



# To Implement Reward and Punishment Methods for Cultivating Independent Character in Primary School Students: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author AK conceptualized and designed the study, undertaken responsibilities in data analysis and discussion. Author MS actively involved in analysis and reviewed the article. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Aims:** This study aims to: 1) analyze the implementation of reward and punishment in forming the independent character of elementary school students? 2) mapping the forms of reward and punishment used in forming the independent character of elementary school students.

**Study Design:** The study adopted a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design.

**Place and Duration of Study:** The research was conducted in Primary School State 1 Terong Tawah, West Lombok, Indonesia, between January 2023 and August 2023.

**Methodology:** The author conducted in-depth interviews with two people, namely the school principal and class teacher. Apart from that, the author also made observations. The analysis procedure follows the interactive analysis recommended by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, encompassing data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. To

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ensure data validity, the study employs data triangulation, including source triangulation and technique triangulation. Additionally, member checks contribute to data validation.

**Results:** The findings reveal: 1) The implementation of reward and punishment in shaping the independence character of primary school students involves two processes: (1) Planning or Preparation of Reward and Punishment; (2) Implementation of Reward and Punishment during Learning. 2) Various forms of rewards are applied, such as giving stars, expressing commendatory phrases, and providing additional grades. Meanwhile, the forms of punishment administered to primary school students vary according to the nature of the mistakes, including reprimands, advice, additional assignments, and motivational strategies that aid in character formation.

**Conclusion:** The reward and punishment methods used can be considered as methods that accommodate humanist values. Teachers do not provide punishment in the form of violence that has physical and psychological impacts.

*Keywords: Reward; punishment; character; independent; school; primary.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a highly significant element in the fabric of life, impacting both individuals and communities. Indonesia, being one of the large and developing nations, requires well-equipped human resources distributed evenly across every province, encompassing both rural and urban areas. It can be asserted that Indonesia possesses reliable human resources with qualities that are dependable in various aspects.

One of the factors that can enhance the quality of human resources is education. Education serves as a means to shape morally upright and virtuous individuals, aligning with the aspirations and values of society. It aims to cultivate individuals who are not only intellectually astute but also possess emotional intelligence and motor skills [1].

Education and humanity are inherently inseparable in navigating life, be it within the family, community, or the broader context of nation and state. Education plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of human resources and contributes to the realization of the aspirations of the Indonesian nation. It serves as a primary factor in shaping an individual's character, influencing both positive and negative aspects of human personality. Essentially, education is intertwined with the essence of humanity, representing a conscious effort towards maturity through carefully planned processes.

Harmonizing the behavior of children and guiding them towards a better path is no simple feat. Therefore, specific approaches are necessary to facilitate the educational process towards positive change. Among these approaches is the application of rewards and punishments. The

concepts of reward and punishment are derived from the realm of human resource management, particularly aimed at motivating individuals to engage in virtuous deeds and enhance their achievements [2].

The teacher administers rewards and punishments as mechanisms of reinforcement and stimuli in the process of educating students [3]. The allocation of rewards to students may take the form of prizes or positive reinforcement for commendable actions. The dispensation of rewards is intended to motivate children to apply greater diligence in their endeavors and exhibit virtuous behavior. Conversely, punishment is meted out to students in the event of transgressions or errors. The imposition of punishment serves to evoke remorse in students for their misguided actions [4].

The rewards and punishments constitutes one of the methodologies employed in nurturing the character of students. In terminological parlance, character entails an endeavor in educating students to make judicious decisions and to apply them in their daily lives, thereby enabling them to contribute positively to their surroundings. Character is defined as the fundamental traits, qualities, and intrinsic aspects that exist within each individual.

The Ministry of Education has formulated 18 core values as part of the effort to cultivate the national character instilled in students. These 18 values include: religious, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democratic, curiosity, nationalistic spirit, love for the homeland, appreciation of achievement, friendliness/communicativeness, love for peace, enthusiasm for reading,

environmental concern, social concern, and responsibility [5].

One of the pivotal characteristics to be instilled in students is the virtue of independence. Independence encompasses an attitude or behavior that resists undue reliance on others when addressing assigned tasks. The trait of independence propels and encourages an individual to autonomously tackle the challenges of life and existence, thereby fostering motivation for initiative, creativity, innovation, proactivity, and diligent effort [6]. Certainly, characterizing independence as an individual's disposition or behavior that is not contingent upon others is accurate.

Another factor influencing students' academic performance is self-directed learning, denoting an autonomy in learning without dependence on others. Essentially, autonomy is an individual's behavior characterized by initiative, problem-solving ability, self-confidence, responsibility, and the capability to undertake tasks independently, without relying on others. Autonomy in learning holds significant importance and warrants attention from stakeholders in the field of education.

For students accustomed to independent learning, confronting challenges tends to elicit a composed response during academic tasks. This composure arises from their heightened self-confidence, rendering them less susceptible to external opinions. Self-directed learning constitutes a crucial element in the realm of educational activities, emphasizing students' responsible engagement in the learning process. Students possessing strong autonomy are less prone to surrendering easily, displaying resilience in the face of challenges. This autonomy is manifested in problem-solving skills, showcasing an enhanced capacity for critical thinking. Students recognize the imperative of autonomous learning, acknowledging that continuous reliance on external assistance is not a sustainable approach to education [7].

Based on the preliminary observations conducted by the researcher on May 5, 2023, concerning the issue of students' independence, it remains a persistent concern at SDN 1 Terong Tawah. The researcher identified several students still displaying a lack of independence. Observable instances of non-independent behavior include students' response to assigned

tasks and during question-and-answer sessions. The students' lack of independence is evident when teachers assign tasks, and instead of attempting to answer independently, some students resort to looking at or copying answers from their peers, or seeking assistance from classmates who have completed the task.

Furthermore, during the course of learning activities, if students do not comprehend a particular subject matter, they sometimes remain silent and refrain from seeking clarification from the teacher. This silence indicates the students' lack of independence in terms of questioning or investigating the given material. Consequently, teachers employ a system of rewards and punishments to prevent students from repeating non-independent behaviors and to encourage them to engage in positive actions that reflect independent attitudes (Observation, May 5, 2023).

**This study is guided by two problem formulations:** 1) How is the implementation of rewards and punishments in shaping the independence character of primary school students? 2) What are the forms of rewards and punishments implemented in the formation of the independence character of primary school students? This study contributes to reinforcing the conceptual framework and practical implementation of rewards and punishments for primary school students.

## 2. METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a methodology employed to investigate and comprehend the behaviour of individuals or groups, as well as social phenomena, in natural conditions. This method aims to gather descriptive (non-quantitative) data through oral or written means, which is then interpreted in a descriptive manner [8]. The design of this study is phenomenological. The research is conducted at Primary School State 1 Terong Tawah, West Lombok. The analytical procedure employed is interactive analysis, as recommended by Miles et al. [9], involving data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions [9]. To ensure the validity of the data, the author employs data triangulation, encompassing source triangulation and technique triangulation. Additionally, data validity is verified through member checks.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 The Implementation of Reward and Punishment in Enhancing the Independence Character of Primary School Students

Based on the data analysis conducted, the enhancement of the independence character of primary school students through the implementation of reward and punishment is carried out through two processes: firstly, the planning and preparation of rewards and punishments; secondly, the administration of rewards and punishments during the learning process.

##### 3.1.1 Planning or preparation of rewards and punishments

Teachers engage in preparation or planning to administer various types of rewards and punishments to students, aiming to stimulate their motivation in developing independent character. This is evident in interviews where teachers express their active consideration of methods to provide positive incentives and negative consequences to students, encouraging them to cultivate an independent attitude. This can be understood from the following excerpt from the interviews:

“Before the learning activities commence, we undertake thorough preparation. One aspect we consider is related to the provision of rewards and punishments to students. This preparation is tailored to the type of activities the students will be engaged in during the learning process. In this context, our focus is on the development of the students' independent character.” (Husen, Headmaster, Interview, 2023)

A similar statement is also expressed by Lina Hariani, a class teacher and informant in this study, as follows:

“Before the commencement of the learning session, we undertake various preparations, one of which involves arranging the tools or materials that support the administration of rewards and punishments during the learning process. We strive to ensure that we have various types of tools or materials that can be effectively utilized for providing rewards or punishments. For instance, we may provide stickers or certificates of appreciation for

rewards, and conversely, we have an organized system or method for administering appropriate punishments.” (Lina Hariani, Class Teacher, Interview, 2023).

The author is convinced that the planning of reward and punishment methods in education is crucial to maximize their implementation. Reward and punishment are considered effective teaching methods to foster learning motivation in students, shape positive behavior, and support the achievement of educational goals. The provision of rewards can motivate students to excel and exhibit positive behaviour, while punishment can serve as both a preventive and corrective educational tool to diminish negative behaviour [10].

In the context of shaping independent character, the provision of rewards can be considered a form of positive incentive, motivating learners to achieve higher accomplishments and adopt positive behaviours. Meanwhile, as a corrective tool, punishment can deliver appropriate consequences for negative behaviour, providing students with an opportunity to learn from their mistakes and redirect their behaviour towards a more positive trajectory. Thus, both the dispensation of rewards and punishments play a crucial role in shaping the independent character of students through the provision of positive incentives and adequate consequences for negative behaviours.

The study by Pribadi et al., [11] asserts that well-planned implementation allows each child to receive a reward for every positive change or adherence to established norms. Conversely, if students fail to comply with these norms, they become eligible for punishment. Thoughtful planning also ensures that this method can enhance students' awareness of compliance and adherence to school rules while providing reinforcement for their academic discipline. Therefore, the author perceives that meticulous planning regarding the dispensation of rewards and punishments has a positive impact on students' awareness of compliance and adherence to school regulations.

Furthermore, Pribadi et al. [11] emphasise that planning the implementation of the reward and punishment method is crucial. This is essential to ensure that the dispensation of rewards and punishments can be tailored to the situation and

conditions of the students, thereby enhancing discipline among them. A well-planned implementation allows each child to receive a reward for every positive change or adherence to established norms. Conversely, if students fail to comply with these norms, they become eligible for punishment. Thoughtful planning also ensures that this method can enhance students' awareness of compliance and adherence to school rules while providing reinforcement for their academic discipline.

In this context, Assyifa et al. [12] emphasize the importance of teachers planning rewards and punishments, understanding their application procedures beforehand. This is achieved by engaging in discussions with students regarding the rules to be implemented. This process is crucial to ensure that both teachers and students have a shared understanding of the rewards and punishments to be employed in the learning process. Consequently, the implementation of rewards and punishments can be carried out effectively to enhance students' learning motivation. Furthermore, Syawaludin & Marmoah (2018) add that, before implementing rewards and punishments, it is essential to identify specific behaviors to reinforce (such as active class participation) or behaviors to diminish (such as disrupting peers during learning).

The author detects that in preparing or planning methods of rewards and punishments, several steps need to be considered by teachers, as follows:

### **3.2 Firstly, In-Depth Understanding of Objectives**

It is crucial to comprehend that the primary objectives of administering rewards and punishments are to instill values and habits, motivate learners to be disciplined in their studies, and support the development of positive character traits [10]. Grasping the core purposes of rewards and punishments is highly significant as it allows for a more focused and effective approach in managing student behavior and shaping a positive learning environment.

### **3.3 Secondly, Fair and Consistent Approach**

School administrators and teachers must ensure that the administration of rewards and punishments is fair, without discriminating based on the status or group of learners. Punishments

should be meted out without any vengeful intent, and rewards should be bestowed based on genuine achievements to positively motivate learners [10]. According to Assyifa et al. [12], maintaining consistency in the application of rewards and punishments is crucial. This aids in building trust and ensures that students understand that rules apply universally without exceptions.

### **3.4 Thirdly, Training and Guidance for Teachers**

School administrators need to provide guidance and training to teachers regarding the technicalities and implementation of methods involving rewards and punishments. This includes explaining how to objectively assess the behavior and achievements of learners and how to provide constructive feedback [10]. Training assists teachers in understanding the principles of fairness in administering rewards and punishments. This encompasses ensuring that the criteria for rewards and punishments are clear and equitable for all students, without any discrimination or unfair treatment. By offering thorough guidance and effective training, school administrators can aid teachers in implementing methods of rewards and punishments that are fair, effective, and aligned with the desired learning objectives.

### **3.5 Fourthly, Supporting Teacher Programs**

The school administration should support teacher programs in the use of methods involving rewards and punishments. This includes providing necessary resources and creating a conducive learning environment for the implementation of these methods [10]. The use of rewards and punishments helps regulate student behaviour in the classroom. By offering positive incentives (rewards) and negative consequences (punishments), teachers can establish an orderly and conducive learning environment. Therefore, school support for these programs should be based on a profound understanding of the needs and characteristics of students, while adhering to ethical guidelines and educational standards.

### **3.6 Administering Rewards and Punishments During the Learning Process**

After rewards and punishments have been planned or prepared, the next stage is the

implementation phase during the learning process. Teachers have the opportunity to directly respond to student behaviour by providing rewards as a form of appreciation for positive performance or administering punishments in response to undesirable behaviour. This process not only reinforces the impact of rewards and punishments but also sends a clear signal to students about the relationship between their actions and the consequences they receive. Thus, the administration of rewards and punishments during the learning process serves not only as a tool to maintain classroom discipline but also as an effective means to shape positive behaviour and enhance student motivation in the teaching and learning process.

In the context of this study, the administration of rewards and punishments is carried out by teachers during the learning process with the aim of shaping the character of learners, particularly emphasizing the development of independent traits. This can be elucidated through the excerpt from the following interview:

"Of course, in this school, we implement the administration of rewards and punishments in the teaching and learning process, as an institution that upholds character education, particularly emphasizing independence. Thus, the school strives as much as possible to produce learners who excel academically and possess independent character as they progress to higher levels of education." (Husen, Interview, 2023).

The informants explain that the administration of rewards takes place when students successfully complete tasks or exhibit positive behavior. For instance, if students perform well on assignments or engage in commendable actions, they receive recognition as a form of appreciation. On the other hand, punishment is applied when students display a lack of independence. For example, if a student is observed playing with peers without being able to complete their own tasks, it will result in disciplinary action. In this manner, rewards and punishments serve as tools to provide consequences in accordance with student behavior, concurrently functioning as a strategy to cultivate independence through an emphasis on self-reliance in task completion (Husen, Interview, 2023; Lina Hariani, Interview, 2023).

Furthermore, Husen, the Headmaster, reinforces that the administration of rewards and punishments is undertaken to cultivate independent character. This can be understood through the excerpt from the following interview:

"If a student's activities demonstrate a well-established independent character, we provide rewards as a form of appreciation. These rewards may include praise, recognition, or other incentives designed to offer positive motivation to the students. Conversely, if a student's activities do not yet reflect a sufficiently developed independent character or are subpar, we implement punishment as an effort to help shape better behaviour. The punishment may involve disciplinary actions commensurate with the level of the student's mistake, always carried out with an educational approach." (Observation, Husen, Interview, 2023; Lina Hariani, Interview, 2023).

In the context of the teaching and learning process, teachers implement a system of rewards and punishments as a classroom management strategy. The administration of rewards serves as recognition and positive reinforcement for desired behaviour, encouraging students to consistently excel and actively participate in learning. Conversely, punishment is employed as a consequence for undesirable behaviour, aiming to correct and reduce the likelihood of rule violations in the classroom. By combining these two strategies, teachers aim to create a conducive learning environment where students are motivated to learn effectively and maintain self-discipline. Nevertheless, it is essential for teachers to ensure that the implementation of rewards and punishments is carried out fairly and proportionally, supporting the development of positive character and the enhancement of students' social skills.

The administration of rewards should be given to acknowledge and reinforce positive behaviour. This may take the form of verbal praise, certificates of appreciation, special privileges, or small gifts. The objective is to motivate students to consistently exhibit the desired behaviour [12]. The administration of rewards aims to provide recognition and positive reinforcement for the positive behaviour exhibited by students. The cultivation of independent character is expected to be encouraged through positive reinforcement and acknowledgment of actions directed towards desired values and behaviours.

Punishment should be applied in a constructive manner and must aim to impart lessons rather than merely mete out penalties. Punishment may take the form of beneficial additional tasks, loss of privileges, or assignments designed to help students understand the consequences of their actions [12]. In the context of fostering independent character, punishment represents a negative response to undesirable behaviour. It may involve additional tasks, loss of privileges, or specific assignments intended to provide an understanding of the consequences of those actions. The goal is to assist students in building self-awareness independently and motivate them to make better behavioural choices in the future, autonomously.

Additionally, Wardhani [13] emphasizes that punishment is administered to have a deterrent effect on students who make mistakes, preventing them from repeating similar errors. Punishment is a consciously induced action resulting from the acknowledgment of the consequences of the mistakes made. The author argues that by instilling independence through the application of punishment, students are afforded the opportunity to develop self-awareness regarding their actions. This process not only fosters a sense of responsibility for mistakes but also encourages students to learn to recognize the consequences of each action. Thus, the administration of punishment serves not only as a form of discipline but also as a learning tool that provides motivation for students to become independent individuals accountable for their actions.

### **3.7 Forms of Rewards and Punishments that can be Given to Primary School Students**

Various forms of rewards are given. Teachers provide rewards such as star symbols, commendatory phrases, additional grades, and others. In implementing rewards, teachers utilize media. The use of this media or tool helps create a more dynamic and interactive learning environment. Students can more easily comprehend rules and consequences, making the learning process more effective. Additionally, visualization through media or tools can enhance student engagement in understanding the values and norms we aim to instill. (Observation, Husen, Interview, 2023; Lina Hariani, Interview, 2023)

Lina Hariani (Interview, 2023) adds that before the learning process begins, teachers provide media or tools that assist in the administration of

rewards and punishments during the learning process. The form of a reward is given when students can answer questions from the teacher or perform a good deed. In such instances, students receive stars, additional grades, applause, or even commendatory phrases that further motivate them to engage in similar behaviours.

Students who receive rewards are those who actively demonstrate independent attitudes in the learning process. For example, when given independent tasks, these students can effectively manage time and resources. Additionally, the students' attitudes indicate initiative in seeking solutions to challenges faced, as well as proactive efforts to deepen their understanding of the material. Rewards are given as recognition of students' efforts and dedication in developing their independence, which, in turn, can serve as a positive encouragement to continually hone their independent abilities in the educational context. This can be observed in the following interview excerpt:

“During the observation in the learning process, it was evident that the teacher carefully awarded rewards to students demonstrating independent attitudes. When the teacher posed questions, students could independently answer without requiring assistance. They were actively seeking answers in the learning materials, displaying dedication to understanding the material independently. Furthermore, while working on tasks, students appeared engrossed in their individual efforts without relying on assistance from classmates. Their courage to overcome challenges and complete tasks independently serves as a tangible example of the independence cultivated in the learning process. When the teacher awarded these students, smiles of happiness were apparent on their faces. The administration of rewards not only serves as a form of appreciation but also acts as a catalyst for additional motivation for students to continue exhibiting positive behaviour and independence in their learning. Additionally, this observation also notes that the positive reactions from students receiving rewards have a positive impact on other students in the class. They seem motivated to do the same, creating a spirited and supportive learning environment.” (Observation, November 28, 2023).

The author perceives that the rewards given by the teacher can be considered appropriate. The rewards provided are not only verbal but also non-verbal. Rohmatun et al. [14] state that verbal rewards can take the form of praise, while non-verbal rewards include body language, objects, or items. Examples of non-verbal rewards include gifts given to students. Furthermore, rewards can also be given in the form of spontaneous praise or applause without prior notification on how it will be received. Ramanian & Wardhani [15] exemplify praise as a reward. When a child produces excellent work, the teacher will give praise such as "wow, the illustration is excellent" and provide applause or a thumbs-up. The awarding of stars is also done to appreciate a child who completes a task exceptionally well, with the hope that the child will become more enthusiastic and creative in completing subsequent assignments.

Furthermore, Fitri & Pangestu [16] illustrate that the reward method is implemented by providing enjoyable appreciation to students for their commendable achievements in the educational process. This form of appreciation can take the shape of verbal expressions, such as "smart child," or physical gestures, such as "Applause." In practice, rewards are given to students to motivate them further and make them feel valued. Rewards can include positive praise, the presentation of gifts for accomplishments, as well as acknowledgment and respect for someone [13].

Nevertheless, however, material rewards are also part of the implementation of this method, where items are given to children for achieving desired accomplishments, such as adhering to predetermined school rules. An example of a material reward is crafting paper airplanes or boats that the child can take home, as well as the presentation of a star diagram as a symbol of appreciation for the expected behaviour by the teacher [15]. By providing items as rewards, teachers not only give positive reinforcement for expected behaviour but also offer children the opportunity to experience pride and personal satisfaction from their hard work, reinforcing an independent attitude. This form of reward not only acknowledges achievements but also provides a tangible experience that strengthens children's independent skills as they learn to pursue their own goals with effort and dedication.

Meanwhile, the forms of punishment given to primary school students vary according to the

nature of the transgression. These may include reprimands, advice, additional tasks, and motivational measures that contribute to character formation (Observation, Husen, Interview, 2023; Lina Hariani, Interview, 2023). The author believes that advice, warning statements, additional tasks, and reprimands can be integrated as part of a comprehensive approach to educating students, while motivation also becomes an essential element in aiding their growth and development. The advice given should be educational and guide students to understand the consequences of their actions. Both advice and warnings should be more constructive, providing students with an opportunity for self-reflection and motivating positive change.

Based on the observation on Friday, December 1, 2023, during the learning process, in addition to providing rewards, the teacher was seen giving punishment because the student was not paying attention to the teacher's explanation. The initial form of punishment given was advice, but when the student repeated the same mistake, the teacher reprimanded the student. This made the student more aware of the mistake and prevented them from repeating it, promoting greater independence.

The author notes that the types of punishments applied so far seem to align with humanistic principles. These punishments may be designed considering human values, empathy, and respect for individual dignity. This approach reflects the view that the legal system should not only focus on recovery and correction but also take into account the human aspects of each involved individual. Therefore, during the observation, the author did not find any physical or psychological punishments.

According to Syawaludin & Marmoah [2], in the application of punishment, it is important to use consequences that are non-physical, such as reprimands, warnings, or home visits for students exhibiting negative behaviour. This is to ensure that the approach used is safe and educational. This is also in line with the findings of the Rohmatun et al., [14] that punishment should ideally be in the form of reprimands, warnings, or penalties. These punishments are designed to deter students from engaging in negative behaviour and encourage them to rectify their mistakes without repeating them. Examples of punishment include additional tasks, memorizing multiplication tables, grade reductions, or direct reprimands from the teacher.



According to Wani & Sutarini [17], punishment is administered through advice and warnings, not through physical punishment, as the primary goal of providing punishment is to reduce or eliminate undesirable behaviour without causing suffering to students. Additionally, reasonable and non-violent punishments, such as reprimands, advice, and the assignment of school tasks, are considered more effective in shaping positive behaviour and avoiding the negative impacts that may arise from physical punishment. Therefore, punishment should be educational and not cause harm to students either physically or psychologically.

Punishment should be educational because its goal is not to instill fear or violence but to motivate students to align their behaviour with the expected standards. This approach aims to provide learning and improve behaviour rather than merely administering punishment. An educational punishment will be more effective in shaping positive behaviour and discipline in students without causing negative impacts such as fear or psychological violence [18].

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the formulated problems, this study concludes: First, the process of implementing rewards and punishments in shaping the independence character of primary school students includes: (1) Planning or Preparation for Rewards and Punishments; (2) Implementation of Rewards and Punishments During Learning. Second, the forms of rewards applied are diverse. Teachers provide rewards in the form of stars, praise sentences, and additional grades. Meanwhile, the forms of punishment given to primary school students vary according to the transgressions, such as reprimands, advice, additional tasks, and motivational measures that contribute to character formation.

**This study recommends:** 1) Further researchers should conduct studies on evaluating the effectiveness of rewards and punishments in shaping the independence character of primary school students; 2) Subsequent researchers can also investigate the long-term impacts of providing rewards and punishments on student behaviour; 3) Teachers and schools should delve deeper into planning and preparing reward and punishment systems. In this regard, it is crucial to ensure that

these methods align with the characteristics of students and the goals of fostering independence.

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#### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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