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Managing Discipline as Professional Readiness in a SMK Kesehatan: A Qualitative Case Study of Character-Based Management

Ayatullah Mahdi Mudarrisi[1a*], Dinny Mardiana[2b]
[1,2] Universitas Islam Nusantara, Indonesia

[a]mahdimudarrisi91@gmail.com, [b]mardianadinny3@gmail.com

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***Correspondence Address:**
mahdimudarrisi91@gmail.com

Abstract:
This study examined how a health vocational school managed discipline as part of students' character formation and professional readiness. A qualitative case study was conducted at SMK Kesehatan Tunas Madani in Sukabumi, West Java, Indonesia, from December 2025 to March 2026. Participants were purposively selected from the principal, vice principal for student affairs, character-development teacher, homeroom teachers, students, and parents. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document review. Interactive analysis involved data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Source and method triangulation and checks with key participants supported credibility. The findings showed that the school translated discipline, responsibility, and integrity into written rules, daily routines, classroom learning, and laboratory and teaching-factory practice. The alignment of written expectations, teacher monitoring, and vocational standard operating procedures produced a consistent behavioural message. Recognition and educational consequences were used to reinforce accountability. However, the evidence was stronger for observed compliance than for value internalisation or autonomous self-regulation. Implementation was also constrained by the absence of a counsellor with specialist training and discontinuity between routines at school and at home. Discipline in a health vocational school should therefore be managed as a context-specific professional practice, supported by fair response procedures, tiered counselling support, student reflection, and longitudinal behavioural evaluation. The study offers a bounded explanation of management mechanisms and does not establish causal improvement.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

School discipline is often reduced to compliance with attendance times, uniform requirements, and written rules. This view is insufficient for vocational education. Vocational students are preparing for workplaces that require punctuality, responsibility, safety, and adherence to procedures. These expectations are especially tangible in health-related education, where procedural errors, delays, or negligence may affect service quality and the safety of other people. Discipline should therefore be understood as the capacity to regulate one's conduct and meet professional standards, not merely as the absence of misconduct.

Schools can develop this capacity through a climate that connects norms, relationships, learning, and organisational structures. Reviews of school climate research show that clear rules are only one part of the system. How rules are applied, the quality of teacher–student relationships, message consistency, and everyday learning experiences also shape student behaviour (Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016). From this perspective, character-based management means translating selected values into mutually reinforcing policies, roles, routines, interactions, and evaluation practices.

Consistency matters because habits develop when behaviour is repeatedly performed in relatively stable contexts and in response to recurring cues (Wood & Rünger, 2016). Morning assemblies, punctual classroom entry, readiness to learn, use of practical uniforms, and adherence to laboratory procedures may establish regular behavioural patterns. Repetition, however, does not by itself show that students have accepted a value as their own. Self-determination theory distinguishes externally controlled regulation from more autonomous forms of regulation that have personal meaning (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Discipline research should consequently distinguish visible compliance from value internalisation and self-regulation.

This distinction is also important when schools use rewards and sanctions. Recognition can signal that a behaviour is valued, while consequences can help students understand accountability. Both practices may nevertheless keep motivation external if students act only to obtain a reward or avoid punishment. Practices that provide reasons, listen to students' perspectives, use respectful language, and allow students to repair the effects of their conduct support responsibility more effectively than control alone (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Research on restorative practices and empathic discipline also highlights the importance of relational quality and non-punitive responses (Gregory et al., 2016; Okonofua et al., 2016).

In vocational education, discipline becomes more meaningful when it is connected with the occupational identity students are beginning to develop. Learning environments that connect school activities with work practices can help students integrate occupational knowledge, skills, and norms (Zitter et al., 2016). Schools also contribute to adolescent identity development through learning experiences, relationships, and messages about who students are expected to become (Verhoeven et al., 2019). Health professions education describes professional identity as developing through engagement with professional values and norms, role modelling, experience, and reflection (Cruess et al., 2019). Most of this literature concerns higher health professions education and cannot be transferred directly to vocational secondary schools. Its concepts are nonetheless useful for examining how rules and practical procedures may introduce health vocational students to professional responsibility.

Organisational coherence determines whether character values remain slogans or become part of students' experience. Implementation research indicates that programme outcomes depend on implementation quality, organisational support, practitioner capacity, and contextual fit (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Teacher role modelling should also not be treated as passive good behaviour. Students need to recognise the value being modelled and connect it with moral reasons and specific situations (Sanderse, 2013). Discipline management must therefore be

examined through the relationship between written rules, teacher conduct, school routines, responses to misconduct, and the support available to students.

Family engagement and counselling services extend this context. Family–school partnerships become more meaningful when they move beyond information exchange towards engagement centred on the student's learning and development (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). School and parent-organisation leadership also affect whether meaningful partnerships can develop (Povey et al., 2016). School counselling interventions have an empirical basis for supporting a range of student outcomes, but support quality depends on the competence, time, and capacity of those providing it (Whiston et al., 2011). When a specialist is unavailable, case management may be dispersed among teachers who already have instructional and additional administrative responsibilities.

SMK Kesehatan Tunas Madani in Sukabumi has established written rules, habituation activities, teacher monitoring, and professional values related to health-sector work. The original manuscript reported lateness, mobile-phone use during lessons, and non-compliance with rules as continuing concerns. The more important research problem, however, is not whether the school has a character programme. It is how values are converted into consistent practice, which mechanisms may explain disciplined behaviour, and what limits the development of self-regulation.

This study aimed to analyse how character-based management was planned and enacted to support student discipline in a health vocational school. It addressed three questions: (1) How were character values translated into rules, routines, and vocational practice? (2) How did recognition, sanctions, monitoring, and role modelling operate in discipline development? (3) Which contextual conditions supported or constrained implementation? These questions position discipline as an organisational process and a component of professional readiness rather than a list of behaviours to be enforced.

Method (منهج)

Design and setting

The study used a qualitative case study design to develop an in-depth understanding of discipline management in the school's real-life context. Case studies are suitable for examining complex organisational processes through multiple sources of evidence (Crowe et al., 2011). The case was bounded as the implementation of character-based management at SMK Kesehatan Tunas Madani in Sukabumi, West Java, Indonesia. Data collection took place from December 2025 to March 2026.

Participants and selection

Participants were purposively selected from school leaders and staff directly involved in discipline management, teachers, students, and parents. These groups provided perspectives on school policy, implementation practices, student behaviour, and school-home continuity.

Data collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document review. Interviews explored value planning, rule implementation, habituation activities, recognition and consequences, allocation of responsibilities, parental support, and implementation constraints. Observations focused on student arrival, morning assembly, classroom learning, monitoring, and vocational practice. Two specifically documented events were an arrival and assembly observation on 9 February 2026 from 06:45 to 07:30 and a Grade 10 classroom observation on 17 February 2026. The documents reviewed included student rules, the student-affairs work programme, character-education programme documents, the student violation casebook, the organisational structure, and teacher duty allocations.

The three methods enabled comparison between formal policy, participant accounts, and observed practice.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). During data condensation, interview transcripts or notes, observation records, and documents were read repeatedly and relevant segments were identified in relation to the study questions. The analysis focused on priority values, rules, routines, vocational practice, reinforcement, monitoring, support structures, family involvement, and implementation constraints.

During data display, evidence was organised in a cross-source matrix that compared interview accounts, observational evidence, and documentary records for each emerging category. This process enabled the researchers to identify areas of convergence as well as inconsistencies across data sources. During conclusion drawing and verification, recurring patterns were examined to identify relationships among school rules, daily routines, vocational expectations, reinforcement practices, and contextual constraints. Interpretations were checked against the available evidence before being retained as findings.

Credibility was supported through source triangulation, method triangulation, and checks with key participants. These strategies enabled comparison among school leaders, teachers, students, parents, documents, and observations. Reporting also maintained a distinction between observed evidence and researcher interpretation, consistent with qualitative standards of credibility, sincerity, and meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010).

This study examined processes within one school and did not measure changes in student discipline over time. Because comparable pre- and post-implementation behavioural data were unavailable, the findings are not interpreted as evidence of programme effectiveness or causal improvement. Instead, they describe the mechanisms through which discipline was organised, communicated, and experienced within the case.

Result (نتائج)

3.1 Professional values were translated into operational rules

The school designated discipline, responsibility, and integrity as priority values. These values appeared in student rules, student-affairs programmes, and character-education documents. The principal connected the selected values with health-sector expectations: “Students in a health vocational school must have strong discipline. Health-sector work requires punctuality, compliance with rules, and responsibility for assigned duties.” Discipline was thus framed as preparation for a work role rather than school order alone.

Written rules translated the values into observable behaviour. They addressed attendance, practical uniforms, classroom conduct, laboratory behaviour, and consequences for violations. This translation created a relatively clear link between abstract values and behavioural expectations. During the observation on 9 February 2026 from 06:45 to 07:30, students arrived before the assembly, formed orderly lines, and followed teacher instructions. Attendance was monitored through school records, while compliance was monitored in classrooms and during practical activities.

3.2 Habituation occurred across three connected settings

Discipline was not confined to one character-development activity. It appeared across school routines, classroom learning, and vocational practice. During morning assembly, punctual attendance and orderly lines were accompanied by messages about responsibility and the professional conduct expected of future health workers. Religious activities and classroom routines repeated similar expectations. A student-affairs teacher explained, “Discipline is not enough when it is only explained to students. It has to be practised every day.”

The Grade 10 observation on 17 February 2026 showed expectations for punctual arrival, readiness to learn, and task completion. The teacher connected task completion with responsibility. In laboratories and the teaching factory, students wore practical uniforms and followed instructions and standard operating procedures. Practical settings offered the most specific context because orderliness was connected with work sequences and health-sector standards. These findings demonstrate behavioural regularity across structured school settings. They are therefore interpreted as evidence of observed compliance and repeated practice, rather than as direct evidence of value internalisation or autonomous self-regulation.

3.3 Recognition and educational consequences supported accountability

The school provided appreciation or recognition to students who were punctual, followed rules, and completed tasks responsibly. Recognition signalled behaviours that the school valued. Sanctions were applied after violations, but teachers described them as educational guidance. One teacher stated, "The sanction is not intended merely to punish. It helps students understand that every action has consequences." Reported responses included dialogue, guidance, and explanations of the misconduct.

The data did not specify violation categories, sanction levels, consistency among educators, opportunities for students to explain their circumstances, or follow-up after guidance. The evidence therefore supports only the teachers' stated educational orientation. It is insufficient to assess procedural fairness or students' experiences of recognition and sanctions.

3.4 Monitoring was distributed, but counselling capacity was limited

The principal set policy direction, duty teachers and classroom teachers monitored conduct, and homeroom teachers and student-affairs staff managed student guidance. This allocation extended monitoring from the school entrance to classrooms and practical settings. Teacher commitment allowed the programme to operate even though the support structure was incomplete.

The school did not have a guidance and counselling teacher with specialist training in counselling. The principal explained that homeroom teachers and teachers with additional student-affairs duties handled much of the guidance work. Organisational and duty-allocation documents supported this account. The arrangement concentrated case management among teachers who also taught classes. It does not demonstrate failed guidance, but it creates risks of limited time, variable judgement, and insufficient specialist support for cases requiring counselling competence.

3.5 Continuity between school and home was uneven

The school communicated with parents through meetings and direct contact about student behaviour. One parent reported that their child had become more organised in managing study time and more responsible for household tasks. This account suggests that school routines may have transferred to the home, but it came from one reported quotation and was not supported by longitudinal observation.

Teachers also reported that home routines did not always align with school expectations, making repeated reminders necessary when students returned to school. This finding indicates contextual discontinuity. It does not establish that families caused misconduct, but it shows that discipline messages and routines were not always aligned across the two settings.

3.6 Synthesis of mechanisms and boundaries

Table 1. Synthesis of character-based discipline management mechanisms

Management component	Observed mechanism	Context-specific evidence	Boundary or tension
Value definition	Values were translated into behavioural expectations	Discipline, responsibility, and integrity appeared in rules and programmes	The extent of student participation in defining values was unknown
Habituation	The same message was repeated across settings	Assembly, classroom, laboratory, and teaching factory	Behavioural regularity did not demonstrate internalisation
Reinforcement	Recognition marked positive behaviour; sanctions were explained as consequences	Recognition for punctuality; dialogue after violations	Student experience and procedural fairness were not documented
Monitoring and support	Responsibility was distributed among leaders and teachers	Attendance monitoring, duty teachers, homeroom teachers, and student affairs	Lack of a specialist counsellor increased workload and inconsistency risks
Family partnership	Communication sought to align routines	Parent meetings and direct contact	Evidence of home transfer was limited, and routines were not always aligned

Discussion (مناقشة)

4.1 Discipline operated as context-specific professional formation

The central finding is not simply that the school had written rules and habituation activities. It connected discipline with the role of a future health worker and then translated that connection into attendance, practical uniforms, laboratory conduct, adherence to instructions, and task completion. This relationship between a value and a work situation distinguishes the case from a generic character programme. Discipline acquired a practical function as readiness to meet occupational standards.

This interpretation is consistent with hybrid learning environments that connect school processes with work processes (Zitter et al., 2016). In this case, the laboratory and teaching factory formed the relevant school–work boundary. Students were not only told that punctuality and responsibility were good. They were expected to enact these values while following practical procedures. Identity research suggests that school experiences contribute to how adolescents understand who they are and may become (Verhoeven et al., 2019). Health professions education similarly treats engagement with professional norms, role models, experience, and reflection as part of professional identity formation (Cruess et al., 2019). The present participants were secondary school students rather than medical students. The findings should therefore be

interpreted as foundations for professional readiness, not evidence of a mature professional identity.

This interpretation has a direct evaluative implication. Programme success should not be judged only through reductions in general rule violations. The school should assess behaviours relevant to health practice, including preparation before practical work, accurate performance of work sequences, appropriate use of equipment, reporting of errors, and responsibility for completing assigned tasks. These indicators connect discipline with the occupational competence being developed.

4.2 Organisational coherence stabilised the discipline message

Observed compliance can be explained by the coherence of three elements: written rules, daily routines, and vocational practice. Rules defined the expected behaviour. Assembly, classroom routines, and teacher monitoring repeated the definition. Laboratories provided a setting that resembled occupational practice. When all three elements communicated the same message, students encountered relatively stable expectations throughout the school day.

This finding clarifies the management mechanism. Character-based management was not an additional ceremonial activity. It involved aligning policy, roles, implementation, and feedback. School climate research similarly treats rules, relationships, learning, and the institutional environment as connected dimensions (Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016). Implementation research shows that organisational support and practitioner capacity shape implementation quality and consistency (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Message consistency appeared relatively strong in this case. Consistency of responses to misconduct could not be assessed because the data did not compare educators or cases.

Teacher modelling strengthened coherence when teachers' conduct matched the standards they expected from students. Modelling, however, does not work automatically. Sanderse (2013) argues that students need to understand what is being modelled and why it matters. Teachers should therefore do more than arrive punctually or repeat rules. They should make explicit how conduct relates to safety, trust, service quality, and responsibility for other people. Specific explanations help students interpret discipline as a professional value rather than a teacher preference.

4.3 Habituation produced regularity, but internalisation was not established

Morning assembly, classroom readiness, and practical procedures provided repeated behaviour in stable contexts. This pattern accords with habit research, which explains that behaviour becomes more automatic when it repeatedly occurs with stable contextual cues (Wood & Rünger, 2016). The observed punctual arrival, orderly lines, learning readiness, and procedural compliance demonstrate regularity during the documented situations.

The original manuscript went beyond the evidence when it concluded that repetition had already become character or had been internalised. Most available evidence concerned observable conduct and adult accounts. The analysis did not adequately examine why students complied, what they did without monitoring, how they responded to conflicts between rules and peer pressure, or whether they could explain the meaning of discipline. Without such evidence, the study cannot distinguish habit, strategic compliance, and autonomous self-regulation.

Ryan and Deci (2020) explain that the same behaviour may be driven by external pressure, an internal sense of obligation, personal acceptance of a value, or intrinsic interest. These forms of motivation matter when external control is reduced. School routines can create conditions for internalisation, but they cannot guarantee it. Reflection after practical activities, case discussions about the consequences of negligence, student participation in setting classroom standards, and self-assessment could support this process. Practices that provide meaningful choice, competence support, and respectful relationships are more likely to move regulation from control towards accepted responsibility (Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

4.4 The value of sanctions depended on procedural legitimacy, not severity

Teachers described sanctions as dialogue and explanations of consequences. This orientation is closer to educational accountability than punishment designed only to induce fear. International evidence suggests that restorative practices can improve teacher–student relationships when implemented consistently, while empathic discipline can reduce exclusionary responses (Gregory et al., 2016; Okonofua et al., 2016). This case did not demonstrate a restorative model because the data did not address repair of harm, participation by affected parties, or restorative agreements. Dialogue nevertheless provided a relevant starting point.

Procedural legitimacy is the central issue. Students need to know which expectation was breached, have an opportunity to explain the context, receive a proportionate consequence, and understand how to repair the situation. If different teachers give different consequences for similar conduct, the character message may become an experience of unfairness. The study did not examine this issue. Claims that the sanction system was "effective" would therefore be unsupported.

Recognition also requires careful use. It may clarify valued behaviour, particularly when feedback identifies a specific action and its effect. Competitive awards or routine material rewards may instead keep students focused on external recognition. Self-determination theory highlights the distinction between external control and autonomous acceptance of values (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In this context, feedback such as "You prepared the equipment in the correct sequence, allowing the group to work safely" is more educational than labelling one person "the most disciplined student" without an explanation. The focus moves from who wins to behaviour, reasons, and responsibility that all students can learn.

4.5 Distributed responsibility broadened monitoring but did not replace specialist counselling

The principal, duty teachers, homeroom teachers, character-development teacher, and student-affairs staff formed a broad monitoring network. Its strength was continuity. Conduct could be noticed across settings, and initial guidance could come from adults who knew the student. The same structure also had limits. When classroom teachers investigated, judged, counselled, and monitored cases in addition to teaching, workload increased and role boundaries became unclear.

The absence of a specialist counsellor was not merely a staffing shortfall. It created a risk that every problem would be interpreted as misconduct, although lateness, absence, or phone use may relate to family difficulties, mental health, peer relationships, or learning needs. A meta-analysis indicates that school counselling interventions can support student outcomes, although results depend on intervention form and quality (Whiston et al., 2011). This evidence supports the need for specialist competence, not a claim that appointing one counsellor would solve every problem.

A realistic response is a tiered support system. Teachers can use a shared procedure for reminders and minor violations. Homeroom and student-affairs staff can conduct a brief conference when a pattern recurs. Cases with psychosocial concerns should be referred to a qualified counsellor, either through an appointed school counsellor or a formal external partnership. Regular case-review meetings can reduce reliance on one individual and help distinguish discipline, learning, and psychosocial support needs.

4.6 Discontinuity between school and home constrained transfer

One parent reported better time management and responsibility at home. This is a useful indication, but it does not establish that the school programme changed behaviour at home. Teachers simultaneously reported that some home routines differed from school expectations. Together, these data show variation in transfer rather than a uniform school effect.

Family partnership should not be limited to notifications after misconduct. The literature distinguishes administrative involvement from engagement centred on student learning and development (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). School leadership also helps create conditions for meaningful relationships with parents (Povey et al., 2016). In this case, communication could

focus on one or two observable behaviours, such as morning preparation and task completion, followed by a simple shared monitoring plan. This approach is more directed than a general request for parents to "support discipline."

The school should also avoid treating differences in family routines as moral failure. Work schedules, transport, household responsibilities, and access to communication may affect a family's ability to follow an agreement. Because the study did not examine these conditions, the appropriate conclusion is the need for context-responsive alignment, not blame.

4.7 Practical implications and study limitations

The findings support five specific actions. First, the school can develop a discipline matrix linking each behaviour with a health competence, setting, observation indicator, and safety or service rationale. Second, educators need common observation criteria and a shared response ladder to reduce inconsistent handling. Third, post-violation dialogue should address the behaviour, its impact, the student's perspective, a repair action, and a review date. Fourth, the school should establish tiered support and counselling referral procedures. Fifth, evaluation should use repeated data on punctuality, violation type and setting, completion of follow-up actions, and student reflection on their reasons for acting.

Several limitations affect the strength of the conclusions. The case covered one school. The source manuscript did not report participant numbers, interview duration, coding procedures, or ethical details. Specifically documented observations covered only selected moments. Violation records were not analysed longitudinally, and student voices were not prominent in the findings. One parent account cannot represent behaviour transfer to the home. Researcher positionality and reflexivity were also not described. The study consequently offers a contextual explanation of mechanisms that may be operating, not an estimate of effectiveness or causal evidence.

Future research could combine an in-depth case study with behavioural data collected before, during, and after programme implementation. Comparisons across health vocational schools or programmes could examine whether the connection between school rules and professional norms appears consistently. Repeated student interviews are also needed to distinguish compliance, habit, value acceptance, and autonomous self-regulation.

Conclusion (خاتمة)

This study shows how character-based discipline management operated within the specific context of a health vocational school. Discipline, responsibility, and integrity were translated into written rules, daily routines, classroom expectations, and laboratory and teaching-factory procedures. The distinctive contribution of the case lies in showing how school discipline was connected with occupational expectations, particularly punctuality, procedural compliance, responsibility, and readiness for health-related practice. Character-based management therefore functioned not only as a system of behavioural regulation but also as an organisational framework through which professional expectations were communicated to students.

The evidence, however, supports a more limited conclusion regarding student development. Observed punctuality, orderly behaviour, task completion, and procedural compliance indicate behavioural regularity within structured school settings, but they do not establish that students had internalised these values or developed autonomous self-regulation. The study also does not demonstrate that the programme caused improvements in discipline because it involved a single case and did not include longitudinal or comparative behavioural data. Limited student voice, the absence of a specialist counsellor, insufficient evidence concerning procedural fairness, and uneven continuity between school and home further delimit the findings.

Within these boundaries, the study suggests that discipline management in health vocational education may be strengthened by linking behavioural expectations explicitly to occupational standards, using consistent and fair response procedures, incorporating student

reflection, providing tiered counselling support, and evaluating behaviour longitudinally. Future studies should examine these mechanisms across multiple vocational schools and include repeated student-level data to distinguish compliance, habituation, value internalisation, and autonomous self-regulation.

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