



## Reward and punishment model for elementary students' character building in the digital era

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### ABSTRACT

The digital era presents new challenges in the field of education, particularly in shaping students' character. Reward and punishment are among the strategies used to develop student behavior in line with positive values. This study aims to analyze the use of *reward* and *punishment* in shaping the character of elementary school students in the digital era. The research approach employed is a qualitative case study design. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation. The data obtained were analyzed through three steps: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. The results of the study indicate that implementing appropriate rewards can increase students' learning motivation and positive behavior, while educational punishment can reduce negative behavior without causing harmful psychological effects. The conclusion of this study emphasizes that a proportionally applied *reward* and *punishment* model, aligned with technological advancements, can be an effective strategy for shaping the character of elementary school students in the digital era. The implication of this research is the need for educational policies that are adaptable to digital developments, allowing the reward and punishment model to be implemented optimally.

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### ABSTRAK

Era digital membawa tantangan baru dalam dunia pendidikan, terutama dalam pembentukan karakter peserta didik. Reward dan punishment menjadi salah satu strategi yang digunakan untuk membentuk perilaku peserta didik agar sesuai dengan nilai-nilai positif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis reward dan punishment dalam membentuk karakter peserta didik Sekolah Dasar (SD) di era digital. Pendekatan penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Data yang diperoleh dianalisis menggunakan tiga langkah yaitu kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Keabsahan data menggunakan triangulasi sumber dan triangulasi teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemberian reward yang tepat dapat meningkatkan motivasi belajar dan perilaku positif peserta didik, sedangkan punishment yang bersifat edukatif dapat mengurangi perilaku negatif tanpa menimbulkan efek psikologis yang merugikan. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa model reward dan punishment yang diterapkan secara proporsional dan sesuai dengan perkembangan teknologi dapat menjadi strategi efektif dalam membentuk karakter peserta didik sekolah dasar di era digital. Implikasi dari penelitian ini adalah perlunya kebijakan pendidikan yang adaptif terhadap perkembangan digital agar model reward dan punishment dapat diterapkan secara optimal.

**Kata Kunci:** era digital; pembentukan karakter; punishment; reward; sekolah dasar

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in recent decades has significantly transformed the educational landscape, not only in the way information is disseminated but also in the patterns of interaction between teachers and learners. The digitalization of education creates opportunities for remote learning with flexibility in time and place and enriches learning methods through various online platforms and educational applications (Hadiapurwa *et al.*, 2021; Rokhmawati *et al.*, 2025). However, behind this convenience, a major challenge arises in shaping students' character, especially when they are exposed to unfiltered digital information that can affect the expected moral values (Mufti *et al.*, 2024).

Character building, as one of the main goals of education, faces new complexities in this digital era. Easy access to information through the internet, while providing educational benefits, also makes students vulnerable to negative influences that can shape attitudes and behaviors that deviate from expected moral values (Kahfi, 2025; Ramdhayani *et al.*, 2020). This condition requires a learning strategy that not only focuses on mastering knowledge but also strengthens students' character values in a digital context.

Character building is an important aspect of education, especially in this digital era. Good character encompasses not only disciplined behavior, responsibility, and social awareness, but also the capacity to act wisely in responding to challenges in the digital world (Arbi & Amrullah, 2024). On the other hand, although technological advances provide many conveniences in the learning process, technology also introduces challenges that are just as significant, especially in terms of interaction between teachers and students (Garlinska *et al.*, 2023). Advanced technologies, such as online platforms, educational apps, and social media, have created new avenues for student learning. However, challenges arise when direct interaction between students and teachers is limited, which can hinder the holistic development of students' character (Sofi-Karim *et al.*, 2023).

Previous research indicates that implementing a structured reward-and-punishment system can enhance students' learning motivation and character development. Recognition of achievements through digital media can strengthen students' motivation and increase engagement in the learning process (Dewi & Alam, 2020). Consistent with this, gamification elements, such as digital badges in game-based learning, have been shown to improve student performance and encourage long-term engagement (Lara-Cabrera *et al.*, 2023; Haque *et al.*, 2024). Nevertheless, improper implementation of gamification can undermine students' intrinsic motivation and reduce their understanding of the learning material, underscoring the need for an appropriate gamification strategy (Almeida *et al.*, 2023; Raharjo *et al.*, 2024). These findings highlight the importance of careful design in integrating digital technology to support character development. However, most existing studies focus primarily on the effectiveness of digital learning in improving academic achievement, whereas the comprehensive integration of character development in digital learning remains underexplored.

Nevertheless, there remains a gap in the literature for this study. Most studies focus on the effectiveness of digital learning in improving academic achievement, whereas the integration of comprehensive character development within digital learning remains underexplored. There has been little research on how reward-and-punishment models can be effectively applied in digital learning environments to strengthen students' character. Therefore, further research is needed to bridge this gap and enable the optimal, contextually integrated integration of character education in the digital era.

Research on students' character development in the digital era has been widely conducted. However, most studies focus on academic aspects and pay less attention to how technology can be applied to character development itself. Most existing studies focus on how technology improves learning quality, whereas its role in students' character development has not been explored in depth. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining how digital technology, particularly in the form of digitally based reward-

and-punishment models, can shape students' character in the rapidly evolving digital information era. Technology can facilitate character development, given that character is shaped not only in the classroom but also through social interactions and students' behavior outside the classroom, which is often influenced by the information they access in the virtual world.

This study identifies three main issues, namely: the implementation of a digital technology-based reward model in influencing learning motivation and encouraging positive behavior among students; the effectiveness of applying educational punishments based on technology in reducing negative behavior among students without causing harmful psychological effects; and the contribution of teachers' roles and parental involvement in supporting the successful implementation of digital technology-based reward and punishment models in shaping students' character. The hypothesis proposed in this study is that implementing reward-and-punishment models integrated with digital technology will be more effective in shaping students' character than conventional models, because digital technology enables more transparent, personalized, and adaptive recognition and consequences tailored to students' needs in the digital era.

This study aims to analyze and evaluate the implementation of digital technology-based reward and punishment models in shaping students' character in the digital era. The main focus of this research is an analysis of the influence of digitally based reward models on students' motivation to learn and positive behavior. In addition, this study examines the impact of implementing technology-based educational punishment models on reducing the frequency of negative behavior in the school environment. The role of teachers as facilitators in implementing digital reward-and-punishment models is also evaluated, including the strategies employed in the learning process. Furthermore, this study assesses the extent of parental involvement in supporting the successful implementation of these models at home and at school. Through this research, it is hoped that educational policy recommendations will emerge that support the optimal use of digital technology in strategies for shaping students' character, and that a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of digitally based reward-and-punishment approaches in shaping students' character in the modern era will be provided.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Character Education and Social-Cognitive Theory

Character education is a systematic process of instilling moral values in shaping individuals who are integrous, responsible, and ethical (Habsy *et al.*, 2024b). The three main dimensions of character education include moral knowing (the ability to distinguish right from wrong), moral feeling (the development of empathy and conscience), and moral action (the actualization of values in action), which must be developed integrally in the learning process (Susanti, 2022). Cognitive factors and sociocultural contexts influence character formation, necessitating an approach that is situational, interactive, and reflective. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) emphasizes the importance of learning through observation, imitation, and modeling, which is reinforced by cognitive processes such as self-efficacy, motivation, and environmental influences (Zsolnai, 2016). Children learn from important figures around them, such as teachers, parents, and peers, who serve as models of values such as honesty and responsibility (Mubin *et al.*, 2021).

This modeling activates cognitive and affective systems in processing social experiences, consistent with reciprocal determinism, which emphasizes the mutual interaction among behavior, environment, and personal factors. Children act as active agents in character formation through daily social experiences, including emotional interactions with teachers that encourage prosocial behavior (Andini *et al.*, 2024). Thus, character education requires the integration of cognitive, affective, and moral action aspects. The social-cognitive approach indicates that character is shaped through meaningful social learning processes.

In elementary school, this approach is important because children are at the concrete-operational stage, where social values and rules are understood and internalized through direct experience (Imanulhaq & Ichsan, 2022).

### **Reward and Punishment in the Context of Digital Education**

The concept of reward and punishment has long been integral to behaviorist theory, which is widely applied in education. B.F. Skinner, a leading figure in this approach, argued that, through the theory of Operant Conditioning, consequences, either reinforcement or punishment, can shape that behavior. Reinforcement consists of positive reinforcement, which is providing a pleasant stimulus after the desired behavior occurs, and negative reinforcement, which is the removal of an unpleasant stimulus to strengthen a particular behavior (Munthe *et al.*, 2023). Conversely, punishment includes positive punishment (adding an unpleasant consequence) and negative punishment (removing a pleasant stimulus) to reduce the frequency of undesired behavior. In elementary schools, rewards and punishments are often used to promote discipline, encourage active participation, and instill moral values from an early age (Habsy *et al.*, 2024a). The development of digital technology has driven the transformation of the application of rewards and punishments from conventional methods to a more adaptive, digitally-based approach (Musseng *et al.*, 2025). The current digital reward system is classified into two categories: material and immaterial rewards. Material rewards include achievement certificates, medals, and cash prizes, while immaterial rewards include verbal praise in special forums, appreciative writings, and opportunities to participate in certain projects. Meanwhile, digital punishment is designed more educationally and reflectively, such as restricting access to content, using reflective online assignments, and issuing automatic reminders of violations (Putra & Wiryawan, 2021).

For this digital system to function effectively, the theoretical foundation of students' intrinsic motivation is an important consideration. One relevant approach is Self-Determination Theory, developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, which emphasizes the importance of fulfilling three primary psychological needs: autonomy (the freedom to act), competence (the ability to complete tasks), and relatedness (the sense of connection with others). If the digital reward system aligns with these three needs, reinforcement of student behavior can be more effective and sustainable (Nyuhuan, 2024). In the context of educational technology, the success of implementing digital rewards and punishments is also influenced by the extent to which users accept and adopt the technology. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis, highlights two main variables: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of the digital system (Marmoah *et al.*, 2022). If the platform used does not align with students' characteristics or adequately supports the learning process, its effectiveness may be hindered. This review shows that the use of digital rewards and punishments is inseparable from interconnected theoretical dimensions, ranging from behaviorist and motivation theories to technology acceptance models. Each dimension contributes to understanding the complexity of implementing digital reinforcement systems in character education at the elementary school level.

### **Integration of Religious Values and Local Culture**

In the context of character education in Indonesia, the integration of religious values and local culture into digital reward-and-punishment systems plays a strategic role in shaping students' holistic character. This approach emphasizes not only moral and spiritual aspects but also efforts to ground these values in children's daily lives. (Abidin *et al.*, 2025). The implementation of reward and punishment in Islamic education should adhere to the principles of sharia, customs, and local norms to ensure comprehensive character development. From the perspective of the benefits (maslahat) of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah as explained by Firdaus, reward is understood as targhīb (positive motivation). In contrast, punishment is

understood as tarḥīb (educational warning), both of which are not merely tools for the mechanistic control of behavior (Aquil *et al.*, 2025).

The application of operant conditioning grounded in Islamic values, implemented through consistent rewards for good behavior and reflective punishments, has been shown to improve students' discipline and prosocial character (Imami *et al.*, 2025). In addition, the use of digital rewards, such as Islamic badges and educational punishments in the form of online reflections, significantly increases motivation and shapes students' character (Wulansari *et al.*, 2025). The implementation of digital rewards and punishments, grounded in local values and Nusantara wisdom, aligns with the spirit of Islam Nusantara as an inclusive and culturally rooted form of religiosity. Islam Nusantara emphasizes the importance of conveying Islamic teachings while respecting local culture, including values of cooperation and respect for teachers, which can be achieved through the tarḥīb-tarḥīb approach. These teachings are based on the principles of mercy and justice in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and are directed towards safeguarding the five main aspects of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah: religion (dīn), life (nafs), intellect ('aql), progeny (nasl), and property (māl). This context enables the development of rewards, such as badges with local nuances, as part of a character-learning strategy (Sirait, 2016). Consistent with this religious framework, a digital reward system should be designed according to the principles of psychological needs in Self-Determination Theory. In this case, the rewards should foster the development of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Pangaribuan *et al.*, 2021).

### **The Role of Teachers and Families in Shaping Digital Character**

Character development through digital reward-and-punishment strategies requires synergy among teachers, parents, and school policies. Teachers play a central role as role models, facilitators, and providers of fair and consistent feedback. As socialization agents, teachers, together with the family environment, instill values and norms through a balanced approach that mitigates negative effects such as stress and low student motivation. Consistency in administering rewards (such as digital badges) and educational punishments (such as online reflective assignments) reinforces the view that this intervention is not merely a tool for compliance but a means of self-development. Open explanations of each action are also important to ensure that students feel supported rather than punished (Iskandar *et al.*, 2024).

Parental contribution to character development cannot be overlooked, especially as an extension of the teacher's role at home. This role can be realized through digital parenting and monitoring of children's behavior via platforms such as WhatsApp groups or behavior dashboards. Parents who are emotionally present, set rules for technology use, and support the rewards given by the school will strengthen the process of value internalization. Research shows that digital parenting, combined with a positive school climate and smart supervision of gadget use, can improve discipline and reduce deviant behavior (Ngulandari *et al.*, 2024). The use of screen time as a bargaining tool should be limited because it can hinder the development of children's intrinsic motivation and emotional skills (Panjeti-Madan & Ranganathan, 2023).

Support from educational management also plays a key role. The availability of formal policies that support a character-based digital system, the provision of child-friendly platforms, and teacher training in technology are important factors influencing the success of the reward-and-punishment system. Without clear policies and adequate training, a digital system risks becoming merely a formality that has no significant impact on students' character development (Fahmi *et al.*, 2024).

Collaboration between parties is ideally built within a collaborative ecosystem. Proactive communication between teachers and parents is important to ensure a shared understanding of the character indicators internalized through a reward-and-punishment system. Teachers need to communicate students' progress transparently, while schools create an open, dialogical climate regarding values and behavior. In this

context, the character approach is no longer black-and-white but becomes an integral part of learning. Research from Pekayon Elementary School, using an experimental design, shows that digital rewards can increase student engagement more than punishment (Wulansari *et al.*, 2025). Thus, digital reward and punishment strategies will only be effective if implemented within a collaborative framework that is fair, communicative, and reflective. Teachers play a central role as moral models; parents reinforce and monitor at home; and schools provide supportive policies and infrastructure. Through the synergy of these three elements, the digital system not only shapes external discipline but also fosters students' authentic and sustainable moral character.

## METHODS

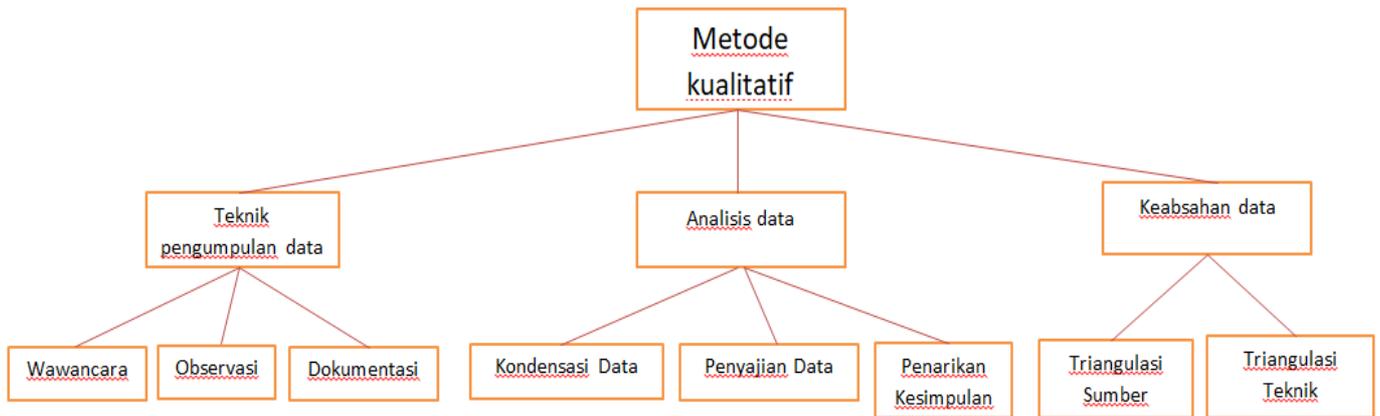
This study employs a qualitative, case-study approach to explore in depth the implementation of digital reward and punishment in shaping the character of elementary school students. This approach is chosen to understand phenomena in real-life contexts, taking into account the social and cultural complexities of the school environment, as stated by Creswell & Poth (2016) in their book "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches." An intrinsic case study design is used to focus the study on a unique case: the implementation of a digital system in an elementary school that integrates technology into character building. The research site was located at SDN 3 Sempu, Banyuwangi, East Java, which was purposively selected because the school has implemented a digital reward-and-punishment system continuously for more than two years. The researcher positioned themselves as the primary instrument, directly interacting in data collection and in interpreting the meaning of the observed phenomena.

This study involved 19 active participants selected through purposive sampling based on direct involvement in the digital reward-and-punishment system. These participants comprised 12 students, 6 from grade IV and 6 from grade V, who were known to be actively involved in the implementation of the system. In addition, 4 classroom teachers were involved because they played a direct role in planning and implementing character-building strategies. A guidance counselor was also included because of their role in supporting students' behavioral development. The school principal was involved because they have the authority to establish policies for implementing this system. At the same time, 1 administrative staff member was included because they are responsible for managing the digital system's data and documentation. Participants were selected purposively to ensure the depth of information relevant to the research objectives.

Data were collected through three main techniques: interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted semi-structuredly with the principal, classroom teachers, Guidance and Counseling teachers, and several students and educational staff. The questions were designed flexibly to allow for in-depth information gathering. In interviews with students, the approach was adjusted according to their cognitive development level to ensure more effective and ethical communication. Observations were conducted by directly engaging in the school environment, noting the implementation of digital rewards and punishments, and students' responses to them. Additionally, documentation was obtained from school archives, including digital award records, discipline reports, and applicable rules and regulations, to enrich context and strengthen the findings.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive techniques proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which include three main stages: data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The analysis began while data collection was ongoing, through highlighting key information, grouping categories, and identifying thematic patterns that represent digital reward and punishment practices in elementary schools. The findings were compiled gradually to ensure coherence between the empirical context and the relevant supporting theory. To ensure data validity, triangulation techniques were

employed, including both source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation is achieved by comparing information obtained from multiple informants, whereas technique triangulation is achieved by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, data validation is performed through member checking and discussions with peers (peer debriefing). All procedures in this method are illustrated in the flowchart of the qualitative research method, which includes data collection techniques, analysis processes, and validation mechanisms, as presented in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Structure of Qualitative Research Methodology  
Source: Author's Construction (2025)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the elementary school years, children are in an important phase of developing early moral identity. Observations in school settings indicate that children who feel valued, heard, and understood tend to develop empathy and caring attitudes toward others. Therefore, creating a learning environment that supports character development is crucial, as this is achieved through role modeling, moral dialogue, and consistent reflection on values practiced by teachers. In this context, implementing a digital technology-based reward model is expected to enhance students' learning motivation and encourage positive behavior. The school emphasizes the importance of this system in fostering positive responses from students,

*“Kami memang sudah menerapkan sistem digital ini selama dua tahun, dan peserta didik lebih cepat merespons reward digital dibanding reward konvensional. Model reward berbasis teknologi digital memberikan penghargaan atau umpan balik secara langsung dan real-time kepada peserta didik. Karena guru perlu memastikan bahwa reward tidak hanya diberikan atas hasil, tetapi juga proses belajar. Sehingga peserta didik termotivasi dan semangat belajar.”*  
(Principal)

This indicates that the school's experience in implementing a digital system has had a positive impact on students' responses and motivation. This aligns with students' perceptions of digital rewards, particularly in cultivating intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. According to the PAI teacher, digital rewards such as praise on the school platform, virtual badges, and public recognition encourage extrinsic motivation. However, some students also develop an intrinsic drive to maintain good behavior across various stages, guided by careful planning. This aligns with the PAI teacher's opinion,

*“Ada peserta didik yang merasa bangga karena dapat reward, tapi sekarang juga dia jadi pengen bantu teman meski enggak dapet poin. Artinya pujian publik mendorong motivasi ekstrinsik; berkembang motivasi intrinsik yang memberikan dampak terhadap psikologis peserta didik, yakni membangkitkan keinginan belajar lebih, kompetensi antar peserta didik, dan keterkaitan antara satu dengan lainnya.”* (Teacher, interview on March 19, 2024)

The explanation concludes that the implementation of technology-based rewards encourages students' learning motivation through praise delivered in WhatsApp groups, which has a psychological impact, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This aligns with the statements of directly involved parties, namely the principal, teachers, and students, in the implementation of the technology-based reward model. The results of the source triangulation are identified in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Source Triangulation

Informant A (Principal)	Informant B (Teacher)	Informant C (Student)	Information Results
The perception of digital rewards elicits intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as evidenced by content shared in the WhatsApp group.	These rewards have a significant impact, particularly on students' psychological well-being. 8 out of 12 students increased their participation over 3 weeks; their self-confidence improved.	Always enthusiastic when receiving praise or awards, so they can help friends even without getting points. Moreover, if it is just a sticker, only I know. However, if it is in the WhatsApp group, my mother can also see it.	Accurate

*Source. Research 2024*

**Table 1** presents the source triangulation results, indicating the accuracy of the interviews with the three informants. The rewards provided consistently and clearly enhance students' self-confidence. Based on observational data, 8 of 12 students demonstrated increased participation within 3 weeks of receiving digital rewards. Teachers also noted increased engagement in online discussion forums. In addition, several students reported that digital rewards were more motivating because parents and friends could see them.

It is well established that the use of a reward model based on digital technology affects learning motivation and encourages positive behavior, with parental support. As a result, students become more enthusiastic about learning because they are motivated by rewards visible to their parents. When parents learn that their child has received an award, the child feels proud and seeks to maintain or improve their achievements. In addition to rewards that stimulate students' motivation, technology-based educational punishments can motivate students by reducing negative behavior without causing adverse psychological effects. This is because the effectiveness of educational punishment influences self-reflection and a sense of responsibility. Punishments, such as writing reflection letters, also promote moral awareness. As reflected in the words of a student who was given a punishment because of their own mistake, as follows,

*“Aku nyesel banget waktu harus nulis surat minta maaf. Rasanya malu tapi bikin aku mikir, ternyata selama ini aku terlalu egois dan nggak pernah benar-benar ngerti perasaan orang lain, terutama guru yang memberikan tugas padaku. Dari situ aku belajar buat lebih jujur sama diri sendiri dan berusaha untuk selalu melakukan kebaikan dan perintah dari guru.”*  
 (Student F, interview on March 22, 2024)

The statement illustrates the reflective impact of the digital punishment system implemented in schools. To enhance understanding of its implementation, the following visual documentation illustrates the process of administering punishment virtually.



**Figure 2.** *Implementation of Punishment Administration Virtually*  
Source. *Research 2024*

**Figure 2** shows that implementing punishment through a system that issues warnings or sends direct notifications to parents has a significant impact on students. It manifests through behavioral changes. Based on school documentation, there was a 40% decrease in tardiness and a 60% increase in on-time task completion after three weeks of implementing educational punishment.

The implementation of punishment also elicits emotional responses in students. This is because it can cause embarrassment in front of peers when conducted publicly and lower self-esteem, thereby indirectly fostering students' self-awareness, especially when they feel permanently labeled negatively. Although no significant negative effects have been found, students mentioned that digital punishment, such as restricting access to educational games, is more acceptable than physical or verbal punishment. It provides a deterrent effect with the support of teachers, parents, and the school environment. The roles of teachers and the school environment are crucial to the learning process. Teachers play a dual role as facilitators and role models. They apply punishment without causing humiliation and give rewards without bias. As stated by Khusnul Khotimah, the classroom teacher, as follows:

*"Kami selalu jelaskan alasan pemberian punishment, dan kami diskusi dulu dengan anak sebelum eksekusi. Penggunaan platform digital (seperti Google Form dan WhatsApp Broadcast, atau aplikasi sejenisnya) memang secara tepat untuk memberikan reward dan*

*punishment yang edukatif, bukan hukuman yang menakutkan. Karena sebenarnya guru tidak hanya memberi skor saja, tetapi juga menjelaskan makna dari perilaku baik dan buruk, mengaitkan dengan nilai-nilai karakter seperti disiplin, tanggung jawab, dan empati.” (Fourth Grade Teacher, interview on March 16, 2024)*

This indicates that teachers demonstrate consistency and effective communication because of the skills they possess. With the help of technology, teachers can objectively and consistently monitor and assess students' behavior and provide timely feedback. According to observational data, teachers regularly communicate students' progress to parents via an application, thereby ensuring continuity between school and home.

Parental participation in this process has proven to be important. They are invited to review the students' behavior reports regularly. This provides parents with an opportunity to provide education and a system of control for their children. According to the opinion of parents of students at SDN 03 Sempu,

*“Waktu anak saya dapat reward dan saya tahu dari grup, saya langsung kasih selamat juga di rumah. Karena orang tua yang terlibat, meskipun bukan hanya saya, akan melanjutkan penguatan perilaku yang dilakukan guru di rumah masing-masing. Sehingga anak-anak terdorong untuk semangat belajar dan berpikir positif. Sebenarnya, teknologi itu alat bantu, bukan satu-satunya penentu nilai karakter. Tetapi, teknologi sangat penting untuk zaman sekarang.” (F's parents)*

Based on the observed data, the school uses a simple application built on Google Forms and WhatsApp Broadcast to record, monitor, and transparently distribute rewards. Parental participation in this process has proven important, as they are periodically invited to review students' behavior reports. This will achieve success in improving character through regular coordination among teachers, parents, and students, using a humanistic approach that treats punishment as educational and rewards as non-excessive. The success of the digital reward-and-punishment model is not only about the application itself but also about the extent to which teachers and parents actively and reflectively collaborate to consistently shape students' character both at school and at home.

## **Discussions**

These findings indicate that digital reward and punishment strategies are not only tools for behavioral control but also pedagogical media that can encourage the internalization of values. Students' positive responses to digital rewards indicate a shift in preference toward forms of appreciation that are more contextual with the digital world in which they are familiar. This supports the view that motivation to learn among elementary school children can be fostered through direct, real-time experiences and positive reinforcement (Riska *et al.*, 2025). Publicly distributed digital rewards via WhatsApp groups or similar applications play a role in building pride, self-esteem, and social recognition, which, in turn, strengthen prosocial behavior and the spirit of learning.

Conversely, the implementation of digitally mediated punishment, carried out with a reflective approach, such as writing an apology letter, demonstrates that students not only face consequences but also undergo a process of self-evaluation. This indicates that educational punishment can foster moral awareness and personal responsibility. The sense of shame students acknowledge when writing the letter serves as a turning point in the internalization of values such as honesty, empathy, and awareness of one's actions. This phenomenon aligns with Lickona's idea, which emphasizes the importance of character education through meaningful moral experiences (Zuhri *et al.*, 2022).

The effectiveness of this educational punishment is further supported by school documentation, which shows a 40% decrease in tardiness during the intervention period. This reduction serves as an initial indicator that students are beginning to evaluate their actions not solely in terms of personal consequences

but also in terms of their impact on others. Thus, this study shows that the proportional application of reward and punishment models significantly shapes students' character in the digital era. These findings strengthen the argument that, when designed appropriately, reward and punishment systems can not only improve discipline but also foster a sense of responsibility among students toward themselves and their environment (Zuhdiah, 2019; Zuhri & Mahbubi, 2023).

Furthermore, these findings are consistent with the concept of character formation, which emphasizes the importance of integrated development of three main dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Susanti, 2022). In this context, the active involvement of teachers and parents through digital platforms strengthens the continuity between the values taught at school and those instilled at home. It creates a character-education ecosystem that is responsive to technological developments and to students' psychosocial needs.

The findings of this study reinforce the principles of behaviorism articulated by Skinner in operant conditioning theory. Rewards function as positive reinforcers that increase the frequency of desired behavior, whereas punishment serves to decrease the frequency of undesired behavior. Field data indicate that providing digital rewards in a timely and transparent manner, such as virtual badges or recognition on online platforms, increases students' motivation to learn and their active participation. This reflects the principles of reinforcement immediacy and social visibility in Skinner's theory, which posits that reinforcement is more effective when delivered immediately after the positive behavior occurs (Kusumawati *et al.*, 2023; Viana *et al.*, 2023). This connection strengthens the argument developed in the literature review regarding the transformation of reward and punishment from conventional methods to a more adaptive, digitally based approach (Musseng *et al.*, 2025).

The research findings also reflect key aspects of Bandura's social cognitive theory discussed in the literature review. Students are motivated not only by the rewards they receive but also by observing peers who earn recognition. In this context, active observational learning occurs in digital spaces, where students observe the social consequences of others' behavior and adjust their own behavior to elicit similar responses. These findings support the concept of reciprocal determinism, which emphasizes the mutual interaction between behavior, environment, and personal factors in character formation (Mubin *et al.*, 2021; Zsolnai, 2016). Social engagement on digital platforms increases student motivation through continuous social expectations and recognition, consistent with the modeling principle in social cognitive theory, as explained in the literature review (Martins *et al.*, 2021).

The findings of this study align with previous research indicating that the use of reward and punishment can enhance students' learning motivation, particularly in religious education. This indicates that reward and punishment strategies increase students' motivation in religious education, demonstrating the relevance of this approach across subjects and character domains (Tefbana & Sanjaya, 2024). Furthermore, the research results show that digital rewards, such as point systems and badges, are the main drivers of learning motivation in the digital era. Interestingly, a similar pattern was observed among elementary school students, indicating that the penetration of technology into children's lives from an early age also alters how they perceive rewards and motivation (Pranawengtias, 2022).

Moreover, the findings of this study also confirm the importance of integrating religious values and local culture as outlined in the literature review. The implementation of reward and punishment in the context of character education in Indonesia should take into account Sharia principles, customs, and local norms to ensure a comprehensive character-building process. From the perspective of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah as previously explained, reward is understood as targhīb (positive motivation), while punishment is understood as tarhīb (educational warning) (Aquil *et al.*, 2025). The application of operant conditioning grounded in Islamic values, implemented through consistent rewards for good behavior and reflective punishments, has been shown to improve students' discipline and prosocial character (Imami *et al.*, 2025). This can be realized through the use of locally themed digital badges, such as 'Pejuang Jujur' or 'Sahabat

Tahlil,' as well as leaderboards named after local or Islamic figures. This approach aims to avoid the use of manipulative or traumatic digital rewards and punishments that ignore students' cultural contexts. For example, an Islamic badge bearing the inscription 'Salat Tepat Waktu' not only serves as a symbolic reward but also strengthens students' spiritual identification and fosters an inclusive digital learning space in which students feel accepted and valued within their community. Thus, properly designed digital incentives can extend the function of rewards, not only as behavioral reinforcement but also as a means of developing empathy and social responsibility.

Furthermore, local cultural values can be integrated through various forms of reflective expression, such as pantun, proverbs, or regional music. For example, students who demonstrate discipline can be given digital pantun themed around discipline, thereby encouraging them to love and appreciate the nation's cultural heritage. This approach enriches the character dimension by internalizing values derived from local traditions. Therefore, digital rewards and punishments are not merely instruments for regulating behavior, but also serve as a medium for character transformation that harmoniously integrates religious, cultural, and psychological aspects.

Another important aspect revealed by this study is the crucial role of collaboration between teachers and parents in supporting the implementation of a digital reward-and-punishment system. This finding reinforces concepts discussed in the literature review regarding teachers' roles as role models, facilitators, and providers of fair and consistent feedback. Teachers who apply rewards and punishments proportionally and fairly can prevent negative effects, such as low motivation or stress, among students (Iskandar *et al.*, 2024). Parental contributions through digital parenting and monitoring children's behavior on digital media have also been shown to strengthen the process of value internalization. Research shows that digital parenting, accompanied by a positive school climate and smart supervision of gadget use, can improve discipline and reduce deviant behavior (Ngulandari *et al.*, 2024).

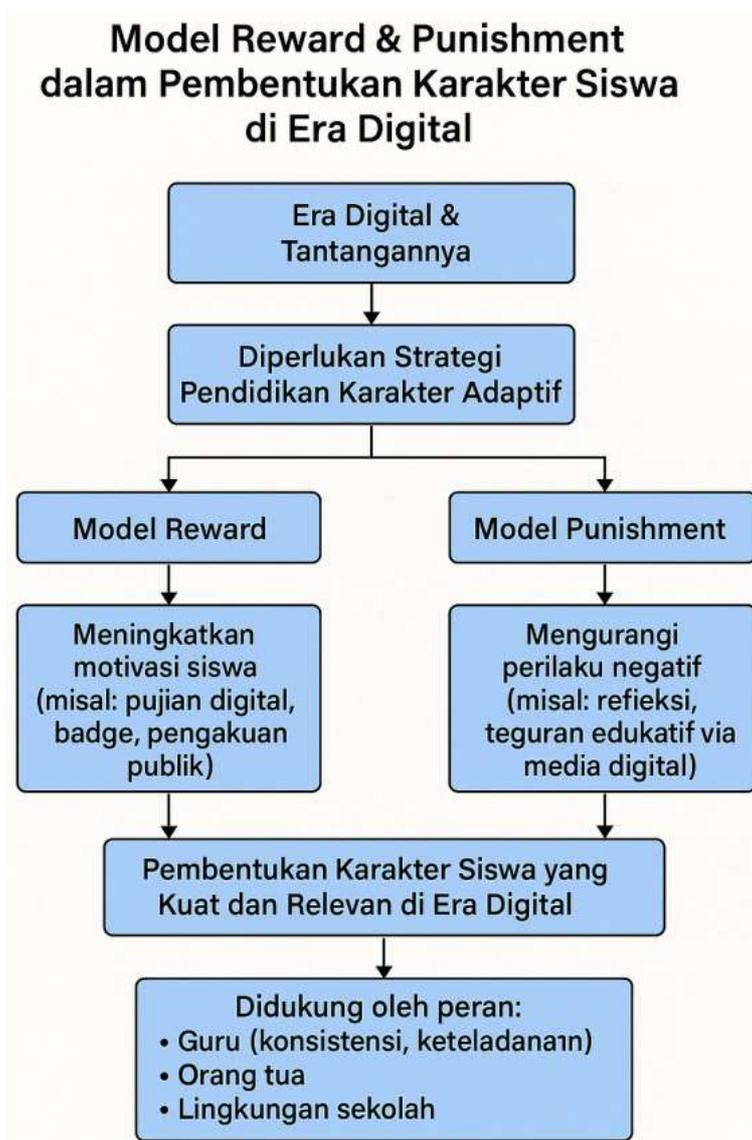
The connection with the self-determination theory, as outlined in the literature review, is also clearly evident in the findings of this study. A digital reward system that aligns with the three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—can produce deeper and more sustainable reinforcement of student behavior (Nyuhuan, 2024). The badges awarded are not only for academic achievements but also for actions such as helping friends, expressing opinions politely, strengthening character values, and fulfilling children's social needs. A simple yet meaningful application has proven far more effective than complex digital systems that are not emotionally or socially connected to students. However, the approach differs from previous research that emphasized punishment based on symbolic nationalism, such as mandating the singing of songs as a form of correction. This study shows that reflective punishment, such as writing reflection tasks or having personal dialogues, is more effective for elementary school students because it builds awareness rather than creating feelings of shame or fear. In other words, the child's age and psychological development should be considered when determining appropriate educational and constructive punishments (Kurniawan *et al.*, 2025). This aligns with the stage of concrete operational cognitive development in children aged 7-12 years, as described in the literature review, in which values and social rules are understood logically and internalized through direct experience (Imanulhaq & Ichsan, 2022).

This study also has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted at a single elementary school with a specific cultural background, so the results cannot yet be generalized. Second, the four-week observation period was insufficient to assess the long-term impact on students' character. Third, the researcher's direct involvement as an observer introduces the potential for bias, although this was mitigated by triangulation of documentation and interview data.

Practically, teachers are advised to combine digital rewards with immediate verbal feedback so that students still receive a personal touch and intrinsic motivation. Schools need to develop standard operating procedures for a fair and transparent digital reward-punishment system, and involve parents through digital

channels to strengthen character development at home. From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the application of behaviorist principles to educational technology and demonstrates that reinforcement principles remain highly relevant in the digital world. Additionally, the findings enrich Bandura's social learning theory by highlighting the role of observation within the digital ecosystem. Behaviors and rewards are displayed openly and widely, thereby reinforcing social imitation through teacher and parent involvement.

As a conceptual synthesis, these findings affirm that digital reward and punishment strategies not only impact behavior but also serve as instruments of modern character education that simultaneously engage psychological, social, and technological aspects. The integration of behaviorism, social cognitive theory, self-determination theory, and the technology acceptance model, as discussed in the literature review, has been shown to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the complexities of implementing digitally based reinforcement systems in character education at the elementary school level. Therefore, the conceptual model developed will illustrate how theory, practice, and supporting actors interact to shape students' character systemically and contextually in the digital era. This model is shown in **Figure 3** below.



**Figure 3** Reward and Punishment Model Scheme in Shaping Student Character in the Digital Era  
Source: Author's Document, 2025

**Figure 3** above shows a schematic model of reward and punishment as a strategy for shaping students' character in the digital era. Rewards are used to reinforce positive behaviors, such as discipline and responsibility, whereas punishment is used to educate and correct deviant behaviors. This scheme emphasizes the importance of balancing both, as well as the active role of teachers, parents, and technology in guiding students towards the sustainable development of good character.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion that have been conducted, the research hypothesis is proven: the implementation of a reward and punishment model integrated with digital technology is more effective in shaping students' character compared to conventional models because it allows for more transparent, personalized, and adaptive recognition and consequences that meet the needs of students in the digital era. Regarding the first issue, the implementation of a digital technology-based reward model has been shown to enhance students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and to promote positive behavior. Recognition through digital platforms not only provides momentary satisfaction but also encourages

students to develop prosocial behavior in a sustained manner. The transparency of the digital system allows learners to experience meaningful recognition, as it is visible to their social environment, in line with Self-Determination theory, which emphasizes the fulfillment of psychological needs in the form of autonomy, competence, and social relatedness.

Regarding the second issue, the use of technology-based educational punishment is effective in reducing students' negative behaviors without causing harmful psychological effects. The punishment approach through digital reflection and constructive reprimands encourages students to self-reflect and develop moral awareness without creating trauma or fear, thereby enabling the character education process to proceed constructively and meaningfully. Regarding the third issue, synergistic collaboration between teachers and parents is a determining factor in the successful implementation of technology-based models for shaping students' character. Teachers act as consistent and fair facilitators in applying the digital system, while parents serve as the school's extension at home through digital parenting. This synergy creates a holistic ecosystem of character education with consistent value reinforcement between school and family.

Overall, implementing a reward-and-punishment model based on digital technology, applied proportionally and supported by active collaboration among educational stakeholders, can be an effective strategy for shaping the character of elementary school students in the digital era. This system not only instills external discipline but also fosters authentic moral character by developing self-awareness, social responsibility, and students' intrinsic motivation. The implications of this study include the need to develop standard operating procedures for a fair and transparent digital system, regular training for teachers on the use of educational technology for character building, the development of child-friendly digital platforms, and the integration of religious values and local culture in the design of digital systems to strengthen national identity and character.

Further research is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to observe the long-term impact of the system on character development, comparative studies in schools with diverse backgrounds, quantitative research to statistically measure effectiveness, studies on the integration of local wisdom into digital systems, as well as exploration of the impact of digital systems on students' social relationships and empathy to ensure a balance between the digital world and authentic social interactions.

## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

I declare that this writing is my own original work and free from plagiarism. Thank you for encouraging me to complete this article quickly.

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