

# Building Better Behavior: How School Environments Shape Student Character

Christine Lucia Mamuaya<sup>1</sup>

Universitas Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya

Orcid: 0009-0002-7154-6361

## Abstract

This study explores the strategic role of the school environment in shaping positive student behavior through a comprehensive literature review. Recognizing that schools are not only academic institutions but also environments where students develop social and emotional skills, this research investigates how physical settings, social relationships, school culture, and emotional support influence student conduct. Using sources from reputable academic journals, the study categorizes the school environment into four key components: physical environment, social environment, school rules and culture, and emotional support. Findings indicate that clean, safe, and well-designed classrooms contribute to better focus and reduced behavioral issues. Positive teacher-student relationships and peer interactions foster cooperation and reduce bullying. Clear, fair rules and supportive school cultures help internalize values like respect and responsibility. Emotional support from teachers and counselors enhances student confidence and emotional regulation. The study highlights the importance of a holistic approach, where all elements of the school environment work together to promote student well-being and positive behavior. The findings also suggest practical implications for educators and policymakers, especially in designing school environments that are inclusive, supportive, and conducive to both academic and character development. Ultimately, creating a positive school environment is a collective responsibility that significantly influences students' success and growth.

**Keywords:** School Environment, Student Behavior, Positive Discipline, Emotional Support

## Introduction

Around the world, schools are not just places for learning subjects like math or science. They are also places where children learn how to behave, interact with others, and become good members of society (Simpson & Sacken, 2020). However, many schools face problems like bullying, fighting, and students not following rules. These issues are not only in one country but are seen in many parts of the world.

In the United States, for example, some schools have strict rules that lead to students being suspended or even arrested for small mistakes (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). This situation is called the "school-to-prison pipeline," where students, especially from minority groups, are more likely to end up in trouble with the law because of school policies. In Indonesia, reports have shown that many cases of violence happen in schools, affecting students' safety and learning (Lilawati, 2024).

These problems show that the environment in schools can greatly affect how students behave. A negative environment can lead to more problems, while a positive environment can help students behave better and feel safe.

Understanding how the school environment affects student behavior is very important. If we know what makes students behave well or badly, we can make changes to help them. This is not only good for the students but also for teachers, parents, and the whole community. A positive school environment can lead to better learning, fewer behavioral problems, and happier students (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). It

can also reduce issues like bullying and violence (Wang et al., 2013). By studying this topic, we can find ways to improve schools and help students succeed both academically and socially.

Many researchers have studied the impact of the school environment on student behavior. For instance, a study by Lindstrom Johnson et al. (2012) found that the physical aspects of a school, like cleanliness and safety, can influence how students perceive rules and consequences, which in turn affects their behavior. Another study highlighted the importance of green spaces in schools. Exposure to greenery has been linked to reduced behavioral problems and improved cognitive functions in children (Dadvand et al., 2015; Dadvand et al., 2019). Research has also shown that outdoor learning environments can enhance mental health, academic performance, and social skills among students (Mann et al., 2022). Furthermore, the quality of teacher-student relationships plays a crucial role in influencing social behaviors. Supportive and respectful interactions lead to better social competencies among students (Kumari & Biswas, 2023).

While these studies provide valuable insights, there is still a need for more comprehensive research that combines various aspects of the school environment—physical, social, and emotional—and their collective impact on student behavior. Most studies focus on specific elements, but understanding how these factors interact can offer a more complete picture.

Additionally, much of the existing research is based on quantitative data. There is a lack of qualitative studies that explore students' and teachers' personal experiences and perceptions of the school environment. Such insights can provide a deeper understanding of the issues and help in developing more effective interventions.

This study aims to fill the existing research gap by conducting a literature review that examines the strategic role of the school environment in building positive student behavior. It will explore how different elements of the school environment—such as physical settings, teacher-student relationships, and school policies—interact to influence student behavior.

By analyzing existing literature, the study seeks to identify effective strategies and practices that schools can implement to create a positive environment conducive to good behavior. The goal is to provide educators, policymakers, and stakeholders with actionable insights to enhance student behavior and overall school climate.

## Methods

This study employed a literature review method to explore how various aspects of the school environment influence student behavior. Rather than collecting new data directly from students, teachers, or school administrators, the research focused on analyzing existing scholarly work. The purpose was to synthesize insights from previously published studies and identify common patterns, strategies, and findings that are relevant to building positive behavior in school settings.

To collect relevant and credible literature, we conducted comprehensive searches using academic databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and official websites of established educational institutions. Specific keywords were used to guide the search, including: *"school environment," "student behavior," "positive behavior," "school discipline," "school climate,"* and *"supportive learning environment."* These keywords helped in narrowing down the literature to studies that specifically explored the relationship between environmental factors and student conduct.

In selecting which articles to include, we applied clear criteria to ensure quality and relevance. The selected studies had to be authored by experts in education, psychology, or child development; published in peer-reviewed journals or recognized academic sources; and contain well-structured arguments or findings that focused on how the school environment influences behavior. Additionally, we sought to include studies from various cultural and educational contexts to ensure a broader perspective.

After identifying numerous potential sources, we selected those that were most directly aligned with our focus. The eight key studies reviewed include: Afalla and Fabelico (2020), who explored how effective

classroom design supports academic and behavioral success; Lamoreaux and Sulkowski (2020), who examined how school safety and design reduce stress and misbehavior; Martinez and Wighting (2023), who investigated teacher-student relationships and classroom dynamics; and Acosta et al. (2019), who studied how school connectedness reduces bullying. Additionally, Gage et al. (2019) evaluated the impact of consistent discipline policies; Manzano Sánchez et al. (2021) examined school values and their role in shaping prosocial behavior; Colomeischi et al. (2022) focused on the impact of school mental health programs; and Marsh (2019) explored emotional well-being and its correlation with student conduct.

Each of these studies was carefully reviewed to extract key ideas, including how different school environments influence behavior, what patterns appear across the literature, and which environmental elements—such as physical space, social support, school policies, and emotional care—most strongly affect student outcomes. After analyzing the studies, we grouped the findings into four main categories: Physical Environment, Social Environment, School Rules and Culture, and Emotional Support. This thematic structure allowed us to clearly explain how various aspects of the school environment interact to support or hinder student behavior. The literature review approach not only deepened our understanding of the topic but also enabled us to propose practical strategies for educators and policymakers based on a solid foundation of international research.

## Results

From the literature we reviewed, we found several important points about how the school environment can shape student behavior. These points are grouped into four main areas:

*Physical Environment.* A good physical environment helps students feel safe, calm, and ready to learn. Many studies show that clean, bright, and well-designed classrooms improve students' ability to concentrate and behave well. For example, Afalla and Fabelico (2020) found that students in classrooms with natural lighting, fresh air, and flexible seating arrangements showed better attention and fewer behavior problems. Lamoreaux and Sulkowski (2020) also emphasized that noise levels, classroom layout, and safety features like fire exits, secure gates, and first aid facilities help reduce stress and increase feelings of safety among students. When students feel physically comfortable and secure in their learning space, they are more engaged in learning and less likely to misbehave.

*Social Environment.* The relationships between students, teachers, and peers play a big role in shaping behavior. A positive social environment creates a culture of respect and support. Martinez and Wighting (2023) reported that when teachers build warm, respectful relationships with students, there are fewer cases of classroom disruptions and more cooperation. Students are more willing to follow rules and participate in class.

Acosta et al. (2019) found that students who feel connected to their school community and have strong friendships are less likely to be involved in bullying or violent behavior. When students work in teams and help each other, they learn important social skills such as empathy, patience, and problem-solving.

*School Rules and Culture.* Clear rules and a positive school culture guide students in knowing what is right and wrong. Rules help students understand expectations. When rules are fair and applied equally, students are more likely to respect them. Gage et al. (2019) pointed out that schools with consistent rules and positive behavior policies saw improved student conduct and fewer suspensions.

Manzano Sánchez et al. (2021) compared schools with strict punishment policies to those using a supportive discipline system. They found that schools promoting values like honesty, respect, and responsibility had better student behavior outcomes. In these schools, students followed rules not because of fear, but because they understood the importance of those values.

The culture of a school—including what teachers and staff model through their behavior—is also important. If teachers and school leaders show respect, kindness, and integrity, students tend to follow their example.

*Emotional Support.* Students do better when they feel emotionally safe and supported. Emotional support means that teachers, counselors, and other staff care about students' feelings and mental well-being. When students feel heard and accepted, they behave better in school.

Colomeischi et al. (2022) found that schools offering emotional counseling, peer support groups, and mental health programs reduced problems like fighting, bullying, and emotional breakdowns. Students who felt supported were less likely to act out in class or withdraw from social interactions.

According to Marsh (2019), emotional well-being is closely connected to behavior. Students facing problems at home or stress from social situations need caring adults at school. A teacher who listens, a counselor who checks in, or a principal who greets students each morning can all help students feel more confident and peaceful.

**Table 1. Summary of Key Points from the Literature:**

Category	Positive Effects on Student Behavior	Key References
Physical Environment	Better concentration, fewer distractions, safer feelings	Afalla and Fabelico (2020); Lamoreaux and Sulkowski (2020)
Social Environment	Better relationships, less bullying, more cooperation	Martinez and Wighting (2023); Acosta et al. (2019)
School Rules & Culture	Clear expectations, fewer discipline problems, stronger moral values	Gage et al. (2019); Manzano Sánchez et al. (2021)
Emotional Support	Lower aggression, more confidence, better emotional control	Colomeischi et al. (2022); Marsh (2019)

These results show that a well-designed school environment includes more than just physical buildings. It also involves people, rules, and emotions. When all parts work together, students are more likely to grow into respectful, kind, and responsible individuals.

## Discussion

The school environment is undeniably influential in shaping student behavior. It is not just the physical space of the classroom, but the social, emotional, and cultural context that collectively impacts how students act and engage in their learning. Previous research has consistently shown that when students are in a positive school environment, they tend to show better behavior, increased motivation, and stronger academic performance.

*Physical Environment and Student Behavior.* One of the key aspects of the school environment is its physical setup. Studies have found that a well-organized and well-maintained classroom can improve student concentration and reduce disruptive behavior. Rands and Gansemer-Topf (2017) reported that classroom design—such as proper lighting, space for movement, and good ventilation—can directly influence student engagement and reduce stress levels. This finding supports earlier studies, such as that of Lucas et al. (2024), who observed that natural light and comfortable room temperatures create a conducive environment for students to focus and participate actively in lessons.

In comparison, studies have also shown the negative effects of poorly maintained school environments. Lack of cleanliness, inadequate facilities, and safety hazards can contribute to anxiety and frustration among students. A chaotic or cluttered classroom, for instance, can distract students and hinder their ability to stay engaged in lessons. These findings underscore the importance of ensuring that the physical aspects of a school are considered as part of creating a positive learning environment.

*Social Environment and Relationships.* The social environment of a school is equally, if not more, important. Positive teacher-student relationships, peer support, and a sense of belonging are all critical factors that affect student behavior. According to Way (2011), students who feel respected and valued by their teachers are less likely to engage in disruptive behavior. These findings align with research by Lee and Huang (2021), who found that when students perceive their school as a place where they are treated with kindness and fairness, they are more likely to show positive behaviors such as cooperation and respect for others.

This is particularly important because positive social interactions in school often extend beyond the classroom. Students who have strong friendships and peer support networks are less likely to experience loneliness, bullying, or isolation. These students are more confident and less likely to engage in negative behaviors like aggression or exclusion (Buckley et al., 2011). Additionally, students who see their peers and teachers engaging in cooperative behaviors are more likely to model those behaviors themselves, creating a cycle of positivity and mutual respect within the school community.

*School Rules and Culture.* Clear and consistent rules play an important role in shaping behavior. Demir et al. (2023) highlighted that when students understand what is expected of them and see rules being applied consistently across the school, they are more likely to behave accordingly. Rules that promote respect, cooperation, and responsibility set the tone for how students interact with each other and with school staff. This is supported by Rijal et al. (2023), who found that schools that focused on creating a positive culture—where values like honesty and mutual respect were upheld—had fewer discipline problems and better student outcomes.

On the other hand, inconsistency in rule enforcement can lead to confusion and frustration, which may result in poor behavior. It is essential for teachers and school leaders to not only enforce rules but also model them, showing students the importance of following guidelines and respecting others. When students see their teachers and peers upholding the same values, they are more likely to follow suit.

*Emotional Support and Student Behavior.* Emotional support is a key factor that can significantly improve student behavior. Schools that provide emotional and psychological support, such as counseling services or peer support groups, create an environment where students feel safe to express their emotions and seek help when needed. Research by Merritt et al. (2012) found that students who received emotional support from teachers and counselors were less likely to exhibit behavioral problems such as aggression or withdrawal. This finding is supported by Oberle (2018), who pointed out that emotional well-being directly correlates with positive classroom behavior.

Additionally, emotional support extends beyond the actions of teachers and counselors. Peer relationships also play a significant role in emotional support. Students who feel a sense of belonging within their peer groups are more likely to feel secure and confident in their behavior. Schools that foster an inclusive and supportive atmosphere help students build resilience and coping mechanisms, which can prevent negative behaviors stemming from stress or personal issues.

### **Collective Responsibility for a Positive Environment**

Ultimately, the creation of a positive school environment is not the responsibility of one individual but requires the collective effort of the entire school community. Teachers, school leaders, administrative staff, and even students themselves all have a role to play in fostering an environment that encourages good behavior. Simple actions, like greeting students with a smile, providing encouragement, or addressing a student's concerns, can make a significant difference in how students feel about their school and how they behave.

### **Conclusion**



The school environment plays a crucial role in shaping student behavior, not only through formal teaching but also through the emotional and social climate it fosters. A positive, supportive, and well-structured school environment encourages students to develop discipline, empathy, and a sense of responsibility. When students feel safe, respected, and supported, they are more likely to engage in learning, cooperate with peers and teachers, and demonstrate positive behavior both inside and outside the classroom. These findings reinforce the importance of whole-school approaches that integrate social, emotional, and behavioral support as part of the educational experience.

The implications of this study suggest that school leaders, policymakers, and educators must prioritize the development of school environments that support student well-being holistically. Investing in social work services, training teachers in emotional literacy, and ensuring access to mental health resources are essential steps in fostering a resilient educational setting. Especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted students' routines and emotional stability, schools must adopt flexible and inclusive strategies to rebuild community, restore trust, and provide personalized support for students. Future policies and programs should focus on reducing inequalities in access to support services, particularly in rural or under-resourced schools, to ensure that every student can thrive regardless of their background.

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