

IMPLEMENTING THE MILITARY BARRACKS PROGRAM FOR CHARACTER EDUCATION IN PURWAKARTA: A SOCIOCULTURAL EDUCATIONAL REVIEW

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Abstract. The rising incidence of student delinquency, including truancy, fighting, and involvement in youth gangs, has prompted the implementation of a military-style rehabilitation program in Purwakarta Regency as an alternative strategy for addressing behavioral problems. This study aims to evaluate the program's implementation, stakeholder perceptions, and its impact on student attitudes and behavior. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings indicate that the program effectively fosters short-term behavioral changes by enforcing strict discipline and routine. However, the changes often diminish after reintegration into the school environment due to a lack of sustained support. While parents generally respond positively, concerns persist regarding the psychological intensity of the intervention. The study also reveals a heavy reliance on external interventions due to inadequate internal counseling systems within schools. It concludes that although the military approach serves as an initial behavioral trigger, long-term transformation requires a shift toward more humanistic models involving restorative practices, trained school counselors, and holistic educational policies to ensure sustainable support for at-risk students..

Keywords: Military-Based Student Rehabilitation, Adolescent Behavioral Issues, Values-Based Character Formation

I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of juvenile delinquency and the moral degradation of students represents a serious challenge in the Indonesian education system. Deviant behaviors such as bullying, truancy, brawling, and drug abuse frequently occur in various schools. These issues not only disrupt the learning process but also reflect the weakness of character education, which should instill moral values, responsibility, empathy, and discipline in students. Therefore, the concept of character education serves as a crucial foundation for both preventive and corrective efforts in addressing behavioral problems among adolescents[1].

Various strategies have been implemented to rehabilitate problematic students, including individual counseling, school-based point systems, and community programs. However, the effectiveness of these strategies remains suboptimal, particularly in regions with limited resources and unsupportive family environments[2]. In 2025, the local government of Purwakarta Regency, in collaboration with military personnel, launched a student development program conducted in a military camp. The program targeted junior and senior high school students exhibiting deviant behavior.

These students underwent 14 days of physical and mental training at the Artillery Regiment 1 Sthira Yudha in Purwakarta. A total of 39 students were voluntarily enrolled in the program by their parents, under the initiative of West Java Governor Kang Dedi Mulyadi and supported by Purwakarta Regent Saepul Bahri Binzein. However, there is a notable absence of empirical and systematic data evaluating the effectiveness of this program in transforming students' behavior and character. Key research questions include: Does this semi-military approach yield positive behavioral changes? What are the perspectives of students, teachers, parents, and military personnel? Is the approach consistent with child protection principles? Although praised by regional authorities as a moral recovery initiative, the program has drawn criticism from academics and members of the Indonesian Parliament (Commission X), who argue that it may stigmatize students and neglect more humanistic pedagogical principles[3] [4].

As an alternative solution to the stagnation of conventional methods, the semi-military discipline approach has been adopted as a novel intervention strategy. It is believed to restore positive behavior by instilling order, responsibility,

and leadership through physical and mental training. The program is conducted in a structured military environment supervised by trained instructors and integrates character education, physical activities, and daily discipline[5]. Behavioral progress is evaluated during the training period to inform follow-up decisions. This approach offers the potential for a new model of intervention that integrates the roles of schools, families, and external disciplinary institutions[6].

Previous studies have suggested that military-based discipline programs can enhance students' mental resilience, character, and self-control. Research by (Boklan[7]) demonstrated the benefits of military training on the physical and psychological development of school-aged youth. However, other studies have highlighted potential resistance among students and long-term psychological effects if the programs lack appropriate psychopedagogical frameworks [8] [9]. In contrast to earlier research that focused on military training for national identity or university students[10]. Genevaz[10], this study specifically investigates the effectiveness of a semi-military approach for troubled adolescents at the secondary education level offering a unique contribution to the discourse on discipline-based educational interventions.

The urgency of this research lies not only in the increasing moral crisis among students but also in the pressing need to develop evidence-based intervention models that can inform educational policy. The findings are expected to address the ongoing debate between the effectiveness of military-style programs and the need for more humanistic character education. For policymakers, the study may provide a framework for evaluating or replicating similar programs in other regions. For educators and child protection advocates, this research offers critical insights into the ethical and long-term implications of alternative education models[11]

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the military camp-based student development program implemented in Purwakarta Regency. The research focuses on program implementation, stakeholder perceptions, and the impact on students' attitudes and behaviors. The context of the study involves junior and senior high schools in Purwakarta, with units of analysis including student participants, educators, parents, and military instructors. The findings are expected to provide empirical insights that support reforms in adolescent character education in Indonesia.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen to enable an in-depth and holistic understanding of the implementation of a character-building program for troubled students conducted in a military camp. The research aimed to explore how students, teachers, parents, and military personnel engaged with and responded to the program[12], [13].

The study was conducted in Purwakarta Regency, West Java Province, specifically at the training location: the Military Camp of Artillery Regiment 1/Sthira Yudha. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with relevant

stakeholders, including students' parents, local government officials, community leaders, education practitioners, and representatives from the Department of Education and the military regiment. In addition, data were obtained through participant observation during the training process, literature review, documentation, news reports, and official government publications[14]

The data analysis process followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman[15], which includes three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. To ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings, the study applied the four criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba[16]: credibility (established through triangulation of sources, methods, and timing, as well as member checks with informants); transferability (achieved through thick description that enables readers to determine applicability in other contexts); dependability (ensured by maintaining an audit trail of data collection and processing); and confirmability (upheld through reflective journaling and data audits that allow for external verification).

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Recruitment Patterns and Student Selection Criteria

The initial findings of this study revealed that students selected for the military rehabilitation program were primarily those deemed problematic in terms of behavior. These included students who skipped school, smoked, engaged in physical fights, joined motorbike gangs, or showed early signs of minor delinquent behavior. The selection process was conducted internally by the schools, relying on behavioral records from guidance counselors and recommendations from classroom teachers. As one counselor from a public junior high school explained, *"We don't just randomly assign students. The ones we send are those we have already tried to help through individual counseling and parental involvement, but there were no significant improvements."* This reflects the reality that schools often find themselves overwhelmed and unable to address students with behavioral issues using internal mechanisms. Consequently, the military camp is perceived as a last-resort measure. From the perspective of Travis Hirschi's[17] Social Control Theory, these students appear to have lost their attachment and commitment to the school institution, thus requiring external intervention to restore their social bonds and behavioral norms.

The finding that students selected for the military rehabilitation program were those considered behaviorally problematic—such as truants, fighters, or gang members aligns with the principles of Social Control Theory Hirschi argued that weak social attachment and commitment to normative institutions make individuals more vulnerable to deviant behavior. In this context, schools failed to restore students' social bonds through internal mechanisms like counseling, thus external intervention (e.g., military camps) was perceived as a last resort. This finding reinforces prior research by Payne & Welch[18], who observed that rigid disciplinary measures are often applied to students deemed "unmanageable" within traditional school systems.

However, the findings also contrast with critiques of zero-tolerance approaches in education. Skiba & Knesting (2001) argued that punitive interventions, such as military-style programs, may worsen school detachment and increase dropout risks. This suggests a flaw in student selection: rather than repairing social ties, such programs may simply displace the problem into more repressive environments. Supporting this, Li & Lerner[19] found that positive youth development programs were more effective in fostering social bonds without resorting to harsh discipline.

These findings raise questions about whether Social Control Theory should be revised to include external interventions, such as state-sponsored military training, as substitutes for traditional institutions like school or family. Gottfredson[20] suggested that external interventions are only effective when accompanied by reintegration into the original social environment something not yet evident in the implementation of this program. If the military intervention remains temporary without proper follow-up, Hirschi's theory may need to incorporate a concept like institutional reinforcement to explain the failure of long-term behavioral change.

On the other hand, Broidy et al[21]. found that attachment to authority figures (e.g., military trainers) could temporarily substitute lost school bonds. This could justify modifying Hirschi's theory by adding the variable of alternative attachment figures within external interventions. However, the weakness of this approach lies in its transience. Laub & Sampson[22] noted in their life-course theory, consistent social support is essential for sustained behavioral transformation.

A key strength of this study lies in highlighting the gap between theory and practice: although Social Control Theory helps explain the roots of deviant behavior, it lacks a framework for sustainable external interventions. This aligns with Welsh et al.[23] who found that external disciplinary programs often fail when they exclude family and community involvement. A major limitation, however, is the lack of a critical lens toward selection bias students from marginalized backgrounds may be too readily labeled as problematic, a concern echoed in Morris[24] on racial disparities in school discipline.

Furthermore, this study did not explore alternatives like restorative justice[25] (Zehr, 2002) or mentorship programs[26], which in several contexts have proven more effective than military-based interventions. Thus, these findings support the growing need to integrate Social Control Theory with more holistic intervention models, such as those proposed in Braithwaite's reintegrative shaming theory, which emphasizes reintegration over exclusion.

Structure and Activities During Rehabilitation

The military-style rehabilitation program was designed to last six months, with an initial 14-day pilot phase to assess its impact. Daily activities began at 4:00 a.m. with communal dawn prayers, followed by physical exercises, morning assemblies, marching drills (PBB), and motivational and reflection sessions. Academic instruction was maintained by having teachers visit the military barrack on a scheduled basis.

Field observations indicated that the program operated under a repetitive yet highly disciplined routine. A TNI (Indonesian Armed Forces) instructor emphasized, *"We want them to get used to order. These kids lived without rules, so we start from the basics like time discipline, neatness, and responsibility."*

The approach reflects a militaristic pedagogical model grounded in Skinner's behaviorist theory, which argues that behavior can be reshaped through consistent stimulus and response. However, the approach has not been free from criticism. My Esti Wijayanti, a member of the national legislature's Commission X, stated, *"This program must be postponed and thoroughly reviewed, as there has been no communication between the Governor of West Java and Commission X or the Minister of Education. We must avoid labeling children and causing them psychological harm."*

The military-based rehabilitation program adopts a strict disciplinary approach with a structured schedule beginning at 4:00 a.m., encompassing physical training, marching drills, and reflection sessions. Theoretically, this method aligns with Skinner's behaviorism[27], which emphasizes behavior formation through reinforcement and punishment. However, it neglects the role of intrinsic motivation, which is critical for sustained behavioral change according to Ryan & Deci[28]. Criticism from My Esti Wijayanti regarding potential psychological trauma is further validated by Gershoff's[29] meta-analysis, which links harsh discipline to increased aggression and mental health issues.

Effectiveness of the Program on Behavioral Change

The program's impact on behavioral change appeared to be mixed. Interviews conducted after the program revealed that many students experienced feelings of guilt and self-awareness. One student recalled, *"At first, I was angry about being sent to the camp. But after a few days, I started thinking—my parents must be so worried. I was also ashamed of the TNI trainers who disciplined us every day."* These sentiments suggest a short-term reflective effect. However, guidance counselors reported that some students reverted to their previous behaviors within a month of reintegration into the school environment. This finding supports Goldstein's[30] conclusion that military-based disciplinary programs may produce initial change, but without ongoing support from school and home, the effects are likely to be short-lived. The program thus functions more effectively as a behavioral "trigger" rather than a permanent corrective intervention.

Findings from this study reveal that while the program does lead to short-term behavioral changes—such as emerging guilt and self-awareness—these effects often fade once students return to their school environment. Goldstein[31] warned of the limitations of isolated interventions without sustained support. Hirschi's[17] social control theory highlights the importance of strong social bonds with one's environment, which this program fails to reinforce. These findings are consistent with Durlak et al[32]., who demonstrated the superiority of holistic programs over partial interventions, and with Laub & Sampson's[22] longitudinal study emphasizing the necessity of ongoing support for lasting behavioral transformation.

Parental Response and Public Perception

Parental reactions to the program were largely supportive. Many saw the camp as a necessary intervention to restore discipline, especially in cases where parental authority had failed. One parent shared their experience, stating, *"As parents, we had run out of options. When we scolded him, he would run away. In the camp, he couldn't act on his own. When we visited, he was more obedient and showed remorse, even crying and prostrating at our feet."* Despite this, some parents voiced concerns about whether the program's intensity might be too harsh for children, both physically and emotionally. Among educators and school officials, ethical concerns were raised about the long-term use of military-style discipline in character education. Critics questioned whether this approach aligned with child development principles. As Sadirman[33] pointed out, character education should not rely solely on punishment or military drills but must be built on authentic values, daily habit formation, and personal, meaningful relationships.

Most parents responded positively to the program, particularly because they observed immediate behavioral improvements in their children. This pattern aligns with Baumrind's[34] findings that parents often favor authoritarian approaches for quick behavioral change. However, Noddings[35] cautioned that compliance should not be equated with genuine character development.

School Dependence on External Interventions

The study also found that schools increasingly depend on external parties—such as the TNI, military camps, or the local education office to manage students with severe behavioral challenges. This trend exposes a significant structural deficiency in school-based counseling systems. Many guidance counselors admitted they lacked the necessary training to handle students with deep psychological or behavioral issues. One counselor commented, *"The ratio is unreasonable. One counselor may be responsible for 400 to 500 students. How can we offer individualized approaches in that context?"* This concern aligns with national data from the Ministry of Education and Culture, which shows that more than 60% of schools in Indonesia do not have professionally qualified counseling staff. As such, the military program is often viewed not as a strategic solution but as an emergency response to systemic weaknesses.

Through the lens of Hirschi's social control theory and Skinner's behaviorist framework, the intervention may temporarily enforce discipline, but without empathetic and psychosocial integration, it risks producing resistance or relapse among students.

The reliance on military programs exposes a fundamental weakness in school-based student support systems. Eccles & Roeser[36] asserted that a positive school climate cannot be replaced by external interventions. Bronfenbrenner's[37] ecological perspective emphasizes that behavioral issues must be addressed at multiple systemic levels, not solely at the individual level. Culturally responsive intervention models, such as those proposed by Sue et al.[38], may offer more sustainable and contextually appropriate alternatives.

A comprehensive analysis indicates that the program requires significant refinement to achieve long-term effectiveness. Braithwaite's[39] concept of reintegrative shaming offers a more constructive approach than isolation and punishment. Maslow's[40] hierarchy of needs reminds us that basic psychological needs must be met before sustainable behavioral change can occur. Policy recommendations include: (1) developing follow-up programs after the main intervention, (2) implementing evidence-based training for school counselors, (3) adopting restorative approaches instead of punitive ones, and (4) adjusting counselor-to-student ratios to meet professional standards. These measures aim to establish a more holistic and sustainable support system for at-risk students.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that while the military rehabilitation program offers a short-term solution for students with behavioral problems, it is largely a reactive measure driven by the inadequacy of school-based counseling systems. The program may trigger initial self-reflection and discipline, but without ongoing support from schools and families, its effects are often temporary. Ethical concerns also arise regarding its intensity and psychological impact. Therefore, sustainable behavioral change requires a shift toward integrated, humanistic approaches that involve trained counselors, restorative practices, and community-based support.

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