

GRACE-BASED DISCIPLINE IN A CHRISTIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN MAKASSAR

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ABSTRAK: Studi ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan implementasi Disiplin Berbasis Kasih Karunia (GBD) di sebuah sekolah dasar Kristen kecil di Makassar dan untuk mengidentifikasi faktor pendukung, faktor penghambat, dan aspek yang membutuhkan penguatan lebih lanjut. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, dengan data yang dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur, analisis dokumen, dan empat siklus survei siswa dan guru. Data dianalisis secara interaktif melalui reduksi data, tampilan data, dan penarikan kesimpulan serta verifikasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa GBD diimplementasikan melalui koreksi yang lembut dan tidak memperlakukan, rutinitas kelas yang konsisten, hubungan guru-siswa yang hangat, dan penggunaan konsekuensi instruksional daripada tindakan hukuman. Praktik-praktik ini selaras dengan pendekatan disiplin positif dan kerangka pendidikan karakter nasional. Faktor pendukung utama meliputi kepemimpinan sekolah yang berkomitmen, kapasitas relasional guru, ukuran kelas yang kecil, dan pelatihan GBD. Faktor penghambat meliputi variasi kesiapan sosial-emosional siswa dan perbedaan harapan disiplin antara sekolah dan rumah. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa GBD merupakan pendekatan disiplin yang layak untuk pendidikan dasar di Indonesia, asalkan praktik restoratif dan komunikasi disiplin yang aman secara emosional terus diperkuat.

Kata Kunci: Disiplin Berbasis Kasih Karunia, Manajemen Kelas, Pendidikan Karakter, Filsafat Pendidikan, Implementasi.

ABSTRACT: This study aims to describe the implementation of Grace-Based Discipline (GBD) in a small Christian elementary school in Makassar and to identify supporting factors, inhibiting factors, and aspects requiring further strengthening. The study employed a qualitative case study approach, with data collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and four cycles of student and teacher surveys. Data were analyzed interactively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings indicate that GBD is implemented through gentle and non-shaming correction, consistent classroom routines, warm teacher–student relationships, and the use of instructional consequences rather than punitive measures. These practices align with positive discipline approaches and national character education frameworks. Key supporting factors include committed school leadership, teachers’ relational capacity, small class size, and GBD training. Inhibiting factors include variations in students’ social-emotional readiness and differing disciplinary expectations between school and home. The study concludes that GBD is a viable disciplinary approach for Indonesian elementary education, provided that

restorative practices and emotionally safe disciplinary communication continue to be strengthened.

Keywords: *Grace-Based Discipline, Classroom Management, Character Education, Educational Philosophy, Implementation.*

INTRODUCTION

Discipline is an important component of elementary education because it influences character formation, classroom climate, and students' long-term behavioral development. In many educational contexts, including Indonesia, disciplinary practices have historically emphasized obedience and compliance through authority-centered approaches. However, recent research shows that punitive and exclusionary disciplinary systems may weaken student well-being, teacher–student relationships, and school climate while producing only limited long-term behavioral change. As a result, contemporary educational research increasingly emphasizes relational, preventive, and restorative approaches that support emotional safety, self-regulation, and positive behavioral development.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and restorative discipline practices have become important alternatives to punitive discipline. PBIS emphasizes preventive guidance, explicit behavioral expectations, school-wide consistency, and reinforcement of positive behavior, while restorative approaches emphasize relational repair, accountability, and dialogue. In these models, discipline is implemented through supportive classroom structures and relational guidance rather than coercive control. Recent studies also show that the success of restorative and positive discipline systems depends on implementation consistency, school culture, teacher judgment, and student responsiveness.

Within Christian educational settings, Grace-Based Discipline (GBD) emerges as a relational disciplinary approach grounded in Christian values such as dignity, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restorative correction. Although rooted in theological principles, the practical implementation of GBD aligns with contemporary educational frameworks that emphasize empathy, emotional regulation, social-emotional learning, and character education. In practice, GBD integrates restorative discipline principles with Christian character formation through relational correction and emotionally safe disciplinary

practices. Therefore, discipline is understood not merely as behavioral control, but as a process of guiding students toward moral growth, relational responsibility, and self-regulation.

This study was conducted at a small Christian elementary school in Makassar, Indonesia, serving both local Indonesian students and students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The multicultural nature of the school creates a need for disciplinary practices that are relational, culturally responsive, and emotionally safe. The school implements Grace-Based Discipline as its primary behavioral framework through gentle correction, relational communication, and instructional consequences rather than punitive measures. These practices are embedded in daily classroom life through warm teacher–student interactions, consistent classroom routines, flexible instructional arrangements, and selective intervention toward minor disruptions.

Despite increasing attention toward restorative and relational discipline approaches, empirical studies examining their implementation in Indonesian Christian elementary school settings remain limited. Existing studies in Indonesia have addressed related areas such as positive discipline, character education, bullying prevention, and teacher authority, but have not sufficiently examined how an integrated relational-restorative disciplinary system operates in daily classroom practice, particularly within faith-based and multicultural elementary school contexts. Therefore, further research is needed to examine how relational discipline approaches function in real school environments where classroom routines, moral formation, teacher authority, and student perceptions interact in practice.

This study contributes to the literature by examining Grace-Based Discipline as an integrated relational-restorative framework implemented within a multicultural Christian elementary school context in Indonesia. In addition, the study identifies how disciplinary intentions communicated by teachers may differ from students' perceptions and memories of disciplinary experiences. Therefore, this study aims to describe the implementation of Grace-Based Discipline in a Christian elementary school in Makassar, identify supporting and inhibiting factors influencing its implementation, and identify aspects of implementation that still require strengthening. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of humane, relational, and culturally responsive disciplinary practices in elementary education, particularly within multicultural and faith-based school settings.

RESEARCH METHOD**Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to examine the implementation of Grace-Based Discipline (GBD) at a Christian elementary school in Makassar, Indonesia. The school implements the national curriculum while emphasizing character education and relational disciplinary practices.

Participants included 21 staff members and teachers, as well as 68 students from Grades 1–6. Participants were selected purposively based on their involvement in classroom learning processes and the implementation of school disciplinary practices.

Research Instruments and Validation

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, online questionnaires administered through Google Forms, and document analysis. Observational data were obtained from 14 classroom and disciplinary videos documenting naturally occurring classroom interactions and disciplinary situations. Observations focused on teacher correction style, classroom routines, behavioral management strategies, teacher body language, types of consequences, and student emotional responses.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two school founders and one classroom teacher to explore the philosophy, objectives, and implementation strategies underlying Grace-Based Discipline. In addition, four rounds of online questionnaires were distributed to teachers and students to examine perceptions related to emotional safety, classroom correction, behavioral expectations, and disciplinary experiences.

Document analysis included school disciplinary guidelines, teacher training materials, classroom posters, and teacher notes related to classroom management and student behavior. Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data validity was strengthened through methodological triangulation, source triangulation, and limited member checking. Permission to conduct the study and use school data was obtained from school leadership prior to data collection.

Research Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the reduction stage, observation notes, questionnaire responses, interview data, and school documents were organized according to recurring patterns related to correction style, classroom routines, relational interaction, consequences, and student responses. In the data display stage, findings were arranged in narrative descriptions and tables to compare patterns across data sources. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified through comparison of observation, questionnaire, interview, and document data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The implementation of Grace-Based Discipline (GBD) at Cornerstone School was examined through student and teacher questionnaire responses, classroom observations, teacher reflections, interviews, document analysis, and video-based disciplinary evidence. The findings show that GBD was implemented through calm correction, consistent classroom routines, warm teacher–student relationships, structured consequences, and efforts to avoid public shaming. The data also show several areas requiring further strengthening, particularly consistency under pressure, student peer relationships, and students’ interpretation of disciplinary experiences.

1. Quantitative Findings on Grace-Based Discipline

Figure 1 presents seven indicators related to correction, emotional safety, character development, and disciplinary responses. The data show high levels of encouragement following correction, strong motivation for character development, high relational obedience to teachers, moderate perceptions of safety, and very low reporting of punitive consequences.

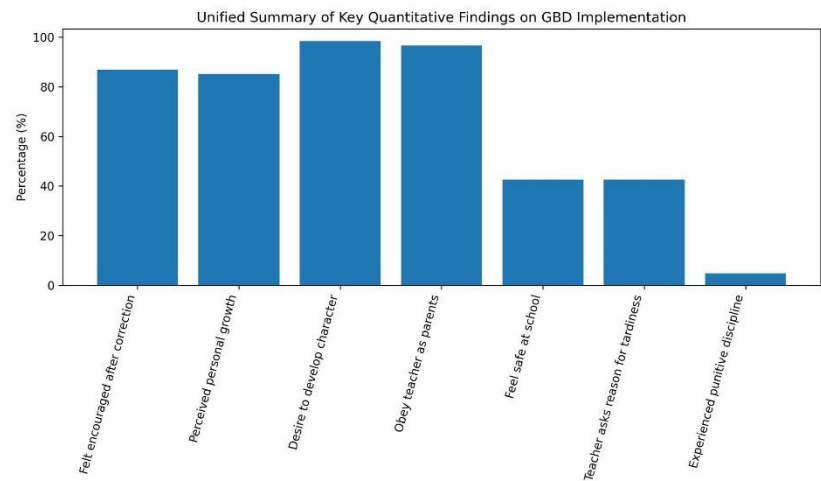


Figure 1. Integrated Summary of Key Quantitative Findings on the Implementation of Grace-Based Discipline (GBD).

As shown in Table 1, 86.9% of students reported feeling encouraged after receiving correction, while 85.2% reported experiencing character development. A very high percentage of students, 98.4%, expressed a desire to continue improving themselves. Relational trust toward teachers was also strong, with 96.7% of students reporting obedience to teacher authority. However, only 42.6% of students reported feeling safe at school, and the same percentage reported that teachers asked for reasons before giving corrections. Punitive responses were reported by only 4.9% of students.

Table 1. Student-Reported Indicators of Grace-Based Discipline Outcomes at Cornerstone School

Indicator	Result (%)	Interpretation
Feel encouraged after the correction	86.9%	Correction perceived as supportive and motivating
Perceived character development	85.2%	Students report moral/behavioral growth
Desire to continue self-improvement	98.4%	Strong intrinsic motivation for development
Obedience to teacher authority	96.7%	High relational trust in teachers
Feel safe at school	42.6%	Moderate perception of emotional safety

Teacher asks the reason before correction	42.6%	Partial implementation of dialogic discipline
Experience of punitive response	4.9%	Low frequency of punitive discipline

Note. Percentages reflect combined survey responses across multiple student questionnaires.

2. Classroom Implementation of Grace-Based Discipline

Qualitative findings from 14 classroom and disciplinary videos clarified how these quantitative patterns appeared in daily school practice. Across six grade levels, teachers generally used short, calm, and dignity-preserving correction. Common correction strategies included soft verbal reminders, gentle commands, brief redirection, humor, and private correction. Examples included statements such as “shhh... listen,” “eyes on me,” and other short reminders used to regain attention without public embarrassment. When students gave incorrect answers or behaved inappropriately, teachers often reframed mistakes as part of learning and encouraged students to continue participating.

Consistent classroom routines were also observed across grade levels. Younger students responded to structured attention signals and call-and-response patterns, while older students responded to countdowns, verbal cues, and transition instructions. These routines helped teachers maintain classroom order and clarify expectations. Some classrooms also used reinforcement systems such as points, stars, or card-based monitoring. These systems were used alongside verbal explanation and teacher guidance.

The relational dimension of classroom life was clearly visible. Teacher–student interactions were generally warm, informal, and emotionally safe. Teachers frequently used light conversation, humor, and contextual dialogue related to daily life or lesson content. Even when misbehavior occurred, teachers often maintained relational continuity by avoiding public humiliation and using brief corrective feedback. Students generally remained responsive to teacher direction even in relaxed classroom environments.

Structural and pedagogical support also contributed to GBD implementation. In lower grades, assistant teachers provided individualized support by sitting near students who needed behavioral or academic assistance. In higher grades, smaller class sizes and flexible seating arrangements allowed teachers to monitor students more closely and provide more individualized guidance. Teachers also adjusted language use between English and Indonesian depending on student comprehension needs.

Another observed pattern was selective tolerance toward minor disruptions. Light talking, movement, and informal interaction were generally tolerated when they did not interfere with learning. Teachers intervened more directly when behavior involved dishonesty, disrespect, or significant disruption. This pattern was observed across several classroom contexts.

Although relational correction was dominant, moments of inconsistency were also observed. In some cases, teachers used threats or punitive statements, such as withholding lunch, during stressful classroom situations. In other cases, student emotional or behavioral escalation was not immediately addressed through restorative intervention. In formal disciplinary situations, restorative dialogue and moral instruction were present, but subtle shaming and student resistance were also observed. These findings show that GBD was present in school practice, but not always consistent in every emotional or behavioral situation.

3. Student and Teacher Perceptions of Discipline

Student questionnaire responses provided further insight into how discipline was experienced by students. Many students reported that teachers corrected them by advising, reminding, explaining rules, asking them to stop, or guiding them gently. Students also demonstrated awareness of school values such as respect, kindness, fairness, forgiveness, honesty, and non-bullying behavior. Classroom expectations such as listening, waiting for turns, and speaking appropriately were generally understood.

Open-response data showed a more complex pattern. Although general survey results showed low reported punitive discipline, students' descriptions of specific disciplinary experiences often focused on consequences. In a small sample

of student-reported disciplinary actions from a given week, 40% of reported cases reflected grace-based correction, while 60% referred to punitive or consequence-based responses such as yellow/red cards, repeated writing tasks, or being sent to the office.

Table 2. Student-Reported Disciplinary Actions of a Given Week by Any Teacher at Cornerstone School

Category	Summary	Sample Quotations	Cases	Percentage
Grace-Based Discipline	Advising, reminding, explaining the rules, asking students to stop, and guiding gently	"They discipline me about showing respect..."; "Speak and provide good information to educate."; "The teacher told them to stop."	8	40%
Not Grace-Based Discipline (Punitive / Consequence-Based)	Yellow/red card, writing 100–150 sentences, or being taken to the office	"Gave him a red card and made him do 150 sentences."; "We got a yellow card and had to write 100 sentences."; "Go to the office."	12	60%

Note. Percentages reflect combined survey responses across multiple student questionnaires.

Student responses also showed generally positive emotional experiences at school. Many students reported feeling safe, comfortable, and motivated to improve their character. However, peer relationships showed more mixed patterns. While teacher–student relationships appeared strong and trust-based, student–student relationships included reports of conflict, exclusion, teasing, and relational tension.

Teacher survey findings were consistent with the observational data. Teachers described discipline as a combination of moral guidance, corrective feedback, structured consequences, and preservation of student dignity. In practice, teachers reported using dialogue-based correction for minor issues and structured consequences for repeated or more serious misconduct. Teacher responses also emphasized individualized attention, verbal reminders, classroom monitoring, and moral explanation.

Table 3. Teacher-Reported Disciplinary Actions of the Same Given Week at
Cornerstone School

Sample Quotations	Communication Type
“Berkata benar/jujur lebih baik... guru bisa membantu kamu mencari solusi.”	Teaching underlying value / explaining the moral reason and benefit of honesty
“Mostly verbally remind them... modeling at the beginning... reminding verbally.”	Modeling and verbal reminder
“Kami membuat aturan tentang kejujuran... dan mendisiplinkannya jika bohong berat.”	Rules and consequences
“Siapa yang tidak ribut akan mendapat penilaian khusus dari saya.”	Rewarding, but not directly related to honesty
“Bahwa dalam setiap hal harus berkata jujur... katakan apa yang sebenarnya terjadi.”	Clear directive / explicit instruction
“Friendly voice.”	General encouragement / vague communication
“Saya mengajarkan nilai karakter, yaitu kejujuran... penting agar dipercaya orang lain.”	Character teaching / value-based instruction

4. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Teachers also identified several conditions that affected the consistency of GBD implementation. They reported that GBD was easier to apply when students were willing to reflect, when sufficient time was available for dialogue, and when teachers were emotionally regulated. They also reported that GBD became more difficult when students resisted accountability, when peer conflict had already become entrenched, when negative behavior was repetitive, or when lesson time was limited.

The disciplinary situations captured in the video data showed variation in how GBD was applied. One situation showed a highly restorative process involving structured dialogue, moral framing based on Christian values, and collaborative problem-solving between students and staff. Another situation showed a mixed model in which restorative dialogue and forgiveness were present, but structured sanctions and subtle shaming were also observed. A third situation showed an in-class restorative intervention in which conflict was addressed through reflection,

perspective-taking, and practical classroom adjustment. These examples show that implementation ranged from strongly restorative practice to partial restorative adaptation depending on context and behavioral complexity.

Overall, the results show that GBD at Cornerstone School was already established as a dominant disciplinary framework in daily school practice. The strongest patterns included calm correction, structured classroom routines, warm teacher–student relationships, moral explanation, and limited use of punitive responses. At the same time, the findings also show areas requiring further strengthening, particularly consistency under stress, student peer relationships, real-time emotional regulation, and student interpretation of disciplinary experiences.

Discussion

1. Relational and Restorative Foundations of GBD

The implementation of Grace-Based Discipline (GBD) at Cornerstone School demonstrates a structured effort to integrate relational, restorative, and value-based discipline within daily classroom practice. Observational findings show that teachers consistently used calm, brief, and non-shaming correction while maintaining warm and stable relationships with students. Classroom routines, behavioral cues, and instructional reminders were also applied consistently across grade levels. These patterns align with restorative and relationship-centered disciplinary approaches that emphasize emotional safety, preventive classroom management, and instructional correction rather than punitive responses.

GBD at Cornerstone also shares several characteristics with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), particularly in its use of preventive guidance, explicit behavioral expectations, structured routines, and reinforcement of positive conduct [3]. However, unlike conventional PBIS models, disciplinary practice at Cornerstone is explicitly grounded in Christian values such as grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, and moral responsibility. Teachers described correction not merely as a response to misbehavior, but as an opportunity to restore relationships and guide students toward character development. In this sense, discipline functioned as both behavioral guidance and moral formation.

Teacher modeling was another important aspect of implementation. Teachers frequently demonstrated emotional regulation, respectful communication, and reflective correction during classroom interactions. These practices appeared to strengthen student responsiveness and classroom participation. Students learned not only through direct instruction, but also by observing how teachers handled mistakes, conflict, and behavioral disruptions. This finding is consistent with social learning theory, which emphasizes the role of observational learning in shaping behavior.

2. The Gap Between Teacher Intention and Student Perception

At the same time, the findings reveal a gap between teacher intention and student perception of disciplinary experiences. Although the overall survey pattern showed low reported exposure to punitive responses, students' open-ended descriptions of specific disciplinary experiences showed stronger recall of consequence-based incidents. This indicates that restorative correction may be more frequent in daily practice, while punitive or emotionally intense events may be more memorable to students. This interpretation is supported by research showing that students' perceptions of school discipline are shaped by their experiences of punitive behavior-management systems, as well as cognitive research showing that emotional events can be remembered more strongly than routine or neutral interactions. Therefore, the issue is not necessarily that punitive discipline dominates daily practice, but that punitive or emotionally salient disciplinary moments may carry greater weight in students' memory and interpretation.

3. Conditions Supporting and Limiting Implementation

Cultural and developmental factors influenced implementation. Some students appeared to interpret even calm correction as punitive because of previous experiences with authoritarian disciplinary systems at home or in broader cultural contexts where obedience and hierarchical authority are emphasized. In addition, younger students and students with weaker emotional regulation skills sometimes experienced difficulty engaging in restorative reflection. These findings indicate

that the effectiveness of GBD depends not only on teacher practice, but also on students' developmental readiness and prior disciplinary socialization.

Relational dynamics within the school environment also showed an important distinction. Teacher–student relationships were generally characterized by trust, warmth, and relational authority, while peer relationships showed more frequent conflict, exclusion, and relational tension. This suggests that restorative values were more consistently practiced in vertical relationships between teachers and students than in horizontal relationships among students. Strengthening peer-level relational competence through social-emotional learning, mediation, and reflective dialogue is therefore an important area for further development. Recent research on social-emotional learning supports the importance of structured interventions for strengthening students' social, emotional, behavioral, and relational competencies.

Several supporting factors contributed to the implementation of GBD at Cornerstone School. These included leadership commitment, small classroom size, consistent routines, teacher adaptability, and alignment between institutional values and classroom practice. These findings support previous studies emphasizing the importance of organizational coherence, school climate, and school-wide commitment in sustaining positive disciplinary systems.

Several inhibiting factors were also identified. Teachers sometimes experienced difficulty balancing grace and fairness in situations involving repeated misconduct or unclear behavioral responsibility. Time limitations, emotional stress, and repeated behavioral disruptions reduced opportunities for restorative dialogue and sometimes increased reliance on structured consequences. These findings indicate that restorative implementation is shaped by emotional, structural, and contextual pressures in everyday school practice.

Overall, GBD at Cornerstone School functions as a hybrid relational-restorative disciplinary system that combines preventive behavioral structures with Christian moral values. The approach contributes positively to emotional safety, relational trust, and character formation, while also facing developmental, cultural, and structural challenges that affect consistency of implementation. The main contribution of this study is its demonstration that restorative discipline in a multicultural Indonesian Christian school requires more than behavioral systems

alone; it also requires sustained emotional, relational, and organizational support for both teachers and students.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Grace-Based Discipline at Cornerstone School shows that relational and restorative discipline can be applied meaningfully within a multicultural Christian elementary school context in Indonesia. The study found that GBD was implemented through calm and non-shaming correction, consistent classroom routines, warm teacher–student relationships, moral guidance, and instructional consequences rather than primarily punitive responses. These practices supported character formation, emotional safety, and relational trust in daily classroom life.

The study also identified several supporting and inhibiting factors in GBD implementation. Supporting factors included leadership commitment, small classroom size, teacher adaptability, consistent routines, and alignment between Christian values and disciplinary practice. Inhibiting factors included teacher stress, time limitations, repeated student misconduct, unclear behavioral responsibility, students' varying emotional readiness, and weaker restorative relationships among peers. These findings indicate that GBD requires not only clear disciplinary procedures, but also sustained emotional, relational, and organizational support.

Based on these findings, schools that seek to implement Grace-Based Discipline should strengthen teacher training in emotional regulation and restorative communication, develop clearer internal guidelines for grace-based correction and appropriate consequences, and provide structured social-emotional learning for students. Regular communication with parents is also needed so that relational and non-punitive discipline can be supported beyond the classroom. Future research may examine GBD implementation in larger schools, different educational settings, or comparative contexts to further assess its relevance and sustainability.

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