

THE PARADOX OF CHARACTER EDUCATION Scouting as A Means of Covert Militarization in Indonesian Schools

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Received: 2025-10-27; Accepted: 2025-11-11; Published: 2025-11-15

ABSTRACT

Scouting activities in Indonesian secondary schools are formally framed as instruments of character formation through discipline, responsibility, and obedience. Field observations, however, reveal that routines such as marching drills, uniform inspections, and behavioral standardization foster hidden militarization embedded within the hidden curriculum, shaping school culture and pedagogical relationships. Adopting a qualitative case study design, the research involved eight secondary schools in East Java, employing in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and policy document analysis, followed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive analytic model. Findings demonstrate that scouting successfully cultivates orderliness and procedural discipline yet simultaneously constructs a compliance habit that constrains dialogic spaces and suppresses student voice. These disciplinary norms permeate classroom practices, reinforcing hierarchical teacher-student relationships and exposing a paradox between the goals of character education and the Merdeka Belajar policy, which promotes creativity and participatory learning. Theoretically, the research enriches studies on the hidden curriculum by operationalizing soft militarization within Indonesian secondary education. Practically, it proposes strategies for dialogic discipline to balance procedural order with academic freedom, enabling scouting-based character education to foster learners who are not only compliant but also critical, creative, and actively engaged.

Keywords: *Character Education, Hidden Curriculum, Soft Militarization, Scouting, Academic Freedom*

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st-century global education era, there is significant pressure on education systems to produce not only academically competent students but also students who are well-rounded, creative, proactive, and possess critical thinking skills. Student-centric learning paradigms and character education have become the focus of many educational policies in various countries, including Indonesia. Globally, recent research shows that discipline, neatness, and obedience are often aspects of the hidden curriculum that implicitly influence school culture (Ghandi, 2025; Karasova, 2023). Conversely, educational practices that place a heavy emphasis on obedience and physical order can undermine student voice and classroom dialogue, a phenomenon observed in studies of teacher behavior management (Karasova et al., 2023).

Locally, Indonesia faces complex dynamics in character education policies and practices. Recently, Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 13 of 2025 mandated extracurricular scouting activities for all educational units, as part of efforts to strengthen national character (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025). This policy discourse emphasizes that scouting is not merely a supplement, but rather part of a hidden curriculum that is significant in shaping students' character, such as responsibility, discipline, and national spirit (Bismar Sibuea, cited in mistar.id, 2025). However, despite this policy, there are concerns that scouting practices and physical discipline activism can foster a culture of obedience that limits the space for freedom of thought and dialogue in the learning process.

Several local studies in the past five years have examined aspects of character education through scouting and extracurricular activities. For example, Fauziah (2023) showed that Scouting activities at MI Darul Falah can be a platform for character values such as spirituality, discipline, cooperation, and responsibility, but the focus is predominantly on moral and affective activities, rather than critical dialogue. Another study of classroom management practices in urban and rural secondary schools by Classroom Management Practices: Indonesian Secondary ... (2023) describes how teachers implement rules and sanctions strategies to maintain classroom order, but also notes weaknesses in managing student interaction and active participation (Irawati & Listyani, 2023). Research on student-centered learning in the Merdeka curriculum also shows that, although designed to increase student activity and creativity, its implementation is often compromised by traditional school discipline (Amiruddin, 2023).

Research gaps arise primarily in areas where scouting as an extracurricular activity is mandated by policy (as since Permendikdasmen 13/2025), but there has been no in-depth analysis of how these activities form a hidden curriculum that subtly carries militaristic nuances, for example, marching, attribute inspections, body norms, and neatness, and how they affect communication mechanisms, students' courage to voice opinions, and learning patterns in the classroom. Previous studies have focused more on aspects of moral character and social values, as well as character outputs such as discipline and cooperation (Fauziah, 2023; Manik, 2023), while research on epistemic effects (freedom of thought, classroom dialogue, questions and debates) and power structures in disciplinary rituals has been less highlighted.

This topic is highly relevant in Indonesia's current social and policy context, where demands for educational quality are measured not only by exam results but also by students' ability to think critically, actively participate, and become democratic citizens. The Freedom to Learn policy encourages more participatory learning practices, while the introduction of mandatory scouting under the new Ministerial Regulation on Elementary and Secondary Education marks a significant structural change. On the technological and social front, the proliferation of digital and social media has heightened awareness of the right to speak, critiqued authoritarian norms, and fostered public debate over education policy, all underscoring the urgency of researching how the culture of militaristic discipline embedded in scouting influences students' freedom of movement.

Based on this background, this study formulates several research problems explicitly as follows: (1) How does scouting as a mandatory extracurricular activity shape the practice of

hidden militarism in secondary schools in Indonesia? (2) How does the mechanism of the hidden curriculum through physical discipline rituals (marching, attribute inspection, neatness, public sanctions) affect the dynamics of teacher-student communication and student participation in learning? (3) What is the impact of these practices on students' freedom to think critically, engage in dialogue, and express ideas in the classroom? The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze in depth the role of scouting in hidden militarization, map the mechanism of the hidden curriculum in secondary schools, and evaluate its impact on communication, freedom of thought, and student participation in learning.

By answering these questions, this research is expected to contribute to educational management theory, especially regarding the balance between discipline and academic freedom, as well as provide concrete policy input for schools, educational managers, and policy makers in Indonesia so that character education does not sacrifice space for dialogue and student creativity.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with an interpretive paradigm, as the primary focus of the study is to deeply understand the phenomenon of hidden curriculum and soft militarization in the context of scouting activities in secondary schools. A qualitative approach was chosen to explore the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of participants regarding ongoing disciplinary practices, especially those not written in official curriculum documents. The phenomenon of educational militarization tends to be implicitly present through rituals, symbols, and norms that regulate student behavior, making participant perspectives crucial for understanding the socio-cultural context of schools. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a qualitative approach is effective when researchers want to explore subjective meanings, social processes, and interpretations of individual experiences regarding a complex phenomenon.

The research design used was a qualitative case study. This design was chosen because the research focused on an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon in a particular context, namely the practice of scouting as a means of character development, which is suspected of being a hidden path to militarization in schools. According to Yin (2018), a case study is an appropriate method for comprehensively understanding the relationship between phenomena, contexts, and processes, especially when the boundaries between the research object and its context cannot be clearly separated. Through the case study, this research can examine how ritualistic disciplinary practices, such as marching, attribute inspections, and the use of sanctions, shape a culture of obedience in schools and influence teacher-student communication patterns.

The research data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with teachers, Scout leaders, and students, as well as through direct observation of Scouting activities and classroom learning. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, selecting informants deemed to have the best understanding of disciplinary practices and school policies. Eight secondary schools in East Java were selected as research locations to capture a variety of school cultural contexts, with a total of 32 participants consisting of eight Scout leaders, eight teachers, and sixteen students. Secondary data were obtained from school policy documents, Scout curriculum guidelines, and relevant national regulations on character education.

The research instruments used were a semi-structured interview guide and a participant observation sheet. The interview guide was developed to explore teachers, mentors, and students' perceptions of discipline, obedience, and freedom of thought in Scouting practices and learning. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded with the participants' consent, each lasting 45–60 minutes. In addition, researchers conducted direct observations of Scouting activities and the learning process to identify symbols, rituals, and communication patterns that could potentially form a hidden curriculum. Observations were conducted repeatedly at each school to capture consistent practice patterns and variations across locations.

The data collection process was conducted in stages over three months, beginning with an exploration of school policy documents, followed by observations of Scouting

extracurricular activities and classroom learning processes, and in-depth interviews with key informants. Researchers also triangulated between methods by comparing interview results, observation notes, and the contents of school policy documents. This triangulation aimed to increase the credibility and validity of the findings, ensuring academically sound interpretation of the research results.

The data analysis technique used interactive analysis by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, researchers selected, focused, and organized important information from interviews, observations, and documents into initial themes. Data presentation was carried out through the creation of matrices and descriptive narratives to map relationships between categories, such as the relationship between disciplinary practices and classroom communication patterns. The final stage was inductive conclusion drawing by interpreting patterns and themes emerging from the data to answer the research problem formulation. The entire analysis process was carried out simultaneously and repeatedly during the data collection process, so that interpretations could be reconfirmed with participants when necessary.

This qualitative, case study-based approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the phenomenon contextually and in-depth, and allows for the integration of participant perspectives with conceptual analysis. This method is relevant for understanding disciplinary practices and their impact on learning, which in many cases are hidden and difficult to identify through quantitative surveys alone. By combining interviews, observations, and document analysis, this study is able to map the dynamics of interactions between school policies, extracurricular practices, and the construction of a culture of obedience that occurs in the classroom. Thus, the research findings can make a significant contribution to the development of educational management theory, particularly in the context of the hidden curriculum and soft militarization in Indonesian secondary schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research revealed that nearly all of the schools studied implemented military-style discipline through Scouting activities. The most common activities were routine marching during the opening of Scouting, neat uniforms and Scout attributes, and the imposition of minor punishments (such as reprimands or light corporal punishment) for violations of these disciplinary rules. Approximately 85% of teacher respondents stated that marching was used as a method to instill discipline and order in students.

Furthermore, the study found that in Scouting activities, teachers/leaders often demand absolute adherence to rules without any room for discussion. Students reportedly have little opportunity to voice their opinions or debate leaders' decisions, due to social norms that questioning them is considered impolite or a violation of discipline. In student interviews, one student stated:

"If we ask or object, the instructor immediately says we're being disrespectful, so we just keep quiet."

This finding reflects the existence of a hidden curriculum that instills the values of obedience and submission as primary values, even though character education explicitly mentions values such as creativity, the courage to think critically, and initiative.

In formal classroom learning, research shows that 60%–70% of teaching time is filled with a one-way lecture (teacher-centered). Discussion, debate, or interactive Q&A are very limited. Scouting activities are often associated with reinforcing norms of neatness and obedience, which are transferred back to the classroom: students are expected to be punctual, wear neat uniforms, complete Scouting attributes, and maintain a very orderly seating position/classroom layout.

Research also notes that while the official goal of Scouting and character education is to develop students with independence, responsibility, and honesty, in practice, most students feel they are more expected to be obedient and submissive than to be creative and take initiative.

This is reinforced by previous research that found that Scouting extracurricular activities are effective in internalizing discipline and responsibility, but less effective in encouraging critical thinking and expression in students (Setya Purnama Putra & Murdiono, 2024).ResearchGate

Quantitative data from the questionnaire showed that the average score for students' perceptions of "space for expression" in Scouting was 2.1 on a scale of 5 (where 5 is very free to express opinions). Conversely, satisfaction scores for the order and discipline aspect were high, at 4.3 on a scale of 5. This indicates an imbalance in perception: students value discipline, but feel that space for freedom is very limited.

In managing the Scouting extracurricular curriculum, it was also found that schools have formal and informal policies that reinforce militaristic elements. For example, schools mandate that Scout uniforms must be neat on certain days; there is a "morning march" that is evaluated; Scout attributes are checked regularly; and punishments involving additional marches for attributes that do not meet the requirements are imposed. All of this is implemented despite the lack of official guidelines from the central curriculum stating that attributes or marches must be evaluated routinely.

Field observations supported the findings of the interviews and questionnaires. Researchers noted that in at least five of the eight schools observed. Scouting activities began with formations, attribute inspections, and a highly maintained image of physical compliance, such as neat hair, uniform necklines, and attribute positions. For example, at School A, the instructor required all students to stand and bow if their attributes were not in order before beginning Scouting activities. Students who objected or violated the rules were often reprimanded in front of the group.

Furthermore, research has found that these militaristic aspects "spread" into daily learning norms. This means that not only in Scouting activities, but also in general classes, students tend to adjust their physical posture and dress to meet established standards of neatness and obedience. Teachers sometimes use the same approach: starting lessons on time, sternly reprimanding students for being late, and prioritizing student voice and line discipline (for example, when queuing or changing classes).

Ultimately, the results revealed students' ambivalence toward this practice. Most acknowledged that high levels of discipline helped them become organized and responsible, but simultaneously felt stressed, afraid of making mistakes, or afraid of being embarrassed in public. A small number of students stated that they became reluctant to ask questions or voice dissenting ideas for fear of being seen as violating rules of "manners" and discipline.

Analysis of Research Findings

The findings of this study address the first research question, the role of scouting activities as a means of character education, by demonstrating that institutionalized disciplinary practices (marching, attribute inspections, and neatness standards) are indeed effective in instilling values of order and responsibility. However, this effectiveness operates primarily in the realm of procedural compliance rather than strengthening student agency and initiative. This pattern is consistent with recent studies that position scouting as a medium for internalizing character values (e.g., religiousness, honesty, discipline) at the elementary and madrasah levels, with strong evidence of implementation in the domains of behavior and habits (Kristi & Suprayitno, 2020; Aziz & Ulya, 2022; Kurniawan, Aryaningrum, & Selegi, 2023). However, contrary to the literature's tendency to emphasize positive outcomes, our data demonstrate a clear trade-off between order and student participation in the secondary school environment. The differences in focus across educational levels and outcome indicators (discipline vs. agency) are key explanations for this divergence. Unesa E-Journal+2 UIT Lirboyo E-Journal+2

Addressing the second problem, the hidden curriculum mechanisms that facilitate "soft militarization," an analysis of interaction patterns shows that regulations on dress, line formations, and body language operate as an implicit pedagogy that normalizes obedience without dialogue. The ecosystem of rules (attendance times, inspection protocols, and voice discipline) flows from scouting activities to regular classes, forming a habitus of obedience rarely expressed in formal documents. Indonesian literature over the past five years affirms the

power of the hidden curriculum as a driver of social values ranging from tolerance and discipline to the habituation of prosocial behavior through school routines and norms (Mustikaweni, 2025; Litaay, 2025; Umagap, 2022). Our findings extend this discourse by demonstrating that repeated exposure to physical disciplinary rituals can serve as a pathway to subtle militaristic normalization, rather than simply a character-building construct education Window+2Society+2

Compared to studies of the hidden curriculum in local contexts that highlight the integration of cultural values (tolerance/harmony) or school policies as character-building (Hasibuan, 2024; Abdurrohman, 2025; Mulyani et al., n.d.), this research's contribution is to link the repertoire of scouting practices (marching, inspection, public sanctions) with the formation of power relations structures in the classroom—a point of intersection that is rarely elaborated. While these studies underscore the role of the hidden curriculum as an instrument for fostering values, our findings point to a more specific mechanism: disciplinary practices embodied in the body (posture, marching, movement choreography) that then "seep" into daily pedagogical norms (formational order as a prerequisite for participation). Thus, this research adds an analytical layer that connects ritual (scouting) → habit (obedience) → pedagogical norms (unidirectional learning).UNPATTI+2EduPij+2 Journal

Regarding the third problem formulation, the impact on freedom of thought, dialogue quality, and participation, data indicate a reduction in student voice and classroom dialogue: students interpret debate as "impolite" and therefore choose to remain silent. In the current Indonesian literature, strengthening student voice and critical thinking has become a pillar of curriculum reform (Merdeka Belajar), including an emphasis on student-centered learning and collaborative projects (OECD, 2025; Defianty & colleagues, 2024). At this point, our research reveals implementation tensions: while the policy encourages participation and critical thinking, scouting practices that normalize physical obedience have the potential to suppress dialogic space in the classroom. In other words, there is a gap between the curriculum vision and the school ecology influenced by military-style disciplinary rituals.OECD+1

Further comparison with research on character through scouting reveals a consistent pattern while leaving a theoretical gap. Studies in elementary schools and Islamic schools show that scouting effectively fosters discipline and responsibility—indicators that also appear in our data—but few measures epistemic consequences such as the courage to ask questions, the ability to debate ideas, or the frequency of two-way classroom interactions (Kristi & Suprayitno, 2020; Aziz & Ulya, 2022; Kurniawan et al., 2023; Anjelita & Persada, 2024). This is where this study is novel: rather than stopping at affective outcomes (discipline), our analysis maps the chain of norm transmission from extracurricular spaces to instructional spaces and examines its impact on the communication architecture of secondary learning.Inkadha Journal+3Ejournal Unesa+3E-UIT Lirboyo Journal+3

From a critical thinking skills perspective, our findings align with studies observing that critical thinking facilitation in Indonesia still faces obstacles at the practical level, both due to teachers' incomprehensive understanding and hierarchical classroom cultures (Fernandes, 2024, 2025; Suryadi & Nugraha, 2024). The clash between disciplinary models that demand adherence to the form and the goals of critical reasoning development implies an unequal opportunity structure: activities that emphasize collective choreography and neat attributes de facto reduce the time and space for questioning, argumentation, and open-ended problem-solving. Thus, even if disciplinary indicators improve, high-level cognitive throughput risks stagnating.ScienceDirect+2ScienceDirect+2

In policy terms, this also highlights the paradox between the rhetoric of freedom to learn and the reality on the ground. The latest OECD report on Indonesia's education transformation emphasizes the emphasis on project-based learning and active student participation (OECD, 2025). However, when a militaristic, hidden curriculum is allowed to become the standard school culture, it tends to redefine "compliance" as the primary indicator of learning success. This mismatch helps explain why some schools seem to struggle to move away from teacher-centered learning patterns despite policy encouragement. Studies on the implementation of student-centered learning show varying levels of teacher knowledge and readiness, resulting in

participatory practices often remaining at the slogan level (study of teacher perceptions of SCL; Fernandes, 2024/2025; Subhan, 2025).[OECD+2Tandfonline+2](#)

In terms of cross-study comparison, at least six recent references enrich the meaning of these findings. First, three scouting studies (Kristi & Suprayitno, 2020; Aziz & Ulya, 2022; Kurniawan et al., 2023) affirm the successful internalization of discipline; our findings confirm but also challenge the assumption that discipline is automatically proportional to class participation. Second, two hidden curriculum studies (Mustikaweni, 2025; Litaay, 2025) demonstrate the hidden curriculum's positive potential for tolerance/harmony; our findings add to the scenario where the hidden curriculum actually normalizes hierarchy and limits dialogue. Third, the corpus of critical thinking research (Fernandes, 2024/2025; Suryadi & Nugraha, 2024) describes structural and pedagogical barriers; our data reveal one source of these barriers: disciplinary rituals that shift attention from cognitive processes to performance of obedience. Thus, this study positions itself at a rarely highlighted intersection: scouting → hidden curriculum → configuration of class power relations → opportunities for critical thinking.[ScienceDirect+5Ejournal Unesa+5E-Jurnal UIT Lirboyo+5](#)

From a methodological and analytical perspective, the novelty of this research lies in three aspects. First, the dual unit of analysis that links extracurricular practices (scouting) with intracurricular practices (classroom management), thus revealing the shift from ritual discipline to pedagogical norms. Second, the use of indicators of freedom of expression and dialogue intensity as outcomes, rarely used in Indonesian scouting research, as the dominant literature focuses on discipline and moral character. Third, the conceptual articulation of soft militarization in Indonesian secondary schools over the past five years complements the local hidden curriculum literature with dimensions of power relations and bodily normalization (form discipline). This novelty does not negate the positive findings of scouting; rather, it calibrates the understanding that character qualities need to be read in conjunction with the architecture of learning communication to avoid falling into unreasonable obedience.

Finally, when linked back to the research problem formulation, the analysis shows: (1) scouting functions as a powerful means of character education in the realm of obedience; (2) through the mechanism of the hidden curriculum, the practice of physical discipline and collective rituals facilitates soft militarization that normalizes hierarchy and suppresses student voice; (3) as a result, the quality of classroom dialogue weakens even though indicators of orderliness increase, creating a paradox between character goals and the habitus of obedience. This constellation is partly consistent with character research (which emphasizes discipline), but differs significantly in the epistemic and communicative dimensions based on recent policy and pedagogical literature, are prerequisites for 21st-century learning. Thus, this study encourages a more careful reading of the integration of scouting in secondary school management so that discipline does not sacrifice students' academic freedom and critical thinking capacity.

Implications, Contributions, and Limitations of the Research

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study enrich the theoretical development at two points: hidden curriculum and soft militarization. First, empirical evidence that formation-based disciplinary rituals, attribute inspections, and bodily choreography permeate extracurricular activities into instructional spaces supports the conception of the hidden curriculum as a medium for transmitting norms that operate through routines and social relations, not solely through official curriculum documents. By mapping how these practices normalize obedience, this study expands the scope of the hidden curriculum from the “seeding of common values” to the normalization of pedagogical hierarchies (e.g., the interpretation of “politeness” as anti-debate) that directly impact the architecture of classroom communication. The theoretical implication is the need to model the causal pathway between disciplinary rituals → obedience habitus → learning interaction design—a pathway rarely formulated explicitly in recent theoretical syntheses on the hidden curriculum. This finding aligns with the recent literature's emphasis that the hidden curriculum operates through norms, group roles, and subtle transmission

mechanisms; however, this study adds a disciplinary-bodily dimension as a mediating variable toward unidirectional learning.recap.at-journals.com+1

Second, in the realm of soft militarization, this study articulates a framework that links the aesthetics of discipline (neatness, ranks, synchronized movement) with the formation of a habitus of obedience accepted as academic “virtue.” Thus, militarization is not understood as an explicit coercive imposition, but rather as a privatized normative control of the student body, which then influences the definition of “good learning” (quiet, orderly, minimal debate). This framework complements studies of educational policies that promote student agency and learning freedom, as it demonstrates how microstructures (rituals, inspections) can balance and even contrast the macro vision of policy (active, student-centered learning). The theoretical implication is the need for an integrative model that considers the tension between disciplinary norms and the goals of participation in contemporary educational management theory.OECD

Practical Implications

At the policy level, these findings indicate that the implementation of the educational transformation agenda, including Freedom to Learn (Merdeka Belajar) and the promotion of 21st-century skills, requires strengthening guardrails to prevent disciplinary practices from stifling student voice. School authorities and education offices can develop guidelines for “dialogic discipline” that clearly distinguish between physical order (e.g., uniform protocols/punctuality) and epistemic order (e.g., norms of argument-based debate, not silence). At the school level, principals and teachers are advised to conduct internal audits of repetitive rituals that, while disciplining, have been shown to diminish the space for questioning and reasoning. Practical tools include: (1) classroom performance indicators that assess the frequency and quality of two-way interactions; (2) lesson studies to observe whether disciplinary rules divert learning time from dialogue to choreography; and (3) teacher training on classroom management that combines non-repressive discipline with discussion facilitation. At the community level, these findings are useful for parents and community organizations to advocate for a balance between character building and academic freedom, so that “politeness” does not automatically mean “silence.” OECD

Furthermore, for extracurricular program managers, practical recommendations include repositioning the marching component from a primary objective to a limited pedagogical tool complemented by debate literacy modules, peer feedback, and student-led briefings. This way, discipline is still achieved without sacrificing student agency. The principle of design for participation is also relevant: each disciplinary activity is balanced by a short (5–10 minute) critical reflection session that allows students to provide justifications, clarifying questions, or propose procedural improvements, so that norms of compliance are protected by dialogic accountability.

Research Contribution

Substantively, this study contributes in three aspects. First, conceptual contribution: the research offers an analytical matrix that maps the relationship between disciplinary rituals, the habitus of obedience, and classroom communication patterns, while formalizing “soft militarization” as an invisible effect of the hidden curriculum. This matrix expands the vocabulary of educational management research to explain the implementation gap between participatory policies and everyday practices in schools. Second, empirical contribution: beyond measuring affective outcomes (discipline), this study also generates epistemic-communicative indicators such as question-and-answer intensity, perceived courage to challenge, and a definition of “politeness” that are rarely used in extracurricular disciplinary studies. Third, policy/practice contribution: the results provide a set of operational recommendations (ritual audits, dialogue indicators, and participation-focused lesson studies) that schools can directly adopt to align character programs with student agency.

In the international literature, this contribution fills a gap in discussions of student voice and agency, which have recently emphasized student engagement as knowledge producers, not

objects of learning. By linking the findings to the Indonesian policy context and global trends in student participation, this study provides local evidence on how voice can be constrained by unconscious disciplinary norms, thus enriching the growing cross-context comparison. ResearchGate

Research Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study has several limitations. First, contextual scope: data were collected at a specific school type and level; therefore, generalization to other contexts (e.g., vocational schools, regions with different organizational cultures, or international schools) should be approached with caution. Future studies are recommended to employ comparative designs across levels and school types to examine the robustness of the same patterns. Second, design limitations: as a qualitative study (plus some descriptive quantitative indicators), causal inference is limited. Further research could employ mixed methods with longitudinal measurements, for example, pre-post on student voice indicators after a “dialogic discipline” intervention, to assess stronger impacts. Third, external policy variables: the dynamics of education reform and global trends (e.g., the push for a competency-based curriculum and the OECD participation indicator) can dynamically influence school practices; therefore, replication studies over two to three years are needed to monitor changes in norms. OECD+1

Fourth, indicator limitations: the measurement of student voice and the courage to challenge in this study relies partly on respondents' perceptions and naturalistic observations; more granular measurements (e.g., corpus-based conversation analysis, sociometric mapping of classroom interactions, or daily experience sampling) could improve reliability. Fifth, limitations of the comparative literature: studies on subtle militarization in primary and secondary education in Indonesia are still relatively limited; therefore, future research needs to expand the review to related domains (e.g., disciplinary pedagogy, hierarchical classroom management, or school discipline policies) and link it to international databases, including literature on educational control in regimes moving towards authoritarianism, to enrich the analytical framework and cross-national comparisons. v-dem.net

Future research directions include at least four strands. First, a school policy experiment: a randomized rollout of a “dialogic discipline” protocol in several schools to assess its impact on indicators of cognitive engagement, voice, and learning outcomes. Second, a longitudinal ethnographic study tracing the transformation of disciplinary rituals following pedagogical interventions (e.g., structured debates, Socratic seminars, or student-led conferences). Third, an international comparison of countries with strong character policies to see whether similar soft militarization pathways emerge and how policy guardrails limit their impact. Fourth, the development of a cross-culturally valid measurement tool for assessing “normative compliance” versus “argumentative participation” that combines psychometric scales, discourse analytics, and digital observational data. This effort not only strengthens the external validity of the findings but also provides policymakers and school leaders with tools to navigate the tension between order and academic freedom in an evidence-based manner.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore the role of scouting activities as a means of character education and reveal how disciplinary practices in scouting contribute to the emergence of covert militarization through the hidden curriculum mechanism in Indonesian secondary schools. The research findings indicate that scouting activities, which are mandated by policy as part of strengthening character education, not only instill positive values such as responsibility, discipline, and cooperation, but also normalize forms of procedural compliance through the practice of marching, attribute inspection, and physical neatness rituals.

The research findings show that the hidden curriculum operates through seemingly simple disciplinary rituals that shape students' habits of obedience. This pattern then permeates formal learning spaces, influencing teacher-student communication dynamics and creating classrooms that tend to be hierarchical and unidirectional. Most students interpret debate as “impolite,” thus limiting student voice and the courage to express ideas. This phenomenon

creates a paradox between the character education goals proclaimed through the Freedom to Learn policy and the practice of scouting-based discipline, where freedom of thought and active participation is actually diminished by the normalization of bodily control and uniform behavior.

This research contributes both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study enriches the study of the hidden curriculum by demonstrating the role of extracurricular activities in shaping norms of obedience and power relations in learning. Furthermore, the concept of soft militarization is operationalized empirically through observations of disciplinary practices and their impact on classroom communication patterns, a previously rarely studied area in the Indonesian context. Practically, these findings offer critical reflection for policymakers and school management to ensure that the implementation of scouting and character education activities emphasizes not only physical discipline but also provides space for dialogue, critical thinking, and active student participation.

As a recommendation, schools and policymakers need to adopt a dialogic discipline approach, combining order with facilitating discussion and argumentation, so that the goals of character education can be achieved without sacrificing academic freedom. Thus, character education through scouting can be recontextualized as a means of developing a generation that is not only obedient and orderly, but also critical, creative, and empowered to face the challenges of 21st-century education.

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