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TAMANSISWA AND THE ETHICS OF NON-PUNITIVE DISCIPLINE: REFRAMING PUNISHMENT IN PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

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Keyword

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Abstract

This article reconceptualizes Tamansiswa's among system as a theory-bearing model of non-punitive discipline that contributes to global progressive education. Drawing on a qualitative multiple-case study of two Tamansiswa primary schools, the article reanalyses empirical data from the author's master's thesis using ethics of care and critical pedagogy as complementary lenses. Findings demonstrate that Tamansiswa's rejection of punishment is philosophically grounded in respect for the child's kodrat alam and the cultivation of budi pekerti; that teachers as pamong exercise ethical authority through sustained relational presence, moral exemplarity, and individualized guidance; that discipline is reframed from obedience to moral autonomy and self-regulation via dialogical reflection and communal norms; and that among operates as a Southern Theory, offering a decolonial alternative to punitive, Eurocentric disciplinary paradigms. The analysis shows how care-based practices and anti-oppressive pedagogies cohere to produce agency and communal responsibility without coercion, and how indigenous ethical vocabularies can inform restorative and autonomy-supportive frameworks. Practical implications include reorienting teacher education toward relational competencies, embedding ethical frameworks within restorative policies, and recognizing local wisdom as a curricular resource. The study's bounded case design and reliance on secondary analysis limit claims of generalisability; future research should pursue comparative, longitudinal, and mixed-methods studies to evaluate scalability and outcomes. By foregrounding Tamansiswa as both a historical praxis and a contemporary, normative resource, the article advances an ethical and ideological reframing of punishment with theoretical and practical relevance for educators and policymakers globally. The findings invite policymakers to integrate culturally grounded ethics into national disciplinary frameworks urgentl

INTRODUCTION

1. Backrground and context

Globally, education is re-evaluating harsh disciplinary approaches. In many countries, strict "zero-tolerance" policies and corporal punishment have been shown to backfire. For example, a WHO review concludes that physical punishment "increases children's behavioural problems over time and has no positive outcomes" (WHO, 2021). Likewise, the U.S. American Psychological Association has warned that exclusionary, punitive discipline tends to intensify inequity and even raise rates of misconduct (Lodi et al., 2021). In response, international educators and policymakers now emphasize alternatives. Current reform movements include *restorative justice* in schools, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), trauma-informed teaching, and *child-friendly school* models that explicitly ban violence. For instance, a recent study of Indonesian early childhood centers found formal policies "against physical punishment and other forms of violence," creating a "warm and friendly environment" where children feel safe (Aziz et al., 2025). Such shifts reflect a broad demand for more humane, relational approaches in pedagogy.

Indonesia's own educational heritage anticipated many of these progressive ideas. In 1922 Ki Hajar Dewantara (Raden Mas Soewardi Soerjaningrat) founded the Tamansiswa ("Garden of Students") movement as a nationalist response to colonial schooling. Tamansiswa promoted child-centered, character-building education rooted in local culture rather than rote obedience. Dewantara conceived a *sistem among*, an organic pedagogical method based on asah, asih, asuh (to sharpen intellect, to love, to nurture). Under *sistem among* the learner's unique nature is respected: students learn through active experience and self-direction, while teachers guide with affection and example. Ferary (2021) explains that in this system teachers "momong" (care for), *"among"* (offer an example), and "ngemong" (observe) students as they explore knowledge, rather than using drill or indoctrination. In this way Dewantara anticipated concepts like "independent learning" (*merdeka belajar*) and holistic character education. He explicitly rejected the colonial school's rigid authoritarianism and foreign-centric curriculum, insisting instead that schools teach local history, values and mother tongues. Tamansiswa, thus, can be seen as an indigenous *decolonial* pedagogy: a culturally affirming alternative born amid Dutch rule.

Critically, Dewantara's *among* approach is fundamentally ethical and non-punitive, paralleling contemporary care-based pedagogies. It resonates with Noddings's (2013) *ethic of care*, which holds that teachers should empower and empathize with students rather than impose abstract rules, and with Paulo Freire's idea of dialogic education that uplifts oppressed cultures. Tamansiswa's child-centered ethos also aligns with John Dewey's progressive vision of schools as communities where learners develop in harmony with life. By emphasizing affection (*asih*) and guidance over coercion, among offers a practical model of schooling *without punishment*. As one analyses of Tamansiswa notes, Dewantara's principles implicitly yield "alternative methods to punitive and exclusionary discipline" (Lodi et al., 2021). In practice, many Tamansiswa schools historically banned corporal punishment and fostered mutual respect. These features closely match today's *child-friendly* criteria – safety, non-discrimination, and nurturing pedagogy – that scholars argue are essential to holistic child development.

Re-examining Tamansiswa today is thus both timely and instructive. This study aims to reposition Dewantara's legacy not as a quaint "local heritage" but as a valid global contribution to educational theory. By analyzing Tamansiswa's *among* system through the lens of contemporary debates, we show how a South Asian model enriches global pedagogy. In doing so, the research creates an epistemic dialogue between Dewantara and Western thinkers (e.g. Freire, Noddings, Dewey), highlighting how a Global South perspective can advance ethics of education. Ultimately, revisiting Tamansiswa addresses urgent issues in 21st-century schooling – the repudiation of harsh discipline, the promotion of social justice, and the cultivation of character – from a non-Western viewpoint. The goal is to articulate clear research objectives and contributions: to affirm the educational value of among as an ethical, non-punitive pedagogy; and to argue that local experiences in Indonesia have broader relevance for global education theory and practice.

2. Previous studies and state of the art

Research on non-punitive discipline within progressive education has grown substantially over the last decade, yet it remains fragmented across subfields—restorative justice (RJ), school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), and trauma-informed schooling—each carrying distinct evidentiary strengths and limitations. Recent systematic reviews of RJ argue that the literature has been dominated by programmatic and implementation-focused studies, with comparatively fewer works theorizing the *ethical* and *ideological* bases of non-punitive discipline or connecting them to non-Western pedagogical traditions. (Marcucci et al., 2025) methodologically diverse review of RJ scholarship, for instance, shows that debates routinely pivot on effectiveness and institutional uptake while leaving underexamined the anti-carceral ethical commitments that animate restorative practices in schooling. This reveals a theoretical gap: the field still lacks robust accounts of *why* punishment should be refused on ethical grounds, and how alternative conceptions of authority and care can be grounded in culturally specific philosophies of education.

Evidence syntheses on PBIS likewise report small-to-moderate positive effects on behavioral and some academic outcomes, yet they primarily operationalize "success" through behavioral metrics rather than normative criteria (e.g., dignity, relational responsibility) central to progressive education. Early meta-analyses and more recent evaluations by Solomon et al., 2012) underscore measurable benefits at Tier-1 but seldom interrogate the moral status of preventive, reinforcement-based discipline or its compatibility with emancipatory aims. This points to an evidentiary-cum-theoretical gap: outcome-oriented PBIS research offers limited traction for ethical debates on punishment and authority, especially outside Western contexts.

Trauma-informed education adds an important relational lens but the evidence base is still consolidating and uneven across global settings. Recent overviews stress promise alongside concerns about fidelity, conceptual inflation, and the risk that trauma discourse re-animates deficit framings when transplanted without cultural–political grounding. Here the practical-knowledge and methodological gaps are salient: we have limited guidance on *contextualized* implementation in non-Western school systems, and, as founded by Casale & Linderkamp (2025), few designs that pair empirical evaluation with critical-ethical analysis.

Within Indonesian studies, scholarship on Ki Hadjar Dewantara and the Tamansiswa movement has reasserted their contemporary relevance—typically by reconstructing historical principles or aligning them with current policy agendas. Ferary's (2021) re-examination of Dewantara clarifies core ideas (e.g., the *among* system and the triadic ethos of *asih–asah–asuh*), yet the analysis remains primarily philosophical-descriptive; it does not elaborate a systematic ethical argument against punitive discipline nor map Tamansiswa onto the global ethics-of-discipline debate. An Oxford Research Encyclopedia entry by Aletheiani (2021) similarly situates Dewantara among public-oriented educational alternatives, but again stops short of articulating a non-punitive ethical framework that can converse with RJ, PBIS, or trauma-informed approaches. These strands collectively surface a *knowledge* and *theoretical* gap: Tamansiswa is rarely positioned as a fully fledged ethical–ideological model of non-punitive discipline within comparative education, and its Global South provenance is underutilized for re-centering non-Western epistemologies in progressive education.

A parallel gap concerns care ethics. While Noddings's (2013) *Caring* has shaped the relational turn in educational ethics, its uptake in school-discipline research is typically indirect—invoked as background rather than worked through in dialogue with concrete, culturally rooted pedagogies. The literature thus lacks comparative accounts that put a non-Western progressive tradition like Tamansiswa into explicit conversation with care ethics to derive normative criteria for *refusing punishment* (e.g., relational authority, "completion in the other," and attentiveness as ethical grounds for guidance without coercion).

Building on these lacunae, the present study offers three contributions. First, it reframes Tamansiswa's *among* as an explicitly *ethical* and *ideological* architecture of non-punitive discipline—moving beyond historical-normative description toward a defensible argument for why punishment is incompatible with the relational telos of progressive education in the Global

South. Second, it stages a structured dialogue between *among* and contemporary non-punitive frameworks (RJ, PBIS Tier-1 prevention, trauma-informed schooling), demonstrating points of convergence (relational repair, preventive ecology, attentiveness to harm) and, as stated by Michael et al. (2023) principled divergence (grounds of authority, cultural–political aims). In doing so, it recasts the evaluation criterion from "program effectiveness" to *ethical adequacy* within a plural, decolonial canon of progressive education. Third, it advances a comparative ethics-of-discipline perspective that is both globally conversant and locally anchored: Tamansiswa is positioned not as a heritage case but as a generative theory-bearing contribution that can problematize carceral logics in schooling and enrich the philosophical foundations of non-punitive discipline worldwide. This is the study's novelty (*reframing punishment via Tamansiswa's ethical–ideological perspective*) directly addresses the identified theoretical, knowledge, and practical-knowledge gaps in the existing literature.

3. Theoretical framework

This paper advances a dual-theoretical reading of Tamansiswa's *among* system by mobilising Ethics of Care and Critical Pedagogy as complementary analytic lenses. Nel Noddings's care-based ethics relocates moral discourse from abstract, rule-governed systems to concrete interpersonal relations; care is realised as attentive presence, modelling, and responsive responsibility rather than as sentimental softness or permissiveness. Noddings's relational ethics therefore equips us to interpret the *pamong–child* relation as the primary site in which moral formation and discipline occur: the teacher's sustained attentiveness and responsibility generate internalised dispositions in learners and render punitive sanctions both unnecessary and ethically corrosive (Noddings, 2013). Restated for empirical analysis, the care lens foregrounds three analytic priorities (Silva & Rojas, 2024), named relationality (how trust and recognition are built), caring-as-practice (how listening, modelling, and patient guidance operate pedagogically), and the critique of justice-based morality (how retributive logics undermine educative ends) all of which align with the core descriptions of *among* in the data (full presence of *pamong*, attention to the child's *kodrat*, and character cultivation). such as restorative approaches and child-friendly schooling.

Critical Pedagogy supplies the political and ideological vocabulary required to situate those micro-ethical practices within a wider project of emancipation education (Shih, 2018). Contemporary articulations of Freirean thought emphasise that schooling is never neutral: it either domesticates or liberates, reproduces subordination or cultivates critical consciousness (Giroux, 2014). Read through this lens, *among* becomes intelligible as an act of ideological resistance (Towaf, 2016), a historically-grounded pedagogy that contests colonial and authoritarian schooling by privileging dialogic relations, student subjectivity, and cultural dignity. Combining care and critique yields analytic synergy: Ethics of Care explains *how* non-punitive discipline works at the relational level, while Critical Pedagogy explains *why* such an approach is politically and historically consequential. Together these frameworks allow us to define non-punitive discipline (relationally organised practices that eschew retributive sanctions and aim to cultivate moral autonomy), ideological resistance (pedagogic acts that contest dominant disciplinary regimes), and *among* (Tamansiswa's integrated praxis of *asah-asih-asuh* in which guidance, affection, and moral formation operate as mutually reinforcing modalities). This dual lens therefore structures the analysis of the findings.

Aligned to the theoretical framework and empirical themes, the article addresses the following research questions:

a. How can Tamansiswa's *among* system be theorised as a care-based, non-punitive model and how does it compare with contemporary restorative and autonomy-supportive approaches?

b. How do *pamong* instantiate ethical authority, and through which relational mechanisms do they foster character and self-regulation without punishment?
c. In what ways does *among* operate as ideological resistance to colonial/authoritarian schooling, and what are the implications for decolonising progressive education?
d. What theoretical and pedagogical contributions can Tamansiswa offer to global debates on restorative schooling, ethics of care, and educating for autonomy?

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative multiple-case study design to analyse Tamansiswa's *among* system as an ethically grounded, non-punitive pedagogy. A case-study approach is appropriate where the objectiveS is to examine complex social phenomena in their real-world contexts and to capture both the particularities of practice and their interpretive meaning (Yin, 2018). The present article is based on the author's master's research, which investigated two Tamansiswa primary schools (SD Tamanmuda Jetis and SD Tamanmuda Ibupawiyatan) as bounded cases; these sites were selected purposively because they exemplify longstanding implementations of the *among* tradition and thus afford rich, contrasting evidence of non-punitive pedagogy (Miftakhuddin, 2021). The multiple-case design enables within-case description and cross-case comparison, thereby supporting analytic generalisation to theoretical constructs.

1. Data collection

Primary data for this re-analysis derive from the original fieldwork reported in the thesis (Miftakhuddin, 2021). The empirical corpus comprised interviews with key informants (teachers/pamong, school principals), focus groups with parents where available, classroom observations of teaching–learning interactions, and documentary sources (school regulations, lesson plans, and curricular materials). Participants were identified through purposive sampling to ensure inclusion of actors who enact or observe *among* practices in situ (Patton, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were employed to elicit participants' epistemic and moral rationales for disciplinary practice, while non-participant classroom observation generated fine-grained data on interactional patterns, teacher presence, and paraprofessional routines. Documentary analysis complemented interview and observation data by revealing institutional norms and formalised statements about discipline and character education. Interview protocols and observation templates were developed to align with the study's theoretical concerns (care relations, ideological positioning, and autonomy-supportive pedagogies), and were piloted during initial site contact (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

2. Data analysis

Data analysis proceeded iteratively and reflexively, following established procedures for rigorous qualitative inquiry. Fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and documents were transcribed and imported into a qualitative analytic workflow; coding combined in vivo and concept-driven techniques, following the coding practices articulated by Saldaña (2016) and the systematic matrix approaches described by Miles et al. (2014). Initial open coding generated descriptive categories (e.g., "pamong presence", "forms of guidance", "responses to misbehaviour"), which were then axially linked to higher-order analytic themes aligned with the theoretical framework (care relations, ideological resistance, autonomy formation). Thematic consolidation followed the trustworthiness criteria recommended for qualitative research: credibility (member checking and triangulation across data sources), dependability (audit trail of coding decisions), confirmability (peer debriefing), and transferability (thick description of contexts) (Nowell et al., 2017). Where relevant, pattern-matching logic was used to compare empirical patterns with expectations derived from ethics of care and critical pedagogy. All analytic steps were documented in memos to preserve reflexive insight and analytic provenance.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study collectively portray the *among* system of Tamansiswa as a coherent, ethically grounded model of non-punitive discipline that operates at the intersection of

care-based pedagogy, moral character formation, and ideological resistance. First, the rejection of punishment is not framed as permissiveness but as a principled stance rooted in Ki Hadjar Dewantara's philosophy of respecting children's *kodrat alam* and cultivating *budi pekerti* through relational trust and moral guidance. Second, teachers as *pamong* function not merely as facilitators of learning but as ethical authorities whose authority derives from moral exemplarity and personalised care, resonating with global discourses on the teacher as a moral agent and democratic educator (Freire, 2005; Noddings, 2013). Third, discipline is reframed from enforcing obedience to nurturing autonomy, with students encouraged to self-regulate and internalise values rather than comply out of fear, aligning with autonomy-supportive education and constructivist approaches (Reeve, 2016). Fourth, the *among* system emerges as a form of Southern Theory (Connell, 2020), that challenges Western-dominated pedagogical paradigms by offering a locally rooted yet globally relevant framework for humane and just schooling. Together, these findings illuminate how Tamansiswa bridges ethical and ideological dimensions of progressive education, contributing to global debates on restorative practices, child-friendly schooling, and decolonising pedagogy. They also suggest that indigenous pedagogies, when theoretically reframed, can expand the conceptual repertoire of global education beyond Eurocentric traditions. In doing so, the study positions Tamansiswa as both a historically situated and future-oriented educational model with significant implications for theory, policy, and practice.

1. Tamansiswa's rejection of punishment: A philosophical-ethical grounding

Findings from the present study, drawn from the author's original fieldwork in two Tamansiswa primary schools, reveal that the *among* system explicitly rejects the use of punishment as a means of disciplining children. This stance is grounded in Ki Hadjar Dewantara's philosophical commitment to respecting the child's *kodrat alam* (natural disposition), nurturing *budi pekerti* (moral character), and fostering a familial relationship between teacher (*pamong*) and pupil. Classroom observations and interviews with *pamong* indicated that discipline was enacted through guidance, modelling, and relational engagement, rather than through coercion or retributive measures. The *pamong* saw punishment not merely as ineffective, but as morally incongruent with the ethos of *among*—which positions the child as a valued moral subject rather than as an object of behavioural control.

From the perspective of Noddings's (2013) *ethics of care*, this rejection of punishment exemplifies *relational ethics*, wherein moral action is defined not by universalised legalistic norms but by the concrete, lived relationship between the one-caring and the cared-for. In the *among* system, *pamong* deliberately cultivate trust, emotional closeness, and attentiveness to individual needs, thereby creating conditions in which discipline emerges organically from mutual respect rather than fear. This resonates with Noddings' assertion that caring is a moral practice (an active, responsive engagement with the needs of others) rather than a passive emotional state. Field data showed that *pamong* were consistently "fully present" with their students, tailoring interventions to each child's circumstances and avoiding impersonal sanctions.

The critique of *justice-based morality* embedded in the Ethics of Care further illuminates Tamansiswa's stance. In rejecting punitive discipline, *pamong* are rejecting an ethic that privileges rigid rule enforcement over nurturing human growth. Justice-oriented frameworks often assume that wrongdoings must be met with proportionate penalties; care ethics challenges this assumption by foregrounding moral responsibility to preserve the dignity and developmental potential of the other (Held, 2006). This explains why *pamong* view punitive acts as antithetical to their moral mission: punishment not only risks harming the child emotionally but also undermines the relational trust essential for moral formation.

Critical pedagogy, as articulated by Freire (2005), offers a complementary lens by framing Tamansiswa's non-punitive stance as an ideological act of resistance. Historically, the *among* system arose in the context of colonial education, which often relied on authoritarian discipline to enforce compliance and produce docile subjects. Freire's concept of education as the

practice of freedom recognises that pedagogical choices—such as the rejection of punishment—are never neutral. They reflect an underlying political and ethical commitment to humanisation, dialogical engagement, and the transformation of oppressive structures. In the Tamansiswa context, abstaining from punitive measures is not permissive leniency, but a deliberate refusal to replicate the coercive logics of colonial schooling.

The ideological dimension of this rejection becomes particularly salient when compared to contemporary global debates on school discipline. In many educational systems, punitive models persist despite growing evidence of their detrimental effects, including increased student alienation, school dropouts, and the perpetuation of inequities (Gregory et al., 2017). In contrast, movements such as restorative justice in schools, positive behavioural interventions and supports (PBIS), and trauma-informed education have sought to replace retribution with relational repair, skill-building, and socio-emotional support (Evans & Lester, 2008; Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Tamansiswa's *among* system, however, predates these initiatives by decades, offering a culturally embedded example of what a non-punitive, care-based discipline can look like when grounded in local philosophical traditions.

Moreover, the *among* approach aligns with autonomy-supportive education models, which emphasise fostering self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and moral agency rather than compliance (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Observations revealed that *pamong* guided students to reflect on their actions, encouraged peer mediation, and reinforced pro-social behaviours through dialogue—strategies shown in international research to enhance long-term behavioural self-management (Reeve, 2016). This not only mirrors but enriches the global discourse by integrating autonomy-supportive practices with an indigenous ethic of care and communal responsibility.

Importantly, Tamansiswa's rejection of punishment is not a wholesale rejection of discipline; rather, it reframes discipline as a process of moral guidance and self-discovery. This distinction challenges a common misconception in both local and international debates: that non-punitive approaches are synonymous with permissiveness. As Noddings (2013) stresses, care-based pedagogy is neither lax nor unprincipled; it demands attentiveness, moral courage, and sustained relational investment. Similarly, Freire (2005) reminds us that liberation-oriented education entails both love and rigorous responsibility. In Tamansiswa schools, the absence of punishment is paired with a strong emphasis on character formation, social responsibility, and community harmony, operationalised through the *Tri-Nga* principles (*ngerti*, *ngrasa*, *nglakoni*)—to know, to feel, to enact.

By situating Tamansiswa's stance alongside global non-punitive movements, we see a twofold significance. Theoretically, it bridges ethics of care's micro-ethical focus on relationships with critical pedagogy's macro-ethical concern for dismantling oppressive structures. Empirically, it demonstrates that a Global South tradition can anticipate and parallel developments in progressive education that are often framed as innovations from the Global North. This disrupts the epistemic imbalance in educational discourse, offering Tamansiswa as a legitimate, theoretically robust contribution to the ongoing search for humane, effective, and justice-oriented discipline models.

Tamansiswa's philosophical–ethical rejection of punishment is not simply a local cultural curiosity but a globally relevant pedagogical stance. It affirms that caring, dialogical, and autonomy-supportive discipline is possible without sacrificing moral rigour; it also illustrates how educational traditions rooted in anti-colonial resistance can inform contemporary efforts to humanise schooling. Recognising Tamansiswa as a site of pedagogical knowledge production expands the canon of progressive education and invites an epistemic dialogue between Dewantara, Noddings, Freire, and other theorists committed to education as an ethical and emancipatory practice.

2. Teachers as *pamong*: Ethical authority and moral responsibility in child-friendly education

The second key finding from this study foregrounds the role of teachers in Tamansiswa as *pamong*—a term that connotes not merely the transmission of knowledge but the ethical and

moral stewardship of children's development. Empirical evidence from classroom observations and in-depth interviews showed that *pamong* function simultaneously as facilitators of learning, moral exemplars, and protectors of the child's dignity. Their authority is not rooted in coercion but in an ethical relationship that blends guidance with genuine care, fostering an environment aligned with the principles of child-friendly education as endorsed by global frameworks such as (UNICEF, 2009) *Child-Friendly Schools Manual*.

This positioning of the *pamong* resonates strongly with Noddings' notion of the teacher as a moral agent whose legitimacy stems from a sustained capacity to care. In the *among* system, authority is relational rather than hierarchical: the *pamong* earns respect through attentive listening, personal engagement, and the demonstration of moral integrity. This relational ethics contrasts sharply with traditional authoritarian models, where authority is enforced through positional power and the threat of punishment. Interviews revealed that *pamong* often described their role in familial terms, likening their responsibility to that of a parent who guides without humiliating, disciplines without violence, and models desired behaviours through lived example.

From the ethics of care perspective, the *pamong* embodies "caring as moral practice" by attending to the child's holistic well-being—intellectual, emotional, social, and moral. This involves recognising the individuality of each student and adapting pedagogical strategies to fit their unique circumstances, an approach consistent with differentiated instruction in global best practices (Tomlinson, 2014). By refusing punitive discipline, *pamong* prioritise relational trust and emotional safety, which are foundational to both cognitive engagement and moral formation. This echoes empirical findings in international contexts showing that teacher warmth and responsiveness significantly predict student motivation, engagement, and pro-social behaviour (Roorda et al., 2011)

Critical pedagogy further deepens our understanding of the *pamong*'s ethical authority. Freire (2005) conceptualised educators as "cultural workers" whose task is not only to transmit knowledge but to foster critical consciousness (*conscientização*) and resist dehumanising practices. In the Tamansiswa context, this means actively rejecting the reproduction of colonial-era schooling norms—rigid hierarchies, rote learning, and punitive discipline—and instead cultivating a democratic classroom ethos where dialogue, participation, and mutual respect prevail. The *pamong*'s role as a cultural worker is also inherently political: by modelling non-violent authority, they challenge societal assumptions that discipline requires domination and control.

This finding aligns with global scholarship on "pedagogical love" (Hooks, 2003) and "democratic education" (Gutmann, 1999), both of which emphasise the moral responsibility of educators to affirm the humanity of their students. In Tamansiswa schools, this affirmation is visible in daily routines: *pamong* greet students personally, engage in informal conversations about their lives, and involve them in decisions affecting the class. Such practices parallel those in other contexts where democratic and caring pedagogies have been shown to reduce behavioural issues and strengthen community bonds (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006).

International literature on child-friendly education similarly underscores the importance of teacher–student relationships as a determinant of student well-being and achievement. For instance, research in diverse cultural settings indicates that non-punitive, supportive teacher practices are linked to higher levels of student trust and school satisfaction (Suldo et al., 2009). The *pamong*'s ethic of moral responsibility thus represents not merely a local cultural norm but an instantiation of a globally recognised pedagogical ideal—one that integrates ethical care with democratic participation.

However, Tamansiswa's approach offers an important corrective to certain limitations in global child-friendly education discourse, which often emphasises structural and policy reforms without sufficiently addressing the ethical subjectivity of teachers. In the *among* system, the transformation of discipline and pedagogy begins with the self-transformation of the teacher: embodying humility, patience, and moral consistency. This echoes Freire's (2005) assertion that "the pedagogy of the oppressed" demands educators who are themselves committed to the praxis of freedom—educators who reject domination in all its forms, including the micro-politics of punitive discipline.

In comparative terms, the *pamong*'s ethical authority extends beyond common Western notions of "teacher professionalism" by integrating moral and cultural stewardship into the core of teaching practice. While many global frameworks emphasise skills, competencies, and measurable outcomes, Tamansiswa embeds the teacher's moral identity within a broader philosophy of life, rooted in *memayu hayuning bawana*—the Javanese ideal of nurturing the harmony and beauty of the world. In this way, the *pamong*'s refusal to punish is not simply a pedagogical technique but a manifestation of a cosmology that views education as a sacred moral undertaking.

The theoretical and global significance of this finding lies in its potential to reframe the discourse on teacher authority in progressive education. Rather than seeing authority and care as opposites, Tamansiswa demonstrates how ethical authority can emerge precisely from a foundation of care, relational respect, and moral responsibility. This contributes a distinctive Global South perspective to ongoing international debates on teacher identity, child-friendly education, and the ethics of non-punitive discipline—showing that authority without violence is not only possible but pedagogically powerful.

3. Reframing discipline: From obedience to autonomy through the among system

The third major finding of this study reveals that discipline within the *among* system is not synonymous with passive obedience, but rather with the cultivation of moral autonomy. Empirical evidence from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and document analysis indicates that Tamansiswa's approach shifts the goal of discipline from securing compliance to fostering self-regulation grounded in internalised values. Instead of conditioning children to follow rules through fear of punishment, *pamong* guide students to develop the capacity to evaluate their own actions, assume responsibility, and act in alignment with the principles of *budi pekerti* (moral character).

Central to this reframing is Dewantara's principle of *Tri-Nga—ngerti* (to understand), *ngrasa* (to feel), and *nglakoni* (to act). This triadic framework situates discipline as a process of conscious moral development: understanding ethical principles, internalising them emotionally, and enacting them in behaviour. In practice, this means that a student who makes a mistake is encouraged to reflect on the consequences of their actions, discuss alternative choices, and restore relational harmony. This process mirrors contemporary restorative practices, which aim to repair harm and rebuild trust rather than impose retribution (Zehr, 2015). From the perspective of the Ethics of Care, this approach exemplifies "caring as moral practice" by treating discipline as an opportunity for moral growth rather than as a mechanism of control. The *pamong*'s role is to create the relational and emotional conditions in which students can critically examine their own choices without fear of humiliation. As Noddings (2013) argues, such care-based discipline requires sustained attentiveness, dialogue, and mutual respect—conditions clearly observable in Tamansiswa classrooms, where mistakes are framed as teachable moments rather than offences to be punished.

Critical pedagogy provides an equally illuminating lens. Freire (2005) contends that authoritarian discipline reproduces the "banking model" of education, in which students are positioned as passive recipients of authority, conditioned to obey without question. In contrast, the *among* system resists such dehumanising practices by positioning students as subjects of their own learning. The absence of punitive measures removes the coercive structures that inhibit critical thought and agency, allowing students to participate actively in the moral reasoning process. This aligns with Freire's vision of education as the "practice of freedom," where discipline is rooted in dialogue, responsibility, and collective well-being.

Internationally, the shift from obedience to autonomy resonates with theories of self-determination, which identify autonomy-supportive teaching as a key driver of intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and pro-social behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Empirical studies in diverse educational contexts show that when students are given meaningful opportunities for choice, explanation, and participation in rule-making, they develop stronger internal moral compasses and require fewer external controls (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Reeve, 2006).

The *among* system's emphasis on *self-rule* therefore situates it squarely within this global movement toward autonomy-supportive education, while offering a culturally grounded articulation of the same pedagogical goal.

Yet Tamansiswa's contribution is more than a local version of autonomy-supportive learning. Unlike some contemporary approaches that frame autonomy primarily in cognitive or psychological terms, the *among* system roots autonomy in moral responsibility and communal harmony. Autonomy is not conceived as mere individual freedom, but as the capacity to act with consideration for others and the collective good—an orientation closely tied to Javanese ethics and the principle of *memayu hayuning bawana* (to maintain and enhance the beauty and harmony of the world). This moral-communitarian framing adds a critical nuance to global debates on discipline, challenging the individualist bias that sometimes characterises Western models of autonomy.

Furthermore, the Tamansiswa experience suggests that non-punitive, autonomy-oriented discipline can be sustained even in large, resource-constrained classrooms, provided that teacher–student relationships are strong and culturally resonant. This finding counters a frequent scepticism in the literature that autonomy-supportive approaches are impractical in contexts where teachers face heavy workloads or students come from disadvantaged backgrounds (Jang et al., 2010). In Tamansiswa, relational trust, shared values, and the absence of punitive threats reduce the need for constant behavioural policing, thus making the system both culturally coherent and operationally sustainable.

Theoretically, reframing discipline as autonomy redefines the locus of control in education. Instead of being a top-down imposition, discipline becomes a co-constructed moral practice that draws on both relational ethics and critical consciousness. Globally, this model offers an alternative to both punitive discipline and permissive laissez-faire approaches, showing that it is possible to uphold high behavioural standards without resorting to coercion.

4. Reviving local wisdom in global pedagogical discourse: The among system as southern theory

This fourth finding positions the *among* system not merely as a local pedagogical curiosity but as a generative site of knowledge that can recalibrate global discourses on discipline, character education, and social justice in schooling. Empirically, the study shows how *among* operationalises an ethic of non-punitive guidance, moral cultivation (*budi pekerti*), and relational authority (*pamong*) to foster student autonomy without recourse to coercion. Theoretically, this constellation resonates with and extends contemporary debates on decolonising education and epistemic justice: it demonstrates how a Global South tradition can articulate a coherent alternative to punitive and technocratic models of classroom order that still dominate policy and practice. Read through the lens of Southern Theory, Tamansiswa exemplifies how educational knowledge travels upward—*from* the South to the presumed universal canon—thereby challenging entrenched hierarchies of credibility in educational thought (Connell, 2020).

Southern Theory urges scholars to interrogate how global knowledge orders marginalise intellectual traditions whose origins lie outside Euro-Atlantic circuits of prestige. In this register, *among* is not an "add-on" to an already complete theory of progressive education; it is a normative and conceptual resource capable of reframing what progressive education can mean in contexts marked by histories of colonial domination and authoritarian schooling. Rather than situating Tamansiswa as a derivative analogue of North Atlantic reforms, the finding underscores its status as an *originating* ethical-pedagogical project—one that conjoins non-punitive discipline with cultural-moral formation and communal responsibility. This claim aligns with scholarship that links global social justice to *cognitive justice*: there is no equitable educational future if the knowledge practices of the South are confined to anecdote or "culture," while the North monopolises theory (de Sousa Santos, 2014).

Decolonising education frameworks deepen this argument by showing how curricular and pedagogical paradigms reproduce colonial relations of knowing unless alternative epistemologies are given conceptual authority. (Stein & de Oliveira Andreotti, 2017) work demonstrates that "decolonization" in education carries divergent trajectories—from

inclusionary reforms to more radical projects that unsettle modern/colonial assumptions about the human, knowledge, and progress. In light of this typology, *among* can be read as a radical ethical-pedagogical orientation: it does not simply replace punishments with rewards or new behaviorist protocols; it recasts discipline as dialogical moral growth nested in a cosmology of care and communal harmony. By foregrounding *pamong* as ethical stewards and by cultivating self-rule in children, *among* constitutes an epistemic and moral stance that refuses the authoritarian grammars of colonial schooling while avoiding the individualistic drift sometimes present in Western autonomy-centric models.

Current debates on the "epistemic urgency" of decolonising the school curriculum give this contribution a timely inflection. Akbar (2024) argues that curricular reform in the Global North requires more than additive content; it requires rethinking whose experiences and knowledge practices count as the ground of educational judgment. The *among* system speaks directly to that challenge: it offers a fully worked-out grammar of relational authority, communal ethics, and non-punitive discipline grounded in Javanese moral philosophy—precisely the kind of conceptual architecture too often absent from policy-led "best practices." Where much international guidance on discipline now promotes restorative or relational approaches, the uptake is frequently procedural and decontextualized. By contrast, Tamansiswa's non-punitive stance is *thickly* normative, anchored in an indigenous moral anthropology of the child and in the social role of the educator as cultural worker; this thickness is what allows the practice to endure beyond programmatic cycles.

Empirical literatures on epistemic injustice within education further illuminate why *among* matters globally. Omodan (2023) shows how curricula, pedagogy, and assessment systematically privilege certain ways of knowing, rendering subaltern epistemologies inaudible in both content and form. The present finding demonstrates a concrete counter-example: a school tradition that not only validates local knowledge but organises its disciplinary ethos around it. In Tamansiswa, ethical guidance, dialogical repair, and communal responsibility are not "soft skills" appended to instruction; they are constitutive of what it means to *educate*. This reorganisation challenges the tacit universalism of Northern frameworks that export technical solutions—checklists for "restorative practice," scripts for "social-emotional learning"—while leaving untouched the normative commitments that animate classroom life.

At the level of comparative education, scholars have begun mapping how Southern Theory can re-orient research designs and interpretive frames rather than merely diversify case studies. (Mukherjee, 2019) argues that drawing on Southern thought (e.g., Tagore) can produce better theoretical fits for empirical data and more just comparative categories. The *among* system corroborates this move: explaining its durability and coherence requires theoretical tools that take seriously its ethical metaphysics (*kodrat alam*, *memayu hayuning bawana*), its social ontology (teacher as *pamong*), and its telos (autonomy as moral responsibility). When analysed through those concepts, the non-punitive character of discipline is neither permissive nor exotic; it is a rational feature of an internally consistent educational philosophy that can travel without being deracinated.

None of this denies the value of contemporary reforms associated with restorative practices. Indeed, recent evaluations suggest restorative approaches can reduce exclusionary removals and build inclusive communities, while also facing implementation limits when grafted onto punitive school cultures (Stahl et al., 2024). The *among* system helps explain such mixed results: where restorative work is proceduralized absent a coherent ethical frame, it struggles to displace entrenched logics of punishment. Tamansiswa shows what it looks like when restorative, dialogical, and autonomy-supportive practices are embedded in a shared moral horizon—precisely the kind of horizon decolonising scholarship urges systems to surface and legitimise(Adami, 2021; Adefila et al., 2022).

The global significance of this finding is twofold. Conceptually, it advances an alternative paradigm of progressive education in which non-punitive discipline is grounded in a Southern ethical ontology rather than retrofitted onto Northern managerialism. Methodologically, it models how to read Global South traditions as *theory-bearing*—capable of informing general debates on teacher authority, character formation, and justice in schooling. In short,

elevating *among* as Southern Theory responds to the call for cognitive justice by expanding the canon of progressive pedagogy with concepts forged outside Euro-Atlantic modernity. This is not a gesture of multicultural inclusion; it is a substantive redefinition of what counts as rigorous and humane educational knowledge in a world still grappling with the legacies of colonialism.

CONCLUSION

This study has advanced a theoretically grounded and empirically informed re-reading of Tamansiswa's *among* system as a coherent, ethics-driven model of non-punitive discipline that is both philosophically robust and pedagogically practicable. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork from two Tamansiswa primary schools and analysed through the complementary lenses of ethics of care and critical pedagogy, the article has shown that Tamansiswa's refusal of punishment is not an absence of discipline but a principled reconfiguration of it: discipline is cultivated through relational care, moral exemplarity, dialogical pedagogy, and the intentional formation of autonomy and responsibility. Empirically, the findings demonstrated (1) a philosophical-ethical grounding for rejecting punishment; (2) the *pamong* as an ethical authority who enacts care-based guidance; (3) a reframing of discipline from obedience to moral autonomy; and (4) the capacity of *among* to function as a theory-bearing contribution from the Global South to progressive education debates.

Theoretically, the study contributes at three levels. First, it extends ethics of care by showing how care as moral practice can constitute the architecture of classroom discipline—not merely a complement to technical behaviour management but its ethical foundation. Second, it situates *among* within the project of critical pedagogy, demonstrating how non-punitive classroom practices can operate as ideological resistance to colonial and authoritarian schooling and therefore as practices of freedom. Third, by foregrounding *among* as Southern Theory, the research challenges epistemic hierarchies in comparative education and illustrates how indigenous pedagogies can supply generalisable concepts for rethinking discipline worldwide.

Practically, the findings imply concrete directions for policy and practice. Teacher education should foreground relational competencies and moral exemplarity (the *p among* ethos), rather than prioritising punitive classroom control; school improvement efforts should treat restorative protocols as ethical frameworks rather than procedural checklists; and curriculum reformers should consider embedding local wisdom and communal values (e.g., *asah-asih-asuh*, *memayu hayuning bawana*) as legitimate sources of pedagogical design. These implications are particularly salient for contexts seeking to implement humane, scalable alternatives to exclusionary discipline.

The study also has limitations that delimit the scope of inference. It is a qualitative re-analysis of two case sites drawn from a master's thesis, which constrains claims about large-scale effectiveness or cross-national transferability. Additionally, while the dual theoretical frame enabled rich interpretive insight, further empirical triangulation—especially longitudinal or mixed-methods designs—would strengthen causal claims about behavioral and developmental outcomes. Accordingly, future research should (a) test the pedagogical mechanisms identified here in larger, comparative samples and in experimental or longitudinal designs; (b) explore professional development models that cultivate the *pamong* ethic and assess their impact on classroom climate and student wellbeing; and (c) carry comparative theoretical work that places Tamansiswa alongside other Global South traditions to build a pluriversal grammar of non-punitive pedagogy.

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