

Cultivating Rule-Abiding Behavior through Digital-Age Civic Education in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

Purpose: Student rule compliance has become an increasingly important issue in the digital era. Civic Education learning should emphasize the cultivation of rule-abiding behavior. This article has two research objectives. 1) To describe the cultivation of rule-abiding behavior in the classroom in digital-age civic education learning among fifth-grade elementary school students. 2) To explore the cultivation of rule-abiding behavior in schools in digital-age civic education learning among fifth-grade elementary school students.

Methodology: This is a qualitative-ethnographic study. The research subjects were the principal, civic education teachers, and fifth-grade student of State Elementary School 3 Tanggan, Sragen. Data collection methods included interviews, observation, and document analysis. Data validity was obtained through triangulation of sources and methods. Data analysis was conducted inductively.

Results: The result of the study show that 1) students began to reflect an attitude of obedience to class rules through habituation strategies, teacher role modeling, and the use of digital media. 2) Students who were guided using a contextual approach and the use of school social media successfully increased their awareness and active participation in obeying school rules.

Applications/Originality/Value: This research in its qualitative ethnographic approach, which allows researchers to directly observe interactions, habits, and the culture of student compliance in the context of Civic Education learning in the digital age.

Introduction

Student compliance has gained greater attention in the digital age. Civic education should emphasize the cultivation of rule-abiding behavior. The digital era presents various conveniences as well as complexities in cultivating discipline among students. The field of education is significantly impacted by this. Previous research shows that various problems arising from the development of science and technology have a significant impact on schooling, one of which is the younger generation's deteriorating character (Asa Ibnu A, 2019). Technological advances have an impact on pupils' attitudes and conduct in both positive and negative ways, making character education very important to be taught from an early age (Putra & Fathoni, 2022). Therefore, in dealing with the demands of the digital age, which is full of opportunities and threats, character education, especially in terms of obeying rules, is the key to shaping a young generation that is able to uphold moral values and have a sense of responsibility.

Rule adherence by fifth-grade primary school pupils in the research site tends to be suboptimal. Many students still exhibit undisciplined behavior, such as not adhering to classroom and school rules. Data from preliminary interviews with Civic Education teachers, supported by fifth-grade students in the odd semester of 2025/2026 at State Elementary School Tanggan 3 Sragen, shows that there are several fifth-grade students who still do not obey rules, such as talking when the teacher is explaining the lesson in front of the class, arriving late to school, and violating the class duty schedule. There were about two to three students who did not obey school rules, so the teacher gave them punishments, such as cleaning the classroom or giving them additional assignments. This shows that student discipline is not yet fully optimal, especially in terms of obeying rules, so it requires further attention. According to (Putriyani et al., 2025) the implementation of classroom rules is important to foster a disciplined attitude.

In addition, the students' lack of initiative is also evident in their minimal efforts to proactively comply with class rules, such as reminding their friends to uphold order or independently evaluating their compliance with the duty roster and completing the assigned tasks. Only some students have shown initiative in carrying out their responsibilities and obeying the rules. This lack of initiative has resulted in their delay in developing the habit of obeying the rules, which is very necessary in digital age Civics Education learning. At the international level, Aelterman et al. (2019) stated that student compliance with classroom rule are crucial for fostering a positive learning climate and encourage academic engagement as the basis for self-discipline. Research (Pratiwi & Bektiningsih, 2025) states that the rules that students must obey in class include attendance discipline, punctuality, wearing uniforms, and student behavior.

The root causes of these problems can originate from teachers, students, learning tools, the environment, and parents. The root causes from teachers tend to be that habit-forming strategies and classroom management have not been optimally implemented so that students are not accustomed to facing the consequences of indiscipline consistently, enforcing rules without fostering awareness of discipline from within students, and teaching methods that seem incompatible with students' learning styles. According to Subakri in Halimah (2024) teachers are one of the people who play a direct role with students, especially in the field of education. In this case, effective citizenship education strategies include habituation, role modeling, and rule enforcement (Sunaryati et al., 2025). This shows that the application of habituation and role modeling by teachers is the key to shaping students' compliance with school rules.

The root cause of this is students' low motivation to learn and awareness of rules. This condition is reflected in their inconsistent behavior in carrying out their duties and their lack of optimal effort in maintaining order and discipline in the classroom. This is consistent with research stating that learning motivation is a fundamental factor that forms the basis for individuals to engage in the learning process (Siregar et al., 2024). According to (Suryati et al., 2024) the stage of child development also has an influence. The elementary school stage is a critical phase in the formation of personality and social and emotional skills. Children are not yet able to control their emotions, so they easily break the rules when they are angry or bored or want to attract attention.

Learning tools are also a root cause that influences the cultivation of student rule-abiding behavior in schools. One step that can overcome this problem is to use digital technology (Utami et al., 2022). Currently, the impact of technological advances extends to different facets of life, especially in the field of education (Sutama, 2020). In the current digital age, the use of technology can be a factor in cultivating character in students (Marini et al., 2021). This demonstrates how using digital technology is not only a learning aid that can enhance educational result but also fosters students' awareness and compliance with school rules.

The root cause of the problem of cultivating obedience to rules in schools can be examined from the environmental aspect. An unfavorable school environment and a lack of role models from the school community can set an example for students to behave indisciplinarily. Students will imitate what adults do, so teachers must set a good example (Puspitasari et al., 2023). The family environment is the first education that students receive. Students will accept what they see and hear from their parents, so that it becomes an example for students' behavior outside the family environment (Magfiroh et al., 2019). In addition, the external environment also has an influence, such as peers who influence student discipline. This is supported by Yanti (2017) research, which proves that students violate school rules by being disorderly and disrespectful due to the influence of their friends.

The root cause lies with parents a lack of parental attention to their children's education greatly determines the disciplined character of students. The role of parents is very. This is consistent with research findings that indicate the role of parents is necessary in providing disciplinary education, as parents are the first school for children in instilling attitudes and behavior (Herlina, 2020). Children tend to imitate what their parents do rather than obey verbal commands (Hadi Prabowo et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be concluded that parental role modeling and consistency in applying discipline at home form the foundation for developing children's rule-abiding character.

Research on the cultivation of rule-following behavior has been conducted in various countries. Previous studies in Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain have concluded that the cultivation of rule-following behavior needs to be carried out through systematic strategies, including explicit teaching of rules, implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs, and the involvement of teachers, parents, and the community in efforts to support character building (Dittmann et al., 2025; Mertens et al., 2020; Dabdoub et al., 2024). The outcomes of these three studies show a lack of focus on specifically examining the cultivation of rule-following in the context of digital era Civic Education learning in elementary schools. Previous studies also did not integrate digital media as part of the strategy for shaping student compliance. The findings of this study different from previous studies in that it describes the cultivation of rule-following through habituation strategies, teacher role modeling, and the use of digital media in its implementation. The novelty of this study lies in its use of a qualitative ethnographic approach, which is still rarely used to directly observe the dynamics of interaction, habits, and practices of student compliance in school life.

Different studies were conducted in three countries. Previous research on rule-following in Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong concluded, among other things, that 1) the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) program instills a habit of reflection so that students can internalize rule-following through structured dialogue and problem-solving experiences, 2) The cultivation of rule-following is carried out by analyzing the need for psychoeducational modules designed to strengthen social skills as an internal foundation for the formation of rule-following attitudes, and 3) emphasizing the importance of integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into learning activities (Tan & S. L. Ng, 2021; Amat et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2025). These three studies emphasize an adaptive approach through value reflection, social-emotional reinforcement, and pedagogical strategies that involve active student participation in understanding and applying moral principles in relation to school life. The results of this study differ from those of other studies, most of which focus on general character-building strategies and do not highlight the integration of digital technology as a means of instilling rule-abiding behavior in schools, particularly in civic education in the digital era. The novelty of this study, which explores the cultivation of school rule-abiding behavior using a contextual approach, is that it successfully increases awareness and active participation in obeying school rules.

Based on this brief description, an alternative solution is offered for the cultivation of rule-abiding behavior in digital era civic education learning for fifth-grade elementary school students. The cultivation of rule-abiding behavior in this study consists of 1) classroom rules and 2) school rules. The location of this study is State Elementary School 3 Tanggan Sragen.

There are two objectives of this study. 1) To describe the cultivation of classroom rule-abiding in digital era civic education learning among fifth-grade elementary school students at the research location. 2) To explore the cultivation of school rule-abiding in digital era civic education learning among fifth-grade elementary school students at the research location.

Methods

This study used a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a method that aims to understand the meaning and subjective interpretation of social and cultural phenomena through an exploratory approach (Humayra & Albina, 2025). Data were collected by exploring the participants' experiences and views in depth.

This research design uses qualitative ethnographic research. According to Adolphs & Knight (2020) ethnographic design encourages researchers to enter the social environment to understand practices, meanings, and cultural interactions comprehensively in the educational community. Therefore, this research was conducted in schools, where it examined the school community regarding the cultivation of rule-abiding behavior in digital era Civic Education learning.

This research was carried out over a of six months during the ood semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, with one month for planning, three months for research implementation, and two months for reporting. The planning stage began in June 2025, covering research activities to strengthen the theoretical basis, preparation of research proposals, obtaining research permits from schools, and the creation of research tools like interview guidelines, observation sheets, and document analysis guidelines. The research implementation stage begins in July to September 2025, involving data collection through in-depth interviews, comprehensive observations, and document analysis. The reporting stage runs from October to November 2025, covering the preparation of a thesis draft, writing and refining scientific articles for publication, and preparing for the thesis defense.

The data obtained consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from the original source, namely in-depth interviews with the research subjects, namely the principal, teachers, and fifth-grade students of the elementary school where the research and observation were conducted during civic education classes in the classroom, focusing on observing the actual situation, activities, and interactions that occurred. Secondary data was obtained from the analysis of school documents in the form of rules and regulations and official records of student violations.

Validity was ensured by using source and method triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from various data sources to guarantee the findings' correctness and consistency thereby making the research results more valid. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing and evaluating the level of reliability of information obtained using the time and tools obtained in qualitative methods (Sugiyono, 2013). Technique triangulation is carried out by combining interviews, observations, and documentation to obtain more comprehensive and objective data. To ensure the credibility of the data, the triangulation technique collects information from a single source through multiple methods.

Result

This study produced findings obtained through three data collection techniques, namely interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with four subjects one Civic Education teacher (E), the principal (P), and two students (SA, DP). Based on the interview results, it was found that cultivating obedience to rules is very important for students so that their behavior complies with the rules that apply in the Civic Education learning process. Teacher E conveyed the class and school rules at the elementary school where the research was conducted, which included arriving on time, maintaining classroom cleanliness, dressing according to the rules, and participating in learning activities in an orderly manner, such as paying attention to the teacher's explanations, not talking during lessons, and completing assignments on time. Observations were conducted during Civic Education lessons with fifth-grade students at SDN 3 Tanggan. Documentation was carried out to reinforce the findings that the process of cultivating rule-abiding behavior can be implemented in Civic Education lessons. Of the 20 fifth-grade students at State Elementary School 3 Tanggan, two students were selected as research subjects based on their abilities in class, one Civic Education teacher acted as a facilitator, and the principal became a key informant regarding school policy regulations. Cultivating classroom rules compliance in digital era Civic Education learning for fifth grade elementary school students.

Table 1. Subject

Nama	Subject
E	S1 (Subject 1)
P	S2 (Subject 2)
SA	S3 (Subject 3)
DP	S4 (Subject 4)

Based on [Figure 1](#), the strategy of cultivating obedience to class rules in Civic Education learning was carried out through habituation, and students appeared to follow the process of learning in a systematic way. The results showed that the habituation strategy was the first step in shaping rule-abiding behavior in the classroom. In this habituation activity, the teacher disciplined students to pray before learning began, arrive on time, respect the teacher in the classroom, and adhere to the learning process in a systematic way. During the observation, it was seen that students followed the learning process in an systematic way in compliance with the classroom rules that were applied. This habituation shows that students are accustomed to following classroom rules without coercion, because the value of discipline has been internalized in students.



Figure 1. Student learning in an orderly manner

Based on excerpts from interviews with the Civic Education teacher (E), it was evident that fifth-grade students participating in Civic Education learning activities demonstrated an attitude of obedience to rules. Students also complied with the class duty schedule, maintained classroom cleanliness, and reprimanded each other if a friend violated classroom rules. The Civic Education teacher explained in the interview, *"Obeying the rules disciplines children so that learning runs well. Several fifth-grade students in their daily civic education lessons have shown an attitude of obeying the rules, such as entering the classroom on time and being orderly during lessons"*. Thus, the culture of obeying the rules in the fifth grade has been formed through a process of habituation applied by the teacher. Student compliance is evident in their punctuality, orderliness during learning, and concern for maintaining cleanliness and reprimanding friends who violate the rules.

The results of the observation show that the cultivation of rule-abiding behavior in the classroom in Civic Education lessons is not only carried out through habituation, but is also reinforced by the role of the teacher as a role model who sets an example through their behavior, speech, and attitude so that students imitate what they see. In this study, teachers not only conveyed the rules verbally but also exemplified them in their daily behavior, such as arriving on time, dressing neatly, and using polite language when communicating with students. The observation »s findings demonstrated that students were already in class before the Civic Education lesson began, used polite language when communicating, wore uniforms according to school rules, and maintained good behavior during the lesson. One of the students' interviews revealed that the teacher's exemplary behavior was a role model for them, as stated by the student (SA) *"The teacher always arrives on time for civics class, so we also prepare ourselves so that we can study in an orderly manner according to the class rules"*. This means that the cultivation of obedience to class rules is highly dependent on the teacher's exemplary behavior. Teachers who consistently demonstrate disciplined behavior by arriving on time, dressing neatly, and communicating politely will become a moral stimulus that encourages students to imitate and practice compliance with class rules.

Civics education in the digital age can utilize digital media to cultivate an attitude of obedience to rules. Based on observations, teachers use various digital media such as educational videos, animated shows, and interactive presentations that show examples of compliance with rules in the learning material. Civic Education (E) teachers stated in interviews, *"If we only explain things verbally, children quickly get bored. But if we use videos or pictures, they are more enthusiastic and immediately understand which behaviors are good and which violate the rules"*. Considering the findings of the observation through the use of digital media in the process of cultivating rule-abiding behavior, there were changes in student behavior, such as increased order during learning activities, compliance with teacher instructions, and increased awareness of following class rules without having to be reminded. The use of these media was used as a contextual tool to facilitate students comprehension of the importance of obeying rules.

Based on the research results, students showed an increase in their attitude of obeying school rules when teachers used a contextual approach and utilized digital technology. In an interview, a Civic Education (E) teacher stated, *"When the rules are explained with examples that are familiar to children, they become more understanding of why the rules were made. Especially now that we are utilizing digital media and school media to remind them of the rules that must be obeyed"*. From the interview excerpts and observations, there was an increase in student compliance with rules when teachers applied a contextual learning approach related to real situations that were familiar to them. Through this approach, the fifth-grade students in the study were able to understand the reasons for the rules, so that they did not only obey the rules because they were forced to, but out of personal awareness. Based on excerpts from interviews with teachers, it is also evident that the utilization of digital technology and school media, such as class groups, digital posters, and school platforms, helps strengthen students' awareness and discipline in following school rules.

Time discipline is an indicator of compliance with school rules that apply in the elementary school where the research was conducted. The results of the observation show that students' awareness of the importance of punctuality at school increased after the teacher provided a contextual explanation of the impact of being late for school, which was then reinforced by regular reminders on the school's social media. This is supported by a student's statement (DP), *"because there are reminders in the school group, I remember to leave early so I won't be late"*. From excerpts of student interviews, it appears that the use of school social media as a schedule reminder makes them more motivated and focused in managing their time for arriving at school. In addition, the awareness that tardiness can disrupt the learning process also encourages them to be disciplined with time.

Neatness and appropriateness in dress code is one of the rules applied in the elementary school where the research was conducted. The research data shows that student compliance in wearing uniforms according to school rules increased significantly after teachers conducted socialization using digital media. In an interview, the principal (P) of the school where the research was conducted revealed, *"After socialization through digital media, students' attention to uniform attributes increased, and they reminded each other"*. Students (SA) added that digital media made them more aware of the school rules that must be obeyed. Considering the findings of the interviews with the principal, it was assessed that this strategy facilitated the delivery of information because students could access reminders of the rules at any time through the school's digital platform. He also observed positive behavioral changes, where students showed more concern for the use of uniforms. Students (SA) also revealed that digital media helped them better understand the rules of neatness in dress, and they felt that the delivery of information through these media was more interesting and easier to remember than verbal explanations alone.

Based on observations of student compliance in maintaining the orderliness and cleanliness of the educational setting, this reflects the cultivation of an attitude of obedience to school rules. The results of the observation show that several students have consistently carried out their class duty and maintained the cleanliness of the school environment after the teacher applied a contextual approach and reinforced it by publishing the duty schedule on the school's social media. Considering the findings of the interviews with the Civic Education teacher (E), he stated, *"Children who previously often forgot their cleaning duties are now more mindful and show greater responsibility because the schedule is posted on the school group"*. This interview excerpt illustrates the views of teachers and students regarding the use of digital media. The teacher believes that publishing the duty roster through a digital platform helps students to be more responsible. This is also supported by the opinion of students (DP) that they are more motivated to comply with school rules through digital platforms such as school groups. They feel more motivated to obey the rules of cleanliness because there are interesting reminders in the school group. In addition, based on observations, other students are also involved in carrying out duty rosters in turns, which shows that compliance with the rules is being implemented well.

Discussion

The results of the study show that the cultivation of obedience to class rules in digital era Civic Education learning at State Elementary School 3 Tanggan is carried out through several strategies. Based on the interview results, teachers apply strategies for cultivating obedience to class rules in Civic Education learning through habituation, teacher exemplification or the role of teachers as role models, and the use of digital media. Based on the observation results, habituation is the initial strategy in shaping students' character in the classroom. They were seen to adhere to the learning process in a systematic way, arrive on time, and respect the teacher who explained the material. Teachers played a role in instilling this habit of obeying classroom rules by implementing the rules that had been agreed upon beforehand. Documentation of activities showed that students followed the process of learning in a systematic way, thereby creating a positive learning climate. These findings are in line with the opinion of (Setyowati & Utomo, 2024), which states that habituation is an effective method for the process of cultivating student character. This study also found that Civic Education learning can be a means of cultivating students' obedience to rules through the habituation strategy. This is consistent with the study conducted by Frestiana et al. (2025) it declares that Civic Education learning is effective in shaping students' disciplinary attitudes through the habit formation of classroom rules. This means that habit formation strategies that are applied consistently make students accustomed to following classroom rules without coercion, because the value of discipline has been internalized in students.

The role of teachers as role models is also a strategy in cultivating classroom discipline at the research site, as confirmed by the results of observations. Teachers set an example through their behavior, words, and attitudes so that students imitate what they see. Teachers' exemplary behavior, namely their ability to model words and actions, is an effective strategy in shaping students' character (Khotimah et al., 2025). The students interviewed stated that they imitated what their teachers did, such as arriving on time, so they would also imitate this by arriving on time before the civic education lesson began. This statement shows that teachers serve as role models for them. This is reinforced by previous research, which states that teachers' exemplary behavior in daily activities serves as a mirror for their students (Kusumayanti et al., 2021). Another study (Winanjar Rahayu et al., 2023) states that the role of teachers as role models is very influential in building the character of quality students. In other words, the cultivation of obedience to classroom rules is highly dependent on teacher role modeling. Teachers who consistently demonstrate disciplined behavior by arriving on time, dressing neatly, and communicating politely will become a moral stimulus that encourages students to imitate and practice compliance with classroom rules.

The findings from the interviews and observations also show that civic education in the digital era can utilize digital media to cultivate an attitude of obedience to rules. Teachers said that digital media such as educational videos, animated shows, and interactive presentations that show examples of compliance with rules can be used as a strategy. Therefore, technology is needed as a learning medium to shape discipline in line with the characteristics of students in the digital age (Sinaga & Soesanto, 2022). The rise in students is evidence of this rule-abiding behavior. Research (Dinayanti et al., 2025) found that the use of animation-based digital media has significant potential in improving student discipline and responsibility in the classroom. Another study (I'tikaf, 2024) confirms that the use of digital platforms can instill moral and ethical values in the digital age. This means that digital media usage in Civic Education learning does not only serve as a means of delivering material, but also as a strategy to cultivate students' rule abiding attitudes through concrete and interesting examples of disciplined behavior so that students are motivated to imitate the positive behavior displayed.

The application of contextual learning and the use of digital media are also strategies for cultivating obedience to school rules. Contextual learning activities reflect the principle of learning by doing. In this process, the cultivation of obedience to rules is linked to direct practice. In the interview, the teacher stated that school rules are explained using examples that are familiar to children and utilizing digital media as a reminder of the rules that must be obeyed. These results are consistent with the research by Sarah et al. (2024) states that a contextual approach can help students become more disciplined. Technology not only facilitates learning but also serves as an effective communication tool for educators and students (Memon et al., 2022). Thus, a contextual approach combined with technology can cultivate obedience to school rules in Civic Education learning.

The results of the study show that time discipline is students' awareness of the rules that apply at school. Observations show that punctuality at school increases when teachers provide contextual explanations during Civic Education lessons, which is then reinforced by regular reminders through school social media such as school groups. Research by Resti et al. (2024) shows that technology in education can help teachers save time and increase effectiveness in communicating with parents. The use of digital technology in education has a significant impact on student discipline (Karina Onmilka et al., 2025). This means that the integration of contextual explanations and the application of digital technology improves time discipline. Students are not just understand the consequences of tardiness but also become accustomed to discipline due to regular reminders from school media.

The increase in student compliance in dressing is reflected in student behavior while at school. In this case, student compliance in wearing school uniforms increased significantly after socialization using digital media. The principal assessed that the use of social media had a positive impact on students' self-awareness in dressing. These outcomes show that the use of digital media has proven to be effective in strengthening students' awareness and commitment to school rules, so that compliance in dressing is already evident in students' daily lives at school. This is consistent with research (Rizki Ramadhani, 2024) it declares that social media is not only used for communication between humans, but also improves the standard of living in terms of discipline.

Based on the results of observations, the contextual approach applied by teachers enables students to understand the meaning of rules in relation to their daily activities. The use of digital media serves as a reminder and a means of publishing the duty roster, which strengthens student involvement in carrying out their responsibilities. This shows that the use of a contextual approach and effective social media management cultivates an attitude of obedience to rules among students at the research site, as seen from the students' consistency in complying with the rules and regulations that apply at school. The success of this approach is consistent with research (Syahbudin et al., 2024) which reveals that targeted social media management can improve student discipline, help them overcome obstacles, and facilitate access to needed information. Overall, the results of the study's findings indicate that the strategies of modeling, teacher exemplarity, use of digital media, and contextual approach are able to foster a culture of rule-abiding students in Civic Education learning in elementary schools. The effectiveness of these strategies is clearly reflected in consistent changes in student behavior, such as arriving on time, dressing neatly, carrying out class duties, and taking part in education in a systematic way. In this case, the ethnographic approach used in the study provides empirical contributions that have not been widely done in the field of elementary school civic education. This shows that the consistent application of these three strategies can produce new findings that differ from previous studies.

Conclusion.

This study concludes that the cultivation of rule-abiding behavior in civic education in the digital era at State Elementary School 3 Tanggan was successfully achieved through habituation, teacher role modeling, the use of digital media, and a contextual approach, which resulted in increased student discipline in terms of time, dress code, duty responsibilities, and orderly learning. These findings confirm the theoretical contribution that the internalization of discipline values in elementary school students can be strengthened through consistent direct interaction between learning experiences, teacher behavior examples, and the use of technology that is familiar to the digital generation. The ethnographic approach provides a realistic picture of character building practices in elementary schools. Teachers and schools are advised to continue strengthening these strategies in line with technological developments and student characteristics. This study also recommends that further studies explore the effectiveness of this strategy in different school contexts, examine the influence of parents' roles in strengthening discipline, and develop a sustainable digital education model for cultivating rule-abiding behavior in an era of ever-evolving technology.

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