



The Effect of the Role-Playing Method in Pancasila Education on Elementary School Students' Learning Discipline: A Quasi-Experimental Study at a Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

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abstract

Background: Low learning discipline among elementary school students, seen in lateness, lack of focus, and rule violations, weakens Pancasila Education.

Aims: The study objective is to determine the effect of the role-playing method in Pancasila Education on the learning discipline in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

Methods: A quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control group design was applied to two intact classes (29 students each) at a Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Discipline was measured with a 20-item Likert questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.890$) and analyzed using *t*-tests and Eta Squared in SPSS 26.

Results: Discipline scores rose significantly in the experimental class ($p = 0.002$) but not in the control class ($p = 0.891$). Post-test scores differed significantly between classes ($p < 0.001$), with a large effect ($\eta^2 = 0.278$).

Conclusions: Role playing effectively improves learning discipline. The study extends role-playing research from cognitive outcomes to a behavioral character trait and offers teachers a practical strategy for character-oriented Pancasila Education.

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1. Introduction

Background

Education is a conscious and planned process aimed at developing learners' spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, skills, and noble character (Ismail et al., 2025). One basic attitude that students need to develop from the elementary level is learning discipline: the ability to manage time, comply with rules, and take responsibility for learning tasks, which

ultimately benefits academic achievement (Handayani et al., 2025). The elementary years are a crucial period for forming character and study habits, which makes learning discipline an important foundation for individual awareness and responsibility in following prevailing rules (Arliyus et al., 2025). From a moral-education perspective, Lickona (1991) argues that discipline and responsibility are not acquired through instruction alone but are formed through repeated moral action, which places the quality of classroom experience at the center of character formation.

Problems of learning discipline are not unique to one school or country. Large-scale international data show that arriving late for school, skipping classes, and a poor classroom disciplinary climate are widespread and are systematically associated with lower achievement. In the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), school systems with more students who arrive late or skip classes tend to have lower mathematics scores, and a negative disciplinary climate is linked to weaker school performance (OECD, 2013). At the classroom level, common manifestations include students arriving late, losing focus during lessons, leaving the classroom frequently, not completing assignments, and paying little attention to the teacher's explanations (Harefa & Lase, 2023; Rozak et al., 2025). These conditions are further aggravated by widespread use of gadgets and online games, which attract students' attention more than learning activities do (Santoso, 2022).

Low learning discipline has a direct bearing on Pancasila Education, a subject that holds a strategic position in instilling Pancasila values as the basis of character formation. When students lack discipline, the values of discipline, responsibility, and compliance with norms are difficult to internalize effectively (Arodani et al., 2025). The consequence is an instructional paradox: the subject designed to cultivate disciplined citizens is itself delivered in classrooms where discipline is weakest (Djuwita, 2019). Addressing the problem therefore requires not only reminding students of rules but also changing the way Pancasila Education is taught.

A preliminary observation at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah studied here showed that the learning discipline of fifth-grade students was still relatively low, marked by students arriving late, losing focus, not starting assignments promptly, and not fully complying with classroom rules. The teacher also reported that Pancasila Education was still dominated by lectures and simple question-and-answer sessions, so that students tended to be passive and easily bored. This pattern is consistent with broader evidence that traditional lecturing is associated with poorer student performance than active learning approaches (Freeman et al., 2014). It therefore indicates a need for more varied learning methods that suit the developmental characteristics of elementary school students.

Previous studies have examined role playing in several learning contexts. Hasibuan et al. (2025) reported that role playing improved cooperation among elementary students in Civics lessons; Mukhbita et al. (2025) synthesized evidence that role play improves the speaking skills of elementary school children; and Burhan et al. (2026) examined its contribution to learning outcomes and student activity in primary social studies. These contributions are valuable because they show that role playing is feasible and engaging at the elementary level and that it can be adapted to subjects beyond language learning.

Taken together, however, these studies share three limitations that matter for the present problem. First, their outcome variables are predominantly cognitive or skill-based (cooperation,

speaking, achievement), so they say little about whether role playing changes sustained behavioral dispositions such as discipline. Second, part of the evidence is secondary rather than primary: Mukhbata et al. (2025) is a systematic literature review, and the broader literature on role play is concentrated in language teaching, as the bibliometric analysis of Saleh et al. (2024) and the language-development study of Hamzah et al. (2023) illustrate. Third, studies that rely on classroom action research without a comparison group, such as Jeramat et al. (2021) on achievement in social studies and Rohmanurmeta (2017) on Indonesian-language learning, cannot separate the effect of the method from maturation or other classroom factors; Rohmanurmeta also notes practical drawbacks such as time and space demands. These limitations leave open whether role playing can improve learning discipline in Pancasila Education when compared against a control group.

The gap identified in the literature is the absence of controlled evidence on the effect of role playing on a behavioral character trait within Pancasila Education. The novelty of the present study lies in addressing this gap: rather than measuring achievement or activeness, it tests the effect of role playing on learning discipline; it uses a non-equivalent control group design; it combines within-group and between-group tests with an effect-size estimate; and it documents treatment fidelity through a lesson-implementation observation sheet. The study thus contributes theoretically by extending experiential and social learning accounts of role playing from cognitive to behavioral outcomes, and practically by informing the design of character-oriented Pancasila Education in elementary schools.

Based on this argument (the problem of low discipline, its consequence for Pancasila Education, the limitations of existing role-playing research, and the mechanism linking role playing to discipline), the study objective is to determine the effect of the role-playing method in Pancasila Education on the learning discipline in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

1.1 Role playing as an experiential and social learning method

One method considered relevant to this problem is role playing. Role playing is an experiential learning method developed by Shafteel & Shafteel (1967), who held that through acting out situations, learners explore their feelings and build awareness through spontaneous involvement followed by analysis of real-life situations (Akbar et al., 2023). The method allows students to take part directly in the learning process through roles that mirror everyday life, so that they not only understand concepts theoretically but also experience and practice social values, including discipline (Hamzah et al., 2023; Saleh et al., 2024).

Bandura (1977) social learning theory offers a complementary explanation of why the method may affect behavior. When students observe, enact, and discuss peers' behavior in a structured setting, they acquire norms through modeling and reinforcement rather than through admonition. The systematic stages of role playing, namely group motivation, role selection, preparing observers, preparing the stages of enactment, enactment, and reflection (Sutikno, 2019), give these processes a concrete form: students are habituated to follow rules, perform roles according to agreement, cooperate with peers, and take responsibility for assigned tasks, so that disciplined study habits are formed gradually.

1.2 Learning discipline and conceptual framework

Learning discipline is understood here as a set of student behaviors reflecting obedience and compliance with rules, regulations, and prevailing norms, grounded in internal awareness of the goal of learning. It is classified into four indicators: (1) discipline in studying, (2) discipline in using time, (3) discipline in completing assignments, and (4) discipline in following school rules (Sambaralam et al., 2023). The conceptual framework of this study positions role playing as the independent variable expected to influence learning discipline as the dependent variable, through the experiential and social learning mechanisms described above.

2. Methods

2.1 Research design

This study used a quantitative approach with an experimental method. The design was a quasi-experiment with a non-equivalent control group pretest–posttest design (Table 1). This design allows the researcher to compare changes in learning discipline between an experimental group given the role-playing treatment and a control group taught with the lecture method. Because intact classes were used, students were not randomly assigned to groups (Creswell, 2022).

Table 1. Research Design

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Control (CG)	O1	–	O3
Experimental (EG)	O2	X	O4

Note: O1/O2 = mean pre-test scores; O3/O4 = mean post-test scores; X = role-playing treatment.

2.2 Research procedures

The study proceeded in four stages. In the preparation stage, the researchers obtained permission from the school, prepared the lesson plans for both classes, and validated the instruments (Section 2.4). In the pre-test stage, the learning discipline questionnaire was administered to both classes before any treatment. In the treatment stage, the experimental class received Pancasila Education, following the stages described by Sutikno (2019): group motivation, role selection, preparation of observers, preparation of the stages of enactment, enactment, and discussion and reflection. The control class studied the same material over the same number of meetings through the lecture and simple question-and-answer method the teacher normally used. During the treatment, an observer completed the implementation checklist for the experimental class. In the post-test stage, the same questionnaire was administered to both classes after the final meeting.

2.3 Participants

The study was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The population comprised all fifth-grade students at the school, totaling 58. Because the population was small (fewer than 100), all members were taken as the sample using non-probability total sampling (Table 2). The two intact classes were assigned to the experimental and control conditions.

Table 2. Distribution of the Research Sample

Group	Class	Number of Students
Experimental class	V A	29
Control class	V B	29

Source: Primary research data.

2.4 Data collection

Learning discipline was defined as a set of student behaviors reflecting obedience and compliance with rules, regulations, and prevailing norms, grounded in self-awareness to achieve learning goals. Operationally, it was measured through four indicators: discipline in studying, in using time, in completing assignments, and in following school rules. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire of 20 statements measuring learning discipline and a checklist observation sheet measuring the implementation of the role-playing method. Before use, the instruments were validated in two steps. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded 0.890 for the 20 items, indicating that the instrument is highly reliable and suitable for use.

2.5 Data analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and parametric inferential statistics in SPSS version 26. Before hypothesis testing, prerequisite tests were performed: normality using the Shapiro–Wilk test ($\alpha = 0.05$) and homogeneity using Levene's test ($\alpha = 0.05$). Hypotheses were tested using paired-sample *t*-tests to examine pre-test and post-test differences within each group and an independent-sample *t*-test to examine post-test differences between the experimental and control classes; the null hypothesis was rejected when $p < 0.05$. The magnitude of the effect was measured with Eta Squared ($\eta^2 = t^2 / (t^2 + df)$), interpreted using Cohen (1988) criteria: small (0.01), medium (0.06), and large (0.14).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Results

The results are presented in four parts: descriptive statistics, prerequisite tests, hypothesis tests, and treatment implementation.

3.1.1 Descriptive statistics

In the experimental class, the most frequent pre-test score interval was 70–74, with 9 students (31.0%); after the role-playing treatment, the most frequent post-test interval shifted upward to 76–78, with 10 students (34.5%). In the control class, the most frequent pre-test interval was 68–72 (27.6%), and the most frequent post-test interval was 74–78, with 8 students (27.6%), with a more even distribution than in the experimental class.

3.1.2 Prerequisite tests

Table 3 and Table 4 present the normality and homogeneity tests. The significance values for all pre-test and post-test data in both groups were greater than 0.05, so the data were normally distributed and homogeneous, and parametric tests were used.

Table 3. Results of the Shapiro–Wilk Normality Test

Class	Data	N	Statistic	Sig.	Conclusion
Experimental	<i>Pre-test</i>	29	0.909	0.216	Normal
Experimental	<i>Post-test</i>	29	0.920	0.130	Normal
Control	<i>Pre-test</i>	29	0.909	0.116	Normal
Control	<i>Post-test</i>	29	0.920	0.120	Normal

Source: SPSS 26 output.

Table 4. Results of Levene's Homogeneity Test

Data	Levene Statistic	Sig.	Conclusion
<i>Pre-test</i>	2.226	0.126	Homogeneous
<i>Post-test</i>	2.226	0.126	Homogeneous

Source: SPSS 26 output.

3.1.3 Hypothesis tests

In the experimental class, the paired-sample *t*-test (Table 5) yielded a significance value of 0.002 (< 0.05), indicating a significant difference between discipline scores before and after the role-playing treatment. In the control class, the significance value was 0.891 (> 0.05), indicating no significant difference before and after lecture-based instruction. H1 was therefore accepted and H2 was rejected.

Table 5. Results of the Paired-Sample *t*-Test

Group	Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	Sig.	Conclusion
Experimental (pre–post)	–5.793	–3.501	0.002	Significant
Control (pre–post)	–0.276	–0.138	0.891	Not significant

Source: SPSS 26 output.

The independent-sample *t*-test (Table 6) yielded a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating a significant difference in post-test discipline scores between the experimental and control classes, so H3 was accepted. The Eta Squared value of 0.278 indicates that 27.8% of the variance in post-test discipline scores is explained by the difference in treatment, a large effect by Cohen's criteria.

Table 6. Results of the Independent-Sample *t*-Test and Eta Squared

Variable	Mean Diff.	<i>t</i>	df	Sig.	Eta Squared	Category
<i>Post-test</i> experimental vs. control	–6.138	–3.883	39.217	0.000	0.278	Large

Source: SPSS 26 output.

3.1.4 Treatment implementation

The observation of implementation (Table 7) showed a rate of 94.7%, categorized as very good. One aspect was not yet optimal: students did not fully display vocal intonation, facial expression, and expressiveness appropriate to their roles.

Table 7. Results of the Observation of Role-Playing Implementation

Aspect	Score Obtained	Maximum Score	Percentage	Category
Implementation of the <i>role-playing</i> method	18	19	94.7%	Very good

Source: Lesson-implementation observation sheet.

3.2 Discussion

The results show that the role-playing method had a significant and large effect on the learning discipline of fifth-grade students in Pancasila Education. Discipline scores rose significantly in the experimental class but not in the control class, and the post-test gap between the classes corresponded to a large effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.278$). This answers all three research questions: the method improved discipline within the experimental class, lecture-based instruction did not do so within the control class, and the two classes differed after the treatment. The consistency across the within-group and between-group tests strengthens the inference that the improvement is attributable to the treatment rather than to repeated testing alone.

The improvement in the experimental class was expected on theoretical grounds. Less expected was how little the control class moved (mean difference -0.276), which suggests that lecture-dominated lessons did little to build discipline over the same period. This is consistent with the preliminary observation that lecture-based Pancasila Education left students passive, and with evidence that passive instruction yields weaker outcomes than active learning (Freeman et al., 2014). The implementation data also revealed a partial shortfall: students did not fully display intonation and expressiveness, yet discipline still improved, which suggests that the discipline-relevant elements of the method (following agreed roles, taking turns, reflecting on behavior) did not depend on dramatic quality.

These findings are consistent with Shaftel's experiential account of role playing, in which learners develop attitudes and behavior by living through a role (Akbar et al., 2023). When students enact a situation, they not only understand the concept cognitively but also internalize the value through direct experience, which makes learning more meaningful and discipline easier to instill. The social learning perspective Bandura (1977) adds a mechanism that fits the structure of the lessons: students observe peers modeling rule-following which is consistent with the role of modelling in moral and character education and are in turn observed, which creates immediate social reinforcement for punctuality, task completion, and compliance (Sanderse, 2013). The staged structure of the method likely also mattered. Joyce and Weil, as cited in Sutikno (2019), explain that the success of role playing depends on systematic stages, from role selection and enactment to discussion and reflection. At each stage, students are habituated to follow rules, respect peers' opinions, take responsibility for assigned tasks, and reflect on the behavior displayed. The high implementation score (94.7%) supports the view that the observed effect arose from the method delivered as designed, and it fits Lickona (1991) argument that discipline is formed through repeated, guided practice. The findings also align with the view of learning discipline as compliance with rules that grows from self-awareness (Handayani et al., 2025; Mejeh & Held, 2022), and the expected behavioral changes correspond to the four indicators of attention during lessons, use of time, responsibility for assignments, and compliance with class rules (Sambaralam et al., 2023).

Earlier studies linked role playing mainly to cooperation, speaking skills, achievement, and activeness (Burhan et al., 2026; Celume et al., 2020; Hasibuan et al., 2025; Mukhbita et al., 2025), and much of the evidence base is concentrated in language learning (Hamzah et al., 2023; Saleh et al., 2024). The present study adds quasi-experimental evidence, with a comparison group and an effect size, that the method also affects a behavioral character trait within Pancasila Education. In doing so it addresses the gap identified in the Introduction: the earlier cognitive and skill-based outcomes, the reliance on secondary evidence, and the absence of comparison groups in action research designs (Görün et al., 2025).

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample was small (58 students from two intact classes in one school) and was selected by total sampling rather than random sampling. Second, as in any quasi-experiment, students were not randomly assigned to conditions, so pre-existing differences between the two classes cannot be fully excluded; the control class's negligible change and the within-group tests partly mitigate, but do not remove, this concern. Third, the study had limited control over confounding variables outside the school, such as family supervision, peer influence, and gadget use at home, as well as differences in teacher–class dynamics. Fourth, discipline was measured with a self-report questionnaire, which is vulnerable to social desirability bias, and was not triangulated with independent behavioral records such as attendance and punctuality logs. Fifth, the treatment period was short and no follow-up measurement was taken, so the persistence of the gains is unknown. Finally, role-playing lessons place demands on time and space that may limit their feasibility in other settings (Cunha et al., 2023; Rohmanurmeta, 2017).

Because of these limitations, the findings should be generalized cautiously: they apply most directly to fifth-grade students in similar madrasah or elementary school settings. For practice, they suggest that teachers can embed structured role-playing scenarios in Pancasila Education, adapting themes and scripts to students' characteristics, and that schools can include such scenarios in character-education programs. For research, future studies should use larger and more diverse samples, randomized or matched designs, behavioral indicators, delayed post-tests, and other character traits or subjects.

4. Conclusion

The role-playing method has a significant and large effect on the learning discipline of fifth-grade students in Pancasila Education at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah studied. The independent-sample *t*-test showed a significant post-test difference between the experimental and control classes ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) with an Eta Squared of 0.278 (large effect), and the paired-sample *t*-test showed a significant improvement in the experimental class but no significant difference in the control class. The novelty of this study lies in its focus and design, this study shows, with a control group and an effect-size estimate, that role playing can build learning discipline, a behavioral character trait, within Pancasila Education. Its contribution is theoretical, extending experiential and social learning explanations of role playing from cognitive to behavioral outcomes, and practical, offering teachers and curriculum developers a concrete method for turning Pancasila Education from the transmission of values into the practice of values. Teachers are advised to apply role playing with scenarios adapted to students' characteristics, and schools to support such student-centered methods within character-education programs.

Because the study involved a small sample from a single school, future research should replicate it with larger samples, behavioral measures, and other levels, subjects, and character traits.

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