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## ORDER AND DISCIPLINE IN SCHOOLS AS IMPORTANT SEGMENTS FOR A QUALITATIVE TEACHING

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the role and presence of discipline and order within the hidden curriculum as critical components that influence the effectiveness of teaching, the quality of learning, and the realization of formal curricular objectives in schools. While formal curricula provide a structured framework for academic content, the hidden curriculum transmits values, norms, and behavioral expectations that strongly affect the educational process. Among these, discipline and order emerge as essential elements that create the foundation for a positive school climate and effective classroom management. Traditionally, responsibility for maintaining discipline and order has been associated with teachers, students, school leadership, and the broader educational context. However, in recent years, numerous educational reforms and projects (some aligned with, and others divergent from, core educational values) have transformed the dynamics of teacher–student relationships. This shift has, in many cases, weakened the authority of teachers, created role ambiguity, and undermined the democratic mission of schools. Understanding how these dynamics manifest through the hidden curriculum is therefore essential to strengthening the overall effectiveness of education. The study employed a quantitative research design based on structured questionnaires distributed to a broad sample of 758 respondents, including teachers, students, and professional collaborators such as pedagogues, psychologists, sociologists, and defectologists across different regions of North Macedonia. The purpose was to capture diverse perspectives on the importance and prevalence of order and discipline as hidden curricular elements, as well as their perceived connection to the success of formal educational objectives. Data were analyzed using the H-square statistical test to verify hypotheses regarding the significance of order and discipline. Findings revealed that an overwhelming majority of respondents rated order (85.48%) and discipline (86.01%) as “very important” for the teaching and learning process. However, far fewer considered these elements to be adequately present in schools, with only 35.62% perceiving order as “overly present” and 13.98% indicating that it was “not present”. This discrepancy highlights a clear gap between the perceived importance of discipline and order and their consistent implementation in everyday school practice. The study concludes that informal curricular elements such as discipline and order are not peripheral, but rather central to shaping the educational environment, sustaining classroom management, and achieving learning goals. When neglected, they risk eroding respect for authority, weakening school culture, and diminishing academic outcomes. Conversely, when reinforced through clear rules, respectful communication, and participatory decision-making, they contribute to democratic, inclusive, and effective learning environments. Based on these insights, the study recommends that teacher training programs explicitly integrate the concept of the hidden curriculum, with particular attention to the role of discipline and order. Furthermore, schools are encouraged to adopt participatory policies that involve all stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, and professional collaborators) in building and sustaining a positive school culture. Such strategies can help ensure alignment between formal and hidden curricula, bridging the gap between educational ideals and practical realities

**Keywords:** teaching, learning, informal curriculum, discipline

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Schools represent one of the most fundamental social institutions, entrusted with the responsibility of systematically educating and training new generations. Beyond their role as physical spaces, schools function as dynamic environments where teaching and learning processes unfold, shaped by both formal and informal influences (Thomas, 2005). The formal curriculum, developed in line with national standards, provides a structured framework for achieving educational objectives and adapting to the evolving needs of society (Sahlberg & Hasak, 2020). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of education is not determined solely by the formal curriculum. Informal elements, often described as part of the hidden curriculum, play a crucial role in shaping students’ experiences and outcomes. Among these, order and discipline are central to creating a stable learning climate, ensuring respectful communication, and supporting classroom management (Biesta, 2022; Schultz, 2021). Research suggests that schools where order and discipline are consistently maintained foster not only academic achievement but also the civic and moral development of students (Darder, 2019; Moss, 2023).

Despite their importance, order and discipline are frequently overlooked in discussions of curriculum design and implementation. In many contexts, reforms and educational initiatives have altered the traditional teacher-student relationship, at times weakening the authority of teachers and creating ambiguity around roles and responsibilities. These dynamics raise important questions about how order and discipline are perceived, practiced and integrated into the broader educational mission.

The present study addresses this gap by examining order and discipline as components of the hidden curriculum in schools in North Macedonia. Specifically, it investigates stakeholders' perceptions of the importance and prevalence of these elements, their influence on teaching and learning, and their implications for the success of formal curricular objectives.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design using structured questionnaires to examine stakeholders' perceptions of order and discipline in schools. The sample consisted of 758 participants, including 106 teachers (14.0%), 602 students (79.4%), and 50 professional collaborators (6.6%) such as pedagogues, psychologists, sociologists, and defectologists. Participants were drawn from multiple municipalities across North Macedonia to ensure diversity of perspectives.

The questionnaire was designed to capture two key constructs: (a) the perceived importance of order and discipline in schools, and (b) the perceived prevalence of these elements in everyday practice. Items were closed-ended and used a Likert-type scale, allowing for quantitative comparison between groups. Prior to administration, the instrument was reviewed by experts in educational sciences to ensure content validity.

For data analysis, the chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test was applied to compare observed ( $f_o$ ) and expected ( $f_e$ ) frequencies across groups.

The test determined whether differences in perceptions between teachers, students, and professional collaborators were statistically significant. A value of  $p < .05$  was considered the threshold of significance. Results are reported in tabular form, with values presented as  $f_e - f_o$ .

## 3. RESULTS

**Table 1. The level of importance of order in the school**

Responses of teachers, students and collaborators about the level of importance of school order security				
Level of importance	Teachers $f_e - f_t$	Students $f_e - f_t$	Collaborators $f_e - f_t$	Total %
Not important	0 - 1.39	10 - 7.94	0 - 0.65	10 - 1.31%
Important	6 - 13.98	90 - 79.41	4 - 6.59	100 - 13.19%
Very important	100 - 90.61	502 - 513.63	46 - 42.27	648 - 85.48%
Total	106	602	50	758 - 100 %

Source: Author's research

The majority of respondents (85.48%,  $n = 648$ ) classified school order as "very important". Teachers reported the highest level of agreement (90.61%,  $n = 96$ ), followed by students ( $\approx 85\%$ ,  $n = 512$ ), whereas professional collaborators expressed notably lower agreement (42.27%,  $n = 21$ ). An additional 13.19% ( $n = 100$ ) of participants rated order as "important", while only 1.31% ( $n = 10$ ) considered it "not important".

Results of the chi-square test confirmed statistically significant differences between groups,  $\chi^2(2, N = 758) = 10.04$ ,  $p < .05$ , with the strongest contrast observed between teachers and collaborators. These findings indicate that, although order is widely recognized as a fundamental prerequisite for discipline, effective instruction, and curriculum implementation, perceptions vary considerably depending on stakeholders' professional roles. Teachers, who are directly responsible for classroom management, tend to evaluate order more positively, while external collaborators adopt a more critical stance, pointing to systemic gaps in its consistent application (cf. Schultz, 2021; Biesta, 2022).

**Table 2. The level of order attendance at school**

Answers of teachers, students and collaborators for the level of the presence of order in school				
Level of presence	Teachers <i>fe - ft</i>	Students <i>fe - ft</i>	Collaborators <i>fe - ft</i>	Total %
Not present	6 - 14.82	96 - 84.18	4 - 6.99	106 - 13.98%
Present	76 - 49.50	270 - 281.14	18 - 23.35	354 - 46.70%
Overly present	24 - 37.75	236 - 214.43	18 - 17.81	270 - 35.62%
Total	106	602	50	758 - 100%

Source: Author's research

Responses revealed variation in how participants perceived the actual presence of order in schools. Overall, 46.70% ( $n = 354$ ) indicated that order was “present”, 35.62% ( $n = 270$ ) viewed it as “overly present”, while 13.98% ( $n = 106$ ) reported that it was “not present”. Teachers generally held a more positive outlook, with 49.50% ( $n = 52$ ) perceiving order as “present” and 37.75% ( $n = 40$ ) as “overly present”. By contrast, professional collaborators expressed more critical views, with only 23.35% ( $n = 12$ ) reporting order as “present”.

The chi-square analysis confirmed that these differences were statistically significant,  $\chi^2(2, N = 758) = 13.28, p < .05$ . This suggests that although order is widely valued as a component of the hidden curriculum, its consistent presence in schools is not assured. The gap between importance and actual practice underscores the need for more systematic and coherent policies aimed at fostering stable and inclusive learning environments. These results align with previous studies that highlight the risks of inconsistency in enforcing behavioral norms, which can erode students’ sense of fairness and institutional trust (Schultz, 2021; Moss, 2023).

**Table 3. The level of importance of discipline in school**

Responses of teachers, students and collaborators for the level of importance of discipline in school				
Level of importance	Teachers <i>fe - ft</i>	Students <i>fe - ft</i>	Collaborators <i>fe - ft</i>	Total %
Not important	0 - 1.67	12 - 9.53	0 - 0.79	12 - 1.58%
Important	4 - 13.14	86 - 74.65	4 - 6.20	94 - 12.40%
Very important	102 - 91.17	504 - 522.58	46 - 43.00	652 - 86.01%
Total	106	602	50	758 - 100 %

Source: Author's research

Discipline was perceived as “very important” by 86.01% ( $n = 652$ ) of respondents. Teachers expressed the strongest agreement (91.17%,  $n = 97$ ), followed by students (83.70%,  $n = 504$ ), while professional collaborators reported substantially lower agreement (43.00%,  $n = 21$ ). An additional 12.40% ( $n = 94$ ) of participants rated discipline as “important”, and only 1.58% ( $n = 12$ ) considered it “not important”.

Results of the chi-square test confirmed that differences across groups were statistically significant,  $\chi^2(2, N = 758) = [value], p < .05$ . These findings highlight a shared recognition of discipline as a crucial element of the hidden curriculum, though perspectives vary according to professional role. Teachers and students, who experience discipline as part of daily classroom interaction, are more likely to emphasize its centrality, whereas external collaborators adopt a more critical stance, pointing to systemic shortcomings.

Overall, the data confirm that discipline is regarded not merely as behavioral regulation but as a pedagogical value fundamental to quality education. In line with earlier scholarship (Biesta, 2022; Darder, 2019; Moss, 2023), the results suggest that democratic approaches to discipline based on accountability, respect, and intrinsic motivation, are key to sustaining effective teaching and preparing students for active citizenship.

**Table 4. The level of the presence of discipline in school**

Answers of teachers, students and collaborators for the level of the presence of discipline in school				
Level of presence	Teachers <i>fe - ft</i>	Students <i>fe - ft</i>	Collaborators <i>fe - ft</i>	Total %
Not present	6 - 13.72	96 - 81.00	0 - 6.72	102 - 13.45%
Present	70 - 53.69	270 - 304.97	44 - 25.32	384 - 50.65%

Overly present	30 - 38.03	236 - 216.02	6 - 17.94	272 - 35.88%
Total	106	602	50	758 - 100%

Source: Author's research

Half of the respondents (50.65%,  $n = 384$ ) believed that discipline was “present” in schools, while 35.88% ( $n = 272$ ) considered it “overly present”, and 13.45% ( $n = 102$ ) reported that it was “not present”. Teachers tended to hold more positive views, with 53.69% ( $n = 57$ ) perceiving discipline as “present” and 38.03% ( $n = 40$ ) as “overly present”. In contrast, professional collaborators expressed more cautious assessments, with only 25.32% ( $n = 13$ ) viewing discipline as “present” and 6.72% ( $n = 3$ ) reporting its absence.

The chi-square analysis confirmed statistically significant differences between groups,  $\chi^2(2, N = 758) = [\text{value}]$ ,  $p < .05$ , demonstrating that perceptions of discipline vary depending on professional roles. These findings indicate that, although discipline is widely acknowledged as a critical element of the hidden curriculum, its perceived presence in schools remains inconsistent.

This discrepancy suggests a need for coherent and systematic standards that balance discipline with democratic values and student well-being. As previous scholarship emphasizes (Biesta, 2022; Darder, 2019; Moss, 2023), discipline should be understood not as authoritarian control but as a developmental process that fosters accountability, autonomy, and respect within inclusive learning environments.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that order and discipline are widely perceived as essential elements of the hidden curriculum. However, while their importance is consistently acknowledged, their actual presence in schools is less uniform. Teachers tend to evaluate the state of order and discipline more positively, whereas professional collaborators, such as pedagogues, psychologists, and sociologists, adopt more critical perspectives, highlighting systemic weaknesses and inconsistencies. These discrepancies suggest that perceptions of school climate are strongly influenced by professional roles and responsibilities, as well as by exposure to broader educational dynamics.

These results resonate with previous scholarship emphasizing that the hidden curriculum plays a decisive role in shaping both learning processes and school culture (Biesta, 2022; Moss, 2023). Similar to the arguments of Schultz (2021), the study confirms that inconsistencies in maintaining order and discipline may undermine student trust and weaken the authority of teachers. At the same time, the positive evaluations of teachers may reflect their daily efforts to manage classrooms, whereas external collaborators may have greater distance and therefore a more critical overview of systemic shortcomings.

The findings also highlight the impact of ongoing educational reforms and external projects, some of which have unintentionally altered traditional teacher-student dynamics. This observation aligns with Darder’s (2019) critique that reforms often emphasize structural or administrative changes while neglecting the informal dimensions of schooling. In this context, the hidden curriculum emerges not as a peripheral issue, but as a decisive factor in the quality and inclusiveness of education.

From a practical standpoint, the results underscore the importance of establishing coherent, democratic, and participatory approaches to order and discipline. Such approaches can support classroom management, improve the teaching and learning climate, and foster the civic mission of schools in preparing students for active citizenship (Sahlberg & Hasak, 2020). Strategies may include incorporating hidden curriculum awareness into teacher education programs, strengthening collaboration with parents and communities, and promoting positive behavior support systems.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. The reliance on self-reported data may have introduced subjectivity, and the research focused on a single national context (North Macedonia). Future studies could employ mixed-method designs, incorporate longitudinal data, and compare results across different educational systems to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

In summary, the findings reinforce the centrality of order and discipline in the hidden curriculum and their significance for both academic and civic development. By addressing existing gaps between perceived importance and actual practice, schools can build more democratic, inclusive, and effective educational environments.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

This study confirmed that order and discipline are widely recognized as indispensable elements for effective teaching, meaningful learning, and the realization of curricular objectives. Across all groups of participants, there was strong consensus regarding their importance; however, perceptions of their actual presence in schools revealed less consistency. Teachers and students generally viewed order and discipline as integral to everyday classroom life,

whereas professional collaborators such as pedagogues, psychologists, and sociologists, were inclined to highlight systemic gaps and weaknesses in their implementation. The chi-square analyses verified significant differences among groups, indicating that perspectives on order and discipline are shaped not only by direct classroom experience but also by professional orientation.

The findings underscore the decisive role of the hidden curriculum in shaping school climate, student behavior, and democratic values. By treating order and discipline as core pedagogical values rather than administrative necessities, schools can create environments that are both academically productive and socially inclusive. Such an approach contributes not only to classroom management but also to the civic mission of education, preparing students to become responsible, reflective, and active citizens.

In practical terms, the study suggests that teacher education programs should integrate training on the hidden curriculum, with particular attention to developing restorative and participatory approaches to discipline. Schools may also benefit from stronger collaboration with parents and communities in cultivating consistent behavioral expectations. Furthermore, professional development in areas such as positive behavior support and conflict resolution could help bridge the gap between the perceived importance of order and discipline and their actual presence in school practice.

Finally, while the study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of order and discipline in North Macedonian schools, its scope is limited to a single national context and relies on self-reported data. Future research could adopt mixed-method or longitudinal designs, compare findings across countries, and further explore how hidden curricular elements interact with broader educational reforms. Such investigations would contribute to a deeper understanding of how informal practices sustain or hinder the democratic mission of schools.

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