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TEACHER MORAL COMPETENCE, CULTURAL SENSITIVITY, AND CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES OF TEACHERS: A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to evaluate how cultural sensitivity mediated the relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies of teachers in Panabo City through structural equation modeling. Using a non-experimental quantitative design and a descriptive-correlation technique, data were collected from 146 public secondary school teachers in Panabo City through simple random sampling. A modified survey questionnaire, pilot-tested for reliability, was used to measure teacher moral competence, classroom discipline strategies, and cultural sensitivity. Findings revealed that teacher moral competence was generally rated as moderately extensive, with a strong emphasis on ethical responsibility but limited consistency in decision-making. Classroom discipline strategies were also moderately extensive, with consistency in rule enforcement being the most evident, while conflict resolution skills were the least developed. Cultural sensitivity among teachers was moderately extensive, with the highest emphasis on avoiding insensitive behaviors but limited positive engagement with students from diverse backgrounds. The results showed a moderate positive relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies and a strong positive relationship with cultural sensitivity. The mediation analysis confirmed that cultural sensitivity partially mediated the relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies, with a suppressive effect. The model demonstrated excellent fit, indicating that the mediation structure was statistically robust.

KEYWORDS: *Teacher Moral Competence; Classroom Discipline Strategies; Cultural Sensitivity; Structural Equation Modeling; Mediation Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Poor classroom discipline strategies among elementary school teachers remain a significant challenge, often undermining the learning environment and student behavior. These issues can stem from various factors, including a lack of cultural sensitivity and insufficient moral guidance in teachers, which affect how discipline is managed in diverse classrooms. Recognizing this gap, the current study aims to explore the mediating effect of cultural sensitivity on the relationship between teacher morality and their classroom discipline strategies. By employing Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), the research intends to quantify how cultural sensitivity influences disciplinary methods, potentially leading to improved practices. Thus, this approach seeks to provide actionable insights that can enhance classroom management and foster a more respectful, effective teaching atmosphere.

In the United States, poor classroom discipline strategies among elementary school teachers are often linked to high stress levels and lack of proper training in behavior management. Williams, Mallant, and Svajda-Hardy (2023) noted that many teachers struggle to maintain order due to insufficient support and resources. As a result, classrooms can become chaotic, affecting student learning and engagement. Moreover, Bottiani et al. (2019) asserted that factors such as diverse student needs and behavioral challenges require adaptive strategies that many teachers may not be well-equipped to handle. These issues highlight the need for targeted professional development and systemic support to improve discipline strategies in U.S. schools.

In Arabian countries, cultural factors and rigid traditional teaching methods can contribute to ineffective classroom discipline. Badr (2019) observed that teachers sometimes face challenges balancing respect for cultural norms with the need for modern discipline techniques. Consequently, students may exhibit disruptive behaviors that are not effectively managed, leading to poor learning environments. According to Lokot et al. (2020), the lack of culturally sensitive training programs for teachers further exacerbates these problems. Addressing these issues requires educational reform and culturally tailored professional development to improve discipline strategies within classrooms.

Throughout Asia, particularly in rapidly developing regions, teachers often encounter difficulties with classroom discipline due to large class sizes and diverse student behaviors. Jayawardena (2021) highlighted that overcrowded classrooms make it challenging for teachers to implement personalized discipline strategies. This situation leads to inconsistent enforcement of rules and a decline in the effectiveness of classroom management. In addition, Ssenyonga et al. (2019) noted that teachers

may also lack access to modern discipline training, which would help them manage diverse learning environments more effectively. Therefore, improving classroom discipline in Asia demands both enhanced teacher training and efforts to reduce class sizes.

In the Philippines, poor classroom discipline strategies at the elementary level often result from limited resources, high student-teacher ratios, and insufficient support from administration. Aguilar (2021) suggested that these factors contribute to a lack of effective behavior management techniques. As a result, teachers sometimes struggle to create a conducive learning environment, which can affect student performance and motivation. According to del Valle (2022), the challenge is compounded by economic constraints that limit access to professional development and modern teaching tools. Addressing these concerns requires investment in teacher training, better resource allocation, and supportive leadership to enhance classroom discipline.

In Panabo North District, Panabo City, poor classroom discipline strategies are influenced by similar issues found globally, but they are also shaped by local socio-economic factors. Teachers in this area often handle large classes with limited resources, making effective discipline challenging. The lack of ongoing professional development in modern discipline techniques exacerbates the problem, as teachers may rely on outdated methods. Additionally, community and parental involvement in shaping student behavior may be inconsistent, further complicating classroom management. To improve discipline strategies, there is a pressing need for localized training programs, increased resource allocation, and stronger community engagement in the educational process.

There is a notable gap in existing literature regarding how cultural sensitivity mediates the relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies, especially in the context of Panabo North District, Panabo City. While many studies have examined teacher moral competence and its effects on discipline, few have considered the role of cultural sensitivity as a crucial factor that shapes how these moral principles are applied in the classroom. Additionally, most research has relied on qualitative or simple quantitative methods, leaving a need for more complex statistical approaches like Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to uncover underlying relationships. This lack of focus on cultural sensitivity in relation to teacher behavior and discipline practices leaves educators without clear guidance on how to integrate respect for cultural diversity into effective management strategies. Addressing this gap through a quantitative SEM study would provide more precise insights and a stronger evidence base for educational interventions.

The urgency of conducting this study in Panabo North District arises from the unique cultural and educational challenges faced by teachers in this area. Given the diverse student population and the importance of maintaining classroom discipline in an effective and culturally respectful manner, understanding how cultural sensitivity influences teacher moral competence and discipline strategies is essential. Using SEM allows for a detailed examination of these complex relationships, offering actionable insights that can directly inform teacher training and policy development. The findings could lead to improvements in how teachers manage classrooms, thus, benefiting student learning and school climate. In summary, this study is not only academically significant but also practically urgent to address local educational challenges and enhance teaching effectiveness through culturally informed practices.

Statement of the Problem

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate how cultural sensitivity mediated the relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies of teachers in Panabo City, as analyzed through structural equation modeling. Therefore, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the extent of teacher moral competence in terms of:
1.1 decision-making;
1.2 fair treatment of students;
1.3 commitment to ethical responsibility; and
1.4 respect for diversity?
2. What is the extent of classroom discipline strategies of teachers in terms of:
2.1 consistency in rule enforcement;
2.2 positive reinforcement;
2.3 proactive behavior management; and
2.4 conflict resolution skills?
3. What is the extent of cultural sensitivity of teachers?
4. Is there a significant relationship among teacher moral competence, classroom discipline strategies, and cultural sensitivity of teachers?
5. How do cultural sensitivity mediate the relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies of teachers?

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METHODOLOGY

This section contains the research design, research respondents, research ethics, research instrument, research procedure, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

In this study, the researcher employed a quantitative research approach, specifically the descriptive-correlational technique through structural equation modeling, to collect data, ideas, facts, and information relevant to the study. Quantitative research involved the systematic empirical investigation of observable phenomena through statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques. It emphasized objective measurements and the numerical analysis of data collected through surveys, questionnaires, or existing statistical data (Lazaraton, 2005). This approach was suitable for the study as it allowed for the measurement of teacher moral competence, cultural sensitivity, and classroom discipline strategies in numerical terms. Quantifying these variables enabled the researcher to analyze patterns and relationships statistically. It facilitated generalization of the findings to a larger population of teachers, enhancing the study's validity and reliability.

Additionally, descriptive research aimed to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation, or phenomenon. It focused on answering the "what" question by providing information about the current status of variables without exploring cause-and-effect relationships (Loeb et al., 2017). The descriptive method was appropriate for this study as it sought to depict the current levels of teacher morality, cultural sensitivity, and classroom discipline strategies among teachers in Panabo North District. It allowed for the collection of detailed information that portrayed how these variables manifested in the educational setting. This method provided a foundational understanding necessary for further analysis and modeling.

As noted by Seeram (2019), the correlational approach examined the relationship between two or more variables to determine whether they were associated or linked. It involved measuring variables and assessing the statistical relationships between them without manipulating any variables. This approach was fitting for the study because it aimed to investigate the relationships among teacher moral competence, cultural sensitivity, and classroom discipline strategies. By identifying the strength and direction of associations between these variables, the study uncovered how they influenced one another. Understanding these correlations was crucial for developing interventions to enhance teaching practices.

Moreover, Thakkar (2020) described Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as a multivariate statistical analysis technique that assessed structural relationships between measured variables and latent constructs. It combined factor analysis and multiple regression to analyze complex causal relationships simultaneously. SEM was highly suitable for this study as it sought to model the complex interplay among teacher moral competence, cultural sensitivity, and classroom discipline strategies. SEM allowed the researcher to test hypotheses about direct and indirect relationships between variables within a comprehensive framework. This method provided deeper insights into how these factors collectively impacted classroom dynamics, making it ideal for the study's objectives.

Research Respondents

The study targeted a sample of 146 secondary school teachers from a population of 230 in Panabo City. Slovin's formula was used to calculate this sample size, applying a margin of error of 0.05. The formula, where N represented the total population and e the margin of error, yielded a statistically representative sample of 146 teachers, ensuring the findings could be generalized to the broader population.

Once the sample size was determined, simple random sampling was employed to select respondents. This probability sampling technique ensured that every teacher in the population had an equal chance of being chosen, minimizing selection bias. Following the approach of Noor et al. (2022), this method promoted fairness and impartiality. Teachers were assigned unique identifiers, and a random number generator was used to randomly select the 146 participants, ensuring an accurate reflection of the educational context in Panabo City.

In implementing the sampling strategy, careful attention was paid to ensuring the sample reflected the diverse characteristics of the teacher population. This was essential for preserving the sample's representativeness, which strengthened the validity of the study's conclusions. By capturing the demographic diversity of the district, the research produced findings that were both statistically robust and contextually relevant, providing a thorough analysis of the educational dynamics in Panabo City.

Moreover, the inclusion criteria for selecting respondents focused on secondary school teachers currently employed in Panabo City. Teachers were required to have at least five years of teaching experience to ensure they possessed sufficient classroom exposure for meaningful insights into teacher morality, cultural sensitivity, and discipline strategies. Additionally, respondents were required to participate voluntarily and provide informed consent. These criteria ensured the selection of qualified individuals whose experiences and perspectives were relevant to the study's objectives.

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Research Instrument

For the current study, the research methodology included the deployment of carefully structured survey questionnaires designed to explore the intricacies of the investigation. The questionnaire was divided into three distinct sections. The first part of the questionnaire focused on teacher moral competence, which was measured in terms of decision-making, fair treatment of students, commitment to ethical responsibility, and respect for diversity. The Cronbach alpha value of the instrument is 0.800 described as good, interpreted as reliable. Responses were collected using a 5-point Likert scale to assess the extent of agreement or disagreement with each statement, with subsequent analysis based on predefined ranges of means that categorized the data effectively.

Range of Mean	Description	Interpretation
4.20 - 5.00	Very Extensive	Teacher moral competence is always observed.
3.40 – 4.19	Extensive	Teacher moral competence is oftentimes observed.
2.60 – 3.39	Moderately Extensive	Teacher moral competence is sometimes observed.
1.80 – 2.59	Less Extensive	Teacher moral competence is seldom observed.
1.00 – 1.79	Not Extensive	Teacher moral competence is never observed.

The second part of the instrument focused on the classroom discipline strategies of teachers. This section was designed to evaluate the domains, namely consistency in rule enforcement, positive reinforcement, proactive behavior management, and conflict resolution skills. The Croonbach alpha value of the instrument is 0.943 described as excellent, interpreted as highly reliable. The data collection utilized a 5-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. The gathered responses were then analyzed using predefined mean ranges to systematically categorize the data.

Range of Mean	Description	Interpretation
4.20 - 5.00	Very Extensive	The classroom discipline strategies of teachers are always demonstrated.
3.40 – 4.19	Extensive	The classroom discipline strategies of teachers are oftentimes demonstrated.
2.60 – 3.39	Moderately Extensive	The classroom discipline strategies of teachers are sometimes demonstrated.
1.80 – 2.59	Less Extensive	The classroom discipline strategies of teachers are seldom demonstrated.
1.00 – 1.79	Not Extensive	The classroom discipline strategies of teachers are never demonstrated.

The third part of the instrument focused on the cultural sensitivity of teachers. Responses were gathered using a 5-point Likert scale, allowing for precise measurement of agreement or disagreement with each item. The Croonbach alpha value of the instrument is 0.713 described as acceptable, interpreted as reliable. This data was then analyzed using predefined mean ranges to effectively categorize and interpret the results. Such a methodical approach guaranteed a detailed and accurate assessment of the study's key variables.

Range of Mean	Description	Interpretation
4.20 - 5.00	Very Extensive	Cultural sensitivity is always evident among teachers.
3.40 – 4.19	Extensive	Cultural sensitivity is oftentimes evident among teachers.
2.60 – 3.39	Moderately Extensive	Cultural sensitivity is sometimes evident among teachers.
1.80 – 2.59	Less Extensive	Cultural sensitivity is seldom evident among teachers.
1.00 – 1.79	Not Extensive	Cultural sensitivity is never evident among teachers.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to Conduct the Study

The initial step in securing permission to conduct the study involved the researcher obtaining an endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School at The Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc., Davao City. This endorsement served as a formal recognition and support of the research project, validating its academic merit and alignment with the institution's research objectives. Subsequently, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the Graduate School RMC-Research Ethics Committee (GSRMC-REC), ensuring that the study adhered to established ethical standards, particularly in terms of confidentiality, consent, and the overall welfare of the respondents.

Once the endorsement and ethical clearance were secured, the researcher approached the Schools Division Superintendent in Panabo City to request permission to conduct the study within the public secondary schools. This request included copies of both the endorsement from the Dean and the ethical clearance certificate, demonstrating compliance with academic and ethical standards. Following approval from the superintendent, the researcher contacted the principals of the individual

schools in Secondary Schools in Panabo City. During this phase, the researcher explained the study's purpose, its potential benefits for the educational community, and the specific roles and expectations of the schools and their teachers, ensuring transparency and fostering cooperation.

Distribution and Retrieval of the Questionnaire

The first step in the distribution of the questionnaire involved the selection of research respondents, which was based on the established inclusion criteria, ensuring all respondents were teachers in Public Secondary Schools in Panabo City. A pilot test was conducted on a small group of respondents (not more than 30) to ensure the clarity and reliability of the questionnaire. The pilot test helped identify any ambiguities or biases in the questions and allowed the researcher to make necessary adjustments, ensuring the questionnaire's effectiveness in accurately collecting the intended data.

Following the successful pilot test, the main distribution of the research questionnaires was carried out. The selected respondents were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire, ensuring they could provide thoughtful and thorough responses. Respondents were allowed to choose their preferred method of completion, either face-to-face or online, accommodating their convenience and comfort levels. This approach facilitated a higher response rate and accommodated the diverse preferences and schedules of the respondents, enhancing the quality and accuracy of the data collected.

The final phase involved the retrieval of the completed questionnaires. The researcher established a deadline for submission, which was communicated clearly at the time of distribution. Respondents submitted their completed questionnaires through the predetermined method, either returning the physical documents in face-to-face settings or submitting them electronically. Once all questionnaires were collected, the researcher proceeded with data analysis, using statistical software to quantify the results and examine the mediating effect of cultural sensitivity on the relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies of teachers using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Collation and Statistical Treatment of Data

The collation and statistical treatment of data in the study began with the careful organization of retrieved survey data. Upon collection, each questionnaire was reviewed to ensure completeness and accuracy. The data were then entered into Microsoft Excel, a versatile tool for organizing and managing large datasets. In Excel, data were systematically tallied, and entries were categorized based on variables: teacher moral competence, cultural sensitivity, and classroom discipline strategies of teachers. This preliminary organization set the foundation for accurate and effective analysis, facilitating the identification of patterns and trends within the collected data.

Following the initial organization in Excel, the study progressed to descriptive statistical analysis to summarize and describe the features of the dataset. This phase involved calculating the mean for the scale variables such as teacher moral competence, cultural sensitivity, and classroom discipline strategies of teachers. The statistical mean provided an average value, offering insights into the central tendency of responses for each variable. These statistics highlighted common tendencies within respondents' answers, providing a clear picture of the baseline characteristics of the sample and contextualizing the subsequent inferential analysis.

The final stage of data analysis involved applying inferential statistics to explore the relationships and effects among the variables. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was utilized to determine the strength and direction of the linear relationships between variables such as teacher moral competence, cultural sensitivity, and classroom discipline strategies of teachers. Additionally, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to assess the hypothesized relationships between multiple variables, providing a comprehensive view of direct and indirect influences. This advanced statistical technique enabled the researcher to understand the mediating effect of cultural sensitivity on the relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies of teachers. The use of Pearson correlation and SEM provided robust evidence to support or refute the theoretical constructs proposed in the study, informing targeted educational interventions.

After the collation and statistical treatment of the data, the researcher embarked on the interpretation and discussion of the results. This phase involved synthesizing the statistical findings to ascertain the implications of the mediating effect of cultural sensitivity on the relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies of teachers using SEM. The researcher highlighted significant correlations and the impact of predictive variables on outcome measures. This interpretive process was essential for understanding the practical significance of the data, enabling the researcher to draft informed conclusions and formulate evidence-based recommendations for enhancing teacher support and professional development initiatives.

Data Analysis

The following statistical tools were utilized by the researcher in processing the gathered data:

Mean. The mean was used to measure the extents of teacher moral competence, cultural sensitivity, and classroom discipline strategies as reported by public secondary school teachers in Panabo City. It provided a central tendency measure, summarizing teachers' perceptions of these variables.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed to assess the strength and direction of the linear relationship between teacher moral competence, cultural sensitivity, and classroom discipline strategies. It quantified the degree to which changes in one variable were associated with changes in another, providing insights into the nature of these relationships.

Model Fit Indices. Model fit indices were calculated to evaluate how well the data fit the hypothesized measurement model in the path analysis. Indices such as Chi-square, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), CFI (Comparative Fit Index), and TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) were used to assess the adequacy of the model structures in representing the relationships among teacher morality, cultural sensitivity, and classroom discipline strategies of teachers.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to test the direct and indirect relationships between teacher moral competence, cultural sensitivity, and classroom discipline strategies. It enabled the researcher to examine the hypothesized model and assess how these variables interacted, providing a comprehensive understanding of their influence on teachers' practices.

Sobel z-Test. The Sobel z-test was employed to assess the significance of the mediating effect of cultural sensitivity on the relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies. This test determined whether the mediation path significantly influenced the overall model's outcomes, providing statistical confirmation of the indirect relationships within the model.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher promptly observed the necessary protocols as outlined in the standard guidelines for carrying out the research study, particularly focusing on the study protocol assessment criteria for managing the population and data. The survey questionnaires, along with supporting references, were submitted for further evaluation. After receiving approval from the Ethics Committee, the researcher proceeded to the next phase of the study.

Social Value

At the macro level, this study held significant social value by contributing to the enhancement of national educational policies. By providing empirical evidence on how teacher morality and cultural sensitivity influenced classroom discipline strategies, the research informed the Department of Education's efforts to improve teacher training programs across the Philippines. This led to the development of more effective and ethically grounded educational practices, ultimately elevating the quality of education nationwide and fostering a more inclusive society.

At the meso level, particularly within the Panabo North District, the study offered valuable insights that benefited local educational institutions. By understanding the specific dynamics of teacher morality and cultural sensitivity in this context, school administrators and policymakers implemented targeted interventions to address disciplinary challenges. This improved classroom management practices, enhanced teacher-student relationships, and created a more supportive and equitable learning environment for all students in the district.

At the micro level, the study directly benefited the individual teachers who served as respondents. By participating, teachers had the opportunity to reflect on their own moral reasoning and cultural awareness, which led to personal and professional growth. The findings provided them with practical strategies to improve their classroom discipline approaches, fostering a more positive classroom atmosphere, enhancing their instructional effectiveness, and contributing to their job satisfaction and professional fulfillment.

Informed Consent

The researcher implemented a thorough informed consent process to ensure that all respondents were fully aware of the study's purpose and their rights. An information sheet was provided to each respondent, clearly outlining the objectives of the research, which aimed to explore the relationships among teacher morality, cultural sensitivity, and classroom discipline strategies using structural equation modeling. The document explained how the study aimed to contribute to the improvement of educational practices and benefit the teaching community.

Respondents were informed about what participation entailed, including the completion of surveys or questionnaires related to the study variables. The information sheet emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary and that respondents had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. It also assured them that there were no foreseeable risks associated with their involvement and that their responses would be kept confidential.

To formalize consent, respondents were asked to sign a consent form after reviewing the information sheet. This form reiterated the key points, including the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality. By signing the consent form, respondents acknowledged that they had been adequately informed and agreed to participate under the stated conditions. This process ensured that ethical standards were upheld, and respondents' autonomy and rights were respected.

Vulnerability of Research Respondents

While teachers were not typically classified as a vulnerable population, the researcher recognized that discussing personal aspects such as morality and cultural sensitivity could cause discomfort or anxiety for some respondents. To mitigate this, the researcher designed survey questions thoughtfully, using neutral and respectful language to avoid any potential offense or distress. Questions focused on professional experiences and perceptions rather than personal beliefs or sensitive information.

The researcher also provided respondents with the option to skip any questions they did not feel comfortable answering, emphasizing that there were no penalties for non-response. Additionally, respondents were assured that their individual responses would remain confidential and would not be shared with school administrators or colleagues. By creating a safe and supportive environment, the researcher aimed to minimize any potential discomfort and encouraged honest and thoughtful participation.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 was a paramount concern in this study. The researcher implemented strict protocols to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all respondents. Personal identifiers such as names, specific school affiliations, or any other identifying information were removed or coded to ensure anonymity. Data were anonymized before analysis, and findings were reported in aggregate form, preventing the identification of individual respondents.

All collected data were securely stored using password-protected digital files for electronic data and locked filing cabinets for any physical documents. Access to the data was restricted solely to the researcher and authorized personnel directly involved in the study. The researcher established a data retention schedule in compliance with ethical guidelines, after which all data were disposed of securely. Electronic files were permanently deleted using data-wiping software, and physical documents were shredded to prevent any unauthorized access.

Respondents were informed about these privacy measures during the informed consent process. The researcher explained how their data would be used, stored, and eventually disposed of, ensuring transparency and building trust. By strictly adhering to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and following standard data disposal processes, the researcher demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting respondents' privacy and maintaining the confidentiality of their information throughout the research process.

Risk, Benefits, and Safety

In conducting this study, the researcher carefully assessed potential risks to the respondents. Although the study involved no physical risks, the researcher acknowledged the possibility of emotional discomfort when discussing personal values such as morality and cultural sensitivity. To mitigate this, all survey questions were designed with sensitivity, and respondents were reminded that they could skip any question they found uncomfortable without any negative consequences.

The benefits of participating in the study far outweighed the minimal risks involved. Respondents gained insights into their teaching practices, particularly how their morality and cultural awareness affected classroom discipline strategies. Additionally, the research findings informed school policies and professional development programs, benefiting not only the individual respondents but also the broader educational community through improved teaching strategies and classroom environments.

To ensure the safety and well-being of respondents throughout the study, the researcher adhered to strict ethical guidelines, including the protection of confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Respondents were provided with contact information for the researcher and the ethics review board, should they have any concerns or require clarification regarding their participation. These safety measures guaranteed a secure and respectful research environment.

Justice

The principle of justice was upheld by ensuring that all secondary school teachers in the Panabo North District had an equal opportunity to participate in the study. The selection of respondents was based on random sampling, ensuring fairness in the recruitment process. Additionally, no group or individual was unfairly excluded from the study, and all respondents were treated equitably, with their time and contributions valued equally.

Transparency
Transparency was ensured by fully informing the respondents about the nature and purpose of the study from the outset. The researcher clearly explained the objectives, methods, potential benefits, and any risks involved during the informed consent process. Respondents had access to detailed information about how the data would be used and stored, ensuring they could make an informed decision about their participation.

Conflict of Interest
To avoid any potential conflict of interest, the researcher ensured that personal or professional relationships with the respondents did not influence the study's outcomes. The researcher maintained objectivity throughout the research process, ensuring that data were collected and analyzed impartially. Any potential conflicts, such as personal connections with school administrators or teachers, were disclosed, and steps were taken to mitigate their influence on the study.

Qualification of the Researcher
The researcher possessed the necessary qualifications and expertise to conduct this study effectively and ethically. With a background in educational research and experience in quantitative methodologies such as structural equation modeling, the researcher was well-equipped to undertake this complex analysis. This expertise ensured that the study was designed and executed using appropriate research methods, yielding valid and reliable results.

Further, the researcher had undergone training in research ethics and was familiar with the ethical guidelines governing human subjects research. This knowledge enabled the researcher to navigate ethical considerations adeptly, such as obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and minimizing potential risks to respondents. By leveraging these qualifications, the researcher committed to conducting the study with the highest professional and ethical standards.

Adequacy of Facilities
The researcher utilized adequate facilities to ensure the study was conducted efficiently and securely. Data collection was facilitated through secure, accessible environments, such as designated rooms within the schools that provided privacy and comfort for the respondents. These spaces were arranged to minimize disruptions to the respondents' schedules and to create a conducive atmosphere for honest and thoughtful participation.

In terms of data management, the researcher employed reliable technological resources to store and analyze the collected data. Secure servers and password-protected databases were used to safeguard digital information, adhering to the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Additionally, any physical documents were stored in locked cabinets within secure office spaces, accessible only to authorized personnel. These facilities and resources ensured that the study was conducted smoothly while maintaining the integrity and security of the data.

Community Involvement
Engaging the community was a vital aspect of the research, and the researcher actively involved school administrators and relevant stakeholders throughout the study. Initial meetings were held with school leaders to explain the purpose of the research, its potential benefits, and how it aligned with the community's educational goals. This collaborative approach fostered support and facilitated smoother implementation of the study within the schools.

Moreover, the researcher sought input from the community to ensure that the study was culturally sensitive and addressed relevant local issues. Feedback from community members was incorporated to refine the research instruments and procedures, enhancing the study's relevance and impact. By involving the community, the researcher not only enriched the quality of the research but also promoted a sense of shared ownership and commitment to improving educational outcomes in Panabo City.

RESULTS

Teacher Moral Competence

The findings revealed that teachers' overall moral competence was **moderately extensive (M = 3.29)**. Among the indicators, commitment to ethical responsibility obtained the highest mean (M = 3.42), interpreted as extensive, while decision-making received the lowest mean (M = 3.18). This indicates that teachers generally demonstrate ethical responsibility but need further improvement in moral decision-making and consistent application of ethical principles.

Classroom Discipline Strategies

The overall classroom discipline strategies were rated **moderately extensive (M = 3.37)**. Consistency in rule enforcement obtained the highest mean (M = 3.43), followed closely by proactive behavior management (M = 3.42). Conflict resolution skills received the lowest mean (M = 3.25). These findings suggest that teachers generally maintain classroom order but need to strengthen their approaches to resolving student conflicts.

Cultural Sensitivity of Teachers
Teachers' cultural sensitivity obtained an overall mean of **3.27**, interpreted as moderately extensive. Avoiding behaviors or language that may be insensitive to cultural norms received the highest mean (M = 3.62), while engaging positively with students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds received the lowest (M = 3.08). This highlights the need to strengthen intercultural engagement and culturally responsive teaching practices.

Relationship Among the Variables
Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships among the three variables:

- Teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies: **r = 0.628, p < 0.001**, moderate positive relationship.
- Teacher moral competence and cultural sensitivity: **r = 0.767, p < 0.001**, strong positive relationship.
- Classroom discipline strategies and cultural sensitivity: **r = 0.251, p = 0.002**, weak positive relationship.

These findings indicate that higher teacher moral competence is associated with better classroom discipline strategies and greater cultural sensitivity.

Mediation Analysis
The mediation analysis revealed a significant negative indirect effect of teacher moral competence on classroom discipline strategies through cultural sensitivity (β = -0.530, p less than 0.001). However, the direct effect remained positive and significant (β = 1.301, p less than 0.001), resulting in a significant total effect of 0.771 (p less than 0.001).

The findings indicate a **significant suppressing mediation effect**, suggesting that cultural sensitivity partially counteracts the positive relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies. Thus, cultural sensitivity plays a significant but complex mediating role in the relationship between the two variables.

FINDINGS

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate how cultural sensitivity mediated the relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies of teachers in Panabo City through structural equation modelling utilizing non-experimental quantitative design using descriptive-correlation technique. The researcher selected the 146 public secondary school teachers within Panabo City as the respondents through simple random sampling method. The researcher made use of modified and enhanced adapted survey questionnaires which was pilot tested in a nearby school to ensure high reliability and internal consistency of the items in the instrument. The result of the study are summarize as follows:

Teacher moral competence is generally rated as moderately extensive, indicating that ethical principles are recognized but not yet fully and consistently applied in teaching practices. Among the dimensions, Commitment to Ethical Responsibility is the most evident, reflecting a strong sense of accountability and adherence to ethical standards. In contrast, Decision-Making is the least prominent, suggesting that teachers may benefit from further support in applying consistent ethical judgment in complex classroom situations.

Classroom discipline strategies are observed to a moderately extensive degree, indicating that teachers implement behavior management techniques with some variability. Consistency in rule enforcement is the most frequently applied strategy, demonstrating teachers' emphasis on maintaining clear expectations. However, conflict resolution skills are the least developed, reflecting a need for more structured training in guiding students through constructive dispute resolution.

The results indicate that teachers' cultural sensitivity is generally moderately extensive, with the highest emphasis on avoiding behaviors or language that may be insensitive to different cultural norms, reflecting teachers' awareness and caution in their interactions. This suggests that teachers recognize the importance of respecting cultural diversity, which supports an inclusive learning environment. However, the moderate practice of engaging positively with students from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds suggests a need for more proactive efforts in building meaningful cross-cultural interactions and fostering student inclusion.

Meanwhile, the results indicate a moderate positive relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies, suggesting that teachers with higher moral competence are more likely to apply effective disciplinary practices. Additionally, a strong positive relationship exists between teacher moral competence and cultural sensitivity, highlighting that morally competent teachers are also more culturally aware. Finally, a weak but significant positive relationship is observed between classroom discipline strategies and cultural sensitivity, indicating that teachers who are culturally sensitive may adopt more inclusive disciplinary approaches.
Lastly, the mediation analysis reveals that teacher moral competence has a direct positive influence on classroom discipline strategies, with cultural sensitivity acting as a partial mediator. Notably, cultural sensitivity demonstrates a suppressive effect, reducing the magnitude of the direct relationship between moral competence and discipline strategies. This suggests

that while morally competent teachers are culturally aware, their sensitivity may sometimes lead to more cautious disciplinary responses. The model demonstrates excellent fit, confirming that the mediation structure is statistically robust.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study several conclusions were generated:

The results conclude that teacher moral competence is generally moderately extensive, with the highest emphasis on commitment to ethical responsibility, indicating that teachers often adhere to ethical standards and demonstrate professional accountability. This suggests that teachers maintain a foundational sense of ethics, which supports responsible decision-making and fair treatment of students. However, the moderate practice of ethical decision-making highlights a need for further training in consistent ethical reasoning, particularly in complex classroom situations.

More so, the results show that classroom discipline strategies are generally moderately extensive, with consistency in rule enforcement being the most evident, reflecting teachers' commitment to maintaining clear behavioral expectations. This suggests that teachers prioritize fairness and transparency in managing student behavior, which supports a positive learning environment. However, the moderate practice of conflict resolution skills indicates a need for more targeted training in guiding students through constructive dispute resolution.

In addition, cultural sensitivity of teachers among public secondary schools in Panabo City is moderately extensive, indicating general awareness of cultural diversity but limited engagement with students from various backgrounds. The emphasis on avoiding insensitive behaviors reflects a strong foundation of respect, while the lower rating in positive engagement suggests a need for more proactive cultural interactions. Schools should prioritize professional development in culturally responsive teaching to enhance teachers' ability to connect meaningfully with diverse student populations.

Meanwhile, the findings conclude that teacher moral competence has a moderate positive relationship with classroom discipline strategies and a strong positive relationship with cultural sensitivity, while classroom discipline strategies have a weak but significant relationship with cultural sensitivity. This suggests that morally competent teachers are more likely to demonstrate both effective discipline and cultural awareness, but their ability to integrate these practices may vary. It is recommended that schools provide targeted training that strengthens teachers' ethical decision-making, cultural sensitivity, and inclusive discipline practices to ensure a balanced and responsive learning environment.

Finally, the findings conclude that teacher moral competence directly influences classroom discipline strategies, while cultural sensitivity partially mediates this relationship with a suppressive effect, suggesting that higher cultural sensitivity may reduce the firmness of discipline. This implies that while morally competent teachers are likely to demonstrate ethical discipline, their cultural awareness may lead to more cautious or empathetic responses. It is recommended that schools provide balanced training that enhances teachers' ability to integrate ethical decision-making with culturally responsive discipline practices. The results support Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory (1958) by affirming that higher moral competence leads to better decision-making in discipline, align with Bennett's Cultural Competence Theory (1986) by showing that moral competence fosters cultural sensitivity, but partially challenge the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), as the suppressive effect of cultural sensitivity indicates that increased awareness may sometimes reduce the direct impact of ethical intentions on behavior.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, the following recommendations are offered to inform policy, school leadership, teaching practice, and future research:

It is recommended that schools enhance teachers' ethical decision-making skills, as this indicator received the lowest mean, suggesting a need for more consistent ethical judgment in complex situations. Regular workshops on ethical principles, reflective discussions, and case-based ethical decision-making exercises can help teachers develop a stronger moral foundation. Additionally, peer collaboration and mentoring on ethical scenarios may provide teachers with diverse perspectives and support in making value-based decisions.

To strengthen classroom discipline strategies, schools should focus on enhancing teachers' conflict resolution skills, which received the lowest mean. Providing targeted training on mediation techniques, peer conflict management, and restorative practices can equip teachers with the skills needed to guide students in resolving disputes constructively. Role-playing exercises and collaborative problem-solving activities may also help teachers become more confident in managing conflicts effectively.

Schools should prioritize initiatives that promote positive engagement with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, as this indicator received the lowest mean. Professional development on culturally responsive teaching, including activities that foster intercultural dialogue and empathy, can help teachers build meaningful connections with students. Integrating multicultural education into the curriculum and providing reflective sessions on cultural awareness can further enhance teachers' cultural sensitivity.

Given the weak positive relationship between classroom discipline strategies and cultural sensitivity, schools should focus on strengthening the integration of culturally responsive discipline practices. This can be achieved through training that connects cultural awareness with practical behavior management techniques, ensuring that teachers can apply discipline while respecting students' diverse backgrounds. Collaborative discussions and resource-sharing on culturally sensitive discipline can also promote consistency among teachers.

Moreover, the results suggest a suppressive effect of cultural sensitivity on the relationship between teacher moral competence and classroom discipline strategies, indicating a need for balance. Schools should provide training that helps teachers maintain ethical discipline while being culturally sensitive, avoiding excessive leniency that may reduce discipline effectiveness. Workshops on balancing ethical principles with cultural awareness can help teachers apply discipline in a fair yet inclusive manner.

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