



Values education teachers' approaches to student discipline: Striking a balance between authority and compassion

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how Values Education teachers in the Philippines manage student discipline and the challenges they face in balancing authority and compassion. Specifically, it examined the strategies teachers employ, the constraints encountered, and the implications for promoting moral and behavioral development among learners. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through interviews with ten Values Education teachers, focusing on their lived experiences in maintaining classroom discipline. The findings revealed that teachers predominantly use positive reinforcement, establish clear rules and expectations, maintain consistent routines, and implement fair consequences to promote desirable behavior. However, balancing authority with compassion remains challenging due to factors such as misinterpretation of empathy as leniency, maintaining firmness while showing understanding, emotional and mental fatigue, and external influences from learners and parents. The study highlights the importance of compassionate yet structured discipline in fostering moral responsibility, self-regulation, and respectful teacher-student relationships. These insights contribute to the growing body of knowledge on humane classroom management, emphasizing the integration of empathy and authority in Values Education. Recommendations include professional development programs on reflective, culturally responsive discipline practices; institutional support for teachers' emotional well-being; and future studies on scalable frameworks that balance moral guidance with effective classroom control.

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Introduction

Values Education plays a vital role in shaping not only students' intellectual growth but also their moral character, social responsibility, and sense of empathy. In the Philippine education system, it serves as a foundation for building responsible and compassionate citizens who can make ethical decisions in everyday life. In this context, classroom discipline becomes a crucial arena in which moral and civic values are enacted. The way teachers respond to misbehavior or guide students toward self-discipline reflects the very principles they seek to teach: respect, accountability, and care for others. Thus,

understanding how Values Education teachers manage discipline provides valuable insight into how moral education is lived and practiced in schools.

Classroom discipline traditionally emphasizes authority, ensuring order, structure, and adherence to rules. However, emerging educational research highlights that effective discipline also requires compassion, empathy, and respect for students' dignity. Recent studies suggest that balancing these two dimensions promotes not only compliance but also moral development and self-regulation (Zhang et al., 2025; Angelical & Doronio, 2025). Authority establishes boundaries and expectations, while compassion allows teachers to address misbehavior as a learning opportunity rather than mere punishment. This balance is particularly relevant in Values Education, where teachers are expected to model the virtues they teach.

Values Education teachers employ various approaches to address student discipline, ranging from traditional rule enforcement to restorative and reflective practices. Some integrate Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which emphasize proactive guidance and positive reinforcement (Sugai & Horner, 2021), while others use moral reflection and dialogue to help students understand the impact of their actions (Flores & Malapit, 2023). In the Philippine setting, many teachers blend these approaches with culturally rooted values such as *pakikipagkapwa* (fellowship), *respeto* (respect), and *hiya* (sense of shame), demonstrating that discipline can be both firm and compassionate.

Despite teachers' best efforts, several constraints hinder their ability to balance authority and compassion effectively. Overcrowded classrooms, the rise of technology and social media distractions, and the pressure to maintain academic performance can limit teachers' capacity for individualized attention and empathy (Camarines et al., 2024; Amin & Nasrullah, 2022). Additionally, institutional policies such as the Department of Education's Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012) prohibit punitive measures, requiring teachers to navigate discipline within rights-based frameworks. While these policies promote student welfare, they may also leave teachers uncertain about how to assert authority without being perceived as harsh or unfair.

In the Philippine context, cultural expectations further complicate the balance between authority and compassion. Teachers are traditionally viewed as authority figures deserving of *respect*, yet students today are increasingly influenced by more democratic and expressive social norms. Perceptions of favoritism (*palakasan*) or inconsistent discipline can erode trust and weaken moral influence (Angelical & Doronio, 2025; Espartero-Asiatico, 2023). Therefore, maintaining fairness and emotional balance becomes not just a classroom management issue but an ethical responsibility for Values Education teachers.

This study sought to explore how Values Education teachers address student discipline and what challenges they encounter in balancing authority and compassion. While numerous studies have examined classroom discipline, much of the existing research centers on general behavior management strategies, common patterns of misbehavior, or the implementation of positive discipline programs. However, there are limited studies specifically focusing on Values Education teachers, whose work is deeply connected to moral formation and character development. Although previous literature

recognizes the importance of balancing firmness and empathy, it seldom captures how teachers navigate this balance in their daily classroom practices. Likewise, studies that discuss Filipino values such as *respeto* and *pakikipagkapwa* do not fully explain how these cultural principles shape real disciplinary decisions, particularly amid contemporary challenges such as large class sizes, digital distractions, and rights-based school policies. This absence of research examining the lived experiences and practical realities of Values Education teachers highlights a significant gap. Addressing this gap is the primary motivation for the present study, which aims to provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how discipline is carried out in moral education and how teachers strive to exercise both authority and compassion in guiding their students.

This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the practical and emotional dimensions of discipline in moral education. The findings may inform teacher training, promote reflective classroom practices, and support the development of discipline approaches that are both humane and effective. Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute to the ongoing effort of creating classrooms where discipline is an act of guidance, not control, and compassion becomes a form of moral leadership.

Literature review

The purpose of this related literature is to contextualize the research within the body of existing knowledge and support the necessity of this study. It offers methodological insights, a theoretical foundation, and aids in preventing repetition. It also advances comprehension, strengthens the researcher's credibility, and helps formulate hypotheses.

Teachers' challenges in student discipline

Student discipline is a fundamental concern in educational settings as it directly affects classroom management, learning outcomes, and the overall school climate. Teachers, being at the frontline of instruction and student engagement, face numerous challenges in maintaining discipline while balancing the responsibility of providing quality education. Literature from both international and local contexts highlights the multifaceted nature of discipline issues, the difficulties encountered by teachers, and the implications for educational practice.

One of the recurring themes in the literature is the difficulty teachers face in striking a balance between authority and compassion. According to Bear (2015), discipline should not only aim to suppress misbehavior but also foster responsibility and positive relationships. Teachers who rely solely on authoritarian approaches often encounter resistance and fear from students, while overly permissive approaches may undermine their authority (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). Studies in the Philippine context, such as those by Salazar (2019), show that Filipino teachers value “*pag-aaruga*” (care) alongside discipline, but this dual expectation can create tension in practice.

The role of parents in discipline is also well-documented. Studies consistently emphasize that parental support and consistency between home and school are vital in addressing student misbehavior (Epstein, 2011). However, teachers often experience limited collaboration with parents, especially when parents deny or excuse their child's behavior (Carreon, 2017). In the Philippine setting, parental cooperation is

further hindered by economic challenges, as some parents prioritize livelihood over close monitoring of their child's schooling (Orbeta et al., 2016).

Another emerging issue in student discipline is the increasing use of gadgets and social media, which has introduced new behavioral and attention-related problems in the classroom. Recent studies reveal that excessive or non-academic use of mobile devices contributes to reduced focus, off-task behavior, and lower academic engagement. Supriyanto et al. (2024) found a significant negative relationship between entertainment-oriented gadget use and students' concentration, while Sholekah et al. (2022) reported that frequent gadget use accounted for a decline in learning performance. Similarly, Paradero, Villanueva, and Jomud (2025) observed that Filipino elementary learners who used technological devices mainly for socialization exhibited more distracted behavior and diminished participation in class activities. These findings emphasize the growing need for teachers to establish clear digital discipline and promote responsible gadget use to maintain productive learning environments.

Maintaining fairness in student discipline continues to be a significant challenge for teachers. Recent studies reveal that disciplinary actions are often influenced by unconscious bias, cultural expectations, or institutional pressures. Okabe (2025) found that teacher evaluations in rural Philippine schools tend to show gender bias, with male students receiving harsher judgments compared to females. Similarly, studies link perceptions of unfair or harsh discipline to lower levels of teacher support and increased bullying incidents among students. In the Philippine context, Escobal et al. (2023) noted that Values Education teachers often struggle to remain impartial, as issues of "palakasan" or favoritism can affect both discipline decisions and teacher-student trust. These findings underscore the importance of promoting equitable, transparent, and values-driven disciplinary practices that uphold fairness and strengthen mutual respect in the classroom.

Student discipline is not merely a classroom issue, but a systemic concern influenced by family dynamics, institutional policies, socio-cultural conditions, and broader societal trends. Teachers encounter significant challenges that require a balance of authority, empathy, and adaptive strategies. International and local studies emphasize that successful discipline requires collaboration among teachers, parents, school administrators, and the community. Furthermore, continuous professional development in classroom management, mental health awareness, and the integration of positive behavior interventions are critical in supporting teachers.

Authority in student discipline

Authority in the classroom remains essential for maintaining structure, order, and effective learning. Recent studies emphasize that an authoritative approach, characterized by high expectations, clear rules, and responsiveness, creates a positive and well-managed classroom environment. Dela Cerna and Baguio (2024) found that teachers who established clear expectations and accountability fostered more organized and disciplined classrooms. Similarly, Obispo, Magulod Jr., and Tindowen (2024) reported that authoritative classroom management promotes student engagement, confidence, and strong teacher-student relationships in higher education. In early childhood settings, teachers who consistently applied authoritative practices created stable and supportive learning spaces that enhanced student behavior and

cooperation (San Manuel District Study, 2024). These findings affirm that balanced authority is vital to maintaining classroom order and supporting meaningful learning experiences.

Teachers' authority largely depends on how students perceive its fairness and legitimacy. Recent studies indicate that students are more likely to respect and accept authority when teachers demonstrate consistency, support, and respect. Camarines et al. (2024) found that Filipino senior high school students value teachers who provide emotional and academic support, as these behaviors strengthen trust and validate legitimate authority in the classroom. Likewise, Alimahan and Ubayubay (2024) reported that fair and structured classroom management fosters student respect and reduces misbehavior. Conversely, when authority is perceived as arbitrary or biased, students tend to resist or disengage. In the Philippine context, while cultural values such as *respeto* reinforce teacher authority, it must still be balanced with fairness and consistency to maintain students' trust and cooperation.

Also, teachers' authority is not only personal but also institutional. It is shaped by school rules, educational policies, and systemic frameworks that define how discipline should be implemented. Recent studies highlight that institutional legitimacy and clear policies strengthen teachers' ability to manage classrooms effectively. Mayake and Base (2025) emphasize that school governance, accountability, and training systems legitimize teachers' authority, while Angelical and Doronio (2025) found that consistent enforcement of school rules enhances teachers' confidence and credibility in maintaining discipline. Likewise, recent DepEd directives on positive, non-violent discipline (DepEd, 2024) reaffirm that authority must be exercised within rights-based and compassionate frameworks.

Recent studies indicate that teacher authority is increasingly challenged by changing student behaviors, parental involvement, and the pervasive influence of technology and social media. Overcrowded classrooms and environmental distractions make it difficult for teachers to maintain consistent discipline and engagement (Teacher Survey, 2023). Likewise, student-centered teaching styles that lack clear boundaries may reduce learners' respect for authority and classroom order (Misamis Oriental Study, 2024). Parental interventions and online influences further shape how students perceive and respond to teachers' authority, highlighting the need for approaches that balance structure, empathy, and adaptability (Pacaña, 2024).

Recent studies reveal that excessive reliance on authority alone can lead to authoritarian classroom practices that suppress student participation and autonomy. Such approaches often result in student disengagement, fear, and emotional exhaustion. Peng and Huang (2024) found that authoritarian teaching negatively affects students' well-being and motivation, while Huang, Chang, and Lin (2025) reported that learners under authoritarian management show lower emotional resilience and academic performance. Hence, authority in discipline is most effective when balanced with fairness, empathy, and respect for students' voices.

The Values Education study emphasizes that authority should be exercised not just to control behavior but to foster moral development. Narvaez and Lapsley (2009) note that authority, when grounded in explanation and moral reasoning, helps students internalize values rather than merely obey rules.

Teachers of values and character education often integrate authority with dialogue, ensuring that discipline becomes a formative process rather than simply a punitive one.

Recent studies continue to differentiate between authoritarian and authoritative forms of authority in education. Authoritarian discipline focuses on control and obedience, often resulting in compliance but reduced emotional well-being and autonomy among students (Arenas et al., 2022). In contrast, authoritative approaches—marked by firmness, fairness, and empathy—promote students' responsibility, self-regulation, and academic engagement (Divine Word College Study, 2025; Iloilo Province Study, 2022). Hence, compassionate yet firm authority remains aligned with current best practices in student discipline.

In general, this underscores that authority is indispensable in student discipline but must be exercised with fairness, consistency, and empathy. While authoritarian authority may secure short-term compliance, authoritative authority, which means being firm yet compassionate. This gives better support to student growth and long-term responsibility. Institutional policies and cultural values also shape how authority is understood and applied in classrooms. Ultimately, the effective use of authority in discipline lies not in control alone but in combining legitimacy, fairness, and moral guidance.

Compassion in student discipline

Recent studies highlight compassion as a vital element of effective classroom discipline. Compassionate discipline emphasizes empathy, understanding, and care by addressing the root causes of misbehavior rather than relying on punishment. Camarines et al. (2024) found that students deeply value teachers who provide emotional support and genuine accompaniment, while Angelical and Doronio (2025) reported that caring relationships and fairness foster better classroom behavior. Similarly, Espartero-Asiatico (2023) emphasized that inclusive and compassionate approaches help meet the needs of students with behavioral or emotional challenges. Thus, compassion in discipline nurtures moral growth, trust, and student engagement.

Contemporary scholarship extends this framework with compassion-focused and trauma-informed perspectives. Compassion in discipline involves empathy, contextual understanding, and relational repair, framing discipline not as punishment but as an opportunity for growth (Bishop, 2022). This aligns with the goals of humane education: dignity, fairness, and care. Trauma-informed perspectives emphasize that punitive discipline may retraumatize vulnerable students, whereas compassionate responses can support resilience and long-term behavioral change (Huang et al., 2023).

A recent study supports the idea that compassionate teacher–student relationships help foster trust, reduce conflict, and increase student motivation. For example, Regidor, Vesmanos, & Deguito (2024) found a moderately positive correlation between how supportive students perceive the learning environment to be and their motivation for learning among senior high students in Davao del Norte. Also, studies on culturally responsive pedagogy, such as those by Condeza and Mongas (2025) in Higaonon communities and Edilo, Evarado Jr., and Callaman (2022) among mathematics teachers, highlight that when educators recognize and integrate students' cultural backgrounds into teaching and

discipline, learners feel more valued, respected, and engaged. Such practices not only enhance motivation but also strengthen students' sense of belonging and mutual respect within the classroom.

Compassionate discipline also involves prevention through encouragement of positive behavior. Eliseo (2024) reports that in elementary classrooms, reinforcing good behavior, modifying penalties when needed, and partnering with parents create more orderly, motivated, and responsible students. Values Education teachers (Escobal et al., 2023) show that environments centered on respect, fairness, and learning from mistakes foster student ownership of behavior. Angelical & Daronio (2025) find that consistent reinforcement of positive behavior and clear expectations lead to greater student cooperation, while in mathematics instruction, the use of praise and feedback was significantly linked to higher student motivation (Teachers' Use of Positive Reinforcement..., 2025). Together, these findings suggest that compassion in discipline is most effective when teachers proactively recognize and reinforce positive behaviors, thus creating a supportive environment that encourages moral growth and responsibility.

Compassionate discipline also involves engaging students in reflective conversations that promote moral awareness and empathy. Recent studies show that reflective practices—such as journaling and restorative dialogues—help students process emotions, recognize their mistakes, and take responsibility for their actions. Makiaway et al. (2024) found that reflective journaling enhances learners' self-awareness and motivation, while Angelical and Daronio (2025) reported that private conversations and feedback sessions encourage behavioral improvement and strengthen teacher–student relationships. These reflective approaches allow discipline to become a learning experience rather than a form of punishment.

In many religious and values-based schools, compassionate discipline is grounded in ethical and spiritual principles. Recent studies show that teachers' spirituality and moral values strongly influence how they manage behavior and maintain classroom order. Castillo and Barrameda (2024) found that Catholic school teachers integrate values such as forgiveness, moral accountability, and community harmony into their discipline practices. Similarly, Perales (2023) reported that teachers' spirituality positively correlates with effective classroom management in parochial schools, indicating that compassion and discipline coexist through faith-based moral frameworks.

This consistently shows that compassionate approaches to discipline are more effective in promoting student growth than punitive methods. Whether through authoritative but caring strategies, positive reinforcement, reflective dialogues, or culturally responsive discipline, the common thread is the teacher's ability to enforce accountability while maintaining empathy. Compassion in discipline humanizes the process, turning misbehavior into a learning opportunity rather than a source of alienation.

Balancing authority and compassion

The challenge of balancing authority and compassion in student discipline is one of the most persistent issues in education. Teachers are tasked not only with maintaining order but also with nurturing students' moral, emotional, and social development. Literature shows that effective discipline involves finding the middle ground between strict enforcement of rules (authority) and empathetic understanding of students'

circumstances (compassion). When properly balanced, these elements contribute to a positive classroom climate and long-term behavioral growth.

Teachers often struggle to find the right balance between authority and compassion in managing classroom discipline. Excessive authority may lead to authoritarianism, while excessive compassion risks permissiveness and loss of control. Recent studies reveal that this tension is especially evident in overcrowded Philippine classrooms, where misbehavior is more frequent and teachers face competing demands for empathy and order. Dacunes, Angco, and Ebio (2023) found a positive correlation between effective classroom management strategies, such as clear rules and consistent routines, and pupils' self-efficacy, emphasizing that inconsistent enforcement can lead to lower student confidence and increased misbehavior. Likewise, Perez and Umali (2024) reported that teachers implementing strategic and inclusive management practices in Cavite rely on empathy and differentiated instruction to maintain order, yet systemic challenges such as large class sizes and limited resources often hinder their ability to balance firmness with compassion. These findings underscore the need for sustained professional development that equips teachers with skills to exercise discipline that is both structured and empathetic. Contemporary educational research emphasizes that authority and compassion are not contradictory but mutually reinforcing dimensions of effective classroom discipline. Rather than viewing control and care as opposing forces, scholars argue that meaningful discipline arises when teachers uphold firm expectations while demonstrating empathy and understanding.

Recent studies support this integrated approach. *Compassionate Discipline: Providing an Inclusive Approach Toward Students with Discipline-Related Concerns* (Espartero-Asiatico, 2023) shows that combining clear behavioral guidelines with individualized emotional support enhances both student behavior and well-being. Likewise, *Best Practices of Teachers in Maintaining Students Discipline* (Angelical & Doronio, 2025) found that when teachers balance consistency and fairness with encouragement and care, students respond with greater cooperation and accountability. Finally, *Bridging Policy and Practice* (Mag-atas & Carmona, 2023) demonstrates that rights-based disciplinary frameworks help educators maintain authority while fostering compassion, reinforcing the idea that structure and empathy can coexist in effective discipline.

Teachers who successfully balance authority and compassion create classrooms that are structured yet supportive. Authority ensures order and fairness, while compassion strengthens trust and motivation. When combined, they foster a positive classroom climate where students are more likely to comply with rules not out of fear but out of respect and responsibility (Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

Balancing authority and compassion foster not only discipline but also stronger teacher–student relationships. Recent studies emphasize that when teachers demonstrate fairness and empathy, students are more likely to cooperate and take responsibility for their actions. Angelical and Doronio (2025) found that teachers who integrate consistent rules with relational trust and care create classrooms where students feel valued and intrinsically motivated to behave appropriately. Similarly, Zhang, Wang, Deng, Ma, and Qi (2025) reported that students' perceptions of teacher care significantly predict positive teacher–student relationships and emotional well-being, reducing behavioral resistance. These findings

highlight that authority, when guided by compassion, transforms discipline into a process of moral and personal growth rather than punishment.

Moreover, this balance is essential for equity. Overly punitive discipline disproportionately affects marginalized students, whereas compassionate authority provides a more just and inclusive approach (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Therefore, schools must train teachers to adopt reflective, culturally responsive practices that integrate both authority and compassion.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to explore the approaches of Values Education teachers in addressing student discipline, with emphasis on how they balance authority and compassion in their practices. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What approaches do values education teachers employ in addressing student discipline?
2. What are the constraints of teachers in balancing authority and compassion in student discipline?

Research methodology

This chapter presented the research design, the locale of the study, population, and sampling, data presentation instrument, data gathering procedure, research methodology, ethical consideration, and data presentation and analysis.

Research design

This study employed a phenomenological research design. Specifically, this study adopted a descriptive phenomenology that focuses on understanding lived experiences and contextual nuances. This approach allows an in-depth exploration on the values education teachers to student discipline. It used an open-ended question embedded in an online interview questionnaire for values education teachers. This approach allows the researcher to collect a rich narrative data that can provide deeper insights into leadership practices and challenges.

Locale of the study

The study will be conducted at Ilocos Norte National High School, Division of Laoag City, focusing on the Values Education teachers. This setting was chosen because it provides a rich context to examine how teachers handle student discipline while balancing authority and compassion. The school caters to students from diverse backgrounds, which allows for varied perspectives on disciplinary approaches. Conducting the study in this locale will help capture how Values Education teachers integrate firm authority with empathetic understanding in addressing student behavior and promoting positive values formation.

Population and sampling

The population of the study will consist of Values Education teachers at Ilocos Norte National High School, Division of Laoag City. These teachers are directly involved in guiding students' character formation and managing discipline, making them appropriate participants in exploring approaches that balance authority and compassion.

Given the manageable size of the target group, purposive sampling will be employed. This sampling technique is appropriate because it intentionally selects participants who possess the specific expertise and experience needed to provide rich and relevant insights into the research problem. All available Values Education teachers in the school will be considered as respondents, ensuring that the study captures a comprehensive understanding of their strategies in addressing student discipline.

Data gathering procedure

The primary instrument for data collection in this study will be a researcher-made questionnaire administered through Google Forms. This digital platform was selected due to its accessibility, efficiency, and ability to reach respondents conveniently while minimizing logistical challenges. The questionnaire will be designed to obtain data on Values Education teachers' approaches to student discipline, with a focus on how they balance authority and compassion in various classroom situations.

Ethical considerations

The study upheld strict ethical standards to protect the rights and privacy of all participants. Participation will be entirely voluntary, and respondents will have the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Informed consent will be obtained electronically through the first section of the online form, which will explain the purpose, scope, and procedures of the study. All responses will remain confidential and anonymous; personal identifiers will not be included in the reporting of results. Data will be stored securely in password-protected files and will be used solely for academic purposes. The researcher will respect the time, perspectives, and professional responsibilities of all participants throughout the research process.

Results and discussions

This part presented findings from the online interview questionnaire with the thirteen (13) respondents from the Values Education Department of Ilocos Norte National High School of the Schools Division of the City of Laoag. The data is organized according to key themes identified.

Problem 1: What approaches do values education teachers employ in addressing student discipline?

Table 1: Discipline approaches

Themes	Categories	Frequency
Theme 1: Positive and structured approach to	Positive reinforcement	4
	Establishing clear rules and expectations	4
	Consistent routines and fair consequences	3

managing student discipline	Proactive and engaging strategies	2
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Note. Data were gathered from open-ended online questionnaire responses from thirteen (13) Values Education teachers of Ilocos Norte National High School of the Schools Division of the City of Laoag. The results of teachers’ responses revealed that they predominantly use positive and structured strategies to manage student discipline.

Positive reinforcement

The responses reveal that Values Education teachers primarily rely on positive and structured approaches when addressing student discipline. The most frequent strategies were positive reinforcement (26.67%). Teachers consistently highlight the importance of acknowledging good behavior, providing praise, and reinforcing desirable conduct to motivate learners.

“I practice positive reinforcement by acknowledging and praising good behavior.” (P3)

“Positive reinforcement and building responsibility.”(P4)

“I use positive reinforcement, clear rules, and consistent communication to promote good behavior.” (P5)

“I use a combination of positive reinforcement and consistent classroom routines.”(P7)

This finding aligns with the study of Fatima, Kirmani, and Tanweer (2023), which found that the consistent use of reinforcement strategies in the classroom significantly improved students’ learning behaviors and engagement. Similarly, Elkadi and Sharaf (2023) emphasized that positive discipline enhances students’ well-being and academic achievement by fostering a supportive and respectful classroom atmosphere. These results support the idea that discipline rooted in positivity and empathy contributes not only to behavioral improvement but also to holistic learner development.

Establishing clear rules and expectations

About 26.67% of teachers focused on establishing clear rules and expectations, which helps prevent misbehavior by creating a shared understanding of classroom norms.

“I set classroom rules at the very beginning.” (P1)

“Establish Clear Expectations Early. At the beginning of the year, I collaborate with students to create class rules and routines.”(P2)

“I make sure students clearly understand the rules and consequences.” (P8)

These findings indicate that Values Education teachers prioritize encouraging desirable behavior, setting clear expectations, and maintaining consistency as the foundation of effective discipline. This approach aligns with current research on positive discipline, which emphasizes fostering moral responsibility and

creating a supportive classroom environment rather than relying solely on punitive measures. Elkadi and Sharaf (2023) found that positive discipline strategies in the classroom foster students' well-being and academic achievement while promoting moral responsibility.

Consistent routines and fair consequences

A smaller proportion (20%) emphasized the use of consistent routines and fair consequences, ensuring accountability and predictable classroom management.

"I find that clear expectations, positive reinforcement, and consistent routines are the most effective discipline strategies in managing student behavior."

"When discipline issues arise, I apply fair and consistent consequences and encourage students to reflect on their actions."

These recent findings also resonate with earlier frameworks, such as Bear (2010) and Gregory and Ripski (2008), who both emphasized that fairness, clear communication, and positive teacher-student relationships form the foundation of effective classroom discipline. Taken together, these studies affirm that the teachers' approaches in the present study reflect current best practices in educational psychology — integrating compassion, structure, and consistency to achieve both behavioral and moral growth among learners.

Proactive and engaging strategies

Additionally, teachers mentioned using proactive and engaging strategies (13.33%), such as varied activities, to prevent misbehavior before it occurs. Finally, maintaining firmness with empathy (13.33%) also emerged as a key approach, especially from respondents who balance authority with compassion due to their perceived "second parent" role in school.

"I also use proactive strategies, such as building rapport, setting clear expectations, and engaging students in meaningful activities to minimize misbehavior."

The findings of this study reveal that Values Education teachers manage student discipline through a positive and structured approach, emphasizing clear expectations, consistent routines, and positive reinforcement. Teachers shared that they establish classroom rules early, maintain fairness in implementing consequences, and promote positive behavior through praise and encouragement. These practices demonstrate a proactive stance toward discipline, one that seeks to prevent misbehavior rather than react to it.

Moreover, the emphasis of the respondents on clear rules and consistent routines reflects the conclusions of Pulos et al. (2024), who highlighted that evidence-based classroom management practices, such as setting expectations and maintaining consistency, are essential to sustaining a positive learning environment. Likewise, the study of Dar, Rizvi, and Jumani (2024) demonstrated that positive discipline strategies, including collaboration, encouragement, and relationship-building, lead to improved teacher-student interactions and reduced behavioral problems.

Overall, the discussion suggests that Values Education teachers' discipline strategies are grounded in positive discipline principles, where clear expectations, proactive engagement, and positive reinforcement guide student behavior. This approach not only maintains order in the classroom but also aligns with the moral goals of Values Education, nurturing self-discipline, responsibility, and respect.

Problem 2: What are the constraints of teachers in balancing authority and compassion in student discipline?

Table 2: Balancing approach and constraints

Themes	Categories	Frequency
Theme 2. Struggling to balance firmness and empathy in upholding discipline	Ensuring consistency and fairness	4
	Misinterpretation of compassion as leniency	4
	Maintaining firmness with empathy	2
	Emotional and mental fatigue	2
	External factors (learners and parents)	1

Note. Data were gathered from open-ended online questionnaire responses from thirteen (13) Values Education teachers of Ilocos Norte National High School of the Schools Division of the City of Laoag. The results of the teachers' responses revealed that balancing authority and compassion in disciplining students presents several challenges. The responses were grouped into five categories, with frequencies and percentages calculated based on the total of thirteen (13) respondents.

Misinterpretation of compassion as leniency

Three teachers (31%) said that students sometimes misinterpret empathy and understanding as weakness or leniency. While teachers aim to guide and support, students may take advantage of the compassion, making it difficult to maintain authority.

“One major challenge is ensuring that students understand the seriousness of their actions without feeling rejected or humiliated. Sometimes, showing too much compassion may be mistaken for leniency, while being too strict can create fear or distance. Finding the right tone and approach that both corrects and supports the student requires patience and emotional balance.” (P1), (P2), (P3)

The findings reveal that balancing authority and compassion remains one of the most complex aspects of classroom management among Values Education teachers. Many respondents shared that showing empathy is sometimes mistaken for leniency, which can weaken their authority. Others noted the difficulty of maintaining firmness while showing understanding, particularly when students face personal or emotional challenges. This reflects the emotional and moral tension inherent in teaching, the desire to discipline with justice while preserving dignity and respect. This aligns with Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010), who noted that teachers using supportive approaches often struggle with being perceived as less authoritative. Bear and Manning (2020) also emphasized that while empathy strengthens relationships, it must be paired with accountability to prevent misuse of teacher kindness.

Maintaining firmness with empathy

Another three teachers (15%) highlighted the struggle of being firm while remaining empathetic. They strive to correct behavior without instilling fear or discouragement, emphasizing the importance of patience and emotional balance.

“One of the main challenges I experience is maintaining firmness while still showing empathy. As a teacher, I want students to understand that rules and boundaries are important, but I also want them to feel supported and understood.” (P4)

“Sometimes it’s hard to stay firm while still being understanding, especially when students have personal issues affecting their behavior.” (P5)

“Maintaining discipline without discouraging students or appearing too strict is challenging.” (P6)

According to Hong, Cai, Lan, and Chen (2022), an empathetic approach to classroom management is linked to fairness and moral responsibility, which in turn improves the consistency of discipline and reinforces the legitimacy of teachers’ authority in the eyes of students. These findings are consistent with the study of Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010), who found that teachers often struggle to maintain authority without alienating students, especially when using disciplinary practices rooted in care and empathy. Similarly, Bear and Manning (2020) emphasized that effective discipline requires balancing control and support. Teachers must establish authority without creating fear or resentment. The challenge lies in ensuring that compassion does not dilute accountability.

Consistency and emotional fatigue

Two respondents (15%) mentioned that managing emotions while applying consistent discipline leads to stress and emotional fatigue. Constantly balancing authority and care requires significant emotional labor.

“Balancing authority and compassion in discipline is challenging due to maintaining consistency, addressing individual needs, managing emotions, gaining trust, collaborating with stakeholders, avoiding punitive measures, time constraints, upholding authority, and ensuring cultural sensitivity.” (P7, P8)

According to Ma, Zhang, Dong, and Yu (2023), teachers’ emotional labor, particularly the effort to manage feelings while maintaining fairness and consistency, is strongly associated with emotional exhaustion and can negatively affect classroom climate. Similarly, Tang, Li, and Xu (2023) found that accountability pressures and the emotional work required to enforce consistent discipline contribute to teacher burnout and reduced well-being. These studies support the finding that balancing authority and compassion requires ongoing emotional regulation and resilience.

Upholding fairness and moral guidance

Two teachers (8%) emphasized the challenge of aligning discipline with the moral and ethical principles of Values Education. They aim to enforce rules while ensuring students feel respected and guided toward moral development.

“I remind myself of the core principles of Values Education that discipline should always be rooted in respect, empathy, and moral guidance.” (P9)

“I stay firm but fair. Setting clear rules while treating every student with respect and consistency.” (P10)

Elkadi and Sharaf (2023) noted that while compassionate approaches reduce behavioral issues, they can lead to perceptions of partiality if not implemented consistently. This supports the current finding that consistency and fairness remain key to maintaining respect and trust. Furthermore, Pulos et al. (2024) emphasized the need for institutional support and professional development to help teachers manage emotional demands while sustaining equitable discipline.

Overall, the most dominant challenges were Misinterpretation of Compassion as Leniency and Maintaining Firmness with Empathy, each accounting for 27% of responses. These findings indicate that while teachers strive to discipline with care and fairness, maintaining a balance between authority and compassion remains complex and emotionally demanding.

External factors: Learners and parents

One respondent pointed out that external circumstances, such as family issues, personal student struggles, or lack of parental support which affect how discipline is carried out.

These findings resonate with Elkadi and Sharaf (2023), who explained that students' home environments and parental involvement significantly influence classroom behavior and teachers' disciplinary decisions.

The highest-frequency challenges were Misinterpretation of Compassion as Leniency and Ensuring Consistency and Fairness, both at 31%. These findings show that while Values Education teachers aim to uphold empathy, fairness, and respect, maintaining authority while being compassionate is emotionally complex and requires continuous self-regulation.

The results emphasize that discipline in Values Education is more than enforcing rules, it involves balancing moral guidance, emotional understanding, and professional consistency. This delicate balance, though challenging, is central to fostering responsible and morally grounded students.

Conclusion

This study explored the approaches of Values Education teachers in managing student discipline and the challenges they face in balancing authority and compassion. The findings indicated that teachers employ positive and structured discipline strategies, such as positive reinforcement, establishing clear rules and

expectations, consistent routines and fair consequences, and proactive engagement strategies, to foster desirable behavior, moral responsibility, and a supportive classroom environment. These strategies align with best practices in educational psychology, emphasizing holistic learner development rather than reliance on punitive measures.

The study also highlighted the complexities of balancing authority and compassion. The dominant challenges were misinterpretation of compassion as leniency and maintaining firmness with empathy. Additional challenges included emotional and mental fatigue, ensuring fairness and moral guidance, and external factors such as uncooperative learners or parents. These findings underscore that effective classroom management requires not only structured strategies but also emotional resilience and moral awareness.

This study contributes to the field of educational practice by providing insights into how Values Education teachers integrate positive discipline, empathy, and moral guidance in real classroom settings. It highlights specific strategies and challenges, demonstrating the balance between structure and care in fostering both behavioral compliance and holistic development. The findings can inform teacher training programs, curriculum design, and professional development focused on effective classroom management.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. The sample size was small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, data relied on self-reported teacher experiences, which may not fully represent other regions or school types. Future studies could expand the sample to include a larger and more diverse group of teachers across different regions to improve generalizability. Observational or mixed-method research could provide additional insight into how discipline strategies are applied in practice. Further research could also examine the long-term effects of positive discipline strategies on student behavior, engagement, and moral development.

Overall, this study emphasizes that effective classroom management in Values Education is both structured and compassionate, integrating clear rules, positive reinforcement, consistency, and empathy. Teachers' ability to balance authority and compassion is crucial for fostering behavioral, moral, and emotional development among learners.

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