

Original Article

Commitment and Compliance with the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers in Public Elementary Schools

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between teachers' commitment and compliance with the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers in public elementary schools in Panabo North District, Division of Panabo City. A descriptive correlational design guided the inquiry. The study involved 132 teachers selected through simple random sampling from a population of 210. Data came from an adapted Commitment to the Code of Ethics Scale and a Teachers' Compliance with the Code of Ethics Scale. Descriptive statistics showed very extensive commitment and very extensive compliance. Correlation analysis indicated a high positive relationship between commitment and compliance. Multiple regression results showed that the domains of profession commitment, commitment to students, and commitment to achieve excellence significantly predicted compliance. Findings support school actions that strengthen professional commitment as a vital strategy for ensuring ethical standards are maintained.

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1. Introduction

Teacher ethics shapes public trust in schools and sustains the legitimacy of the teaching profession. In the Philippines, the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers provides expectations for relationships with the state, the community, the profession, school leaders, learners, and parents. Ethical standards, however, do not operate as rules alone. They depend on teachers' internal commitment, school conditions, and

professional culture. When teachers treat ethical duties as part of professional identity, compliance becomes more consistent, especially in contexts that require discretion, fairness, and care.

Professional codes also function as educational tools. International scholarship argues that a code of ethics has strongest impact when teacher education and school systems teach its principles, clarify common dilemmas, and build capacity to apply the code in daily practice (Maxwell, 2017; O'Neill et al., 2010). Teachers face dilemmas with no single correct response, such as tension between care and justice, confidentiality and disclosure, or compassion and consistent discipline. Critical incident research describes these ethical dilemmas as recurring features of teaching that require judgment under uncertainty (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). Without structured guidance, teachers may respond through habit, peer norms, or short term pressure rather than through principled reasoning.

Evidence also suggests that compliance may vary by domain. A study on teachers' code of ethics in Ethiopia reported strong implementation toward students and the profession, yet weaker enactment in domains that involve parents and community expectations (Ayenalem et al., 2022). Domain differences may reflect role ambiguity, uneven support, and the social risks teachers perceive when ethical duties intersect with power relations, community pressure, or workplace politics. These patterns strengthen the need for localized evidence that identifies which domains are strongest and which domains require more support in a given district.

Commitment provides a theoretical bridge between ethical standards and ethical action. In organizational research, commitment is a psychological state that binds an individual to a course of action, and the three component model frames commitment as affective, continuance, and normative components that influence behavior (Meyer & Allen, 1991). In education, commitment can apply to the profession, to students, and to standards of excellence. A teacher who invests effort to improve practice, protect learner welfare, and uphold professional norms may also demonstrate stronger ethical compliance in tasks such as assessment, classroom management, communication, and collaboration.

Self-determination theory adds a motivational lens to this link. When teachers experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they show more internalized regulation, which supports consistent ethical conduct and pro social action (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Teachers who feel supported by school leaders and valued by colleagues may uphold ethical standards even when compliance requires extra time, documentation, or difficult conversations. Workplace ethics research also reports that organizational commitment can connect ethical leadership with ethical behavior, suggesting that commitment is a mechanism through which ethical expectations translate into daily conduct (Guo et al., 2023).

In many public school settings, teachers face competing demands such as administrative requirements, parent pressure, resource constraints, and workload. These constraints can test ethical judgment in classroom management, assessment, professional boundaries, and communication with stakeholders. Codes of ethics

provide standards, yet they do not resolve all dilemmas. Educators often need guidance, peer support, and reflective practice to apply ethical rules in context (Maxwell, 2017). Within this context, it remains useful to examine whether teachers who report stronger commitment also report stronger compliance with the code, and whether specific commitment domains predict compliance.

This study examined commitment and compliance with the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers among public elementary school teachers in Panabo North District, Division of Panabo City. It quantified the extent of commitment and compliance across key domains and tested the association between the two constructs. It also tested whether commitment domains predict compliance. The findings provide local evidence that can guide district actions that support ethical teaching practice.

2. Methodology

The study applied a quantitative descriptive correlational design to describe the levels of commitment and compliance and to test their relationship. The setting covered public elementary schools in Panabo North District, Division of Panabo City. The study involved 132 teachers from a population of 210 teachers. The sample came from simple random sampling to give each teacher a fair chance of selection. Eligibility required current employment in a public elementary school within the district.

The study used an adapted survey questionnaire with two scales. The first scale measured commitment to the code of ethics and drew from the Commitment to the Code of Ethics Scale developed by Mwesiga et al. (2018, as cited in Boniface & Ngalawa, 2020). It covered profession commitment, commitment to students, and commitment to achieve excellence. The second scale measured compliance and used the Teachers' Compliance with the Code of Ethics Scale developed by Libo-on and Eslabon (2025). It covered responsibilities toward the profession, higher authorities in the profession, learners, parents, and the community. Both scales used a five point Likert format from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

An expert panel reviewed the instrument for content validity and provided feedback on clarity, readability, and item relevance. A pilot survey with 30 teachers supported face validity and informed revisions. Reliability analysis applied Cronbach's alpha. In this study, the commitment scale showed excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.90$) and the compliance scale showed good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.82$).

The researchers secured permission from the graduate school and the schools division office before data collection. The researcher coordinated with school leaders for distribution and retrieval of questionnaires. The study protected confidentiality and anonymity to support honest responses and to reduce social pressure. Ethical review and oversight came from the institutional research ethics committee.

Data analysis used mean and standard deviation to describe levels of commitment and compliance. Pearson-r tested the relationship between commitment

and compliance. Multiple linear regression tested whether commitment domains predicted compliance. The study used a significance level of 0.05 for inferential tests.

3. Results

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for teachers' commitment to the code of ethics. Overall, the participants demonstrated a very extensive level of commitment ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.70$). This consistently high level of dedication was reflected across all three specific domains measured.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for teachers' commitment to the code of ethics ($n = 132$).

Domain	Mean	SD	Descriptive level
Profession Commitment	4.36	0.77	Very Extensive
Commitment to Students	4.35	0.75	Very Extensive
Commitment to Achieve Excellence	4.35	0.78	Very Extensive
Overall	4.35	0.70	Very Extensive

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics regarding teachers' compliance with the code of ethics. Overall compliance among the respondents was reported to be very extensive ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.78$). This high adherence to ethical standards was observed uniformly across all relational domains, including interactions with the profession, higher authorities, learners, parents, and the community.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for teachers' compliance with the code of ethics ($n = 132$).

Domain	Mean	SD	Descriptive level
Profession	4.35	0.80	Very Extensive
Higher Authorities in the Profession	4.37	0.85	Very Extensive
Learners	4.38	0.87	Very Extensive
Parents	4.36	0.83	Very Extensive
Community	4.35	0.82	Very Extensive
Overall	4.37	0.78	Very Extensive

Table 3 details the correlation analysis examining the relationship between teachers' overall commitment and their compliance with the code of ethics. The results indicate a statistically significant, high positive correlation between the two variables, $r = 0.60$, $p = 0.000$.

Table 3. Correlation results.

Variables	r-value	p-value
Commitment and compliance	0.60	0.000

Table 4 summarizes the multiple regression analysis conducted to determine the predictive value of the three commitment domains on overall ethical compliance. The overall regression model was statistically significant ($F = 52.24$, $p < .001$) and accounted for 38.4% of the variance in compliance ($R^2 = .384$). All three domains emerged as significant, positive predictors of a teacher's compliance with the code of ethics.

Table 4. Regression results.

Predictor domain	B	SE	Beta	t	P-value	Decision
Constant	2.85	0.80		4.90	0.000	Significant
Profession Commitment	0.80	0.72	0.68	4.25	0.000	Significant
Commitment to Students	0.78	0.76	0.65	4.20	0.000	Significant
Commitment to Achieve Excellence	0.75	0.70	0.62	4.16	0.000	Significant

4. Discussion

The study found very extensive commitment to the code of ethics among public elementary teachers, alongside very extensive compliance across key ethical domains. This pattern suggests that many teachers treat ethical duties as central to professional identity and routine practice. Codes of professional conduct can guide action, yet their impact depends on how teachers learn, interpret, and apply the code in context (Maxwell, 2017; O'Neill et al., 2010). High ratings in the learner domain also fit evidence that teachers often prioritize direct duties to students, where ethical choices are immediate and visible (Ayenalem et al., 2022).

The high positive relationship between commitment and compliance indicates that teachers who report stronger commitment also report stronger ethical compliance. This relationship aligns with organizational commitment theory, which links commitment to sustained behavior that supports professional norms and long term role obligations (Meyer & Allen, 1991). In school settings, commitment can reflect attachment to teaching, a felt duty to serve learners, and a responsibility to uphold professional standards. These aspects can support ethical action in tasks such as assessment fairness, confidentiality, learner discipline, and collaboration with colleagues and supervisors.

A motivational explanation also supports this pattern. Self-determination theory holds that autonomy, competence, and relatedness support internalized motivation and self-regulation, which can strengthen consistent ethical conduct under pressure (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020). When teachers feel capable and supported, they may follow ethical procedures with less resistance, such as documentation, consultation, and adherence to due process. When support is weak or

expectations are unclear, ethical choices may depend more on coping and short term survival than on deliberate professional judgment.

Regression results show that the commitment domains predicted compliance. Profession commitment and commitment to students showed strong predictive value, which suggests that ethical practice grows when teachers invest in professional development, uphold collegial standards, and prioritize learner welfare. Commitment to achieve excellence also predicted compliance, which implies that striving for quality work can translate into more careful and principled decisions. In practice, professional learning that integrates ethics into instructional planning, assessment, and classroom management may strengthen the same pathway.

The results also highlight the importance of addressing ethical dilemmas as lived experiences, not only as abstract rules. Research on teachers' critical incidents describes ethical dilemmas as recurring features of teaching practice that require judgment under uncertainty (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). Teachers may face tension between compassion and impartiality, between protecting confidentiality and responding to harm, or between maintaining boundaries and providing support. Ethics education that uses cases, reflection, and guided dialogue can help teachers recognize dilemmas early and apply the code in ways that protect learners and sustain professionalism (Maxwell, 2017; O'Neill et al., 2010).

For school and district practice, the findings support actions that strengthen professional commitment and sustain ethical compliance. Mentoring systems, peer coaching, and sustained professional development can reinforce ethical norms and provide teachers with support for difficult situations. Clear communication of expectations, fair supervision, and accessible consultation channels can help teachers maintain ethical consistency. School leaders can also model ethical decision making through transparent processes, consistent application of policies, and respectful engagement with teachers, parents, and community partners.

Although the study reports high compliance, policy work should still attend to the limits of self-report measures. Social desirability can inflate ethical ratings, and teachers may interpret items as aspirational ideals rather than observed behavior. Future studies can add multiple data sources such as peer ratings, document review, and scenario based assessments of ethical judgment. Mixed methods designs can also explore how teachers explain ethical choices and how school climate, leadership, and workload shape ethical conduct.

Within the Philippine context, the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers provides a formal framework for professional conduct. Evidence from this study suggests that programs that strengthen commitment can support stronger compliance, and this approach can complement regulatory enforcement. A balanced strategy can include standards, supervision, and sustained professional learning that helps teachers apply the code in real school conditions.

5. Conclusion

Public elementary teachers in Panabo North District reported very extensive commitment and very extensive compliance with the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers. Commitment showed a high positive association with compliance, and commitment domains significantly predicted compliance. School and district efforts that strengthen professional commitment may support sustained ethical practice.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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