



Teachers' Awareness, Compliance, and Challenges in Upholding the Code of Ethics: Insights from Public Elementary Schools in Panganiban District, Catanduanes, Philippines

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Abstract

Professional ethics are foundational to the teaching profession, positioning educators as moral agents and exemplars of integrity. In the Panganiban District of Catanduanes, teachers operate within closely knit communities where personal and professional roles often intersect, creating unique ethical and contextual challenges. Despite the statutory framework provided by Republic Act No. 7836, gaps persist between ethical awareness and actual practice, particularly in rural settings characterized by limited access to professional development and institutional support. This descriptive–correlational study investigated 71 public elementary school teachers to assess their levels of ethical awareness, compliance with the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers, and perceived challenges in ethical practice. Weighted means and Pearson's correlation analyses were employed to quantify trends and examine interrelationships among variables. Results indicated very high ethical awareness (mean = 3.76) and high compliance (mean = 3.75), with teachers most proficient in professional duties and slightly less so in civic responsibilities. Perceived challenges were generally low (mean = 1.88), although adapting to cultural expectations posed the greatest difficulty. Correlational analyses revealed a very strong positive relationship between awareness and compliance ($r = 0.98$) and strong negative relationships between awareness and challenges ($r = -0.82$) and compliance and challenges ($r = -0.79$). These findings suggest that enhanced ethical awareness and compliance mutually reinforce each other while mitigating perceived challenges, emphasizing the critical role of knowledge development and supportive institutional frameworks in promoting professional integrity and ethical resilience in rural educational contexts.

Keywords: ethical awareness, Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers, teacher compliance, professional integrity, rural education, correlational study



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INTRODUCTION

Professional ethics form the cornerstone of the teaching profession, positioning educators not only as facilitators of learning but also as moral agents and exemplars of integrity (Board for Professional Teachers [BPT], 2019; Sari et al., 2021). Globally, ethical standards in education uphold accountability, fairness, and respect for human dignity — principles that are essential to maintaining public trust and institutional credibility (Hussein, 2020).

Ethical professionalism transcends pedagogical competence, encompassing compassion and a deep moral commitment to learners and society (Tirri, 2021; Oser & Johansson, 2020). In the Philippines, Republic Act 7836, "An Act to Strengthen the Regulation and Supervision of the Practice of Teaching in the Philippines and Prescribing Licensure Examination for Teachers," institutionalized the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers, defining the behavioral and moral expectations of licensed educators (BPT, 2019).

Despite this established framework, recent empirical findings have revealed persistent inconsistencies between teachers' ethical awareness and their actual professional practice (Libo-on & Eslabon, 2025; Gernalin, Bautista, & Maguate, 2023). Awareness serves as a crucial foundation for ethical compliance; without sufficient understanding of the Code, teachers may unintentionally deviate from professional standards (Hussein, 2020; Sari et al., 2021). Compliance, on the other hand, is not only a matter of personal conviction but also influenced by external factors such as school leadership, institutional culture, workload, and policy enforcement (Despolo, Eguizabal, & Lugo, 2018). These considerations underscore that ethical conduct in education is both an individual and organizational responsibility requiring continuous reflection, monitoring, and systemic support.

While several national and international studies have examined teacher ethics in urban and policy-intensive educational settings (Sari et al., 2021; Tirri, 2021; Hussein, 2020), there remains a contextual research gap concerning teachers in geographically isolated and resource-limited areas such as the island province of Catanduanes. In such rural settings, teachers often face unique ethical and professional challenges, including limited access to professional development, constrained administrative supervision, and community-based sociocultural pressures that may influence ethical decision-making (Oser & Johansson, 2020). The "Panganiban District"—a rural educational context within the Division of Catanduanes—presents a relevant setting to explore these dynamics, as teachers here operate within small communities where personal and professional roles frequently intersect. This proximity can blur ethical boundaries, potentially affecting adherence to the Code of Ethics and shaping how teachers interpret ethical obligations in practice.

Moreover, a knowledge gap persists in the local literature regarding how teachers in such peripheral regions perceive, internalize, and operationalize professional ethics. Existing

studies have largely concentrated on teachers' compliance levels but have given limited attention to the underlying awareness, contextual factors, and lived challenges that shape ethical conduct. Similarly, a methodological gap is evident, as few studies have utilized descriptive-correlational designs to examine the interrelationship among awareness, compliance, and contextual challenges in a single framework—particularly within the Philippine public elementary education context (Libo-on & Eslabon, 2025; Ingaran, Madriaga, Cagatao, & Bautista, 2025; Rafols & Pedroso, 2025).

Grounded in these gaps, the present study investigated the level of awareness, extent of compliance, and challenges faced by public elementary school teachers in upholding the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers in the Panganiban District, Division of Catanduanes. By addressing these gaps, the study provides localized empirical insights that can inform ethics education, teacher supervision, and professional accountability mechanisms. Ultimately, the findings aim to strengthen ethical integrity and professional responsibility among educators, particularly within the rural public-school system of the Philippines.

Statement of the Problem. This study aimed to determine the level of awareness, degree of compliance, and challenges encountered by public elementary school teachers in upholding the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers in Panganiban District, Division of Catanduanes. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of awareness of public elementary school teachers regarding the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers?
2. What is the level of compliance of public elementary school teachers with the provisions of the Code of Ethics?
3. What challenges do public elementary school teachers encounter in complying with the Code of Ethics.

4. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' level of awareness and their level of compliance with the Code of Ethics?
5. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' level of awareness and the challenges they encounter in complying with the Code of Ethics?
6. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' level of compliance and the challenges they encounter in adhering to the Code of Ethics?

Null Hypotheses. The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at a 0.05 significance level:

Ho₁. There is no statistically significant correlation between elementary teachers' level of ethical awareness and their level of compliance with the Code of Ethics.

Ho₂. There is no statistically significant correlation between elementary teachers' level of ethical awareness and the challenges they encounter in complying with the Code of Ethics.

Ho₃. There is no statistically significant correlation between elementary teachers' level of compliance and the challenges they face in adhering to the Code of Ethics.

Scope of the Study. This study was conducted in the Pangnaniban District, Division of Catanduanes, during the School Year 2024–2025. It aimed to assess the level of awareness, degree of compliance, and challenges experienced by public elementary school teachers in upholding the “Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers” as mandated by the Board for Professional Teachers under Republic Act No. 7836. The research encompassed all public elementary schools in the district, involving duly appointed teachers as respondents to represent the teaching force at the basic education level. It focused on three core dimensions of professional ethics: teachers' awareness of the Code, their compliance with its principles and standards, and the difficulties encountered in maintaining

ethical conduct within their professional context. These dimensions were examined both descriptively and relationally to identify possible correlations among awareness, compliance, and challenges.

Data were gathered using a structured, expert-validated survey instrument to ensure content validity and contextual appropriateness. The study was confined to professional and ethical practices directly related to instructional duties, community engagement, and institutional responsibilities, excluding administrative or legal disciplinary cases. Conducted from March to August 2025, this research aimed to generate empirical evidence that could inform educational policymakers, school administrators, and teacher education institutions. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of initiatives that enhance ethical awareness, strengthen compliance mechanisms, and address contextual barriers affecting teachers' adherence to professional and ethical standards within the Division of Catanduanes.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework. This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework combining the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, and the Neo-Kohlbergian Approach to explain how teachers' ethical awareness, moral reasoning, and contextual conditions shape their adherence to the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers. TPB provides the behavioral foundation by positing that ethical conduct is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2020). In this context, teachers' awareness of the Code forms ethical attitudes, while institutional expectations and school norms shape perceived obligations to comply. Empirical evidence confirms TPB's utility in predicting teachers' ethical decisions in structured educational environments (Chan & Zhang, 2021; Zafar et al., 2022). Complementing this, Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development situates teachers' ethical behavior within hierarchical moral reasoning structures—pre-conventional, conventional, and post-

conventional levels—which determine how individuals interpret, prioritize, and internalize ethical rules (Frisancho & Delgado, 2021). Teachers operating at conventional and post-conventional levels are more capable of transforming ethical awareness into consistent compliance, whereas those at pre-conventional levels may struggle despite knowledge of the Code. The Neo-Kohlbergian Approach further refines this mechanism by focusing on moral judgment schemas—personal interest, maintaining norms, and post-conventional schemas—highlighting how ethical challenges emerge when contextual pressures conflict with teachers’ dominant moral schema (Bebeau & Thoma, 2021; Narvaez & Rest, 2020). Integrating these perspectives, the study conceptualizes awareness as ethical cognition, compliance as the behavioral manifestation of stage- or schema-based moral reasoning, and challenges as contextual barriers that disrupt the translation of moral intention into action. This synthesis clarifies the hypothesized correlations among awareness, compliance, and challenges by identifying moral reasoning structures and schemas as the theoretical mechanism linking the variables. The study employed a correlative framework in which teachers’ ethical awareness and behavioral intentions influence ethical compliance and professional practice challenges (Figure 1).

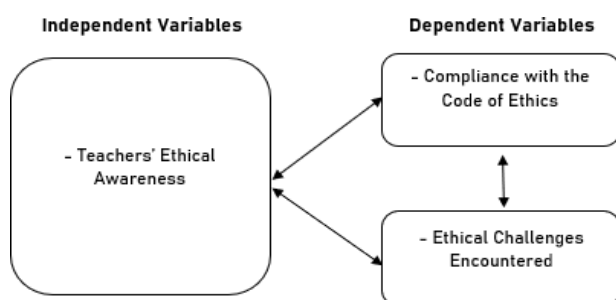


Figure 1
Conceptual framework illustrating the influence of teachers’ ethical awareness and behavioral intentions on ethical compliance and challenges in professional practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study draws on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to posit that teachers’ ethical

behavior is determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Andersson et al., 2022). Building on this psychological foundation, contemporary moral development research argues that ethical judgment evolves through increasingly sophisticated moral reasoning schemas, thereby equipping educators to make context-sensitive professional decisions (Ayenalem, 2022). Empirical evidence reveals that even when awareness is high, contextual barriers such as administrative workload, ambiguous or unclear ethical policies, and limited institutional monitoring hinder ethical enactment (Wang et al., 2024; Keshmiri et al., 2023). Correspondingly, effective professional ethics in teaching require not only knowledge of codes but also institutional supports such as mentoring and reflective practices (Sahin, 2021; Forster and Maxwell, 2023).

International studies provide foundational insights into professional ethics, but translation to the Philippine context requires localized investigation. Within the Philippines, although the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers and Republic Act No. 7836 provide a statutory backbone, localized studies note persistent implementation and comprehension gaps at the grassroots level (Libo-on & Eslabon, 2025; Ladica & Osias, 2024). For example, Libo-on and Eslabon (2025) found that public elementary teachers demonstrated high awareness and compliance with the Code of Ethics, yet daily ethical enactment remains underexplored. Similarly, research on teachers’ work ethics and professional behaviour revealed discrepancies between policy expectations and actual practice—highlighting that readiness for ethical implementation depends not only on formal rules but on contextual realities of teachers’ work (Ladica & Osias, 2024).

Methodologically, descriptive–correlational design, which employs weighted means and correlation analysis, are especially effective for examining perceptual and behavioral incongruities between policy intent and practice (Ricaplaaza and Quines, 2024; Ladica and Osias, 2024). Localized research in Catanduanes by

Cordial (2025a, 2025b) exemplifies how comparative perception analysis enhances understanding of policy compliance. His empirical studies on Disaster Risk Reduction Management (DRRM) revealed that stakeholder engagement and governance coherence are critical to community resilience and accountability. This finding resonates with evidence in education policy research (Gonzales et al., 2024), which argues that alignment between policy implementers and teachers is essential for integrity and compliance. Indeed, just as Cordial (2025b) demonstrated perceptual gaps undermining disaster readiness, similar misalignments between educational leadership and teachers may impede ethical adherence and institutional trust.

The need for institutional support in ethical compliance is similarly prioritized in the Philippine education sector. Research on the implementation of professional standards in the Philippines emphasizes that sustained teacher compliance and integrity are heavily dependent on supportive, collaborative school leadership and professional learning communities (DepEd, 2017). This national perspective mirrors international research, which likewise highlights that sustained ethical compliance requires a system of continuous professional development, transparent leadership, mentoring communities, and participatory policy structures (Carvalho, 2025; OECD, 2019). Taken together, these insights reveal a critical gap: while teachers may demonstrate ethical awareness, the translation into consistent, context-sensitive practice is contingent upon institutional support and active engagement. This study addresses this gap by examining the interplay between ethical awareness, moral reasoning, and institutional context in shaping teachers' compliance with professional standards.

METHODS

Research Design. This study employed a descriptive–correlational quantitative design to examine the interrelationships among ethical

awareness, perceived contextual challenges, and self-reported compliance of public elementary school teachers adhering to the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers in the Panganiban District, Division of Catanduanes, Philippines.

This design was chosen to address the empirical gap regarding localized relationships among these variables within the specific rural context of Catanduanes. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2020) and the Neo-Kohlbergian Approach to Moral Development (Rest et al., 2020), the study specifically aimed to determine the significant correlations among the three variables. Descriptive analysis identified prevailing conditions for each variable, while correlational techniques (e.g., Pearson's r) were used to determine the strength and direction of the interrelationships. The study employed validated survey instruments to collect data from 71 teachers across 12 schools in the district.

Population, Samples and Sampling Technique.

The population of this study is comprised of 71 teachers taken from the 86 public elementary school teachers across twelve schools in the Panganiban District, Division of Catanduanes. This group constitutes the target population to which the study findings are intended to generalize. The sample size was derived using Slovin's formula at a 5% margin of error (Tahira, Kazmi, & Zahid, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2020). Although the population size is relatively small and close to the total number of teachers, Slovin's formula provided a statistically objective, replicable basis for determining the minimum required respondents and ensured proportional representation across schools.

Proportionate allocation was subsequently applied to align each school's sample share with its actual population size, preventing over- or under-sampling. This approach promotes methodological clarity, adequate statistical precision, and reliable representation, supporting rigorous descriptive–correlational analysis of teachers' ethical awareness, compliance, and perceived challenges.

Instrumentation. This study utilized a researcher-developed questionnaire to assess public elementary school teachers' awareness, compliance, and challenges in adhering to the "Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers" (RA 7836) within the Pangniban District. The instrument was structured into three domains: ethical awareness, compliance behavior, and encountered challenges. Each represents a distinct dimension of professional ethics in the local education context. Items in the awareness domain were anchored to specific provisions of the Code, such as the statement, "I know that the schools are the nurseries of the future citizens of the state and I am a trustee of the cultural and educational heritage of the nation," which reflects Article II, Section 1 and emphasizes the teacher's civic and cultural role.

Compliance items translated ethical principles into observable actions, exemplified by "I uphold the dignity of teaching by demonstrating punctuality, preparedness, and respect in all school activities," aligned with Article VI. Meanwhile, the challenges domain explored barriers to ethical adherence, including resource limitations, as illustrated by the item, "Limited access to professional development hinders my ability to comply with ethical standards," which corresponds to Article IX.

All items were rated using a four-point Likert scale, as defined in the instrument matrix. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts in educational ethics, research methodology, and school leadership. A pilot test involving 20 teachers outside the study population yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.914, indicating strong internal consistency. Data collection was conducted anonymously to minimize social desirability bias and encourage honest responses. The use of correlational analysis enabled the study to examine interrelationships among awareness, compliance, and challenges, thereby providing deeper insight into the ethical dynamics influencing teacher behavior in Philippine basic education.

Table 1

Rating Scale Matrix for Teachers' Awareness, Compliance, and Challenges in Ethical Practice

Assigned Point	Numerical Range	Awareness Verbal Interpretation	Compliance Verbal Interpretation	Challenges Verbal Interpretation
4	3.25 – 4.00	Very High	Highly Compliant	Very Serious
3	2.50 – 3.24	High	Compliant	Serious
2	1.75 – 2.49	Low	Less Compliant	Less Serious
1	1.00 – 1.74	Very Low	Least Compliant	Least Serious

Legend: Awareness – Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the Code of Ethics; Compliance – Extent to which teachers adhere to professional ethical standards; Challenges – Perceived difficulties or barriers in implementing ethical practices.

Data Analysis. Data gathered from the 71 public elementary school teachers were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics to address the study's objectives. To determine the prevailing levels of ethical awareness, compliance behavior, and encountered challenges, weighted mean was computed for each domain, with verbal interpretations based on the 4-point Likert scale ranges defined in the instrument, thereby establishing current trends in knowledge and adherence. Concurrently, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's *r*) was employed to determine the significant interrelationships among the three core variables—awareness, compliance, and challenges—supporting the correlational design of the study. All statistical computations were conducted at the 0.05 level of significance. The comprehensive findings derived from these analyses offer evidence-based guidance to enhance ethical practice, professional development, and integrity in the Pangniban District (Tahira, Kazmi, & Zahid, 2020; Mathes, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2020).

Ethical Considerations. Ethical considerations in this study were rigorously observed by obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining strict anonymity and confidentiality. Adherence to established professional research ethics safeguarded participants' rights and reinforced the credibility and integrity of the data collection and reporting processes.

These practices align with contemporary standards for ethical conduct in educational research, emphasizing accountability, transparency, and the protection of human subjects (Kang & Hwang, 2023; Ederio, Inocian, Calaca, & Espiritu, 2023; BERA, 2024).

RESULTS

The results are organized according to each research problem, with dedicated headings reflecting the corresponding research questions. This structure facilitates a clear and systematic presentation of teachers' ethical awareness, compliance, and the challenges encountered in adhering to the Code of Ethics.

Level of Awareness of Public Elementary School Teachers on the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers. As presented in Table 2, elementary teachers demonstrate a very high level of ethical awareness, with weighted means ranging from 3.67 to 3.83 on a four-point scale. The highest mean of 3.83 in the teaching profession dimension indicates a strong grasp of core professional duties and active recognition of expected standards. Conversely, the slightly lower mean of 3.67 in the State dimension suggests that, while teachers maintain high awareness, familiarity with ethical responsibilities related to civic duties and societal engagement may be relatively lower. The overall mean of 3.76 underscores a consistently strong and internalized understanding of ethical principles, reflecting teachers' readiness to translate knowledge into professional practice.

Table 2
Summary of Elementary Teachers' Level of Awareness on the Code of Ethics

Ethical Dimension	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Rating	Rank
Teacher in Relation to the State	3.67	Very High (Strongly Agree)	4
Teacher in Relation to the Community	3.78	Very High (Strongly Agree)	2
Teacher and the Teaching Profession	3.83	Very High (Strongly Agree)	1
Teacher in Relation to Learners	3.74	Very High (Strongly Agree)	3
Overall Weighted Mean	3.76	Very High (Strongly Agree)	

Level of Compliance of Public Elementary School Teachers with the Provisions of the Code of Ethics. Table 3 indicates that elementary teachers also demonstrate a high level of compliance with the Code of Ethics across all dimensions. The highest weighted mean of 3.80 in the State dimension reflects consistent fulfillment of civic and professional obligations, whereas the slightly lower mean of 3.70 in the community dimension suggests some variation in engagement with local stakeholders. The overall mean of 3.75, categorized as highly compliant, demonstrates that teachers not only understand ethical standards but also translate them into consistent and observable professional behavior. Collectively, these results highlight a strong alignment between ethical knowledge and practical application, positioning teachers as conscientious professionals who uphold both civic and educational responsibilities.

Table 3
Summary of Elementary Teachers' Compliance Levels with the Code of Ethics

Ethical Dimension	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Rating	Rank
Teacher in Relation to the State	3.80	Highly Compliant (Strongly Agree)	1
Teacher in Relation to the Community	3.70	Highly Compliant (Strongly Agree)	4
Teacher and the Teaching Profession	3.77	Highly Compliant (Strongly Agree)	2.5
Teacher in Relation to Learners	3.73	Highly Compliant (Strongly Agree)	2.5
Overall Weighted Mean	3.75	Highly Compliant (Strongly Agree)	

Challenges Faced by Public Elementary School Teachers in Complying with the Code of Ethics. Table 4 presents the teachers' perceived challenges in adhering to the Code of Ethics. The highest mean of 2.91, categorized as serious, identifies adapting to the nation's cultural values and heritage as the most significant challenge, suggesting complexities in integrating professional responsibilities with societal norms. In contrast, the lowest mean of 1.52, described as least serious, reflects minimal difficulty in managing personal emotional attachments, indicating that teachers generally navigate interpersonal boundaries effectively. The overall weighted mean of 1.88 suggests that, collectively, the challenges

encountered are perceived as less serious, though targeted interventions may be necessary to support cultural integration and contextual ethical decision-making.

Table 4
Challenges Encountered by Public Elementary School Teachers in Upholding the Code of Ethics

Challenge Indicators	Frequency (n=71)				Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
	4	3	2	1			
1. Difficulty in adapting to the nation's cultural values and heritage.	0	28	26	17	2.91	Agree/ Serious	1
2. Challenges in promoting moral integrity, national pride, and constitutional allegiance.	10	26	24	11	2.49	Disagree/ Less Serious	2
3. Struggles in maintaining physical, mental, and moral well-being.	0	6	35	30	1.70	Strongly Disagree/ Least Serious	5
4. Limited time to engage in community-related initiatives.	0	4	36	31	1.61	Strongly Disagree/ Least Serious	9
5. Lack of leadership confidence to extend guidance to others.	1	12	30	28	1.80	Disagree/ Less Serious	3
6. Difficulty in separating personal religious beliefs from professional responsibilities.	0	2	44	25	1.67	Strongly Disagree/ Least Serious	7
7. Inability to pursue further studies for professional growth.	0	7	35	29	1.69	Strongly Disagree/ Least Serious	6
8. Challenges in fostering cooperation with colleagues.	0	3	40	28	1.64	Strongly Disagree/ Least Serious	8
9. Instances of allowing others to take credit for one's work.	0	7	40	24	1.76	Disagree/ Less Serious	4
10. Personal struggles in managing emotional attachments or relationships.	0	0	37	34	1.52	Strongly Disagree/ Least Serious	10
Average weighted mean					1.88	Disagree/ Less Serious	

Correlation Between Teachers' Level of Awareness and Level of Compliance with the Code of Ethics and Professional Standards. The correlation analyses further elucidate the relationships among awareness, compliance, and challenges. Table 5 reveals a very strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between teachers' awareness and compliance ($r = 0.98 > 0.250$ at $\alpha = 0.05$).

Table 5
Correlation Between Teachers' Awareness and Compliance Levels with the Code of Ethics and Professional Standards

Variables Examined	Statistical Test	Computed Value (r)	Critical Value ($\alpha = 0.05$)	Decision	Interpretation
Teachers' Level of Awareness vs. Teachers' Level of Compliance with the Code of Ethics	Pearson r	0.98	0.250	Significant	Higher levels of teachers' awareness are associated with greater compliance with the Code of Ethics across all ethical dimensions

The positive direction of the coefficient indicates that as awareness of ethical principles increases, compliance correspondingly increases across all professional dimensions. The magnitude reflects an almost perfect linear

association, underscoring the strong alignment between understanding and implementation of ethical standards. This finding confirms that fostering awareness directly supports consistent and exemplary professional conduct.

Relationship Between Teachers' Level of Awareness and Challenges Encountered in Complying with the Code of Ethics. Table 6 demonstrates the relationship between teachers' awareness and the challenges encountered in adhering to the Code of Ethics.

Table 6
Correlation Between Teachers' Level of Awareness and Challenges in Complying with the Code of Ethics

Variables Examined	Statistical Test	Computed Value (r)	Critical Value ($\alpha = 0.05$)	Decision	Interpretation
Teachers' Level of Awareness vs. Challenges in Complying with the Code of Ethics	Pearson r	-0.82	0.250	Reject H_0	Teachers' awareness shows a strong, negative correlation with compliance challenges, indicating that greater awareness is linked to fewer perceived difficulties.

The computed correlation ($r = -0.82 > 0.250$ at $\alpha = 0.05$) indicates a strong, negative, and statistically significant relationship. The negative direction signifies that higher awareness is associated with fewer perceived difficulties, and the magnitude reflects a robust inverse association. Practically, this underscores that awareness not only enhances understanding but also functions as a mitigating factor against obstacles, enabling teachers to navigate professional responsibilities more effectively.

Relationship Between Teachers' Level of Compliance and Challenges Encountered in Adhering to the Code of Ethics.

Table 7
Correlation Between Teachers' Level of Compliance and Challenges in Adhering to the Code of Ethics

Variables Examined	Statistical Test	Computed Value (r)	Critical Value ($\alpha = 0.05$)	Decision	Interpretation
Teachers' Level of Compliance vs. Challenges in Adhering to the Code of Ethics	Pearson r	-0.79	0.250	Reject H_0	Teachers' compliance shows a strong, negative, and significant relationship with the challenges they encounter, meaning higher compliance is associated with fewer challenges.

Similarly, Table 7 examines the relationship between teachers' compliance and the challenges they face. The correlation coefficient

($r = -0.79 > 0.250$ at $\alpha = 0.05$) shows a strong, negative, and statistically significant relationship, indicating that teachers with higher levels of compliance report fewer difficulties in professional practice. The negative association suggests that adherence to ethical standards acts as a protective factor, reducing the frequency and severity of challenges in ethical decision-making. This highlights the importance of promoting compliance as a practical mechanism for supporting teachers in maintaining professional integrity while minimizing barriers to ethical conduct.

Overall, the findings collectively demonstrate that teachers' ethical awareness and compliance are interrelated and inversely related to the challenges encountered. High awareness and compliance not only reinforce each other but also reduce perceived obstacles, suggesting a cyclical relationship in which understanding drives practice, and adherence strengthens confidence in navigating professional responsibilities. These results emphasize the critical role of awareness and compliance in fostering a professional environment where ethical principles are consistently upheld, challenges are minimized, and teachers are equipped to maintain high standards across all dimensions of practice.

DISCUSSION

The study's findings provide a comprehensive view of elementary teachers' ethical awareness, compliance, and perceived challenges in adhering to the Code of Ethics, highlighting the interplay between understanding, practice, and contextual obstacles. As presented in Table 2, teachers exhibit a very high level of ethical awareness, with weighted means ranging from 3.67 to 3.83. The highest mean in the teaching profession dimension (3.83) reflects a strong grasp of professional responsibilities and recognition of expected standards, whereas the slightly lower mean in the State dimension (3.67) suggests relatively less familiarity with civic duties and societal engagement. The overall mean of 3.76

underscores a consistent and internalized ethical understanding, indicative of readiness to translate knowledge into professional practice (Andersson et al., 2022; Ayenalem, 2022).

Table 3 indicates that teachers demonstrate high compliance across all dimensions, with the State dimension scoring highest (3.80) and the community dimension slightly lower (3.70). The overall mean of 3.75 confirms that teachers not only understand ethical principles but also implement them consistently in their professional behavior. This alignment between awareness and enactment emphasizes the practical significance of ethical knowledge in guiding professional conduct (Sahin, 2021; Forster & Maxwell, 2023).

Teachers' perceived challenges, summarized in Table 4, reveal that adapting to national cultural values and heritage is the most serious difficulty (mean = 2.91), while managing personal emotional attachments is least challenging (mean = 1.52). The overall mean of 1.88 suggests that challenges are generally perceived as less serious; however, context-specific support may enhance ethical decision-making, particularly in integrating cultural and societal expectations with professional responsibilities (Wang et al., 2024).

Correlation analyses further elucidate the relationships among awareness, compliance, and challenges. Table 5 demonstrates a very strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation between awareness and compliance ($r = 0.98 > 0.250$, $\alpha = 0.05$), indicating that higher awareness consistently translates into greater adherence to ethical standards. Table 6 shows a strong, negative, and significant relationship between awareness and challenges ($r = -0.82$), suggesting that greater awareness reduces the perceived difficulties of complying with the Code. Table 8 similarly reports a strong, negative, and significant association between compliance and challenges ($r = -0.79$), highlighting that adherence itself mitigates obstacles, functioning as a protective factor in professional practice. Collectively, these

correlations reveal a cyclical relationship in which awareness promotes compliance, and both constructs inversely relate to challenges, reinforcing teachers' capacity to navigate professional responsibilities effectively.

The findings align with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which posits that ethical behavior is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Andersson et al., 2022). Teachers with greater awareness and a supportive professional environment are more likely to act in accordance with ethical standards. Moral development theory further supports these results, suggesting that sophisticated moral reasoning equips educators to make context-sensitive ethical decisions (Ayenalem, 2022). Empirical studies underscore that while awareness is necessary, practical barriers—such as workload, unclear policies, and limited institutional support—can impede compliance (Wang et al., 2024; Keshmiri et al., 2023). Consequently, both knowledge and enabling conditions are critical for sustaining ethical conduct.

In the Philippine context, studies note that while teachers demonstrate high awareness and compliance with the Code of Ethics, operationalizing these principles in daily practice remains inconsistent (Libo-on & Eslabon, 2025; Ladica & Osias, 2024). Localized research in Catanduanes also emphasizes that alignment between policy expectations and teacher perception is vital for reducing professional challenges and reinforcing integrity (Cordial, 2025a, 2025b; Gonzales et al., 2024). Nationally, sustained compliance is facilitated by supportive leadership, professional learning communities, and mentoring programs (DepEd, 2017), while international evidence underscores continuous development and participatory governance as key to fostering ethical resilience (Carvalho, 2025; OECD, 2019).

In summary, the findings indicate that ethical awareness and compliance are mutually reinforcing and inversely related to professional challenges. Teachers with higher levels of awareness and compliance are better

equipped to navigate ethical responsibilities. Based on these results, it is recommended that school administrators implement targeted professional development programs focused on deepening ethical knowledge and moral reasoning. Additionally, establishing institutional support mechanisms, such as mentorship systems, ethics committees, and structured reflective practices, can help teachers address professional challenges more effectively. These interventions, grounded in the local context of public elementary schools, are adaptable to broader national and international educational settings, providing a scalable model for fostering a culture of integrity and professional accountability across diverse learning environments.

Author contributions. (Not available)

Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Artificial intelligence use. AI-assisted language editing was performed using ChatGPT; authors reviewed and approved all content.

Ethics approval statement. This study involved human respondents; however, formal ethical approval was not sought from the authors' institution. The authors affirm that participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality of responses was strictly maintained. No procedures were undertaken that posed risk or harm to the participants.

Data availability statement. All data supporting the findings of this study are included within the manuscript and its supplementary materials.

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