

Implementing Positive Discipline in Schools: Educator Challenges and Evidence-Based Recommendations for Systemic Reform

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ABSTRACT

Corporal punishment in Sri Lankan schools remains prohibited under national education policy, while a 2025 Penal Code (Amendment) Bill proposed an express statutory offence of corporal punishment against persons under 18; nevertheless, a persistent gap remains between policy prohibition and everyday disciplinary practice. Although prior research has documented the harms associated with punitive discipline, less is known about the practical, institutional, and sociocultural barriers that constrain teachers' adoption of positive alternatives. This study therefore aimed to identify the challenges teachers face when implementing non-punitive disciplinary approaches and to formulate evidence-based recommendations for a systemic positive discipline framework. A concurrent mixed-methods design was employed with 100 teachers and 200 students from ten government schools in the Sri Jayawardenepura Education Zone. Quantitative data from structured questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics, including priority-weighted mean scores and cross-category comparisons, while qualitative data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were analysed thematically. The findings show that barriers operate at multiple, mutually reinforcing levels. Large class sizes (83.7%) and time constraints (79.6%) were the most prominent school-level constraints; inadequate teacher training (77.6%) was the leading professional barrier; parental expectations of punitive discipline (73.5%) represented a substantial sociocultural obstacle; and the absence of national implementation guidelines (69.4%) was the principal systemic deficit. Five qualitative themes were identified: time and resource scarcity, the knowledge-practice gap, cultural and generational resistance, absence of systemic support, and the emotional cost of implementation. The latter highlights teacher exhaustion and professional isolation as a comparatively underexamined dimension of disciplinary reform. The study concludes that sustainable change requires coordinated action across teacher education, school leadership, parent engagement, resource allocation, monitoring, and national policy. A multi-stakeholder restorative discipline framework, supported by practical professional development and institutional accountability, is recommended.

Keywords: positive discipline; implementation challenges; teacher emotional burnout; education policy; child rights

INTRODUCTION

The persistence of corporal punishment in Sri Lankan schools, despite explicit legal prohibition, represents one of the most pressing challenges confronting the national education system. While the harmful effects of punitive disciplinary practices are well documented in both domestic and international research, the barriers that prevent teachers from adopting positive alternatives — and the policy frameworks needed to support that shift — have received comparatively little scholarly attention. This gap has direct practical consequences. Teachers know that punishment should not be used, but many lack guidance regarding suitable alternatives; administrators wish to develop supportive disciplinary policies but have no practical frameworks to draw upon; and policy makers seek to enforce the law but lack locally grounded evidence to inform implementation.

The Penal Code (Amendment) Bill introduced in 2025 proposed the insertion of Section 308B to expressly criminalize corporal punishment against persons under 18 (Government of Sri Lanka, 2025). Although this proposal should not be described as enacted law, it underscores the continuing policy and legislative attention given to protecting children from corporal punishment. Schools therefore need practical guidance to translate existing education policy and child-protection principles into non-punitive disciplinary practice. This study addresses that need by analysing implementation barriers and identifying evidence-based responses.

This article is analytically distinct from the authors' earlier publication on the same research programme (Sanjeevanie & Randeniya, 2026), which established the prevalence of punitive practices and educator attitudes toward positive alternatives. The present article draws on the same broader dataset to pursue a different analytical question: not whether teachers value positive discipline, but what specifically prevents them from implementing it, and at what personal cost. This distinction is elaborated further below.

Research objectives

This article addresses two research objectives:

- To identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing positive disciplinary approaches.
- To present evidence-based recommendations for a positive disciplinary framework as a systemic alternative to traditional punitive practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical framework

Five theoretical perspectives inform this study. Skinner (1938) showed that positive reinforcement builds lasting behavioral change more effectively than punishment, which suppresses behavior without developing self-regulation. Bandura (1977) demonstrated that teachers function as behavioral models: educators using supportive methods model prosocial norms, while those using punishment implicitly teach coercion as a conflict resolution strategy. Dreikurs (1968) positioned the teacher-student relationship as a partnership built on mutual respect, with natural and logical consequences replacing imposed sanctions. Glasser (1998) argued that developing student responsibility requires opportunities for autonomous reflection rather than fear-based compliance. Zehr (2015) proposed a restorative framework in which disciplinary encounters focus on repairing harm and restoring relationships. Together, these five perspectives provide a coherent rationale for moving beyond punitive methods.

Domestic evidence on implementation challenges

Domestic research consistently identifies the structural and professional barriers that impede positive disciplinary reform. The National Child Protection Authority (NCPA, 2017) found that teachers cited insufficient time, the influence of senior colleagues who model punitive practices, and limited knowledge of alternatives as key reasons for continued use of physical punishment. Menikdiwela (2020) found that secondary school teachers resort to punitive methods not by preference but due to large class sizes, time constraints, and resource scarcity. Jayasinghe (2021) confirmed that strategies disassociated from punishment are more effective for developing students' emotional management skills, but noted that teachers need structured support to build these competencies. These studies diagnose the problem without providing empirically validated, Sri Lanka-specific solutions — a gap this study directly addresses.

International evidence on implementation challenges

International scholarship identifies both the potential of positive disciplinary approaches and the importance of implementation quality. Gregory and Evans (2020), in their review of restorative justice in education, concluded that restorative initiatives can reduce exclusionary discipline and strengthen supportive school environments, while emphasizing that outcomes depend on comprehensive models and strategic implementation. Similarly, Lee and Gage (2020), in a systematic review and meta-analysis of school-wide positive behavioral interventions

and supports, found statistically significant reductions in school discipline and improvements in academic achievement, with small-to-medium effects. Together, these findings indicate that positive disciplinary reform is more likely to be sustained when evidence-based approaches are supported by coherent school-wide implementation, professional capacity, and institutional commitment.

The persistent law-practice gap

Despite Ministry of Education Circular No. 12/2016, which superseded the earlier Circular No. 2005/17, 86.7% of teachers in this research context continue to use physical punishment (Sanjeevanie & Randeniya, 2026). The 2025 Penal Code (Amendment) Bill further proposed an express offence of corporal punishment against persons under 18 (Government of Sri Lanka, 2025), but it should be distinguished from enacted law. This gap reflects not only individual teacher resistance but a systemic failure at the policy level: legal prohibition exists without operationalized guidelines, implementation infrastructure, or accountability mechanisms. Closing this gap requires more than legislation — it requires a comprehensive, evidence-based positive disciplinary framework, which is the focus of the present analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

A concurrent mixed methods design was used (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analyzed independently, and integrated at the interpretation stage. The quantitative strand employed a descriptive cross-sectional survey; the qualitative strand used phenomenological inquiry (Patton, 2015) to capture the lived experiences of teachers navigating implementation.

Participants and sampling

Ten government schools were selected from the Sri Jayewardenepura Education Zone through multi-stage stratified sampling, covering urban and semi-urban settings across three school types (Type 1AB, 1C, and 2). One hundred teachers were selected by subject department and 200 students in Grades 9 to 11 were sampled by grade level, with gender balance maintained. For the qualitative component, five in-depth interviews were conducted with school leaders and senior teachers, and five focus group discussions were held — two with teachers ($n = 16$) and three with students by grade level ($n = 30$) — until thematic saturation was reached.

Data collection

The teacher questionnaire comprised seven sections; Sections 5 and 6 are of primary relevance here. Section 5 assessed implementation challenges across 27 items in five categories (school, teacher, parent/community, student, and systemic), rated by priority (high, medium, low).

Section 6 gathered recommendations across 17 items in three categories (teacher training, school administration, policy), also rated by priority. Three open-ended questions elicited in-depth reflections. Semi-structured interview and focus group guides explored disciplinary barriers, systemic challenges, and recommendations for change.

Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed in SPSS Version 26 using descriptive statistics: frequency distributions, priority-weighted mean scores (3 = high, 2 = medium, 1 = low priority), and cross-category comparisons of these mean ratings across the five challenge domains.

These comparisons are reported as descriptive patterns in the priority-weighted means rather than as tests of statistical significance, and the findings should be interpreted accordingly. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with NVivo 12 software. Trustworthiness was established through methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement across eleven weeks of data collection, and member checking with selected participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Faculty of Education Ethics Review Committee, University of Colombo. Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants; parental consent was secured for all student participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all data were handled anonymously and confidentially throughout.

FINDINGS

Challenges faced by teachers in implementing positive discipline

School-level challenges

Table 1 presents school-level structural barriers, rated as the most acute implementation challenges among the five domains surveyed. Large class sizes (83.7%, $M = 2.82$) and time constraints (79.6%, $M = 2.76$) were identified as high priority by the largest proportions of teachers. These two factors directly undermine the practical conditions required for positive disciplinary engagement, as restorative and communication-based approaches demand individualized attention and relational investment that become increasingly difficult with larger classes and reduced instructional time. Resource deficiencies (65.3%), insufficient administrative support (59.2%), and the absence of school-level positive discipline policies (57.1%) were also rated among the more pressing challenges.

Table 1. School-Level Implementation Challenges (n = 98). M: 3 = High, 2 = Medium, 1 = Low priority.

School-Level Challenge	High %	Medium %	Low %	M (SD)
Large class sizes (30+ students)	83.7	14.3	2.0	2.82 (0.44)
Time constraints	79.6	16.3	4.1	2.76 (0.50)
Resource deficiencies	65.3	28.6	6.1	2.59 (0.60)
Insufficient administrative support	59.2	32.7	8.2	2.51 (0.64)
Absence of positive discipline policies	57.1	34.7	8.2	2.49 (0.64)
Predominantly traditional school culture	49.0	38.8	12.2	2.37 (0.69)
Lack of collegial support	42.9	44.9	12.2	2.31 (0.68)

Teacher-level challenges

At the individual level, inadequate training in non-punitive approaches (77.6%, $M = 2.73$) was the most prominent barrier — most teachers reported lacking the practical skills and confidence to implement these methods effectively. Limited access to practical demonstrations and replicable models (69.4%) reinforced that teachers need more than conceptual understanding; they need observable examples. The habitual use of traditional methods (63.3%) and the belief that positive approaches are ineffective (55.1%) represent deep-seated attitudinal barriers that knowledge provision alone cannot resolve. Emotional exhaustion associated with attempting implementation without institutional support (49.0%) was also identified as a notable individual-level challenge, foreshadowing the qualitative theme discussed below.

Parent and community-level challenges

Parental expectation of punitive discipline (73.5%, $M = 2.67$) was the most widely reported community-level barrier. Many parents continue to regard traditional disciplinary measures as necessary and appropriate, creating tension for teachers attempting to adopt alternative approaches. Low parental involvement (67.3%) compounded this difficulty, as supportive discipline frameworks require home-school alignment that cannot be achieved without active family engagement. Limited parental awareness of positive approaches (65.3%) and their limited application at home (59.2%) confirm that community education is an essential component of any sustainable reform strategy.

Systemic-level challenges

The absence of national policy-level guidelines for positive disciplinary implementation (69.4%, $M = 2.63$) was identified as the most critical institutional deficit. Without explicit Ministry of Education directives and operationalized frameworks, teachers lack the institutional legitimacy and professional infrastructure needed to sustain alternative approaches. The examination-driven orientation of the Sri Lankan education system (65.3%) directs attention toward syllabus coverage at the expense of social-emotional learning. The absence of national training provision (63.3%) and monitoring mechanisms (59.2%) reflect structural under-investment that individual teacher effort alone cannot compensate for.

Cross-category priority comparison

Table 2 presents a descriptive cross-category comparison of priority-weighted mean ratings. Systemic, parent/community, and school-level challenges show the highest mean ratings and are closely clustered, while teacher-level and student-level challenges show comparatively lower means. This pattern is noteworthy: it suggests that the most consistently prioritized barriers to positive disciplinary implementation lie outside the individual teacher, in the structural, institutional, and policy environment. As a descriptive pattern rather than a statistically tested difference, this finding should be treated as indicative rather than confirmatory; it nonetheless points toward interventions that address only teacher knowledge or skill, without simultaneously reforming the surrounding conditions, as unlikely on their own to achieve sustainable change.

Table 2. Cross-Category Comparison of Challenge Priority Ratings (n = 98).

Challenge Category	Mean (M)	SD	Priority Ranking
Systemic	2.57	0.54	1st (joint)
Parent/community	2.57	0.51	1st (joint)
School-level	2.55	0.48	1st (joint)
Teacher-level	2.48	0.52	4th
Student-level	2.44	0.58	5th

Qualitative themes: The lived experience of implementation

Thematic analysis of interviews and focus group discussions yielded five themes. Theme 1: Time and Resource Scarcity captured structural constraint as the most immediate practical barrier. A school principal stated: “We understand that positive discipline methods are better. But in this school, there are 35 to 40 children in every classroom. There simply is not time for a teacher to sit with each child individually, listen to their concerns, and develop behavioral plans.” Theme 2: The Knowledge-Practice Gap described the persistent distance between theoretical familiarity and classroom application. A mid-career teacher explained: “We have heard about positive alternative methods in training programs. But how to actually bring those into the classroom — that remains very unclear. There are no practical examples, no demonstrations, no models to follow.” Theme 3: Cultural and Generational Resistance captured the difficulty of transforming disciplinary beliefs shaped over decades of professional and cultural socialization. A principal reflected: “When I was a student, our teachers carried canes. We were afraid, but we respected them. Now, as a principal, I am told there is a discipline system without punishment. But my own internalized understanding is different. Changing that is enormously difficult.” Theme 4: The Absence of Systemic Support documented the experience of professional isolation among teachers attempting reform without institutional backing. A deputy principal stated: “Circulars arrive from the Ministry prohibiting physical punishment. But then what are we supposed to do? There are no guidelines, no training, no monitoring, no financial support.” Theme 5: The Emotional Cost of Implementation adds to a limited body of Sri Lankan educational literature examining the psychological consequences borne by teachers pursuing non-punitive reform without support. A mid-career teacher described: “Some days I feel like giving up. I try to be positive, give children opportunities, resolve things through dialogue. But nothing changes. The children behave the same. Parents complain that I am too lenient. The administration tells me to maintain discipline. This is exhausting.”

Recommendations for a positive disciplinary framework

Teacher training recommendations

Training programs incorporating practical classroom examples attracted the highest teacher training priority (87.8%, $M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.39$). The notably small standard deviation indicates unusually strong consensus that theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient — teachers need training grounded in real scenarios and replicable techniques. Implementation guidebooks (83.7%) and the opportunity to observe successful peers (79.6%) confirmed that teachers need accessible resources and observable role models. Regular feedback sessions (75.5%) and method demonstrations (73.5%) indicate that professional development must be sustained and iterative, not a one-time event.

School administration recommendations

Clear school-level positive discipline policies were the highest administrative priority (85.7%, $M = 2.84$). Without institutionally endorsed guidelines, teachers lack the structural support needed to implement alternative approaches with confidence. Consistent practices across all teachers (81.6%) directly addressed the qualitative finding that incoherence between individual teachers' approaches creates confusion and weakens reform. A school-based positive discipline resource center (77.6%), active principal leadership (75.5%), recognition and reward systems (73.5%), and parent awareness programs (71.4%) together confirm that sustainable implementation requires material resources, institutional authorization, and whole-school cultural change.

Policy-level recommendations

At the national level, developing a comprehensive positive discipline policy framework was the highest priority (83.7%, $M = 2.82$), as shown in Table 3. This finding responds directly to the policy-level gap most consistently identified throughout the study: schools receive prohibitive instructions without corresponding implementation guidelines or support. Rigorous enforcement of existing prohibition legislation (79.6%) was second-ranked, reflecting the qualitative consensus that prohibition without monitoring and accountability is insufficient to change entrenched practice. Dedicated financial provision (77.6%), mandatory continuing professional development (75.5%), and the integration of positive disciplinary frameworks into pre-service teacher education (73.5%) complete the national-level agenda.

Table 3. Policy-Level Recommendations Priority Ratings (n = 98). M: 3 = High, 2 = Medium, 1 = Low priority.

Policy-Level Recommendation	High %	Medium %	Low %	M (SD)
National positive discipline policy framework	83.7	14.3	2.0	2.82 (0.44)
Rigorous enforcement of prohibition laws	79.6	16.3	4.1	2.76 (0.50)
Dedicated funding for positive discipline	77.6	18.4	4.1	2.73 (0.51)
Mandatory CPD in positive discipline	75.5	20.4	4.1	2.71 (0.52)
Integration into initial teacher education	73.5	22.4	4.1	2.69 (0.53)

Qualitative recommendation themes

Five recommendation themes emerged from the qualitative data. Theme 1: From Theory to Practice called for professional development that moves beyond knowledge transmission toward active, context-specific skill-building. A principal proposed: “We recommend training programs incorporating practical case studies, role-play, structured observation visits to successful schools, monthly follow-up, and mentoring systems.” Theme 2: Whole-School Cultural Transformation emphasized that restorative discipline cannot rest on individual teachers but requires school-wide policy coherence. A deputy principal recommended: “A positive discipline committee; a policy booklet for all teachers, students, and parents; student leadership development; weekly recognition systems; and parent awareness programs.” Theme 3: Policy Clarity and Accountability identified the absence of operationalized national guidance as a fundamental obstacle. A principal stated: “Clear guidance from the Ministry is essential — a national framework, flexible contextual adaptation, an implementation timeline, and monitoring with accountability for violations.” Theme 4: Parent-School Partnership identified transforming

parental expectations as indispensable. A student articulated the need simply: “What we want is for our parents and teachers to understand us — to give us opportunities to talk.” Theme 5: Resources and Sustainability emphasized that reform requires deliberate resource allocation. A principal advocated for “counseling facilities and materials; budgetary provision for recognition systems; reduced timetable loads for teachers coordinating initiatives; and dedicated funding for teacher training.”

DISCUSSION

Three linked findings form the central argument of this study. First, implementation of positive discipline in Sri Lankan schools is best understood as an ecological or systemic problem rather than primarily a matter of individual teacher competence: the cross-category comparison (Table 2) shows systemic, parent/community, and school-level barriers rated above teacher- and student-level barriers, indicating that the conditions surrounding the classroom, not the classroom alone, most consistently constrain reform. Second, attempting positive disciplinary reform without institutional support carries a documented emotional cost for teachers, a dimension largely absent from prior domestic accounts of this problem. Third, legal prohibition of corporal punishment, on its own, is insufficient to change practice; without an implementation architecture — training, guidelines, resourcing, and monitoring — prohibition creates an expectation that schools and teachers cannot yet meet. These three findings are developed in turn below.

The multi-dimensional nature of implementation barriers

A central finding of this study is that barriers to positive disciplinary implementation operate simultaneously across structural, individual, community, and systemic levels, and appear mutually reinforcing in the qualitative data. The cross-category comparison (Table 2) shows that systemic, parent/community, and school-level challenges carry the highest priority-weighted means — consistent with the interpretation that the most consistently prioritized obstacles lie outside the individual teacher. This extends the domestic literature (NCPA, 2017; Menikdiwela, 2020) by documenting structural and institutional dimensions descriptively and in relation to one another. It is also consistent with Gregory and Evans (2020), who emphasize the importance of comprehensive implementation in restorative justice initiatives, and with Lee and Gage (2020), whose systematic review demonstrates that school-wide positive behavioral supports can improve disciplinary and academic outcomes when implemented as coherent systems. Interventions targeting only teacher knowledge, without addressing the surrounding conditions, are unlikely on this evidence to achieve sustainable change.

The emotional cost: An underexamined dimension

The fifth qualitative theme — the Emotional Cost of Implementation — represents a comparatively underexamined dimension of Sri Lankan disciplinary reform literature. Previous domestic research (Jayasinghe, 2021; Menikdiwela, 2020) documented teacher strategies and challenges without examining their psychological consequences in depth. The present findings add to this limited body of evidence by describing the emotional exhaustion, declining self-efficacy, and professional isolation reported by teachers pursuing non-punitive reform without institutional support. This is theoretically consistent with Glasser's (1998) basic needs framework: teachers whose needs for recognition and competence go unmet through unsuccessful implementation experiences may become psychologically vulnerable, which could undermine sustained commitment to change. Teacher psychological wellbeing therefore warrants treatment as a structural component of reform strategy, not a peripheral concern, though this interpretation would benefit from further, purpose-designed research.

Cultural and generational resistance

Theme 3 shows that cultural resistance to positive disciplinary reform is deeply rooted. As Bandura (1977) showed, behaviors internalized during formative professional socialization are particularly resistant to change when reinforced by institutional norms. The generational transmission of punitive practices appears to operate not only through individual belief formation but through active peer pressure: junior teachers who attempt restorative approaches described facing criticism from senior colleagues who regard such methods as signs of weakness. The present findings therefore suggest that cultural change should accompany technical training: peer modelling, reflective professional dialogue, and school-wide consistency are plausible strategies for addressing

entrenched disciplinary norms, although their effectiveness in the Sri Lankan context requires direct empirical testing.

The policy imperative

The recommendation data indicate that sustainable disciplinary reform requires a comprehensive, multi-level policy response. The strong prioritization of a national policy framework (83.7%) reflects the organizational void most consistently described by participants: legal prohibition exists without operationalized guidance, implementation mechanisms are largely absent, and accountability systems are limited. Training programs should address attitudinal transformation alongside knowledge transmission; participants' accounts suggest that changing beliefs, not only informing teachers, may be necessary for sustainable reform, a proposition that warrants dedicated empirical testing in future work.

Limitations

The sample was drawn from a single education zone and may not fully represent practices in rural, estate, or other regional contexts. The cross-sectional design limits causal conclusions, and the cross-category comparisons in Table 2 are descriptive rather than statistically tested; consequently, differences between categories should be interpreted as indicative patterns rather than confirmed effects. Teacher self-reports are subject to social desirability effects, and the emotional cost findings — though consistent across multiple participants — would benefit from longitudinal and quantitative validation using validated burnout or self-efficacy measures.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study supports five principal conclusions. First, barriers to positive disciplinary implementation are multi-dimensional, requiring a correspondingly multi-level reform response. Second, systemic barriers — the absence of national policy guidelines, enforcement mechanisms, and training infrastructure — carry the highest priority ratings, identifying the policy level as a primary locus for intervention. Third, the Emotional Cost of Implementation is documented here as a substantial and comparatively underexamined dimension of teacher professional experience in the Sri Lankan literature. Fourth, cultural and generational resistance is deeply embedded and will likely require sustained, multi-stakeholder engagement to shift. Fifth, the recommendation data provide an evidence-based agenda for reform, grounded in participants' own expertise and priorities.

For policy makers, a comprehensive positive discipline policy framework should be developed, aligned with existing child-protection obligations, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the policy direction reflected in the 2025 Penal Code (Amendment) Bill. A dedicated Ministry of Education implementation unit could coordinate policy development, training, and national data management.

A cascading teacher training program addressing both knowledge and attitudes should be designed and implemented nationally, with master trainers supporting zone-level delivery. A national monitoring system should track disciplinary practices and outcomes across school types, and a phased rollout — beginning with a pilot cohort and extending to all school types over several years — would support manageable, evidence-informed national scale-up.

For school administrators, written positive discipline policies should be developed through participatory processes. Professional development addressing both knowledge and attitudinal dimensions should be delivered to all staff. School-based positive discipline resource centers should be established, and structured emotional support for reform-minded teachers should be treated as an institutional priority.

For teachers, critical self-reflection on internalized disciplinary habits is a reasonable starting point, followed by the deliberate development of skills in restorative communication and positive reinforcement. Peer mentoring networks should be cultivated to reduce the professional isolation that the emotional cost findings suggest is a real and, for some teachers, damaging experience.

Relationship to previous research

This article builds on and extends the authors' earlier empirical publication, Sanjeevanie and Randeniya (2026), *Punitive Practices, Attitudes, and Positive Alternatives: An Empirical Study of School Discipline in Sri Lanka*, published in *Contemporary Issues in Humanities and Social Sciences: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. The earlier publication established the prevalence of punitive practices, educator attitudes, and the perceived value of positive alternatives, drawing on the same broader study of ten government schools in the Sri Jayewardenepura Education Zone. The present article draws on the same broader research programme but poses a distinct analytical question and reports a substantially different set of results: it examines *why* positive discipline is difficult to implement in practice, focusing specifically on multi-level implementation barriers, the comparatively underexamined emotional cost of unsupported reform, and multi-stakeholder recommendations for systemic policy and practice. No results, tables, or quotations are duplicated between the two articles. The earlier study is cited transparently throughout to distinguish prior findings from the present analysis, consistent with standard practice for a multi-paper research programme drawn from a single dataset.

Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available because they involve school-based human participants and are subject to ethical and confidentiality requirements. De-identified data may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to applicable ethical approval.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this article.

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