

Beyond Knowledge: The Influence of Teachers' Attitudes, Knowledge and Skills on Discipline Management in Rural Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills on discipline management in rural secondary schools in Sabah, Malaysia. Effective discipline management remains an important aspect of school administration, particularly within rural educational settings where teachers often encounter diverse behavioural and contextual challenges. Guided by the Professional Competence Continuum Model, the study employed a quantitative non-experimental cross-sectional correlational survey design. Data were collected from 317 teachers selected from 19 rural secondary schools in the Interior Division of Sabah using a multistage sampling procedure. The research instrument measured four constructs, namely teachers' attitudes, teachers' knowledge, teachers' skills, and discipline management. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis through IBM SPSS Statistics Version 30. The findings revealed that teachers' attitudes, knowledge, skills, and discipline management were all at high levels. Correlation analysis indicated significant positive relationships between teachers' attitudes, knowledge, skills, and discipline management. However, multiple regression analysis showed that only teachers' attitudes ($\beta = .289$, $p < .001$) and teachers' skills ($\beta = .311$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted discipline management, whereas teachers' knowledge did not demonstrate a significant predictive effect ($\beta = .062$, $p = .391$). Teachers' skills emerged as the strongest predictor of discipline management. The findings demonstrate that disciplinary knowledge alone does not independently predict discipline management effectiveness when considered alongside teachers' attitudes and practical disciplinary skills. Instead, teachers' attitudes and practical disciplinary skills emerged as the primary competency dimensions influencing effective discipline management in rural secondary schools. This study contributes to the literature on teacher competence and discipline management by providing empirical evidence from underrepresented rural secondary schools and offers important implications for competency-based teacher professional development and educational policy.

Keywords: Teacher Competence; Discipline Management; Teachers' Attitudes; Teachers' Skills; Rural Secondary Schools

INTRODUCTION

Discipline management remains one of the most important dimensions of school effectiveness because it directly influences students' behavioural development, classroom climate, emotional well-being, and academic achievement. Effective discipline management contributes to the establishment of safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments that facilitate meaningful teaching and learning processes. Contemporary educational settings have become increasingly complex due to growing behavioural diversity, socio-emotional challenges, and the increasing expectation for schools to promote inclusive and supportive learning environments. Consequently, discipline management is no longer viewed merely as behavioural control or punitive intervention, but rather as a professional practice involving behavioural support, emotional responsiveness, and the promotion of positive learning environments (Bear, 2010; Emmer & Sabornie, 2015). Recent evidence further suggests that

effective classroom management positively influences students' academic, behavioural, emotional, and motivational outcomes (Korpershoek et al., 2016).

The growing complexity of discipline management has intensified professional expectations placed upon teachers. Contemporary classrooms require teachers not only to maintain behavioural order but also to respond effectively to students' socio-emotional needs and diverse behavioural challenges. Recent studies indicate that effective behavioural management increasingly depends on teachers' professional competencies rather than solely on institutional disciplinary procedures (Burić & Kim, 2020; Gregory et al., 2021; Lazarides et al., 2020). Furthermore, positive classroom environments have been shown to influence students' behavioural development, emotional adjustment, and engagement in learning activities (Wang et al., 2024). These developments suggest that teachers' competencies play a critical role in determining the effectiveness of discipline management practices within schools.

Teacher competency is commonly conceptualised as a multidimensional construct comprising attitudes, knowledge, and skills that collectively influence professional performance and instructional effectiveness (Baumert & Kunter, 2013; Blömeke et al., 2015). Teachers' attitudes shape professional commitment, behavioural responsiveness, and willingness to engage in disciplinary responsibilities. Professional knowledge provides conceptual understanding of behavioural management strategies, disciplinary procedures, and classroom interventions, while practical skills enable teachers to implement disciplinary practices effectively in authentic classroom situations (Emmer & Sabornie, 2015). Although these competency dimensions are widely recognised as important contributors to professional effectiveness, empirical evidence regarding their relative influence on discipline management remains inconsistent. Some studies have highlighted the importance of teachers' attitudes and practical skills in supporting behavioural management effectiveness (Aldrup et al., 2018; Collie et al., 2020; Simonsen et al., 2008), whereas findings concerning the contribution of professional knowledge have been less conclusive (Blömeke et al., 2015; Guerriero, 2017; König et al., 2020).

The issue becomes particularly important within rural educational contexts. Rural schools frequently encounter contextual challenges such as geographical isolation, limited educational resources, reduced professional support, and broader socio-environmental constraints compared to urban schools (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Showalter et al., 2019). These contextual realities may influence the manner in which teacher competencies contribute to discipline management practices. Teachers working in rural educational environments often require stronger behavioural adaptability, practical responsiveness, and implementation capability to manage disciplinary situations effectively. Consequently, the relative influence of attitudes, knowledge, and skills on discipline management may differ from patterns reported in mainstream educational settings.

Despite growing interest in teacher competence and discipline management, several important research gaps remain. First, previous studies have generally conceptualised teacher competence as a multidimensional or unified construct without distinguishing the relative predictive influence of teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills on discipline management (Blömeke et al., 2015). Consequently, limited empirical evidence is available regarding which competency dimension contributes most significantly to effective discipline management. Second, existing research has predominantly focused on classroom management, behavioural outcomes, or general teacher effectiveness rather than discipline management as a distinct professional responsibility within schools (Bear, 2010; Emmer & Sabornie, 2015). Third, although studies on teacher competence have expanded considerably, most empirical investigations have been conducted in urban or mainstream educational settings, whereas rural secondary schools remain substantially underrepresented despite facing unique contextual challenges that may influence teachers' discipline management practices (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Showalter et al., 2019). Collectively, these gaps restrict current understanding of how different dimensions of teacher competence contribute to discipline management within rural educational environments.

Addressing these gaps is important because contemporary competency frameworks suggest that effective discipline management extends beyond disciplinary knowledge alone. Teachers are expected not only to possess adequate professional knowledge but also to demonstrate positive professional attitudes and practical disciplinary skills when responding to diverse behavioural situations. However, empirical evidence regarding the relative contribution of these competency dimensions remains limited, particularly within rural secondary school

contexts. Therefore, this study examines the influence of teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills on discipline management practices in rural secondary schools in Sabah, Malaysia. Specifically, the study investigates the extent to which these competency dimensions predict discipline management effectiveness among teachers working within rural educational contexts. By identifying the relative contribution of teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills to discipline management, this study contributes to the broader discourse on teacher competence while providing empirical evidence from underrepresented rural secondary school settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives

This study is grounded in the Professional Competence Continuum Model proposed by Blömeke et al. (2015), which conceptualises teacher competence as a dynamic interaction of cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions that collectively influence professional performance. Unlike traditional perspectives that view competence as a static attribute, the model emphasises that effective professional practice emerges through the integration of teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and skills when responding to authentic educational situations. Within the context of discipline management, this perspective suggests that teachers' effectiveness in managing student behaviour depends not only on what they know, but also on how they think, feel, and act in disciplinary situations.

The affective dimension of teacher competence is represented by teachers' attitudes towards discipline management. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) proposes that attitudes influence behavioural intentions, which subsequently affect actual behaviour. In addition, Eagly and Chaiken (1993) argued that attitudes reflect individuals' evaluative tendencies towards particular responsibilities and situations. In the present study, teachers' attitudes refer to their attitudes towards improving disciplinary knowledge and their moral responsibility in maintaining student discipline.

The cognitive dimension is represented by teachers' professional knowledge. Shulman (1987) emphasised that effective teaching requires specialised professional knowledge that guides educational decision-making and professional practice. This perspective is further extended by the COACTIV model, which identifies professional knowledge as a key component of teacher competence that supports effective instructional and behavioural decisions (Baumert & Kunter, 2013). Within this study, teachers' knowledge refers to their understanding of disciplinary principles and discipline enhancement programmes implemented in schools.

The behavioural dimension of competence is represented by teachers' professional skills. Boyatzis (1982) defined competency as a set of underlying capabilities that contribute directly to effective performance, while Spencer and Spencer (1993) highlighted the importance of observable behaviours in demonstrating professional competence. In discipline management contexts, these competencies are reflected through teachers' disciplinary process skills, including their ability to implement disciplinary procedures, manage behavioural incidents, and apply disciplinary interventions effectively.

The dependent variable of this study, discipline management, is informed by established perspectives on school discipline and classroom management. Bear (2010) emphasised the importance of balancing behavioural control and student development through preventive and developmental approaches, while Emmer and Sabornie (2015) highlighted the role of systematic classroom management practices in maintaining positive learning environments. In addition, the School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBIS) framework proposed by Sugai and Horner (2002) advocates proactive and school-wide approaches to promoting positive student behaviour. Collectively, these perspectives provide the theoretical basis for understanding discipline management within contemporary educational settings.

Teachers' Attitudes and Discipline Management

Teachers' attitudes represent an important affective dimension of professional competence that influences their beliefs, intentions, and behavioural responses in educational settings. According to the Theory of Planned

Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), attitudes influence behavioural intentions, which subsequently affect actual behaviour. In discipline management contexts, teachers' attitudes encompass their perceptions regarding the importance of disciplinary knowledge as well as their moral responsibility in maintaining student discipline. Positive attitudes towards these aspects are likely to encourage greater commitment and proactive engagement in discipline management practices.

Eagly and Chaiken (1993) conceptualised attitudes as psychological tendencies expressed through favourable or unfavourable evaluations of particular objects, situations, or responsibilities. Within schools, teachers who perceive discipline management as an essential professional responsibility are more likely to support preventive disciplinary measures, maintain behavioural expectations, and respond consistently to student misconduct. Positive professional attitudes may therefore strengthen teachers' willingness to apply disciplinary procedures and participate actively in initiatives aimed at promoting positive student behaviour.

Empirical evidence suggests that teachers' attitudes contribute significantly to effective classroom management and behavioural outcomes. Positive professional attitudes have been associated with supportive classroom climates, stronger teacher–student relationships, and greater readiness to implement behavioural interventions when necessary (Gregory et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024). In addition, teachers with favourable attitudes towards their professional responsibilities often demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy, resilience, and adaptability when dealing with disciplinary challenges (Burić & Kim, 2020; Collie et al., 2020). These findings indicate that attitudes influence not only teachers' perceptions of discipline management but also their professional actions when addressing behavioural issues.

From a competency perspective, attitudes function as an important affective resource that supports effective professional performance. Blömeke et al. (2015) argued that professional competence involves the interaction of cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions that collectively shape professional actions. Consequently, teachers who value disciplinary knowledge and recognise their moral responsibility in maintaining discipline may be more inclined to utilise their knowledge and skills effectively in managing student behaviour. Despite the recognised importance of teachers' attitudes, studies examining their influence on discipline management within rural secondary school settings remain limited. Therefore, further investigation is required to understand the contribution of teachers' attitudes to discipline management effectiveness in rural schools.

Teachers' Knowledge and Discipline Management

Professional knowledge constitutes a fundamental component of teacher competence because it provides the cognitive foundation necessary for informed decision-making and effective professional practice. Shulman (1987) emphasised that teachers require specialised professional knowledge that enables them to interpret educational situations, apply appropriate strategies, and respond effectively to classroom challenges. Within discipline management contexts, professional knowledge includes understanding disciplinary principles, school disciplinary procedures, and programmes designed to strengthen student behaviour and character development.

The COACTIV model further highlights professional knowledge as a key component of teacher competence that supports effective educational decision-making and classroom practice (Baumert & Kunter, 2013). Teachers who possess adequate knowledge of disciplinary principles and discipline enhancement programmes are generally better equipped to identify behavioural issues, interpret disciplinary situations, and implement appropriate intervention strategies. Such knowledge enables teachers to make decisions that are consistent with school policies and educational objectives while promoting positive student behaviour.

Previous studies have reported positive associations between teachers' professional knowledge and classroom management effectiveness. Teachers with stronger pedagogical and professional knowledge are more likely to establish orderly learning environments, manage behavioural challenges effectively, and support positive student outcomes (Guerriero, 2017; Korpershoek et al., 2016). Knowledge of discipline-related programmes and behavioural support initiatives may further enhance teachers' capacity to implement preventive and developmental approaches to discipline management.

However, contemporary perspectives on teacher competence suggest that knowledge alone may not be sufficient to ensure effective professional performance. Blömeke et al. (2015) proposed that professional knowledge contributes to performance through situation-specific processes involving perception, interpretation, and decision-making before it can be translated into action. This perspective suggests that although knowledge serves as an essential foundation for discipline management, its effectiveness depends largely on teachers' ability to apply that knowledge appropriately in real educational settings. Given the limited research examining discipline-related knowledge within rural secondary schools, further investigation is required to determine its contribution to discipline management effectiveness in such contexts.

Teachers' Skills and Discipline Management

Teachers' skills represent the practical dimension of professional competence that enables the application of knowledge and attitudes in authentic educational situations. Boyatzis (1982) defined competency as a set of underlying capabilities that contribute directly to effective job performance, while Spencer and Spencer (1993) emphasised that competencies become meaningful when demonstrated through observable behaviours. Within discipline management contexts, teachers' skills refer particularly to disciplinary process skills that enable them to implement disciplinary procedures, manage behavioural incidents, and maintain orderly learning environments effectively.

Effective discipline management requires teachers to demonstrate practical skills when dealing with student behaviour. These skills include implementing disciplinary procedures, documenting behavioural incidents, communicating with students and parents, conducting interventions, and applying disciplinary actions in accordance with established guidelines. According to Emmer and Sabornie (2015), effective classroom management depends not only on teachers' understanding of behavioural principles but also on their ability to implement appropriate management strategies consistently in daily practice.

The importance of professional skills is further supported by the Professional Competence Continuum Model proposed by Blömeke et al. (2015), which suggests that competence becomes visible through professional performance and action. In discipline management contexts, teachers may possess sufficient knowledge of disciplinary principles and maintain positive attitudes towards discipline, yet effective management ultimately depends on their ability to translate these resources into practical actions. Consequently, disciplinary process skills serve as an important mechanism through which professional knowledge and attitudes are transformed into effective discipline management practices.

Empirical studies consistently indicate that practical management skills contribute significantly to classroom management effectiveness and behavioural outcomes. Teachers who demonstrate strong behavioural management skills are more likely to establish positive classroom environments, reduce behavioural disruptions, and respond effectively to disciplinary challenges (Simonsen et al., 2008; Korpershoek et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2024). Nevertheless, limited evidence is available regarding the influence of disciplinary process skills within rural secondary schools. Therefore, further investigation is necessary to determine the contribution of teachers' skills to discipline management effectiveness in rural educational settings.

Rural Educational Context

Educational research has increasingly recognised that school context plays an important role in shaping teaching practices, professional performance, and student outcomes. Rural schools frequently operate under conditions that differ substantially from those experienced by schools in urban settings. These differences include geographical isolation, limited access to educational resources, reduced professional development opportunities, and broader socio-economic challenges that may influence both teaching and learning processes (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Showalter et al., 2019). Consequently, the effectiveness of educational practices, including discipline management, may be influenced by contextual factors unique to rural environments.

Within rural schools, teachers are often required to assume multiple professional responsibilities beyond classroom instruction. In addition to managing teaching and learning activities, they may be expected to address student welfare issues, behavioural challenges, community engagement, and administrative responsibilities. Such

circumstances require teachers to demonstrate greater adaptability, professional commitment, and practical problem-solving capabilities when responding to disciplinary situations. As a result, effective discipline management in rural schools may depend not only on formal disciplinary procedures but also on teachers' ability to apply appropriate attitudes, knowledge, and skills within complex educational environments.

The challenges associated with rural schooling may be particularly evident in geographically remote areas such as the interior regions of Sabah. Schools located in these areas often operate within environments characterised by limited infrastructure, restricted access to professional support services, and diverse socio-cultural backgrounds among students. These contextual realities may influence how teachers interpret behavioural issues, implement disciplinary practices, and maintain positive learning environments. Therefore, understanding the role of teacher competency in discipline management requires consideration of the contextual conditions within which teachers perform their professional responsibilities.

Despite increasing attention given to rural education, empirical studies examining discipline management within rural secondary schools remain relatively limited. Much of the existing literature on discipline management and teacher competency has been conducted in urban or mainstream educational settings, creating uncertainty regarding the applicability of these findings to rural contexts. Furthermore, limited evidence is available concerning the relative influence of teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills on discipline management within rural educational environments. Addressing this gap is important for developing a more comprehensive understanding of discipline management practices and informing strategies aimed at strengthening teacher competency in rural secondary schools.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the Professional Competence Continuum Model proposed by Blömeke et al. (2015), which views teacher competence as a multidimensional construct comprising affective, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions that collectively influence professional performance. Within the present study, these dimensions are represented by teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills, respectively. The model suggests that effective discipline management is influenced by the interaction of these competency dimensions as teachers respond to authentic educational situations.

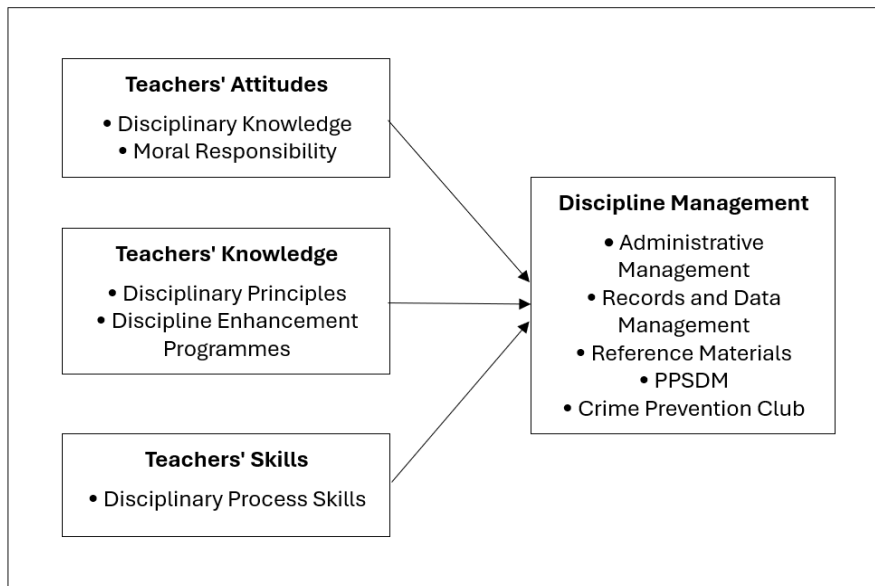
The affective dimension is represented by teachers' attitudes towards disciplinary knowledge and their moral responsibility in maintaining student discipline. This dimension is supported by the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that attitudes influence behavioural intentions and subsequent actions. The cognitive dimension is represented by teachers' knowledge of disciplinary principles and discipline enhancement programmes. This perspective is informed by Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Shulman, 1987) and further supported by the COACTIV model (Baumert & Kunter, 2013), which emphasise the importance of professional knowledge in guiding educational decision-making. The behavioural dimension is represented by teachers' disciplinary process skills, which are informed by competency theories proposed by Boyatzis (1982) and Spencer and Spencer (1993). These theories emphasise that effective professional performance depends on the ability to apply competencies through observable actions and behaviours.

The dependent variable of this study is discipline management, which encompasses administrative management, discipline records and data management, reference materials, student character development programmes, and crime prevention initiatives implemented within schools. Conceptually, discipline management is informed by perspectives on school discipline and classroom management proposed by Bear (2010), Emmer and Sabornie (2015), and Sugai and Horner (2002), which collectively emphasise systematic, preventive, and developmental approaches to managing student behaviour.

Based on the theoretical and empirical evidence reviewed, this study proposes that teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills positively influence discipline management practices in rural secondary schools. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework underpinning the study. Guided by the Professional Competence Continuum Model (Blömeke et al., 2015), teachers' attitudes, knowledge and skills are conceptualised as competency dimensions that influence discipline management practices in rural secondary schools.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

(Note. Adapted from the Professional Competence Continuum Model by Blömeke et al., 2015)



Accordingly, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Teachers' attitudes have a significant positive influence on discipline management in rural secondary schools.

H2: Teachers' knowledge has a significant positive influence on discipline management in rural secondary schools.

H3: Teachers' skills have a significant positive influence on discipline management in rural secondary schools.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative non-experimental cross-sectional correlational survey design to examine the influence of teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills on discipline management in rural secondary schools. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to examine relationships and predictive influences among variables without manipulating the research setting. Data were collected at one point in time using a structured questionnaire, and the findings were analysed statistically to address the research objectives.

Population and Sample

The study was conducted in rural secondary schools located in the Interior Division of Sabah, Malaysia. The target population comprised 1,780 secondary school teachers from 19 government rural secondary schools across four districts, namely Keningau, Pensiangan (Nabawan), Tambunan, and Tenom.

The sample size was determined based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table, which indicated that 317 respondents were sufficient for a population of 1,780. A multistage sampling procedure was employed. First, stratified sampling was used according to district categories. Second, cluster sampling was applied at the school level. Finally, simple random sampling was used to select teachers from the selected schools. The final sample consisted of 317 teachers.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on relevant literature, theoretical models, and discipline management frameworks. The questionnaire consisted of five sections. Section A gathered

demographic information. Section B measured teachers' attitudes using 20 items. Section C measured teachers' knowledge using 16 items. Section D measured teachers' skills using 9 items. Section E measured discipline management using 60 items. Overall, the final instrument comprised 105 items, excluding demographic items.

The attitude construct measured teachers' attitudes towards improving disciplinary knowledge and their moral responsibility in maintaining student discipline. The knowledge construct measured teachers' understanding of disciplinary principles and discipline enhancement programmes. The skills construct focused on disciplinary process skills. The discipline management construct covered administrative management, discipline records and data management, reference materials, student character development programmes, and crime prevention initiatives. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Prior to the actual study, a pilot study involving 100 teachers from rural secondary schools outside the main sample was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the instrument. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to establish construct validity. Following the pilot study and item refinement process, two items from the teachers' skills construct were removed, reducing the skills construct from 11 items to 9 items for the actual study. The final instrument demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the actual study, with Cronbach's alpha values of .966 for teachers' attitudes, .963 for teachers' knowledge, .960 for teachers' skills, and .981 for discipline management.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 30. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to determine the levels of teachers' attitudes, knowledge, skills, and discipline management. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between teachers' attitudes, knowledge, skills, and discipline management. Multiple regression analysis was then performed to determine the influence of teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills on discipline management.

Prior to inferential analysis, the assumptions of normality, outliers, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity were examined. The data met the required assumptions for parametric analysis. Statistical significance was determined at the .05 level.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were conducted to examine teachers' perceptions regarding attitudes, knowledge, skills, and discipline management practices in rural secondary schools. Overall, the findings indicated high levels across all study variables, suggesting that respondents generally perceived themselves as possessing favourable professional competencies and effective discipline management practices within their respective school contexts.

Teachers' attitudes demonstrated favourable levels of professional disposition towards discipline management responsibilities. Similarly, teachers' knowledge reflected positive perceptions regarding disciplinary procedures, behavioural intervention strategies, and school disciplinary policies. Teachers' skills also recorded relatively strong perceptions, indicating that respondents generally perceived themselves as capable of implementing practical classroom management and behavioural intervention strategies effectively. In addition, discipline management practices demonstrated positive overall perceptions, suggesting that respondents believed they were generally effective in maintaining school discipline and managing student behaviour within rural secondary school environments.

The descriptive findings indicate that teachers in rural secondary schools generally perceive themselves as professionally prepared to manage disciplinary situations. Nevertheless, descriptive statistics alone do not explain whether these competency dimensions meaningfully influence discipline management practices. Therefore, further inferential analyses were conducted to examine the relationships and predictive influence of the examined variables.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Teachers' Attitudes	4.07	0.61	High
Teachers' Knowledge	3.70	0.62	High
Teachers' Skills	3.85	0.63	High
Discipline Management	4.14	0.54	High

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between teachers' attitudes, knowledge, skills, and discipline management practices. The findings revealed that all three competency dimensions were positively and significantly associated with discipline management. In addition, significant positive relationships were also identified among the independent variables, namely teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

Teachers' attitudes demonstrated a moderate positive relationship with discipline management ($r = .513$, $p < .001$), indicating that teachers with stronger professional attitudes tended to report more effective discipline management practices. This finding suggests that positive professional dispositions, commitment, and behavioural responsiveness may contribute meaningfully to effective discipline management within rural secondary school settings.

Teachers' knowledge also showed a significant positive relationship with discipline management ($r = .467$, $p < .001$). The finding indicates that teachers possessing stronger disciplinary knowledge generally reported better discipline management practices. However, the strength of the relationship was comparatively lower than those observed for attitudes and skills, suggesting that theoretical understanding alone may not fully explain effective discipline management practices in authentic school contexts.

Among the examined competency dimensions, teachers' skills demonstrated the strongest positive relationship with discipline management ($r = .532$, $p < .001$). This finding suggests that practical disciplinary competencies, including behavioural intervention capability, communication strategies, and disciplinary implementation skills, may play particularly important roles in supporting effective discipline management practices within rural secondary schools.

The findings further revealed significant positive relationships among the independent variables. Teachers' attitudes were positively correlated with teachers' knowledge ($r = .581$, $p < .001$) and teachers' skills ($r = .602$, $p < .001$). Additionally, teachers' knowledge demonstrated a strong positive relationship with teachers' skills ($r = .759$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that the competency dimensions are conceptually related and tend to develop concurrently among teachers. Nevertheless, the correlation coefficients did not exceed the threshold of .90, indicating that multicollinearity was not a serious concern in the present study.

Overall, the correlation findings indicate that teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills were all significantly associated with discipline management at the bivariate level. However, correlation analysis alone does not determine the unique contribution of each competency dimension when examined simultaneously. Consequently, multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the strongest predictors of discipline management.

Table 2 Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Teachers' Attitudes	—	.581**	.602**	.513**
2. Teachers' Knowledge	.581**	—	.759**	.467**
3. Teachers' Skills	.602**	.759**	—	.532**
4. Discipline Management	.513**	.467**	.532**	—

Note. $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the extent to which teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills predicted discipline management practices in rural secondary schools. Prior to the analysis, assumptions relating to normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity were examined and found to be satisfactorily met. The tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values indicated no serious multicollinearity concerns among the independent variables, confirming the suitability of the regression model for further analysis.

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 313) = 54.491$, $p < .001$, indicating that the combined influence of teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills significantly explained variations in discipline management practices. The model accounted for 34.3% of the variance in discipline management ($R^2 = .343$; Adjusted $R^2 = .337$), suggesting that teacher competency dimensions contributed substantially to explaining discipline management effectiveness within rural secondary schools.

The findings further revealed that teachers' skills emerged as the strongest predictor of discipline management ($\beta = .311$, $p < .001$), followed by teachers' attitudes ($\beta = .289$, $p < .001$). Among the examined competency dimensions, practical disciplinary skills demonstrated the strongest predictive influence on discipline management, suggesting that behavioural implementation capability may be more critical than theoretical disciplinary understanding within rural school environments. The finding implies that teachers who possess stronger disciplinary process skills are more likely to manage student discipline effectively in challenging educational settings.

Teachers' attitudes also significantly predicted discipline management, indicating that positive professional dispositions, behavioural responsiveness, and commitment towards discipline management contribute meaningfully to discipline management effectiveness. Teachers demonstrating stronger professional attitudes may be more likely to respond constructively and consistently when managing disciplinary situations in schools.

In contrast, teachers' knowledge did not significantly predict discipline management when attitudes and skills were simultaneously included in the regression model ($\beta = .062$, $p = .391$). Although teachers' knowledge demonstrated a significant positive relationship with discipline management at the correlation level, its predictive contribution diminished after controlling for attitudes and skills. This finding suggests that disciplinary knowledge alone may not necessarily translate into effective discipline management practices without the support of positive professional attitudes and practical disciplinary competencies.

The non-significant effect of teachers' knowledge represents an important empirical finding in the present study. The result indicates that within rural secondary school contexts, effective discipline management may depend more heavily on teachers' behavioural responsiveness and practical implementation capabilities than on theoretical disciplinary understanding alone. The finding therefore highlights the differentiated influence of teacher competency dimensions in explaining discipline management effectiveness within rural educational environments.

Table 3 Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Discipline Management

Predictor	Standardized β	t	p
Teachers' Attitudes	.289	4.902	< .001
Teachers' Knowledge	.062	.860	.391
Teachers' Skills	.311	4.209	< .001

Model Summary

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	p
.586	.343	.337	54.491	< .001

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

The findings of the study provide partial support for the proposed hypotheses. Teachers' attitudes and teachers'

skills significantly predicted discipline management practices, thereby supporting Hypotheses 1 and 3. However, Hypothesis 2 was not supported because teachers' knowledge did not significantly predict discipline management when analysed together with attitudes and skills.

Table 4 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Teachers' attitudes significantly influence discipline management in rural secondary schools.	Supported
H2	Teachers' knowledge has a significant positive influence on discipline management in rural secondary schools.	Not Supported
H3	Teachers' skills significantly influence discipline management in rural secondary schools.	Supported

Overall, the findings demonstrate that discipline management effectiveness in rural secondary schools is more strongly associated with teachers' practical competencies and professional dispositions than with disciplinary knowledge alone. The differentiated influence of competency dimensions observed in this study provides important empirical insights into the complexity of teacher competency and discipline management relationships within rural educational settings.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the influence of teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills on discipline management in rural secondary schools in Sabah. The findings revealed that teachers' attitudes and skills significantly predicted discipline management, whereas teachers' knowledge did not demonstrate a significant predictive effect when analysed simultaneously with the other competency dimensions. Although teachers' knowledge demonstrated a significant positive bivariate relationship with discipline management, its unique contribution became non-significant when analysed simultaneously with teachers' attitudes and skills in the multiple regression model. This finding suggests that professional knowledge alone may not be sufficient to influence discipline management unless it is accompanied by positive professional attitudes and the practical ability to apply that knowledge effectively in authentic classroom situations. These findings indicate that effective discipline management depends not only on teachers' professional knowledge but also on their professional attitudes and their capacity to transform knowledge into effective disciplinary practices. Overall, the findings support the Professional Competence Continuum Model proposed by Blömeke et al. (2015), which conceptualises professional competence as the interaction of cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions that collectively shape professional performance.

The findings revealed that teachers' attitudes significantly influenced discipline management in rural secondary schools. This result supports the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which proposes that attitudes influence behavioural intentions and subsequently affect actual behaviour. Teachers who demonstrate positive attitudes towards disciplinary knowledge and recognise their moral responsibility in maintaining student discipline are more likely to engage actively in discipline management practices. The finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that positive professional attitudes contribute to stronger classroom management, more constructive teacher–student interactions, and greater commitment to behavioural intervention efforts (Gregory et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024). Within rural educational settings, where teachers frequently encounter diverse behavioural and contextual challenges, positive attitudes may encourage greater persistence and professional commitment in managing student behaviour effectively.

The study also found that teachers' skills emerged as the strongest predictor of discipline management. This finding highlights the importance of practical disciplinary competencies in supporting effective discipline management practices. The result is consistent with competency theories proposed by Boyatzis (1982) and Spencer and Spencer (1993), which emphasise that professional competence is ultimately demonstrated through effective performance and observable behaviours. The finding further supports the argument advanced by Blömeke et al. (2015) that professional competence becomes meaningful when knowledge and attitudes are translated into action through situation-specific performance. In the context of discipline management, teachers

may possess adequate disciplinary knowledge and positive professional attitudes, yet successful discipline management depends largely on their ability to implement procedures, manage behavioural incidents, communicate effectively with students and parents, and apply appropriate disciplinary interventions. Consequently, disciplinary process skills appear to play a particularly important role in ensuring effective discipline management within rural secondary schools.

An important finding of the present study is that teachers' knowledge did not significantly predict discipline management when examined together with attitudes and skills, despite demonstrating a significant positive relationship with discipline management at the correlation level. This finding suggests that disciplinary knowledge alone may not be sufficient to influence discipline management effectiveness unless it is translated into practical actions and behavioural competencies. Although teachers may possess a sound understanding of disciplinary principles, school regulations, and discipline enhancement programmes, such knowledge does not automatically result in effective disciplinary practices. This finding aligns with the perspective of Blömeke et al. (2015), who argued that professional knowledge contributes to performance through situation-specific processes involving perception, interpretation, and decision-making before it can influence professional action. The result therefore indicates that knowledge serves as an important foundation for discipline management, but its practical value depends largely on teachers' ability to apply that knowledge effectively in authentic educational situations.

The present finding also carries an important implication for teacher competency research. While professional knowledge has traditionally been regarded as a fundamental component of teacher competence, the present study demonstrates that knowledge alone does not necessarily translate into effective discipline management. Rather, disciplinary knowledge appears to exert its greatest value when integrated with positive professional attitudes and practical disciplinary skills. This finding reinforces the view that professional competence should be understood as a dynamic and multidimensional construct, in which cognitive resources become meaningful only when enacted through professional judgement and effective classroom practices.

The findings contribute to the existing literature on teacher competence and discipline management by providing empirical evidence from rural secondary schools in Sabah. Much of the existing research has been conducted in urban or mainstream educational settings, resulting in limited understanding of how teacher competency dimensions function within rural school environments. The present findings demonstrate that although knowledge remains an important component of professional competence, attitudes and skills play a more direct role in influencing discipline management effectiveness within rural educational contexts. This evidence extends the applicability of competency-based perspectives in explaining discipline management practices within geographically remote and resource-constrained school environments.

Overall, the findings indicate that effective discipline management reflects the combined influence of teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills, although these dimensions do not contribute equally. Teachers' skills emerged as the most influential factor, followed by teachers' attitudes, while teachers' knowledge did not independently predict discipline management when examined alongside the other competency dimensions. These findings reinforce the importance of developing teacher competency holistically through professional development initiatives that strengthen not only teachers' disciplinary knowledge but also their practical disciplinary skills and professional attitudes. Such efforts may contribute to more effective discipline management practices and more positive learning environments in rural secondary schools. Taken together, these findings suggest that strengthening teacher competence requires a balanced emphasis on cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions rather than relying solely on disciplinary knowledge.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on teacher competence and discipline management by providing empirical support for the Professional Competence Continuum Model (Blömeke et al., 2015). The results demonstrate that the dimensions of teacher competence do not contribute equally to discipline management effectiveness. While teachers' attitudes and skills significantly predicted discipline management, teachers' knowledge did not exert an independent predictive influence when examined alongside the other

competency dimensions. This finding extends existing competency-based perspectives by highlighting that disciplinary knowledge alone may not be sufficient to influence professional performance unless it is translated into positive professional attitudes and practical disciplinary actions.

The findings further support the argument that effective professional practice is shaped not merely by cognitive resources but by the interaction of affective, cognitive, and behavioural competencies. Consistent with the Professional Competence Continuum Model, the study demonstrates that teacher competence extends beyond the possession of knowledge and involves the application of knowledge through professional attitudes and practical skills. Consequently, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of teacher competence within discipline management contexts, particularly in rural educational environments.

Practical Implications

The findings suggest that efforts to strengthen discipline management should focus not only on improving teachers' disciplinary knowledge but also on enhancing practical disciplinary competencies and professional attitudes. Professional development programmes should therefore incorporate experiential learning opportunities, case-based discussions, behavioural intervention training, mentoring activities, and simulated disciplinary management exercises that enable teachers to apply disciplinary knowledge in authentic situations.

Given that teachers' skills emerged as the strongest predictor of discipline management, schools may benefit from providing continuous training related to disciplinary procedures, behavioural intervention strategies, conflict management, communication skills, and student behaviour support practices. Such initiatives may strengthen teachers' capacity to respond effectively to disciplinary challenges and improve overall discipline management effectiveness within schools.

The findings further suggest that professional development initiatives should prioritise competency application rather than knowledge acquisition alone, particularly in rural school environments where teachers frequently encounter complex disciplinary situations requiring immediate practical responses. Teacher professional development programmes should therefore move beyond conventional knowledge-based training towards competency-oriented learning that integrates reflective practice, behavioural rehearsal, coaching, mentoring, collaborative problem-solving, and authentic school-based experiences. Such an approach is more likely to strengthen teachers' capacity to respond effectively to increasingly complex disciplinary situations and improve discipline management practices within rural educational settings.

Policy Implications

The findings have important implications for educational policymakers, particularly the Ministry of Education Malaysia, the Sabah State Education Department, and district education offices responsible for supporting rural schools. Current professional development initiatives often emphasise knowledge acquisition through courses, workshops, and briefings. However, the present findings suggest that competency development programmes should place greater emphasis on practical disciplinary skills and behavioural management competencies.

Policy initiatives aimed at strengthening discipline management in rural schools should therefore promote competency-based professional development approaches that integrate knowledge, attitudes, and practical skills. Such initiatives should provide teachers with opportunities to engage in practical training, coaching, mentoring, and school-based professional learning activities that facilitate the application of disciplinary knowledge in authentic educational settings.

By adopting a more holistic competency development approach, educational authorities may enhance teachers' ability to manage student behaviour effectively, strengthen school discipline systems, and create more positive learning environments within rural secondary schools. Accordingly, competency-based professional development policies should recognise that strengthening teachers' disciplinary knowledge alone is unlikely to produce meaningful improvements unless accompanied by systematic opportunities to develop practical disciplinary competencies and professional attitudes. Such policy directions may contribute to more sustainable improvements in discipline management and foster safer, more supportive learning environments within rural secondary schools.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the influence of teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills on discipline management in rural secondary schools in Sabah. The findings revealed that teachers' attitudes and skills significantly predicted discipline management, whereas teachers' knowledge did not demonstrate a significant predictive effect when analysed simultaneously with the other competency dimensions. Among the examined competency dimensions, teachers' skills emerged as the strongest predictor of discipline management.

The findings of this study suggest that effective discipline management extends beyond disciplinary knowledge alone. Although professional knowledge provides an essential foundation for teachers' disciplinary responsibilities, it did not independently predict discipline management effectiveness when considered alongside teachers' attitudes and practical disciplinary skills. Instead, teachers' professional attitudes and disciplinary skills emerged as the primary competency dimensions influencing effective discipline management. These findings highlight the importance of developing teacher competence holistically by integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions, enabling teachers to translate professional knowledge into effective disciplinary practices within authentic school contexts.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature on teacher competence and discipline management by providing empirical evidence from rural secondary schools in Sabah. The findings reinforce the relevance of competency-based perspectives in explaining discipline management effectiveness and offer practical implications for teacher professional development and educational policy aimed at strengthening discipline management practices in rural schools.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that effective discipline management is determined not simply by what teachers know, but by how effectively they transform professional knowledge into positive professional attitudes and competent disciplinary practices.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), the Sabah State Education Department (JPNS), the relevant District Education Offices, and participating schools prior to data collection. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. Participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were maintained throughout the research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly available due to ethical and confidentiality considerations but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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