

The Impact of Indonesia's Child Protection Act on Classroom Discipline and Teacher Attitudes: A Case Study of SMKN 1 Barru

Aslindah Hasanuddin¹, Heri Tahir¹, Irsyad Dachri¹
¹Universitas Negeri Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia

Corresponding author e-mail: aslindah.hasanuddin@student.unm.ac.id

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Abstract: The Fourth Industrial Revolution has influenced education in Indonesia, including classroom management and discipline. This study examines: (1) how the Child Protection Act (Law No. 35 of 2014) is implemented in the learning process at State Vocational High School/SMKN 1 Barru, and (2) efforts made by school stakeholders to minimize violations of the Act. A qualitative descriptive approach was used. Data were collected through classroom observations, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with teachers and counseling staff, and documentation review during June–August 2018. The findings show that teachers demonstrate mixed attitudes toward the Act: some perceive it as supporting humane education, while others fear criminalization and thus avoid disciplinary actions. Stakeholders attempt to reduce violations through tiered guidance based on the severity of student misconduct, strengthening communication among teachers, students, school leaders, and parents, and emphasizing non-physical disciplinary strategies.

Keywords: Child Protection Act, Learning Process, Teacher Discipline, Vocational School

A. Introduction

Across the world, schools are increasingly expected to be places where children learn in safety, dignity, and respect. Global child-rights frameworks emphasize that education must protect children from violence and degrading treatment while also supporting their holistic development (Dito, S. B. et al., 2021; Erdianti, R. N., et al. 2020). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by Indonesia and most countries, affirms children's rights to survival, development, participation, and protection from all forms of violence and harmful punishment (UNICEF, 1989). In education settings, this means that discipline should be constructive, proportional, and non-violent (Azzahra, A., et al. 2023; Adzillah, S. N. I., et al. 2024). Contemporary evidence also shows that corporal punishment still practiced in many contexts harms children's physical and mental health and does not improve behavior in the long term, strengthening global policy pressure to replace punitive discipline with restorative approaches (End Corporal Punishment. 2024).

In Indonesia, child protection has been embedded in the nation's constitutional and legal commitments since independence. The Preamble of the 1945 Constitution mandates the state to "educate the life of the nation," which implies that schooling must foster well-being and security for every child (Fitrianto, I., et al. 2025; Nasution, N., et al. 2025). This mandate became more specific through national child-protection legislation, culminating in Law No. 35 of 2014 (amending Law No. 23 of 2002) on Child Protection, commonly referred to as the Child Protection Act (Republic of Indonesia. 2017). The Act explicitly positions children as rights-holders who must be protected from violence, neglect, discrimination, and harmful treatment in all spaces, including schools (Noer, K. U. Et al. 2021; Recibe, J. O. 2024). In parallel, Indonesia's education system also requires teachers to create effective learning climates that build character and literacy. The Revised 2016 Curriculum 2013 and the Strengthening Character Education policy (PPK) introduced through Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 emphasize integrity, religiosity, nationalism, independence, and mutual cooperation as core values developed through everyday learning and school culture (Kurniasih, H et al., 2018; Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. 2022). Therefore, Indonesian schools operate under two interconnected imperatives: protecting children's rights and ensuring disciplined, character-building learning environments.

These imperatives become more complex in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0). IR 4.0 has accelerated technological change and reshaped social interaction, communication, and learning models. In Indonesian education, one prominent impact is the shift from purely face-to-face classical instruction to blended and online learning environments supported by internet technology (Dito, S. B. et al. 2021; Salindry, A. E. Et al. 2025). This shift increases the need for adaptive classroom management. Teachers are not only facilitators of knowledge but also managers of learning behavior across physical and digital spaces. When classroom discipline weakens through lateness, truancy, disruption, or disengagement learning outcomes and character education goals can deteriorate (Sungsang, J. et al. 2023; Widodo, P. et al. 2024).

However, discipline in Indonesia has long been entangled with culturally familiar punitive practices (Windari, R. et al. 2021; Zulkarnain, A. et al. 2024). Many teachers historically relied on physical or humiliating punishments to enforce rules, believing these methods deter misconduct and preserve classroom order. The Child Protection Act challenges this tradition by prohibiting violence and placing legal consequences on abusive actions (Republic of Indonesia. 2014). Ideally, this legal protection encourages humane pedagogy and safer schools. Yet in practice, the Act can be interpreted by teachers as a threat of criminalization, especially when legal socialization is limited and media narratives highlight cases of teachers being reported for disciplinary incidents (Umbase, R. S. et al. 2024; Salindri, A.E., et al. 2025). Such

perceptions may reduce teachers' willingness to correct misbehavior, producing a tension between the necessity of discipline for learning and the obligation to avoid child-rights violations. This tension is not unique to Indonesia but becomes acute where professional training on non-violent discipline is insufficient and where the boundary between correction and abuse is poorly understood (Asio, J. M. R., et al. 2020; Darojati, N. L., et al. 2023).

This study is situated in that policy and social context. Preliminary observations at State Vocational High School (SMK Negeri) 1 Barru suggest that classroom discipline has become a sensitive issue after the Child Protection Act gained prominence. Teachers reported uncertainty about what disciplinary actions remain acceptable; some became hesitant to intervene in student misconduct for fear of violating the Act. When teachers withdraw from disciplinary roles, classroom control may decline and students may repeat violations without meaningful guidance. At the same time, counseling guidance (BK) teachers and school leaders must maintain school order and learning continuity while ensuring compliance with child-protection law. These conditions indicate a potential "implementation gap": a policy designed to protect children may unintentionally contribute to weaker classroom governance when interpreted mainly through fear rather than through pedagogical guidance.

Based on this background, the research problem can be stated as follows: How does the implementation of the Child Protection Act shape disciplinary practices and classroom learning at State Vocational High School/SMKN 1 Barru, and what efforts are undertaken to prevent violations while sustaining effective learning? To address this problem, the study asks two explicit research questions:

1. How is the Child Protection Act (Law No. 35 of 2014) implemented in the learning process at State Vocational High School 1 Barru?
2. What efforts do school stakeholders (teachers, BK staff, and school leadership) make to minimize violations of the Act during classroom learning?

Answering these questions is significant for several reasons. First, empirically, it clarifies how teachers interpret and operationalize child-protection norms in everyday learning, particularly in vocational school contexts where student discipline issues may be frequent. Second, practically, it informs schools and policymakers about the kinds of support teachers need such as legal socialization, professional development in restorative discipline, and clearer school-level protocols to reconcile child protection with effective classroom management. Third, theoretically, the study contributes to discussions on policy implementation in education, showing how legal mandates interact with teacher beliefs and institutional culture under conditions of rapid socio-technological change linked to IR 4.0. Finally, for Indonesia's character-education agenda, understanding discipline under child-rights constraints is crucial to ensuring that PPK values are not merely stated in curriculum documents but practiced through humane and consistent school governance.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case-study design to examine in depth how the Child Protection Act is implemented in daily classroom learning and how it influences disciplinary practices in a specific school setting. A qualitative descriptive approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to capture participants' real experiences and interpretations in a natural context. The case-study orientation was used to focus the investigation on one bounded institution, enabling detailed analysis of policy-practice interactions. This design is appropriate for exploring tensions between legal child-protection mandates and practical classroom management. Overall, the approach prioritizes rich description and meaning-making from multiple perspectives within the school community shown in figure 1.

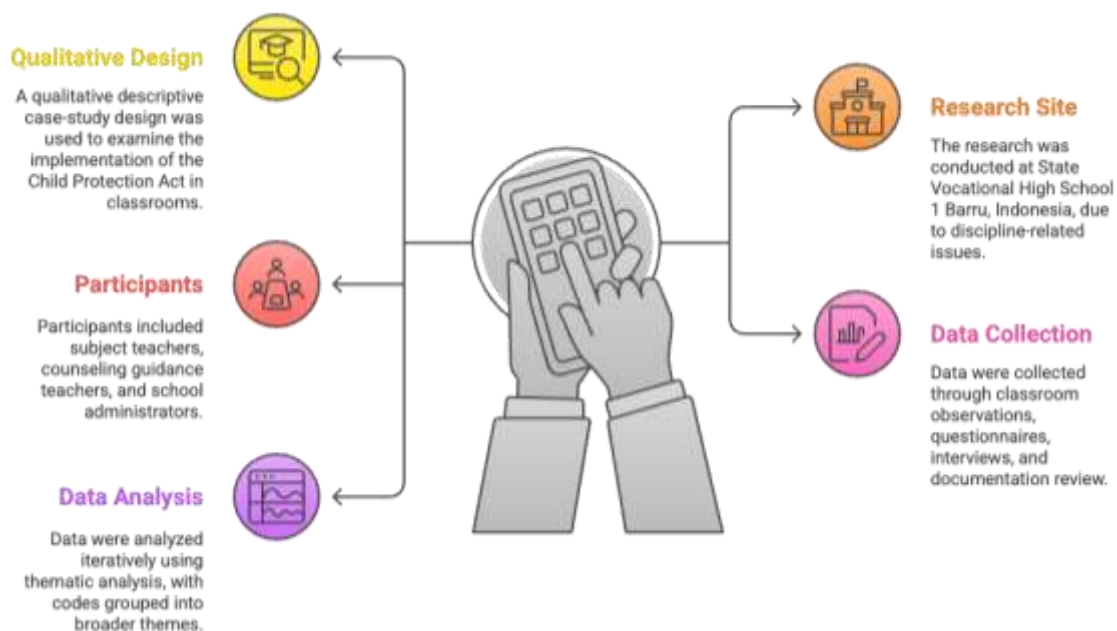


Figure 1. The Process of Analysis Data

The research site was purposively selected at State Vocational High School 1 Barru, Barru Regency, Indonesia. This school was chosen because preliminary surveys and early observations indicated persistent discipline-related issues during lessons, such as student lateness, truancy, and leaving class while instruction was ongoing. These characteristics made the site information-rich for understanding the practical impact of the Child Protection Act on learning control. Data collection was conducted from June to August 2018 so that the researcher could observe routine teaching cycles within one semester period. The time frame also enabled follow-up interviews and document checks to confirm emerging findings.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure that those most directly involved in classroom discipline and child-protection implementation were included. The study involved 30 subject teachers from different departments and grade levels, because they are the main actors responsible for enforcing rules during lessons. In addition, seven counseling guidance (BK) teachers participated, as they formally manage behavioral interventions and oversee student-violation records. The study also included two to three school administrators, such as the vice principal for student affairs and a discipline coordinator, to clarify school-level policies and procedures. Inclusion criteria required that participants were actively serving in their roles during the research period and agreed to participate voluntarily.

Data were obtained using four complementary techniques to strengthen depth and triangulation. First, classroom observations were carried out across several lessons using an observation checklist and field-note guide that recorded types of student misconduct, teacher disciplinary responses, references to the Act in practice, and immediate classroom outcomes. Second, a structured questionnaire was distributed to all subject teachers, containing closed and short open-ended items on their awareness of the Act, sources of information, perceived boundaries of discipline, and self-reported practices. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, BK staff, and administrators using protocols tailored to each group, with interview topics ranging from experiences of discipline after the Act to stakeholder coordination strategies. Fourth, documentation review was undertaken on school rules, violation logs, counseling records, and relevant school circulars to verify interview accounts and map formal procedures. These four sources provided converging and contrasting evidence for analysis.

All data were analyzed iteratively using thematic analysis. The process began with data reduction by organizing observation notes, transcribing interviews, cleaning questionnaire results, and cataloguing documents. The researcher then applied initial coding to label meaningful units linked to the research questions, such as “fear of criminalization,” “avoidance of physical punishment,” “tiered guidance,” and “minor versus moderate violations.” Codes were grouped into broader themes, compared across participant categories, and displayed through narrative summaries and frequency tables. Credibility was enhanced through method triangulation across observations, questionnaires, interviews, and documents, and discrepancies were treated as analytic findings rather than errors. Ethical safeguards included informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity in reporting, and secure storage of all research data.

C. Results and Discussion

Result

Teachers' Knowledge of the Child Protection Act

This section reports teachers' baseline knowledge of the Child Protection Act because awareness and legal literacy are central to how discipline is interpreted and enacted in classrooms. Teachers who lack clear understanding may either violate the Act unintentionally or avoid disciplinary intervention out of uncertainty. To assess awareness and sources of information, questionnaires were administered to 30 subject teachers.

Tabel 1. Teacher knowledge about the Child Protection Act

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	28	93.33%
Do not know	2	6.67%
No answer	0	0%
Total	30	100%

As shown in Table 1, the vast majority of teachers (93.33%) reported knowing about the Child Protection Act, while only two teachers (6.67%) indicated that they did not know the Act. This finding suggests that the Act has reached teachers at the level of general recognition. However, self-reported awareness does not necessarily imply substantive legal understanding, particularly regarding permissible disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, teachers' reported sources of information were examined to clarify the depth and character of their knowledge.

Tabel 2. Sources of information about the Act

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Colleagues	2	6.67%
Print media (books/newspapers)	2	6.67%
Electronic media (TV/social media)	26	86.66%
Total	30	100%

Table 2 indicates that most teachers (86.66%) learned about the Act primarily through electronic media, including television and social media, whereas only small proportions reported learning through colleagues (6.67%) or print media (6.67%). Reliance on mass and social media may broaden awareness but often provides fragmented or case-focused narratives rather than systematic legal or pedagogical guidance. Consequently, teachers may hold incomplete or imprecise interpretations of the Act, which can shape their disciplinary decisions through uncertainty rather than informed judgment.

Teachers' Disciplinary Attitudes in Classrooms

This subsection describes teachers' disciplinary practices and their perceived legal-emotional stance toward the Child Protection Act. The analysis focuses on (a) the type of guidance teachers used in response to student misconduct and (b) the extent to which fear of legal consequences influenced discipline. These data were derived from teacher questionnaires and supported by classroom observations.

Table 3. Type of guidance given to students

Guidance type	Frequency	Percentage
Physical punishment	2	6.67%
Non-physical guidance	28	93.33%
No answer	0	0%
Total	30	100%

As presented in Table 3, nearly all teachers (93.33%) reported using non-physical forms of guidance, while only 6.67% acknowledged using physical punishment. This distribution indicates broad compliance with the Act's prohibition of violent discipline. Nevertheless, questionnaire responses and observational notes suggested that avoidance of physical punishment was not always grounded in well-developed restorative strategies. Instead, several teachers appeared to choose minimal or indirect corrective actions because they perceived disciplinary intervention as legally risky.

Table 4 Perceived fear/trauma toward the Act

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Trauma	5	16.67%
Fear of being criminalized	23	76.66%
Not afraid	2	6.67%
Total	30	100%

This interpretation is reinforced by Table 4, which shows that 76.66% of teachers reported fear of criminalization and 16.67% reported trauma related to the Act's possible consequences. Only 6.67% indicated no fear. In other words, most teachers construed the Act as a potential threat rather than as a framework supporting humane discipline. Under such conditions, teachers may avoid firm correction, reduce confrontation, or transfer disciplinary responsibility to counseling staff. This pattern can weaken classroom control and contribute to the teacher apathy described by BK teachers.

Patterns of Student Violations and Stakeholder Responses

This subsection summarizes the forms of student misconduct occurring most frequently and describes how school stakeholders responded within the boundaries of the Act. Data were obtained from interviews with seven BK teachers and were cross-checked with school disciplinary documentation. BK teachers consistently

described recurring violations that could be grouped into three severity levels. Minor violations included lateness, untidy uniforms, non-standard footwear, and littering indicating weak adherence to daily school norms. Moderate violations included truancy/alpha behavior, hair length beyond school standards, and carrying or using mobile phones during lessons. Severe violations were reportedly rare and involved risky behaviors such as substance misuse (e.g., inhalant/fox glue use). This pattern indicates that discipline challenges in this setting were dominated by routine misconduct rather than high-severity delinquency, but such repeated minor and moderate violations still disrupted learning continuity.

Stakeholders primarily used tiered, non-physical interventions. Initial responses involved verbal warnings and counseling; repeated violations led to written statements and parent contact. School leaders emphasized that disciplinary rules were communicated and agreed upon with parents and students during enrollment, and that guidance should prioritize coaching over punitive force. These practices indicate institutional efforts to sustain order while maintaining legal compliance and child-rights standards. However, triangulation revealed inconsistencies between BK interview claims and written violation logs. Several verbal reports were not fully supported by documentation, suggesting that record-keeping practices were not yet systematic. Weak documentation limits the school's ability to track trends objectively or evaluate intervention effectiveness over time. Thus, the discipline problem was not solely behavioral but also administrative, affecting the reliability of monitoring and follow-up. Overall, the Child Protection Act functioned as a legal framework promoting humane education, yet its classroom impact depended heavily on teachers' interpretations. Although teacher awareness was high, their knowledge was largely media-derived, which may explain pervasive fear of criminalization. This fear produced a dual effect: teachers avoided physical punishment (consistent with the Act), but many also hesitated to apply firm, consistent non-violent discipline. When corrective actions became inconsistent or overly cautious, repeated minor and moderate violations persisted because students experienced limited behavioral consequences.

Stakeholders attempted to mitigate this through graduated non-physical sanctions and parent involvement. Still, inconsistent documentation reduced the school's capacity to evaluate discipline patterns and refine responses. Consequently, the Act's influence in this context was indirect: it altered teacher behavior through perceived legal risk, and this altered behavior shaped classroom climate and learning control. Strengthening teachers' legal literacy and training in restorative discipline is therefore critical to ensuring that child protection complements rather than unintentionally undermines effective classroom management.

Discussions

This case study investigated how Indonesia's Child Protection Act (Law No. 35 of 2014) shapes classroom discipline and teacher attitudes at SMK Negeri 1 Barru. The findings reveal a consistent pattern: teachers' awareness of the Act is high, yet their day-to-day disciplinary practices are strongly mediated by fear of legal consequences. This confirms that legal child-protection policies can produce different classroom effects depending on how teachers internalize the law, the quality of policy socialization, and the availability of non-violent discipline alternatives within schools. In other words, the Act's influence is not simply normative; it is enacted through teacher perceptions and institutional routines.

First, the data show that nearly all teachers knew of the Child Protection Act, but most acquired their knowledge from television and social media. This reliance on informal media channels is critical because it often frames child-protection issues through prominent criminal cases involving teachers rather than through balanced professional guidance. Recent Indonesian legal and educational scholarship has stressed that such media-driven knowledge environments contribute to *misinterpretation* of what constitutes unlawful punishment and what forms of disciplinary authority remain legitimate (Windari, R., et al. 2021). In practice, teachers may come to treat the Act as a punitive threat rather than a pedagogical safeguard, producing what policy research terms a socialization gap high awareness without operational clarity. Similar conclusions were reported in recent school-level studies in Indonesia showing that teachers often feel uncertain about legal boundaries in discipline after the Act's strengthening, especially when formal training is limited (Zahara, N. 2021). Thus, the present findings align with broader evidence that legal literacy, not merely awareness, determines whether child-protection policy supports or destabilizes classroom governance.

Second, the strong avoidance of physical punishment in this study indicates compliance with the Act's prohibition of violence. Importantly, however, teachers' compliance appeared intertwined with fear: over three-quarters of participants reported fear of criminalization. This result parallels recent national discussions and empirical work describing a growing "teacher vulnerability" narrative after the Act's amendment, whereby even routine corrective actions are perceived as potentially criminal (Windari, R., et al. 2021; Sipahutar, A. I., et al. 2024). Legal analyses published in the last five years emphasize that the Child Protection Act is frequently applied in public discourse without sufficient differentiation between abusive violence and proportionate, educational discipline, resulting in defensive teaching practices (Windari, R., et al. 2021). From an educational perspective, this matters because effective discipline is not synonymous with punishment; it requires consistent, proactive guidance. When teacher authority becomes fear-based and overly cautious,

the classroom may shift toward low-intervention management, producing the “apathy” noted by BK staff in this case.

Third, the persistence of minor and moderate student violations in SMK Negeri 1 Barru can be interpreted as a downstream consequence of cautious disciplinary climates. The violations described lateness, truancy, uniform noncompliance, mobile-phone use are common in Indonesian schools and are typically regulated through routine correction. Yet when teachers fear disciplinary escalation into legal conflict, correction can become inconsistent or delayed. Multiple recent Indonesian studies similarly report that teacher reluctance to discipline after child-protection law enforcement is associated with weaker classroom control and repeated low-level misconduct (Zahara, N. 2021; Tanduklangi, R. 2023). The pattern suggests a feedback loop: fear reduces firmness; reduced firmness normalizes small violations; repeated violations further erode teacher confidence. Importantly, this does not imply that child-protection law inherently weakens discipline. Instead, it shows that discipline capacity must be rebuilt through lawful, non-violent strategies, otherwise the law is experienced mainly as restriction.

Fourth, stakeholder responses in this case tiered non-physical sanctions, counseling, and parent communication demonstrate a school-level attempt to reconcile discipline with child rights. These practices correspond to Indonesia’s broader movement toward *child-friendly schools* and non-violent disciplinary frameworks promoted in recent years by national and international child-protection actors (End Corporal Punishment. 2024; UNICEF Indonesia. 2023). However, the present study also found inconsistency between BK interview claims and written violation logs, indicating weak documentation. This matters because effective restorative or tiered discipline depends on reliable behavior tracking and coordinated follow-up. Recent work on child-friendly school implementation in Indonesia similarly emphasizes that policy success requires not only eliminating violence, but also strengthening school systems for monitoring, referral, and parent partnership. Therefore, the documentation gap found here should be understood as an institutional barrier that prevents the school from evaluating whether its non-violent strategies are reducing violations over time.

Taken together, the findings support a central argument: the Child Protection Act acts as a humane legal umbrella, but its classroom effects depend on teachers’ legal literacy and confidence in restorative discipline. Where socialization is informal and fear dominates, teachers avoid violence yet also avoid firm correction, indirectly weakening discipline. Recent legal scholarship in Indonesia has called for clearer regulatory harmonization between teacher-protection provisions and the Child Protection Act to prevent disproportionate criminalization while still deterring abuse (Zulkarnain, A., et al. 2024).. In practical terms, this case suggests several priorities: (a) structured legal socialization for teachers focused on clear boundaries and examples of lawful discipline; (b) professional development on restorative and behavior-

support practices so teachers do not equate non-violence with passivity; and (c) improvement of documentation systems so BK interventions are evidence-based and trackable. These steps would allow child protection to enhance classroom order rather than unintentionally erode it.

Finally, this study has limitations. As a single-site case study in a vocational school, findings are context-specific and should not be generalized automatically to other school types or regions. In addition, questionnaire responses may underreport physical punishment due to social desirability. Future research could compare multiple schools across provinces, include student and parent perspectives, and evaluate how formal training in child-rights-based discipline changes teacher confidence and student behavior over time. Still, as a detailed case, this study contributes to recent Indonesian scholarship by illustrating how fear-mediated teacher attitudes become the key pathway through which child-protection law affects classroom discipline.

D. Conclusions

This study shows that the Child Protection Act functions as an important legal umbrella for humane education, but its classroom impact at SMK Negeri 1 Barru is shaped mainly by teacher perceptions rather than by clear legal understanding. Most teachers are aware of the Act, yet their knowledge comes largely from television and social media, which leads to uncertainty about what disciplinary actions are lawful. As a result, teachers overwhelmingly avoid physical punishment, but many also hesitate to apply firm and consistent non-violent discipline because they fear being criminalized. This fear contributes to reduced classroom control and allows routine student misconduct especially minor and moderate violations such as lateness, truancy, uniform noncompliance, and phone use to recur. School stakeholders, particularly counseling teachers and administrators, respond through tiered non-physical guidance and parent communication, indicating commitment to child protection while maintaining order; however, weak documentation of violations limits effective monitoring and evaluation of interventions. Practically, these findings imply that child protection policy will support learning only when teachers receive structured training on the Act's boundaries and on restorative, non-punitive discipline strategies that keep classrooms orderly without violence. Schools also need stronger systems for recording violations and coordinated collaboration among teachers, counselors, parents, and community partners so that guidance is consistent and evidence-based. The study is limited by its single-school case-study design and reliance on teacher self-reports, which may understate sensitive practices; therefore, future research should compare multiple schools, include student and parent perspectives, and examine how formal legal socialization and restorative-discipline training affect teacher confidence, disciplinary consistency, and student behavior over time.

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