TEACHER PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND STUDENT RESPECT IN INDONESIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: AN EMOTION REGULATION PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Declining students' respect toward teachers has become a growing concern in Indonesian secondary schools, particularly amid rapid social and cultural change. This study examines the relationship between students' perceptions of teacher professional responsibility and their respectful behavior toward teachers. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 300 students enrolled in vocational and general secondary schools in Indonesia. A Likert-scale questionnaire measured students' perceptions of respectful behavior and three dimensions of teacher professional responsibility: instructional, ethical, and relational. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis. The findings indicate that 62.7% of students demonstrated moderate to low levels of respectful behavior, particularly in verbal conduct and adherence to classroom norms. Most students (68.4%) perceived teacher professional responsibility primarily in terms of instructional delivery rather than ethical guidance or relational engagement. Correlational analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between students' perceptions of teachers' ethical and relational responsibility and their respectful behavior ($r = 0.49$, $p < .001$). In contrast, perceptions limited to instructional competence showed a weaker association with students' respect. These results suggest that professional responsibility defined by ethical consistency and relational engagement is more strongly associated with students' respect than responsibility framed solely as instructional competence. The study highlights the importance of integrating ethical and relational dimensions into teacher professional development and school policy to strengthen respectful classroom interactions in Indonesian secondary education.

Keywords: educational ethics, professional responsibility, respect-centered education, students' perceptions

Introduction

Respect toward teachers is a core ethical principle that underpins effective educational practice and constructive teachers-students relationships Within educational ethics, respect is understood not merely as compliance with authority but as a moral disposition that affirms dignity and trust in pedagogical interactions (Sockett, 2012). Empirical observations indicate that verbal defiance, refusal to follow classroom rules, and the weakening of formal boundaries between teacher and students, especially in secondary school settings has been reported in recent studies (Sitompul, 2018 ; Sari & Nugroho, 2022). Rahman et al. (2023) found that students tend to associate professionalism primarily with teacher pedagogical competence, while ethical conduct and relational sensitivity receive less attention. This narrow understanding risks marginalizing the

moral dimensions of teaching that are central to the cultivation of respect and positive students behavior.

From the perspective of educational ethics, scholars argue that professional responsibility should be conceptualized as an integrated ethical construct, as teaching is inherently a moral practice requiring ethical consistency and relational accountability as teaching is inherently a moral practice in which ethical consistency and relational accountability are fundamental (Campbell, 2013). Similarly, Oser (2018) highlights teacher roles as moral agents whose daily actions model values such as fairness, care, and respect.

Empirical research supports this view, indicating that when students perceive discrepancies between teacher instructional roles and their ethical conduct, respect tends to diminish, often resulting in disengagement and behavioral problems (Maxwell & Schwimmer, 2016). The issue of declining respect toward teacher has also become highly visible in Indonesian public discourse. Throughout 2025, national media outlets reported several incidents involving overtly disrespectful student behavior toward teacher, including verbal confrontations and challenges to teacher authority (Antara, 2025; Kompas, 2025; Detik News, 2025). These cases sparked public debate about the erosion of moral values, discipline, and respect within schools. Educational policymakers and school leaders have responded by emphasizing character education and stricter disciplinary measures as potential solutions. While such approaches are important, they often focus primarily on students behavior without sufficiently examining the ethical dimensions of teacher professional responsibility.Existing research in Indonesia has largely addressed declining respect through the lenses of classroom management strategies, disciplinary policies, or character education programs (Hidayat & Pramono, 2021). Although these study offer valuable insights, they tend to treat respect as an outcome of external regulation rather than as an ethical principle embedded in professional practice. More recent findings suggest that students are more likely to demonstrate respectful behavior when they perceive teacher as ethically grounded, relationally consistent, and culturally responsive (Putri et al., 2024).

Despite growing attention to teacher professionalism and student behavior, many studies still conceptualize respect as a secondary outcome of disciplinary practices rather than as an ethical principle embedded in professional responsibility (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Oser, 2018). This perspective separates professional competence from moral authority, leaving ethical dimensions of teaching such as fairness, consistency, and relational sensitivity underexplored (Sockett, 2012; Campbell, 2013). Consequently, the moral and relational processes through which respect develops in everyday pedagogical interactions are often overlooked.Research in educational ethics suggests that students continuously evaluate teachers actions for ethical coherence, including how rules are enforced, how conflicts are handled, and how students dignity is acknowledged (Maxwell & Schwimmer, 2016; Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013). When these ethical signals are perceived as inconsistent or instrumental, professional authority may be seen as procedural rather than morally legitimate, thereby weakening students willingness to demonstrate respectful attitudes and behaviors.

Relational ethics scholars argue that respect emerges through reciprocal moral recognition, where students feel treated fairly and acknowledged as moral agents (Noddings, 2013; Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). When professional responsibility is enacted in ways that affirm students dignity, cultural context, and voice, respect becomes a shared ethical disposition rather than a unilateral demand enforced through hierarchy or sanctions. Conversely, when professional responsibility is perceived as narrowly technical, emotionally distant, or inconsistently applied, students may disengage morally, leading to diminished respect and increased resistance to classroom norms (Wentzel, 2015).

In the Indonesian context, this ethical-relational dynamic is particularly salient due to the coexistence of long-standing cultural norms that emphasize respect for authority figures and contemporary social influences that increasingly challenge traditional hierarchical relationships.

Indonesian educational culture has historically positioned teachers as moral exemplars deserving deference (Suyanto & Hisyam, 2019). However, rapid digitalization, expanding access to social media, and shifting family school relations have reshaped students expectations of authority and interaction, fostering more horizontal and dialogical orientations toward teachers (Setiawan & Hadi, 2022).

Recent media reports documenting conflicts between teachers and students, including cases of verbal confrontation and physical altercation, illustrate how respect can no longer be assumed as an automatic cultural inheritance but has become a contested moral construct in everyday school life (Antara, 2025; Kompas, 2025). This situational complexity underscores the need to move beyond deficit-oriented narratives that frame declining respect solely as a problem of students discipline or moral decay. Research indicates that such narratives risk obscuring the role of institutional practices and professional conduct in shaping students behavior (Biesta, 2015). Instead, a growing body of scholarship calls for closer examination of how professional responsibility is enacted, interpreted, and morally evaluated by students within specific socio-cultural contexts (Oser & Althof, 2019).

Quantitative studies in Indonesia have largely operationalized professionalism in terms of pedagogical skills, administrative compliance, or performance standards, offering limited insight into how ethical responsibility and relational engagement influence students respectful behavior (Rahman, Widodo, & Lestari, 2023; Putri, Anwar, & Yusuf, 2024). This gap constrains the development of contextually grounded frameworks capable of addressing respect as a moral and relational phenomenon rather than as a disciplinary issue to be managed.

By positioning respect as an ethical principle rather than merely a behavioral outcome, this study extends the concept of teacher professionalism beyond technical competence. The study aims to:

1) This study examines Indonesian secondary school students' perceptions of respect and teachers' authority within everyday teacher-student relationships.
2) It further analyzes how teachers' professional responsibility is students understand, with particular attention to the relative emphasis placed on instructional competence compared to ethical conduct and relational practice.
3) Finally, the study investigates the extent to which students' perceptions of teacher ethical and relational responsibility predict their respectful attitudes and behaviors toward teachers.

This study provides policy-relevant insights for strengthening teacher professionalism in Indonesia by emphasizing respect as an ethical foundation of professional responsibility.

Literature Review

Teacher professional responsibility as an ethical construct

Teacher professionalism has traditionally been conceptualized in terms of technical competence and instructional effectiveness within institutional standards (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).Within this framework, professional responsibility is often reduced to fulfilling contractual obligations, delivering curriculum, and maintaining classroom order. While such dimensions are important, scholars of educational ethics argue that this technocratic orientation offers an incomplete account of professional responsibility, as it marginalizes the moral and relational dimensions (Sockett, 2012; Campbell, 2013). Oser (2018) emphasizes that teachers function as moral agents whose daily decision discipline students, respond to mistakes, or exercise authority carry ethical significance. Maxwell & Schwimmer (2016) argue that professional responsibility is fundamentally ethical, as it involves balancing institutional expectations with moral obligations toward students' dignity and well-being respect toward teachers is not merely a behavioral expectation but a moral response to ethically grounded professional responsibility.

When these ethical dimensions are neglected, professionalism risks becoming procedural rather than morally grounded. Recent studies suggest that students are highly sensitive to teachers' ethical conduct and interpret professionalism through relational experiences rather than formal qualifications. Tirri and Kuusisto (2013) found that teacher moral awareness and ethical reflection significantly influence classroom climate and students trust. This indicates that professional responsibility cannot be fully understood without examining how it is perceived by students in everyday pedagogical interactions.

Respect in education: from authority to relational ethics

Respect has long been regarded as a cornerstone of educational relationships, traditionally grounded in hierarchical authority and institutional roles. In many cultural contexts, including Indonesia, respect toward teachers has been historically associated with obedience, deference, and social norms emphasizing authority figures (Suyanto & Hisyam, 2019). However, contemporary educational research increasingly challenges the assumption that respect can be sustained solely through positional authority. Relational ethics scholars conceptualize respect as a reciprocal moral disposition that emerges through ethical interaction, care, and recognition rather than unilateral enforcement (Noddings, 2013; Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). Wentzel (2015) demonstrates that positive teacher students' relationships characterized by mutual respect are strongly associated with students' engagement, motivation, and prosocial behavior.

Importantly, respect is not merely an attitudinal outcome but a relational process shaped by students' interpretations of teacher ethical actions. Maxwell & Schwimmer (2016) note that students assess the moral legitimacy of teacher authority based on how rules are applied and whether students' voices are acknowledged. When authority is exercised without ethical justification or relational sensitivity, respect may deteriorate into compliance driven by fear or disengagement.

Students' perceptions of professional responsibility and respectful behavior

An emerging body of research highlights the central role of student perceptions in shaping respectful behavior toward teachers. Rather than passively receiving professional authority, students actively evaluate teacher conduct, intentions, and moral coherence (Biesta, 2015). These evaluations inform students willingness to accept authority and demonstrate respect in both verbal and behavioral forms. Empirical studies indicate that students are more likely to exhibit respectful behavior when they perceive teachers as ethically responsible and relationally engaged. Putri, Anwar and Yusuf (2024) found a positive association between students perceptions of teacher professionalism and respectful classroom behavior in Indonesian secondary schools, although professionalism was primarily operationalized in instructional terms. Similarly, Rahman, Widodo and Lestari (2023) reported that relational aspects of professionalism, such as fairness and teacher support, significantly predicted students engagement.

However, much of the existing literature has yet to explicitly position respect as the ethical core of professional responsibility. Instead, respect is often treated as a dependent variable influenced by classroom management or character education programs (Hidayat & Pramono, 2021). This approach risks overlooking how ethical responsibility itself shapes students moral responses to authority. As Oser and Althof (2019) argue, moral education occurs not only through explicit instruction but through the ethical quality of everyday professional practice.

Methodology

Research design and approach of the study

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey research design specifically aimed at examining the relationship between students' perceptions of teacher professional responsibility and students' respectful behavior toward teachers. This design directly addresses the study aim of identifying associative patterns between key perceptual and behavioral variables rather than establishing causal effects. Quantitative survey research is appropriate when the objective is to measure attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral tendencies across a relatively large population and to test theoretically grounded relationships among variables using standardized measurement instruments (Cohen et al., 2018). A cross-sectional design was employed to capture students perceptions at a single point in time, which aligns with the study's focus on current manifestations of respect and professional responsibility as experienced by students, reflecting contemporary conditions of teachers-students' relationships within Indonesian secondary schools.

This design is particularly suitable for studies focusing on ethical perceptions and relational constructs, as it allows for the identification of prevailing patterns without manipulating variables or introducing interventions (Bryman, 2016). To respond to the research problems, data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure students' perceptions of teachers' professional responsibility and their own respectful behaviors, ensuring consistency between the research objectives, the selected design, and the instruments employed. The study is grounded in ethical relational theory, which conceptualizes respect as a moral and relational response shaped by perceived professional conduct rather than as a mere outcome of disciplinary control (Noddings, 2013; Oser & Althof, 2019).

Research sites and participants

The research was conducted in Indonesian secondary school settings in the province of West Sumatera. The selected schools were located in the cities of Padang, Solok, and Bukittinggi, as well as in Sijunjung Regency and Tanah Datar Regency. These locations were deliberately chosen to represent both urban and peripheral (semi-urban and rural-edge) educational contexts. The distinction between urban and peripheral contexts is grounded in regional and educational research that emphasizes how geographical location influences access to resources, institutional capacity, and educational outcomes. For instance, Michael Woods (2011) highlights that rural and peripheral areas often differ structurally from urban centers in terms of infrastructure, service accessibility, and socio-economic dynamics, which in turn shape institutional practices. Similarly, Paul Cloke (2006) explains that rural-urban differentiation is not merely spatial but also social and organizational, affecting how educational institutions function within their communities. Kondo et al. (2014) note that contextual heterogeneity such as differences between urban and non-urban settings should be considered in sampling designs to enhance representativeness and generalizability. Therefore, the inclusion of both urban (Padang, Solok, Bukittinggi) and peripheral/regency-based schools (Sijunjung and Tanah Datar) aligns with methodological recommendations in educational and regional research to capture contextual variation.

This approach strengthens the external validity of the study by ensuring representation of diverse institutional and socio-geographic conditions within West Sumatera. The study involved general senior high schools (SMA) and vocational high schools (SMK). The inclusion of both school types was intended to enhance contextual representativeness, as vocational and general schools differ in instructional orientation, teacher authority structures, and interactional norms.

The participants consisted of 300 secondary school students enrolled in Grades 10-12. A stratified random sampling technique was applied, with school type (SMA and SMK) serving as

the stratification variable to ensure proportional representation of each educational track. Stratified sampling is recommended when researchers aim to reduce sampling bias and ensure adequate representation of key subgroups within a population (Cohen et al., 2018). The sample size of 300 respondents exceeds the recommended minimum for correlational research and is adequate for detecting moderate effect sizes with sufficient statistical power (Hair et al., 2019).

Data collection

Instrument development

Data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire consisting of 36 items divided into two primary constructs. The instrument was specifically designed to measure students' perceptions of teachers' professional responsibility and their own respectful behaviors, ensuring alignment between the research objectives, the selected design, and the measurement instruments employed. The first construct, Students' Respectful Behavior, comprised 15 items organized across three dimensions: Verbal Respect (5 items), Compliance with Classroom Norms (5 items), and Acceptance of Teacher Authority (5 items). The second construct, Perceived Teacher Professional Responsibility, comprised 21 items organized across three dimensions: Ethical Consistency (7 items), Relational Accountability (7 items), and Cultural Sensitivity (7 items). All items used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample items included polite language use toward teachers (Verbal Respect), fair rule application (Ethical Consistency), active listening to students' opinions (Relational Accountability), and recognition of cultural differences in pedagogical interactions (Cultural Sensitivity).

Content validity

Content validity was assessed using expert judgment involving three specialists in educational ethics and educational measurement. The Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated at both the item level (I-CVI) and the scale level (S-CVI). The I-CVI values ranged from 0.83 to 1.00, and the S-CVI/Ave was 0.92, indicating excellent content validity.

Construct validity was examined using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Principal Axis Factoring and Varimax rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.89, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($p < .001$), confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The analysis yielded a six-factor structure consistent with the theoretical model, with factor loadings ranging from 0.58 to 0.82. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. As presented in Table 1, all subscale values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory to high reliability across all dimensions.

Table 1. *Reliability Cronbach's alpha coefficients*

Subscale	Cronbach's α
Verbal Respect	0,84
Compliance with Norms	0,81
Acceptance of Authority	0,86
Ethical Consistency	0,88
Relational Accountability	0,85
Cultural Sensitivity	0,79
Overall Scale	0,91

Note. All values exceed the recommended threshold of a = 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019).

Administration procedures

Data collection was conducted with formal approval from school authorities and followed established ethical procedures to ensure voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. Questionnaires were administered during regular class hours under researcher supervision, and students were informed that their responses would not affect academic evaluation. The average completion time was approximately 20 minutes.

Ethical considerations

This study adhered to established ethical guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2018). Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participant anonymity and confidentiality were strictly protected throughout the study. The research involved minimal risk, as it focused exclusively on students' perceptions of professional conduct rather than sensitive personal or behavioral data.

Data Analysis

Overview of analytical approach

Data analysis was conducted in two sequential stages to address the research problems concerning students' respectful behavior and their perceptions of teacher professional responsibility. The first stage employed descriptive statistics, while the second stage utilized inferential correlation analysis. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$, allowing for the identification of statistically meaningful associations relevant to the study aims.

Descriptive statistics

In the first analytical stage, descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means (M), and standard deviations (SD) were calculated to summarize the distribution and central tendencies of the main study variables. Descriptive analysis was applied across all dimensions of both constructs: Students' Respectful Behavior (Verbal Respect, Compliance with Classroom Norms, and Acceptance of Teacher Authority) and Perceived Teacher Professional Responsibility (Ethical Consistency, Relational Accountability, and Cultural Sensitivity).

Mean scores were interpreted using a five-point scale framework: scores ranging from 1.00 to 2.33 were categorized as low, scores from 2.34 to 3.67 as moderate, and scores from 3.68 to 5.00 as high. This categorization provided a systematic basis for comparing levels of respectful behavior and perceived professional responsibility across the sample. Frequencies and percentages were additionally used to classify students into overall levels of respect (high, moderate, and low) and to determine the predominant type of professional responsibility framing (instructional versus ethical-relational) as perceived by participants.

Correlation analysis

In the second analytical stage, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of relationships between students' perceptions of teacher professional responsibility and their respectful behavior toward teachers. Pearson correlation is the appropriate statistical technique for assessing linear associations between continuous variables measured on Likert-type scales (Field, 2018).

Correlational analysis was performed both at the overall construct level and at the dimensional level, enabling a more granular understanding of which specific dimensions of professional responsibility (Ethical Consistency, Relational Accountability, and Cultural Sensitivity) demonstrated the strongest associations with students' respectful behavior. The strength of correlations was interpreted using conventional benchmarks: r values below 0.30 were classified as weak, values between 0.30 and 0.49 as moderate, values between 0.50 and 0.69 as strong, and values of 0.70 and above as very strong (Cohen, 1988). All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26.0).

Findings

Research Problem 1: What is the level of students' respectful behavior toward teachers in Indonesian secondary schools?

Table 2. *Level of Students' Respect Toward Teachers*

Level of Respect	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
High	112	37.3%
Moderate	138	46.0%
Low	50	16.7%
Total	300	100%

The results indicate that a substantial proportion of students reported moderate to low levels of respectful behavior. As shown in Table 2, only 37.3% of students demonstrated high levels of respect, while 62.7% fell within the moderate to low categories. These findings indicate that respectful behavior toward teachers is not consistently demonstrated among secondary school students, particularly in everyday classroom interactions. This result supports concerns raised in recent Indonesian educational discourse regarding the erosion of respectful attitudes toward teachers in secondary school settings.

Table 3. *Mean scores of students' respectful behavior dimensions*

Dimension	Mean (M)	SD
Verbal Respect	3.12	0.84
Compliance with Classroom Norms	3.28	0.79
Acceptance of Teacher Authority	3.46	0.76
Overall Respectful Behavior	3.29	0.73

Further analysis of the mean scores across dimensions (Table 3) reveals that verbal respect (e.g., polite language use and tone of communication) received the lowest mean score (M = 3.12, SD = 0.84), followed by compliance with classroom norms (M = 3.28, SD = 0.79). The highest mean score was observed for acceptance of teacher authority (M = 3.46, SD = 0.76), suggesting that while student may formally acknowledge teacher authority, this acknowledgment does not consistently translate into respectful verbal and behavioral practices. These results indicate that student respect tends to be procedural rather than relational.

Research Problem 2: How do students perceive teacher professional responsibility?

Table 4. *Students' perceptions of teacher professionalism*

Perception of Professionalism	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Instructional competence (teaching effectiveness & classroom management)	205	68.4%
Ethical and relational responsibility (moral guidance, fairness, care)	95	31.6%
Total	300	100%

As summarized in Table 4, 68.4% of students perceived teacher professionalism mainly as the ability to deliver lessons effectively and manage classrooms, whereas only 31.6% emphasized ethical guidance, moral consistency, and relational engagement as core components of professional responsibility. This finding indicates a limited moral framing of professionalism from the students perspective.

Table 5. *Mean scores of students perceived teacher professional responsibility dimensions*

Dimension	Mean (M)	SD
Ethical Consistency	3.34	0.71
Relational Accountability	3.21	0.77
Cultural Sensitivity	3.05	0.82
Overall Professional Responsibility	3.20	0.74

When examined by dimension (Table 5), ethical consistency obtained a moderate mean score (M = 3.34, SD = 0.71), indicating perceived inconsistencies in rule enforcement and moral decision-making. Relational accountability yielded a slightly lower mean (M = 3.21, SD = 0.77), particularly in aspects related to dialogue, empathy, and recognition of students voice. Cultural sensitivity recorded the lowest mean score (M = 3.05, SD = 0.82), suggesting that students often perceived insufficient acknowledgment of their socio-cultural backgrounds in everyday pedagogical interactions. These findings indicate that professional responsibility is not consistently perceived as ethically grounded or relationally responsive.

> **Research Problem 3: Is there a relationship between perceived teacher professional responsibility and students respectful behavior toward teachers?**

Table 6. *Correlation between dimensions of teacher professional responsibility and students' respectful behavior*

Dimension of Professional Responsibility	r	p value	Interpretation
Ethical consistency	0.52	< .001	Strong correlation
Relational accountability	0.47	< .001	Moderate–strong correlation
Cultural sensitivity	0.39	< .001	Moderate correlation

Further analysis by dimension (Table 6) showed that ethical consistency exhibited the strongest correlation with respectful behavior (r = 0.52, p < .001), followed by relational accountability (r = 0.47, p < .001). Cultural sensitivity also demonstrated a significant but comparatively weaker correlation (r = 0.39, p < .001). These results indicate that ethical coherence and fairness in professional conduct play a particularly critical role in shaping students respectful behavior toward teachers.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that most students show moderate to low levels of respectful behavior toward teachers, particularly verbal respect and classroom compliance. Teacher professional responsibility is mainly perceived in technical and instructional terms rather than as an ethical and relational practice. There is a moderate and significant relationship between perceived professional responsibility and students respectful behavior. Ethical consistency emerges as the strongest dimension associated with students respect, followed by relational accountability and cultural sensitivity.

Figure 1. *Trend of reported teacher-student conflict cases in Indonesian media (2021–2025).*
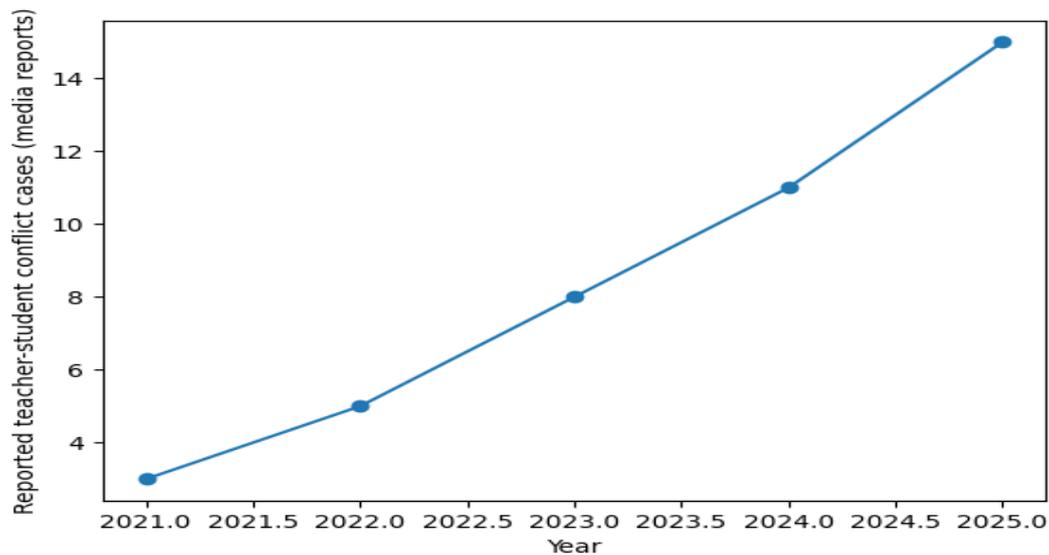
Reports of teacher-student conflict appearing in national media indicate an increasing trend in recent years. Instead of presenting a screenshot of a news website, the figure above summarizes documented cases reported by major Indonesian news outlets, including DetikNews, Kompas.com, and Antara News between 2021 and 2025. The data illustrate growing public concern regarding deteriorating teacher-student relations, challenges to teacher authority, and declining mutual respect in schools. One widely reported case occurred at SMK Negeri 3 Tanjung Jabung Timur, Jambi, where a conflict between a teacher and students escalated into a physical altercation after remarks made by the teacher were perceived as offensive. The incident, which circulated widely on social media, led to a police report and an official investigation by provincial education authorities (DetikNews, 2025). Overall, the increasing number of reported incidents suggests that the issue is not isolated but reflects a broader pattern discussed in public discourse.

Taken together, these findings address the research problems and support the argument that respect toward teachers is not merely a behavioral expectation but a moral response to ethically grounded professional responsibility. When teacher professional conduct is perceived as ethically consistent and relationally accountable, students are more likely to demonstrate respectful attitudes and behaviors.

Discussion

The present study set out to reconceptualize professional responsibility in education through a respect-centered perspective by examining (1) the level of students' respectful behavior toward teachers, (2) students' perceptions of teacher professional responsibility, and (3) the relationship between these two constructs. The findings provide convergent empirical evidence that declining respect toward teachers cannot be adequately understood as a behavioral or disciplinary issue alone, but rather as an ethical-relational phenomenon closely tied to how professional responsibility is enacted and perceived by student.

Students respect as procedural rather than relational

The first major finding indicates that a majority of students demonstrated moderate to low levels of respectful behavior toward teachers, particularly in verbal interaction and compliance with classroom norms. Importantly, the dimension of acceptance of teacher authority yielded the highest mean score, suggesting that students continue to recognize teacher formal authority while simultaneously exhibiting deficits in everyday expressions of respect.

This pattern supports the interpretation that students respect in contemporary Indonesian secondary schools has become increasingly procedural rooted in institutional roles rather than relational or morally grounded. This finding resonates with ethical scholarship that distinguishes between authority derived from position and authority grounded in moral legitimacy. Hansen (2001) argues that when authority is experienced as purely institutional, respect tends to manifest as surface-level compliance rather than as an internalized ethical disposition. The present findings suggest that while institutional authority remains intact, its moral resonance may be weakening, resulting in fragmented expressions of respect.

In the Indonesian context, this procedural orientation toward respect may reflect broader socio-cultural shifts. Traditional norms that emphasized deference to teachers as moral exemplars coexist uneasily with contemporary influences that encourage more dialogical and horizontal relationships.

As a result, respect can no longer be assumed as an inherited cultural norm but must be ethically earned through daily professional practice. This interpretation aligns with recent Indonesian studies indicating that students respect increasingly depends on perceived fairness, consistency, and relational engagement rather than on formal status alone (Putri et al., 2024)

Instrumental conceptions of professional responsibility

The second key finding reveals that students predominantly conceptualize teachers' professional responsibility in technical and instructional terms. Nearly two-thirds of participants associated professionalism primarily with lesson delivery and classroom management, while substantially fewer emphasized ethical guidance and relational engagement. This instrumental framing is significant, as it suggests that the moral dimensions of professionalism are not salient in students evaluative frameworks.

This finding reinforces long-standing critiques in the literature regarding the technocratic reduction of teachers' professionalism. Scholars such as that policy-driven accountability regimes often privilege measurable instructional competence at the expense of ethical and relational responsibility. When professionalism is communicated and assessed primarily through technical indicators, students may internalize a similarly narrow understanding, evaluating teachers based on performance efficiency rather than moral credibility.

The relatively low mean scores for relational accountability and cultural sensitivity further underscore this concern. Students' perceptions of limited dialogue, empathy, and cultural recognition suggest that professional responsibility is not consistently experienced as relationally responsive. This finding aligns with Noddings' relational ethics framework, which posits that respect develops through sustained experiences of care, attentiveness, and moral responsiveness within relationships (Noddings, 2013). When such experiences are absent or inconsistent, professionalism may be perceived as emotionally distant and ethically superficial.

Ethical professional responsibility as a predictor of respect

The third and most consequential finding demonstrates a moderate and statistically significant relationship between perceived professional responsibility and students' respectful

behavior. Notably, ethical consistency emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by relational accountability and cultural sensitivity. This pattern provides robust empirical support for the study central argument that respect functions as a moral response to ethically credible professional conduct.

The prominence of ethical consistency highlights the importance of fairness, transparency, and coherence in teachers' daily decision-making. Students appear particularly sensitive to how rules are enforced, how conflicts are handled, and whether similar situations are treated equitably. This finding echoes Osers (2018) theory of moral professionalism, which emphasizes that ethical inconsistency undermines moral authority and invites resistance rather than respect. When teachers' actions are perceived as arbitrary or instrumental, students may comply outwardly while disengaging morally. Relational accountability strong association with respect further reinforces the ethical relational nature of professionalism. Students who perceive teachers as willing to listen, explain decisions, and acknowledge students' perspectives are more likely to reciprocate with respectful behavior.

Although cultural sensitivity showed a comparatively weaker correlation, its significance should not be understated. In culturally diverse educational contexts such as Indonesia, recognition of students' socio-cultural backgrounds contributes to feelings of dignity and moral inclusion. The lower mean score in this dimension suggests a missed opportunity for strengthening respect through culturally responsive professional practice.

Implications for reconceptualizing professional responsibility

Taken together, these findings substantiate the need to reconceptualize professional responsibility by positioning respect at its ethical core. Rather than treating respect as a behavioral outcome to be enforced through discipline or character education programs, the results suggest that respect is cultivated through ethically consistent, relationally accountable, and culturally sensitive professional conduct. This perspective challenges deficit-oriented narratives that locate declining respect solely in students' attitudes or moral decay.

The study thus extends existing literature by empirically demonstrating that ethical dimensions of professionalism are not peripheral but central to shaping students' behavior. In doing so, it complements and advances relational ethics scholarship by grounding theoretical claims in quantitative evidence from the Indonesian context a setting that remains underrepresented in international discussions of educational ethics.

Policy and practice implications

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that efforts to address declining respect should prioritize professional development that foregrounds ethical reflection, relational competence, and cultural responsiveness. Teacher education programs should move beyond technical skill acquisition to include structured opportunities for ethical deliberation, moral consistency, and relational awareness. At the policy level, evaluation frameworks that emphasize instructional performance alone may inadvertently undermine the ethical foundations of professional authority.

By reframing respect as a moral response to professional responsibility rather than as a disciplinary expectation, this study offers a more sustainable and ethically grounded approach to strengthening teacher-student relationships. Such a reconceptualization holds promise for restoring moral legitimacy, fostering mutual respect, and enhancing the ethical integrity of educational practice in contemporary Indonesian schools.

Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the data were based solely on students' self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by subjective interpretation or response bias. Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions about the relationship between perceived professional responsibility and students' respectful behavior. Finally, as the study was conducted within the context of Indonesian secondary schools, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other educational or cultural settings. Future research may benefit from using longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to gain a deeper understanding of how professional responsibility and respect develop in educational relationships.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study sought to reframe professional responsibility in education through a respect-centered perspective by examining students' respectful behavior, their perceptions of teachers' professional responsibility, and the relationship between these constructs in Indonesian secondary schools. The findings indicate that students generally exhibit moderate to low levels of respect, particularly in verbal interaction and adherence to classroom norms. Although teachers' formal authority remains recognized, respect is increasingly expressed in procedural rather than relational ways, suggesting that it is no longer automatically derived from institutional status. In addition, students tend to interpret professional responsibility mainly in technical and instructional terms, while ethical guidance and relational engagement receive less attention. This pattern reflects a narrow, performance-oriented view of professionalism.

Importantly, the study found a significant positive relationship between perceived professional responsibility and students' respectful behavior, with ethical consistency emerging as the strongest predictor. Overall, the findings highlight that respect is closely linked to ethically grounded professional conduct. Repositioning respect at the core of professional responsibility offers a more sustainable approach to strengthening ethical teacher-student relationships in contemporary educational contexts.

Recommendations

Future research should further examine the ethical and relational dimensions of professional responsibility using diverse research designs. Longitudinal and qualitative studies may provide deeper insights into how students' respect and perceptions of teacher professionalism develop over time and within classroom interactions. In addition, future studies could include teachers' perspectives and explore different educational contexts to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of professional responsibility and respectful relationships in schools.

This From a practical perspective, teacher education and professional development programs should emphasize ethical consistency, relational competence, and cultural sensitivity to strengthen respectful teacher-student relationships.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

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