Exploring the Attitude of Secondary School Principals Towards the Teachers' Code of Ethics Practice in India

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.3126/jdl.v4i1.88024

Abstract

This study examines how secondary school principals in India perceive the implementation of the teachers' code of ethics, considering variables such as gender, type of school, professional experience, and age. A cross-sectional questionnaire-based research design was employed, utilising a five-point Likert scale to capture attitudes regarding teachers' ethical practices. Data from 76 principals were analysed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVA in Jamovi software at a 95 per cent confidence level ($p \leq 0.05$). The findings reveal no statistically significant differences in attitude scores across gender, school type, age group, or length of administrative experience. Overall, principals displayed a positive stance towards ethical conduct among teachers. The study contributes to educational ethics literature by contextualising school leaders' perceptions and suggests professional development measures to reinforce ethical practices within Indian secondary education.

Keywords: educational ethics, professional conduct, principals, secondary schools, teacher ethics

Introduction

Professional codes of ethics function as normative frameworks defining the standards of integrity, accountability, and trustworthiness across professions such as medicine, law, journalism, and education (Arthur et al., 2019; Forrester, 2018; Knapp et al., 2017). They provide a moral compass by articulating shared values, including honesty, fairness, and respect, that sustain professional credibility (Freeman et al., 2004; Greenstone, 2018). Ethical compliance not only guides individual conduct but also secures public confidence in professional systems (Hart & Marshall, 1992).

Within education, ethics serve as a cornerstone of teaching quality. As teachers profoundly influence the developmental, moral, and cognitive growth of students, their professional behaviour is pivotal for educational outcomes (Bruce & Marina, 2016). Codes of ethics for teachers delineate duties toward students, colleagues, parents, and the wider community, translating moral principles into daily practice (Banks, 2003; Fredrikson, 2004). International agencies such as UNESCO (2010) underscore that maintaining such standards fosters equity, respect, and inclusivity (Poisson, 2009).

The Indian National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) reinforces this perspective by highlighting ethical standards as central to teacher professionalism. It advocates continual professional development, fair working conditions, and a culture grounded in integrity. Within this framework, school principals play a crucial supervisory and moral leadership role. Their attitudes can either reinforce or erode adherence to teachers' ethical commitments. Hence, understanding principals' views helps to identify opportunities for strengthening ethical practice across school systems.

The present research investigates how secondary school principals in India perceive the teachers' code of ethics, exploring potential variations based on demographic factors.

Objective and Hypothesis

The primary objective was to assess principals' attitudes toward teachers' ethical practice with reference to gender, school type, age, and administrative experience. Four research questions guided the analysis:

1. Do male and female principals differ in their attitudes toward teachers' ethical practice?
2. Are there differences between principals from government and private schools?
3. Do principals' attitudes vary across age groups?
4. Do years of administrative experience influence attitudes?

These were examined through the following null hypotheses:

H_{01}: No significant gender-based difference exists in principals' mean attitude scores.

H_{02}: No significant difference exists between public and private school principals.

H_{03}: Age groups of principals do not significantly differ in attitude.

H_{04}: Years of administrative experience do not significantly affect principals' attitudes.

Review of Literature

The discourse surrounding the professionalisation of teaching has long been marked by contestation, reflecting divergent views about whether teaching constitutes a vocation grounded in moral purpose or a regulated profession governed by codified standards (Kerchner & Caufman, 1995; Baggini, 2005; Wilkinson, 2005; Whitty, 2008; Beck, 2008). Early writings on the professional identity of teachers underscored an inherent tension between bureaucratic accountability and the moral autonomy central to pedagogy. Poisson (2009) argues that fostering ethics and integrity within teaching requires more than mere compliance with prescriptive rules. Instead, effective professional codes should articulate explicit guidance concerning rights, duties, and expectations, thus providing both a moral framework and a regulatory mechanism for conduct.

Over the past three decades, a substantive body of scholarship has asserted the necessity of recognising teaching as a profession anchored in a distinct ethical code (Forster, 2012; Van Nuland, 2009; Carr, 2006; Banks, 2003; McNergney & Herbert, 2001; Darling-Hammond & Goodwin, 1993). These works converge on the notion that codified ethics can elevate the status of teachers, reinforce public trust, and clarify professional boundaries. Despite these affirmations, researchers have voiced

criticisms concerning the applicability and enforceability of such codes. Freeman (2000), Boon (2011), Lovat and Toomey (2007) and Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) highlight the absence of systematic training in ethical decision-making and the limited institutional mechanisms for ensuring compliance. Lovat (1998) observes that ethical codes serve multiple purposes, ensuring public accountability, delineating disciplinary procedures, and safeguarding the profession's integrity, yet without embedded ethical reasoning and reflexivity, these codes risk degenerating into procedural formality.

Complementing these debates, several studies have focused on teachers' personal moral responsibility for cultivating ethical learning environments (Sockett, 1993; Holmes, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1996). The argument advanced by these scholars is that schools are inherently moral ecosystems, and thus teachers' decisions invariably involve moral dimensions. Osguthorpe and Sanger (2013), Soltis (1986), and Ryan (1993) similarly emphasise that teaching encompasses both moral and pedagogical obligations, with ethical practice permeating everyday classroom interactions, curriculum choices, and assessment methods. Campbell (1997) and Goodlad et al. (1990) further expand this view by positioning teacher ethics as a systemic rather than individual concern, embedded within cultures of schooling, leadership structures, and policy frameworks. Collectively, these scholars underscore the inextricable link between moral purpose, professional standards, and teacher identity.

A substantial corpus of research conceptualises the teachers' code of ethics as embodying the virtues that underpin exemplary character, truthfulness, fairness, justice, compassion, integrity, and respect (Moss Curtis, 2006; Campbell, 2013; Damon & Colby, 2014). These virtues constitute what Arthur et al. (2005) describe as moral exemplarity, the practice through which teachers model ethical behaviour to promote students' moral development. Osguthorpe (2008) and Carr (2007) note, however, that this dual expectation, that teachers remain morally irreproachable while guiding students' ethical growth, renders the field uniquely complex. It requires an equilibrium between professional accountability and authentic moral agency.

Maxwell (2015) advances this dialogue by asserting that teacher ethics cannot be reduced to static codes or external mandates; rather, they should be seen as relational, reflective, and context-dependent. Echoing earlier philosophical perspectives (Dunne, 2003; Noddings, 1992; Rorty, 1999), Maxwell positions teaching as a human practice, characterised by continuous ethical deliberation amid uncertainty. Empirical

research on students' attitudes supports this stance. For instance, Beishuizen et al. (2001) demonstrate that students highly value teachers who display empathy, fairness, and respect, attributes central to ethical pedagogy. Nevertheless, Spendlove et al. (2012) and Thornberg (2006) caution that formal codes, while valuable, cannot capture the situational complexities of moral choice inherent in daily educational practice.

Recent consensus in teacher-education research emphasises integrating ethics throughout the professional preparation curriculum, rather than confining it to isolated modules (Maxwell, Tremblay-Laprise, & Filion, 2016). This integrated approach promotes ethical reasoning as a habitual component of pedagogical competence, aligning with the broader movement toward reflective professionalism. Parallel to this pedagogical development, contemporary scholars such as Stoesz (2022) and Tauginienė and Gaižauskaitė (2019) underscore the early cultivation of academic integrity values. Instilling respect for intellectual honesty and moral reasoning from initial schooling stages, they argue, lays a durable foundation for ethical behaviour in higher education and professional contexts (McNeill, 2022; Wangaard, 2016).

Beyond codified obligations, research consistently demonstrates that the essence of ethical teaching resides in relationships, most notably between teachers and students. A robust body of work links positive teacher-student relationships with students' academic achievement, socio-emotional development, and organisational trust (Guo et al., 2010; Howes et al., 2008; Mashburn et al., 2008). Fosnot (2005), Crosnoe, Johnson and Elder (2004), and Downey (2008) collectively show that the quality of teacher-learner interactions significantly shapes learning outcomes, self-efficacy, and classroom climate. Accordingly, ethical teaching is viewed as inseparable from pedagogical care and the promotion of students' agency.

Equally central to the ethical landscape of education is the relationship between teachers and parents. The teachers' code of ethics obliges educators to maintain constructive dialogue and mutual respect with parents irrespective of cultural, religious, or socio-economic backgrounds. Studies have shown that respectful teacher–parent relationships foster trust and improve student outcomes (Tirri & Husu, 2002; Hedayati, Tirri, & Husu, 2019). Levinthal et al. (2021) report that parents value teachers' capacity to empathise with their perspectives and to communicate transparently regarding their children's educational progress. Such expectations expand the ethical domain of teaching beyond classroom boundaries to include community and familial engagement.

The literature further highlights that ethical awareness among teachers extends to collegial interaction and institutional culture. As Berkeley and Ludlow (2008) and O'Neill and Bourke (2010) affirm, ethical considerations are pivotal to achieving equitable learning environments. Teachers are expected to exercise professionalism, collegial respect, and a collective sense of responsibility (Warnick & Silverman, 2011). Decker et al. (2022) stress that this ethical infrastructure, comprising mutual respect, accountability, and institutional support, enables educators to fulfil both moral and intellectual obligations within the school community.

In recent years, attention has turned to the systemic embedding of ethics within educational policy and professional development frameworks. Peterson and Arthur (2021) argue that continuous professional development grounded in ethical reflection nurtures virtuous practitioners capable of navigating complex moral dilemmas in education. Scholars increasingly contend that fostering ethical cultures within schools requires sustained mentorship, leadership commitment, and institutional modelling of ethical behaviour.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative survey design to examine the attitudes of secondary school principals in India towards teachers' adherence to the professional code of ethics. The design enabled the collection of data from a defined population at a single point in time, thereby facilitating group comparisons across demographic characteristics. A structured questionnaire was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative information regarding principals' demographic profiles and their perceptions of ethical practices within their institutions.

Participants and Sampling

The target population consisted of secondary school principals across different regions of India. Using a convenience sampling approach, 110 principals were contacted through institutional networks and professional associations. Seventy-six responses were returned, yielding a response rate of 69.1 per cent. Participants represented both public and private schools, with diversity in gender, age, and years of administrative experience.

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of anonymity, and provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire.

Instrument Development

Instrument development was informed by an extensive review of relevant literature on teachers' professional ethics (Poisson, 2009; Maxwell and Schwimmer, 2017). Draft items were reviewed by a panel of experienced principals and teacher-educators to verify content validity and contextual appropriateness. Feedback from this expert review was incorporated to refine the wording, ensure conceptual clarity, and improve response interpretability.

Data were collected using a self-designed questionnaire consisting of two major sections.

i. **Demographic Information:** This section gathered details on gender, type of school (public or private), age group, and duration of administrative experience.

ii. **Attitude Toward Teachers' Code of Ethics:** The second section assessed principals' perceptions through 25 items, including 22 closed-ended questions and 3 open-ended questions. The closed-ended items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

Structure of the Questionnaire

The attitudinal items reflected four domains of professional ethics practice:

i. **Ethics Towards Students:** addressing respect for students' dignity, safeguarding rights, meeting individual learning needs, promoting personal development, avoiding abuse or humiliation, and ensuring safety.

ii. **Ethics Towards Parents:** focusing on maintaining harmonious relationships, sharing progress updates, and involving parents as partners in the educational process.

iii. **Ethics Towards Colleagues:** exploring collegial respect, cooperation, fair communication, and professional accountability.

iv. **Ethics Towards the Principal and Institution:** assessing teachers' alignment with administrative values, adherence to institutional procedures, and recognition of shared professional responsibility.

The open-ended items invited respondents to elaborate on perceived challenges related to the implementation of teachers' codes of ethics and to suggest strategies for improvement within their schools.

Validity and Reliability

Instrument reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.64 for the overall attitude scale. Although modest, this reliability level is acceptable for exploratory studies in the social sciences. The questionnaire's face and content validity were established through expert consultation with principals and teacher-educators, ensuring that the items adequately represented the construct of ethical attitude in educational contexts.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out over a three-month period. Questionnaires were distributed electronically and in print form to participating principals. Respondents completed the instrument independently and returned it via email or sealed envelopes to maintain confidentiality. Incomplete or ambiguous responses were excluded from statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and tabulated in Microsoft Excel and further analysed using Jamovi 2.3.28 for Windows. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions) were calculated to summarise demographic information and overall attitudinal tendencies. To test the research hypotheses, independent-samples t-tests were applied to compare mean scores by gender and school type. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to evaluate mean differences across age groups and years of administrative experience. A probability level of $p \leq 0.05$ was adopted as the threshold for statistical significance. Responses to the open-ended questions were organised into thematic categories through qualitative content analysis, allowing deeper interpretation of principals' insights into ethical challenges and improvement strategies.

Results

Participants' ages ranged from 30 to 60 years (M = 44.8, SD = 8.19). Among them, 61.8 per cent were male and 38.2 per cent female. Public-school principals made up 55 per cent of the group, and 45 per cent represented private institutions. Mean administrative experience was 7.4 years (SD = 2.98). (Table 1)

Table 1

Demographic Profile

Characteristics	mean±SD
	n(%)
Age Group(mean±SD: 44.80±8.19)	
30-40	26 (34.21%)
41-50	28 (36.84%)
51-60	22 (28.95%)
Gender	
Male	47 (61.84%)
Female	29 (38.16%)
Type of School	
Public	42 (55.26%)
Private	34 (44.74%)
Experience (mean±SD: 7.41±2.98)	
0-5	19 (25%)
6-10	35 (46.05%)
11-20	22 (28.95%)

To examine whether the type of school influenced principals' attitudes toward the teachers' code of ethics, an independent-samples t-test was conducted comparing the mean scores of principals from public and private institutions across the twenty-two attitude factors. As presented in Table 2, the mean scores for both groups were broadly similar across all dimensions of ethical practice. The analysis indicated that the majority of differences between public- and private-school principals were statistically non-significant at the 0.05 level, suggesting that the organisational setting of the school does not substantially affect principals' perceptions of teachers' adherence to ethical standards.

Table 2:

T-test for Comparison of Mean Scores of Public and Private School Principals' Attitudes Toward Teachers' Code of Ethics Practice

Factors	Public N=42		Private N=34			P-value
	M	SD	M	SD	Statistic	
Values dignity, beliefs, and rights of students	4.1	0.8	3.9	0.7	-1.08	0.29
Recognizes the uniqueness, individuality, and	3.7	0.9	3.7	0.9	0.25	0.80

Factors	Public N=42		Private N=34		Statistic	P-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
specific needs of the students						
Assists each student to realize his/her capabilities	3.5	0.8	3.4	1.0	-0.74	0.46
Assists students in developing values	2.3	0.7	2.4	0.9	0.67	0.50
Refrains from any form of abuse or humiliation	4.0	1.1	3.8	0.9	-0.83	0.41
Uses appropriate language and behaviours with students	4.4	0.7	4.2	0.7	-1.44	0.15
Considers students' safety as a priority	4.3	0.8	4.1	0.9	-0.88	0.38
Considers students as partners in education	4.0	0.7	3.9	0.9	-0.37	0.71
Considers parents as partners in education	2.3	0.9	2.2	1.0	0.64	0.52
Maintains a harmonious relationship with parents	4.3	0.7	4.1	0.8	-0.86	0.39
Regularly informs parents about the progress of the students	4.2	0.9	4.3	0.6	0.27	0.79
Acknowledges the status and authority of colleagues	2.1	0.7	2.1	0.7	0.24	0.81
Respects the responsibilities of the colleagues	3.8	0.6	3.6	0.6	-1.36	0.18
Uses proper language and behaviour with colleagues	4.4	0.7	4.2	0.7	-1.44	0.15
Adopts appropriate procedure to address incompetence or misbehaviour of colleagues	4.1	0.9	4.1	0.7	-0.02	0.98
Avoids humiliation or abuse toward colleagues	3.9	0.9	3.9	1.0	0.27	0.79
Acknowledges the need for cooperation and support of colleagues as a professional duty	4.1	0.8	3.9	0.7	-1.08	0.29
Enhances the dignity and status of the teaching profession	3.7	0.9	3.7	0.9	0.25	0.80
Remain updated on educational changes and developments	2.2	0.9	2.4	0.7	1.14	0.26
Assists new teachers in settling successfully as a teacher	3.5	0.8	3.4	1.0	-0.74	0.46
Accepts professional obligation toward education	3.8	0.9	4	0.8	1.21	0.23
Recognizes principal as a partner in education	3.7	0.9	3.7	0.9	0.25	0.80

To test whether principals' gender was associated with differing perceptions of teachers' ethical practices, an independent-samples t-test was performed comparing mean attitude scores between male and female respondents across the twenty-two ethical

dimensions. As summarised in Table 3, male and female principals reported generally similar levels of agreement on most indicators. Although a few variables, such as "values dignity, beliefs, and rights of students" and "uses appropriate language and behaviours with students", showed statistically significant mean differences, the majority of comparisons were non-significant at the 0.05 level. Overall, the results indicate that both male and female school leaders expressed comparably positive attitudes toward the teachers' code of ethics, suggesting that gender does not play a decisive role in shaping principals' ethical perceptions.

Table 3

T-test for Comparison of Mean Scores of Male and Female Principals' Attitudes Toward Teachers' Code of Ethics Practice

Factors	Male N=47		Female N=29		Statistic	P-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Values dignity, beliefs, and rights of students	3.90	0.72	4.3	0.66	2.6686	0.009
Recognizes the uniqueness, individuality, and specific needs of the students	3.60	0.95	3.90	0.74	1.2157	0.228
Assists each student to realize his/her capabilities	3.60	0.80	3.20	0.99	-1.7645	0.082
Assists students in developing values	2.40	0.81	2.20	0.69	-0.9493	0.346
Refrains from any form of abuse or humiliation	4.10	1.09	3.70	0.93	-1.6225	0.109
Uses appropriate language and behaviours with students	4.10	0.73	4.70	0.55	3.6080	0.001
Considers students' safety as a priority	4.40	0.53	4.00	1.20	-1.7309	0.088
Considers students as partners in education	3.70	0.74	4.20	0.82	2.5518	0.013
Considers parents as partners in education	2.50	0.91	2.00	0.82	-2.4592	0.016
Maintains a harmonious relationship with parents	4.10	0.81	4.30	0.66	1.0072	0.317
Regularly informs parents about the progress of the students	4.20	0.76	4.50	0.87	1.5546	0.124
Acknowledges the status and authority of colleagues	2.20	0.73	1.80	0.60	-2.4102	0.018
Respects the responsibilities of the colleagues	3.70	0.66	3.70	0.54	-0.0409	0.968
Adopts appropriate procedure to address incompetence or misbehaviour of colleagues	4.10	0.74	4.10	0.92	0.1522	0.879
Avoids humiliation or abuse toward colleagues	3.80	0.90	4.00	0.94	0.6403	0.524

Factors	Male		Female		Statistic	P-value
	N=47		N=29			
	M	SD	M	SD		
Acknowledges the need for cooperation and support of colleagues as a professional duty	3.90	0.72	4.30	0.66	2.6686	0.009
Enhances the dignity and status of the teaching profession	3.60	0.95	3.90	0.74	1.2157	0.228
Remain updated on educational changes and developments	2.30	0.87	2.30	0.75	-0.1458	0.884
Assists new teachers in settling successfully as a teacher	3.60	0.80	3.20	0.99	-1.7645	0.082
Accepts professional obligation toward education	3.90	0.80	3.80	0.99	-0.8474	0.400
Recognizes principal as a partner in education	3.60	0.95	3.90	0.74	1.2157	0.228

To explore whether principals' age influenced their perceptions of teachers' ethical conduct, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted across three age categories: 30-40 years, 41-50 years, and 51-60 years. The descriptive results and test statistics are presented in Table 4. The overall mean scores for the three groups were closely aligned on all ethical dimensions. Although minor numerical differences were observed, for example, slightly higher ratings in some items among principals aged 51-60, none of these differences reached statistical significance at the 0.05 level, except for "refrains from any form of abuse or humiliation," where a small but significant age variation appeared. The findings therefore suggest that principals across different age groups share broadly comparable perspectives on teachers' adherence to the professional code of ethics, indicating that age is not a major determinant of ethical attitude in this context. (Table 4)

Table 4

One-way ANOVA for Comparison of Mean Scores of Principals' Attitudes Toward Teachers' Code of Ethics Practice Across Three Age Groups

Factors	30-40		41-50		51-60		F	P
	N=26		N=28		N=22			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Values dignity, beliefs, and rights of students	4.1	0.64	4.0	0.74	4.1	0.81	0.240	0.79

Factors	30-40 N=26		41-50 N=28		51-60 N=22		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Recognizes the uniqueness, individuality, and specific needs of the students	3.5	0.71	3.8	0.93	3.9	0.97	1.457	0.24
Assists each student to realize his/her capabilities	3.7	0.85	3.2	0.88	3.6	0.91	1.980	0.15
Assists students in developing values	2.4	0.96	2.4	0.69	2.2	0.59	0.748	0.48
Refrains from any form of abuse or humiliation	3.5	1.16	4.1	1.03	4.2	0.75	3.900	0.03
Uses appropriate language and behaviours with students	4.4	0.65	4.2	0.77	4.3	0.72	0.881	0.42
Considers students' safety as a priority	4.4	0.76	4.1	1.01	4.1	0.75	0.906	0.41
Considers students as partners in education	4.0	0.58	4.0	0.69	3.8	1.11	0.532	0.59
Considers parents as partners in education	2.3	0.98	2.3	0.80	2.3	1.0	0.034	0.97
Maintains a harmonious relationship with parents	4.0	0.68	4.4	0.62	4.3	0.94	2.036	0.14
Regularly informs parents about the progress of the students	4.2	1.0	4.4	0.74	4.2	0.66	0.537	0.59
Acknowledges the status and authority of colleagues	2.0	0.74	2.0	0.69	2.2	0.69	0.884	0.42
Respects the responsibilities of the colleagues	3.7	0.54	3.8	0.57	3.6	0.74	0.976	0.38
Uses proper language and behaviour with colleagues	4.4	0.65	4.2	0.77	4.3	0.72	0.881	0.42
Adopts appropriate procedure to address incompetence or misbehaviour of colleagues	4.3	0.68	4.1	0.96	4.0	0.72	0.962	0.39
Avoids humiliation or abuse toward colleagues	3.7	1.06	4.0	0.74	4.0	0.95	0.568	0.57
Acknowledges the need for cooperation and support of colleagues as a professional duty	4.1	0.64	4.0	0.74	4.1	0.81	0.240	0.79
Enhances the dignity and status of the teaching profession	3.5	0.71	3.8	0.93	3.9	0.97	1.457	0.24
Remain updated on educational	2.3	0.56	2.3	0.94	2.3	0.94	0.021	0.98

Factors	30-40 N=26		41-50 N=28		51-60 N=22		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
changes and developments								
Assists new teachers in settling successfully as a teacher	3.7	0.85	3.2	0.88	3.6	0.91	1.980	0.15
Accepts professional obligation toward education	3.9	0.91	3.9	0.93	3.8	0.80	0.080	0.92
Recognizes principal as a partner in education	3.5	0.71	3.8	0.93	3.9	0.97	1.457	0.24

To determine whether administrative experience influenced principals' perceptions of teachers' ethical practices, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted across three experience categories: 0-5 years, 6-10 years, and 11-20 years of service as a school principal. The outcomes are summarized in Table 5. The descriptive means show a broadly similar pattern of responses across all groups, with only minimal numerical variation. Although principals with over ten years of experience recorded slightly higher mean scores on certain items, such as considering student safety and collegial respect, these differences were not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, except for the variables "considers students' safety as a priority" and "avoids humiliation or abuse toward colleagues," where minor but significant variation occurred. Overall, the analysis indicates that length of administrative experience exerts little influence on principals' attitudes toward the teachers' code of ethics, suggesting that ethical perspectives remain relatively consistent across different career stages.

Table 5

One-way ANOVA for Comparison of Mean Scores of Principals' Attitudes Toward Teachers' Code of Ethics Practice Across Three Groups by Experience Years

Factors	0-5 N=19		10-Jun N=35		20-Nov N=22		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Values dignity, beliefs, and rights of students	.0	.8	.9	.8	.2	.6	.1	.4
Recognizes the uniqueness, individuality, and specific needs of the students	.7	.1	.6	.7	.9	.9	.0	.4
Assists each student to realize his/her capabilities	.4	.0	.5	.8	.5	.0	.1	.9

Factors	0-5 N=19		10-Jun N=35		20-Nov N=22		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Assists students in developing values	.4	.9	.3	.9	.4	.5	.5	.6
Refrains from any form of abuse or humiliation	.1	.8	.7	.2	.1	.0	.1	.3
Uses appropriate language and behaviours with students	.1	.8	.3	.8	.5	.6	.5	.2
Considers students' safety as a priority	.7	.3	.4	.6	.3	.6	.5	.0
Considers students as partners in education	.9	.9	.7	.8	.2	.7	.1	.1
Considers parents as partners in education	.2	.9	.2	.9	.5	.9	.9	.4
Maintains a harmonious relationship with parents	.0	.8	.1	.8	.5	.6	.1	.1
Regularly informs parents about the progress of the students	.3	.7	.2	.9	.3	.8	.1	.9
Acknowledges the status and authority of colleagues	.1	.6	.0	.8	.2	.7	.9	.4
Respects the responsibilities of the colleagues	.7	.5	.7	.7	.6	.6	.2	.8
Uses proper language and behaviour with colleagues	.1	.8	.3	.8	.5	.6	.5	.2
Adopts appropriate procedure to address incompetence or misbehaviour of colleagues	.0	.9	.1	.9	.3	.6	.6	.5
Avoids humiliation or abuse toward colleagues	.2	.7	.6	.0	.1	.0	.5	.0
Acknowledges the need for cooperation and support of colleagues as a professional duty	.0	.8	.9	.8	.2	.6	.1	.4
Enhances the dignity and status of the teaching profession	.7	.1	.6	.7	.9	.9	.0	.4
Remain updated on educational changes and developments	.2	.7	.2	.8	.5	.0	.0	.4
Assists new teachers in settling successfully as a teacher	.4	.0	.5	.8	.5	.0	.1	.9
Accepts professional obligation toward education	.5	.0	.0	.8	.9	.9	.3	.1
Recognizes principal as a partner in education	.7	.1	.6	.7	.9	.9	.0	.4

Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to examine the attitudes of secondary school principals towards the practice of teachers' professional code of ethics. The research thoroughly assessed the principals' comprehension of professional code of ethics, the content of these codes, and the existing research in the field of code of ethics for school teachers. By considering all aspects of attitude, the research aimed to analyze their interdependence. The study investigated teachers' professional code of ethics practice in relation to students, parents, colleagues, and principals. A positive attitude towards the professional code of ethics among teachers is essential. This study found that 92% of the principals consented that a professional code of ethics for teachers was highly significant. According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016), teachers' codes of ethics are written documents aimed at guiding educators, protecting students, and upholding the integrity of the teaching community. The principals in this study concurred with Bullock's (2018) perspective that beliefs and moral obligations to actions, correctness, respect for the rights of others, reliability, honesty, integrity, fairness, self-control, etc. constitute the moral attributes that are part of educators' code of ethics.

The study found no significant difference in the attitudes of male and female principals toward teachers' professional code of ethics practices similar to the findings in the study of Woldeab and Solomon (2020). However, previous studies have shown a notable contrast in the professional ethics practice of male and female teachers in higher secondary schools. Some studies suggest that male teachers outperform female teachers in professional code of ethics practices (Thoker, 2017; Dhinkaran & Shivakumar, 2014), while others indicate that female teachers exhibit better ethical practices (Odunaike et al., 2013). Although this study revealed no significant mean score difference between male and female principals' attitudes, female principals' scores reflect a more positive attitude. The study also revealed no significant differences between public and private school principals' mean attitudes toward professional code of ethics practice. It was found that the type of school did not impact the code of ethics practice among teachers, contrary to the findings of some previous studies. Previous research suggested that private school teachers adhered to the professional code of ethics better than their public school counterparts (Muhammad et al., 2014). Despite being more qualified and experienced, public school teachers did not significantly differ in their code of ethics practice.

Additionally, many principals of private schools reported that the school management placed a strong emphasis on behaviour and parent relations. This study revealed that there was no significant difference in mean scores based on the age and years of experience of the principals. However, it was noted that principals above 50 years of age with extensive experience exhibited a slightly more positive attitude towards the professional code of ethics practiced by teachers.

The study also involved open-ended questions concerning professional code of ethics misconduct. Principals expressed their views on various factors contributing to such misconduct among secondary school teachers. These factors included a lack of professional training, negative attitudes towards the teaching profession, pursuing teaching solely for economic reasons, frequent changes in the curriculum, and a high degree of non-teaching and non-school work. Previous studies have supported many of these factors (Kindu et al., 2023; Akinrotimi, 2021; Rani, 2019; Mashaba, 2015). As a result, it is imperative to focus on continuous professional development activities for teachers to encourage the adoption of a model professional code of ethics, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes (Singh et al., 2020).

The study also delved into the subject of teachers' engagement with parents. More than 95% of the teachers maintained positive relations with parents and kept them informed about their students' progress. However, fewer than 50% of the teachers regarded parents as educational partners, as perceived by the principals. The principals observed that most teachers acknowledged the significance of fostering positive relationships with parents. Several studies (Sawhney, 2015; Ou, 2014; Vashit, 2005) have underscored the beneficial effects of such relationships. Private school principals pointed out that parents' interactions with teachers and school management significantly impacted student enrolment.

The research found that principals promoted purposeful collaboration and dialogue among colleagues and stakeholders. They advocated for humility and consideration among fellow teachers, as well as respect and dignity, as outlined in numerous studies (Kindu, 2022; Woldeab & Solomon, 2020; Saxena & Upadhyay, 2020). According to this research, over 90% of the principals, teachers respected their colleagues' responsibilities, used appropriate language and behaviour, and refrained from humiliating or abusing their colleagues. It was also disclosed that teachers recognized cooperation and mutual support as part of their professional obligations.

The principals were also requested to provide their insights on the importance of including pre-service curriculum and in-service training related to the professional code of ethics for teachers. The majority of principals expressed the belief that ethics, as a fundamental aspect of professionalism, should be thoroughly integrated into the teacher education curriculum. This would prepare teachers to make sound judgments while adhering to established professional standards, as was also observed by the previous researchers (Campbell, 2013; Boon, 2011; Vongalis-Macrow, 2007; Soltis, 1986). Additionally, regular in-service training on the implementation of the professional code of ethics can improve effectiveness and ensure that teachers stay informed about evolving professional norms. Since teaching is deeply rooted in relationships, ethical practices should be an essential component of professional teacher training (Bruce & Marina, 2016; Ungaretti et al., 1997; Strike, 1990).

Limitations of the Study

This study has a few limitations that need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, the data used in the study were self-reported by a group of participants who were all from secondary schools. The study did not consider the different age groups and years of experience for the intra-public or intra-private school principals' attitude analysis separately. Furthermore, the study did not consider the size of the schools in terms of the number of teachers and students. Lastly, the study did not provide any information about the principal's professional code of ethics.

Conclusion

Ethical frameworks are essential to the credibility, accountability, and social legitimacy of any profession. In education, the code of ethics prescribes not only standards of good conduct but also articulates the moral mission of a profession and its social accountability. This study confirms that teachers' ethical practice perceived from the viewpoint of school principals remains a basis for the high quality of education and the credibility of institutions. The findings show that there are no statistically significant differences across gender, type of school, age, or administrative experience. Nonetheless, the positive attitude that school principals displayed with respect to these principles may reflect a common commitment to ethical norms within the schooling system.

Today's democratic schools expose teachers to complicated moral challenges

connected to equity and inclusiveness, as well as competing demands of pedagogy and policy. In this context, the teachers' code of ethics is a guiding framework within which teachers can reflect and act with fairness, integrity, and respect. When teachers internalize these codes of ethics, they manifest the abstract principle of the profession in the day-to-day classroom activities that uphold justice and human dignity.

Ongoing institutional support must sustain ethical professionalism. Ethical reasoning needs to be embedded in the teacher education curricula for pre-service and in-service training. Furthermore, school leadership should model ethical behaviour and provide faculty with ongoing opportunities for moral dialogue. With educational systems in constant flux due to societal changes, continued adaptation of and support for professional ethical codes will remain paramount. Ultimately, the strength of a nation's education system does not rest primarily on textbooks and resources; it is equally dependent on the moral courage and ethical consciousness of its practitioners. Consequently, a well-developed and diligently enforced code of ethics remains necessary in engaging educators and nurturing the trust, coherence, and broader humanization mission of education.

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