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Understanding Teachers' Professional Ethics from Philosophical and Educational Perspectives

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the understanding of teachers' professional ethics from philosophical and educational perspectives using a qualitative approach. Teachers' professional ethics serve as a moral foundation that guides professional behavior and decision-making within the educational context. Through philosophical analysis, this study explores the theoretical foundations of teachers' professional ethics derived from normative ethics, applied ethics, and educational philosophy. The research employed a qualitative method using document analysis, literature review, and hermeneutic interpretation of various primary and secondary sources. The findings indicate that teachers' professional ethics are not only related to technical teaching competence but also encompass moral integrity, social responsibility, and commitment to students' character development. The philosophical perspective reveals that teachers' professional ethics are rooted in philosophical traditions that value

wisdom, justice, and virtue as fundamental principles in the educational process. The practical implications of this study contribute to the development of teacher education curricula, the formulation of professional codes of ethics, and the improvement of learning quality in educational institutions.

Keywords

Ethics of the Teaching Profession, Educational Philosophy, Moral Education, Professional Development

Introduction

The teaching profession is one of the professions that carries great moral and social responsibility in shaping the character and intellectual capacity of future generations. As agents of social and moral change, teachers are not only responsible for delivering knowledge but also serve as moral role models and character builders who significantly influence students' holistic development. In this regard, teachers' professional ethics become a fundamental aspect that cannot be separated from educational practice, as every educational interaction inherently contains profound and continuous moral dimensions (Anderson & Campbell, 2019).

The importance of understanding teachers' professional ethics has become increasingly urgent in the modern era, where educational challenges are becoming more complex and diverse. Developments in information technology, changes in social structure, increasing cultural diversity, and demands for accountability within the educational system create a landscape that requires teachers to possess a strong and adaptive moral compass. The post-COVID-19 pandemic era has also added new complexities to educational practice, where teachers must navigate

ethical dilemmas in hybrid learning, digital inequality, and students' mental health challenges.

Professional ethics are not merely associated with formal regulations that must be followed; more than that, they constitute a system of values and moral principles that guide all professional actions and decisions of educators. Professional ethics encompass internalized values that underpin professional judgment, decision-making processes, and interpersonal relationships within the educational context (Brown & Wilson, 2020). This does not only include what teachers do in the classroom but also how they interact with colleagues, parents, administrators, and the wider community.

From a philosophical perspective, teachers' professional ethics can be understood as the practical application of various ethical traditions that have developed throughout human civilization. Philosophical foundations provide a strong theoretical framework for understanding the nature of moral obligation, character development, and ethical reasoning within the educational context. Each philosophical tradition, both Western and Eastern, offers valuable insights for understanding the moral complexity of the teaching profession.

Research on teachers' professional ethics from philosophical and educational perspectives has become increasingly relevant given the paradigm shifts occurring in education. Digital transformation, which changes the way teaching and learning take place, globalization, which brings diverse cultural perspectives into classrooms, and socio-cultural changes that influence values and expectations in education, all

require teachers not only to be technically competent but also to have strong ethical foundations to face various moral dilemmas in educational practice (Davis et al., 2021).

The complexity of ethical issues in modern education cannot be resolved through simple or purely rule-based approaches. Teachers often face situations in which different ethical principles may conflict with one another or where cultural values may differ from professional standards. For instance, tensions may arise between respecting parental authority and ensuring student well-being, or between meeting individual student needs and adhering to classroom management requirements. Such situations require sophisticated ethical reasoning grounded in strong philosophical foundations.

The philosophical foundations of teachers' professional ethics can be traced to various schools of thought, ranging from Aristotelian virtue ethics, which emphasizes virtue and character development, Kantian deontological ethics, which focuses on universal moral duties and respect for humanity, to consequentialist ethics, which considers the outcomes and consequences of educational actions (Johnson & Martinez, 2020). Each philosophical perspective contributes uniquely to understanding the complexity of teachers' professional ethics, and integrating these perspectives can provide a comprehensive ethical framework.

In the Indonesian educational context, understanding teachers' professional ethics cannot be separated from the philosophical values of Pancasila and the national educational tradition, which emphasizes character and moral development of

students. Pancasila as the philosophical foundation of the Indonesian nation provides a unique perspective on teachers' professional ethics that integrates spiritual values, humanistic principles, nationalism, democratic ideals, and social justice (Sutrisno & Wahyuni, 2021). This indicates that teachers' professional ethics possess both universal and contextual dimensions that must be understood comprehensively.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine the understanding of teachers' professional ethics from philosophical and educational perspectives using an in-depth and comprehensive qualitative approach. This research seeks to integrate insights from various philosophical traditions with contextual realities within the educational system, particularly in Indonesia, to develop a holistic understanding of the ethical dimensions of the teaching profession.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with an interpretive-hermeneutic paradigm to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' professional ethics from philosophical and educational perspectives. A qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to explore meanings, interpretations, and deep understandings related to the phenomenon of teachers' professional ethics.

The research design used was document analysis, applying qualitative content analysis techniques. This study analyzed various primary and secondary documentary sources related to

teachers' professional ethics, educational philosophy, and applied ethics theory.

Result and Discussion

Philosophical analysis of teachers' professional ethics reveals that the theoretical foundation of teachers' professional ethics is derived from three major philosophical traditions that complement and integrate with one another within the context of educational practice (Carr, 2000; Sockett, 2011).

Virtue Ethics Tradition in the Context of Teaching

Based on the analysis of various sources, the tradition of virtue ethics makes a fundamental contribution to understanding teachers' professional ethics. From an Aristotelian perspective, an ethical teacher is one who possesses excellence of character (*arete*), reflected in wisdom (*sophia* and *phronesis*), courage (*andreia*), justice (*dikaiosyne*), and temperance (*sophrosyne*) (Aristotle, trans. 2009; Kristjánsson, 2015).

Wisdom in the teaching profession encompasses two dimensions: theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), which relates to mastery of subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge, and practical wisdom (*phronesis*), which relates to the ability to make appropriate moral decisions in concrete teaching situations. Courage reflects a teacher's willingness to defend truth, advocate for students' best interests, and take constructive pedagogical risks. Justice is reflected in fairness in treating all students and in objective assessment. Temperance signifies self-control and modesty in exercising authority and power (Carr, 2000; Campbell, 2008).

Contribution of Deontological Ethics

The Kantian perspective provides a framework of moral duty and categorical imperatives relevant to the teaching profession. The principle of “treat humanity, whether in yourself or in others, always as an end and never merely as a means” has profound implications for teacher-student relationships. Students must be treated as individuals possessing dignity and autonomous capacity, not merely as objects to achieve academic targets or administrative goals (Strike & Soltis, 2009).

The concept of the categorical imperative also requires teachers to act based on maxims that can be universalized as moral law. This means that every action and decision made by teachers must be universally justifiable and free from contradiction.

Consequentialist Ethical Perspective in Education

The utilitarian approach to teachers’ professional ethics emphasizes careful consideration of the consequences of every pedagogical action. Teachers must evaluate the long-term impact of instructional strategies, disciplinary measures, and educational policies on students’ well-being and development (Mill, 2002; Curren, 2017).

However, the application of pure utilitarianism in the educational context faces challenges, particularly in situations where achieving the greatest good for the greatest number may sacrifice the interests of individual students or minority groups. Therefore, rule utilitarianism is often considered more applicable in educational contexts (Mill, 2002; Benade, 2015).

Pedagogical Dimensions of Teachers’ Professional Ethics in the Learning Process

Analysis of the pedagogical dimension shows that teachers’ professional ethics in the learning process encompass several core

principles. First, the principle of educational beneficence requires teachers to always act in the best interests of students. Second, the principle of non-maleficence obliges teachers to “do no harm” in all aspects of educational practice. Third, the principle of autonomy emphasizes respect for students’ developing autonomy and encourages critical thinking and independent learning (Strike & Soltis, 2009; Cain & Harris, 2013).

Ethics in Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment and evaluation processes are highly sensitive areas within teachers’ professional ethics. Fairness, objectivity, transparency, and accountability are fundamental principles that must be upheld. Teachers have the moral responsibility to provide constructive feedback, valid and reliable assessments, and fair and consistent evaluation.

Ethics in Classroom Management and Disciplinary Actions

Ethical classroom management requires balancing order with respect for students’ dignity. Disciplinary actions must be proportional, educational, and restorative rather than punitive. Teachers must avoid public humiliation, corporal punishment, and any form of psychological harassment.

Implementation of Teachers’ Professional Ethics in the Indonesian Context

Integration with Pancasila Values

In the Indonesian context, teachers’ professional ethics cannot be separated from the values of Pancasila as the nation’s philosophical foundation. Each principle of Pancasila has specific ethical implications for the teaching profession: Belief in One Almighty God requires teachers to respect the spiritual dimension of education; Just and Civilized Humanity emphasizes respect for human dignity; The Unity of Indonesia promotes unity in

diversity; Democracy Guided by the Inner Wisdom of Deliberation/Representation highlights democratic values in classroom management; and Social Justice for All People of Indonesia demands equitable access and fair treatment in education (Sutrisno & Wahyuni, 2021; Tilaar, 2012).

Challenges in Implementation

The implementation of teachers' professional ethics in Indonesia faces several challenges: (1) the gap between ideal expectations and practical realities within the education system; (2) insufficient preparation in teacher education programs regarding ethical dimensions; (3) the lack of systematic support systems for ethical decision-making; (4) conflicts between professional ethics and administrative demands; and (5) cultural and contextual factors that sometimes conflict with universally accepted ethical principles.

Conclusion

This study shows that teachers' professional ethics are a complex, multidimensional construct that must be understood through an integration of philosophical traditions, pedagogical principles, and contextual realities. Ethical foundations in teaching cannot rely on a single framework but require a synthesis of virtue ethics, deontological principles, and consequentialist perspectives. Teachers' ethics extend beyond technical teaching competence to include moral integrity, character development, social responsibility, and commitment to students' holistic well-being. In Indonesia, implementation faces specific cultural and policy challenges, with Pancasila providing a distinct ethical foundation while maintaining universal ethical values.

The study emphasizes the need for systematic reform in teacher education, practical ethical frameworks, and institutional support systems. Future research should focus on implementation strategies, ethical competence assessment, and context-based ethical guidelines for teachers.

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