

Work Ethics of Elementary School Teachers in Relation to their Professional Development

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Abstract — This study aims to delve into the work ethics of elementary school teachers concerning their professional development, utilizing data that considers factors such as teaching experience, educational attainment, professional development, and perceived challenges. Employing a cross-sectional survey research design, the study unveils that experienced teachers, particularly those with over ten years of service and advanced qualifications, exhibit a steadfast commitment to professional ethics and development. The findings reflect high levels of self-efficacy and job satisfaction, aligning with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers. Nevertheless, a notable disparity emerges between the idealistic perceptions of the teaching profession and the practical realities faced by these educators, particularly among those with increased experience or higher education. Notwithstanding, they showcase high professionalism across various domains, including adherence to professional ethics, compliance with school policies, reverence for the teaching profession, collaboration with colleagues, and dedication to professional development goals. Unveiling an intricate relationship between elementary school teachers' professional profiles and their perceptions of work ethics, the study underscores the paramount importance of ethics in teaching practices and advocates for a comprehensive approach to teacher development. In conclusion, the research underscores the imperative of continuous professional development, emphasizing its crucial role in bolstering teachers' work ethics and fostering their professional growth, recognizing and addressing the multifaceted nature of the teaching profession.

Keywords — **Work Ethics, Professional Development, Teaching Profession**

I. Introduction

The demand for competent and professional staff is increasing globally due to the widespread influence of globalization and technological advancements in all aspects of society. As a result, educational systems need to evolve to equip students with the necessary knowledge

and skills to face the challenges that lie ahead. Teachers play a pivotal role in this endeavor as their ethical conduct and dedication profoundly impact the development of future global citizens (Darling-Hammond & Ducommun, 2021). In elementary education, teachers are responsible for laying the foundation for lifelong learning and instilling the essential skills required by the 21st century (Suaco et al., 2023). It is worth noting that teachers' performance and, consequently, student outcomes is significantly influenced by their work ethics (Dinç et al., 2020).

Scholarly works, such as those by Darling-Hammond & Ducommun (2021) and Suaco et al. (2023), emphasize the crucial connection between professionalism and behavioral traits like work ethics. Van Maele and Van Houtte (2019) further explore this topic by explaining how teacher-student relationships influence teachers' perception of professionalism and sense of belongingness.

Recognizing teachers as paramount role models in society, their adherence to ethical principles becomes imperative for the systematic advancement of education and training. Bıyıklar (2019) emphasizes the commencement of ethics education during pre-service training, continuing through on-the-job training, highlighting its pivotal role in shaping professional conduct. In an era of rapid global transformations, the significance of teachers' work ethics in fostering student success cannot be overstated (Wang et al., 2020). Moreover, Van Maele and Van Houtte (2019) underscore the ethical obligation of teachers to cultivate a sense of belonging among students, thereby enriching the social and psychological dimensions of education.

In the Philippines, initiatives by the Department of Education (DepEd), such as Republic Act No. 6713, aim to elevate the quality of education by establishing a code of conduct and ethical standards for public officials and employees, including teachers. Almasa (2020) highlights the alignment of curricula with Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), indicative of a concerted effort to integrate pre-service training with nationally recognized competencies. However, a discernible gap exists in comprehending the cultivation and sustenance of work ethics, particularly among elementary school teachers in the Philippines (Dinç et al., 2020).

In essence, an in-depth exploration of the work ethics of elementary school teachers in Cuyapo East District offers a localized perspective on a globally pertinent issue. This underscores the pivotal role of work ethics in teaching, which intersects with professional values, self-efficacy, and teacher effectiveness. Despite its acknowledged importance, a conspicuous gap persists in scholarly investigations. Through a comprehensive examination of work ethics, this study aspires to contribute substantially to educational theory, policy, and practice, fostering elementary teachers' professionalism.

Statement of the Problem

The study sought to address the following research problems:

1. What is the profile of elementary school teachers in Cuyapo East District, Nueva Ecija, in terms of:
 - a. teaching position;
 - b. years of teaching experience;
 - c. highest educational attainment;
 - d. professional development (number of relevant training attended); and
 - e. coordinatorship?
2. What is the level of the work ethic of the respondents as perceived by themselves, their co-teachers, and school heads along the following:
 - a. professional ethics;
 - b. school policies and procedures;
 - c. the dignity of teaching as a profession;
 - d. professional links with colleagues;
 - e. professional reflection and learning to improve practice; and
 - f. professional development goal?
3. What is the level of challenges encountered by the respondents in their work assignments in terms of:
 - a. professional challenges;
 - b. ethical and behavioral challenges;
 - c. relational challenges; and
 - d. technological and contextual challenges?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the level of work ethics perceived by the respondents across teaching positions, years in service, and highest educational attainment?

II. Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a cross-sectional survey research design, a method well-suited for examining the relationships between variables at a specific point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This design facilitated the collection of quantitative data from a broad and diverse sample of participants, enabling an exploration of the intricate interplay between individual profiles, teacher work ethics, and encountered challenges (Fowler, 2020). A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure the sample's representativeness of elementary school teachers in Cuyapo District, Nueva Ecija. This technique involved categorizing the population into subgroups based on pertinent characteristics, such as school type and teaching experience, and randomly selecting participants from each subset.

Subsequently, the gathered data underwent evaluation and interpretation using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This analytical tool facilitated the systematic analysis of the collected data, identifying patterns, correlations, and trends pertinent to the research objectives.

III. Results and Discussion

Respondents' Profile

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the respondents' profiles based on their teaching position, years of teaching experience, and highest educational attainment.

Table 1:
Respondents Profile as to Teaching Position, Years of Teaching Experience and Highest Educational Attainment

Profile	frequency	Percentage
Teaching Position		
Teacher I	34	28.81
Teacher II	9	7.63
Teacher III	65	55.08
Master Teacher I	8	6.78
Master Teacher II	2	1.69
Years of Teaching Experience		
0-2 years of service	10	8.47
3-5 years of service	21	17.80
5-10 years of service	28	23.73
10 or more years of service	59	50.00
Highest Education Attainment		
Bachelor's Degree	15	12.71
Master's Degree	42	35.59
Doctorate Degree	2	1.69
MA Units	53	44.92
PhD/EdD units	6	5.08

The analysis of the data collected from the sample of teachers reveals noteworthy distributions and percentages within each category. Teacher III emerged as the most common position among the respondents, comprising 55.08% of the sample, followed by Teacher I at 28.81%. This distribution suggests a predominant presence of experienced educators within the surveyed group.

Regarding years of teaching experience, respondents were categorized into four groups: 0-2 years, 3-5 years, 5-10 years, and 10 or more years of service. Remarkably, half of the respondents fell into the category of ten or more years of service, indicating a significant proportion of educators with extensive tenure in the field.

Educational attainment among the respondents varied across different levels, with a notable emphasis on higher education. A substantial portion of respondents hold Master's Degrees, while a considerable number have completed MA units. This trend underscores dedication to ongoing learning and professional growth, aligning with the principles of lifelong learning emphasized by Dinç, Akengin, & Kocayörük (2020).

The dominance of Teacher III positions signifies a wealth of experience within the teaching profession, complemented by many educators boasting ten or more years of teaching experience. Moreover, the prevalence of postgraduate studies, particularly Master's Degrees, underscores a commitment to advancing knowledge and expertise among the surveyed educators.

This demographic profile offers valuable insights for educational institutions and policymakers. It provides a deeper understanding of the composition of the teaching workforce and its implications for professional development and organizational strategies.

Table 2:
Perceived work ethics as to Professional ethics

Indicator	Teachers		School Heads	
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE
Demonstrate awareness of existing laws and regulations that apply to the teaching profession and become familiar with the responsibilities.	2.75	HPT	2.69	HPT
Review regularly personal teaching practices using existing laws and regulations that apply to the teaching profession and responsibilities.	2.77	HPT	2.81	HPT
Discuss teaching and learning practices that apply existing codes, laws, and regulations to the teaching profession and their responsibilities with colleagues.	2.80	HPT	2.88	HPT
Lead colleagues in regularly reviewing existing codes, laws, and regulations that apply to the teaching profession and its responsibilities.	2.78	HPT	2.81	HPT
Grand Mean	2.78	HPT	2.80	HPT
Legend				
Scale	Description			
3.26 – 4.00	Distinguished Teachers (DT)			
2.51 – 3.25	Highly Proficient Teachers (HPT)			
1.76 – 2.50	Proficient Teachers (PT)			
1.00 – 1.75	Beginning Teachers (BT)			

The analysis reveals interesting insights into how teachers and school heads perceive their adherence to professional ethics, particularly regarding awareness of laws and regulations and engagement in discussions on teaching practices.

The least mean indicator suggests that both groups perceive themselves as moderately aware of existing laws and regulations related to the teaching profession and responsibilities. This finding indicates a potential area for improvement or professional development, particularly for school heads, to enhance their understanding of legal frameworks governing their roles.

Conversely, the highest mean indicator indicates that both teachers and school heads perceive themselves as moderately engaged in discussing teaching and learning practices related to codes, laws, and regulations. This positive finding highlights a collaborative and proactive approach to professional development, where educators value exchanging ideas and insights on best practices.

Overall, the data suggests a generally consistent perception of work ethics among both groups, with school heads demonstrating a slightly higher overall mean score. However, the disparity in mean scores between the two groups implies that school heads may benefit from additional emphasis on awareness of laws and regulations compared to teachers.

The study's findings resonate with Almasa's (2020) emphasis on aligning curriculum with professional standards to enhance the quality of pre-service teacher education. The high level of professional ethics demonstrated by the teachers underscores the effectiveness of such alignment in fostering a strong ethical foundation within the teaching profession.

Table 3:
Perceived work ethics as to social policies and procedures

Indicators	Teachers		School Heads	
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE
Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of school policies and procedures to foster harmonious relationships with the wider school community.	2.77	HPT	2.75	HPT
Comply with and implement school policies and procedures consistently to foster harmonious relationships with learners, parents, and other stakeholders.	2.83	HPT	2.75	HPT
Exhibit commitment to and support teachers in implementing school policies and procedures to foster harmonious relationships with learners, parents, and other stakeholders.	2.81	HPT	2.94	HPT
Evaluate existing school policies and procedures to make them more responsive to the needs of the learners, parents, and other stakeholders.	2.77	HPT	2.88	HPT
Grand Mean	2.80	HPT	2.83	HPT

The overall grand mean scores paint a positive picture, indicating that teachers and school heads perceive their work ethics regarding social policies and procedures to be highly proficient (HPT), reflecting a solid understanding and commitment to ethical practices. However, a closer examination reveals nuances in specific areas. While teachers and school heads generally excel in understanding and committing to social policies and procedures, the slightly lower scores in compliance and implementation for school heads suggest a potential area for improvement. This finding implies a need for school leaders to ensure consistent adherence to policies, enhancing the overall effectiveness of policy implementation within the school community.

On a positive note, the high score for support in implementation by school heads suggests a proactive and supportive approach, indicating a strong commitment to assisting teachers in adhering to policies. However, the moderate scores in the evaluation of policies indicate that both groups recognize the importance of regularly reviewing and improving policies, suggesting room for enhancement in this aspect.

Overall, the findings reflect a positive perception of ethical practices related to social policies and procedures among teachers and school heads. However, the variations in scores across indicators highlight specific areas that may benefit from targeted improvement and professional development efforts. This information is valuable for educational institutions and policymakers as it underscores the importance of ethical conduct in interactions with the broader school community and provides a foundation for reinforcing these values.

This is following Dinç, Akengin, and Kocayörük (2020), who argue that it is crucial to prioritize and support policy implementation to create a positive learning environment that contributes to learners' overall development. This highlights the importance of a committed approach to policy implementation.

Table 4:
Perceived work ethics as to the dignity of teaching as a profession

Indicator	Teachers		School Heads	
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE
Demonstrate behaviors that uphold the dignity of teaching as a profession by exhibiting qualities such as a caring attitude, respect, and integrity.	2.81	HPT	3.00	HPT
Adopt practices that uphold the dignity of teaching as a profession by exhibiting qualities such as a caring attitude, respect, and integrity.	2.88	HPT	2.91	HPT
Identify and utilize personal professional strengths to uphold the dignity of teaching as a profession to help build a positive teaching and learning culture within the school.	2.81	HPT	2.91	HPT
Act as a role model and advocate for upholding the dignity of teaching as a profession to build a positive teaching and learning culture within and beyond the school.	2.81	HPT	2.85	HPT
Grand Mean	2.83	HPT	2.87	HPT

The analysis reveals that teachers and school heads scored above the Highly Proficient Teachers (HPT) level across all indicators, indicating a strong perception of demonstrating behaviors that uphold the dignity of teaching. However, there are subtle differences between the two groups in certain aspects. Teachers scored slightly lower than school heads on the indicator related to upholding the dignity of teaching, suggesting that while both groups exhibit qualities such as caring attitude, respect, and integrity, school heads may perceive themselves as doing so more consistently or effectively. Nevertheless, both groups demonstrate a commitment to maintaining the dignity of teaching.

Similarly, teachers and school heads perceive themselves as adopting practices that uphold the dignity of teaching, with negligible differences in mean scores between the two groups. This implies a shared belief in upholding professional standards and values within educational institutions.

Regarding leveraging personal strengths to build a positive teaching and learning culture, school heads scored slightly higher than teachers. This suggests that school heads may feel more confident or capable of utilizing their strengths for this purpose, highlighting their leadership role in fostering a conducive educational environment.

Lastly, both groups perceive themselves as role models and advocates for upholding the dignity of teaching, further emphasizing their commitment to professional ethics and standards.

These findings underscore the significance of perceived work ethics in maintaining the dignity of teaching and highlight the ongoing efforts needed to uphold professional standards within educational institutions. They align with the insights of Darling-Hammond and Ducommun (2021), emphasizing the pivotal role of leadership, work discipline, and effective utilization of professional skills in enhancing teacher performance and maintaining the integrity of the teaching profession.

Table 5:
Overall Perceived Work Ethics

Indicators	Teachers		School Heads	
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE
Professional Ethics	2.78	HPT	2.80	HPT
School policies and procedures	2.80	HPT	2.83	HPT
The dignity of teaching as a profession	2.83	HPT	2.87	HPT
Professional links with colleagues	2.84	HPT	2.75	HPT
Professional reflection and learning to improve practice	2.85	HPT	2.86	HPT
Professional development goals	2.92	HPT	2.98	HPT
Grand Mean	2.84	HPT	2.84	HPT

Teachers scored slightly lower than school heads in professional development goals (mean = 2.92 and 2.98). However, both groups scored within the HPT range, indicating a solid motivation to set and achieve professional development goals aligned with established standards. It highlights a commitment to lifelong learning and career advancement within the teaching profession.

The findings affirm the importance of maintaining high ethical standards and upholding the dignity of teaching as a profession. Schools should continue to prioritize professional development programs that foster a culture of professionalism and integrity among educators. The results highlight the importance of investing in professional development initiatives that support teachers and school heads in setting and achieving meaningful career advancement and improvement goals. Schools should provide resources and opportunities for ongoing learning and skill development aligned with professional standards.

School heads are crucial in setting the tone for professional ethics and development within educational institutions. Schools should recognize and support their leadership contributions in fostering a culture of excellence and continuous improvement.

Overall, the findings suggest a positive perception of work ethics among teachers and school heads, with opportunities for further enhancement through continued support for professional development, collaboration, and ethical conduct within educational institutions.

Table 5 provides a comprehensive analysis of the overall challenges encountered by respondents in their work assignments. The indicators were evaluated on a scale with corresponding descriptors, covering professional, ethical behavioral, relational, technological, and contextual challenges.

Table 6:
Overall Level of Challenges Encountered by the Respondents

Indicators	Teachers		School Heads	
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE
1. Professional Challenges	2.21	MNS	2.20	MNS
2. Ethical and behavioral Challenges	2.10	MNS	2.11	MNS
3. Relational	2.10	MNS	2.11	MNS
4. Technological and Contextual	2.12	MNS	2.13	MNS
Grand Mean	2.13	MNS	2.14	MNS

In indicator 1, teachers and school heads perceive professional challenges as moderately not severe (MNS), with mean scores of 2.21 and 2.20, respectively. This aligns with findings from Molino (2019), who investigated the relationship between ethics, professionalism, practices, and behavior in the work environment among elementary teachers.

Indicator 2 shows that both groups rate ethical and behavioral challenges similarly, with mean scores of 2.10 for teachers and 2.11 for school heads, falling under the moderately not severe (MNS) category. This may indicate the evolving ethical standards in education, as Almasa (2020) discussed concerning the alignment of educational curricula with professional standards.

Similarly, in indicator 3, teachers and school heads perceive relational challenges, with mean scores of 2.10 for teachers and 2.11 for school heads, also falling under the moderately not severe (MNS) category. This echoes the significance of teacher-student relationships highlighted by Van Maele and Van Houtte (2019), suggesting that while these relationships are crucial, they also present moderate challenges to teachers.

Indicator 4 indicates that both groups perceive technological and contextual challenges similarly, with mean scores of 2.12 for teachers and 2.13 for school heads, falling under the moderately not severe (MNS) category. This might reflect the challenges Suaco, Mangaliag, and Gadgad (2023) highlighted in adapting to new technologies and methodologies in education.

Overall, these findings shed light on the perceived challenges teachers and school heads face in various aspects of their professional roles, emphasizing the importance of addressing these challenges to enhance the quality of education delivery and professional satisfaction.

Correlation of the respondents' perceived work ethics across the profile

Table 7 represents the correlation coefficients between the respondents' perceived work ethics based on different teaching positions (TP) and specific aspects of work ethics labeled IIA to IIF.

Table 7:
Correlation Analysis of the Respondent's perceive work ethics in terms of teaching position
 $\alpha = 0.05$

	Professional Ethics		School Policies and Procedures		The dignity of teaching as a profession		Professional link with colleges		Professional reflection and learning to improve practice		Professional development goals	
	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value	r-value	p-value
Teaching Profession	0.74	0.00	0.27	0.00	-0.96	0.00	-0.84	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.39	0.00
Years of teaching Experience	0.80	0.00	-0.70	0.00	-0.33	0.00	0.27	0.00	0.33	0.00	-0.34	0.00
Highest Educational Attainment	0.28	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.73	0.00	-0.12	0.00	0.75	0.00	0.33	0.00

The correlations identified in the data shed light on various aspects of professional ethics, perceptions of the teaching profession, adherence to school policies, and the dignity of teaching. These insights offer valuable considerations for fostering a positive and supportive professional environment within educational institutions.

Firstly, a strong positive correlation between professional ethics and the perception of the teaching profession indicates that teachers prioritizing professional ethics tend to have a higher regard for the profession's dignity. This underscores the importance of emphasizing and fostering professional ethics among educators to cultivate greater pride and commitment to teaching.

Similarly, a moderate positive correlation exists between adherence to school policies and the dignity of teaching, suggesting that effective communication and alignment between school policies and the values of the teaching profession can enhance teachers' sense of professional dignity.

However, strong negative correlations are observed between the dignity of teaching and professional reflection and professional links with colleges. This suggests that teachers who perceive teaching as dignified may be less inclined toward seeking external validation or peer collaboration. While emphasizing professional dignity is crucial, balancing it with opportunities for reflection and collaboration to foster continuous improvement is essential.

Moreover, a strong negative correlation is noted between the dignity of teaching and professional reflection, indicating that teachers who highly value the dignity of teaching may perceive professional reflection and learning as less necessary. Efforts should be made to integrate reflection and learning into the professional development culture while also reaffirming the dignity and value of teaching.

Lastly, a moderate negative correlation is observed between professional development goals and the perception of the teaching profession, implying that teachers prioritizing professional development goals may have a slightly lower regard for the overall profession. Balancing individual professional growth with a sense of collective identity and purpose within the teaching profession is essential for sustaining motivation and cohesion among educators.

In summary, these correlations highlight the complex interplay between various aspects of professional identity, ethics, and perceptions within the teaching profession, providing valuable insights for promoting a supportive and conducive professional environment for educators.

IV. Conclusion

1. The profile of elementary school teachers, primarily Teacher III with extensive experience, demonstrates a commendable work ethic marked by their dedication to professional development and active involvement in training and coordinatorship roles. Their commitment to advancing educational practices, especially in technology integration and practical arts, highlights their role as catalysts for lifelong learning and professional excellence within the educational system.
2. Elementary school teachers and school heads have a positive perception of work ethics, notably in professional ethics, understanding of social policies, and commitment to professional development aligned with national standards. However, the study also identifies areas for improvement, such as legal awareness, network participation, and leadership in professional growth. These findings emphasize the importance of ongoing professional development and collaborative efforts to maintain teaching standards, suggesting a pathway for enhancing educational practices through targeted interventions that address identified gaps.
3. Teachers and school heads perceive the range of challenges, from professional duties to technological adaptation, as manageable with moderate concern. This perception indicates a resilient and adaptable educational workforce confident in its ability to address and overcome challenges. The findings underscore the importance of continuous professional development, effective policy implementation, and supportive environments to navigate these challenges successfully.
4. The study uncovers an intricate relationship between elementary school teachers' professional profiles and their perceptions of work ethics. While advancements in position and experience align positively with professional ethics and policy adherence, unexpected negative

correlations with the dignity of teaching and professional relationships warrant further exploration. Additionally, the absence of significant differences in attitudes toward professional development across teaching roles underscores a universal need for support in this domain. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to enhance work ethics among educators at all levels, aiming to cultivate a more ethical, collaborative, and professionally developed educational workforce.

V. Recommendations

1. **Professional Development and Technology Integration.** It is recommended that efforts continue to support and expand professional development opportunities, emphasizing technology integration and practical arts. This approach sustains and enhances teachers' commitment to lifelong learning. Targeted training programs should be developed and implemented to meet the specific needs of experienced educators, especially those in senior positions like Teacher III, to further enrich their skills and knowledge. Encouraging and facilitating teachers' involvement in coordinatorship roles and other leadership positions within schools is crucial to fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement.
2. **Legal Awareness, Professional Networks, and Leadership Development.** Programs to increase legal awareness among teachers and school heads are essential to ensure compliance with relevant laws and regulations. Enhancing participation in professional networks and communities of practice can significantly improve collaborative learning and the sharing of best practices among educators. Additionally, leadership development initiatives for teachers and school heads are recommended to cultivate essential leadership skills and promote professional growth.
3. **Addressing Challenges with Continuous Development and Supportive Policies.** Strengthening continuous professional development programs is critical to equipping educators with the necessary skills to manage diverse challenges, including professional, ethical, behavioral, relational, and technological issues. Policies should be reviewed and updated regularly to adapt to the changing educational landscape and support educators in effectively tackling these challenges. Creating supportive environments encouraging open communication and collaboration among educators is vital for sharing strategies and solutions to overcome challenges.
4. **Research, Accessibility, and Targeted Interventions for Work Ethics.** Further research is needed to explore the underlying causes of negative correlations observed between teaching positions and perceptions of the dignity of teaching and professional relationships. Ensuring that professional development opportunities are accessible and relevant to all educators, regardless of their position or years of experience, is fundamental to promoting a uniformly high standard of work ethics across the educational workforce. Finally, developing targeted interventions to address identified gaps in work ethics perceptions,

including initiatives aimed at enhancing the dignity of the teaching profession and strengthening professional links among colleagues, is crucial for fostering a more ethical, collaborative, and professionally developed educational workforce.

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