

## Ethical Practices of the Teaching Profession among Secondary School Teachers Based on Demographic Factors

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aims to evaluate the level of implementation of Teaching Professional Ethics by considering demographic factors among secondary school teachers (Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan, SMK) in Kedah Malaysia. The study involved 376 teachers selected from 147 schools. A quantitative approach was employed, with data collected using a questionnaire comprising 29 items measured on a five-point Likert scale. Data analysis was conducted using statistical methods such as Pearson Correlation, t-tests, and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The findings revealed significant differences in the practice of Teaching Professional Ethics based on demographic factors, namely age and teaching experience.

**KEYWORDS:** Professional Ethics of Teaching Practices, Secondary Schools (SMK), Demographic Factors

### I. INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the work culture exhibits both individualistic and collectivistic characteristics. This work environment creates a more dynamic atmosphere in the professional domain. The attitude of individuals prioritizing societal needs over personal interests has shaped Malaysians into a collectivistic society, stemming from a strong familial system and robust community ties. Following the 1990s, economic changes in Malaysia's market brought significant shifts. Consequently, workers were increasingly exposed to Western cultures and values that emphasize individualism, personal achievements, wealth accumulation, and entrepreneurial pursuits. The ethical standards within Malaysian society have also declined, impacting organizational commitment and work ethics. These shifts in values can influence attitudes and behaviors through a macroeconomic context, which plays a role in explaining variations in employee behavior (Fischer & Mansell, 2009).

Ethics refer to human behavior and values (Thiroux, 2000). Meanwhile, a profession is defined as an occupation that provides unique and essential services based on intellectual expertise, with adequate qualifications and professional training, while adhering to the ethical standards set by the organization (Yahya & Zainuddin, 2003). In other words, teachers must adhere to the code of ethics as educators and understand the responsibilities enshrined within the ethics of the teaching profession. When the code of ethics is used as a guideline by teachers in fulfilling their responsibilities, the goals, mission, and vision of the organization can be achieved. This is because organizations and employees are interdependent on one another.

### II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although bound by the code of ethics of the teaching profession, there are still cases of ethical violations among teachers. This has raised doubts and concerns among parents and society in Malaysia regarding the actions of teachers. Are such actions justifiable? Do these actions adhere to the guidelines and ethics recommended? An

examination of disciplinary reports by the Education Service Commission for 2016 reveals numerous cases of ethical violations by teachers. According to the Annual Report of the Education Service Commission (SPP, 2016), 60 disciplinary cases were reported, with 58 cases involving education service officers, primarily teachers. Cases of absenteeism, misconduct, and court convictions are among the issues related to teacher ethics. Some teachers faced actions such as suspension or dismissal orders for offenses involving criminal activities, corruption, drugs, violations of Syariah law, and offenses under the Penal Code (SPP, 2016). Based on these reports, it is evident that there are shortcomings in the practice of the teaching profession's ethics by a segment of teachers, which significantly impacts their commitment to their organizations, particularly the Ministry of Education Malaysia, and, more broadly, the schools where they work. This raises the question of whether these cases are influenced by demographic factors or other underlying causes.

According to the report by the Disciplinary Unit for Teachers in Kedah (2017), there were 10 types of offenses committed by Educational Service Officers in Kedah, involving 100 teachers who faced disciplinary actions. Although the number of offending teachers is only 100, the impact on the schools where these teachers serve is substantial, affecting not only their colleagues but also the students in those schools. In 2017, disciplinary cases involving absenteeism among teachers in Kedah reached 34 cases. Meanwhile, the number of disciplinary cases reported by the Education Service Commission (SPP) nationwide for the same year totaled 40 cases. The disciplinary cases reported by the SPP represent the total number of cases involving teachers across Malaysia. If the cumulative nationwide total for teacher absenteeism cases is 40 and 34 of these were reported in Kedah during the same year, it can be concluded that teachers in Kedah face significant challenges in fulfilling their responsibilities as educators. These figures exclude cases of teacher misconduct involving criminal activities and court convictions. Are secondary school teachers (SMK) in Kedah also contributors to the increase in these misconduct cases? Thus, Kedah is an appropriate location for this study, with secondary school teachers in the state serving as the population for this research.

An examination of previous studies conducted in secondary schools in Kedah reveals that researchers have predominantly focused on other variables, with limited studies specifically addressing the practices of the Teaching Profession Ethics and the factors influencing them. The locations and samples of these studies also vary across the research that has been conducted. Studies focusing on secondary schools (SMK) in Kedah are notably scarce. In essence, secondary schools make up the majority of schools in each state, including Kedah. Therefore, this gap needs to be addressed by conducting a study that specifically targets secondary school teachers in Kedah.

Based on findings from previous studies, current issues, and verified facts, it is evident that teachers in Kedah are experiencing significant challenges in practicing the ethics of the teaching profession, particularly among secondary school (SMK) teachers. Could this be due to a misalignment between the ethical conduct displayed by teachers and the objectives of the National Education Philosophy, leading educators to prioritize personal satisfaction over adhering to the teaching profession's code of ethics? Are the principles of *Tonggak 12*, as emphasized in the values and ethics of Malaysia's public service, not being practiced by SMK teachers in Kedah? Can these transformative efforts provide motivation and encouragement for SMK teachers in Kedah to become competent educators? These questions remain unanswered. To address these uncertainties, a study must be conducted in SMK schools in Kedah to examine the extent to which the teaching profession's ethical practices are being implemented, particularly in relation to demographic factors.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Ethics of Public Service is one of the foundational policies within the public sector and must be adhered to by all public servants in Malaysia. The internalization of values and work ethics among public servants in Malaysia is guided by three core principles of Public Service Ethics. The essence of these principles involves elements of patriotism, work ethics, and noble values (INTAN, 2021), which are to be applied and practiced by all public servants in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. Meanwhile, Teacher Ethics is a set of regulations that serves as a guideline for teachers in Malaysia to foster mutual respect, uphold civility, care for the teaching profession, and manage their lives more meaningfully. In the teaching profession, ethics function as

a framework to monitor teachers' actions, ensuring the well-being of the society they interact with is safeguarded. Additionally, the presence of teaching ethics helps regulate teachers' behavior to align with social norms and avoid violating basic human rights. The Code of Teaching Ethics, which has been introduced, serves as a guide for teachers to understand their roles and responsibilities as educators.

The Code of Teaching Ethics in Malaysia must be adhered to in order to safeguard the reputation of the teaching profession and enhance its quality. All teachers in Malaysia are bound by the Professional Conduct of the Teaching Profession, which is encapsulated in the following pledge:

*“We, the teachers of Malaysia, are confident that the primary purpose of education is to strive towards the formation of citizens who are knowledgeable, loyal, responsible, and competent, who recognize the significance of our efforts in the pursuit of truth and the achievement of noble aspirations, and who believe in democracy, individual freedom, and the principles of the Rukun Negara.*

*Through education, society can assist its youth in understanding their culture, acquiring knowledge accumulated over generations, and preparing them to face future challenges.*

*Recognizing the magnitude of our responsibility to guide the younger generation towards their full potential, we hereby accept the following code of ethics as a guide to enable us to elevate our profession to the highest standard of integrity: (i) responsibility towards students, (ii) responsibility towards parents, (iii) responsibility towards society and the nation, and (iv) responsibility towards colleagues and the teaching profession”.* (Malaysian Teacher Standards, Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2009)

Demographic factors encompass aspects such as gender, age, educational level, and length of service. According to the study by Mowday et al. (1982), male employees tend to exhibit lower levels of commitment compared to female employees. Meanwhile, in terms of age, an individual's commitment to the organization increases with age (Mowday et al., 1982; Greenberg & Baron, 1993). This occurs because opportunities to transition to other jobs become more limited as age increases (Greenberg & Baron, 1993). In addition, employees who have served longer in an organization tend to demonstrate higher levels of loyalty compared to those who are newly employed (Mowday et al., 1982). Next, the educational level of employees is another factor to consider. There is an inverse relationship between the level of education and commitment to the organization. The higher an employee's level of education, the lower their organizational commitment (Mowday et al., 1982). Employees with higher educational qualifications tend to have greater expectations and perceptions of the organization. For instance, they anticipate promotions, salary increments, and roles within the organization that align with their educational attainment. This expectation is often challenging for organizations to fulfill, resulting in a decline in employee commitment. This situation is supported by the findings of a study conducted by Mathieu and Zajac (1990), which revealed that the higher an employee's level of education, the lower their commitment to the organization. Furthermore, the length of service within an organization also influences an individual's commitment to it. Senior employees tend to exhibit higher levels of commitment to the organization compared to those who are newly employed (Mowday et al., 1982). This is because senior employees often develop a sense of loyalty, attachment, and gratitude toward the organization.

#### IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The total number of respondents consisted of 140 male teachers (37.2%) and 236 female teachers (62.8%). In terms of age, respondents aged between 41 and 50 years represented the largest group, totaling 139 individuals (37.0%). This was followed by respondents aged 31 to 40 years, with 114 individuals (30.3%), and those aged 51 to 60 years, numbering 111 individuals (29.5%). Respondents aged 21 to 30 years constituted the smallest group, comprising 12 individuals (3.2%). With regard to teaching experience, five respondents (1.3%) had between 36 and 42 years of experience. The group with 29 to 35 years of experience included 39 respondents (10.4%), while those with 22 to 28 years of experience formed the largest group, totaling 119 respondents (31.6%). Meanwhile, 100 respondents (26.6%) had 15 to 21 years of teaching experience. The group with 8 to

14 years of teaching experience consisted of 85 respondents (22.6%), and those with 1 to 7 years of experience totaled 28 respondents (7.4%).

Overall, the practice of Professional Teaching Ethics is at a high level, with a mean value ( $M = 4.27$ ;  $SD = 0.36$ ). There are three dimensions of Professional Teaching Ethics practices that are at a high level, with the dimension of teachers' responsibility towards society and the nation having the highest mean value ( $M = 4.43$ ;  $SD = 0.43$ ). Meanwhile, the dimension of teachers' responsibility towards parents is at a moderately high level, with a mean value ( $M = 4.03$ ;  $SD = 0.56$ ). There is no difference in the practice of Professional Teaching Ethics based on the demographic factor of gender, as shown by the value ( $t = -0.61$ ;  $p = 0.31 > 0.05$ ). Similarly, all dimensions of Professional Teaching Ethics practices indicate no differences based on gender demographics. The findings also reveal that the responsibility of teachers towards students is consistent between male and female teachers. However, female teachers exhibit higher levels of responsibility towards colleagues, the profession, as well as society and the nation, compared to male teachers. On the other hand, in the dimension of teachers' responsibility towards parents, male teachers demonstrate a higher level of responsibility compared to female teachers. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the practice of Professional Teaching Ethics in secondary schools (*Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan*) in the state of Kedah based on gender.

The results of the one-way ANOVA test for the practice of Professional Teaching Ethics based on age indicate that the Levene's test result is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that the assumption of homogeneity of variances between the practice of Professional Teaching Ethics and age is not met. The results of the one-way ANOVA test are also significant ( $F = 6.306$ ;  $p = 0.00 < 0.05$ ), indicating that there are differences in the practice of Professional Teaching Ethics based on age among teachers teaching in secondary schools (*Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan*) in the state of Kedah. To identify which age group has significant differences compared to other age groups, a post-hoc test was conducted. Table 4 details the results of the post-hoc test, which shows that the age group of 31 to 40 years demonstrates significant differences in mean scores compared to other age groups. The mean score for the 31 to 40-year age group ( $M = -0.18$ ;  $SD = 0.11$ ) is lower than the mean score for the 21 to 30-year age group ( $M = -0.15$ ;  $SD = 0.04$ ), lower than the mean score for the 41 to 50-year age group ( $M = -0.15$ ;  $SD = 0.04$ ), and lower than the mean score for the 51 to 60-year age group ( $M = -0.19$ ;  $SD = 0.05$ ). This indicates that the practice of Professional Teaching Ethics among teachers aged 31 to 40 years is the lowest compared to other age groups.

The results of statistical analysis for all dimensions of the practice of Professional Teaching Ethics indicate no significant differences based on teaching experience, except for the dimension of teachers' responsibility towards students ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), which shows a significant difference in practice based on teaching experience. Overall, the statistical analysis through the one-way ANOVA test for the practice of Professional Teaching Ethics based on teaching experience indicates that the result of Levene's test is significant ( $p = 0.025$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that the assumption of homogeneity of variances between the practice of Professional Teaching Ethics and teaching experience is not met. Therefore, there are significant differences in the practice of Professional Teaching Ethics based on teaching experience.

The results of the Levene's test indicate a non-significant outcome ( $p > .05$ ), which satisfies the assumption of homogeneity of variances between the practice of Professional Teaching Ethics and academic qualifications. The one-way ANOVA statistical test shows a result of ( $p = .36$ ;  $p > .05$ ). Since the obtained p-value is greater than .05, this indicates that there are no significant differences in the practice of Professional Teaching Ethics among secondary school (*Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan*) teachers in the state of Kedah based on their academic qualifications.

## V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings, the overall level of Professional Teaching Ethics practices is high, with a mean value of 4.27. The mean values for all dimensions are at a high level; however, the dimension of teachers' responsibility towards parents is at a moderately high level. These findings are supported by Zainah and Wan Muna (2021), who stated that the level of Professional Teaching Ethics practices is high, with a mean value of 4.46. This study also emphasizes that teachers must adhere to the work ethics established by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, the Teacher's Code of Ethics, and the Malaysian Teacher Standards. Furthermore, the aspects contained within organizational work ethics must be given serious attention so that teachers, as agents of socialization, can instill positive values. A professional teacher must also possess strong moral principles, behave appropriately, and comply with professional ethics (Gazali, 1992; Zainah & Wan Muna, 2021). This is crucial because the challenges faced by teachers today require a high level of commitment and ethics. The findings of Sa'adiah et al. (2020) are consistent with the overall mean value for Professional Teaching Ethics practices, which is at a high level, with a mean value of 4.07. All items examined in the study on Professional Teaching Ethics practices were also found to be at a high level.

There is no difference in the practice of the Teaching Profession Ethics based on gender. Evidence shows that both male and female teachers perform their responsibilities and duties with full commitment and dedication without any disparity. Ronald and Johori (2021), Mohd Hasaidi and Nadarajan (2018), and Aniza Ahmad and Zamri Mahamod (2015) support the assertion that there is no difference between male and female teachers in fulfilling their responsibilities towards students, which is one of the key ethical codes in the Teaching Profession Ethics. Therefore, mastery of skills is crucial for teachers, given their role in educating individuals towards betterment and assessing student performance. Furthermore, teachers must possess unique qualities that distinguish them from other professions (Aniza Ahmad & Zamri Mahamod, 2015). Similarly, the findings of Nasuha (2020) also revealed the same results, indicating no difference in demographic gender factors in the practice of the Teaching Profession Ethics. However, Salbiah et al. (2017) found differences between male and female teachers in the practice of the Teaching Profession Ethics. Female teachers demonstrated higher ethical values compared to male teachers. A low level of professionalism among teachers may result in lower-quality outcomes and negatively affect students' achievements.

The practice of Teaching Profession Ethics has been found to have a significant relationship with the age factor of teachers. Research findings reveal that teachers aged between 31 and 40 years have a mean score that differs significantly from other age groups ( $p < 0.05$ ). Regardless of age progression or challenges encountered, teachers are expected to perform their responsibilities appropriately. Kohlberg (1984) argues that age positively influences ethics. However, these findings contradict several other studies. For instance, Syed Zubair et al. (2021) and Samuel (2022) found no significant relationship between teacher ethics and age. Syed Zubair et al. (2021) suggest that teachers' ethical practices are not age-dependent but are more influenced by familial systems. Additionally, age does not impact teachers' ethical practices during online teaching and learning sessions conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, online teaching and learning have been observed to provide advantages for younger teachers in managing ICT.

Overall, the findings of this study, based on statistical analysis, reveal a significant difference in the practice of Teaching Profession Ethics based on teaching experience. However, the dimensions of Teachers' Responsibility Towards Colleagues and the Profession, Teachers' Responsibility Towards Society and the Nation, and Teachers' Responsibility Towards Parents show no significant differences based on teaching experience. The study by Nida and Joko (2016) found a significant difference between teaching experience and the practice of Teaching Profession Ethics. This is because a teacher's experience helps them develop strategies that support work efficiency in meeting established standards. (2) Teaching experience provides teachers with an advantage in carrying out their tasks, as they have previously performed the work and understand the challenges involved. (3) Each experience contributes to their skills and knowledge in fulfilling their responsibilities. (4) Repeated performance of tasks over a long period allows individuals to become highly proficient in their work (Nida &

Joko, 2016). This perspective is further supported by the study conducted by Mewangi et al. (2023), which asserts that teaching experience has a positive and significant influence on teachers' attitudes and professionalism.

The results of the Levene's test indicate that there is no significant difference in the practice of Teaching Profession Ethics among secondary school teachers in Kedah based on academic qualifications, with a value of  $P=.36$  ( $P>.05$ )  $P = .36$  ; ( $P > .05$ ). These findings are supported by the studies of Semuel (2022), Syed Zubair et al. (2021), and Sa'adiyah et al. (2020). Teachers are encouraged to continuously enhance their academic qualifications and teaching skills in line with current developments to remain relevant (Sa'adiyah et al., 2020). However, the findings of studies by Mewangi et al. (2023) and Stephen et al. (2013) present contrasting results, indicating significant differences in the practice of Teaching Profession Ethics based on academic qualifications. In Tanzania, educational qualifications are a critical indicator of teachers' knowledge of professional ethics codes and behavior, particularly among physical education teachers. As such, less-educated teachers in Tanzania are advised to undergo professional development to better understand the importance of education, the teaching profession, and societal values.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference and contribute to the existing body of literature for future researchers. Additionally, the study's scope on teacher ethics can be expanded beyond the state of Kedah to include a broader population, exploring other factors that may impact the practice of Teaching Profession Ethics among teachers under the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM). These findings can also serve as a reference for school administrators to better understand the demographic factors of teachers that may positively or negatively influence their responsibilities as educators. At the District Education Office (PPD) and State Education Department (JPN) levels, this study provides an indication of the current level of ethical practices among teachers and highlights the necessary steps to maintain and improve ethical standards within the teaching profession.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The Teachers' Code of Ethics serves as a mandatory guide for all educators in carrying out their duties and responsibilities, ensuring that their conduct aligns with organizational norms. Adherence to this code encourages teachers to act professionally, ethically, and with dignity in their roles as educators and members of society. Consequently, the aspiration to achieve high-quality, ethical, and professional education and learning can be realized. Moreover, to fulfill their responsibilities meaningfully, exemplary teachers must possess both academic and professional expertise in their respective fields (Zainun, 1994; Zainah & Wan, 2021), as current challenges demand a high level of commitment from all teachers, regardless of gender.

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