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# Professional Ethics of Elementary School Teachers: Balancing Academic Demands and Students' Emotional Needs

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## Abstract

*Professional ethics play a vital role in creating a harmonious learning environment, especially at the primary school level. This study aims to explore how primary school teachers balance academic demands with students' emotional needs in their daily practices. The research employs a qualitative approach using a case study method in three different primary schools. The data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of supporting documents, such as lesson plans and interview recording with parents. The data were analyzed using data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing and verification, thematic analysis, data triangulation, and narrative analysis to delve deeper into teachers' personal stories and experiences. The findings indicate that the teachers had moral dilemmas in meeting the curriculum targets or in addressing students' emotional needs. Some teachers successfully integrated both through the flexible approaches, such as project-based learning that emphasized the collaboration and empathy. However, some challenges emerged, such as having time constraints, dealing with administrative workloads, and the lack of specialized training in professional ethics were identified.*

**Keywords** – Professional Ethics, Elementary School Teachers, Academic Demands, Emotional Needs



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## 1. Introduction

Elementary School (ES) teachers are the primary actors in establishing the intellectual and character foundations of students (Kamila, 2023). At this level, the role of teachers extends beyond being instructors; they also serve as mentors who facilitate students' emotional and social development (AK Amala, 2021). Basic education is a critical period for students because they do not only receive academic instructions but also begin to grasp life values, such as empathy, cooperation, and responsibility (Sutarjo, 2023). Therefore, teacher professionalism in integrating ethical values to teaching practice is essential to creating a conducive learning environment (Annisa, 2024). However, in practice, ES teachers often face various challenges. One of which is the pressure from academic demands (Arifin, 2025).

A dense curriculum, learning outcome targets, and administrative obligations frequently consume teachers' time and energy (S. P. I. , S. S. P. , Pm. M. , D. I. S. S. P. I. , R. A. , M. S. , . . . & A. A. Gunawan, 2023). This situation tends to make teachers focus more on students' academic achievements than students' emotional needs (Anggraena, 2022). On the other hand, elementary school students require extra attention from teachers as their emotional development is developing (Yulia, 2023). Neglecting these needs can negatively impact the teaching and learning process, leading to low learning motivation, behavioral problems, and increased stress levels among students (Amala, 2023).

Another challenge is the lack of training and practical guidance for teachers in managing emerging moral dilemmas (Ressi, 2024). Teachers are often faced with situations where they must prioritize academic demands or students' emotional needs (Nurdyansyah, 2016). For instance, a student experiencing emotional difficulties may require additional time for individual guidance. However, teachers are frequently constrained by the pressure to complete the curriculum on schedule. Decisions made in such situations are heavily influenced by teachers' understanding of professional ethics (Tamam, 2013).

Teachers' professional ethics serve as a framework of principles that guide them in making wise moral decisions (Muspawi, 2020). These principles encompass the commitment to integrity, empathy, fairness, and respect for students' holistic needs (Juwan, 2024). However, the implementation of professional ethics among elementary school teachers faces numerous challenges, such as the gap between theoretical knowledge taught in professional training and practical realities (Sulasmi, 2021). Teachers often feel inadequately supported in applying these ethical principles, particularly when confronted with dilemmas (Lutfi, 2013). The shift in educational paradigms prioritizing quantitative outcomes, such as test scores and school rankings, further complicates the situation. Teachers frequently face pressure to produce measurable academic results, leading to the neglect of non-academic aspects, including students' emotional needs (Darmiyati Zuchdi, 2023). This underscores the urgent need to explore ways for teachers to balance their academic and emotional roles effectively through the application of professional ethics (Pribadi, 2024).

This study aims to describe the gap between academic demands and students' emotional needs by identifying the challenges, strategies, and impacts of implementing professional ethics in the daily practices of elementary school teachers. By exploring the perspectives of teachers, students, and other stakeholders, this research is expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive education policies that prioritize student well-being. Through this approach, teachers can be better equipped to fulfill their role as educators who not only meet academic requirements but also support students' emotional development.

## **2. Method**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design aimed at developing an in-depth analysis of a single or multiple cases by collecting data

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from various sources (I. Gunawan, 2022). The research was conducted in three elementary schools purposively selected based on specific criteria: 1) schools with students from various socio-economic backgrounds; 2) schools which implement character development programs for students; 3) primary school teachers with minimum five-year teaching experience. The data collection techniques were in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and supporting documents analysis (i.e. lesson plans and recordings of students' parents). Data analysis techniques comprise data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing and verification, thematic analysis, data triangulation, and narrative analysis to delve deeper into teachers' personal stories or experiences. These techniques help to understand how teachers perceive dilemmas and make decisions within the professional context of teaching.

### **3. Result and Discussion**

#### **a. Result**

##### *1) Primary School Teachers' Perceptions about Professional Ethics*

The interview results indicated that many primary school teachers perceived positively on the professional ethics as the reference on behaving and making decision on the teaching process. They were also aware of the importance of fulfilling both academic demands and students' emotional needs in learning process. This understanding is reflected in their commitment to providing fair attention to all students, maintaining integrity, and prioritizing student well-being. However, the teachers' perceptions varied, depending on their teaching experience and professional training they obtained. In this case, teachers with more than five year teaching experience were more confident in facing moral dilemmas, while novice teachers were frequently confused and experienced uncertainty in making decisions. In accordance to the result, it is essential to conduct continuous development regarding professional ethics to ensure consistent implementation.

## *2) The Implementation of Professional Ethics in Daily Life*

The results of classroom observations explained that teachers implemented various strategies to implement professional ethics, such as:

### a) modifying teaching methods

Teachers strived to adapt their teaching approaches to meet the individual needs of students without compromising the progress of the group. For example, students struggling to understand the material are given extra time or a more personalized approach.

### b) building emotional connections

Teachers created an inclusive and supportive classroom environment through an empathetic communication approach. For instance, extra attention through informal conversations or activities outside of learning hours were required by students showing the signs of stress or emotional issues.

### c) integrating moral values

Teachers incorporated some values, such as cooperation, tolerance, and empathy into learning materials to help students understand the importance of healthy interpersonal relationships.

However, not all teachers are able to implement these strategies consistently. Administrative workload and pressure to meet the curriculum targets became the major barriers.

## *3) Moral Dilemmas Faced by Teachers*

The application of teachers' professional ethics were frequently dilemmatic. Some of the common dilemmas are:

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a) prioritizing academic demands or emotional needs

Teachers had to choose completing the lesson material based on schedule or providing special attention to students who required emotional support.

b) giving fair treatment

Treating all students equally in class could be dilemmatic for teachers, especially when some students required more attention than others.

c) disciplinary implementation

Teachers frequently felt indecisive about determining the appropriate form of disciplinary action without damaging their emotional relationship with the students.

In this case, the decisions in these dilemmas were influenced by teacher's personal experience, school culture, and prevailing policies. This highlights the need for clearer guidance to help teachers make morally sound decisions.

4) *The Impact of Implementing Professional Ethics on Students*

The results of the Interviews with students and parents showed that the implementation of professional ethics by teachers had a significant impact on student development. Some of the positive impacts identified are:

a) increasing learning motivation

Students felt more valued and supported which could lead to active participant motivation in learning.

b) improving Social Relationships

Teachers applying an empathetic approach successfully created an inclusive classroom environment, where students feel safe to share their thoughts and feelings.

c) character development

The moral values taught through a professional ethics approach helped students build a better personality.

However, some students also reported that the lack of attention to their emotional needs could lead to feelings of being undervalued which may potentially decrease their enthusiasm for learning.

**b. Discussion**

*1) The Importance of Professional Ethics in Primary Education*

This study emphasizes that professional ethics serves as a critical foundation in teaching practices at the primary school level. Teachers who could balance the academic demands with students' emotional needs could create an effective learning environment and contribute to students' holistic development. The role of teachers in building emotional connections with students aligns with child development theories stating the importance of social and emotional support in the learning process. However, the pressure from education policies that prioritizes academic outcomes often makes it challenging for teachers to provide adequate emotional attention to students. This highlights the need for reforming education policies to focus more on the comprehensive well-being of students.

*2) Challenges in Implementing Professional Ethics*

The research findings reveal that heavy workloads and limited time are the primary obstacles to implementing professional ethics. Teachers often must make quick decisions in dilemmas without sufficient support. Additionally, the lack of specialized training on professional ethics hinders teachers' ability to confidently address moral dilemmas. To overcome these challenges, several measures can be taken, including:

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a) Continuous Training

Training programs focused on managing moral dilemmas can help teachers improve their competencies in applying professional ethics.

b) Reduction of Administrative Burdens

Reducing administrative tasks unrelated to teaching can give teachers more time to focus on students' needs.

c) Policy Support

Education policies that provide teachers with flexibility in classroom management can help them balance academic and emotional roles.

3) *The Impact of Professional Ethics on Students*

The positive impact of implementing professional ethics on students underscores the importance of a holistic approach to education. Teachers who paid attention to their students' emotional needs made the students feel valued. As a result, the ultimately enhances their confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Additionally, this approach aids students in developing essential social skills for their future lives. However, the study also found that neglecting the emotional aspects could have negative impacts, such as decreased learning motivation and increased stress levels among students. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to understand that the success of education is not only measured by academic achievements but also by the emotional well-being of students.

4) *Implications of the Research*

This research provides several practical and theoretical implications:

a) Practical

Schools need to offer specialized training programs on professional ethics for teachers to enhance their ability to



address moral dilemmas. Education policies should prioritize balancing academic demands with students' emotional needs.

b) Theoretical

This research affirms the relevance of child development theories in the context of implementing professional ethics by teachers. However, further studies are needed to explore the relationship between the application of professional ethics and student learning outcomes in greater depth.

5) *Recommendations*

Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations were provided:

- a) Teachers should adopt flexible teaching approaches to accommodate the individual needs of students without neglecting the needs of the group. Additionally, teachers should enhance their competencies through continuous training on professional ethics.
- b) Schools should foster a supportive school culture for implementing professional ethics by facilitating regular discussions, sharing experiences, and reducing administrative pressures to enable teachers to focus more on students' needs.
- c) The government should also be encouraged to establish policies that support holistic education so that balancing the emphasis on academic outcomes and student well-being could be established. Moreover, professional ethics should be integrated into teacher training programs as a mandatory component of the curriculum.

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#### 4. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the implementation of primary school teachers' professional ethics in learning has a significant impact on students' academic and emotional development. Despite facing various challenges, teachers who adopted a moral approach succeed in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Support obtained from schools and the government is essential to ensure that teachers can optimally fulfill their roles in shaping a generation that is intellectually bright and emotionally resilient.

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