The Lecturers' Belief on Ethics and Professional Moral Values in Teaching Practice

Mahfuzah Mohammed Zabidi[1], Asmaa Mohd Arshad[2], Norakmal Ab Hamid[3], Mohd Hafiz Ab Wahab[4], Siti Khurshiah Mansor[5]

[1]Academy of Islamic Contemporary Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kampus Pasir Gudang, Johor, Malaysia
[2,4,5]Academy of Islamic Contemporary Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor,Malaysia
[3]Academy of Islamic Contemporary Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kampus Dengkil, Selangor,Malaysia
Corresponding Author's email: mahfuzah3051@uitm.edu.my
asmaa1640@uitm.edu.my
norakmal@uitm.edu.my
hafiz313@uitm.edu.my
sitik302@uitm.edu.my

Abstract: The soft skills module that was introduced in 2006 is aimed to prepare graduates with a holistic quality for industrial or labour market needs. As a result, the lecturers are required to integrate the element of soft skills in their respective teaching. However, reports on the application of soft skills in teaching identified the element of professional ethical and moral values (NEMPs) was the least emphasis element for a lecturer. Lack of skills to apply these values, time constraints in completing the course syllabus and absence of referral documents are identified factors that caused the problems. Thus, this study explores the beliefs of six selected lecturers on their ethics and professional moral values in teaching practice. The research data was obtained through semi-structured interviews and analysed using Atlas.ti to obtain key themes which then could be used as a guide in implementing the application of ethical and moral values in teaching.

Keywords: Ethics, Values education, Soft skills, Teaching, Moral values.

1.   Introduction

The main purpose of implementing the soft skills module is to improve the quality of graduates and meet the needs of the job market thus solving unemployment problems among graduates (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia 2006). Employers in the industry need graduates who are dynamic, flexible and competitive at a global and local scale. Intellectual or academic achievement alone is insufficient if not equipped with soft skills such as critical thinking, leadership, teamwork and positive self-worth allowing graduates to play a good role in the field of work. The elements of the soft skills set will prepare students for a more challenging life as well as enabling them to play a good role in their work (Murihah et al. 2016, Zaliza & Mohd Safarin 2014).

2.   Issues in the Application of Professional Moral and Ethical Values in Teaching

One of the soft skills that is closely linked to the development of positive attitudes is the element of ethical and professional moral values. This element is aimed at producing graduates who are not only able to work in their respective professions but also develop the sensitivity towards the impact of economy, environment and socio-cultural values in professional practice. In addition, students are also expected to be able to analyse and decide on ethical-related problems and practice ethical behaviour while having a sense of responsibility towards society (Ministry of Higher Education 2006). This indicates that elements of ethical and professional moral values involve the ability to practice high levels of morals in professional practice and social interaction.

There are two methods that are discussed in applying soft skills to the students: (i) "Model Stand Alone" with soft skills taught as a separate course and (ii) "Infusion Model" or "Embedded Model" that integrates soft skills in the curriculum of the courses. This means, during the course of the teaching session, the lecturer is responsible for integrating the appropriate elements of soft skills in the syllabus, assignments and assessment of the courses being taught. With regard to the time constraints and the complexity to restructure all study plans "Infusion Model" is more appropriate in applying soft skills, particularly ethical and moral professional values (Tang et al. 2015, Zakaria et al., 2014).

However, after more than a decade of the implementation of soft skills, the imbalance of the element of soft skills emphasized in teaching was identified. The ethical and professional moral values are the least emphasized elements by lecturers in their teaching (Tang et al. 2015, Salahudin et al., 2016). According to Boo, Ai & Voon (2019), the students learn best when they are provided with sincere and kind guidance by the lecturers. Although the lecturers recognize the importance of this element, due to the lack of knowledge and skills to apply, this element is somewhat ruled out. Lecturers are also reported to have a lack of skills to evaluate the achievement of these elements within students. Lecturers are more inclined to deliver the syllabus in the given period of time, rather than putting much focus to integrate this element as it is considered time-consuming. In addition, the lack of reference materials or documents to integrate these elements during lectures is also a factor in the lack of emphasis in teaching (Mohd Zaki et al., 2008, Shahrulanwar et al., 2011 Rashidi).

### 3.	Research Methodology

As an effort to help overcome these issues faced by lecturers, a qualitative study is conducted. By using purposive sampling, six lecturers were selected to be interviewed. Their selection is based on their teaching experience, the quality of teaching recognized by the teaching supervisor (ProPens) and also positive feedback from students. Interviews explore the lecturers' beliefs in ethical and professional moral values and its importance. Basically, the respondents were asked with two questions. (i) What do you understand with "ethics and professional moral values" that need to be integrated in your teaching practice? (ii) Why do you think such integration is important? The data was analysed thematically using Atlas.Ti software. Cohen Kappa tests are identified on them to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

Here are the background of lecturers interviewed:

Table 1: Lecturers' background

No.	Lecturers' Code	Teaching Experience	Area of Expertise
1	Mr. T	22 years	*Dakwah* and Leadership
2	Mr. A	22 years	Management
3	Mrs. F	23 years	Education
4	Mrs. A	20 years	Islamic Thoughts
5	Mrs. S	17 years	Education
6	Mrs. Z	23 years	Management

4. Findings

This study addresses the question of (i) What are the beliefs of selected lecturers on the ethical and moral values of professionals as stated in the soft skills, and (ii) What strategies have been made to apply those values in the teaching and learning process? The results of the interviews reveal the beliefs and strategies undertaken by the lecturers as follows:

Table 2: Lecturers' belief in ethics and professional moral values

Theme	Description
Praiseworthy character	Students' noble character in line with the academic achievement
Key values in the perfection of work	Good universal values that suits the respective professions
Key to life success	Good attitude as a basic to achieve success in life
Spiritual element	Ethical values connects with the human spiritual element

4.1 Lecturer's belief in ethics and professional moral values

In explaining the beliefs on the elements of professional ethical and moral values, most of the lecturers interviewed relate them to good values or praiseworthy character. According to one of the respondents, "*We mention it as ethical and professional moral values ... but in a simple and easy way to understand it, we want to produce a student who is ethical. We want the student's moral values to be in line with the lessons learned in class* "(Mr. T, 2017).

"*That values and ethics, for me ... are ... having good morality, that's it*" (Mr. A, 2017).

When it comes to professional ethics and moral values within a career aspect, one of the respondents stated, "*For me, this ethical value ... refers to the appreciation of values in their respective professions...the good universal value that suits their future career...*" (Mrs. S, 2017). Along with this view, one of the other respondents also touched on the integrated values of ethical and professional moral as the key to the perfection of the work.

"*Work will be imperfect if there is no ethical value ... though, the work reached its purpose. In the process we teach, there must be an emphasis on this value. We want our students to be knowledgeable and ethical. We want both elements in our students*, "(Mrs. F, 2017).

In addition, there are responses that referred to the importance of ethical and moral values in the aspects of life in general. Professional ethical and moral values are seen as the major factors of life success. This is due to the strength of ethical values as a driving force for someone to be positive and ethical in life.

"*What I understand is that these ethical values refer to the internalization of values in their respective professions. It is a value that fits into the career that will be pursued. But, as educators, we do not want to limit the value to the aspect job only ... we want our students to practice positive values throughout his life, not just for the sake of work only,* "(Mrs. A, 2017).

Besides, there are also respondents who mentioned on the stated spiritual element in the National Philosophy of Education (NPE),

"*If we follow the National Philosophy of Education, we want our students to have and really practice universal positive values. It does not matter whether he or she is a Muslim or not. Human beings have these two dimensions…physical and spiritual... The problem with spiritual*

things cannot be solved physically ... For me, ethics and morals is regarded as spiritual aspects…something inside…our inner being…starts from our heart "(Mrs F, 2017).

Another respondent described that the ethical values shown by an individual actually reveals his spiritual level. Therefore, to be truly ethical is made parallel in the form of religious guidance. The lecturer stated,

"The problem with spiritual matters cannot be solved physically ... For me, this ethical and moral aspect is a spiritual aspect.... Your outer being…your character is determined by your inner being…your beliefs, your emotion... Hence, religion and divine revelation are important as our basis to be ethical and to practice morality. Man is judged in terms of his spiritual state ... not just intellectually or physically, "(Mrs. S, 2017).

From the interviews, it is understood that most respondents directly relate the ethical and moral values with the positive values shown by a person in both career and life. Ethics and professional values in relation to self or among peers and society at large require religious guidance. The practice of morality is a fundamental element for every individual to achieve excellence in career and true success in life.

5.   Discussion

In explaining the meaning of professional ethical and moral values, majority of respondents relate the term directly to moral values in Islam. Good manners truly beautify every individual. Professional ethical and moral values in implementing soft skills are not supposed to be seen as merely aiming for employment. The ethical or moral values are the factors which determine the virtue of a person in the sight of God and His creatures.

Morality also complements the spiritual needs for humans. Therefore, ethical values and morality is closely related with the aspect of divinity. Good deeds that are not based on divine aspects or revelation does not complement the true meaning of morality. Although one positive act is perceived as good, the spiritual condition which is separated from the divine and prophecy values would cause the good deeds to be an external factor and does not fulfil the human spiritual needs (Zakaria et al., 2014).

This may lead to the dualism in identifying the purpose of life. One could be very successful in career but does not achieve true happiness in life as human spiritual contentment is something related with his or her inner being. Human nature should be closely linked with God, The Creator. Being ethical and competent in one's career should be regarded as a medium to seek God's pleasure. The lack of ethical and moral values which ignored the existence of God could be rectified by constant remembrance of His presence to see His beloved creature (Al-Ghazali 1967).

As shared by most respondents on the connection between ethical and professional moral values with the spiritual element of human beings, the emphasis on good values related to the divine aspect is also fundamental in religion. The ethical values of a person to himself or to the society or in the career begins with his awareness of his two dimensional being which are both physical and spiritual. Therefore, the ignorance of the spiritual needs in cultivating ethics and professional moral values within students will never develop a truly good man neither to himself nor to his society and career. The motive of installation of soft skills especially ethics and professional moral values which focuses on fulfilling work-market needs only degrade the status of human being from vicegerent of Allah to merely the tools for the achievement of economic prosperity.

It is suggested that one vital aspect that should be included in instilling the values of ethics and professional moral is the awareness of God's existence meaning doing something good and beneficial for the sake of gaining His pleasure. A person who practices God-consciousness will recognize and acknowledge his purpose of creation in this world so that he will act and deal with himself and his society at large in a good manner, including in his career (Al-Ghazali 1967, Ibn Miskawayh 1368). This explains that having a decent

relationship with Allah SWT which begins with knowing Him and to worship Him can lead a person to be more conscious about his ethics and morality in his career.

The vertical relationship with God affects the horizontal relationship in human life. The remembrance of God and all His commandments control one's desire to do unethical attitudes. The constant belief that God is always present and watching every single act every single moment drives ones to do good things and avoid misconduct in life or career.

Conviction on the hereafter also guides ones' decision whether to do good or bad. Every act is taken into account and will be judged and rewarded fairly in life after death (Haron 2001). The values of persistence, sincerity, resilience, hardworking, trust, responsible, proactive, patience and gratitude are unleashed by the strong belief in God. This is the reason why the element of ethics and professional moral values need to be based on the beliefs of God and the Hereafter. God will be the centre of focus in doing well and right whether to oneself, society or the environment. Indirectly, the strong beliefs in religious conviction is the fundamental basis for the construction of ethical and professional moral values in the students (Khadijah et al. 2015, Salahudin et al., 2016). Therefore, the element of spiritual development in education should not be ignored.

From a broader perspective especially in the phases of human life, the importance of applying soft skills does not simply to guarantee job placements for students after graduation. The application of soft skills is to fulfil human nature in the domain of spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social and physical. The lecturers play an important role to integrate these values in their students. Efforts to inculcate good values in students is not only limited in the classroom, but also outside the classroom. Lecturers are not only responsible for teaching and delivering the content of the syllabus, but more importantly is to instil good values in students (Mohd Kamal 1998, Al-Ghazali 1967).

For that reason, the lecturers need to have a clear worldview about education that focuses on the development of a person holistically. The concept of education is based on the Tawhid paradigm that has been documented in the Quran including the teachings and traditions of Prophet Muhammad. The role of every individual is to be His servant and vicegerent to accomplish the mission in bringing the blessings to the whole world.

The commitment of lecturers in integrating the ethical and professional moral values depend on the worldview and beliefs of the lecturers on the purpose of the teaching. It is hoped that lecturers would have a sound understanding about the concept of education so that teaching process does not only focuses on the preparation of getting a job after graduation but also in development of students as a good human being and capable of achieving a prosperous and content life (Mohd Kamal 1997, Murihah et al 2016, Salahudin et al. 2016). Although the purpose of soft skills included in the curriculum as to address the problem of unemployment, yet most lecturers interviewed sees the development of students as good people as the most important factor in order to develop a prosperous life

. For that reason, lecturers should strive to prepare for the best in teaching and educating students (Kamarul Azmi & Ab Halim 2007, Zaharah 2005). Among them are (i) planning the implementation of ethical values in teaching sessions, (ii) showing good examples to students, (iii) improving the mastery of soft skills in themselves as lecturers, (iv) teaching process and afterwards.

The process of applying these values in teaching can be initiated by having a clear teaching philosophy. In the teaching philosophy, lecturers express their beliefs about the purpose of learning, the characteristics of their students and the best approach to impart knowledge and educate students. Defining teaching philosophy helps the lecturers to translate it in their teaching practices in the classroom. It also helps the lecturers to structure the installation of ethical and moral professional values as well as other soft skills elements. The process of planning and organizing the contents of the teaching and the targeted value to be applied are very important even though this is less emphasis in higher education level (Ahmad Eismat 2009, Tang et al., 2014).

Lecture methods which are commonly practiced by lecturers are less likely to be able to foster good ethical and moral values if not integrated with some other methods of teaching. The diversity of methods in the ongoing process of education can replace the bad attitude with better ones. Practical class activities such as projects are examples of teaching methods that can help reinforce the process of applying good values (Ang 2015). Therefore, the application of good values that are appropriate to the teaching topics should be arranged

in order through teachings and learning activities to enable lecturers in identifying the most appropriate method for cultivating good character and values within the student as committed, patient, tolerant, sensitive, courageous (Zaharah 2005).

Philosophy of teaching also produces advantages for students when it is shared with them. For example, during the first class or during the beginning of the semester, briefing on the key values such as speaking the truth, honesty, respect, tolerance and other positive values are shared with students. During the beginning of every class, the lecturer could describe the manners attributing specific values to the current issues, relate it to student's daily life and reviewing the real-life examples of characters who can inspire these students.

Lecturers can also share or recommend suitable reading materials to students and invite them to reflect on each content of the teaching received individually. This allows the students to link the contents of teaching to his or her life as well as taking in the ultimate essence of the lesson to be a guideline in their personal life. The internalization process for these values should be done gradually, in a gentle manner and repetitively inculcated so that the good values especially in strengthening the belief in God will be self-realized in students.

6.   Conclusion

This study concludes that the lecturers relate the elements of ethics and professional moral values with the religious teachings. It is religion that guides humans to do good and avoid evil in all aspects of human life. Therefore, the process of integrating these values need to be integrated with the spiritual elements especially in believing God as the central focus in human life. This study also strengthens the National Philosophy of Education that regards the belief in God as the foundation for the development of human holistically. The aspect of emotional and spiritual in education cannot be removed or ignored in order to prepare students for their life's undertakings whether it is for the sake of fulfilling job market needs or for their living accomplishments as a human being.

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