

Article

Ethics and Deontology in Spanish Public Universities

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Abstract: The existence of ethical and deontological codes is a reality integrated in highly competitive sectors, such as the medical sector or the legal profession. Most studies on ethics and deontology focus on the way in which they are communicated and their effectiveness. However, no special interest has been paid to the existence, application and content of ethics and deontology in the university sector and its relationship with the transmission of ethical and deontological principles to students. Professionals, employees and managers who will play their role in society, perform their work in companies or develop strategic plans, are trained at universities, which must play an important role in the ethical and deontological training of future social actors. Therefore, it is necessary to respond to whether public universities have codes of ethics and whether the fact of having these codes implies a greater commitment to the inclusion of ethical values in their training programs. To this end, Spanish public universities are analyzed and the results, which are grouped by areas of knowledge, are presented. The results achieved provide useful insight for university managers concerned with implementing ethical and responsible policies.

Keywords: ethics; deontology; educational system planning; higher education policy; university

1. Introduction

People's individual behavior and what is considered morally correct, as well as the science that studies people's appropriate behavior, are classified within the concept of ethics [1]. The way in which an individual behaves in the different situations in which he/she is immersed in his/her professional development can positively or negatively influence the image, reputation and idea that the rest of the employees and customers may have of the organization, as well as the way in which it provides its services or sells its products [2]. In short, ethics affects how organizations present themselves to society [3]. To avoid improper, abusive, amoral, unfair or negatively perceived behaviors, organizations develop so-called codes of ethics or conduct, which are none other than an ideal of corporate behavior [4]. A code of ethics is a document that describes the moral standards used to guide people's behavior [5,6]. Decades ago, companies began to use these codes, and today, it is a fully extended practice that reaches public administrations and, with it, universities [7].

Codes of conduct regulate relationships between employees, between employees and the administration, between managers and employees, between employees and customers [3]. They sometimes manage to set minimums on hours, working conditions, remuneration, barriers to discrimination and even the ways and means of carrying out and achieving the objectives set in the strategic plans, even reaching the production chain, collaborators, financing and, in short, other public and private entities with which they can be related [8,9].

The existence and application of codes is not something new and partly re-emerged at the beginning of the 21st century due to a particular awareness of the corporate social responsibility of the public and private sectors [7]. Currently, recognition of criminal responsibility of private entities and

the importance of self-regulation and compliance, which clearly originated after the financial crisis caused by the use and abuse of certain dishonest practices in the sale of toxic assets and products of particular complexity to an inappropriate audience, has resulted in the re-emergence of these codes or, at least, the importance of their correct control and compliance [8]. In addition to this, protective legislative trends with the consumer and the state of general concern for the environment have made the codes and their control an extremely important tool [10]. They have gone from having a secondary role to being one of the main tools to build an adequate and correct corporate image and reputation [11,12].

Although codes of ethics are common in entities that seek to assert themselves and are used as a tool for corporate social responsibility [13], it is no less true that concepts such as ethics and deontology have a different etymology and are clearly separated concepts, which are usually confused, not only by society, but also by professionals and academics [14].

In public and private sectors, these codes are cited indistinctly as codes of ethics, codes of conduct or codes of good governance [15]. These codes, with different names, basically have the same purpose: to provide stakeholders with an indication of the conduct regarding the voluntary adoption of a series of ethical principles and values and how to act in certain types of situations in order to show an image or a set of principles on which they base the development of their activity a priori [1,14,16].

They seek a correct the internal regulation of companies in order to avoid scandals (for example, Emron, Urralburu, Ibercop Filesa, Kio, Gescartera, Gurtel, Malaya, etc.), such as those that led to the crisis and have the intention of improving citizens' trust in private entities, markets and in the administration [17–19]. As in the private sector, behaviors which are considered unethical, such as corruption scandals, have burdened the public sector in general and that of universities in particular [2]. Universities have not been kept aside from scandals, embezzlements, endogamy and similar situations, for example, the Master's Case in 2018 [11,12].

Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize that the importance and relevance of these regulations and codes has also increased in the public sector [2]. For example, the Spanish Government and the European Union are seeking the development of internal control systems, both in private and public entities, which avoid the commission of activities that are not only illegal, but also morally reproachable and, obviously, universities are not institutions that are untouched by these actions [20,21].

Universities must be regulated by ethical principles, but also due to the fact that they are responsible for the training of future world leaders and professionals of any category, they must convey ethical and/or deontological training to future professionals [2]. This ethical training and training in values must gain relevance and the university must place emphasis on this type of training, since obtaining ethical knowledge is essential for the future employee, manager and/or entrepreneur [22]. It is an urgency and a necessity to educate in ethical values if universities want to train upright, autonomous and socially conscious students [23].

On the one hand, universities are responsible for students' ethical training, so it is essential for there to be an adequate relationship and consistency between compliance with university codes of ethics and training [2]. Universities should not be afraid to incorporate ethical issues, modify or create a new learning scenario and establish guidelines in this regard or train teachers on the orientation of their classes [24]. If students are trained in ethical values, they will be more critical and more upright, and debate and dialogue will be encouraged in the classrooms. The university must ensure the union of technical and ethical competencies [25] that must go together if we do not want to repeat the behaviors of professionals who only seek profitability and their own interest, and are not aware that they live in society [26].

This responsibility must include business schools that also deal with the training of recent graduates, who must obtain adequate ethical training [27,28]. This ethical nature clashes with the responsibility attributed to business schools in scandals derived from or responsible for the financial crisis of 2007 [29–31].

On the other hand, universities are responsible for the design of training programs, in which they must incorporate subjects dealing with ethical and deontological aspects. Furthermore, universities feel

responsible for the lack of ethics of those professionals who have been the main figures in scandals [29]. Therefore, university managers have reconsidered the mission of university institutions and have incorporated being ethical entities into their agendas (through the development of codes of ethics) and have developed training plans with an ethical, deontological and responsible orientation [2].

For this reason, the aim of this research is to respond to: is it important for universities to develop codes of ethics? Is the incorporation of ethical and deontological criteria in the training program relevant? Is there a relationship between having a code of ethics and the incorporation of ethical and deontological criteria in the programs?

To respond these questions, we must remember the importance of universities as part of the focus of the education of future employees, workers and political leaders of the nation, in an increasingly competitive and interconnected environment. We analyze if the widespread practice of the existence of codes of ethics in the private sector reaches public universities and if the existence of these codes of ethics entails including training subjects in the ethical and deontological field within their training program.

Firstly, we present the theoretical framework on ethics and deontology with an emphasis on the university sector. Secondly, we establish the sample and the methodology used. Thirdly, we describe the empirical study carried out to identify which Spanish public universities have a code of conduct and which ones transmit these principles to their students, focusing on the three fields of knowledge of the regulated professions. Finally, we propose the main implications of this research.

2. Theoretical Framework

Codes of ethics go beyond the activities of the organization itself, as they incorporate aspects of individual ethics [5,32–34]. Berenbeim (1987) [35] defines the code of ethics as an important means for compliance with general ethical principles. Pitt and Groskaufmanis (1990) [36] state that a corporate code of ethics or code of conduct is any written statement of ethics, law or policy, outlining the obligations of one or more types of corporate employees. Stevens (1994) [37] states that the aim of corporate codes of ethics is to influence the behavior of employees and they usually require higher standards than those established by law. These codes can be part of a human resource policy manual, a contract, corporate statements, or a code created exclusively for this.

Regarding deontological codes, they establish the goals and beliefs for a professional that must be fulfilled [38]. The same as with codes of conduct, they require higher or more demanding standards than those set by the law and evolve in accordance with social, environmental and economic demands. Frankel (1988, p.110) [39] noted that a profession's code of ethics is "the most visible and explicit enunciation of its professional standards ... and embodies the collective conscience of a profession". Furthermore, Frankel argued that professional codes can be classified as aspirational, educational or regulatory. The first classification establishes the ideals that professionals should strive for, the second one improves understanding through comments and the third one provides a detailed set of rules.

Although it is not the object of this study, the strategic plans of organizations usually include ethical references and metaphysical ideas such as values and ideals. Stevens (1994) [37] also states that the distinctions between ethical, professional codes and strategic plans often become vague and overlap.

Corporate codes exist partly because corporations are legally responsible for their employees' actions [40]. They have partly been built as a defense against senior positions. However, they do not always free the company. Courts have ruled that instructions to employees do not necessarily alleviate the organization from the responsibility for employee irregularities [36]. A corporation can be found liable for employee misconduct and have successfully communicated appropriate standards of behavior to their employees [41,42].

Some corporate codes of ethics are little more than legal barriers and self-defense mechanisms; others are intended to influence and shape employee behavior [43]. In any case, the impact of these codes is a major concern. Whether a code can influence organizational change or successfully establish

corporate culture elements depends on its effectiveness as a message. Therefore, it is important to examine these codes, considering how their messages are communicated to employees [42,44].

Ultimately, company managers often establish a corporate code of ethics with the aim of regulating employee behavior [45] and it is considered an integral part of success [46]. Hence, the increase in corporate codes of ethics in the 21st century [1,16,45,47,48], as it is considered a good management practice and is incorporated as one of the indicators of being a socially responsible company.

Furthermore, multinational organizations use corporate codes of ethics as instruments to guide decision-making processes and establish common standards among employees from different cultures [44,49]. Therefore, they invest huge amounts of money in the process of implementing the codes themselves (code design, training, courses, means of implementation, etc.). However, large-scale unethical business practices exist even in corporations that have adopted a code of ethical conduct, with Enron and WorldCom being the most recent examples [19,46].

Some managers establish a code of ethical conduct for image and appearance reasons and due to its power to deflect criticism and investigation of their unethical practices [4,5,17,50]. In other cases, managers have limited the implementation process to a few formal methods that do not address their underlying unethical business culture. In general, there is little literature on the effectiveness of codes of ethical conduct [16,37]. However, McKendall et al. (2002) [51] argue that although corporations have been adopting corporate codes of ethics and programs for their implementation, this has not reduced legal violations.

As for deontology, it goes beyond the individual level and becomes a norm to be applied in a group. Deontological codes must be approved by the group, be understandable and refer to the specific profession for which they are created. They must adapt to the times and become mandatory, under a disciplinary practice, whose power is normally entrusted to the professional organization that promulgates and approves them and which the professional depends on [32]. In other words, codes of ethics are like corporate codes of ethics that apply to regulated professions and which require membership.

In general, managers and professionals who develop codes of ethics, deontology or conduct have been trained at universities. The objectives of universities are to provide future professionals with the necessary theoretical and practical competences, and to generate a critical capacity and ethical and moral standards [52]. Regarding the acquisition of competences, we do not intend for students to acquire them. Regarding the acquisition of ethical and moral principles, it is worth asking whether they have been incorporated into the training programs of degrees. Altarejos et al. (1998) [53] have shown the serious deficit that the moral and ethical training of university students for professional practice carries. Reamer (2001) [54] has pointed out that members of professions as diverse as law, medicine, business, journalism, engineering, psychology or social work are paying more attention than before to ethical dimensions and are incorporating the teaching of ethics into their programs. Kennedy (1990) [55] explains the need to include more ethical training in training programs, since this is practically non-existent.

In recent years, there has been an interest and an effort on behalf of universities to develop codes of ethics related to the academic interest in university social responsibility [2,56]. Social responsibility is no longer only an issue of corporations, educational institutions are committed to being responsible with their teaching and research [57]. The result is the creation of social responsibility offices, responsibility reports and strategic plans including responsibility standards. One of the goals to be socially responsible is to develop a code of ethics that shows that university members are committed to these principles and it is a way that the university management has to demonstrate its good administration and governance [57]. In addition, the development of a code of ethics has been shown to have benefits in other assets of great strategic interest such as reputation, image, legitimacy or the commitment of stakeholders [12].

In line with this argument, it is not the same to write a social responsibility report or a code of ethics as to be an institution committed to responsibility and ethical principles [5]. In other words,

drafting and adhering to a code implies implementing and monitoring behaviors in accordance with it. Drafting a code of ethics does not imply that the university is ethical. In addition to approving policies and documents that include these principles, to be considered ethical, they must implement cross-cutting actions that convey these principles. Therefore, having a code of ethics must be in line with conveying these principles to all stakeholders and one way of conveying them is to train future professionals in these matters. Based on this approach, we establish the following hypothesis to be tested:

Hypothesis 1. *Universities that adopt a code of ethics are more committed to incorporating ethical values into their training programs.*

Being aware that ethics and deontology are different concepts, but at the same time related, it is essential to check whether those universities that have developed codes of ethics incorporate subjects related to deontology into the training programs of regulated professions, and if there is the required membership and adherence to the deontological code of the profession. Students who are training to practice these professions must be aware of the difference between ethics and deontology and also know what the membership process is and its conditions. It is necessary to answer whether the students of regulated professions, which must be affiliated obligatorily at the end of their studies, are aware of the compulsory acceptance of codes of ethics in order to perform their work and what this entails. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses by fields of knowledge:

Hypothesis 2.1. *Universities with codes of ethics incorporate ethical and deontological knowledge into regulated professions such as engineering and architecture.*

Hypothesis 2.2. *Universities with codes of ethics incorporate ethical and deontological knowledge into regulated professions such as legal sciences.*

Hypothesis 2.3. *Universities with codes of ethics incorporate ethical and deontological knowledge into regulated professions such as health sciences.*

3. Sample and Methodology

The sample used is the Spanish university sector, that is, a total of 52 Spanish public universities. To do this, we accessed each of the 52 public universities and we checked if they have a code of ethics as of December 2019. We must mention that by simply confirming what name is given to these codes is already an interesting implication. This is an indication of whether they understand the difference between ethics, deontology and code of conduct.

For this study, we selected public universities instead of private ones, with the aim of standardizing the sample. Public universities are different from private universities in terms of management styles and profit maximization objectives [58]. Some scholars argue that the management of both face similar problems and challenges that require the same strategies to overcome them [59]. However, public universities face more complicated situations in which the nature of the problems and challenges related to, for example, honesty, integrity, transparency, accountability and corruption, are different [60]. In general, public and private universities have the same general objectives, which are research, teaching and the creation of value for society. However, the conditions in which they operate in the education sector are not the same and, as a general rule, their target audience is different [61]. Public universities have a limited budget that depends on the regional government and the personnel hiring system (public and private) and the governing bodies are elected through an electoral system in which all stakeholders participate. Therefore, public and private universities compete in the same sector, but not under the same competitive conditions.

Once the universities that have a code of ethics were validated, we carried out a detailed study of the curricula for the Degree in Law, Degree in Architecture and Degree in Medicine. This choice is due to the fact that they are regulated professions and, therefore, they must adhere to the deontological code of their general councils and professional association (and, therefore, they must know the difference and the implications of ethics and deontology before facing the labor market); they refer to three fields of knowledge with different codes of ethics; they are three sectors with great civic responsibility and social function.

Once these data were obtained, we carried out a statistical analysis to demonstrate the relationships proposed in the hypotheses and to demonstrate whether the ethical commitment of universities goes beyond the adoption of a code of ethics.

4. Results

The first step is to check how many Spanish public universities have developed and approved a code that includes ethical values, and which is available on the web. There are 22 public universities with codes available on the web and 27 without a code of ethics. The number of universities with codes represent a little less than half of the Spanish public universities (Table 1). Most of these codes are called Codes of Ethics, finding that two of them are called Code of Conduct (Complutense University of Madrid and the National University of Distance Education). We also compiled information on the founding year of the university and the code of ethics, as well as the number of students. These data indicate that the age and size of the university does not influence the incorporation and approval of the code of ethics.

Table 1. Universities and codes of ethics.

University	Foundation	Students *	Code of Ethics	Year
Autonomous University of Barcelona	1968	31.302	Not available	
Autonomous University of Madrid	1968	23.109	Not available	
Carlos III University of Madrid	1989	16.300	Code of Ethics	2019
Complutense University of Madrid	1822	14.394	Code of Conduct	2008
Jaume I University of Castellón	1991	11.233	Code of Ethics	2017
Miguel Hernández University of Elche	1996	10.603	Code of Ethics	2019
National University of Distance Education	1972	132.674	Code of Conduct	2010
Pablo de Olavide University	1997	10.041	Not available	
Polytechnic University of Cartagena	1998	4.368	Code of Ethics	2014
Polytechnic University of Catalonia	1971	22.444	Not available	
Polytechnic University of Madrid	1971	27.578	Not available	
Polytechnic University of Valencia	1968	20.454	Code of Ethics	2019
Pompeu Fabra University	1990	15.902	Code of Ethics	2012
Public University of Navarra	1987	7.237	Not available	
Rey Juan Carlos University	1996	44.857	Code of Ethics	2019
Rovira i Virgili University	1991	12.167	Not available	
University of A Coruña	1989	13.581	Not available	
University of Alcalá	1499	15.599	General Code of Ethics	n/a
University of Alicante	1979	21.784	Code of Ethics	2018
University of Almería	1993	11.184	Not available	
University of Barcelona	1450	44.293	Code of Ethics, Integrity and Good Practices	2018
University of Burgos	1994	6.349	Code of Ethics	n/a
University of Cádiz	1979	18.489	Code of Ethics (Peñalver Code)	2005
University of Cantabria	1972	8.372	Not available	
University of Castilla-La Mancha	1985	22.541	Code of Ethics, Good Governance and Good Management	n/a

Table 1. Cont.

University	Foundation	Students *	Code of Ethics	Year
University of Córdoba	1972		Not available	
University of Extremadura	1973	16.801	Code of Ethics	2017
University of Girona	1991	13.548	Not available	
University of Granada	1531	43.929	Not available	
University of Huelva	1993	9.003	Not available	
University of Islas Baleares	1978	11.513	Not available	
University of Jaén	1993	11.998	Code of Ethics of Teaching and Research Staff (TRS)	2019
University of La Laguna	1927	17.335	Not available	
University of La Rioja	1992	3.546	Not available	
University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria	1989	16.198	Not available	
University of León	1979	8.927	Not available	
University of Lleida	1991	8.869	Ethical Values	n/a
University of Málaga	1972	31.353	Code of Ethics	n/a
University of Murcia	1914	27.504	Code of Ethics	2016
University of Oviedo	1608	17.523	Not available	
University of País Vasco	1980	35.978	Not available	
University of Salamanca	1218	20.849	Code of Ethics and Good Governance	2018
University of Santiago de Compostela	1495	19.912	Code of Ethics	2007
University of Sevilla	1505	52.298	Not available	
University of Valencia	1499	38.248	Not available	
University of Valladolid	1241	18.429	Not available	
University of Vigo	1990	16.474	Not available	
University of Zaragoza	1542	26.635	Not available	

* Course 2018-19 [62].

The content of the Code of Conduct does not differ from the other codes analyzed, since, after all, they should all be called corporate codes of ethics or codes of conduct. However, we return to the beginning and ask the question: is the indistinct use of these terms a consequence of polysemy or is the difference between the two names really known?

We identified that three codes include aspects related to good practices and good governance in their names (University of Barcelona, University of Castilla La Mancha and University of Salamanca). On the one hand, this may be due to the criticisms and scandals that have emerged in recent times in universities; and on the other hand, due to the election of the governing bodies of the universities, which makes them report on the transparency and governance of their actions.

If we consider the year of approval, the pioneering universities in the drafting of codes are: the University of Cádiz (2005), the University of Santiago de Compostela (2007) and the Complutense University of Madrid (2008). The universities that agreed to this commitment in 2019 are: University Carlos III of Madrid, the University of Jaén (with a code aimed at teachers), the Miguel Hernández University of Elche, the Polytechnic University of Valencia and the Rey Juan Carlos University.

The second step is to identify whether these universities incorporate these ethical values into their curricula, especially in regulated professions, which require their acceptance in order to perform their work (Table 2). To do this, we accessed the curricula of each of the universities. We looked to see if the selected degrees are offered, and if there are any ethics and deontology subjects. The results of the study show that there are different patterns when it comes to accepting the ethical and deontological standards of universities in their training programs. Furthermore, the results show that a university without a code of ethics can incorporate ethics and deontology subjects into its training itineraries. We found universities without codes of ethics. We found universities without codes of ethics (e.g., University of Zaragoza) including subjects related to this topic in the analyzed degrees.

On the contrary, there are also universities with codes of ethics (e.g., University of Castilla La Mancha) without subjects including this topic.

Table 2. Universities with codes of ethics and academic programs.

University	Code	Architecture	Law	Medicine
Autonomous U. Barcelona	NO	N.O.	NO subject	Medical ethics (COMPUL)
Autonomous U. Madrid	NO	N.O.	NO subject	Clinical bioethics (COMPUL)
Carlos III U.	YES	N.O.	Ethics and deontology of legal professions (OPT)	N.O.
Complutense U. Madrid	YES	N.O.	NO subject	NO subject
Jaume I U. Castellón	YES	NO subject	NO subject	Bioethics and professionalism (COMPUL)
Miguel Hernández U. Elche	YES	N.O.	Philosophy of law and deontology (COMPUL)	Bioethics (COMPUL) legal medicine and medical deontology (COMPUL)
National U. Distance Educ.	YES	N.O.	NO subject	N.O.
Pablo de Olavide U.	NO	N.O.	NO subject	N.O.
Polytechnic U. Cartagena	YES	N.O.	N.O.	N.O.
Polytechnic U. Catalonia	NO	NO subject	N.O.	Not offered
Polytechnic U. Madrid	NO	NO subject	N.O.	N.O.
Polytechnic U. Valencia	YES	NO subject	N.O.	N.O.
Pompeu Fabra U.	YES	N.O.	NO subject	Bioethics (COMPUL)
Public U. Navarra	NO	N.O.	NO subject	Deontology, bioethics and communication (CUMPUL)
Rey Juan Carlos U.	YES	Deontology	Professional deontology, basic legal principles and equality (COMPUL)	Professional deontology and health legislation (COMPUL)
Rovira i Virgili U.	NO	NO subject	NO subject	Bases of communication and ethics (COMPUL)
U. A Coruña	NO	NO subject	NO subject	N.O.
U. Alcalá	YES	Discontinued	Bioethics (OPT)	Medical ethics (COMPUL)
U. Alicante	YES	NO subject	NO subject	N.O.
U. Almería	NO	N.O.	NO subject	N.O.
U. Barcelona	YES	N.o.	NO subject	NO subject
U. Basque Country	NO	NO subject	NO subject	Medical ethics, communication and clinical relationship (COMPUL)
U. Burgos	YES	N.O.	NO subject	N.O.
U. Cádiz	YES	N.O.	NO subject	Medical ethics (COMPUL)
U. Cantabria	NO	N.O.	NO subject	Forensic medicine, bioethics and toxicology (COMPUL)
U. Castilla-La Mancha	YES	NO subject	NO subject	NO subject
U. Córdoba	NO	N.O.	NO subject	Legal medicine and ethics (COMPUL)
U. Extremadura	YES	N.O.	NO subject	History of medicine and bioethics (COMPUL)

Table 2. Cont.

University	Code	Architecture	Law	Medicine
U. Girona	NO	NO subject	Ethics and human rights (OP)	Physical examination and fundamentals of medical ethics (COMPUL)
U. Granada	NO	NO subject	NO subject	Foundations of research in health and bioethics (COMPUL)
U. Huelva	NO	N.O.	NO subject	N.O.
U. Jaén	YES	N.O.	NO subject	N.O.
U. La Laguna	NO	N.O.	NO subject	Ethical, legal and humanistic aspects of medicine and health communication I (COMPUL), II (COMPUL) and III (COMPUL)
U. La Rioja	NO	N.O.	NO subject	N.O.
U. Islas Baleares	NO	N.O.	NO subject	Medical ethics (COMPUL)
U. Las Palmas de G. Canaria	NO	NO subject	NO subject	History of medicine, cultural and ethical bases of health and disease (COMPUL)
U. León	NO	N.O.	NO subject	N.O.
U. Lleida	YES	N.O.	NO subject	Medical ethics (COMPUL)
U. Málaga	YES	NO subject	NO subject	Medical ethics (COMPUL)
U. Murcia	YES	N.O.	NO subject	Medical ethics (COMPUL)
U. Oviedo	NO	N.O.	NO subject	History of medicine, bioethics and communication (COMPUL)
U. Salamanca	YES	N.O.	NO subject	Forensic and legal medicine, and Medical ethics (COMPUL)
U. Santiago de Compostela	YES	N.O.	NO subject	Medical ethics (COMPUL)
U. Sevilla	NO	NO subject	NO subject	Medical ethics (COMPUL)
U. Valencia	NO	N.O.	NO subject	Medical ethics (COMPUL)
U. Valladolid	NO	NO subject	NO subject	Bioethics (COMPUL)
U. Vigo	NO	N.O.	NO subject	N.O.
U. Zaragoza	NO	Legal and ethical responsibility in professional practice (COMPUL)	Law and ethics (COMPUL)	Healthcare communication, medical ethics and legislation I (COMPUL) and II (COMPUL)

N.O.: No offered; COMPUL: Compulsory; OPT: Optative.

Regarding the hypothesis of whether universities with a code of ethics incorporate these values into their training program, we can see that Rey Juan Carlos University is the only university that includes the subject of deontology in its degrees (we also confirm that it includes this subject in all its degrees, regardless of being for regulated professions or not). It is followed by Miguel Hernández University of Elche, which includes these subjects in the two degrees offered. In fact, in its medicine degree, its training program includes two subjects related to this topic. On the contrary, we find universities that do not include this knowledge, such as the Complutense University or the University of Castilla La Mancha.

Once the analysis was conducted, we confirmed that four universities with a code of ethics include deontology and ethics in their training programs, and, therefore, have a maximum relationship between them. There are nine universities that show no evidence of a relationship between the code of ethics and the subjects. Finally, there are five universities with an average relationship, due to the fact

that there is no common pattern in the incorporation of this subject into their degrees and it differs from one degree to another, so it can be said that there is no general orientation towards it.

If we analyze the universities without a code of ethics, we can confirm that some of them still are universities with an ethical orientation in their studies, such as the University of Girona or Zaragoza. Likewise, the results reflect that the strategies followed by universities without a code of ethics do not differ from those that have one, therefore, it indicates that the elaboration of a document must go beyond its writing, it must be assumed by the organization.

Next, we present the results according to the field of knowledge. In the first place, we confirmed that the engineering and architecture field does not include subjects related to ethics and deontology, except for Rey Juan Carlos University (with code) and the University of Zaragoza (without code). Secondly, it is confirmed that in the legal science field, it is only compulsory in three universities (two with code and one without) and in another three it is an optional subject (two with code and one without). Thirdly, in the health science field, it is confirmed that this subject is present in programs, except for the Complutense University of Madrid, University of Barcelona and University of Castilla La Mancha. Regarding the degrees in medicine, the presence of subjects on ethics and deontology and the disparity of names and assigned teaching hours stands out. We found that there are universities that combine ethical aspects with forensic medicine, communication, physical examination or history in the same subject. Obviously, the most important thing is to transmit ethical knowledge to students, but the disparity of denominations makes us think about the place of ethics and deontology in medicine.

5. Implications

The first implication of the study is that of the 52 analyzed universities, only 22 have their code of ethics published on their website in an accessible way, which leads to two conclusions. The first one is that more than 50% of the public universities studied may not have any type of internal regulation of the conduct of their employees or ethical considerations applicable to them, probably based on the existence of a legal regulation of the Public Employee Statute, which could give the false impression that these types of codes are unnecessary. Although, as already stated, in the 20th century, everything related to compliance derives from this type of behavior and from the need for self-regulation of behaviors both in the public and private sectors, with the subsequent aim to project a better image, as well as to obtain better results or, where appropriate, as a good governance tool [63].

The second conclusion is that 27 universities (more than 50% of universities) have not published their code of ethics on their website, which can be considered an incorrect communication policy [56,63,64]. In this regard, they are therefore confirming one of the most common criticisms that is in the bibliography studied, where one of the most common errors is an incorrect or null communication of these types of codes. In addition, we confirm that the concept of ethics and conduct is confused, as seen in previous studies on ethics and deontology, where many of the universities call these type of codes codes of ethics and others (the least), codes of conduct.

Regarding the age of the codes of ethics in the universities studied, we find that 50% are less than five years old, and of that 50%, half were approved in 2019, and the oldest ones were approved in 2005 and in 2008, so it can be concluded that, in general, they have recently been created or at least are not excessively old. If we consider the founding date of the universities, we verify that there is no relationship between having a code of ethics and the age of the universities.

The aim of the study was to find out if the existence of codes of ethics and conduct in the universities studied resulted in a greater presence of subjects related to this topic in their training program. That is, if public universities have a greater interest or tendency for their students to obtain training in these aspects (Hypothesis 1). From the results obtained, it is concluded that only four universities with a code of ethics have implemented ethics subjects in their training programs, nine universities do not have any subjects and five do not have a shared pattern in their degrees. If we analyze the universities without a code of ethics, we can confirm that some of them are universities with an ethical orientation in their studies. Therefore, the existence of a code of ethics does not determine

the ethical and deontological orientation of training programs in general, and, thus, Hypothesis 1 must be rejected.

In addition to the different names and the use of the code of ethics denomination, it is shown that there is confusion in the terminology, as they should be called codes of conduct. In this regard, it is interesting to identify that the terms ethics and deontology are used indistinctly to name the subjects. Therefore, we can point out that universities must deepen their ethical orientation. Universities with codes of ethics have no further involvement in academic training in this area, since only four universities show an interest by including subjects related to ethics or deontology in the vast majority of their degrees.

Continuing with the hypotheses proposed, we observe that the degrees in the area of engineering and architecture (Hypothesis 2.1) show a greater lack of ethical and deontological training. The training program of the architecture degree stands out, as introduces deontological and ethical aspects at two universities, one with a code of ethics and one without it. Therefore, we must reject the hypothesis that states that universities with a code of ethics integrate subjects on this matter into their training programs in the area of engineering and architecture.

If we take degrees of the legal area into account (Hypothesis 2.2), it stands out that in the degree of law, deontology only appears in four universities, despite being a particularly relevant subject due to the impact it has on developing the profession and the social importance of its knowledge and application, as well as the concern of professional associations with its compliance. The universities that include these types of subjects are six of the 45. Therefore, we must reject the hypothesis that states that universities with a code of ethics incorporate subjects on this matter into their training programs in the legal area. Those responsible for designing the training itineraries may consider this knowledge to be included in other subjects such as civil law. However, we believe that it is essential to convey to students in regulated professions what is ethics and what is deontology, since when they graduate, they will be collegiate and must accept a sanctioning code of ethics.

On the contrary, Hypothesis 2.3 does not validate that, in health science degrees, subjects on ethics and deontology are included. Only two of the universities analyzed do not have ethics or deontology subjects. Ten universities call the subject Medical Ethics and it is also a compulsory subject, and 19 universities employ various denominations, including aspects of communication, history, forensics or legal medicine. Therefore, we can conclude that deontology training has a special presence in medicine, which indicates that the relevance of ethical aspects differs depending on the field of knowledge. This can also be seen in the very structure, content and orientation of the deontological codes of the different professions [15,43].

In conclusion, this study provides relevant implications, which show that universities should be ethical and responsible, just like private organizations. They must convey ethical principles to future workers by incorporating subjects that convey these values, which must be part of their training programs. Furthermore, it is shown that the drafting of a code of ethics does not have to imply an ethical orientation. In addition to drafting it, it must be transmitted to the organization's stakeholders, not only to employees, but also to users, which in this case are students.

Finally, this study has its limitations. This study focuses on the effect on students from public universities. Future studies could expand the analysis to the effect on other stakeholders (professors and non-teaching staff), from public and private universities, so as to carry out a comparative study. It is necessary to study the policies for the creation, implementation, communication and monitoring of university codes of ethics further, as well as the existence of procedures related to their compliance and impact on professors and students. In addition, we propose to analyze the incorporation of ethical competences into the memory of the grades and identify the subjects that incorporated them. This will help understand whether ethical and deontological knowledge has been incorporated as a transversal knowledge in the grade or as a new subject/topic. Finally, an interesting future line of research would be the analysis of specific ethical aspects such as gender equality. Although there are gender-specific

units, codes and protocols in most Spanish universities, it is not clear that gender equality criteria are actually being communicated to students.

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