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## Meaning and Uniqueness of Ethics and Ethical Teacher Behaviors in the Teaching Profession

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# Meaning and Uniqueness of Ethics and Ethical Teacher Behaviors in the Teaching Profession

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## Abstract

This research aimed to determine ethical teacher behaviors according to the opinions of prospective teachers and teachers. In this qualitatively designed study, the phenomenology design was used, and 30 participants were interviewed. Research results showed that the participants understood the responsibilities of teachers, the respect and importance of the teaching profession, effective teaching, developing healthy relationships with school members, and benefiting students and society from teacher's professional ethics. Almost all of the participants stated that the teaching profession should have unique ethical codes for different reasons. Ethical teacher behavior has emerged within the scope of rights and justice, interest and importance to people and the profession, not to harm or benefit, and the boundary of public and private space. Finally, suggestions for improving professional teaching ethics, which can be evaluated in professional, individual, social, organizational, and political contexts, were put forward in the research. It is believed that the research will make a significant contribution to the literature, as it addresses the issue of ethics by taking the views of teachers both preparing for the profession and within the profession, reveals the specific context in Turkey, and reflects descriptions of real-life experiences.

## Introduction

Questions about the good-bad or right-wrong aspects of human behavior have been going on since ancient times. When the ancient Greek texts are examined, virtuous behavior is seen at the center of a good life. It is claimed that a person who exhibits virtuous behavior is also a good person (Plato, n.d./2016). These behaviors defined as ethical (Sims, 1992) are shaped by moral values that direct human behaviors (Fisher, 2013).

In the pre-Enlightenment period, social norms and values were the basis of ethical behaviors. With the Enlightenment Period, an ethical approach that puts the mind at the center has been developed. Kant matched ethics with the individual mind and claimed that that with the correct use of mind, people can turn to ethical behaviors. With the transition to the industrial society, Kant's understanding of ethics was accompanied by a pragmatic ethical understanding. Pragmatist understanding places happiness at the basis of a good life and tries to determine the degree to which a behavior is good by happiness (Noddings, 2017).

Although there are different approaches to ethics, it can be claimed that people feel safe and happy in environments where ethics is at the center of individual and social life, and ethical attitudes or behaviors are displayed. In an ethical organizational climate with benevolence, it is seen that employees have a high level of trust in each other (Nedkovski et al., 2017). Especially in educational environments where there is intense individual interaction, it is seen that this issue gains importance, and there is an increasing interest in this subject in course contents and scientific research, although it is an essential issue in the field of application (Fisher, 2013; Frick, 2011). In this context, ethical education, teacher's ethical behaviors, and ethical dilemmas are among the most frequently examined topics (Altinkurt & Yılmaz, 2011; Lilach, 2020; Maxwell & Schwimmer, 2016; Sagnak, 2010; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011; Starratt, 1991; Warnick & Silverman, 2011).

Although ethics has been a neglected issue for the teaching profession for many years compared with other professions (Barrett et al., 2006), recently, the teaching profession has its ethical codes (National Education Association, 2020). According to Aydın (2006), ethical principles such as professionalism, responsibility, justice, equality, ensuring a healthy and safe environment, non-corruption, honesty, integrity and trust, objectivity, professional commitment and continuous improvement, respect, and effective use of resources should be followed in the teaching profession. Research by Koç and Fidan (2020) showed that ethical teachers should stand at an equal distance to everyone and behave ethically. They are fair, consistent, tolerant, strong in communication, prioritize people, and put professional values above personal values. In the same study, unethical teachers were defined as persons who discriminate, practice intimidation, behave rudely or violently, act contrary to moral values, violate teaching duties for personal gain, act against the law, and do not fairly evaluate students. In another study, it is stated that teachers should organize their behavior around four multifaceted and crosscutting ethical principles (Campbell, 2003a): justice, kindness, honesty, and respect.

In the preparation process for professional life, it is expected that teacher candidates will develop a sensitivity to ethical principles. Because teachers should pay attention to what is good and right in their attitudes and behavior and perform effective teaching, similarly, teachers in the profession must reflect the ethical principles they adopt as principles in their attitudes and behaviors. In this study, we conducted interviews with both teacher candidates and teachers who were in their profession to investigate ethical teacher behavior and how these behaviors can be improved. It is believed that the research will make a significant contribution to the literature as it reveals the specific context in Turkey and reflects real-life experiences.

### **Professional Ethics for Teachers and The Context in Turkey**

Teachers have a respectable place in the conscience of society, as teachers have tasks such as educating young generations and enlightening society. The teacher, who is expected to be a moral leader and make ethical decisions, is expected to put forward an effort beyond the mechanical practices associated with the school (Frick, 2011). That is why the good practices or self-given efforts put forward by teachers for their students or schools go beyond the school's boundaries and are met with great interest in society. From time to time, these good practices or self-given efforts are also covered in the national press. In Turkey, a teacher who did not go on holiday to produce masks for citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic or a school principal who allocated his room to teachers and made a warehouse in the school his office room can be seen as such good examples of ethical teacher behavior (Sabah

Newspaper, 3 June 2020; Sözcü Newspaper, 15 November 2019). Examples like this can be frequently seen in local and national media in Turkey. Notably, in times of crisis, people can often see themselves as part of a larger moral community that is compassionate towards those experiencing problems (Crawford, 2017). However, both in Turkey and in other countries, it is seen that teachers are also become the main topic of conversation from time to time with their attitudes or behaviors that are not right or good (Barrett et al., 2012; Tezcan & Güvenç, 2020).

In Turkey recently, the Minister of National Education shared the following message from his social media account, as some teachers shared images of their classes in social media during the distance education process:

*The classroom environment is intimate and private. It is also true for live virtual classes. I request that you not share the screenshots and recordings of virtual live lessons with people who are not connected to your student. Even in a digital environment, our class is our free space where we can express ourselves comfortably. (Ziya Selçuk, 2020)*

Besides, it is seen that teachers come to the fore with undesirable behaviors such as student violence and sexual harassment. All these negativities attract the attention of educators and researchers to ethics, especially teachers' professional ethics.

Although ethics is a subject that we encounter most in the news (Sims, 1992), it has become a subject that has been examined with an academic concern, especially in the organizational field (Trevino et al., 2014) since the 1980s. Professional ethics and teachers' professional ethics have also been frequently examined in this context (Campbell, 2003b; Maxwell & Schwimmer, 2016; Warnick & Silverman, 2011). It can be claimed, in brief, that professional ethics express moral integrity and consistency in commitment to values (Sims, 1992). On the other hand, teachers' professional ethics reflects this stance against professional ethics in the teaching profession. The paradigm of teachers' professional ethics is based on the premise that educational practice is infused with unique ethical considerations and obligations specific to the profession. Ethics of justice, care, and criticism are included in this ethic (Crawford, 2017). Waxwell and Schwimmer (2016) stated that the purpose of professional ethics education in teaching is to equip students with knowledge, skills, and tendencies to make ethically responsible decisions in professional practices, and there is a consensus on this issue in the relevant literature. Fisher (2013) stated that teachers' professional ethics could be defined as a set of beliefs that a teacher accepts through relationships with students, colleagues, administrators, and parents (or caregivers of children) who are the school's stakeholders. Campbell (2003a) defined teachers' professional ethics as the teachers' awareness of good and struggle against abuse in their daily activities or practices individually or as a professional group member. According to Frick (2011), ethics can be addressed within schools' justice, care, and criticism. It requires the care of a student's best interests within the framework of rights, responsibilities, and respect. It thus creates different professional ethics for school administrators, teachers, and all school employees.

The importance given to ethical and moral principles or values in the teaching profession in Turkey is observed both in pre-service education programs and in the ethical legislation related to public officials. Professional, ethical principles determined for educators, are discussed under the titles of ethical principles in relations with students, professional ethic principles, ethical principles in relations with colleagues, ethical principles in relations with parents, ethical principles in relations with school administration and society, and ethical

principles in the relations of school administrators with teachers, students, and parents (Public Officers Ethics Committee, n.d.). While moral and ethical issues are included in pedagogy courses in teacher training programs, a new course called “Morals and Ethics in Education” is also taught (Council of Higher Education, 2018).

### **Method**

For this study we used the qualitative research method of phenomenology. Michael van Manen (2020) defines phenomenology as allowing something to manifest itself and become visible. In this study, prospective teachers and teachers were asked to express their opinions on ethical teacher behavior based on their knowledge or experiences.

### **Participants**

In this study we interviewed 15 prospective teachers studying at a public university in Ankara and 15 teachers working in different provinces of Turkey in order to obtain detailed descriptions of ethical teacher behaviors (Cohen et al., 2018), and maximum diversity in sampling. Participation in the study was voluntary and the interviews were conducted after obtaining the signed participant consent form. Participant confidentiality was respected in the study; codes were used as PT1, PT2... PT15 for prospective teachers and T1, T2... T15 for teachers. Twelve of the prospective teachers were females, and three were males. Four prospective teachers were in German teaching, three in music teaching, three in classroom teaching, two in guidance and psychological counseling teaching, one in Turkish language and literature teaching, one in special education teaching, and one in English language teaching. Eleven of the teachers were males, and four were females. The average age of the teachers was 35, and their average professional seniority was around 12 years. The teachers' content area distribution was as follows: classroom teaching (6), science teaching (5), guidance and psychological counseling teaching (1), Turkish language and literature teaching (1), preschool teaching (1), and social studies teaching (1).

### **Data Collection**

We used a semi-structured interview form in the study. Semi-structured interviews are used to reconstruct the subjective theory of the interviewee about the subject under study (Flick, 2009). Our aim was to reveal the subjective experiences of the participants about teachers' professional ethics. The same questions were directed to the participants in the interview forms prepared separately for the prospective teachers and teachers on duty. The interview began with this warming question: “What do you think is ethics?” The interview continued with these fundamental questions:

- What do you understand about the meaning of teachers' professional ethics?
- Do you think the teaching profession should have its ethical principles, and why?
- What do you think of teachers' behavior that is ethical and unethical?
- What can be done to improve ethical behavior in the teaching profession?

After the closing question (“Is there anything you would like to add before you end the interview?”), we finished the interview by thanking those interviewed for their contribution. Before conducting interviews with the participants, we consulted with three experts, one from the Turkish language, one from the measurement and evaluation, and one from the field of subject expertise, and finalized the interview form. We conducted a pilot application of the form before the interview; there were no problems with the clarity of the questions, so the final version of the interview form was not changed.

## Data Analysis Procedures

After collecting data, we transcribed the interviews, and with careful reading, produced codes and themes. We applied the content analysis technique in the analysis of research data. In content analysis, data is converted to standard structures (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In content analysis, repetitive phrases or units of meaning are listed and clustered into common categories/themes representing participants' words (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). We included direct participant opinions to reflect the codes and themes set out in the study. These quotes reveal the depth of the participants' emotions, thoughts, experiences, and insights (Patton, 1990). We each analyzed the data individually, compared the findings with the data studied, and created standard codes and themes. In order to ensure reliability, the codes were also checked by independent field experts and researchers.

## Results and Discussion

In the study we asked what the participants understood from teachers' professional ethics, what they think about the unique ethical codes of teaching, what they think about ethical or unethical teacher behaviors, and what can be done to improve teachers' professional ethics.

### Participant Views on the Meaning of Teachers' Professional Ethics

Regarding the meaning of teachers' professional ethics, we observed that the participants emphasized the teacher's responsibilities, the respect of the profession, effective teaching, establishing healthy relationships, providing benefits, and rules or norms that should be followed in the profession. Participants also noted that professional ethics is a facilitating guide for teachers; it gives knowledge of right and wrong to the teacher and gives meaning to the teaching profession beyond a professional occupation. It was also stated that it expresses love, conscience, self-sacrifice, devotion, and unrequited attention. Finally, it was stated that what is desired with professional ethics is to make the teacher an ideal person and a good role model.

Regarding the meaning of teachers' professional ethics, PT1 said, *“Teachers know their responsibilities towards society, profession and students, protect the dignity of the teaching profession, defend the truths that are accepted by the society and stand against mistakes”* According to PT8, *“Teachers' professional ethics includes the necessary rules for both professionalism of relations between teachers and providing a better future for students.”* T2 used the phrase *“A profession that the Constitution and laws establish, only acts to serve humanity, and is fulfilled to raise scientific and free individuals without serving any strata or group”* for teachers' professional ethics. T11 said, *“The responsibilities of the profession come to my mind. Here, I think that the profession's responsibilities towards the student, parent, other teachers, and administrator cover the ethics of the teaching profession.”* T8 used the following expressions within the scope of love: *“Teaching starts with loving, loving all people, especially students.”* T12 stated that he saw teachers' professional ethics as *“professional competence.”*

In support of the research findings, Treviño et al. (2014) stated that professional ethics set standards of behavior for professionals, guide them in dealing with ethical dilemmas, and reflect organizational values. Shapira-Lishchinsky's (2020) study mentions the importance of school rules in the ethical behavior of teachers. It asserts that “respecting the rules and

regulations” shows that a balance should be struck between teachers' conscience and their obligation to obey the rules. Similarly, Campbell (2000) stated that teachers need ethical standards that can guide and resources to help them cope with the ethical complexities and dilemmas inherent in teaching practice.

### **Participant Views on Ethical Principles Unique to the Teaching Profession**

Except for one prospective teacher, all the other prospective teachers claimed that the teaching profession should have its ethical principles. PT10 claimed that there could be no ethical principles specific to the teaching profession because its claim is universal. Other participants stated that the teaching profession should have its ethical principles because it is an influential and respected profession; it affects the individual and society, guides and provides benefits to them; shapes the future of societies; and requires sacrifice. Participants also stated that there should be ethical principles specific to teaching to ensure unity and order among teachers, prevent abuses, and transform the school into a healthy and safe learning environment. Finally, it was claimed that the teaching profession should have its ethical principles because it has original methods and techniques, and it is necessary to determine its boundaries. “*Yes, I think the teaching profession should have its ethical principles because the person who changes a society and individuals in society, educates, and makes it useful to society is the teacher,*” PT1 said. PT6 explained that the teaching profession should have its ethical principles with the following statements:

*Teaching is a profession that takes responsibility not only for one generation but also for many generations. It is a profession that gives direction to the society, so it is valued. For example, those who brought Finland out of the swamp and moved it to the status of civil states were teachers with ethical principles and particular goals. As I mentioned in the beginning, every profession should have its ethical principles and common ones.*

PT7, on the other hand, focused on the reputation of the teaching profession and put forward the following view:

*Because teaching is a sacred profession, and in this profession, teachers touch the lives of students. In order to be able to influence students correctly, to be a good model, the teaching profession must have certain ethical principles. Because if everyone teaches their way, there would be no unity in education. A climate without ethics causes chaos and prevents the formation of a healthy education and training environment.*

PT11 explained this necessity with the words, “*the student can learn something from anywhere, but he always learns the truth from the teacher.*” T2 stated that every profession is based on different duties and responsibilities, so the teaching profession should have its ethical principles. T5 emphasized the different aspect of the teaching profession and used the following expressions:

*Doctors deal with human anatomy; engineers deal with mines, agriculture, construction; teachers are concerned with the human spirit. The teacher tries to shape the students as a sculptor tries to shape clay. Therefore, when talking about professional ethics, the teaching profession comes first.*

T14 stated that “*Everyone should pay attention to the point where they should stand, especially the teachers,*” and stated that the profession should have its ethical principles.

When these findings are associated with the relevant literature, similar results are seen in the studies of Özan et al. (2017). In this study conducted with school administrators, all participants stated that ethical codes were necessary for creating an ethical school climate, adopting ethical behavior and values, achieving the school's goals, and ensuring organizational communication. It is seen that these claims of the participants are practically equivalent to many professions, including the teaching profession (Treviño et al., 2014). Warnick and Silverman (2011), justifying the findings of the study, claimed that the teaching profession differs in terms of professional ethics because it is a profession that focuses on the well-being of the students, draws attention to the moral dimensions specific to education, and focuses on the correctness of educational solutions.

### **Participant Views on Ethical Teacher Behaviors**

Our analysis of the opinions of teacher candidates and teachers on ethical teacher behaviors revealed four categories: (1) right and justice, (2) interest and caring towards oneself and others, (3) not harming or benefiting, and (4) public and private boundary.

In the context of rights and justice, the interviewees expressed participatory views, and emphasized “*not discriminating between students, being impartial, acting fairly/equally, not judging students according to their appearance-achievements, seeing each student as special or unique.*” The behavior not to resort to unfair gains such as “*corruption, taking bribes, using public resources for their personal needs, giving private lessons to their students, and getting paid for the lesson or activities they did not do*” was seen as ethically essential. Being sensitive to the students' values, beliefs, preferences, private life, opinions, showing respect, and not showing prejudice were also shown as ethical teacher behaviors. Participants also found it necessary to “*believe that all students can succeed and provide opportunities for every student to improve themselves.*” Participants also emphasized that ethical teachers do not consider themselves superior and do not behave arrogantly. They are as transparent and accountable as possible. They have democratic attitudes and behaviors and do not gain unfair things through power-interest relationships or accepting gifts. The most common unethical behavior of teachers in Turkey was found as being “not sufficiently interested in students with low success levels” (Altinkurt & Yilmaz, 2012). Campbell (2003a) argued that someone who lies for personal gain or deceives others, who is insensitive to the feelings of others, is unlikely to turn into a principled honest person after becoming a teacher. Again, consistent with the findings of this study, in the study by Koç and Fidan (2020), all participants put forward the opinion that one “stands at an equal distance to everyone” when defining an ethical leader. Again, all participants put forward an opinion within the scope of “discrimination” and “nepotism” when defining an unethical leader. Barrett et al. (2006) also, in line with the findings of this study, found it unethical to raise students' grades due to pressure from family or school management in their research.

In the context of interest and caring towards oneself and others, participants considered it important that teachers be adequate, especially in professional knowledge, perform their duties responsibly, continuously develop themselves, and make efforts. Participants also stated that each teacher should care, love, and adopt their profession. It was also essential to pay attention to the course time, use the course time effectively/efficiently, be prepared for the course, and not spend time with personal work. It is crucial to create love, respect, tolerance, understanding, and trust in the school and the classroom. Participants stated that teachers should love their students and relate to their students. The teacher's accuracy in his words, behavior, and the information he teaches, his honesty with his students and colleagues, and his consistency in his attitude or behavior were also considered ethical



teacher behavior. Participants stated that an ethical teacher is an exemplary person who does not exhibit threatening behavior. It was also found crucial that the teacher adheres to his profession, makes sacrifices, and exhibits selfless behavior. Additionally, the teacher teaches by the student's capacity or level and pays attention to it when giving tasks to students, motivates students, arouses the desire to learn in them, and ensures that they are engaged in the lesson. Participants reported it was ethically crucial for teachers to create appropriate learning environments for students; be constructive and not pessimistic against negativities; behave by social, national, and universal values; and be conscientious and adhere to the Constitution, laws, and rules. Finally, teachers' self-criticism and awareness of their shortcomings; not denigrating their school, colleagues, and students; being compassionate towards their students; protecting the respectability of the profession; and sharing with colleagues were also found significant in terms of professional ethics. These results manifest themselves as the behaviors expected from an ethical leader in the relevant literature. The ethical climate is shared beliefs about the proper behavior and how to handle ethical problems. According to Sims (1992), ethical dilemmas often result in unethical behavior when the ethical climate is unclear or positive. Therefore, it can be claimed that the healthier the ethical climate of the school, the more probability of teachers to display ethical behaviors. It can be argued that teachers have essential roles in maintaining an ethical climate because the teacher is expected to be an ethical leader and can provide this climate. There is also a critical perspective in the literature regarding the interest of students. Vogt's (2002) study emphasized that this interest or care should not be confused with parental care, and having such a perspective may harm the professionalism of the teaching profession.

Participants mainly stated that teachers should not apply violence and pressure to students, should not use bad words and behaviors, should not shout in anger, should not make fun of students, should not scold or hurt students, and teachers should be helpful and not harm. Participants stated that protecting the self and dignity of students and not trying to humiliate them in front of the crowd is also ethical teacher behavior. Also, it was found essential to consider students' benefits and use public resources in this direction. These results coincide with the themes revealed in Koç and Fidan's (2020) research that an unethical teacher acts rude or acts violently. Campbell (2003a) stated that the ethical teacher prioritizes the students' interests, so they should adhere to the same principles of honesty, respect, justice, and courtesy while dealing with school administrators and their relations with students. Additionally, teachers who exhibit ethical behaviors considering the student's benefit also try to teach their students behaviors such as being nice to each other, avoiding bad behavior, and being respectful to their society (Campbell, 2003b).

Within the public and private boundary scope, the participants stated that it is ethical for teachers not to reflect their problems, opinions, or ideology to the classroom environment and act like professionals. Participants also discussed that it is essential for the professional ethics of teaching to have relationships with school stakeholders without violating personal space, not gossip about school members, and comply with confidentiality and not disclose sensitive information. These results are consistent with the results from Barrett et al.'s (2006) research. More than half of the participants found it unethical for teachers to gossip about their students in the related study. About two-fifths of them found it unethical for a teacher to make derogatory comments about another teacher. As PT1 said,

*The ethical behavior of teachers is to fulfill the responsibilities brought by the profession. In other words, teachers should not discriminate between students. They*

*should use their lesson time efficiently. They should provide opportunities to their students at the maximum level, and they should not corrupt the budget allocated for the school.*

PT11 explained unethical teacher behavior with the following case:

*It was my high school years. The teacher of the geography course attended my lesson for four years and made us watch videos of the lessons on the smartboard for four years. We never witnessed him lecturing. He was also not being fair in evaluating the exams. He was giving more points to the students he got along with well. Another teacher was forcing us to attend the course on the weekend, which was free for the student but paid an additional fee to the teacher's salary. He was always saying, "Otherwise, you will not pass the class."*

PT15 explained the ethical teacher and the unethical teacher with the statements:

*Teachers are those who greatly influence the lives of children. Some teachers motivate children, inspire them, and touch their lives to become someone who means a lot to the student. In contrast, some teachers do not even benefit themselves, who only go to and from school.*

T3 shared the following case regarding unethical behavior:

*I had a math teacher that I loved very much in my high school years. He was a complete model in my eyes. In one of our lectures, he wrote a question on the board. "Who should solve, who should solve this question?" he said, pointing at me and said, "Hey fat man, come and solve this question." It was a mistake made against me in front of my friends. I was a teenager. I cried for exactly two class hours.*

T5 stated that he found it unethical for a teacher to teach private lessons to the student he taught. T6 stated that ethical teachers should always be interested in their students and said: "We are a direction compass, wherever we show the children look in that direction." T14 explained the ethical teacher with the following case:

*My father, who passed away, was a teacher and had chronic kidney and heart disease. If he were not uncomfortable enough to fall on the bed due to his illness, he would attend his class. He would say, "Even orphans have a right to the salary I receive from the state," and he would add, "Those students come to school to receive education from the state. I cannot deprive them of this".*

### **Participant Views on the Development of Ethical Behaviors in the Teaching Profession**

Our analysis of participant views on improving ethical behavior in the teaching profession revealed five categories: professional, individual, social, organizational, and political. Participants stated that qualified training should be given to prospective teachers and teachers professionally and ethically through activities such as theoretical courses, practical courses, seminars, meetings, and courses in the professional context. Participants also noted that it is vital for teachers to develop an awareness of professional responsibility. Participants also discussed that valuing the profession, loving the profession, giving meaning to the profession beyond its financial gains, and knowing the purpose and importance of the profession will also contribute to the development of teachers' professional ethics. Participants also suggested that sharing professional knowledge or experience between teachers will contribute to ethical behavior. Professional autonomy and loyalty to the teaching oath were also deemed

necessary in developing ethical behavior. These results were highlighted as a deficiency that should be eliminated in the research of Warnick and Silverman (2011). In their research, Maxwell and Schwinner (2016) similarly focused on the importance of prospective teacher training in professional ethics. They noted that teaching moral dilemmas and case studies are essential in prospective teacher training.

Pertaining to the individual context, our data analysis showed that the importance of making self-interrogations related to ethics, developing self-awareness, acting with self-orientations, and developing self-respect, self-confidence and self-efficacy was another emergent theme. Participants stated that teachers should start development from themselves, that they should continuously improve themselves, and that it is crucial for them to be open to change. Participants also deemed it essential for the teacher to conduct research on ethics; behave attentively towards the student, class, school, and society with ethical concern and awareness; and be knowledgeable about ethical values, social rights, and wrongs. Teachers' habituation of ethical behavior; effort and determination to be ethical; reading of teacher lives, especially exemplary teacher lives; development of empathy abilities; and interest in art were also considered necessary for developing ethical behavior in teachers. It can be argued that every teacher who participates in self-questioning will develop a positive attitude towards ethics. However, for reasons such as busy work pace, tasks to be completed, and meeting personal needs, teachers may not find enough time for these interrogations. However, the challenges of everyday organizational performance should not preclude the focus on moral content in organizational decision-making (Sims, 1992).

Within the social context regarding students, families, and the community of teachers, the data revealed that consultation with these stakeholders and cooperation with these stakeholders was deemed essential to improve teachers' professional ethics. Also, ethical awareness in the family and society, giving importance to the teaching of ethical values in the family during the child development process, and universities supporting schools with ethical education or research were deemed necessary to develop ethical behaviors. Finally, the participants stated that it is essential that the individual, family, society, and media trust and respect teachers and not pressure teachers. The results obtained in different studies support these results in certain aspects. For example, teachers' raising the student grade due to family pressure was a serious ethical problem (Barrett et al., 2012). However, "no score pollution" (in other words, accurate assessment) is considered an essential guide in teachers' professional ethics (Green et al., 2007).

In the organizational context, it was seen essential to sanction compliance with ethical principles in schools, see and appreciate the ethical behavior of teachers by the school administration, provide financial support to the school and teacher by the senior management, support school activities, turn schools into safe environments, and make schools qualified. In order to develop ethical behaviors in teachers, it was also deemed necessary that top-level administrators set an example for teachers in terms of adherence to ethical principles and comply with ethical principles in teacher evaluations. Sims (1992) also emphasized the importance of these issues. They stated that individuals exhibit unethical behaviors, even if they are wrong, because organizations often display behaviors that harm ethical standards. Leadership is a fundamental issue in the context of organizational ethics. In this context, although the participants' suggestions are essential, it will be helpful for top administrators to evaluate professional ethics behaviors from this framework and reflect on how effectively the organization's decisions or policies emerge from these unethical behaviors. Leaders play a

crucial role in representing power and role models in organizations and influence the attitudes and behaviors of their subordinates (Treviño et al., 2014). It can even be said that there is an increasing interest in moral or ethical leadership (Cemaloğlu & Kılınc, 2012; Gini, 1997; Greenfield, 2004; Uğurlu & Üstüner, 2011). Ethical scandals in businesses, governments, non-profit organizations, and even religious organizations have raised concerns about the ethical aspect of leadership and increased interest in ethical leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

When the participant views are examined within the scope of politics, our analysis showed it is essential to enable prospective teachers to practice more in schools and concentrate on practical lessons. Observing the suitability of the candidates to the profession during the entrance to education faculties and appointment process was also found significant in developing ethical behaviors. Participants noted that education unions should act on teacher development and rights, not on political concerns. Also, ensuring fairness and equality of opportunity in education and acting by the Constitution, laws, and regulations were also considered necessary to improve professional ethics. Participants also stated that the adoption of the Teaching Professional Law is vital for teachers' professional ethics. Finally, it was considered essential to activate the career ladder in teaching and reduce teachers' status and pay differences. In the context of eligibility for the profession, models such as Village Institutes, Teacher Schools, and Anatolian Teacher High Schools have been tried in Turkey in the historical process. However, there are no high schools to train candidates for teachers in pre-undergraduate programs in recent periods. This can be achieved by re-establishing schools at the secondary level, which was previously tried in Turkey and aimed at educating teachers, following the needs of modern society. It is believed that it is essential for education unions to distance themselves from political parties and save themselves from being associated with certain parties. Social justice for developing ethical behavior in teachers can be achieved through justice in distributing educational resources.

Another way to achieve this is to develop a social and cultural sensitivity towards the target group. It can also be achieved through a participatory understanding of inclusion in decisions (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2016). In other words, this can be achieved by ensuring equality of opportunity for each student and without alienating any student. This issue is also emphasized in the Constitution and the Basic Law of National Education in Turkey. The “Teaching Professional Law” emphasized by the participants is an issue on Turkey's agenda and maintains current attention. Adopting this law as soon as possible can also contribute to ethical behavior because unwritten expectations about teachers can lead to behavior that results in ethical violations, as it does not lead to a sanction. However, it is necessary to be aware of the ethical dilemma that comes with strict adherence to the rules. Because every behavior that complies with the rule may not produce ethical results (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2016), therefore, it is helpful to consider the conditions in which the behavior occurs.

Some of the data points provided by participants included: “*The school psychological counselor can organize a school-wide seminar for teachers about ethical rules, and teachers can develop themselves with this information.*” PT4 also said,

*Families may be asked to fill out a form. These forms may include behavior expected from teachers, things that come to mind when a good teacher is mentioned, and*

*suggestions to teachers. The teachers can examine that and find appropriate answers to that in developing teaching ethics.*

PT8 touched on the importance of qualified education, *“I think a teacher gains ethical behaviors related to the profession, mostly in the education they receive to become teachers. To teach professional ethics behaviors to be adopted better, this education needs to be developed.”* PT10 emphasized the importance of individual development and art and put forward the following view: *“Art develops and affects people more deeply.”* T1 said, *“First of all, the value of teachers in society should be increased. Furthermore, I think that the decrease in this value is mostly the fault of teachers. Teachers should start changing this situation from themselves first.”* T14 explained that the behaviors exhibited by senior managers are effective on teachers' ethical behaviors with the following case:

*At one time, a king passes by an orchard with his army. The King sees the fruit but does not touch the fruit. After the owner of the orchard arrives, he pays for it and buys some fruit. When the vizier asks why he is doing this, he says, “If I take a few fruits from there, the soldier will pull the tree out.”*

T15 said, *“It is difficult to gain ethical behavior later. Instead of trying to give ethical values to teachers of a certain age, it may be more effective to ensure that they are ethical with sanctions.”*

### **Conclusion**

In the research, firstly, we sought an answer to what teachers' professional ethics means. Regarding this question, the participants stated that they understood the responsibility of teachers, the respect and importance of the teaching profession, effective teaching, developing healthy relationships with school members, and benefiting students and society. Participants also stated that they understood the rules to be followed in the profession, the guiding aspect of ethics, right and wrong, love, devotion, dedication, conscience, and the ideal person. Secondly, we tried to determine what the participants thought about the specific aspects of teachers' professional ethics. In this context, all other participants, except one person, stated that the teaching profession should have its codes for different reasons, such as the teachers' impact on the individual and society, creating a healthy and safe learning environment, and effectively fulfilling their professional responsibilities. We also examined ethical teachers' behaviors. In this context, the participants put forward various opinions regarding right and justice, interest and caring towards oneself and others, not harming or self-benefiting, and public and private boundaries. Finally, we sought an answer to how to improve the ethical teacher's behavior. The participants made various suggestions at professional, individual, social, organizational, and political levels in this context.

Although the research makes significant contributions to the relevant literature, it also has an important limitation. The limitation is that the study reflects the casual views of the participants on teachers' professional ethics. It is possible to obtain more satisfactory data with research conducted in an environment where intense experiences regarding ethics are experienced, such as a school where ethical violations are experienced or a teacher where others speak positively about her because of her ethical behavior.

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