Development, Validity, and Reliability Assessment of the Professional Ethics Scale for Faculty Members of Farhangian University

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Article Info

Article type:
Original Research

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Given the educational mission of universities in Iran, paying attention to the ethical component in the education and training of human resources is essential. Therefore, the preparation and validation of a native instrument for assessing the professional ethics of the educational staff appears to be necessary. The aim of this study was to construct and normalize a scale for assessing the professional ethics of faculty members at Farhangian University.

Methodology: The present study was a sequential exploratory mixed method research. For this purpose, a sample of 267 faculty members and staff of Farhangian University in the northwest of the country was selected using a cluster sampling method. The research instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire. For data analysis, in addition to descriptive indices, Cronbach's alpha and retest methods were used to assess reliability, and factor analysis, content validity, and convergent validity methods were used through SPSS-V22 and Lisrel-V8.8 software.

Findings: Based on the results of the exploratory factor analysis, using varimax rotation, honesty, justice, respect, responsibility, adherence to laws, loyalty, and preservation of human dignity were identified as components of professional ethics among faculty members of Farhangian University.

Conclusion: Overall, the results showed that this scale has satisfactory reliability and validity in assessing the professional ethics of faculty members.

Keywords: Psychometrics, Professional Ethics, Faculty Members, Farhangian University.

1.   Introduction

One of the most important variables in the success of any organization is adherence to ethics (Mehrparvar et al., 2023; Shokri et al., 2022; Tabatabaei et al., 2022). Employees prefer to work in professional organizations because an ethical environment, stemming from professionalism, leads to the reduction of unpleasant factors in teamwork and increases job satisfaction and appropriate relationships among colleagues (Niazaziri, 2014). Regarding the importance of ethics in all aspects of life, scholars in every era have considered the comfort and tranquility of a healthy life in a society with a high level of ethical development as essential. So much so that some researchers believe; without adhering to ethics, scientific communities are formed, and the flow of science production is also disrupted (Erfan, 2018). Thus, organizations' neglect of work ethics and weakness in adhering to ethical principles in dealing with organizational human resources and external stakeholders can cause problems for the organization and question the legitimacy of the organization and its actions (Rezaei, 2017). In addition, researchers believe that professional ethics create an ethical atmosphere and improve job satisfaction in the organization (McLennan et al., 2022; Montazer Ataei & Karimi Moonaghi, 2022).

Today, many countries in the industrialized world have matured to the point where ignoring ethical issues and shirking social responsibilities and commitments leads to the demise of the firm. For this reason, many successful companies have felt the need to develop an ethical strategy and have come to believe that an ethics-based culture must permeate the organization (Kolk, 2016). Therefore, they have endeavored to give professional ethics a special place in research; when we move from the individual and personal realm to the business realm, work ethics or professional ethics come into play, such as medical ethics, teaching ethics, engineering ethics, and the like (Elias, 2016). Among these, the field of education and training, especially those active in education, holds special importance in adhering to ethical patterns. In other words, since education is the foundation of sustainable human development, it must be in the direction of human personality development, and achieving educational goals can be achieved without considering ethical aspects (Mousavi, 2017).

Professional ethics consist of a set of duties, standards, principles, and ethical-value requirements related to professions that evaluate the performance, behavior, and relationships of professors in terms of correctness or incorrectness. Based on the above definition, professional ethics consists of qualities, characteristics, ethical rules, codes, and ethical charters that guide people in their professions towards the correct performance of duties and tasks and prevent them from making mistakes (Banks, 2016; Mousavi, 2017; Sadat Mousavi & Ebrahimi, 2024). Professional ethics in higher education define the limits of appropriate or inappropriate behaviors and guide faculty members in the execution of their professional responsibilities. Since the professional responsibilities and duties of professors and faculty members in universities fall into three categories: educational, research, and entrepreneurial. Therefore, their professional ethics also oversee these three categories. In educational professional ethics, influential people, managers, policymakers, faculty members, and students are involved, among which, the role of faculty members in universities is much more significant than others. University professors, apart from their specialized field in which they must have sufficient expertise, must also know the teaching profession and be familiar with its professional principles. Because teaching is the primary function of the university (Ivory & Bronte, 2010). The principles of professional ethics in education are discussed from two aspects. First, the ethical standards that must be observed in education and related to the teaching and learning process, and the personal ethics principles, according to which, an individual must commit themselves to ethical conduct (Gluchmanová, 2017; Gunz & Thorne, 2020; Hajkhozeymh et al., 2014). Various factors facilitate professional ethics in university professors, including managerial factors such as mutual trust between professors and university management, as mentioned by many researchers, stating that trust and honesty among individuals in an organization lead to professional ethics. Also, at the individual level, the ability to think critically and make correct decisions is among the influential factors on professional ethics (Gluchmanová, 2017; Miller et al., 2019; Ruhi, 2008). Another influential factor could be the presence of ethical leadership. Kelly (2017) in her research points to the relationship between ethical leadership and the creation of professional ethics in the organization (Kelly, 2017). Banks (2016) states that responsibility affects individuals' ethical orientation (Banks, 2016). Miller and colleagues (2019) also found in their research that components of ethical leadership and ethics in the use of information and communication technologies are components of professional ethics and influence the creation of work identity (Miller et al., 2019). Additionally, Gluchmanova (2017) presented a

practical model based on theoretical and practical studies for professional ethics in education that covered educational and research dimensions (Gluchmanová, 2017).

Experts in the field of education and training believe that the university, with its responsibility towards society and students, plays a fundamental role in fostering ethical principles such as the culture of accountability in the trained workforce (Leonidas et al., 2012). Despite universities having this important mission and despite the bright historical and civilizational outlook of Iranians in education and cultural and religious heritage, currently, society, especially university environments, suffer from a lack of ethical concerns in various professions (Almutairi, 2022; Shokri et al., 2022).

The consideration of academic integrity and professionalism among faculty members, as reflected in their influence on students' ethical behavior and perceptions, forms the cornerstone of this endeavor. Almutairi (2022) provides crucial insights into the effects of academic integrity of faculty members on students' ethical behavior, highlighting the significant impact that educators' ethical conduct has on shaping the moral compass of their pupils. This study underscores the importance of embedding integrity and ethical considerations within the academic fabric, thereby reinforcing the rationale for a comprehensive evaluation tool that can assess the ethical dimensions of faculty conduct (Almutairi, 2022).

Mehrparvar, Keshmiri, and Jambarsang (2023) explore the effective components of teachers' professionalism from the viewpoints of various stakeholders, offering a multidimensional perspective on what constitutes professional behavior in educational settings. Their findings contribute to the understanding of professionalism as a multifaceted construct, encompassing ethical considerations, and thereby inform the development of assessment tools aimed at evaluating these components within the academic context (Mehrparvar et al., 2023).

Shokri, Yazdani, Ahmadi, and Afshar (2022) delve into a concept analysis of professionalism in teachers and faculty members, shedding light on the essential attributes that define professional conduct in the educational sphere. This analysis provides a theoretical underpinning for identifying the core elements of professionalism that should be encapsulated within any instrument assessing faculty members' ethical and professional behaviors (Shokri et al., 2022).

Finally, Tabatabaei, Mirzazadeh, Amini, and Mafinejad (2022) discuss the differing perceptions of professional and unprofessional behaviors between clinical faculty members and medical students, revealing the subjective nature of professionalism and the potential discrepancies in how ethical behavior is interpreted by different groups within the academic community. Their research underscores the necessity for a validated scale that objectively assesses professionalism, accommodating the diverse perspectives and expectations present in the educational landscape (Tabatabaei et al., 2022).

Therefore, given the above-mentioned points regarding the importance of ethics in the professional and social lives of educational staff at universities, it seems necessary to prepare a native tool for assessing the professional ethics of university faculty members. However, to date, no study within the country has designed a native instrument for assessing the professional ethics of university faculty members. Therefore, considering the existing contradiction between the need to prepare and standardize an instrument for assessing professional ethics and the absence of such a native tool in Iran, the aim of conducting the present research was to create a comprehensive tool that includes all dimensions of professional ethics in accordance with its theoretical concept.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The research method, based on the nature of the data, was mixed (quantitative, qualitative) and applied in purpose. The qualitative research population consisted of academic experts and officials at Farhangian University. The characteristics of the research experts, as confirmed by knowledgeable professors, were individuals with awareness and information in the area of outstanding skills, who could represent the community by providing precise information. In the qualitative part of the research, interviews were conducted with 23 academic experts and university officials, including 4 managers from Farhangian University, 4 top professors from Farhangian University, 8 deputy deans of education and research at Farhangian University, 4 experts in education at the university campuses, and 3 individuals from the office of curriculum studies and development at Farhangian University, selected through purposive sampling. The tool for collecting information was interviews. The quantitative research population included all faculty members of Farhangian University across the country, and considering that in factor analysis the sample size is considered to be 5 to 15 times the number of

questions, 267 individuals were selected as the sample size. Furthermore, using stratified cluster sampling, the country was initially divided into 5 regions: north and south, east, west, and center, and from each region, three campuses were selected. The researcher randomly chose the sample number from each university according to the sample to population ratio and distributed the questionnaires randomly among the faculty members.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

For data collection in this study, library research, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires were used. In the qualitative part of this study, semi-structured interviews were employed. The researcher analyzed the participants' data during the sampling process to complete any missing information with new information from new participants. After conducting 23 interviews, the main and secondary factors were repeated in previous interviews, and the researcher reached saturation. During the interviews, efforts were made to collect opinions on suitable indicators for determining the components of professional ethics, and the main and secondary factors were examined and finalized. The duration of each interview ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. To ensure the validity of the qualitative part of the research, valuable opinions from professors familiar with this field and Farhangian University experts who were knowledgeable and experienced in this area were used. Participants were also involved in the analysis and interpretation of the data simultaneously. Reliability was calculated using the inter-coder reliability method. In the interviews, two coders reached an agreement on the subject matter, and one of the educational management professors familiar with coding was asked to participate as a secondary coder in the research. Along with this research colleague, three interviews were coded, and the inter-subject agreement percentage, used as a reliability index for analysis, was calculated to be 1.75%, indicating appropriate reliability. For data collection in this study, a researcher-made questionnaire derived from the codes from the interviews was used, completed by polling the faculty members of Farhangian University.

The questionnaire items were divided into two parts: A) General items aimed at gathering general and demographic information of the respondents, including four questions covering gender, age, education, academic rank, and work experience. B) A researcher-made questionnaire on professional ethics, consisting of 30 items on a five-point

Likert scale, developed after reviewing theoretical and practical foundations and the results of exploratory interviews (with open and axial coding of the exploratory interview texts). It should be noted that during the questionnaire distribution, the researcher was present to clarify any ambiguities for the participants verbally. To calculate validity, face validity, content validity, and construct validity were used. The final questionnaire's face validity was established without editorial, formatting, spelling errors, etc., with the help of the researcher, some sample members, the supervisor, and the advisor. For content validity, CVR and CVI forms were used. It is important to note that content validity was assessed before distributing the questionnaire through experts (interviewees, supervisors and advisors, doctoral students specialized in this field, some of the subjects, etc.). Based on this validity, no question required deletion, though some questions were revised.

For reliability calculation, Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability were used. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all components of professional ethics was above 0.70. It is important to note that a pre-test of Cronbach's alpha was conducted on 30 separate subjects, and after confirming the internal consistency of the questions was appropriate, the final questionnaire was distributed to the other subjects.

3. Findings and Results

For data collection in the qualitative section, interviews were conducted with 23 academic experts who had executive records at decision-making levels. Of these 23 academic experts participating in this research, 8 were women and 15 were men. Also, regarding educational status, 2 had bachelor's degrees or lower, 5 had master's degrees, and 16 had doctoral degrees.

After identifying the professional ethics model, it was first necessary to ensure that the available data (sample size and the relationship between variables) were suitable for factor analysis. For this purpose, the KMO index and Bartlett's test were used. The results showed that the KMO index was greater than 0.6, indicating sample size sufficiency based on identified indicators for factor analysis. A significance level of 0.000 for Bartlett's test also indicates the research variable's suitability for factor analysis because it rejects the null hypothesis of an identity correlation matrix. Then, based on the identified indicators, factor analysis was conducted on the professional ethics variable. Standardized

parameter estimates in the figure below show that all indicators are statistically significant, and their factor loadings are at a high level. The fit indices review indicates an appropriate model fit.

Table 1

Professional Ethics Items

Component	Coefficient	t-Value	Item	Factor Loadings	t-Value	Status
Honesty	0.84	12.38	Item 1	0.77	-	Confirmed
			Item 2	0.82	14.08	Confirmed
			Item 3	0.82	14.10	Confirmed
			Item 4	0.85	14.80	Confirmed
Justice	0.83	13.53	Item 5	0.85	-	Confirmed
			Item 6	0.83	16.92	Confirmed
			Item 7	0.90	19.25	Confirmed
			Item 8	0.75	14.40	Confirmed
			Item 9	0.74	14.18	Confirmed
Respect	0.85	14.73	Item 10	0.90	-	Confirmed
			Item 11	0.89	21.62	Confirmed
			Item 12	0.88	20.77	Confirmed
			Item 13	0.73	14.66	Confirmed
Responsibility	0.98	15.71	Item 14	0.82	-	Confirmed
			Item 15	0.72	13.32	Confirmed
			Item 16	0.77	14.59	Confirmed
			Item 17	0.79	15.20	Confirmed
			Item 18	0.80	15.42	Confirmed
			Item 19	0.83	16.34	Confirmed
			Item 20	0.79	15.05	Confirmed
Lawfulness	0.92	15.93	Item 21	0.88	-	Confirmed
			Item 22	0.85	18.09	Confirmed
			Item 23	0.76	14.91	Confirmed
Loyalty	0.88	15.62	Item 24	0.91	-	Confirmed
			Item 25	0.92	23.01	Confirmed
			Item 26	0.78	16.48	Confirmed
Preservation of Human Dignity	0.88	11.98	Item 27	0.72	-	Confirmed
			Item 28	0.86	13.70	Confirmed
			Item 29	0.88	14.06	Confirmed
			Item 30	0.85	13.60	

As seen in Table 1, the significance level for all components (except for the respect component) is less than 0.05, and thus, the null hypothesis is rejected with 95% confidence for these components, and the research hypothesis is confirmed. However, for the respect component, the null hypothesis of the mean of this component being equal to 3 (theoretical number) is accepted. Also, according to the mean difference column, a positive numerical value indicates that the condition of that component is desirable, and a negative numerical value indicates an undesirable condition of that component.

Table 2

Fit Indices for the Path Analysis Model

Index Type	Index Name	Abbreviation	Value	Acceptable Fit
Absolute Fit Indices	Chi-Square Coverage Level	-	971.86	-
	Goodness of Fit Index	GFI	0.95	Greater than 0.9
Incremental Fit Indices	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index	AGFI	0.93	Greater than 0.9
	Comparative Fit Index	CFI	0.98	Greater than 0.9

Parsimonious Fit Indices	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation	RMSEA	0.051	Less than 0.1

As shown in Table 2, the fit indices of the model are in a satisfactory state.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of the Study
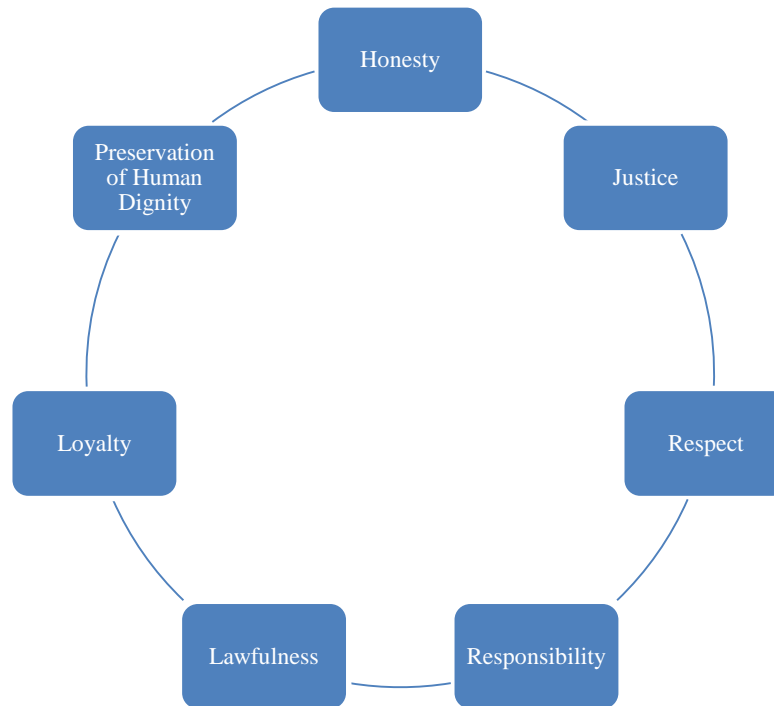
4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present research was conducted with the aim of developing, validating, and verifying the Professional Ethics Scale for Faculty Members of Farhangian University. The results from the analysis of the current research findings showed that the developed questionnaire consists of 30 items, which include the components of honesty (4 items), justice (5 items), respect (4 items), responsibility (7 items), lawfulness (3 items), loyalty (3 items), and preservation of human dignity (4 items).

In this regard, some findings from previous research are consistent with the findings of the present study. Niazazari, Enayati, Behnamfar, and Kahrudi (2014) stated that professional ethics has a significant and positive correlation with organizational commitment (Niazaziri, 2014). Almutairi (2022) highlights the pivotal role that the academic integrity of faculty members plays in influencing students' ethical behavior, suggesting a direct correlation between educators' ethical conduct and the moral development of their students. This linkage underscores the necessity of fostering an environment where professional ethics are not only taught but exemplified by faculty members (Almutairi, 2022). Similarly, the work of Mehrparvar, Keshmiri, and Jambarsang (2023) identifies effective components of teachers' professionalism, providing a nuanced understanding of how various dimensions of professional conduct, including ethical considerations, impact the educational milieu. Such perspectives enrich the discourse on the importance of a robust ethical foundation in higher education settings, reinforcing the findings of the current study (Mehrparvar et al., 2023). Moreover, the research underscores the significance of ethical leadership within academic institutions, as indicated by Tabatabaei et al. (2022), who examine perceptions of professional behaviors among faculty members and students. These discussions collectively highlight the integral role of professional ethics in shaping the educational experience, affirming the relevance of the developed Professional Ethics Scale for Faculty Members of Farhangian University in assessing and

promoting ethical standards within the academic community (Tabatabaei et al., 2022).

When discussing professional ethics among professors, concepts such as honesty come to mind. Being honest and truthful among professors, who themselves teach a large portion of individuals, is of great importance. The correctness and honesty of professors teach students the way and manner of being humane. On the other hand, responsibility is another characteristic of an ethically oriented professor. Professors with professional ethics are responsible and accountable for their actions, maintaining this responsibility at all times. Responsibility in teaching, responsibility in mistakes, and responsibility in power. In addition to responsibility, attention to human dignity means that, first, they have accepted themselves as developed humans and know how to maintain their own and others' respect, and second, they transfer this sense of dignity and value to others. In confirmation of the importance of the findings and the role of adherence to ethical principles by professors and its role in increasing learning motivation, as well as adherence to ethical principles by students, the results of Rouhi et al.'s study (2008) showed that the most significant factor affecting students' academic motivation is the scientific and ethical competence of faculty members. Researchers believe that educational organizations can grow professionally and ethically only when their members are developed. In this context, teachers and professors, due to their crucial responsibility in educating different individuals, are considered the most important factor in creating change in the educational system (Ruhi, 2008).

Based on the results obtained from this research, it can be said that the tool developed in this study has satisfactory validity and reliability. Therefore, the use of the questionnaire developed in this research can be fruitful in measuring the level of professional ethics among faculty members of universities, especially members of the Farhangian University faculty.

Given the findings of this research and considering the existing literature on the importance of ethics in all aspects of individuals' lives in society, conducting further research to identify factors affecting the ethical components of teachers and professors seems necessary. It is suggested that future research in this area explore methods and training necessary to strengthen and improve the professional ethics components of Farhangian University professors or teachers, so with the increase of professional ethics in teachers and professors, we witness students and ultimately an ethical society. Despite the satisfactory findings in the current study,

like other conducted research, it had some limitations in the research execution process. One of the main limitations was sampling limited to Farhangian University faculty members, which might pose a problem in generalizing the research results to professors of other universities and teachers, suggesting that future research should also be conducted on professors of other universities and teachers.

Authors' Contributions

In this study, the authors collectively were responsible for data collection, analysis, and manuscript writing.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

Declaration of Interest

No conflict of interest was reported.

Funding

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical principles such as confidentiality and voluntary participation.

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