Evaluation of the Relationship between Professional Ethics of University Professors and Academic Progress of Students in Southern Tehran

Dr. Zohreh Esmaeili  
Assistant professor of department of educational science and psychology Payame Noor University, pobox19395-3697Tehran,IR of Iran  
esmaeilyir@yahoo.com

Nazi Naseri  
MA of Educational Planning, Payame Noor University, South Tehran, Iran  
nazinaseri22@yahoo.com

Sepideh Jafargholizadeh  
MA of Curriculum, Payame Noor University, South Tehran, Iran  
sepidosia@yahoo.com

Abstract

This research was performed with the purpose of evaluation of the relationship between professional ethics of university professors with academic progress of students and Payame Noor University, Southern Tehran. Statistical population consisted of 1969 Master’s Degree students at Payame Noor University, Southern Tehran from which 162 students were selected by stratified random sampling to participate in the study. For data collection, questionnaire for evaluation of professional ethics of professors by Babasafari (2013) was used for evaluation of professional ethics of professors by students with reliability coefficient of 0.92 and also mean scores of students from the relevant unit were used. For data analysis SPSS and AMOS software were used. Results showed that meaningful correlation existed between professional ethics of professors in five subcategories (teaching, research, manners, humane relations and organization) with academic progress of students. Additionally, the five subcategories mentioned were able to explain 0.48 of academic progress of students.

Keywords: Professional Ethics, Academic Progress, University Professors.
Introduction:

The area of higher and university education has various functions the most important and expansive of them being scientific and practical education of students in various fields. Professors and members of university scientific community whom a major portion of this function is placed in their hands, due to their pedagogical profession have ethical duties and responsibilities which are referred to as professional ethics of teaching. Professional ethics in teaching has subcategories which are primarily focused on two sections namely professor’s ethical duties during his or her pedagogy and the ethical duties of the professor in line with his or her developmental role (Imanipour, 2012). The topic of professional ethics has long been focus of attention in various countries, occupational and professional groups and endeavor has been made for formulation of ethical codes and standards. Universities also since they are forerunners of cultural, social and political movements in societies and opinions and beliefs dominating over them sooner or later gets transferred to society and opens new arenas for the public are not free of need for professional ethics (Nemati, 2010). Higher education is associated with suitable conditions for occurrence of ethical issues and ethics has application in all contexts and activities of higher education (Hoper, 2005). It goes beyond legal duties and professional responsibilities of organizations and attends challenging issues (Hogan, 2008). Professional ethics in higher education identifies limits and boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate behavior and guides members of the scientific community in performing their professional responsibilities (Nemati, 2010). Since professors have fundamental effect on the ethical atmosphere of the entire university environment (Shulte et al, 1991) and their behavior is effective on ethical and practical improvement of students (Lisman, 1996), university professors irrespective of their specialty field need to be skillful in principles and values of professional ethics. Since they have the duty of educating and teaching, they should also be skillful in the instructing profession and be familiar with professional principles. The reason is that teaching is considered the first function and mission of a university. Teaching provided by an educational system may lead to occurrence of special behaviors in society which are ethnically subject to criticism and evaluation. With regards to professional ethics of university professors and teachers of schools little research has been performed. For example, Moray and colleagues (1996) in a research titled “Ethical principles of university teaching” mention nine ethical principles in the university which include: efficiency of curricular content, efficiency of teaching, attending sensitive topics, helping the student grow, lack of improper relationships with students, confidentiality, respect for colleagues, accurate evaluation of students and respect for the teaching institution. Rafael and Canizal (2001) in a study titled “Evaluation of ethical improvement and professional ethics of professors at the University of Texas” found out the mean score of ethical reasoning of professors in correlation with age, gender, occupational position, scientific and sectional standing differed but this difference was not statistically significant. In a second round of analysis, age created more diversity in responses in relation with questions of ethical opinions. Cam and colleagues (2012) show that while physical education teachers have noted that they respect professional ethics in the dimensions of professionalism, responsibility taking, truthfulness, and respect at a high level, yet, principals have reported that they pursue professional ethics at a lower level. Babasafari (2013) showed that significant difference exists between all dimensions of professional ethics of professors except for humane and organizational relationships. Meaningful difference does not exist between the opinion of boy and girl students and university students in humanities and basic sciences regarding the five
dimensions of professional ethics of professors. Seinhaninejhad and colleagues (2014) showed that the constituents of personality traits, mastery over content, dominance over teaching methods, standard evaluation and observance of teaching rules among professors of University of Medical Sciences in Ghom, meaningful difference existed between the mean compared to average level. Bouzarjomehri and colleagues (2013) have evaluated the professional ethics of professors of the Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences at Yazd from the view point of students. With the purpose of evaluating effective teaching, components of methodology, interactive relationship with students, knowledge seeking and centricity towards student growth, class management and appropriate evaluation were investigated. Evaluation of professors was performed based on constituents of individual and colleagues’ report contents. Results showed that professors of Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences at Yazd are generally qualified scientifically and ethically but need to devote more consideration to student issues and spend more time interacting with them. Considering the limited external studies and studies by internal researchers regarding professional ethics, there is no complete and comprehensive research in the context of professional ethics of professors inside the country specially studies that evaluates the effect of this ethical quality of professors and teachers on educational aspects of students such as academic performance. Considering that research in this regard has major importance, in this research, we evaluated effect of professional ethics of professors at Payame Nour University on performance or academic progress of Master’s Degree students. The reason for selecting Master’s Degree students was that they have worked with professors in research contexts and since one of the dimensions of professional ethics of professors in this study is the research dimension, therefore questions related to this aspect can be responded to with sufficient information. The variable of professors’ professional ethic has 5 dimensions (teaching, research, manners, humane relations and organization). The necessity for investigating various dimensions is related to the issue that firstly, all these dimensions each have special importance and in total show professional ethics of instructors and it is important to determine what effect does better performance of professors in each dimension have on academic progress of students. Therefore, the main problem of this research was evaluation of the relationship between professional capabilities of professors in the five constituents mentioned with academic performance of students at Payame Nour University, Southern Tehran. Concordantly, the following questions were designed for this research:

**Main Question:** 1- Is there a correlation between professional ethics of professors with five components of teaching, research, mannerism, humane relation and organizational domain with academic performance (academic progress) of students?

**Minor Questions:**
1- Is there correlation between professional ethics of professors (teaching dimension) with academic performance (academic progress) of students?
2- Is there correlation between professional ethics of professors (research dimension) with academic performance (academic progress) of students?
3- Is there correlation between professional ethics of professors (mannerism dimension) with academic performance (academic progress) of students?
4- Is there correlation between professional ethics of professors (humane relationships dimension) with academic performance (academic progress) of students?
5- Is there correlation between professional ethics of professors (organizational dimension) with academic performance (academic progress) of students?
Theoretical Framework of the Research

Even though famous philosophers such as Socrates and Plato considered ethics an internal matter, yet, some western philosophical schools do not accept this opinion. Away from the argument on intrinsic or extrinsic nature of ethics, we should note that recent research has considered the role of ethical teachings very important. Studies have shown that school is an educational institute with important role in ethical growth, even though the role of the family, friends and social models should not be lightened in this sense (Temli et al, 2012). For ethical teaching various methods exist. One of the ways to teach ethics is with examples and models and the other method is by way of curricular topics (Fenstemacher et al, 2009). In defining professional ethics or business mores some «consider it prevalent behavioral styles among people of the same profession» (Esfandiari Moghadam & Hassanlou, 2010). The principles of professional ethics at universities and educational institutes of many countries, in line with provision of a collection of moral rules and standards which everybody agrees with and increased bounds to professional principles, have led to preparation of a collection of guidelines for ethical codes (Foster, 2012). These ethical principles are discussable in two aspects: first are ethical standards that need to be observed in the matter of teaching and are related to the process of teaching-learning (for the teaching section and particularly professors). Second is the principle of personal mores which individuals need to consider themselves obligated to follow them in any place and time. These two dimensions form the principles of ethics in every educational institute and university (Imanipour, 2012). Overall, even though professional moral principles are related to the dimension of teaching-learning in higher education institutes of various particular countries and are subordinate to the laws of each country, yet, frequently they are found in all following principles: 1- student empowerment 2- unfavored relationship with the students 3- confidentiality 4- respect for colleagues 5- respect for the institution 6- mastery of content 7- evaluation 8- mastery of educational principles (Imanipour, 2012). The second dimension related to ethics includes items that every individual at the university and institute should act upon. These principles are very diverse and dependent on culture, religion and philosophy dominant on society (Garel & Boreg, Translation by Nasr et al, 2012, p 154). Chan (2002), Akar and Yildirim (2004), Pedder (2006) and research by Sabaghtan (1996), Bayani (2008), Nainian (2002), Esmailinasab (2004), Fraser and Walberge (1991) in relation with professional ethics of teachers have shown that teachers that observe professional ethics in classrooms and are considerate of individual and group needs of students have students that are more successful in learning and have better academic performance (cited in: Hashemi Fesharaki, 2005). Therefore, it can be stated that growth of professional capabilities of teachers can have positive effect on their outlook with regards to professional performance inside and outside of the classroom, lead to increased capability in them and identification of goals by them in the direction of increasing student academic performance (Meiers & Ingrarson, 2006). Yet, up to now, the effect of this characteristic has not been investigated on academic performance in higher education inside the country. In this research, the purpose was evaluation of the effect of observance of professional ethics of professors on academic progress in higher education.

Method

This research was applied in kind and for its performance descriptive and correlational methodology was used. Statistical population included 1969 Master’s Degree students at
Payame Nour University, Southern Tehran. With calculation of the population variance, a number of 162 students were selected based on the Morgan table by way of stratified random sampling for participation in the study. For data collection, two instruments were used: Questionnaire for evaluation of professional ethics of professors (Babasafari, 2013) which has been designed in the frame of 5 dimensions and 52 items. To evaluate the constituents a five degree Likert scale was used. The student should select one choice among the options which represents his or her opinion about the relevant professor (with special coding). The five dimensions of professional ethics of professors include teaching (items 1 to 12) such as preparedness for teaching, scientific mastery, fairness in evaluation, and dimension of research (items 13 to 23) such as valuing research activities, supporting and collaborating with the student in various stages, allocation of sufficient time, dimension of mannerism (items 24 to 34) such as mental openness and freedom of thinking, well groomed appearance, truthfulness in speech and behavior, dimension of human relations (items 35 to 43) such as respectfulness in approach towards students and colleagues, lack of gender and ethnic discrimination and organizational dimension (items 44 to 52) such as observance of university etiquette, legal and moral guidelines in the profession.

The index of academic performance for the purpose of measuring academic performance: considering the mean grade point average of students in the relevant unit in various fields, the researcher initially coded the questionnaire completed by students of each professor and next by seeking university student affairs office, evaluated and calculated mean of grades achieved by students of that professor in the end of term examination that had been recorded in the education office. Subsequently, for equalization of the grade of the students in various courses and calculation of their academic progress, the mean of the total grade was changed from a qualitative to a quantitative scale with scores of 18-20 being changed to 4, scores of 15-17 to 3, scores of 13-15 to 2 and scores below 13 were changed to 1. In this research for data analysis single sample t-test, Pearson’s correlation coefficient, multivariable analysis of variance and step by step regression with the help of AMOS and SPSS 20 softwares were used and the fit index of the model was determined using version 18 of the software.

Results

Table 1. Correlation between professional behavior of the professors and academic progress of students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Academic progress</th>
<th>Organizational dimension</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Mannerism</th>
<th>Humane relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic progress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td><strong>0.45</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dimension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td><strong>0.55</strong></td>
<td>0.3**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td><strong>0.57</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.44</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.69</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mannerism</td>
<td><strong>0.15</strong></td>
<td>0.3**</td>
<td>0.04**</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humane relationship</td>
<td><strong>0.43</strong></td>
<td>0.4**</td>
<td><strong>0.37</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.45</strong></td>
<td>0.08**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**meaningful at a 0/001 level. *meaningful at a 0/01 level.

Considering the results obtained in Table 1, professional behavior of professors had positive and meaningful correlation in order with the component of research 0/57, teaching 0/55, organizational dimension 0/45, humane relationships 0/43, mannerism 0/15 at a 0/01 level.
Additionally, among five subcategories of professional capability, the dimension of teaching and research had the highest correlation and the constituent of mannerism the least correlation with academic performance of students. To determine which of the predicting variables (dimensions of professional ethics) can better predict the criteria variable (academic progress), multivariable regression analysis with a step by step approach was used and while presenting the proposed model, the relationship between the two variables was evaluated with the help of the proposed model and use of path analysis with AMOS. The results were as follows:

**Table 2: Regression analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Df1</th>
<th>Df2</th>
<th>Significance level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional ethics and academic progress</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>46.39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering the results of Table 2, the calculated amount for r was 0.69 and the value for r squared was 0.48 which shows that professional ethics of professors in all five dimensions predicts 0.48 of changes in academic performance of students. The value calculated for F was equal to 46.39 which is meaningful at a 0.001 level. Considering the results, it can be stated that at least one of the predicting variables (research, teaching, humane relations, mannerism and organizational dimension) can predict criteria variable (academic progress).

**Table 3: Step by step regression analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional ethics variables</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>54.39</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational dimension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humane relations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering the results of Table 3, the value calculated for T shows that among the components of professional ethics of professors, the dimension of research with 4/81 had the highest predicting power of academic progress of students and the component of mannerism did not have sufficient predicting power in this context. Considering the results obtained, the correlation between components of professional ethics with academic progress can be proposed based on the structural model (diagram 1).
Table 4: The Chi-square index and significance level of the path model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research model</th>
<th>Number of free parameters</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>Degrees of freedom</th>
<th>Significance level</th>
<th>Relative Chi-square</th>
<th>GFI</th>
<th>AGFI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>567/4</td>
<td>0/335</td>
<td>1/142</td>
<td>0/992</td>
<td>0/994</td>
<td>0/030</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering Table 4, since the relative Chi value (CMIN /DF) is less than 3, it is acceptable. The p-value is not significant (is higher than 0/05). Therefore, the assumption of appropriate value of the model is accepted with the research data. Additionally, considering that the value for the indices of GFI and AGFI are near one and the value for RMSEA obtained for the formulated model is equal to 0/05, it can be concluded that the path model has desired conditions. Considering the acceptability of the fitting index of the model, for evaluation of regression coefficients (factor load) of each of the variables with the criteria variable (academic progress), the path analysis model was used the result of which are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Regression coefficients of path model and their significance level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation between variables and academic progress</th>
<th>Regression coefficients</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic progress…&gt; Organizational dimension</td>
<td>0/170</td>
<td>0/0390</td>
<td>Is meaningful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic progress…&gt; Teaching</td>
<td>0/180</td>
<td>0/0230</td>
<td>Is meaningful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic progress…&gt; Research</td>
<td>0/220</td>
<td>0/0180</td>
<td>Is meaningful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic progress…&gt; Mannerism</td>
<td>0/100</td>
<td>0/0460</td>
<td>Is meaningful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic progress…&gt; Humane relations</td>
<td>0/160</td>
<td>0/012</td>
<td>Is meaningful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results of Table 5 show that all components of professional ethics of professors at a confidence level of 95 percent have meaningful effect on the variable of academic performance of students.
Discussion and Conclusion

University as a research and educational center in interaction with student, professor, personnel and the external environment needs to be ethical. Furthermore, considering the strategic role of the university in promotion of professional ethics in occupations and organizations, the necessity for ethical upholding by the institute of the university is more sensed. The purpose of performing this research was evaluation of the relationship between observance of professional ethics by professors and academic performance of students at the Master’s Degree level. The results of this research showed that positive and meaningful correlation existed between professional ethics and academic performance of students. The results of this research agree with research by Sabaghian (1996), Bayani (2008), Nainian and Biabangard (2002), Fraser and Walberge (1991), Chan (2002), Akar and Yaldirim (2004) and Pedder (2006). Considering the results obtained, it is suggested to those responsible in higher education to endeavor to encourage professors in having ethical behavior with provision of spiritual and ethical atmosphere in the education system and increased attention to the position and status of professors. Additionally, the results showed that in the dimension of research namely in contexts such as encouraging students to participate in research activities, collaborating with and supporting them in the various stages of research and valuing their research endeavors has more effect on academic performance of students compared to other indices. Additionally, the teaching component of professional ethics has high correlation with student academic progress. In fact, in the opinion of students, professors have prior preparedness for teaching, have the necessary mastery to present the subjects, are timely and organized in educational and classroom matters and allocate sufficient time for resolution of students’ class problems and can create educational motivation in students. Apparently, issues such as respect for colleagues, avoidance of ethnic, racial and demographic discrimination, attention to student problems, encouragement and support of younger colleagues, attention to moral, scientific and professional criteria in performing research activities are also effective on academic performance of students. Overall and based on the results of the research, it can be claimed that observance of ethical components in pedagogy by professors leads to effectiveness of the process of teaching and learning. Presence of ethical components in teaching can guarantee its increased effectiveness. It appears that the topic of ethics in higher education needs increased effort and endeavor. Increasing concern about obliteration of ethical boundaries in higher education institutes has challenged and affected many higher education activities. In this context, consideration of evaluation of higher education activities regarding attention to ethical issues is useful and desired. Maybe, by setting ethical codes and evaluation of professors, students, directors and all individuals involved in higher education using these codes, many matters contradictory with professional ethics can be prevented. The important issue relevant to this topic is improved ethical behavior of students and professors inside and outside of the classroom using internal demands. Therefore, it is suggested to officials of the educational system to hold training sessions, conferences and invite expert professors for presentation of scientific and up to date information to new comer professors and with establishment of counseling centers to help professors, particularly those with short work experience, to resolve occupational barriers and problems and promote professional ethical capabilities.
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