

Extent of Professional Ethics Observance among Secondary School Teachers: Private versus Public

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Abstract: Differences in organizational characteristics lead to disparity in ethical observance and consequently ethical decision-making. This study seeks determine whether extent of professional ethics observance among private and public secondary school teachers significantly differ. This is a descriptive non-experimental study which utilized one-shot survey among 109 teacher-respondents. Findings indicated that there is higher proportion of private school teachers who ‘highly observe’ professional ethics in their everyday lives than the public school teachers. Inferential statistical results further confirmed that extent of professional ethics observance was highly observed by private school teachers than by public school teacher, $U=833.0$, $p>0.0$. This study argues that, albeit this finding, professional ethics is indivisible from the teaching profession as teachers are expected to exhibit higher moral and ethical standards. With this, ethical expectations even overlap between teachers’ professional and personal lives.

1. Introduction

Differences in the way decisions are achieved in organizations affect ethical observance and the ethical decision-making in particular (Rus & Rusu, 2015; Heres & Lasthuizen, 2012; Venezia et al., 2010). These differences are borne out from the basic idea that there are persisting systematic differences across organizational environments. In addition, distinct organization characteristics such as organizational culture even more broaden the disparity between private and public organizations (Rus & Rusu, 2016).

According to Richards (2006), organizational factors are among the most prominent features that moderate these differences in ethical observance and practices. He elaborated that, say for

instance, in the case of the private sector, managers are caught between the conflict on choice of profit over ethics. On the other hand, non-profit organizations may put high emphasis on the utilitarian perspective which in turn leads to higher ethical standards. Heres and Lasthuizen (2012) support in stating that, managers in public organizations tend to emphasize societal accountability while managers in private organizations tend to view ethics as an embedded component in organizational culture where branding and image-building, among others, are paramount.

In a study by Van der Wal et al., (2008), they identified the similarities and the cross-cutting differences between the organizational values of the private and the public sector. They reported that among the

unique values in the private sector are 'profitability', 'honesty', and 'innovativeness'. Meanwhile, among the unique values in the public sector are 'lawfulness', 'incorruptibility' (which they identified interchangeably with 'integrity'), and 'impartiality'. Similar values present between the both sectors are 'accountability', 'expertise', 'reliability', 'effectiveness', and 'efficiency'. According to Rus and Rusu (2015), private organizations tend to be more compliant with ethical principles and values as they are compelled to build greater rapport and promote customer-oriented attitude.

Venezia et al. (2010) describe that ethical work climates in the private and public sectors significantly differs in terms of their focus. According to them, private sectors tend to focus on entrepreneurship, risk-taking, encouraging creative approaches that challenge the parameters of the law, and answering to the stakeholders. Erstwhile, the public sector tends to focus on the intricacy of bureaucracy and emphasis on public service and sworn oaths to the constitution and rules of law. In a detailed discussion, they however delineated, that these do not mean to say that one sector is more ethical than another or that one country has a monopoly of ethical behavior. Instead, they content that, though differences are persistently present, core ethical standards are observed in whichever context.

Aguiar do Monte (2017) shared his ounce of intellectual contribution in this public versus public comparison debate. According to him, government agencies, or the public sector in general, works less efficiently and effectively than the markets, referring to the private sector as a whole. He rationalized that this is because the public sector find it difficult to instil among their employees a sense of personal significance

as employees find it difficult to link the success of the organization and their contributions. In addition, he identified the lower risk of job loss as one of the leading culprits in this paradox.

Conversely, Tamunomiebi and Ehior (2019) remarked that the case is rather different for private organizations as high ethical behavior or employees are linked to good financial performance. In addition, they also note that ethical behavior in business organizations is also found to be related with work efficiency and effectivity. Inversely, they contend that unethical behavior lead to bad image which is unhealthy for the organization.

Nonetheless, the private sector cannot also be considered to be the bearers of the holy grail of professional ethics. As Richards (2006) explains, private sector employees are more tolerant of questionable business practices than their counterparts in the public sector who emphasized similar, if not really identical, ethical principles. According to him, this can be caused by the private employees' perception towards greater benefits and negative consequences. He further elaborates that this can also be rationalized by describing the less proximity of the private sector to the victims and more proximity to the perpetrators of these questionable business practices.

While literature succinctly provides clear-cut differences in the ethical observance in the public and private sector, there are no published studies or scientific articles, to the extent that the researcher conducted her investigation, that tackled the same subject from the perspective of the teaching profession more so from the perspective of Filipino teachers. This was given explanation by Van der Wal et al. (2008) saying that most studies are

monosectoral and monodisciplinary in both theory and method as studies seek to provide generalizable conclusions that would encompass broader subjects. This is a gap that the researcher seeks to address in this study.

The Moral Teacher

Teaching is a moral activity (Fenstermacher, 1990; Hodgkinson, 1991; Hansen; 2001). It is a moral exercise as teachers essentially build relationships with key stakeholders like students, colleagues, parents, and the community (Goodlad et al., 1990; Lyons, 1990; Sockett, 1993). To this end, teaching is grounded on values that form the foundation of the teaching profession (Ehrich et al., 2011). As Buzzelli and Johnston (2001) put it, ‘teachers are moral agents... and thus classroom interaction in particular, is fundamentally and inevitably moral in nature’.

Becoming a teacher is to immerse oneself to the realm of the ideal. Teachers are expected to be the models of the good and acceptable. Gluchmanova (2015) further explains that the educational system, where teachers serve as leading personas, is the repository of the social and cultural values. As such, teachers are expected to exemplify these values at the optimum level.

These, among others, endow the teacher with the primary roles to develop responsible and virtuous citizens (Fenstermacher, 1990). As such, teachers, as core figures in the child’s moral development (Strike & Soltis, 2009), behold the responsibility of explicit teaching of the good and bad and modelling of virtuous behaviours (Olejárová, 2017). Fenstermacher (1990) even highly attributes that ‘teacher’s conduct at all times and in all ways is a moral matter.’ As suggested by

Gluchmanova (2015), this duty extends to all teachers at all levels where cognitive, intellectual, and moral progress must be at the core of the teaching profession.

Code of Ethics in Teaching

Developments in educational ethics research have found that, in addition to the morality of teaching, there are unexplored moral dimensions of the teaching profession and ethical professional practice (Fenstermacher, 1990; Sockett, 1993; Strike & Soltis, 2009). The heavily value-laden characteristic of the teaching profession puts the teacher at a position where she is very much susceptible to ethical dilemmas (Ehrich et al., 2011). With this necessitates the need to institutionalize and/or codify moral behaviors from the non-moral, thus the conception of professional ethical codes of conduct in relation to the teaching practice.

Intellectuals, however, warned that these codes of conduct must not be exaggerated and must only serve as a general framework as they do not answer multi-layered situations involving competing priorities and responsibilities (Sumsion, 2000; Kakabadse et al., 2003; Campbell, 2008). Yet, it must also be remarked that these ethical codes provide an authority in resolving these ethical dilemmas thereby regulating the behavior of the professionals (Deschach, 2014). In fact, scholars even argued that these codes of ethical conduct are the cornerstone of every profession including teaching (Heller, 1983; Dripps, 1984; Rich, 1984; Cobb and Horn, 1989).

Studying the genealogy of code of ethics for teachers, Rich (1984) reported that the first of its kind was developed as early as the late 19th century. It was however until

after post WWII that the codes of ethical conduct were strengthened as the teaching profession was gradually professionalized. This was even hyped by the 1990s when researchers and educators intensified ethical discussions on the teaching profession and most prominently with the publication of the book *The Moral Dimensions of Teaching* by Goodlad et al., in 1990 (Campbell, 2008).

These global advancements in ethical teaching practice trickled in the Philippines with the passage of Republic Act 7836 or the 'Philippine Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994'. Pursuant to its statutory provisions and the regulatory authority provided to the Board for Professional Teachers (BPT) under Presidential Decree No. 233, s. 1973, the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers was adopted and institutionalized in the entire Philippine archipelago.

Local Literature

In the Philippines, research on professional ethics of teachers is rather scanty. Upon review, the researcher was able to retrieve only two published research articles: the first which studied perceptions on teaching profession and ethical practices by Catuby (2017); and second which philosophizes the nature of ethics for teachers by Caslib (2014). Among the noteworthy findings of Catuby (2017), she described the prominent ethical practices observed by the teachers in their personal, social, economic, political, and behavioral beings. Meanwhile, Caslib (2014), rationalized that teachers cannot be adjudged as unethical or immoral by the schools' standards and ethics since they do not own the monopoly of ethics and morality.

Reviewing further, the researcher discovered that much of the literature in teachers' professional ethics can be found on case law decisions from courts. There are substantive cases which can be found in the various repositories of court decisions, some of which are hailed landmark cases in the Philippine jurisprudence.

One of the most cited cases in Philippine legal contests is the case of *Chua-Qua vs. Clave* (G.R. No. 49549). The decision of the case, which was promulgated in 30 August 1990 and penned by Justice F. Regalado, involved a private school teacher, 30 years old, who fell in love with her Grade 6 student, then 16 years old. They eventually got married and the school requested termination of the teacher for grounds of '...abusive and unethical conduct unbecoming of a dignified school teacher and that her continued employment is inimical to the best interest and would downgrade the high moral values of the school'.

The Philippine Supreme Court (SC) ruled in favour of the teacher with J. Regalado further penning in a famous statement that '...if the two eventually fell in love despite the disparity in their ages and academic levels, this only lends substance to the truism that the hard has reasons of its own which reasons does not know'. The SC declared the dismissal illegal but did not order reinstatement though ordering backwages for the teacher for three years without deductions.

Other popular cases laws which questioned and defined teachers' moral and ethical conduct include: *Santos vs. NLRC* (G.R. No. 115795), *Pat-og vs. CSC* (G.R. No. 198755), *Leus vs. SSCW* (G.R. No. 187226), *Capin-Cadiz vs. BHCI* (G.R. No. 187417), and *USI vs. Dagdag* (G.R.

234186). Another remarkable administrative case was the case of *Jeffrey Aninag RE Grave Misconduct* (CSC Decision No. 15-0908).

In the case of *Santos vs. NLRC*, two married private school teachers were involved for having extra-marital relations was affirmed by the SC. In *Pat-og vs CSC*, a retiring public school teacher was dismissed and denied of his benefits for physical assault of a student was dismissed by the SC. On the other hand, three cases namely *Leus vs. SSCW*, *Capin-Cadiz vs. BCHI*, and *USI vs. Dagdag*, all involved private school teachers who got pregnant out of wedlock. The SC sided with the petitioners thus establishing the principle that a disgraceful or immoral conducts involve two-step process: (1) that the totality of the conduct is considered; and (2) that the conduct is assessed vis-à-vis the circumstances and the prevailing norms.

Finally, the Aninag administrative case, decided by the Civil Service Commission (CSC), was disseminated all throughout the country through CSC regional and field offices. Copies of the decision were also given to all DepEd offices and at least one copy was provided to each of the school heads (CSC Memo No. 27, s. 2016). The case involved a public school teacher who sexually harassed a student and allegedly other teachers and had even previously admitted that to have raped another student.

Caslib (2014) argues that ethical standards of a teacher must be observed inside and outside the classroom. As such, the teaching profession may even blur the lines that demarcate the professional versus personal lives of the teachers. Unlike in other organizations, the moral obligations imposed and supposed towards teachers are

binding in whichever context. Behaviours outside the school may even take much amplification. One recent issue worthy to mention is the arrest of one teacher after satirically and jokingly tweeted on giving a bounty on whoever may kill the Duterte (Buan, 2020).

Summary of the Review

Teaching is innately moral and ethical. The ethical obligations expected to teachers do not end when they step outside of school. In fact, teachers' ethics is much prone to question and criticism as they live their personal lives. Being a teacher is not just a profession but a way of living. The inherent nature of the teaching profession to be involved with various stakeholders situates them to deal with recurring ethical dilemmas.

The review further revealed that there is lacking literature that describe whether there is a significant difference between the observance of ethics among private and public schools though it can be observed that schools are mired with different ethical issues. Basing from the review of cases, it can be noted that for most of the cases among private school teachers can be associated with their characters as 'social beings' while for public school teachers as can be more associated with their characters as 'professional beings.' However, this finding is yet to be considered circumstantial. With this, it is just meritorious to conduct the present investigation to further confirm or reject the initial assumptions formulated from the review.

2. Objectives

This study seeks to determine whether there is a significant difference in

the extent of professional ethics observance between private and public secondary school teachers.

Specifically, this study seeks to:

1. describe the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - a. age
 - b. sex;
 - c. educational attainment;
2. determine the extent of professional ethics observance of private and public secondary school teachers; and
3. determine whether there is a significant difference in the extent of professional ethics observance between private and public secondary school teachers.

Hypothesis

This study endeavors to test the following hypotheses.

1. There is no significant difference in the extent of professional ethics observance between private and public secondary school teachers.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This is a descriptive non-experimental study which utilized one-shot survey to determine the extent of professional ethics observance of private and public secondary school teachers.

Study Population

The target population consisted of all secondary school teachers at one municipality in South Cotabato. Sample size was determined using single-stage cluster sampling and fish-bowl method. All names of private and public secondary schools

were listed in separate pieces of paper and were put in a bowl. Four schools were picked, two each from private and public schools group. All teachers from the said schools were chosen as respondents with a total of 42 private school teachers (38.5%) and 67 public school teachers (61.5%).

Research Instrumentation

The research instrument consists of two parts. Part I included the demographic profile of the teachers which includes their age, sex, and level of educational attainment. Part II contained 15 statements about their professional ethics observance adapted from Catuby (2017). Permission to use the author's questionnaire was sent via email. Some statements in the questionnaire were modified and reduced to fit the needs of the design of the study. Further, response anchors were changed into a Likert scale to be rated by respondents from 1 (not observed) to 7 (always observed). Total score was computed and interpreted as 'high observance' (91-105), 'fair observance' (76-90), and 'poor observance' (1-62).

Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was adapted from a published and peer-reviewed journal authored by Catuby (2017). The modified version was sent to the teacher for review. Also, the researcher had it checked with co-teachers and a personally-acquainted researcher for content validation. After receiving their feedback and suggestions, the researcher incorporated them to the final material.

Data Collection

A letter of permission stating the nature and purpose of the study was sent to the respective school principals together

with an endorsement from the school’s district supervisor. The researcher called the schools prior to visit to determine the number of teachers. At the request of the respondents, as well as considering safety issues, the researcher collected the answered questionnaire a week after. Upon collection of the answered questionnaire, the researcher double- checked each item to ensure completeness of responses. Questionnaires with incomplete answers were not considered. Data were then coded, tabulated, and processed with the aid of the computer.

Statistical Treatment and Analysis

Data gathered were processed and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Descriptive statistics such as mean and frequency distribution were calculated for all variables. The researcher utilized the Mann-Whitney U test for the test of difference since data were not normally distributed after checking the histogram results.

Ethical Considerations

A letter was sent to school principals seeking their permission to conduct the study and involve their secondary teachers as participants. Anent to this is an endorsement letter from the school’s district supervisor.

In each of the questionnaires, a letter and an informed consent form were attached. The letter described the nature and purpose of the study. Meanwhile, the consent form sought voluntary participation of the respondents including a clause that guarantees their right to refuse at any point.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents is grouped according to age, sex, and level of education. On average, private school teacher-respondents were 34 years old while public school teachers were 41 years old. Taken as a whole, most of the respondents aged around 39 years old. It can be further noticed that the biggest sample for private school teachers belong to 23-35 age bracket while for public school belong to 45-60. It can be rationalized that, as in most cases, newly graduated teachers first enter private institutions and would rather think that entering the public force is a job until retirement.

Table 1. Demographic profile

Demographic Profile	Secondary School Teachers					
	Private		Public		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Age						
23 – 35	20	47.6	17	25.4	37	33.9
36 – 45	12	28.6	22	32.8	34	31.2
45 – 60	10	23.8	28	41.8	38	34.9
Total	42	100.0	67	100.0	109	100.0
μ (Private) = 33.5; μ (Public) = 41.3; μ (Total) = 39.0						
Sex						
Male	16	38.1	29	43.3	45	41.3
Female	26	61.9	38	56.7	64	58.7
Total	42	100.0	67	100.0	109	100.0
Level of Education						
Bachelor	34	81.0	41	61.2	75	68.8
Master’s	6	14.3	22	32.8	28	25.7
Doctorate	2	4.8	4	6.0	6	5.5
Total	42	100.0	67	100.0	109	100.0

Meanwhile, there are more female (61.9%) than male (38.1%) private school teachers. The same trend, but this time a little bit closer, reflects among public school teachers who are dominated by female (56.7%) than male (43.3%) teachers. This finding further confirms the notion that the teaching profession is gradually feminized.

In terms of the level of education attained, bachelor degree holders dominate in both private (81.0%) and public (61.2%) schools. A great disparity was however observed between those in graduate level or graduate degree holders. For the private sector, there are only at least two out of ten (19.1%); while at least four out of ten (38.8%) are from the public sector. If examined closely, this can be associated with the surging number of teachers in the public schools seeking promotion.

4.2 Extent of Professional Ethics Observance among Private and Public Secondary School Teachers

Table 2. Extent of professional ethics observance among private and public school teachers

Extent of Professional Ethics Observance	Secondary School Teachers					
	Private		Public		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
High Observance	19	45.2	11	16.4	30	28.3
Fair Observance	17	40.5	43	64.2	60	56.6
Poor Observance	6	14.3	13	19.4	19	17.9
Total	42	100.0	67	100.0	109	100.0

Results of this study indicated that almost half (45.2%) of private school teachers ‘highly observed’ professional ethics in their day-to-day activities. In contrast, one out of ten (14.3%) reported ‘poor observance’ to professional ethics. If we try to relate this finding to the demographic profile of teachers, it can be recalled that the private school respondents were predominantly composed of those from the younger age bracket which is 23-35 years old. One explanation that can be offered is the characteristic of the younger people to be full of idealism and passion (Meisel, 2016). In this case, younger teachers may tend to be more idealistic and

are yet full of vigour as they try to apply their knowledge being just out from the academe where they were trained to exhibit high ethical and academic standards. Inversely, the public school respondents tend to rather score lower than their counterparts as the respondents come from older age bracket which is 45-60 years old. It can be said that seasoned teachers may have developed a quite realistic view of professional ethics from their years of experience in the profession.

Meanwhile, for public school teachers, two-thirds (64.2%) indicated ‘fair observance’ of professional ethics in their day-to-day activities. Alarmingly, about one-fifth (19.4%) reported that they ‘poorly observe’ professional ethics as part of their daily routine. Only about one-sixth (16.4%) indicated to have ‘highly observed’ professional ethics.

If compared descriptively, it can be deduced that there is a higher proportion of private school teachers who reported to have ‘highly observed’ professional ethics than public school teachers. However, to further construe this finding, an inferential statistic can better confirm nor reject this assumption.

As a whole, at least more than the majority of the teachers (56.6%) indicated that they only ‘fairly observe’ professional ethics in their day-to-day activities. It is still relatively disturbing that almost one-fifth (17.9%) indicated ‘poor observance’ to these ethical standards of the teaching profession. This is an alarming number for school administrators which may solicit further investigation. More importantly, this bears detrimental effects for the students who consider their teachers as their role models (Olejárová, 2017). Teachers may even be questioned if they practice behaviours which does not conform with what they teach in the classroom (Strike and Soltis, 2009).

4.3 *Difference in Professional Ethics Observance between Public and Private Secondary School Teachers*

Table 3. Difference in professional ethics observance between private and public secondary school teachers

	Type of School	
	Private	Public
	Mean Rank	Mean Rank
Extent of Professional Ethics Observance	68.67	46.43
Mann-Whitney U: 833.0		<i>p > 0.0 Significant</i>

A Mann-Whitney U test indicated that extent of professional ethics observance was highly observed by private school teachers (Mdn=88) than by public school teachers (Mdn=80), U=833.0, p>0.0.

This finding further confirms that, indeed, even in the education sector, ethical observance varies when private and public schools are compared. As previously noted in the review of the literature, this does not automatically say that the private sector has the monopoly of ethics or that they stand spontaneously as moral and ethical authorities (Venezia et al., 2010).

Instead, it can be pointed out that difference was borne out by organizational distinctiveness in both these sectors (Richards, 2006). Literature has long proven that private and public sectors significantly differ in terms of their set-up, culture, and values (Van der Wal et al., 2008). In terms of the set-up, private schools still operate as quasi-business organizations. Private schools depend their operations on the number of enrolment for which they need to win the feedback of the students. As such, much pressure is involved towards teachers to keep a good branding and image (Tamunomiebi & Ehior, 2019). Meanwhile,

in terms of culture, private schools are more flexible in terms of their standards in doing things unlike the public schools that are centrally managed by the Department of Education. Finally, differences in values may also provide another perspective wherein private schools, as previously noted, are private organizations where they highly promote customer-oriented attitude and values (Rusu, 2015).

Nevertheless, these finding sparks another query: if organizational characteristics influence ethical observance, are there any factors able to moderate or mediate such relationship?

5. *Conclusion and Recommendation*

This study suggests that private schools tend to highly observe professional ethics in their day to day activities. This finding can be associated in the inherent distinctiveness of private and public organizations in terms of their culture, values and ethical climates (Rus & Rusu, 2015; Venezia et al., 2010; Van der Wal et al., 2008). The necessity for private sectors to promote customer-oriented attitude and values (Rus & Rusu, 2015) and/or to improve their branding and image (Tamunomiebi and Ehior, 2019) is key factors that can be pointed out why private organizations maintain to receive such distinction.

Whether professional ethics observance significantly differs between private and public sectors, it is still paramount that teachers observe and exhibit highest moral and ethical standards both in their personal and professional lives (Caslib, 2014). The moral and ethical duties of the teacher does not stop whenever he is outside of school nor does it have a switch that one

can easily turn on or off depending the context. More than the act of teaching and the teaching profession per se, being a teacher involves an unending question and test of one's moral and ethical standards even if others are not present to admonish oneself. This is what Campbell (2008) rigorously argue to be equivocally preeminent in the teaching profession – the moral dimensions of teaching.

This study does not claim to have pioneered local discussions in the private vs. public ethical observance as it has already been discussed in various textbooks. Nonetheless, this study seeks to provide a framework for future researchers who will take the same topic where literature in scientific publications seem to rather scanty and limited.

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