

ASSESSING STUDENTS' READINESS TO IMPLEMENT BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN THE WORKPLACE AUTHORS

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Abstract : *This study investigates students' readiness to implement business and professional ethics in the workplace and identifies the factors that influence such readiness. The study employed a descriptive quantitative approach involving 42 sixth-semester students from the Diploma III programs in English, Accounting, and Financial Management at Pignatelli Triputra University. The participants had completed Business Ethics and Professional Ethics courses and had undertaken internship programs. Data were collected using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive statistical techniques and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that students demonstrate a high level of readiness to apply ethical principles in professional settings, with an overall mean score of 4.45 out of 5. Ethical attitude emerged as the most influential factor (4.66), followed by ethical knowledge (4.45), internship experience (4.43), and the campus environment (4.18). In addition, students expressed highly positive perceptions regarding the importance of ethics in professional life. The major challenges identified include work pressure, conflicts of interest, unethical organizational environments, and temptations to engage in dishonest practices. The study concludes that students' readiness to implement business and professional ethics is shaped by cognitive, affective, and experiential dimensions that are reinforced by an institutional culture promoting integrity. Therefore, higher education institutions should strengthen ethics-based education, expand experiential learning opportunities, and cultivate an academic culture of integrity to better prepare graduates for ethical challenges in the workplace.*

Keywords: *business ethics, professional ethics, work readiness, integrity, higher education.*

1. Introduction

Ethics has become an increasingly important issue in the contemporary workplace due to the growing complexity of organizations and the intensification of global competition. Numerous cases of ethical misconduct, including corruption, data manipulation, and conflicts of interest, indicate that technical competence alone is insufficient without strong moral integrity. Although business activities are primarily intended to generate economic benefits, pursuing such benefits while neglecting the interests of other stakeholders contradicts the fundamental principles of business and professional ethics.

Business ethics serves as a framework for responsible decision-making, whereas professional ethics emphasizes adherence to professional codes of conduct to maintain public trust and accountability. Consequently, business and professional ethics play a critical role in fostering individual integrity, preventing fraudulent behavior, and protecting stakeholders' rights

and interests. Higher education institutions are therefore expected to equip students with ethical competencies that enable them to address ethical dilemmas in professional settings. However, previous studies have shown that a considerable gap remains between ethics education in the classroom and its practical implementation in the workplace (Ferrell et al., 2021; Treviño & Nelson, 2021).

Ethical perception refers to an individual's ability to recognize, interpret, and evaluate ethical issues that arise in academic and professional contexts. Ethics education plays a significant role in enhancing this ability by increasing students' awareness of ethical principles, encouraging critical reflection, and improving their capacity to distinguish between ethical and unethical behaviors. Learning activities that incorporate case studies, discussions, and real-life ethical dilemmas help students develop stronger moral sensitivity and greater confidence in making responsible decisions. Furthermore, ethical perception is strengthened when ethics education contributes to students' professional identity formation, enabling them to internalize ethical values that guide their future professional conduct. Therefore, well-designed ethics education not only improves students' ethical awareness but also prepares them to respond appropriately to ethical challenges in the workplace. (Mufidah & Nugroho, 2023; O'Leary & Stewart, 2022).

In an organizations, leaders who consistently demonstrate ethical values are more likely to gain employees' trust, which encourages stronger commitment, greater job engagement, and more responsible work behavior. Organizational trust serves as an important mechanism through which ethical leadership influences employee performance, as employees are more willing to collaborate, share knowledge, and contribute to organizational goals when they perceive their leaders as ethical and trustworthy. Ethical leadership reduces the likelihood of unethical workplace behaviors while promoting integrity and mutual respect among organizational members. Therefore, organizations that cultivate ethical leadership and strengthen trust between leaders and employees are better positioned to achieve sustainable improvements in both individual and organizational performance. (Alzoubi & Aziz, 2023).

Previous research on business and professional ethics has predominantly focused on students' ethical perceptions or the effectiveness of ethics education. Nevertheless, limited studies have comprehensively examined students' readiness to implement ethical principles in professional environments by simultaneously considering ethical knowledge, ethical attitudes, internship experiences, and academic environments. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap in the literature.

Based on the above description, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of students' readiness to implement business and professional ethics in the workplace?
2. What factors influence students' readiness to implement ethical principles in professional settings?
3. How do students perceive the importance of ethics in the workplace?
4. What challenges do students encounter in implementing business and professional ethics in professional environments?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Business Ethics and Professional Ethics

Business ethics refers to a set of moral values and principles governing behavior in economic activities (Crane & Matten, 2021). It concerns the interests of all parties involved in business activities, commonly referred to as stakeholders. Professional ethics encompasses standards of conduct that guide behavior within a particular profession (Hartman et al., 2022). Although professional codes of ethics vary across professions, they generally emphasize transparency, accountability, honesty, and discipline.

Integrity serves as a fundamental foundation for ethical decision-making by guiding individuals to act consistently with moral values, even when they face organizational pressures or competing interests. Relevant to this, ethical decision-making will be strengthened when organizations cultivate a culture of integrity that encourages honesty, transparency, and accountability in everyday professional practices. Consequently, organization leaders who consistently demonstrate integrity create an environment in which employees are more likely to make ethical decisions and uphold organizational values. (Zhao & Wry, 2024).

2.2 Work Readiness

Work readiness refers to an individual's preparedness to successfully transition into the workplace by integrating relevant knowledge, practical skills, professional attitudes, and adaptability to organizational demands. It encompasses not only technical competence but also employability attributes such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, self-management, and the capacity for continuous learning. In today's dynamic labor market, graduates who demonstrate career planning, proactive behavior, and the ability to apply their academic knowledge in real workplace contexts are more likely to adapt effectively to changing job requirements and perform successfully in professional environments. Consequently, higher education institutions play a crucial role in enhancing students' work readiness by combining academic learning with experiential opportunities that foster both professional competence and lifelong employability. (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2021; Ismail & Rasdi, 2021).

2.3 Ethics Education in Higher Education

Business and professional ethics courses play an important role in providing students with knowledge and practical insights regarding ethical issues in business and professional settings. Effective ethics education integrates theoretical knowledge with experiential and practice-based learning approaches, enabling students to develop ethical reasoning and decision-making skills that are applicable in real workplace situations (Hartman et al., 2022; Chan & Ahmad, 2023). Internship programs provide valuable opportunities for students to observe and experience the application of ethical principles in real organizational contexts, strengthening their ethical awareness and professional competence (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2021).

Teaching Business ethics and Professional Ethics serves a vital role in preparing students to address ethical challenges in increasingly complex professional environments. Effective teaching extends beyond introducing ethical theories by engaging students in the analysis of real-world cases, critical discussions, and reflective learning activities that strengthen ethical reasoning and decision-making skills. The success of business ethics instruction also depends on its integration throughout the curriculum, supported by active learning strategies and educators who consistently model ethical values in both teaching and professional practice. Despite growing recognition of its importance, business ethics education continues to face challenges, including limited instructional time, varying student engagement, and the need to connect theoretical concepts with practical workplace situations. Therefore, higher education

institutions should adopt innovative and experiential approaches to foster students' ethical awareness, integrity, and readiness for responsible professional conduct. (Schwartz, 2022).

2.4 Factors Influencing Ethical Behavior

Ethical behavior is shaped by the interaction of personal, organizational, and environmental factors that influence how individuals recognize and respond to ethical issues. Personal values, moral reasoning, and ethical competence provide the basis for responsible decision-making, while organizational elements such as ethical leadership, workplace culture, and institutional policies create conditions that either support or discourage ethical conduct. Furthermore, continuous ethics education, professional experience, and organizational support strengthen individuals' ability to apply ethical principles consistently in complex workplace situations. Consequently, the development of ethical behavior requires not only individual commitment but also organizational environments that reinforce integrity, accountability, and ethical responsibility. Ethical behavior does not emerge automatically but is shaped by multiple interacting factors, including moral knowledge, ethical attitudes, organizational and social environments, and work experiences. These factors collectively influence ethical decision-making processes and contribute to the development of ethical competencies and readiness for professional practice (Craft, 2021; Sanyal & Poonamallee, 2022).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to investigate students' readiness to implement business and professional ethics in the workplace. The population consisted of sixth-semester students enrolled in the Diploma III programs in English, Accounting, and Financial Management at Pignatelli Triputra University. A total of 42 students were selected using purposive sampling based on two criteria: (1) having completed the Business Ethics and Professional Ethics courses and (2) having participated in an internship program. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The instrument measured five dimensions of ethical readiness, namely:

1. Self-readiness for entering the workplace;
2. Knowledge of business and professional ethics;
3. Ethical attitudes and values;
4. The influence of the academic environment on ethical behavior; and
5. Internship experience in companies or public institutions.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and percentages. Meanwhile, responses to open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify students' perceptions and challenges regarding ethical implementation in professional settings.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondent Profile

The respondents consisted of 42 sixth-semester students, of whom 47.6% were male and 52.4% were female. All respondents had completed courses related to business and professional ethics, and 97.6% had participated in internship programs. These characteristics indicate that the respondents possessed relatively homogeneous academic and practical experiences relevant to the objectives of this study.

4.2 Students' Readiness to Implement Business and Professional Ethics

The findings indicate that students demonstrate a high level of readiness to implement ethical principles in professional settings, with an overall mean score of 4.45 out of 5.

The dimensions of readiness are presented as follows:

1. Professionalism (Mean = 4.57)
2. Ethical decision-making (Mean = 4.48)
3. Work readiness (Mean = 4.48)
4. Ability to deal with ethical dilemmas (Mean = 4.43)
5. Professional collaboration (Mean = 4.29)

These findings suggest that students possess strong professional values and ethical awareness. However, the relatively lower score for professional collaboration indicates the need to strengthen collaborative and project-based learning approaches, as teamwork is considered an essential competency in contemporary professional environments.

4.3 Factors Influencing Students' Ethical Readiness

Four major factors were identified as influencing students' readiness to implement ethical principles in the workplace.

First, ethical knowledge (Mean = 4.45) indicates that students possess an adequate understanding of ethical concepts, professional codes of conduct, and the consequences of ethical violations.

Second, ethical attitude (Mean = 4.66) emerged as the most influential factor. This finding demonstrates that students possess strong moral commitments and reject dishonest practices in business and professional activities.

Third, the campus environment (Mean = 4.18) received the lowest score among the factors examined. This result suggests that academic integrity and role modeling by lecturers still require further strengthening.

Fourth, internship experience (Mean = 4.43) significantly contributed to students' understanding of the practical implementation of ethical principles in real workplace situations.

4.4 Dominant Factors

The factors influencing students' ethical readiness can be ranked as follows:

1. Ethical attitude (4.66)
2. Ethical knowledge (4.45)
3. Internship experience (4.43)
4. Campus environment (4.18)

These findings indicate that ethical attitudes are the primary determinant of students' readiness to apply ethical principles in professional environments.

4.5 Students' Perceptions of Ethics

Students exhibited highly positive perceptions regarding the importance of ethics in professional life.

1. Ethics is important in the workplace (Mean = 4.68).
2. Ethical principles must be implemented (Mean = 4.69).
3. Ethics courses are beneficial (Mean = 4.55).

These findings demonstrate that students recognize that career success depends not only on technical competencies but also on moral integrity and ethical commitment. A conducive ethical atmosphere encourages responsible decision-making by reinforcing the realization of ethical codes in a workplace. The effectiveness of ethics programs depends not only on formal training but also on consistent leadership support and the integration of ethical principles into everyday organizational practices (Valentine, S., & Fleischman, G., 2021).

Besides, effective leadership and supportive organizational practices also prove to play a significant role in motivating employees, strengthening job satisfaction, and promoting responsible workplace behavior. (Luthans, 2021). The integration of experiential learning with ethics education supports the development of ethical behavior by connecting theoretical knowledge with practical experience and continuous self-reflection (Zhou & Ee, 2023).

4.6 Qualitative Findings

The thematic analysis revealed several major challenges in implementing business and professional ethics in the workplace:

1. Pressure to achieve organizational targets;
2. Conflicts of interest;
3. Unethical work environments; and
4. temptations to engage in dishonest practices.

These findings indicate the existence of a moral action gap, referring to the discrepancy between ethical understanding and the actual implementation of ethical behavior in professional practice. This phenomenon has been widely recognized in contemporary business ethics literature, which suggests that individuals may possess sound moral judgment yet fail to translate it into ethical actions when confronted with organizational pressures and situational constraints (DeTienne et al., 2021).

Students also proposed several recommendations, including extending internship duration, incorporating real-life ethical case studies into classroom learning, conducting simulations of ethical dilemmas, and strengthening disciplinary practices and academic integrity within the university environment. Above all, internship program seems to be a priority that deserves more attention. It provides students with opportunities to apply classroom knowledge in authentic workplace settings, allowing them to develop practical competencies that cannot be acquired through theoretical learning alone (Widodo & Nurhayati, 2022).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that students possess a high level of readiness to implement business and professional ethics in the workplace. Ethical attitude emerged as the most influential factor shaping students' readiness, followed by ethical knowledge, internship experience, and the academic environment. Furthermore, students exhibited highly positive perceptions regarding the importance of ethics in professional life.

The findings also reveal that students face several challenges in implementing ethical principles, particularly work-related pressures, conflicts of interest, and unethical organizational environments. Therefore, higher education institutions should strengthen integrity-based academic cultures and develop experiential learning approaches to enhance graduates' ethical competencies and professional readiness.

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be proposed.

- (1) First, universities should integrate business and professional ethics across various courses through case-based learning approaches to improve students' ability to analyze and resolve ethical issues.
- (2) Second, internship programs should be enhanced in terms of duration and quality through stronger collaboration with industry partners to provide students with authentic experiences in ethical decision-making and professional conduct.
- (3) Third, universities should regularly organize simulations and training programs on ethical dilemmas to improve students' ethical judgment and decision-making skills.

- (4) Fourth, academic institutions should strengthen cultures of integrity through lecturers' role modeling, the implementation of academic codes of conduct, and the promotion of honesty and responsibility within the campus environment.
- (5) Fifth, future studies are encouraged to involve larger and more diverse samples from multiple higher education institutions. Further research may also employ inferential statistical approaches, such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or Partial Least Squares (PLS), to examine the relationships among variables more comprehensively.

Principally, students' readiness to face the implementation of business and professional ethics involves:

1. Cognitive Dimension

The cognitive dimension reflects students' understanding of ethical principles, professional codes of conduct, and ethical decision-making processes. Higher education institutions play a fundamental role in providing students with a strong foundation in business ethics and professional ethics (Ferrell et al., 2021). Through this knowledge, students are expected to recognize ethical issues, evaluate alternative courses of action, and make responsible decisions in professional settings. Ethical knowledge serves as the initial stage in developing ethical competence and prepares students to respond appropriately to complex workplace situations.

2. Affective Dimension

The affective dimension emerged as the most influential factor in shaping students' ethical readiness. This finding is consistent with recent studies suggesting that ethical attitudes, moral identity, and personal values are key determinants of ethical decision-making and professional behavior (Sanyal & Poonamallee, 2022); Zhang & Li, 2024). Ethical attitudes represent an individual's commitment to honesty, responsibility, fairness, and professional integrity. In today's business environment, integrity is often considered more valuable than academic achievement alone because organizations increasingly seek employees who are not only technically competent but also capable of upholding ethical standards in their professional conduct.

3. Psychomotor Dimension

Psychomotor experiences through internship program enable students to apply theoretical knowledge in real organizational settings while confronting actual ethical dilemmas encountered in professional practice. Such experiences contribute significantly to the development of ethical competence by bridging the gap between classroom learning and workplace realities. Therefore, stronger collaboration among higher education institutions, industry partners, and other stakeholders is essential to enhance the quality and effectiveness of internship programs. Nevertheless, the relatively lower evaluation of the campus environment indicates that the organizational culture within higher education institutions still requires further improvement to foster integrity, ethical leadership, and academic honesty (Schein & Schein, 2021).

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