Perceptions and Practices of Ethical Values in Teaching among Secondary School Subject Specialists in Malakand Division: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract:

This study sought to establish attitudes of subject specialists in secondary schools in Malakand Division on the implementation of core ethical values of honesty, justice, respect for others, and trustworthiness in their teaching practices. The results show that honesty, respect for others and being trustworthy are well recognized and appreciated by the educators as instrumental qualities of professional behavior. By comparison, the value of justice was felt with disjoints and with a great deal of reservations. The high emphasis on honesty is in line with other studies carried out in other parts of Pakistan. For example, Khan (2021a) found that in the entire Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, secondary school teachers do recognize honesty as an integral part of their professional obligations, mostly because of its immediate effect on students' trust and assessment methods' integrity. Similarly, Ahmad (2022a) observes that educators in urban Punjab value honesty in their relations with students and grading, and this is basic to their moral and religious obligations. The recognition of respect for others as a vital ethical value also aligns with existing literature. Shah (2021) and Nawaz (2020a) found that Pakistani educators view respect for students, colleagues, and community members as a fundamental principle of Islamic pedagogical ethics. These studies underscore that in collectivist and religiously oriented societies, such as many regions of Pakistan, respect is intricately linked to cultural and spiritual values.

Keywords: Values, Ethical Values, Subject Specialists, Honesty, Justice, Respect, Trustworthiness

Introduction

Education plays a vital role in shaping the future of individuals and society. Education disseminates knowledge of different disciplines and develops various values that shape the personalities of teachers and students. Yeldirim (2009) defined values as "standards by which members of a culture determine and share what is good or bad, what is desired or undesirable, and what is beautiful or ugly." The values of teaching are the fundamental moral norms, beliefs, and principles that guide educators in interactions with learners, peers, and the educational community and their work (Veugelers, 2001; Gul & Khan, 2020; Gul & Dogar, 2021). According to Hodelín and Fuentes (2014), values are the behavioral framework of an institution's members and are influenced by a number of elements, including the organization's character, its founding purpose,

and its future projections. These are considered foundations of successful instruction and vary from teacher to teacher, often including values such as compassion, equity, fairness, appreciation, empathy, social justice, commitment to fostering students' learning and growth, and integrity (Gul & Ali, 2021a; Greefrath et al., 2022). Through value education, teachers play a crucial role in nurturing students' social and emotional development, fostering a sense of belonging and community, and encouraging positive social behaviors such as cooperation, empathy, and civic engagement.

Literature indicates that earlier studies (Gul & Khan, 2021; Niauwenhuis 2007; Aspen 2007; Pandlebury and Enslen 2007; Childs-Bowen, Moller, and Scrievners 2000; Gul & Ali, 2021b) examined how teachers and students perceived "values education" in a western context. Additionally, some empirical studies (Heck, 2003; Shafa, 2003; Simkins, Ssum & Memon, 2003; Heck, 2003; Shafa, 2003; and Smith, 2019) highlighted the role that cultural and contextual dynamics play in the development of a set of values, attitudes, and behavioral norms of students. According to Johneson, 2020, teachers frequently see these values as a reflection of their individual identities as well as their work identities. They think that a major factor influencing student engagement and academic accomplishment is the values they maintain in their teaching style.

Ethical values are principles that guide educators in making morally sound decisions and actions in their professional roles (Ahmad & Gul, 2023a; Ahmad & Gul, 2023b; Gul, 2023). Ethical values for teachers are rules of conduct pertaining to the standards of morality expected of them in the profession. Among the ethical practices that teachers are supposed to embrace are fair treatment, stakeholder diversity, confidentiality, and safety of students (Gul & Ahmad, 2023). Ethical issues are highly concerning in the field of education because ethical issues guide the behavior of teachers and tutors. These principles offer a guide to practice for how educators use social media to interact with their colleagues, their students, the educational institution, or the larger educational discourse (Gul & Ahmad, 2022a). For example, effectiveness, quality, access, participation, and equity in all the sectors of education are measured by such ethical values as fairness, honesty, respect, and integrity.

Ethical standards have a significant impact on students' behavior and decision-making (Gul & Ahmad, 2022b). Research indicates that students' ethical development is significantly influenced by the learning results of moral education (Saiful Anwar et al., 2023). However, character development has decreased because of the modern educational system's emphasis on technical knowledge (M. Abdulhafeez et al., 2013). E-learning environments provide challenges for ethical development because of the physical absence of instructors and the lack of an institutional structure that encourages ethical behavior (A. Muhammad et al., 2016). Research indicates that compared to traditional learning, e-learning might offer greater chances for unethical behavior (A. Muhammad et al., 2016). To address these issues, there is a need for ethical education that supports the development of ethical competencies among healthcare professionals and students (Henrik Andersson et al., 2022). Integrating ethical values into educational curricula and leveraging ICTs for character development in e-learning platforms are proposed solutions (M. Abdulhafeez et al., 2013).

The existing literature also confirms that teachers' job satisfaction and performance are significantly impacted by ethical behaviors in educational contexts. The ethical environment of the school acts as a subjective mediating factor between the constructive impact of ethical leadership

by school administrators and teacher job satisfaction (Cansor et al., 2021; Gul & Khilji, 2021). A study conducted by Bagheri & Fathi Rad (2020) concluded, with a focus on ethical issues, that teachers' job satisfaction and efficacy in EFL classrooms are associated with each other. Ethical considerations in teachers' selection and recruitment procedures in higher education institutions have a valuable effect on teachers' job satisfaction (Gul & Reba, 2022; Gul & Tahir, 2023a; Gul & Tahir, 2023b; Ayub, Gul, Ali, & Rauf, 2021; Bukhari, Gul, Bashir, Zakir, & Javed, 2021). Furthermore, instructors have a significant impact on their students' moral and ethical principles; hence, it is critical to continue professional development training in areas such as intercultural competency and ethical education (Gul, Talat, Mumtaz, & Shaheen, 2021; Popovska & Popovski, 2021). These findings emphasize the importance of moral behavior and leadership in educational contexts in order to increase teacher effectiveness and satisfaction, which in turn improves student outcomes and the learning environment overall. Explanatory-exploratory studies of ethical values that strengthen teachers' job satisfaction and well-being are thus relevant for improving the quality of education (Gul, Ayub, Mazhar, Uddin, & Khanum, 2021. In this way, understanding strategies and interventions that can help teachers to adhere to ethical norms as well as the professional development of individuals on this highway is aimed at filling the gap in literature. Overall, such efforts can begin to filter through progressively more into students' learning outcomes and, consequently, the organization's educational delivery system.

Theoretical framework
Ethical principles shape the moral judgments and decision-making processes of educators. The foundation of Ethical Leadership Theory lies in integrity, honesty, justice, and fairness. This theory characterizes ethical behavior as the ongoing practice of conduct that aligns with normative standards such as honesty, fairness, integrity, and care—reflected in one's actions and relationships. As leaders within the classroom, teachers exemplify these ethical standards on a daily basis. Ethical leaders exhibit moral behavior, motivate others, and foster a culture of trust (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005). In the realm of education, teachers act as ethical leaders by maintaining justice, transparency, and accountability in their classrooms. Kohlberg's (1981) Stages of Moral Development further support this theory by illustrating the progression individuals make from rule-based morality to principled ethical reasoning. Educators who embody ethical values demonstrate honesty, respect, and accountability, thereby reinforcing the moral development of their students and nurturing a morally sound learning environment. According to Kohlberg's theory, advanced moral reasoning (post-conventional level) encourages individuals to act based on internalized principles (such as justice and human rights) rather than merely adhering to external regulations. Teachers operating at higher moral stages are more inclined to make educational and disciplinary choices informed by universal ethical principles (for instance, respecting the dignity of all students and ensuring equitable treatment for everyone). Educators exhibit ethical values through fairness and transparency (for example, by applying classroom rules without bias and providing honest feedback) and by integrating ethical discussions into their teaching. Ethical leaders articulate their values clearly and engage in two-way communication to reinforce ethical standards. In the classroom, this manifests as modeling integrity (such as keeping commitments and acknowledging errors) and advocating for justice (by treating diverse learners equitably). Upholding ethical values cultivates trust and a positive moral atmosphere, which subsequently enhances a teacher's sense of efficacy and dedication.

Hypothesis of the study

H2. Subject specialists perceive the practice of ethical values as an important aspect of their teaching.
Hi   subject specialists perceive the practice of honesty in their teaching.
Hii   Subject specialists perceive the practice of justice in their teaching
Hiii   Subject specialists perceive the practice of respect for others in their teaching
Hiv   Subject specialists perceive the practice of trustworthiness in their teaching.

Research Methodology
This study used mixed-method research design. According to Creswell, and Creswell, D. (2017), a mixed-method research design is a comprehensive approach to conducting research that combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Stratified random sampling technique was used for selection of sample size of the study. Stratified random sampling is a method of sampling that involves the division of a population into smaller subgroups known as strata. Total sample size was 263 higher secondary school male educators' subject specialist. Region wise, the number of samples for region lower Dir is 104, region Malakand is 29, region Buner is 39, region Swat is 75 and region Lower Chitral is 16. Data was collected through questionnaire and semi structured interviews which were analyzed through descriptive statistics, regression analysis and thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clark, 2012.

Results

H2. Subject specialists perceive the practice of ethical values as an important aspect of their teaching.
Descriptive statistics with frequency, percentage, and Mean were used to analyze results of this hypothesis. The results are presented in table with textual description in a separate form for each sub hypothesis.

Table 4.4 Descriptive Statistics of Perceptions of Teachers On Ethical Values Of Teaching

S.NO	Statements	F/%	SA	A	D	SDA	M	SD
1	Honesty (EV1)	F	86	176	1	0	1.67	.47
		%	33	67	.4	0		
2	Justice (EV2)	F	55	33	74	101	2.84	1.1
		%	21	13	28	38		
3	Respect for others (EV3)	F	86	176	1	0	1.67	.47
		%	32	68	.4	0		
4	Trustworthiness (EV4)	F	54	208	1	0	1.79	.47
		%	21	79	.4	0		

Sub hypothesis H1   *Subject specialists perceive the practice of honesty in their teaching.*
In table No. 4.4 different categories of the Ethical values are given. Teachers' perception on integrating ethical value of honesty, the statements showed that with a frequency of F: 176 (67%) responded agreed and 33% of the respondents strongly agreed that they perceived honesty as an important aspect of teaching. Based on the hypothesis is accepted.

Sub hypothesis H2;   *Subject specialists perceive the practice of justice in their teaching*
       While the teacher's perception on integrating value of Justice Showed that with a

frequency of F: 101 (38%) of the respondent strongly disagreed, 28% disagreed where as 21% strongly agreed and 13% agreed that they do not perceived justice as an important aspect of teaching. Based on the alternate hypothesis is rejected.

Sub hypothesis H3; *Subject specialists perceive the practice of Respect for others in their teaching*

The teachers' perception on integrating value of Respect for others showed that with a frequency of F: 176 and percentage of 68% of the respondents agreed. 32% strongly agreed that they perceived honesty as an important aspect of teaching. Based on the hypothesis, it is accepted.

Sub hypothesis H4; *Subject specialists perceive the practice of Trustworthiness in their teaching*

The teachers' perception on integrating value of Trustworthiness showed that with a frequency of F: 208 (79%) of the respondent agreed and 21% strongly agreed that they perceived Trustworthiness as an important aspect of teaching. Based on the hypothesis, it is accepted. The data shows that secondary school subject specialists possess a high level of trustworthiness, respect for others and honesty among all the ethical values while Justice was found at lowers level. So, the hypothesis that "Subject specialists perceive the practice of Ethical values as an important aspect of their teaching" is accepted**.**

Discussion
This study investigated the views of subject specialists in secondary schools within the Malakand Division concerning the implementation of core ethical values—honesty, justice, respect for others, and trustworthiness—in their teaching practices. The results indicate that honesty, respect for others, and trustworthiness are widely acknowledged and positively regarded by educators as essential elements of their professional behavior. In contrast, the value of justice was perceived with inconsistencies and significant reservations. The strong emphasis on honesty is consistent with previous research conducted in other regions of Pakistan. For instance, (Gul, Ilyas, Gul, Riaz, & Khan, 2025; Gul, Rabbi, Batool, Tahir, & Asif, 2024b; Mehmood, Rao, & Gul, 2024; Tufail, Gul, & Ali, 2024b) discovered that secondary school teachers throughout Khyber Pakhtunkhwa widely acknowledge honesty as an indispensable aspect of their professional responsibilities, primarily due to its direct impact on students' trust and the integrity of assessment methods. Likewise, Ahmad (2022a) noted that educators in urban Punjab prioritized honesty in their interactions with students and in grading practices, considering it fundamental to their moral and religious duties. The recognition of respect for others as a vital ethical value also aligns with existing literature. Shah 2021; Bareach & Gul, 2025; Ali, Gul, & Gul, 2025; Khan, Gul, Riaz, Bibi, & Ahmad, 2025; Nawaz 2020a) found that Pakistani educators view respect for students, colleagues, and community members as a fundamental principle of Islamic pedagogical ethics. These studies underscore that in collectivist and religiously oriented societies, such as many regions of Pakistan, respect is intricately linked to cultural and spiritual values.

Teachers in the Malakand Division may similarly emphasize this value due to the region's conservative and religious characteristics. In addition, the high sense of being trustworthy by subject specialists in Malakand is in line with findings of Shabbir (2021a) who often observed that

rural educators use dependent relationships of trust in the community to remain authoritative and respected within schools. In this regard, trustworthiness is above personal virtue and becomes a professional necessity that affects the social status and acceptance of teachers in closely connected communities. A considerable shift from the existing literature is noted in the comprehension of justice (Gul, Kanwal, & Khan, 2020; Sohail, Gul, & Mushtaq (2018); Tufail, Gul, & Ali (2024a); Gul, Rabbi, Batool, Tahir, & Asif (2024a); Gul, Alm, Ayub, Saleem, & Mahmood (2024); Rab The present study shows that many of the respondents were unable to agree or strongly disagree with the idea concerning how they uphold justice in their teaching, which means that there is no consensus and internalization of such a principle. This differs from what is found in more urban or institutionally structured regions. For instance, Ahmad (2022a) reported generally positive perception of justice amongst educators in Lahore, hence; these teachers had both awareness and structural support for providing equitable practices in tests and classroom management. There could be one probable cause for this difference, and this can be assigned to the local and structural character of the Malakand Division. Being a relatively underdeveloped region with little institutional control and training, educators may face difficulties that hinder them from applying justice in their teaching practices. Shah (2021). Inequities with regards to resources, power and favoritism are more pronounced in peripheral areas and may result to demotivating teachers or indulging in ethical shortcuts. Furthermore, in the Malakand Division, the position of the community, the tribe or the local hierarchies may very much influence the student evaluation or discipline, and the understandings and usages of justice may differ. This sociocultural complexity can point out the explanation why educators of this region encounter peculiar difficulties in adopting the principle of justice.

Conclusion
It is apparent from the findings of this research that secondary school subject specialists understand ethical values such as honesty, respect for others, and trustworthiness, as the basic aspect of their teaching methodology. These values are ingrained and leveled consistently, which implies a positive ethical stand of educators. However, the principle of justice was not supported the same way, which could be an illustration of the discrepancy between the ideal of fairness and its usage in the educational settings. The lack of consensus on this concept of justice makes it necessary to investigate for structural, personal, or cultural influences that may stand to prevent its implementation. Therefore, even though the main hypothesis (the fact that the subject specialists recognize the importance of ethical values in their teaching) is substantiated, it should be mentioned that all the ethical values are not viewed and applied in the same way. Based on the findings and discussions, the study supports educational institutions to provide continuous training, workshops in relation to ethical teaching practices with the specific emphasis on justice. Educational authorities should develop or reinforce ethical guidelines for teachers that should list clear expectations on honesty, justice, respect, and trustworthiness, so that these principles are incorporated within the day-to-day running of school and evaluation systems. Moreover, teachers should encourage discussions among peers or reflection in journals in order to critically examine their ethical convictions and classroom practices because if the reflective functions are performed, then ethical development can be developed and discrepancies between intentions and actions can be exposed.

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