

Assessment of the Ethical Orientations of Turkish Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Students' development in terms of values, moral education and character is crucial for the development of any society. Considering that these are gained through family and school, school principals and teachers can be the key players. Even if teachers do not deliberately act as models or ethic agents or their main purpose is not merely ethical education, they still affect the students directly and indirectly. Therefore, exploration of their ethical decisions and what orientations guide them in making those ethical decisions is highly important. In this regard, teachers' ethical orientation is worth measuring. In this study, Ethical Position Questionnaire, which has so far been commonly used to explore ethical orientations of various professionals and cultural groups, was translated into Turkish; and validity and reliability study was applied on teachers. Research group consisted of 251 primary school teachers working in state schools located in Kocaeli province, Turkey. To identify the construct validity of Ethical Position Questionnaire (EPQ), factor analysis was conducted. The analysis revealed that EPQ is two factor-structured and these factors explain %45 of the variance. Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency reliability assessed for the total items of Turkish version of EPQ was .81 and for the first subscale -idealism-, for the second scale -relativism- was found .84 and .86 respectively. In conclusion, The Turkish version of Ethical Position Questionnaire was identified as a valid and reliable research tool to assess ethical positions of primary school teachers.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching profession has its own unique characteristics. Therefore, teachers' decisions have certain implications for their students and overall society. According to Colnerud [1], ethical decision making is a part of teaching practice and is closely related to young generations. While teachers lead their behaviors, they should be aware of their actions as they can act as models for their students [2],[3]. Therefore, the next generation teachers need to develop their moral characters in a way that they can be good models for their students. When teachers disregard the ethical dimensions of their practices, students can suffer from the side effects. Considering the role of teachers as models, it seems that their underlying ethical motivation in ethical decisions is of particular importance. Soltis [4] suggests that the practice of teaching should not contain ethical relativity or arbitrariness and subjectivity should be removed from the educational occasions. From the literature, it can be concluded that teachers' relativist actions in the context of ethical decision making is unacceptable. Campbell [5] points out that professional ethics do not include ethical subjectivism and moral relativism; and teaching and learning practice should be in line with the universal moral rules [6]. Teachers' relativist and subjectivist actions and ethical decision making are unacceptable. They should not be relativist and they ought to benefit from generally accepted universal moral rules. In this context, 'Ethical Position Questionnaire' -used to measure the ethical positions of decision makers- can be regarded an effective tool.

1.1. Ethical Decision Making and Ethical Position Questionnaire

If you start asking what kind of a person you are or will be, what kind of results will occur when you carry out an action or if it is true to perform or not to perform an action; it means that you think ethically [7]. Measuring the ethical thinking has attracted the attention of social scientists for many years. Ethical Position Questionnaire, used to measure the ethical position of the decision makers and administered to a variety of career and culture groups, is based on various ethical theories. This questionnaire was first extracted from a questionnaire taken from doctoral dissertation of Forsyth in 1977. The findings of study revealed that there are two factors, idealism and relativism, affecting individual ethical judgments [8].

In the study called 'A taxonomy of ethical ideologies' of Forsyth [8], he classified the ethical ideologies and argued that they are underlying personal moral philosophies. This classification has been shown in Table 1. Idealism and Relativism are the main groups and they each cover two subgroups. Absolutism refers to an ideology in which there are universal moral rules, and those moral rules should guide people in ethical decision making. Situationism refers to an ideology where it is claimed that people should judge for the best result for the individual and analyze the situation at hand ethically. Relativism subgroups support the ideologies that contradict with universal moral rules. While subjectivists accept that individual moral philosophies and perspectives are more important than universal moral rules in solving ethical problems, the exceptionists' decision making is vague. It is not easy to understand how they respond to a particular situation as they adopt a utilitarian approach. Their judgments are changeable towards the same situation.

Ethical Position questionnaire is comprised of 20 statements and two dimensions. The first ten statements are related to idealism while the second ten statements are related to relativism. Sub-groups are defined as high-low idealism and high-low relativism. The questionnaire was designed as 9 Likert type. When evaluated in terms of ethical judgments, absolutists, who are high idealist and low relativist; and situationists, who are high idealists and high relativists, lead their actions by universal moral rules. Subjectivists, who are low idealist and high relativist; and exceptionists, who are low idealist and low relativist reason ethical judgments through case analysis. So, individuals have got personal moral philosophies as situationism, absolutism, exceptionism and subjectivism in reasoning an ethical decision [8].

Forsyth et al. [9] conducted a meta-analysis on the results and findings of Ethical Position Questionnaire. The study analyzed 220 studies that used this questionnaire and two of those studies were applied in Turkey [10],[11]. Idealism and relativism dimensions were discriminative in accordance with the cultural and moral values of those countries. The meta-analysis study revealed the ethical ideologies classifications of these 220 countries. In this classification; Spain, Brunei, Britain, India, Malaysia, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates and West Side of U.S.A and Turkey were situationist countries, which means high idealism and high relativism.

Table 1. Taxonomy of Ethical Ideologies [1]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Relativism			Idealism					
Exceptionist		Subjectivist		Situationist		Absolutist		
Moral values can be helpful guidelines in ethical decision making. However, because of their being utilitarian, their judgments have exceptional characteristics.		Ethical judgments are based more on personal moral rules and perspectives than universal moral rules. They are relativists.		They reject universal moral rules. They defend themselves as they think that there should be individual analysis for the situations.		They assert that the best possible result can be achieved through universal moral rules.		

Ethical Position Questionnaire is the most preferred among the scales and questionnaires that have been developed to measure the ethical ideologies; and it has not been administered to teachers in Turkey for validity and reliability of its Turkish adaptation. Therefore, the purposes of the present study are to identify what ethical ideology Turkish teachers have and to test the validity and reliability of the Turkish version of Ethical Position Questionnaire.

Table 2. Classifications of Ethical Ideologies [1]

	Low Relativism	High Relativism
High Idealism	Absolutist	Situationist
Low Idealism	Exceptionist	Subjectivist

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Subjects

The research sample was comprised of 251 Turkish teachers, who participated voluntarily in this study, during 2014-2015 academic years. They are tenured in public primary schools in the Marmara region of Turkey. Of the 251 teachers, 118 (47%) were males, while 133 (53%) were females.

2.2. Ethical Position Questionnaire

Ethical Position Questionnaire was used to identify ethical ideologies of Turkish teachers. Statements one to ten measure idealism; and statements 11-20 imply relativism. There are no reverse statements. The questionnaire was designed as 9 Likert type. Permission to use the questionnaire was granted by the author.

2.3. Procedure

Before factor analysis of the Turkish version of the Ethical Position Questionnaire, content validity study was deployed. An adaptation study should not be thought as a pure translation of the original items to be validated in a new context [12]. Therefore, studies on content validity and cross-cultural adaptation of the tests offer a guideline for researchers [13]. According to the guidelines, forward and back translation procedure should be implemented by bilinguals who are also knowledgeable about the subject area and familiar with the cultures.

For this study, a group of language experts including certified interpreters, teachers of English and bilinguals in the field of education was formed. It was noteworthy to state that they were all experienced in the subject area, familiar to the culture, and provided international language proficiency certificates. The original version was translated by a commission of 3 academic members of Kocaeli University and 3 English teachers and 2 interpreters. Turkish version of questionnaire was then back translated to the original language for consistency analysis. After the translation procedure was completed, it was checked in terms of grammatical accuracy and academic level. Finally, the final Turkish version was obtained. Then, an experimental study was applied involving 30 teachers to identify and correct ambiguities. The analysis and expert opinion revealed that the test could be applicable to the intended subjects. Turkish translation and adaptation study was followed by construct validity. For the construct validity, factor analysis was conducted. In order to explore reliability, Cronbach's Alpha values were assessed.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Turkish Version of Ethical Position Questionnaire

Before exploratory factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test and Bartlett's test of Sphericity were applied. In order for questionnaire data to be fit with the factor analysis, KMO should be over .60 and Bartlett's test should be significant [14],[15]. Exploratory factor analysis revealed a two-factor solution. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (index: .853) and Bartlett's test of Sphericity (Bartlett's=2364, 153, $p<0.001$) indicated that the data were deemed fit for factor analysis. The factor analysis showed that the questionnaire exceeded the acceptable standard of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's value of .60; was significant in Bartlett's test of Sphericity; and two factors had Eigenvalues larger than 1. Nineteen items included in the questionnaire exceeded factor loadings of 0.41, and 46.76% of the total variance was explained by the two factors. Nineteen of the twenty items were involved in the questionnaire because one of the items (item 7) in the idealism subscale was low-loaded (0.40). The reliability of the measure assessed with Cronbach's alpha was .76 for the total questionnaire. The results of validity and the reliability analysis can be seen in Table 3 and Table 4 respectively.

3.2. Construct Validity

The factor loadings and total variance of Turkish version of EPQ are presented in Table 3. As Table 3 demonstrates, the first ten items of the questionnaire are placed in the Idealism subscale and the second ten items are placed in Relativism subscale. 7th item of the Idealism dimension has been identified as low loaded (.263). Factor loadings of other items range between .41 and .795. Eigen value for the idealism is 5,434; while Eigen value for relativism is 4,421. It was found that all of the items in the questionnaire had acceptable values. Exploratory factor analysis implied a two-factor solution for the questionnaire. These two factors explain 45% of the total variance. Cattell [16] claimed that it was difficult to identify factor numbers because of the number of variables and failures. Thus, while identifying factors, both the exploratory factor analysis and scree plot were used. Scree plot is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Ethical Position Questionnaire: Subscale Factor Values and Total Variance (N= 251)

Questionnaire Items	Total variance	Idealism	Relativism
1. People should make certain that their actions never intentionally harm another even to a small degree.	.576	.547	
2. Risks to another should never be tolerated, irrespective of how small the risks might be.	.622	.503	
3. The existence of potential harm to others is always wrong, irrespective of the benefits to be gained.	.687	.540	
4. One should never psychologically or physically harm another person.	.631	.514	
5. One should not perform an action which might in any way threaten the dignity and welfare of another individual.	.733	.630	
6. If an action could harm an innocent other, then it should not be done.	.712	.640	
7. Deciding whether or not to perform an act by balancing the positive consequences of the act against the negative consequences of the act is immoral.	.263	.400	
8. The dignity and welfare of the people should be the most important concern in any society.	.543	.456	
9. It is never necessary to sacrifice the welfare of others.	.581	.561	
10. Moral behaviors are actions that closely match ideals of the most "perfect" action.	.466	.410	
11. There are no ethical principles that are so important that they should be a part of any code of ethics.	.482		.420
12. What is ethical varies from one situation and society to another.	.595		.519
13. Moral standards should be seen as being individualistic; what one person considers to be moral may be judged to be immoral by another person.	.712		.593
14. Different types of morality cannot be compared as to "rightness."	.718		.651
15. Questions of what is ethical for everyone can never be resolved since what is moral or immoral is up to the individual.	.765		.670
16. Moral standards are simply personal rules that indicate how a person should behave, and are not be applied in making judgments of others.	.514		.624
17. Ethical considerations in interpersonal relations are so complex that individuals should be allowed to formulate their own individual codes.	.619		.628
18. Rigidly codifying an ethical position that prevents certain types of actions could stand in the way of better human relations and adjustment.	.565		.454
19. No rule concerning lying can be formulated; whether a lie is permissible or not permissible totally depends upon the situation.	.795		.522
20. Whether a lie is judged to be moral or immoral depends upon the circumstances surrounding the action.	.728		.532

Scree plot reveals that the questionnaire can be seen as a four-factor solution. But the vertical drop gained after the two factors may be representative of a two-factor solution for the questionnaire. Original study was two-factor structured and this was confirmed by exploratory factor analysis and scree plot (Figure 1).

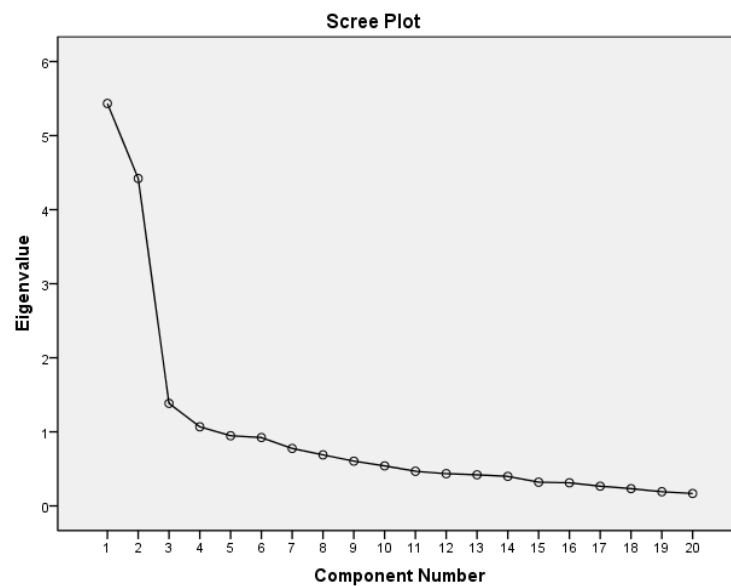


Figure 1. Scree Plot

3.3. Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha for the internal consistency was found as .81 for the total questionnaire and .84 and .86 for the other two dimensions, idealism and relativism respectively. The results of item analysis, performed for the predictability and discriminant validity of the total items in the questionnaire, showed that corrected item-test correlations ranged from 0.34 to 0.64. Means, standard deviations and coefficient consistencies are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Turkish version of Ethical Position Questionnaire: means, deviations and Cronbach's alphas

Questionnaire items	Mean	Std D.	α
1. People should make certain that their actions never intentionally harm another even to a small degree.	8.257	1.658	.801
2. Risks to another should never be tolerated, irrespective of how small the risks might be.	7.767	2.141	.808
3. The existence of potential harm to others is always wrong, irrespective of the benefits to be gained.	8.012	1.898	.796
4. One should never psychologically or physically harm another person.	8.626	1.144	.807
5. One should not perform an action which might in any way threaten the dignity and welfare of another individual.	8.576	1.232	.800
6. If an action could harm an innocent other, then it should not be done.	8.589	1.190	.800
7. Deciding whether or not to perform an act by balancing the positive consequences of the act against the negative consequences of the act is immoral.	6.323	2.551	.850
8. The dignity and welfare of the people should be the most important concern in any society.	8.211	1.369	.805
9. It is never necessary to sacrifice the welfare of others.	7.850	1.641	.806
10. Moral behaviors are actions that closely match ideals of the most "perfect" action.	6.427	2.367	.841
11. There are no ethical principles that are so important that they should be a part of any code of ethics.	5.183	2.551	.888
12. What is ethical varies from one situation and society to another.	5.937	2.835	.875
13. Moral standards should be seen as being individualistic; what one person considers to be moral may be judged to be immoral by another person.	6.062	2.673	.867
14. Different types of morality cannot be compared as to "rightness."	6.400	2.674	.867
15. Questions of what is ethical for everyone can never be resolved since what is moral or immoral is up to the individual.	5.845	2.852	.860
16. Moral standards are simply personal rules that indicate how a person should behave, and are not be applied in making judgments of others.	6.383	2.475	.876
17. Ethical considerations in interpersonal relations are so complex that individuals should be allowed to formulate their own individual codes.	5.554	2.653	.866
18. Rigidly codifying an ethical position that prevents certain types of actions could stand in the way of better human relations and adjustment.	4.083	2.812	.880
19. No rule concerning lying can be formulated; whether a lie is permissible or not permissible totally depends upon the situation.	4.733	3.023	.873
20. Whether a lie is judged to be moral or immoral depends upon the circumstances surrounding the action.	4.933	2.836	.875

4. DISCUSSION

Exploratory factor analysis revealed that Turkish version of Ethical Position Questionnaire was two factors-structured and these two factors explains % 45 of the total variance. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency assessed for the total 20 items of the questionnaire was .81; with idealism factor being .84 and relativism factor being .86. Therefore, Turkish version of Forsyth's Ethical Position Questionnaire was found a reliable and valid assessment tool for measuring teachers' ethical orientation.

In recent literature related to ethics of teachers, there are some concepts as organizational virtuousness, social development, and social justice at school. Teachers play a crucial role in the social development of the students, and they should strengthen mechanisms of organizational virtuousness in their schools [17]. In terms of social justice, teachers' social identity interplays with social justice, and social identity should be given importance [18]. Therefore, ethical concepts in education can be more meaningful by gaining insights into ethical orientation of the teachers and trainers as directs subjects.

Ethics education contributes to the ethical awareness and ethical reasoning competencies. Instruments should be designed to measure the impact of ethics education on reflective and analytical skills as well as on behavioral competencies [19]. In order to lead a right direction to the ethics education, measurement tools such as ethics position questionnaire is important.

Teachers are to make their own decisions and are fully responsible for projecting themselves into a future that they imagine. However, they do not have perfect knowledge of the consequences of their decisions before or after they act [20]. Teachers themselves may learn their proclivity of ethics by measuring themselves using this questionnaire and come to a decision in hard times while facing an ethical dilemma.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, administrators and practitioners in school setting can use this tool to learn about their ethical orientation and lead right decisions in terms of ethics as well as making use of the tool in shaping their ethics education curriculum. It is thought that administering Turkish form of Ethical Orientation Questionnaire for different professionals may contribute to the reliability and validity of the questionnaire.

Most of the important organizational behaviors, such as ethical decision making, are associated with ethical orientation. In this sense, this study provides a reliable and valid assessment tool to investigate Turkish teachers' ethical orientations. By explaining similarities and differences in ethical orientations of teachers, it would be possible to develop an adequate understanding and to make comparisons of the nature of ethical behaviors of teachers across different nations.

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