



## School principals' perception of professional ethics and the extent of its observance in high schools in Birjand

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### Abstract

This research has been done with a mixed exploratory method with the aim of identifying the perception and the degree of observance of professional ethics of school principals. The required data were collected using a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The statistical population of the study included all secondary school principals in Birjand. In quantitative phase, 75 people were selected as a sample by relative random sampling. 375 people were selected to be surveyed about the level of professional ethics of their managers. Then, based on the analysis of the findings of the quantitative stage of the research, the participants in the qualitative stage of the research (16 people) were selected by purposive sampling. Descriptive and inferential statistical indicators were used to analyze quantitative data and interpretive analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. The results show that from the perspective of teachers, the professional ethics of principal is at a desirable level. Also, the variables of gender and level of education did not make a significant difference in the level of observance of managers' professional ethics. The results of the qualitative phase of the research also represented school principals' perceptions of professional ethics in five main dimensions, including benefit-oriented ethics, person-centered ethics, duty-based ethics, rights-oriented ethics, & justice-oriented ethics. Each of which included several categories. Also, the results obtained from data analysis showed that school principals have a better understanding of task-oriented ethics than other dimensions of professional ethics and benefit-oriented ethics is at a higher level in terms of compliance than other dimensions. But the dimension of justice-oriented ethics was lower than other dimensions in terms of both understanding and observance.

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## **Introduction**

Today, the impact of organizations on various aspects of human life is very wide. Managers of organizations on the one hand want success, survival and moving from the status quo to the desired status, and on the other hand their success depends on how to properly interact with the environment. The subject of professional ethics stems from this interaction (Gharamaleki, 2017). Many decisions and behaviors of managers are influenced by ethical values and are rooted in ethics. Many managers have a high level of expertise, skills and knowledge in their profession, but due to non-compliance with ethical issues in their decisions, they do not achieve the desired success and as a result fail (Gholami, 2010).

This issue is more important for educational organizations and especially school principals who have a great role in education and humanization. Educational administrators face the issue of ethics in different ways. For this reason, their decisions and plans at the time of conclusion require a lot of consideration that, if they are not observed, it will lead to problems in individual and social dimensions (Mirkamali, 2004). Therefore, success in the organization, especially in educational organizations that have extensive human relations, is due to the creation and application of ethics in the organization (Malone, 2020) and the performance of managers depends on their professional ethics (Vaparzeh, Talebi, & Sameri, 2019). Although the subject of professional ethics in education was raised later than other professions, it is more important. School principals are always faced with situations that force them to make ethical decisions (Tekel & Karadağ, 2017).

The concept of professional ethics and ethics in the organization has been a scientific concept since almost the second half of the twentieth century (Svensson & Wood, 2004). And in recent years has attracted the attention of various researchers; In such a way that today the issue of ethics in the organization is mentioned as an important challenge facing various organizations (Cardy & Selvarajan, 2006). In educational administration, ethics includes "value principles and rules that guide the decisions and behavior of managers as to whether they are right or wrong." (Mirkamali, 2004).

Ethics is divided into three main types: descriptive ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics. Professional ethics, which is a branch of ethics, is a part of applied ethics (Gharamaleki, 2015). Professional ethics deals with how a person behaves, is polite, and acts when doing job. In fact, professional ethics is "a discipline of ethical knowledge that studies job relationships" (Shaabani Azadbani, 2017). And tries to answer ethical issues raised in various professions (Hartong, 2007). The study of professional ethics was first introduced in other branches of management such as public administration and business management (Mirkamali, 2011). In educational administration, professional ethics is important that who want to be recognized as leaders in schools and to be influential in education must be guided by a set of beliefs, norms and values (Murphy, 2002) that this set of beliefs and values is professional ethics.

In educational organizations and schools, the subject of professional ethics includes a set of behavioral characteristics which leads to the observance of the rights of stakeholders inside and outside the school and it is manifested in

issues such as benevolence, observance of the law, non-abuse of the profession and reliability (Mirkamali, 2011). Therefore, professional ethics in educational administration includes all aspects of ethics and social responsibility in this profession (Karami, Galavandi, & Galaei, 2017).

The observance of professional ethics by the principals causes other members of school or educational organization follow this ethics and transmitted to other people within the organization (Shakeri, 2011); in such a way that the moral leadership of principals will lead to more social adjustment of students (Badleh, Nemati, & Hosseini, 2020). Therefore, in addition to the managerial role they have in their area, principals, willingly or unwillingly, find a role model in schools because their performance is exposed to the eyes of others which doubles their responsibility (Saki, 2019). Therefore, school principals are expected to have professional ethics due to their organizational position and important responsibilities in the educational organization (Hackley, 1998). Research (e.g. Ozan, Ozdemir & Yirci, 2017) also shows that from the perspective of teachers, principals with higher professional ethics act more mature, fair and ethical in their decisions. A review of research literature in the field of professional ethics in the context of educational organizations such as universities and schools shows that professional ethics is one of the most important factors affecting the effectiveness of organizations and the success of managers (Tabasi, 2012; Sanee & Yari, 2015; Ozgoli, 2006; Kazemi, 2012; Mostafazadeh Bora, 2019).

In addition, researchers examine the relationship between the professional ethics of

educational administrators and their emotional intelligence (Lashkari, 2012), Organizational commitment of teachers in schools (Bahagir, 2012), Teachers' organizational citizenship behavior (Ardalan, Abdolmaleki, & Heidari, 2020), Social responsibility between school principals and teachers (Karami, et al, 2018), and other variables affecting the performance of managers. Also in other studies the dimensions and requirements of professional ethics to school principals (Pejman, 2018), principles and standards of professional ethics of school principals (Fallahi, 2016), identifying the components of professional ethics of educational administrators (Pourmosavi, 2016) has been discussed.

However, there is evidence that many managers in the education system do not have information about the meaning and tools of ethics management in their institutions. Also, for many managers, ethics training, ethics experts, ethical lines, or methods of protecting whistleblowers are not known (Puiu & Ogarca, 2015).

Many principals promote and practice professional ethics in accordance with their perceptions. Principals' mindset and beliefs are a determining factor in their moral performance.

Incomplete and reductionism attitudes are major barriers to ethical performance in the organization. In other words, if principals' perceptions of professional ethics are flawed, their actions will be flawed. Therefore, one of the effective factors in the failure of individuals in ethical interaction is the lack of a clear idea of ethical interaction. Incomplete perceptions of professional ethics often lead to immoral decisions. For example, "those who reduce ethics to law and consider ethics as part of rules

and regulations remain moral only to the extent of legal requirements" (Gharamaleki, 2015). Also, one of the reasons for the decrease in the effectiveness and efficiency of schools in recent years is the lack of attention to the standards of professional ethics (Hajkhosai, 2017). Therefore, due to the importance of the role of professional ethics in school management and the fact that the ethical practice of principals results from their perception, in this study, the questions are answered: What is the status of professional ethics of school principals? And how do school principals understand professional ethics?

### **Literature**

With the expansion and development of organizations, their issues and challenges have also expanded. A set of these issues is related to the subject of ethics, which is called professional ethics (Azizi, 2010). "Professional ethics is a branch of ethics that studies the ethical duties of a profession and its ethical issues" (Gharamaleki, 2015) and expresses the beliefs of a professional group about what is right and relevant to the standards of that profession (Ghasemzadeh, Zavar, Mahdiun, & Rezaei, 2015).

Professional ethics has been proposed today under various ethical systems. Among these, the five major ethical systems are more famous. The study of these ethical systems helps us to have a deeper understanding of ethics (Ameli, 2009). It is not possible to say which system is better. It is suggested that people take a systematic and multiple perspective instead of referring to one system in dealing with moral issues and dilemma. These five ethical systems (theories or schools) are:

1. Profitability School: This ethical theory is based on utility or utilitarianism (Lalande, 1999). The school of profitability includes the laws that observing them causes the greatest happiness for human beings and non-observance of these laws increases misery for human beings (Rajabi, 2014). The most common final criterion discussed in professional ethics is the highest profit for most people with the least loss (Gharamaleki, 2010). In this school, the correctness or incorrectness of a behavior, from an ethical point of view, is determined by the consequences of that behavior (Smart, 1997). Who think this way believe that financial success is the only criterion for making a decision. And any ethical thing is ignored or given less priority (Mowlana, 2009). Therefore, according to the profitability school, the criterion for the rightness or wrongness of an action is the results of that action, not the motive that caused it to be performed.

2. Deontological School: According to this school, the moral value of any action depends on the intention of the decision-maker and not on the outcome; Because the result of that action was not clear at the time of the decision (Hosmer, 2011). In other words, duty-based ethics believes that the good and bad of an action is not only based on its results, but also the motivation of that good and bad action. In other words, duty-based ethics believes that the good and bad of an action is not based on its results but depends on the motivation of the person (Ledbetter, 2005). A prominent proponent of this approach is Immanuel Kant (Jacks, 1994). The deontological system that Kant founded instead of utilitarianism believes that nothing can justify our disregard for ethical duties and therefore we are

unconditionally committed to them (Gharamaleki, 2015). In fact, Kant rejects any ethical motive except perform the duty. According to Kant's ethical ideas, ethical value is given to actions that are performed due to duty. For Kant, this duty is absolute and unconditional (Hosmer, 2011).

3. **Distributive Justice School:** The school of distributive justice was introduced by John Rawls who considers justice as the criterion and basis of superiority and value of an action (Hosmer, 2011). Since the two schools of Profitability and deontology cannot be the only basic criterion of convincing right and wrong in ethics, we must know the principle of credible justice to guide us in the distribution of good and evil and that is the school of distributive justice (Ameli, 2010). The theory of distributive justice as an ethical school can be extended from a specific economic system of distribution of benefits to an ethical system for evaluating behavior. According to which an action can be called correct, just and appropriate if it leads to increased cooperation between members of the community and whoever opposes this current is considered wrong, unjust and inappropriate (Hosmer, 2011).

4. **Individualistic School:** The individualistic ethic proposed in Buber's thought focuses on the conscience of individuals. In this theory, the criterion of right and wrong of an act is the inner conscience of individuals. Buber believed that the end does not justify the means. Ends and means must be consistent. He claimed that a person could be a member of society and maintain one's individuality, and when felt that society was wrong, could do something to lead the community (Bahagir, 2012). Therefore, it can

be said that individual ethics takes precedence over any other kind of ethics in one sense. People should be ethical in their jobs, but in ethics they do not necessarily need a job or a position. Ethics in organizations is the result of the ethical concerns of individuals (Mousavi, Vashni, Saadipour, 2017b).

5. **Personal Liberty School (Ethical rights approach):** The ethical rights approach emphasizes that human beings have rights and freedoms that should not be violated by the decision of each individual. Therefore, correct decision protect the rights of stakeholders (Daft, 2009). The legal system functions as an incentive mechanism to promote ethical behavior in society and shape incentives through laws, regulations, and punishment. Therefore, the legal system, while having sufficient power to protect these core values, must be flexible enough to respond quickly to these changes (Mousavi, Vashni, Saadipour, 2017b).

### **Research Method**

This research is an applied research that has been done with the explanatory mixed study approach. The research was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, quantitative data were collected and analyzed using descriptive-survey research method and in the second step, qualitative data is used to further explain and reveal some ambiguous aspects (Bazargan, 2008). Since there are no specific criteria for recognizing principals with superior professional ethics, and on the other hand, identifying the understanding and degree of observance of professional ethics of school principals only by using research projects in which only one method (quantitative or qualitatively), cannot comprehensively answer

questions about how to understand and act both, in the present study has used a sequential mixed method. Because the purpose of this study was that the researcher first collected quantitative data to examine the level of professional ethics of principals from the perspective of teachers and also to identify principals who were at the top and bottom of professional ethics as a case. Then, with the identification of these cases, the study of their understanding of the professional ethics of school administration from the perspective of these people was conducted in a qualitative manner.

The population of the study includes all high school principals in Birjand in the academic year 2019-2020 with 95 principals (57 females and 38 males). Also, the number of primary high schools in Birjand is equal to 45 schools (45 principals and 610 teachers) and the number of secondary high schools is equal to 50 schools (50 principals and 727 teachers). Therefore, the total number of high school teachers in Birjand is 1337 people, of which 375 people participated in a survey related to the quantitative part of the research. To select the sample, 75 people were selected from the principals using Cochran's formula by relative random sampling method (according to gender and educational level). Then, according to the sample selected from the principals, 5 teachers from each school (a total of 375 teachers) were examined. In fact, the level of professional ethics of principals was assessed by their teachers. Due to the fact that the distribution of secondary schools in the city of Birjand does not have a regional division, the variables of gender and level of education were used in the optimal distribution of the studied samples. Due to the fact that the distribution of Birjand

high schools does not have a regional division, the variables of gender and educational level were used in the optimal distribution of the studied samples.

In order to assess the level of observance of professional ethics of principals, the questionnaire of professional ethics (Bahagir, 2011) was used. This questionnaire has 34 questions and includes the components of professional ethics (benefit-oriented ethics, person-centered ethics, duty-based ethics, justice-oriented ethics and rights-oriented ethics). Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire in this study, which was calculated as 0/87. One-sample t-test was used to analyze the quantitative data.

In the second step of the research, the case study was used as a research method. Because case study is for study a particular case, subject or phenomenon (Glini Moghaddam, 2015). Key informants (interviewees) were identified by using the results of the quantitative part of this research. The interviewees were selected from among the principals who had the most or the least professional ethics. In this way, 12 people (codes 1 to 12) were selected from among the principals with the highest score of professional ethics and 4 people (codes 13 to 16) were selected from among the principals with low professional ethics. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data in the qualitative part of the research. In order to analyze the data collected in the qualitative part of the research, interpretive-reflective analysis method and Strauss & Corbin coding method were used in two stages: open and axial coding.

The validity of qualitative research has been considered in two steps of implementation and results. Validity of implementation refers to the activities and actions that both before the

implementation and during the interview will increase the quality of the interview results. Such as reading related articles and research, asking clear questions, and conducting a pilot interview to ensure that sufficient preparation has been made to begin the interview. To provide validity in the results as well Lincoln & Guba (1985) criterion was used. Credibility was assessed by participants or interviewees. For this purpose, in several cases, the transcript of the interview with an analysis of the interview was given to the interviewee to ensure the accuracy of the information obtained in the interview. In order to ensure dependability, the researchers tried to achieve the social adequacy of the participants and by using this criterion, with the reproducibility of the participants they can deal with the different dimensions of the subject in depth. In order to obtain the criterion of transferability in this

research, an attempt was made to provide sufficient information to the readers by mentioning in detail the actions taken in the research process. In order to be confirmability, the research process and its results were approved by three experts.

### Findings

Question 1: What is the status of professional ethics in high school principals in Birjand?

In order to answer this question, the status of principals' professional ethics from the perspective of their teachers was studied by descriptive-survey research method and using the questionnaire. One-sample t-test (due to the normality of variable distribution) was used to analyze the data. The results of the analysis of the collected data are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. One-sample t-test of principals' professional ethics and its components**

Variable	Components	Mean	Std. deviation	t-statistic	P-VALUE
Professional ethics	Benefit-oriented ethics	4.36	0.47	25.06	0.000
	Person-centered ethics	4.25	0.57	17.10	0.000
	Duty-based ethics	4.23	0.58	16.70	0.000
	Justice-oriented ethics	4.07	0.66	10.49	0.000
	Rights-oriented ethics	4.27	0.59	17.46	0.000
	Total	4.23	0.45	21.54	0.00

As can be seen in Table 1, the mean score of the professional ethics variable in the sample group is 4.23 with a standard deviation of 0.45, which is significantly higher than the standard score (mean 3). It can be concluded that the status of professional ethics of school principals from the perspective of their teachers is above average and generally desirable. Also, the average score of all five dimensions of professional ethics (benefit-

oriented ethics, person-centered ethics, task-oriented ethics, justice-oriented ethics and rights-oriented ethics) is significantly higher than the average.

In addition to analyzing the general status of professional ethics and each of its dimensions, the status of professional ethics among school principals in Birjand from the perspective of teachers is described in Table 2.

**Table 2. Status of professional ethics of school principals**

Groups	Mean score of professional ethics	Number
1	4.4-4.7	33
2	4-4.3	30
3	3.7-4	12
Total		75

According to Table 2, high school principals in Birjand are divided into three groups in terms of professional ethics, from the perspective of their teachers: 33 of them have high professional ethics, 30 have moderate professional ethics, and 12 have a low level of professional ethics.

In order to compare the professional ethics of principals according to the type of their school (first and second high school), t-test for two independent groups was used and the results of which are reflected in Table 3.

**Table 3. Independent t-test of research variables by degree**

Variable	Components	Levene's statistic (f)	P-Value	T statistic
Professional ethics	Benefit-oriented ethics	3.48	0.06	-0.78
	Person-centered ethics	0.51	0.47	-0.32
	Duty-based ethics	0.03	0.87	-0.56
	Justice-oriented ethics	0.79	0.036	-2.67
	Rights-oriented ethics	3.27	0.07	-1.28
	Professional ethics of principals	0/40	0.52	-1.55

The average score of professional ethics among the principals of the first high schools is 4.19 and for the principals of the second high schools is 4.28. But according to statistical results, this difference is not significant. The status of each of the five dimensions of professional ethics among primary and secondary school principals was also examined. Comparison of the professional ethics of male and female principals by using t-test for two independent groups also showed that there is no significant difference between

the professional ethics of female principals (with an average of 4.27) and men (with an average of 4.22).

Question 2: What is the understanding of professional ethics of high school principals in Birjand?

In order to answer the second research question, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 16 selected principals. To analyze the data obtained from the interviews,



the coding method was used in two open and axial stages. In total, after analyzing the data, 316 key points, 123 concepts and 20 basic categories were extracted. These 20 categories were also categorized under the 5 main dimensions of professional ethics (duty-based ethics, individual-centered ethics, benefit-oriented ethics, justice-oriented ethics, and rights-based ethics).

1. Duty-oriented ethics. According to duty-oriented ethics, the moral value of any action does not depend on its outcome. Because the result is not clear at the time of decision making, but the value of that action depends on

the intention of the decision maker (Hosmer, 2011). The task-oriented ethic consists of seven categories that the principals of high schools in Birjand expressed in interviews. The categories of patience, honesty, action based on values, piety, discipline and belonging to work can be considered as moral actions that regardless of the results they bring, doing them for human beings. It is obligatory and this obligation is in the verbs themselves. Table 4 shows the evidence for the analysis of interviews and the concepts and categories related to the task-oriented ethics dimension.

**Table 4. School principals' perception of task-oriented ethics**

Key points extracted from the interview	Concept	Category
Every principal must be patient and tolerant in relation to others, and according to the needs they have, he can meet the people (M1), I deaf The requirement of professional management is that the person has the foresight and be patient with others (M6), The stone of people's patience. Even if we can not do anything for him, listen to him so that he becomes mentally drained (M8), Be thoughtful and wise and be patient in matters (M12),, educational director in degree First he has to be very patient because our work is a bit complicated because we are dealing with human beings (M4), a principal with professional ethics has a very high tolerance threshold (M7), a principal with ethics takes care of people's problems and As long as they deal with problems (M3), I think working with children and being a school principal is really tolerable (M15).	Patience in doing things	Patience and perseverance
The principal does not get tired and angry from doing the client's work quickly (M10), he does the work out of patience and the goal is not to finish it soon (M3).	Avoid rushing	
When something goes wrong or something happens, first of all I try not to lose my balance and keep my cool, which I think prevents a wrong decision (M7), the principal in dealing with unfavorable and critical situations, well on Problems prevail (M4), composure in the face of crises and not losing balance and making wrong decisions means that at the same time I try not to show stress (M3), high speed of action and ability to manage Crisis and doing your best (M4), controlling your anger in critical situations (M10), helping to find the root of people's problems to prevent a recurrence (M9)	Crisis management ability	

Key points extracted from the interview	Concept	Category
One of the most important aspects of it, in my opinion, can be the issue of honesty with both himself and his client (M1), honesty and truthfulness in work and avoiding lying (M15), I think the first issue in professional ethics The same discussion of honesty and truthfulness is to avoid lying (M2), honesty and truthfulness can greatly help the principal to behave better (M9)	Honesty with all people	Honesty and truthfulness
The principal is honest in both words and deeds, not only in deeds, but I know this is very important in advancing things (M5)	No contradiction in word and deed	
She is honest with everyone and does not seek to hide in her work (M9), not having a mask on her face, she does not behave ambiguously (working in a glass room), she does not play movies and hide (M11)	Do not behave ambiguously	
We, as a moral principal and as a Muslim, must apply the commands of religion in our work (M1), if he practices divine piety, he will surely succeed (M1), I think one should work for God and Always keep in mind the pleasure of God (M13), the principal whose goal is the pleasure of God does not hesitate to do anything in school (M16)	Adherence to religious duties	Piety and Righteousness
Working with trust in God and knowing Him as our overseer (M6)	Belief in God watching	
As a moral principal, we must be sincere in our work and do it with pure intention and pay attention to what is lawful and what is unlawful (M5).	Sincerity at work	
I do not care what the others see how they do it, but I myself try to do my job in the best possible way and I do not do less because I believe that I should do the right thing and my bread is halal and I do my job right for God apart from material matters (M5).	Halal livelihood	
Professional ethics is a discussion of values and beliefs, that is, what is important to individuals apart from material issues (M2), professional ethics is a set based on adherence to a value framework defined for that system, as well as that Which society values and respects (M9)	Adherence to a value framework	Management based on values
When we have a heartfelt belief in our values and adhere to them, this is professional ethics (M16), a set of characteristics and customs or social issues that you are bound to and fashion them in your actions and behavior. Keep in mind that these are actually your characteristics and morals and you are usually known with these in the place of the cartoon (M11)	Heartfelt belief in values	
In my opinion, one of the factors and the first steps of professional ethics is the role model of the principal, who, whether he likes it or not,	Appearance model	Skills in role modeling

Key points extracted from the interview	Concept	Category
now has a positive or negative effect on the children (M3), observing such things as wearing the right clothes, proper hair. And the way of speaking which is a sign of people's personality (M2), appropriate and professional coverage can be another characteristic of ethical principals (M10).		
In my opinion, the principal is a role model for her staff, for students and even for families, so in the field of behavior and education, she should be careful that many people look at her (M9).	Behavioral model	
They themselves have a successful model for themselves, in fact, they know what path to follow to get the best result (M10).	Success model	
One of the most important things in professional ethics is to have order or to get things done on time (M4), when a principal is regular, they will inevitably learn from his subordinates (M2). A person who has a professional ethic means that he will be a regular person (M1), a regular principal has the ability to coordinate between different groups of students, parents and teachers, etc. (M7)	Establish order in things	Having discipline
I believe in planning a lot and I try to do all my work on planning to make the most of the situation (M7), I think a successful principal has planning in all his work (M11), a principal The ethicist tries to get to work on time and to leave on time (M10), he does what is left to him as soon as possible and does not leave it for 90 minutes (M10).	punctuality	
Do not interfere with personal issues and problems in the workplace Another characteristic of an ethical principal I think (M8), a successful principal never takes his own discomfort from home to work or vice versa (M12)	Do not interfere with personal and business affairs	
The ethical principal does things with satisfaction and does not have the feeling of boredom and repetition, ie she does not get tired of work soon (M11), belongs or is attached to work (M2)	Job Satisfaction	
Love, passion and faith in work and working for God apart from material issues (M3), one of the characteristics can be interest in your work and profession (M4), in my opinion, professional ethics means enjoying work and Your profession (M5), when professional ethics is associated with cartoons when you really love cartoons (M6), a person who has a high enthusiasm and motivation pursues his work and has this desire when he goes to work, it can be said that There is professional ethics (M10)	Love to work	Belonging to work
When I say management is an art, we mean the same management that ensures professional ethics. Someone who considers management as an art is attached to his work (M9), the principal must devote all his efforts to achieving the goals of education (M16)	Accepting management as an art	

2. Person-centered ethics: Person-centered ethics focuses on the conscience of individuals as the means by which they act. In fact, inner conscience and guilt are the guides of right and wrong (Ledbetter, 2005). The dimension of person-centered ethics consists of five categories that the principals of high schools in

Birjand expressed in interviews. Table 5 shows the evidence for the analysis of interviews and the concepts and categories related to the dimension of person-centered ethics.

**Table 5. School principals' perception of person-centered ethics**

Key points extracted from the interview	Concept	Category
In my opinion, the first person to enter the school and the last person to leave should be the principal (M2). You have to listen to the voice of your own conscience (M14), the discussion of conscience is very important. Suppose a principal does not have a conscience.	Listen to the voice of conscience	Work conscience
Do not interfere with personal issues and problems related to work (M8), I try to balance the administrative affairs and personal affairs of people who do not burn skewers or kebabs (M13), I can be a healthy and honest person if I can conscience I observe this in my work (M11)	Being balanced	
I always try to do the best thing I can, and I just want to finish sooner and be comfortable (M4), having the power to respond to people's demands in the best possible way (M1), having Highly motivated in work (M9), if he thinks that several areas of his work are important, he tries to make more effort in those areas (M10), focusing on the most important parts of the work from the characteristics of a A principal can have professional ethics (M7)	Doing the job in the best way	
I try never to feel proud when I work with my co-workers and school staff in general, and to say that I am better after this and want to be proud of God (M6), look down and look Forgiveness of mistakes as much as possible (M13)	lack of arrogance	Humility
An ethical principal is always learning, even from her subordinates (M5)	Humility in learning	
Controlling my anger in critical situations (M10), reminders, for example, if I want to give, I try to be in a state of humor and intimacy, instead of using violence and harsh language (M5), having self-control (M8)	Avoid violence	
To consider myself a servant and that I consider it my duty to do what I do (M13), to consider myself a servant of people and to consider their satisfaction in actions and decisions (M12), every official in my opinion should consider himself a servant of others. (M6), an ethical principal with a spirit of service to others without eyes and has a mind (M8)	Servant without mint	

Key points extracted from the interview	Concept	Category
A person who is creative in his work based on mutual respect and always considers himself a part of his colleagues, not superior (M12), humility and respect for others and being equal to others and lack of self-superiority can be the characteristics of a principal. Have professional ethics (M2), lack of showing off and self-superiority (M16)	Lack of self-aggrandizement	
I try not to hurt anyone due to my negligence and negligence in work and I do my duty in the best possible way (M11), the principal must consider himself responsible for everything that happens in school and Be responsive (M12)	Conscientiousness	spirit of responsibility and commitment
In my opinion, a principal with professional ethics should be responsible and adhere to it, because if everyone is supposed to behave in any way, that ultimate goal will be 100% damaged (M3), a sense of responsibility.	responsibility	
In my opinion, the most important condition for observing professional ethics is the issue of work commitment. If we do not have honesty and commitment to our work, how can I expect this from others (M8), an ethical principal must be committed to his work (M15)	Commitment to work	
In my own words, professional ethics means being successful in communicating with others. If we see an employee communicating with a comfortable principal, this is a sign of the success of that principal (M9), an ethical principal can easily interact with his employees, that is, he tries to be in an environment where he is clean and intimate with his subordinates. Create (M10), a principal who has professional ethics in my opinion can communicate well with his audience, that is, the best relationship that is the same emotional relationship with people (M1), establishing human relationships and Good emotionality in the workplace (M7), in today's society there are successful people in management who have higher public relations, and this public relations is directly related to the professional ethics of individuals (M6).	Good and constructive interaction with others	Informal relationships
The principal understands the morals of the people and listens to the pain and hearts of each person in his collection (M3), if you can establish a good emotional relationship, people will definitely fall in love with your appropriate treatment and then you can expect that. Explain this to people (M5), the principal who understands his subordinates and when they have a problem helps them to solve the problem (M4)	Empathy and understanding of people	
I myself, who can almost be said to have feelings for my colleagues and children when I have a problem with them, and I try to sympathize with them and understand them, and I try not to blame people for their mistakes, but even to help the root. Finding people's problems to	Becoming helpful	

Key points extracted from the interview	Concept	Category
prevent it (M3), I think one of the main factors of my success in these few years of service has been the intimate relationship I had with my collection (M5)		
In my opinion, a principal has a professional ethic that has a good mood so that he can easily establish emotional relationships with the people in his collection and can have a friendly and intimate relationship with others in addition to observing the rules and regulations (M6). , Intertwining labor laws and regulations with human issues because human beings are not machines that we deal with dryly (M12), naturally in a work environment where morality prevails, freshness and vitality are well felt (M3)	Create an effective friendly atmosphere	
A principal with professional ethics should give a grade to his work almost every month and correct his own problems (M12). M14), the principal must act systematically in his work (having a systemic view and self-correction) (M11)	Feedback for correction	self assessment

3. Benefit-oriented ethics: In this view, the person chooses the action that brings the most joy or happiness to the largest number of people and seek what is best for the community. The benefit-oriented ethic dimension consists of three categories, which are represented by interviews with high school principals in Birjand. Table 6 shows the evidence for the analysis of interviews and the concepts and categories related to the benefit-oriented ethics dimension.

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**Table 6. School principals' perceptions of benefit -oriented ethics**

Key points extracted from the interview	Concept	Category
A component of professional ethics can be the issue of encouraging people, so I try to internalize these encouragements over time (M2), a principal with professional ethics has a good ability to motivate people (M5), We know and encourage people to succeed (M3), to praise others' successes and to attribute their own successes to them, not his own (M10), the final results and educational goals for his own collection. Specifies well (M11)	Ability to motivate people	Providing the ground for people to progress
Appreciate people and give them personality and treat them with respect and dignity to increase their motivation (give people personality to make them feel valued) (M9), have a spirit of sacrifice and value the wishes of people (M14)	Respect for people	
Helps to boost people's creativity (M10), identifying talented people and delegating responsibility for their own creativity (M4), does not control his work so much that no one else grows (M10), does constructive competition to some extent That does not turn into jealousy and the person can express his creativity is good (M12)	Strengthen creativity	
We must always keep in mind the satisfaction of the people that our client never leaves our workplace either mentally or emotionally dissatisfied (M1), to keep his collection satisfied in any situation (M2), we do our best. -I try to create maximum benefits for my teachers and students in the school (M14), more teacher satisfaction is always considered by the principal (M8).	Maximum satisfaction of people	Satisfying people and maintaining their respect
When she delegates a responsibility to another, she must trust it and consider its satisfaction (M10).	Trust in people	
Respect and attention to the needs of the people in his work collection. If you pay attention to those needs, it covers most of the issues and problems (M5), honoring and respecting others (M13), respecting and honoring the client (M8), I rise to the respect of the client and go to the front door. (M6), in the document of fundamental change, one of its principles and areas is in fact honoring the client (M3)	Maintaining the dignity of employees and clients	
The obvious aspect of professional ethics is keeping secrets and trusts (M6).	Confidentiality	Confidentiality
Keep a secret and do not reveal too much of what the client is saying to the point where that sense of trust is lost (M1)	Gain people's trust	

4. Rights-oriented ethics: The rights-oriented approach emphasizes that human beings have freedoms and rights that cannot be taken away by individual decision. Thus, a decision that is ethically correct best protects

the rights of those affected (Bahagir, 2012). As a result of analyzing the interviews of high school principals in Birjand, rights ethics was identified in three general categories, which are summarized in Table 7.



**Table 7. School principals' perceptions of rights -oriented ethics**

Key points extracted from the interview	Concept	Category
Be critical, but do not be upset that he is being criticized for creating this hostility again (M3). Be directly criticizable and do not threaten the interests of people in this criticism (M1), criticism is the main factor in moving the principal forward and saves you from being a rocket (M6)	Accepting fair criticism	Criticism
Criticism can be one of these characteristics. I myself go back and forth whenever I make a mistake and I am not upset that someone says something wrong (M8). Or by the collection under his command (M7)	Accept responsibility for mistakes	
Protecting the lawful and reasonable right of employees to protest is also a characteristic of an ethical principal (M10), the interests of teachers are not threatened in commenting and all teachers are free to comment (M15).	Giving the right to protest	
Skilled principals always learn from their mistakes to dodge and make excuses and worthless excuses (M14).	Learning from mistakes	
Deciding and solving problems with the cooperation and like-mindedness of others and consulting people has always been in our school, which is because it is their own mind to do the body with more satisfaction (M6), for each step we want to take together We make decisions and our decisions are collective (M3), we usually have weekly exchange meetings, after which we choose the best opinion (M15), there is a good ground for expressing opinions in the school (M13). )	Holding exchange meetings	Participation
We have based our advice and exchange from the very beginning, and I will comment on every decision I make, because in every series there is an intellect (M3), directing the behaviors of others (M11), consulting things. And move forward as a group (M9), we welcome suggestions from people in our work (M16)	Creating a consultation space	
The principal has a professional ethic of consultation and like-mindedness and follows the team work in the best way in her workplace (M10), participates in decision making and the opinion of the group is important to her (M7)	team work	
We have councils to make decisions, depending on what the issue is. The Council of Teachers, the Student Council, the Parents and Teachers Association, etc. (Article 8) give others the right to decide (Article 14).	Decision making with maximum participation	
Personally, I have a few ways to do everything and I try to choose the best one according to the circumstances of the situation I am in (M8), in different situations it can be a necessity (M4), a principal with ethics	Contingency management	Flexibility and avoidance



Key points extracted from the interview	Concept	Category
can Do the job with the least budget and the least fringe (M3), so since the state of education is always changing, the principal must be able to adapt to the situation (M14), ignoring mistakes As much as possible, because man is fallible, but let us also warn him to correct (M13), flexibility in behavior and ignoring inadvertent mistakes until it enters the system of lines (M9)		of self-centeredness
The principal must be flexible in the performance of his employees (M4), with a rule of 300 people can not be managed and must be a flexible principal (M16)	Flexible personality	
Morality that is both serious and should not be such that the personality of people is questioned but at the same time not too strict (M5), flexibility in affairs and lack of unnecessary strictures that sometimes the same strictness باعث causes boredom and dissatisfaction of people because our young generation is different from us (M3), lack of one-dimensional view and lack of fairness (M5), a principal with professional ethics in implementing some of the rules and regulations of flexibility It has and does not deal very dryly (M10), intertwining labor laws and regulations with human issues (M12), if I can do something so that our laws and regulations are not harmed, I will try to finish the work of my colleague (M8).	Avoid unnecessary strictures	

5. Justice-oriented ethics: Justice-oriented principals of high schools in Birjand in ethics is the distribution of property and interviews. Table 8 shows the evidence for the possessions, trophies, honors and privileges analysis of interviews and the concepts and according to the merits of individuals (Jacks, categories related to the dimension of justice-oriented ethics. 1994). The justice-oriented ethic consists of two categories, which were stated by the

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**Table 8. School principals' perceptions of justice-oriented ethics**

Key points extracted from the interview	Concept	Category
I have always tried to treat all people the same, and where different people are to be treated differently, I explained the reasons for my behavior to them and convinced them (M7), to observe justice between Individuals and avoidance of discrimination (M2), if the principal is fair, will meet the demands and expectations of the people (M15), the ethical principal in the transfer of posts acts according to the rules and not the relationship (M8), I, a professional ethic principal, never play a party in the division of tasks in his collection (M6).	Avoiding discrimination	Observance of justice and fairness
There is no educational justice In all areas where this concern arises for the principal (M7), establishing educational justice and having the same view of all people (M4), the views are not the same in my opinion, they must observe fairness. They look at special schools one-dimensionally, so they have more facilities, more staff, they have to be better. If everyone has improved by one year compared to the previous year, he has done that art himself (M5).	Educational Justice	
Have a psychological character and can subdue the audience and know what the audience needs (M1), the principal who can create an effective educational environment in his workplace said he has professional ethics (M10), the principal must believe To have moral and educational issues as well as its demands and regular studies in this field (M9)	Having an interdisciplinary perspective	Recognizing the abilities and spirits of people
The ethical principal tries to recognize the capacities of people first and assign responsibilities to them as much as possible (M11), according to the knowledge I have of my audience, I try not to treat everyone the same and with any I deal with a person who fits his personality and I try to know the spirits of people (M3), Selecting people who are outstanding in every way for more important positions (M16), the principal should be well acquainted with the personality traits of the people and should consider this in the transfer of positions (M4), pay attention to the characteristics Personality traits in my opinion are very important for the management profession (M10), the position of people in school should be commensurate with their position and position, so it's up to the principal to be able to correctly identify the capacities of people (M8)	Recognition of capacities	

**Discussion and conclusion**

Each person's actions depend on his or her beliefs and perceptions. If we want ethical behavior and decisions to occur among school principals, we first need to gain a thorough

understanding of their perceptions of professional ethics.

This research was conducted with a mixed approach in two stages, quantitative and qualitative. The results of the quantitative stage

of the research showed that the status of professional ethics of school principals from the perspective of their teachers is generally desirable. Also, in all five dimensions of professional ethics (benefit-oriented ethics, person-centered ethics, duty-oriented ethics, justice-oriented ethics and rights-oriented ethics) principals have a favorable situation. There is no significant difference between male and female principals in other aspects except justice-oriented ethics and observance of professional ethics in first and second grade high school principals is not significantly different. Also, the degree of observance of professional ethics by each of the principals was determined and through this, key informants for the second phase of the research were identified. In the qualitative section, 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals.

In the qualitative stage of the research and in order to identify principals perceptions of professional ethics, the results of data from interviews with 16 principals with the highest and lowest scores showed that school principals' perceptions of professional ethics can be classified into five dimensions: Task-oriented ethics, person-centered ethics, utility-based ethics, justice-oriented ethics and rights-based ethics, each of which includes several categories.

Task-oriented ethics consists of seven categories: patience and perseverance, honesty and truthfulness, piety, management based on values, role modeling, having discipline, belonging to work. In the conscientious system founded by Kant instead of utilitarianism, the good and bad of an action are not only based on its results, but also on the characteristics of the action itself or the motive for doing it

(Ledbetter, 2005). Many of principals have acknowledged that given the current state of education and the weakness of motivational mechanisms, they believe that religious beliefs and spiritual attitudes are the only factors that enable individuals to perform well morally. The results of Khayat Moghadam & Tabatabai Nasab (2017) research also showed that in comparison with the components of principals' professional ethics, the factor of spirituality in principals has a higher rank than other indicators. According to Sergiovanni, educational organizations are institutions that consider themselves responsible and accountable, so their leadership must have piety, commitment, honesty and integrity, all of which are rooted in the ethics and core value of educational administration (Mirkamali, 2011). Gharamaleki (2010) also believes that principals are value-oriented based on a conscientious ethic approach and always observe religious values in their job. On the other hand, a principal who is very enthusiastic about work has a high level of motivation for his job and is more likely to resist when faced with job difficulties (Mousavi, Vashni, Heydari, Mohammadi, Soleimani, & Qaisarzadeh, 2017a). Birjand high school principals are highly motivated to do management at work and believe that it is the interest and attachment to the profession itself that motivates them more than financial incentives or anything else. In fact, this spontaneity and duty-orientation obliges principals to perform professionally and creates or strengthens a sense of responsibility. Adherence to general principles and rules, principles and moral values and goals of education is one of the symptoms of task-oriented ethics (Bahagir, 2012). Also,

Mirkamali (2004) considered the effect of perceptions and values of individuals and personality traits on the ethical behaviors of principals as important, which is in line with most of the identified categories of the present study in the dimension of task-oriented ethics.

Person-centered ethics consists of five categories. Work conscience, humility and modesty, a spirit of responsibility and commitment at work, informal relationships and self-esteem are among the behavioral characteristics of principals based on an individual-centered ethical approach. This ethical approach emphasizes the ethical value of the individual. Every individual has rights that must be respected in all circumstances. Individualists emphasize the goals and aspirations of individuals. And they argue that the interests of the individual should come first. These results are consistent with the results of Shalbaf (2010) who showed that professional ethics is directly related to organizational responsibility and commitment, so that professional ethics is known as a kind of professional responsibility. Amiri, Hemmati, & Mobini (2011) have also stated that this concept refers to the fact that in a profession, a person performs his or her responsibility based on a sense of inner commitment and obligation and not on external obligation. Fallahi (2016) in his research considers having a work conscience as one of the principles and standards of professional ethics of principals.

Benefit-oriented ethics consists of three categories: Providing the context for people to progress, satisfying people and maintaining their respect in different situations and creating confidentiality and trust. Benefit-oriented ethics is a school that believes that the right thing to do is to bring more good and profits to

the world (Rajabi, 2014). The utilitarian system, in the final analysis, emphasizes the desirability of the verb in terms of its effects and role, that is, it ultimately establishes good and bad not according to the intentions of individuals but according to its result and effects (Gharamaleki, 2015). According to this strategy, principals try to consider the satisfaction of people in their organization as much as possible. In their decisions, they prioritize the interests of students and teachers and seek their maximum satisfaction. Because they believe that if people are satisfied with their job, they will have the necessary motivation and desire to stay in it and will try to be effective in it. Baghi (2017) in an Islamic approach to the professional ethics of educational administrators, showed service leadership in his model of professional ethics, which is in line with the dimension of utility ethics in the present study. Mousavi, Vashni, Heydari, Mohammadi, Soleimani, & Qaisarzadeh (2017a) also considered the attention to the mutual benefit of teachers when making decisions as one of the success factors of principals with professional ethics.

Rights-based ethics consists of three categories: criticism, participation, and flexibility. The ethical rights approach emphasizes that human beings have freedoms and rights that cannot be taken away by individual decision. Therefore, a decision that is ethically correct best protects the rights of those affected. Based on this view, the school principal provides the right and opportunity for others to comment, thus trying to listen to their problems, as well as having the necessary flexibility in their organization. In this regard, Hoseini (2012) believes that direct and accurate monitoring of the work and behavior

of principals by others and following their affairs with a positive outlook is necessary to help them if they make a mistake and this is one of the most important factors that establish and stabilize professional ethics. Gharamaleki, 2010 states in this regard that ethical principals ask parents, staff, students and teachers to monitor and question him because that is how the principal remains honest. Also, Bahagir (2012) endorsed giving subordinates the right to criticize and evaluate fair performance.

The last dimension of professional ethics is justice-oriented ethics, which consists of two categories: observing justice and fairness and recognizing the abilities and talents of individuals. According to this approach, the school principal treats people in similar situations the same in his decisions. One of the dimensions of justice in management is the equal view of the rights of all people. The principal should be fair enough not to prefer relatives and fellow citizens to each other in his subset, not to multiply the positive performance of insiders, and not to be indifferent to the performance of others. Also, one of the prominent aspects of justice-oriented is recognizing the capacities of individuals and paying attention to the special characteristics of individuals. The results of research by Shabani Mashkul, Saki, & Assare (2016) also showed that the existence of a fair and just moral environment in the school will increase the improvement of school performance. Bahagir (2012) also concluded in his research that the observance of justice-oriented professional ethics by principals increases organizational commitment in teachers. The results of Davoodi, Milad, Shayan (2019) research also showed that the ethical values of the organization affect

procedural justice and distributive justice. Improving organizational justice increases organizational commitment and increasing organizational commitment promotes employee ethical behavior.

In general, the results of this study, especially in the qualitative part, indicated that although some high school principals in Birjand were not fully acquainted with professional ethics, but they expressed points that are almost the same principles of professional ethics. Therefore, on the one hand, according to the analysis, it is understood that principals who scored higher in professional ethics in the quantitative stage of research, in the qualitative stage, especially in the dimension of task-oriented ethics, they had a better understanding of it. On the other hand, according to the interviews conducted with low-level principals in the field of professional ethics, it became clear that one of the main reasons for non-observance of professional ethics by these principals is their lack of knowledge and awareness about this issue. Accordingly, the first step in observing the rules of professional ethics is to get acquainted with these rules, to understand and believe in them. Also, studies have shown that this lack of knowledge and the consequent lack of professional ethics by some principals is due to this fact that there are no standard principles for decision-making in schools. Secondly, there is no special training for them in this field, either in the beginning or during the service, to inform the principals about the principles of professional ethics. If there is a discussion of professional ethics in schools, it only means individual ethics and principal's act on their own opinions in schools. Therefore, the important issue here is the lack of sufficient

knowledge of school principals about professional ethics and the lack of support from officials and the structure of the educational system on this issue.

Therefore, the subject of professional ethics of principals in schools needs the support and provision of many conditions and facilities by the authorities in this area. Based on the results of this study, it is suggested that the education organization take action on professional ethics during their human resource development and empowerment programs for school principals. Because a principal encounters issues related to these principles several times during the day. Also, in the field of professional ethics in educational administration, in order to explain and analyze the ethical problems of school principals, individual, organizational and environmental factors should not be neglected. Neglecting these factors in analyzing and explaining the causes of ethical dilemma leads us to surrender and unrealism. Future researchers are also encouraged to study the impact of each of these important factors on professional ethics in schools. It is also suggested that in future research, deterrents and facilitators of professional ethics be identified and analyzed. Also, future researchers can develop a framework for professional ethics for school principals. Based on this framework it is possible to provide the ground for correct perception and ethical practice for principals in schools.

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#### **Ethical considerations**

During the implementation of this research and the preparation of the article, all national laws and principles of professional ethics related to the subject of research, including the rights of statistical community, organizations and institutions, as well as authors and writers have been observed. Adherence to the principles of research ethics in the present study was observed and consent forms were consciously completed by all statistical community.

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#### **Conflict of interest**

According to the authors of the present article, there was no conflict of interest. This article has not been previously published in any journal, whether domestic or foreign, and has been sent to the School Administration Quarterly for review and publication only.

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