The key success factors influencing teacher ethics for higher education institutions in minority areas of Sichuan province

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Abstract: To explore in-depth factors affecting teacher ethics for higher education institutions in ethnic areas of Sichuan and to improve the level of teacher ethics and to provide a talent base for the high-quality development of higher education. Teacher ethics for higher education institutions is a synthesis of ethical concepts, ethical qualities, and behavioral norms that teachers should follow in the course of their professional work. This study constructed a structural equation model of teacher ethics and further analyzed the influence of ethical climate, professional identity, and psychological contract on teacher ethics. This study used SPSS and AMOS software to process and analyze 400 questionnaire data. Ethical climate, professional identity, and psychological contract all have a significant positive effect on teacher ethics. Ethical climate and psychological contract both have a significant positive effect on professional identity. Professional identity plays a significant mediating effect between ethical climate and teacher ethics, psychological contract and teacher ethics. This study has constructed the index system of the influencing factors of teacher ethics to understand the influencing mechanism of teacher ethics of higher education institutions in the ethnic areas of Sichuan. It enriches the research results in the field of teacher ethics in higher education institutions.

1. Introduction

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has attached great importance to the construction of teacher ethics. Many advanced models have emerged in the field of higher education, and the construction of teacher ethics has continuously achieved new results. At the same time, violations of teacher ethics and discipline have occurred from time to time. Since April 2019, MOE has begun to publicly expose typical cases of violation of the ten guidelines for teachers' professional conduct; as of August 2023, 13 batches with a total of nearly 93 cases have been exposed, involving inappropriate relationships with students, academic misconduct, paid tutorials, receiving gifts and gratuities in violation of the law, and corporal punishment and even abuse of students. There were 35 cases of university teachers violating teacher ethics, accounting for 37.6 percent of the 93 cases. The ethical problems of higher education teachers need to be paid attention to, and teacher ethics should be unremitting.

Being in the organizational field, job field and psychological field, individual teachers are subconsciously bound by the ethical climate of the institution, always facing the interrogation of professional identity, and influenced by the fulfillment of institution responsibilities in the psychological contract. The clarification of the mechanisms of ethical climate, professional identity, and psychological contract in the process of teacher ethics formation is conducive to individual teachers resolving the conflict between the inner self and the outer norms and effectively avoiding ethical risks. Therefore, this study stands from the perspective of individual teachers to explore in depth the factors affecting teacher

ethics for higher education institutions in ethnic areas of Sichuan. The main purpose is to improve the level of teacher ethics and to provide a talent base for the high-quality development of higher education.

2. Literature Review

Teacher ethics for higher education institutions is a synthesis of ethical concepts, ethical qualities, and behavioral norms that teachers should follow in the course of their professional work. It is an important criterion for regulating the mutual relations between teachers, teachers and their students, teachers and their professions, teachers and the country, and so on. This paper searches the relevant literature to find out the factors affecting teacher ethics in higher education institutions.

Falkenberg and Herremans (1995) pointed out that the organizational ethical climate sometimes has a greater and wider impact than formal ethical norms in guiding the ethical behavior of organizations and individuals. Schweitzer and Douma (2004) pointed out that there is a significant correlation between the ethical climate of the organization and the employees' ethical behavior. Ethical climate has a guiding role and can significantly influence the ethical behavior of organizational members. Hong et al. (2022) argued that creating a good ethical climate in kindergartens can help to improve teachers' professional ethical literacy and reduce ethical misconduct among teachers. Zhang et al. (2017) pointed out that a self-interested ethical climate can stimulate individuals' selfishness, inducing them to satisfy their self-interest through unethical means and inducing self-interested unethical behaviors.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) suggests that individuals will display compliant attitudes and behaviors to maintain a sense of social identity and develop a higher level of work ethic (Zhu & Guo,2021). Yu et al. (2011), starting from Social Identity Theory, concluded that teachers with high professional identity tend to try to reduce the difference between their positive characteristics and the teacher group to maintain and improve their sense of identity and that teachers with a high degree of professional identity naturally love their profession and actively focus on their work without any external forces. Liu (2023) analyzed the relationship between professional identity and teacher ethics and concluded that professional identity has a more significant positive influence on teacher ethics.

Starting from Social Exchange Theory (SET), teachers will measure the fulfilment of the psychological contract by the institutions to determine what they give, which will impact teacher ethics. The conclusion and violation of the psychological contract largely affects the teacher's speech and behavior, and thus affects the teacher's professional ethical character (Morrison, 1997). If teachers and institutions are in a discordant state of mutual distrust and dissatisfaction, it is not only detrimental to the growth of the construction of teacher ethics but also leads to the danger of the slippage of teacher ethics (Jin & Yang, 2014). Wang et al (2022). constructed a theoretical model of institution-teacher contract, teacher professional psychological contract, student-teacher contract and teacher ethics, and found that the degree of satisfaction of the institution-teacher contract significantly affects the level of professional ethics of teachers.

Social Context Theory (SCT) suggests that individual's professional identity is influenced by situational factors. According to Zhang (2006), the teacher's implicitly acquired understanding, of what surrounds the individual and what others expect of the individual greatly influences his identification with the teacher. According to Qiao (2023), the organizational climate of kindergartens was significantly and positively related to and predictive of teachers' professional identity. Guan (2022) et al. concluded that adopting an organizational ethical climate management model could enhance nurses' professional identity and solidarity, improve mental health, and enhance job satisfaction.

Feng et al. (2023) pointed out that employees may be more satisfied and committed if they perceive that their psychological contract is being met (e.g., they receive the promised learning opportunities, fair treatment, and support). This positive emotional connection can enhance their willingness to continue in the profession and their professional identity behavior (Bellini et al, 2022). In analyzing the impact of the psychological contract of early childhood teachers on teacher competence, Hu et al. (2024) found that all three sub-dimensions of the psychological contract (normative, interpersonal, and developmental responsibilities) significantly and positively predicted professional identity. According to Stuer (2019), organizational psychology suggests that the fulfillment of psychological needs directly affects one's

professional identity. Odhiambo (2018) suggested that the level of psychological contract affects work attitude, job satisfaction, occupational well-being, and professional identity.

There was a significant effect of ethical climate and psychological contract on professional identity and a significant effect of professional identity on teacher ethics, which suggests a possible mediating role of professional identity in the effect of ethical climate and psychological contract on teacher ethics. Feng (2023) argued that the professional identity of emergency department nurses mediates the relationship between the organizational climate of care and hidden absenteeism. Wang (2022), using social workers as an example, found that professional identity partially mediates the relationship between servant leadership and dedication, whereas servant leadership is part of the ethical climate, dedication is part of teacher ethics. Zhou et al. (2023) found that professional identity partially mediated the effect between professional benefit and work engagement, and the contribution of the mediating effect to the total effect was 54.56%.

3. Research Hypotheses

According to the content of the literature review, the key success factors influencing teacher ethics include ethical climate, professional identity, and psychological contract. There was a significant predictive, mediating effect relationship between the factors. Based on the literature, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H_1: Ethical climate has a significant positive effect on teacher ethics.

H_2: Professional identity has a significant positive effect on teacher ethics.

H_3: Psychological contract has a significant positive effect on teacher ethics.

H_4: Ethical climate has a significant positive effect on professional identity.

H_5: Psychological contract has a significant positive effect on professional identity.

H_6: Professional identity plays a significant mediating effect between ethical climate and teacher ethics.

H_7: Professional identity plays a significant mediating effect between psychological contract and teacher ethics.

4. Research Methodology

In this study, the initial questionnaire was designed concerning more mature measurement questionnaires. After item analysis and Item-Objective Consistency Index (IOC) test, a formal "Teacher Ethics Influencing Factors Questionnaire" was finally formed. A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed, and 400 valid questionnaires were recovered. The questionnaire data was sorted and analyzed, and the structural equation models of ethical climate, professional identity, psychological contract, and teacher ethics were constructed using AMOS software. And after confirmatory factor analysis, the structural equation models of ethical climate, professional identity, psychological contract, and teacher ethics were finally constructed. Path analysis was used to explore the correlation between each factor.

5. Structural equation model

The structural equation model was constructed in conjunction with the previous research hypotheses, and correlation lines between the independent variables were plotted. Substituting the data into AMOS yielded the following results.
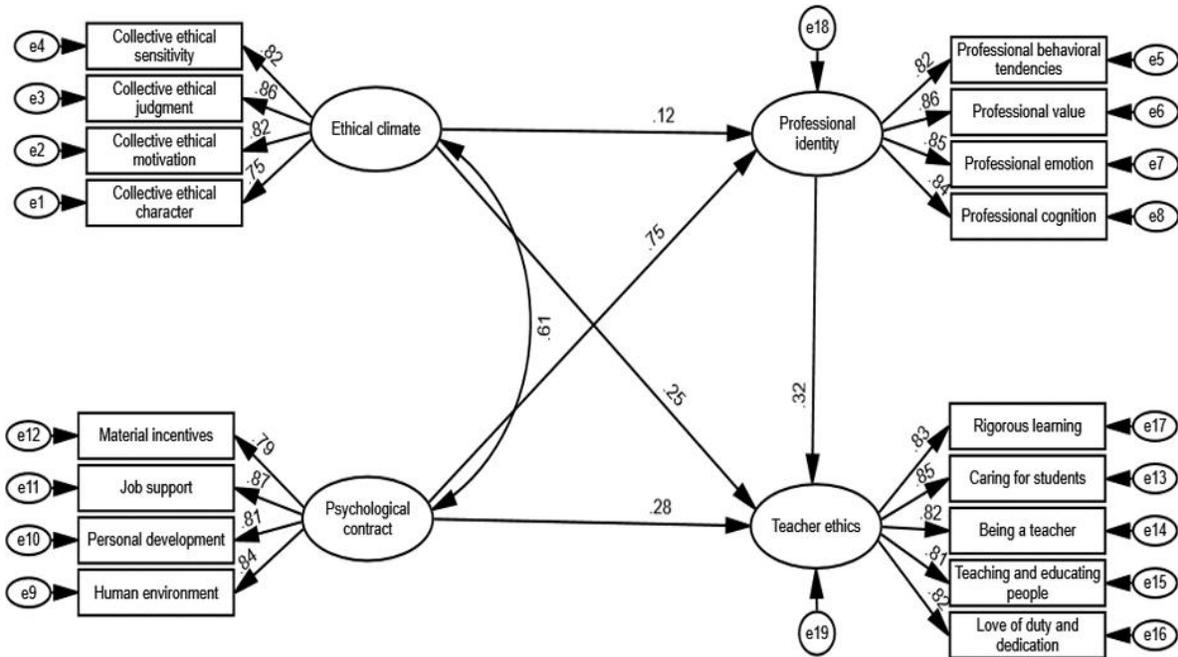
Figure 1.
Structural equation model.

Table 1.
Fit index of structural equation model.

Type	Reference indices	Reference value	Statistical value	Conclusion
Absolute fit indices	χ^2/df	<3	2.746	Qualified
	GFI	>0.9	0.918	Qualified
	RMSEA	<0.10	0.066	Qualified
	RMR	<0.05	0.036	Qualified
	SRMR	<0.1	0.031	Qualified
Incremental fit indices	CFI	>0.9	0.961	Qualified
	TLI	>0.9	0.953	Qualified
	IFI	>0.9	0.961	Qualified
	NFI	>0.9	0.941	Qualified
Parsimonious fit Indices	AGFI	>0.8	0.888	Qualified
	PGFI	>0.5	0.678	Qualified
	PNFI	>0.5	0.782	Qualified
	PCFI	>0.5	0.799	Qualified

As shown in the above table, the absolute fit indices meet the criteria, indicating that the hypothetical model can fit the actual data well. The incremental fit indices meet the criterion, indicating that the model performs much better than the independent model and the benchmark model after considering the effect of sample size. The parsimonious fit Indices meet the criterion, which indicates that the model achieves a high degree of parsimony and avoids over-parameterization while achieving a high degree of fit. Overall, the structural equation model constructed in this study reaches a high level in terms of explanatory power and parsimony, and it can effectively reveal the influence of three key factors, namely, ethical climate, professional identity, and psychological contract, on teacher ethics and the magnitude of their effects.

Table 2.
Path coefficients between variables.

Variable X	Influence relations	Variable Y	Std path coefficients	Unstd path coefficients	S.E.	C.R.	p
Psychological contract	→	Professional identity	0.750	0.758	0.060	12.577	***
ethical climate	→	Professional identity	0.124	0.139	0.056	2.507	0.012*
Psychological contract	→	Teacher ethics	0.278	0.276	0.086	3.214	0.001**
Ethical climate	→	Teacher ethics	0.250	0.276	0.060	4.594	***
Professional identity	→	Teacher ethics	0.324	0.319	0.082	3.873	***

Note: "→"indicates an influence relationship. "***" indicates significant at the 0.001 level. "**" indicates significant at the 0.01 level. "*" indicates significant at the 0.05 level.

In the path analysis, the standardized path coefficients of psychological contract and ethical climate on professional identity were positive, with p-values less than 0.05, indicating that psychological contract and ethical climate have a significant positive effect on professional identity. Theoretical hypotheses H5 and H4 are valid. In the path analysis of the psychological contract, ethical climate, and professional identity on teacher ethics, the standardized path coefficients are all positive with a p-value less than 0.01, indicating that psychological contract, ethical climate, and professional identity have a significant positive influence on teacher ethics. Theoretical hypotheses H3, H1, and H2 are valid.

6. Mediation Effect Test

In this study, the mediating effect of professional identity between ethical climate, psychological contract, and teacher ethics was examined using the Bootstrap method with a set number of 2,000 iterations. The method provides a 95% confidence interval estimate of the mediating effect, i.e., the mediating effect is not significant if the interval estimate contains 0, and is significant if the interval estimate does not contain 0. The results of the test are as follows.

Table 3.
Mediation effect test.

Variable	Effect	Bias-corrected 95%CI		Two tailed significance
		Lower	Upper	
ethical climate→professional identity→teacher ethics	0.081	0.014	0.191	0.016
psychological contract→professional identity→teacher ethics	0.090	0.036	0.176	0.010

Note: Estimating of 2000 bootstrap sample.

From the table above, the bias-corrected 95% CI for ethical climate to professional identity to teacher ethics ranges from 0.014 to 0.191, and the interval estimate does not contain 0, indicating that professional identity plays a significant mediating effect between ethical climate and teacher ethics. Theoretical hypothesis H6 is valid.

The interval of the bias-corrected 95% CI for psychological contract to professional identity to teacher ethics is 0.036 to 0.176, and the interval estimate does not contain 0, indicating that professional identity plays a significant role in mediating the effect between psychological contract and teacher ethics. Theoretical hypothesis H7 is valid.

7. Conclusion and Discussion

Ethical climate has a significant positive effect on teacher ethics. Professional identity has a significant positive effect on teacher ethics. The psychological contract has a significant positive effect

on teacher ethics. Ethical climate has a significant positive effect on professional identity. The psychological contract has a significant positive effect on professional identity. Professional identity plays a significant mediating effect between ethical climate and teacher ethics. Professional identity plays a significant mediating effect between psychological contract and teacher ethics.

In analyzing the key success factors influencing teacher ethics for higher education institutions in minority areas of Sichuan Province, it's essential to strengthen the construction of teacher ethics for higher education institutions and promote the high-quality development of higher education by focusing on four aspects: the creation of ethical climate, the enhancement of teachers' professional identity, the fulfillment of the psychological contract, and the enhancement of teacher training.

7.1. Creat A Favourable Ethical Climate

Higher education institutions first need to clarify which concepts and behaviours are advocated by the ethical climate. On this basis, it is necessary to establish and improve the rules and regulations on rewarding excellence and punishing inferiority in the ethical climate, as well as to make efforts to shape the school culture, collective values and other informal systems that are conducive to the creation of an ethical climate. In addition to the findings of the study, it was found that full-time teachers and educational administrators have limited perceptions of the ethical climate due to the nature of their work. In addition to creating an ethical climate, schools should also carefully design and carry out relevant ethical training so that teachers and educational administrators are fully aware of, and care for teachers when they face ethical dilemmas, and continue to improve their decision-making ability and confidence in dealing with ethical issues.

7.2. Enhance Teachers' Sense of Professional Identity

Create a good atmosphere of professional culture, guide teachers in career planning, and enhance the professional cognition of teachers. Vigorously promote the outstanding teachers' typical, and positively affirm the value and achievements of higher education teachers' group. Grasp the ideological dynamics of teachers in a timely manner, and help them solve the difficulties and problems they face. Protect the legitimate and reasonable rights and interests of teachers, constantly improve their working, learning and living conditions, and guide the formation of a strong sense of belonging to the profession, so that teachers identify themselves with their profession from the bottom of their hearts.

7.3. Fulfill Institution Responsibilities in Psychological Contract

An efficient communication mechanism is established to enable teachers and institutions to understand each other's responsibilities and obligations, adjust their respective concerns and management strategies in a timely manner, and maintain the dynamic optimization of the psychological contract between institutions and teachers. Institutions should actively fulfil the promises made to teachers during induction management and daily management regarding work, study, life, welfare, promotion, training and development. When institutions fails to fulfil its promises on time in a certain aspect, it should do a good job of explaining and crisis management in time to ensure that no psychological contract violation occurs.

7.4. Strengthen Teacher Training

The results of the study show that the higher the level of education, the higher the scores of higher education teachers on ethical climate, professional identity, psychological contract, teacher ethics and its dimensions. The difference between teachers with bachelor's degree or above and teachers with college degree or below is especially obvious, showing a significant 'fault' phenomenon in many dimensions. This puts forward new requirements for the pre-service education and in-service training of teachers. Higher education institutions should focus on the overall improvement of the academic level, introduce relevant policies and increase funding to encourage teachers to participate in a variety of forms of learning and training both inside and outside the institution to improve the comprehensive quality and education level.

8. Suggestions for Further Research

This study has constructed the index system of the influencing factors of teacher ethics, as well as the structural equation model of the influencing factors of teacher ethics constructed on this basis, which helps to understand the influencing mechanism of teacher ethics of higher education institutions in the ethnic areas of Sichuan. It enriches the research results in the field of teacher ethics in higher education institutions. At the same time, this study selects higher education teachers in ethnic areas of Sichuan Province as the research object, which cannot represent the overall situation of teachers in ethnic areas and has certain limitations. In the next step, the study will further enrich the sample composition andadd different influencing factors of teacher ethics to understand the basic situation of higher education institutions teachers more comprehensively and to dig into the mechanism of teacher ethics in a more detailed way through adding more explanatory variables.

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