



## Research article

## Secondary school teachers code of ethics in Ethiopia: implications for policy and practice

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the implementation level of teachers' code of ethics in secondary schools in Ethiopia. A descriptive survey research design with quantitative and qualitative approaches was employed. The study participants were 404 teachers, 289 students, 10 principals, and 5 district education office experts. Data was collected by means of questionnaires and interviews. The quantitative data was analyzed by using percentage, frequency, mean, standard deviation, and independent samples t-test and the qualitative data through thematic analysis technique. The findings indicated that teachers implemented the code of ethics regarding students, colleagues, and the teaching profession at a high level; however, their commitment was low to the parents and the community domain. The study also revealed that gender, age, and teaching experience affected the implementation level of teachers' code of ethics in the three dimensions. Based on the results, it is recommended that concerned bodies need to: pay due attention to ethics courses in the initial teacher training programs; design and implement different mechanisms that can increase teachers' intrinsic motivation and commitment to their code of ethics; frame a clear, detailed, and executable code of ethics, and institutionalize continuous community awareness program about teachers and the teaching profession as it will help them to maintain their interest in and commitment to their profession and thereby help them practice their code of ethics more effectively.

## 1. Introduction

Various professions have work ethics or ethical standards to maintain public trust and guide practitioners on how to execute their professional responsibilities. Studies emphasized that professional ethics is very essential in making the human relationship sacred, worthy, fruitful and productive (Jayamma and Sumangala, 2012). In the teaching profession, ethical issues are central to the career, and therefore, the appropriate practice of teacher code of ethics is compulsory and crucial to supporting all the learners (Purevjav et al., 2017). Most importantly, teachers are expected to adhere to their code of ethics as they have the mandate to transfer knowledge, skills, and values (Nabukenya, 2010; Sawhney, 2015). As a result of such expectations, the practice of ethics in the teaching profession has been drawing increasing attention by the vast majority of researchers over the last three decades (Campbell, 2008).

In Ethiopia, documental evidence indicates that the government pays due attention to the teaching profession, teachers, and their professional

code of ethics. The government puts a professional code of ethics in the policy as one of its most significant components (Ministry of Education, 1994) and stipulated that it will serve as a criterion in teacher recruitment, selection, professional development, and career progression (Ministry of Education, 2002; 2020). The government also designs different strategies not only to increase the knowledge and pedagogical skills but also to enhance the professional ethics of the teachers. The strategies include: ensuring favorable working conditions, implementing competence and performance-based career progression, providing adequate and continuous incentives and benefits, organizing a nationwide award ceremony for model teachers, and ensuring teacher professional development and support system. These approaches planned to result in: (a) improved living conditions for deserving teachers; (b) increased esteem of teachers and the teaching profession by the community; (c) attraction of competent students toward the teaching profession; (d) rewarding the deserving teachers and weeding out inept ones; (e) high-level of teacher satisfaction, motivation, competency, and

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commitment (MoE, 1994; 2002, 2020). This indicates that the Ethiopian government has in place a sound policy and strategy-wise emphasis on teachers' professional development in general and their code of ethics in particular. The government believes that ethically-minded teachers with good professional competency can minimize the gap between poor and good quality education by maximizing the benefits of learning for every child (Ministry of Education, 2002; 2010; 2015)

However, beyond the policy and strategy focuses, adequate information is not available on the status of the practice of teachers' code of ethics in Ethiopian schools. Of course, the Ministry of Education has indicated that teachers are not as committed to professional ethics as desired, and their effort to assist students is low (MoE, 2008 cited in Aweke et al., 2017). Other national pieces of evidence do not directly show the compliance level of teachers to their code of ethics other than a few hints to logically guess the issue. For example, a survey by the Ministry of Education and a study on Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) trainees indicate that teachers lack interest in their profession that their level of motivation is low and they waste much instructional time; and 70% of teachers want to leave teaching if given an option to take other jobs with a similar pay (Aweke, 2015; Koye, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2018; 2020). In addition, there are two recent studies related to teachers' codes: the first deals with professional development and code of ethics of higher education institution teachers (Mohammed, 2020) and the second is about primary and secondary school teachers' perception of code of ethics and the impact on their professionalism (Daniel and Sapo, 2020). However, these studies did not address the implementation level in the context our study is attempting to look at. Moreover, as far as the researchers' experience is concerned, continuous complains are heard from students, parents, the community, and educational experts that teachers do not perform their duties wilfully. The scant research gap coupled with unverified experiences triggered the researchers to conduct this study on the status of teachers' code of ethics in secondary schools of Amhara Region in Ethiopia. The research is thus designed to:

1. Examine the extent to which secondary school teachers implement their code of ethics in the specified three dimensions.
2. Determine whether a significant difference exists among teachers in implementing a code of ethics based on gender, age, level of qualifications, and teaching experience.

## 1.1. Literature review

### 1.1.1. Concept of teacher code of ethics

The term ethics derived from the Greek word 'Ethos' to mean custom and character, is a comprehensive concept that integrates theoretical and applied ethics. The theoretical aspect embraces normative, descriptive, and meta-ethics, while the applied part deals with professional ethics (Gülcan, 2015). Professional ethics in an everyday dialog is often linked with the code of ethics; nevertheless, the former is a much broader concept that comprises an entire range of behavior apart from the formally prescribed conduct listed in the form of the code of ethics (Trošelj and Ivković, 2016). In this paper, we used the teachers' code of ethics and their professional code of conduct interchangeably. There might be unwritten rules for appropriate conduct in any community (O'Neill and Bourke, 2010); however, in this study, teachers' code of ethics refers to those prescribed norms, values, principles, rules, regulations, and standards governing teachers' professional conduct within their profession in general and regarding students, colleagues, parents, and the community in particular (Affi, 2005; Ayeni, 2011; Gilman, 2005). Teachers' associations or the occupational regulatory body commonly prepare professional codes that a teacher accepts concerning relationships with all stakeholders (O'Neill and Bourke, 2010). Teachers' code of ethics also refers to morally correct, honorable, and acceptable

teacher conduct with several purposes under consideration (Nuland, 2009; Omisore and Adeleke, 2015).

### 1.2. Purpose of the teacher code of ethics

The code of ethics in the teaching profession has numerous interrelated purposes including but not limited to: 1) safeguarding students, colleagues, administrators, and other stakeholders of teachers from being exposed to undesirable behaviors and actions; 2) guiding teachers to focus on doing the right things in their professional effort; 3) increasing awareness of the public and the education community about the teaching profession; 4) ensuring that the prestige of the teaching profession and the codes of ethics are considered as important hallmark of the profession; 5) creating and maintaining professional standards through the explicit statement of the core purposes, vital ethical principles, the kinds of conduct required, and the types of qualities expected of people who belong to this profession and; 6) making provisions for legal or professional regulations that requires teachers to adhere to the code and use the provisions for disciplinary purposes in cases of misconduct (Gilman, 2005; Maxwell, 2017; The Teaching Council, 2016). Generally, teachers' code of ethics serves as a means to reinforce public trust in the profession and guide teachers to be 'good' in their professional conduct (Ida, 2017; Maxwell, 2017; Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012; O'Neill and Bourke, 2010).

### 1.3. The status of teachers' code of ethics

The existing literature indicates mixed results about the status of teachers' code of ethics concerning the given attention as a significant element and the actual level of practice. Research evidence shows that the teachers' code of ethics is a crucial element (Purevjav et al., 2017), which received due attention from several researchers over the last 30 years (Campbell, 2008). However, some instances indicate that the teaching codes have not been given an appropriate level of focus compared with other careers. For example, work on professional ethics in education for teachers began in the 1980s, and lagged behind two decades compared to a serious discussion of professional ethics for medical, law, and business schools in the 1960s. Later on, though ethics courses and codes were developed for teachers based on other professions, they failed to gain traction in teacher education programs. A recent review confirms that only 9% of teacher education programs offer ethics courses as program requirements or electives, compared to 71% for business programs, 60% for nursing, and 51% for social work programs from studies which used a sample of 156 colleges and universities (Glanzer and Ream, 2007). This indicates that educational programs are given less attention in terms of providing ethics courses when compared with other professional schools. Likewise, the implementation of teachers' code of conduct globally indicates various levels of practice. For example, some studies show that primary and secondary school teachers implemented their code of ethics concerning students, parents, and the community at medium and high-levels (Al-hothali, 2018; Mabagala et al., 2012; Mwesiga and Philipkireti, 2018; Ou, 2014). In contrast, other findings reveal the poor practice of code of ethics by teachers who fail to report to duty for no reason, are drunk while on duty, and have sexual relationships with their clients (Helterbran, 2008; Nuland, 2009; Sawhney, 2015). Similarly, Mkumbo (2012) confirmed that Tanzanian secondary school teachers' commitment to the teaching profession and the practice of their code of ethics are devastatingly low. Other researchers also in Tanzania, showed high-level and most prevalent forms of professional ethics malpractice such as absenteeism, abusive and violent teacher behavior, and sexual harassment in secondary schools (Mfaume and Bilinga, 2017). All such poor practices of code of ethics by teachers are attributed to many causative factors that include low salaries and remuneration, poor living and working conditions, influence of science

and technology, lack of professional knowledge, poor government and community attitudes for teachers, low level of self-control, disloyalty to the profession, lack of knowledge of the code of ethics, lack of interest in the teaching profession and infrequent supervision and inspections of schools (Al-hothali, 2018; Mfaume and Bilinga, 2017; Mkumbo, 2012).

#### 1.4. Components/dimensions of the teachers' code of ethics

The dimensions used to measure teachers' code of ethics vary across countries. For example, in Ireland, the teachers' code of ethics emphasizes six aspects/dimensions: professional values and relationships, integrity, conduct, practice, professional development, collegiality, and collaboration (TTC, 2016). In Malta, the code insists that teachers maintain trust in the teaching profession, have professional relationships with students, respect the uniqueness and diversity of students, work collaboratively with colleagues and parents, act honestly and with integrity, and update their professional knowledge and practice (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012). Similarly, researchers provide different focuses and examine many aspects of teachers' code of ethics. For instance, Ozbek (2007) looked at the teachers' code from three domains: (1) professionalism, (2) responsibility, and (3) honesty; whereas, Mwesiga and Philipkireti (2018) examined the teachers' code of ethics in terms of the commitment to the teaching profession, students and excellent achievement. Thoker (2017) investigated the practices of teachers' code in the dimensions of honesty and integrity, transparency and confidentiality, respect toward students and society, and high quality of teaching. Ou (2014) explored the compliance level of teachers to their codes in treating the aspects of students, parents, and colleagues with respect, establishing good rapport with their schools and the public at large. Such scenarios confirm that except for some overlaps, examination and conceptualization of teachers' code of ethics are subject to different classifications of domains.

## 2. Conceptual framework

Considering the review result, our study tried to observe the practice of secondary school teachers' code of ethics with three dimensions (see Figure 1 on the left side) and whether independent variables such as gender, age, teaching experience, and level of qualifications have an influence on the practice or not (see Figure 1, on the right side).

The National Council for Teacher Education in India has developed a code of professional ethics guidelines that mainly focuses on teachers' obligations toward students, parents and community, the teaching

profession, and colleagues (Sawhney, 2015). Our conceptual framework generally coincides with the Indian teachers' guidelines to their code of conduct though it varies slightly in the contents stipulated under each ethical dimension. Content-wise, we framed our conceptual framework on the ideas of Oliva (1997) and Vashit (2005), who incorporate three domains. The teachers' responsibility to the students' dimension entails giving due consideration to the student's welfare; personal development, fostering their honesty, integrity, and considerate behavior; acting with justice; recognizing individual differences and acknowledging diversity; protecting students from conditions harmful to learning or health and safety, and refrain from exposing the student to embarrassment by compromising professional relationships with them for personal advantage. Teachers' duty to colleagues and the teaching profession should incorporate ethical codes that focus on the following: respecting the professional standing and opinions of colleagues; helping junior colleagues and those in training in all possible ways; accepting the authority of senior professionals while retaining the right to express professional opinions; recognizing an obligation to advance the professional growth; and distinguishing the requirement to improve the effectiveness as a teacher. The responsibility of teachers regarding the parents and community encompasses teachers' commitment to consult with parents on the welfare and academic progress of students, encourage parents to actively participate, and act within the community in a manner that enhances the prestige of the teaching profession. In addition to this, previous studies indicate that independent variables such as gender, age, experience, and educational levels influence the practice of teachers' code of ethics (Mabagala et al., 2012; Mwesiga & Philipkireti, 2018; Ou, 2014; Ozbek, 2007; Thoker, 2017).

## 3. Methods and materials

### 3.1. Research design

The researchers used a descriptive survey design with quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The descriptive design helps to understand existing facts, behavior, and situations of a given phenomenon and the practice of events in larger entities (Gray, 2004; Leary, 2001; Kothari, 2004). The quantitative and qualitative approaches are also vital to a condensed and comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2009; 2012; McKim, 2015); bring out the best of both approaches by eliminating the weakness of a single approach (Creswell, 2009; Dornyei, 2007) and triangulate the quantitative and qualitative data sets (Fernandez and Azorin, 2011).

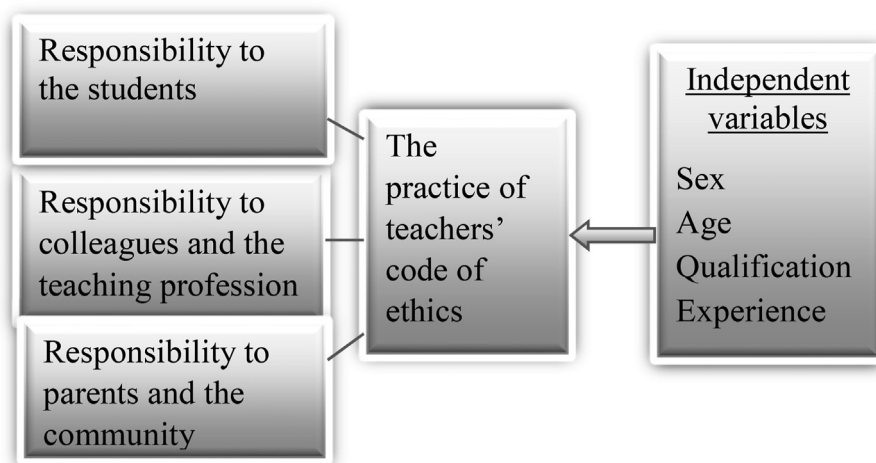


Figure1. Conceptual framework (Authors, 2022)

### 3.2. Population, sample, and sampling techniques

The target population of this study was public secondary school teachers, students, principals, and district education experts who worked in four randomly selected zones of Amhara regional state, Ethiopia, namely: Central, North, West, and South Gondar Zones. The researchers selected 22 sample schools from 127 secondary schools proportionally using a simple random sampling technique. We employed a stratified random sampling technique to select 421 and 300 sample teachers and students respectively by determining the sample size using Yamane's (1967) formula;  $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$  = where n = sample size, N= Population, e = sample error by taking a 95% confidence interval. The researchers also selected 10 principals and five district education experts through a convenience sampling technique from the 22 secondary schools and ten district education offices respectively. As a result, 421 (324 male and 97 female) teachers and 300 (193 male and 107 female) students participated in the study (see Tables 1 and 2).

### 3.3. Data collection tools

The researchers used two data collection instruments to collect quantitative and qualitative data from the participants. For the quantitative data collection, the researchers used 17 closed-ended and one open-ended questionnaire items to measure the extent of implementation of teachers' code of ethics under three dimensions, teachers' code of ethics about (students = 8, colleagues and the teaching profession = 5, and parents and the community = 4 items). The first eight items related to students' domains were filled both by teachers and students while items in the other two aspects were administered only to teachers. To ensure the quality of the items, we developed the questionnaire through six steps: (1) identifying first thoughts from literature, (2) formulating a rough draft of the questionnaire, (3) testing its face validity, (4) pre-testing (5) pilot testing and (6) a final adoption of the questionnaire (Creswell, 2012). To avoid communication barriers, we translated the items into Amharic, the native language of the participants, and piloted them with 40 non-sampled teachers, resulting in a Cronbach Alpha of  $\alpha = 0.89$ , which indicates high internal consistency between items (Cohen et al., 2007; Field, 2009). We distributed the questionnaires to 421 teachers and 300 students, 404 (95.9%) questionnaires from the teachers, and 289 (96.3%) of them by the students were completed and used for the data analysis (see Tables 1 and 2). We also employed a semi-structured interview checklist to guide interviews with 10 principals and five district education office experts, as interviews are the most widely used data collection method in qualitative and/or mixed methods research (Creswell, 2007; 2012; Merriam, 2009), to uncover views, opinions, and expectations regarding the issues that the questionnaire could not address (Cohen et al., 2007). The semi-structured interview enabled us to elicit the interviewees' opinions on the topic of interest

**Table 1.** Demographic data of teacher participants (N = 404).

variables	category	freq.	%	min	max	mean	SD
Gender	Male	314	77.7%				
	Female	90	22.3%				
Educational level	First-degree	315	78.0%				
	Second-degree	89	22.0%				
Age	<=30 years old	143	35.4%	21	59	34.08	6.674
	>= 31 years old	261	64.6%				
Teaching experience	<= 10 years	171	42.3%	1	40	12.19	6.252
	>= 11 years	233	57.7%				

**Table 2.** Demographic data of student participants (N = 289).

variables	category	freq.	%	min	max	mean	SD
Gender	Male	188	65.1%				
	Female	101	34.9%				
Age	<=14 years old	1	0.3%	14	25	18.22	1.618
	15–18 years old	184	63.7%				
	>=19 years old	104	36.0%				
Grade Level	Grade 9th	44	15.2%				
	Grade 10th	104	36.0%				
	Grade 11th	81	28.0%				
	Grade 12th	60	20.8%				

instead of prompting them to make preconceived choices (Merriam, 2009).

### 3.4. Data analysis techniques

The researchers analyzed the quantitative data using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and independent sample t-test to measure the implementation level and determine if there are significant differences among teachers in practicing their code of ethics based on gender, age, educational level, and teaching experience in the three dimensions. We analyzed the qualitative data using the thematic analysis technique with verbal narration after recording and coding the data. We formatted the questionnaire items with five-point Likert scales: 1 = very low, 2 = low 3 = medium, 4 = high, and 5 = very high. We interpreted the data analysis by comparing the actual mean with the expected mean, which is 3.00 that denotes a medium implementation level of code of ethics. If the calculated mean was below the expected one ( $M < 3.00$ ), we inferred it as a low-level practice of teachers' code of ethics; however, if it is above the expected mean ( $M > 3.00$ ), we considered it as a high-level implementation of the teachers' code of ethics. Besides, since mean values may represent crude data, we used frequency counts and percentage scores side-by-side to avoid the problem.

### 3.5. Ethical consideration

The researchers considered ethical issues as suggested by (Creswell, 2007). We informed the participants about the purpose of the study and made sure that their participation was voluntary during data collection. We also told them the data is used only for research purposes. To keep anonymity, we used codes (numbers) for participants' direct quotes throughout the data analysis.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Implementation level of teachers' professional code of ethics

We examined the practice of teachers' professional code of ethics under the specified three dimensions of code of ethics (see Figure 1 and Tables 3, 4, and 5).

#### 4.1.1. Teachers' code of ethics for students

In this subsection, we examined the compliance level of teachers' responsibility to their students. We analyzed the quantitative data using frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation (See annexes 3 & 4 for frequency and percentage scores) and the qualitative data through thematic analysis.

**Table 3.** The practice of teachers' code of ethics about students' dimension.

Items	Teachers (404)		Students (N = 289)	
	M	SD	M	SD
I Give primary consideration to the students well being	3.74	1.038	3.45	1.216
I assist the students in developing his/her ability to work	3.71	.975	3.40	1.224
I recognize that each child differs in the promotion of their education	3.48	1.141	3.21	1.291
I do not use professional relationships with students for private advantage	3.97	1.311	4.02	1.298
I provide learning equally to each student	3.68	1.220	4.43	.977
I assist the students in developing his/her whole personality	3.70	.995	3.51	1.291
I treat all my students impartially	3.79	1.234	3.66	1.413
I protect the students from conditions harmful to learning, health & safety	3.42	1.257	3.30	1.326
<b>Average mean</b>	<b>3.69</b>	<b>1.146</b>	<b>3.62</b>	<b>1.254</b>

Table 3 indicates the mean scores for all items are above the expected mean ( $M > 3.00$ ) that confirm secondary school teachers had a higher compliance level to their code of ethics regarding the students. The overall average frequency/percentage values, 251 (62.1%) of teachers and 179 (62%) of the students reveal that the code of ethics related to students practiced at a higher -level. The average mean scores by teachers ( $M = 3.69$ ;  $SD = 1.146$ ) and students ( $M = 3.62$ ;  $SD = 1.254$ ) also ensure that teachers practice their legal duty of care to students at a better level, which shows that teachers provide higher consideration to assist students and enhance their personality; recognize the individual variations and provide learning equally to all students by establishing positive professional relationships.

The qualitative data offer relatively similar findings; the data obtained from principals and experts with interviews and from teachers and students through open-ended questions confirm that teachers properly implement their code of conduct regarding students as per the following themes:

**4.1.1.1. Appropriate teacher-student relationship.** The qualitative data indicates that only a few teachers do not have a positive and appropriate relationship with their students. A general observation of the participants' data confirm that secondary school teachers have a good intimacy with their students. Out of the 10 principals and five education experts interviewed, most of them responded that they have not seen any breach or violation of ethical conduct from teachers in terms of their professional relationship with students. For example, an interviewee witnessed that "most of the teachers are ethical, abiding by their professional codes of ethics... and have a good relationship with their students" [Expert 1]. "As my evaluation as a school principal...most teachers maintain a positive and respectful relationship with their students" [Principal 6]. The other participant elaborated: "I can say almost all teachers interact with their

students based on the professional code of ethics; we do not face a disciplinary breach among teachers concerning relationships with our students" [Principal 10].

**4.1.1.2. Extra support and high expectations for students' achievement.** The qualitative data indicates that fewer teachers do not care about their students' success and never want to support needy students [Students 29 & 57]. On the other hand, the responses from a good number of the interviewees confirm that most teachers exert the maximum efforts to realize the highest achievement of their students. One of the principals stated: "For me..., almost all teachers are ethical; they employ their full potential responsibly to improve the student's achievement. They help all students and provide additional tutorial support to females and low scorers" [Principal 1]. Three students for the open-ended question responded in a similar way as the principal in that teachers provide adequate support for students and involve them in different extracurricular activities and that most teachers implement their professional code of ethics at a very high-level because they did everything possible to help students. The fact that teachers cared about the psychological and social wellbeing of students and their academic development were reported by [Principal 10, Student 23 & 58].

**4.1.1.3. Positive response to the needs of students and impartial treatment.** It is expected that teachers positively respond to the needs of students and treat them impartially. In this regard, the participants indicated that though few teachers have ignorant and restrictive behavior, most teachers have approachable and considerate behavior toward the needs of students; that they allow students to freely express their opinions and treat them fairly. Student participants asserted that most teachers allow all the students to ask any question they have and respond to it more positively and appropriately [Students 34 & 42]. Responses from Student #28 and #74 revealed that their teachers treated all students impartially and responded to their questions and concerns in a positive manner during the teaching-learning process.

**4.1.1.4. Proper use of instructional time and resources.** The qualitative data shows that most teachers are punctual and implement the teaching-learning process based on their plans. However, there were cases as reported by some of the interviewees that few teachers missed classes, some arrived at the school, and entered the classroom late. However, most of the participants reflected that "most teachers come to school on time, plan their activities and implement them accordingly" [Principal 7]; they never miss classes [Principals 4 & 9] and they "use their time and instructional resources effectively" [Principal 8].

**4.1.2. Teachers' code of ethics to their colleagues and the teaching profession**  
Here, we examined the implementation level of teachers' code of ethics to their colleagues and the teaching profession.

Table 4 indicates that the mean scores for almost all the items (except item five,  $M = 2.94$ ;  $SD = 1.322$ ) are above the expected mean (3.00). The frequency/percentage values also confirm most participants (except item 5) responded that there was a high-level implementation of the

**Table 4.** Practice of teachers' code of ethics for their colleagues and the teaching profession.

Items	Participant teachers (N = 404)				
	Low	Medium	High	M	SD
I respect the professional standing and opinions of my colleagues	115 (28.5%)	118 (29.2%)	171 (42.3%)	3.21	1.191
I'm ready to help my junior colleagues and those in training	108 (26.7%)	44 (10.9%)	252 (62.3%)	3.67	1.485
I accept the authority of senior professional colleagues	84 (20.8%)	145 (35.9%)	175 (43.3%)	3.32	1.091
I recognize my obligation to improve my effectiveness as a teacher	108 (26.7%)	66 (16.3%)	230 (56.9%)	3.50	1.371
I participate in programs of continual professional growth like in-service training, seminar, conference, etc.	157 (38.9%)	91 (22.5%)	156 (38.6%)	2.94	1.322
<b>Average</b>	<b>114(28.3%)</b>	<b>93(23%)</b>	<b>197(48.7%)</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>1.292</b>

teachers' code of ethics. It implies a high-level practice of the teachers' code of ethics in respecting the professional standing and opinions of their colleagues; readiness to help junior colleagues and those in training, and accept the authority of senior colleagues; and recognition of their obligation to improve their effectiveness. However, the data for item five indicates that the teachers' effort in their continuous professional development during in-service training, seminar, and conference participation was at a low implementation level (M = 2.94; SD = 1.322). Despite this fact, the average frequency/percentage score (197 [48.7%]) and mean value (M = 3.33; SD = 1.292) show that teachers' professional

Teacher respondents held the same views to the open-ended questions. For example, a respondent suggested ...“in my opinion, some teachers consider the teaching profession as the only means to get a job and do not give much attention to their job” [Teacher 116].

4.1.3. Teachers' code of ethics about parents and the community

In this sub-dimension, we examined the implementation level of teachers' code of ethics regarding parents and the community.

The mean scores for the third dimension i.e., parents and the community indicate low practice of code of ethics (see Table 5). Mean values

Table 5. Teachers' responsibility to parents and the community.

Items	Participant teachers (N = 404)				
	Low	Medium	High	M	SD
I recognize the right of a parent to consult on the welfare of a student	164 (40.6%)	103 (25.5%)	137 (33.9%)	2.86	1.256
I encourage parents in the education and welfare of their children	166 (41.1%)	91 (22.5%)	147 (36.4%)	2.86	1.235
I act within the community in a manner which enhances mutual respect	171 (42.3%)	96 (23.8%)	137 (33.9%)	2.88	1.273
I play an active role in community relations	178 (44.0%)	82 (20.3%)	144 (35.7%)	2.87	1.289
<b>Average</b>	<b>170(42.1%)</b>	<b>93(23.0%)</b>	<b>141(34.9%)</b>	<b>2.86</b>	<b>1.263</b>

code of ethics regarding their colleagues and the teaching profession implemented at a higher level. However, the qualitative data provides a mixed result as per the following themes:

4.1.2.1. Relationship and support among colleagues. The data solicited from in-depth interviews yielded different findings: teachers who have a positive interaction and mutual support with their colleagues and those who neither respect nor assist their colleagues. To evidence this, the informants witnessed that most teachers have a good relationship with their peers while few of them have not such positive relationship with their colleagues [Expert 1 & principal 3]. “Except some exceptional teachers who neither help others nor want to be supported by them, most teachers often support each other” [Expert 2]; “they have due respect for their peers' ideas, opinions, and personality” [Principal 10], and “they devoted time and effort to help colleagues and are open-minded to learn from their peers” [principal 6].

4.1.2.2. Teachers' interest and respect for their profession. As one ethical responsibility, teachers need to have a sincere interest in and due respect for their teaching profession. However, the qualitative data indicates mixed results that revealed most teachers are interested in their teaching profession and have appropriate respect for it while, few of them do not have an interest in and high esteem for their teaching career. The following remarks elaborate more on the case: most of the teachers have greater respect to their profession and they love it very well [Principal 6 & 7], and “engaged in it with their fullest interest” [Principal 3]. In contrast, some teachers consider the teaching profession as a bridge to move on to other job, disrespect and dislike it [Principal 6 & Expert 2] and “few of them stay in the teaching profession without their real interest” [Teacher 93]. An education expert reported that:

*These days, few teachers join the teaching profession taking it as an alternative career to find employment in other fields of interest. These teachers have hope for employment in teaching following the common saying in Amharic language “ባጣ ባጣ የመምህርነት ቅጥር አለጣ”* which translates to mean that if one can't find other jobs, there is always a job opportunity in teaching. Teachers who join the teaching profession this way do not appropriately implement the code of ethics because they do not know about the code of ethics from the beginning, and they do not look at teaching as their lifelong profession [Expert 3].

for all items are below the expected mean (M < 3.00). As to frequency/percentage values, the majority of participants indicate their response at the low-level option, which implies that teachers less recognize the right of parents to be consulted on the welfare of their children. Teachers do not also encourage parents at the expected level to enable parents so they can actively participate in the education of their children. Similarly, the data indicates that teachers play an unsatisfactory role in school community relations characterized by a low level of mutual respect between teachers and the community. The overall average frequency/percentage score (170 [42.1%]) and mean value (M = 2.86; SD = 1.263) reveal that teachers implemented their code of ethics regarding parents and the community at a lower level. This quantitative finding is supported by the qualitative one though the latter showed mixed results.

4.1.3.1. Teachers' interaction with parents and the community. The data showed that fewer teachers established a good relationship with parents and the neighbouring community while the majorities do not. Contributing factors limit teachers not to discharge their responsibility to parents and the community. Supporting this idea, an informant stated:

*I feel that some teachers had a positive relationship with parents and the surrounding community. Such teachers are actively involved in serving and mobilizing parents and the community. However, many of the teachers do not want to positively and actively interact with parents and the community due to certain negative factors [Principal 8].*

Teachers perceive that the community and the government have less respect for them than other professionals. They believe that the community has a negative attitude and disrespect for teachers. Principal #1 reflected “I witnessed...teachers feel that the community and the government do not give the recognition teachers deserve while expert #5 commented “What is worsening these days is the poor attitude and disrespect of the community toward teachers”. An interviewee elaborated a bit more by suggesting that:

*The community gives low respect for teachers compared to other professionals. For instance, on one occasion, a farmer invited lunch to an agriculture expert and said “ብሉ ግብርና (geberena) መምህርም ይበለዋል”* to mean that “please eat it, even the teacher eats it.” You can imagine how such a saying affects teachers' emotion and impacts on their work spirit [Expert 5].

As a result, “several teachers become demotivated, reluctant and emotionally affected particularly in their desire to engage in parental and community activities in each school” [Expert 3]. The other factors contributing to the low-level implementation of teachers' code of ethics regarding parents and the community attributed to financial problems and lack of knowledge about the specific roles of teachers to the community. Participants emphasized this point as: “due to economic burdens, teachers implemented their code ethics concerning parents and the community at lower level [Teacher 8], and “most of them could not think to work with parents and the community other than carrying out jobs following the fixed teaching-learning schedules” [Expert 5]. Similarly, many teachers do not know their professional duties that focus toward parents and the community as reported by [Principal 3 & Teacher 41].

#### 4.2. The effect of independent variables on teachers' code of ethics

The researchers examined the influence of gender, age, level of qualification, and teaching experience. We employed independent samples t-test to achieve the objective.

**Table 6.** Implementation level of code of ethics with respect to independent variables.

Variables	Category	N	M	SD	t	df	p-value
Gender	Male	314	3.39	.6878	-2.016	402	.044
	Female	90	3.56	.7106			
Educational level	First Degree	315	3.46	.6894	1.657	402	.098
	Second Degree	89	3.32	.7104			
Age	<=30 years old	143	3.60	.6551	3.756	402	.000
	>= 31 years old	261	3.34	.7001			
Teaching experience	Less experienced (<=10 years)	171	3.56	.6577	3.241	402	.001
	More experienced (>=11 years)	233	3.34	.7086			

Table 6 indicates a mean difference among teachers based on their gender, age, level of qualification, and teaching experience. The mean difference between first-degree and second-degree holders is not at the expected significant level since ( $p = .098$ ) is above 0.05, implying that teachers' qualification does not affect the practice of teachers' code of ethics. Concerning other variables, the independent sample t-test shows significant differences among teachers due to their gender ( $p = .044$ ), age ( $p = .000$ ), and experience ( $p = .001$ ). In all cases, females, teachers aged 30 and below years old, and less experienced teachers with ( $<=10$  years of teaching experience) have a higher level of ethical practice than their counterparts. This indicates that gender, age, and teaching experience affected the practice level of secondary school teachers' code of ethics in all dimensions considered in the study.

## 5. Discussion

The study examined the practice of teachers' code of ethics in secondary schools of Amhara Region, Ethiopia. We investigated the teachers' responsibility to the students, colleagues, the teaching profession, parents, and the community. The results indicate different compliance levels of teachers to their codes under the three dimensions. The study reveals a high -level practice of teachers' code of ethics regarding the students' dimension, which is similar to previous studies (Al-hothali, 2018; Mabagala et al., 2012; Mwesiga and Philipkireti, 2018; Ou, 2014; Ozbek, 2007; Thoker, 2017); however, it contradicts with previous Ethiopian reports that indicate low teachers interest to support students and much instructional time wastage both in and out of school for various reasons such as meetings, administrative tasks, and absenteeism. The current study confirms that secondary school teachers are highly committed to students' welfare and safety, personal development, and high academic achievement; they are highly responsive to the needs of students, and provide the necessary support and guidance for them. This

result is thus similar to the studies conducted with Japanese and Finnish teachers who have a high -level of ethical standard and commitment to the holistic development of students and regard their students' academic achievement as a priority issue (Katsuno, 2012; Kuusisto et al., 2012). Such a high teachers' commitment is vital as it has several implications for the academic and personal development of students. For instance, caring for the students' well-being enables them to reach their potential through and with the necessary scaffolding and empathic response to their needs (Garza et al., 2014). Teachers who actively engage and provide appropriate guidance to the students can improve the teaching-learning process; reduce deviant students' behavior, and direct them to enforcement of school rules and regulations (Mushtaq and Khan, 2012). The teachers' high expectations and communication with the students about it are also helpful in ensuring the highest academic achievement (Denessen, Keller, Bergh & Broek, (2020).

The data for the second dimension, the level of teachers' commitment to their colleagues and the teaching profession provides a mixed result. In this study, teachers practiced their codes regarding their colleagues at a higher-level, which conflicts with the findings of Ou (2014), who re-

ported a low level of teachers' commitment to their colleagues. However, our results reveal that teachers have a moderate adherence to the teaching standards. The qualitative data, to some extent, indicates that few teachers have a diminished interest in the teaching profession. In Ethiopia, studies by Koye (2014) and Aweke (2015) show that teachers work with poor motivation and low interest in the teaching profession and do not want to remain in the teaching profession if they get the chance to leave their job for other careers. A similar report by the Ministry of Education asserts that nearly three-fourths of (70%) teachers would leave the profession if given a job with a similar pay scale (MoE, 2015). However, our study confirms that most teachers are committed to their teaching career though there were a few exceptions. Studies in a number of other countries indicated that most teachers have a high-level of commitment to their teaching profession (Moses et al., 2017; Mwesiga and Philipkireti, 2018). As a general rule of code of conduct, teachers need to be cooperative with their colleagues and a host of others (Peterson and Arthur, 2021); accountable to their peers in their practice, and adaptive to recent developments in their profession (Rusznayak, 2018); enthusiastic in their intentions to stay in their job and appreciative of their profession's social relevance and responsibility (Moses et al., 2017). Doing so enables teachers to be safe from mistreating each other (Vadher, 2005); be proud of belonging to the teaching profession, as holding a high esteem for and pride in the profession motivates individual teachers to see themselves as professionals (Gilman, 2005).

The result of the current study reveals that teachers have a lower level of commitment to their codes about parents and the community (see Table 5). In contrast with our study, earlier studies found that teachers have a moderate devotion to the parents and community domain (Al-hothali, 2018; Ou, 2014). According to the literature from other studies, community and professionals have two-way relations: on the one hand, teachers are expected to provide the community with expertise and innovations that enable the progress of a community, and, on the other

hand, the community should be expected to give these same professionals rewards, respect, and recognize the position they deserve in society (Trošelj and Ivkovic, 2016). However, when an imbalance occurs within these relationships, it would result in 'misconduct' (Nuland, 2009). That is what revealed in our study, in that teachers show less commitment in implementing their code of ethics regarding parents and the community. In the qualitative data, different factors were indicated as reasons for the low-level practice of teachers' code of ethics to the parents and community domain. The report by the Ministry of Education in Ethiopia supports our finding. According to MoE (2015), among the factors that exacerbated the negative attitude of teachers towards their profession, lack of recognition/social status by their community is considered the major one. Another report indicated that parents ranked teaching not as a high prestige profession (MoE, 2020). This might have contributed to a low level of the practice of teacher codes in this study. When teachers fail to adhere to the basic ethical principles and fundamental moral values regarding parents and the community, deteriorated performance and a significant increase in negligence will occur (Trošelj and Ivkovic, 2016), which would again result in another negative consequence as one imbalance in one relationship may result in discrepancies in subsequent relationships (Nuland, 2009).

Our study further indicates that independent variables such as gender, age, and teaching experience affected the commitment level of teachers to their code of ethics in all dimensions (see Table 6). However, teachers' level of qualification has no such effect on the practice of teachers' codes of ethics. It is thus similar to Al-hothali (2018), who found no significant difference among teachers based on their educational level in the practice of the code of ethics. Gender has a significant influence on the practice level of teachers' codes across all the dimensions in the current study, which is in congruence with the results of Ozbek (2007) and Thoker (2017); but, in conflict to the research outputs of (Mabagala et al., 2012; Mwesiga and Philipkireti, 2018). This study also indicates that age and teaching experience influenced the commitment level of teachers to their codes; in both cases, younger teachers with fewer years of experience have higher commitment than veteran teachers aged above 30 years old. But, contrary to this finding, prior studies confirm that age and teaching experience do not affect the compliance level of teachers to their codes of ethics (Al-hothali, 2018; Mabagala et al., 2012).

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

The current study indicates that Ethiopian secondary school teachers had a high level of commitment to their code of ethics vis-à-vis the students' and colleagues' domain, where they had a lower level of ethical practice to the parents and the community dimension. The study also shows gender, age, and teaching experience affected the commitment level of teachers to their code of ethics. Thus, the study has significant implications for policy and practice in Ethiopia. It sheds light on the current practice of teachers' code of ethics in secondary schools, an issue which was not adequately addressed and recognized so far. The findings will hopefully enable the concerned bodies to take measures that enhance best practices and resolve the poor performance in the commitment of teachers to their code of ethics. The study would also serve as a benchmark for prospective researchers interested in investigating the issues of ethical code of ethics in the teaching profession. The study results will help policymakers, teacher associations, and other concerned organizations to develop a comprehensive and context-based professional code of ethics and design mechanisms in which teachers can familiarize themselves with such professional ethics both in the initial training stage and throughout their career life. The study also provides vital future directions for the practices of teachers' code of ethics in the short-run and long-term. For the short period, the results draw attention to further research to examine whether the teachers in various geographical regions and educational structures have a different commitment to their code of ethics. It is also worth investigating factors

that affect the practice of teachers' code of ethics in order to design a mechanism that can maximize the effect of positive aspects and minimize negative influences. For the long-term, depending on the research findings, we recommend the concerned bodies to (1) provide due emphasis for ethics courses in the initial teacher training stage as those courses play an essential role in creating foundations for professional ethics; (2) design and implement different mechanisms that can increase teachers' intrinsic motivation and commitment as the habit of good work ethics comes from within; (3) frame clear, detailed, and executable code of ethics so that teachers can apply them in without much difficulty; and (4) institutionalize continuous community awareness program about teachers and the teaching profession to restore the social status and prestige of teachers as it will help to maintain their interest in and commitment to their profession and thereby help them practice their code of ethics according to standards expected from the profession. We further recommend consecutive studies on the relationship between ethical practice and teacher performance and the perception of parents and the community about teachers' code of ethics.

### 6.1. Limitations of the study

This study has some limitations: it was conducted in Amhara region which is only one of the many regions in Ethiopia where a number of intervening factors based on cultural, economic and social variables could have affected the results of the study had a similar study been conducted in different geographical areas. The researchers are also cognizant of the fact that had a similar research been conducted in higher level educational institutions (colleges and universities), the results could have possibly led to different conclusions regarding the practice of professional code of ethics in the teaching profession in Ethiopia. The researchers also did not include personal disposition aspects of teachers' ethics such as loyalty, integrity, and honesty, which may reduce the comprehensiveness of the finding.

### Declarations

#### Author contribution statement

Kindu Ayechech Ayenalem: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Samuel Getnet Abate: Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data.

Habtamu Reta Ayalew: Performed the experiments; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data.

Jemberu Arega Mengesha: Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data.

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#### Data availability statement

Data will be made available on request.

#### Declaration of interest's statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

#### Additional information

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