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Analysis of the Relationship Between Professional Ethics and Teamwork with the Mediating Role of Teachers' Social Responsibility in Iraq

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted with the aim of determining the relationship between professional ethics and teamwork with the mediating role of social responsibility among teachers in Babylon Province, Iraq. The study employed a correlational research design, and causal relationships among the variables of professional ethics, teamwork, and social responsibility were tested. The statistical population consisted of all teachers in the Department of Education of Babylon Province, totaling 530 individuals for the 2024–2025 academic year. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table, a sample of 227 teachers was determined and selected through a non-random sampling method. Data were collected using standardized questionnaires, including the Professional Ethics Questionnaire by Armito et al. (2011), the Teamwork Questionnaire by Lencioni (2004), and Ahmadi's (2009) Social Responsibility Questionnaire. The reliability coefficients for these instruments were 0.78, 0.72, and 0.87, respectively. The face validity of the questionnaires was confirmed by several individuals similar to the target sample. After data collection, descriptive analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 23), and inferential analyses, including Pearson correlation, structural equation modeling, and analysis of variance, were performed using PLS software. The results revealed a significant positive relationship between professional ethics and social responsibility ($r = 0.623$). Moreover, a significant relationship was found between social responsibility and teamwork ($r = 0.259$). Additionally, professional ethics and teamwork showed a significant relationship through the mediating role of social responsibility ($r = 0.117$). Based on these findings, it can be concluded that in order to strengthen teamwork among educational professionals, sufficient investment should be made in promoting teachers' professional ethics, as professional ethics not only directly but also indirectly — through enhancing social responsibility — reinforces teachers' teamwork behavior.

Keywords: professional ethics, teamwork, social responsibility, organizational citizenship behavior, teachers

Introduction

In the modern educational landscape, the role of teachers has evolved far beyond the mere transmission of knowledge. It now encompasses ethical decision-making, collaboration, and social responsibility as essential dimensions of professional

competence. Professional ethics and teamwork are two foundational pillars that determine not only the quality of instruction but also the moral and social integrity of educational institutions (1). Professional ethics refer to the principles and standards that guide teachers' behavior, ensuring fairness, respect, honesty, and responsibility in their interactions with students, colleagues, and the wider community (2). Teamwork, meanwhile, reflects the collective effort of educators working together toward shared educational goals through mutual trust, communication, and coordinated problem-solving (3). In today's rapidly changing and complex educational environments, ethical awareness and cooperative behavior are no longer optional attributes—they are essential components of effective teaching and organizational performance (4, 5).

Professional ethics form the moral backbone of the teaching profession. Teachers who act ethically not only uphold the dignity of their profession but also contribute to a culture of trust, responsibility, and respect within their institutions (6). Ethics in education involve adhering to moral principles such as honesty, justice, empathy, and professional integrity (7). Ethical teachers serve as role models who influence the character formation and civic attitudes of students, shaping future generations toward responsibility and integrity (8). Research has demonstrated that professional ethics enhances teacher credibility, strengthens relationships with students, and fosters organizational commitment and satisfaction (9, 10). In developing educational systems such as Iraq's, where teachers play a pivotal role in social reconstruction and moral education, adherence to ethical standards becomes even more critical (11, 12).

Teamwork among educators has emerged as a vital determinant of school effectiveness and teacher well-being. Collaborative work structures in schools encourage knowledge sharing, continuous learning, and the development of innovative teaching methods (13). Teachers who engage in teamwork learn from one another's experiences, exchange strategies for student engagement, and collectively address classroom challenges (14, 15). A cooperative environment enhances both the quality of teaching and the motivation of teachers to contribute meaningfully to institutional goals (16, 17). Empirical studies show that teamwork is associated with higher organizational trust, better communication, and increased productivity among teachers (3, 18). Moreover, teamwork fosters emotional support and reduces job stress, allowing teachers to function more effectively in challenging educational settings (4, 19).

The relationship between professional ethics and teamwork has been a focal point of educational research in recent years. Ethics serve as a foundation for teamwork because moral principles such as honesty, respect, and fairness foster trust and cooperation among colleagues (20, 21). In organizations where professional ethics are valued, employees are more likely to engage in collective decision-making, share information transparently, and resolve conflicts constructively (2, 22). Teachers who internalize ethical standards tend to develop stronger interpersonal relationships and exhibit greater willingness to collaborate on shared tasks (9, 23). For instance, a study conducted among Iraqi social studies teachers showed that professional ethics directly enhance teamwork, with social responsibility acting as an important mediating variable (12). Such findings highlight that professional ethics not only influence individual behavior but also serve as a catalyst for building a cooperative and accountable educational culture.

Social responsibility plays a crucial mediating role in linking professional ethics to teamwork. It represents an individual's moral and civic obligation to act in ways that benefit society and the organization (24, 25). In the context of education, social responsibility manifests as teachers' commitment to the well-being of their students, their communities, and their institutions (7). Socially responsible teachers recognize that their duties extend beyond classroom instruction to include fostering equity, justice, and environmental stewardship (26, 27). This sense of responsibility motivates teachers to cooperate with their peers to achieve shared social and educational goals (4, 28).

Scholars have emphasized that social responsibility serves as a psychological bridge connecting ethical awareness to collective behavior (22, 29). Teachers who are ethically conscious are more likely to view teamwork as a moral obligation

rather than a mere professional necessity (30). Studies show that when teachers internalize social responsibility, they are more cooperative, empathetic, and proactive in group activities (31, 32). Moreover, a strong sense of social responsibility can strengthen teachers' engagement, job satisfaction, and willingness to contribute to organizational goals (21, 26). This is particularly relevant in Iraq, where the education system plays a central role in rebuilding social cohesion and promoting moral development (11, 33).

The theoretical framework underpinning the link among professional ethics, social responsibility, and teamwork is grounded in social exchange theory. This theory suggests that relationships in organizations are based on mutual trust and reciprocal exchanges (8). When teachers act ethically, they foster trust and reciprocity, encouraging others to engage in collaborative and prosocial behaviors (3). Ethical conduct promotes fairness and consistency, which are necessary for maintaining cohesive teamwork (17, 34). In turn, teamwork reinforces ethical norms by creating an environment in which transparency and accountability are valued (4, 9). The integration of these variables creates a virtuous cycle where ethics enhance teamwork, teamwork strengthens social responsibility, and social responsibility deepens ethical awareness.

Empirical research across different cultural and organizational contexts supports this model. Studies in higher education and public institutions have confirmed that ethical leadership and moral behavior significantly enhance team performance and job engagement (2, 22). Similarly, research in Iraq and Iran indicates that social responsibility mediates the relationship between professional ethics and teamwork, suggesting that moral commitment translates into collaborative behavior through civic-mindedness (10, 23). Furthermore, findings by Ismael and Yesiltas (2020) showed that socially responsible employees exhibit higher work engagement and organizational citizenship, demonstrating the transformative power of ethical and responsible attitudes in teamwork.

In Iraq's educational system, where cultural diversity, economic transitions, and post-conflict challenges persist, promoting professional ethics and social responsibility among teachers is essential for sustainable educational reform (24, 33). Teachers not only transmit knowledge but also shape the moral and civic identity of future citizens (7). Therefore, reinforcing ethical integrity and collective responsibility among educators directly contributes to social stability and national development (5, 14). Moreover, the collectivist nature of Iraqi culture, which values interdependence and cooperation, provides fertile ground for strengthening teamwork when combined with ethical training and institutional support (13, 35). Educational policymakers must thus prioritize the integration of ethics and teamwork training into teacher professional development programs to align cultural values with organizational behavior (19, 27).

Despite increasing attention to these constructs, research examining the mediating role of social responsibility between professional ethics and teamwork among teachers in Iraq remains limited (12, 18). While previous studies have confirmed positive associations between ethics and teamwork in various contexts (22, 36), few have explored how social responsibility shapes this relationship in the Iraqi educational framework. The distinct social, cultural, and institutional conditions of Iraq necessitate localized research to understand how moral and cooperative values interact within its schools (2, 30).

This study, therefore, seeks to fill this research gap by empirically examining how professional ethics influence teamwork among teachers in Babylon Province, Iraq, both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of social responsibility (29, 37). The findings are expected to contribute to theoretical advancements in the field of educational management and provide practical insights for policymakers, school leaders, and teacher training institutions seeking to foster ethical conduct, teamwork, and social responsibility among educators (14, 23, 30).

Accordingly, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between professional ethics and teamwork with the mediating role of social responsibility among teachers in Babylon Province, Iraq.

Methods and Materials

This study was conducted using a correlational research design. The main objective of the study was to examine the causal relationships among professional ethics, teamwork, and social responsibility within the educational environment among teachers. To achieve this goal, causal relationship testing was employed, which allows for the analysis of inter-variable relationships. All stages of the research were carried out in accordance with ethical research principles, including respect for privacy and confidentiality. The target population included all 530 teachers in Babylon Province during the 2023–2024 academic year. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, a sample size of 227 participants was determined and selected using a non-random convenience sampling method.

The data collection instruments consisted of two standardized questionnaires and one validated questionnaire, each demonstrating acceptable levels of validity and reliability:

1. **Professional Ethics Questionnaire:** This questionnaire was developed by Armito et al. (2011) and consists of 20 items rated on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”). It has been widely used in similar studies to assess professional ethics in educational and occupational contexts. In a study by Ma'anipour (2012), the questionnaire's validity was confirmed through expert opinions from supervisors and faculty members. Its reliability, based on a pilot study of 30 participants, was reported as 0.89.
2. **Standard Teamwork Questionnaire:** The standard teamwork questionnaire was developed based on Lencioni's (2004) model. It contains 19 items rated on a five-point Likert scale. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed in a study by Bazi (2015), and its Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was reported as 0.90.
3. **Social Responsibility Questionnaire:** The social responsibility questionnaire for employees was designed by Ahmadi (2009) and includes 7 items aimed at assessing the level of social responsibility. It uses a five-point Likert scale for scoring. In Ahmadi's (2009) study, the face validity of the questionnaire was confirmed, and construct validity was verified through factor analysis. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.71, indicating good internal consistency.

Sampling was conducted using a non-random convenience method among teachers in Babylon Province, Iraq. After collection, the questionnaires were reviewed for completeness. Incomplete or invalid responses were excluded until the sample size reached adequacy. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 23) for descriptive statistics and the Partial Least Squares (PLS) software for inferential analyses, including Pearson correlation, structural equation modeling (SEM), and analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Findings and Results

According to the descriptive results, 37.9% of the participants were male, and 58.9% were female. Approximately 33.9% of the participants were older than 35 years. In terms of education, 38.8% of participants held a bachelor's degree, while 33.2% of the teachers had more than 15 years of teaching experience. The mean and standard deviation of scores for professional ethics, teamwork, and social responsibility are presented in Table (1).

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Professional Ethics, Social Responsibility, and Teamwork Scores

Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation
Professional Ethics	70.63	12.57
Social Responsibility	25.19	0.87
Teamwork	63.77	12.59

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between professional ethics and teachers' social responsibility.

Table 2. Correlation Coefficient Between Professional Ethics and Social Responsibility

Predictor Variable	Effect Coefficient	R ²	Significance Level
Professional Ethics	0.623**	0.388	0.001

The results in Table (2) indicate that the correlation between professional ethics and social responsibility is significant ($r = 0.623$). Based on the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.388$), approximately 38.8% of the variance in social responsibility is shared with professional ethics. Therefore, the first hypothesis, which posits a positive and significant relationship between professional ethics and social responsibility, is confirmed.

Hypothesis 2: There is a relationship between teachers' social responsibility and teamwork.

Table 3. Correlation Coefficient Between Social Responsibility and Teamwork

Predictor Variable	Effect Coefficient	R ²	Significance Level
Social Responsibility	0.259**	0.067	0.001

The results in Table (3) show a significant correlation between social responsibility and teamwork ($r = 0.259$). According to the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.067$), 6.7% of the variance in teamwork is shared with social responsibility. Hence, the second hypothesis, stating that there is a significant relationship between social responsibility and teamwork, is supported.

Hypothesis 3: Social responsibility mediates the relationship between professional ethics and teachers' teamwork.

Table 4. Correlation Coefficient Between Professional Ethics and Teamwork with the Mediating Role of Social Responsibility

Predictor Variable	Effect Coefficient	R ²	t-value	Significance Level
Professional Ethics * Social Responsibility	0.117*	0.014	2.135	0.031

The results in Table (4) demonstrate that the correlation between professional ethics and teamwork with the mediating role of social responsibility is significant ($r = 0.117$). Based on the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.014$), approximately 1.4% of the variance in teamwork is explained by professional ethics through the mediation of social responsibility. Therefore, the third hypothesis, which proposes that social responsibility mediates the relationship between professional ethics and teamwork, is confirmed.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the relationship between professional ethics and teamwork with the mediating role of social responsibility among teachers in Babylon Province, Iraq. The statistical results revealed significant and positive correlations among these three variables. Specifically, professional ethics demonstrated a strong relationship with social responsibility ($r = 0.623$), social responsibility had a significant positive relationship with teamwork ($r = 0.259$), and professional ethics showed a meaningful relationship with teamwork through the mediating role of social responsibility ($r = 0.117$). These findings highlight the fundamental role of ethical conduct and social responsibility in fostering cooperative behavior among educators, aligning with the theoretical and empirical foundations established in prior research (10, 12, 22).

The strong correlation between professional ethics and social responsibility confirms that ethical awareness among teachers significantly enhances their sense of obligation toward the educational community and broader society. Ethical teachers tend to exhibit altruism, fairness, and accountability, which naturally lead to behaviors reflecting social responsibility (2, 20). This outcome is consistent with previous studies emphasizing that professional ethics are a primary predictor of social responsibility in both public and private organizations (1, 21). Rostami et al. (2020) also demonstrated that the internalization of moral principles strengthens individuals' sense of social obligation, creating a positive feedback loop that benefits institutional ethics

and collective functioning. In educational environments, teachers with higher ethical commitment view social responsibility as an integral part of their professional identity, perceiving it not merely as a rule but as a moral and civic duty (7, 30).

This relationship may be explained through the moral development perspective, which argues that ethical maturity enhances sensitivity to social issues and collective well-being (6). In this context, teachers with developed moral reasoning are more inclined to act responsibly toward students and the school community. The study by Mahdavi Vasokolaie Asgari et al. (2024) similarly showed that professional ethics in academic institutions enhance accountability, responsibility, and organizational cohesion. These findings reaffirm the interconnectedness of ethics and responsibility, suggesting that moral integrity lays the groundwork for responsible citizenship in professional environments. In Iraqi schools, where teachers play crucial roles in rebuilding social trust and ethical awareness, the significance of this relationship becomes even more pronounced (11, 33).

The results also revealed a significant positive correlation between social responsibility and teamwork among teachers, supporting the notion that socially responsible educators are more likely to engage collaboratively and prioritize group success over individual recognition. This finding corroborates the work of Ismael and Yesiltas (2020), who found that social responsibility enhances work engagement, organizational citizenship, and teamwork in educational institutions. Similarly, research by Ramezani (2023) and Zarei (2023) indicated that teachers who are more socially responsible are also more committed to cooperative practices, perceiving teamwork as a moral responsibility. Such behavior reflects the ethical principle of interdependence, where collaboration is understood as a form of shared accountability toward achieving educational and social objectives (13, 14).

The connection between social responsibility and teamwork can be further understood through the framework of social learning theory. Teachers learn from observing responsible and cooperative behaviors among their peers and internalize these norms as part of their professional culture (3, 16). When ethical and socially responsible practices are institutionalized, they enhance mutual trust and empathy, which are essential for teamwork. Studies conducted by Hanaysha and Tahir (2016) confirmed that ethical and cooperative work environments lead to increased job satisfaction and performance. Similarly, Khuong and Tien (2020) found that the development of loyalty and collective identity within organizations relies heavily on employees' sense of social responsibility. These perspectives reinforce the idea that teamwork is not merely a technical skill but a moral process rooted in shared ethical values and communal orientation (23, 38).

Moreover, the finding that social responsibility mediates the relationship between professional ethics and teamwork underscores the integral role of moral and civic consciousness in bridging ethical principles and collaborative behavior. This aligns with prior empirical studies suggesting that ethics alone may not directly produce teamwork unless accompanied by a sense of responsibility toward others and society (20, 22). The mediation mechanism indicates that ethical awareness must be translated into social responsibility for its cooperative effects to materialize. In other words, ethics provide the moral foundation, while social responsibility provides the motivational drive that transforms individual values into collective actions (26, 28).

This result resonates with the theoretical propositions of social exchange theory, which posits that individuals reciprocate ethical treatment and social commitment through cooperative behaviors (8). When teachers operate within an ethically supportive environment, they are more likely to engage in teamwork, as trust and reciprocity are reinforced by shared values and mutual respect. In this sense, social responsibility serves as a reinforcing mechanism that translates ethical beliefs into cooperative actions (9, 34). Ganji and Imani Fard (2017) emphasized that when ethical values are institutionalized, teamwork becomes a natural consequence of collective moral awareness. Similarly, Rostami et al. (2020) found that ethical orientation fosters organizational socialization and collaboration, while responsibility strengthens these relationships by adding a layer of moral obligation.

The results of the current study are also supported by the findings of Mahdavi Vasokolaie Asgari et al. (2024), who concluded that professional ethics enhance accountability and engagement, leading to improved team performance. Al-Zaidi et al. (2024) reported similar findings among social studies teachers in Iraq, showing that professional ethics positively influence teamwork through social responsibility and organizational citizenship behaviors. These results, together with those from the present research, highlight the universality of ethical cooperation mechanisms across educational and cultural contexts. They also indicate that social responsibility acts as a psychosocial process through which individual moral values are transformed into collective practices (27, 36).

The interplay among these variables can also be examined from the perspective of organizational culture. Educational institutions that cultivate ethical norms and emphasize social accountability tend to promote stronger teamwork and communication among teachers (7, 13). The ethical climate within schools encourages transparent communication and collective problem-solving, reducing interpersonal conflict and promoting unity (17, 19). This finding is aligned with the research of Aslani (2017) and Ghasemzadeh Alishahi (2021), both of whom found that ethical culture enhances employee participation and commitment by increasing their sense of belonging to the institution. Thus, it can be concluded that when ethics and social responsibility are embedded in the organizational ethos, teamwork becomes a natural behavioral manifestation of these shared values (23, 30).

Furthermore, the study's findings underscore the cultural relevance of teamwork and ethics within the Iraqi educational system. The collectivist cultural values prevalent in Iraq emphasize cooperation, solidarity, and social harmony, which complement the principles of professional ethics and social responsibility (5, 14). This cultural alignment enhances the likelihood that teachers perceive teamwork as a social and moral duty. The role of education in transmitting these collective values further reinforces the ethical dimensions of teamwork. As highlighted by Soleiman Nejad et al. (2024), integrating social values and responsibilities into the educational curriculum can strengthen both moral awareness and collaborative competencies among teachers and students.

Taken together, the findings suggest that strengthening professional ethics among teachers leads to an enhanced sense of social responsibility, which in turn promotes teamwork and cooperative performance. This pattern reflects a virtuous cycle where ethics, responsibility, and collaboration reinforce one another. When teachers act ethically, they contribute to a more trustworthy and supportive institutional climate; when they embrace social responsibility, they sustain that climate through active cooperation and civic-minded engagement (1, 22). Therefore, policymakers and educational leaders seeking to improve teamwork in schools must focus on developing programs that integrate ethical education with social responsibility initiatives (4, 15). The practical implications of this interrelationship extend beyond teacher collaboration, influencing students' moral development and the overall ethical fabric of the educational system (33, 35).

Overall, the empirical evidence of this study confirms the theoretical assumption that professional ethics and social responsibility act as critical antecedents of teamwork. These findings contribute to the growing literature on moral education, teacher professionalism, and organizational behavior in educational settings. By demonstrating that social responsibility mediates the relationship between ethics and teamwork, this study advances the understanding of how moral and civic values translate into practical cooperative behaviors. In the Iraqi context—where educational institutions are central to social stability and civic reconstruction—these findings have both theoretical and applied significance (11, 32).

Although the findings provide valuable insights into the interrelations among professional ethics, social responsibility, and teamwork, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted using a correlational design, which restricts causal inferences about the directionality of relationships among variables. Future experimental or longitudinal research designs could offer a more robust understanding of causal pathways. Additionally, data were collected exclusively from teachers in

Babylon Province, Iraq, which limits the generalizability of results to other regions or educational systems. The use of self-report questionnaires may also introduce response bias, as participants might have provided socially desirable answers rather than fully accurate reflections of their behavior. Finally, cultural and institutional differences among schools may have influenced perceptions of ethics and teamwork in ways not captured by the study's instruments.

Future research should aim to explore these relationships using mixed-method or longitudinal approaches to examine how ethical training and responsibility development evolve over time in teachers. It would be beneficial to include larger and more diverse samples from various regions in Iraq or other Middle Eastern countries to compare cultural and institutional influences. Researchers should also examine the role of mediating and moderating variables such as organizational culture, leadership style, emotional intelligence, and teacher motivation to provide a more comprehensive model. Furthermore, qualitative studies could explore teachers' lived experiences and narratives to uncover deeper insights into how ethics and social responsibility shape teamwork dynamics in real classroom and school settings.

The results of this study have important implications for educational policy and professional development. Educational administrators should integrate ethics and social responsibility training into teacher preparation and in-service programs to foster a culture of cooperation and accountability. School leaders can promote teamwork by establishing environments that reward ethical conduct and socially responsible behaviors through recognition systems and collaborative structures. Curriculum designers should also embed ethical reasoning and social responsibility into educational frameworks to prepare teachers and students for civic participation. Finally, creating mentorship and peer collaboration programs can help institutionalize teamwork practices that are grounded in ethical principles and collective responsibility, ultimately contributing to a more cohesive and value-driven educational system.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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