

Ethical Sensitivity for Teachers' Professional Ethics in Moral Education Teaching

Norjilawati Mohd Amin^{1*}, Muhammad Atiullah Othman¹, Hishamuddin Ahmad²

¹Department of Moral, Civic and Character Education, Faculty of Human Sciences, Sultan Idris Education University, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia

²Department of Human Development, Faculty of Human Development, Sultan Idris Education University, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia

***Corresponding Author**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100900196>

Received: 19 September 2026; Accepted: 24 September 2026; Published: 06 October 2026

ABSTRACT

This article presents a critical thematic literature review examining ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for teachers' professional ethics in teaching, with particular attention to Moral Education teachers. Based on an analysis of 31 selected articles, the review synthesises research on ethical sensitivity, teachers' professional ethics, moral judgement, and teaching practice. Four main themes were identified: ethical sensitivity as recognition and interpretation in teaching; ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for professional ethical judgement; blind spots and limitations of ethical sensitivity in teachers' professional practice; and the integration gap between ethical sensitivity and professional ethics in teaching. The findings indicate that caring, good intentions, and knowledge of ethical principles do not necessarily guarantee teachers' ability to recognise the full range of morally significant features in pedagogical situations. Perspective taking, awareness of bias, sensitivity to individual and group differences, the generation of interpretations, and recognition of consequences emerged as important processes that precede professional judgement. Guided by Rest's Four Component Model and Narvaez's operationalisation of ethical sensitivity, this review argues that teachers' professional ethics begins with the capacity to recognise that a situation has moral significance before professional judgement, decision-making, and action can occur. For Moral Education teachers, this relationship is particularly significant because they not only teach values and moral judgement but must also demonstrate consistency between the values they teach and their own professional practice. The review therefore highlights the need to integrate the development of ethical sensitivity more explicitly into the education and professional development of Moral Education teachers.

Keywords: Ethical sensitivity, Teachers' professional ethics, Moral Competence, Moral Education, Sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

This article undertakes a critical thematic literature review to present a more integrated approach to understanding ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for teachers' professional ethics in teaching, with particular attention to Moral Education teachers. Ethical sensitivity and professional ethics in education are often discussed within related but not fully integrated traditions. The professional ethics literature tends to focus on dilemmas, judgement, responsibility, and teachers' actions, whereas the ethical sensitivity literature examines the capacity to recognise and interpret morally significant features of a situation. Put simply, professional ethics is often discussed in terms of what teachers ought to do once an ethical problem has been recognised. Although this position is important for understanding professional decisions and actions, this review suggests that it remains insufficient because ethical action does not begin with judgement alone. A situation must first be noticed, recognised, and interpreted as morally significant before professional judgement or action can occur.

This position is grounded in Rest's Four Component Model of Moral Behaviour, which places moral sensitivity as the first component preceding moral judgement, moral motivation, and the implementation of moral action. In the teaching context, ethical sensitivity refers to the capacity to recognise the parties involved, read emotional cues, take the perspectives of others, demonstrate care, understand individual and group differences, recognise social bias, generate interpretations, and identify the possible consequences of an action. Narvaez's operationalisation of the construct demonstrates that ethical sensitivity is not merely knowledge of moral principles, but an interpretive process that determines what enters a person's awareness as morally significant. Kuusisto, Tirri, and Rissanen (2012), for example, operationalised teachers' ethical sensitivity through seven dimensions in the Ethical Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire (ESSQ), while Hanhimäki and Tirri (2009) showed that teachers' ethical experiences emerge in relationships with students, families, colleagues, administrators, and the wider school community.

This review is guided by the following research question: How does contemporary research conceptualise ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for teachers' professional ethics in teaching, particularly in the context of Moral Education teachers? For teachers, this framing shifts attention away from professional ethics as merely knowledge of codes or principles towards the capacity to recognise what is ethically significant in pedagogical situations. For teacher education and professional development, it provides a basis for attending to processes that precede professional judgement, including perspective taking, bias detection, contextual interpretation, and awareness of consequences. For Moral Education, this position is particularly significant because teachers do not merely teach concepts of values and morality but also make professional decisions that carry ethical implications for students.

We argue that ethical sensitivity, professional judgement, and teachers' ethical action cannot be separated as wholly independent processes. Teachers can only make moral judgements about what they have first recognised as morally significant. Professional ethical failure, therefore, does not necessarily begin at the point of choosing the wrong action. It may begin earlier when ethically significant features are not recognised, when particular perspectives are overlooked, when bias goes unnoticed, or when the consequences of an action are not anticipated. In this sense, ethical sensitivity provides the foundation for subsequent professional judgement and action.

Existing literature provides evidence that this relationship cannot be assumed to operate automatically. Ronkainen et al. (2023), in their study of Finnish and Estonian teachers, found that caring was among the stronger dimensions, whereas reading ethical issues was among the weaker ones. Some participants also did not include ethical sensitivity in their conceptions of successful teaching. Maxwell et al. (2021), using the scenario- and video-based Test of Ethical Sensitivity in Teaching (TEST), showed that many educators failed to recognise multiple ethically significant features in teaching situations. These findings reveal an important distinction between perceiving oneself as a caring or ethical teacher and actually being able to recognise ethical features in complex professional situations.

Ethical sensitivity is also a process situated within social and cultural contexts. Gholami and Tirri (2012) showed that the operationalisation of the ESSQ among Kurdish teachers in Iran required several modifications and that some dimensions demonstrated weaker reliability. Gholami, Kuusisto, and Tirri (2015) further found that caring by connecting to others was more stable across Finnish and Iranian contexts, whereas perspective taking was more culturally dependent. This finding is important because perspective taking is one of the fundamental mechanisms through which teachers understand students' experiences. If this process is itself shaped by norms, experiences, and cultural assumptions, ethical recognition and interpretation cannot be regarded as entirely neutral processes.

This perspective draws attention to the relationship between ethical sensitivity and bias in professional practice. One of the dimensions associated with ethical sensitivity is preventing social bias, yet the literature indicates that some forms of bias may operate beyond teachers' explicit awareness. Costa, Langher, and Pirchio (2021) identified negative implicit attitudes towards students from ethnic minority groups in the literature they reviewed. Glock and Karbach (2015), as well as Glock and Böhmer (2018), similarly demonstrated that social categories can enter teachers' implicit attitudes, stereotypes, and spontaneous

judgements. Under such conditions, ethical issues do not necessarily appear as clear-cut dilemmas. They may instead be embedded in how students are perceived, how their abilities are anticipated, or how their behaviour is interpreted.

Evidence from studies related to migration and cultural diversity further clarifies this problem. Ayala et al. (2024) showed that nationality stereotypes can influence judgements of the learning abilities of Haitian migrant students, while Neuenschwander and Garrote (2025) found that some groups of students with migration backgrounds received lower academic expectations. Kehl et al. (2024) further showed that microaggressions can occur in classroom interactions without necessarily being recognised by teachers themselves as problematic. In this review, these studies are not used to position migration or cultural diversity as the ultimate focus, but rather as evidence of circumstances in which a failure to recognise ethically significant aspects can influence professional judgement and action.

This relationship is particularly relevant to Moral Education teachers. Moral Education directly addresses values, moral judgement, interpersonal relationships, and action, yet mastery of this content does not in itself ensure that teachers are able to recognise moral dimensions within their own professional practice. A teacher may be able to explain the concept of justice while still failing to recognise bias in a particular decision; may teach the value of respect while overlooking the implications of an interaction for a student; or may promote caring while remaining unaware that certain expectations produce unfairness. Moral Education teaching therefore involves not only what teachers teach about morality, but also how teachers themselves recognise, interpret, and respond to the moral dimensions that arise within pedagogical relationships.

This position is consistent with an understanding of teaching as a relational practice that always occurs within a particular context. Teachers' decisions concerning assessment, discipline, interaction, choice of examples, responses to value conflicts, and treatment of difference have consequences for students. Professional ethics therefore cannot be reduced to compliance with formal codes. Professional principles acquire meaning through particular situations, and a principle can only be applied appropriately when the relevant features of that situation have first been recognised. Ethical sensitivity provides the initial mechanism that enables this process to occur.

Several terms are used in the literature to describe related processes, including ethical sensitivity, moral sensitivity, ethical awareness, moral awareness, ethical recognition, and moral recognition. Despite terminological variation, these terms share a concern with the initial process of recognising the moral features of a situation before judgement or action occurs. The professional ethics literature, meanwhile, uses terms such as teacher ethics, professional ethics, professional morality, ethical competence, and ethical teaching to discuss teachers' responsibilities and actions. The overlap between these two groups of terms indicates that recognition, judgement, and action are already present within the scholarship, but the processual relationship among them has yet to be adequately synthesised.

Working definitions are useful for clarifying how the key concepts are used in this review. Teacher ethical sensitivity refers to the capacity to recognise and interpret ethically significant features of pedagogical situations, including the perspectives of others, caring, individual and group differences, social bias, alternative interpretations, and the possible consequences of actions. Teachers' professional ethics refers to professional judgement, responsibility, decision-making, and action related to pedagogical relationships, justice, student welfare, and professional obligations. Moral Education teaching is used as the professional context in which both capacities are required, because teachers operate simultaneously as educators of moral content and as professional agents who make decisions with ethical implications.

What follows is a critical thematic literature review focused on the complex relationship between ethical sensitivity and professional ethics in teaching. The review engages with the literature through the lenses of moral recognition, perspective taking, caring, group differences, bias, interpretation, and awareness of consequences, while identifying patterns, gaps, and tensions in the ways ethical sensitivity is connected to teachers' professional practice. The central argument developed is that ethical sensitivity is a prerequisite for professional ethics because teachers must first recognise and interpret the moral significance of a situation

before they can make professional judgements and enact ethical professional actions. In the context of Moral Education teachers, this framing provides a basis for understanding professionalism not only through what teachers know about morality, but also through what they are able to notice, interpret, and respond to ethically in actual teaching practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This review is guided by Rest's Four Component Model of Moral Behaviour, particularly the first component, namely moral or ethical sensitivity, together with Narvaez's operationalisation of the construct. In Rest's model, moral action does not begin with judgement about what is right or wrong, but with an individual's capacity first to recognise and interpret that a situation has moral significance. Ethical sensitivity therefore precedes moral judgement, moral motivation, and the implementation of moral action. In the teaching profession, this position is important because teachers continually encounter pedagogical situations involving students' interests, rights, welfare, relationships, perspectives, and possible consequences before any professional decision or action is taken. The teacher literature reviewed also locates ethical sensitivity within the Rest–Narvaez tradition and operationalises it through dimensions related to emotions, perspective taking, caring, individual and group differences, social bias, interpretation, and the consequences of actions.

Narvaez extends Rest's moral sensitivity component by elaborating it into more specific capacities within social interaction, including reading and expressing emotions, taking the perspectives of others, connecting to others through caring, working with interpersonal and group differences, preventing social bias, generating interpretations and options, and identifying the consequences of actions. These dimensions provide an appropriate lens for understanding ethical sensitivity as a professional capacity because professional ethics does not depend solely on knowledge of codes, principles, or rules. Before a principle can be applied, teachers must first recognise the parties involved, understand relevant perspectives, interpret the moral significance of a situation, recognise possible biases, and consider the consequences of the choices made. Ethical sensitivity therefore operates at an early stage that provides the foundation for professional judgement and action.

This lens is particularly significant in Moral Education teaching. Moral Education teachers do not merely convey knowledge about values, morality, and judgements concerning right and wrong actions, but also make professional decisions through interactions with students, the selection of content and examples, the management of differing viewpoints, assessment, the resolution of value conflicts, and the management of pedagogical relationships. Each of these situations may contain ethical dimensions that need to be recognised before a professional response can be formed. Moral Education teaching therefore cannot be entirely separated from teachers' professional ethics because the values being taught also operate through the ways teachers interpret situations, treat students, and make decisions in their teaching practice.

From a Rest–Narvaez perspective, this relationship positions ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for professional ethics. Recognising that a situation has moral significance provides the basis for judging what constitutes an appropriate course of action. Such judgement subsequently precedes motivation and professional action. This sequence is important because teachers cannot make ethical judgements about aspects that have not first been recognised as morally significant. In teaching contexts, professional ethical failure therefore does not necessarily begin at the point of choosing the wrong action, but may occur earlier when teachers fail to recognise the rights, needs, perspectives, biases, injustices, or consequences embedded in a pedagogical situation.

This framework also draws attention to the influence of context on ethical recognition and interpretation. Comparative evidence from Finnish and Iranian teachers indicates that some dimensions of ethical sensitivity do not necessarily function uniformly across cultures; in particular, perspective taking has been found to be more culturally dependent than caring. These findings indicate that teachers do not interpret students' experiences and perspectives within a completely neutral space. Teachers' norms, experiences, values, and cultural frameworks may influence what they notice and how they assign meaning to a situation.

Professional ethical sensitivity therefore also requires awareness that one's own interpretations may be shaped by assumptions that are not always consciously recognised.

The Rest–Narvaez framework also helps explain the position of bias within teachers' professional ethics. One of the capacities associated with ethical sensitivity is preventing social bias. The literature reviewed indicates that stereotypes and biases can influence teachers' perceptions, expectations, and evaluations without necessarily being explicitly recognised. From the perspective of this theoretical framework, such problems occur at an early stage of the moral process. When bias is not recognised as a factor influencing interpretation, subsequent professional judgement may begin from an already distorted understanding of the situation. The capacity to recognise possible bias therefore becomes part of the prerequisite for fairer and more ethical professional judgement.

Awareness of the consequences of actions also occupies an important position within this framework. Teachers make decisions that may affect students' experiences, opportunities, relationships, and well-being, including through seemingly routine practices such as providing feedback, assessment, the use of examples, conflict management, or responses to behaviour. Ethical sensitivity helps teachers recognise that the consequences of an action may not be the same for every student. Sensitivity to consequences therefore extends professional ethics beyond questions of teachers' intentions to include attention to the actual effects of pedagogical decisions.

From this perspective, ethical sensitivity is not regarded as equivalent to the entirety of teachers' professional ethics. Rather, it constitutes an initial capacity that enables the professional ethical process to begin. Professional ethics encompasses judgement, motivation, decision-making, and action, whereas ethical sensitivity concerns the capacity first to recognise and interpret what is morally significant within a situation. The Rest–Narvaez framework therefore provides the theoretical foundation for this review by positioning ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for professional ethics in Moral Education teaching, while directing the analysis towards the relationship between moral recognition, professional judgement, and teachers' actions in pedagogical practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a critical thematic literature review methodology, which combines systematic search strategies with interpretive analysis to identify patterns, gaps, and tensions within a body of scholarship (Grant & Booth, 2009). Unlike a systematic review, which seeks comprehensive coverage and standardised quality assessment, a critical thematic literature review prioritises conceptual engagement with selected literature, thereby allowing a more nuanced analysis of how key concepts are constructed and debated within a field. This approach follows the methodological logic used in the exemplar article, which combined systematic search strategies with interpretive analysis to identify patterns, gaps, and tensions in the literature.

The selection of this approach was justified by several considerations. First, the literature on teachers' ethical sensitivity is broad and multidisciplinary, encompassing moral psychology, teachers' professional ethics, teacher education, multicultural and intercultural education, and studies related to migration and cultural diversity; a critical thematic approach allows representative works to be identified while maintaining analytical depth. Second, the study's theoretical commitment to ethical sensitivity as an initial component of the moral process requires an interpretive stance capable of foregrounding dimensions of recognition, interpretation, and relationships within teaching situations. Third, the use of concepts such as ethical sensitivity, moral sensitivity, ethical awareness, perspective taking, bias, and cultural diversity across different research traditions requires a methodology capable of examining how these concepts are differently defined and applied. This rationale is consistent with the exemplar article, which adopted a critical thematic approach because the literature examined was multidisciplinary, involved particular theoretical commitments, and included concepts interpreted differently across research traditions.

The first author conducted an extensive literature search through Web of Science, Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar in September 2026. Search terms were developed iteratively by combining conceptual clusters related to ethical sensitivity, teachers and teaching, migration and cultural diversity, and educational contexts. Table 1 presents the search terms used.

Table 1 Search Terms by Conceptual Cluster

Conceptual Cluster	Search Terms
Ethical Sensitivity	ethical sensitivity, moral sensitivity, ethical awareness, moral awareness, ethical recognition, moral recognition
Teachers and Teaching	teacher, teachers, teaching, educator, educators, pre-service teacher, student teacher, teacher education
Migration and Cultural Diversity	migration, migrant, immigrant, refugee, multicultural, intercultural, cultural diversity, culturally diverse, ethnic diversity
Educational Context	school, classroom, primary school, secondary school, school education, teacher education

The structure of the conceptual clusters and search terms follows the form used in the exemplar article, which organised search terms according to the study's main conceptual clusters. One indicative Boolean search string combining the four clusters was: ("ethical sensitivity" OR "moral sensitivity") AND (teacher OR educator) AND (migration OR multicultural OR "cultural diversity") AND (school OR classroom).*

The search focused on peer-reviewed publications in English related to teachers' ethical sensitivity and teaching in the context of migration and cultural diversity. Earlier foundational works were also considered when they were theoretically significant to the development of the concept of ethical sensitivity. This approach is consistent with the exemplar article, which included foundational works outside the main search period when critical reading indicated that such works were necessary to ensure adequate conceptual coverage.

Following review and deduplication across indexing sources, 31 unique articles were identified for ongoing reading and coding. Based on the primary index assigned to avoid double counting, the corpus consisted of 16 Web of Science articles, five Scopus articles, one ERIC article, and nine articles from Google Scholar or supplementary searches. Articles indexed in more than one database were counted only once according to the designated primary index. The number of initial search results, articles excluded after title and abstract screening, and full-text articles excluded were not recorded in the available search materials and are therefore not reported here.

The second author then critically reviewed the selection made by the first author by examining the corpus for gaps in coverage and representativeness. This process led to the identification of additional works, including foundational studies on moral and ethical sensitivity, teachers' professional ethics, and studies examining bias, stereotypes, justice, cultural differences, and the experiences of migrant students. This process of critical review and collaborative expansion of the corpus was intended to reduce blind spots that might arise from the disciplinary positioning of a single researcher. This approach follows the procedure adopted in the exemplar article, in which the second author was involved in assessing gaps in coverage and representativeness before the final corpus was established.

From the expanded corpus, 31 unique articles were ultimately selected for thematic analysis and are referred to in the findings section. The analysis was conducted through several phases based on Boyatzis's (1998) approach to thematic analysis, which emphasises the identification of patterns across qualitative information through the iterative development of codes. Initial coding involved close reading and annotation of sections related to ethical sensitivity, recognition of ethical issues, perspective taking, caring, cultural differences, bias, justice, and the consequences of teachers' actions. Codes were developed inductively from patterns observed in the literature and deductively from concepts central to the theoretical framework of ethical sensitivity. The exemplar article similarly employed a combination of inductive and deductive coding based on patterns in the literature and concepts drawn from its theoretical framework.

The first author conducted three iterative coding cycles: open coding to generate descriptive labels, a second round to group codes into provisional categories related to concepts of ethical sensitivity, and a third round to refine the categories through constant comparison. The second author audited the coding process, while differences in interpretation were resolved through dialogic discussion. This procedure follows the three coding cycles used in the exemplar article.

Four main themes emerged from the analysis: the conceptual and theoretical foundations of teachers' ethical sensitivity; the significance of ethical sensitivity in professional practice and teaching within culturally diverse contexts; the limitations and tensions of ethical sensitivity in migration-affected and culturally diverse classrooms; and the gap in connecting the literature on teachers' ethical sensitivity with the cultural complexity of classrooms.

Throughout the process, both authors maintained a critical orientation by paying particular attention to how culture, migration, bias, stereotypes, justice, power relations, and group differences appeared or failed to appear in the literature on teachers' ethical sensitivity. The analysis also attended to tensions between self-reported ethical sensitivity and the demonstrated ability to recognise ethically significant issues, as well as to the possibility that understandings of ethical sensitivity are shaped by cultural context. This analytical structure retains the approach of the exemplar article, which attended not only to dominant patterns in the literature but also to aspects that were absent or insufficiently addressed.

FINDINGS

The analysis identified four main themes that explain the position of ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for teachers' professional ethics in teaching. These four themes were selected because they reveal the conceptual gap underlying this review: the ethical sensitivity literature has developed most extensively within traditions that conceptualise it as the capacity to recognise and interpret ethically significant features; studies of professional practice indicate that such recognition precedes teachers' judgement and responses; research on measurement, bias, and cultural context reveals limitations between perceived ethical sensitivity and sensitivity actually demonstrated in practice; while the relationship between ethical sensitivity and professional ethics in teaching has yet to be developed in an integrated manner within the literature.

Based on these patterns, the four themes identified were: ethical sensitivity as recognition and interpretation in teaching; ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for professional ethical judgement; blind spots and limitations of ethical sensitivity in teachers' professional practice; and the integration gap between ethical sensitivity and professional ethics in teaching. Literature on culture, bias, stereotypes, and diversity was used as contextual evidence to illustrate conditions that may influence teachers' capacity to recognise and interpret ethical issues, rather than as the ultimate focus of the review. In the context of Moral Education teachers, this synthesis is particularly important because their teaching directly involves values, moral judgement, interpersonal relationships, justice, and professional action within pedagogical situations that contain ethical dimensions.

Ethical Sensitivity as Recognition and Interpretation in Teaching

The most prominent theme concerns the conceptualisation of ethical sensitivity as teachers' capacity to recognise and interpret ethically significant features in teaching situations. This body of literature has been

strongly influenced by Rest's Four Component Model and Narvaez's operationalisation of ethical sensitivity, which positions sensitivity as an initial component in the moral process before judgement and action can occur. In their study of Finnish teachers, Kuusisto, Tirri, and Rissanen (2012) employed the Rest–Narvaez framework and the Ethical Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire (ESSQ), which comprises seven dimensions: reading and expressing emotions, taking the perspectives of others, caring for others, working with interpersonal and group differences, preventing social bias, generating interpretations and options, and identifying the consequences of actions. Their findings indicated high self-reported ethical sensitivity, with experienced teachers demonstrating higher levels than student teachers in several aspects.

This understanding indicates that ethical sensitivity in teaching extends beyond merely knowing professional rules or being able to determine whether an action is right or wrong. It begins earlier, at the level of what teachers notice, become aware of, and interpret as morally significant. Hanhimäki and Tirri (2009), through narratives of teachers' critical incidents in Finland, showed that ethical situations in schools arise in relationships with students, families, other teachers, administrators, and the wider school community. Emotions, caring, collaboration, and respect were important features of these experiences, particularly the capacity to read and express emotions. These findings highlight the relational nature of ethical sensitivity: before teachers can make professional judgements or responses, they must first recognise that a relationship, decision, or situation contains a moral dimension.

This position is important for teachers' professional ethics because professional judgement can only occur after an aspect of a situation has been recognised as ethically relevant. If teachers fail to recognise that their actions, words, assessment decisions, treatment of students, or professional relationships carry moral implications, ethical judgement will not be activated at the subsequent stage. In Moral Education teaching, this issue becomes particularly significant because teachers not only convey content related to values and morality but simultaneously make pedagogical decisions that themselves have ethical implications for students.

Research using the ESSQ has further extended this understanding across different cultural contexts. Gholami and Tirri (2012), who tested the ESSQ structure among 556 Kurdish teachers in Iran, found that the seven-factor structure achieved a reasonable fit but required several modifications. Although the findings suggested that the ethical sensitivity framework could be applied beyond its original context, some dimensions demonstrated weaker reliability and raised questions about the cultural dependence of the construct's operationalisation. Further analysis showed that the reliability of preventing social bias and reading/expressing emotions was relatively low, partly attributed to cultural differences.

The issue of culture became more evident in the Finland–Iran comparison conducted by Gholami, Kuusisto, and Tirri (2015). Their study showed that not all dimensions of ethical sensitivity functioned in the same way across cultural contexts. Caring by connecting to others was found to be more stable across cultures, whereas perspective taking was more strongly influenced by cultural context. This finding is important because perspective taking is one of the principal mechanisms through which teachers attempt to understand students' experiences. However, if this process is itself shaped by cultural norms, teachers may not necessarily interpret students' perspectives independently of their own cultural frameworks. In other words, perspective taking is not necessarily a culturally neutral process.

From the perspective of professional ethics, these findings suggest that the capacity to recognise an issue as ethical is not simply a fixed internal ability but may be shaped by teachers' experiences, social norms, and cultural frameworks. Professional ethics therefore cannot be grounded solely in knowledge of codes or principles. It also depends on teachers' capacity to recognise how their own assumptions influence the way they perceive students, interpret behaviour, and make pedagogical decisions.

The literature also demonstrates that caring is not necessarily equivalent to the capacity to recognise ethical issues. Ronkainen et al. (2023), in a study involving 255 Finnish teachers and 412 Estonian teachers, found that caring was among the highest-rated dimensions, whereas reading ethical issues was the lowest. More importantly, approximately 30% of participants did not include ethical sensitivity in their conceptions of

successful teaching. This pattern reveals an important tension: teachers may care about students while still failing to recognise an interaction, decision, or practice as having ethical implications.

This tension is important for understanding teachers' professional ethics. Good intentions and caring do not in themselves guarantee ethical professional action because teachers must still recognise morally relevant features before making judgements. A teacher may intend to help a student, but if the teacher fails to recognise that an action involves justice, rights, bias, confidentiality, or consequences for others, that intention alone is insufficient to produce an ethically appropriate professional response.

Evidence from situation-based instruments further reinforces this issue. Park and Song (2016), who used two scenarios through a revised TESS with 82 South Korean elementary school teachers, found that 81 of the 82 teachers were able to identify at least one ethical issue. However, only a small proportion were able to identify multiple ethical issues and contextual features embedded within the situations. These findings indicate that ethical recognition is not a binary matter of whether a teacher is "sensitive" or "insensitive." A teacher may recognise one obvious aspect while still overlooking other features that are also ethically significant.

The distinction between perceived and demonstrated ethical sensitivity becomes more evident in the study by Maxwell, Boon, Tanchuk, and Rauwerda (2021). Unlike the ESSQ, which relies on self-report, they used the Test of Ethical Sensitivity in Teaching (TEST), a video- and scenario-based approach that assesses recognition of rights and responsibilities, situational factors, options, and consequences. In a sample of nearly 400 educators from the United States, Canada, and Australia, overall performance was relatively low, and many participants failed to identify multiple ethically significant aspects of the situations presented.

The findings of Maxwell et al. (2021) have direct implications for teachers' professional ethics: perceiving oneself as an ethical teacher is not the same as demonstrating the capacity to recognise ethical features in actual professional situations. Ethical sensitivity is therefore more appropriately understood as a professional capacity that must be demonstrated through the recognition and interpretation of situations rather than merely as an attitude or self-perception.

The study by Kavandi et al. also positioned perspective taking, the recognition and interpretation of issues, reflection, and awareness of consequences as important elements in the development of student teachers' ethical sensitivity. Their analysis emphasised that teacher education should help prospective teachers not only understand students' perspectives but also identify issues and anticipate the possible consequences of their actions. This further supports the view that ethical sensitivity is an interpretive process that precedes professional judgement and response, rather than merely a positive attitude towards students.

In the context of Moral Education teachers, this position has specific implications. Moral Education teaching involves discussions of values, moral judgement, value conflicts, interpersonal relationships, and situations requiring teachers to make pedagogical decisions. Professional competence in this field therefore does not begin only at the stage of selecting teaching strategies or explaining a particular value. It begins at a more fundamental level: whether teachers recognise that a situation has ethical significance, which aspects they recognise, whose perspectives they consider, and what consequences may result from the response they choose.

The most significant insight from this theme is the existence of a gap between the relational nature of ethical sensitivity and the actual capacity to recognise the full range of ethical features within a situation. The ESSQ literature shows that caring, perspective taking, group differences, and the prevention of social bias are components of ethical sensitivity, yet scenario-based studies demonstrate that teachers may still overlook multiple ethically significant elements. At the same time, cross-cultural comparative evidence indicates that at least some aspects of the interpretive process are culturally influenced.

Theme One therefore demonstrates that ethical sensitivity is a prerequisite for teachers' professional ethics because professional judgement and action can only be formed when teachers first recognise and interpret a situation as ethically significant. The central issue is not simply whether teachers care or intend to do the

right thing, but what they are able to notice, what they interpret as morally significant, and the extent to which they recognise the consequences of their pedagogical decisions.

This theme provides the foundation for the next theme, which examines more specifically how ethical sensitivity functions as a prerequisite for professional ethical judgement that is, how the process of recognising and interpreting an issue provides the basis for Moral Education teachers' professional decisions and actions.

Ethical Sensitivity as a Prerequisite for Professional Ethical Judgement

The second theme demonstrates that ethical sensitivity is not merely one characteristic of teachers' professional ethics, but a prerequisite that enables professional ethical judgement to occur. A teaching situation can only be considered from an ethical perspective when teachers first recognise that the situation contains moral significance, identify the parties affected, understand the perspectives involved, and interpret the possible consequences of the actions taken. The literature reviewed shows that this process becomes more challenging when teaching involves differences in culture, values, language, social position, and conflicting professional demands. Therefore, cross-cultural literature is used in this theme not as the ultimate focus of the study, but as a context that demonstrates how ethical sensitivity is required before teachers can make appropriate professional judgements.

The relationship between ethical sensitivity and professional judgement can be seen through the dimension of perspective taking. Abacioglu, Volman, and Fischer (2020), in a study of 143 primary school teachers in the Netherlands, found that the ability to take perspectives was associated with more socially and culturally sensitive teaching and had a stronger relationship with culturally responsive teaching practices than multicultural attitudes alone. This finding is important because perspective taking is also one of the main dimensions of ethical sensitivity. In the context of professional ethics, teachers cannot determine the most appropriate course of action if the perspectives of students or other affected parties have not first been recognised and understood.

However, the ability to take perspectives cannot be equated merely with having positive attitudes towards diversity. Subasi Singh and Akar (2021) showed that pre-service teachers may be accepting of diversity yet still face limitations in cross-cultural knowledge and challenges arising from language differences. This indicates that ethical sensitivity requires more than a disposition to be caring or open-minded. Teachers need the capacity to interpret the meaning of a situation accurately before making a professional judgement about it. If the initial interpretation is shaped by insufficient knowledge or unexamined assumptions, subsequent ethical judgement may also be constrained.

The relationship between sensitivity and professional judgement becomes clearer when teachers encounter ethical dilemmas. Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011), through a study of teachers' critical incidents, identified conflicts involving care, justice, confidentiality, rules, and norms. Awareness of these conflicts constitutes an initial step before teachers can evaluate competing moral demands. In a subsequent study, Shapira-Lishchinsky (2016) showed that reasoning about ethical incidents may involve care, justice, culturally responsive pedagogy, democracy, and critical pedagogy. Waked and Moshel (2023) similarly showed that Arab female teachers in Israel faced tensions between justice and care, as well as between professional and cultural norms.

These studies demonstrate that professional ethical judgement does not begin when teachers choose between two courses of action. It begins earlier, when teachers recognise that competing moral demands are present. Conflicts between care and justice, between individual interests and institutional rules, or between cultural norms and professional responsibilities must first be recognised as ethical problems. If these conflicts are not recognised, professional judgement may not be consciously activated. Ethical sensitivity therefore functions as an entry point into the process of ethical reasoning.

Boon and Lewthwaite (2016) further reinforce this position by linking the ethic of care with quality teaching in multi-ethnic and multiracial contexts. Caring, respect, and responsiveness to cultural differences emerge

as important elements of pedagogical relationships. However, caring alone is insufficient to explain professional ethics. Caring must be accompanied by the capacity to recognise students' needs, understand how an action may affect them, and determine whether a decision produces justice or injustice. Thus, caring becomes significant to professional ethics when combined with the accurate recognition and interpretation of a situation.

Studies involving migrant students provide a clearer illustration of the consequences when such recognition does not occur. Chircop (2022) found that some educators in Malta viewed migrant students as needing to adapt or "fit in," while certain linguistic differences and religious identities were regarded as problems. From the perspective of professional ethics, the central issue is not simply whether teachers hold positive or negative attitudes towards migrant students, but whether they recognise that expectations perceived as normal may carry implications for justice, participation, and the treatment of students. A pedagogical decision cannot be ethically evaluated if its effects on students have not first been recognised.

This dimension is also demonstrated by Ialuna, Civitillo, and Jugert (2024), who found associations between teacher–student relationships and students' sense of belonging in classrooms with substantial numbers of migrant or refugee students. Their study shows that the ways in which teachers interpret and relate to students have relational consequences for students' experiences at school. This illustrates that professional ethical sensitivity is not confined to recognising major dilemmas or breaches of ethical codes. It also involves awareness of how routine interactions, expectations, and pedagogical decisions can influence students' positions and experiences.

The literature on bias further strengthens the relationship between recognition and professional judgement. Costa, Langher, and Pirchio (2021) found that negative implicit attitudes towards students from ethnic minority groups appeared in a substantial proportion of the studies they reviewed. Glock and Karbach (2015), as well as Glock and Böhmer (2018), showed that stereotypes and implicit attitudes can enter spontaneous judgements about students. This creates an important challenge for professional ethics: teachers' capacity to make fair judgements depends in part on whether the factors influencing those judgements are first recognised.

This issue becomes even more important in assessment. Bonefeld and Dickhäuser (2018) showed that students' migration backgrounds could influence performance evaluations under certain conditions, while Chin et al. (2020) demonstrated the presence of implicit racial attitudes in a large sample of K–12 teachers. Within the ethical sensitivity framework, these findings relate directly to the dimension of preventing social bias. Teachers need not only to know that bias is inappropriate; they must also be able to recognise the possibility of bias when making actual professional decisions.

Ayala et al. (2024) provide more direct evidence that nationality stereotypes can enter teachers' evaluations of Haitian migrant students. Neuenschwander and Garrote (2025) likewise showed that some groups of students with migration backgrounds received lower academic expectations even after several achievement-related factors had been controlled. From the perspective of professional ethics, these findings demonstrate that a judgement may appear academic or professional while still containing a moral dimension that remains unrecognised by the teacher. Fairness in professional action therefore depends first on the capacity to detect the factors that make a decision ethically significant.

The most important insight from this theme is that the literature on cross-cultural teaching actually provides empirical evidence for several processes already identified within the concept of ethical sensitivity: perspective taking, caring, awareness of individual and group differences, prevention of bias, and consideration of consequences. However, these processes are typically discussed through culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education, bias, or justice, rather than directly as components of ethical sensitivity that precede professional judgement.

Kehl et al. (2024) illustrate this tension clearly by showing that teachers' positive beliefs do not necessarily align with their practices and that microaggressions may occur without being recognised by teachers as problematic. This finding demonstrates that professional ethics cannot be grounded solely in intentions,

professed values, or declarative knowledge. An ethical feature must first enter teachers' professional awareness before it can be considered, evaluated, and addressed.

For Moral Education teachers, this relationship has particular significance. Moral Education teachers not only teach concepts of values and moral judgement to students, but must themselves make professional decisions concerning relationships with students, the management of differing viewpoints, responses to value conflicts, assessment, justice, and the ways in which moral issues are framed in teaching. Under such circumstances, knowledge of moral principles does not automatically guarantee ethical professional practice. Teachers must first recognise who is affected, which values or rights are involved, whose perspectives have not yet been considered, what possible biases may influence interpretation, and what consequences may follow from the action chosen.

The second theme therefore reinforces the central argument of this review that ethical sensitivity is a prerequisite for teachers' professional ethical judgement. Ethical sensitivity enables a situation to be recognised as morally significant; ethical judgement then enables teachers to evaluate the appropriate course of action in response to that situation. Without this initial stage, teachers may possess ethical knowledge, good intentions, and professional commitment yet still fail to activate moral judgement when ethically significant aspects remain unrecognised.

This theme leads to the third theme. If ethical sensitivity is a prerequisite for professional judgement, the next critical issue concerns the factors that may cause teachers to fail to recognise an ethical issue despite possessing care, knowledge, or good professional intentions. The third theme examines these blind spots and limitations within teachers' professional practice.

Blind Spots and Limitations of Ethical Sensitivity in Teachers' Professional Practice

The third theme examines the limitations of ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for teachers' professional ethics. Although ethical sensitivity enables teachers to recognise and interpret morally significant features before professional judgement and action occur, the literature shows that this process does not operate automatically, uniformly, or independently of contextual influences. Instead, tensions exist between self-reported and demonstrated ethical sensitivity, between caring and the recognition of ethical problems, and between good professional intentions and the actual capacity to recognise the moral elements embedded in teaching situations.

The first limitation concerns the influence of culture on the process of ethical interpretation. Gholami and Tirri (2012), in their study of 556 Kurdish teachers in Iran, found that the use of the ESSQ required modifications in confirmatory factor analysis and that several dimensions demonstrated relatively low reliability, including preventing social bias and reading and expressing emotions. These findings indicate that ethical sensitivity does not necessarily take the same operational form across cultural contexts.

This issue becomes clearer in the study by Gholami, Kuusisto, and Tirri (2015). Although caring by connecting to others showed greater stability across Finnish and Iranian contexts, perspective taking was found to be more culturally dependent. Differences associated with power distance and collectivism suggest that teachers do not take the perspectives of others within a neutral interpretive space. Rather, interpretations of students' behaviour, needs, and experiences may be shaped by teachers' own cultural norms, expectations, and assumptions.

From the perspective of professional ethics, this indicates that knowledge of moral principles alone is insufficient if teachers fail to recognise that the way they interpret a situation is also shaped by their own social and cultural frameworks. A teacher may understand principles of justice, respect, or care but still arrive at a limited interpretation if the perspectives of others are not accurately recognised. Ethical sensitivity therefore involves not only the detection of moral issues, but also reflection on the basis through which teachers determine what is considered normal, appropriate, or problematic in teaching.

The second limitation concerns the distinction between caring and ethical recognition. Ronkainen et al. (2023) found that Finnish and Estonian teachers scored higher on the dimension of caring, whereas reading ethical issues was among the lowest-scoring dimensions. Approximately 30% of participants also did not include ethical sensitivity in their conceptions of successful teaching. These findings indicate that teachers may care about students' welfare while still failing to recognise an interaction, decision, or practice as having ethical implications.

This distinction is important for professional ethics because good intentions are not a sufficient measure of ethical professional action. Caring can only guide action when teachers are able to recognise what is occurring, who is affected, and which ethical dimensions are involved. If an issue does not enter teachers' professional awareness, the moral judgement that should occur at the subsequent stage may never be activated.

A more fundamental limitation emerges from the distinction between perceived and demonstrated ethical sensitivity. Maxwell et al. (2021), using a situation-based test rather than relying solely on self-report measures, found that overall ethical sensitivity performance among educators was relatively low and that many participants failed to recognise all ethically significant features within teaching situations. These findings indicate that identifying oneself as a fair, caring, or ethical teacher does not necessarily correspond with the actual capacity to recognise multiple moral dimensions in complex professional situations.

Sirin, Rogers-Sirin, and Collins (2010) reinforce this argument through the Quick-Racial and Ethical Sensitivity Test, which uses specific situations related to racial intolerance. Their study demonstrates that general ethical sensitivity cannot automatically be assumed to translate into the capacity to recognise all forms of injustice occurring in particular contexts. From a professional perspective, this means that teachers may possess general ethical knowledge while still requiring contextual sensitivity to recognise how ethical violations emerge in real situations.

The third limitation concerns bias operating beyond teachers' explicit awareness. Costa, Langher, and Pirchio (2021) showed that negative implicit attitudes towards students from ethnic minority groups appeared in the literature they reviewed. The implication for ethical sensitivity is fundamental: if a stereotype or tendency influences perception without conscious awareness, teachers may fail to recognise that their professional judgement is being shaped by factors with moral implications.

Ayala et al. (2024), for example, showed that nationality stereotypes can enter evaluations of the learning abilities of Haitian migrant students. In the context of professional ethics, this finding indicates that a decision that appears academic, objective, or routine may still contain ethical dimensions that remain unrecognised by the teacher. Professional problems therefore do not necessarily appear in the form of clear moral dilemmas; they may be embedded in assumptions, social categories, and ordinary practices.

The study by Kehl et al. (2024) provides one of the clearest examples of failed ethical recognition in professional practice. Through classroom observations and interviews with secondary school teachers in Germany, the study showed that teachers' beliefs and practices do not necessarily align. Microaggressions could be identified through observation but were often not regarded by teachers themselves as problematic during post-lesson reflection. These findings challenge the assumption that professional commitment, positive intentions, or beliefs in inclusivity automatically result in ethical action.

This leads to an important implication: professional ethics is not only about possessing the right values, but also about the capacity to recognise when one's own actions conflict with those values. Teachers may believe that they are fair and respectful towards students, but if microaggressions, bias, or exclusion are not recognised as problematic, those professional beliefs may not translate into consistent practice.

The limitations of ethical sensitivity are also evident in professional assessment judgements. Peter, Karst, and Bonefeld (2024) found that when objective assessment criteria were not provided, participants with negative implicit associations assigned lower grades to students with Turkish migration backgrounds, whereas the use of objective criteria reduced the influence of such bias. These findings indicate that

individual ethical sensitivity alone may not be sufficient to guarantee fair professional decisions. Professional ethics also requires structures, procedures, and institutional practices that reduce the opportunity for bias to influence teachers' judgements.

Neuenschwander and Garrote (2025) also showed that nationality stereotypes can influence teachers' expectations of students, including expectations related to achievement and educational pathways. Within the framework of professional ethics, this extends the issue of sensitivity beyond merely recognising differences among students to recognising how particular social categories enter teachers' own expectations and professional decisions.

Another blind spot emerges when dominant norms are treated as neutral norms. Chircop (2022) found that some educators in Malta viewed migrant students as needing to "fit in," while certain linguistic differences and religious identities were regarded as problems to be addressed through student adaptation. From the perspective of professional ethics, this situation demonstrates that teachers may intend to be helpful while still failing to recognise that certain expectations carry implications of exclusion, fairness, or power imbalance.

Frühauf et al. (2024) further showed that stereotypes can produce different consequences for particular groups of students and that stereotype activation under certain conditions is associated with poorer learning outcomes among immigrant students. This finding extends ethical sensitivity from a concern with teachers' intentions to a concern with professional consequences. An action cannot be evaluated solely on the basis of what the teacher intended; its effects on students must also be recognised and considered.

The most striking insight from this theme is that the limitations of ethical sensitivity cannot be explained merely as a lack of individual teachers' moral knowledge. The literature indicates at least three interrelated sources of difficulty: ethical interpretation is shaped by cultural context; bias may operate outside conscious awareness; and the consequences of an action may differ according to the social position of those involved. Under such conditions, teachers may have good intentions, demonstrate care, and understand professional principles, yet still fail to recognise the ethical features embedded in routine practices.

For Moral Education teachers, these blind spots have particular implications. Moral Education teaching positions teachers not only as transmitters of values but also as models of how values are translated into professional judgement and action. Inconsistencies between the values taught and teachers' own actions—for example, teaching justice while failing to recognise bias, teaching respect while failing to recognise microaggressions, or teaching responsibility while failing to consider the consequences of a decision—can weaken the ethical dimension of teaching itself.

The third theme therefore demonstrates that ethical sensitivity is a necessary prerequisite but not an automatic guarantee of professional ethics. Ethical sensitivity may be shaped by culture, constrained by unconscious bias, and fail to translate into appropriate action when teachers do not recognise the actual consequences of their decisions. The professional ethics of Moral Education teachers therefore requires not only knowledge of moral principles, but also an ongoing capacity to examine how situations are recognised, interpreted, and assigned meaning before professional decisions are made.

This tension leads to the fourth theme. The ethical sensitivity tradition provides the conceptual language for explaining the processes of recognising perspectives, bias, differences, and consequences, while the professional ethics literature provides the language of teachers' judgement, responsibility, and action. However, the relationship between ethical sensitivity as an initial process of recognition and professional ethics as judgement and action in teaching has yet to be substantively integrated. The fourth theme therefore examines this integration gap.

The Integration Gap Between Ethical Sensitivity and Professional Ethics in Teaching

The fourth theme concerns an integration gap between two closely related bodies of scholarship that have nevertheless developed through different conceptual emphases. The first examines ethical sensitivity or

moral sensitivity through moral psychology and teacher ethics, with emphasis on the recognition of ethical issues, perspective taking, caring, individual and group differences, the prevention of social bias, the generation of interpretations, and awareness of the consequences of actions. The second examines teachers' professional ethics through questions of professional dilemmas, caring, justice, responsibility, judgement, and teachers' actions in teaching situations. The analysis indicates that these two bodies of literature have a strong conceptual relationship, yet the connection between ethical sensitivity as an initial process of recognition and professional ethical judgement and action remains insufficiently examined as an explicit analytical focus.

The ethical sensitivity literature provides a clear conceptual basis for explaining what teachers need to recognise before professional judgement and action can occur. Kuusisto, Tirri, and Rissanen (2012), for example, operationalised ethical sensitivity through the seven dimensions of the ESSQ, including perspective taking, caring, working with individual and group differences, preventing social bias, generating interpretations, and identifying the consequences of actions. These dimensions demonstrate that professional action does not begin merely at the point of choosing between right and wrong courses of action. Rather, teachers must first recognise who is involved, which perspectives need to be considered, what forms of bias may be present, and the possible consequences of a particular decision. In this sense, ethical sensitivity occupies a position prior to professional ethical judgement.

This relationship becomes more complex when teachers' interpretive processes are shaped by social and cultural contexts. Gholami, Kuusisto, and Tirri (2015) showed that caring was more stable across cultures, whereas perspective taking was more dependent on cultural context. These findings indicate that ethical recognition and interpretation do not occur in an entirely neutral manner. Teachers bring particular norms, experiences, and expectations when interpreting students and teaching situations. Ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for professional ethics therefore requires not only the capacity to recognise an issue, but also awareness that the interpretive process itself may be shaped by teachers' own frameworks.

Tirri (2023) extends this issue by positioning teachers within a context of global transition and emphasising the need to recognise moral aspects that are relatively stable across cultures as well as those that depend on cultural context. This position reinforces the need to understand professional ethics as more than compliance with predetermined principles or codes. Teaching situations may contain moral demands that vary according to relationships, contexts, and the parties involved. Teachers therefore require the capacity to recognise the moral significance of a situation before professional principles can be applied meaningfully.

Conversely, parts of the teaching literature provide empirical evidence of processes closely related to ethical sensitivity without necessarily framing them through this construct. Abacioglu, Volman, and Fischer (2020), for example, showed that perspective taking was associated with more socially and culturally responsive teaching, while Boon and Lewthwaite (2016) linked an ethic of care with quality teaching in multi-ethnic and multiracial contexts. Both findings overlap with dimensions of ethical sensitivity, particularly perspective taking and caring. However, the relationship between these capacities and the subsequent process of professional ethical judgement has yet to be systematically elaborated.

A similar overlap can be observed in research on teacher bias. The ethical sensitivity tradition includes the prevention of social bias as one of its dimensions, whereas the literature on bias has largely developed as a distinct body of research. Costa, Langher, and Pirchio (2021), Glock and Karbach (2015), Glock and Böhmer (2018), and Bonefeld and Dickhäuser (2018) showed that social categories such as ethnicity, race, and migration background can influence teachers' attitudes, spontaneous judgements, and assessments. From the perspective of professional ethics, the more fundamental issue is whether teachers first recognise that a particular tendency is influencing their judgement. If bias does not enter teachers' ethical awareness, knowledge of justice or professional principles may not be sufficient to prevent its effects on pedagogical decisions.

Studies involving migrant students make this problem more visible. Chircop (2022) showed that some educators viewed migrant students as needing to adapt to dominant norms, while Ayala et al. (2024)

demonstrated that nationality stereotypes could influence teachers' evaluations of Haitian migrant students. Neuenschwander and Garrote (2025) also showed that some groups of students with migration backgrounds received lower academic expectations even after several achievement-related factors had been controlled. These studies document conditions with ethical implications for professional judgement, but do not necessarily examine whether teachers recognised these factors as ethical problems before making decisions.

Kehl et al. (2024) provide evidence more directly related to this issue by showing that microaggressions can occur in classroom practice without necessarily being recognised by teachers themselves as problematic when reflecting on their teaching. This finding directly exposes the gap between professional beliefs and ethical recognition. Teachers may hold inclusive values or perceive themselves as fair professionals, yet their actions may still carry moral implications that do not enter their awareness. Under such conditions, ethical judgement does not fail solely because teachers choose the wrong action, but because the problem is not recognised as requiring ethical consideration in the first place.

The relationship between ethical sensitivity and professional ethics also emerges through awareness of the consequences of action. One dimension of ethical sensitivity is the ability to recognise the possible consequences of a choice. Frühauf et al. (2024) showed that stereotype activation can produce different effects for immigrant students, while Peter, Karst, and Bonefeld (2024) showed that the use of objective assessment criteria can reduce the influence of implicit associations on the evaluation of students with migration backgrounds. This evidence indicates that sensitivity to consequences forms part of the foundation of professional judgement, while also demonstrating that teachers' individual capacities need to be supported by professional procedures and institutional structures that limit the influence of bias.

What emerges from this body of literature is an integration and theoretical gap rather than an absence of research on ethical sensitivity or teachers' professional ethics. Research on ethical sensitivity has produced concepts, dimensions, and instruments for explaining how teachers recognise the moral features of a situation. At the same time, research on teachers' professional practice has generated evidence relating to caring, justice, bias, dilemmas, responsibility, decision-making, and the consequences of action. However, these bodies of scholarship continue largely to employ their own theoretical language, constructs, and research designs. Consequently, the process linking ethical recognition with professional judgement and action has yet to be adequately explained as a continuous relationship.

This disconnection raises an important issue for teachers' professional ethics: teachers may possess knowledge of professional principles yet fail to recognise that a particular interaction, assumption, or decision has ethical significance. Conversely, the capacity to recognise perspectives, bias, differences, justice, and possible consequences provides the basis for subsequent professional judgement. Evidence from the preceding themes indicates that this issue cannot be understood solely by examining ethical knowledge or moral judgement after a problem has already been recognised. Attention must also be given to the process that precedes judgement, namely what teachers are able to notice and interpret as morally significant.

The principal contribution emerging from the fourth theme is therefore the need to conceptualise ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for teachers' professional ethics in teaching. This integration does not imply that ethical sensitivity is equivalent to professional ethics as a whole. Rather, ethical sensitivity explains the initial process through which teachers recognise that a relationship, decision, assessment, conflict, or action has moral significance before professional judgement and response can occur. In the context of Moral Education teachers, this relationship is particularly significant because teachers not only teach moral knowledge and judgement to students, but must simultaneously demonstrate the capacity to recognise the ethical dimensions embedded in their own teaching practice. Accordingly, the central conceptual gap is no longer merely between ethical sensitivity and culturally diverse classrooms, but between ethical recognition and the formation of professional ethical judgement and action in Moral Education teaching.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The analysis across the four themes reveals a research landscape that remains fragmented, despite the strong

conceptual relationship between ethical sensitivity and teachers' professional ethics. The ethical sensitivity literature provides a clear basis for understanding how teachers recognise and interpret morally significant aspects through dimensions such as perspective taking, caring, attention to individual and group differences, prevention of social bias, generation of interpretations, and awareness of the consequences of actions. In contrast, the literature on professional ethics and teaching practice has focused largely on dilemmas, caring, justice, responsibility, judgement, and teachers' professional decisions. However, the relationship between these two bodies of scholarship has rarely been theorised directly as a sequential process. The synthesis emerging from this review indicates that ethical sensitivity should be understood as an initial process that enables teachers to recognise and interpret the moral significance of a situation before professional ethical judgement and action can occur.

This fragmentation becomes more significant when the evidence on ethical sensitivity is examined critically. The literature shows that teachers may demonstrate high levels of caring, yet such caring is not necessarily accompanied by an equally strong capacity to recognise ethical issues. Ronkainen et al. (2023), for example, found that caring was among the more prominent dimensions, whereas reading ethical issues was lower, and some teachers did not include ethical sensitivity in their understanding of successful teaching. Maxwell et al. (2021), using a situation-based test, further showed that demonstrated ethical sensitivity may be lower than what is suggested through self-report measures. Teachers' professional ethics therefore cannot be assumed solely on the basis of good intentions, caring, or teachers' perceptions of themselves as ethical professionals.

What this review reveals is not merely a lack of research, but a conceptual blind spot in the way the relationship between ethical sensitivity and teachers' professional ethics is often understood. When professional ethics is addressed primarily at the level of judgement, decision-making, or compliance with principles, there is a risk that the earlier process through which teachers recognise that a situation carries moral significance receives insufficient attention. At the same time, when ethical sensitivity is discussed mainly as an individual capacity, the contexts that shape what teachers are able or unable to perceive may also be marginalised. Gholami, Kuusisto, and Tirri (2015) showed that perspective taking may be influenced by culture, while Gholami and Tirri (2012) demonstrated that the operationalisation of the ESSQ does not function uniformly across different cultural contexts. These findings suggest that moral recognition and interpretation are themselves not entirely independent of teachers' social and cultural positioning.

These blind spots have tangible consequences in professional practice. The literature on bias shows that teachers may make judgements that appear professional or neutral while still being influenced by social categories of which they may be unaware. Costa, Langher, and Pirchio (2021) showed that implicit attitudes towards students from ethnic minority groups may operate outside teachers' explicit awareness. Ayala et al. (2024) found that nationality stereotypes can enter teachers' evaluations of Haitian migrant students, while Neuenschwander and Garrote (2025) showed that some groups of students with migration backgrounds received lower educational expectations even after achievement and socioeconomic factors had been controlled. Kehl et al. (2024) provide a more direct example, showing that microaggressions can be observed in classroom interactions without necessarily being recognised by teachers themselves as problematic. This evidence does not make migration or cultural diversity the ultimate focus of the review, but provides a clear empirical context illustrating how professional judgement can be compromised when ethically significant aspects are not first recognised.

The significance of this review lies in making this sequence more explicit: the challenge of professional ethics concerns not only how teachers act after recognising a problem, but whether they recognise the problem as ethically significant in the first place. A teacher may care about students yet fail to recognise that their expectations are influenced by stereotypes; may know the principle of justice yet remain unaware that an assessment decision produces unequal treatment; or may regard a practice as neutral even though its effects differ across students. Chircop (2022), for example, showed how some educators viewed migrant students as needing to "fit in," with linguistic differences and certain religious identities regarded as problems to which students themselves needed to adapt. Situations such as these demonstrate that professional ethics begins at the level of what teachers are able to notice and interpret as morally significant.

The ethical sensitivity framework based on Rest and its operationalisation by Narvaez provides a conceptual resource for explaining this relationship. In the literature reviewed, ethical sensitivity encompasses not only caring but also perspective taking, attention to individual and group differences, prevention of social bias, generation of interpretations, and awareness of the consequences of actions. From this perspective, ethical sensitivity precedes professional judgement because teachers must first determine what carries moral significance, whose perspectives have not yet been considered, what biases may shape interpretation, and who may experience the consequences of a pedagogical decision. This relationship supports the positioning of ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for professional ethics rather than as a synonym for professional ethics as a whole.

This perspective has important implications for understanding perspective taking. Abacioglu, Volman, and Fischer (2020) showed that perspective taking is associated with more socially and culturally responsive teaching. However, the findings of Gholami, Kuusisto, and Tirri (2015) caution that perspective taking itself may be culturally dependent. Perspective taking should therefore not be understood simply as the capacity to imagine another person's experience. In teachers' professional ethics, it also requires reflection on teachers' own interpretive frameworks, including assumptions about what constitutes appropriate behaviour, what modes of communication are regarded as normal, and what expectations are held regarding students' achievement or identities.

The analysis also indicates that ethical sensitivity alone may not be sufficient to ensure ethical professional action. Peter, Karst, and Bonefeld (2024) found that the use of objective assessment criteria could reduce the effects of implicit associations on the evaluation of students with migration backgrounds. This finding indicates that responsibility cannot be placed entirely on teachers' individual moral capacities. Ethical sensitivity needs to be supported by professional procedures, assessment practices, school cultures, and decision-making structures that reduce opportunities for bias to influence educational outcomes. Ethical sensitivity is therefore more appropriately understood as a necessary but not sufficient condition for teachers' professional ethics.

This review identifies several directions for future research. First, more empirical studies are needed that directly examine the relationship between ethical sensitivity and teachers' professional ethical judgement and action. Existing research has often examined ethical sensitivity as a construct or professional ethics through dilemmas and actions separately. Future studies should investigate how an ethical feature is initially recognised, how teachers interpret it, how that recognition shapes professional judgement, and subsequently how judgement is translated into action in actual teaching situations. In the context of Moral Education teachers, this is important because teachers not only teach moral concepts but also encounter professional decisions involving values, justice, relationships, responsibility, and consequences for students.

Second, research needs to move beyond reliance on self-report measures. Differences between findings from the ESSQ and situation-based approaches indicate the importance of combining self-report instruments with scenarios, critical incidents, classroom observations, reflective interviews, or performance-based measures. Maxwell et al. (2021) showed that ethical sensitivity demonstrated in situations can reveal aspects that remain invisible through self-perception, while Sirin, Rogers-Sirin, and Collins (2010) demonstrated the value of context-specific situations in assessing the capacity to recognise violations of ethical principles. Such approaches are important for distinguishing between what teachers believe about themselves and what they are actually able to recognise in professional situations.

Third, more research is required on the cross-cultural validity of ethical sensitivity constructs and instruments. Evidence from Kurdish Iranian teachers and comparisons between Finland and Iran indicates that some dimensions may not carry the same meaning or psychometric strength across cultures. Instruments such as the ESSQ should therefore not be assumed to be universal without examining construct equivalence, language, and the social context of the population being studied. This is also important when ethical sensitivity is investigated among Moral Education teachers, because the construct needs to be examined in relation to the nature of the profession, teaching content, and the educational context in which teachers operate.

Fourth, future research should connect ethical sensitivity with professional outcomes and actions. Recognising an issue is an important step, but the subsequent question is whether such recognition leads to more ethical judgement, decision-making, and action. Research should also examine the institutional conditions that enable or constrain teachers from acting when they recognise an issue as ethically significant. This relationship is important because Rest's Four Component Model itself distinguishes sensitivity from judgement, motivation, and action; therefore, strength in the first component cannot automatically be assumed to result in corresponding professional action.

This analysis also has implications for teacher education and professional development. Professional ethics training should not be limited to teaching ethical codes or discussing abstract professional dilemmas. Teachers need opportunities to analyse complex and ambiguous teaching situations that require them to identify affected parties, value conflicts, differing perspectives, possible biases, and the consequences of decisions. The aim is not to provide a single standard answer for every situation, but to broaden what teachers are able to recognise as ethically significant before they make professional judgements.

For the education of Moral Education teachers, these implications become more specific. Professional preparation needs to distinguish between knowledge about morality and the capacity to recognise moral dimensions within one's own professional practice. Teachers may be able to explain values such as justice, respect, responsibility, or caring to students, but conceptual mastery does not necessarily ensure that they recognise when their own teaching decisions, assessments, interactions, or expectations have ethical implications. Professional education for Moral Education teachers should therefore attend to the processes of ethical noticing and moral interpretation as foundations for subsequent professional judgement and action.

Reflective practice should also attend to the distinction between intention and effect. Teachers may intend to help or to act fairly, yet an action may still produce different experiences for different students. Evidence relating to microaggressions, teacher expectations, and stereotypes indicates that professional reflection should not end with consideration of teachers' intentions, but should also examine what happens to students, who benefits, who may be marginalised, and what assumptions shape teachers' professional interpretations. In Moral Education teaching, such reflection is particularly important because consistency between the values taught and the ways teachers themselves act becomes part of the ethical credibility of teaching.

Critically, the development of ethical sensitivity should also avoid the assumption that every professional problem originates from an individual teacher's moral deficiency. The evidence reviewed indicates that school structures, assessment procedures, institutional norms, and social contexts also shape the environments in which professional decisions are made. Individual sensitivity needs to be accompanied by professional structures that help teachers recognise bias, review decisions, and minimise injustice. Professional ethics should therefore be understood as an interaction between teachers' moral capacities and the professional and institutional conditions that shape their actions.

These directions also carry methodological and ethical responsibilities. Research on ethical sensitivity should be cautious about treating self-report measures as sufficient evidence of professional capacity and should not assume that instruments developed in one context can be transferred directly to another. Research should also attend to the perspectives of those affected by pedagogical decisions, because what teachers regard as neutral or unproblematic may be experienced differently by students. This principle is particularly relevant when ethical sensitivity is used to understand the professional ethics of Moral Education teachers, because assessments of professionalism should not depend solely on teachers' perceptions of their own actions.

Overall, this review indicates that the central issue is not whether ethical sensitivity is important for teachers; the existing literature already provides a strong basis for its significance. The more critical issue is how ethical sensitivity functions as a prerequisite for professional ethics in teaching. Teachers cannot make ethical judgements about what has not first been recognised as morally significant. However, this process of recognition can be shaped by culture, bias, experience, dominant norms, and institutional structures. For Moral Education teachers, this tension is particularly significant because they are not only responsible for

teaching moral concepts and moral judgement, but must also demonstrate how moral dimensions are recognised, interpreted, and translated into professional action in teaching. The principal contribution of this review is therefore to position ethical sensitivity as the initial foundation linking pedagogical situations with professional ethical judgement and action among Moral Education teachers.

CONCLUSION

This critical thematic literature review examined the position of ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for teachers' professional ethics in teaching, with particular attention to its relevance for Moral Education teachers. The analysis identified four main themes: ethical sensitivity as recognition and interpretation in teaching; ethical sensitivity as a prerequisite for professional ethical judgement; blind spots and limitations of ethical sensitivity in teachers' professional practice; and the integration gap between ethical sensitivity and professional ethics in teaching. Across these four themes, the findings indicate that ethical sensitivity provides an initial foundation that enables teachers to recognise and interpret morally significant aspects of a situation before professional judgement and action can occur.

Guided by Rest's Four Component Model and Narvaez's operationalisation of ethical sensitivity, this review shows that teachers' professional ethics does not begin only at the stage of judging whether an action is right or wrong. The process begins earlier through the capacity to recognise the parties involved, take the perspectives of others, demonstrate caring, understand individual and group differences, recognise possible social biases, generate interpretations of a situation, and identify the consequences of an action. Ethical sensitivity is therefore not equated with professional ethics as a whole, but is positioned as a prerequisite that provides the basis for teachers' professional judgement, decision-making, and action.

The analysis also shows that caring, good intentions, and knowledge of ethical principles do not necessarily guarantee comprehensive recognition of moral issues in teaching situations. Differences between perceived and demonstrated ethical sensitivity, the influence of culture on perspective taking, and the possibility that bias and stereotypes may operate outside teachers' awareness indicate that ethical recognition has certain limitations. Teachers may perceive themselves as fair, caring, or professional while still failing to recognise the ethical dimensions embedded in interactions, assessments, expectations, or pedagogical decisions. Ethical sensitivity should therefore be understood as a professional capacity that requires continuous development, reflection, and support.

For Moral Education teachers, this position has particular significance because Moral Education teaching involves not only the transmission of knowledge about values and moral judgement, but also the enactment of professional decisions that have ethical implications for students. Moral Education teachers need to demonstrate consistency between the values they teach and the ways in which they recognise, interpret, judge, and act in actual pedagogical situations. Mastery of moral content alone is insufficient if teachers fail to recognise bias, injustice, value conflicts, differences in perspective, or the consequences of decisions within their own practice. Ethical sensitivity therefore becomes a foundation for the ethical credibility of professional practice in Moral Education teaching.

Nevertheless, several limitations of this review should be acknowledged. The focus on English-language publications limits the representation of scholarship from non-Anglophone traditions and educational contexts that may hold different understandings of ethical sensitivity and professional ethics. A substantial proportion of the ethical sensitivity studies identified were also concentrated in particular national contexts, while studies that directly examine the relationship between ethical sensitivity, professional judgement, and teachers' actions remain limited. Existing evidence further suggests that some dimensions of ethical sensitivity, particularly perspective taking, may be culturally influenced and that ethical sensitivity instruments do not necessarily function uniformly across contexts. The interpretive nature of the critical thematic review also means that the themes identified reflect the study's theoretical orientation towards the relationship between ethical sensitivity and teachers' professional ethics. Other researchers may produce different conceptual groupings. In addition, the gap between self-reported ethical sensitivity and

performance in actual ethical situations indicates that conclusions regarding teachers' professional capacities should not rely solely on self-perception measures.

These limitations open avenues for future research that directly examines the relationship between ethical sensitivity, professional judgement, and teachers' actions. Empirical studies should investigate how an issue is initially recognised as ethically significant, how the situation is interpreted, how that interpretation shapes professional judgement, and how judgement is translated into action in actual teaching practice. Scenario-based approaches, critical incidents, classroom observations, reflective interviews, and performance-based measures could complement self-report instruments and provide a more accurate account of ethical sensitivity as demonstrated in practice. Cross-cultural research is also needed to assess the equivalence of ethical sensitivity concepts and instruments across different educational contexts. In the context of Moral Education teachers, future research should examine how ethical sensitivity operates in situations involving value conflicts, moral assessment, teacher–student relationships, differences in perspective, and pedagogical decision-making. Such research could clarify not only teachers' levels of ethical sensitivity, but also the extent to which this capacity is related to professional ethical judgement and action.

Overall, this review affirms that ethical sensitivity is a prerequisite for teachers' professional ethics because teachers can only make ethical judgements and take ethical action when morally significant aspects of a situation have first been adequately recognised and interpreted. However, ethical sensitivity does not automatically guarantee ethical professional action because the process of recognition may be influenced by culture, bias, experience, social norms, and institutional structures. For Moral Education teachers, this relationship is particularly significant because their professionalism requires not only the capacity to teach about morality, but also the capacity to demonstrate sensitivity to the moral dimensions embedded in their own teaching practice. The principal contribution of this review is therefore to position ethical sensitivity as an initial foundation that connects pedagogical situations with professional ethical judgement and action in Moral Education teaching.

Author contributions

Author contributions NMA conceived and designed the study, led the literature review process, and developed the conceptual and theoretical direction of the article. NMA conducted the primary literature search, organised and analysed the literature, developed the thematic structure, and prepared the initial drafts of the manuscript. HA contributed to the review process by critically examining the selected literature and providing analytical input on the interpretation of ethical sensitivity, cultural diversity, and the teaching of local and global citizenship responsibility competencies. HA also reviewed and edited the manuscript to strengthen its theoretical coherence and overall scholarly quality. Both authors contributed to the refinement of the final manuscript and approved the submitted version.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was supported through the Hadiah Latihan Persekutuan (HLP) sponsorship, Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE).

Funding

Funding This research received no external funding.

Data availability

Data availability No new datasets were generated during the current study. The literature analysed in this review was derived from publicly available published sources.

Declarations

AI usage Generative artificial intelligence tools were used to support aspects of manuscript development,

including language refinement, structural organisation, and drafting assistance. All literature selection, interpretation, thematic analysis, source verification, and scholarly conclusions were critically reviewed and determined by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

REFERENCE

1. Abacioglu, C. S., Volman, M., & Fischer, A. H. (2020). Teachers' multicultural attitudes and perspective taking abilities as factors in culturally responsive teaching. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90(3), 736–752. doi:10.1111/bjep.12328.
2. Ayala, M. C., Webb, A., Maldonado, L., Canales, A., & Cascallar, E. (2024). Teacher's social desirability bias and migrant students: A study on explicit and implicit prejudices with a list experiment. *Social Science Research*, 119, 102990. doi:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2024.102990.
3. Bonefeld, M., & Dickhäuser, O. (2018). (Biased) grading of students' performance: Students' names, performance level, and implicit attitudes. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 481. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00481.
4. Boon, H. J., & Lewthwaite, B. E. (2016). Teacher ethics: The link between quality teaching and multi-ethnic and multiracial education. *Athens Journal of Education*, 3(4), 331–344. doi:10.30958/aje.3-4-3.
5. Bostwick, K. C. P., Martin, A. J., Lowe, K., Vass, G., Woods, A., & Durksen, T. L. (2025). A framework for teachers' culturally responsive teaching beliefs: Links to motivation to teach Aboriginal curriculum and relationships with Aboriginal students. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 161, 105020. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2025.105020.
6. Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Sage Publications.
7. Chaimo, K., & Thanasilp, S. (2026). Psychometric properties of instruments assessing the ethics of teaching: A COSMIN-based systematic review. *Journal of Educational Evaluation for Health Professions*, 23, 12. doi:10.3352/jeehp.2026.23.12.
8. Chin, M. J., Quinn, D. M., Dhaliwal, T. K., & Lovison, V. S. (2020). Bias in the air: A nationwide exploration of teachers' implicit racial attitudes, aggregate bias, and student outcomes. *Educational Researcher*, 49(8), 566–578. doi:10.3102/0013189X20937240.
9. Chircop, L. (2022). "Until they fit in." Maltese educators' practices and attitudes towards migrant students in middle and secondary schools. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 16(2), 148–158. doi:10.1108/JME-04-2021-0042.
10. Costa, S., Langher, V., & Pirchio, S. (2021). Teachers' implicit attitudes toward ethnic minority students: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 712356. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2021.712356.
11. Frühauf, M., Hildebrandt, J., Mros, T., Zander, L., McElvany, N., & Hannover, B. (2024). Does an immigrant teacher help immigrant students cope with negative stereotypes? Preservice teachers' and school students' perceptions of teacher bias and motivational support, as well as stereotype threat effects on immigrant students' learning. *Social Psychology of Education*, 27, 709–749. doi:10.1007/s11218-023-09793-z.
12. Gholami, K., Kuusisto, E., & Tirri, K. (2015). Is ethical sensitivity in teaching culturally bound? Comparing Finnish and Iranian teachers' ethical sensitivity. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 45(6), 886–907. doi:10.1080/03057925.2014.984588.
13. Gholami, K., & Tirri, K. (2012). The cultural dependence of the Ethical Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire: The case of Iranian Kurdish teachers. *Education Research International*, 2012, Article 387027, 1–9. doi:10.1155/2012/387027.
14. Glock, S., & Böhmer, I. (2018). Teachers' and preservice teachers' stereotypes, attitudes, and spontaneous judgments of male ethnic minority students. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 59, 244–255. doi:10.1016/j.stueduc.2018.09.001.

15. Glock, S., & Karbach, J. (2015). Preservice teachers' implicit attitudes toward racial minority students: Evidence from three implicit measures. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 45, 55–61. doi:10.1016/j.stueduc.2015.03.006.
16. Grant, M. J., & Booth, A. (2009). A typology of reviews: An analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies. *Health Information & Libraries Journal*, 26(2), 91–108. doi:10.1111/j.1471-1842.2009.00848.x.
17. Hanhimäki, E., & Tirri, K. (2009). Education for ethically sensitive teaching in critical incidents at school. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 35(2), 107–121. doi:10.1080/02607470902770880.
18. Ialuna, F., Civitillo, S., & Jugert, P. (2024). Culturally responsive teaching, teacher-student relationship and school belongingness: A multi-informant study in ethnically diverse classrooms. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 47, 100839. doi:10.1016/j.lcsi.2024.100839.
19. Kavandi, H., Marashi, M., Hashemi, J., & Safaei Moghaddam, M. (2019). Analyzing ethical sensitivity: Developing on student-teacher education. *Iranian Journal of Educational Sociology*, 2(1), 134–142. doi:10.29252/ijes.2.1.134.
20. Kehl, J., Krachum Ott, P., Schachner, M., & Civitillo, S. (2024). Culturally responsive teaching in question: A multiple case study examining the complexity and interplay of teacher practices, beliefs, and microaggressions in Germany. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 152, 104772. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2024.104772.
21. Kuusisto, E., Tirri, K., & Rissanen, I. (2012). Finnish teachers' ethical sensitivity. *Education Research International*, 2012, Article 351879, 1–10. doi:10.1155/2012/351879.
22. Maxwell, B., Boon, H., Tanchuk, N., & Rauwerda, B. (2021). Adaptation and validation of a test of ethical sensitivity in teaching. *Journal of Moral Education*, 50(3), 267–292. doi:10.1080/03057240.2020.1781070.
23. Narvaez, D., & Endicott, L. G. (2009). *Ethical sensitivity*. Alliance for Catholic Education Press.
24. Neuenschwander, M. P., & Garrote, A. (2025). Biased teacher expectations of students with migration backgrounds: Analysis with nationality stereotype clusters. *Zeitschrift für Bildungsforschung*, 15, 277–292. doi:10.1007/s35834-024-00460-7.
25. Park, J., & Song, J. (2016). Elementary school teachers' ethical sensitivity on socio-scientific issues. *Journal of Korean Elementary Science Education*, 35(4), 416–425. doi:10.15267/keses.2016.35.4.416.
26. Peter, S., Karst, K., & Bonefeld, M. (2024). Objective assessment criteria reduce the influence of judgmental bias on grading. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, 1386016. doi:10.3389/feduc.2024.1386016.
27. Rest, J. R. (1986). *Moral development: Advances in research and theory*. Praeger.
28. Ronkainen, R., Kuusisto, E., Eisenschmidt, E., & Tirri, K. (2023). Ethical sensitivity of Finnish and Estonian teachers. *Journal of Moral Education*, 52(2), 172–188. doi:10.1080/03057240.2021.1960491.
29. Sadler, T. D., Amirshokoohi, A., Kazempour, M., & Allspaw, K. M. (2006). Socioscience and ethics in science classrooms: Teacher perspectives and strategies. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 43, 353–376. doi:10.1002/tea.20142.
30. Shapira-Lishchinsky, O. (2011). Teachers' critical incidents: Ethical dilemmas in teaching practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(3), 648–656. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2010.11.003.
31. Shapira-Lishchinsky, O. (2016). From ethical reasoning to teacher education for social justice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 60, 245–255. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2016.08.010.
32. Sirin, S. R., Rogers-Sirin, L., & Collins, B. A. (2010). A measure of cultural competence as an ethical responsibility: Quick-Racial and Ethical Sensitivity Test. *Journal of Moral Education*, 39(1), 49–64. doi:10.1080/03057240903528675.
33. Subasi Singh, S., & Akar, H. (2021). Culturally responsive teaching: Beliefs of pre-service teachers in the Viennese context. *Intercultural Education*, 32(1), 46–61. doi:10.1080/14675986.2020.1844533.
34. Tirri, K. (2023). The moral teacher in global transition: The 2022 Kohlberg Memorial Lecture. *Journal of Moral Education*, 52(3), 261–274. doi:10.1080/03057240.2022.2142540.
35. Waked, J., & Moshel, S. (2023). Ethical dilemmas facing female teachers in the Arab education system in Israel. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 24(4), 563–575. doi:10.1007/s12564-022-09817-x.