




Challenges in Implementing the Teachers Code of Ethics in Responding to Social Dynamics

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the various barriers faced by educators in implementing professional codes of ethics amid disruptive social transformation. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research analyzes how shifting social norms and the rapid penetration of digital technology have reshaped traditional ethical boundaries between teachers and students. These changes create new spaces of interaction that often blur the limits of professionalism. The findings reveal that teachers' professional integrity is currently influenced by three main factors: the strong presence of digital environments beyond the classroom, inconsistent public expectations, and gaps in educators' regulatory literacy. A lack of preparedness in responding to these dynamics can lead to ethical dilemmas that risk undermining the dignity of the teaching profession. Therefore, this study argues that partial or one-dimensional solutions are no longer sufficient. Systemic efforts are needed through the strengthening of contextual ethical literacy and protective institutional support. Such synergy is essential to ensure that educators possess not only intellectual competence but also adaptive moral resilience, enabling them to sustain their role as role models in an increasingly complex and dynamic educational environment.

Keywords

Adaptive Moral Resilience; Digital Transformation;
Educational Ecosystem; Professional Ethics; Social Dynamics

INTRODUCTION

The global transformation of education, driven by globalization and the rapid advancement of digital technology, has brought significant changes to learning systems, communication patterns, and professional relationships between teachers and students (Abshor, 2021; Helmi et al., 2026). These changes have not only influenced the way knowledge is delivered, but have also shifted the standards of professional conduct within

the field of education. The emergence of social media, digital learning platforms, and technology-based communication has created a more open yet increasingly complex space for interaction. In this context, the teachers' code of ethics serves as an essential foundation for maintaining professionalism, accountability, and integrity among educators, ensuring that the educational process continues in an ethical, safe, and character-oriented manner for students (Munawir et al., 2025; Naibaho & Nainggolan, 2025). Therefore, strengthening the implementation of the teachers' code of ethics should no longer be viewed merely as a normative regulation, but rather as a strategic necessity in maintaining the dignity and professionalism of the teaching profession amid rapid social change.

However, social dynamics and the rapid development of digital technology have introduced various new challenges in the implementation of the teachers' code of ethics. The professional boundaries between teachers and students have become increasingly blurred due to the intensity of interactions through digital media and social networking platforms. Teachers are now required not only to possess pedagogical competence, but also the ability to make ethical decisions in complex situations that often lack clear practical guidelines (Andriyati et al., 2025; Choliq et al., 2025). This condition has led to various challenges, including the misuse of social media, declining ethical sensitivity in digital communication, and difficulties faced by teachers in adapting professional standards to contemporary social realities. If not properly addressed, these issues may affect the quality of educational relationships, professional integrity, and even public trust in educational institutions.

These issues indicate a gap between the normative ethical framework and its practical implementation in the field. Although professional regulations and codes of ethics have been formally established, many teachers still encounter difficulties in applying them contextually within the dynamic digital era (Gofur et al., 2025; Stefani & Meylina, 2024). This gap is influenced by low regulatory literacy, limited understanding of digital ethical challenges, and the lack of optimal reinforcement of moral values in teacher professional education. As a result, teachers often face ethical dilemmas without adequate conceptual or practical preparedness. Previous studies conducted by (Gultom & Naibaho, 2025). previous studies have largely emphasized the importance of professional ethics in establishing harmonious relationships between teachers and students. However, they have not comprehensively examined how disruptive digital social challenges influence the

implementation of the teachers' code of ethics, nor have they explored adaptive strategies that can be employed to strengthen teacher professionalism within such contexts.

Based on these conditions, this study offers novelty by analyzing the implementation of the teachers' code of ethics in responding to social dynamics and the demands of the digital era in a more contextual manner, particularly through the identification of ethical challenges arising from changes in modern educational interaction patterns. In addition, this study proposes adaptive strategies that emphasize the importance of strengthening ethical literacy, institutional support, and the development of teachers' moral resilience as part of sustainable professional development. Therefore, the objective of this study is to critically analyze the challenges in implementing the teachers' code of ethics amid disruptive social changes and to formulate strategies for strengthening teacher professionalism that are relevant to the needs of contemporary education. Through a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design, this research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of education that not only emphasizes intellectual competence, but also teachers' moral integrity and adaptive capabilities in facing the complexities of the Society 5.0 era.

THEORETICAL SUPPORT

The teachers' code of ethics constitutes the academic core of the teaching profession, functioning as a fundamental framework for ethical decision-making within the school environment (Asyha et al., 2025; Padang et al., 2025). A review of recent literature emphasizes that the urgency of the teachers' code of ethics lies in its capacity to maintain integrity, responsibility, and professionalism, which simultaneously foster a conducive and dignified educational ecosystem. As a moral compass, the code of ethics ensures that every action taken by educators remains aligned with professionally and socially recognized standards of values.

The teachers' code of ethics functions as a normative foundation that regulates teachers' behavior, responsibilities, and standards of professionalism in carrying out their educational duties (Anggita et al., 2025). The role of this code of ethics includes establishing ethical boundaries and providing guidelines for expected conduct in interactions between teachers, students, colleagues, and the wider community (Sihotang et al., 2026). The effective implementation of the teachers' code of ethics is crucial for

maintaining the quality of education and the reputation of the teaching profession, while also shaping educators who are responsible and possess strong integrity.

However, previous approaches tend to have several limitations. Normative perspectives are often rigid and less responsive to social changes, particularly in addressing the rapidly evolving dynamics of digital communication. Meanwhile, reflective approaches that emphasize individual awareness frequently overlook structural factors, such as social pressures and contradictory public expectations. As a result, these two approaches have not been fully capable of explaining the complexity of ethical challenges faced by teachers in the era of digital transformation. These limitations indicate the need for a more integrative approach that views ethics not merely as an individual issue, but also as a systemic phenomenon influenced by social and technological environments.

A critical evaluation of various previous studies reveals a significant gap between ideal regulations and their actual implementation in practice. Many educators perceive that existing regulations need to be synchronized with the dynamics of communication in the digital era in order to remain relevant in addressing contemporary challenges (Ariani, 2024). The massive penetration of technology demands the reconstruction of traditional ethical boundaries in order to minimize the risk of degrading the dignity of the teaching profession due to unpreparedness in navigating disruptive social changes (Nafi'a et al., n.d.).

In this context, teacher professionalism in the contemporary era is no longer sufficient if it relies solely on pedagogical competence. Teachers are required to integrate mastery of subject matter, innovative learning capabilities, and adaptive capacities in responding to social and technological changes (Choliq et al., 2025; Sumarlin & Lanjar, 2025). In the Society 5.0 era, these competencies must be strengthened by moral resilience, namely the ability to uphold ethical values while remaining flexible in dealing with complex and dynamic situations. Therefore, professional ethics should not merely be understood as a set of rules, but also as an adaptive capacity that continuously evolves (Jannah et al., 2025; Nugroho & Nursikin, 2025).

Based on the synthesis of these various perspectives, this study develops a conceptual framework that positions the digital environment as the primary triggering factor giving rise to ethical challenges, which in turn necessitates the strengthening of moral resilience among educators. The increasingly broad and borderless digital

environment has created new forms of interaction that often transcend traditional professional boundaries. This condition generates various ethical dilemmas that cannot always be resolved solely through formal regulations. Therefore, teachers require moral resilience as an adaptive capacity to navigate such complexities wisely and responsibly.

Narratively, the relationships among the variables in this study can be explained as follows: the greater the intensity and complexity of the digital environment encountered by teachers, the greater the potential for ethical challenges to emerge in professional practice. These ethical challenges, if not balanced with adequate moral capacity, may reduce the integrity and quality of teacher professionalism. Conversely, when teachers possess strong moral resilience, supported by ethical literacy and institutional support, such challenges can be addressed adaptively without compromising professional values.

Therefore, this study emphasizes that strengthening professional ethics in the digital era cannot be carried out partially. It requires synergy between digital literacy, contextual ethical understanding, and the development of moral capacity as the primary foundation for building a teaching profession that is adaptive, maintains integrity, and remains relevant amid the changing times.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design (Septiana & Khoiriyah, 2024) this approach was employed to examine in depth the implementation of the teachers' code of ethics in responding to complex social dynamics, particularly in the era of digital transformation. The approach was selected because it provides a contextual understanding of educators' subjective experiences in navigating ethical dilemmas within an educational environment that continues to evolve.

The study was conducted at PAUD Negeri Bung Karno, located in Bubutan Village, Bubutan District, Surabaya City. This institution was selected as the research site because it represents an urban educational environment characterized by a relatively high intensity of social interaction and exposure to digital technology. The research subjects consisted of eight teachers selected through a purposive sampling technique (Suriani & Jailani, 2023), namely based on specific considerations relevant to the objectives of the study. The participant criteria included: (1) active teachers directly involved in the learning process, (2) having a minimum of three years of teaching experience, (3) having encountered

situations related to professional ethical dilemmas, and (4) being involved in the use of digital technology in learning activities as well as communication with students and parents..

Data collection procedures were carried out through three main techniques, namely in-depth interviews with educators to capture their subjective interpretations of ethical principles, participatory observation to directly examine professional behavior within the school ecosystem, and documentation of educational policies and applicable codes of ethics. All data collection processes were conducted chronologically to ensure that the interconnections among findings could be scientifically validated.

The data analysis plan employed a qualitative descriptive method (Sari et al., 2022), the analysis focused on identifying patterns, themes, and interpretations emerging from teachers' professional experiences. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the researcher conducted document analysis related to the teachers' code of ethics in order to evaluate its effectiveness in shaping professional behavior. In addition, policy analysis was integrated to examine the existing regulatory framework and to evaluate potential revisions needed to make it more responsive to the challenges of the digital era. The scope of this methodology was focused on how teachers interpret and implement ethical principles in dealing with complex moral and social dilemmas. Through these detailed procedures, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview that enables other researchers to replicate or adopt similar approaches in studies of professional ethics.

RESULT

This study reveals that the implementation of the teachers' code of ethics in the digital era cannot merely be understood as compliance with normative regulations, but rather as a complex practice influenced by the interaction between the digital environment, social pressures, and individual moral capacity. The field findings indicate five interrelated major issues, namely digital environmental disruption, public expectation pressures, gaps in ethical literacy, dilemmas related to technological innovation, and the importance of digital moral exemplarity.

First, digital environmental disruption has been shown to blur the professional boundaries between teachers, students, and parents. The intensity of communication through social media and instant messaging applications has created expectations that

teachers should always be available without time limitations. This is reflected in the statement of one informant: “If messages are not replied to, teachers are considered uncaring, but if they keep replying continuously, there are no longer any boundaries” (Informant 3). This phenomenon indicates a shift in professional norms from previously structured patterns toward more fluid and undefined forms. These findings are consistent with previous studies stating that digitalization expands the space of educational interaction; however, this study further demonstrates that such expansion also generates ethical ambiguities that have not been fully anticipated within conventional codes of ethics. Therefore, the primary contribution of this finding is the provision of an empirical foundation for developing more contextual and operational digital ethical guidelines.

Second, the pressure of public expectations demonstrates a shift in the power relations between teachers and society. Teachers no longer possess full authority in disciplining students, as every action has the potential to be questioned socially or legally. As expressed by one informant: “Nowadays, even reprimanding students must be done very carefully” (Informant 1). This condition indicates a transition from a traditional authority model toward a more participatory model that is increasingly sensitive to individual rights. In contrast to previous studies emphasizing the importance of harmonious relationships between teachers and parents, this finding reveals another dimension in the form of increasing professional vulnerability among teachers. Therefore, an important contribution of this result is its emphasis on the urgency of institutional protection and the reconstruction of educational communication between schools and society.

Third, the gap in ethical and regulatory literacy emerged as a crucial factor that exacerbates the complexity of ethical dilemmas. Although teachers are aware of the existence of the code of ethics, they experience difficulties in applying it within the continuously evolving digital context. This is reflected in the statement: “There are still no clear guidelines for cases related to social media” (Informant 2). These findings reinforce criticisms of normative ethical theories that tend to be static, as highlighted in previous studies. However, this study goes further by demonstrating that the primary issue lies not only in the regulations themselves, but also in teachers’ interpretative capacities. Therefore, this study provides practical value through recommendations for developing more adaptive ethics training based on real-case scenarios.

Fourth, the dilemma between digital innovation and professional ethics demonstrates that technology possesses an ambivalent character, serving both as an opportunity and as a risk. Teachers recognize that technology can enhance the quality of learning, yet it also has the potential to violate professional boundaries if not used wisely. The informant's statement, "Social media supports learning, but it also carries risks" (Informant 4), confirms the need to maintain a balance between pedagogical creativity and ethical compliance. These findings enrich previous studies that have predominantly emphasized the benefits of technology by introducing the dimension of ethical risk as an important variable in digital educational practices.

Fifth, moral exemplarity in the digital world emerged as the most fundamental aspect in maintaining teacher professionalism. All informants agreed that teachers must serve as role models not only in the classroom, but also within digital spaces. As stated by one informant: "Teachers today must also become role models in the online world" (Informant 8). This finding expands the concept of exemplarity, which has previously been discussed mainly in the context of direct interaction, to include a permanent and publicly visible digital identity. In this context, teachers function as agents of social learning who not only transfer knowledge, but also shape students' digital ethics through real practices and behaviors.

Conceptually, all of these findings reinforce the relationship between the digital environment, ethical challenges, and moral resilience. The digital environment functions as a trigger for increasingly complex ethical challenges, while moral resilience becomes the key capacity that determines how teachers respond to such challenges. In contrast to previous studies that primarily focused on technical or pedagogical competence, this study emphasizes that adaptive moral resilience constitutes a central element in maintaining professional integrity in the digital era.

The main implication of this study is the necessity of a systemic approach to strengthening teacher professionalism, which includes: (1) the development of contextual digital ethical guidelines, (2) the enhancement of ethics literacy based on real-life practices, (3) the strengthening of institutional protection, and (4) the integration of digital competence with moral capacity. Therefore, the findings of this study not only enrich theoretical discussions on professional ethics, but also provide practical contributions in

designing teacher development strategies that are more adaptive to the dynamics of twenty-first century education.

Table 1. Development of Findings Summary and Theme Categorization

No	Main Theme	Field Findings	Meaning and Relevance	Strategic Implications
1	Digital Environmental Disruption	Interactions have expanded to social media without time limitations	Blurring the professional boundaries between teachers and students	Development of contextual digital ethical guidelines
2	Public Expectations	Parents are becoming more critical and sensitive toward teachers' actions	Increasing the vulnerability of teachers' professional positions	Legal protection and professional advocacy
3	Ethical Literacy	Understanding of the code of ethics has not yet adapted to the digital era	Creating confusion in decision-making	Case-based ethical literacy training
4	Innovation Dilemma	The use of technology creates both opportunities and risks	Conflict between creativity and ethical boundaries	Integration of ethics into digital literacy
5	Digital Exemplarity	Teachers become role models in online spaces	Ethics are not limited to the classroom environment	Strengthening digital professional identity
6	Regulatory Gap	Regulations have not yet accommodated digital dynamics	Mismatch between regulations and practical implementation	Reformulation of educational ethics policies
7	Moral Resilience	Teachers require adaptive capacities in dealing with ethical dilemmas	Becoming a key factor in maintaining professionalism	Strengthening moral resilience through institutional support

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the implementation of the teachers' code of ethics in the Society 5.0 era faces increasingly complex challenges due to digital environmental disruption, pressures arising from public expectations, and the limited availability of contextual ethical literacy. The main findings indicate that the code of ethics is no longer effective when understood merely in a textual sense; rather, it must be operationalized through the integration of digital literacy, adaptive pedagogical competence, and moral resilience as a reflective capacity in addressing ethical dilemmas. The implications of these findings highlight the need for a paradigm shift from a static normative approach toward a systemic approach that positions professional ethics as a dynamic practice influenced by

individual, social, and technological factors. Therefore, several practical recommendations can be implemented, including: (1) the development of more applicable and contextual digital ethical guidelines, (2) the organization of professional ethics training based on real case studies to improve ethical decision-making abilities, (3) the strengthening of institutional policies that provide legal protection and professional support for teachers, and (4) the integration of character strengthening and digital literacy into continuous professional development programs. Through these measures, teachers are expected not only to adapt to technological developments, but also to maintain their integrity and role as moral exemplars within an increasingly complex educational ecosystem.

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