



# Ethical Pattern of Faculty Members in Iran's Higher Education

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Academic faculty members need to emphasize ethical principles in order to improve higher education, with the understanding of this importance, the current research was conducted with the aim of designing the ethical model of academic faculty members in Iran's higher education.

**Material & Methods:** This research is a type of qualitative study that uses foundational data theory. The participants, including experts and faculty members of the country's public universities, who were responsible for the promotion of academic members, were selected as key informants through a targeted sampling method of 45 people. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The reliability and validity of the data were obtained from the two methods of reviewing the participants and recoding by experts. Data were analyzed by open, central and selective coding.

**Results:** The results showed that the moral model of faculty members in Iran's higher education is explained in 10 main categories and 27 subcategories. Major and core categories in the form of 6 dimensions of causal conditions including (individual factors, organizational factors), core (cultural-educational, educational ethics, research ethics, scientific-executive), background conditions (higher education policies, moral activism), intervening conditions (environmental factors), strategies (micro level - university, macro level - higher education) and consequences (individual and organizational) were elevated to a higher abstract level and finally the research paradigm model was presented.

**Conclusion:** The regulations for the promotion of academic staff members in Iran require a detailed revision of the content with an ethical and qualitative approach in order to make the indicators of the promotion regulations efficient and effective.

**Keywords:** *Ethical principles, Higher education, Faculty members, Promotion system.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's business world, organizations have gradually realized the importance of empowering their human resources by creating opportunities for participation in the decision-making process and independence [1]. The lack of effective human resource empowerment programs is associated with negative results such as gross differences between employees in the organization, uncoordinated personnel systems,

stress in the work environment, reduced employee creativity, reduced employee organizational commitment, and reduced job satisfaction and performance [2]. Improving the human resources of organizations is one of the aspects of human resources management that is very important and adopting appropriate policies in this field can have a significant impact on the progress of the organization. In higher education institutions, the promotion system of faculty

members plays a major role in directing their scientific activities [3]. In terms of their important mission in training experts and scholars, universities play an important role in training competent and qualified human resources for the country, among them, professors are one of the factors whose quality improvement has a significant impact on the performance of universities [4]. Academic faculty members are people who are able to transform human societies and accelerate the scientific, cultural and social development of societies [5]. In this way, the improvement of professors should be considered as a basic principle in nurturing and supporting these valuable resources [6-8]. The higher education system should formulate a sustainable long-term faculty development strategy for these valuable resources so that they can operate effectively in the rapidly changing higher education environment and achieve academic goals [9, 10]. In fact, the improvement of professors is considered as an essential component for academic success for both professors and universities [11].

In the early 1960s, in most universities, scientific promotion emphasized the importance of teaching. Then, in the 1990s, along with advances in exploration and technology, the new knowledge economy became more focused on research. With the emergence of this approach, various factors in the promotion of professors were given attention and emphasis, for example, with the continuous provision of foreign financial aid, research began to expand as a model for the work of professors [12]. With the development of international ranking systems, the criteria for ranking the position and performance of a university will be the qualification and research performance of the professors of that university [13, 14]. In such a way that the publication of articles in journals with peer review and accurate evaluation became extremely important for scientific advancement [15, 16]. Based on this, the

performance evaluation of professors has been a growing phenomenon at the international level [17]. Evaluation of professors has two forms of management and development as well as two goals: one is to collect data to support organizational decisions regarding status change, promotion, tenure and competence; Another is to help the institute and professors to review the performance and plan for future programs. However, faculty evaluation is considered a symbolic activity that was introduced to faculty as a result of external pressure. Evaluation should be focused on creating and maintaining a positive situation, creativity and learning for the individual, to help the individual to reach their goals [18, 19].

Academic retention and promotion of professors is considered as one of the most important factors in the evaluation of specific performance indicators of each university, and its realization creates better results in the outputs of this system. Paying attention to the upstream documents, including the comprehensive scientific map of the country, makes it more important to maintain and improve the status of university professors. Based on scientific texts, evaluation should be transparent, impartial and in accordance with appropriate standards [20]. In this regard, having a comprehensive and accurate system for evaluating professors' performance can have many positive effects [21]. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the participation of professors in cultural fields, education, research and services according to the criteria included in university policies [20].

The existing literature in the field of academic promotion shows that there is dissatisfaction among some of the professors and even managers regarding the methods used to evaluate professors for permanent employment and promotion [22]. Researchers have shown that universities with educational and service missions continuously try to shape these missions

into a stronger research focus [23, 24]. A number of studies concluded that more universities use research-based criteria in hiring, evaluating and rewarding professors [25]. Emphasis on research productivity, specifically publication of articles instead of teaching, has become the dominant basis for academic rewards and promotion. In relation to the promotion process of professors, in a research, policies and promotion processes were investigated in several selected universities. The results of this research showed that there are fundamental differences between the approaches and criteria in the promotion system of these universities and the approaches and criteria of the promotion system in our country [26]. What seems to be important in this context is the observance of ethical principles in the professor promotion system. At the same time, the ethics of social institutions should be based on the level of agency of the structure. The subject of investigation at the level of agency is people and their psychological mechanisms, but the subject of investigation at the structural level is regulations, laws, social traditions, economic and political structure [27]. It should be stated that higher education has suitable conditions for the emergence of ethical problems and ethics is used in all fields and activities of higher education as one of the basic issues [28]. In this regard, during the past years, the study of ethics in the academic environment has been researched [29, 30]. In connection with contemporary issues of the world in multicultural educational environments, the role of ethical approach has been emphasized. Ethics means customs and traditions that are related to values and virtues. Ethics defines acceptable rules of behavior and imposes behavioral restrictions. There are two broad theoretical areas about ethics, which are: normative ethics and descriptive ethics; Normative ethics is concerned with defining morality and establishing standards and prescribing moral norms and values, and is not

designed to explain or predict behavior. Descriptive ethics, which originates from the field of psychology, describes the values and moral arguments of individuals and groups in order to understand them in different situations [31].

Considering the rapid changes and developments of science, technology and technology and the need for ethical development and qualitative and comprehensive improvement of universities in the country in order to coordinate and adapt universities with their local, national and transnational environments; Considering the role and importance of professors in achieving this goal and furthering the lofty goals of higher education as much as possible; The role of policy makers in drafting the regulations for the promotion of professors in the country; The bold role of these regulations in directing the educational, research and service activities of these key elements in universities and higher education centers; And considering that the promotion of professors is part of the university's development policies, and inefficiency in promotion policies can lead to the promotion of inefficient professors and ultimately the inefficiency of the system; And finally, taking into account that the regulations for the promotion of professors have experienced many changes in the last 10 years; The question that arises is what the expert professors, managers, policy-makers and experts of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology and universities have in relation to the ethical system for the promotion of professors. According to what was raised, the current research seeks to answer the question, what are the characteristics of the ethical pattern of the faculty members in Iran's higher education?

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The research method is practical in terms of the goal, and in terms of the approach of data collection, it is qualitative, using the method of

foundational data theory. The participants include experts and professors of the country's public universities who have experience in positions related to the promotion of academic staff members. In order to find out the opinions of the participants, a theoretical sampling method was used. The estimation of the sample size was based on the theoretical saturation of the data. Based on this, the interview reached theoretical saturation with 42 people, and three more interviews were conducted for more certainty. In order to collect research data in the qualitative part, a semi-structured interview was used. In order to comply with the principles of research ethics, during the interviews, participants were asked to allow their conversations to be recorded and recorded, and after the end of the interview, the interviews were carefully reviewed and returned to paper. In order to analyze the qualitative data, the theme analysis method was used, which is based on open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In order to check the validity of the research data, the results of the

analysis were presented to 6 participants and the process of reaching the diagram was explained to them, the findings of this work confirmed the general findings of the research. Also, Christiansen's angle technique was used to evaluate the validity and quality of the findings. In this sense, it has been tried to make the breadth of information and the depth of information possible with continuous mental engagement with data. To achieve this goal, after coding the data by the researcher, 3 people were asked to code some of the interviews to evaluate the accuracy and validity of the coding and the obtained categories. The results of this section were similar to the coding done in the previous step.

## RESULTS

Based on the results of qualitative data analysis, a total of 10 main categories and 27 subcategories were identified and presented.

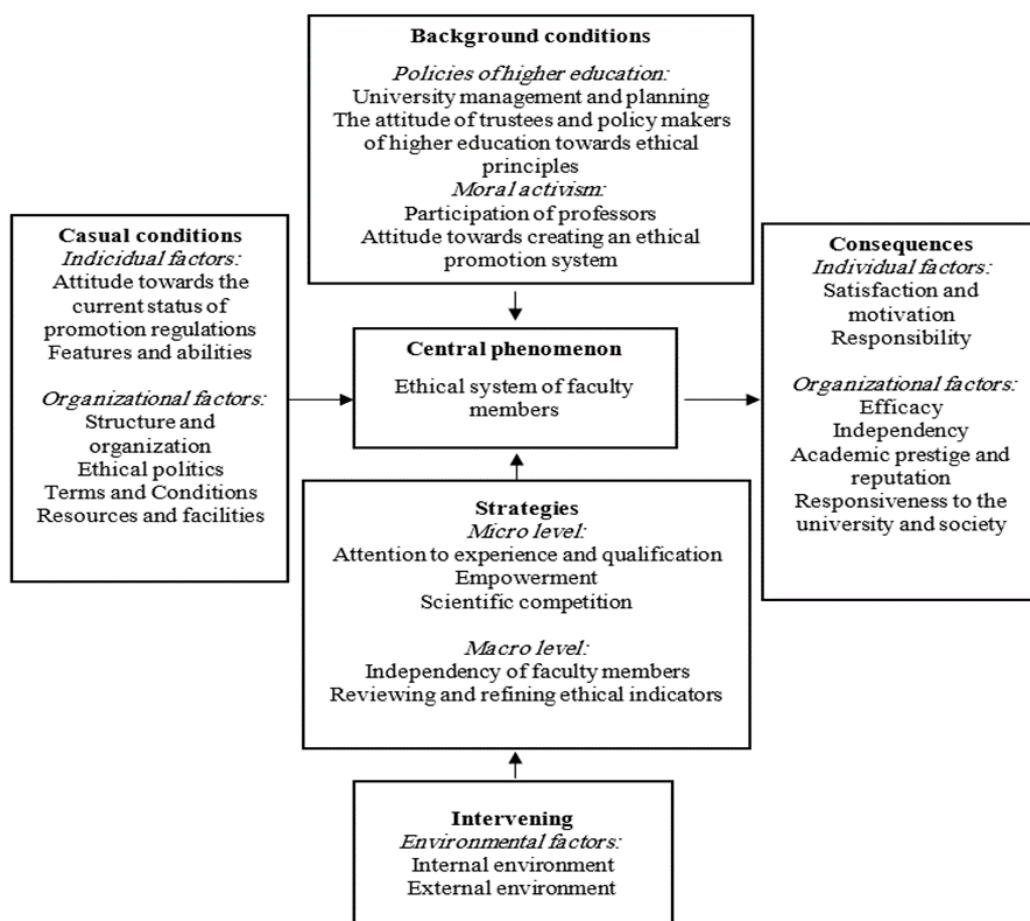
**Table 1:** The results of open and axial coding and correspondence of main categories and subcategories

| Paradigmatic model factors | Main categories               | Subcategories                                                                             |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Casual conditions          | Individual factors            | The attitude of professors towards the current situation of promotion regulations         |
|                            |                               | Features and abilities                                                                    |
|                            | Organizational factors        | Structure and organization                                                                |
|                            |                               | Policy-making based on the development of moral principles                                |
|                            |                               | Terms and Conditions                                                                      |
| Axial coding               | Promotion system              | Resources and facilities                                                                  |
|                            |                               | Cultural-educational                                                                      |
|                            |                               | Educational ethics                                                                        |
|                            |                               | Research ethics                                                                           |
| Background conditions      | Policies of higher education  | Scientific-executive                                                                      |
|                            |                               | University management and planning                                                        |
|                            | Moral activism                | The attitude of trustees and policy makers of higher education towards ethical principles |
|                            |                               | Participation of professors                                                               |
|                            |                               | The attitude of professors towards the creation of an ethical promotion system            |
| Strategies                 | Micro level- University       | Attention to the experiences and qualifications of the professors                         |
|                            |                               | Empowerment of faculty members                                                            |
|                            |                               | Ethics in scientific competition                                                          |
|                            | Macro level- higher education | Independence of faculty members                                                           |
|                            |                               | Revision and refinement of ethical indicators in the promotion regulations                |

|                        |                       |                                              |
|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Intervening conditions | Environmental factors | Internal environment                         |
|                        |                       | Global environment                           |
| Consequences           | Individual            | Satisfaction and motivation                  |
|                        |                       | Responsibility of professors                 |
|                        | Organizational        | Efficiency and effectiveness                 |
|                        |                       | Independence of the university               |
|                        |                       | Academic prestige and reputation             |
|                        |                       | Responsiveness to the university and society |

The attitude process towards the formulation of the ethical model of faculty members in Iran's

higher education, based on the systematic design of the database theory, is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Paradigmatic model: ethical model of faculty members in Iran's higher education

### DISCUSSION

The current research was conducted with the aim of compiling the ethical model of faculty members in Iran's higher education. The results showed that the ethical model of the faculty member promotion system in Iran's higher education in 10 main categories and 27 sub-

categories is affected by two main individual and organizational factors. Individual factors included the attitude of academic staff members towards the current situation, promotion regulations, characteristics and abilities, and organizational factors including structure and organization, policy making, rules and

regulations, and organizational resources and facilities. In order to formulate the ethical model of academic staff members, two major strategies were presented at the micro level and at the macro level. The micro level included paying attention to the experiences and qualifications of the academic faculty members, empowering the academic faculty members, and paying attention to creating and providing the necessary platforms to create a healthy scientific competition based on ethics among the academic faculty members of the university. At the macro level, the important strategies included the independence of professors, having a decentralized structure, revising and refining the indicators in the regulations for the promotion of faculty members in order to improve the situation. The policies and policies of higher education, university management and planning, and the attitude of trustees and policy-makers of higher education should be effective. Creating an ethical system can have an impact on the improvement of the regulations for the promotion of professors. And also, the moral activism of the faculty members can be effective through the positive attitude of the professors towards the creation of a favorable promotion system and the participation of the faculty members in decision-making and policy-making. Strategies are affected by the direct impact of intervening conditions, under the title of environmental factors, which includes a set of internal and external environmental factors. And this can have consequences for the satisfaction and motivation of the academic staff and their responsibility at the individual level and efficiency and effectiveness, the independence of the university, the reputation and reputation of the university and the accountability to the university and the society at the organizational level.

In a study, it was found that with active participation in professional activities, having the opportunity to study before being promoted to

the rank of professor, assigning fair grades to the criteria, increasing the teaching grade and accelerating the promotion process [32]. In another study, the roles of the human resources manager, including supporting and organizing learning in organizations in professional fields, are consistent. Academic promotion in universities is granted based on the triple standard of activities, teaching, research and service [33]. In another study, it was reported that considering that professors work in three areas: education, research, and service provision, therefore, development plans should be based on these areas and strategies to achieve these areas should be considered [34, 35]. In another study, it was found that the most references in the field of academic rank promotion are related to the general problems of the promotion regulations, which have caused mental preoccupation of professors. Therefore, it is important to match the promotion regulations with macro policies, which is also consistent with the research results from this point of view [36]. In another research, the most important strategy presented was the necessity of self-evaluation by academic staff members with the strategies presented [18]. These results can be consistent with the findings of the present study.

The limitations of the research included the problem of communicating with some experts for various reasons, including the spread of the Corona virus, busy work, and also the lack of theoretical foundations in line with the research topic. Therefore, it is suggested to pay attention to encourage and encourage dynamism in the university environment in the development of regulations for the promotion of faculty members. To achieve this goal, it is recommended to pay attention to the following components:

–Paying attention to the experiences and qualifications of academic staff members: the collection of works and scientific works of

professors can be a basis for verifying their competence and qualifications. It is necessary to pay attention to the fact that such people are influential in the scientific process of the country, and it seems that the regulations in this regard require the development of indicators for a more accurate evaluation of professors.

- Empowering academic staff members and paying attention to creating and providing the necessary platforms for creating healthy and ethical scientific competition among university professors.
- Academic independence and having a decentralized structure of revision: the development of policies and promotion regulations based on ethical principles should be done by the universities themselves and with the active participation of professors.
- Refinement of indicators and participation of professors in decision-making and policies related to the by-laws for the promotion of academic staff members to improve the situation with an emphasis on ethical principles.

## CONCLUSION

The general results of the research showed that the moral pattern of academic staff members in Iranian education in the form of 6 dimensions of causal conditions including (individual factors, organizational factors), central (cultural-educational, educational ethics, research ethics, scientific-executive), background conditions (policies and politicization of higher education, ethical activism), intervening conditions (environmental factors), strategies (micro level - university, macro level - higher education) and consequences (individual and organizational) can be explained. It can be concluded that by formulating the ideal moral model of academic staff members, and by taking into account the upstream strategies and documents, as well as by creating environmental platforms and contexts, and by compiling and designing indicators and

criteria that are suitable and comprehensive and appropriate to the functions of the university and society's expectations from it, and by emphasizing the centrality of responding to society's needs and expectations, it is possible to reach a suitable scientific position in global scientific relations while solving existing domestic problems. Therefore, it is necessary to review carefully and scientifically, focusing on the application of the promotion regulations. Finally, according to the research results, in order to improve the innovation capacity of universities and keep the creativity of academics vital, a scientific and logical evaluation system can promote the long-term development of professors.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues (such as plagiarism, conscious satisfaction, misleading, making and or forging data, publishing or sending to two places, redundancy and etc.) have been fully considered by the writers.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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