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Ethical conduct of students: a systematic review article

Conductas éticas de estudiantes: un artículo de revisión sistemática

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Abstract

The purpose of this article was to analyze the impact of ethical behavior on students. To this end, a systematic review was conducted using the PRISMA method. As inclusion criteria, articles indexed in high-impact databases such as Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and SciELO, published between 2021 and 2025, were selected. The results were obtained after examining a total of 494 articles, of which 24 were selected: 9 from Scopus, 7 from WoS, and 8 from SciELO. The findings reveal that ethics education for students is fundamental to their professional and social development. It should not be limited solely to the use of control mechanisms but should be integrated into the academic process to foster responsibility and honesty. Furthermore, it is crucial to promote responsible and sustainable professional practices, as well as to educate individuals committed to their environment. Finally, the conclusions highlight that developing ethical behavior requires enhancing soft skills and promoting decision-making based on ethical principles. Educational interventions, using recreation, practical experiences, counseling, and case studies, are effective strategies for helping students understand and apply these principles. This also ensures the strengthening of their emotional and social skills, enabling them to confront ethical dilemmas without compromising their values or psychological well-being.

Keywords: ethical behaviors, strategies, students.

Resumen

El presente artículo tuvo como objetivo analizar las repercusiones del comportamiento ético en los estudiantes. Para ello, se llevó a cabo una revisión sistemática siguiendo el método PRISMA. Como criterios de inclusión, se seleccionaron artículos indexados en bases de datos de alto impacto, tales como Scopus, Web of Science (WoS) y SciELO, publicados entre 2021 y 2025. Los resultados se obtuvieron tras examinar un total de 494 artículos, de los cuales se eligieron 24: 9 de Scopus, 7 de WoS y 8 de SciELO. Los hallazgos revelan que la educación ética en los estudiantes es fundamental para su desarrollo profesional y social. No debe limitarse únicamente al uso de mecanismos de control, sino integrarse en el proceso académico para fomentar la responsabilidad y la honestidad. Además, es crucial promover prácticas profesionales responsables y sostenibles, así como formar personas comprometidas con su entorno. Finalmente, en las conclusiones se destaca que el desarrollo de comportamientos éticos requiere potenciar habilidades blandas y promover la toma de decisiones basadas en principios éticos. Las intervenciones educativas, mediante el uso de recreaciones, experiencias prácticas, asesoramiento y análisis de casos, son estrategias efectivas para que los estudiantes comprendan y apliquen estos principios. De esta manera, se asegura también el fortalecimiento de sus habilidades emocionales y sociales, permitiéndoles enfrentar dilemas éticos sin poner en riesgo sus valores ni su bienestar psicológico.

Palabras clave: conductas éticas, estrategias, estudiantes.

Introduction

In the last five decades, science has significantly advanced; however, this progress has often inadequately considered the impact of its discoveries. Consequently, substantial moral conflicts have arisen that affect social well-being and the natural balance, making it essential for ethics to also transform and evolve (Quevedo et al., 2022).

In the educational sphere, ethical concerns manifest at various points. For example, during synchronous interactions in online education, issues related to privacy and surveillance arise due to the exposure of participants' images in these sessions (Monteiro et al., 2023). Another relevant challenge is the recurrence of dishonest practices, where some students resort to unacceptable methods, such as cheating on exams to pass easily. Although evidence suggests that most committed this offense only once or on a few occasions, the common sanction was a final warning prior to expulsion from the institution (Kocanjer & Kadoic, 2016).

Moreover, it is common to find academic papers rife with uncredited ideas, an ethically reprehensible act. Additionally, inconsistencies in organization and the correct use of bibliographic references are observed, as well as neglect in the application and explanation of research instruments and in formulating conclusions that lack solid backing. This highlights a risk in the ethical training of students when scientific principles are not respected, nor is the ethical dimension reflected in academic outcomes (Quevedo et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Guerrero-Dib et al. (2020) found that, in addition to plagiarism and cheating, some students engage in dishonest behaviors in the workplace, such as unjustified absenteeism or stealing supplies, indicating that academic dishonesty can extend beyond the educational environment.

Regarding the factors influencing these decisions, Kohlberg (1976) proposes three ethical controls: external control through rules and their enforcement, personal morality as internal control, and social influences as social control. In this context, personal autonomy is under development, shaped by individual interests and a new technological ethos that entails a constant pursuit of self-actualization, a diminished sense of humanity and belonging, a reduction in civic spontaneity, and an increasing automation of the individual (Sadin, 2020). However, school-based ethical education focuses on strengthening ethical knowledge by integrating awareness, reasoning, and moral judgment, although teachers often resort to external perspectives, such as punishment, to address ethical dilemmas (Chaoping, 2023).

Corruption represents a serious problem in Mexico, and information regarding academic immorality in the country is not encouraging. Academic integrity is essential for achieving high educational standards. It has been demonstrated that students who admit to committing violations against academic honesty are also involved in dishonest behaviors in other spheres. Similarly, those who perceive academic infractions as minor tend to engage more frequently in inappropriate behaviors (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2020). Therefore, it is imperative that educational institutions and businesses implement programs that promote a culture of academic integrity, designing experiences that encourage learning, highlight the benefits of acting ethically, mitigate risks and consequences of immoral behaviors, discourage deception, and establish clear and effective procedures for sanctioning academic violations.

Finally, considering that ethics, as a philosophical discipline, analyzes the norms that regulate morality both in society and within the individual, particularly in confronting extraordinary historical situations (Miranda & Villasís, 2019), it is crucial to highlight that relational ethics, recognition theory, and practice architecture theory provide valuable tools for exploring school practices that promote student well-being and safety. These approaches contribute to a profound understanding of how current practices interact with the conditions that facilitate or, conversely, restrict them (Graham et al., 2023).

Thus, the general objective of this study was to identify the implications of ethical behavior among students.

Methodology

or this study, a systematic review was conducted following the PRISMA method. The inclusion criteria considered articles published between 2021 and 2025, extracted from high-impact databases such as Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and SciELO. A total of 494 articles were analyzed, of which 24 were selected for the final analysis: 9 from Scopus, 7 from WoS, and 8 from SciELO (see Figure1).

Figure 1
Articles by publication database

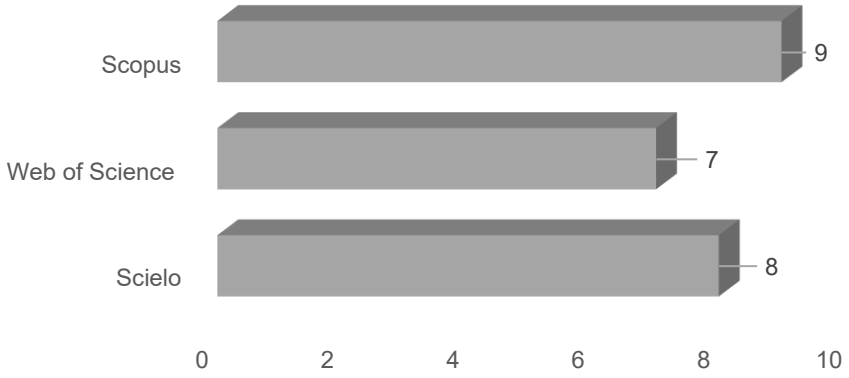


Table 1
Search strings in database articles

Database	Search Term	Results	Selected
Scopus	*"ethical" AND "conduct" AND "students"*	342	9
WoS	*"ethical" AND "conduct" AND "students"*	140	7
Scielo	*"ethical" AND "conduct" AND "students"*	12	8
		494	**24**

Figure 2
Flow diagram for article selection according to PRISMA

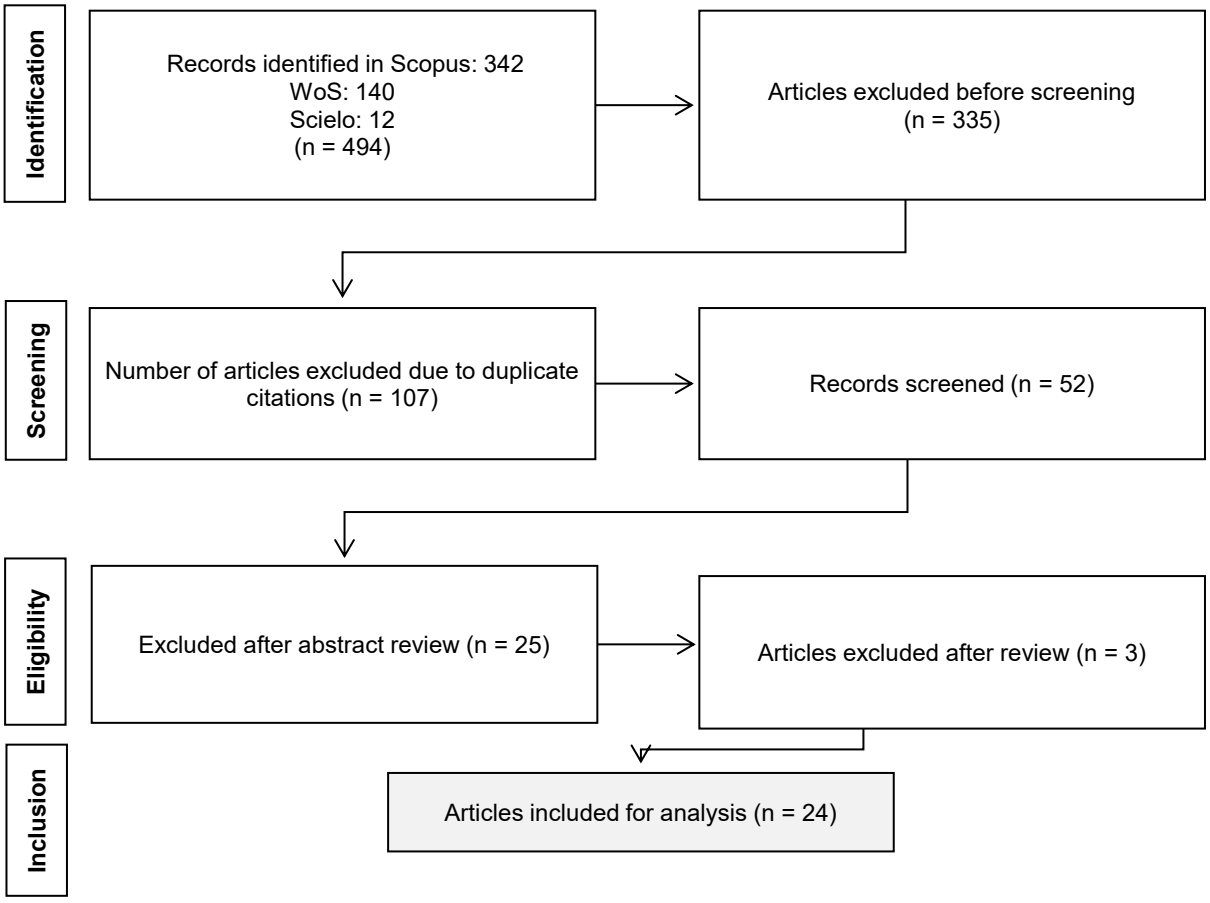


Table 2
Articles on the implications of ethical conduct

No.	Authors	Implications of ethical conduct
1	Klahn, P. (2025)	Effective teaching strategies are required to prepare students for the development of soft skills.
2	Kolcu & Kolcu (2025)	The use of validated tools, such as SITAT-TR, contributes to strengthening professional ethics education through simulations, ensuring that future professionals act responsibly and effectively in collaborative environments.
3	Sattar & Yusoff (2025)	It is essential to implement support measures that strengthen emotional stability and ethical training to ensure responsible and sustainable professional practice over time.
4	Rahman et al. (2025)	Artificial intelligence can optimize education; however, its implementation requires rigorous ethical evaluation to avoid biases and ensure fairness in teaching and assessment processes.
5	Weng et al. (2025)	Regulating data usage and promoting a balanced teaching approach that combines technology with the development of interpersonal skills are fundamental.

6	Ma (2025)	In a technological context, it is important to identify regulations and promote the development of reading skills to prevent misuse of technology and encourage responsible application.
7	Grohmann et al. (2025)	In the educational sphere, implementing psychological support strategies in schools is effective for strengthening ethical decision-making among students.
8	Likhit et al. (2025)	Developing environmental ethics in university students requires strategies that reinforce intrinsic values and social responsibilities.
9	Li (2025)	The development of ethical conduct in research is essential to ensure the validity and applicability of knowledge across all disciplines.
10	Gao et al. (2022)	The limited effectiveness of current ethics training programs in research highlights the need for more integrative strategies that include practical experiences, mentoring, and case analysis to ensure ethical decision-making in graduate students.
11	Raza et al. (2021)	Ethical leadership and social support are relevant strategies for strengthening ethical conduct in the workplace.
12	Tanaka (2021)	It is imperative to include the development of emotional and social skills so that professionals can address ethical dilemmas without compromising their principles or psychological well-being.
13	Antes & Maggi (2021)	The implemented strategies not only prevent inappropriate practices but also enhance the credibility of results and the fair recognition of research efforts.
14	Monthofer et al. (2023)	Designing interventions that reinforce ethical training in research enables participants to understand and effectively apply ethical principles.
15	Danh (2022)	Codes of conduct are key not only for the cultural adaptation of international students but also for their academic and professional success in foreign contexts.
16	Shrivastava & Wanjari (2024)	Escape rooms represent valuable educational opportunities; however, their successful implementation requires attention to various ethical factors to optimize outcomes and ensure respectful learning.
17	Hans et al. (2023)	Ethics in student training must be integrated across all disciplines, avoiding isolation as a subject, so that future professionals understand their social impact and relevance to their field.
18	Rêgo et al. (2023)	Digital education demands the promotion of clear ethical principles that ensure safe and respectful interactions, protecting the privacy and rights of all participants.
19	Savi et al. (2023)	Ethical training must transcend strict regulations and include practical experiences that encourage reflection and the conscious application of ethical principles in research.
20	Jacobs & Mncube (2023)	The promotion of ethics in education cannot rely exclusively on monitoring tools but must be integrated into academic training to strengthen commitment to honesty and responsibility.
21	Peña & Hernández (2022)	Ethical training is essential for students researching in sensitive environments, such as health, ensuring respect and minimizing conflicts with participants.
22	Antonucci et al. (2022)	Ethical education in medicine is crucial for future professionals to act responsibly and sensitively, minimizing errors and conflicts in patient care during critical situations.

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23	Torres & Zanatta (2022)	Higher education must strengthen ethical training through applied strategies that address deficiencies in supervision, research, and bioethics, ensuring professionals are integral and committed.
24	Quevedo et al. (2022)	The hybrid research modality promoted a positive change in students' ethical behavior, enhancing their professional training and their capacity to address problems with integrity.

Results and discussion

Importance of ethical conduct in students

Ethical training in students represents an essential pillar for their professional and social development. This training should not be confined to an isolated subject, but rather integrated across all academic areas, thereby ensuring that students understand the impact of their actions on society and in their respective fields (Hans et al., 2023). Moreover, the promotion of ethics in education cannot rely exclusively on oversight mechanisms; it must be an integral part of the academic process to reinforce commitment to honesty and responsibility (Jacobs & Mncube, 2023). Additionally, implementing measures that strengthen emotional stability and ethical training is fundamental for ensuring responsible and sustainable professional practice over time (Sattar & Yusoff, 2025). Therefore, ethical training should be incorporated transversely within curricula, accompanied by strategies that ensure its sustainable application.

In the context of digital education, it is imperative to establish clear ethical principles that guarantee safe and respectful interactions, protecting the privacy and rights of all participants (Rêgo et al., 2023). Similarly, artificial intelligence constitutes a tool that can optimize educational processes; however, its adoption must be accompanied by rigorous ethical evaluation to avoid biases and ensure fairness in teaching and assessment systems (Rahman et al., 2025).

On the other hand, in the field of research, ethics is crucial for preserving the integrity of studies and minimizing conflicts. This training should not be limited to rigid regulations but should enhance practical experiences that encourage reflection and the conscious application of ethical principles (Savi et al., 2023). This ethical dimension is particularly relevant in sensitive environments such as healthcare, where adequate preparation allows for respect towards participants and strengthens the validity of studies (Peña & Hernández, 2022). In medicine, ethical education is fundamental for future professionals to act responsibly and sensitively, minimizing errors and conflicts in patient care (Antonucci et al., 2022). In summary, ethics promotes the reduction of conflicts, strengthens respect and responsibility, and contributes to minimizing errors.

Furthermore, ethics plays a crucial role in the adaptation and academic success of international students, as behavioral norms not only facilitate cultural integration but are also essential for their performance in international contexts (Danh, 2022). Likewise, developing environmental ethics among university students requires strategies that reinforce intrinsic values and social responsibilities (Likhit et al., 2025).

Finally, higher education must strengthen ethical training through concrete strategies that address deficiencies in oversight, research, and bioethics, thus ensuring that professionals are integral and committed (Torres & Zanatta, 2022). In fact, the hybrid research modality has proven to be an effective strategy for promoting positive changes in students' ethical behavior, consolidating their professional training and their capacity to address problems with integrity (Quevedo et al., 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen student ethics given its evident impact on the formation of integral and committed citizens capable of generating favorable changes.

Strategies for developing ethical conduct

To foster ethical conduct in students, effective educational strategies are required that promote soft skills and appropriate decision-making based on ethical principles (Klahn, 2025). In this regard, the use of validated tools that strengthen the teaching of personal and professional ethics is recommended, such as simulations that ensure responsible and efficient performance in future professionals (Kolcu & Kolcu, 2025). Additionally, designing interventions that reinforce ethical training in research allows participants to understand and effectively apply ethical principles (Monthofer et al., 2023).

In an increasingly technological context, it is essential to identify clear regulations and promote the development of reading skills to prevent the misuse of technologies, as well as to ensure their responsible use (Ma, 2025). Furthermore, it is crucial to design strategies that reduce associated risks, such as regulations for data

usage and the promotion of a balanced teaching approach that combines technology with the development of interpersonal skills (Weng et al., 2025). In this way, educational strategies focused on ethical conduct integrate the development of soft skills, simulations, and responsible use of technology.

For research, fostering ethical conduct is key to ensuring the validity and proper application of knowledge across various disciplines (Li, 2025). However, the limited effectiveness of current ethics training programs highlights the need for more comprehensive strategies that include practical experiences, mentoring, and case analysis to ensure appropriate decision-making in graduate students (Gao et al., 2022). By implementing these strategies, not only are inappropriate practices prevented, but the credibility of results is also strengthened, and research efforts are fairly recognized (Antes & Maggi, 2021).

Moreover, ethical leadership combined with social support constitutes important elements for strengthening ethical conduct in the workplace (Raza et al., 2021). It is equally necessary to develop emotional and social skills that enable professionals to face ethical dilemmas without compromising their principles or psychological well-being (Tanaka, 2021). From the educational standpoint, implementing psychological support strategies in schools has proven to be an effective resource for strengthening ethical decision-making among students (Grohmann et al., 2025).

Finally, innovative methodologies, such as escape rooms, offer valuable educational opportunities; however, their success depends on addressing various factors, including ethical considerations, to optimize outcomes and ensure a respectful learning experience (Shrivastava & Wanjari, 2024). Consequently, it is essential to implement a variety of strategies and resources that promote ethical development in students, thereby contributing to the formation of citizens with adequate personal, professional, and social development.

Conclusions

Ethical education in students constitutes a fundamental pillar for their professional and social development. This training should not be limited exclusively to oversight tools but fully integrated into the academic process to strengthen responsibility and honesty. Additionally, it is imperative to promote responsible professional practice that is sustainable over time, and to cultivate individuals who are committed and ethically aware.

On the other hand, to foster ethical conduct, it is necessary to develop soft skills that facilitate decision-making based on ethical principles. In this framework, educational interventions that include simulations, practical experiences, mentoring, and case analysis enable students to understand and effectively apply ethical principles. Similarly, strengthening emotional and social skills is key for students to confront ethical dilemmas without jeopardizing their values or psychological well-being.

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