

Ethical beliefs and behaviour of university educators: evidence from Russia

Ethical beliefs
and behaviour

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Abstract

Purpose – This exploratory study aims, firstly, to analyse and categorise judgements on ethical behaviour and actual behaviour of university educators. Secondly, the study addresses the impact of demographic data, such as gender, age and role on these issues.

Design/methodology/approach – We utilised online survey data from academic employees of four leading universities in Russia, who are involved in teaching activities. In this study, we used correlation, regression and factor analyses.

Findings – Our results demonstrate that teaching, while too distressed to be effective, is a common experience among university educators. By contrast, the rarest categories include teaching under the influence of drugs or alcohol. In addition, there is a high congruence between beliefs and respective behaviours. Females are typically more ethical in both judgements and actual behaviour. Factor analysis of behaviours yielded 16 interpretable factors.

Practical implications – Firstly, the salary of the university educators should be adequate and competitive and match with their workload. Secondly, the work of the educators should be given recognition that may become their stimuli for improvement in university teaching. Thirdly, universities should develop ethics centres, which help faculty members and students to take the right decisions in situations involving questionable behaviour in the classroom. Lastly, the development of ethical codes, for faculty members and students, may become their guidance in situations with ethical dilemmas.

Originality/value – This study contributed to the very limited research on the ethical aspects of higher education in Russia.

Keywords Academic ethics, Professional ethics, Higher education, Russia, Tertiary education, Factor analysis, Unethical behaviour

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Ethical issues in higher education draw considerable public attention, with its focus on educators' roles and behaviour. In tertiary education, there are many categories of educators, from Teaching Assistant, Tutor to Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Assistant/Associate/Full Professor, all of which, for the purpose of this article, we will class as "educators". Every day, instructors face various ethical dilemmas that arise in different situations when dealing with their students and colleagues, for example, when teaching, discussing research, etc. (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). By ethical dilemmas, we mean a problem that arises between two possible solutions, of which neither is absolutely acceptable or preferable from an ethical point of view.

If educators do not meet the standards of ethical conduct, while teaching in the classroom, their students may fail to meet them as well, which might lead to several negative consequences, such as student academic dishonest behaviour (Starovoytova and Arimi, 2017)

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that includes such cases as cheating, plagiarism and bribery (Denisova-Schmidt, 2017). Previous research suggests that faculty members' behaviour is one of the most significant factors influencing the development of ethical values and principles among students (Robie and Keeping, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary to examine the ethical beliefs of educators of different disciplines on proper behaviour during teaching. By ethical beliefs in our study, we mean a number of moral principles that a person follows in their conduct. They also reflect people's ideas of what is right or wrong in terms of behaviour. In this study, the terms "beliefs" and "perceptions" are used interchangeably.

Compared to the studies on academic ethics in the United States and European countries, previous research in Russia is limited. Most investigated topics are centred around a faculty development curriculum that lacks an ethical aspect in some universities (Jarvis *et al.*, 2005) and instruments for sustaining the professional ethics of university educators (Bojchenko, 2013; Moiseenko *et al.*, 2016).

Therefore, it is important to study the ethical beliefs and behaviour of university educators while teaching in the classroom in different regions in Russia for several reasons. Firstly, Russia has one of the largest higher-education systems in the world with an enrolment rate of almost 80% and very few dropouts (Denisova-Schmidt, 2017). However, as it is also one of the most corrupt countries in the world (ranked 137 out of 180 by Transparency International, 2020), this aspect negatively influences its higher education system, in terms of quality and reputation (Denisova-Schmidt *et al.*, 2016). Thus, it can serve as a possible case study for other national contexts with large-scale higher education systems.

Secondly, the internationalisation of higher education leads to an increase in student and faculty outgoing mobility in Russia. Russian educators participate in international exchange or internship programmes, which are supported by their home universities. Most of them choose the United States or Western European countries as their destination points (Shmatko and Katchanov, 2016). Thus, it may be beneficial for host universities from these countries to be aware of the ethical beliefs and behaviours of these educators.

The aim of this study is to analyse the ethical beliefs and behaviours of university educators in Russia. Following a study by Tabachnick *et al.* (1991), for the purpose of this research, we have developed a questionnaire, with each item representing a certain type of misbehaviour in higher education settings.

We proceeded as follows. First, we analysed those behaviours, which were identified by educators as most frequent and most unethical. Second, we investigated within-subject differences in the frequency ratings for the summary variables. Third, we demonstrated the differences between males and females in their judgements, actual behaviours and congruence of both. Fourth, we examined the influence of age, gender and position on the rated frequencies of the different categories of behaviour. Finally, with the help of factor analysis, we identified supra-ordinate categories of educators' ethical violations.

This article contributed to the following domains of research in higher education. Firstly, it documented the importance of ethics in higher education. Secondly, it highlighted the role of the educator in ethical settings. Finally, it provided implications for university educators in Russia and countries with similar higher education systems.

In the next sections, we reviewed the literature. After this, we introduced data and methods. Next, we presented and discussed the results. The last section concluded.

Literature review

The importance of ethics in higher education

Scholars and practitioners are sometimes confused about the constituents and definition of ethical conduct of educators in the university, compared to the ones of improper conduct. Several studies on educators' perceptions of ethical behaviour discussed whether different kinds of harmful behaviour were unethical, merely unprofessional or generally unacceptable

in higher education settings (Robie and Kidwell, 2003; Tanchuk *et al.*, 2016). This proves the fact that there is no consensus on the definition of ethical behaviour while teaching.

Ethical beliefs start developing within the family at home and later on through social relationships, which are formed by the norms of society and the environment (Goldstein, 2008). However, these ethical perceptions and attitudes may be affected by the improper conduct of people that a person encounters. Therefore, such a person may follow some negative examples of behaviour. Thus, even though students have already learned some behavioural norms, they are still able to absorb information on ethics at tertiary educational institutions, so they will be able to behave ethically in any situation (O'Leary and Stewart, 2013). However, if an educator does not follow ethical principles while teaching, their students may adopt the same negative behavioural patterns.

The purpose of higher education is not only to deliver professional knowledge to students but also to pass on moral values and ethical beliefs so that the students will respect their community and maintain social and academic integrity (Collier *et al.*, 2018). In this study, we investigated the situation within the social disciplines such as economics, law, management, etc. For instance, ethics in management education helps to demonstrate the significance of a person's actions and show the principles of behaviour that should be followed by people and organisations, which may help students to reflect on their conduct ethically (Gottardello and del Mar Pàmies, 2019).

Universities, with the help of educators, should take a leading role in establishing an ethical environment on campuses, as it is the educators, who can become students' role models in their ethical decision-making processes. During the period when organisations and universities fail to provide an honest environment, it is significant for the researchers to intervene and propose steps for improvement. For instance, students should be encouraged during their studies by faculty members, to explore the future working sphere and apply their knowledge into practice (Gottardello and del Mar Pàmies, 2019). Moreover, previous research has demonstrated that students, in the course of their studies at university, learn professional, ethical values (Ritter, 2006). However, scholars say that the universities do little to stimulate such learning, with a focus on the high standards of professional conduct (Gottardello and del Mar Pàmies, 2019).

Russian higher education is currently facing the same issues, as stated above (Tsvyk, 2014). Moreover, the research shows that Russian universities implicitly stimulate dishonest behaviour among their students (Chirikov and Shmeleva, 2018). As universities have a great influence on the mindsets of their students, they should establish such approaches to education delivery, which espouse the ideas of integrity and inclusion (Mubarak and Rahman, 2019).

The role of the educator

It is considered that educators are one of the main mediators who facilitate change in the educational environment. Therefore, an educator's quality is highly significant, as it ensures the efficacy of educational outcomes (Van Nuland and Khandelwal, 2006). However, an educator's quality does not only mean professional qualifications and status but also implies lifetime commitment and ethical behaviour (Van Nuland and Khandelwal, 2006). It is clear that the ethical beliefs and conduct of the educators may have a crucial role in shaping perceptions and, finally, the conduct of students (Stevens *et al.*, 1993).

In fact, educators sometimes face difficulties when teaching ethically sensitive topics, for example, they admit having a lack of proper teacher training, resources to structure the class, lack of time, lack of relevance for students or, merely, the lack of interest in doing so (Sadler *et al.*, 2006; Gottardello and del Mar Pàmies, 2019). Moreover, Adkins and Radtke (2004) state that some educators may assume that the value of ethical education is rather small and

unimportant, because they believe that ethical attitudes develop prior to university enrolment and depend on different factors, such as culture, family and religion. Nevertheless, even though university educators might have such a point of view, they may still feel responsible to help their students in learning how to approach and deal with ethical issues (Adkins and Radtke, 2004, p. 282). The researchers concluded that teacher-training programmes must emphasise the importance of ethics and its connection with different disciplines in order to help them cope with the challenges that occur during classes (Boon, 2011). Boon (2011) states that this is the only way to improve the quality of teaching and, therefore, potentially, students' ethical vision. Therefore, it is essential to help them in this endeavour, by developing and establishing the code of professional ethics (Harris *et al.*, 2002; Moiseenko *et al.*, 2016) and by providing additional lectures or seminars on ethics education, where they can also discuss the ethical problems they face.

The role of educators and their quality is also widely discussed in Russian academic society. Various Russian researchers agree that university educators can make students comply with the moral and ethical standards developed by society, which is viewed as one of the goals of teaching activity (Logachev *et al.*, 2009). This is why educators are seen as ethics mentors or role models for students (Tuguz and Lyausheva, 2013). However, university ethical codes in Russia, with a separate section about ethical principles for faculty members, are rare. Nevertheless, public attention is drawn to the issues concerning their moral and ethical behaviour, in the Russian media and research.

Past research on university educators' ethical beliefs and behaviour

The existing research, regarding the ethical behaviour of educators, is mostly focused on a business area as a whole (Robie and Keeping, 2004; Jakobsen *et al.*, 2005; Gottardello and del Mar Pàmies, 2019) or specific areas, for instance, studies on ethical attitudes of faculty in marketing (Mason *et al.*, 1990), management (Gilley and Walters, 2016) and accounting (Cameron and O'Leary, 2015). Kidwell and Kidwell (2008) investigated the perceptions of ethical behaviour among faculty members based on whether they were teaching courses in qualitative or quantitative fields. The findings demonstrated various differences among the respondents who represent quantitative disciplines such as accounting, economics and finance and qualitative disciplines, such as IT, management and marketing. For instance, quantitative faculty found such behaviours as credit rather than salary provision for teaching assistants and controversial media display in the classroom less ethical compared to their qualitative counterparts. These differences were explained by various academic backgrounds of the educators. It should be noted that there has not been any research on the ethical perceptions of the faculty in social disciplines.

Moreover, ethical beliefs have been investigated in various domains, involving (1) teaching methods and classroom behaviour, (2) research and publication practices, (3) relationships with students and (4) external employment (Robie and Keeping, 2004). For instance, the results of the study by Gottardello and Karabag (2020) demonstrated that professors believed that their behaviours and teaching styles influenced students' actions and attitudes. Holtfreter *et al.* (2020) were investigating the reasons for dishonest practices in research among faculty members. They surveyed the tenure faculties in the natural, social and applied sciences at the top 100 universities in the United States. According to the study results, some faculty members tend to use dishonest practices in research when they feel professional pressure, for instance to secure grant funding or they believe that there is a low possibility of detection. Chory and Offstein (2018) studied faculty–student relationships and stated that university educators had issues in terms of establishing the boundary line with their students. Burnaz *et al.* (2010) investigated the ethical perceptions of Turkish university instructors. The researchers found out that, due to external employment, university

educators neglected some of their responsibilities such as student supervision, absence during office hours, etc. Even though such actions were perceived as unethical by the faculty members, they were believed to still occur at the universities.

According to [Robie and Keeping \(2004\)](#), three main themes emerge frequently from the studies on the ethical perceptions of the faculty. The first one is the engagement in sexual relationships with students in exchange for grades, which was found to be one of the most unethical conducts in all the mentioned studies. The second one is the acceptance of various gifts and money in exchange for grades, which was also perceived as extremely unethical. The third one is the falsification of research data and plagiarism. Furthermore, the research on this topic has mostly been centred around Anglo-Saxon and European countries, including Australia, the UK and the USA ([Forster, 2019](#); [Gottardello and del Mar Pàmies, 2019](#)).

Despite the research papers mentioned above, there are very few empirical studies that analysed, in-depth, the beliefs and behaviour of university educators. Moreover, to our knowledge, none of these studies have been conducted within a Russian educational context on multi-regional data. Subsequently, this study focuses on the following research question: What are the ethical beliefs and behaviour of Russian university educators?

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on [Bandura's \(1977\)](#) concept of self-efficacy and the broader social cognitive theory. According to the latter, people follow the types of behaviour observed from others in certain environmental contexts and often in the way related to their perceived ability to behave ([Bandura, 2006](#)). Thus, the concept of self-efficacy is viewed as an important trait of people that can have a significant influence on their thought patterns and emotions that enable and form their actions and beliefs ([Marzuki et al., 2017](#)). One's self-efficacy beliefs mediate relationships between knowledge and behaviours within certain environmental contexts. However, efficacy beliefs constantly vary throughout a person's life and may be changed depending upon the context ([Bandura, 2006](#)). In this study, we use self-efficacy theory to emphasise the important role of observational learning in the development of personality, which means that faculty members are in a position of role models for their students. Therefore, their behaviour should be consistent with ethical principles established in the society and universities so that students may follow their behavioural patterns in everyday life. This conceptual framework also helps in the interpretation of the received results on educators' behaviour and beliefs and suggests recommendations for the university administrators on how to shape faculty members' behaviour and beliefs according to the established ethical principles in the society and the university.

Data and method

The survey procedure and ratings of behaviours

A survey questionnaire was sent via email during September–December 2019 to 660 full-time academic employees of four leading universities in Russia, based on aggregated rankings, who are involved in teaching activities, identified in the Faculty directory of the respective official university web pages. Our target universities hold top positions in university ratings in four Russian cities: two cities of federal importance, Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and two large provincial cities in the European part of Russia. The response rate was 20%. The survey questionnaire was adapted from that used by [Tabachnick et al. \(1991\)](#). Firstly, we converted monetary values to the national currency at the current exchange rate. Secondly, we conducted a pilot study to minimise potential misunderstanding by respondents. In addition, we conducted three interviews in order to reveal attitudes and perceptions of the survey

questions. As a result, we excluded 13 questions – either irrelevant or *tabu* in the Russian context, such as “Selling unwanted complimentary textbooks to used book vendors”, “Taking advantage of a student’s offer such as wholesale prices at parents’ store”, “Engaging in sexual fantasies about students”, “Teaching that certain races are intellectually inferior”, “Teaching that homosexuality *per se* is pathological”. Participants were asked to rate each of 50 behaviours in terms of two categories. First, to what extent did the participants consider the behaviour ethical? In rating whether each behaviour was ethical, participants could use five categories: “unquestionably not”, “under rare circumstances”, “do not know /not sure”, “under many circumstances” and “unquestionably yes”. Second, to what extent had they engaged in the behaviour during their teaching activities? Participants could rate the behaviour’s occurrence in their academic activities as never, rarely, sometimes, fairly often or very often.

The list of the 50 questions appears in SMI. In addition to answering the Likert-scale questions, participants were asked to provide demographic information.

Analyses

There were three levels of analyses. Firstly, we examined the frequency distributions for each of the 50 categories, and identified those behaviours, which were selected by educators as the most frequent and unethical. We examined for (1) within-subject differences in the frequency ratings for the summary variables, (2) differences between males and females in their frequency ratings of the summary variables. Secondly, utilising multivariate regression analysis, we examined the influence of age, gender and position on the rated frequencies of the different categories of behaviour. We controlled for marital status and location, using the most frequent responses as respective reference categories. Finally, we identified the supra-ordinate categories of educators’ ethical violations by conducting a factor analysis. For this purpose, we used a principal components analysis with varimax rotation.

Results

Demographic characteristics and ratings of the 50 behaviours

Among the 130 respondents, [1] 62 (48%) and 68 (52%) were males and females respectively; aged on average 40.6 years ($N = 129$; $SD = 12.3$; $min = 23$; $max = 74$). The largest part of survey participants (45%) works in Moscow, followed by Saint Petersburg (27%), Nizhniy Novgorod (16%) and Perm (12%). With respect to the position, 46% of the respondents were associate professors, 18% were senior lecturers and 15% were full professors, while lecturers and those holding other positions accounted for 11% and 10% respectively. Around 70% of the respondents were involved in teaching social disciplines (economics, law, management, etc.). More than three-quarters (76%) of the respondents were married or had a civil partner, while the remaining 24% were either single or divorced. See [Table 1](#) for details.

Ethical beliefs and behaviours

Relationship between behaviour and belief. Congruence between engaging in behaviours and beliefs about their ethicality was evaluated through the p -statistic, i.e. a test of probability of similar ranking on two indices with ordered categories. In the full sample, of the 50 behaviours, 44 related positively and statistically significantly to the respective beliefs with p -values < 0.01 , except for “Becoming sexually involved with a student” and “Engaging in a sexual relationship with another faculty member, within your department, who is of the same academic rank as you” ($p < 0.1$). Only two items, namely “Making deliberate or repeated

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Location</i>		
Moscow	58	45
Saint Petersburg	35	27
Nizhniy Novgorod	21	16
Perm	16	12
<i>Position</i>		
Associate Professor	60	46
Senior Lecturer	23	18
Full Professor	20	15
Lecturer	14	11
Other	13	10
<i>Teaching specialty (multiple options)</i>		
Social disciplines (economics, law, management, etc.), except sociology and pedagogy	70	54
Mathematics, programming, computer science	27	21
Humanities (philosophy, philology, history, literature, languages, etc.)	16	12
Professional disciplines, practice	16	12
<i>Marital status</i>		
Married	88	68
Single	23	18
Divorced	11	8
In civil partnership	8	6

Table 1.
Demographic
characteristics of
respondents

sexual comments, gestures, or physical contact that is unwanted by a student” and “Teaching where there is no adequate complaint procedure for students” failed to reach reliable congruence (see SM2 for details).

If we compare males and females, the most striking differences are related to “Using university resources to create a “popular” textbook”, “Accepting a student’s expensive gift”, “Teaching when too distressed to be effective”, “Accepting undeserved authorship on a student’s published paper” and “Engaging in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within your department who is of higher or lower rank than you”. While the congruence is insignificant for males, it is positive and statistically significant at least at 5% level for females. In contrast, “Becoming sexually involved with a student”, “Using profanity in lectures” and “Including false or misleading information when writing a letter of recommendation for a student”, are positive and statistically significant at 1% level for males, while being insignificant for females.

Almost universal behaviour. For only one of the 50 items, namely, “Teaching when too distressed to be effective”, 88% of the respondents, indicated that they had engaged in this behaviour, on rare occasions (see Table 2). Fortunately, this behaviour occurs very often to only 8% of participants.

Rare behaviours. We define rare behaviours as those, which never occurred or occurred on a rare basis among less than 10% of respondents. The rarest items were sexual harassment (Questions 9 and 18) and teaching while under the influence of illegal drugs (Question 27), which was never reported on more than a rare basis. These behaviours were acknowledged by only 1.6, 1.6 and 0.8% of the respondents respectively. Although, for more than 90% of respondents, the following behaviours never occurred, they also gained very low percentage in categories other than rare: “Becoming sexually involved with a student”, “Selling goods to a student”, “Teaching while under the influence of alcohol”, “Accepting undeserved authorship on a student’s published paper”, “Engaging in a sexual relationship with another

Behaviour	Ethical to what extent?					How often does it occur in your practice?*				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1. Using university resources to create a “popular” textbook	24.6	25.4	26.2	16.2	7.7	76.2	14.8	6.3	2.3	0.0
2. Ignoring strong evidence of cheating	73.8	16.9	6.9	2.3	0.0	45.4	35.9	13.3	4.7	0.8
3. Giving easy courses or tests to ensure your popularity with students	70.8	19.2	8.5	1.5	0.0	75.4	17.2	4.7	1.6	0.8
4. Giving academic credit instead of salary for student assistants	46.9	11.5	24.6	10.0	6.9	82.3	3.9	7.9	3.9	0.8
5. Teaching full time while “moonlighting” at least 20 h per week	9.2	9.2	26.9	19.2	35.4	52.3	11.8	14.2	7.9	13.4
6. Dating a student	24.6	22.3	26.9	10.0	16.2	63.8	16.7	8.7	7.1	2.4
7. Asking small favours (e.g. a ride home) from students	43.8	24.6	14.6	10.0	6.9	74.6	18.1	4.7	1.6	0.0
8. Hugging a student	63.8	16.9	13.1	4.6	1.5	79.2	13.4	3.9	1.6	0.8
9. Telling a student: “I’m sexually attracted to you”	83.8	6.9	6.2	1.5	1.5	96.9	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
10. Accepting a student’s expensive (worth 50 USD or more) gift	69.2	15.4	11.5	3.1	0.8	89.2	7.1	1.6	0.8	0.0
11. Teaching when too distressed to be effective	3.8	10.8	36.2	22.3	26.9	12.3	38.1	27.8	14.3	7.9
12. Becoming sexually involved with a student	78.5	10.8	6.9	3.1	0.8	95.4	1.6	0.8	0.0	0.0
13. Accepting a student’s invitation to a party	21.5	17.7	24.6	16.2	20.0	63.8	20.5	9.4	4.7	0.8
14. Selling goods (e.g. your car, cell phone or books) to a student	55.4	13.1	18.5	5.4	7.7	94.6	3.1	0.8	0.0	0.0
15. Teaching material, you have not really mastered	50.8	23.8	16.9	6.9	1.5	49.2	39.4	5.5	2.4	3.1
16. Accepting a student’s inexpensive gift (worth less than 5 USD) regardless of the reason	15.4	12.3	23.8	22.3	26.2	40.8	30.7	11.8	12.6	3.9
17. Teaching a class without adequate preparation that day	34.6	31.5	23.1	6.2	4.6	40.8	41.7	10.2	3.9	3.1
18. Making deliberate or repeated sexual comments, gestures or physical contact that is unwanted by the student	97.7	0.0	2.3	0.0	0.0	96.9	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
19. Teaching while under the influence of alcohol	90.0	5.4	3.8	0.0	0.8	94.6	2.4	0.8	0.0	0.0
20. Helping a student file an ethics complaint against another teacher	32.3	10.8	20.8	20.8	15.4	87.7	7.9	1.6	1.6	0.0
21. Encouraging students to participate in your research projects	4.6	9.2	17.7	24.6	43.8	32.3	23.0	20.6	12.7	11.1
22. Having students be research subjects as part of a course requirement	26.2	26.2	27.7	10.8	9.2	72.3	16.7	6.3	2.4	0.8
23. Accepting undeserved authorship on a student’s published paper	80.8	12.3	6.2	0.8	0.0	92.3	3.9	1.6	0.8	0.0
24. Teaching in classes so crowded you could not teach effectively	14.6	17.7	29.2	23.8	14.6	29.2	48.0	13.4	7.1	2.4

Table 2. Percentage of respondents in each category

(continued)

Ethical beliefs
and behaviour

Behaviour	Ethical to what extent?					How often does it occur in your practice?*				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
25. Using a grading procedure, which does not adequately and transparently measure, what students have learned	48.5	25.4	17.7	5.4	3.1	50.0	34.6	11.8	1.6	1.6
26. Teaching content in a non-objective or incomplete manner	48.5	27.7	17.7	3.8	2.3	56.9	32.5	5.6	2.4	1.6
27. Teaching while under the influence of cocaine or other illegal drugs	92.3	5.4	1.5	0.0	0.8	96.9	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
28. Allowing a student's "likability" to influence your grading	62.3	22.3	11.5	3.1	0.8	53.8	32.5	11.1	0.8	0.8
29. Using profanity in lectures	79.2	14.6	4.6	0.8	0.8	89.2	8.7	0.8	0.0	0.0
30. Allowing students to drop courses for reasons not officially approved	23.1	25.4	23.1	16.2	12.3	38.5	36.5	14.3	4.8	5.6
31. Engaging in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within your department who is of the same academic rank as you	16.2	7.7	22.3	13.8	40.0	92.3	1.6	2.4	0.0	2.4
32. Engaging in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within your department who is of higher or lower rank than you	16.2	10.0	26.9	16.9	30.0	93.1	3.1	2.4	0.0	0.0
33. Inadequately supervising teaching (e.g. large delay or absence in providing feedback for students' works)	53.8	26.9	11.5	6.2	1.5	60.0	29.1	7.1	3.1	0.0
34. Omitting significant information when writing a letter of recommendation for a student	38.5	32.3	24.6	3.1	1.5	81.5	8.7	7.9	0.0	0.0
35. Including false or misleading information when writing a letter of recommendation for a student	80.0	17.7	0.8	0.8	0.8	86.2	11.0	0.8	0.8	0.0
36. Teaching where there is no adequate complaint procedure for students	63.1	22.3	12.3	2.3	0.0	80.0	9.7	7.3	0.0	0.0
37. Grading on a strict curve regardless of class performance level	9.2	13.8	27.7	21.5	27.7	21.5	28.6	27.0	12.7	10.3
38. Using films, etc., to fill class time (and reduce your teaching work) without regard for their educational value	55.4	29.2	11.5	3.1	0.8	77.7	14.3	6.3	0.0	0.0
39. Telling colleagues confidential disclosures told to you by a student	58.5	18.5	18.5	3.8	0.8	77.7	17.3	3.9	0.0	0.0
40. Teaching ethics or values to students	6.2	6.2	20.8	20.0	46.9	20.8	23.0	31.7	12.7	11.9
41. Failing to update lecture notes when re-teaching a course	25.4	20.0	28.5	13.8	12.3	35.4	34.4	16.8	8.0	4.8
42. Assigning unpaid students to carry out work for you, which has little educational value for the student	48.5	23.8	16.9	9.2	1.5	79.2	11.9	5.6	1.6	0.0
43. Privately tutoring students, whom you currently teach, for a fee	66.2	13.1	10.8	4.6	5.4	90.8	5.5	1.6	0.0	0.8

(continued)

Table 2.

Behaviour	Ethical to what extent?					How often does it occur in your practice?*				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
44. Criticising all theoretical orientations, except those you personally prefer	63.8	18.5	11.5	3.1	3.1	75.4	14.3	5.6	1.6	1.6
45. Using cocaine or other illegal drugs in your personal (nonteaching) life	62.3	5.4	13.8	2.3	16.2	93.8	2.4	0.0	0.8	0.0
46. Insulting, ridiculing, etc., a student in the student's presence	90.0	6.2	2.3	0.8	0.8	86.2	11.0	0.8	0.8	0.0
47. Insulting, ridiculing, etc., a student in his or her absence	82.3	11.5	4.6	0.8	0.8	76.9	17.6	2.4	0.8	0.0
48. Encouraging competition among students	12.3	12.3	30.0	24.6	20.8	30.0	25.6	24.8	11.2	8.0
49. Ignoring unethical behaviour by colleagues	29.2	32.3	30.8	5.4	2.3	30.8	37.1	21.8	5.6	4.0
50. Becoming sexually involved with a student only after he or she has completed your course and the grade has been filed	25.4	10.8	33.1	12.3	18.5	90.0	4.0	4.0	0.0	0.0

Table 2.

Note(s): *Responses 1–5 can sum to less than 100% because of missing data

faculty member within your department”, “Privately tutoring students, whom you currently teach, for a fee” and “Becoming sexually involved with a student only after he or she has completed your course and the grade has been filed.”

Difficult judgements. We define a difficult judgement as one in which at least 25% of the respondents indicated “do not know /not sure” in terms of whether the behaviour was ethical. There were 14 items that met this criterion, namely: “Using university resources to create a “popular” textbook”, “Giving academic credit instead of salary for student assistants”, “Teaching full time while “moonlighting” at least 20 h per week”, “Dating a student”, “Teaching when too distressed to be effective”, “Accepting a student’s invitation to a party”, “Having students be research subjects as part of a course requirement”, “Teaching in classes so crowded you could not teach effectively”, “Engaging in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within your department who is of higher or lower rank than you”, “Grading on a strict curve regardless of class performance level”, “Failing to update lecture notes when re-teaching a course”, “Encouraging competition among students”, “Ignoring unethical behaviour by colleagues” and “Becoming sexually involved with a student only after he or she has completed your course and the grade has been filed”. The comments left by respondents in the feedback form provided us with potential explanations. Typically, the lack of details in some questions made them difficult to answer. Interestingly, there were no difficult judgements among females. SM3 represents the summary of relevant feedback for some items provided on a voluntary basis after completing the survey. In around half of these messages, the respondents suggested avoiding ambiguity in certain survey questions by adding more contexts.

The impact of demographic data on behaviour

Gender- and age-driven responses. Predictably, females typically behave more ethically compared to their male colleagues in the majority of the situations. However, there are a few exceptions when males reported “never” with respect to the occurrence of certain behaviours

significantly more often, for example, “Using university resources to create a “popular” textbook” (88.5 vs 66.2%), “Accepting a student’s inexpensive gift (worth less than 5 USD) regardless of the reason” (54.1 vs 29.9%). See SM4 for details.

The following items were negatively and significantly ($p < 0.05$) affected by age: “Encouraging students to participate in your research projects”, “Failing to update lecture notes when re-teaching a course”, “Assigning unpaid students to carry out work for you, which has little educational value for the student”, “Insulting, ridiculing, etc., a student in the student’s presence”, “Insulting, ridiculing, etc., a student in his or her absence”, “Becoming sexually involved with a student only after he or she has completed your course and the grade has been filed”. In contrast, the effect of age was positive for “Teaching ethics or values to students”.

The following items were negatively and significantly ($p < 0.05$) associated with males: “Ignoring strong evidence of cheating” and “Accepting a student’s inexpensive gift regardless of the reason”. In contrast, the effect of male gender was positive and significant ($p < 0.05$) for “Allowing a student’s “likability” to influence your grading”, “Using profanity in lectures”, “Allowing students to drop courses for reasons not officially approved”, “Inadequately supervising teaching”, “Assigning unpaid students to carry out work for you, which has little educational value for the student” and “Insulting, ridiculing, etc., a student in the student’s presence”.

Position-driven responses. The following items were found significantly ($p < 0.05$) associated with holding a certain position. For full professors “Accepting a student’s invitation to a party” and “Using profanity in lectures” had a positive and negative effect respectively. Holding a non-specific senior position was negatively associated with “Allowing a student’s “likability” to influence your grading” and “Insulting, ridiculing, etc., a student in the student’s presence”. In contrast, there was a positive association with “Engaging in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within your department who is of the same academic rank as you”, “Grading on a strict curve regardless of class performance level” and “Teaching ethics or values to students”. For senior lecturers, there was a negative association with “Using profanity in lectures”, and “Including false or misleading information when writing a letter of recommendation for a student”. For non-specified other junior positions, there was a negative association with “Giving academic credit instead of salary for student assistants”, “Teaching full time while “moonlighting” at least 20 h per week”, “Telling colleagues confidential disclosures told to you by a student” and “Failing to update lecture notes when re-teaching a course”. In contrast, “Engaging in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within your department who is of the same academic rank as you” was positively associated with the faculty members holding non-specified other junior positions.

Factor analysis

Factor analysis of the 50 behaviours yielded 16 factors with eigenvalues greater than one. Examination of the rotated component matrix (varimax rotation) allowed us to identify 16 interpretable factors (see [Table 3](#)).

Our first factor of “Incompetent teaching” is closely connected with factors “Distracted teaching” and “Ignoring effectiveness”. Some Russian university educators demonstrated indifference towards the teaching process, which may be due to different reasons, like lack of adequate teaching training, low salary and the low prestige of the teaching profession. However, the factor “Strict teaching”, on the contrary, illustrated educators’ dedication to teaching, but sometimes educators may go too far with their strictness, which may lead to students’ negative attitudes to the instructor as well as to the course. Moreover, dedicated educators acknowledged the need to teach values and ethics to students, so they would be

Q#	Behaviour	Factor loadings
<i>Factor 1: personal harm to students</i>		
3	Giving easy courses or tests to ensure your popularity with students	0.4139
33	Inadequately supervising teaching (e.g. large delay or absence in providing feedback for students' works)	0.4566
34	Omitting significant information when writing a letter of recommendation for a student	0.4884
46	Insulting, ridiculing, etc., a student in the student's presence	0.6799
35	Including false or misleading information when writing a letter of recommendation for a student	0.7553
23	Accepting undeserved authorship on a student's published paper	0.8189
<i>Factor 2: incompetent teaching</i>		
30	Allowing students to drop courses for reasons not officially approved	0.4158
28	Allowing a student's "likability" to influence your grading	0.4296
41	Failing to update lecture notes when re-teaching a course	0.5574
17	Teaching a class without adequate preparation that day	0.5694
15	Teaching material, you have not really mastered	0.5807
26	Teaching content in a non-objective or incomplete manner	0.6715
47	Insulting, ridiculing, etc., a student in his or her absence	0.6941
<i>Factor 3: addictions-driven misbehaviour</i>		
9	Telling a student: "I'm sexually attracted to you"	0.7353
45	Using cocaine or other illegal drugs in your personal (non-teaching) life	0.9392
27	Teaching while under the influence of cocaine or other illegal drugs	0.9422
<i>Factor 4: inadequate behaviour</i>		
29	Using profanity in lectures	0.5254
20	Helping a student file an ethics complaint against another teacher	0.7361
18	Making deliberate or repeated sexual comments, gestures or physical contact that is unwanted by the student	0.8858
<i>Factor 5: sexual relationship with another faculty member</i>		
14	Selling goods (e.g. your car, cell phone or books) to a student	0.5093
32	Engaging in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within your department who is of higher or lower rank than you	0.7541
31	Engaging in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within your department who is of the same academic rank as you	0.7731
<i>Factor 6: distracted teaching</i>		
2	Ignoring strong evidence of cheating	0.4046
39	Telling colleagues confidential disclosures told to you by a student	0.5373
22	Having students be research subjects as part of a course requirement	0.5541
38	Using films, etc., to fill class time (and reduce your teaching work) without regard for their educational value	0.6815
<i>Factor 7: strict teaching</i>		
5	Teaching full time while "moonlighting" at least 20 h per week	0.5543
21	Encouraging students to participate in your research projects	0.5858
48	Encouraging competition among students	0.6082
37	Grading on a strict curve regardless of class performance level	0.6960
<i>Factor 8: ignoring effectiveness</i>		
49	Ignoring unethical behaviour by colleagues	0.6533
24	Teaching in classes so crowded you could not teach effectively	0.7123
<i>Factor 9: failure to recognise boundaries between public and private behaviour</i>		
6	Dating a student	0.4139

Table 3.
Results of factor
analysis for 50
behaviours

(continued)

Q#	Behaviour	Factor loadings	Ethical beliefs and behaviour
42	Assigning unpaid students to carry out work for you, which has little educational value for the student	0.4181	
8	Hugging a student	0.5886	
7	Asking small favours (e.g. a ride home) from students	0.7093	
<i>Factor 10: teaching with inadequate complaint or grading procedures</i>			
25	Using a grading procedure, which does not adequately and transparently measure what students have learned	0.5358	
36	Teaching where there is no adequate complaint procedure for students	0.6800	
<i>Factor 11: teaching under the influence of alcohol</i>			
44	Criticising all theoretical orientations, except those you personally prefer	0.6714	
19	Teaching while under the influence of alcohol	0.8490	
<i>Factor 12: sexual involvement with a student</i>			
11	Teaching when too distressed to be effective	0.4334	
50	Becoming sexually involved with a student only after he or she has completed your course and the grade has been filed	0.4694	
13	Accepting a student's invitation to a party	0.5208	
12	Becoming sexually involved with a student	0.7324	
<i>Factor 13: position abuse for personal benefit</i>			
1	Using university resources to create a "popular" textbook	0.4330	
4	Giving academic credit instead of salary for student assistants	0.8643	
<i>Factor 14: gaining from students</i>			
16	Accepting a student's inexpensive gift (worth less than 5 USD) regardless of the reason	0.4716	
43	Privately tutoring students, whom you currently teach, for a fee	0.8688	
40	<i>Factor 15: Teaching ethics or values to students</i>	0.8152	
10	<i>Factor 16: Accepting a student's expensive (worth 50 USD or more) gift</i>	0.8557	

Table 3.

able to behave ethically in any situation, which is another factor. The second-largest factor of "Personal harm to students" and the factor "Position abuse for personal benefit" can be interpreted as a teacher's/educator's desire to act for their benefit, while putting a student at a disadvantage. The next factors were also closely related, namely "Gaining from students" and "Accepting a student's expensive (worth 50 USD or more) gift", which demonstrated that educators sought an appreciation of their work.

The following factors, namely "Failure to recognise boundaries between public and private behaviour" and "Sexual involvement with a student", can happen when the aspiration to "become closer" with students leads to the violation of boundaries between personal behaviour and educator's responsibilities. What is more, the factor "Sexual relationship with another faculty member" also results in the crossing of professional boundaries.

"Addiction-driven misbehaviour" and "Teaching under the influence of alcohol" factors are considered as unquestionably unethical by the respondents and never or rarely occurred in the respondents' practice. The next factors, "Teaching with inadequate complaint or grading procedures" and "Inadequate behaviour", may happen when there are no proper regulations at the university or there is no control of their fulfilment.

Discussion

We assumed that the unique institutional or cultural environment predetermined some of the judgements and respective behaviours. The feedback obtained in the comments supported

this argument. This is also consistent with Bandura's self-efficacy theory, where certain environmental settings affect an individual's self-efficacy beliefs. For example, educators at some Russian universities cannot affect "Giving academic credit instead of salary for student assistants", if such a choice is made by students and regulated by the rules. Unfortunately, inadequately low salaries, in some academic positions in Russia, combined with stringent demands on research, publications and a high teaching load force "Teaching full time while "moonlighting" at least 20 h per week". Not surprisingly, "Teaching when too distressed to be effective" is a familiar situation to 48% of respondents.

Behaviours and judgements with respect to accepting students' gifts are strongly predicted by the value of the gift. For example, educators in Russia are very loyal to inexpensive gifts, such as flowers and chocolates for women. In contrast, accepting presents worth 3,000 rubles (around 50 USD) or more is a very rare behaviour simply because it is considered to be a bribe according to the Russian Criminal Code.

Moreover, our study results were consistent with the findings of the studies by [Tabachnick et al. \(1991\)](#) and [Barret et al. \(2012\)](#) that were conducted in the United States, in terms of rare behaviours concerning intimate relationships with students. Even though faculty members are advised to establish trusting relationships with their students and to show that they care about them, it may lead to misunderstanding between them. Moreover, it is not clear how to maintain the boundary between personal and professional relationships with students, as well as with colleagues. Moreover, such items as "Becoming sexually involved with a student only after he or she has completed your course and the grade has been filed" and "Engaging in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within your department who is of higher or lower rank than you" were difficult to evaluate. This may be due to the fact that there is no legislation or any university regulations in Russia, which hinder such relationships between alumni and their teachers, between faculty members and, even, between students and educators.

Our findings also indicated that senior faculty members were more careful in terms of their behaviour in the classroom and demonstrated stricter judgements of students' unethical behaviour, which could be due to their experience and self-confidence in their position, while junior faculty members expressed a more lenient attitude towards some forms of ethically questionable behaviour. These outcomes are consistent with social cognitive theory that states the significance of self-efficacy beliefs on educator's behavioural patterns ([Marzuki et al., 2017](#)). These findings also provide further evidence of the results obtained in the study by [Tabachnick et al. \(1991\)](#), [Robie and Keeping \(2004\)](#). One of the reasons for position-driven responses may be the fact that, the higher position a person is occupying, the more attention is paid to his/her behaviour by the public, when the cases of unethical conduct are published in the media.

The results of this study underlined the differences between male and female understanding of what behaviour is considered acceptable and what is not, and their actual misconduct, which also corresponded with the findings of the study by [Barret et al. \(2012\)](#) and the literature review, which demonstrated that females normally conduct themselves more ethically, compared to their male counterparts. This fact was not surprising, as many studies state that females' actions are more ethical than males' ([Ballantine and Mccourt, 2011](#); [Bampton and Maclagan, 2009](#)).

Taking into account all the findings, it seems reasonable for the universities, worldwide, to pay more attention to the question of ethical beliefs and behaviour among their members.

Conclusion

The ethical beliefs and behaviour of university educators is a significant aspect of discussion among researchers and Russian universities administrators because it directly influences the

conduct of students and the credibility of the national system of higher education (Boichenko, 2013). The obtained results provide evidence for this conclusion and more empirical support for the social cognitive theory and its concept of self-efficacy developed by Bandura (2006). According to this theory, behavioural patterns and beliefs are viewed as the interaction of one's own behaviour, the conduct of others and the environmental settings that affect them (Bandura, 2012). This proves the significance of faculty members' conduct as they become role models for their students and may impact their behaviour and beliefs.

The current study attempts to elucidate ethical beliefs and behaviour of university educators during teaching by employing the data collected in the four Russian universities. The factor analysis of behaviours yielded 16 interpretable factors. These factors help us better understand some of the ethical dilemmas instructors encounter in their everyday decision-making, and the significance that they attach to these dilemmas. Based on these findings, we elaborate the implications for university educators.

Firstly, the salary of the university educators should be adequate and competitive and match with their workload. Otherwise, it leads to a decrease in the quality of the education provided by university educators. Such a problem of the mismatch between salary and amount of work is common, not only for Russian universities, but for many others likewise (Delello *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, the numerous demands put on the university educators, in terms of teaching and publishing, negatively affect their ethical behaviour as they try to succeed in both. Therefore, the workload should be evenly distributed between teaching and research. Secondly, the work of the educators, with students, should be given recognition that may become their stimuli for improvement in university teaching. Another key implication for the universities is to provide special training or seminars for faculty members, as well as for students, on the importance of academic integrity. This is especially relevant for junior faculty members as the results demonstrate them to have a more lenient attitude towards some types of unethical behaviour in which they are also involved. Universities should also develop ethics centres, which research academic ethics, and help faculty members and students to take the right decisions in situations involving questionable behaviour in the classroom. The scope of activities provided by such centres is broad. They include lectures, seminars, workshops and discussions. They also offer fellowships, ethics certificates and consultation services (Safatly *et al.*, 2017). Such centres help to organise discussions on ethical problems and provide valuable advice. According to Safatly *et al.* (2017), they have proved to be useful in establishing academic integrity on campuses.

Furthermore, the introduction of ethical codes with clearly outlined ethical principles may become a guidance for faculty members and students in situations with ethical dilemmas. Previous research has demonstrated that a code of ethics can become a useful instrument of maintaining professional values and principles in the university and help dealing with new challenges. However, its effectiveness depends on a number of factors including a corporate culture of a particular university, national peculiarities and a consensus of participants as to what conduct is acceptable (Rezaee *et al.*, 2001; Moiseenko *et al.*, 2016). The proposed measures may facilitate the creation of a comprehensive ethical infrastructure in Russian universities, as well as in universities from countries that have similar higher education systems and cultural contexts to Russia. Moreover, this study contributes to the theoretical and methodological development of the research on educators ethical beliefs and behaviour.

This paper has some limitations restraining the degree to which the findings can be generalised. Firstly, the total number of responses was relatively low. Secondly, the number of respondents was unevenly distributed among the four cities. Thirdly, educators, who specialise in teaching social disciplines, were overrepresented. Finally, the reported incidence of improper behaviour while teaching may be underestimated as the study uses self-reported data and the topic of ethics in education is highly sensitive. Despite the aforementioned

limitations, this article contributed to the very limited research on the ethical aspects of higher education in Russia. Therefore, we consider observing a more representative pool of participants in terms of teaching specialisation and location as well as using an alternative, not self-rating, questionnaire, as the most promising directions for future research in this area. In addition, it would be interesting to identify the impact of per hour payment on ethical judgements and behaviours of university educators in Russia, in a larger number of ethical contexts.

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Note

1. For the sample of 130 respondents with proportion under $H_0 = 0.1$, minimum detectable effect (MDE) = 0.17 and non-inferiority margin = 0, the power of the sample is 81.94%, which is slightly better than ideal 80% (Cohen, 1988).

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