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FUNDAMENTOS DO AGIR ÉTICO EM ESTUDANTES DO ENSINO SUPERIOR

FUNDAMENTS OF THE ETHICAL ACTING IN HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

FUNDAMENTOS DE LA ACCIÓN ÉTICA EN LOS ESTUDIANTES DE EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR

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RESUMO

Introdução: Urge que o ensino superior na área da saúde desenvolva nos estudantes um compromisso ético-moral pró-ativo e valores socioprofissionais promotores de uma cultura de proximidade que fomente sentimentos de cidadania ativa criadora de vínculos de pertença.

Objetivos: Avaliar os fundamentos éticos que suportam a moralidade das ações em estudantes do ensino superior.

Métodos: Estudo descritivo em corte transversal, realizado com 345 estudantes do IPV, 80% mulheres, com média de idades de 20,82 anos. Aplicou-se o “Questionário de Cidadania Ativa e Modo de Agir Ético” (CiAMAE) de Cunha (2015).

Resultados: 74.8% dos estudantes revelaram um modo de agir ético, positivo/adequado, (sendo 45.8% adequado e 29% muito adequado) e 25.2% um modo de agir ético inadequado. A moralidade das ações dos estudantes centrou-se no individualismo e assentou nos seguintes princípios éticos: 68.7% Subjetivismo Ético (69.1% ♂ e 68.6% ♀); 56.5% Relativismo (56.5% ♂ e 56.7% ♀); 53.9% Ética Deontológica (55.8% ♂ e 47.0% ♀); 11.3% Subjetivismo/ Egoísmo Ético, (7.4% ♂ e 12.3% ♀).

Conclusões: A maioria dos estudantes não usa a ponderação imparcial do bem. Maioritariamente manifestaram aceitar uma perspectiva ética subjetivista. Em oposição, aplicar o critério da imparcialidade ética implicaria considerar o bem supremo, em que todo e qualquer estudante esclarecido, escolheria para si e para os outros, esse bem supremo universal.

Palavras-chave: princípios éticos; moral; agir; ensino superior; estudantes.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: It is urgent that higher education in health develop a proactive ethico-moral commitment in students which is translated into the creation of socio-professional values.

Objectives: To evaluate the ethical foundations which support morality in higher education students.

Methods: A descriptive, cross-sithectional study, performed in 345 ESSV/IPV students, 80% female, average age of 20.82 years old. The “Questionário de Cidadania Ativa e Modo de Agir Ético” (CiAMAE) by Cunha (2015) was applied.

Results: The results were 74.8% of the students showed a positive/adequate ethical method of acting; (with 45.8% adequate and 29% very adequate). In 25.2% the method of acting was ethically inadequate. The morality of the student’s actions were focused mostly on individualism and were based on the following ethical principles: 68.7% ethical subjectivism (69.1% ♂ and 68.6% ♀); 56.5% Relativism (56.5% ♂ and 56.7% ♀); 53.9% Deontological Ethics (Kant) (55.8% ♂ and 47.0% ♀); 11.3% Subjectivism/Ethical Selfishness (7.4% ♂ and 12.3% ♀).

Conclusions: We may infer that the majority of the students do not have/ do not use an impartial consideration of good as criteria for morality of actions. They mostly manifested accepting an ethical subjectivist perspective, which means that good is not considered as a value for everyone. In contrast, applying the criteria of ethical impartiality would imply considering the greater good, and choosing/adopting the universal point of view in which any rational and enlightened student would choose for him/ herself and for others that universal greater good.

Keywords: ethical principles; morality; acting; higher education; students.

RESUMEN

Introducción: Insta a la educación superior en salud a desarrollar en los estudiantes un compromiso ético-moral proactivo y valores socioprofesionales, promotores de una cultura de proximidad que fomenta sentimientos de ciudadanía activa, creativa de enlaces de pertenencia.

Objetivos: Evaluar los fundamentos éticos que apoyan la moralidad de las acciones en los estudiantes de educación superior.

Métodos: Estudio descriptivo transversal, realizado con 345 estudiantes del IPV, 80% mujeres, con una edad media de 20.82 años. Se ha aplicado el “Questionário de Cidadania Ativa e Modo de Agir Ético” (CiAMAE) de Cunha (2015).

Resultados: 74.8% de los estudiantes reveló un modo de actuación ético, positiva/adeuada (con el 45.8% adecuado y el 29% muy adecuado) y el 25.2% un modo de actuación éticamente inadecuado. La moralidad de las acciones de los estudiantes se centraron en el individualismo y en base a los siguientes principios éticos: 68.7% el Subjetivismo Ético (69.1% ♂ y 68.6% ♀); el Relativismo 56.5% (56.5% ♂ y 56.7% ♀); 53.9% Ética Deontológica (55.8% ♂ y ♀47.0%); 11.3% el Subjetivismo/el Egoísmo Ético (7.4% ♂ y 12.3% ♀).

Conclusiones: La mayoría de los estudiantes no utilizan el examen imparcial del bien. La mayoría de ellos expresaron aceptar una perspectiva ética subjetivista. Por el contrario, la aplicación del criterio de imparcialidad ética sería considerar el bien supremo en que cualquier estudiante inteligente elegiría para sí mismos y los demás, este supremo bien universal.

Palabras Clave: principios éticos; moralidad; actuación; educación superior; estudiantes.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics, a word which comes from the ancient Greek word *ethos*, indicates the kind of person someone truly is, his/her character, his/her moral values and, above all, how he/she will behave, his/her human conduct. Ethics is also considered as a science that studies the values and the moral principles of a society and of its groups.

Through ethics, one can question what is good or bad to a certain kind of society and analyze the principles or values which will contribute to the common good. Ethics implies the existence of action and of the other, since it will manifest itself through one's responsible and conscious actions. This way, the action which Kant will consider as ethical will be the one that will show enough freedom, the one which will derive from practical reasoning and that can be considered as a universal law (Battestin, Bergamo & Gazzola, 2016, p.191;195;193).

Knowing the ethical course of action of higher education students is useful to diagnose their training needs as far as the proximity ethics principles are concerned. This knowledge will also be used to support the creation of different study plans which training methodologies and contents will help form critically-minded and active citizens who will think globally but who will act locally.

This way, the objective of this study was to evaluate the ethical principles that will support higher education students' course of action.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Acting in a way that doesn't endanger one's existence or someone else's existence is nowadays seen as a fundamental doctrinal and ethical imperative. However, assuming an ethical conduct implies a rational and critical reflection on the validity of the human conduct and will be evident, in people's every day actions, in the way the individuals and the community decide what is right and what is wrong and in the way they act to undo the existing inequalities and to promote common good (Cunha et al., 2015 March, p.7382). However, the Human Being isn't born ethical, he needs to develop this aspect as he grows up and that is why education is a powerful instrument in the construction of an ethical society, since it involves, not only the construction of knowledge, but also the construction and consolidation of a set of values which are essential to be grant people the capacity to live in society. To achieve this aim, education must incorporate ethical aspects, both in the conception of concepts and in the theoretical models upon which its practice is based (Rossato, 2015 as quoted in Battestin, Bergamo & Gazzola, 2016, p. 196).

Education institutions are places of excellence where the teaching- learning process that will accompany the individual over the years will occur (Vasconcelos, 2007; Fonseca, 2014), so academic training not only represents the transmission of knowledge but also encourages the use of that knowledge to better understand the reality while forming participative and proactive citizens (Araújo, 2008, p.89).

Therefore, education as a project focuses on the learning of an active, critical and responsible citizenship. To that extent, it is essential that "a commitment" to themselves and to society could be developed within the students in order to trigger an inner dialogue that would help them become aware of the existence of personal ethics which is characterized by a higher and better sense of autonomy and where free moral reasoning and questioning should be constant. It is then essential to favor the students' full and global training (Araújo, 2008, p.97). However, "science without a conscience is but the ruin of the soul" (Pires, 2007, p.25). That is to say that providing someone with the scientific and technical skills of a certain field is not enough, the goal we want to achieve is each and every student's integrated development, students who are viewed as informed, socially responsible and proactive citizens who want to get hold of a more critical and reflexive vision of the global world (Santos, Silva & Guedes, 2011, p. 2).

This way, the investigative work on ethical acting has been growing steadily and becoming more and more relevant within the academic field, as society expects education institutions to play a vital role in the training of future global citizens who will be able to understand the rules and standards required by the different ethnic societies and who will be capable of behaving in an inclusive and proactive way within different multicultural contexts (Stearns, 2009 as quoted in Cho & Chi, 2015, p.213).

2. METHODS

A descriptive and cross sectional study which purpose was to provide knowledge about the ethical principles upon which higher education students' courses of action are based and that was conceived to answer the following specific question: "Which ethical principles support higher education students' ethical acting?"

2.1 Sample

The sample was composed of 345 students who were attending the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu. 277 (80%) of those students were female and 68 were male. Their age ranged from 17 and 46 years old which gave us a 20.82 years old (± 21 years old) average age. We used a non-probability convenience sampling method to select the participants.

2.2 Data collection instruments

The data collection instrument included the following measurement tools:

-Biographical and academic data questionnaire (it gathered information about gender and age, academic information regarding the students' course, the year they were attending, the specific training they got in Citizenship, Morality, Bioethics/Ethics, Law and Values, number of specific training hours, place where this specific training took place);

- Cunha's "Questionário de Cidadania Ativa e Modo de Agir Ético (Active Citizenship and Ethical Acting) (2015)" (CiAMAE). This questionnaire assesses the participants' ethical behavior. It is divided into 4 sections in which we want to identify the ethical criterion used by the respondent when facing a certain situation. Four ethical texts were presented, all of them intimately related to a given ethical dimension (Deontological Ethics; Ethical/Moral Subjectivism; Subjectivism/Relativism; Subjectivism; Objectivism; Relativism; Subjectivism/Ethical Selfishness; Utilitarianism). The respondent will have to select only one of the options he is given.

2.3 Procedures

The standards of conduct defined for scientific research were respected in order to safeguard the participants' rights and freedom, as well as their rights and ethical principles, through their informed consent. The study received a favorable opinion from the Ethics Committee at the Superior School of Health of Viseu and the data collection was previously authorized.

Statistical treatment was processed using the 21.0 version for Windows (2013) of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The statistical significance values adopted were $p < 0.05$.

3. RESULTS

Ethical Acting

Statistics regarding ethical acting scores reported a minimum of 7.00 and a maximum of 63.00, which gives us a 21.69 (± 8.863) mean value.

Ethical Acting according to people's gender

The students' morality of actions focused essentially on individualism and was based on the following ethical principles: 68.7% Ethical Subjectivism (69.1% ♂ and 68.6% ♀); 56.5% Relativism (56.5% ♂ and 56.7% ♀); 53.9% Deontological Ethics (Kant) (55.8% ♂ and 47.0% ♀); 11.3% Subjectivism/ Ethical Selfishness (7.4% ♂ and 12.3% ♀). We concluded that most of the students don't have/ don't use the impartial weighting of everyone's good as a criterion for the morality of their actions, since they mostly accept a subjectivist ethical perspective (68.7%), which means that good isn't seen as a value for all of them (Table 1)

Table 1 – Statistics regarding Ethical behavior according to their gender

Gender	Male		Female		Total		Residual		X ²	p
	n	%	n	%	n	%	1	2		
Texts/actions	68	19.7	277	80.3	345	100.0				
Deontological Ethics (Kant)										
0.00	30	44.1	129	46.6	159	46.1	-4	.4	1.472	0.689
8.00	23	33.8	95	34.3	118	34.2	-1	.1		
16.00	12	17.6	35	12.6	47	13.6	1.1	-1.1		
24.00	3	4.4	18	6.5	21	6.1	-6	.6		
Ethical acting based on Deontological Ethics (Kant)	38	55.8	148	47.0	186	53.9			0.039	0.843
Ethical /moral Subjectivism										
0.00	21	30.9	87	31.4	108	31.3	-1	.1	4.664	0.097
7.00	19	27.9	110	39.7	129	37.4	-1.8	1.8		
14.00	28	41.2	80	28.9	108	31.3	2.0	-2.0		
Ethical acting based on Ethical/Moral Subjectivism.	47	69.1	190	68.6	237	68.7			0.001	0.971
Subjectivism/relativism										
0.00	37	54.4	145	52.3	182	52.8	.3	-.3	0.093	0.760
6.00	31	45.6	132	47.7	163	47.2	-.3	.3		
Ethical acting based on Subjectivism / relativism	31	45.6	132	47.7	163	47.2			0.034	0.854
Subjectivism										
0.00	57	83.8	229	82.7	286	82.9	.2	-.2	0.051	0.821
5.00	11	16.2	48	17.3	59	17.1	-.2	.2		
Ethical acting based on Subjectivism	11	16.2	48	17.3	59	17.1			0.036	0.849
Objetivism										
0.00	57	54.4	176	63.5	213	61.7	-1.4	1.4	n.a.	n.a.
8.00	24	35.3	81	29.2	105	30.4	1.0	-1.0		
4.00	6	8.8	16	6.9	25	7.2	.6	-.6		
1200	1	1.5	1	0.4	2	0.6	1.1	-1.1		
Ethical acting based on Objectivism	31	45.6	98	36.5	132	38.2			1.061	0.303
Relativism										
0.00	30	44.1	120	43.3	150	43.5	.1	-.1	0.014	0.906
3.00	38	55.9	157	56.7	195	56.5	-.1	.1		
Ethical acting based on Relativism	38	55.9	157	56.7	195	56.5			0.004	0.950
Subjectivism/Ethical selfishness										
0.00	63	92.6	243	87.7	306	88.7	1.1	-1.1	1.319	0.251
2.00	5	7.4	34	12.3	39	11.3	-1.1	1.1		

Ethical acting based on Subjectivism / Ethical selfishness	5	7.4	34	12.3	39	11.3			1.080	0.299
Utilitarianism										
0.00	25	36.8	115	41.5	140	40.6	-.7	.7		
1.00	26	38.2	102	36.8	128	37.1	.2	-.2	0.811	0.847
2.00	15	22.1	55	19.9	70	20.3	.4	-.4		
3.00	2	2.9	5	1.8	7	2.0	.6	-.6		
Ethical acting based on Utilitarianism	43	63.2	162	58.5	199	59.4			0.128	0.721

Ethical Acting according to people's age

Younger students (≤ 19 years old) show a higher ethical acting supported by Kant's Deontological Ethics (59.1%). As far as Ethical/moral Subjectivism is concerned, the highest percentage was obtained by the group of the youngest students and by those who were between 20 and 21 years old (70.1%, respectively). When it comes to Subjectivism/relativism, the highest percentage was obtained by older students (≥ 22 years old) with a 52.9% score, followed by the 20-21 year old students (49.1%). We also found out that older students show a higher ethical acting based on Subjectivism (18.3%). The participants who were 20-21 years old obtained a higher score in Relativism (63.2%). As for Subjectivism/ Ethical Selfishness, the highest percentage was obtained by the younger students (64.5%) (Table 2).

Table 2 - Statistics regarding Ethical behavior according to people's age

Age	≤ 19		20-21		≥ 22		Total		Residual			x ²	p
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	1	2	3		
Texts/actions	127	36.80	114	33.0	104	30.1	345	100.0					
Deontological Ethics (Kant)													
0.00	52	40.9	61	53.5	46	44.2	159	46.1	-1.5	1.9	-.5		
8.00	43	33.9	38	33.3	37	35.6	118	34.2	-.1	-.2	.4	7.541	0.274
16.00	21	16.5	12	10.5	14	13.5	47	13.6	1.2	-1.2	-.1		
24.00	11	8.7	3	2.6	7	6.7	21	6.1	1.5	-1.9	.3		
Ethical acting based on Deontological Ethics (Kant)	75	59.1	53	46.4	58	55.8	186	53.9				1.173	0.279
Ethical/moral Subjectivism													
0.00	38	29.9	34	29.8	36	34.6	108	31.3	-.4	-.4	.9		
7.00	49	38.6	38	33.3	42	40.4	129	37.4	.3	-1.1	.8	3.760	0.439
14.00	40	31.5	42	36.8	26	25.0	108	31.3	.1	1.6	-1.7		
Ethical acting based on Ethical / moral Subjectivism	89	70.1	80	70.1	68	65.4	237	68.7				0.000	0.995
Subjectivism/relativism													
0.00	75	59.1	58	50.9	49	47.1	182	52.8	1.8	-.5	-1.4	3.511	0.173
6.00	52	40.9	56	49.1	55	52.9	163	47.2	-1.8	.5	1.4		
Ethical acting based on Subjectivism / relativism	52	40.9	56	49.1	55	52.9	163	47.2				0.618	0.432

Subjectivism													
0.00	104	81.9	97	85.1	85	81.7	286	82.9	-4	.8	-4	0.577	0.750
5.00	23	18.1	17	14.9	19	18.3	59	17.1	.4	-.8	.4		
Ethical acting based on Subjectivism	23	18.1	17	14.9	19	18.3	59	17.1				0.318	0.573
Objectivism													
0.00	84	66.1	71	62.3	58	55.8	213	61.7	1.3	.1	-1.5		
8.00	37	29.1	35	30.7	33	31.7	105	30.4	-.4	.1	.3	n.a.	n.a.
4.00	5	3.9	8	7.0	12	11.5	25	7.2	-1.8	-.1	2.0		
1200	1	0.8	-	-	1	1.0	2	0.6	.4	-1.0	.6		
Ethical acting based on Objectivism	43	40	43	37.7	46	44.2	132	38.2				0.185	0.667
Relativism													
0.00	58	45.7	42	36.8	50	48.1	150	43.5	.6	-1.7	1.1	3.186	0.203
3.00	69	54.3	72	63.2	54	51.9	195	56.5	-.6	1.7	-1.1		
Ethical acting based on Relativism	69	54.3	72	63.2	54	51.9	195	56.5				0.504	0.478
Subjectivism/ Ethical selfishness													
0.00	109	85.8	101	88.6	96	92.3	306	88.7	-1.3	.0	1.4	2.397	0.302
2.00	18	14.2	13	11.4	8	7.7	39	11.3	1.3	.0	-1.4		
Ethical acting based on Subjectivism / Ethical selfishness	18	14.2	13	11.4	8	7.7	39	11.3				0.318	0.573
Utilitarianism													
0.00	45	35.4	44	38.6	51	49.0	140	40.6	-1.5	-.5	2.1		
1.00	47	37.0	47	41.2	34	32.7	128	37.1	.0	1.1	-1.1	n.a.	n.a.
2.00	30	23.6	21	18.4	19	18.3	70	20.3	1.2	-.6	-.6		
3.00	5	3.9	2	1.8	-	-	7	2.0	1.9	-.3	-1.8		
Ethical acting based on Utilitarianism	82	64.5	70	61.4	53	51.0	205	25.4				0.059	0.809

Levels of Ethical Acting according to people's training

67% of the participants in our study reported that they had already received training in Citizenship (84.8%), Morality (59.3%), Bioethics/Ethics (16.9%), Law (96.1%) and Values (96.1%). The average training time was 31.44 hours (± 25.56), ranging between 1 and 150 hours. According to the participants' training time, three groups were created: ≤ 19 hours, 20-38 hours and ≥ 40 hours. We found out that most students got 40 or more hours of active citizenship training (39.7%). This active citizenship training was obtained within the participants' families (26.0%), during their basic education (42.0%), during their secondary education (32.9%), in college (82.6%) and through lifelong learning opportunities (17.3%).

Students who got less training hours show an ethical acting based on Kant's Deontological Ethics (59.1%). These students are followed by those who received a longer training (55.8%). The highest percentage in Ethical/moral Subjectivism was obtained by students who got less training time (70.1%). We also found out that students who got more hours of training were those who obtained a higher score in Subjectivism/Relativism (52.9%) and in Subjectivism (18.3%). As for Subjectivism/Ethical Selfishness, the highest percentage was obtained by students who got less hours of training (64.5%) (Table 3).

Table 3 – Statistics regarding Ethical behavior according to people's citizenship, moral, ethics, law and values training.

Training time	≤ 19 hours		20-38 hours		≥ 40 hours		Total		Residual			x ²	p
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	1	2	3		
Texts/actions	32	23.5	67	49.3	37	27.2	136	100					
Deontological Ethics (Kant)													
0.00	52	40.9	61	53.5	46	44.2	159	46.1	-1.5	1.9	-.5	7.541	0.274
8.00	43	33.9	38	33.3	37	35.6	118	34.2	-.1	-.2	.4		
16.00	21	16.5	12	10.5	14	13.5	47	13.6	1.2	-1.2	-.1		
24.00	11	8.7	3	2.6	7	6.7	21	6.1	1.5	-1.9	.3		
Ethical acting based on Deontological Ethics (Kant)	75	59.1	53	46.4	58	55.8	186	53.9				15.461	0.000
Ethical/moral Subjectivism													
0.00	38	29.9	34	29.8	36	34.6	108	31.3	-.4	-.4	.9	3.760	0.439
7.00	49	38.6	38	33.3	42	40.4	129	37.4	.3	-1.1	.8		
14.00	40	31.5	42	36.8	26	25.0	108	31.3	.1	1.6	-1.7		
Ethical acting based on Ethical / moral Subjectivism	89	70.1	80	70.1	68	65.4	236	68.7				10.429	0.001
Subjectivism/relativism													
0.00	75	59.1	58	50.9	49	47.1	182	52.8	1.8	-.5	-1.4	3.511	0.173
6.00	52	40.9	56	49.1	55	52.9	163	47.2	-1.8	.5	1.4		
Ethical acting based on Subjectivism / relativism	52	40.9	56	49.1	55	52.9	163	47.2				5.364	0.021
Subjectivism													
0.00	104	81.9	97	85.1	85	81.7	286	82.9	-.4	.8	-.4	0.577	0.750
5.00	23	18.1	17	14.9	19	18.3	59	17.1	.4	-.8	.4		
Ethical acting based on Subjectivism	23	18.1	17	14.9	19	18.3	59	17.1				7.552	0.006
Objectivism													
0.00	84	66.1	71	62.3	58	55.8	213	61.7	1.3	.1	-1.5	n.a.	n.a.
8.00	37	29.1	35	30.7	33	31.7	105	30.4	-.4	.1	.3		
4.00	5	3.9	8	7.0	12	11.5	25	7.2	-1.8	-.1	2.0		
12.00	1	0.8	-	-	1	1.0	2	0.6	.4	-1.0	.6		
Ethical acting based on Objectivism	43	33.8	43	37.7	46	44.2	132	38.2				5.966	0.015
Relativism													
0.00	58	45.7	42	36.8	50	48.1	150	43.5	.6	-1.7	1.1	3.186	0.203
3.00	69	54.3	72	63.2	54	51.9	195	56.5	-.6	1.7	-1.1		
Ethical acting based on Relativism	69	54.3	72	63.2	54	51.9	195	56.5				6.586	0.010
Subjectivism/Ethical selfishness													
0.00	109	85.8	101	88.6	96	92.3	306	88.7	-1.3	.0	1.4	2.397	0.302
2.00	18	14.2	13	11.4	8	7.7	39	11.3	1.3	.0	-1.4		

Ethical acting based on Subjectivism / Ethical selfishness	18	14.2	13	11.4	8	7.7	39	11.3				6.609	0.010
Utilitarianism													
0.00	45	35.4	44	38.6	51	49.0	140	40.6	-1.5	-.5	2.1		
1.00	47	37.0	47	41.2	34	32.7	128	37.1	.0	1.1	-1.1	n.a.	n.a.
2.00	30	23.6	21	18.4	19	18.3	70	20.3	1.2	-.6	-.6		
3.00	5	3.9	2	1.8	-	-	7	2.0	1.9	-.3	-1.8		
Ethical acting based on Utilitarianism	82	64.5	70	61.4	53	51.0	205	59.4				11.308	0.001

Levels of Ethical Acting

In order to determine the prevalence of ethical acting, three groups, according to the 25 and 75 percentile, were created based on the global scoring obtained: inappropriate ethical acting- participants who obtained a 16 or less score; appropriate ethical acting- for participants whose score was between 17 and 24; very appropriate ethical acting- for participants whose score was above 25. (Table 4)

We found out that 74.8% of the students show a positive ethical course of action, 45.8% of them showed an appropriate ethical acting and 29.0 showed a very appropriate ethical acting. 25.2% revealed an inappropriate ethical acting.

Table 4 – Ethical Acting Sample groups (Cunha, 2015)

Ethical acting	Score Items		Category Global score	
	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.
Deontological ethics (Kant)				
In his action the individual must always fulfill his duty	0	8		
When facing ethical-moral dilemma situations, people must choose to fulfill their duty	0	8	8	24
An action is ethically good if it is carried out with good intentions	0	8		
Ethical/moral Subjectivism				
In his action the individual must take his moral principles into account	0	7	7	14
When dealing with ethical-moral dilemma situations, people must act according to their conscience	0	7		
Subjectivism/Relativism				
An action is ethically good if it complies with morality	0	6	6	6
Subjectivism				
Ethical- moral values are individual and subjective	0	5	5	5
Objectivism				
In his action, the individual must act according to impartial and universal criteria	0	4	4	12
Ethical- moral values are universal and objective	0	4		
Ethical- moral values imply impartiality and consensus	0	4		
Relativism				
Ethical-moral values are relative and vary from society to society	0	3	3	3
Subjectivism/Ethical selfishness				
In his action, the individual must follow his inclinations and personal interests	0	2	2	2

Utilitarianism				
When dealing with ethical-moral dilemma situations, people must choose the actions that will have the best consequences for themselves	0	1		
When dealing with ethical-moral dilemma situations, people must choose the actions that will have the best consequences for the greater number of people	0	1	1	4
An action is ethically good if it brings pleasure/happiness	0	1		
An action is ethically good if it has good consequences	0	1		
Ethical course of action scores			36	70

Levels of Ethical Acting and socio-demographic variables: gender and age

Female students show higher percentages in all the ethical acting levels: 78.5% of them show an appropriate ethical behavior; 81.0% show a very appropriate ethical acting and 82,8% of them an inappropriate ethical behavior. As far as age groups are concerned, we found out that younger student (≤ 19 years old) show a higher percentage when it comes to show a very appropriate ethical acting (42.0%), while most of the 20-21 year old students (37.3%) mainly show an appropriate ethical acting. Most of the older students (33.0%) reveal a very appropriate ethical acting. We don't find significant statistical differences between those groups (Table 5)

Table 5 – Levels of Ethical Acting according to socio-demographic variables: Gender and age.

Ethical acting	Inappropriate		Appropriate		Very Appropriate		Total		Residual			X ²	p
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	1	2	3		
	87	25.2	158	45.8	100	29.0	345	100.0					
Gender													
Male	15	17.2	34	21.5	19	19.0	68	19.7	-.7	.8	-.2	0.694	0.707
Female	72	82.8	124	78.5	81	81.0	277	80.3	.7	-.8	.2		
Age													
≤ 19	34	39.1	51	32.3	42	42.0	127	36.8	.5	-1.6	1.3		
20-21	30	34.5	59	37.3	25	25.0	114	33.0	.3	1.6	-2.0	5.301	0.258
≥ 22	23	26.4	48	30.4	33	33.0	104	30.1	-.9	.1	.7		

Levels of Ethical Acting and academic variables

Students who attended more hours of citizenship, morality, bioethics/ethics, law and values training show higher percentages when it comes to reveal an appropriate ethical acting (46.3%). Those whose training was obtained within their families revealed a higher appropriate ethical acting (28.2%). Among the students who received their training during their basic education, there was a prevalence of inappropriate ethical acting (45.6%; $X^2=6.181$, $p=0.045$). Students who received their formation through college show a higher percentage in appropriate ethical acting (87.2%). Finally, 25.0% of the students who told us they had got their training through lifelong learning experiences (17.3%) show a very appropriate ethical acting, followed by those who show an appropriate ethical acting (18.2%; $X^2=6,919$, $p=0.031$) (Table 6).

Table 6 – Levels of Ethical Acting according to academic variables

Ethical acting	Inappropriate		Appropriate		Very appropriate		Total		Residual			X ²	p
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	1	2	3		
	32	23.5	67	49.3	37	27.2	136	100.0					
Hours of training													
≤ 19	9	28.1	20	29.9	15	40.5	44	32.4	-6	-6	1.2	5.217	0.266
20-38	9	28.1	16	23.9	13	35.1	38	27.9	.0	-1.0	1.1		
≥ 40	14	43.8	31	46.3	9	24.3	54	39.7	.5	1.5	-2.2		
Training context	57	24.7	110	47.6	64	27.7	231	100.0					
Family													
No	41	71.9	79	71.8	51	79.7	171	74.0	-.4	-.7	1.2	1.476	0.478
Yes	16	28.1	31	28.2	13	20.3	60	26.0	.4	.7	-1.2		
Primary education													
No	31	54.4	66	60.0	37	57.8	134	58.0	-.6	.6	.0	0.487	0.784
yes	26	45.6	44	40.0	27	42.2	97	42.0	.6	-.6	.0		
Secondary education													
No	31	54.4	76	69.1	48	75.0	155	67.1	-2.4	.6	1.6	6.181	0.045
Yes	26	45.6	34	30.9	16	25.0	76	32.9	2.4	-.6	-1.6		
College degree													
No	12	21.1	14	12.8	14	21.9	40	17.4	.8	-1.7	1.1	2.996	2.224
Yes	45	78.9	95	87.2	50	78.1	190	82.6	-.8	1.7	-1.1		
Ongoing training													
No	53	93.0	90	81.8	48	75.0	191	82.7	2.4	-.3	-1.9	6.919	0.031
Yes	4	7.0	20	18.2	16	25.0	40	17.3	-2.4	.3	1.9		

DISCUSSION

We found out that 74.8% of the students show a positive ethical acting, with 45.8% of them showing an appropriate ethical acting and 29.0% showing a very appropriate ethical acting. However, 25.2% of the participants show an inappropriate ethical course of action. Since there will be teaching practice implications, we are certain that School must encourage students to take decisions that will create consensus because they are based on universal values. Hence the increasing relevance given to bioethical education as part of the discussion of Morality's Trans-subjective Criteria like the Rationality criterion, for instance, (what anyone would do for himself and for the others) interconnected with Impartiality, among others (...).

To educate people about the morality of their actions implies educating them about the morality of their intentions, because the only way we can confirm whether an intention is good or not is to be sure that the course of action was ethical (Barata, 2008, p.7). In that context, literature shows that when citizens participate in social, political, civil and doctrinal life, they seek the construction of relevant answers to the social problems they witness and to the collective well-being. This way, they express both their moral judgment and the achievement of their intentions based on concrete actions that are influenced by ethical-moral principles. Through their commitment they become more responsible and more aware of the real contexts (Cordeiro, 2012, p. 32).

In this context, according to Nunes (2016, p. 9), we can stress out that the actions taken for the sake of society are a sort of controlling principle that encompasses the social and moral order of human affairs.

CONCLUSIONS

Results demonstrate that the morality of the students' actions was mainly based on individualism and that the ethical principles upon which those actions were based were: 68.7% Ethical Subjectivism; 56.5% Relativism; 53.9% Deontological Ethics (Kant); 11.3% Subjectivism/Ethical Selfishness. We conclude that most students don't have/don't use the impartial weighting of the common good as a criterion for the morality of their actions, since they mostly seem to accept a subjectivist ethical perspective which means that good is not seen as a value for all of them. On the other hand, applying the ethical impartiality criterion would imply considering the existence of a supreme good and choosing/adopting a universal point of view in which any and every rational and enlightened subject would choose this supreme good for himself and for the others.

Keeping in mind the results we have obtained, we believe that school plays a vital role in promoting more ethical acting training, a training that will reinforce the ethical principles and values in order to help students develop and apply more sustained ethical-moral practices.

In this study, the fact that the veracity of the results we obtained depends on the respondents' level of sincerity and honesty (the risk of not expressing effective realities) can be considered as a limitation. This situation will eventually lead to the emergence of answers that are associated with desired conducts regarding the common good.

There is a knowledge gap when we deal with studies that approach ethical acting and there are few research works approaching this issue that had been conducted with higher education students. This way, there is a need to develop new studies in this field, especially studies that will help determine the existence of elements and/or factors that may contribute to the development of ethical courses of action that will favor a certain behavior or a way of living based on certain ethical-moral principles and that will stimulate responsible and inclusive decision-making that will serve the surrounding community's common good.

This way, educating people so that they can develop ethical/moral principles that will favor an ethical way of action which will help promote a supreme good for each one of them and for the others is an absolutely essential condition and it will undoubtedly contribute to the development of individuals who will carry, transmit and create a kind of behavior and way of being imbued with the right ethical-moral support that will serve the primacy of human dignity.

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