Ethical Leadership of Head Teachers and its Impact on Teachers' Motivation at the Elementary Level

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The present study employed a quantitative, descriptive research design to examine the impact of ethical leadership on elementary school teachers' motivation in public elementary schools of a district in Punjab, Pakistan. It was a quantitative and descriptive study in nature. Considering the ethical guidelines, a questionnaire was administered to 400 randomly selected male and female elementary-level teachers. In developing the survey instrument, relevant literature was reviewed, and expert input was obtained to ensure the appropriateness of the questions for assessing the variables of interest. The confidentiality of the respondents was maintained throughout the data-gathering process. The data was statistically analyzed using SPSS version 20, measuring means and standard deviations. The results revealed a significant positive association between principals' ethical leadership style - characterized by integrity, honesty, and considerate treatment of staff – and elevated intrinsic motivation levels among teachers. As educational leaders shape the culture in their institutions, these findings carry important implications. Promoting ethical leadership through enhanced training and modeling desired behaviors can improve teacher retention, performance, and job satisfaction. It can translate to better outcomes for students. Further in-depth inquiries through qualitative and longitudinal research across diverse settings can enrich understanding of this phenomenon and aid the development of context-specific interventions leveraging ethical leadership to motivate teachers.

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental pillar for the progress of any society. The quality of education imparted relies heavily on the motivation and dedication of teachers (Archambault et al., 2022). Research highlights that motivated teachers are more committed to their profession, willing to expend greater effort in their teaching practices and foster improved student outcomes (Kilag & Sasan, 2023). Therefore, understanding and enhancing teacher motivation has become essential in improving educational systems worldwide. In this regard, the role of school leadership, particularly the headteacher, is critical as their leadership style and behaviors directly impact the teachers' motivation under their guidance (Bogler & Nir, 2012; Borrego et al., 2023).

Of the diverse leadership styles examined in educational research, ethical leadership has garnered increasing attention for its potential to motivate teachers and facilitate school improvement (El Bakkali, 2020). It is defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making". Ethical leaders display integrity, trustworthiness, fairness, care for others, ethical guidance, and ethical accountability (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Ayoko, 2022)). Such leadership helps establish open communication, transparency, and moral decision-making within schools.

Earlier studies reveal ethical leadership's multidimensional impact on shaping teachers' attitudes and motivation. Researchers have found that headteachers who adopt ethical leadership practices foster greater organizational commitment, job satisfaction (Guo, 2022; Quin et al., 2015) and job satisfaction among teachers. The sense of trust, justice, and genuine concern created through ethical leadership enhances teachers' belief in the school's goals and their willingness to exert extra effort (Havard-Dew, 2021). Furthermore, by transparently providing instructional guidance, resources, and autonomy, ethical leaders strengthen teachers' self-efficacy, professional capacity, and intrinsic motivation (Berkovich & Eyal, 2018).

While illuminating, current research on the relationship between headteacher ethical leadership and teacher motivation remains limited in focus and context. There is a scarcity of studies examining this phenomenon at the secondary school level (Berkovich & Eyal, 2018). Educational contexts distinctly shape leadership demands and teacher motivations across primary, secondary, and higher levels. Thus, focused research across various academic levels is needed to comprehensively understand. Moreover, the few studies conducted have a heavy representation of Western and developed country contexts (Quin et al., 2015; Ki et al., 2023). Explorations within non-Western and developing country settings are required for more diverse and generalizable insights.

It highlights a need to examine the relationship between secondary school teachers' ethical leadership and teacher motivation within developing countries such as Pakistan. Pakistan's education system faces multiple challenges, including resource constraints, lack of teacher training, and poor learning outcomes (Beck & Brodersen, 2018). Low motivation and high turnover among teachers have been identified as significant contributing factors. Therefore, understanding how leadership approaches like ethical leadership can enhance teacher motivation and, in turn, educational quality in this context is imperative.

The current study addresses this gap by investigating the relationship between elementary school head teachers' ethical leadership and teachers' work motivation in Pakistan. It employed

quantitative methods to survey teachers from public elementary schools in the Punjab province regarding their perceptions of their headteacher's ethical leadership practices and their intrinsic and extrinsic work motivations. Self-developed questionnaire was used to address the objective of the study. Relevant literature was reviewed with the expert opinion during developing the questionnaire. The study intends to provide empirical evidence regarding whether and how Pakistan's secondary school headteachers' embodiment of ethical leadership interacts with teachers' motivational processes. The findings will have important implications for enhancing teacher motivation and performance through targeted improvements in school leadership. The research aims to address gaps in the literature and offer cross-cultural insights into ethical school leadership. For practice, it seeks to inform policy and leadership development initiatives on harnessing ethical leadership strategies to create a flourishing school climate and boost education quality.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To assess elementary schoolteachers' perceptions of their headteacher's ethical leadership practices.
2. To examine the effect of elementary schoolteachers' perceptions of their headteacher's ethical leadership and their motivation.
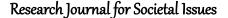
1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of secondary school teachers in Pakistan regarding the ethical leadership practices displayed by their headteachers?
2. Is there a significant effect of elementary schoolteachers' perceptions of their headteacher's ethical leadership practices and their self-reported motivation?

2. Literature Review

Leadership styles and behaviors exhibited by head teachers can significantly influence school climate, teacher attitudes, and student outcomes (Berkovich & Eyal, 2018). Among diverse leadership approaches, ethical leadership has emerged as a critical area of focus in recent educational research. Ethical leadership involves leading through ethical behaviors such as considering other's interests, displaying integrity and care, encouraging participation in decision-making, and holding followers accountable (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Studies indicate that head teachers who adopt ethical leadership strategies can positively impact teacher motivation and dedication (Havard-Dew, 2021). Teacher motivation predicts effectiveness and student achievement (Han & Yin, 2016). Examining how headteacher ethical leadership influences teacher motivation is key. This literature review synthesizes key studies on this phenomenon within elementary school contexts.

Initial evidence on headteacher ethical leadership effects comes from (Nguni et al., 2006). A Tanzanian study found transformational and ethical leadership positively associated with primary schoolteachers' job satisfaction and commitment. Both leadership styles incorporated elements of role modeling integrity, motivating staff, and promoting ethical conduct. Similarly, a study by Al-omari (2013) revealed that ethical leadership positively predicted job satisfaction among elementary school teachers. Core facets like fairness, power-sharing, ethical guidance, and people orientation were impactful.

Regarding intrinsic motivation, Bogler and Nir (2012) mixed-methods Israeli study found headteachers' transformational and ethical leadership predicted primary schoolteachers' higher self-efficacy and internal work motivation through role modeling, participative decision-making and setting a shared vision. In Ghanaian elementary schools, Han and Yin (2016) work revealed that headteachers' inspirational motivation and integrity were key ethical leadership dimensions boosting teachers' intrinsic motivation.

Together, these studies provide initial evidence that head teachers practicing ethical leadership can positively influence elementary school teachers' motivation by meeting their needs for fairness, empowerment, self-efficacy, and self-determination. However, further research is needed to understand how ethical leadership influences teacher motivation within varying cultural and organizational contexts. Investigations remain limited across educational levels, with a need for focused examination at the elementary stage. Additionally, as educational challenges and leadership needs diverge across regions, studies across diverse country settings are imperative to understand comprehensively and inform context-appropriate policies on leveraging ethical leadership to enhance teacher motivation.
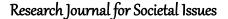
In the Pakistani context, there are different studies regarding leadership and motivation like leadership practices for headteachers (Jamil et al., 2024; Nguni et al., 2006), challenges of instructional supervision, instructional and transformational leadership (Aman et al., 2021; Arif et al., 2023); understanding academic motivation of higher achievers (Bukhari et al., 2021).

3. Research Methodology

It was a quantitative study of descriptive research designed to examine the effect of headteachers' ethical leadership on teacher motivation in elementary schools. A survey method was employed to collect numerical data for statistical analysis. This design allows efficient data collection across a large sample to identify associations between key variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The target population comprises elementary school teachers in Punjab. A random sampling technique was used to recruit 350 teachers from elementary schools in a district in Pakistan. A self-developed questionnaire comprising 15 items on a Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree was used for the data collection. Frequency, mean, and SD were calculated to find the study results. The scale was translated into Urdu using back-translation procedures. Permission was obtained from the education department and school head teachers. Surveys were distributed to teachers at staff meetings with informed written consent. SPSS software version 20 was used to conduct descriptive and reliability analysis. Descriptive statistics was calculated for sample demographics and scale items. Mean and SD were used from the respondents. The study was carried out per research ethics guidelines to ensure no harm to participants. Regulatory approval will be obtained before data collection.

4. Findings of the Study

The table no 1 presents descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) for headteachers' ethical leadership and its impact on teachers' motivation. Overall, the means for most statements are moderately high (between 3.72 and 4.53 on a 5-point scale), suggesting that head teachers are perceived as displaying fairly high levels of ethical leadership. For example, head teachers are seen as quite fair in their dealings (mean 4.53), insisting on ethical tasks (4.16), and providing equal treatment to teachers (4.25). The highest means are for fairness in dealing and

equal treatment of teachers, indicating these are viewed as key ethical behaviors of head teachers. The lowest means are for encouragement and appreciation of teachers through rewards, suggesting these are less commonly perceived ethical practices. Lower standard deviations (below 1) indicate more consensus in responses. Higher standard deviations (above 1) suggest more varied responses.

Table 1: Elementary School teachers' perspective on headteachers' ethical leadership for motivation

Statement/Aspect	M	SD
Headteacher's		
insist on ethical tasks	4.16	1.20
trustworthy for carrying out promises	3.95	0.32
hindrance in teaching-learning	4.08	0.51
fairness in dealing	4.53	0.81
equal treatment/fairness with teachers	4.25	0.61
displeasure regarding unethical practices	4.15	1.21
encouragement for teachers	3.75	1.01
motivation for teachers to learn	3.86	1.57
oppose unethical practices in the institution	3.72	1.21
discouraging behaviour	3.73	1.01
appreciation for teachers through rewards	2.51	1.49
aggression in supervision	3.25	1.17
ethical leadership for an increase in teachers' performance	3.15	1.18
ethical leadership develops teachers' collaboration	3.80	1.06
positive effect on the school environment	4.12	0.53

Regarding the impact on teacher motivation, moderately high means for motivation, performance, collaboration, and school environment (3.15-4.12) indicate headteachers' ethical leadership is perceived to positively influence these outcomes. Overall, the table shows that head teachers display ethical leadership through fairness, fulfilling promises, and opposing unethical practices. This leadership is viewed as increasing teacher motivation, performance, collaboration and improving the school environment.

4. Conclusions

This study examined the relationship between headteachers' ethical leadership and teachers' motivation in elementary schools. The findings from the descriptive statistics provide valuable insights. Overall, the moderately high means for most statements regarding headteachers' ethical leadership practices indicate that elementary school teachers perceive them as exhibiting fairly strong ethical leadership. The highest means were for fairness in dealing with teachers and equal, non-discriminatory treatment of teachers. It highlights that head teachers view a sense of justice and care for welfare as critical ethical behaviors. The lowest means were for providing encouragement and rewards, implying these positive motivational practices are less common among head teachers. The standard deviations also show a reasonably high consensus among teachers in their perceptions of headteachers' ethical leadership.

Additionally, the moderately high means for teacher motivation, performance, collaboration, and school climate regarding headteacher ethical leadership signify that ethical leadership positively impacts these outcomes. Therefore, the findings align with social exchange and learning theories, which propose that the ethical leader-follower relationship, founded on trust, respect, and care, elicits greater teacher engagement. When teachers perceive their head teachers

acting with integrity and consideration, they reciprocate through higher motivation and commitment to the school.

However, the standard deviations indicate some variability in teacher perceptions of the influence of ethical leadership on their attitudes and motivation. It suggests the relationship may depend on individual factors like self-efficacy, organizational commitment, and value congruence with leaders. The connection between ethical leadership and teacher motivation likely operates through organizational mechanisms like culture, climates, and individual social exchanges.

In conclusion, this study empirically supports a positive relationship between headteachers' embodiment of ethical leadership practices and elementary school teachers' work motivation. School leaders seeking to enhance teacher and school performance should emphasize ethical behaviors like fairness, integrity, genuine concern for teachers' welfare, participative decision-making, and provision of growth opportunities. Policymakers must incorporate ethical leadership training into headteachers' professional development.

5.1 Discussion

This study provides valuable insights into the relationship between headteacher ethical leadership and teacher motivation in elementary schools. The findings reveal that teachers perceive their head teachers as exhibiting moderately high levels of ethical leadership practices overall. In particular, fairness, integrity, and equal treatment were viewed very positively. It aligns with prior research highlighting the importance of justice, care, and equality in ethical educational leadership (Ehrich et al., 2015). However, some practices, like encouragement and rewards, were less prominent. It indicates potential areas of improvement for head teachers to motivate their staff.

The positive association between head teacher ethical leadership perceptions and teacher motivation supports social exchange and learning perspectives. Social exchange theory posits that when leaders demonstrate care and consideration, followers reciprocate through greater engagement and commitment (Hollander, 1992). Social learning theory emphasizes role modeling of desired attitudes and conduct (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Headteachers who consistently exemplify ethical practices can thus enhance teacher motivation through reciprocal goodwill and motivation to emulate their moral leadership. These findings have critical implications as recent studies reiterate that motivated teachers positively impact student learning and development (Han & Yin, 2016). Hence, initiatives to foster ethical leadership among head teachers can improve teacher effectiveness and educational outcomes. Policymakers must incorporate training on ethical practices into leadership development programs. Additionally, hiring protocols could assess ethical leadership propensities.

However, contextual factors, including overall school climate and culture, also need attention to realize the positive potential of ethical leadership (Havard-Dew, 2021). Some limitations provide avenues for further research. The sample was restricted to one district, warranting replication across diverse settings (Havard-Dew, 2021). The self-report methodology also concerns subjectivity, suggesting incorporating multi-source data in future studies (Nguni et al., 2006). Finally, the cross-sectional design means causality cannot be established definitively. Longitudinal and experimental approaches could provide more robust evidence. Overall, by contributing empirical insights into an understudied area in elementary schools, this study meaningfully advances knowledge on leveraging ethical leadership for motivating teachers and driving school improvement.

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