

Proposing an Organizational Ethics Model in Iranian Schools

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to design and validate a comprehensive model of organizational ethics in Iranian schools, integrating leadership, teacher ethics, learner ethics, and ethical culture.

Methods and Materials: The research employed an exploratory mixed-methods design. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 educational experts and provincial education directors selected through purposive sampling until theoretical saturation. Thematic analysis using the Attride-Sterling framework was applied to identify basic, organizing, and global themes. In the quantitative phase, a stratified quota sample of 368 school principals from Khuzestan and Kurdistan provinces completed a researcher-developed Likert-scale questionnaire derived from the qualitative findings. Content validity was assessed using CVR and CVI indices with expert panels. The model was further validated through confirmatory analysis using SmartPLS 3, applying structural equation modeling, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) for measurement robustness.

Findings: The structural model demonstrated that ethical leadership ($\beta = 0.837$, $t = 43.608$, $p < .001$), teacher ethics ($\beta = 0.850$, $t = 47.868$, $p < .001$), learner ethics ($\beta = 0.908$, $t = 101.586$, $p < .001$), and ethical culture ($\beta = 0.515$, $t = 11.677$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors of organizational ethics. Supporting mechanisms ($\beta = 0.905$, $t = 99.443$, $p < .001$), guaranteeing mechanisms ($\beta = 0.758$, $t = 29.120$, $p < .001$), and contextual enablers ($\beta = 0.923$, $t = 132.177$, $p < .001$) also contributed significantly. Reliability indices exceeded 0.90, and convergent validity (AVE) ranged from 0.55 to 0.74, confirming psychometric adequacy.

Conclusion: The validated model demonstrates strong explanatory power and practical relevance, offering an evidence-based framework for promoting organizational ethics in schools. By addressing ethical leadership, teacher and learner ethics, and school culture within supportive institutional contexts, the model provides a roadmap for fostering integrity, responsibility, and educational quality.

Keywords: Organizational ethics, teacher ethics, ethical leadership, ethical culture, student ethics

1. Introduction

Organizational ethics in schools has moved from a values-laden aspiration to an operational imperative, shaping climates that influence student development, teacher conduct, and public trust. Contemporary governance frames ethics as both a cultural resource and a strategic control system that constrains opportunism while enabling pro-social behavior, especially in complex, multi-stakeholder settings such as public education (Martínez et al., 2021; Ullah et al., 2019). At the individual level, perceived organizational morality and socially responsible human resource practices are associated with higher well-being and citizenship behaviors, suggesting that ethics architecture is consequential for both performance and human flourishing (Abdelmoteleb & Saha, 2020). In educational contexts characterized by rising accountability and rapid digitalization, an explicit, evidence-based model of organizational ethics is therefore vital to align leadership, teaching practice, and learner behavior with community expectations (Rahimi et al., 2024).

Professional ethics clarifies role-specific duties, norms, and boundaries that guide teachers as street-level professionals who continuously translate curricular aims into daily micro-decisions (Feiz & Elahi, 2021). Foundational accounts position teaching ethics as a synthesis of virtue (character), deontology (duty), and care (relational responsibility), which must be enacted through situated judgment in classrooms (Oktavian, 2021). Empirical work has identified concrete behavioral components—respect, fairness, authenticity, and reflective practice—that are visible to students and parents and therefore central to legitimacy (Masouminejad et al., 2022). Consistently, practitioner-oriented perspectives emphasize responsibility and professionalism as determinants of instructional quality and student learning, underlining that teacher ethics is not ancillary but constitutive of pedagogical effectiveness (Ahadpour & Bahrengi, 2020; Yazdanshenasi, 2024).

Ethical leadership provides the “transmission belt” that links institutional values with everyday conduct through modeling, fair procedures, and value-infused decision-making (Moshref Javadi et al., 2021). In schools, ethical governance manifests in transparent rule-setting, dialogic communication, and inclusive participation that legitimizes authority and reduces norm conflict (Pansiri et al., 2021). Recent modeling work further shows that organizational virtue, supported by justice perceptions and professionalism, predicts positive staff outcomes and coherent climates across

departments (Shirvani et al., 2024). At the system level, professional ethics is structurally connected to social responsibility and organizational commitment, with ethical climates dampening cynicism—an especially relevant mechanism in environments managing reform fatigue (Rahimi et al., 2024).

Yet schools operate amid evolving ethical stressors. Digital platforms have expanded surveillance, visibility, and temptation, producing dilemmas around privacy, cyberbullying, and authenticity of assessment artifacts (Sha, 2022). Comparable sectors report escalating ethical strain from workload intensification and boundary erosion, underscoring common patterns of institutional vulnerability that education shares with health and social services (Sa’u, 2022). Within schools, rising behavioral challenges—aggression, disengagement, and norm violation—complicate teacher role performance and stretch disciplinary systems (Mohaqqeq & Fakhari Taze Yzadi, 2022). Cross-cultural studies of teacher ethics highlight that normative expectations vary by context, making sensitivity to local professional cultures a prerequisite for effective policy transfer (Sari et al., 2022). Philosophical traditions can enrich such work: virtue-ethical readings of the Tao Te Ching, for example, emphasize moderation, integrity, and non-domination, offering resources for ethics education that balance principle with prudence (Wang, 2024). In practice, strengthening professional ethics supports more prosocial organizational behavior among staff, potentially buffering the disruptive effects of these pressures (Mousavi, 2023).

Learner ethics deserves equal emphasis. Schools socialize students into public reason, reciprocity, and responsibility; thus, ethics should be embedded not only in civics curricula but in daily routines and service processes that students experience (Purnomo et al., 2021). Because students observe and emulate adults, organizational hypocrisy—espousing values but rewarding misaligned behavior—undermines moral learning and erodes trust (Martínez et al., 2021). Insights from professional fields are instructive: in accounting and auditing, robust ethical infrastructures sustain independence and resist rationalizations for corner-cutting, a dynamic relevant to academic integrity and assessment fairness in schools (Smith & Johnson, 2023; Zhang, 2024). By analogy, transparent rules, consistent enforcement, and reflective dialogue can cultivate learner autonomy without sliding into punitive formalism.

Designing an organizational ethics model requires methodological clarity and stakeholder inclusion.

Developmental research on professional ethics argues for iterative, context-sensitive models that capture how novices become ethical practitioners through enculturation, supervision, and communities of practice (Kabirian, 2024). Curriculum-level innovations—especially in high-stakes environments such as operating rooms—demonstrate that mixed-methods designs can map ethical competencies, validate indicators, and guide assessment at scale (Sadati, 2023). From an organizational design perspective, contingency models accommodate variability in task environments and institutional logics, enhancing external validity across diverse school types (Razavi Al-Hashem et al., 2023). Where ethics intersects with compliance, structural models show that ethical culture moderates or transmits the effects of norms on quality, suggesting the importance of both “hard” controls and “soft” cultural levers (Rezaei et al., 2024). Methodologically, consensus-building techniques such as fuzzy Delphi and interpretive structural modeling are valuable for distilling expert judgments into coherent factor systems and prioritizing interventions (Zakizadeh et al., 2023). In parallel, studies on tax avoidance demonstrate that ethics can operate as a mediating mechanism that translates professional standards into behavior change—an instructive insight for student conduct and staff decision-making (Sugiyanti, 2023).

The cultural architecture of ethics in schools spans values, rituals, and practices that communicate what counts as “good” and “permissible.” When teachers’ moral identities are affirmed, their emotional life aligns more closely with organizational goals, reducing value-strain and improving relational climates (Seyfi Fathabadi et al., 2023). Organizational initiatives that foreground transparency, responsibility, and commitment can scaffold teachers’ ethical self-efficacy and help close the knowing–doing gap (Rahimi et al., 2024). Documentary analyses of governance highlight that codes, guidelines, and policy instruments must be interpreted within the local professional culture to avoid symbolic compliance (Pansiri et al., 2021). Cross-jurisdictional evidence on teacher ethics further indicates that development trajectories are historically sedimented, requiring both respect for tradition and readiness for reform (Sari et al., 2022; Wang, 2024).

At the meso level, organizations need ethical infrastructures that integrate leadership, HR systems, and learning processes. Pervasive ethics arises when structures (e.g., appraisals, promotion criteria), symbols (e.g., recognition programs), and socialization (e.g., mentoring) pull in the same direction (Martínez et al., 2021). Socially

responsible HRM and visible moral norms build perceptions of justice and care, which in turn predict well-being and discretionary effort—critical resources in teacher-intensive institutions (Abdelmotaleb & Saha, 2020). Conversely, misaligned incentive systems heighten ethical vulnerability, especially where performance metrics are high-stakes and multidimensional (Ullah et al., 2019). Managing these tensions requires measurement: structural models that incorporate professional ethics and cultural variables can diagnose bottlenecks and optimize interventions (Rezaei et al., 2024).

Within the teacher domain, empowerment and engagement function as conduits through which ethical leadership improves classroom practice and student outcomes (Ahadpour & Bahrengi, 2020). Professional ethics must be grounded in explicit standards and reflective capacities so that teachers can navigate value conflicts, communicate boundaries, and respond to novel dilemmas (Feiz & Elahi, 2021; Oktavian, 2021). Behavioral indicators of ethical leadership—clarity, fairness, role modeling—support this development by shaping norms of dialogue and accountability (Moshref Javadi et al., 2021). Policy syntheses emphasize that ethical governance at school level benefits from documentation, stakeholder input, and periodic review to sustain legitimacy and learning (Pansiri et al., 2021).

Ethical challenges are not limited to misconduct; they also include gray zones, systemic pressures, and unintended consequences of reforms. Studies document how workload, ambiguous role expectations, and resource constraints can erode compliance and increase rationalizations, thereby calling for preventative strategies rather than purely punitive responses (Ullah et al., 2019). Emerging work on professional ethics in health and education suggests that dialogic learning, scenario-based training, and multi-source feedback build moral sensitivity and practical wisdom (Kabirian, 2024; Sadati, 2023). A contingency-based perspective recommends tailoring ethics interventions to organizational size, governance complexity, and community values to maximize uptake (Razavi Al-Hashem et al., 2023).

The present study responds to these conditions by proposing and validating a comprehensive organizational ethics model for schools that integrates leadership ethics, teacher ethics, learner ethics, and ethical culture, while explicitly addressing contemporary stressors such as digitalization and behavioral disruption (Masouminejad et al., 2022; Mohaqqueq & Fakhari Taze Yzadi, 2022). The model positions responsibility, transparency, and

commitment as upstream determinants of ethical climates and links them to measurable outcomes at the individual and organizational levels (Rahimi et al., 2024). It also recognizes the importance of stakeholder-facing processes—family partnerships, community norms, and inter-institutional collaborations—in sustaining ethical practices beyond the school walls (Purnomo et al., 2021; Yazdanshenasi, 2024).

Methodologically, the study employs expert input and structural modeling to ensure both contextual relevance and psychometric robustness.

2. Methods and Materials

The present study was conducted with the aim of designing and validating an organizational ethics model for Iranian schools using an exploratory mixed-methods approach. The qualitative phase included two groups of participants: the first group consisted of experts in educational management and human resources from universities across the country (selected based on having publications or research experience in organizational ethics). The second group consisted of managers, namely a) all general directors of provincial departments of education (a total of 30 individuals, with the inclusion criterion of 10 years of managerial experience in educational management). Using purposive sampling, a total of 12 interviews across the two groups led to theoretical saturation; however, to ensure robustness, the interviews continued until 15 participants were reached.

In the quantitative phase, the statistical population consisted of school principals in Khuzestan Province (1,086 individuals) and Kurdistan Province (897 individuals). Due to the large size of the population, 368 individuals were selected through quota sampling. In the qualitative phase, to identify the dimensions, components, and indicators of organizational ethics in the Iranian economic, political, cultural, and social context, semi-structured interviews were

conducted with experts and managers. Data were coded and classified into basic, organizing, and global themes using thematic analysis (Attride-Sterling framework). Based on the qualitative findings, a five-point Likert questionnaire was developed, including components of ethical culture, ethical leadership, teacher ethics, and learner ethics, and was distributed among the quantitative sample. In addition, a separate questionnaire was completed by the same experts to validate the comprehensiveness of the model. Quantitative data were analyzed using structural equation modeling to assess construct validity, reliability, and model fit. The content validity of the questionnaires was confirmed by CVR and CVI indices, while the credibility of the qualitative results was supported through Lawshe's group modeling.

3. Findings and Results

The results of this study provide empirical evidence for the conceptual model of organizational ethics in Iranian schools, combining insights from both qualitative and quantitative phases. In the qualitative phase, analysis of expert interviews identified core dimensions—ethical leadership, teacher ethics, learner ethics, and ethical culture—along with contextual enablers, supporting mechanisms, and guaranteeing mechanisms as integral components of organizational ethics. These dimensions were subsequently operationalized into measurable constructs and validated through a large-scale survey of school principals. The quantitative results confirmed the reliability and validity of the model, with composite reliability coefficients exceeding 0.90 and average variance extracted (AVE) values surpassing the acceptable threshold of 0.50. Structural equation modeling further demonstrated that all major paths between the latent variables and organizational ethics were statistically significant, indicating that the proposed model possesses both theoretical robustness and practical applicability.

Table 1

Basic and organizing themes in the analysis of ethical challenges

Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Distancing from religious moral values	Decreased affective and normative commitment in teachers' behavior and conduct
	Economic and cultural poverty
	Being a child of divorced parents
Cultural and Social Challenges	Parental addiction
	Dominance of materialistic and liberal ethics
	Prevalence of consumerism
	Students' deviant behaviors, especially in secondary school
	Aggression
	Recklessness

Lack of strict discipline such as tardiness and absenteeism	Excessive boldness Disregard for values such as respect for teachers Disorder
Difficulty in classroom management	Lack of motivation among teachers Bringing cell phones into schools
Immoral behaviors in cyberspace	Shocks of cyberspace and new technologies
Challenges Related to Cyberspace and Technology	Premature puberty in students due to accessibility of cyberspace Selling exam questions
Neglect of the school's hidden curriculum	Lack of examination of the philosophy of religious and moral issues
Educational and Pedagogical Challenges	Moral education and preparing students for the future

Table 2

Basic and Organizing Themes in the Analysis of Ethical Leadership

Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Honesty, compassion, fairness, non-discrimination → Personality and ethical characteristics of leaders	Moral conscience, magnanimity, intimacy, reflectiveness
Participation in decision-making, staff relations, respect for staff rights → Educational leadership dimensions	Professional behavior and interactions, leadership styles and performance
Orderliness, planning orientation → Professional and managerial characteristics	Neat appearance, work discipline, organizational commitment
Religious education role, sayings of moral figures, promotion of staff's moral and scientific level → Educational, personality, and religious dimensions	Healthy role model, faithful teachers, knowledgeable staff, healthy discourse
Distinction between manager and inspirational leader → Inspirational leadership characteristics	Leaders' personal views, sound reasoning, charisma

Table 3

Basic and Organizing Themes in the Analysis of Teacher Ethics

Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Respect for students	Respect for student rights, distributive justice, honesty, ethical realism
Personality and ethical characteristics	Patience, cheerfulness, teacher dignity, love, altruism, passion for teaching
Commitment and responsibility	Lifelong learning, belief in positive changes, paternal follow-up of students Teacher accountability, openness to criticism
Educational and teaching approaches	Attention to learning approaches, critical thinking, enhancing teacher literacy Active classrooms, enthusiasm for teaching, high educational goals, modern pedagogy Mastery of modern teaching methods, metacognitive content, conceptual teaching
Social relations and student interaction	Constructive competition, situational agency Promoting empathy and cooperation among students

Table 4

Basic and Organizing Themes in the Analysis of Ethical Culture

Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Dress code, dignity, self-esteem, chastity, kindness, fairness → Individual and ethical characteristics	Tolerance, good speech, discipline, competence, altruism
Teacher-student and student-teacher interactions, dialogue → Social relations and interactions	Empathy, respect for others, responsibility
Respect for values, norms, and symbols → Social culture and values	Behavior consistent with Iranian-Islamic culture, adaptation in behavior
Environmental awareness and public culture	Promoting proper cyberspace use, respect for the environment, positive attitudes toward environment
Emphasis on religiosity, preserving Iranian-Islamic culture, preventing moral alienation → Cultural training and education	Promoting reading culture, participation in cultural and artistic programs, research culture in schools

Table 5

Basic and Organizing Themes in the Analysis of Learner Ethics

Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Respect for teachers and principals, respect for teachers, preserving the dignity of school and classroom, mutual respect → Respect and social interactions	Friendship and kindness, empathy, interaction
Punctuality, commitment to educational affairs, effort for learning, interest in learning, degree of commitment to learning → Commitment and motivation for learning	Enthusiasm for learning, fostering the spirit of "learning to live," inquisitiveness
Courtesy, good speech, adherence to moral principles, honesty, loyalty in friendship → Ethics and behavior	Conduct and behavior, work conscience, orderliness, avoiding distractions
Being research-oriented, learners' recognition that science must be transformed into practice, thought into planning, and creativity into production → Research and creativity	Learners' five senses, leadership

Table 6

Basic and Organizing Themes in the Analysis of Organizational Ethics Contexts

Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Religious governance	National and religious ceremonies, culture of religious tolerance
Cultural contexts	Local customs and traditions, Iranian-Islamic lifestyle, ritual ceremonies
Family context	Students' participation in decision-making, informal institutions
Social contexts	Social issue education, students' voluntary participation in social activities
Legal and political contexts	Impartial legislation, avoiding politicization, laws of the Fundamental Transformation Document of Education
Educational content in textbooks, attention to non-biased cultural programs → Scientific and educational contexts	School counselors, parent-teacher associations, free discussion forums, research
Institutions and organizations	Clerics present in schools, family

Table 7

Basic and Organizing Themes in the Analysis of Supporting Mechanisms of Organizational Ethics

Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Ministry of Education, seminaries, universities, schools, family → Institutions and organizations	Parent-teacher associations, teachers' associations, teachers, moral and sports instructors
Establishing sustainable ethical rules → Laws and regulations	Administrative regulations
Encouraging ethical teachers, creating motivation to establish ethical standards in schools → Encouragement and recognition	Verbal acknowledgments, rewarding ethical individuals, professional reward system
Institutionalizing moral conscience → Moral conscience and adherence	Staff adherence to ethics at all levels

Table 8

Basic and Organizing Themes in the Analysis of Guaranteeing Mechanisms of Organizational Ethics

Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Teachers and school staff	Rigorous and professional evaluations, proper handling of offenders
Supervision and evaluation	Emphasis and monitoring of teachers' and students' behavior
Institutionalizing ethical standards in schools	Work conscience, ethical, legal, and customary rules, personal conscience
Institutionalization and cultural development	Attention to moral, cultural, and emotional affairs alongside education
Use of motivational mechanisms → Encouragement and motivation	Collective support for ethical individuals
Education system and decision-making bodies	Schools, school principals, administrative regulations, appropriate structure and policymaking
Management and policymaking	General directorates of provincial education departments, local education offices

For the content validation of the model, group modeling was used. In this method, the content validity ratio (CVR) was calculated using Lawshe's formula.

Table 9

Minimum Acceptable Content Validity Ratio (CVR) for Model Confirmation

Minimum CVR	Panel Members	Minimum CVR	Panel Members	Minimum CVR	Panel Members
0.49	15	0.62	10	0.99	5
0.42	20	0.59	11	0.99	6
0.37	25	0.56	12	0.99	7
0.33	30	0.54	13	0.75	8
0.31	35	0.51	14	0.78	9
0.29	40				

To validate the organizational ethics model in the qualitative phase, the quantitative panel of experts was employed using CVR (content validity ratio) and CVI (content validity index). A total of 12 university experts and specialists in the field of education participated in evaluating the necessity of the model's components. According to Lawshe's table, the minimum CVR value for confirming each component with this number of experts was set at 0.56. The experts selected one of three options for each

component: "essential," "useful but not essential," and "not essential." Components with CVR values below this threshold were eliminated. To calculate CVI, experts assessed the relevance of the components on a four-point Likert scale. Results indicated that the final CVR value of the model was 0.73 and the CVI value was 0.78, demonstrating appropriate content validity for the proposed model.

Table 10

Content Validity Ratio (CVR) of the Proposed Organizational Ethics Model

Organizing Theme	Basic Theme	Agreement Coefficient	Approval Status
Ethical challenges	Cultural and social challenges	0.59	Approved
	Behavioral and disciplinary challenges	0.52	Approved
	Challenges related to cyberspace and technology	0.65	Approved
	Educational and pedagogical challenges	0.58	Approved
Ethical culture	Individual and ethical characteristics	0.72	Approved
	Social relations and interactions	0.67	Approved
	Social culture and values	0.63	Approved
	Attention to environment and public culture	0.76	Approved
Ethical leadership	Cultural education and training	0.83	Approved
	Personality and ethical traits of leaders	0.65	Approved
	Educational leadership dimensions and components	0.71	Approved
	Professional and managerial characteristics	0.63	Approved
Teacher ethics	Educational and religious dimensions	0.83	Approved
	Leadership characteristics	0.69	Approved
	Teachers' personality and ethical characteristics	0.71	Approved
	Commitment and responsibility	0.60	Approved
Learner ethics	Educational and teaching approaches	0.67	Approved
	Social relations and interactions with students	0.71	Approved
	Respect and social interactions	0.76	Approved
	Commitment and motivation for learning	0.52	Approved
Supporting mechanisms	Ethics and behavior	0.72	Approved
	Research and creativity	0.72	Approved
	Institutions and organizations	0.65	Approved
	Laws and regulations	0.58	Approved
Guaranteeing mechanisms	Encouragement and recognition	0.83	Approved
	Moral conscience and adherence	0.65	Approved
	Supervision and evaluation	0.69	Approved
	Institutionalization and cultural development	0.66	Approved
Contexts	Encouragement and motivation	0.75	Approved
	Management and policymaking	0.54	Approved
	Cultural contexts	0.59	Approved
	Social contexts	0.58	Approved
	Legal and political contexts	0.82	Approved
	Scientific and educational contexts	0.73	Approved

Table 11

Content Validity Index (CVI) of the Proposed Organizational Ethics Model

Organizing Theme	Basic Theme	CVI	Approval Status
Ethical challenges	Cultural and social challenges	0.79	Approved
	Behavioral and disciplinary challenges	0.90	Approved
	Challenges related to cyberspace and technology	0.83	Approved
	Educational and pedagogical challenges	0.91	Approved
Ethical culture	Individual and ethical characteristics	0.94	Approved
	Social relations and interactions	0.95	Approved
	Social culture and values	0.79	Approved
	Attention to environment and public culture	0.87	Approved
	Cultural education and training	0.83	Approved
Ethical leadership	Personality and ethical traits of leaders	0.85	Approved
	Educational leadership dimensions and components	0.96	Approved
	Professional and managerial characteristics	0.89	Approved
	Educational and religious dimensions	0.88	Approved
	Leadership characteristics	0.81	Approved
Teacher ethics	Teachers' personality and ethical characteristics	0.97	Approved
	Commitment and responsibility	0.88	Approved
	Educational and teaching approaches	0.82	Approved
	Social relations and interactions with students	0.86	Approved
Learner ethics	Respect and social interactions	0.86	Approved
	Commitment and motivation for learning	0.88	Approved
	Ethics and behavior	0.83	Approved
	Research and creativity	0.84	Approved
Supporting mechanisms	Institutions and organizations	0.87	Approved
	Laws and regulations	0.81	Approved
	Encouragement and recognition	0.78	Approved
	Moral conscience and adherence	0.77	Approved
Guaranteeing mechanisms	Supervision and evaluation	0.90	Approved
	Institutionalization and cultural development	0.87	Approved
	Encouragement and motivation	0.79	Approved
	Management and policymaking	0.82	Approved
Contexts	Cultural contexts	0.84	Approved
	Social contexts	0.91	Approved
	Legal and political contexts	0.81	Approved
	Scientific and educational contexts	0.82	Approved

Therefore, based on the content validity ranking, the constructs of the organizational ethics model are valid.

In this section, the main research variables are described. To address the research questions, structural equation modeling with the partial least squares (PLS) approach was applied using SmartPLS 3 software. To validate the model in the quantitative phase, two indices were used: composite reliability and convergent validity (AVE).

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are two key indices for evaluating the reliability of the measurement model in PLS. Because Cronbach's alpha is more conservative, composite reliability, which is more accurate, is preferred. Values above 0.70 for both indices indicate acceptable reliability of constructs.

Table 12

Results of Reliability Indices for the Proposed Model

Latent Variable	Composite Reliability (C.R.)	Latent Variable	Composite Reliability (C.R.)
Ethical challenges	0.94	Learner ethics	0.94
Ethical culture	0.92	Supporting mechanisms	0.92
Ethical leadership	0.95	Guaranteeing mechanisms	0.93
Teacher ethics	0.91	Contexts	0.90

In this model, ethical challenges (0.94), ethical culture (0.92), ethical leadership (0.95), teacher ethics (0.91), learner ethics (0.94), contexts (0.90), supporting mechanisms (0.92), and guaranteeing mechanisms (0.93) all

demonstrate appropriate composite reliability. Based on the established threshold (above 0.70), the composite reliability coefficients for all constructs are acceptable.

Table 13

Results of Convergent Validity (AVE Criterion)

Latent Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Latent Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Ethical challenges	0.67	Learner ethics	0.68
Ethical culture	0.74	Supporting mechanisms	0.55
Ethical leadership	0.69	Guaranteeing mechanisms	0.58
Teacher ethics	0.70	Contexts	0.55

In this model, the AVE values for ethical challenges (0.67), ethical culture (0.74), ethical leadership (0.69), teacher ethics (0.70), learner ethics (0.68), contexts (0.55), supporting mechanisms (0.55), and guaranteeing mechanisms (0.58) demonstrate suitable convergent validity. Based on the criterion threshold (above 0.50), all constructs possess acceptable convergent validity, confirming the adequacy of the measurement model.

Standardized factor loadings and *t*-values between all constructs and their respective latent variables are presented in Figures 1 and 2 and Table 14. According to Holland (1999), the threshold for acceptable factor loadings is 0.40. If the loading is below 0.40, the factor must be revised or removed from the model.

Figure 1

Standardized factor loadings between latent variables and indicators of the organizational ethics model.

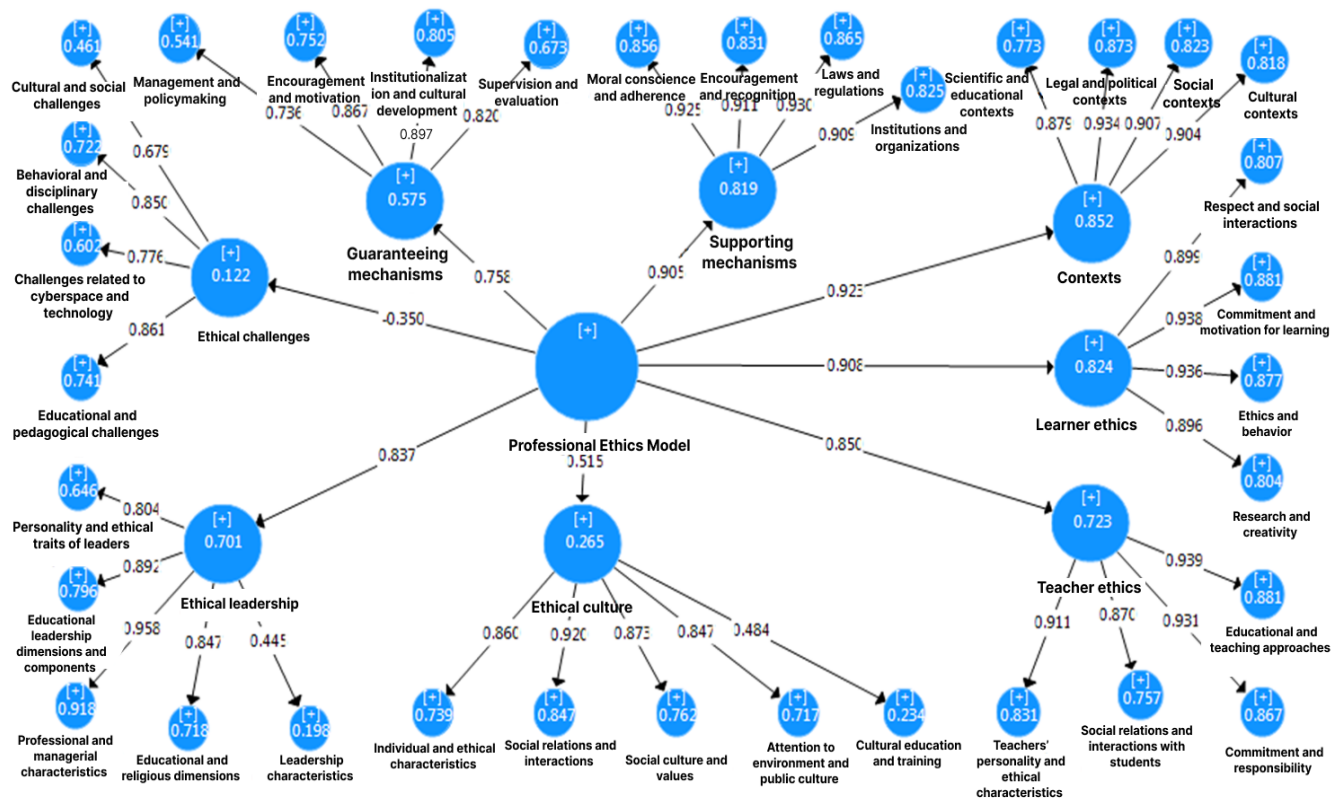


Figure 2

t-values between latent variables and indicators of the organizational ethics model.

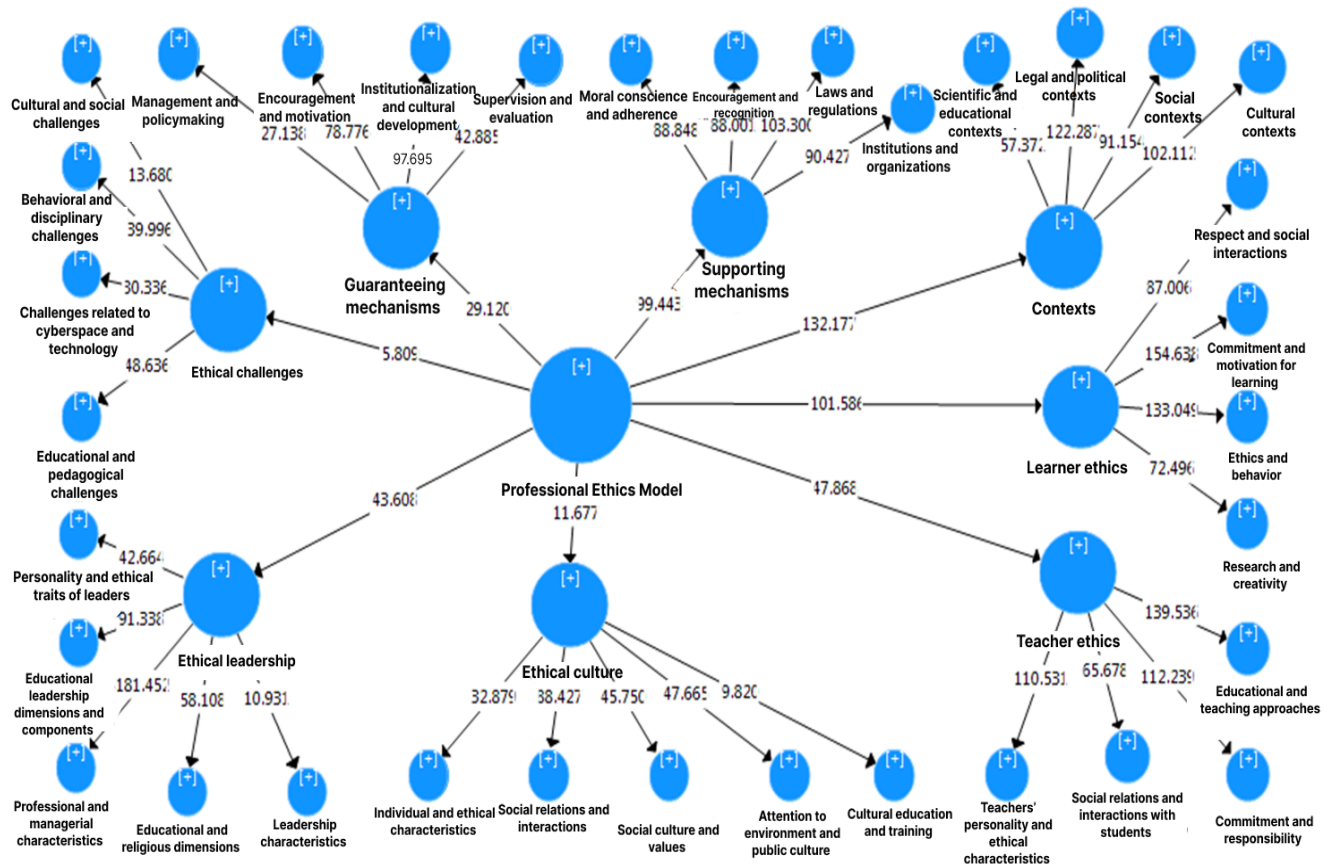


Table 14

Standardized Factor Loadings and *t*-values Between Latent Variables and Indicators of the Organizational Ethics Model

Path	Beta Coefficient	<i>t</i> -Value	Significance Level
Ethical challenges → Organizational ethics	-0.350	5.809	0.001
Ethical culture → Organizational ethics	0.515	11.677	0.001
Ethical leadership → Organizational ethics	0.837	43.608	0.001
Teacher ethics → Organizational ethics	0.850	47.868	0.001
Learner ethics → Organizational ethics	0.908	101.586	0.001
Supporting mechanisms → Organizational ethics	0.905	99.443	0.001
Guaranteeing mechanisms → Organizational ethics	0.758	29.120	0.001
Contexts → Organizational ethics	0.923	132.177	0.001

Based on the results of standardized factor loadings and *t*-values between constructs and latent variables, as presented in Figures 1 and 2 and Table 14, all criteria meet the required thresholds, confirming that the organizational ethics model demonstrates good fit.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrated that organizational ethics in Iranian schools can be understood as a multi-dimensional construct encompassing four core

domains: ethical leadership, teacher ethics, learner ethics, and ethical culture, embedded within broader institutional contexts and supported by specific mechanisms of support and guarantee. The validated model exhibited strong psychometric reliability and convergent validity, indicating that the identified dimensions are robust and theoretically meaningful. Each dimension highlights distinct but interconnected pathways through which ethics is expressed, nurtured, and institutionalized in schools.

One of the most prominent findings concerned the salience of ethical leadership. Ethical leadership was shown to be a critical driver of organizational ethics, with high factor loadings and significant paths in the structural model. This underscores the notion that leaders act as role models whose actions set the tone for acceptable conduct and define the ethical climate (Moshref Javadi et al., 2021). This is consistent with earlier studies emphasizing that ethical leadership fosters teacher empowerment, job engagement, and positive organizational behavior (Ahadpour & Bahrengi, 2020; Shirvani et al., 2024). Leaders who display fairness, compassion, and commitment to moral principles legitimize authority and facilitate the alignment of professional duties with broader organizational values. By integrating educational, professional, and religious dimensions, ethical leadership ensures that ethical values are not merely abstract ideals but concrete practices embedded in managerial interactions.

The results further highlighted teacher ethics as a core dimension, with particularly strong factor loadings. Teachers, as the most direct agents of student development, carry the responsibility of modeling ethical behavior in everyday classroom practices. Dimensions such as respect for students, fairness in evaluation, and commitment to teaching were identified as pivotal components. This resonates with genealogical approaches to teacher professional ethics, which view teachers as the custodians of moral development in schools (Feiz & Elahi, 2021). Similar insights are evident in studies from Indonesia and Iran, which report that professional ethics is integral to improving the quality of education and shaping teacher-student relationships (Sari et al., 2022; Yazdanshenasi, 2024). Furthermore, studies on teacher knowledge emphasize that ethical behavior is inseparable from pedagogical expertise, as knowledge must be translated into morally responsible action (Masouminejad et al., 2022). These results confirm the centrality of teacher ethics in ensuring that schools serve not only as sites of academic learning but also as moral communities.

Another notable outcome was the identification of learner ethics as a distinct dimension. Unlike many models that focus exclusively on staff, this research showed that the ethical behavior of students—respect for teachers, responsibility in learning, and commitment to honesty—constitutes a key dimension of organizational ethics. The findings revealed that students' motivation for learning, moral conduct, and inclination toward research and creativity are crucial for the sustainability of ethical culture

in schools. These results support broader perspectives on education that see learners not merely as recipients of moral norms but as active participants in shaping the school's ethical climate (Purnomo et al., 2021). Learner ethics is also vital for preventing misconduct in digital contexts, where the proliferation of social media and technological tools has introduced new ethical dilemmas (Sha, 2022). As previous studies confirm, schools that embed ethical expectations into student routines cultivate civic responsibility and social capital, aligning with the mission of education as a moral enterprise (Martínez et al., 2021).

The dimension of ethical culture also emerged as strongly validated. Ethical culture encompasses shared norms, respect for traditions, environmental awareness, and religious-moral integration. The findings showed that ethical culture operates as the glue that binds individual and organizational behaviors into a coherent system. This aligns with international evidence suggesting that culture acts as both a supportive and constraining force, shaping organizational morality and employee conduct (Abdelmotaleb & Saha, 2020; Ullah et al., 2019). In schools, cultural reinforcement ensures that values are continuously reproduced through rituals, traditions, and everyday practices. Moreover, ethical culture influences how stakeholders interpret policies and manage dilemmas, thereby reducing the risks of symbolic compliance or ethical relativism (Pansiri et al., 2021). This supports prior work showing that schools with stronger ethical cultures are more resilient in the face of social and technological disruptions (Mohaqqeq & Fakhari Taze Yzadi, 2022).

The study also identified contextual enablers and mechanisms that either support or guarantee organizational ethics. Supporting mechanisms included family involvement, parent-teacher associations, and reward systems that encourage ethical conduct. Guaranteeing mechanisms, by contrast, focused on evaluation, supervision, and policymaking structures that institutionalize ethical standards. Together, these mechanisms provide both motivational and structural reinforcements, ensuring that ethical norms are not only promoted but also enforced. Such dual approaches are consistent with contingency models of ethics, which emphasize that ethical conduct requires both cultural embedding and regulatory safeguards (Razavi Al-Hashem et al., 2023). In line with the structural equation modeling results, both types of mechanisms showed significant contributions, confirming that ethical sustainability requires a balance of encouragement and control.

The robustness of the proposed model is further supported by comparison with international literature on professional ethics. For example, research on the auditing profession indicates that professional ethics safeguards independence and accountability, thus reinforcing organizational trust (Smith & Johnson, 2023; Zhang, 2024). Similarly, studies of midwifery and surgery education show that ethics curricula, when embedded in training, improve professional responsibility and service quality (Kabirian, 2024; Sadati, 2023). These parallels suggest that professional ethics, regardless of field, requires contextual models that reflect both universal values and local realities. In schools, ethical leadership, teacher ethics, learner ethics, and ethical culture form a comprehensive matrix that captures this duality.

Another noteworthy finding is the identification of ethical challenges. Schools in Iran were shown to face six major challenges: socio-cultural issues, behavioral problems, cyberspace-related dilemmas, educational concerns, weaknesses of the hidden curriculum, and insufficient integration of religious approaches. These findings echo prior studies that document behavioral problems among students and their impact on classroom management (Mohaqqeq & Fakhari Taze Yzadi, 2022). They also align with evidence from other contexts showing that globalization and digitalization have introduced ethical tensions that traditional disciplinary frameworks struggle to address (Sa'u, 2022; Sha, 2022). By mapping these challenges, the study contributes to an empirical understanding of where interventions are most needed, offering actionable insights for policymakers and school leaders.

The findings also resonate with broader conceptualizations of ethics across professions. For example, research on tax consultants shows that ethics can act as a mediating mechanism in reducing opportunistic behavior (Sugiyanti, 2023), while studies in auditing and accounting emphasize that ethical safeguards reduce conflicts of interest (Zhang, 2024). In schools, ethics plays a similar mediating role, buffering against misconduct, cynicism, and disengagement (Rahimi et al., 2024). This convergence underscores the universality of ethics as both a preventive and developmental force across organizational settings.

By validating the organizational ethics model, this study advances theory and practice in several ways. Conceptually, it synthesizes dispersed literature on leadership, teaching, learning, and culture into an integrated framework.

Empirically, it employs rigorous methods, including CVR and CVI validation and structural equation modeling, to ensure robustness. Practically, it offers schools a roadmap for diagnosing ethical strengths and weaknesses, designing interventions, and monitoring progress. This is consistent with previous recommendations that ethics should be both context-sensitive and structurally embedded to achieve lasting impact (Rezaei et al., 2024; Zakizadeh et al., 2023).

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. First, the qualitative phase was based on expert interviews and may have been influenced by selection bias. Although theoretical saturation was reached, the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents were not equally represented, which may limit the comprehensiveness of the identified themes. Second, the quantitative phase was conducted in only two provinces, Khuzestan and Kurdistan, which constrains the generalizability of findings across the diverse cultural and social contexts of Iran. Third, the reliance on self-reported questionnaires introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, particularly given the sensitive nature of ethical topics. Finally, while the study validated the model statistically, it did not test longitudinal changes, leaving questions about the sustainability of ethical practices over time.

Future research should extend the scope of data collection to include a broader and more diverse sample of schools across different provinces and educational levels. Incorporating the perspectives of students and parents more systematically would provide a more holistic understanding of learner ethics and family contributions to organizational ethics. Longitudinal designs are recommended to track how ethical practices evolve over time and under changing socio-political conditions. Comparative studies across countries could also highlight cultural similarities and differences in ethical challenges and solutions, enriching the theoretical generalizability of the model. Finally, experimental and intervention studies could test the effectiveness of targeted programs—such as ethics training for leaders or classroom-based ethics curricula—in strengthening specific dimensions of the model.

For practice, the validated model provides a practical framework for schools to evaluate and improve organizational ethics. School leaders should prioritize ethical leadership development through training programs that emphasize fairness, transparency, and moral modeling. Teachers should be supported with ongoing professional development in ethics, ensuring that ethical principles are integrated into pedagogy and classroom management.

Learners should be engaged in participatory activities that cultivate respect, responsibility, and creativity, embedding ethics into daily routines. At the institutional level, mechanisms of support and guarantee—such as reward systems, evaluation protocols, and family involvement—should be formalized to ensure sustainability. Finally, policymakers should use the model as a diagnostic and planning tool, integrating it into broader strategies for educational reform and quality improvement.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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Declaration of Interest

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Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were under the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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