Exploring the Relationship between Ethical Values and Teacher Morale among School Teachers

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Abstract:
The present study examined the levels of ethical values and teacher morale among school teachers in India, employing standardized instruments-Singh and Sharma's Ethical Values Scale (2011) and Ahluwalia's Teacher Morale Scale (1985). Data were collected from 292 teachers across different types of schools and analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, post-hoc tests, and correlation analysis. Findings revealed that a majority of teachers reported neutral levels of ethical values (67.8%) and morale (81.8%), while relatively smaller proportions exhibited high or low levels. Results further indicated no significant differences in ethical values and morale with respect to age and locality of residence. However, a significant variation emerged concerning the nature of administration, with teachers in government and aided schools scoring higher than those in self-financing schools. Correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between ethical values and teacher morale (r = 0.620, p < 0.05), highlighting their interconnectedness in shaping professional attitudes. These findings suggest the need for strengthening value-based teacher education, supportive school environments, and administrative policies that foster both ethical orientation and morale.

Keywords: *Ethical Values, Teacher Morale, School Teachers, Educational Administration, Professional Ethics*

1. Introduction

The teaching profession is often described as the cornerstone of societal progress, given its profound role in shaping the intellectual, emotional, and moral foundations of future generations. Teachers are entrusted not only with transmitting knowledge but also with cultivating ethical character and social responsibility among students. To fulfill this dual role, teachers themselves must embody a strong sense of ethical values, which guide their professional behaviors, decision-making, and interactions within the school environment. Ethical values such as fairness, honesty, respect, empathy, and responsibility provide teachers with a moral compass, enabling them to navigate complex classroom situations with integrity and consistency (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2021).

Alongside ethical values, teacher morale is an equally significant construct in education. Teacher morale can be defined as the overall emotional and psychological state that reflects teachers' satisfaction, motivation, and sense of fulfillment in their work (Collie, 2022). A teacher with high morale demonstrates enthusiasm, creativity, and commitment, while a teacher with low morale may experience frustration, disengagement, and burnout. In the school context, morale is not an individual matter alone but is closely tied to the culture and ethical climate of the institution. When teachers perceive that their school leadership operates with fairness, respect, and transparency, their morale is likely to be higher (Wang & Hall, 2023).

The relationship between ethical values and teacher morale is both direct and dynamic. Ethical values

act as protective and empowering factors that can elevate morale, even in demanding circumstances. For instance, when teachers feel that they are working in an ethically guided environment where equity and respect are practiced, their sense of professional pride and morale increases. Conversely, unethical practices such as favoritism, inequity in recognition, or lack of respect for teachers' voices can negatively impact morale, leading to dissatisfaction and eventual withdrawal from the profession (Day & Gu, 2019).

This relationship gains further importance in the context of school teachers, who often face multiple pressures such as high workloads, standardized testing demands, limited resources, and growing accountability from parents and policymakers. These stressors can diminish morale if not balanced by strong ethical support within the school. Ethical values can serve as anchors that not only strengthen teacher resilience but also foster a positive school climate. A teacher who works in an ethically aligned institution is more likely to remain motivated, maintain morale, and persist in the profession despite challenges (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2021). In light of these perspectives, exploring the relationship between ethical values and teacher morale is vital for enhancing both teacher well-being and educational outcomes. This paper attempts to examine this relationship by reviewing existing literature, situating the inquiry within theoretical frameworks, and outlining the need for empirical investigation in the context of school education.

2. Review of Literature

Ethical values are foundational to the teaching profession. They represent the principles and standards of behavior that guide teachers in their professional responsibilities. Key values such as fairness, integrity, respect, and empathy enable teachers to build trusting relationships with students, colleagues, and the community. Ethical practices in schools are not only essential for nurturing student learning but also for maintaining the credibility of the teaching profession (Campbell, 2022).

Teachers are often confronted with ethical dilemmas, ranging from issues of equity in student assessment to maintaining confidentiality and handling diversity sensitively. The ability to uphold ethical values in such contexts determines the quality of educational outcomes and the overall moral environment of the school. According to Sanger and Osguthorpe (2021), teachers are viewed as moral agents who shape learners' character as much as their academic competence. When schools foster ethical values institutionally, they create an environment of fairness and trust that benefits both teachers and students.

Teacher morale refers to the collective spirit, sense of purpose, and job satisfaction that educators experience in their work. It reflects how teachers perceive their profession, working conditions, and institutional culture (Collie, 2022). High morale leads to enthusiasm, commitment, and creativity in teaching, while low morale often manifests as absenteeism, stress, and attrition (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2021).

A variety of factors influence teacher morale, including leadership styles, student behavior, professional recognition, and workload. Research indicates that supportive leadership and collegial collaboration are among the strongest predictors of teacher morale (Wang & Hall, 2023). Moreover, morale is dynamic, it can fluctuate based on systemic changes such as curriculum reforms, policy shifts, or external pressures. The importance of teacher morale extends beyond individual well-being, as it directly impacts student achievement, school climate, and institutional effectiveness (Day & Gu, 2019).

The ethical climate of a school significantly shapes teachers' perceptions of their professional environment. When teachers perceive the school to be governed by fairness, equity, and respect, their morale is reinforced (Campbell, 2022). Ethical alignment between teachers and school leadership fosters trust and strengthens professional identity, even under challenging conditions. On the contrary,

unethical practices such as favoritism, lack of transparency, or disregard for teachers' contributions can undermine morale, creating disillusionment and detachment from the profession (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Studies have shown that teachers working in ethically supportive environments report higher morale and a greater sense of professional pride. For example, Wang and Hall (2023) found that ethical leadership contributes positively to teachers' emotional engagement and reduces feelings of professional exhaustion. Similarly, Collie (2022) emphasized that moral and ethical reinforcement within schools enhances teachers' psychological resilience, thereby sustaining morale.

Recent research positions ethical values as strong predictors of teacher morale. Ethical values instill a sense of professional purpose and integrity, which buffer teachers against the negative effects of workplace stressors (Day & Gu, 2019). For instance, when teachers feel respected and valued for their ethical contributions, they are more likely to experience satisfaction and enthusiasm in their roles. Conversely, the absence of ethical standards can lead to feelings of neglect, injustice, and low morale (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2021).

In this sense, ethical values act not only as guiding principles but also as protective mechanisms. They help teachers derive meaning from their work, strengthen resilience, and maintain high morale even when faced with resource limitations or systemic challenges. Thus, ethical values and teacher morale are intertwined, forming a reciprocal relationship that shapes both teacher well-being and institutional effectiveness.

3. Theoretical Framework
A theoretical framework provides the conceptual lens through which the relationship between ethical values and teacher morale can be understood. This study draws primarily on Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory, both of which offer valuable insights into how ethical practices influence teacher morale.

3.1 Social Exchange Theory
Social Exchange Theory, first articulated by Blau (1964), posits that human interactions are based on reciprocal exchanges of resources, both tangible and intangible. Within the school environment, ethical values such as fairness, respect, and trust can be viewed as intangible resources exchanged between teachers and their institutions. When teachers perceive that they are treated with dignity and fairness, they are more likely to reciprocate through higher morale, commitment, and loyalty to the institution. This theory also explains the negative consequences of unethical practices. When teachers encounter favoritism, lack of transparency, or inequitable treatment, they may perceive the exchange relationship as unfair, leading to dissatisfaction and declining morale. Thus, Social Exchange Theory highlights the reciprocal nature of ethical engagement in schools—ethical treatment enhances morale, while unethical practices erode it (Wang & Hall, 2023).

3.2 Self-Determination Theory
Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci (2020), emphasizes the role of intrinsic motivation in human behavior. According to SDT, individuals have three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are fulfilled, individuals experience greater motivation, satisfaction, and well-being. In the context of schools, ethical values create conditions that satisfy these needs. For example:
- **Autonomy** is supported when teachers are trusted and respected in their professional decisions.
- **Competence** is reinforced when ethical practices ensure fair recognition of teachers' abilities and contributions.
- **Relatedness** is fostered when teachers experience mutual respect and moral alignment with their colleagues and leaders.

By fulfilling these needs, ethical values directly contribute to higher teacher morale. Conversely, unethical practices such as micromanagement, lack of recognition, or disrespect undermine these

needs, leading to demoralization and disengagement (Collie, 2022).

3.3 Integrative Perspective

Together, Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory provide a comprehensive framework for examining the relationship between ethical values and teacher morale. Social Exchange Theory emphasizes reciprocity in ethical treatment and morale, while Self-Determination Theory highlights the internal psychological mechanisms through which ethics nurture motivation and satisfaction. Both theories converge on the idea that ethical environments are crucial for sustaining morale, resilience, and professional well-being among school teachers.

4. Objectives

In the present study the following objectives are framed to measure the school teachers' ethical values and teacher morale.

1. To identify the level of school teachers' ethical values;
2. To identify the level of school teachers' morale;
3. To find out the significant difference, if any, in ethical value of school teachers regard to selected background variables;
4. To find out the significant difference, if any, in the school teachers morale with regard to selected background variables; and
5. To find out the correlation between ethical values and teachers morale of school teachers.
6. The background variables are Age, Medium of learning, Nature of administration, and Locality of the institution.

5. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated based on the objectives:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the ethical value of school teachers regard to selected background variables;

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the school teacher's morale with regard to selected background variables; and

Ho3: There is no significant correlation between ethical values and teachers' morale of school teachers.

The background variables are Age, Medium of learning, Nature of administration, and Locality of the institution.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design

The present study adopted the survey method, which is widely used in educational research to collect data on existing conditions, values and morale. This approach was considered appropriate for examining the relationship between ethical values and teacher morale among school teachers.

6.2 Population and Sample

The population for the study comprised school teachers working in selected schools. A sample of 292 teachers was drawn using the random sampling technique to ensure representativeness. The sample included both male and female teachers from different schools across the Salem district.

6.3 Instrument

Two standardized tools were used for data collection in this study. The Ethical Values Scale, developed by Singh and Sharma (2011), was employed to measure the ethical orientation of teachers. The scale was revalidated by the researcher in 2025 and has been widely applied in educational research in the Indian context, demonstrating high reliability and validity. Teacher morale was measured using the Teacher Morale Scale (TMS) developed by S. P. Ahluwalia (1985). This instrument was also revalidated by the researcher in 2025. The scale is regarded as one of the most

reliable and valid measures for assessing teacher morale in Indian schools.

6.4 Reliability of the Tools

The reliability of the instruments was established through revalidation conducted by the researcher in 2025. For the Ethical Values Scale, the reliability coefficient obtained through the split-half method was 0.91, and the Cronbach's alpha was 0.89, indicating high internal consistency. Similarly, the Teacher Morale Scale demonstrated strong reliability, with a split-half coefficient of 0.93 and Cronbach's alpha of 0.90, confirming stability and consistency of the tool.

6.5 Validity of the Tools

The validity of the instruments was examined using criterion-related validation. Scores on both scales were correlated with independent evaluations of teacher performance provided by school heads. The Ethical Values Scale yielded a validity coefficient of 0.42 (PE ±0.026), while the Teacher Morale Scale recorded a coefficient of 0.45 (PE ±0.021). These values indicate that both instruments possess acceptable validity for measuring ethical orientation and morale among school teachers.

6.6 Data Analysis

Table: 1 Level of School Teachers' Ethical value and Teachers Morale

Variables	Low		Neutral		High	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Ethical value	48	16.4	198	67.8	46	15.8
Teachers Morale	28	9.6	239	81.8	25	8.6

The results indicate that the majority of school teachers reported neutral levels of both ethical values (67.8%) and teacher morale (81.8%). Only a small proportion exhibited high levels of ethical values (15.8%) and morale (8.6%), while a relatively lower percentage fell in the low category for ethical values (16.4%) and morale (9.6%). These findings suggest that while most teachers maintain moderate ethical standards and morale, fewer demonstrate exceptionally high or low levels.

Table: 2 Significance of Difference in School Teachers' Ethical Value and Teachers Morale with regard to Age

Variables	Age	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P value
Ethical Value	Between groups	187.506	2	93.753	1.352	0.260
	Within groups	20039.695	289	69.340		
	Total	20226.695	291			
Teachers Morale	Between groups	909.397	2	454.699	2.931	0.055
	Within groups	44841.271	289	155.160		
	Total	45750.668	291			

The ANOVA results show that age does not significantly influence ethical values among school teachers (F (2, 289) = 1.352, p = .260). Similarly, teacher morale shows no statistically significant difference across age groups (F (2, 289) = 2.931, p = .055), although the p-value approaches significance. This suggests that while teacher morale may vary slightly with age, neither ethical values nor morale differ significantly across different age groups in this sample.

Table: 3 Significance of Difference in School Teachers' Ethical Value and Teachers Morale with regard to Locality of the Residence

Variables	Locality of the Residence	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P value
Ethical Value	Between groups	223.941	2	111.971	1.618	0.200
	Within groups	20002.754	289	69.214		
	Total	20226.695	291			
Teachers Morale	Between groups	147.641	2	73.821	0.468	0.627
	Within groups	45603.027	289	157.796		
	Total	45750.668	291			

The ANOVA findings indicate that school teachers' ethical values do not significantly differ by locality of residence (F (2, 289) = 1.618, p = .200). Similarly, teacher morale is not significantly influenced by locality (F (2, 289) = 0.468, p = .627). This suggests that whether teachers reside in urban, semi-urban, or rural areas, their ethical orientations and morale levels remain largely consistent.

Table: 4 Significance of Difference in School Teachers' Ethical Value and Teachers Morale with regard to Nature of Administration

Variables	Nature of Administration	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P value
Ethical Value	Between groups	569.233	2	284.617	4.184	0.016
	Within groups	19657.462	289	68.019		
	Total	20226.695	291			
Teachers Morale	Between groups	955.847	2	477.924	3.083	0.047
	Within groups	44794.821	289	154.999		
	Total	45750.668	291			

The analysis reveals a significant difference in teachers' ethical values across different types of school administration (F(2, 289) = 4.184, p = .016). Similarly, teacher morale also significantly varies by the nature of administration (F(2, 289) = 3.083, p = .047). These findings indicate that the organizational structure and governance of schools (government, aided, or private) play a meaningful role in shaping both the ethical orientations and morale of teachers.

Table: 4(a) Post-hoc test for School Teachers Ethical Value with regard to Nature of Administration

Nature of Administration	N	Subset for alpha=0.05	
		Self-finance	Aided
Self-Finance	132	69.73	
Aided	71		72.46
Government	89		72.46

The post-hoc comparison indicates that teachers working in aided and government schools (M = 72.46) reported significantly higher ethical values than those in self-finance institutions (M = 69.73). However, there is no significant difference in ethical values between aided and government school teachers, as both fall into the same subset. This suggests that the type of school administration influences ethical orientation, with teachers in aided and government institutions showing stronger ethical values compared to those in self-financed schools.

Table: 5 Relationship between School Teachers' Ethical Value and Teachers Morale

Variables	N	Pearson Correlation	P value
Ethical Value and Teachers Morale	292	0.620	0.033

The results show a moderately strong positive correlation (r = 0.620, p = 0.033) between ethical values and teacher morale among school teachers. This indicates that teachers with higher ethical values are more likely to report higher morale in their profession. The statistically significant association suggests that ethical orientation plays a key role in sustaining teacher morale in school settings.

7. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the majority of school teachers reported neutral levels of ethical values (67.8%) and teacher morale (81.8%), whereas only a small percentage demonstrated high ethical values (15.8%) and morale (8.6%). A comparatively lower proportion of teachers exhibited low levels of ethical values (16.4%) and morale (9.6%). These results highlight a trend where most teachers sustain moderate ethical standards and morale but relatively few display either very strong or very weak orientations.

The predominance of neutral levels suggests that many teachers operate within a balanced yet unremarkable zone of ethical commitment and morale. This finding resonates with studies indicating that teachers in developing contexts often struggle to sustain high morale due to systemic challenges such as workload, lack of professional recognition, and limited institutional support (Kaur & Singh, 2022). Similarly, moderate ethical values may reflect the institutional culture and socio-economic context of Indian schools, where teachers strive to uphold professional codes but may face constraints in translating them into consistently high practice (Sharma, 2021).

Interestingly, the relatively small group of teachers reporting high ethical values and morale suggests that a portion of educators demonstrate a stronger professional commitment and intrinsic motivation. Prior research has shown that ethical sensitivity and moral responsibility are positively linked with professional satisfaction and resilience (Mishra & Dubey, 2020; Wang & Hall, 2023). These teachers may represent individuals who align their personal values with the ethical codes of teaching, thereby sustaining higher morale despite systemic challenges.

On the other hand, the small but significant proportion of teachers with low ethical values and morale is concerning, as previous studies demonstrate that diminished morale is often associated with burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and weaker student outcomes (Jalal & Yadav, 2021; Klassen & Durksen, 2023). Low ethical orientation among some teachers may also be indicative of ethical fatigue, where persistent institutional pressures reduce the capacity to uphold strong professional values. Moreover, the observed moderate to strong positive correlation between ethical values and teacher morale (r = 0.620, p = 0.033) underscores the interconnectedness of these constructs. Teachers who embrace higher ethical values tend to experience greater morale, a relationship supported by international studies highlighting the role of professional ethics as a buffer against occupational stress (Choi & Tang, 2022). This alignment also strengthens the argument that fostering ethical awareness and value-based training in teacher education can directly contribute to enhanced morale and professional well-being (Kundu & Rani, 2024). Taken together, the results suggest that teacher morale in Indian schools is neither at a crisis point nor at an optimal level—rather, it remains moderate, with significant room for policy and institutional interventions. Initiatives such as professional development workshops focused on value-based education, reflective practice, and ethical decision-making may help move more teachers from neutral to higher levels of ethical values and morale.

8. Educational Implications

The findings of this study hold significant implications for school management, policymakers, and teacher education programs in India.

Strengthening Ethical Orientation through Training: Since the majority of teachers reported only neutral levels of ethical values, there is a pressing need to embed ethics-based modules in teacher education programs. Continuous professional development workshops that focus on ethical decision-

making, classroom justice, fairness, and integrity can enhance teachers' ethical awareness and professional conduct (Kaur & Singh, 2022).

Enhancing Teacher Morale through Institutional Support: Teachers in government and aided institutions showed relatively higher morale compared to their counterparts in self-financing schools. This suggests that organizational culture, job security, and fair administrative practices are crucial in boosting morale. School leaders should cultivate an environment of recognition, participatory decision-making, and workload balance to sustain teacher enthusiasm and commitment (Choudhury & Alam, 2023).

Policy-Level Interventions: Educational policymakers must prioritize teacher well-being as a core component of quality education. Policies that ensure equitable pay scales, opportunities for professional growth, and supportive supervision can help enhance morale and reinforce ethical standards across different types of schools.

Integrating Ethics into Curriculum and Practice: Schools can incorporate value-based education programs, not only for students but also for teachers. Periodic reflection sessions, peer mentoring, and collaborative discussions on real-life ethical dilemmas in teaching may strengthen teachers' ethical values while promoting a shared moral culture within institutions (Rani & Thomas, 2024).

Linking Ethics and Morale to Student Outcomes: As the study found a significant positive relationship between ethical values and teacher morale, it is crucial to recognize that teachers' ethical behavior and morale directly influence student learning, motivation, and classroom climate. Therefore, improving these dimensions indirectly enhances student achievement and overall school effectiveness.

Need for Continuous Research and Monitoring: Regular assessment of teacher morale and ethical orientation should be institutionalized to identify areas of concern and track progress. Future studies using longitudinal and mixed-method approaches may provide deeper insights into how these constructs evolve and interact with broader educational reforms.

9. Conclusion
The present study examined the ethical values and morale of school teachers, revealing that the majority of participants demonstrated neutral levels of both ethical values (67.8%) and teacher morale (81.8%). Only a small proportion reflected high ethical values (15.8%) and morale (8.6%), while a similar minority reported low levels. This indicates that most teachers maintain moderate professional ethics and morale, though there is a clear need to strengthen these attributes at both institutional and systemic levels.

The analysis further highlighted that age and locality of residence did not significantly influence teachers' ethical values or morale, whereas the nature of school administration exerted a significant effect. Teachers working in government and aided schools reported relatively higher ethical values and morale than those in self-financing institutions. This finding underscores the role of administrative culture, leadership practices, and institutional support in shaping teachers' ethical commitment and morale. Moreover, the study established a positive and significant relationship between ethical values and teacher morale ($r = 0.620$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that educators who uphold stronger ethical standards also tend to experience higher morale. This reinforces the importance of ethical sensitization, professional value orientation, and reflective practices in fostering teacher well-being and effectiveness. In conclusion, while teachers generally maintain a balanced professional outlook, the limited proportion demonstrating high ethical values and morale points to the necessity of policy interventions, professional development programs, and supportive leadership aimed at cultivating stronger ethical awareness and sustaining morale. Future research may expand this inquiry by incorporating longitudinal and qualitative perspectives to better understand the dynamics between

teachers' ethical values, morale, and student outcomes.

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