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Structural Model of Categories Influencing the Design of an Ethical Leadership Model with Emphasis on Managers of Educational Organizations

ABSTRACT

Ethical leadership plays a significant and fundamental role in organizations and exerts profound and extensive effects on organizational culture, performance, and interpersonal relationships. Today, the influence of ethical leadership on various dimensions of organizational performance and employee behavior is undeniable. It should also be noted that ethical dilemmas constitute an inevitable element of managerial decision-making processes. Therefore, ethical leadership represents a fundamental organizational necessity, and attention to it is considered an essential requirement for organizational growth and development, particularly for organizations that prioritize continuous improvement and advancement. Ethical leadership is effectively realized within an organization when it is first implemented at the upper managerial levels, thereby encouraging subordinates to adhere to ethical leadership principles. The present study was conducted to examine and test a structural model of the categories influencing the design of an ethical leadership model for managers of educational organizations. In terms of purpose, the research is applied, and methodologically it adopts a quantitative approach with an exploratory design. Within this framework, the existing conditions were examined using a descriptive survey method. The statistical population consisted of managers of educational organizations in Tehran. Based on Cochran's formula, a sample size of 252 participants was determined, and sampling was conducted using purposive and snowball sampling methods. Model fit results obtained through AMOS and PLS software indicated that convergent validity was confirmed, and reliability was calculated and verified using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The examined structural model demonstrated satisfactory goodness of fit. Furthermore, the findings revealed that among contextual conditions, only contextual and intervening factors had a significant direct effect on interactional factors, whereas causal factors did not have a significant effect on interactional factors. In addition, the indirect effect of causal factors on outcome factors was not significant, while the indirect effects of intervening and contextual factors on outcome factors were statistically significant.

Keywords: Ethics, Ethical Leadership, Educational Organizations

Introduction

Ethical leadership has emerged as one of the most influential paradigms in contemporary organizational and educational management, reflecting a growing global emphasis on integrity, accountability, and value-based governance in complex institutional environments. Educational organizations, in particular, require leadership approaches that transcend administrative control and instead cultivate ethical awareness, professional responsibility, and sustainable organizational development. Ethical leadership refers to leaders' demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions, interpersonal

relationships, and decision-making processes that promote fairness, transparency, and moral responsibility within organizations (1). In modern educational systems characterized by rapid technological transformation, increased societal expectations, and organizational uncertainty, ethical leadership functions not only as a moral obligation but also as a strategic mechanism for improving institutional effectiveness and stakeholder trust. The growing importance of ethical leadership is closely associated with the need to prevent unethical behavior, reduce organizational misconduct, and reinforce positive organizational culture, particularly in environments where leadership decisions directly influence human development and social values (2).

Theoretical developments in leadership research demonstrate that ethical leadership integrates elements of transformational, servant, and value-oriented leadership models while emphasizing accountability and moral reasoning. Ethical leaders shape organizational climates by fostering fairness, open communication, and shared responsibility, thereby strengthening organizational commitment and reducing resistance to change (3). Ethical leadership also contributes to employees' psychological engagement and creative performance through supportive social exchange relationships and ethical role modeling (4). These mechanisms are particularly relevant in educational institutions, where leadership behaviors influence teachers' motivation, students' learning environments, and institutional legitimacy. Research has shown that ethical leadership strengthens job performance and self-efficacy among educators, indicating that leadership ethics directly affect teaching quality and educational outcomes (5). Consequently, ethical leadership is increasingly viewed as a foundational component of effective educational governance rather than a complementary managerial attribute.

Organizational ethics literature highlights the importance of ethical climate as a mediating mechanism linking leadership behavior to organizational outcomes. Ethical leaders establish shared norms that guide decision-making processes, promote organizational justice, and reinforce ethical accountability among employees (6). Ethical climates foster cooperation, trust, and social responsibility, which are essential for teamwork effectiveness and collective organizational functioning (7). Meta-analytic evidence suggests that ethical climate theory explains how organizational values are internalized by members and translated into behavioral standards affecting performance and organizational sustainability (8). Within educational settings, ethical climates significantly influence teachers' attendance behavior, professional commitment, and institutional loyalty, illustrating the central role of leadership ethics in maintaining organizational stability (9). Therefore, ethical leadership must be understood not merely as an individual leadership trait but as a systemic organizational phenomenon embedded in institutional culture and practices.

In addition to shaping organizational climate, ethical leadership contributes to individual-level outcomes such as job satisfaction, motivation, and professional well-being. Studies demonstrate that ethical leadership enhances affective commitment and strengthens emotional attachment between employees and organizations by fostering fairness and respect (10). Ethical leadership practices also reduce knowledge-hiding behaviors and encourage knowledge sharing through psychological ownership and trust-building mechanisms (11). Organizational reward systems and motivational structures further reinforce ethical leadership outcomes by aligning employee performance with organizational ethical standards (12). Research in public and educational organizations confirms that ethical leadership promotes organizational agility and transparency, enabling institutions to respond effectively to environmental challenges while maintaining ethical integrity (13). These findings suggest that ethical leadership operates simultaneously at individual, relational, and organizational levels, generating multidimensional benefits for institutional performance.

Educational organizations face unique ethical challenges because leaders must balance administrative efficiency with educational equity, moral responsibility, and social accountability. Ethical decision-making in educational leadership requires continuous interpretation of ethical dilemmas involving students, teachers, families, and policy stakeholders. Contemporary leadership models emphasize ethical reasoning frameworks that guide administrators in navigating complex moral situations

while maintaining professional integrity (14). Recent developments in educational leadership research have introduced structured ethical decision-making frameworks aimed at improving administrators' sensemaking capabilities and engagement in ethical judgments (15). Similarly, servant leadership perspectives highlight ethical responsibility as the foundation of effective leadership, emphasizing service, empathy, and collective well-being as central leadership values (16). These perspectives reinforce the idea that ethical leadership is not limited to compliance with rules but involves active moral agency and reflective leadership practice.

The rapid transformation of educational systems has intensified the need for ethical leadership models tailored specifically to educational contexts. Advances in educational management research indicate that future-oriented leadership models must integrate ethical dimensions with innovation, learning development, and institutional adaptability (17). Grounded theory studies in higher education management further emphasize the necessity of ethically oriented management models that align employee development, organizational learning, and leadership ethics (18). Ethical leadership also contributes to organizational learning processes by encouraging purposeful organizational forgetting and continuous knowledge renewal, allowing institutions to adapt ethically to changing environments (19). Dynamic organizational training models similarly highlight ethical leadership as a critical driver of professional development and institutional capacity building within educational systems (20). These developments demonstrate that ethical leadership is increasingly linked to organizational innovation and sustainable educational reform.

Contemporary empirical studies increasingly focus on identifying the structural components and contextual conditions influencing ethical leadership effectiveness. Meta-synthesis research has identified multiple dimensions of ethical leadership in schools, including ethical awareness, professional responsibility, organizational justice, and moral modeling (21). Leadership supervision models in primary education emphasize ethical competence as a core dimension of instructional leadership and educational governance (22). Furthermore, ethical leadership behaviors significantly influence school organizational climate by promoting collaboration, trust, and shared ethical values among educational stakeholders (23). Longitudinal studies demonstrate that leadership approaches grounded in ethical and servant leadership principles contribute to sustained organizational responsibility and legal accountability over time (24). These findings highlight the necessity of developing integrated structural models capable of explaining how different organizational factors collectively shape ethical leadership outcomes.

Despite extensive research on ethical leadership, significant gaps remain regarding the interaction among causal, contextual, and intervening organizational factors influencing ethical leadership development in educational organizations. Previous studies have often examined isolated dimensions such as ethical climate, leadership behavior, or organizational outcomes without providing a comprehensive structural framework integrating multiple categories simultaneously. Early research emphasized ethical responsibility and social accountability in higher education institutions, highlighting the importance of structured evaluation models for organizational ethics (25). Later investigations demonstrated that leadership ethics influence employee commitment and organizational effectiveness through complex relational mechanisms rather than simple direct relationships (26). More recent research underscores the need to conceptualize ethical leadership as a dynamic system shaped by internal organizational processes, external environmental pressures, and interpersonal interactions among organizational members (27). Such perspectives call for structural modeling approaches capable of capturing both direct and indirect pathways influencing ethical leadership effectiveness.

Moreover, organizational performance and employee commitment outcomes are closely linked to ethical leadership through psychological and motivational mechanisms. Ethical leadership strengthens job satisfaction and emotional attachment, which in turn enhance employees' commitment to organizational goals and ethical standards (28). Leadership ethics also mitigate

dysfunctional organizational behaviors and reduce personality-related risks associated with unethical financial or administrative practices (2). In educational institutions, where leaders play a critical role in shaping professional identity and ethical culture, leadership behavior directly influences institutional credibility and social legitimacy. Consequently, identifying the structural relationships among leadership determinants, interactional mechanisms, and organizational outcomes becomes essential for designing effective ethical leadership models suited to educational organizations.

Given the increasing complexity of educational administration, globalization of educational standards, and heightened societal expectations regarding transparency and accountability, there is a pressing need for empirically validated models that explain how ethical leadership emerges within organizational systems. Integrating insights from leadership theory, organizational ethics, educational management, and social exchange perspectives provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding ethical leadership as a multidimensional construct shaped by causal conditions, contextual environments, intervening organizational mechanisms, interactional dynamics, and outcome consequences. Such an integrated approach enables educational organizations to move beyond normative discussions of ethics toward evidence-based leadership development strategies capable of sustaining ethical performance and institutional excellence. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to design and test a structural model of the categories influencing the development of an ethical leadership pattern with emphasis on managers of educational organizations.

Methods and Materials

The present study was conducted within an applied research framework using a quantitative approach with an exploratory design aimed at developing and testing a structural model of the categories influencing the design of an ethical leadership model among managers of educational organizations. The research employed a descriptive survey methodology to examine existing organizational conditions and to analyze the relationships among latent variables associated with ethical leadership. The statistical population consisted of managers working in educational organizations located in Tehran during the period of data collection. Participants included senior managers, middle-level administrators, and executive educational leaders who possessed direct managerial responsibilities and practical experience in organizational decision-making processes. The sample size was determined using Cochran's sample size estimation formula, resulting in a final sample of 252 participants considered sufficient for structural equation modeling and multivariate statistical analysis. Sampling was conducted through purposive selection followed by a snowball sampling technique, whereby initially identified qualified participants introduced other eligible managers meeting the inclusion criteria. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the objectives of the research, confidentiality of responses, and exclusive academic use of collected data. Inclusion criteria required participants to have managerial experience within educational institutions and familiarity with organizational leadership practices, ensuring that responses reflected informed professional perspectives relevant to ethical leadership development.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on theoretical foundations of ethical leadership and prior conceptual models addressing organizational leadership, ethical decision-making, and managerial effectiveness. The instrument was designed to measure multiple categories influencing ethical leadership model design, including causal factors, contextual conditions, intervening factors, interactional factors, and outcome-related variables. Questionnaire items were formulated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, allowing respondents to express degrees of agreement regarding leadership behaviors, organizational contexts, ethical practices, and managerial interactions. Content validity of the instrument was established through expert evaluation involving university faculty members and specialists in educational management and organizational leadership who reviewed the items for conceptual clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. Construct validity was examined through convergent validity assessment within the structural equation

modeling framework. Reliability of the measurement instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which confirmed internal consistency across all dimensions of the questionnaire. Prior to final distribution, a pilot assessment was conducted to ensure clarity of wording, appropriateness of item structure, and adequacy of response options, thereby enhancing measurement accuracy and minimizing potential response bias.

Data analysis was performed using structural equation modeling techniques to examine both measurement and structural components of the proposed model. Initially, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize demographic characteristics of participants and to assess the distributional properties of observed variables. Measurement model evaluation included assessment of reliability, convergent validity, and factor loadings to confirm the adequacy of latent constructs. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to verify internal consistency reliability, while convergent validity indices confirmed the adequacy of relationships between observed indicators and their respective constructs. Subsequently, structural model analysis was conducted to test hypothesized relationships among causal, contextual, intervening, interactional, and outcome factors influencing ethical leadership design. Model estimation and goodness-of-fit evaluation were performed using AMOS and Partial Least Squares (PLS) software environments, allowing simultaneous examination of direct and indirect effects among latent variables. Standard fit indices were considered to determine overall model adequacy, and path coefficients were evaluated for statistical significance to identify meaningful structural relationships. The analytical procedure enabled comprehensive assessment of both direct and mediated pathways within the ethical leadership framework, thereby providing empirical validation for the proposed structural model.

Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the participants indicated that among the 248 respondents, 144 individuals (58.1%) were male and 101 (40.7%) were female, while 3 participants (1.2%) did not report their gender. In terms of age distribution, most participants were between 30 and 39 years old ($n = 90$, 36.3%), followed by those aged 40 to 49 years ($n = 86$, 34.7%), participants aged 20 to 29 years ($n = 34$, 13.7%), and individuals aged 50 to 59 years ($n = 33$, 13.3%); only 3 respondents (1.2%) were older than 60 years, and 2 participants (0.8%) did not report their age. Regarding professional work experience, the majority of participants had more than 10 years of professional employment ($n = 150$, 60.5%), while 70 individuals (28.2%) reported 10 to 40 years of experience and 24 participants (9.7%) had between 1 and 3 years of experience; 4 respondents (1.6%) did not provide this information. Concerning educational attainment, most respondents held a master's degree ($n = 115$, 46.4%), followed by bachelor's degree holders ($n = 88$, 35.5%) and doctoral degree holders ($n = 41$, 16.5%), whereas 4 participants (1.6%) did not indicate their education level. With respect to occupational position, the largest group consisted of instructors or lecturers ($n = 108$, 43.5%), followed by managerial or deputy managerial staff ($n = 72$, 29.0%), administrative employees ($n = 51$, 20.6%), retirees ($n = 6$, 2.4%), workers ($n = 4$, 1.6%), students ($n = 3$, 1.2%), homemakers ($n = 2$, 0.8%), and self-employed individuals ($n = 1$, 0.4%), while one respondent (0.4%) did not report occupational status.

Table 1. Factor Loadings of the Categories Influencing Ethical Leadership Model Design

Main Category	Subcategory / Indicator	Factor Loading
Causal Factors	Ethical Justice Orientation	0.82
	Occupational Well-Being	0.79
	Establishment of Ethical Principles	0.86
	Meritocracy	0.84
	Honest Service Delivery	0.81
	Organizational Performance	0.78
	Facilities and Equipment	0.74
	Organizational Identity	0.83

	Development of Ethical Awareness	0.87
	Ethical Competitiveness	0.76
	Formulation of Ethical Regulations	0.85
	Ethical Strategy Development	0.88
	Organizational Capacity Enhancement	0.80
	Human Identity Development	0.77
	Accessibility of Essential Information	0.73
	Ethical Attitude	0.86
	Ethical Role Modeling	0.89
	Ethical Decision-Making	0.91
	Organizational Support	0.78
	Individual Self-Awareness	0.84
	Mutual Cooperation	0.80
	Mutual Respect	0.82
	Resolution of Ethical Dilemmas	0.87
Intervening Factors	Centralization Barriers	0.75
	Weak Organizational Mental Health	0.77
	Fragmented Perspective	0.73
	Lack of Merit Orientation	0.81
	Personal Deviations	0.70
	Improper Decision-Making	0.79
	Ethical Framework Development	0.86
	Continuous Learning	0.88
	Healthy Communication	0.84
	Dynamic Evaluation	0.83
	Goal-Oriented Planning	0.85
	Organizational Competency Development	0.87
	Individual Skill Enhancement	0.82
	Ethical Meetings	0.78
	Research Knowledge Development	0.80
Contextual Factors	Technological Conditions	0.76
	Occupational Conditions	0.81
	Organizational Conditions	0.85
	Ethical Conditions	0.88
	Individual Conditions	0.83
Interactional Factors	Personal Interaction Dimension	0.84
	Organizational Interaction Dimension	0.86
	Occupational Interaction Dimension	0.80
	Ethical Interaction Dimension	0.89
Outcome Factors	Internal Outcomes (Process, Legal, Structural, Normative, Equipment-Based)	0.90
	External Outcomes (Economic, Geographical, Communication, Legal, Political, Technological, Cultural, Religious)	0.87

The results of the measurement model evaluation demonstrated that all indicators exhibited acceptable and strong factor loadings, confirming the adequacy of the construct measurement structure. Factor loadings across the five principal categories ranged from 0.70 to 0.91, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.50 and indicating satisfactory indicator reliability. Within the causal factors dimension, ethical decision-making, ethical role modeling, and ethical strategy development showed the highest loadings, highlighting their central importance in shaping ethical leadership among managers of educational organizations. Intervening factors revealed strong contributions from continuous learning, organizational competency development, and healthy communication, suggesting that organizational facilitation mechanisms significantly strengthen ethical leadership processes, while structural barriers such as centralization and improper decision-making also demonstrated meaningful explanatory power. Contextual factors showed particularly high loadings for ethical and organizational conditions, emphasizing the importance of organizational climate and ethical environment as foundational contexts for leadership development. Interactional factors presented strong loadings across personal, occupational, organizational, and ethical

interaction dimensions, confirming that ethical leadership emerges through dynamic relational processes rather than solely individual traits. Finally, outcome factors demonstrated high loadings for both internal and external consequences, indicating that ethical leadership influences not only internal organizational structures, norms, and processes but also broader economic, cultural, technological, and societal dimensions. Overall, the measurement model exhibited strong construct validity, supporting the suitability of the identified categories for explaining and operationalizing the ethical leadership model in educational organizations.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Causal Conditions	110.10	10.03	45.00	120.00
Intervening Conditions	63.65	5.93	42.00	70.00
Contextual Conditions	22.68	2.26	15.00	25.00
Interactional Factors	58.36	6.60	36.00	65.00
Outcome Factors	18.21	2.22	5.00	20.00

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to examine the central tendency and dispersion of the main research variables related to the ethical leadership model. The findings indicated that causal conditions obtained the highest mean score ($M = 110.10$, $SD = 10.03$), suggesting that participants perceived causal dimensions—such as ethical principles, organizational identity, and ethical decision-making—as highly influential factors in the development of ethical leadership. Intervening conditions showed a relatively high mean ($M = 63.65$, $SD = 5.93$), reflecting the significant role of organizational facilitators and barriers in shaping leadership processes. Contextual conditions demonstrated a moderate mean level ($M = 22.68$, $SD = 2.26$), indicating that environmental and organizational contexts provided a relatively stable background influencing leadership behavior. Interactional factors also presented a considerable average score ($M = 58.36$, $SD = 6.60$), highlighting the importance of interpersonal, occupational, and ethical interactions in managerial leadership practices. Outcome factors reported the lowest mean ($M = 18.21$, $SD = 2.22$), although scores remained close to the upper range of the measurement scale, suggesting generally positive perceived consequences of ethical leadership implementation. Overall, the relatively moderate standard deviations across variables indicate acceptable variability among responses and suggest homogeneity in participants' perceptions regarding the components of ethical leadership within educational organizations.

Table 3. Normality Assessment of Research Variables

Variable	Test Statistic	Significance Level	Result
Causal Conditions	0.16	0.000	Non-normal
Intervening Conditions	0.14	0.000	Non-normal
Contextual Conditions	0.16	0.000	Non-normal
Interactional Factors	0.16	0.000	Non-normal

The normality of the research variables was examined prior to conducting inferential statistical analyses to determine the suitability of parametric modeling techniques. The results indicated that all examined variables, including causal conditions, intervening conditions, contextual conditions, and interactional factors, deviated significantly from a normal distribution. The obtained significance levels for all variables were less than 0.05 ($p = 0.000$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis of normality. Test statistics ranged between 0.14 and 0.16, confirming the presence of distributional non-normality across the dataset. These findings suggest that the data did not meet the assumption of multivariate normality commonly required for covariance-based estimation methods. Consequently, the use of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is robust to non-normal data distributions, was considered appropriate for subsequent analyses. The results

therefore justified the selection of variance-based modeling procedures for evaluating the structural relationships among the components of the ethical leadership model.

Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability Coefficients

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Interactional Factors	13	0.93	0.94
Contextual Conditions	5	0.78	0.84
Causal Conditions	24	0.94	0.94
Intervening Conditions	14	0.91	0.92
Outcome Factors	4	0.78	0.86

The reliability of the research constructs was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability indices to assess internal consistency and measurement stability. The results demonstrated that all constructs achieved acceptable reliability levels, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Interactional factors showed a high level of internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93 and a composite reliability coefficient of 0.94, indicating strong homogeneity among measurement items. Causal conditions also exhibited excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.94$; CR = 0.94), reflecting the robustness of indicators measuring foundational ethical leadership determinants. Intervening conditions achieved similarly strong reliability values ($\alpha = 0.91$; CR = 0.92), confirming consistent measurement of organizational facilitators and barriers. Contextual conditions and outcome factors demonstrated satisfactory reliability levels, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.78 and composite reliability coefficients of 0.84 and 0.86, respectively, indicating acceptable internal coherence despite having fewer items. Overall, the findings confirm that all measurement constructs possess adequate reliability and are appropriate for subsequent structural equation modeling analysis.

The goodness-of-fit indices indicated that the proposed structural model demonstrated an acceptable and satisfactory level of overall fit. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value was calculated as 0.049, which falls below the recommended threshold of 0.08, confirming a low level of residual error between the observed and estimated covariance matrices. Additionally, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) obtained a value of 0.97, exceeding the acceptable benchmark of 0.90 and indicating a very strong model fit compared to the null model. Collectively, these indices confirm that the structural model adequately represents the empirical data and supports the validity of the proposed ethical leadership framework in educational organizations.

Table 5. Standardized Path Coefficients and t-Statistics in the Structural Model

Relationship	Standardized Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Statistic	Significance Level
Contextual Conditions → Interactional Factors	0.35	0.11	3.15	0.002
Causal Conditions → Interactional Factors	0.23	0.12	1.76	0.08
Intervening Conditions → Interactional Factors	0.35	0.08	4.20	0.000
Interactional Factors → Outcome Factors	0.75	0.04	21.04	0.000

The structural model analysis examined the direct relationships among contextual, causal, intervening, interactional, and outcome factors within the ethical leadership framework. The findings indicated that contextual conditions had a significant positive effect on interactional factors ($\beta = 0.35$, $t = 3.15$, $p = 0.002$), demonstrating that organizational and environmental contexts play an important role in shaping ethical interactions among managers. Similarly, intervening conditions showed a significant positive influence on interactional factors ($\beta = 0.35$, $t = 4.20$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that organizational facilitators and barriers substantially affect leadership interactions. In contrast, causal conditions did not exert a statistically significant effect on interactional factors ($\beta = 0.23$, $t = 1.76$, $p = 0.08$), indicating that foundational ethical determinants alone were

insufficient to directly predict interactional dynamics. The strongest relationship in the model was observed between interactional factors and outcome factors ($\beta = 0.75$, $t = 21.04$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that ethical leadership outcomes largely emerge through interactional processes within educational organizations.

Table 6. Standardized Coefficients and t-Statistics for Indirect Relationships

Relationship	Standardized Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Statistic	Significance Level
Causal Conditions → Interactional Factors → Outcome Factors	0.16	0.09	1.71	0.09
Intervening Conditions → Interactional Factors → Outcome Factors	0.26	0.06	3.98	0.000
Contextual Conditions → Interactional Factors → Outcome Factors	0.24	0.08	3.13	0.002

The analysis of indirect effects evaluated the mediating role of interactional factors in transmitting the influence of different conditional variables to outcome factors. The results revealed that the indirect effect of causal conditions on outcome factors through interactional factors was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.16$, $t = 1.71$, $p = 0.09$), indicating that causal dimensions did not meaningfully influence outcomes via interactional mechanisms. Conversely, intervening conditions demonstrated a significant indirect effect on outcome factors mediated by interactional factors ($\beta = 0.26$, $t = 3.98$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting the importance of organizational facilitation mechanisms in producing ethical leadership outcomes. Likewise, contextual conditions showed a significant indirect relationship with outcome factors through interactional factors ($\beta = 0.24$, $t = 3.13$, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that organizational context contributes to ethical leadership effectiveness primarily through enhancing interactional processes. Overall, these findings confirm the mediating role of interactional factors as a central mechanism linking organizational conditions to the outcomes of ethical leadership in educational organizations.

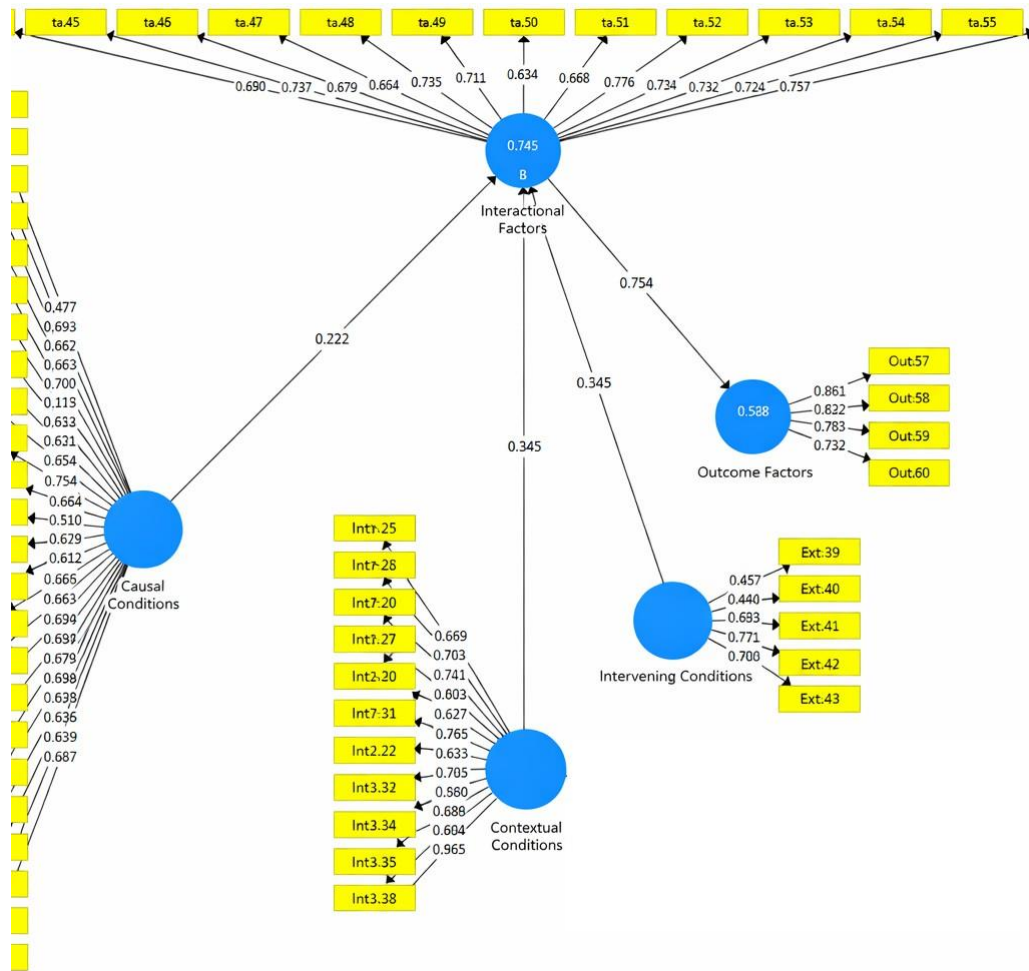


Figure 1. Model with Beta Values

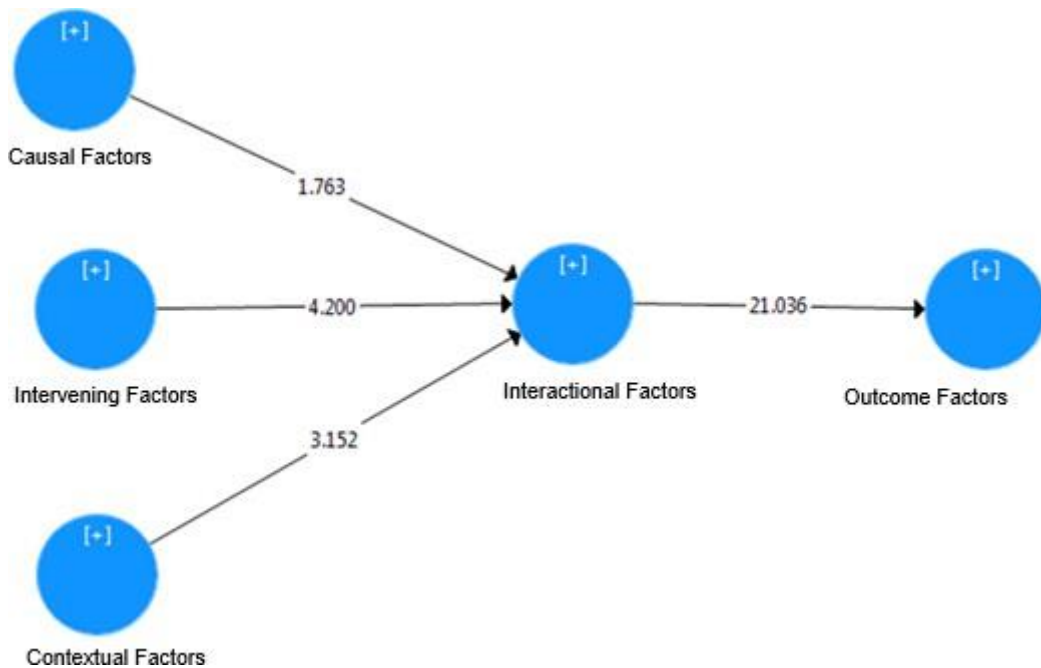


Figure 2. Model with T-Values

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study provide empirical support for a multidimensional structural model explaining the formation of ethical leadership in educational organizations through the interaction of causal, contextual, intervening, interactional, and outcome factors. The results indicated that contextual and intervening conditions exerted significant direct effects on interactional factors, whereas causal conditions did not demonstrate a statistically significant direct influence. Furthermore, interactional factors showed a strong and significant impact on outcome factors, and mediation analysis confirmed that contextual and intervening conditions affected outcomes indirectly through interactional mechanisms. These findings suggest that ethical leadership within educational organizations emerges less from isolated ethical attributes and more from dynamic organizational processes and relational interactions embedded within institutional environments.

The significant effect of contextual conditions on interactional factors highlights the decisive role of organizational climate, institutional culture, and environmental readiness in shaping ethical leadership practices. Educational organizations operate within complex socio-cultural and structural contexts, and leadership behaviors are strongly influenced by organizational norms, ethical expectations, and institutional infrastructures. Prior research confirms that ethical leadership is closely linked to organizational climate and collective values, which serve as the foundation for ethical behavior and collaboration among staff members (23). Similarly, ethical climate theory suggests that contextual conditions determine how ethical norms are interpreted and enacted within organizations, influencing cooperation, trust, and ethical engagement among employees (8). The present findings therefore reinforce the argument that ethical leadership is not merely a personal leadership characteristic but rather an outcome of contextual alignment between organizational structures and ethical expectations.

The significant influence of intervening conditions on interactional factors further emphasizes the importance of organizational facilitators and barriers in the operationalization of ethical leadership. Intervening factors such as organizational learning, communication quality, competency development, and ethical frameworks appear to function as enabling mechanisms that translate ethical intentions into observable leadership practices. Studies have demonstrated that ethical leadership promotes knowledge sharing and reduces counterproductive organizational behaviors when supported by organizational systems that encourage trust and transparency (11). Likewise, ethical leadership strengthens employee engagement and creativity through supportive environments characterized by collaboration and continuous learning (4). The present results extend these findings by demonstrating that ethical leadership effectiveness depends largely on organizational processes that mediate between ethical principles and everyday managerial interactions.

In contrast, the absence of a significant direct relationship between causal conditions and interactional factors suggests that ethical values or leadership intentions alone are insufficient to shape organizational interactions unless supported by contextual and structural mechanisms. This finding aligns with research indicating that ethical leadership requires institutional reinforcement rather than reliance solely on individual moral traits (1). Ethical leaders may possess strong ethical orientations; however, without organizational support systems, ethical norms may fail to translate into collaborative behavior or organizational change. Previous studies have shown that leadership ethics influence organizational outcomes primarily through mediated processes involving ethical climate and organizational practices rather than direct behavioral transmission (26). Thus, the results of this study confirm the systemic nature of ethical leadership development.

The strong relationship observed between interactional factors and outcome factors represents one of the most important contributions of the study. Interactional dimensions—including mutual respect, cooperation, ethical communication, and collaborative decision-making—served as the central mechanism through which ethical leadership generated organizational consequences. Ethical leadership outcomes such as organizational identity, ethical awareness, performance improvement, and

institutional credibility appear to arise through interpersonal exchanges and shared ethical experiences rather than hierarchical authority alone. These findings are consistent with social exchange perspectives emphasizing that ethical leadership fosters reciprocal trust and commitment among organizational members (3). Moreover, ethical leadership has been shown to enhance affective organizational commitment and strengthen employees' emotional attachment to institutions through ethical relational practices (10). Therefore, interactional processes can be considered the operational core of ethical leadership effectiveness.

The mediation results further clarified the mechanisms underlying ethical leadership formation. Contextual and intervening factors indirectly influenced outcome variables through interactional factors, confirming the mediating role of organizational relationships in translating structural conditions into measurable organizational results. This finding supports earlier research demonstrating that ethical leadership shapes organizational performance through intermediate processes such as organizational learning, engagement, and ethical climate development (19). Ethical leadership also contributes to reduced resistance to organizational change when supported by commitment-based human resource practices and relational trust (3). Consequently, ethical leadership outcomes should be understood as emergent phenomena resulting from continuous interaction among leaders, employees, and organizational systems.

The descriptive findings indicating relatively high mean scores across all variables suggest that managers of educational organizations recognize the importance of ethical leadership and perceive ethical practices as integral to organizational functioning. Educational environments inherently demand moral accountability because leadership decisions influence not only administrative performance but also student development and societal values. Ethical leadership strengthens teachers' professional self-efficacy and job performance, thereby improving educational effectiveness (5). Furthermore, organizational transparency and agility have been associated with ethical leadership styles that promote accountability and responsiveness in educational institutions (13). These convergent findings reinforce the relevance of ethical leadership models specifically tailored to educational organizations.

The reliability and measurement validity results obtained in this study further support the robustness of the proposed structural model. High reliability coefficients and satisfactory model fit indices confirm that ethical leadership can be empirically operationalized through identifiable organizational categories. Recent meta-synthesis research similarly emphasizes that ethical leadership in schools comprises interconnected dimensions involving ethical awareness, responsibility, professional competence, and organizational justice (21). The alignment between empirical findings and theoretical frameworks strengthens confidence in the structural approach adopted in this research.

The present study also contributes to contemporary discussions on future-oriented leadership in education. Ethical leadership has increasingly been viewed as a prerequisite for sustainable educational reform, innovation, and institutional resilience. Futuristic leadership models emphasize the integration of ethics with strategic foresight, organizational learning, and adaptive management capabilities (17). Ethical leadership enables educational organizations to navigate complex technological and social transformations while preserving moral integrity and public trust. Additionally, servant leadership perspectives highlight ethical responsibility as the foundation of effective leadership and sustainable organizational success (16). The findings of this study therefore provide empirical evidence supporting emerging leadership paradigms that prioritize ethical governance in education.

Another important implication of the findings concerns ethical decision-making processes among educational leaders. Ethical leadership frameworks grounded in reflective decision-making enhance leaders' capacity to interpret ethical dilemmas and balance competing organizational demands (14). Contemporary models such as the SEED framework emphasize sensemaking and ethical engagement as essential competencies for educational administrators facing complex institutional

challenges (15). The strong mediating role of interactional factors observed in this study confirms that ethical decisions become effective only when embedded within collaborative organizational relationships.

Overall, the discussion of findings indicates that ethical leadership in educational organizations should be conceptualized as a systemic and relational phenomenon shaped by contextual readiness, organizational facilitation mechanisms, and interpersonal dynamics. Ethical leadership outcomes are not produced solely by ethical intentions or leadership personality traits but emerge from the alignment of organizational structures, ethical climates, and collaborative interactions. This integrated perspective advances existing literature by providing empirical evidence for a structural model that explains how ethical leadership develops and operates within educational systems.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research relied on self-reported questionnaire data, which may introduce response bias and limit the objectivity of participants' perceptions regarding ethical leadership practices. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer causal relationships over time, as ethical leadership development is inherently dynamic and may evolve through longitudinal organizational processes. Third, the study focused exclusively on educational organizations within a single metropolitan context, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other cultural, institutional, or national settings. Additionally, organizational variables were examined at an aggregate level, and individual psychological variables influencing ethical leadership behaviors were not directly assessed.

Future studies are encouraged to adopt longitudinal research designs to examine how ethical leadership evolves across different stages of organizational development and educational reform. Comparative studies across diverse educational systems and cultural contexts would provide deeper insight into contextual influences shaping ethical leadership models. Researchers may also integrate qualitative approaches such as interviews or case studies to explore leaders' lived experiences and ethical decision-making processes in greater depth. Examining additional mediating variables, including organizational trust, emotional intelligence, and leadership identity, could further refine structural models of ethical leadership. Moreover, future research may investigate the impact of digital transformation, artificial intelligence integration, and hybrid learning environments on ethical leadership practices within educational organizations.

Educational policymakers and administrators should prioritize the institutionalization of ethical leadership through structured training programs, ethical guidelines, and leadership development initiatives. Organizations can strengthen ethical leadership by fostering open communication, collaborative decision-making, and continuous professional learning environments that reinforce ethical awareness among managers and staff. Establishing transparent evaluation systems and ethical accountability mechanisms can enhance organizational trust and reinforce ethical behavior across institutional levels. Educational leaders should actively promote participatory leadership practices that encourage mutual respect, cooperation, and ethical dialogue among stakeholders. Finally, integrating ethical leadership principles into organizational strategy and policy design can contribute to sustainable institutional development, improved organizational performance, and strengthened public confidence in educational systems.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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