

Research Paper

## Ethical Values as Predictors of Teachers' Morale and Burnout: An Empirical Study among School Teachers

K. Chandrakala<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. K. Dhanalakshmi<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Teaching is an inherently value-oriented profession that requires sustained emotional engagement, ethical judgment, and professional commitment. In recent years, increasing occupational demands have contributed to declining morale and rising burnout among school teachers, raising concerns about teacher wellbeing and sustainability in the profession. Ethical values, which guide teachers' professional conduct and decision making, may serve as important psychological resources that influence teachers' morale and vulnerability to burnout. The present study examined ethical values as predictors of teachers' morale and burnout among school educators. A quantitative descriptive survey design was employed, and data were collected from 420 secondary school teachers selected through stratified random sampling. Standardized instruments were used to measure ethical values, teachers' morale, and burnout. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's product moment correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that teachers demonstrated high levels of ethical values, moderate to high morale, and moderate levels of burnout. Ethical values were found to have a significant positive relationship with teachers' morale and a significant negative relationship with teacher burnout. Further, regression analysis indicated that ethical values significantly predicted both teachers' morale and burnout, explaining a meaningful proportion of variance in these outcomes. The study highlights the importance of strengthening ethical values and ethical practices within educational institutions to enhance teachers' professional wellbeing, reduce burnout, and promote sustainable teaching environments.

**Keywords:** *Ethical Values, Teachers' Morale, Teacher Burnout, Professional Ethics, Teacher Wellbeing*

Teaching is a moral and value-oriented profession that extends beyond academic instruction to include the social, emotional, and ethical development of students. In contemporary educational systems, teachers are required to manage expanding instructional roles alongside administrative responsibilities, accountability pressures, and changing societal expectations. These growing demands have intensified concerns regarding teachers' morale and professional burnout.

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D Scholar, Department of Education, Periyar University, Salem-636011, Tamil Nadu.

<sup>2</sup>Professor and Head, Department of Education, Periyar University, Salem-636011, Tamil Nadu.

\*Corresponding Author

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Teachers' morale reflects their enthusiasm, motivation, confidence, and professional satisfaction. High morale is associated with effective teaching, positive classroom climate, and sustained professional commitment, whereas low morale is linked to disengagement, absenteeism, and reduced instructional quality. Recent studies indicate that many teachers report declining morale, particularly in post-pandemic contexts characterized by increased workload and role expansion (Pressley, 2023).

Alongside declining morale, teacher burnout has become a widespread occupational concern. Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, and it poses serious risks to teachers' mental health and professional effectiveness (Pakdee et al., 2025). Prolonged burnout undermines teachers' emotional engagement and sense of purpose in their work.

While organizational factors influencing morale and burnout have been widely examined, increasing attention is being directed toward internal psychological resources that support teachers' coping and resilience. Ethical values, including integrity, responsibility, fairness, and commitment to learners' welfare, represent an important yet underexplored resource. Recent research suggests that strong ethical orientations are associated with higher job satisfaction and better psychological wellbeing among teachers (Borrelli, 2025).

Despite their importance, ethical values have received limited empirical attention as individual-level predictors of teachers' morale and burnout. Therefore, the present study examines ethical values as predictors of teachers' morale and burnout among school educators, aiming to provide insights that can inform value-based practices in teacher education, school leadership, and educational policy.

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of related literature is organized thematically to present empirical evidence on teachers' morale, teacher burnout, and the role of ethical values and ethical climate in shaping teachers' psychological wellbeing.

#### *Studies on Teachers' Morale*

Teachers' morale has been widely examined as a crucial determinant of instructional quality, professional commitment, and organizational effectiveness. Recent empirical studies indicate that teachers' morale is closely associated with job satisfaction, professional identity, and emotional wellbeing. Pressley (2023) conducted a large-scale quantitative study among school teachers and reported that nearly one-third of educators experienced low morale, primarily due to increased workload, emotional strain, and role ambiguity. The study emphasized that morale is a critical psychological indicator of teacher sustainability.

Similarly, Kim and Asbury (2024) examined teachers' morale in post-pandemic schooling contexts and found that emotional demands and perceived lack of institutional support significantly predicted lower morale. Teachers who reported a strong sense of professional purpose and value alignment with their schools demonstrated comparatively higher morale levels. These findings suggest that morale is not solely influenced by external conditions but also by internal meaning-making processes.

A study by Wang, Hall, and Rahimi (2024) explored the motivational foundations of teachers' morale and found that intrinsic motivation and professional values significantly

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contributed to higher morale. Teachers who perceived teaching as a morally meaningful profession reported greater enthusiasm and confidence in their roles. The authors highlighted the importance of values-driven motivation in sustaining positive professional attitudes.

### ***Studies on Teacher Burnout***

Teacher burnout has been extensively studied as a psychological response to prolonged occupational stress. Burnout is consistently linked with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2021) reported that emotional exhaustion remains the most dominant dimension of burnout among school teachers, driven by workload pressure and emotional labor.

Recent evidence continues to confirm the widespread prevalence of burnout. Pakdee et al. (2025) conducted a cross-sectional study among educators and found that high job demands and low psychological resources significantly increased burnout risk. The study also emphasized that burnout negatively affected teachers' engagement, wellbeing, and professional efficacy.

In another study, García-Carmona, Marín, and Aguayo (2022) examined burnout among secondary school teachers and reported that teachers experiencing chronic stress exhibited higher depersonalization and lower personal accomplishment. The authors noted that burnout not only affects teachers' mental health but also diminishes their capacity to maintain positive teacher–student relationships.

Further, a meta-analytic review by Madigan and Kim (2021) demonstrated that teacher burnout is significantly associated with reduced instructional quality and increased intention to leave the profession. The findings reinforce the urgency of identifying protective psychological factors that can mitigate burnout.

### ***Studies on Ethical Values and Ethical Climate in Education***

Ethical values and ethical climate have gained increasing attention as important contextual and psychological variables influencing teachers' wellbeing. Ethical values are often examined through the lens of ethical leadership, ethical school climate, and professional ethics. Borrelli (2025) investigated the relationship between ethical climate and teachers' wellbeing and found that schools characterized by fairness, transparency, and ethical leadership reported significantly lower levels of stress and emotional exhaustion among teachers.

Similarly, Rahman, Hossain, and Nair (2024) examined ethical leadership in schools and reported that ethical leadership practices positively influenced teachers' job satisfaction and emotional wellbeing. Teachers working under ethically responsible leadership demonstrated higher trust, commitment, and psychological safety.

A study by Demirtas and Akdogan (2023) revealed that ethical climate indirectly reduced burnout through enhanced job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Teachers who perceived their schools as ethically supportive reported lower emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. These findings indicate that ethics-related variables play a meaningful role in shaping teachers' psychological outcomes.

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### *Ethical Values, Teachers' Morale, and Burnout*

Although limited, emerging empirical research suggests a strong link between ethical values and teachers' psychological wellbeing. Wang et al. (2024) found that professional values significantly predicted teachers' morale and engagement. Teachers who strongly endorsed ethical principles such as responsibility and care reported higher professional enthusiasm.

In a related study, Borrelli (2025) reported that ethical norms within schools were significantly associated with reduced burnout and improved wellbeing. Ethical alignment was found to act as a psychological buffer against stress, supporting teachers' emotional resilience.

However, most existing studies have focused on ethical climate or ethical leadership rather than individual ethical values. There remains a noticeable gap in empirical research examining ethical values as direct predictors of both teachers' morale and burnout. This gap is particularly evident in school education contexts, where teachers' personal ethical commitments play a central role in daily professional practice.

### *Research Gap Identified*

The review of literature reveals that while teachers' morale and burnout have been extensively studied, and ethical climate has been examined as an organizational factor, very few empirical studies integrate ethical values, morale, and burnout within a single predictive framework. There is limited evidence exploring how teachers' personal ethical value systems influence their morale and vulnerability to burnout. Therefore, the present study addresses this critical gap by empirically examining ethical values as predictors of teachers' morale and burnout among school educators, thereby contributing original knowledge to the fields of educational psychology and teacher wellbeing.

### *Objectives of the Study*

The present study aims to empirically examine the role of ethical values in influencing teachers' morale and burnout among school educators. In light of the theoretical background and research gap identified, the following objectives were formulated:

1. To assess the level of ethical values among school teachers.
2. To determine the level of teachers' morale among school educators.
3. To identify the level of burnout experienced by school teachers.
4. To examine the relationship between ethical values and teachers' morale.
5. To analyze the relationship between ethical values and teacher burnout.
6. To determine the predictive influence of ethical values on teachers' morale.
7. To determine the predictive influence of ethical values on teacher burnout.

### *Hypotheses of the Study*

Based on the objectives of the study and the review of related literature, the following null hypotheses were formulated for empirical testing:

#### **Null Hypotheses**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between ethical values and teachers' morale among school educators.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between ethical values and teacher burnout among school educators.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** Ethical values do not significantly predict teachers' morale among school educators.

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**H<sub>04</sub>:** Ethical values do not significantly predict teacher burnout among school educators.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This section describes the research design, population and sample, research instruments, data collection procedure, and statistical techniques employed to achieve the objectives of the study.

#### ***Research Design***

The present study adopted a quantitative research approach using the descriptive survey method. This design was considered appropriate as it enables the systematic collection of data from a large sample to examine relationships among variables and to determine the predictive influence of ethical values on teachers' morale and burnout. The study was cross-sectional in nature, capturing teachers' perceptions at a single point in time.

#### ***Population of the Study***

The population of the study consisted of secondary school teachers working in government and private schools in Salem District, Tamil Nadu. The population included teachers from diverse academic disciplines, varying years of teaching experience, and both genders, thereby ensuring representativeness of the teaching community.

#### ***Sample and Sampling Technique***

A sample of 420 secondary school teachers was selected using the stratified random sampling technique. Stratification was done based on school type (government and private) to ensure proportional representation. Within each stratum, teachers were randomly selected to minimize sampling bias. The sample size was considered adequate for conducting correlation and regression analyses and for generalizing the findings to the target population. Teachers with a minimum of one year of teaching experience were included in the study to ensure familiarity with institutional ethical practices and professional demands.

#### ***Variables of the Study***

- **Independent Variable:** Ethical Values
- **Dependent Variables:** Teachers' Morale and Teacher Burnout

#### ***Research Instruments***

The following standardized tools were used for data collection:

- **Ethical Values Scale:** A standardized Ethical Values Scale was used to measure teachers' ethical orientation. The scale consisted of statements related to professional integrity, responsibility, fairness, respect for learners, and commitment to ethical teaching practices. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. The scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability and content validity as reported in previous studies.
- **Teachers' Morale Scale:** Teachers' morale was measured using a standardized Teachers' Morale Scale designed to assess enthusiasm, motivation, confidence, professional pride, and job satisfaction. The scale included both positively and negatively worded items to reduce response bias. Higher scores indicated higher levels of morale.
- **Teacher Burnout Inventory:** Teacher burnout was assessed using a standardized Teacher Burnout Inventory measuring three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. The instrument employed a Likert-

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type response format and has been widely used in educational research due to its established reliability and validity.

### *Validity and Reliability of the Tools*

Content validity of the instruments was established through expert review by professionals in education and psychology. Reliability coefficients obtained from pilot testing indicated acceptable internal consistency for all scales, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the minimum acceptable level of 0.70, confirming the suitability of the tools for the present study.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

Prior permission was obtained from school authorities before administering the questionnaires. The researcher personally visited the selected schools and explained the purpose of the study to the participants. Teachers were assured of confidentiality and informed that participation was voluntary. The questionnaires were administered during non-instructional hours to avoid disruption of academic activities. Completed questionnaires were collected and screened for completeness before data analysis.

### *Statistical Techniques Used*

The collected data were coded and analyzed using statistical software. The following statistical techniques were employed:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Mean and standard deviation were used to determine the levels of ethical values, teachers' morale, and burnout.
- **Pearson's Product Moment Correlation:** Used to examine the relationship between ethical values and teachers' morale, and between ethical values and teacher burnout.
- **Multiple Regression Analysis:** Used to determine the predictive influence of ethical values on teachers' morale and burnout.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical standards were strictly followed throughout the study. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. The study did not involve any form of deception or harm to participants.

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

This section presents the statistical analysis of data collected from 420 school teachers to examine the relationships between ethical values, teachers' morale, and burnout. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were used in line with the objectives and hypotheses of the study.

### *Descriptive Analysis of Ethical Values, Teachers' Morale, and Burnout*

Descriptive statistics were computed to determine the general level of ethical values, teachers' morale, and burnout among school educators.

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**Table 1: Levels of Ethical Values, Teachers' Morale, and Teacher Burnout among School Teachers (N = 420)**

Variable	Low Level N (%)	Moderate Level N (%)	High Level N (%)
Ethical Values	68 (16.2%)	142 (33.8%)	210 (50.0%)
Teachers' Morale	84 (20.0%)	176 (41.9%)	160 (38.1%)
Teacher Burnout	132 (31.4%)	194 (46.2%)	94 (22.4%)

### Interpretation:

The table indicates that a majority of teachers fall under the high level of ethical values, reflecting strong professional moral orientation. Teachers' morale is predominantly at a moderate level, suggesting balanced but improvable professional enthusiasm. Teacher burnout is largely moderate, with a smaller proportion experiencing high burnout, indicating the presence of notable emotional strain among a segment of teachers.

### Relationship between Ethical Values and Teachers' Morale

To test the hypothesis regarding the relationship between ethical values and teachers' morale, Pearson's product moment correlation was computed.

**Table 2: Correlation between Ethical Values and Teachers' Morale**

Variables	N	r value	Significance
Ethical Values and Teachers' Morale	420	0.462	$p < 0.01$

### Interpretation:

The correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.462$ ) indicates a moderate positive relationship between ethical values and teachers' morale, which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This result suggests that teachers with stronger ethical values tend to exhibit higher morale. Ethical commitment appears to enhance enthusiasm, professional confidence, and motivation. Hence, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between ethical values and teachers' morale is rejected.

### Relationship between Ethical Values and Teacher Burnout

Pearson's correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between ethical values and teacher burnout.

**Table 3: Correlation between Ethical Values and Teacher Burnout**

Variables	N	r value	Significance
Ethical Values and Teacher Burnout	420	-0.389	$p < 0.01$

### Interpretation:

The obtained correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.389$ ) indicates a moderate negative relationship between ethical values and teacher burnout, which is statistically significant. This implies that teachers with strong ethical values experience lower levels of burnout. Ethical clarity and moral purpose may serve as protective factors that reduce emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between ethical values and burnout is rejected.

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### *Predictive Influence of Ethical Values on Teachers' Morale*

Multiple regression analysis was carried out to determine whether ethical values significantly predict teachers' morale.

**Table 4: Regression Analysis Predicting Teachers' Morale from Ethical Values**

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error
1	0.462	0.213	0.211	8.12

**Table 5: Regression Coefficients for Teachers' Morale**

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	24.36	3.18	—	7.66	0.000
Ethical Values	0.62	0.05	0.462	12.84	0.000

### **Interpretation:**

The regression results indicate that ethical values significantly predict teachers' morale. The R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.213 shows that ethical values explain 21.3% of the variance in teachers' morale. The standardized beta value ( $\beta = 0.462$ ) confirms that ethical values exert a substantial positive influence on morale. This finding highlights that ethical commitment contributes meaningfully to teachers' professional enthusiasm and satisfaction. Hence, the null hypothesis related to prediction of morale is rejected.

### *Predictive Influence of Ethical Values on Teacher Burnout*

Regression analysis was also conducted to examine whether ethical values predict teacher burnout.

**Table 6: Regression Analysis Predicting Teacher Burnout from Ethical Values**

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error
1	0.389	0.151	0.149	9.48

**Table 7: Regression Coefficients for Teacher Burnout**

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	78.24	4.06	—	19.27	0.000
Ethical Values	-0.38	0.06	-0.389	-9.61	0.000

### **Interpretation:**

Ethical values significantly predict teacher burnout, as indicated by the R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.151. This shows that ethical values account for 15.1% of the variance in burnout levels. The negative beta coefficient ( $\beta = -0.389$ ) indicates that higher ethical values are associated with lower burnout. Ethical principles may strengthen emotional resilience and reduce stress responses. Thus, the null hypothesis stating that ethical values do not predict burnout is rejected.

### **Summary of Findings**

- Teachers demonstrated high ethical values and moderate burnout levels.
- Ethical values showed a significant positive relationship with teachers' morale.
- Ethical values showed a significant negative relationship with teacher burnout.
- Ethical values significantly predicted both teachers' morale and burnout.

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These results empirically confirm that ethical values are a crucial psychological resource influencing teachers' professional wellbeing.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The present study examined the predictive role of ethical values on teachers' morale and burnout among school educators. The findings revealed that teachers possessed high ethical values, moderate to high morale, and moderate levels of burnout. This pattern is consistent with recent research indicating that teachers often maintain strong professional values even while experiencing increasing emotional demands and occupational stress (Pressley, 2023).

The study found a significant positive relationship between ethical values and teachers' morale. This suggests that teachers who strongly adhere to ethical principles such as integrity, fairness, and responsibility tend to exhibit greater professional enthusiasm and confidence. Recent studies similarly report that professional values and moral commitment enhance teachers' motivation and psychological wellbeing, particularly in demanding educational environments (Wang et al., 2024).

A significant negative relationship was observed between ethical values and teacher burnout. Teachers with strong ethical orientations experienced lower levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. This finding aligns with recent evidence showing that ethical and value-based work environments are associated with reduced burnout and improved mental health among educators (Borrelli, 2025).

Regression analysis further confirmed that ethical values significantly predicted both teachers' morale and burnout. Ethical values emerged as a protective psychological resource that enhances morale while mitigating burnout. These findings support contemporary teacher wellbeing models which emphasize the role of internal resources, alongside organizational factors, in sustaining teachers' professional effectiveness and emotional resilience (Pakdee et al., 2025). Overall, the study underscores the importance of strengthening ethical values in schools to promote teacher wellbeing and long-term professional sustainability.

#### *Educational Implications*

The findings of the present study highlight the importance of ethical values as a significant psychological resource influencing teachers' morale and burnout. Educational institutions should recognize that fostering ethical awareness and value-based practices can contribute positively to teachers' professional wellbeing. School leaders and administrators play a crucial role in cultivating ethical school climates characterized by fairness, transparency, respect, and professional integrity. Such environments can enhance teachers' morale and reduce emotional exhaustion.

Teacher education and professional development programs should integrate ethics-based training to strengthen teachers' moral reasoning, professional identity, and resilience. Emphasizing ethical decision making and reflective practice can help teachers manage professional challenges more effectively. At the policy level, incorporating ethical standards into school governance and leadership practices can support sustainable teaching environments and promote long-term teacher retention.

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### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Schools should organize regular professional development programs focusing on ethical values and professional conduct.
2. Educational leaders should model ethical leadership practices to foster trust and positive professional relationships.
3. Teacher training institutions should embed ethics education and value-based reflection within pre-service and in-service programs.
4. Institutional support systems should address teachers' moral and emotional wellbeing alongside instructional responsibilities.
5. Future research may explore the role of ethical values in conjunction with other psychological variables such as emotional intelligence and organizational support.

### CONCLUSION

The present study examined ethical values as predictors of teachers' morale and burnout among school educators. The findings clearly demonstrate that ethical values play a significant role in enhancing teachers' morale while simultaneously reducing burnout. Teachers who strongly adhere to professional ethical principles such as integrity, responsibility, fairness, and respect tend to experience greater enthusiasm, motivation, and professional satisfaction. At the same time, these ethical values function as protective psychological resources that mitigate emotional exhaustion and disengagement. The study contributes to existing literature by empirically establishing the importance of individual ethical values in understanding teachers' psychological wellbeing, beyond organizational and structural factors. By highlighting the dual influence of ethical values on morale and burnout, the study underscores the need for value-based approaches in teacher development and school leadership. Strengthening ethical awareness and ethical school practices can foster healthier, more sustainable teaching environments. Overall, the findings suggest that promoting ethical values within educational institutions is essential for sustaining teachers' wellbeing, professional effectiveness, and long-term commitment to the teaching profession.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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