

Article

**The Relationship Between Ethical Leadership and Teacher Motivation:
A Study at Secondary Schools in Sarawak**

Mackencidy Bujang¹, Bity Salwana Alias^{1*} & Azlin Norhaini Mansor²

¹Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi Selangor, Malaysia

²Centre of Shaping Advanced and Professional Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia,
43600 Bangi Selangor, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: bity@ukm.edu.my

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Abstract: Ethical leadership plays a crucial role in fostering teacher motivation and improving school performance. However, limited research has examined this relationship within the context of secondary schools in Sarawak. This study aims to identify the level of ethical leadership among secondary school principals, assess the level of motivation among teachers, and examine the correlation between ethical leadership and teacher motivation. Guided by Ethical Leadership Theory (Brown et al., 2005) and McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory (1978), the study adopts a quantitative survey design. A pilot study involving 100 secondary school teachers was conducted using a structured questionnaire, and data were analyzed through correlation techniques. Findings reveal that both ethical leadership and teacher motivation levels were high. Moreover, a strong and significant positive correlation was found between ethical leadership and teacher motivation. This suggests that teachers who perceive their leaders as ethical report higher levels of satisfaction, commitment, and enthusiasm in their roles. These findings highlight the importance of ethical leadership in creating a supportive and motivational school climate. The study provides valuable insights for policymakers and school administrators in formulating leadership strategies to enhance teacher motivation and retention. Furthermore, the results are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) through strengthening teacher motivation and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) by emphasizing collaboration among schools, communities, and policymakers. Overall, the study highlights ethical leadership as both a moral value and a practical strategy for improving teacher motivation and strengthening the quality of education.

Keywords: Principal; ethical leadership; teacher motivation; school effectiveness; Sarawak

Introduction

Leadership at educational institutions has a significant influence on teachers' attitudes, behaviours, and motivation. Among various leadership styles, ethical leadership has attracted considerable attention because of its emphasis on integrity, fairness, and moral responsibility (Brown & Treviño, 2006). In schools, principals who demonstrate ethical leadership can build trust, encourage professional commitment, and sustain teacher motivation, which are critical for ensuring effective teaching and student achievement. Teacher motivation has long been recognised as a key determinant of student success and overall school effectiveness (Roth et al., 2007). Motivated teachers are more committed, innovative, and resilient even in challenging circumstances. However, teachers' motivation is vulnerable to decline when leadership is weak, recognition is lacking, and

workloads are excessive (Collie, 2023; Ranganatha et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of leadership practices that can sustain motivation over the long term.

In Sarawak, the social realities of education make this issue particularly significant. Many secondary schools are located in rural or semi-rural areas with limited resources, heavy workloads, and restricted access to professional development opportunities (Asman et al., 2023; Yeo, 2023). It also requires school leaders to manage teachers from varied backgrounds with sensitivity and fairness (Gabriel & Bity Salwana, 2024). Without strong ethical leadership, these challenges may result in declining teacher motivation, burnout, or high turnover rates (Bujang et al., 2025; Mohamad et al., 2023). Principals who practise fairness, integrity, and empathy are therefore crucial in creating supportive school environments where teachers feel respected and motivated despite these contextual constraints.

Despite the growing global scholarship on ethical leadership and teacher motivation, limited research has focused on the East Malaysian context, particularly in Sarawak. Earlier studies in Malaysia have highlighted the relevance of ethical leadership in building trust and commitment among teachers (Muhammad Zerni & Bity Salwana, 2020; Vikaraman et al., 2021), yet empirical evidence in Sarawak's public schools remains scarce. Addressing this gap is important not only to strengthen the understanding of ethical leadership across diverse educational settings, but also to provide practical recommendations for policymakers and school administrators in Malaysia. Hence, this study aims to examine the relationship between ethical leadership and teacher motivation among secondary school teachers in Sarawak. By situating the study within the realities of Sarawak's education system, it contributes to both the theoretical development of leadership studies and the practical strategies needed to support teacher motivation in challenging contexts.

Ethical leadership and effective school environments

Ethical leadership has been increasingly recognized as a fundamental factor in shaping organizational culture, enhancing employee motivation, and fostering trust within educational institutions worldwide. Defined as the demonstration of normatively appropriate behaviour through personal actions, interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct among followers, ethical leadership plays a crucial role in influencing the psychological and professional outcomes of teachers (Brown et al., 2005). In schools, leaders who model ethical behaviour not only establish moral standards but also create supportive environments that directly impact teachers' motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction (Chingwanangwana & Kgari-Masondo, 2024). Numerous international studies have highlighted the positive influence of ethical leadership on teacher motivation. In Portugal, Neves (2024) found that ethical leadership significantly enhanced teachers' intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment. Similarly, Urooj et al. (2024) demonstrated in Pakistan that principals who practised honesty, ethical guidance, and respectful communication fostered higher levels of teacher engagement and commitment. These studies highlight that ethical leadership is not only about setting moral standards but also about sustaining teachers' motivation and job satisfaction across educational systems.

In Malaysia, ethical leadership has also been recognized as a vital dimension in shaping effective school environments and directly enhancing teacher motivation. Vikaraman et al. (2021) identified a positive relationship between principal's ethical leadership and teacher's trust in their principals. Even though many school leaders had not received formal training in ethical leadership, they were found to demonstrate important values such as integrity, fairness, and a people-centred approach. These values contribute to a supportive and respectful school atmosphere, which is essential for nurturing teacher motivation and long-term professional dedication. As schools continue to navigate a range of complex demands related to teaching responsibilities, student safety, and the well-being of school members, ethical leadership emerges as a key approach for ensuring that principals carry out their roles with honesty, responsibility, and effectiveness (Abdul Rahim et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Jusoh et al. (2024) found that leadership grounded in ethical principles plays a vital role in improving teacher performance and sustaining motivation, with teachers under morally supportive leaders showing greater engagement and professional growth. This issue is particularly relevant in the context of East Malaysia, especially Sarawak, where educators face unique challenges related to geographical dispersion, limited infrastructure, and socio-economic disparities. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, (PPPM 2013-2025) identified these structural barriers as key factors contributing to educational

inequities and higher dropout rates in rural areas (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). This is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education, this highlights the critical need for school leadership that upholds ethical decision-making, promotes equity, and translates national educational priorities into contextually responsive practices (UNESCO, 2015). Taken together, these studies reinforce the understanding that ethical leadership not only fosters trust and a positive school culture but also serves as a driving force in strengthening teacher motivation and ensuring quality education across varied educational settings in Malaysia.

In line with the empirical foundations outlined, the conceptual framework proposed for this study is shown below. This study's conceptual framework is grounded in ethical leadership theory by Brown et al. (2005) and achievement motivation theory by McClelland (1978). Ethical leadership refers to the demonstration of appropriate conduct through personal actions, fairness, integrity, and two-way communication (Brown et al., 2005). It is expected that such leadership behaviours from school principals will positively influence teachers' work motivation. Teacher motivation is treated as the dependent variable in this study, while principal ethical leadership is the independent variable. According to McClelland, as stated by Evonne and Crispina (2017), individuals are driven by the need for achievement, and in the context of education, motivated teachers tend to be more committed, goal-oriented, and professionally effective (Evonne & Crispina, 2017; McClelland, 1978). This framework allows the study to explore how ethical leadership practices by principals contribute to enhancing teacher motivation in Malaysian secondary schools. Ethical leadership is conceptualized as the independent variable that directly influences teacher motivation as the dependent variable in Figure 1. This concept was adapted from Brown et al. (2005) and McClelland (1978), adopted by Evonne and Gregory (2017).

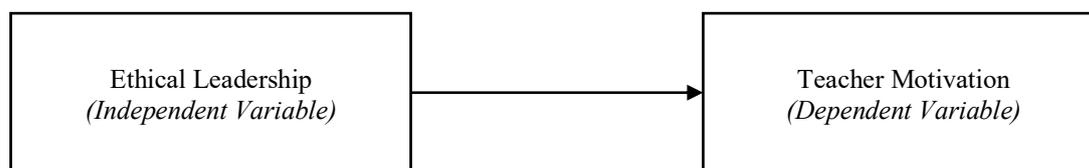


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The role of ethical leadership in shaping teacher motivation has gained increasing attention in educational research, particularly in the context of secondary schools. Ethical leadership, characterized by fairness, integrity, and ethical decision-making, is essential in fostering a positive school environment and promoting teacher commitment (Boydak Özan et al., 2017; Kalshoven et al., 2011). Despite its recognized importance, empirical studies examining the direct correlation between ethical leadership and teacher motivation remain scarce, particularly in Malaysian public schools, where issues such as teacher retention, workload stress, and job dissatisfaction persist (Asraf et al., 2023; Wong & Thien, 2020). As demands on educators continue to increase, it is critical to understand how school principals' ethical leadership influences teacher motivation and professional engagement.

Teacher motivation is a key determinant of high-quality education and student success. However, research suggests that many teachers experience low job satisfaction and diminished motivation due to ineffective leadership, lack of professional recognition, and workplace dissatisfaction (Collie, 2023; Ranganatha et al., 2023; Suffian & Jamal @ Nordin, 2021). While ethical leadership has been linked to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, there is limited research on its direct influence on teacher motivation in the Malaysian education system (Kho et al., 2021; Muhammad Zerni & Bity Salwana, 2020). Given that ethical leadership fosters trust, fairness, and transparency, it is imperative to investigate its role in addressing teacher motivation challenges in Sarawak's secondary schools.

Sarawak presents a unique educational context where geographical, socio-economic, and cultural realities intensify the challenges faced by teachers. Asman et al. (2023) found that teachers in low-enrolment schools in Sarawak faced heavy workloads that undermined their motivation and professional commitment.

Yeo (2023) further noted that rural secondary school teachers in Sarawak often face long commuting distances, resource shortages, and high student and teacher ratios, which affect leadership effectiveness and teacher performance. Gabriel and Bity Salwana (2024) highlighted the issue of student dropout in rural Sarawak schools, linking it to structural barriers and the need for ethical leadership that prioritises equity and support for both students and teachers. Bujang et al. (2025) reinforced this by showing that fostering integrity in principals' ethical leadership is essential for building trust and sustaining motivation among teachers. Given these unique challenges, it is crucial to explore how principals' ethical leadership behaviours support, sustain, and enhance teacher motivation in Sarawak. Addressing this research gap is vital not only for enriching the understanding of ethical leadership in diverse educational settings but also for providing practical insights that can inform leadership development programs and policy interventions tailored to the needs of East Malaysian schools.

This study aims to explore the influence of ethical leadership on teacher motivation among secondary school teachers in Sarawak. Given the importance of leadership practices in shaping the professional experiences and motivational levels of educators, this research focuses on assessing the reliability of the instruments used, the extent of ethical leadership demonstrated by school principals, and the motivation level of teachers. Based on these aims, the study is guided by the following research objectives:

1. To examine the level of ethical leadership demonstrated by secondary school principals.
2. To examine the level of motivation among secondary school teachers.
3. To investigate the relationship between ethical leadership and teacher motivation among secondary school teachers.

In line with the third objectives, this study proposes the following hypothesis: H₁: There is a significant positive correlation between ethical leadership and teacher motivation.

Methodology

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between ethical leadership and teacher motivation by collecting data at a single point in time. Data were collected through the direct distribution of survey questionnaires to teachers from national secondary schools in Sarawak, coordinated by the respective school administrations.

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional and correlational survey design. The cross-sectional design was considered appropriate because the data were collected at a single point in time, which enabled the researcher to capture teachers' perceptions of principals' ethical leadership and their work motivation simultaneously (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, the correlational design allowed the study to examine the nature and strength of the relationships among the variables without manipulating any of them. This combination is particularly suitable for educational settings, where the researcher seeks to understand how leadership practices influence teacher outcomes in a natural context. By adopting this design, the study provided a snapshot of the current situation in national secondary schools in Sarawak and offered evidence-based insights into the association between ethical leadership and teacher motivation.

A quantitative research approach was adopted in this study. The quantitative approach is suitable when the objective is to test hypotheses, examine variable relationships, and generate findings that can be generalised to a larger population (Hair et al., 2010). This approach also provides statistical evidence that strengthens the validity of the conclusions drawn from the data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Structured survey questionnaires were used as the primary instrument for data collection, allowing for standardised responses and reliable statistical analysis. The use of a quantitative approach aligns with the study's aim of identifying the predictive relationship between ethical leadership and teacher motivation in the Sarawak context.

Sampling Technique

This study adopted a simple random sampling technique involving 100 teachers from public national secondary schools (SMK) in Sarawak. This technique was chosen to ensure that all teachers within the target population had an equal chance of being selected. This method was considered appropriate given the wide geographical distribution of secondary schools across Sarawak, which spans urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. By applying random sampling, the study minimized selection bias and enhanced the representativeness of the sample in capturing the diverse experiences of teachers working in different socio-economic and cultural contexts. The inclusion criteria focused on full-time teachers who were actively teaching during the data collection period and willing to provide informed consent. Teachers from national-type secondary schools (SMJK), international school, private schools, primary schools, those on long-term leave, or without direct teaching responsibilities were excluded. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents completed the questionnaires with the assurance of confidentiality.

Instrument

The instruments used in this study were adopted and adapted from the established previous studies to suit the Malaysian secondary school context. Ethical leadership was measured using the Ethical Leadership at Work (ELW) Questionnaire developed by Kalshoven et al. 2011 and adapted by Vikaraman (2019), which categorized into seven dimensions: people orientation, fairness, power sharing, concern for sustainability, ethical guidance, role clarification and integrity (Kalshoven et al., 2011; Vikaraman, 2019). A total of 37 items were used to measure these dimensions. Teacher motivation was measured using the Measure of Individual Differences in Achieving Tendency (QMAT) Questionnaire developed by Mehrabian dan Bank (1978) and adapted by Evonne and Crispina (2017), which covers three dimensions: the need for achievement, the need for affiliation, and the need for power, comprising 12 adapted items (Evonne & Crispina, 2017; Mehrabian & Bank, 1978).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, a two-stage process was undertaken. First, expert validation was sought from a panel of five specialists, all holding doctoral qualifications (PhD). The panel consisted of three senior academic leaders who also served as school administrators with expertise in educational leadership, one officer from the Sarawak State Education Department with a background in educational management, and one senior practitioner from the Ministry of Education specializing in educational management and leadership. These experts were purposefully selected based on their specialization and extensive professional experience of at least five years, thereby strengthening both the face and content validity of the instrument. Following this, a pilot study involving 100 teachers was carried out to refine the questionnaire items and to assess the reliability of the instrument.

Instrument validity was established through expert review using Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR) (Bujang et al., 2025). Five experts participated in the evaluation, consisting of senior officers from the Ministry of Education, the Sarawak State Education Department, and three experienced school principals. For the ethical leadership construct, one item (Item 11, CVR = -0.333) was dropped, while three items (Items 32, 37, and 38, CVR = 0.333) were refined for clarity. For the teacher work motivation construct, one item (Item 59, CVR = 0.667) was refined. After these revisions, the final instrument consisted of 49 items across the two constructs, with confirmation from experts that the items were suitable and relevant for assessing principals' ethical leadership practices in the Malaysian school context. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The results showed that ethical leadership recorded a coefficient of 0.971 and teacher work motivation 0.823. According to Hair et al. (2010), both values exceed the acceptable threshold, with ethical leadership demonstrating excellent reliability and teacher work motivation showing very good reliability for social science research (Hair et al., 2010).

Data Collection Technique

A pilot study was conducted by distributing 105 sets of questionnaires to secondary school teachers, and a total of 100 complete responses were successfully collected. The questionnaires were distributed manually through the respective school administrations, with clear instructions and assurances of confidentiality

provided to all participants. The completed questionnaires were retrieved within an agreed timeframe and subsequently analyzed to evaluate the clarity, reliability, and validity of the items used in the instrument.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29.0. Descriptive statistics, including mean (M) and standard deviation (SD), were used to describe the levels of ethical leadership and teacher motivation. Interpretation of the mean scores followed the guidelines by Hair et al. (2010): a mean score of 1.00 to 1.99 indicated low levels, 2.00 to 2.99 indicated moderate levels, and 3.00 and above indicated high levels.

Table 1. Mean Score Interpretation

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00 to 1.99	Low
2.00 to 2.99	Moderate
3.00 and above	High

Source: Hair et al. (2010)

Correlation analysis examined the relationship between ethical leadership and teacher motivation. The interpretation of the correlation coefficient (r) was based on Hair (2010): ± 0.01 to ± 0.20 as very weak, ± 0.21 to ± 0.40 as weak, ± 0.41 to ± 0.60 as moderate, ± 0.61 to ± 0.80 as strong, and ± 0.81 to ± 1.00 as very strong.

Table 2: Correlation Coefficient Interpretation

Correlation Coefficient (r)	Interpretation
± 0.01 to ± 0.20	Very weak / very small
± 0.21 to ± 0.40	Weak / small
± 0.41 to ± 0.60	Moderate / medium
± 0.61 to ± 0.80	Strong / large
± 0.81 to ± 1.00	Very strong

Source: Hair et al. (2010)

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent before taking part. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, with data used solely for academic purposes. Ethical approval was obtained, and every effort was made to maintain the integrity of the research process.

The Findings

This study aimed to examine the reliability of the research instruments, the levels of ethical leadership and teacher motivation, and the relationship between these two variables among secondary school teachers in Sarawak. The findings are presented according to the research objectives (RO) and hypothesis (H_{a1}) tested in the study.

Respondents' Demographics

A total of 100 teachers participated in this study. The highest proportion of respondents was female (70%), while the lowest was male (30%). For age, most were between 30 and 39 years old (38%), and the fewest were between 20 and 29 years old (12%). In terms of ethnicity, Sarawakian Bumiputera formed the largest group (60%), while Malays were the smallest (12%). For job grade, the highest category was DG48 (33%) and the lowest was DG54 (2%). Regarding years of service, the majority had more than 21 years (29%), whereas the fewest had between 16 and 20 years (13%). For school location, most teachers served in rural schools (83%), while fewer were in urban schools (17%). Table 3 shows the demographic of respondents.

Table 3. Respondents' Demographics

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	30	30
	Female	70	70
Age	20–29 years	12	12
	30–39 years	38	38
	40–49 years	33	33
	50 years and above	17	17
Ethnicity	Malay	12	12
	Chinese	28	28
	Sarawak Bumiputera	60	60
Grade	DG41	29	29
	DG44	30	30
	DG48	33	33
	DG52	6	6
	DG54	2	2
Years of Service	1–5 years	19	19
	6–10 years	16	16
	11–15 years	23	23
	16–20 years	13	13
	21 years and above	29	29
Highest Academic Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	86	86
	Master's Degree	14	14
School Location	Urban	17	17
	Rural	83	83

N=100

The Level of Ethical Leadership Demonstrated By Secondary School Principals

Descriptive statistics were used to determine the level of ethical leadership among secondary school principals. The findings, as summarized in Table 4, indicated a high level of ethical leadership, with a mean score of 4.37 and a standard deviation of 0.378. Based on the interpretation guideline where a mean score of 3.00 and above reflects a high level, it can be concluded that principals generally exhibited strong ethical leadership behaviours.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for ethical leadership

N	Mean	Standard Deviation
100	4.37	0.378

The Level of Motivation among Secondary School Teachers

Descriptive statistics were also used to determine the level of motivation among secondary school teachers. As shown in Table 5, the mean score for teacher motivation was 3.84, with a standard deviation of 0.388, indicating a high level of motivation among teachers. This suggests that the majority of teachers demonstrated strong motivational levels in their professional responsibilities.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for teacher motivation

N	Mean	Standard Deviation
100	3.84	0.388

The Relationship Between Ethical Leadership And Teacher Motivation Among Secondary School Teachers

In line with the third objective, this study hypothesized a significant positive correlation between ethical leadership and teacher motivation. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship

between ethical leadership and teacher motivation. As presented in Table 6, a moderate positive correlation was found between the two variables ($r = 0.481$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that higher perceptions of principals' ethical leadership are significantly associated with higher levels of teacher motivation. Although the correlation strength is moderate, the result is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), thereby supporting the study's hypothesis and confirming that ethical leadership plays an important role in shaping teacher motivation among secondary school teachers in Sarawak. The results indicate that higher levels of perceived ethical leadership are significantly associated with higher levels of teacher motivation. Therefore, the study's hypothesis was supported, confirming that ethical leadership plays a crucial role in influencing teacher motivation among secondary school teachers in Sarawak.

Table 6. Pearson correlation between ethical leadership and teacher motivation

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Significance (p-value)	Strength of Relationship
Ethical Leadership and Teacher Motivation	0.481**	< .001	Moderate

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

This study aimed to determine the levels of ethical leadership and teacher motivation among secondary school teachers in Sarawak, as well as to examine the relationship between these two constructs. The findings provide important insights into the role of ethical leadership in shaping teacher motivation within the Malaysian education context. The demographic profile showed that the respondents were predominantly female, largely Sarawakian Bumiputera, mostly teaching in rural schools, and consisted of both mid-career and experienced teachers. This provides an important context for interpreting the subsequent findings of the study.

The results revealed a high level of ethical leadership demonstrated by school principals ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.378$). This suggests that teachers generally perceived their leaders as consistently fair, transparent, and committed to integrity in their decision-making. Such findings align with previous studies in Malaysia, including those by Vikaraman et al. (2021) and Jusoh et al. (2024), which highlighted that school leaders who uphold ethical values are able to build trust and support among teachers. Similarly, the level of teacher motivation was also high ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.388$), indicating that teachers remained engaged, enthusiastic, and committed to their responsibilities. This finding is consistent with the work of Andrew and Christina (2022), who emphasized that supportive and ethically led school environments contribute to teachers' willingness to sustain their professional efforts despite challenges. In the context of Sarawak, where teachers often face diverse challenges such as remote school locations, limited resources, and cultural diversity, ethical leadership plays a crucial role in shaping a positive school climate. When principals lead with ethical values, they not only foster trust and respect but also contribute to a work environment where teachers feel appreciated, supported, and empowered to perform at their best.

When examining the relationship between ethical leadership and teacher motivation, a moderate positive correlation was found ($r = 0.481$, $p < .001$). This demonstrates that higher levels of perceived ethical leadership are significantly associated with higher teacher motivation. Although the strength of association is moderate, the result is statistically significant and supports the study's hypothesis. This finding is also in line with international studies such as Neves (2024) and Urooj et al. (2024), both of which confirmed that ethical leadership is positively linked with teacher motivation, organizational commitment, and professional engagement. In the context of Sarawak, where schools face unique challenges related to geographic dispersion, infrastructure limitations, and cultural diversity, ethical leadership appears to serve as a stabilizing force that uplifts teacher morale and engagement. Principals who consistently demonstrate ethical behaviour can help maintain teacher morale and drive, despite the constraints present in the school environment. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening ethical leadership as a practical step toward enhancing teacher motivation, especially in schools facing complex and demanding conditions.

The outcomes of this study highlight several important implications for school leadership practices in Malaysia. One of the key findings is that ethical leadership has a clear and positive influence on teacher motivation, even if the strength of the relationship is moderate. When principals uphold values such as honesty, fairness, and mutual respect, they create a school environment where teachers feel valued, trusted, and emotionally secure. This supportive climate contributes to higher levels of teacher enthusiasm, stronger commitment to their roles, and greater resilience in facing professional challenges. These findings call for leadership development programs that not only emphasize administrative competencies and academic performance but also integrate ethical dimensions of leadership. Training modules that guide leaders to make decisions grounded in integrity, empathy, and justice can help cultivate a more positive school climate and strengthen teacher job satisfaction and performance over time. Such an approach is particularly crucial in Sarawak, where diverse and resource-constrained school contexts require leaders who can sustain teacher morale and nurture a strong sense of professional purpose.

Conclusion

This study shows that ethical leadership has an important role in motivating teachers in secondary schools in Sarawak. Principals who lead with fairness, integrity, and care are able to build a positive school environment where teachers feel valued and supported. Such leadership is especially important in schools that face challenges such as limited resources and rural settings. The findings add to the existing knowledge on school leadership by showing how ethical leadership can strengthen teacher motivation in the Malaysian context. For researchers, this study provides a basis to explore further factors that may influence this relationship, such as trust in leaders or organizational commitment, and to use broader methods in future studies. For policymakers, the results highlight the need to integrate ethical leadership into leadership training and evaluation so that school leaders can be role models who encourage teacher motivation and commitment. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, this study supports SDG 4 (Quality Education) by showing how ethical leadership contributes to better teaching and learning, and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) by stressing the importance of cooperation between schools, communities, and education authorities. Overall, ethical leadership should be seen not only as a value, but also as a practical approach to improving teacher motivation and strengthening the quality of education.

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Conflicts of Interest: *We would like to declare that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this publication. All authors have been fully informed and actively participated in the study.*

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