The Correlation Between School Leaders Moral Leadership and Teacher Job Satisfaction: A Study in Henan Province, China

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of school leaders moral leadership on teacher job satisfaction in primary and secondary schools in Henan Province, China. Grounded in Moral Leadership Theory, it examines four key dimensions: integrity, fairness, care, and responsibility, while conceptualizing teacher job satisfaction as encompassing emotional well-being, professional recognition, and organizational support. Using a random sampling approach, 384 responses were collected through a structured questionnaire adapted from the Ethical Leadership Scale and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation in SPSS. Findings reveal that school leaders moral leadership does affected job satisfaction among teachers in Henan Province, China. Deeper within the Moral Leadership component, fairness and care show the strongest positive correlations with job satisfaction, highlighting the importance of transparent decision making and emotional support in enhancing teacher morale. However, integrity, though significant, has the weakest correlation, suggesting a potential gap between leaders' values and actions. Results affirm the applicability of Moral Leadership Theory in Chinese educational contexts and emphasize the role of value driven leadership in fostering teacher satisfaction. The study offers practical implications for leadership development, particularly in promoting ethical governance and supporting teacher retention, while recommending longitudinal and cross regional research for broader insights.

Keywords: School leadership, job satisfaction, education administration, moral leadership

1. Introduction

In modern education, the school leader leadership style plays a key role in educational administration as it directly affects the school's development path, the improvement of teaching quality, and the overall experience of teachers (Nwakoby, 2025). Among various leadership styles, moral leadership, rooted in moral values, helps create a shared sense of moral within the school by showing the leader's character, emotional influence, and value guidance (Göçen, 2021; Puyo, 2022). This type of leadership is seen as the most long-lasting, meaningful and virtue due to its component focuses on the school leader personal moral standards and encourage self-discipline and value alignment through invisible moral influence, leading to a non-coercive form of governance among teachers (Zaim et al., 2021). Leading with virtue means creating a supportive atmosphere through the school leaders' moral leadership (Puyo, 2022) because teachers' performance and affecting their job satisfaction due to its connection with leadership they perceived (Jia et al., 2022).

In today's China, with fast social development and families placing high value on education, primary and secondary school teachers face growing pressure and expectations to meet while expecting to fulfil their satisfaction in their job (Nwakoby, 2025). As China's educational reforms deepen, the nation emphasis on "cultivating virtue and nurturing talent" in the school governance. The China Education Modernization 2035 plan explicitly calls for strengthening moral leadership and fostering core socialist values. However, in practice, many primary and secondary schools still exhibit bureaucratic tendencies and lack effective value-based guidance. For instance, challenges such as teacher burnout and high turnover rates continue to emerge, highlighting the shortcomings of conventional leadership styles in providing emotional support and value cohesion (Arar & Saiti, 2022; Huang et al., 2021).

Henan Province, as a representative and complex educational region, presents a unique context as it includes both resource-rich urban centers like Zhengzhou and under-resourced rural schools, along with a mix of public and private institutions. The educational disparities between urban and rural areas suggest that the impact of school leader moral leadership style may differ significantly across school environments (Chung, 2023). Currently, China's Ministry of Education has emphasized moral cultivation and moral school leadership as core components of national education reform under the "Opinions on Strengthening Teachers' Morality and Conduct" (2021). Through this education reform, school leaders are expected to play a guiding role in fostering moral climates within educational institutions. In this context, school leader moral leadership style is increasingly viewed as a key lever for improving educational quality and ensuring sustainable school development. However, while much attention has been given to improving teacher welfare and professional development, there remains a lack of empirical research on how school leader moral leadership styles specifically affecting teacher job satisfaction, particularly in the context of Chinese primary and secondary education. In Henan Province, China's most populous province with a vast and diverse school system, various schools continue to face challenges such as high teacher turnover, uneven professional motivation, and low morale (Shi et al. 2024; Li & Yu, 2022)

due the issues occurs related to leadership practice. Although various studies focusing on the job satisfaction among teachers and school leader leadership, vary have offered detailed, localized analyses that connect specific school leader moral leadership style behaviors to the lived experiences of teachers (Shi et al., 2024; Li & Yu, 2022).

Moreover, while the existing literature has explored various leadership models like transformation, transaction, instruction, studies on school leader moral leadership style remain underdeveloped, especially in the Chinese context. Most research tends to generalize leadership effects without dissecting the individual moral dimensions, such as fairness or responsibility, their distinct impacts on teacher job satisfaction. Additionally, few studies incorporate teachers' perspectives directly, creating a disconnect between theoretical leadership models and frontline professional experiences (Shi et al., 2024; Li & Yu, 2022). As we know, teacher job satisfaction is a strong predictor of instructional quality, student achievement, and school improvement. Through this study, understanding on how school leader moral leadership style contributes to satisfaction levels will not only enrich the theoretical discourse on educational leadership in China, but also offer school administrators actionable strategies rooted in values and ethics. By investigating the specific pathways through which school leader moral leadership style affects teacher job satisfaction, such as interpersonal trust, resource fairness, and emotional support, this study aims to contribute practical recommendations that align with ongoing educational reform goals and enhance the long-term development of China's education system.

As aforementioned above, this study focuses on primary and secondary schools in Henan Province. It systematically explores how the four core dimensions of school leader moral leadership components such as integrity, fairness, care, and responsibility affect teacher job satisfaction. These dimensions have been emphasized in prior studies on school leader moral leadership style's impact across various educational and cultural settings (Göçen, 2021; Zaim et al., 2021; Puyo, 2022). However, through this study, the goal is to provide both theoretical insight and practical suggestions for local education managers, promote the localized use of moral leadership theories (Nwakoby, 2025), and offer new ideas for improving educational governance and school leadership strategies in China specifically in Henan province.

2. Literature Review

2.1 School Leaders Moral Leadership

School leader moral leadership refers to a leadership style in which school leaders guide their actions and decisions based on core moral values such as integrity, fairness, care, and responsibility. This leadership approach emphasizes setting moral examples, fostering trust, and promoting a value-based school culture (Sergiovanni, 1992; Striepe & Cunningham, 2022; Puyo, 2022). According to Göçen (2021), school leaders moral leadership plays a role in shaping school culture and influencing how teachers feel about their work environment. It offers a constructive leadership alternative grounded in ethics, particularly relevant in the context of Chinese educational reform. Understanding and practicing the moral leadership will leads to practical and sustainable strategies for improving teacher morale and educational outcomes (Cheng, 2021; Shi et al., 2024). Perceptions of school leader moral leadership style

may differ based on school type, leadership training, administrative experience, or local educational culture. It may also vary with demographic factors such as school size, location and school leader role. Promoting school leader moral leadership among school leaders has strong implications for policy and practice. If proven effective, it can inform school leaders evaluation systems, guide professional development, and foster leadership models that enhance ethical governance, teacher commitment, and school effectiveness (Li & Yu, 2022).

2.2 Job Satisfaction

Teacher job satisfaction refers to the degree to which teachers feel positively about their roles, responsibilities, and workplace experiences (Cheng, 2021; Li & Yu, 2022; Shi et al., 2024; Toropova & Johansson, 2021). It encompasses both emotional and cognitive responses to various aspects of the school environment, such as recognition, workload, fairness, collegiality, and opportunities for professional development (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Göçen, 2021). A high level of satisfaction reflects not only positive experiences and recognition of their roles but also the presence of organizational trust and leadership support, which in turn influence teacher performance, motivation, and institutional effectiveness (Liu & Sang, 2021). In cultivating this satisfaction, school leaders play a vital role by establishing trustful and cooperative relationships through open communication, mutual respect, and ongoing support (Aquino et al., 2021). In this study, teacher job satisfaction is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, comprising three core dimensions such as intrinsic satisfaction, extrinsic satisfaction, and general satisfaction. Intrinsic satisfaction captures the internal rewards teachers derive from their work, such as autonomy, professional purpose, and meaningful engagement with students. Extrinsic satisfaction includes external factors like salary, job security, leadership support, and fairness in administrative practices. Meanwhile, general satisfaction represents a holistic evaluation of the overall teaching experience, reflecting a teacher's emotional well-being, sense of fulfillment, and willingness to stay in the profession.

2.3 Moral Leadership Theory

Moral Leadership Theory emerged in the late 20th century as a response to the limitations of traditional leadership approaches that focused heavily on authority, power, or purely transactional relationships. The roots of moral leadership can be traced back to James MacGregor Burns' (1978) theory of transformational leadership, which emphasized leadership as a moral process that elevates both leader and follower. Thomas J. Sergiovanni further developed the concept in educational settings in the 1990s. In his book Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement (1992), Sergiovanni proposed that effective school leadership should be guided by moral authority rather than bureaucratic or technical authority. He argued that leaders should act based on shared values and ethical commitments rather than mere managerial compliance. Moral Leadership Theory rests on several foundational assumptions that emphasize the ethical nature of leadership. It views leadership not merely as a managerial role but as a moral act, where leaders serve as ethical role models for others. Decision-making is grounded in core values such as honesty, fairness, care, and responsibility, reflecting a commitment to values-based leadership. The aim of

moral leadership is to foster a school community built on mutual respect, trust, and a shared vision while exert influence through their character, personal integrity, and moral credibility (Chen et al., 2022). In educational settings, this approach translates into school leaders who prioritize service to others, promote fairness, and uphold ethical standards that nurture the professional and personal development of both teachers and students.

Moral Leadership Theory is well-suited to this study for several reasons. First, it aligns with the research focus on leadership values over managerial techniques, emphasizing ethical behavior and moral influence. Second, it reflects the expectations of current educational policies in China, where moral character is a central criterion in evaluating both teachers and school leaders (Puyo, 2022; Cheng, 2021). Third, the theory facilitates the exploration of emotional and psychological factors that impact teachers' motivation, engagement, and satisfaction, making it relevant to understanding teacher well-being. Lastly, it enables the analysis of leadership through the lens of teachers' lived experiences, providing a flexible theoretical foundation for both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Figure 1 presents the conceptual illustration of Moral Leadership Theory.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              School Leaders Moral Leadership Style            │
│                                                              │
│       Integrity   |   Fairness   |   Care   |   Responsibility│
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ▼
        ┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
        │     Positive Leadership Climate & Value Alignment │
        └──────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ▼
    ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
    │                  Teacher Job Satisfaction                │
    │                                                          │
    │  Intrinsic Satisfaction | Extrinsic Satisfaction | General Satisfaction │
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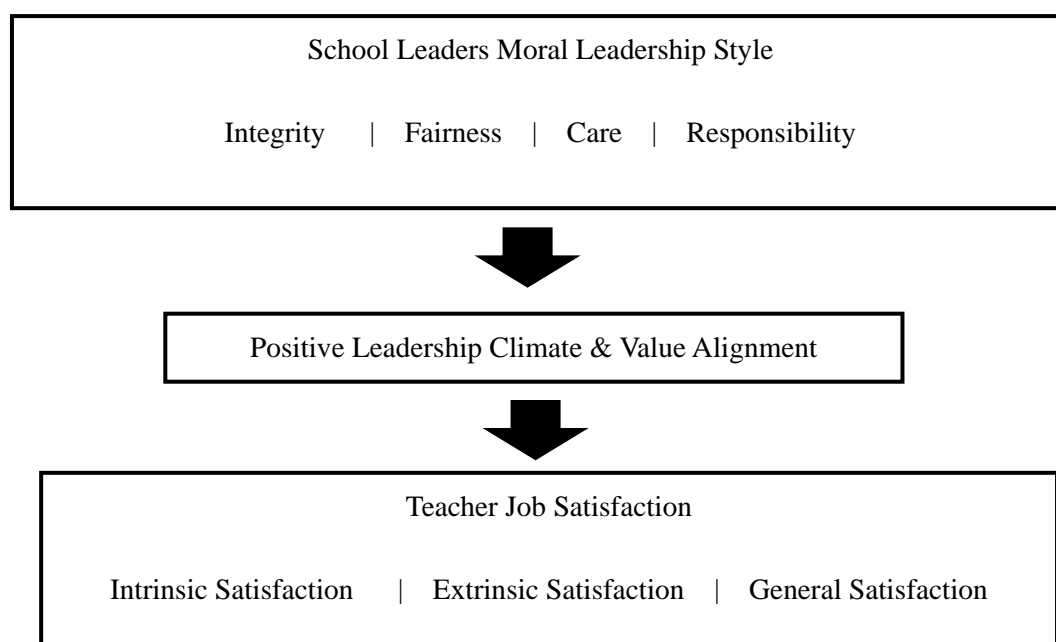
Figure 1. Conceptual Illustration of Moral Leadership Theory in the Study

This conceptual illustration shows how the four moral dimensions of school leaders leadership affect teacher job satisfaction in school.

2.4 Previous Study

A considerable body of literature has explored the dimensions and impact of school leader moral leadership style. Puyo (2022) examined how moral leadership influences organizational climate in Indonesian secondary schools using a four-dimension moral leadership scale, finding moderately high perceptions of moral leadership (M = 3.84), with integrity being rated the highest. Göçen (2021), in a cross-sectional study conducted in

Turkey, applied Sergiovanni's (1992) framework to assess moral leadership perceptions among 384 school school leaderss, identifying significant regional variations (p < 0.05). In the Chinese context, Cheng (2021) surveyed 247 teachers from urban schools in southern China using an adapted Chinese moral leadership instrument and found higher ratings in fairness and care, with notable differences between experienced and novice school leaders (p = 0.02). These studies employed quantitative, survey-based methods, utilizing Likert-scale instruments. While effective in obtaining large-sample insights, their limitation lies in reliance on perception-based data without triangulation. This study adopts a similar quantitative approach but places greater emphasis on the moral dimensions relevant to the Chinese educational context. The key variables investigated in these studies, integrity, care, fairness, and responsibility, mirror the structure used in the present research. However, current literature reveals a gap: few studies have targeted primary and secondary schools in inland Chinese provinces such as Henan, and even fewer have disaggregated the dimensions of moral leadership to directly analyze teacher responses. This study seeks to address these lacunae.

In terms of teacher job satisfaction, recent research has deepened the understanding of both emotional and organizational influences by highlighting specific contributing dimensions such as intrinsic, extrinsic, and general satisfaction. Shi et al. (2024) conducted a large-scale cross-regional survey among 620 primary and secondary teachers in Hubei Province, focusing particularly on leadership fairness and school culture. Their findings indicated that extrinsic satisfaction, especially perceptions of fairness in leadership and equitable treatment, was a significant predictor of job satisfaction (r = 0.41, p < 0.001), with rural teachers demonstrating heightened sensitivity to equity-related issues. Chung (2023) investigated the emotional aspects of teacher job satisfaction in urban South Korean schools and revealed a strong correlation between emotional care and job satisfaction (r = 0.59, p < 0.01), particularly among early-career teachers. This study underscores the importance of intrinsic satisfaction, especially in relation to burnout prevention and teachers' emotional well-being. These findings suggest that emotional support from leadership can substantially boost teacher morale and foster a sense of belonging. In a different context, Arar and Saiti (2022) explored teacher job satisfaction among 488 Arab teachers in Israel and concluded that value-driven leadership had a strong positive impact on general satisfaction and motivation (r = 0.36, p < 0.01). Their research emphasized the role of moral modeling and trust-building, showing how ethical leadership behaviors can shape a school environment that promotes professional fulfillment.

Although all three studies adopted robust quantitative cross-sectional designs with high internal reliability (Cronbach's α > 0.85), the instruments they used varied, ranging from localized Chinese tools to emotionally nuanced scales. Collectively, the variables explored across these studies, including recognition, fairness, workload, and leadership ethics, demonstrate that teacher satisfaction is a multidimensional construct encompassing both affective and cognitive components.

Despite these advances, there remains a lack of research in the Chinese context that examines how specific moral leadership dimensions, such as care, fairness, integrity, and responsibility,

independently and interactively influence different aspects of teacher job satisfaction. Emotional and ethical components are often addressed separately, and teacher perspectives are rarely integrated directly into leadership evaluations. This study addresses these gaps by directly linking school leader moral leadership behaviors to differentiated satisfaction outcomes, namely, intrinsic, extrinsic, and general satisfaction, within the culturally and structurally diverse educational landscape of Henan Province. In exploring the direct relationship between school leader moral leadership and teacher job satisfaction, recent empirical findings underscore the connection. Shi et al. (2024) found a strong positive correlation (r = 0.63, p < 0.01) in Zhejiang Province. Li and Yu (2022), studying 245 teachers across 15 schools in Guangdong Province, concluded that fairness and care were significant predictors of job satisfaction (β = 0.41, p < 0.001). Furthermore, Striepe and Cunningham (2022) adopted a mixed-methods design to investigate ethical leadership in Australian schools, finding that trust cultivated through ethical behavior was central to staff well-being, although implementation varied among leaders. While these studies affirm the significant role of school leader moral leadership, most do not disaggregate individual leadership dimensions or contextualize findings within under-researched areas such as central China. Thus, this study contributes by offering a dimension-specific, context-sensitive analysis of how school leaders moral leadership influences teacher job satisfaction in Henan Province.

3. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative, correlational research design to explore the linear relationship between school leaders moral leadership style dimensions and teacher job satisfaction. The design is descriptive and predictive in nature, seeking to identify the degree of association between the variables without manipulating any of them. The data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire distributed through Tencent Questionnaire Star, ensuring accessibility and familiarity for the participants in Henan. The operationalization of variables aligns closely with the theoretical framework:

Moral Leadership: Measured through four dimensions (integrity, fairness, care, responsibility) based on Brown and Treviño's (2006) model using likert scale. For this purpose, 11 items were adapted purposely for this study.

Teacher Job Satisfaction: Measured using an adapted Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) by Weiss (2022).

The study uses random sampling across 18 cities in Henan Province, ensuring representation from both public and private schools and across primary and secondary levels. Hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlation analysis.

H_1: There is a significant relationship between school leaders moral leadership style and teacher job satisfaction among primary and secondary school teachers in Henan Province, China.

The study was conducted across 18 cities in Henan Province. Henan's diverse educational

landscape, comprising both high-performing public schools and under-resourced private institutions, provides a rich environment for studying the impact of school leaders moral leadership style. The selection of this location is justified by its large number of schools, varied teacher demographics, and contrasting educational settings.

The target population consists of approximately 20,0000 primary and secondary school teachers in Henan Province. This includes both public school teachers, who operate under standardized administrative systems, and private school teachers, who often experience different management styles and employment conditions. A representative sample of 384 teachers was selected to ensure adequate statistical power and generalizability. Random sampling was used to ensure representation across different school types and teaching levels. The stratification dimensions included about school type: public (60%) and private (40%), teaching stage: primary (55%) and secondary (45%) schools. Based on the sample size determination formula proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a population of approximately 20,0000 teachers requires a minimum sample size of 384 participants.

Table 1. Sampling Fraction of Population

Location	Population	Sample size
Henan	20,0000	384

To ensure the scientific rigor and accuracy of the questionnaire used in this study, a multi-step validation and reliability assessment process was implemented. This approach ensures that the instrument accurately reflects the constructs under investigation, namely, school leaders moral leadership style and teacher job satisfaction, and that it yields stable and consistent results across different contexts and administrations. The pilot study was conducted in Henan Province, specifically targeting teachers in both public and private schools. A total of 30 teachers were selected using convenience sampling. The sample was balanced in terms of teaching stage (primary and secondary), years of experience (from <5 years to >10 years), and school type (public vs private) to reflect the diversity of the target population.

3.1 Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to the degree to which an instrument measures what it intends to measure. In this study, three types of validity were evaluated: content validity, construct validity, and face validity.

3.1.1 Content Validity

Content validity was assessed through expert review. One scholars specializing in educational leadership and management were invited to evaluate the relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of the questionnaire items. They reviewed all items related to the four moral leadership dimensions, integrity, fairness, care, and responsibility, as well as the job satisfaction items adapted from the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ). Based on their feedback, items with a content validity ratio (CVR) above 0.42 were retained, ensuring

that the instrument adequately captured all facets of the targeted constructs.

3.1.2 Construct Validity:

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using SPSS to verify the underlying factor structure of the questionnaire. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.82 for the moral leadership scale and 0.85 for the job satisfaction scale, indicating the data were suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$) for both scales. All items had factor loadings exceeding 0.60, confirming that they strongly aligned with their intended latent dimensions and thus demonstrating good construct validity.

3.1.3 Face Validity

A pilot study involving 10 non-sampled primary and secondary school teachers in Henan Province was conducted to evaluate the clarity, readability, and cultural relevance of the questionnaire. Participants were asked to comment on the comprehensibility of the statements and any ambiguities. Based on their suggestions, minor revisions were made to improve the expression and contextual fit of several items, especially in terms of localizing terminology such as "professional moral commitment" and "evaluation and promotion system."

3.1.4 Reliability Analysis

To evaluate the internal consistency of the instruments used in this study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated during the pilot phase. As shown in Table 2, the Ethical Leadership Style (ELS) Scale demonstrated a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.85, indicating a high level of reliability. Similarly, the adapted version of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.88, which also exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.70 as recommended by Taber (2018). The overall reliability of the combined instrument set was 0.865, confirming that the questionnaire items consistently measured the intended constructs.

These results validate the internal consistency of the scales and support their use for the main study.

Table 3. Instruments Reliability

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Ethical Leadership Style (ELS) Scale	0.85	Acceptable
Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ)	0.88	Acceptable
Overall Reliability	0.865	

4. Findings

A total of 384 valid questionnaires were collected in this study, and the demographic characteristics of the samples are distributed as follows:

4.1 Sample Characteristics

A total of 384 valid questionnaires were collected for the study of sample demographic characteristics, and the sample characteristics are shown in Table 3:

Table 3. Distribution of Basic Characteristics of Samples (N=384)

Characteristic Dimension	Category	Number of People	Proportion (%)
Gender	Male	112	29.2
	Female	272	70.5
Age (years)	<30	155	40.4
	30-40	132	34.4
	41-50	72	18.8
	>50	25	6.5
Teaching Experience (months)	<60 (<5 years)	134	34.9
	60-120 (5-10 years)	128	33.3
	121-180 (11-15 years)	72	18.8
	>180 (>15 years)	50	13.0
School Type	Public School	266	69.3
	Private School	118	30.7
Teaching Level	Primary School	189	49.2
	Secondary School	195	50.8

These demographic variables were selected to enhance the depth and representativeness of the analysis. Gender was included because previous studies (e.g., Bogler, 2001) have shown that male and female teachers may differ in how they perceive leadership behaviors, particularly in relation to emotional support and fairness, potentially influencing their levels of job satisfaction. Age and teaching experience were incorporated as key indicators of career stage, which can shape teachers' leadership expectations, exposure to different administrative environments, and susceptibility to burnout. For instance, novice teachers may prioritize mentoring and guidance, whereas more experienced teachers may place greater value on autonomy and professional recognition. The type of school (public vs. private) was also considered, as differing governance models, resource availability, and management styles between school types could significantly affect how leadership is perceived and evaluated. Lastly, teaching level (primary vs. secondary) was included to account for contextual

differences in workload, student-teacher interaction, and leadership engagement, allowing the study to better capture variations in leadership perception across different instructional settings in Henan Province.

From the perspective of gender, female teachers made up the majority (70.9%), which aligns with the national gender composition of the teaching workforce. Similarly, teaching experience showed a younger-skewed distribution, with 68.3% of teachers having less than 10 years of experience, highlighting a new generation of educators with evolving professional expectations. The balanced distribution across public (69.3%) and private (30.7%) schools, as well as between primary (49.1%) and secondary (50.9%) education, ensured that the sample reflects the actual diversity of Henan's education system. Therefore, the inclusion of these variables not only strengthens the representativeness of the sample but also provides a foundation for comparative analysis, enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the study's findings.

4.2 Level of School leaders Moral Leadership Style

Based on 384 valid questionnaires, Table 4 shows scores of primary and secondary school teachers in Henan Province on the dimensions of school leaders moral leadership showed differentiated characteristics.

Table 4. Level of School leaders Moral Leadership Style Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	SD	Level
Care	3.65	0.68	Moderate
Fairness	3.58	0.85	Moderate
Responsibility	3.76	0.65	Moderate
Integrity	3.67	0.54	Moderate
Overall	3.67	0.46	Moderate

The overall mean score for school leaders moral leadership style was 3.67 (SD = 0.46), indicating that teachers perceived a moderately positive presence of moral leadership in their schools. This result suggests that, in general, school leaders are recognized as upholding ethical leadership practices, but there remains room for enhancement across different leadership aspects. Among the four dimensions, responsibility received the highest score (M = 3.76, SD = 0.65), suggesting that school leaders are relatively effective in fulfilling their duties related to school development and staff support. This includes assuming accountability for decisions, implementing long-term goals, and guiding school improvement initiatives. Integrity followed closely with a mean score of 3.67 (SD = 0.54), reflecting teachers' perception that their school leaders generally exhibit consistency between words and actions, uphold ethical norms, and act as moral role models. The relatively lower standard deviation

for this dimension also indicates more uniformity across respondents' views on this trait. Care (M = 3.65, SD = 0.68) was also positively evaluated. Teachers appear to appreciate school leaders who show concern for their professional and emotional well-being, such as through mentoring, active listening, and support during challenging times. However, the slightly higher SD suggests that these practices are not equally distributed across all schools. Fairness received the lowest score among the four dimensions (M = 3.58, SD = 0.85), though still within the moderate range. This indicates that although most school leaders are viewed as generally fair and just in handling teacher relationships and decisions, issues such as favoritism or lack of transparency may still be present in some school environments. The relatively higher standard deviation implies variability in fairness perception across different contexts. In sum, while moral leadership is moderately present in the school systems surveyed, a notable variation exists across the specific dimensions. School leaders scored particularly well on responsibility and integrity, while care and fairness, though still moderate, highlight areas where targeted improvement could strengthen leadership quality. To advance holistic moral leadership practices in Henan's basic education system, it is recommended that training and evaluation systems emphasize ethical consistency, equitable practices, and teacher support mechanisms.

4.3 Teacher Job Satisfaction

In this study, teacher job satisfaction divided into three dimensions such as intrinsic satisfaction, extrinsic satisfaction, and general satisfaction. Based on 384 valid questionnaires, Table 5 shows mean score of primary and secondary school teachers in Henan Province on the dimensions of school leaders' moral leadership.

Table 5. Levels of Teacher Job Satisfaction Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	SD	Level
Intrinsic Satisfaction	3.43	0.68	Moderate
Extrinsic Satisfaction	3.41	0.66	Moderate
General Satisfaction	3.42	0.67	Moderate

The overall situation of teacher job satisfaction is shown in Table 6:

Table 6. Levels of Teacher Job Satisfaction Among Respondents

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Overall	384	100.00%	3.42	0.63
Very low (9-18 points)	6	1.60%		
Low (19-27 points)	108	28.1%		

Medium (28-36 points)	207	53.9%
High (37-45 points)	63	16.40%

Descriptive statistics based on 384 valid responses reveal that the overall level of teacher satisfaction in Henan's primary and secondary schools is moderate, with mean values for the three dimensions ranging narrowly: Intrinsic Satisfaction (M = 3.43, SD = 0.68), Extrinsic Satisfaction (M = 3.41, SD = 0.66), and General Satisfaction (M = 3.42, SD = 0.67). Among them, intrinsic satisfaction slightly leads, indicating that most teachers feel personally motivated and find fulfillment in their work through factors like recognition, autonomy, and self-realization. Extrinsic satisfaction, relating to salary, career development, and school administration, scored slightly lower, suggesting that institutional and structural factors remain a source of dissatisfaction for many teachers. General satisfaction serves as an overall reflection of the teaching experience and falls between the other two dimensions. The relatively consistent standard deviations across all dimensions suggest moderate variability in teachers' experiences, with neither extreme polarization nor uniformity across the sample.

Further categorical analysis of total teacher satisfaction scores (Table 6) shows that while the average satisfaction level is 3.42 (SD = 0.63), still within the moderate range, there is a significant concentration of respondents in the medium satisfaction band (28–36 points), accounting for 53.9% of the sample. Notably, 28.1% of teachers reported low satisfaction, while only 16.4% reported high satisfaction, and a minimal 1.6% experienced very low satisfaction. This indicates that although teachers do not overwhelmingly report dissatisfaction, only a small proportion experience high levels of contentment with their professional environment. These results underscore the importance of leadership efforts to not only sustain intrinsic motivation but also to systematically enhance extrinsic factors, including institutional fairness, promotion mechanisms, and tangible support systems. Improving these elements may be pivotal to shifting a larger proportion of teachers into the high-satisfaction category, thereby boosting teacher retention, morale, and overall school effectiveness.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

For this study, the Pearson Analysis were conducted to verify the relationship between school leaders moral leadership with teacher job satisfaction. Furthermore, in this section, each dimension of moral leadership practice by the school leaders is verified to prove the following hypothesis, with the results shown in Table 7:

H_1 : There is a significant relationship between school leaders moral leadership style and teacher job satisfaction among primary and secondary school teachers in Henan Province, China

Table 7. Pearson Correlation Analysis Table for Each Dimension of School leaders Moral Leadership and Teacher Job Satisfaction

Dimensions of school leaders moral leadership style	Correlation Coefficient (r) with Teacher Job Satisfaction	Significance Level (p)
Care	0.534**	<0.01
Fairness	0.640**	<0.01
Responsibility	0.637**	<0.01
Integrity	0.887**	<0.01
Overall school leaders moral leadership style	**0.976****	**<0.01**

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, **p < .001; Two-tailed test of significance; N= 384

The correlation analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between the overall score of school leader moral leadership style and teacher job satisfaction (r = 0.976, p < 0.01). This proved that schools where school leader exhibit higher levels of moral leadership tend to foster greater teacher job satisfaction. This result strongly supports Hypothesis H_1 and affirms the theoretical proposition of Starratt that moral leadership fosters trust-based organizational identity. Within Henan's educational context, this finding underscores the effectiveness of moral leadership, especially compared to hierarchical or administrative-centered leadership models, in enhancing intrinsic motivation and commitment among teachers.

4.4.1 Correlations by Dimension

The dimensional analysis further reveals meaningful associations between each moral leadership component and teacher job satisfaction:

i.   Care (r = 0.534, p < 0.01): This dimension exhibited a significant positive correlation with teacher job satisfaction. It demonstrates the importance of school leaders' emotional support in meeting teachers' personal and professional development needs. In the cultural setting of Central China, where relational harmony is valued, this finding reinforces the necessity of empathetic and supportive leadership behavior.

ii. Fairness (r = 0.640, p < 0.01): As the strongest correlating dimension, fairness plays a pivotal role in enhancing job satisfaction. Teachers' perceptions of procedural justice, such as inclusion in decision-making and distributive fairness, such as equal access to opportunities, significantly influence their overall satisfaction. This aligns with traditional values emphasizing harmony and equity in workplace relationships.

iii. Responsibility (r = 0.637, p < 0.01): This dimension reflects the degree to which school leaders are seen as accountable for school development and responsive to teacher needs. The correlation indicates that when school leaders assume responsibility for both

operational tasks and long-term development, teachers feel more secure and valued, thereby improving their satisfaction.

iv. Integrity (r = 0.887, p < 0.01): While previous studies often ranked integrity as foundational but less dynamic, in this study it showed an exceptionally high correlation. This suggests that consistency between a school leaders' words and actions has a direct and powerful influence on teachers' trust and satisfaction. When integrity is perceived to be strong, it significantly enhances the credibility of other leadership dimensions.

5. Discussion

This study focuses on primary and secondary school teachers in Henan Province and investigates the relationship between school leader moral leadership style and teachers job satisfaction. school leader moral leadership style is conceptualized through four core dimensions: integrity, fairness, care, and responsibility. Teacher job satisfaction reflects educators' overall sense of support, professional engagement, and occupational well-being. A random sampling method was adopted to ensure the representativeness of the sample across school types, educational stages, and teaching experience. A total of 384 valid questionnaires were collected. The research hypotheses were empirically tested using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The results indicate that both school leaders' moral leadership and teachers' job satisfaction are at a moderately high level. Among the four dimensions, fairness and care showed the most significant impact on satisfaction, suggesting that equitable treatment and emotional support are key elements in shaping teachers' positive experiences. Responsibility and integrity also demonstrated significant positive correlations, though with slightly lower strength. Notably, teachers rated the "care" dimension the highest, underscoring the importance of collective emotional support within the local educational culture. In contrast, the "integrity" dimension received the lowest scores, revealing a gap among some school leaders in aligning words with actions and demonstrating moral leadership. This perceptual discrepancy may weaken teachers' trust in leadership and affect their evaluation of leadership effectiveness.

Despite providing preliminary empirical evidence, this study has certain limitations. It did not conduct a systematic comparison of urban-rural differences, public vs. private school disparities, or variations in satisfaction between primary and secondary schools. These factors may significantly influence leadership perception and teacher job satisfaction, and future research is encouraged to explore these aspects in greater depth. In this study, centered on the relationship between moral leadership style and teacher job satisfaction in primary and secondary schools in Henan Province, carries meaningful implications for both educational theory and practice. It offers a culturally grounded validation of Western-origin leadership theories and delivers context-specific recommendations for educational leadership development and school governance improvement.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study offers several important contributions. First, it localizes the Moral Leadership Theory (Brown & Treviño, 2006) within the Chinese educational context, validating its applicability in Henan Province's collectivist and authority-oriented culture. This aligns with the findings of Shi et al. (2024), who advocate for

contextual adaptation of leadership models to better reflect regional socio-cultural dynamics. Second, by disaggregating school leaders moral leadership style into four dimensions (care, fairness, integrity, and responsibility). This study reveals that fairness and care have the strongest influence on teacher job satisfaction, while responsibility and integrity play relatively weaker but still positive roles. This supports Striepe and Cunningham's (2022) argument that moral leadership must address both emotional and procedural needs to build genuine trust and engagement. Third, the study contributes to leadership trust theory by highlighting the underestimated role of integrity: although it had the lowest score, its decline significantly reduced the effectiveness of other leadership behaviors, reinforcing Chung's (2023) assertion that ethical consistency between a leader's words and actions is critical to long-term trust. Finally, by linking moral leadership to teacher motivation and satisfaction, the research bridges leadership theory with teacher well-being literature, echoing Arar and Saiti's (2022) claim that value-centered leadership is vital in high-pressure education systems to support both the emotional and professional needs of educators.

From a practical perspective, this study yields several actionable insights for school leaders, policymakers, and leadership training institutions. For school leaders, the findings emphasize the importance of consistently fairness and care, through transparent evaluations, equitable workload distribution, and genuine support for teachers' mental well-being and professional development, especially in under-resourced or rural settings (Arar & Saiti, 2022). For educational policymakers, the study suggests integrating moral leadership traits, such as integrity, fairness, and care, into school leaders evaluation systems and promotion criteria. Institutionalizing these values through structured feedback mechanisms can encourage ethical governance as a standard expectation rather than an aspirational quality (Ashfaq & Ilyas, 2021). Leadership training programs should embed modules on moral reasoning, emotional intelligence, and inclusive leadership, using real-world case studies and ethical simulations to reinforce value-driven decision-making (Shi et al., 2024). Additionally, school governance reform efforts may benefit from establishing teacher councils or ethical advisory committees to provide continuous feedback to school leaders, thereby fostering a culture of participation and reducing hierarchical distance (Striepe & Cunningham, 2022). From a human resource standpoint, recruitment and promotion processes for educational leaders should prioritize moral disposition, such as integrity, empathy, and fairness, alongside administrative competence. In summary, this research highlights school leaders moral leadership style as a multidimensional and culturally grounded strategy for enhancing teacher satisfaction, offering both theoretical enrichment and practical guidance for ethical, inclusive, and emotionally intelligent school management.

To enhance teacher job satisfaction through school leader moral leadership style, school leaders should prioritize four key strategies. First, fairness and transparency must be central to decision-making processes, including resource distribution, promotion evaluations, and task assignments. By establishing clear criteria and involving teachers in important decisions, school leaders can reduce perceptions of bias and foster greater institutional trust (Arar & Saiti, 2022). Second, emotional support systems should be strengthened. Care-driven leadership behaviors, such as regular emotional check-ins, peer mentoring programs, and

access to counseling, can significantly improve teachers' well-being and motivation (Chung, 2023; Shi et al., 2024). Third, modeling moral integrity in everyday actions is essential, as consistency between words and deeds builds long-term credibility. School leaders must uphold promises, maintain ethical standards, and serve as moral exemplars in their professional and interpersonal conduct (Striepe & Cunningham, 2022). Finally, responsibility should extend beyond short-term problem-solving. School leaders are encouraged to engage in long-term strategic planning that aligns with shared values and collective goals, thereby promoting sustainable school development (Ashfaq & Ilyas, 2021).

To institutionalize school leaders moral leadership style in school governance, several policy-level actions are recommended. First, education departments should revise school leaders evaluation systems to incorporate teacher feedback on dimensions such as fairness, care, and ethical conduct, ensuring that leadership assessments reflect the lived experiences of educators (Striepe & Cunningham, 2022). Second, policymakers are encouraged to support professional development initiatives that equip school leaders with training in moral reasoning, values-driven decision-making, and effective communication, skills essential for fostering ethical school environments (Shi et al., 2024). Lastly, promoting participatory governance structures, such as teacher councils or advisory committees, can enhance collaborative decision-making and reinforce moral leadership practices at the institutional level (Chung, 2023).

To deepen the understanding of school leader moral leadership style and its impact on teacher job satisfaction, future research should consider several directions. First, longitudinal studies are needed to move beyond the limitations of cross-sectional designs and better establish causal relationships over time (Ashfaq & Ilyas, 2021). Second, comparative studies across different contexts, such as urban versus rural areas, public versus private schools, or primary versus secondary levels, can help uncover how environmental factors moderate leadership effects (Arar & Saiti, 2022). Third, investigating potential mediating variables like trust in leadership, perceptions of organizational justice, or teacher autonomy could clarify the mechanisms through which moral leadership influences satisfaction (Striepe & Cunningham, 2022). Finally, integrating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups would enrich the data, offering deeper insight into how teachers interpret and experience school leader moral leadership style in their daily work (Chung, 2023).

6. Conclusion

This study explored the correlation between school leaders moral leadership and teacher job satisfaction in primary and secondary schools across Henan Province, China. 384 valid responses were collected and analyzed. Results revealed that both school leaders moral leadership and teacher job satisfaction levels were moderately high. Among the four leadership dimensions, care, fairness, responsibility, and integrity, fairness and care emerged as the strongest predictors of teacher job satisfaction, highlighting the centrality of emotional support and transparent decision-making in educational leadership (Striepe & Cunningham, 2022). This study confirmed a significant positive correlation between school leaders moral leadership and teacher job satisfaction, thereby providing empirical support for the

localization and application of principal moral leadership style theory in Chinese educational contexts. In particular, it underscored the cultural significance of collective care and procedural fairness in the Central Plains region. However, integrity scored the lowest among all dimensions, suggesting a need for principals to improve their consistency between words and actions to build greater trust among teachers (Ashfaq & Ilyas, 2021). In terms of implications, the study contributes to the theoretical development of value-based leadership and offers practical guidance for school leaders, policymakers, and education administrators. By promoting emotional care, ethical consistency, and participatory governance, schools can create a more supportive work environment that boosts teacher morale, retention, and overall effectiveness.

Finally, the study acknowledged limitations such as its cross-sectional design and lack of regional comparison, offering suggestions for future research including longitudinal studies, qualitative follow-ups, and broader demographic sampling. In summary, this study deepens the understanding of how principal moral leadership style affects teacher job satisfaction in the Chinese education system and provides a meaningful reference for improving school principal practices under the principle of "governing schools by moral."

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