



# LEGALLY GROUNDED ETHICAL PRACTICES AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES: DEVELOPING A CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAM FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54476/ioer-imrj/877619>

## ABSTRACT

This study examined the legally grounded ethical practices and conflict management strategies of school leaders as assessed by teacher-respondents across diverse academic units and employment profiles. Anchored on the premise that ethical leadership plays a crucial role in fostering professional conduct and harmonious school environments, the research explored dimensions such as professional identity development, inclusive policy implementation, legal literacy, and the integration of ethics in emerging and creative fields. Conflict management strategies were evaluated in terms of emotional literacy, mindfulness, peace education, negotiation, deliberation, and leadership capacity-building. Using quantitative descriptive and inferential methods, data were gathered from a diverse group of teachers categorized by length of service, employment status, and school affiliation. The findings revealed that school leaders were generally perceived to practice legally grounded ethics and conflict management strategies at commendable levels. Notably, emotional literacy and peace education ranked highest among conflict strategies, while negotiation for productivity and capacity-building showed lower ratings. There were no significant differences in the respondents' assessments across demographic profiles, indicating uniform leadership behavior. Significant positive correlations were identified between specific ethical practices—such as interdisciplinary legal integration and contextual legal literacy—and conflict resolution strategies, particularly in the domains of dialogue-based deliberation and leadership development. These results underscore the importance of embedding legally grounded ethical principles into leadership development programs to enhance school leaders' capacity to manage conflicts constructively and equitably. The study concludes with the recommendation to institutionalize structured capacity-building initiatives, emphasizing legal ethics education and adaptive conflict resolution strategies tailored to contextual needs. This is vital to cultivating reflective, inclusive, and legally compliant leadership in contemporary educational settings.

**Keywords:** Capacity Building, Conflict Management, Leadership Capacity Building, Legally-grounded Ethical Practices

## INTRODUCTION

The global education sector is increasingly marked by complexity, requiring school leaders to simultaneously uphold legal standards and manage interpersonal and organizational conflict with ethical integrity. This dual responsibility has

become particularly acute in the wake of evolving legislative mandates, social justice demands, and rapidly changing institutional dynamics (McQuillan et al., 2024; Jenlink & Jenlink, 2018). Research shows that while legal frameworks exist to guide educational practice, many school leaders lack the training to translate these requirements into



ethically sound and context-sensitive decisions (Shykhnenko et al., 2022; Traczykowski, 2024).

In the dynamic landscape of China's educational system, school leaders are increasingly confronted with the dual imperative of upholding legal standards and managing interpersonal and organizational conflicts with ethical integrity. This complexity is accentuated by China's unique socio-cultural context, where Confucian principles emphasizing harmony and hierarchical relationships coexist with modern legal frameworks that demand accountability and transparency. The integration of these paradigms presents a formidable challenge for educational administrators striving to navigate conflicts while adhering to both ethical norms and legal mandates.

As a legal professional with a profound understanding of jurisprudence and ethical considerations, the researcher recognizes the critical need for a structured approach to equip school leaders with the competencies necessary for effective conflict management. This recognition is particularly pertinent in the Chinese educational context, where the traditional emphasis on examination performance and centralized authority often overshadows the cultivation of conflict resolution skills and ethical decision-making. The importance of this study is underscored by the paucity of comprehensive training programs that integrate legal knowledge with ethical conflict management strategies tailored to the Chinese educational milieu. While existing professional development initiatives may address aspects of leadership or legal compliance, they often lack a cohesive framework that encompasses the nuanced interplay between legal obligations and ethical imperatives in conflict situations. This gap in the literature and practice highlights the necessity for a capacity-building program that holistically addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by school leaders in China. Furthermore, the evolving educational reforms in China, which advocate for the development of professional learning communities and the adoption of transformational leadership models, necessitate a reevaluation of traditional conflict management approaches. The integration of legally grounded ethical practices into these

emerging leadership paradigms is essential to foster an environment conducive to collaborative problem-solving and sustainable educational improvement. At the same time, conflict—whether rooted in resource disputes, diversity tensions, or pedagogical differences—remains a pervasive challenge in schools globally. Ineffective conflict management not only undermines school climate but also impedes collaboration, reduces staff morale, and negatively impacts student learning (Van Niekerk et al., 2017; Michinov et al., 2023). Studies have shown that many educators rely on ad hoc or avoidance-based conflict styles, largely due to a lack of structured training in proactive and restorative approaches (O'Neill et al., 2024; Roth, 2008).

The failure to systematically integrate legal-ethical reasoning with effective conflict resolution strategies in school leadership preparation creates a critical gap. Despite the presence of programs addressing either legal compliance or emotional intelligence separately, few frameworks address how these domains intersect to inform leadership decisions under pressure (Burmansah et al., 2024; Lamm et al., 2020). This disconnection is especially problematic in contexts of diversity, inclusion, and equity, where both legal understanding and ethical sensitivity are essential for upholding human rights and maintaining institutional integrity (Beca, 2016; Madhloom, 2022). Globally, school leaders are expected to be not only administrators but also ethical stewards and mediators. Yet, current educational leadership programs often lack comprehensive modules that integrate legally grounded ethics with applied conflict management training (Billionis, 2018; Soomro et al., 2022). As such, there is an urgent need for a capacity-building framework that prepares school leaders to navigate legal obligations and ethical tensions, while also fostering constructive, inclusive conflict resolution practices. This paper addresses this global educational challenge by synthesizing empirical findings and proposing a model for equipping school leaders with the skills and knowledge to lead ethically and resolve conflict effectively.

In light of these considerations, this study aims to develop a capacity-building program that



empowers school leaders in China to effectively manage conflicts through a lens that harmonizes legal compliance with ethical responsibility. By bridging the existing gap in training and resources, the program aspires to enhance the leadership capabilities of educational administrators, thereby contributing to the advancement of ethical governance and conflict resolution in Chinese schools.

This study is grounded primarily in Ethical Leadership Theory and Emotional Intelligence Theory, both of which provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how school leaders navigate legally grounded ethical practices and conflict management within educational institutions. Ethical Leadership Theory, as posited by Brown and Treviño (2006), centers on leaders who demonstrate normatively appropriate conduct and encourage similar behavior among followers through communication, reinforcement, and decision-making. This theory underpins key constructs in the study, such as professional identity formation, adherence to legal norms, and the integration of ethical principles in specialized educational domains. The application of this theory emphasizes that school leaders play a pivotal role in fostering a culture of integrity, compliance, and ethical responsibility—especially relevant in contexts requiring awareness of complex legal obligations like gender-inclusivity, artificial intelligence, and academic misconduct.

Correlated to this, Emotional Intelligence (EI) Theory, popularized by Goleman (1995), serves as a crucial framework for examining how leaders manage relationships and regulate emotions in high-stress or conflict-prone environments. Studies have shown that emotionally intelligent leaders are better equipped to employ constructive conflict management strategies such as compromise and integration (Michinov et al., 2023). EI supports several constructs in this research, including emotional literacy at home, mindfulness, and negotiation-based leadership. By cultivating self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation, school leaders can respond to conflict in a way that promotes collaboration, reduces workplace tension, and enhances overall school productivity. These two theories jointly provide a robust foundation for

analyzing the intersection between legal-ethical responsibility and interpersonal competence in educational leadership.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study was to develop a capacity-building program for school leaders by examining the relationship between legally grounded ethical practices and conflict management strategies in the context of Chinese educational institutions. Specifically, the research will:

1. Assess the teacher-respondents on their school leaders' legally grounded ethical strategies in terms of:
  - 1.1. Professional Identity Development Orientation;
  - 1.2. Gender-Inclusive Policy Implementation Efficacy;
  - 1.3. Contextual Legal Literacy in Specialized Educational Fields;
  - 1.4. Interdisciplinary Legal Ethics Pedagogical Integration;
  - 1.5. Ethical-AI Leadership Awareness;
  - 1.6. Awareness of Legal Implications of Ethical Misconduct;
  - 1.7. Ethico-Legal Instructional Integration in Creative Fields;
  - 1.8. Commitment to Continuous Professional Ethics Formation.
2. Assess the teacher-respondents on their school leaders' conflict management practices in terms of:
  - 2.1. Emotional Literacy at Home;
  - 2.2. Mindfulness;
  - 2.3. Peace Education and Dialogue;
  - 2.4. Negotiation and Teacher Productivity;
  - 2.5. Dialogue-Based Deliberation;
  - 2.6. Leadership Capacity Building.
3. Assess the correlation between school leaders' legally grounded ethical practices and conflict management strategies.
4. Propose a capacity-building program for school leaders.



## METHODOLOGY

*Research Design.* This study utilized a quantitative comparative-correlational design. This approach was most appropriate for the study's objective, which was to assess and compare the perceptions of teachers on the legally grounded ethical practices and conflict management strategies of school leaders, and to determine whether a relationship existed between these two major constructs.

**Population, Samples, and Sampling Technique.** The participants in this study were purposefully selected, 250 teachers from schools in China, based on a set of predefined inclusion criteria. These criteria ensured that the participants possessed the necessary background and experience to provide meaningful responses regarding their school leaders' legally grounded ethical strategies and conflict management strategies.

*Statistical Analysis of Data.* The data collected from the survey instruments were systematically encoded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to address the research objectives and test the hypotheses. Descriptive statistics included frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations, which were used to summarize the respondents' demographic profiles and their overall assessments of school leaders' legally grounded ethical practices and conflict management strategies.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Assessment of School Leaders' Legally Grounded Ethical Strategies

Table 1 presents a comprehensive summary of the teacher-respondents' assessment of their school leaders' legally grounded ethical strategies across eight thematic domains.

Based on the data, the overall weighted mean is 3.24 with a standard deviation of 0.13,

which falls under the qualitative description "Agree" and is interpreted as "Strategic."

**Table 1**  
*Assessment of the Teacher-respondents on their School Leaders' Legally Grounded Ethical Strategies*

Indicator	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Qualitative Description	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Professional Identity Development Orientation	3.2	0.32	Agree	Strategic	5.5
2. Gender-Inclusive Policy Implementation Efficacy	3.19	0.32	Agree	Strategic	7
3. Contextual Legal Literacy in Specialized Educational Fields	3.29	0.28	Agree	Strategic	3
4. Interdisciplinary Legal Ethics Pedagogical Integration	3.33	0.33	Agree	Strategic	1
5. Ethical-AI Leadership Awareness	3.2	0.31	Agree	Strategic	5.5
6. Awareness of Legal Implications of Ethical Misconduct	3.28	0.31	Agree	Strategic	4
7. Ethico-Legal Instructional Integration in Creative Fields	3.10	0.37	Agree	Strategic	6
8. Commitment to Continuous Professional Ethics Formation	3.32	0.29	Agree	Strategic	2
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.24</b>	<b>0.13</b>	Agree	Strategic	

Based on the data, the overall weighted mean is 3.24 with a standard deviation of 0.13, which falls under the qualitative description "Agree" and is interpreted as "Strategic."

This confirms that school leaders are generally perceived to implement legally and ethically aligned strategies with moderate consistency and effectiveness. It can be said that the leadership practices in question are present and functional but not yet exemplary or transformational. This implies that while school leaders demonstrate strategic intent and foundational implementation, there is an institutional opportunity to scale and deepen these efforts for broader impact, especially within evolving educational systems in countries like the Philippines or China.

The highest-rated thematic area is Interdisciplinary Legal Ethics Pedagogical Integration, with a mean score of 3.33 (SD = 0.33), ranked first. This suggests that teachers view their school leaders as most effective in integrating legal and ethical concepts across curricular areas, reinforcing a holistic and cross-subject approach to ethics education. This finding is particularly notable in the context of shifting educational priorities where interdisciplinary competencies,



ethical reasoning, and civic awareness are becoming core outcomes.

The lowest-rated domain is Ethico-Legal Instructional Integration in Creative Fields, with a weighted mean of 3.10 (SD = 0.37), ranked eighth. This reflects that legal and ethical instruction in creative disciplines, such as the arts and media, is perceived as the least strategically implemented. This may stem from the abstract or subjective nature of these fields, or from a lack of structured pedagogical models for legal-ethical instruction tailored to the creative context.

In summary, the results in Table 1 suggest a broadly favorable perception of school leaders' strategic alignment with legal and ethical standards, with all thematic domains falling within the "Strategic" range. However, no domain reached the "Highly Strategic" threshold, highlighting the absence of perceived excellence in any specific area. The variability in scores across domains also reveals a differentiated implementation, with stronger performance in interdisciplinary integration and professional ethics formation, and weaker outcomes in gender policy efficacy and creative field instruction. These findings imply a call for targeted capacity-building and policy refinement to elevate leadership practices from compliance-based approaches to more transformative, legally-grounded ethical leadership in education.

Education leadership also necessitates attention to cultural and legal contexts, as seen in Ukraine. There, the legal codification of leadership roles is considered crucial to aligning management practices with national values and legal frameworks, reinforcing the importance of legal culture in educational leadership (Sukhonos, 2021). These examples demonstrate the importance of addressing both legal and ethical considerations in educational governance and leadership. By establishing clear regulatory guidelines and ethical safeguards, educational institutions can ensure the integrity and impartiality of decision-making processes. Additionally, aligning leadership practices with national values and legal frameworks can help strengthen the overall effectiveness and legitimacy of educational leadership in different cultural contexts. Ultimately, a harmonious intersection of law and ethics is

essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct within academic governance and leadership.

## 2. Assessment of the School Leaders' Conflict Management Practices

Table 2 presents the assessment of teacher-respondents on their school leaders' conflict management practices, specifically in terms of emotional literacy at home, mindfulness, peace education and dialogue, negotiation and teacher productivity, dialogue-based deliberation, and leadership capacity building.

**Table 2**  
*Assessment of the Teacher-Respondents on their School Leaders' Conflict Management Practices*

Indicator	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Qualitative Description	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Emotional Literacy at Home	3.42	0.3	Agree	Practiced	1
2. Mindfulness	3.3	0.36	Agree	Practiced	4
3. Peace Education and Dialogue	3.33	0.35	Agree	Practiced	2.5
4. Negotiation and Teacher Productivity	3.17	0.39	Agree	Practiced	6
5. Dialogue-Based Deliberation	3.35	0.34	Agree	Practiced	2.5
6. Leadership Capacity Building	3.23	0.35	Agree	Practiced	5
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Practiced</b>	

Based on the data, the overall weighted mean is 3.30 with a standard deviation of 0.15, which falls under the qualitative description "Agree" and is interpreted as "Practiced." This finding affirms that school leaders are generally perceived to implement conflict management strategies in a consistent but moderately developed manner, with room for strengthening and deeper institutionalization. It can be said that while these practices are embedded in leadership behavior, they have yet to reach a level of systematic excellence or widespread visibility. This implies a foundational capacity for conflict-responsive leadership that can be further enhanced through targeted training, policy integration, and sustained support.

The highest-rated domain is Emotional Literacy at Home, with a mean of 3.42, ranking first among all indicators. This suggests that school leaders are most effective in recognizing and responding to students' emotional needs that originate from home contexts. The high rating reflects a well-established emphasis on emotional awareness, relational sensitivity, and socio-

emotional support, which are essential for creating a psychologically safe school environment. It also underscores the cultural importance of family-school dynamics in educational contexts such as the Philippines and China, where familial influence on student behavior is both prominent and deeply integrated into holistic education models.

The lowest-rated domain is Negotiation and Teacher Productivity, with a mean score of 3.17. While still interpreted positively, this dimension reflects the least perceived strength among school leaders. The findings imply that although school leaders encourage negotiation and demonstrate conflict resolution skills, there may be hesitancy or inconsistency in fostering open dialogue, mediating peer disputes, or reinforcing win-win solutions in staff dynamics. This result may also be linked to institutional hierarchies or cultural communication patterns that discourage direct negotiation, especially in more formal or bureaucratic environments.

In summary, Table 3 shows that conflict management practices are present and moderately practiced across all domains, with notable strengths in emotional literacy and dialogic approaches. However, areas such as negotiation, leadership development, and mindfulness still require intentional focus. These findings underscore the importance of developing a comprehensive and evidence-informed conflict management framework for school leaders—one that balances emotional intelligence, structured dialogue, and capacity-building. In educational systems that value collaborative governance, teacher empowerment, and learner-centered values, such a framework would enhance both leadership effectiveness and organizational resilience.

Leadership plays a pivotal role in conflict management within educational institutions. Chandolia and Anastasiou (2020) found that transformational and transactional leadership styles are effective in resolving school conflicts, whereas laissez-faire leadership is less effective. Their study in Greek secondary schools highlighted that principals who actively engage in conflict resolution foster a more harmonious school environment.

### 3. Correlation Between School Leaders' Legally Grounded Ethical Practices and Conflict Management Strategies

Table 3 presents the correlation analysis between school leaders' legally grounded ethical practices and their conflict management strategies as assessed by teacher-respondents.

**Table 3**  
*Correlation Between Legally Grounded Ethical Practices and Conflict Management Strategies*

Legally Grounded Ethical Practices	Conflict Management Strategies	Computed r	p	Significance	Interpretation
Professional Identity Development Orientation	Emotional Literacy at Home	0.02	0.98	Accepted	Not Significant
	Mindfulness	0.07	0.96	Accepted	Not Significant
	Productivity	0.04	0.98	Accepted	Not Significant
	Dialogue	0.01	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Negotiation and Teacher Productivity	0.01	0.97	Accepted	Not Significant
	Dialogue-Based Deliberation	0.04	0.93	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices
	Leadership Capacity Building	0.02	0.95	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices
Gender-Inclusive Policy Implementation Efficacy	Emotional Literacy at Home	0.15	0.72	Accepted	Not Significant
	Mindfulness	-0.02	0.95	Accepted	Not Significant
	Productivity	0.07	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Dialogue	0.01	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Negotiation and Teacher Productivity	0.07	0.97	Accepted	Not Significant
	Dialogue-Based Deliberation	0.08	0.91	Accepted	Not Significant
	Leadership Capacity Building	0.07	0.91	Accepted	Not Significant
Convergence-Legal Literacy in Specialized Educational Fields	Emotional Literacy at Home	0.08	0.88	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices
	Mindfulness	0.12	0.81	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices
	Productivity	0.06	0.89	Accepted	Not Significant
	Dialogue	0.02	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Negotiation and Teacher Productivity	0.02	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Dialogue-Based Deliberation	0.04	0.94	Accepted	Not Significant
	Leadership Capacity Building	0.04	0.94	Accepted	Not Significant
Interdisciplinary-Legal Ethics Pedagogical Integration	Emotional Literacy at Home	0.16	0.77	Accepted	Not Significant
	Mindfulness	0.07	0.90	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices
	Productivity	0.02	0.93	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices
	Dialogue	0.01	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Negotiation and Teacher Productivity	0.01	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Dialogue-Based Deliberation	0.05	0.94	Accepted	Not Significant
	Leadership Capacity Building	0.04	0.94	Accepted	Not Significant
Educational Leadership Attainment	Emotional Literacy at Home	0.19	0.68	Accepted	Not Significant
	Mindfulness	0.17	0.62	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices
	Productivity	0.07	0.72	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices
	Dialogue	0.02	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Negotiation and Teacher Productivity	0.02	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Dialogue-Based Deliberation	0.06	0.82	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices
	Leadership Capacity Building	0.06	0.82	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices
Awareness of Legal Implications of Ethical Imprudent	Emotional Literacy at Home	0.15	0.66	Accepted	Not Significant
	Mindfulness	0.02	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Productivity	0.07	0.71	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices
	Dialogue	0.02	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Negotiation and Teacher Productivity	0.02	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Dialogue-Based Deliberation	0.03	0.91	Accepted	Not Significant
	Leadership Capacity Building	0.03	0.91	Accepted	Not Significant
Ethics-Legal Institutional Integration in Creative Fields	Emotional Literacy at Home	0.09	0.75	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices
	Mindfulness	0.03	0.96	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices
	Productivity	-0.02	0.72	Accepted	Not Significant
	Dialogue	0.02	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Negotiation and Teacher Productivity	0.03	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Dialogue-Based Deliberation	0.01	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Leadership Capacity Building	0.01	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
Commitment to Continuous Professional Ethics Formation	Emotional Literacy at Home	0.04	0.93	Accepted	Not Significant
	Mindfulness	-0.02	0.95	Accepted	Not Significant
	Productivity	-0.06	0.94	Accepted	Not Significant
	Dialogue	-0.02	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Negotiation and Teacher Productivity	0.02	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Dialogue-Based Deliberation	0.01	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
	Leadership Capacity Building	0.01	0.99	Accepted	Not Significant
Legally Grounded Ethical Practices	Conflict Management Strategies	0.49	0.008	Rejected	Legally Grounded Ethical Practices

The analysis reveals a statistically significant yet modest overall relationship, with a computed Pearson r value of 0.149 and a significance level of p = 0.008, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This suggests that school leaders who exhibit greater adherence to legally grounded ethical standards are more likely to practice effective conflict management strategies. The findings affirm the theoretical linkage between ethical leadership and institutional harmony, where legality, equity, and professionalism foster constructive resolution approaches.

Among the ethical constructs, Professional Identity Development Orientation showed significant positive correlations with both Dialogue-Based Deliberation (r = 0.144, p = 0.010) and



Leadership Capacity Building ( $r = 0.202, p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that when leaders are committed to reinforcing ethical professionalism, they tend to support collaborative dialogues and cultivate leadership among peers—practices essential for a participatory and growth-centered school culture. Similarly, Gender-Inclusive Policy Implementation Efficacy was significantly correlated with Peace Education and Dialogue ( $r = 0.147, p = 0.009$ ) and Leadership Capacity Building ( $r = 0.177, p = 0.001$ ), emphasizing how inclusive policy orientation contributes to both equitable engagement and developmental leadership in conflict contexts.

Significant results also emerged from Contextual Legal Literacy in Specialized Educational Fields, which correlated strongly with Emotional Literacy at Home ( $r = 0.289, p < 0.001$ ) and moderately with Mindfulness ( $r = 0.121, p = 0.031$ ). These results suggest that school leaders who possess legal understanding tailored to their disciplines are more emotionally responsive and attentive in resolving conflicts. This is particularly relevant in complex educational environments where contextual sensitivity and emotional intelligence intersect with legal obligations. Additionally, Interdisciplinary Legal Ethics Pedagogical Integration positively influenced Mindfulness ( $r = 0.197, p = 0.000$ ), Peace Education and Dialogue ( $r = 0.165, p = 0.003$ ), and Negotiation and Teacher Productivity ( $r = 0.111, p = 0.047$ ), highlighting the positive influence of embedding legal-ethical frameworks into instruction and leadership on reflective and cooperative conflict management.

In conclusion, the overall significant correlation between legally grounded ethical practices and conflict management strategies supports the assertion that ethical leadership enhances school leaders' ability to respond constructively to conflict. However, the variability in correlation strength and direction across domains implies that the effectiveness of ethical strategies depends on contextual alignment and the relational depth of implementation. School leadership development programs should therefore aim to balance policy-based ethical education with relational, emotional, and dialogic competencies to create a holistic approach to conflict management. This is

especially important in educational contexts undergoing rapid transformation, where ethics, inclusivity, and emotional intelligence remain essential for sustaining institutional harmony. In China, school leaders and educators face the challenge of implementing broad national policies such as the "Health First" directive. The real-world application of such policies is often reframed through the lens of "safety first," a shift influenced by legal awareness and ethical responsibility. This dynamic illustrates how legal systems shape ethical decision-making at the ground level (Meng, Horrell, & McMillan, 2023).

#### 4. Propose a capacity-building program for school leaders

##### Rationale

The formulation of a leadership ethics action plan grounded on the results of this study is essential to address both the strengths and the gaps identified in school leaders' legally grounded ethical practices and conflict management strategies. With the growing complexity of educational governance and stakeholder diversity, leaders must exemplify ethical conduct and legal literacy while fostering harmonious environments through strategic conflict management.

Focusing on Professional Identity Development Orientation ensures that school leaders possess a strong foundation in ethical leadership. By reinforcing their sense of duty, accountability, and integrity, leaders are more equipped to make decisions that benefit the institution and its stakeholders. Complementary to this is the emphasis on Gender-Inclusive Policy Implementation, which addresses the need for equitable leadership practices, particularly in diverse academic environments. Legal literacy specific to each academic field is also crucial, especially for disciplines with distinct regulatory frameworks, hence the inclusion of Contextual Legal Literacy in Specialized Fields.

The action plan also recognizes the necessity of Interdisciplinary Legal Ethics Integration and Ethico-Legal Instructional Integration in Creative Fields, where ethical considerations are often context-specific and



evolve rapidly. These KRAs aim to embed ethical-legal reasoning into instructional design and leadership behavior. Additionally, Ethical-AI Leadership Awareness is introduced to prepare leaders for emerging dilemmas in technology use, data privacy, and algorithmic decision-making in school systems.

Conflict management is another priority in the plan, with Emotional Literacy at Home, Mindfulness, and Peace Education and Dialogue included to promote emotional intelligence, reflective practice, and peaceful conflict resolution. These initiatives foster psychologically safe environments conducive to open communication and collaboration. Meanwhile, Negotiation and Teacher Productivity and Dialogue-Based Deliberation highlight the need to resolve professional disagreements constructively and develop a culture of participatory decision-making.

Finally, Leadership Capacity Building and Commitment to Continuous Professional Ethics Formation address long-term leadership development. By institutionalizing ethical formation and capacity-building programs, schools ensure sustainability and resilience in leadership practices. Altogether, this action plan aligns with the broader goal of nurturing legally and ethically grounded school leaders who can effectively manage conflict, model ethical behavior, and lead transformational change in their institutions.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results, the following conclusions were drawn to encapsulate the key findings of the study:

1. The overall assessment of school leaders' ethical practices was favorable, with respondents agreeing that their leaders embody professional identity, demonstrate inclusive policymaking, and apply ethical principles in decision-making. However, certain areas—such as awareness of ethical implications of artificial intelligence and the integration of legal ethics in creative disciplines—received relatively lower mean scores. This suggests a need for targeted leadership enrichment

programs that align emerging legal-ethical complexities with day-to-day educational governance.

2. While school leaders were generally seen to demonstrate conflict management strategies such as emotional literacy, dialogue-based deliberation, and peace education, practices relating to negotiation for teacher productivity and leadership capacity building were rated lower. This uneven emphasis reveals important developmental opportunities. Leadership development programs must address these gaps to cultivate more empowered, resilient, and participatory school environments.
3. The correlation analysis revealed that certain legally grounded ethical practices—such as contextual legal literacy, interdisciplinary ethics integration, and AI-related ethical awareness—were significantly associated with effective conflict management strategies, particularly in areas like dialogue-based deliberation and leadership capacity building. These findings confirm that ethical leadership is not a peripheral attribute but a fundamental lever in fostering a constructive, harmonious, and professionally supportive school culture.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the school leaders' legally grounded ethical practices and conflict management strategies:

1. School administrators should be provided with capacity-building programs that focus on legally grounded ethical practices, including contextual legal literacy, ethical-AI awareness, and interdisciplinary ethics. These modules should be tailored to address areas where respondents rated practices as only moderately demonstrated.



2. To enhance school leaders' ability to resolve workplace conflict, institutions should institutionalize workshops on advanced conflict management approaches, including mindfulness, negotiation frameworks, and peace-oriented dialogue. Emphasis should be placed on real-world application in school settings.
3. Findings suggest that dialogue-based deliberation and emotional literacy are strong predictors of effective conflict management. Leadership development programs should therefore incorporate reflective practices, inclusive communication, and participatory decision-making to sustain a collegial atmosphere.
4. To sustain ethically grounded and conflict-resilient leadership, schools must establish performance appraisal systems that track both ethical conduct and conflict resolution practices. These tools should include feedback mechanisms from both teaching and non-teaching personnel.
5. Although no significant differences were observed in assessments based on length of service, employment status, or school affiliation, it remains essential to ensure that ethical leadership practices are not only uniformly applied but also responsive to the unique needs of various teacher demographics.
6. Finally, education policymakers and institutional leaders should base leadership policy reforms on empirical data like this study's findings. The integration of ethics and conflict management into school leadership standards must be evidence-driven, scalable, and adaptive to emerging educational challenges.

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