Examining the Relationship Between Ethical Climate and Organizational Commitment with the Mediating Role of Organizational–Professional Conflict in Educational Settings of Physical Education and Sport Sciences

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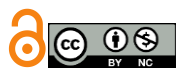* Corresponding author email address: shamsfarahnaz@yahoo.com

A r t i c l e I n f o

A B S T R A C T

Objective: This study aimed to examine the relationship between ethical climate and organizational commitment among physical education teachers in Iran, focusing on the mediating role of organizational–professional conflict.

Methods and Materials: A correlational–descriptive design was used. The statistical population consisted of all physical education teachers in Iran (N ≈ 27,000). Based on Cochran and Sharp's formula, 476 participants were selected through random sampling. Data were collected using four standardized instruments: the Ethical Climate Questionnaire (Cullen et al., 1993), the Organizational–Professional Conflict Questionnaire (Shafer et al., 2002), the Affective Commitment Scale (Meyer & Allen, 1984), and the Impression Management Scale (Paulhus, 1991). Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.76 to 0.89, confirming acceptable reliability. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression analysis via AMOS software, with significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Findings: Results revealed that ethical climate dimensions significantly influenced both organizational–professional conflict and affective commitment. Egoistic/individual, egoistic/cosmopolitan, and benevolent/local climates negatively predicted organizational–professional conflict, whereas principled/individual and principled/cosmopolitan climates showed positive effects. Ethical climate variables accounted for 47% of the variance in organizational–professional conflict and 37% in affective commitment. Organizational–professional conflict exhibited a significant negative correlation with affective commitment but did not mediate the relationship between ethical climate and commitment. Impression management significantly influenced reported perceptions of ethical climate and commitment, indicating potential social desirability bias.

Conclusion: The ethical climate in educational organizations plays a pivotal role in shaping teachers' commitment and managing professional conflicts. Benevolent and principled ethical climates foster stronger affective commitment, whereas egoistic climates undermine it. However, organizational–professional conflict does not function as a mediator in this relationship. Enhancing ethical awareness, fairness, and supportive communication among educational managers can improve teachers' affective commitment and organizational harmony.

Keywords: *Ethical Climate; Organizational Commitment; Organizational–Professional Conflict; Impression Management; Educational Settings; Sport Sciences*

1   Introduction

In modern educational and organizational contexts, ethical conduct and organizational commitment have emerged as vital determinants of institutional effectiveness and individual performance. The increasing complexity of professional roles and ethical responsibilities has necessitated a deeper understanding of how ethical climates influence employee attitudes, particularly commitment and professional alignment. Educational institutions, especially those within physical education and sports sciences, serve as both learning and ethical environments, where leaders must balance organizational objectives with professional standards to sustain harmony and motivation among staff (Yaseen et al., 2025). Within such settings, teachers' organizational commitment is influenced not only by leadership practices but also by the perceived ethical climate, conflict management strategies, and the extent to which organizational and professional values are aligned.

Organizational climate is a multifaceted construct encompassing communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution practices that collectively shape employees' behavioral outcomes and sense of belonging (Augustine & Bora, 2024). A favorable climate is characterized by trust, collaboration, and transparency, leading to higher employee satisfaction, whereas a negative climate rooted in ambiguity or power imbalance fosters disengagement and resistance. The quality of communication and the nature of interpersonal relationships play decisive roles in mediating these dynamics (Nirwana et al., 2025). Within educational systems, effective communication and ethical leadership can strengthen teachers' affective commitment by promoting fairness and moral integrity in institutional interactions (Motsamai & Onyenankeya, 2025).

The ethical climate of an organization represents a collective perception of what constitutes right and wrong behavior in the workplace. It encompasses shared moral norms, ethical practices, and value-based decision-making processes that guide members' conduct (Bates et al., 2025).

Ethical climate acts as a behavioral compass, shaping professional judgments and influencing how conflicts, dilemmas, and responsibilities are managed (Kobiyh et al., 2024). When ethical standards are embedded in an organization's structure, employees develop a stronger moral commitment to their professional duties, enhancing overall organizational loyalty (İncekara et al., 2024). Conversely, environments with weak ethical foundations or ambiguous moral guidelines tend to experience increased ethical conflicts, reduced trust, and lower commitment levels (Mosquera et al., 2024).

Leadership plays an integral role in shaping the ethical tone and emotional climate of an organization. In educational institutions, ethical leadership is not merely an administrative competency but a moral imperative that influences teachers' motivation, decision-making, and professional identity (Wu & Merialses, 2024). Ethical leaders model principled behavior, foster open communication, and encourage ethical reflection among staff, ultimately strengthening their organizational commitment (Mou & Dai, 2024). This dynamic becomes particularly critical in academic and sports education environments, where instructors act simultaneously as educators and ethical role models for students. Leaders who embody integrity and fairness are more likely to cultivate a benevolent and principled ethical climate, which, in turn, enhances collective commitment and reduces workplace conflict (Yaseen et al., 2025).

Conflict is an inevitable element of organizational life, often arising from differences in goals, expectations, or value systems. However, conflict can either be constructive—stimulating dialogue and innovation—or destructive—leading to tension and disengagement (Ferreira et al., 2024). Effective conflict management strategies emphasize communication, empathy, and negotiation to resolve disputes while preserving relationships (Bohuslavska et al., 2024). In contrast, unresolved or poorly managed conflicts in educational environments can exacerbate stress, reduce job satisfaction, and undermine teachers' commitment (Maryani & Gazali, 2024).

Particularly in the educational context, organizational–professional conflict (OPC) occurs when institutional demands contradict professional ethics or pedagogical principles (Shukla et al., 2024). Teachers may experience moral tension when administrative expectations challenge their sense of professional responsibility, leading to reduced motivation and lower organizational attachment (Ostermeier et al., 2023).

Organizational–professional conflict is particularly salient in academic and sports education settings, where professional standards, ethical obligations, and institutional policies intersect. Such conflicts may arise when teachers perceive that their autonomy or ethical integrity is compromised by administrative decisions (Saberi et al., 2024). As a result, understanding the antecedents of organizational–professional conflict becomes essential for maintaining both professional ethics and organizational harmony. Studies have shown that ethical climates emphasizing benevolence and principled conduct tend to mitigate conflict, whereas egoistic climates—focused on self-interest or profit maximization—tend to intensify it (Parboteeah et al., 2024).

Interpersonal communication and relational harmony are also decisive in reducing the frequency and intensity of workplace conflicts. Human relations practices that prioritize empathy, recognition, and fairness contribute to the creation of positive climates that promote both professional satisfaction and commitment (Olivia Putri et al., 2024). Moreover, proactive conflict resolution programs have been found to enhance organizational citizenship behaviors and strengthen interpersonal cooperation (Lin & Villanueva, 2024). Within this framework, an ethical and communicative climate functions as both a preventive and corrective mechanism for organizational–professional conflicts (Ginting et al., 2024).

The literature on conflict management emphasizes that the ethical dimension of an organization can shape how individuals interpret and respond to conflict situations (Hyatt & Gruenglas, 2023). Ethical climates based on fairness and mutual respect promote constructive conflict management by encouraging open dialogue and mutual understanding (Adniyah et al., 2024). In educational contexts, where professional values are deeply ingrained, the perceived alignment between institutional ethics and individual morality becomes pivotal in determining teachers' emotional attachment to their institutions. When ethical misalignment occurs, teachers may experience stress and diminished job satisfaction, which can manifest as withdrawal or professional disengagement (Odhiambo et al., 2023).

The concept of ethical climate is rooted in moral philosophy and organizational sociology, integrating principles of justice, care, and responsibility (Caso et al., 2023). It encompasses the shared moral framework that governs employees' decisions and interactions, reflecting both individual and collective ethical orientations (Kumar & Kanta, 2024). Organizations that cultivate principled climates—anchored in fairness and ethical reasoning—tend to foster employee trust, reduce deviant behavior, and enhance long-term loyalty (Muthuswamy & Varshika, 2023). Conversely, egoistic or instrumental climates often encourage competitive or manipulative behaviors, which erode social cohesion and lead to organizational–professional conflicts (Bravo et al., 2024).

From a human resources perspective, ethical climate and organizational commitment are intrinsically linked. Employees who perceive their work environments as ethical are more likely to demonstrate affective commitment, defined as emotional attachment and identification with organizational goals (Fantahun et al., 2023). This form of commitment fosters resilience, reduces turnover, and enhances performance (Io, 2023). The quality of work life, including ethical governance, fair treatment, and transparent communication, further strengthens this bond (Konrad Lorenz et al., 2025). Thus, an organization's ethical infrastructure can serve as a strategic asset in sustaining engagement and loyalty among staff (Mosquera et al., 2024).

The ethical climate also interacts with contextual moderators that influence how moral perceptions translate into behavior. As highlighted by (Bates et al., 2025), contextual factors such as leadership style, institutional culture, and social norms significantly shape how employees internalize ethical expectations. In schools and universities, where professional ethics and public service motives are central, the ethical climate assumes an even more critical function. Teachers not only interpret institutional ethics through their personal values but also transmit these ethical cues to students, thereby reinforcing or undermining the institution's moral credibility (Karaca Güzel & Göksoy, 2023).

Research in nursing, healthcare, and educational organizations consistently demonstrates that a benevolent and principled ethical climate leads to higher job satisfaction, lower turnover, and stronger moral engagement (Ammari & Gantare, 2024). Conversely, when employees perceive injustice, discrimination, or inconsistency in ethical

practices, their motivation and well-being deteriorate (Bravo et al., 2024). Moreover, discrimination or ethical inconsistency within educational institutions can undermine psychological safety, reducing teachers' willingness to engage collaboratively and innovate (Motsamai & Onyenankeya, 2025).

In the educational domain, the presence of ethical leadership and a just climate can prevent the escalation of professional conflicts by reinforcing trust and moral clarity (İncekara et al., 2024). Ethical leadership fosters an environment where educators feel valued, respected, and fairly treated, which enhances both their ethical behavior and affective organizational commitment (Juniarti, 2024). Additionally, studies indicate that leadership practices emphasizing empathy, inclusivity, and accountability can serve as buffers against moral distress and organizational cynicism (Mosquera et al., 2024).

The intersection of ethical climate, organizational–professional conflict, and affective commitment has been further elucidated in recent studies across diverse cultural and occupational contexts. For instance, secondary school athletic trainers reported that transparent communication and relationship-building strategies reduced professional conflicts and enhanced their commitment (Pike Lacy et al., 2024). Similarly, among auditors and accountants, professional ideology and ethical alignment were found to significantly moderate organizational–professional conflicts (Saberi et al., 2024). These findings underscore the cross-sectoral relevance of ethical climate as a determinant of professional behavior and commitment.

Educational systems worldwide are increasingly confronted with ethical challenges arising from role ambiguity, bureaucratic pressures, and competing institutional priorities (Ostermeier et al., 2023). Such tensions highlight the importance of cultivating a principled ethical climate that aligns organizational policies with professional codes of conduct. Moreover, conflict resolution practices, including negotiation, mediation, and dialogue facilitation, are essential tools in managing ethical and professional disagreements (Ferreira et al., 2024). When combined with strong ethical leadership, these strategies create a moral infrastructure that supports both institutional stability and individual well-being (Bohuslavska et al., 2024).

In sum, an ethical climate serves as the moral architecture of an organization, determining how individuals perceive fairness, resolve conflicts, and commit to collective goals. Within educational environments—particularly in physical education and sports sciences—ethical climates grounded in benevolence and principles foster stronger affective commitment and reduce organizational–professional conflict. Conversely, egoistic climates that emphasize self-interest or rigid hierarchies can erode trust, stimulate conflict, and diminish commitment (Parboteeah et al., 2024). By integrating moral reasoning, transparent communication, and effective leadership, institutions can nurture a climate that promotes both ethical integrity and professional loyalty.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the relationship between ethical climate and organizational commitment with the mediating role of organizational–professional conflict in educational settings of physical education and sport sciences.

2   Methods and Materials

The statistical population of this study consisted of all physical education teachers employed in schools across the country, totaling approximately 27,000 individuals. The sample comprised 476 participants, with 59% being female and 41% male, selected using the Cochran and Sharp table. The rationale for employing this table was to determine the sample size based on the population's characteristics, the desired precision of the observations, and the large size of the statistical population of teachers nationwide.

The data were collected using four standardized questionnaires: (1) the Ethical Climate Questionnaire (Cullen et al., 1993) to assess perceptions of ethical climate in the workplace; (2) the Organizational-Professional Conflict Questionnaire (Shafer et al., 2002), adapted from Aranya's (1984) (Aranya & Ferris, 1984) original instrument, which measures tension between organizational and professional values; (3) the Affective Commitment Questionnaire (Meyer & Allen, 1984) to evaluate teachers' emotional attachment to the organization; and (4) the Impression Management Questionnaire (Paulhus, 1991), used to control for social desirability bias, particularly in studies involving sensitive ethical judgments and perceptions. The reliability of the questionnaires was determined using Cronbach's alpha, with values of 0.76 for the Ethical Climate Questionnaire, 0.89 for the Organizational-Professional Conflict Questionnaire, 0.85 for the Affective Commitment Questionnaire, and 0.79 for the Impression Management Questionnaire, all measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Data collection was conducted through the distribution of electronic questionnaires on social media platforms among a

selected sample of physical education teachers. The study utilized standardized tools to ensure consistency in data collection.

For the analysis of the collected data, two primary statistical methods were employed. First, Pearson's correlation test was used to examine the relationships between the variables of ethical climate, organizational-professional conflict, and affective commitment. This test was selected due to its ability to measure linear relationships between quantitative variables. Subsequently, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to assess the mediating effects of organizational-professional conflict. All analyses were performed using AMOS software. To control for social desirability bias, scores from the Impression Management Questionnaire (Paulhus, 1991) were included as a control variable in the regression model. The statistical significance level for all tests was set at 0.05.

3 Findings and Results

The correlation between the research variables is presented in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1

Internal Correlation of the Research Variables

row	Statistical variable/indicator	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	Professional-organizational conflict	3.58	1.04	1											
2	Affective Organizational commitment	4.19	0.94	-0.09	1										
3	Impression management	4.81	0.90	-0.07	0.23**	1									
4	Egoistic/individual climate	3.31	0.83	-0.06	-0.29**	-0.54	1								
5	Egoistic/local climate	3.92	0.97	-0.22**	0.20**	0.10*	-0.01	1							
6	Egoistic/cosmopolitan climate	4.81	1.14	-0.45**	0.20**	0.02**	-0.27**	-0.43**	1						
7	Benevolent/individual climate	3.89	1.09	-0.21**	-0.03	0.15*	-0.19*	0.47**	0.63**	1					
8	Benevolent/local climate	3.96	3.31	-0.45**	-0.04	0.16*	0.18	0.35**	0.59**	0.58**	1				
9	Benevolent/cosmopolitan climate	3.93	1.24	-0.34**	-0.03	0.14	0.29**	0.50**	0.45**	0.52**	0.85**	1			
10	Principle/individual climate	3.59	0.86	0.29**	-0.25**	0.15*	0.14	0.06	0.16*	0.29**	0.17*	0.13	1		
11	Principle/local climate	4.47	1.10	-0.34**	-0.03	0.15*	0.07	0.48**	0.61**	0.55**	0.81**	0.78**	0.16	1	
12	Principle/cosmopolitan climate	4.44	1.14	-0.31**	-0.10	0.06	-0.13	0.30**	0.66**	0.59**	0.74**	0.60**	0.07	0.71**	1

$p < .05$ marked with * , $p < .01$ marked with **

In Table 1, the means, standard deviations, and internal correlations among the research variables are presented. As shown in Table 1, organizational-professional conflict has a significant positive relationship ($p \leq 0.01$) only with the Principle/ individual climate. Additionally, it exhibits significant negative correlations with Egoistic/local climate, Egoistic/cosmopolitan climate, Benevolent/individual climate, Benevolent/local climate, Benevolent/cosmopolitan

climate, Principle/ individual climate, Principle/ local climate and Principle/cosmopolitan climate. However, organizational-professional conflict does not correlate with organizational commitment,

Impression management and Egoistic/individual climate.

As also observed in Table 1, organizational commitment is significantly positively correlated with Impression management, Egoistic/local climate and Egoistic/cosmopolitan climate. Conversely, it has significant negative correlations ($p \leq 0.01$) with Egoistic/individual climate, Principle/ individual climate and Principle/cosmopolitan climate, respectively. It shows no significant relationship with Principle/ local climate and any dimensions of the benevolence climate.

According to Table 1, perceptual management demonstrates significant positive correlations ($p \leq 0.05$) with Egoistic/local climate, Benevolent/individual climate, Benevolent/local climate, Principle/ individual climate and

Principle/ local climate, respectively. It also has a significant negative correlation with Egoistic/individual climate. However, perceptual management is not significantly related to Egoistic/cosmopolitan climate and Principle/cosmopolitan climate.

The measurement of impression management has shown substantial correlations with many variables. The correlations presented in Table 2 indicate that participants tended to report their organizational-professional conflict in a downward-biased manner, while their reports of affective commitment were biased upward. The negative (positive) correlations between impression management and types of self-centered (Cosmopolitan) climate also suggest that reports of the ethical climate in Educational Settings of Physical Education and Sport Sciences may portray the environment in a more "ethical" light. To control for the effects of social desirability bias, the impression management variable was included in all regression models.

Table 2

Hierarchical Mediation Regression to Examine the Mediating Role of Professional-Organizational Conflict

	Standard beta	t-statistic	p-value
Step 1: effects of ethical climate on OPC			
Independent variables			
Egoistic/individual climate	-0.21	-2.64	0.009
Egoistic/local climate	-0.004	-0.05	0.956
Egoistic /cosmopolitan climate	-0.57	-6.25	0.001
Benevolent/individual climate	-0.02	-0.27	0.781
Benevolent/local climate	-0.46	-3.00	0.003
Benevolent/cosmopolitan climate	0.17	1.28	0.201
Principle/individual climate	0.49	7.62	0.001
Principle/local climate	-0.04	-0.37	0.712
Principle/cosmopolitan climate	0.29	2.84	0.005
Impression management	0.164	2.70	0.008
Model F-value	14.97		
Model significance	0.001		
Model R ^{2}	0.47		
Step 2: effects of ethical climate on affective OC			
Independent variables			
Egoistic/individual climate	-0.44	-5.01	0.001
Egoistic/local climate	0.28	3.43	0.001
Egoistic /cosmopolitan climate	0.35	3.55	0.001
Benevolent/individual climate	-0.31	3.16	0.002
Benevolent/local climate	0.43	2.53	0.012
Benevolent/cosmopolitan climate	0.18	1.24	0.217
Principle/individual climate	-0.16	-2.35	0.020
Principle/local climate	-0.46	-3.34	0.001
Principle/cosmopolitan climate	-0.40	-3.65	0.001
Impression management	0.12	1.81	0,072
Model F-value	10.02		
Model significance	0.001		
Model R ^{2}	0.379		

Step 3: effects of ethical climate and OPC on affective OC			
Independent variables			
Egoistic/individual climate	-0.42	-4.64	0.001
Egoistic/local climate	0.29	3/45	0.001
Egoistic /cosmopolitan climate	0.42	3.80	0.001
Benevolent/individual climate	-0.30	-3.13	0.002
Benevolent/local climate	0.48	2.78	0.006
Benevolent/cosmopolitan climate	0.16	1.10	0.272
Principle/individual climate	-0.22	-2.72	0.007
Principle/local climate	-0.45	-3.31	0.001
Principle/cosmopolitan climate	-0.44	-3.87	0.001
Impression management	0.10	1.49	0.136
OPC	0.11	1.35	0.17
Model F-value	9.33		
Model significance	0.001		
Model R ^{2}	0.386		

These hypotheses were tested using multiple regression models. Hypothesis 1 (H1) was examined by fitting the organizational-professional conflict against the variables of ethical climate and Impression management. As reported in Step 1 of Table 3, the results indicate that two types of ethical climate (Principle/individual climate and Principle/cosmopolitan climate) had a significant positive effect on organizational-professional conflict. As predicted, Egoistic/individual climate, Egoistic /cosmopolitan climate and Benevolent/local climate also exhibited a significant negative effect on organizational-professional conflict. The only exception in H1 was that the effects of Egoistic/local climate, Benevolent/individual climate, Benevolent/cosmopolitan climate and Principle/local climate were not statistically significant. The only other significant variable in this model was Impression management, which showed a negative effect on organizational-professional conflict. This model was highly significant and explained 47 percent of the variance, effectively predicting organizational-professional conflict among physical education teachers.

These hypotheses were tested using multiple regression models. (H1) To test (H2), affective commitment was regressed on factors such as ethical climate and Impression management. The results of this model, presented in Step 2 of Table 3, indicate that ethical climate variables had significant effects on affective commitment, while one type of climate showed no significant effect. As expected, the Egoistic/local climate, Egoistic /cosmopolitan climate and Benevolent/local climate had highly significant positive effects on affective commitment. The Egoistic/individual climate, Benevolent/individual climate, Principle/individual climate, Principle/local climate and Principle/cosmopolitan climate had largely significant negative effects on commitment, whereas the effect of the Egoistic /cosmopolitan climate was not significant. This model was again highly significant and with 37% explained variance was able to predict affective commitment among physical education teachers. The results presented so far indicate that organizational ethical climate has very significant direct effects on organizational-professional conflict (H1) and affective commitment (H2), and there is a strong negative correlation between organizational-professional conflict and affective commitment (H3).

Test (H4) was also conducted. Given that the ethical climate factors had significant direct effects on both OPC and OC in separate regression models, mediation would be indicated if, in a regression of OC on both ethical climate and OPC, the OPC variable remained significant and the climate variables decreased in significance. The results of this test, reported in Step 3 of Table 3, indicate that role conflict is not a significant mediator in the relationship between ethical climate factors and affective commitment. When organizational-professional conflict was entered into the regression of affective commitment on ethical climate, its effect became non-significant.

Figure 1

Hypothesized Relationships among Ethical Climate, Professional-Organizational Conflict, and organizational Commitment
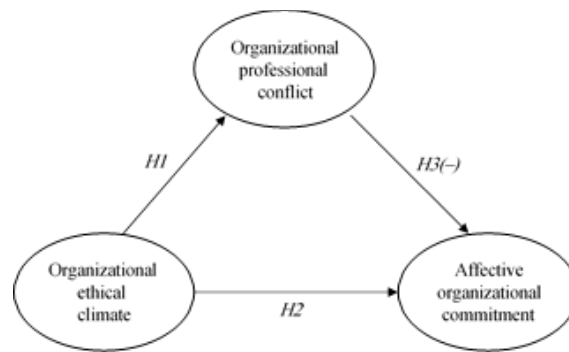
4   Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between ethical climate and organizational commitment with the mediating role of organizational–professional conflict among physical education teachers in Iran. The findings indicated that dimensions of the ethical climate significantly influenced both organizational–professional conflict and affective commitment, whereas organizational–professional conflict did not mediate the relationship between these variables. The results demonstrated that egoistic/individual, egoistic/cosmopolitan, and benevolent/local climates negatively predicted organizational–professional conflict, while principled/individual and principled/cosmopolitan climates exhibited positive effects. Additionally, ethical climate variables accounted for 47% of the variance in organizational–professional conflict and 37% in affective organizational commitment. These findings underscore the pivotal role of moral culture and ethical perception within educational institutions, reaffirming that the ethical environment shapes teachers' emotional attachment and professional alignment within their organizations.

The observed negative relationship between benevolent ethical climates and organizational–professional conflict aligns with the theoretical premise that ethical environments emphasizing care, fairness, and social responsibility tend to mitigate interpersonal tensions and professional dilemmas (Parboteeah et al., 2024). Teachers working in benevolent climates experience greater interpersonal trust, collegial support, and moral clarity, which collectively reduce perceived organizational–professional inconsistencies. Similar findings were reported in studies conducted in healthcare and public administration, where benevolent ethical climates were associated with lower conflict intensity and higher cooperation levels (Ammari & Gantare, 2024; Bohuslavska et al., 2024). In the present study, the

benevolent/local climate was particularly influential, suggesting that an emphasis on compassion and community-oriented values within the school environment reduces professional tension. This finding complements the work of (Ginting et al., 2024), who highlighted that ethical communication and collective empathy significantly improve employee satisfaction and collaborative problem-solving.

Conversely, the positive association between principled/individual and principled/cosmopolitan climates and organizational–professional conflict may seem counterintuitive but can be explained by the nature of professional autonomy and ethical rigidity. In schools where teachers adhere to individualized moral codes or external professional standards, tension may arise when institutional policies diverge from personal or professional ethics (Shukla et al., 2024). This result resonates with the theoretical insights of (Ostermeier et al., 2023), who argued that identity conflict occurs when professional values and organizational expectations collide, creating moral strain and reduced alignment. Furthermore, (Saberi et al., 2024) observed similar patterns among auditors, where adherence to professional ethics sometimes conflicted with organizational directives, leading to organizational–professional discord. Such findings suggest that while principled climates uphold moral integrity, they may inadvertently intensify conflict when institutional flexibility or dialogue mechanisms are insufficient to reconcile ethical disagreements.

The results also revealed that egoistic/individual and egoistic/cosmopolitan climates negatively predicted organizational–professional conflict, suggesting that environments focused on self-interest or institutional pragmatism may paradoxically reduce overt conflict by discouraging moral debate or ethical confrontation. Employees in such climates might prioritize compliance or personal advancement over moral deliberation, leading to superficial harmony rather than genuine ethical alignment (Muthuswamy & Varshika, 2023). This finding is consistent

with (Kobiyh et al., 2024), who noted that in organizations driven by self-interest and profit motives, ethical silence often emerges as a coping mechanism to avoid confrontation. Similarly, (Karaca Güzel & Göksoy, 2023) emphasized that organizational silence—often rooted in fear of reprisal or ethical ambiguity—can suppress constructive dissent and conceal deeper moral conflicts. Therefore, although egoistic climates appear to reduce conflict statistically, they may mask underlying dissatisfaction or ethical disengagement.

The study also demonstrated that ethical climate dimensions significantly influenced affective organizational commitment, corroborating findings from previous research that highlight the interdependence between moral culture and emotional attachment to the organization (Fantahun et al., 2023; Io, 2023). Teachers in environments characterized by fairness, ethical transparency, and moral consistency are more likely to develop affective commitment, as they perceive the organization as aligned with their personal and professional values. These findings echo the conclusions of (Mou & Dai, 2024), who argued that organizational commitment is deeply intertwined with value congruence and identity integration. Similarly, (Yaseen et al., 2025) found that academic leadership that fosters ethical and participative climates enhances teachers' engagement and loyalty. Within this framework, a benevolent and principled ethical climate not only strengthens moral coherence but also fortifies teachers' intrinsic motivation to remain dedicated to their institutions.

Interestingly, the present study found that organizational–professional conflict, while negatively correlated with affective commitment, did not serve as a mediator between ethical climate and commitment. This result suggests that ethical climate exerts a more direct influence on affective commitment than previously assumed. The absence of mediation could be attributed to the relatively high moral awareness and professional solidarity among teachers, which may buffer the negative impact of ethical discrepancies on overall commitment (Pike Lacy et al., 2024). In sports and educational environments, where teachers often view their professional mission as inherently ethical, loyalty to the institution may persist despite intermittent conflicts. This observation is consistent with (Odhiambo et al., 2023), who found that teachers' sense of duty and community belonging often outweigh personal grievances, leading to sustained organizational engagement even in the presence of administrative tension.

The significant role of impression management in shaping reported perceptions of ethical climate and organizational commitment reveals an important social-psychological dimension of the findings. Participants appeared to underreport organizational–professional conflict and overstate commitment, likely due to social desirability tendencies. This aligns with (Bravo et al., 2024), who emphasized that employees often portray their workplace in a more favorable ethical light to maintain professional image and social acceptance. In educational contexts, such impression management may reflect teachers' efforts to align their self-presentation with the moral expectations of their profession (Nur et al., 2024). These findings highlight the necessity for future ethical climate research to account for self-presentation biases and include objective or triangulated measures of ethical perception.

The observed pattern of relationships among ethical climate dimensions, organizational–professional conflict, and affective commitment underscores the multidimensional nature of ethics in educational organizations. Ethical climates emphasizing care, justice, and collective responsibility foster collaboration and shared purpose, whereas climates emphasizing individual moral autonomy or rigid professional codes may inadvertently create friction (Parboteeah et al., 2024). Furthermore, when institutional communication is transparent and inclusive, conflict is less likely to escalate into disengagement (Motsamai & Onyenankeya, 2025; Nirwana et al., 2025). The role of communication, as evidenced in multiple studies, emerges as a cross-cutting determinant of ethical climate effectiveness. Effective communication channels not only enhance moral coherence but also serve as mechanisms for resolving ethical dilemmas before they undermine organizational trust (Augustine & Bora, 2024).

Leadership again proves to be the central axis linking ethical climate, conflict management, and commitment. Ethical leaders model integrity and fairness, thereby shaping both the moral and emotional climate of the organization (İncekara et al., 2024). When leaders act transparently, recognize teachers' ethical concerns, and support professional autonomy, organizational–professional conflicts are minimized, and affective commitment is strengthened (Wu & Merialses, 2024). This is supported by (Mosquera et al., 2024), who emphasized that ethical leadership reduces organizational politics and fosters meaningful work engagement. Similarly, (Adniyah et al., 2024) noted that leaders equipped with conflict resolution and career planning competencies create a more stable and

trust-based work environment. Collectively, these studies suggest that leadership behaviors that integrate ethical sensitivity with participative management enhance both ethical climate quality and organizational loyalty.

Another notable outcome of this study is the consistency between the findings and contemporary frameworks on workplace ethics and organizational behavior. For instance, (Bates et al., 2025) proposed that contextual moderators—such as culture, institutional structure, and professional identity—significantly influence how ethical climate affects behavior. The Iranian educational system, with its strong moral and cultural foundations, may amplify the salience of ethical perceptions in shaping commitment, explaining the strong direct link found in this study. Similarly, (Kumar & Kanta, 2024) demonstrated that quality of work life, including fair treatment and ethical work standards, positively influences employee well-being and engagement. These contextual interactions reinforce the notion that ethical climate is not a static construct but a dynamic system shaped by institutional culture and professional norms.

The link between ethical climate and job performance observed here resonates with previous studies in healthcare and education, where ethical commitment was found to reduce stress and enhance teamwork (Ferreira et al., 2024; Goodarzi et al., 2023). In particular, (Fantahun et al., 2023) found that ethical work environments among healthcare professionals enhanced their organizational commitment and psychological well-being, a pattern mirrored in the current study among teachers. Moreover, (Lin & Villanueva, 2024) highlighted that proactive conflict resolution and ethical dialogue increase organizational citizenship behaviors—behaviors also associated with high commitment and moral engagement. Therefore, the consistent evidence across diverse contexts strengthens the external validity of the present study's findings, confirming that ethical climates built on benevolence and principle foster commitment and harmony across sectors.

It is also important to interpret the non-significant mediating effect of organizational–professional conflict in light of cultural and occupational characteristics. Educational settings often emphasize moral identity and collective purpose, which may neutralize the mediating influence of conflict on commitment (Mou & Dai, 2024). Teachers' intrinsic motivation, reinforced by a sense of public service and professional responsibility, might buffer the adverse effects of conflict, maintaining their emotional connection to the institution (Yaseen et al., 2025). Moreover, professional ethics training, which has become more

widespread in Iranian teacher education, may enhance teachers' ability to manage ethical dilemmas without allowing them to affect commitment (Goodarzi et al., 2023). Thus, cultural and professional resilience may explain the direct, unmediated relationship between ethical climate and commitment observed in this study.

The results further suggest that ethical and benevolent climates have a restorative impact on organizational dynamics by promoting transparency and psychological safety. Studies by (Hyatt & Gruenglas, 2023) and (Bohuslavska et al., 2024) demonstrated that ethical awareness in conflict resolution enhances mutual understanding and reduces organizational tension. These results converge with the current study's findings that a positive ethical climate directly enhances affective commitment. Ethical awareness, when institutionalized through leadership and communication, functions as a preventive mechanism against moral distress and organizational fatigue. Similarly, (Olivia Putri et al., 2024) found that human relations practices grounded in ethics and respect increase harmony and productivity, mirroring the current results that link ethical climate with commitment and cooperation.

Collectively, the findings affirm that ethical climate is not merely a contextual variable but a central determinant of teachers' organizational commitment and professional alignment. Educational institutions must therefore prioritize developing and maintaining ethical environments that emphasize care, fairness, and principled behavior. The results confirm that when ethical norms are clearly defined and equitably enforced, teachers experience a sense of belonging and moral fulfillment, strengthening their affective attachment to their institutions (Konrad Lorenz et al., 2025). This aligns with the perspective of (Mosquera et al., 2024), who emphasized that ethical integrity is foundational to sustainable organizational behavior and institutional success.

Although the present study offers important insights into the relationship between ethical climate, organizational–professional conflict, and commitment, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research design was cross-sectional, which limits the ability to infer causality between variables. Longitudinal designs would be better suited to track changes in ethical climate perceptions and their effects over time. Second, the data relied on self-report questionnaires, which may be influenced by social desirability or impression management biases, as suggested by the results. Third, the sample, though nationally

distributed, was limited to physical education teachers, which restricts generalizability to other educational disciplines. Fourth, cultural and contextual factors unique to the Iranian educational system may limit the applicability of findings to other settings. Finally, the study did not examine potential moderating variables, such as leadership style, gender, or organizational size, which could further refine the understanding of ethical climate effects.

Future studies should employ longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to capture the dynamic evolution of ethical climate and its long-term impact on teachers' commitment. Expanding the research to include diverse educational contexts, such as universities or vocational institutions, could offer comparative insights across hierarchical and cultural structures. Additionally, integrating qualitative interviews would provide richer data on teachers' lived experiences of ethical dilemmas and professional conflicts. Researchers are also encouraged to explore potential moderators, such as leadership ethics, psychological empowerment, and cultural values, to identify boundary conditions under which ethical climates exert stronger or weaker effects. Finally, cross-national comparative research could illuminate how cultural differences shape ethical perceptions and organizational commitment across global educational systems.

Practically, educational administrators should cultivate ethical climates grounded in fairness, transparency, and care. Training programs for school leaders should incorporate ethical leadership development and conflict management strategies to enhance moral awareness and decision-making competence. Institutions should also establish structured communication channels and ethical codes to guide behavior and resolve dilemmas before they escalate into conflicts. Encouraging open dialogue and fostering a culture of trust will not only strengthen teachers' affective commitment but also promote collaborative professionalism. By embedding ethical principles into policy, evaluation, and daily interactions, educational organizations can create resilient and value-driven environments that sustain both performance and integrity.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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