# Ethical leadership in educational organizations: A cross-cultural study

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ABSTRACT    The goal of this study is to examine how educators from both Eastern and Western cultures define ethical leadership and which characteristics they associate with ethical leaders. This study also explores ethical examples of educators, tries to answer if major events like Covid-19, high-technology, migration have changed their ethical perceptions, and lastly, examines their reactions to unethical conduct. This qualitative study employed a phenomenological research design. Data collection using semi-structured interviews and open-ended surveys was conducted with 51 educators from Eastern and Western countries. The findings indicate that the attributes of ethical leadership, like honesty, respect, fairness, and justice, are endorsed across both cultures. Other attributes, like flexibility, religiosity, and responsibility, were articulated by the educators from the Eastern sample, while rationality, team spirit and ability to listen were highlighted in the Western sample. The participants recounted their experiences of ethical leadership around several themes, some of which are a friendly approach, equality, defending the rights of others, and standing for right. They specified their different responses to unethical acts and mainly believe that ethics are constant throughout history.

*Keywords:*    *Academics, Cross-cultural examination, Ethical leadership, Teachers*

# Eğitim kurumlarında etik liderlik: Kültürler arası bir çalışma

ÖZ    Bu çalışmanın amacı, hem Doğu hem de Batı kültürlerinden eğitimcilerin etik liderliği nasıl tanımladıklarını ve etik liderlerle hangi özellikleri ilişkilendirdiklerini incelemektir. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda eğitimcilerin etik olarak gördükleri örnekleri araştırmakta, Covid-19, yüksek teknoloji, göç gibi önemli olayların onların etik algılarını değiştirip değiştirmediğine ilişkin soruları yanıtlamakta ve son olarak katılımcıların etik olmayan davranışlara karşı gösterdikleri tepkileri incelemektedir. Bu nitel çalışmada fenomenolojik desen kullanılmıştır. Doğu ve Batı ülkelerinden 51 öğretmen ve akademisyene açık uçlu sorular yöneltilmiş ve bir kısmıyla yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bulgular; dürüstlük, saygı, adalet ve adalet gibi bazı etik liderlik niteliklerinin her iki kültürde de vurgulandığını göstermektedir. Esneklik, dindarlık, sorumluluk gibi özellikler Doğu örneklemindeki eğitimciler tarafından ifade edilirken, Batı örnekleminde mantıksallık, takım ruhu ve dinleme becerisi vurgulanmıştır. Katılımcılar, etik olarak algıladıkları olayları dostane yaklaşım, eşitlik, başkalarının haklarını savunma ve haklı için durma gibi çeşitli temalar etrafında açıklamıştır. Katılımcılar etik olmayan eylemlere ilişkin farklı tepkilerini belirtmiş ve genel olarak etiğin tarih boyunca değişmediğine inanmaktadırlar.

*Anahtar Sözcükler:*    *Akademisyenler, Etik liderlik, Kültürler arası inceleme, Öğretmenler*

37

## INTRODUCTION

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that extends into many fields, from anthropology to economics, and is perceived differently in different societies based on religion and culture, as well as global, local, historical, and environmental factors. Ethics is a topic that was long discussed by Western and Eastern philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, Ibn Taymiyya, Thomas Aquinas (Mangini, 2018), the Far Eastern spiritual sage Confucius (Holcombe, 1908), and in recent centuries, by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, 19th century English utilitarians John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, and the American moralist John Rawls (Khera, 2001).

Each of these thinkers, among many others, contributed significantly to the conceptualization of ethics from their own perspectives (e.g., consequentialists and deontological ethics) and are evidence of how divergent ethical perceptions and variations could be. Michalos (2008, p.18) states that disagreements regarding the opinions on ethics are not merely between the many and the wise but also among the presumed wise themselves. As the aim of this study is not to look into the origins of ethics and different thoughts, I will be focusing more on the cross-cultural manifestation of ethical leadership conceptualizations and ideas in contemporary educational organizations from the perspectives of educators of Eastern (e.g., Malaysian, Indonesian, and Turkish) and Western (e.g., American, Italian, and Portuguese) origin.

Examining ethical attitudes in terms of different cultures is important since awareness of these attitudes may shed light on the ethical roles expected in different countries from school leaders and educators (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2020). Cross-cultural studies are of paramount importance for the current world, where leading higher education organizations, schools, and colleges are being composed of or have begun to include multinational students and educators in their organizations. That is why leaders and employees in organizations need to understand the differences and similarities in the expectations of others across cultures in doing their job (Resick, Hanges, Dickson, & Mitchelson, 2006, p.346). Similar to this aim, Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2014) examined how ethical and unethical leadership is perceived in the Western and Eastern cultural clusters in the private or the public-social sector. However, to my knowledge, similar studies in the educational field are very few compared to growing cross-cultural studies in the business sphere. The global crises and ethical scandals mainly associated with the business sector in the mainstream media may have diverted ethical studies towards the business sector. The lively debate about business ethics concerning ethical scandals has made ethical leadership one of the "hot topics" in organizational practice (Eisenbeiss, 2012, p.791). Despite the importance of ethics in business, educational organizations that prepare leaders of tomorrow for multinational societies and organizations should focus on ethics more and host ethical leadership studies to guide organizational policymakers in this regard.

### Ethical Leadership in Educational Organizations

Ethical leadership is a management concept that signifies the leaders who integrate ethics in their personal lives and in their roles as organizational managers (Páez Gabriunas, 2017, p.1). As effective leadership and ethical leadership are inseparable (Sotirova, 2018, p. 55), educational leaders should integrate and display ethics and principles in their actions for effective management. They need to understand ethics from a cross-cultural perspective in these times where educational organizations are admitting more international students and scholars. Also, there have arisen online learning communities of different nations. This openness to other cultures through physical and online learning means that educational organizations, especially higher education institutions, will face international competition, making ethical branding a priority for them.

38

Not understanding ethicality from other cultural perspectives or overemphasizing the morals of a local setting might bring in a serious problem, which can be considered between two extremes: ethical imperialism and cultural relativism (Sotirova, 2018). Schools for all ages and universities that host international students should display ethical openness and understand the needs of their employees and students. They should also integrate a cross-cultural ethical understanding into their local curriculum since most nations' societies are going global. Otherwise, educational organizations structured on competitive and branded goals could create an ethical dilemma based on the marketization of education (Natale & Doran, 2012) and thus might face the ethical problems seen in business life.

Okcu (2014) idealizes a school that can be transformed into a common living space where ethical values, justice, tolerance, respect, democracy, cooperation, and social responsibilities are taught. This school atmosphere can be formed by ethical leaders who set examples of this spirit and give an ear to their colleagues' voices. Sagnak (2017) states that ethical leadership is positively related to teachers' voice behavior in that these leaders raise their followers' levels of autonomy to form a climate of safety and ethical culture. So, ethical education leaders are expected to build an environment where educators can voice their concerns and ideas. This ethical effort may set an example for their colleagues and students (Yildirim & Bastug, 2010).

For educators to be content with their work and perform with excellence, leaders need to display an ethical conscience in their practice. This will reinforce collaboration, respect, and trust among educators, and having educational leaders that are sensitive to ethical principles will help their colleagues act according to those principles (Karakose, 2007). Otherwise, educational leaders who refrain from the truth in every circumstance and are not brave enough may inhibit educators' creativity and passion for their work (Cemaloglu & Kilinc, 2012). Indeed, ethical people need to challenge policies that are detrimental to a caring and inclusive learning environment for ethically spirited organizations (Ezzani, 2014), and responding (e.g., by whistleblowing) to unethical acts should be strengthened in educational organizations (Aydin, Demirkasimoglu, & Alkin 2012).

**The Purpose of this Study**

Resick et al.'s (2006) study was one of the well-structured cross-cultural studies on ethical leadership, but it focused on Western-based leadership and ethics literature. Sotirova (2018, p.51-58) states that much of the work in ethics is derived from a Western economy's view and that there is a need to expand the topic for a more thorough and accurate comparison of cultures, values, and ethical systems. Similarly, Eisenbeiss (2012, p. 793) states, *"All the current approaches to ethical leadership proceed from a Western perspective on ethical leadership and do not consider viewpoints, principles or values of other cultural clusters."* Also, much of the existing cross-cultural studies, including an Eastern sample, are in the business sphere. For example, Eisenbeiss (2012) conducted interviews with senior business leaders with different cultural backgrounds and examined their perception of ethical decision-making in the study. Trobez, Vesic, Zerovnik, Ye, and Zuzul (2017) also examined culture and business ethics, with a sample of respondents having a multicultural background.

This study is distinct in that it reveals an ethical conceptualization of educators (teachers and academics) from diverse countries, with a cross-comparison of ethical leadership from an educational organization's perspective. It also tries to shed light on an ethical leadership understanding of the East and West with varied cultures and religions. Thus, the goal of this study is to (a) see how different educators from Eastern and Western countries and cultures define ethical leadership, what characteristics they associate with ethical leaders and (b) analyze ethical cases based on their stories and experiences, (c) see how major events like COVID-19, conflicts, migration, technology, etc. are reflected in their ethical perceptions, and (d) examine Western and Eastern reactions of educators to unethical conduct.

## METHODOLOGY

Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2014, p.344) chose a qualitative explorative approach, as the literature is lacking in systematic research on how ethical and unethical leadership are perceived in Eastern cultures and in the public and social sectors. Similarly, I opted for a qualitative approach to collect data from educators from Western and Eastern countries. I tried to examine the perceptions of educators from different countries about the concept of ethical leadership, their ethical experiences in the organization, the reflections of educators on ethical leadership based on major events (the emergence of newer technologies, the COVID-19 pandemic, etc.), and their reactions to unethical cases as a witness or subject.

Phenomenology, as a qualitative research design, has been followed throughout the study. This design focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The use of qualitative methods allows exploration into the meaning of the participants' experience (Cooper & Schindler, 2014) and provides in-depth information about the participants' perceptions of the target topic.

Existing studies on cross-cultural ethics studies are mainly from the business sphere; however, educators have an essential role in transferring ethics to the next generations, and they are not just expected to teach but also to be a role model and convey ethics to younger generations. It means that their ethical conceptualization might have an effect, not only on their own lifestyle but also on the formation of society at large. In this regard, educators' experiences regarding ethical leadership in the organizational context are examined. The data for this study were collected from 51 educators around the world within a semi-structured interview and open-ended survey format. It seemed most appropriate to conduct in-person interviews with Syrian respondents (N=10), as I had a chance to reach them (in my town) in-person. However, the volunteering participants from other cities and countries (N=41) were mailed with open-ended questions, as it was difficult to collect all these data in-person.

### Participants

To reach out to as many educators as possible, online data collection tools were preferred at first, in which possible participants from Western and Eastern countries were invited by mail to fill in the online survey form, which contained several personal and five open-ended questions. I scanned published studies in the field of ethics, conferences on education and leadership in recent years, and also checked my contacts – teachers and academics – from other countries to collect data. About 250 academics and educators found randomly through this initial check were mailed with their name specified and were asked if they were interested in participating in this study. The goals and questions were attached to the mail; the possible participants were requested to spare around ten minutes for the questions. Moreover, ten Syrian refugee teachers who work in schools in southeastern Turkey were also invited with the help of an Arabic-to-Turkish translator. The translator, a master's degree student in education management, translated all the interviews into Turkish. The semi-structured interview questions were the same as the open-ended questions in the online format. All this process ended with the participation of 51 educators from different countries. Although I aimed to include at least five responses from Eastern and Western countries such as the USA, China, Taiwan, and India, the participants were randomly scattered from Mexico (N=1) to Maldives (N=5) on a volunteer basis.

Michalos (2008i p.9) states, *"What is East or West, or even today for that matter, depends on one's perspective. From my home in British Columbia, Hong Kong is West, and Paris is East."* Similarly, from my home in southeastern Turkey near the border of Syria, I needed to make a distinction among several factors. The division between Western and Eastern countries, as seen in Table 1, was based mostly on geographical factors. The countries in or near the EU and the American continent are accepted as Western countries, which mostly shared the Christian religion (just three participants naming themselves as non-believers in the Western sample). The countries east of the EU and Asian

40

countries are accepted as Eastern countries, which mostly shared the Islamic religion (just one participant named himself as a non-believer in the Eastern group). As Eisenbeiss (2012, p. 794) claims, religions, traditions, and cultures have a significant impact on conceiving ethical leadership, the findings in this study will contribute more to the cross-cultural literature with the participants from different countries. Table 1 gives a short view of participants that voluntarily accepted to be part of this study.

Table 1.
*Participants from countries*

| Group | Pseud. | Country(Birth) | Country(Residence) | Organization | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Western Countries | P1 | Mexico | Mexico | University | Male |
| | P2 | N.Macedonia | N.Macedonia | Primary school | Female |
| | P3 | Romania | Romania | University | Male |
| | P4 | Croatia | Croatia | Primary school | Female |
| | P5 | Latvia | Latvia | University | Female |
| | P6 | România | România | High school | Female |
| | P7 | Ireland | USA | University | Male |
| | P8 | Poland | Poland | Private school | Female |
| | P9 | Malta | Malta | Middle school | Male |
| | P10 | USA | Turkey | University | Female |
| | P11 | Greece | Greece | High school | Female |
| | P12 | Greece | Greece | High school | Male |
| | P13 | Greece | Greece | University | Female |
| | P14 | Greece | Czech Rep. | Private School | Male |
| | P15 | Italy | Spain | University | Male |
| | P16 | Portugal | Portugal | Middle  school | Male |
| | P17 | Australia | Australia | University | Male |
| | P18 | Austria | Austria | High school | Female |
| | P19 | USA | USA | Primary school | Female |
| Eastern Countries | P20 | Bahrain | Bahrain | University | Male |
| | P21 | Turkey | Germany | Primary school | Male |
| | P22 | Turkey | Turkey | Primary school | Male |
| | P23 | Turkey | Germany | University | Male |
| | P24 | Turkey | Turkey | Middle school | Male |
| | P25 | Pakistan | Pakistan | Private school | Female |
| | P26 | Pakistan | Pakistan | Primary school | Female |
| | P27 | Malaysia | Malaysia | University | Male |
| | P28 | Indonesia | Malaysia | University | Female |
| | P29 | Pakistan | Pakistan | University | Male |
| | P30 | Malaysia | Malaysia | University | Female |
| | P31 | Tatarstan/Russia | Malaysia | University | Female |
| | P32 | Indonesia | Indonesia | University | Female |
| | P33 | Pakistan | Pakistan | University | Male |
| | P34 | Pakistan | Pakistan | University | Male |
| | P35 | Malaysia | Malaysia | University | Female |
| | P36 | Turkey | Turkey | High school | Female |
| | P37 | Maldives | Maldives | University | Female |
| | P38 | Maldives | Maldives | University | Female |
| | P39 | Maldives | Maldives | University | - |
| | P40 | Maldives | Maldives | University | Male |
| | P41 | Maldives | Maldives | University | Female |
| Refugee/Eastern Countries | P42 | Syria | Turkey | High School | Male |
| | P43 | Syria | Turkey | Middle School | Female |
| | P44 | Syria | Turkey | Middle School | Male |
| | P45 | Syria | Turkey | High School | Female |
| | P46 | Syria | Turkey | Middle School | Female |
| | P47 | Syria | Turkey | High School | Female |
| | P48 | Syria | Turkey | Middle School | Male |
| | P49 | Syria | Turkey | High School | Male |
| | P50 | Syria | Turkey | Middle School | Male |
| | P51 | Syria | Turkey | Middle School | Male |

Table 1 has 51 participants from 23 countries, fourteen of which are the Western countries. The Eastern nations' group included 32 participants, ten of whom were of Syrian origin, refugees, and were included in a subgroup of Eastern countries. The refugee teacher group was defined as a subgroup of Easterners, as their responses to some answers might differ from the rest of the Eastern group, most probably due to the latest problems they experienced with migration. E-mails were sent to, e.g., Chinese and Taiwanese educators, to form Far Eastern subgroup based on Confucianism. However, no response was received. Thus, the study has two major groups and one sub-group: the Western and Eastern groups, along with the refugee group from the Eastern sample. The participants filled the demographic questions and gave information about their culture and religion. As there are many participants in the study, no tag name is used; instead, P1, P2…P51 are used as pseudonyms to denote the sequence in Table 1. The countries and participants in Table 1 are found to be from the East (N=9, e.g., Turkey, Bahrain, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc.) and the West (N=14, e.g., Mexico, Malta, USA, Romania, Italy, and Portugal). There are 24 participants from universities and 27 participants from primary, middle, and high schools. Twenty-three of them are females, while 27 of them are males. One of the questions was left blank by a participant regarding their gender.

As seen in Table 1, there were differences in some countries by birth and by residence. For example, P10 and P21 were raised in their birth country and then moved to teach their native language in their new countries. They were categorized mostly by their birth countries, as most of their life was spent there. However, P31 was born in Tatarstan/Russia and spent her life in eastern countries (including Turkey) before moving to Malaysia. Data were collected in the fall term of the 2020-21 academic year. Ethics committee permission was given by the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee at Harran University. The participants were informed that they could quit the interview at any time and that the information requested is just for academic purposes.

**Data Collection Tool**

Some of the semi-structured interview questions in the study were first adapted from Resick et al.'s (2011) interview questions, and the final interview form was enlarged with new questions. For example, I wanted to know how major events are reflected in participants' ethical perceptions and how educators respond to unethical cases. The interview questions were distributed in their final format after seeking an expert opinion about this study's goal and main questions. The questions were as follows:

1) How do you define an "ethical leader" in a school context? Please give details.

2) What ethical behaviors and personal characteristics do you expect most from your school leaders and colleagues? Please explain.

3) Think about a situation in which your school leader or colleagues have demonstrated an act of ethical leadership. Describe this situation and explain why you consider the person acting ethically.

4) How do you think your culture, migration, technology, current events, pandemic, economic crisis, your job, etc. have an effect on your ethical leadership conceptualization or definition? Do you think you changed your ethical perception upon these factors or a major personal event? If so, how?

5) What do you think about how you should behave if you face unethical conduct by your school leader or colleague in the school?

Apart from these main questions, demographic information, like their name, country, country of residence, school, beliefs, and mailing address were requested and left optional to fill in. All the information was collected through an emailed online survey link and an interview process with Syrian teachers in Turkey, with the help of an Arabic-Turkish translator.

42

**Data Analysis**

The responses to the open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews were examined and sorted under groups of Eastern and Western perceptions. All responses were read at least twice before going into the content analysis. This first examination showed general differences and codes between Eastern and Western perceptions on ethics and ethical leadership and led me to go into detail by sorting categories, which were later visualized in Figures 1-2. As Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2013) did, the coding process continued in an iterative manner and included several checks in which the categorization system became increasingly refined. In the analysis of data for Figures 1-2, only coding line by line and categorization of similar codes were done so that a detailed visualization can be presented.

Analysis and tabulation of each question's data were slightly different from each other. For the first and second questions, all the qualities and behaviors of ethical leadership were subject to a detailed coding process, which was repeated over two times with three weeks' time between the two data analyses. In this way, I compared the consistency in the analysis and observed whether two processes or coding match to a great extent. In both analyses, there was a large match apart from naming the same categories with synonyms. After two detailed coding processes line by line and category formation by going over the codes several times, Wordle visuals were created for the categories. The Wordle software was used to count the most-recurring categories in the coded texts and display the most-recurring ones with bolder and bigger fonts. For example, the categories of respect, justice, fairness, and flexibility were among the most highlighted qualities of ethical leaders in the Eastern sample, while honesty, respect, fairness, and justice was among the most-recurring ones in the Western sample (see Figures 1-2). The category of flexibility was highlighted by only the Syrian teachers in the study, while other major groups did not make any direct reference to it.

In the tabulation of the responses for question 3, I placed ethical examples of the participants next to the themes (see Tables 2, 3, and 4). Just giving a general theme title without giving direct answers from the raw data would lead to generalized opinions about the participants' ethical examples and ideas; thus, I placed the shortest and similar direct phrases from the participants next to their themes in the table. For question 5, which was shorter in length and more directly specified (just one unethical conduct and one response), I wrote themes and frequencies in tables (see Table 5-6).

In qualitative research, the researchers' ability to transfer the case or event in an objective, direct, and realistic way bears paramount importance (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, p. 269). To maximize credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability in the study, and ensuring honesty in the informants (by mail), thick description (by giving original quotations), the operational detail of data gathering, outlining the research design for dependability, giving limitations (in the method and other sections), and triangulation by another expert for confirmability (in the data analysis process) was followed (see, Shenton, 2004). The cross-check of categories and data analysis process was done by an expert in educational management who has experience in qualitative data analysis, to whom I gave the first and second content analyses' results along with the raw data. A mutual agreement was provided with his suggestions to change some of my categories and sub-group findings. One of the disagreements included whether codes supporting the category of "flexibility" actually can be replaced with the term "understanding." This was later agreed upon as "flexibility," based on the participants' direct referral to this term in several parts of the data.

**FINDINGS**

This study has been focused on analyzing the ethical leadership perceptions of Western and Eastern educators. The answers to questions included the educators' definition of ethical leadership, ethical qualities, and the conduct that they observed in the school, as well as the possible effect of major

events on their ethical perception and their reactions to unethical acts. The first two research questions were about the definition and expected qualities of an ethical school leader. Figures 1-2 below give the most-expected ethical qualities and ethical leadership keywords in a school context from both Eastern and Western points of view.

**Ethical Leadership Perceptions of Eastern and Western Samples**

Figure 1 presents the most recurring ethical leadership qualities in the Eastern sample.



*Figure 1.* Eastern perception of ethical leadership

Figure 2 presents the most recurring ethical leadership qualities in the Western sample.



*Figure 2.* Western perception of ethical leadership

44

When Figures 1 and 2 are compared, many qualities are seen to be endorsed in both cultures in varying degrees. The bolder ones are the most highlighted categories in both groups. It is seen that participants from both groups define ethical leadership mostly with qualities of "honesty, respect, fairness, and justice." Similarly, Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck's (2013, p.353) findings point out collectively held values such as honesty, humanity, justice, responsibility, and sustainability, which display central ethics principles in ancient and modern moral philosophies. These values are also seen in the definitions of ethical leadership and ethical leaders' qualities in this study.

When the various categories are examined in Figures 1 and 2, it is seen that Easterners consider "religious conduct, responsibility, and no-to-favoritism" as other important dimensions of ethical leadership.

P20: *"Ethical leaders treat their team members equally and give incentives to those who deserve them… Favoritism is one common unethical behavior in my workplace."*

P25: *"They have no favorites and treat everyone equally."*

P30: *"...they take full responsibility when receiving a task."*

Different from the Western sample, whose participants did not openly talk about religious effects in their ethical perceptions, some of the Eastern educators directly associated ethics with religiosity and rules in their belief system.

P31: *"Ethical leader means the one who follows Islamic ethical codes…For me, behaving ethically means not to break Islamic and conventional ethical codes and not to bring any injustices or harm to others."*

P28 gave a very short reply to the question about the qualities of an ethical leader; they answered, *"Ihsan,"* which is an Arabic term that means behaving as if God sees every one of your acts.

The Western sample seemed to opt for universal ethical principles in all religions and societies, as P2 indicates that an *"ethical leader is a person who promotes peace, tolerance, acceptance, equality without mentioning religion, race, orientation."*

P7: *"[Ethical leaders] do no harm; every decision must be transparent; compromising decisions are not decisions to be made; [Ethical leaders are] deontological."*

P3: *"The designation of such a leader [ethical] is subjective, as liberty of consciousness and freedom of thought and harmonization of unity and diversity within educational groups is part of the principles which guarantee an efficient and successful education and give an individual the chance to develop his potential."*

Apart from these Western and Eastern conceptualizations, there is an interesting finding about "flexibility" in regard to refugee participants, a subgroup of the Eastern sample. When refugee participants' transcriptions are removed from the analyzed text, the category of "flexibility" disappears from Figure 2. It is most probable that conflicts and migration problems that they experienced led them to consider effective ethical leaders as those who are flexible. In accommodating to the new culture and school system, they seem to expect flexibility from ethical leaders. P51 said that they need school leaders who *"can integrate softness and discipline in their actions under flexibility."* He went on, in short, explaining his sadness about an example of unethical conduct he experienced: *"One time, I was five minutes late for school, and the principal scolded me."* He meant ethical leaders should be flexible in their actions and understand the problems and needs of the teachers. P48 explained another version of his experience with the school principal, one that displayed understanding, caring, and

45

flexibility, saying, *"One day I got sick, but the hospital refused to give me a medical report to give to the principal. But the principal (seeing my case) himself gave me permission."*

From the Western sample's perspective, it is seen that "being a listener, team-spirited and rational" are another important dimension of ethical leadership. Westerners considered fact-based management and rationality as the main point in ethical leadership definition and put forth the importance of listening. P8 stated, *"...being impartial, listening to all involved sides, making judgments not based on emotions...,"* and P19 stated that an ethical principle should be *"...bipartisan: showing empathy, staying rational and fact-based..."* The participants' ideas on listening is reflected by P5: *"...ability to listen and hear [their colleagues' problems, respect for colleagues".* P4 and P12 said that they have *"team spirit."*

## Ethical Leadership Examples from the East and West

In regard to ethical examples in the schools, the participants from Eastern and Western countries provided their experiences and stories of ethical leadership in their schools. They stated that they witnessed several ethical acts by their school leader or colleagues. Since not all participants gave answers to this question (sometimes on the grounds that they consider their leader as unethical), It is only listed a few examples of ethical conduct that the participants stated. Table 2 gives ethical examples observed in schools by the Western sample.

Table 2.
*Ethical cases (Western Sample)*

| My school leaders and/or colleagues (In western sample). | Themes |
|---|---|
| Organize school trips, plays, shows, etc. for the students from different towns to teach them differences and acceptances. | |
| Set up a program for volunteer work, internal support, and ethical rewards to behavior adhering to the credo. | Events for harmony |
| Choose the best teacher for the new position, not the one supported by a high-standing person. | Justice |
| Hold everyone to the same standard. | |
| Never gave preferential treatment to any student. | Equality |
| Did not respond to the attacks of another teacher in the same way (to ease the tension). | |
| Took the case calmly and helped a teacher, a student, and their parents to resolve a student problem from the class. | Friendly approach |
| Canceled the classes due to weather conditions. | Proactive measure |
| Understand me when I have health problems. | Empathy |
| Did not hire her daughter for employment though she was qualified. | No-to-nepotism |
| Equity – allow different responses (and materials) with regard to the different needs of students | Equitable teaching strategies |
| Were able to talk us through about changes and provided transparency in the COVID-19 crisis. | Crisis management |
| Stood up for a teacher when the school authorities tried to crush her as she was thinking and acting independently and critically for the new system. | Defending the rights of others |

Table 2 shows the ethical acts witnessed by the educators from Western countries. The ethical cases seem to revolve around "creating harmony, behaving friendly, equality, justice, equitable teaching strategies, no-to-nepotism, crisis management, and defending the rights of others."

P16 explained his idea on ethical conduct he sees in schools: *"Most situations [ethical cases I observe] have to do with equity - allowing different responses with regard to the different needs of students (differentiation of materials, in assessment, time - respecting different learning rhythms, etc.)"*

Table 3 provides examples of ethical conduct observed in schools from the Eastern sample.

46

Table 3.
*Ethical cases (Eastern Sample)*

| My school leaders and/or colleagues (In Eastern sample). | Themes |
|---|---|
| Don't complain; they just begin to search for a solution and try to handle the problem. | No way for excuses |
| Remind teachers that this is school (in case they behave off limits) | Rules |
| Give equal tasks to all staff. | |
| Give equal duties to each teacher. | Equality |
| Do not discriminate against anybody who may have a weakness. | |
| Act toward the pleasure of Allah and not for human attention. | Religiosity |
| Are not biased towards other teachers. | Non-biased |
| Walks the talk. | Consistency |
| Made a wise decision during a meeting. | Ethical decision making |
| Encourage staff to achieve success and support without telling the staff of his contribution in helping them the situation. | Servanthood |
| Refrain from unethical acts despite pressure and compulsion. | Standing for what is right |
| Speak in soft language. | Friendly approach |

Table 3 shows the ethical cases experienced by the educators from Eastern countries. The ethical cases seem to revolve around "no way for excuses, following the rules, equality, religious attachment, no-bias, consistency, ethical decision making, servanthood, standing for the right choice, and a friendly approach."

P35 explained their ethical experience: *"[My principal] encourage the staff to achieve success and support at all levels without telling the staff of his contribution in helping them."*

Servanthood signifies a feature of servant leaders who contribute to the process firsthand but stand behind the group to encourage them. When tables 2 and 3 are compared, it seems different experiences exist in both groups, and they overlap to some extent. They mainly mentioned ethical practices that cover equality, a friendly approach, and defending and standing for the righteous option. Both groups talked about ethical examples that they witnessed in the schools. These examples vary from one participant to another.

Table 4 provides examples of ethical conduct observed in schools by the Eastern refugee sample.

Table 4.
*Ethical cases (Eastern Sample)*

| My school leaders and/or colleagues (In the Eastern refugee sample). | Themes |
|---|---|
| Have no discrimination toward different (Syrian and Turkish) ethnicities, teachers, and students | Equality |
| Gave me permission for my health problem though I did not have an official permit from the doctor at that time. | Supporting the staff |
| Help the disadvantaged in detail. | |
| Help elderly personnel. | |

In the analysis of the participants' examples, I noticed a difference regarding the refugee sample, who are naturally affected by their experiences in migration. Interestingly, their major concern was equality in the new society. Refugee teachers who work in Turkish and Syrian-populated schools all desire full equity and equality in the school. Six participants out of 10 directly used the examples of their school leaders who have no discrimination towards any (Syrian and Turkish) ethnicities, teachers, and students as seen in Table 4. P43 said, *"My school principal encourages the positive behavior of school students of different ethnic backgrounds without discriminating between Turkish students and other students."* They never mentioned any other ethical experience, though they might have experienced them. Four of the Syrian refugees also gave ethical examples regarding their schools in regard to help and support. P46 said, *"There is an old employee at the school, and he doesn't finish his work because*

47

*he is old. So, the principal gathered all the teachers together and asked them to help him by minimizing the things that increase his workload."* All in all, they prioritize equality among many groups, and they need flexible leaders who will understand and help them.

**Does one's perception of ethical leadership change over time?**

Regarding the question about whether ethical perception changed over time, considering there were technological developments, globalization, conflicts in countries and migration, COVID-19, and other national developments. Most of the participants, including the refugees in the study, stated that they had not changed their ethical perceptions; that is, they still have the same principles toward all ethical and unethical acts.

P2 said, *"No, I don't think that this situation will affect ethical conceptualization."* P10 *"No, the fundamental ethical values are constant throughout the ages."* P17 explained, *"The principles are basically the same. The only possible change the current situation is bringing is that one needs to understand that more individuals might feel to be under more personal stress than in normal circumstances."* P27 considers ethics and principles as stable forever on religious grounds *"The pleasure of God will not change no matter what happens because all that is just a test of God that aims to measure the extent of human faith."*

Generally, most of the participants believed there are no changes in their ethical conceptualization, but these major events and developments strengthened their belief in the necessity of ethics, as in the case of refugees who seem to focus on post-migration experiences and desire an equal (non-racial) and flexible approach in school management. Basically, participants believe they have a long-standing conceptualization of ethical leadership, but their weighted focus on the several qualities seem to change from time to time and event to event. For example, P43 *"I was [a]very disciplined person at that time (before migration), but now I am soft towards my students,"* meaning he formerly cared about discipline, but now he cares more for a soft approach. P4 stated, *"It [the COVID-19 problem] strengthened [my] belief in good, order, respect, and kindness, and it showed me how much work needs to be done in education and how much society needs education of all kinds and for all ages."* There is a need for more focus on ethics, as P5 states, *"Technology can be the trigger for some unethical behaviors, e.g., authors' rights, privacy and autonomy, security, transparency."* P7 said, *"I think they [these major events] challenge my ethics because I am not getting truthful information about the pandemic, the economy, etc."* These answers show that participants believe that we are in more need of ethics in our life with the major events taking place today and in the future. Similarly, P19 explained their ethical role in these turbulent times where COVID-19, high technology, etc. are present, saying, *"My way of acting has always been the same and has not changed because of adverse conditions… Teaching online requires, to my understanding, even more reaching out for students and demonstrating empathy, as only this makes the teaching profitable, mutual trust is needed much more in an online learning environment, as well as is acceptance of students individual situation and beliefs, as a language teacher it is enjoyable to debate different standpoints and beliefs, as this creates authentic communication-which heightens the language learning as well."*

A small number of participants, on the other hand, believed that the ethical perceptions of people change as well. P24 said, *"It [these events] doesn't only change ethical leadership but the ethic itself, too."* P25 said, *"Ethics, too [change], in [the] pandemic; they [people] show concerns just their own profits."* P33 *"No doubt they have [an] impact. Age also matters. [A] person [is] more mature with age and more perfection. This changes ethical perception."* As these statements of the participants imply, people may change their perception of ethics over time, depending on the circumstances. The reason why the majority of them do not have the same idea is that they answered the question with respect to universal values like empathy, help ones in need, trust, etc., which are rooted in ethical philosophy and should be constant at all ages. From this perspective, both groups seem not to share a contradictory perspective on the case.

**Responses to Unethical Leadership Acts in the East and West**

Regarding the participants' responses and acts towards unethical conduct in school, their ideas are listed in this section.

Table 5 gives the responses to unethical conduct observed by the Western sample in their schools.

Table 5.
*Reactions to unethical cases (Western Sample)*

| I would do or start: | *f* |
|---|---|
| Report it to someone in a higher position | 7 |
| Suggest corrective steps (advice) | 2 |
| Discussion right away | 2 |
| End the conversation (immediately) | 1 |
| Leave the school (if it is very sabotaging) | 1 |
| Stand against the unethical person | 1 |
| Feeling bad | 1 |
| Cannot do anything (if it is above my power) | 1 |

The most preferred way of addressing an unethical act is reporting to the authorities. P4 stated, *"Every school has to have an ethical codex. The first step is to report to the ethics committee that some, e.g., the principal's decisions and behaviors aren't ethical."* P7 said, *"I can only complain. The only thin[g] I can do is to go to court and demand my rights."*

Oher participants varied in their responses and reactions: P3 said, *"First of all, things have to be discussed opened and right away."* P10 said, *"[regarding a seriously demoralizing event] You can't do anything in an unethical situation but leave the school, so that's what I did."* P6 stated, *"In the case of the unethical behavior of a colleague, I try to end the conversation immediately, so as not to provoke a conflict."* P18 said that she could not do anything much if the unethical conduct is done by a superior, explaining, *"I have learned not to confront anybody anymore when corruptive behavior is on display -- I can unfortunately not change anything on this level --as the one who has the formal authority has the say and acts."*

Table 6 gives the responses to unethical conduct that the Eastern sample observed in their schools.

Table 6.
*Reactions to unethical cases (Eastern Sample)*

| I would do or start: | *f* |
|---|---|
| Take it slow and visit for advice | 5 |
| Raise my voice or object | 5 |
| Act on rules | 4 |
| Report to someone in a higher position | 2 |
| Do nothing and let them understand their mistakes in time | 1 |
| Warn politely | 1 |
| Behave soft | 1 |
| Leave that situation | 1 |
| Give notice for correcting the case | 1 |
| Remain silent (when there is nothing I can do) | 1 |

The Eastern sample voices some similar reactions to the unethical cases as Westerners do. Both groups opt for reporting to a higher authority, following relevant laws to seek their rights, objecting directly, warning the offending party, or remaining silent. There are, of course, some different reactions, like "giving advice after some time or paying [a]visit" and "do nothing and wait [for] the offenders to realize their mistake."

P36 stated, *"I should respond and shouldn't be quiet if I face…unethical conduct by someone [in] my*
49

*school. I seek for my right in legal ways."*

P35 stated, *"Try to voice out personally … in faculty meeting without naming names, and if that fails, I write a letter to the higher administration."*

Some of the participants in the Eastern sample (N=5) gave different responses compared to the Western sample in that they take it slow and try to give advice to correct the situation later on; they advise patience during the outbreak of the event. P34 said, *"(I have) patience and (do) one attempt to realize him or her unethical conduct."* P43 stated, *"The principal scolded a teacher in front of [the]students and fellow teachers (without a solid reason). Later, a group of teachers spoke to the principal and advised him [that]it was inappropriate behavior."* P44 gave a similar example in which the school manager was forcing one teacher to change his school because he did not like him; one teacher visited the manager later, discussed the issue with him, and advised the manager to think, *"Would you accept this if it was your son or yourself in the same case."* It provided a different perspective, and the tensions eased between both people.

P21 stated a different and silent way of reacting: *"I do nothing and let them understand their mistakes in time. It is nonsense to try to convince an educated person about his/her ideas by words."*


## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study is done to examine how educators from both Eastern and Western cultures define ethical leadership and which characteristics they associate with ethical leaders. Along with that, ethical examples of educators, their reflections on ethical leadership based on major events like COVID-19, the introduction of various technologies, migration, and their reactions to unethical acts are also examined. The study, composed of educators from different countries in the West and East, has presented cross-cultural findings on ethical leadership. First of all, both groups of educators do not seem to have extremely differing perceptions of ethical leadership since they share more similar ideas than the distinct ones on ethical leadership. The major endorsed categories by both groups include "honesty, respect, fairness, and justice." There are some differences in the participants' focus on "sincerity, religious conduct, responsibility, and no-to-favoritism" from the Eastern sample and "rationality, team spirit and being a listener" from the Western sample.

Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2014) found collectively held perceptions of ethical leadership from Eastern and Western samples include leader honesty, integrity, concern for responsibility and sustainability, and people orientation, some of which are shared in this cross-cultural study as well. There are several less-highlighted qualities in this study, such as kindness, ethical decision-making, and transparency, which are found in both groups' conceptualization. Similarly, Resick et al. (2006) stated that there are some variations in the level of endorsement of ethical leadership attributes in the cross-cultural GLOBE study's clusters. They used data from the Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (GLOBE) project across 62 different societies under the clusters of Anglo, Confucian Asian, Eastern European, Germanic European, Latin American, Latin European, Middle Eastern, Nordic European, Southeast Asian, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Then, Resick et al. (2006) analyzed the degree to which four aspects of ethical leadership – character and integrity, altruism, collective motivation, and encouragement – were endorsed as important for effective leadership across all cultures based on financial services, food services, and telecommunications samples. As in the case of other studies (e.g., Resick et al., 2011), despite the universal endorsement of the key attributes of ethical leadership (e.g., character, consideration, and respect for others), a full confirmation of ethical codes among different cultures is not expected. Moreover, the very nature of what is ethically required remains contested, with some people believing that mere compliance to laws is ethical and others believing that ethics extends beyond the law to some sort of societal interaction (Michalos, 2008).

Several differences from the Western and Eastern samples are seen in the study to which could be attributed the personal experiences participants have, their upbringing, differing cultures, religions, and geographical regions in which they were raised or spent most of their time. For example, participants from the South Asian (e.g., Indonesia, Malaysia) sample within the Eastern sample connected ethics with religion and acts in line with holy considerations are seen as ethical. As Resick et al. (2006) implied, Islamic values may have a significant effect on conducting business in Islamic countries. From another perspective, in the Western sample, who did not refer to religious ideals openly, some participants mentioned rationality as a core quality of ethical leadership.

The participants listed several ethical experiences that occurred in their schools. The ethical cases in the Western sample seem to revolve around "creating harmony, behaving friendly, equality, justice, equitable teaching strategies, no-to-nepotism, crisis management, and defending the rights of others." The ethical cases in the Eastern sample seem to revolve around "no way for excuses, following the rules, equality, religious attachment, no-bias, consistency, ethical decision making, servanthood, standing for what's right, and a friendly approach." All these examples can be seen in schools in different nations, and these acts by the leaders should be strengthened. However, ethical cases may be subject to different interpretations in different countries.

Forsyth, O'Boyle, and McDaniel (2008, p. 813) surveyed several studies which found "copyright laws, requesting monetary compensation for smoothing out a business transaction, a male boss who only promotes women who agreed to see him socially, and evaluation of the bosses by their inferiors" to be considered ethically different in various societies. The examples and categories found in this study seem to be invariant across different societies. However, nepotism, favoritism of kinship or other close family members (Chervenak & McCullough, 2007), which has been mainly witnessed in Middle Eastern (Sidani & Thornberry, 2013) and third-world countries (Khera, 2001), should be studied in detail. Accordingly, one of the participants from the Eastern sample stated "favoritism" as one of the main chronic problems of their organization. Ethical conceptualizations of different nations over the same stories should be re-examined in cross-cultural studies.

Among all ethical cases faced in the schools, providing equity and equality by teaching methods is very worthy of attention for educational organizations and ethical leadership studies. School leaders and teachers may think that providing all materials equally ready for all is sufficient on ethical terms. However, having all means to the end does not mean that one can get all the desired results. Thus, equitable teaching strategies are important in that these strategies consider "whom" teachers are teaching (Tanner, 2013), so there should be differences in teaching strategies to allow different responses with regard to students' different needs. This is important in terms of ethicality, especially in disadvantaged regions, where students have varying needs and face hardships.

Distinct from these two groups, refugees working in schools in southeastern Turkey placed more emphasis on equality, help, flexibility, and supporting the staff in need. They all stated the positive effect they experienced when they were treated equally like natives in their host country. This finding, from another aspect, also signifies that people are more inclined to focus on a set of ethical principles that pertain to their case. Interestingly most of the Syrian teachers in some way touched upon ethnically based considerations and how they were treated flexibly and equally. From another perspective on immigrant teachers, Huang (2010, p.91), based on a review of several narrative studies, states that immigrant teachers feel as if they are "caught in-between cultures," "strangers," or "fake," to new cultures; however, the refugee participants in this study's sample do not seem to share a similar focus on these feelings as seen in their unethical and ethical stories, which could be because Syria and Turkey are neighboring countries and share many cultural features based on religion and region. These cultural factors may remove many other negative effects of migration that can be normally experienced as long as an ethical leadership is in place in the host organizations.

There is an interesting finding about "flexibility" regarding refugee participants, a subgroup of the Eastern sample in the study. Most of the refugee participants' definitions of ethical leadership are

51

based on "flexibility." Most probably, migration problems and the adaptation process led them to consider effective ethical leaders as those who are flexible. Though very understandable, the focus on "flexibility" by refugees, who were or are residents of Middle Eastern countries might also be based on the economic culture they have. As Izraeli (1997) points out, Western norms of business ethics do not apply to countries in the Middle East, which has a flexible pricing and bargaining system, a very favored style of transaction. However, the West has fixed prices in business, which is the norm and the same for all. Izraeli (1997) adds that the aim of bargaining is to regulate prices in which suspicion and uncertainty of the value of commodities may be present, thus establishing real value and an ethical way of conducting a transaction upon the requests of the buyer. In line with this culture, flexibility, which is not stated in the Western sample, might have been considered by Easterners as a way to provide equity in their new homes.

This study posed a question about whether ethical perceptions change over time. The participants who were educators working in schools and universities mainly were of the idea that the ethics and principles are constant all the time, and their ethical consideration will not change due to major events experienced, such as Covid-19, wars, technological developments, etc. However, a small number of participants stated a different opinion on the case, meaning that many factors can contribute to the change in the dynamics of ethics and ethical perceptions. Most of the participants had the idea that ethics perceptions are invariant for the time being, in that they seem to feel satisfied with their current conceptualization based on a long tradition, universal principles, or other personal experiences. Also, several codes of ethics, like being honest and fair, have been surely the same for the ages, and the participants might have considered them in their answers. Similarly, Calman (2004, p. 366) states that the core values of ethics are unlikely to change over long periods; however, secondary or derived values are more controversial and within which differences of view occur. Moreover, there is evidence of change in the ethical perceptions of students after entering medical training (See, Stephens, Rees, & Lazarus, 2019) as well.

Reactions to unethical cases ranged from "objecting directly to the unethical event and person" to "reporting the unethical event to a higher authority for official resolution and punishment." Both the Western and Eastern samples shared some general reactions in following official steps based on school rules or official means, but Easterners differed in several responses that included the postponement of the reaction to an unethical event with a later visit, advice, and discussion. One interesting reaction from the Eastern sample included the belief that it was better not to advise and to leave the case as-is, expecting the offender to understand his mistake and deeds in time, as he believed an educated person (being a teacher) should be in a position to understand their mistakes, and advising is no use if the person does it on purpose. One participant explained her feelings (sadness) when she saw such conduct. Pelletier and Bligh (2008) studied reactions to unethical behaviors, which included emotional reactions like cynicism, optimism, pessimism, paranoia, and fear directed to the organization, its practices, and its leaders in an unethical nature.

Western participants specifically opted for "reporting to higher authorities or committees" as a viable response. Similarly, Hagen (2019, p.38), based on his study of different types of responses to unethical behaviors in different sectors with 12 participants, listed "reporting unethical behavior to management, HR, or the next supervisor" as the most preferred action in case of unethical cases. While Easterners also opted for reporting to a higher authority or seeking legal channels in line with school rules, they differed in their responses and placed "advise later" and "object directly" (two contrasting acts on the surface) as the most preferred actions in the case of unethical problems. Regarding reporting to higher authorities, Aydin et al. (2012) found in their study that took place in Turkey that "academics least often adopt and resort to whistleblowing to the authorities in case of unethical practices." There are several variations in responses to unethical acts in the Eastern and Western samples.

In examining the literature, I could not find qualitative studies that consider the differences of responses to unethical behaviors by educators from Eastern and Western countries; existing studies are generally conducted in a quantitative manner and test the direct and indirect effects regarding

52

responses to unethical cases. Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara and Suárez-Acosta's (2014) study found that employees who observe acts of injustice in the organization toward their colleagues react in the form of deviant workplace behavior and decrease their organizational citizenship behavior. This study could help future educational researchers to compare responses from different societies and be a starting point for in-depth qualitative analyses.

All in all, this study has examined four research questions and provided the findings in this regard. While doing research, there were some major limitations I faced. I aimed to include a Far Eastern sample, similar to the refugee teacher group within the Eastern sample. But the desired level of participation was not provided for this group. Thus, a Far Eastern perspective based on Confucianism is lacking in the study. Though a certain number of emails were sent to teachers and academic groups in each country, I faced the hardship of collecting multinational data in equal ratios. Also, there is a possibility that academics' opinions may be affected by academic discussions on ethical behavior. Another important limitation has occurred with the online collection of data from respondents in other countries and cities since I opted for taking written responses from them due to the hardship of doing in-person interviews. Face-to-face interviews could produce more in-depth information. Future studies that plan to replicate this study should include a Far Eastern sample and face-to-face interviews to produce more distinct cross-cultural results.

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53

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54

## TÜRKÇE GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Etik antropolojiden ekonomiye kadar birçok alana yayılan, dini, kültürel, küresel, yerel, tarihi ve çevresel faktörlere göre farklı yorumlanabilen bir felsefe dalıdır. Etik; Platon, Aristoteles, Gazali, İbn-i Sina, İbn-i Teymiyye, Thomas Aquinas (Mangini, 2018) gibi Batı ve Doğulu bilim adamları, Konfüçyüs (Holcombe, 1908) gibi Uzak Doğulu filozoflar tarafından uzun sürece tartışılmış bir konudur. Son yüzyıllarda Etik konusu Alman filozof Immanuel Kant, 19. yüzyıl İngiliz faydacıları John Stuart Mill ve Jeremy Bentham ve Amerikalı John Rawls (Khera, 2001) tarafından oldukça farklı açılardan irdelenmiştir. Etikle ilgili farklı kültürlere ait çalışmalar ve anlayışların konuyla ilgili yazar sayısı kadar geniş bir alana yayıldığı söylenebilir.

Etik tutumların ve anlayışların farklı kültürler açısından incelenmesi eğitim kurumları ve liderleri için yol gösterici olabilir. Bu tutumların farkında olunması, farklı ülkelerde okul müdürlerinden ve öğretmenlerden beklenen etik rollere ışık tutabilir (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2020). Önde gelen yüksek öğretim kurumlarının ve okulların çok uluslu öğrenci ve öğretmenlerden oluştuğu veya bu kişilerin eğitim organizasyonlarına dahil edilmeye başlandığı günümüz dünyası için kültürler arası etik çalışmaları büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu organizasyonlardaki eğitim liderlerinden işlerini yaparken farklı kültürlerdeki kişilerin beklentilerini, farklılıklarını ve benzerliklerini anlamaları beklenmektedir (Resick, Hanges, Dickson ve Mitchelson, 2006, s. 346).

Bu çalışmanın amacı Doğu ve Batı kültürlerinden eğitimcilerin etik liderliği nasıl tanımladığını ve etik liderlerle hangi özellikleri ilişkilendirdiklerini irdelemek, katılımcı hikayelerine ve deneyimlerine dayanarak etik örnekleri analiz etmek, Covid-19, savaş, göç, teknoloji vb. gibi önemli olayların eğitimcilerin etik algıları üzerinde bir etkisi olup olmadığını görmek, Batılı ve Doğulu eğitimcilerin etik olmayan davranışlara ilişkin tepkilerini incelemektir. Bu kapsamda katılımcılara şu sorular yöneltilmiştir: 1) Okul bağlamında bir "etik lideri" nasıl tanımlarsınız? Lütfen detaylı açıklayınız. 2) Okul liderlerinizden ve meslektaşlarınızdan en çok hangi etik davranışları ve ilgili özellikleri bekliyorsunuz? Lütfen açıklayınız. 3) Okul liderinizin veya meslektaşlarınızın etik liderlik sergilediği bir durumu/vakayı düşünün. Bu kişinin ve durumun neden etik olduğunu açıklayınız. 4) Kültürün, göçün, teknolojinin, güncel olayların, salgının, ekonomik krizin, işin vb. durumların etik liderlik kavramsallaştırmanız veya tanımınız üzerinde nasıl bir etkisi olduğunu düşünüyorsunuz? Bu faktörler veya önemli bir kişisel olayın etik algınızı değiştirdiğinizi düşünüyor musunuz? Öyleyse nasıl? 5) Okul lideriniz veya okuldaki meslektaşınızın etik olmayan bir davranışıyla karşılaşırsanız nasıl davranmanız gerektiğini düşünüyorsunuz?

Eisenbeiß ve Brodbeck (2014, s. 344) etik olan ve etik olmayan liderliğin Doğu kültürlerinde ve kamu/sosyal sektörlerde nasıl algılandığına dair sistematik araştırmalardan alınyazının yoksun olduğunu belirtmiştir. Bu nedenle bu çalışmada nitel bir yaklaşım dahilinde Batı ve Doğu ülkelerinden farklı inanç sistemlerine sahip eğitimcilerden veri toplanması hedeflenmiştir. Çalışmada nitel bir araştırma deseni olan fenomenoloji takip edilmiştir. Bu desen, bir bireyin dünyada yaşadığı deneyimlerin incelenmesine odaklanmaktadır (Neubauer vd., 2019). Çalışma verileri, farklı şehir ve ülkelerdeki katılımcılardan online mail üzerinden açık uçlu 5 soru yardımıyla; Suriyeli öğretmenler bağlamında ise yüze yüze yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ile toplanmıştır. Çalışmaya dünyanın 23 ülkeden 51 eğitimci (öğretmen ve akademisyen) katılmıştır.

Veri toplama sürecinde mümkün olduğunca çok sayıda eğitimciye ulaşmak için Batı ve Doğu ülkelerinden olası katılımcıların çevrimiçi anket formunu doldurmaları için mail yoluyla davet edilmesi planlanmıştır. Bu açıdan son yıllarda etik alanında yayınlanmış çalışmalar, eğitim ve liderlik konferansları taranmış; ayrıca veri toplamak için diğer ülkelerden online öğretmen gruplarına ulaşılmıştır. Yaklaşık 250 akademisyen ve öğretmen bu şekilde rastgele davet edilmiş; hepsine çalışma amacını ve linki içeren bir mail atılmıştır. Bu şekilde 51 katılımcı 9 Doğu ülkesi (Örn. Türkiye, Bahreyn, Malezya, Endonezya.) ve 14 Batı ülkesinden (Örn. Meksika, Malta, ABD,

55

Romanya, İtalya ve Portekiz) katılımcılar çalışmada yer almıştır. Çalışmada üniversitelerden 24, ilkokul, ortaokul ve liselerden 27 katılımcı bulunmaktadır. Bunların 23'ü kadın, 27'si erkektir.1 kişi cinsiyet belirtmemiştir.

Çalışma bulgularına göre farklı sonuçlar elde edildiği söylenebilir. Her iki Doğu ve Batı kökenli eğitimci grubu etik liderlik konusunda çok farklı fikirler yerine daha fazla benzer fikirler paylaştıkları görülmektedir. Her iki grup tarafından onaylanan başlıca kategoriler arasında "dürüstlük, saygı, eşitlik ve adalet" yer almaktadır, tüm katılımcı gruplar benzer şeklide etik liderlik özelliklerine değinse de katılımcıların "samimiyet, dini davranış, sorumluluk, çevredekileri kayırmama ve dinleyici olma, rasyonellik, takım ruhu" konularına odaklanmalarında farklılıklar vardır. Örneğin, samimiyet Batı örnekleminde sadece bir kez liderlik tanımda değinilmişken Doğu örneklemince daha fazla vurgulanmıştır. Yine Doğu örnekleminde etik liderlik tanımında arkadaş ve çevredekileri kayırmama önemli bir özellik olarak vurgulanırken Batı örnekleminde bu tanımlarda vurgulanmamış, fakat etik örneklerde akraba atamalarına ilişkin bir örnek ile değinilmiştir.

Eisenbeiß ve Brodbeck (2014), Doğu ve Batı örnekleminde genel kabul gören etik liderlik algılarının lider dürüstlüğü, bütünlük, sorumluluk ve sürdürülebilirlik kaygısı, insan yönelimi olduğunu ifade etmektedir. Bu çalışmada da kısmen benzer şekilde temel değerlere her iki grupta çokça vurgu yapılmıştır ayrıca nezaket, etik karar verme ve şeffaflık gibi daha az vurgulanan birkaç ortak etik liderlik niteliği de bulunmaktadır. Benzer şekilde Resick vd. (2006) kültürler arası GLOBE çalışmasının kümelerinde etik liderlik niteliklerinin onaylanma düzeyinde bazı farklılıklar olduğunu belirtmiştir. Diğer çalışmalarda olduğu gibi (örn, Resick vd, 2011), etik liderliğin temel niteliklerinin evrensel olarak onaylanmasına rağmen (örn. karakter, ilgi ve başkalarına saygı ...) kültürler arası algıda tam uyum beklenmesi muhtemel değildir. Dahası, etik olmanın sınırı hala tartışmalı bir konu olmaya devam etmektedir; bazı insanlar sadece yasalara uymanın etik olduğuna inanırken, diğerleri etiğin yasanın ötesine geçen bir tür toplumsal etkileşime uzandığına inanmaktadır (Michalos, 2008).

Araştırmada katılımcıların sahip oldukları kişisel deneyim, yetiştirilme biçimleri, farklı kültürler, dinler ve coğrafi bölgelere atfedilebilecek Batı ve Doğu örnekleminde birkaç farklılıklar görülmektedir. Örneğin, Doğu örneklemindeki Güney Asyalı (örn. Endonezya, Malezya) katılımcılar etik ile din arasında bağlantı kurmakta ve kutsal düşünceler doğrultusunda hareket etmeyi etik olarak görmektedir. Başka bir perspektiften, dini ideallere açıkça atıfta bulunmayan Batı örneklemi etik liderliğin genel boyutları yanında rasyonalite, takım ruhu ve dinleyici olma özelliğinden bahsetmektedir.

Katılımcılar, okullarında meydana gelen çeşitli etik deneyimleri sıralamıştır. Batı örneğindeki etik vakalar, "uyum oluşturmak, dostane davranmak, eşitlik, adalet, eşitlikçi öğretim stratejileri, kayırmama, kriz yönetimi ve başkalarının haklarını savunmak" etrafında şekillendiği görülmüştür. Doğu örneğindeki etik vakalar, "mazeret aramama, kurallara uyma, eşitlik, dini bağlılık, önyargısızlık, tutarlılık, etik karar verme, hizmetkarlık, doğru olanı savunmak ve dostane bir yaklaşım" etrafında şekillenmektedir. Tüm bu etik vakalar ve boyutları okullarda liderlerden istenen davranışlar arasındadır. Okullarda karşılaşılan etik vakalar arasında, öğretim yöntemleriyle hakkaniyet/eşitlik sağlamak, eğitim kurumları çalışmaları için çok dikkate değerdir. Okul liderleri ve öğretmenler, tüm materyalleri herkes için eşit şekilde hazırlamanın etik açıdan yeterli olduğunu düşünebilirler. Bununla birlikte, tüm materyali vermek kişinin istenen tüm sonuçları alabileceği anlamına gelmez. Bu nedenle, eşitlikçi öğretim stratejileri, bu stratejilerin öğretmenlerin "kime" öğrettiklerini dikkate alması açısından önemlidir (Tanner, 2013). Bu nedenle öğrencilerin farklı ihtiyaçlarına göre farklı yanıtlarına izin vermek için öğretim stratejilerinde farklılıklar olmalıdır. Bu durum, özellikle öğrencilerin farklı ihtiyaçlara sahip olduğu ve zorluklarla karşılaştığı dezavantajlı bölgelerde etiklik açısından önemlidir. Bu iki gruptan farklı olarak, Türkiye'nin güneydoğusundaki okullarda çalışan Suriye'den göç etmiş öğretmenler, eşitlik, adalet ve ihtiyaç sahibi personelin desteklenmesi konulu etik örnekler üzerinde durmuştur. Yeni ev sahibi ülkelerindeki vatandaşlar gibi eşit muamele gördüklerinde yaşadıkları olumlu etkiyi ifade etmişlerdir.

Bu çalışmada, etik algıların zaman içinde değişip değişmediği sorusuna da cevap aranmıştır. Okullarda ve üniversitelerde çalışan eğitimciler, etik ilkelerin her zaman sabit olduğu ve Covid-19, savaş, teknolojik gelişmeler gibi yaşanan büyük olaylar nedeniyle etik algılarının/düşüncelerinin değişmeyeceğini belirtmiştir. Ancak az sayıda katılımcı bu durum hakkında farklı bir görüş belirtmiştir. Katılımcıların çoğunluğu, uzun bir geleneğe, evrensel ilkelere veya diğer kişisel deneyimlere dayanan mevcut etik liderlik kavramsallaştırmalarından tatmin olduklarını hissetmektedirler. Benzer şekilde Calman (2004, s. 366), etiğin temel değerlerinin uzun dönemlerde değişme ihtimalinin düşük olduğunu belirtmektedir. Bununla birlikte ikincil veya türetilmiş değerler daha tartışmalı görüş farklılıklarının ortaya çıktığı yerlerdir. Dahası tıp eğitimine girdikten sonra öğrencilerin etik algılarında değişiklik olduğuna dair kanıtlar vardır (Bkz.Stephens, Rees ve Lazarus, 2019). Bazı katılımcılar, her olayın kişinin etik algısını değiştirebileceğini vurgulamıştır.

Katılımcıların etik olmayan vakalara verdiği tepkiler, "etik olmayan olay ve kişiye doğrudan itiraz etme" temasından "etik olmayan olayı resmi olarak çözmek ve kişiyi cezalandırma için daha yüksek bir makama bildirme" temasına kadar sıralanmıştır. Hem Batı hem de Doğu örnekleminden katılımcılar, etik dışı durumlarda okul kurallarına dayanan resmi adımların izlenmesine vurgu yapmıştır. Doğu ülkelerinde katılımcılar, etik olmayan bir olaya tepkinin daha sonraki bir ziyaret, tavsiye ve tartışmayla ertelenmesini içeren çeşitli yanıtlar da vermiştir. Batılı katılımcılar, uygulanabilir bir yanıt olarak özellikle etik dışı durumu "daha yüksek makamlara veya komitelere rapor vermeyi" tercih etmektedirler. Benzer şekilde, Hagen (2019, s. 38), 12 katılımcıyla farklı sektörlerdeki etik olmayan davranışlara farklı yanıt türleri üzerine yaptığı araştırmada en çok tercih edilen eylem olarak "etik dışı durumu yönetime, insan kaynaklarına veya bir üst amire bildirme" seçeneğini listelemiştir. Doğu örneklemindeki katılımcılardan bazıları aynı şekilde daha yüksek bir otoriteye rapor vermeyi veya okul kurallarına göre yasal çözümler aramayı tercih ederken yanıtlarda farklılık görülmektedir. Doğu örnekleminde "daha sonra tavsiye verme" ve "doğrudan itiraz etme" şeklinde zıt görünen yöntemler tercih edilmektedir.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma dört araştırma sorusunu incelemiş ve bu konudaki bulguları sıralamıştır. Araştırma yaparken bazı sınırlılıklar ile karşılaşılmıştır. Öncelikle Doğu ve Batı gruplarına ek olarak Uzak Doğu örneklemi çalışmaya dahil edilmek istense de hedef ülkelerden yeterli veri toplanamamıştır. Çalışmada ülkelerden eşit sayıda katılımcı dahil edilmesi planlanmış ama bazı ülkelerden az sayıda katılımcı görüş bildirmiştir. Bundan sonraki araştırmacılar uzun soluklu bir çalışma planı dahilinde daha geniş bir örneklem grubuyla ve farklı kültürleri çalışmaya dahil ederek sonuçları karşılaştırabilir.