

## The mediating role of subjective well-being in the relationship between ethical leadership behaviors of school principals and organizational cynicism according to teacher perceptions

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**Abstract:** This study examined the mediating role of subjective well-being in the relationship between school principals' ethical leadership behaviours and organisational cynicism according to teachers' perceptions. Relational survey model, one of the quantitative research methods, was used in the study. The population of the study consisted of teachers working in primary and secondary schools in Tuşba district of Van province of Turkey in 2022-2023 academic year. The sample group of the study consisted of 430 volunteer teachers determined by 'stratified sampling' method, which is one of the non-probability sampling methods. Ethical Leadership Scale, Organisational Cynicism Scale and Teacher Subjective Well-Being Scale were used as data collection tools. The data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) statistical programs. As a result of the research, a moderate negative significant relationship was found between school principals' ethical leadership behaviours and teachers' organisational cynicism levels, and a moderate negative significant relationship was found between teachers' organisational cynicism levels and their subjective well-being. In addition, it was determined that there was a significant positive relationship between school principals' ethical leadership behaviours and teachers' subjective well-being. Finally, it was concluded that subjective well-being has a partial mediating role in the relationship between ethical leadership and organisational cynicism. It was concluded that ethical leadership behaviours exhibited by school principals affect teachers' organisational cynicism levels both directly and indirectly through subjective well-being.

**Keywords:** Ethical leadership, Organisational cynicism, Subjective well-being.

### 1. Introduction

The concepts of quality and efficiency are frequently emphasised in the success of educational institutions. In this sense, leadership becomes more important for the success of educational institutions [1]. There is a significant relationship between the leadership behaviours of school administrators and the success of the school [1, 2, 3, 4]. Management involves individual, social and universal ethical responsibilities and fulfilling these responsibilities is very important for the organisation and individuals [5]. The school principal should be an educational leader who changes and develops himself/herself and his/her environment, is innovative, has open and accurate communication skills, teaches and learns, takes responsibility and risk, respects others and receives respect from others, adopts moral and ethical norms and values as a guide in school management, and is committed to ethical values rather than a classical administrator [6].

Ethical values that a leader can demonstrate through his/her behaviours are honesty, goodness, loyalty, reliability, love, courage, compassion, kindness, generosity, equality, scientificity, rationality, respect and sacrifice [7, 8, 9, 10]. It is very important that managers who adopt ethical leadership approach adopt ethical principles as a guide in their behaviours. Because ethical principles that guide the leader protect the leader from making wrong decisions [11]. Ethical leadership has a great importance

for ensuring an environment of trust in schools [12]. In short, managers with ethical leadership skills are relatively more likely to achieve success in their organisations and to show common excitement with their employees in the long term [13]. It can be said that ethical leadership skills are more orientated towards individuals than other leadership skills. In other words, while leadership styles other than ethical leadership emphasise the successful outcome of the process more, ethical leadership gives importance to human relations along with this emphasis on success [14].

Ethical leadership is when an individual who is accepted as a leader by the organisation engages in right, good and altruistic behaviours [15] and creates relationships with people within the scope of ethical values, principles and norms [16]. Ethical leadership has four dimensions: ethics in decision making, communicative ethics, climatic ethics and behavioural ethics [10]. A leader who adopts ethical principles and values should be honest, fair and consistent in his/her decisions and act in accordance with the principle of equality [17, 18]. According to communication ethics, a leader should be open, consistent, clear and honest in internal and external relations [6]. Ethical principles and values are at the forefront in the organisational environment created according to the ethical climate and the interests of the group, not the individual, are important in this organisation. In the organisational environment, moral values, responsibilities, duties and their results are shared among individuals [7].

In the most general terms, organisational cynicism is defined as 'an individual's negative attitude towards the organisation' [35]. When the studies on cynicism are examined, factors such as people working in organisations with very low wages, overtime, very little rewarding and accidents cause negative behaviours and attitudes in organisations and cause organisational cynicism [36]. Organisational cynicism consists of three dimensions: cognitive, affective and behavioural [37]. Therefore, organisational cynicism is considered in a multidimensional way.

Cynical individuals firstly think that there is no integrity in the organisation they are in. Then they have feelings about it and finally they show these negative feelings with their behaviours. It should be kept in mind that these three dimensions of organisational cynicism are interdependent and interrelated and should be considered as a whole [38]. Organisational cynicism can be harmful to the individual and the organisation with the results it brings out. Cynicism can be considered as a disease and if it is not treated appropriately, it causes negative events in the organisation by damaging the organisational climate. In addition, cynicism damages the organisation's transformation and achievement of its goals for change. Therefore, measures should be taken before organisational cynicism occurs in the organisation [36]. Studies in the literature show that school principals' social justice leadership [39] ethical leadership behaviours [40] effective communication skills [41]; transformational leadership behaviours [42, 43, 44, 45], use of reward power and personality power [46], servant leadership [47, 48] reduce teachers' perceptions of organisational cynicism. In addition, teachers' job satisfaction [49], organisational commitment [50], psychological capital levels [51] and organisational justice perceptions [52, 53, 54] are said to decrease organisational cynicism. However, organisational silence [55, 56], organisational paralysis [57], burnout and breach of psychological contract [53], autocratic leadership [45] coercive power and use of legal power [46] are variables that increase organisational cynicism.

The mood of individuals as a result of having less negative emotions and more positive emotions is defined as the subjective well-being of that individual [58]. Subjective well-being consists of two dimensions: emotional dimension and cognitive dimension. Among these dimensions, emotional dimension is related to mood and emotions. However, the emotional dimension consists of positive and negative emotions; it shows that the individual feels positive emotions more or is happy. In other words, it is an indicator of what kind of emotions the individual feels and at what level. Another dimension is the cognitive dimension. The cognitive dimension is the satisfaction with life as a result of subjective evaluations of one's own life [59]. A high level of subjective well-being in teachers benefits both teachers and the school community. These benefits include a healthy life, job satisfaction, productivity and efficiency, and positive social relations inside and outside the school [60]. In addition, there are studies that show that teachers' high levels of subjective well-being positively affect job performance, occupational resilience, career adjustment and psychological resilience [61, 62, 63, 64, 65]. A review of the literature reveals that teachers' classroom management skills [66], personal achievement [67], job

satisfaction [68, 69], self-efficacy beliefs and satisfaction of psychological needs [70] do not positively affect their subjective well-being. On the other hand, transformational [71], transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles [72] and ethical leadership behaviors [73, 74, 69] adopted by school principals have been found to increase teachers' subjective well-being levels. In Turkey, a limited number of studies focusing on the effect of teachers' perceptions of ethical leadership on their subjective well-being have been found [73, 69].

Educational institutions are environments where administrators, teachers, students and parents are in constant interaction. The practices of administrators and how their leadership approaches are perceived within the organization are very effective and directive for employees. Ethical leadership behaviors of school administrators are very important for teachers, who have a significant impact on the success of students, to develop positive feelings, thoughts and behaviors in both private and professional life, to have high levels of subjective well-being and to get satisfaction from their work [69]. Ethical leadership behaviors of school administrators increase the effectiveness and efficiency of schools. However, the number of studies focusing on the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational cynicism is limited [33, 40, 27, 75, 23, 76, 77, 78, 79]. In this study, both the relationship between these two phenomena was investigated and the mediating role of subjective well-being in the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational cynicism was tried to be determined.

The ability of teachers to freely express their opinions about the decisions taken at school, to express their opinions about any subject, to act in accordance with ethical values and principles, and to make suggestions easily is a situation related to the fact that the behaviors exhibited by school principals are in accordance with ethical principles. However, cynical people in the organization cause serious damage to the change and development of the organization and to the motivation and functioning within the organization [80]. It is seen that ethical leadership behaviors exhibited by managers provide motivation, commitment, high performance and satisfaction to employees. It can be said that in organizations with ethical leaders, employees have much higher trust in organizational leaders. In this direction, it can be thought that the level of organizational cynicism in an organization with ethical leadership will be low. In this sense, school principals' adoption of a management style based on the aforementioned elements is considered to be very important in terms of teachers' productive work, job satisfaction, positive feelings and thoughts towards the school and subjective well-being levels, as well as the successful and effective functioning of the organization. With a positive school climate, teachers' subjective well-being levels can be increased and their cynical attitudes can be decreased. In addition, it is thought that school principals' approaches and managerial practices on ethical leadership in schools will reduce organizational cynicism levels, especially through teachers' subjective well-being. On the other hand, it is thought that knowing the organizational attitudes of educational employees will contribute to the fulfillment of their duties more willingly and efficiently and to the more effective implementation of the educational program and administrative processes [81].

### *1.1. Purpose of the Study*

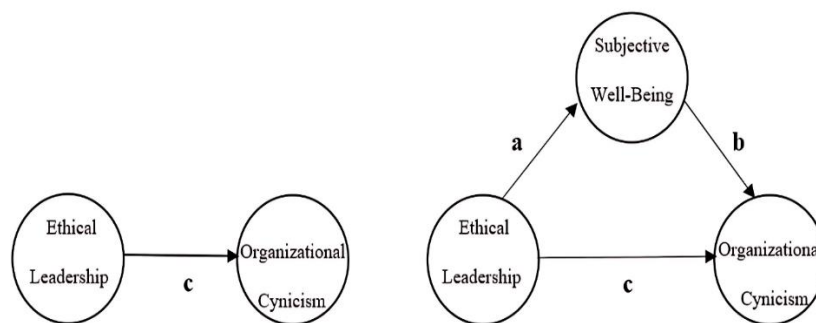
The purpose of this study is to examine the mediating role of subjective well-being in the relationship between school principals' ethical leadership behaviors and organizational cynicism according to teachers' perceptions. For this purpose, the question "Is there a mediating role of subjective well-being in the relationship between school principals' ethical leadership behaviors and organizational cynicism levels according to teachers' perceptions?" constitutes the research problem. The sub-problems determined within the scope of the research are listed below:

1. Is there a significant relationship between school principals' ethical leadership behaviors and organizational cynicism and subjective well-being?
2. Is there a mediating role of teachers' subjective well-being levels in the relationship between school principals' ethical leadership behaviors and teachers' organizational cynicism levels?

## **2. Method**

In this study, the relational survey model, one of the survey models, was used. This model is a survey approach that reveals whether there is a relationship between two or more variables and, if so,

determines the level of this relationship. It is not correct to interpret the relationships identified in the relational survey model as a cause-and-effect relationship. However, by creating some clues in this respect, when the status of a variable is known, it reveals results that will benefit in knowing the status of other variables or variables [82]. The independent variable of the study was determined as ethical leadership behaviors, the dependent variable as organizational cynicism and the mediating variable as subjective well-being. With the findings of the study, the relationships between the variables and the direct and indirect effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable were analyzed. The role of the mediating variable in the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable was determined. In this direction, structural equation modeling was used. Structural equation modeling method tests the relationships between observed and unobserved variables and its most important feature is that it is theory-based [83]. The structural equation model is given in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.**  
Structural equation model.

### 2.1. Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of teachers working in primary and secondary schools in Tuşba district of Van province of Turkey in the 2022-2023 academic year. While determining the sample of the study, “stratified sampling method” was used by considering the number of teachers working in Tuşba district of Van province. In order to have stratified sampling, the selected group or groups must represent the universe. Here, clearer information about subgroups can be obtained. The reason for choosing this method is to easily describe the characteristics of these groups by making comparisons between subgroups [84]. In the study, the proportion of teachers working in primary and secondary schools in Tuşba district in the universe was determined. According to the data obtained from Van Provincial Directorate of National Education, in the 2022-2023 academic year, there are 708 (46.4%) teachers in 83 (64.8%) primary schools and 819 (53.6%) teachers in 45 (35.2%) secondary schools in Tuşba district, totaling 1527 teachers. The sample was determined by considering the above ratios in the number of primary and secondary schools. Accordingly, a total of 43 schools, 28 primary schools and 15 secondary schools, participated in the study. After deducting the missing or incorrect responses in the research scales, a total of 430 volunteer teachers, including 212 (49.3%) teachers working in primary schools and 218 (50.7%) teachers working in secondary schools, constituted the sample of the study. In order for the research sample to be at an acceptable level, a sample size of at least 278 people is sufficient according to the 95% confidence level and 5% deviation [85].

### 2.2. Data Collection Tools

The data collection tool consists of three parts. The first part includes “Ethical Leadership Scale”, the second part includes “Organizational Cynicism Scale” and the last part includes “Teacher Subjective Well-Being Scale”.

#### 2.2.1. Ethical Leadership Scale

Ethical Leadership Scale was developed by Yılmaz [86]. The scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale that is answered and scored as 1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: undecided, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree.

The scale has four factors: communicative ethics, climatic ethics, decision-making ethics and behavioral ethics. These four factors explain 61.1% of the total variance. The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach Alpha value) obtained at the end of the reliability studies on the Ethical Leadership Scale was found to be .97 [86]. According to the measurements obtained in this study, the internal consistency coefficients were  $\alpha = .95$  for the communicative ethics sub-dimension,  $\alpha = .93$  for the climatic ethics sub-dimension,  $\alpha = .89$  for the decision-making ethics sub-dimension,  $\alpha = .93$  for the behavioral ethics sub-dimension and  $\alpha = .98$  for the whole scale.

### 2.2.2. Organizational Cynicism Scale

Organizational Cynicism Scale was developed by Brandes et al. [87] and adapted into Turkish by Kalağan [35]. The scale consists of 13 items. Organizational Cynicism Scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale that is answered and scored as 1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat agree, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree. There are 3 sub-dimensions in the scale: cognitive, affective and behavioral. The cognitive dimension accounts for 29% of the total variance, the affective dimension accounts for 22.4%, and the behavioral dimension accounts for 22.4%. As a result of the reliability analysis, the Cronbach's alpha values of the scale are .91, .95 and .87 for cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions respectively. The Cronbach Alpha value for all items was calculated as .93 [35]. According to the measurements obtained in this study, the internal consistency coefficients were  $\alpha = .90$  for the cognitive dimension,  $\alpha = .96$  for the affective dimension,  $\alpha = .85$  for the behavioral dimension and  $\alpha = .93$  for the whole scale.

### 2.2.3. Teacher Subjective Well-Being Scale

It is a scale developed by Renshaw et al. [88] to determine the subjective well-being levels of teachers in their work life [88] and adapted into Turkish by Ergün and Sezgin-Nartgün [89]. This scale consists of 8 items. Teacher Subjective Well-being Scale is a 4-point Likert-type scale answered as 1: Almost never, 2: Sometimes, 3: Frequently, 4: Almost always. The scale has two sub-dimensions: teaching efficacy and school engagement. As a result of reliability analyses, the internal consistency coefficients of the scale were found to be .82 for the school engagement sub-dimension, .89 for the teaching efficacy sub-dimension, and .83 for all items [89]. According to the measurements obtained in this study, the internal consistency coefficients were  $\alpha = .81$  for the school engagement sub-dimension,  $\alpha = .82$  for the teaching efficacy sub-dimension and  $\alpha = .87$  for the whole scale.

### 2.3. Process

In the research process, first of all, in order to collect the data, permission to use the scales was obtained from the owners of the scales to be used in the research. Before applying the scales, the necessary ethics committee approval (16.01.2023, 1-26) was requested from the Educational Sciences Unit Ethics Committee operating under Atatürk University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee, and then permission to apply the research scales in schools was requested from Van Provincial Directorate of National Education. After obtaining the necessary permissions, the scales were applied to teachers working in primary and secondary schools in Tuşba district of Van province in the 2022-2023 academic year.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the participants were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS 21 programs. Incomplete and incorrectly filled scales were not included in the data analysis. The data set was then examined for missing data and maximum and minimum values, and valid data were digitized. Before starting the analysis, it was examined whether there was correlation or multicollinearity among the variables. As a result of the analysis, it was found that the VIF values were less than 10 (1.24) and the CI values were less than 30 (between 1.00 and 14.17), the Durbin Watson value for autocorrelation was 1.79, the tolerance values were above .10 (.80), the skewness value was between -0.774 and 1.080, and the kurtosis value was between -0.640 and 0.762.

In order to determine the mediating effect of subjective well-being in the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational cynicism, mediation tests were conducted in AMOS 21 program. In order for the mediation effect to be analyzed, the following procedures must have taken place [90]:

1. The relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable must be significant.
2. The relationship between the mediator variable and the independent variable should be significant.
3. The relationship between the dependent variable and the mediator variable should be significant.
4. When the mediator variable is included in the model, the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable should either become insignificant (full mediation effect) or the continued significance should reduce the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable compared to the previous one (partial mediation effect).

In the structural model in which the relationships between the variables will be tested, ethical leadership is defined as the independent variable, subjective well-being as the mediating variable and organizational cynicism as the dependent variable. In order to test the model, the data were entered into the AMOS 21 program and analyzed. There are many tests such as Aroian, Sobel, Preacher & Hayes' bootstrap model and Goodman test to test mediation. In this study, bootstrap test was used to determine the significance of mediation tests. The hypotheses determined in this direction are as follows:

*H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant negative relationship between school principals' ethical leadership behaviors and teachers' organizational cynicism levels and a significant positive relationship between teachers' subjective well-being.*

*H<sub>2</sub>: There is a mediating role of teachers' subjective well-being levels in the relationship between school principals' ethical leadership behaviors and teachers' organizational cynicism levels.*

**Table 1.**

Skewness and Kurtosis values of the variables and sub-dimensions of the study.

Variables	Dimensions	Skewness	Kurtosis
Ethical leadership	Communicative ethics	-0.754	0.129
	Climatic ethics	-0.737	0.258
	Ethics in decision making	-0.774	0.699
	Behavioral ethics	-0.670	0.005
	Total	-0.662	0.138
Organizational cynicism	Cognitive cynicism	0.469	-0.125
	Affective cynicism	1.080	0.762
	Behavioral cynicism	0.203	-0.637
	Total	0.577	0.094
Subjective well-being	School commitment	-0.478	-0.464
	Teaching competence	-0.329	-0.640
	Total	-0.345	-0.580

In scientific research, the distribution of the data set is very important from a statistical point of view since the distribution must be normal or close to normal in order to apply many tests. Skewness-Kurtosis descriptive statistics measures show whether the data are normally distributed [91]. The Skewness-Kurtosis coefficients obtained from the normality analysis performed to determine whether the data obtained from the sample group in this study are normally distributed are shown in Table 1.

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that the Skewness value varies between -0.774 and 1.080 and the Kurtosis value varies between -0.640 and 0.762. Since the Skewness and Kurtosis values are between -1.5 and +1.5, it is determined that the data are normally distributed.

### 3. Findings

The findings related to ethical leadership, organizational cynicism and subjective well-being levels are given in Table 2.



**Table 2.**

Arithmetic means and standard deviation values of ethical leadership, organizational cynicism and subjective well-being scales.

Dimension	X̄	SS
Communicative ethics	4.00	0.75
Climatic ethics	3.85	0.78
Ethics in decision making	4.03	0.69
Behavioral ethics	3.96	0.75
Ethical leadership (Total)	3.96	0.70
Cognitive cynicism	2.44	0.91
Affective cynicism	1.94	0.97
Behavioral cynicism	2.61	1.01
Organizational cynicism (Total)	2.34	0.83
School commitment	3.12	0.66
Teaching competence	3.23	0.56
Subjective well-being (Total)	3.18	0.56

### 3.1. Findings Related to the First Sub-Problem

The findings regarding the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational cynicism and subjective well-being are given in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

The relationship between school principals' ethical leadership behaviors and teachers' organizational cynicism and subjective well-being levels according to teachers' perceptions.

	1	1a	1b	1c	1d	2	2a	2b	2c	3	3a	3b
10. Ethical leadership	10.00											
1a0. communicative ethics		10.00										
1b0. Climatic ethics		0.88**	10.00									
1c0. Ethics in decision making		0.81**	0.80**	10.00								
1d0. Behavioral ethics		0.89**	0.86**	0.80**	10.00							
20. Organizational cynicism	-0.55**	-0.52**	-0.55**	-0.50**	-0.51**	10.00						
2a0. Cognitive cynicism		-0.50**	-0.53**	-0.48**	-0.51**		10.00					
2b0. Affective cynicism		-0.45**	-0.46**	-0.42**	-0.43**		0.60**	10.00				
2c0. Behavioral cynicism		-0.38**	-0.42**	-0.39**	-0.37**		0.62**	0.64**	10.00			
30. Subjective well-being	0.44**	0.42**	0.43**	0.39**	0.41**	-0.31**	-0.27**	-0.30**	-0.24**	10.00		
3a0. School commitment		0.42**	0.45**	0.38**	0.40**		-0.31**	-0.35**	-0.26**		10.00	
3b0. Teaching competence		0.33**	0.32**	0.33**	0.34**		-0.16**	-0.19**	-0.17**		0.66**	10.00

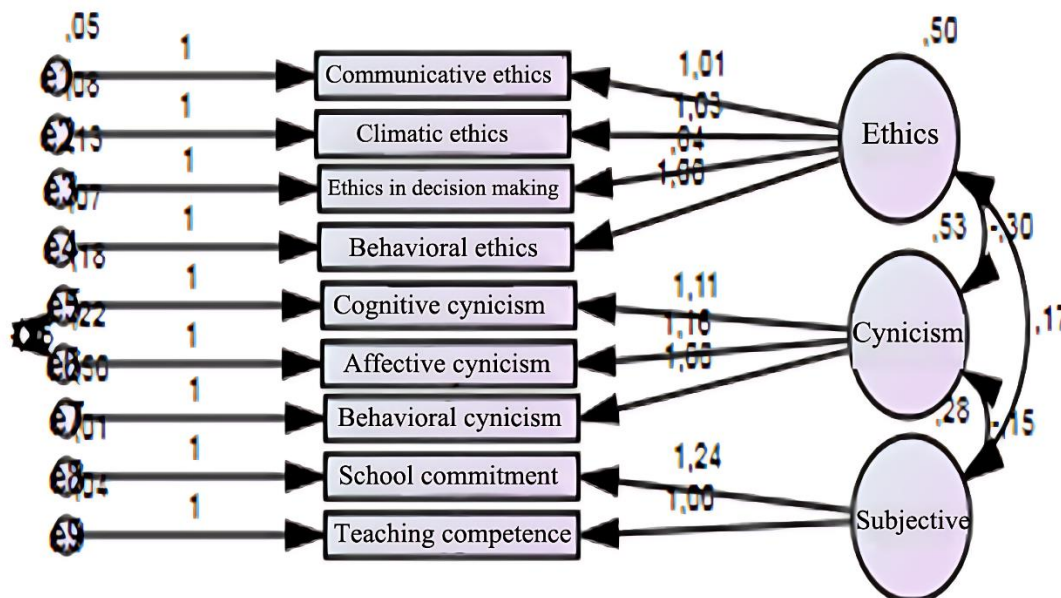
**Note:** \*\* Correlations are significant at 99% level ( $p < 0.01$ ).

When the findings in Table 3 are examined, it is seen that there is a moderate negative significant relationship ( $r = -0.55$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between the ethical leadership behaviors exhibited by the school principals in the schools participating in the study and teachers' organizational cynicism levels. Similarly, there is a moderate negative significant relationship ( $r = -0.31$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between teachers' organizational cynicism levels and teachers' subjective well-being levels. In addition, it was found that there was a significant positive relationship ( $r = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between the ethical leadership behaviors exhibited by school principals and teachers' subjective well-being levels. Accordingly, it can be said that

as the ethical leadership behaviors exhibited by school principals increase, teachers' subjective well-being levels will increase and their organizational cynicism levels will decrease.

3.2. Findings Related to the Second Sub-Problem

In order to determine the effect of ethical leadership behaviors on teachers' perceptions of organizational cynicism, the measurement model was examined. The analysis results of the measurement model are given in Figure 2.

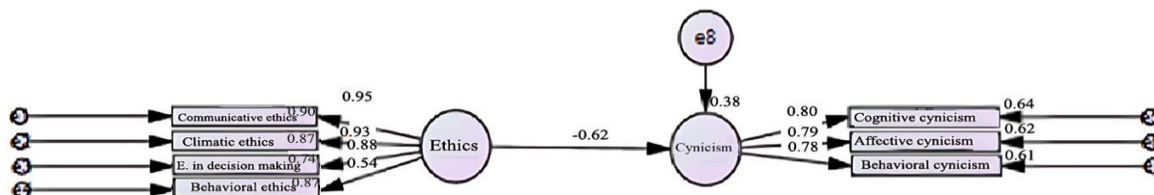


CMIN=44.837; DF=23; CMIN/DF=1.949; p=0.004; RMSEA=0.047; CFI=0.994; GFI=0.978

Figure 2. Measurement model.

When Figure 2 is analyzed, the chi-square value  $\chi^2=44.837$  and the degree of freedom  $df=23$ . With the ratio of the values,  $\chi^2/df=1.95$  was obtained. In line with the values obtained, modification indices were examined and error covariances of items 5 and 6 were combined. When the model was reanalyzed, RMSEA= .05, GFI=.98, CFI=.99 were calculated as goodness of fit index values.

At this stage of the study, in order to determine whether the conditions for mediation effect were fulfilled, it was examined whether the independent variable of the study, ethical leadership, had a significant effect (path c) on the dependent variable, organizational cynicism. Accordingly, Figure 3 shows the structural model and standardized prediction values that reveal the effect of ethical leadership on organizational cynicism. The effect of ethical leadership behaviors on organizational cynicism was tested and the results are shown in Figure 3.



CMIN=29.508; DF=13; CMIN/DF=2.270; p=0.005; RMSEA=0.054; CFI=0.994; GFI=0.981

Figure 3. Model showing the effect of ethical leadership behaviors on organizational cynicism.



It was determined that the fit values of the model created to examine the effect of ethical leadership behaviors on organizational cynicism were within acceptable limits ( $\chi^2/sd=2.27$ , RMSEA= .05, GFI=.98, CFI=.99).

**Table 4.**

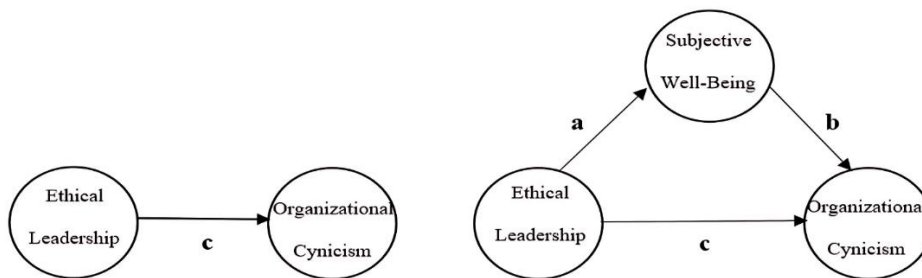
Standardized regression analysis findings on the effect of ethical leadership behaviors on organizational cynicism.

Relationship between variables	$\beta$	S.E.	C.R. (t)	P
Organizational cynicism <--> Ethical leadership	-0.692	0.057	-12.191	***

Note: \*\*\*p<.01.

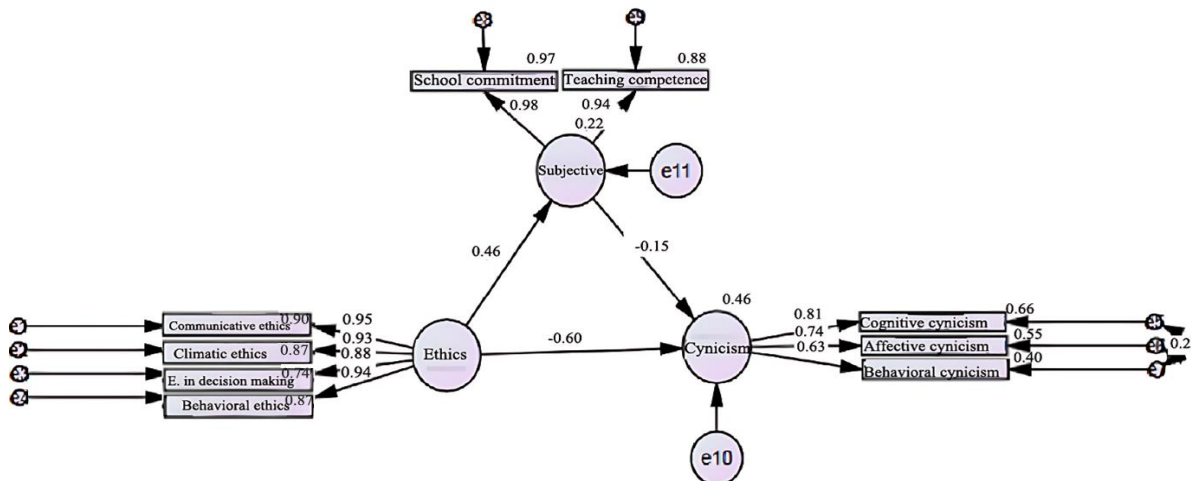
When the findings in Table 4 are examined, it is seen that t values are significant and ethical leadership behaviors exhibited by school principals negatively and significantly predict teachers' perceptions of organizational cynicism ( $\beta=-.69$ ;  $t= -12.191$ ;  $p < .01$ ). After that, a mediation test was conducted to determine the mediating effect of subjective well-being on the effect of ethical leadership on organizational cynicism.

While determining the mediation effect, the process steps suggested by Baron and Kenny [90] were followed [90]. In addition, Bootstrap test was applied to see the significance of the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator variable. The mediating model in question is shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.**  
Mediation effect model.

Figure 5 shows the path diagram obtained as a result of structural equation modeling and the standardized results.



**Figure 2.**  
Mediating effect of subjective well-being between ethical leadership behaviors and organizational cynicism.

The goodness of fit values obtained as a result of the structural equation model for the mediating effect of subjective well-being between ethical leadership behaviors and organizational cynicism were  $\chi^2/sd=1.93$ , RMSEA= .05, GFI=.98, CFI=.99 within acceptable limits [92, 93].

The mediating role of subjective well-being in the effect of ethical leadership on organizational cynicism was examined. The standard error values and regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ) of the variables in the study and the findings of the regression analysis conducted to determine whether the subjective well-being variable has a mediating role in the effect of ethical leadership on organizational cynicism are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.**

Regression analysis findings on the mediating effect of subjective well-being on the effect of ethical leadership on organizational cynicism.

	Result variables				
	Subjective well-being		Organizational cynicism		
	$\beta$	S. E.	$\beta$		S. E.
Ethical leadership (path c)			-0.692*		0.057
R <sup>2</sup>				-0.618	
Ethical leadership (path a)	0.345*	0.037			
R <sup>2</sup>		0.464			
Ethical leadership (path c')			-0.545*		0.065
Subjective well-being (path b)			-0.181*		0.069
R <sup>2</sup>				-.599	
Indirect effect				-0.062* (-0.118 -0.006)	

Note: \*p<0.001.

The findings in Table 5 show that the effect of ethical leadership on organizational cynicism (path c) is statistically significant ( $\beta = -.69$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The relationship between ethical leadership and subjective well-being (path a) is also statistically significant ( $\beta = .34$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The indirect effect between ethical leadership and organizational cynicism was found to be  $-0.062$  with 95% confidence interval  $(-0.118 - 0.006)$ . Since this interval does not include the value 0, it was found to be statistically significant [94]. When ethical leadership, which is the independent variable, and subjective well-being, which is the mediating variable, were entered into the analysis at the same time, it was observed that there was a decrease in the significance level of the previously existing significant relationship between the dependent and independent variables  $(-.69 < -.54)$ . If the ongoing significance between the independent variable and the dependent variable decreases, it can be said that there is a partial mediation effect. As a result, according to the findings obtained from the research, it was concluded that subjective well-being has a mediating effect on the effect of ethical leadership on organizational cynicism.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the findings of the research are discussed and interpreted in relation to the findings of the research itself and the literature and presented in this section under headings.

##### 4.1. Conclusion and Discussion Related to the First Sub-Problem

The results of the study show that there is a significant negative relationship between principals' ethical leadership behaviors and teachers' organizational cynicism levels (H1 accepted). It was found that there is a moderate, negative and significant relationship between ethical leadership and all its sub-dimensions and organizational cynicism and all its sub-dimensions. Similarly, in other studies, it was found that there was a significant negative relationship between school administrators' ethical leadership behaviors and teachers' perceptions of organizational cynicism [33, 40, 76, 23, 77]. In a study, the role of organizational cynicism in the relationship between ethical leadership and deviant work behaviors was examined [95]. According to the findings of the study, it was found that as ethical leadership increases, deviant work behaviors decrease and organizational cynicism has a mediating role in this relationship. In a study examining the effect of ethical leadership on employees' behaviors, it was concluded that there was a positive relationship between managers' ethical leadership and employees'

performance [96]. In another study, it was found that there was a significant negative relationship between primary school teachers' orientation towards change and their organizational cynicism [97]. However, unlike these results, Abay [98] concluded that there was no significant relationship between ethical leadership and organizational cynicism [98]. Therefore, it can be said that as the ethical leadership behaviors exhibited by school principals increase, teachers' organizational cynicism levels will decrease. The behaviors exhibited by school administrators while performing their jobs are perceived by the employees in the school according to the criteria of being ethical or not and reach a certain value [78]. When school administrators show fair, honest, moral and good behaviors, the perception that they exhibit ethical behavior occurs. School administrators set an example for their employees by showing such behaviors. This environment created by the school administrator also determines the relationship between the employees [77]. Organizational cynicism is an attitude shaped through negative feelings, thoughts and behaviors related to the work environment. It also reacts to the history of social or individual experiences that are favorable to change by being influenced by the environment [53]. Employees' belief that changes and innovations can take place in the organization is the most important factor that realizes the change and development of the organization. The leader must have effective leadership skills in order to direct the employees of the organization towards this goal. However, cynical people in the organization prevent the change and development of the organization [80]. Ethical leadership is a type of leadership in which a leader is honest, loyal, goal-oriented, focused on goodness, social justice, personal strength, humility, patience, honesty, virtue-based decision-making and persuading employees to do the right thing [99]. Employees may accept their responsibility and accountability to the organization because of the leaders' trustworthy and ethical behavior; however, when they realize that there are deficiencies in the level of honesty and integrity within the work organization, their morale, job loyalty, dedication and organizational commitment are compromised [100]. Organizational cynicism weakens altruism and conscientiousness [29]. Organizational cynicism behaviors of people with low conscientiousness decrease when their managers have high ethical leadership skills [95]. Ethical leaders express normatively appropriate behaviors through personal actions and interpersonal relationships to prevent the development of cynicism in the organization, which leads to the rise of negative attitudes in employees, and encourage such behaviors through two-way communication, empowerment, and sound decision-making tools to employees who show cynical behavior [101]. When employees perceive those ethical values are at the core of the ethical leader's personality, they develop trust, motivation, passion, initiative, equality, and courage, which in turn reduce employee cynicism and increase their commitment to the organization. Ethical leadership behavior plays an important role in preventing organizational cynicism through ethical and value-oriented practices in the organization. Ethical leaders can increase employees' commitment to the organization by dealing with organizational cynicism appropriately [102]. Ethical leadership behaviors exhibited by managers can be thought to provide motivation, commitment, high performance and satisfaction to employees. It can be said that in organizations with ethical leaders, employees have much higher trust in organizational leaders. In this direction, it can be stated that the level of organizational cynicism in an organization with ethical leadership will be low. Janovská et al. [105] investigated the relationship between the supportive behaviors exhibited by school principals and personality traits and subjective well-being of primary school teachers, and as a result of the study, it was found that the supportive behaviors of school principals with the characteristics of active participation, interest, determination, giving advice, emotional support and providing relevant information increased the subjective well-being of teachers [105]. Yang [106] examined the effect of ethical leadership on employees' job satisfaction, subjective well-being at work, and life satisfaction and found that leadership has a negative direct effect on employees' well-being [106]. From this point of view, it can be said that as the ethical leadership behaviors exhibited by school principals increase, teachers' subjective well-being levels will also increase. A high level of subjective well-being in teachers has great benefits for both teachers and society. These benefits include a healthy life, job satisfaction, productivity and efficiency, and positive social relations inside and outside the school [60]. It is inevitable that a leader in a workplace has an impact on employees [107]. Since there are many advantages of adopting an ethical leadership approach in management, it is desirable for school administrators to have ethical leadership

skills [108]. The ethical and moral characteristics of the school administrator with the adoption of ethical leadership understanding will have a positive impact on teachers [14]. The behaviors of ethical leaders directly or indirectly affect the well-being of their employees [69]. When a leader imposes the necessary sanctions against an unethical behavior, he/she gains the appreciation of the members of the organization and their confidence in the sense of justice increases [109]. Employees of ethical leaders who respect the rights and dignity of their employees may experience more positive satisfaction and happiness due to quality human relations and ethical work norms, as well as perceive their work experiences as fairer and their tasks as more meaningful [110]. Ethical leaders can develop a stronger ethical stance that includes treating employees fairly and providing them with support to cope with various problems through ethical leadership behaviors in the workplace, and thus, workplace stress is reduced and transformed into increased subjective well-being [111]. In addition, there are studies that conclude that teachers' high levels of subjective well-being positively affect their job performance, professional resilience, career adaptability and psychological resilience [61, 62, 63, 64, 65]. In other words, it is thought that as principals exhibit ethical leadership behaviors, teachers will take a more active role in education, their subjective well-being will increase by evaluating their lives positively, and thus continuity in education will be ensured and successful learning outcomes will be obtained.

#### *4.2. Conclusion and Discussion Related to the Second Sub-Problem*

According to the results of the study, it was concluded that subjective well-being has a partial mediating role in the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational cynicism (H2 accepted). Based on this result, it was determined that ethical leadership behaviors exhibited by school principals affect teachers' organizational cynicism levels both directly and indirectly through subjective well-being. Based on these findings, it is possible to say that in schools where ethical leadership behaviors are exhibited by school principals, teachers' organizational cynicism levels will decrease to a great extent, but when teachers' subjective well-being is supported in these educational institutions, the indirect effects of school principals' ethical leadership behaviors on teachers' organizational cynicism levels can be seen. When the related studies are examined, Kaya [23] concluded that organizational cynicism has a mediating role in the effect of ethical leadership on job satisfaction [23]. Researches state that organizational cynicism causes employees to show inadequate performance, low morale, excessive absenteeism, not getting enough satisfaction from work and turnover. In addition, it is said that cynical employees, who make things difficult for themselves as well as the organizations they are in, feel lack of interest, alienation, frustration, helplessness and experience much more emotional burnout [54]. Andersson [112] defined cynicism as an attitude characterized by feelings of frustration, hopelessness, and feelings of limitation such as contempt and distrust towards work organizations, managers, and/or other things present in the workplace [112]. According to Naus et al. [113] cynicism is the way members of an organization defend themselves against problematic events and problems in their work environment [113]. Organizational cynicism occurs when an organization believes that it has different problems and that its efforts to solve these problems are useless [114]. Fighting against negativity is a very important issue for the employee and the organization [115]. Since cynicism stems from employees' experiences in the workplace, management may need to make significant efforts to reduce it [116]. Cynicism leads to the emergence of a number of unconstructive feelings towards their organizations. The most common ones are dislike, anger, hurt and hatred [38]. Due to cynicism, employees are hopeless, less committed to their work, less satisfied and eventually decide to leave the organization [100].

In a study conducted on classroom teachers, it was determined that subjective well-being had a partial mediating role in the relationship between teachers' turnover intention and organizational justice [117]. In another study, it was found that subjective well-being has a mediating role in the relationship between school administrators' instructional leadership and teachers' professional commitment [118]. At the same time, İlgin [119] found that subjective well-being mediated the relationship between workplace incivility and cynicism [119]. In the study of Tinaztepe and İrge [120] it was determined that subjective well-being has a mediating effect on the relationship between overqualification and organizational cynicism [120]. Kim et al. [121] found that perceived organizational support and

coworker support mediated the relationship between empowering leadership and subjective well-being, but did not mediate the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance [121]. Ilyas et al. [122] showed in their study that ethical leadership positively affects the subjective well-being of healthcare professionals [122]. Ethical leadership requires seeking ways to direct the focus of employees towards ethics and to clearly and explicitly promote ethical principles that can guide their decisions and behaviors [123]. Therefore, the leader in the workplace should share power, give employees a voice, treat employees fairly, and promote ethical principles and values in the workplace [124, 125]. Ethical leaders are seen as fair and principled decision-makers for individuals and wider societies, as well as people who behave ethically in their private and professional lives [126]. When the literature was examined, no research examining these three variables was found. However, in many studies mentioned above, it was found that subjective well-being has a mediating role. Magdy [127] believes that there is a strong and significant relationship between the negative behaviors of employees in the workplace and their subjective well-being [127]. A leader should increase the level of well-being of employees in order to gain their loyalty and reduce their turnover intentions [128]. Employees who are satisfied and happy at work tend to be more active, enthusiastic, positive and productive in their work [129]. These employees perform better than employees who are less satisfied with their workplace and have high levels of organizational cynicism [130]. In addition, it is thought that teachers' subjective well-being will increase their commitment to the organization they work for. However, in a study, it is said that high levels of organizational commitment of employees can reduce organizational cynicism [131]. As employees' commitment to their institutions increases, they may evaluate the institution they work for more positively and develop solution-oriented approaches instead of critical thinking [132]. In addition, it is stated that teachers with high subjective well-being contribute to creating a learning climate that will increase the efficiency of their schools and also have a positive effect on students [71]. Accordingly, researchers have argued that the concepts of self-efficacy and teaching efficacy of educators can be mutually influenced on subjective well-being and teacher's sense of achievement, thus improving classroom quality [133, 134]. Society needs teachers who are highly motivated and fulfill their responsibilities and duties. When teachers feel valued and are satisfied with their working conditions, they are more likely to create an environment that supports positive mental development and improves student achievement. Therefore, schools should consider teachers' satisfaction and subjective well-being levels when aiming to improve helpful behavior attitudes [135]. Teachers with high levels of subjective well-being have good relationships with school principals. They act in cooperation and an effective school characteristic emerges. At the same time, teachers' high levels of subjective well-being positively affect their interactions with students and the school climate [136]. In addition, there are studies suggesting that teachers' high levels of subjective well-being positively affect their job performance, professional resilience, career adaptability and psychological resilience [61, 62, 63, 64, 65].

Organizations can reduce organizational cynicism in the workplace by focusing on ethical leadership, open communication, a fair and transparent management approach, and support appropriate to the needs of employees [131]. It is thought that having positive approaches and managerial practices on ethical leadership in educational institutions will reduce organizational cynicism levels, especially through teachers' subjective well-being. The ability of teachers to freely express their opinions about the decisions taken at school, to express their opinions about any subject, to act in accordance with ethical values and principles, and to make suggestions easily is a situation related to the fact that the behaviors exhibited by school principals are in accordance with ethical principles. However, cynical people in the organization cause serious damage to the change and development of the organization and to the motivation and functioning within the organization [80]. It is seen that ethical leadership behaviors exhibited by managers provide motivation, commitment, high performance and satisfaction on employees. It can be said that in organizations with ethical leaders, employees have much higher trust in the leaders of the organization. In this direction, it can be thought that the level of organizational cynicism in an organization with ethical leadership will be low. In this sense, school principals' adoption of a management style based on the aforementioned elements is considered to be very important in

terms of teachers' productive work, job satisfaction, positive feelings and thoughts towards the school and subjective well-being levels, as well as the successful and effective functioning of the organization.

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