



TEACHERS' MORAL CAPITAL: LEVEL, DETERMINANTS AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

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Abstract

This study investigates the level of teachers' moral capital, the factors influencing this perception, and strategies for its development. The research aims to determine teachers' moral capital levels, identify variables affecting their perceptions, and suggest improvements. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative data. Initially, quantitative data were collected from 291 teachers through the "Moral Capital Scale," and later, qualitative data were gathered from 20 teachers via semi-structured interviews to deepen the understanding of the findings. The study population consists of teachers working in public schools in Gaziantep during the 2024–2025 academic year. The results show that teachers' perceptions of moral capital differ based on various personal and contextual factors. Key elements associated with higher moral capital perceptions include teachers' respect for their profession, commitment to ethical values, awareness of their role in students' development, and their ability to serve as moral role models. Additionally, variables such as marital status, age, socio-economic background, and length of service at a school also influence moral capital perceptions. Based on these findings, several recommendations are made: increasing teachers' awareness of moral capital, developing empathy and moral sensitivity, adhering to justice and consistency, utilizing professional development opportunities, enhancing the school climate, and maintaining cultural values and traditions. These strategies aim to strengthen the moral foundation of the teaching profession and contribute positively to educational environments.

Keywords: moral capital, teacher ethics, teacher morality

Introduction

Throughout history, societies have sought to strengthen moral values and promote social cohesion through various approaches and mechanisms that have shaped their development. In this context, capital has become one of the key concepts playing a critical role in cultural formation. While capital is traditionally associated with financial elements, it is more broadly understood as the totality of resources that individuals and organizations possess to achieve their goals. Over time, capital has evolved into a multi-dimensional structure, encompassing social, human, intellectual, and moral aspects. Bourdieu (1986) has categorized capital into economic, social, and cultural types. Various researchers define economic capital as material assets, social capital as the values derived from social relationships and networks (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995), and cultural capital as an educational investment that shapes an individual's knowledge, tendencies, and habits during the socialization process (Vryonides, 2007). Additionally, Valverde (1990) has introduced the concept of moral capital as a non-economic form of capital,

describing it as the capacity to influence others and shape social structures through moral decisions and behaviours. In this regard, elements such as peer groups, religious institutions, and family play a crucial role in fostering moral decision-making.

Moral capital refers to the network of trust-based relationships and attitudes that individuals and organizations build around ethical values. Schinkel and Ruyter's (2017) studies have revealed that moral capital has played a central role in the long-term development of both individuals and societies. In this respect, the development of moral capital requires a long-term investment (Lisenberg, 1991). Moral capital prevents social problems such as crime and violence (Godfrey, 2005), improves moral values (Çelik, 2014), and plays an important role in individuals' ability to distinguish between good and bad by using moral rules (Valverde, 1990).

In the organizational context, moral capital aims for organizations to create a value-oriented culture and to make employee behaviours in line with ethical standards. Thus, it contributes to the institutionalization of moral values by increasing the intrinsic motivation of individuals. In this respect, moral capital has a critical role in increasing the productivity of organizations (Swartz, 1997; Wodka, 2017).

Focusing on the concept of moral capital in educational institutions can contribute to achieving the goals of the school and enable teachers to adopt core values and be positive role models for their students. In schools with teachers with moral capital, values such as tolerance, compassion, loyalty, forgiveness, peace, brotherhood, justice, and honesty come to the fore and constitute an important resource in the formation of a virtuous school (Sergiovanni, 1992; Sergiovanni, 2015). In this context, teachers with high moral capital are expected not only to provide students with academic knowledge but also to raise them as individuals equipped with moral values. On the other hand, teachers with low moral capital may damage students' sense of trust and negatively affect their motivation to learn. Teachers, as one of the key components of the education system, not only transfer academic knowledge but also play a critical role in imparting moral and ethical values to students. Moreover, it is thought that teachers with high moral capital can positively affect students' motivation to learn by increasing their sense of trust. Therefore, determining teachers' perceptions of moral capital can be seen as an important step in understanding their professional competences and their effects on students and improving the quality of the education system. Teachers' moral codes are critical for the educational process and the provision of education (Shahid et al., 2019). The importance of moral education is seen as an essential part of a country's educational curriculum. Teachers play an important role in terms of value education and moral education curriculum serves as the main tool (Zhang et al., 2022). Schools that successfully develop a moral community enable all individuals to contribute by valuing them. Teachers' personal vocation and professionalism are fundamental in this process (Tomlinson, 1997). Trust among teachers constitutes a "moral resource" for school improvements and is associated with increased innovation, access to parents, professional community, and commitment (Vodicka, 2006). The study highlights the key role of educators in instilling moral values, critical thinking skills, and civic responsibility among students, contributing significantly to the development of a society's human capital.

Research Problem

Studies on moral capital in education are highly limited. Upon examination, there are only a few studies on moral capital in Türkiye, primarily in the form of literature reviews on the development of moral capital in schools (Çelik, 2014), concept analyses of moral capital (Özgan & Akgül, 2018), the development of a moral capital scale (Akgül & Özkan, 2020), and the development of teachers' moral capital (Akgül, 2022). Furthermore, an analysis of international literature reveals that moral capital has been studied in the fields of sociology (Sherman, 2006; Swartz, 2013), moral regulation (Valverde, 1994), as a unifying concept (Silverstein et al.,

2012), within the school development process (Gericke & Torbjörnsson, 2022), and in relation to the connection between moral thinking/reasoning and moral action (Kang & Glassman, 2010). In this context, this study aimed to identify teachers' perceptions of moral capital and determine strategies for its development. Additionally, teachers' commitment to professional ethical values has a significant impact on students, as the moral philosophy of a school is shaped by the moral philosophy of its teachers. Teachers who fail to serve as morally appropriate role models may contribute to a decline in a school's moral capital (Çelik, 2014). Therefore, in this study, the level of teachers' moral capital perception, the factors influencing this perception, and the necessary measures for its improvement have not been examined. Depending on the research findings, professional development programmes and in-school support mechanisms can be designed to enhance teachers' moral capital.

Research Focus

The research has focused on determining teachers' perceptions of moral capital, understanding the reasons underlying their perceptions, and identifying the necessary practices to enhance them.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this research was to determine the moral capital levels of teachers and to examine whether there are significant differences in moral capital levels according to various variables and what can be done to increase the moral capital levels of teachers:

1. What are teachers' general perceptions of moral capital?
2. What should be done to improve teachers' moral capital?
3. To what extent do teachers' perceptions of moral capital differ according to various demographic factors?
4. What have been the reasons for changes in teachers' perceptions of moral capital?

Research Methodology

General Background

This research was conducted using a sequential explanatory design, suitable for a mixed-method approach. In other words, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in this study. Combining these approaches can be highly productive, as each has its strengths and weaknesses. By using different methods to explore a phenomenon, researchers were able to obtain more comprehensive results (Patton, 2002). The study began with a quantitative phase, followed by a qualitative phase. Quantitative data formed the main framework, guiding the design and implementation of qualitative processes (Yıldırım, 2019). First, quantitative data were collected and analysed, and then qualitative data were collected and analysed to reveal the reason for the quantitative results (Creswell & Clark, 2015). In this research, following the sequential explanatory design, quantitative analysis first revealed that teachers' perceptions of moral capital whether there is a significant difference according to gender, marital status, education level, school level, tenure, teaching subject, age, professional seniority, socioeconomic background, or commitment to traditions. Qualitative data were then collected and analysed to explore the reasons behind these findings.

Sample

The population of the study consists of teachers working in public schools in Gaziantep in the 2024-2025 academic year. According to the information on the official website of Gaziantep MEB, there are a total of 24263 teachers working in Gaziantep in the 2024-2025 academic year. A simple random sampling technique was applied to determine the sample. According to this technique, each sampling unit has the opportunity to be selected with equal probability from the population. In this method, the selection of one individual does not influence the selection of others, making it highly effective in ensuring representativeness (Büyüköztürk et al., 2019). In this context, the quantitative data of the study were obtained from 291 teachers. The sample size was determined using the G*Power 3.1.9.7 program, with an α value of 0.05, an effect size of 0.5, and a power ($1-\beta$) of 0.85, resulting in a required sample of 146. The final sample included 291 teachers who fully completed the data collection tools. Based on the G*Power analysis, this sample size sufficiently represents the population.

However, in the explanatory sequential design, it is recommended that qualitative data be obtained from the sample selected from the group in which quantitative data are collected (Creswell & Clark, 2015). Therefore, the qualitative study group was selected using maximum diversity sampling, a purposeful sampling method. This approach identifies common phenomena among diverse cases and aims to reveal different aspects of the problem. To ensure diversity, the teacher group was selected based on various factors, including gender, marital status, education level, school level, tenure, teaching subject, age, professional seniority, socioeconomic background, and commitment to traditions and customs. The qualitative data of the study were obtained from 20 teachers. Personal information about the study group from which qualitative data were collected and the sample from which quantitative data were collected are given in Table 1.

Table 1
Sociodemographic Information of the Teachers Constituting the Sample and The Study Group of The Research

Demographic variables	Value	Sociodemographic Information of the Teachers Constituting the Sample (Quantitative)	Sociodemographic Information of the Teachers Constituting the Study Group (Qualitative)
		<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>
Gender	Female	164	12
	Male	127	8
Marital status	Married	189	13
	Single	102	7
Educational attainment	Bachelor's degree	237	13
	Postgraduate	54	7
School level of assignment	Kindergarten	15	1
	Primary School	203	15
	Lower-secondary	47	2
	Upper-secondary	26	2
Length of service at school	1-5 years	152	10
	6-10 years	79	5
	11-15 years	32	2
	16 years and over	28	3
Teaching subject	Preschool teacher	26	2
	Primary school teacher	176	13
	Special education teachers	89	5
Age range	22-30 years old	79	6
	31-39 years old	102	4
	40-48 years old	76	8
	49 years and over	34	2
Professional seniority	1-5 years	72	3
	6-10 years	66	4
	11-15 years	49	8
	16 years and over	104	5
Economic and Social Environment	Bad	48	4
	Medium	212	10
	Good and Very Good	31	6
Level of Adherence to Traditions and Customs	Little or Moderately Connected	241	14
	Tightly Bound	60	6
Total		291	20

When Table 1 is analysed, quantitative data were collected from 291 teachers and qualitative data were collected from 20 teachers. In addition to the demographic variables in the table, it was thought that the economic and social environment and the level of commitment to traditions and customs may also be variables that may affect the perception of moral capital and that these variables should be investigated. It was noted that the variables in both the sample and the study group were similar. In addition, it was aimed to make the study group, in which qualitative data were collected, proportionally similar to the sample. While collecting data during the research process, the participants have first been informed about the study. This ensured that they voluntarily took part in the research. Prior to data collection, ethical approval has been obtained from the Gaziantep University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (Approval No: E-62927161-302.08.01-572033, Decision No: 19, taken at Meeting No: 10 on 02.12.2024). Throughout the study, the personal information and rights of the participants have been protected, and instead of their names, assigned numbers and codes have been used. In this way, the principle of confidentiality has been maintained. Additionally, while collecting qualitative data, appointments have been arranged with participants, and data have been gathered in environments where they could express themselves comfortably. After transcribing the interview data, the transcripts have been sent back to the participants for confirmation. This process has ensured adherence to ethical principles in the study. In this way, ethical principles were complied with in the study.

Instrument and Procedures

In the study, “Moral Capital Scale,” developed by Akgül and Özkan (2020), was used to determine the moral capital levels of teachers. This scale consists of five main dimensions, namely justice, empathy, responsibility, tolerance, and integrity, and a total of 20 items. The results of the Cronbach Alpha (α) analysis conducted to evaluate the reliability showed that the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .871. When evaluated on a dimension basis, Cronbach's Alpha values of all dimensions were above .70. When the reliability of the scale was measured again in this study, it was found that the Cronbach's Alpha value was .85. According to Kılıç (2016), a Cronbach's Alpha value of .70 and above is considered sufficient for the reliability of the scale, while values of .81 and above are considered high reliability. In this context, it was determined that the scale had high reliability values both in the original study and in the current study.

In the study, a semi-structured interview form was used to determine what should be done to improve teachers' moral capital and the reasons for the change in teachers' perceptions of moral capital. In the study, a semi-structured interview form was used to determine what should be done to improve teachers' moral capital and the reasons for the change in teachers' perceptions of moral capital. The semi-structured interview form consists of two parts. In the first part of the form, there are questions to determine the purpose of the research and the demographic characteristics of the participants (gender, marital status, educational attainment, school level, working time in the school, teaching subject, age, professional seniority, economic and social environment, commitment to traditions and customs). In the second part, 8 open-ended questions were prepared as a result of the results obtained from the quantitative data in accordance with the purpose of the research. While preparing the draft of the interview form, the relevant literature was analysed. The draft form, consisting of these two parts, was sent to three academicians who are experts in the field of Educational Administration and have experience in related subjects to determine the content validity. In line with the feedback received from these academics, it was decided not to make any additions or deletions in the questions. The final version of the draft form was sent to two Turkish teachers for linguistic evaluation, and some statements were corrected in line with the feedback. In addition, pilot interviews were

conducted with three teachers on the draft form, and the form was finalised. The final form was used as a data collection tool in the qualitative dimension of the study.

Data Analysis

Firstly, the data of 291 teachers were transferred to the SPSS 22 statistical programme used for data analysis by the researcher. After data entry, in order to decide which tests (parametric and nonparametric) to use, it was examined whether the data showed normal distribution. For this purpose, skewness and kurtosis values of the data were evaluated. The skewness and kurtosis values for the normality distribution of the data used in the study are given in Table 2.

Table 2
Measures of Central Tendency and Kurtosis-Skewness Coefficients of Variables

Moral capital and its dimensions	Skewness Coefficient	Kurtosis Coefficient
Moral capital (General)	-.40	.00
Justice	2.20	-1.01
Empathy	-.52	-.70
Responsibility	.83	-.24
Tolerance	-.36	-.30
Integrity	1.48	-.47

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that the skewness coefficients of the variables vary between -0.52 and 2.20, and the kurtosis coefficients vary between -1.01 and 0.01. According to Jondeau and Rockinger (2003), skewness and kurtosis coefficients between +3 and -3 indicate that the data are normally distributed. In this context, it can be said that the data collected for the moral capital scale used in the research show normal distribution, and these data are suitable for parametric tests. In order to reveal the findings related to the sub-problems of the research, an independent sample t-test was used for pairwise group comparisons (such as gender, teaching subject), and a one-way ANOVA test was used for comparisons of more than two groups (such as age, tenure at school, professional seniority). In addition, Tukey post-hoc test was performed to determine from which groups the significant differences obtained in the ANOVA test originated.

After collecting and analysing the quantitative data of the study, qualitative data were collected for reasons such as making better sense of these data, examining them in depth, and explaining them in detail. Qualitative data were collected with an interview form based on the findings obtained from quantitative data. From the group in which quantitative data were collected, 20 teachers were selected on the basis of volunteerism with the maximum diversity sampling method. The interviews were conducted in teachers' schools and in a comfortable environment. The data obtained were analysed by the content analysis technique. MAXQDA software was used to analyse the data.

Validity and Reliability

In order to increase the internal validity of the research, the relevant literature was reviewed, and the interview form, prepared in line with the expert opinion, was applied to three teachers, and pilot interviews were conducted. In order to make the interviews more effective,

the teachers were interviewed at their schools by making an appointment in advance. Necessary preliminary information was given to the teachers about the subject of moral capital. The duration of the interviews was kept as long as possible in order to create a safe communication environment with the teachers. At the end of the interviews, the participants were asked whether they wanted to make any additions or deletions, and the transcribed versions of the interviews were sent to them, and their approvals were obtained. Thus, verification was obtained from the participants. In order to increase the internal reliability of the research, care was taken to formulate the research questions in a clear, clear and understandable way. The questions were aimed to reflect the research accurately and to be consistent with the research. Data were collected in detail in accordance with the purpose and as required by the research questions. In order to increase internal reliability, consistency was checked with an independent coder. In order to increase the external reliability of the research, what was done in the process was explained in detail. In this context, how and where the interviews were conducted, how and with which methods the data were recorded, whether a programme was used in the analysis of the data obtained, and how the results were reported were stated in detail. The demographic information of the participants in the study is presented in a table. In addition, all these processes were recorded by the researcher so that they would be ready to be analysed by other researchers. It can be said that all these practices mentioned above are measures to increase the validity and reliability of the research (Arastaman et al., 2018).

Research Results

Teachers' General Perceptions of Moral Capital and What Needs to be Done to Improve their Moral Capital

The findings of teachers' perception levels of moral capital and its dimensions are given in Table 3.

Table 3
Values for Teachers' Perceptions of Moral Capital

Moral capital and its dimensions	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Score range	Value
Moral capital (General)	291	3.87	.32	I agree	High
Justice	291	4.28	.55	Strongly Agree	Very High
Empathy	291	4.53	.49	Strongly Agree	Very High
Responsibility	291	4.23	.44	Strongly Agree	Very High
Tolerance	291	4.33	.43	Strongly Agree	Very High
Integrity	291	3.86	.62	I agree	High

Analysis of Table 2 revealed that teachers' overall perceptions of moral capital were within the "agree" range and generally high. Among the dimensions, the highest mean was found in the empathy dimension, while the lowest mean was in the integrity dimension.

As part of the second research question, teachers were asked about strategies to enhance their moral capital. The findings related to this question are given in Figure 1. In this context, when some of the teachers' views on why their perceptions of moral capital may be high were examined, P15 explained his views with the words "*The reason why teachers' moral capital level is high may be due to their commitment to their profession, their effects on students and the supportive school environment.*" P11 said, "Teaching is a profession that is generally

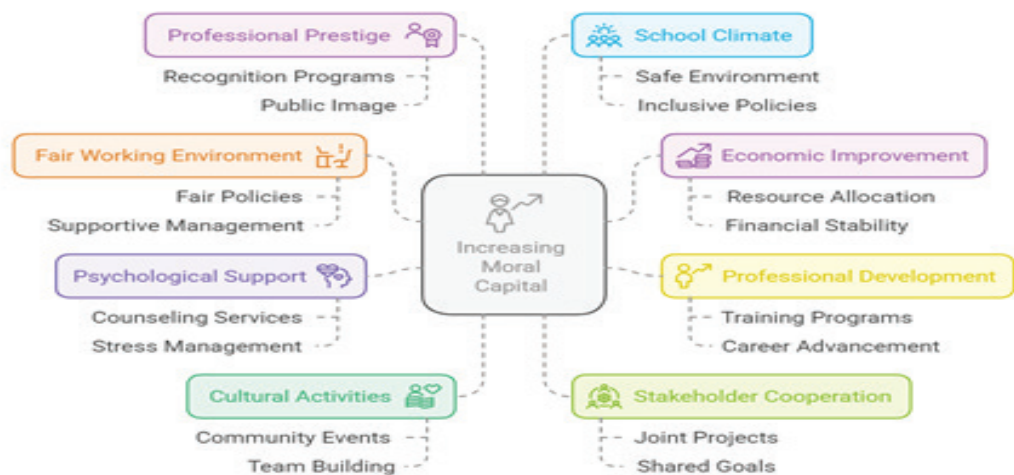
associated with telling the good, the beautiful, and the truth. It is very difficult to do justice to this profession by seeing it only as a money-earning endeavour without being at a good moral level. For this reason, I think that people who prefer this profession choose it with this awareness,” expressed his thoughts with his words.

In the quantitative findings of the study, it was observed that the ‘empathy’ dimension had the highest mean and the ‘integrity’ dimension had the lowest mean. When the interviews conducted in order to explain the results of this finding are examined; P4 stated that “There may be problems in grading, inconsistent behaviours may be displayed, sometimes we may think that children are older, although it is high in general, sometimes inconsistencies may occur.”, while P15 stated that “Empathy is generally strong in teachers because it is important to understand the emotional needs of students. An empathetic teacher can support a student with family problems. In this respect, I think that teachers have this feeling,” expressed an opinion in the form of statements.

In the quantitative findings of the study, it was found that teachers’ general perceptions of moral capital were high. In the interviews, the questions of what should be done to increase teachers’ perceptions of moral capital to very high levels were asked. The answers given by the participants are given in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Findings on What Needs to be Done to Improve Teachers’ Moral Capital



When the responses are analysed, teachers state that their perceptions of moral capital can increase if professional development is provided through trainings. However, they also expressed different opinions that could increase their perception of moral capital. When we look at the participant statements regarding these views; P13 “We should make values education activities more concrete. Rich presentations can be made with group activity studies or workshops. MEB and the University can take part in joint studies. This can increase the moral capital of teachers. In this context, school, student and parent relations can become more efficient.”, while P12 stated that “In order to increase the moral capital of teachers, various trainings can be organized for this field and its sub-dimensions, the contributions of increasing the moral capital of teachers to students, parents and other stakeholders can be explained to teachers with examples, teachers can have a clearer idea about the subject with case studies, teachers can be enabled to participate in various socio-economic activities, the economic level of teachers can be improved, museums and libraries can be given free leave to teachers

to increase their cultural and social data.” P11 stated, “Offering professional development opportunities, providing good working conditions, providing psychological support, and giving clear and positive feedback can increase their perception of moral capital.” Finally, P14 stated that “Teachers’ professional prestige should be increased, professional disinformation should be prevented, economic improvements should be made, teachers should be allowed to have one hour of class a week with an expert teacher even after internship, a meal, tea, guidance hour should be provided to provide a warmer environment in the teachers’ room and alienation in the school should be prevented. If these are done, teachers’ moral capital levels can increase,” expressed an opinion in the form of statements.

When the findings obtained for the first sub-problem of the research are analysed, it is seen that teachers’ general perceptions of moral capital are high and can reach very high levels in sub-dimensions. Teachers suggest various methods to further increase their general perceptions, and they think that the realization of these suggestions may be beneficial.

Teachers’ Moral Capital Perceptions: Differences Across Demographic Variables and Underlying Reasons for Change

As a result of the quantitative analyses, it was determined that gender, education level, school level, teaching subject and professional seniority variables did not affect the perception of moral capital, while marital status, working time at school, age, economic and social environment, and commitment to traditions and customs were related to the perception of moral capital. The interviews conducted to reveal the reasons for these differences, and the tables related to quantitative data are given respectively. Whether the moral capital perceptions of teachers show a significant difference according to the gender variable was analysed by t-test and given in Table 4.

Table 4
Teachers’ Perceptions of Moral Capital According to Marital Status Variable

Moral capital and its dimensions	Marital status	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t	p
Moral Capital (General)	Single	102	3.81	.31	289	-2.02	.04
	Married	189	3.89	.32			
Justice	Single	102	4.14	.59	289	-3.19	.001
	Married	189	4.35	.51			
Empathy	Single	102	4.20	.47	289	-.60	.54
	Married	189	4.24	.42			
Responsibility	Single	102	4.45	.52	289	-2.06	.04
	Married	189	4.58	.47			
Tolerance	Single	102	4.31	.41	289	-.51	.60
	Married	189	4.34	.44			
Integrity	Single	102	3.81	.63	289	-1.09	.27
	Married	189	3.89	.61			

When Table 4 is analysed, it is determined that there is a difference in the general perceptions of the teachers participating in the study with the justice and responsibility sub-dimensions of moral capital. When the arithmetic averages were analysed to determine the source of this difference, it was seen that married teachers had a significantly higher average of justice and responsibility sub-dimensions and general perceptions of moral capital. As a result of the qualitative interviews conducted to explain the reason for these findings, the teachers were asked to explain why the general perceptions of moral capital, justice, and responsibility sub-dimensions of married teachers might be higher. When we look at the participant opinions regarding this situation, P11 said, *"Since married people experience situations such as responsibility and empathy in their own lives, this inevitably reflects on their work life. I also think that having children has a significant effect on moral capital. I see that those who have children exhibit more sensitive behaviours than those who do not, especially in terms of tolerance and compassion."* P12 said, *"I think that married teachers have higher levels of moral capital. Whether it is the division of labour, responsibilities, the awareness of living together or acting justly, or the ability to solve the problems they face in marriage, it is reflected in their school life. I guess that responsibility and division of labour can be very effective in this regard, or I can say that showing consistent behaviours in raising children can cause similar reactions in students,"* explained his thoughts with his words.

Whether the teachers' perceptions of moral capital show a significant difference according to the variable of working time in the school was analysed by ANOVA test and given in Table 5.

Table 5

Teachers' Perceptions of Moral Capital According to the Variable of Working Time in the School

Moral capital and its dimensions	Length of Service at School	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	$F_{(3/287)}$	p	Meaningful Relationship
Moral Capital (General)	(1) 1-5 years	152	3.84	.34	1.26	.28	-
	(2) 6-10 years	79	3.87	.32			
	(3) 11-15 years	32	3.86	.31			
	(4) 16+ years	28	3.97	.27			
Justice	(1) 1-5 years	152	4.26	.51	1.63	.18	-
	(2) 6-10 years	79	4.28	.57			
	(3) 11-15 years	32	4.16	.71			
	(4) 16+ years	28	4.47	.46			
Empathy	(1) 1-5 years	152	4.51	.49	1.31	.27	-
	(2) 6-10 years	79	4.50	.49			
	(3) 11-15 years	32	4.57	.55			
	(4) 16+ years	28	4.70	.45			
Responsibility	(1) 1-5 years	152	4.18	.45	2.63	.05	1-4
	(2) 6-10 years	79	4.23	.43			
	(3) 11-15 years	32	4.27	.38			
	(4) 16+ years	28	4.42	.42			
Tolerance	(1) 1-5 years	152	4.31	.43	.39	.75	-
	(2) 6-10 years	79	4.36	.43			
	(3) 11-15 years	32	4.33	.42			
	(4) 16+ years	28	4.39	.44			
Integrity	(1) 1-5 years	152	3.85	.60	.15	.92	-
	(2) 6-10 years	79	3.89	.69			
	(3) 11-15 years	32	3.86	.58			
	(4) 16+ years	28	3.80	.51			

When Table 5 is analysed, it is seen that the teachers' perceptions of justice, empathy, tolerance, and integrity among the sub-dimensions of moral capital and their general perceptions of moral capital do not show a significant difference according to the variable of working time in the school. However, it was found that there was a difference in the responsibility sub-dimension. When the finding was analysed with Tukey test, it was determined that teachers with a working period of 16 years or more had higher averages than teachers with a working period of 1-5 years. In order to explain the reasons for this situation, qualitative interviews were conducted, and the opinions of the participants were consulted. In this context, some of the participant views are as follows: P15 *"Teachers who have been working in the same school for a long time can better adapt to the dynamics of the school and exhibit a higher perception of moral capital in the dimensions of responsibility and integrity. A teacher who has been working at the same school for many years can exhibit a strong morale in the responsibility dimension by establishing a deep bond with the students."* P11 said, *"A teacher who has been working at the same school for many years is attached to that school wholeheartedly, and there are no reasons for him/her to strive to leave. This causes them to be more active and productive at school. Thus, they take more responsibility and have high moral capital."* P14 stated that *"A teacher who has spent many years at school has a more possessive, more empathetic, more tolerant structure and is able to analyse the students who reflect the profile of the place where he/she lives according to their socio-economic status."* While P19 stated that *"As a teacher's working time at school increases, he/she will integrate with his/her environment, parents, fellow teachers, and students and take responsibility in line with their expectations. This situation will increase his/her moral capital,"* expressed his/her views with the following statements.

Whether teachers' perceptions of moral capital show a significant difference according to the age variable was analysed by ANOVA test and given in Table 6.

Table 6
Teachers' Perceptions of Moral Capital According to the Age Variable

Moral capital and its dimensions	Age	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	$F_{(3/287)}$	p	Meaningful Relationship
Moral Capital (General)	(1) 22-30 years old	79	3.80	.35	1.70	.16	-
	(2) 31-39 years	102	3.89	.30			
	(3) 40-48 years old	76	3.89	.33			
	(4) 49+ years old	34	3.90	.29			
Justice	(1) 22-30 years old	79	4.23	.49	.32	.80	-
	(2) 31-39 years	102	4.28	.56			
	(3) 40-48 years old	76	4.31	.59			
	(4) 49+ years old	34	4.29	.57			
Empathy	(1) 22-30 years old	79	4.44	.50	1.66	.17	-
	(2) 31-39 years	102	4.57	.49			
	(3) 40-48 years old	76	4.53	.51			
	(4) 49+ years old	34	4.64	.45			
Responsibility	(1) 22-30 years old	79	4.14	.50	1.65	.17	-
	(2) 31-39 years	102	4.23	.38			
	(3) 40-48 years old	76	4.28	.45			
	(4) 49+ years old	34	4.30	.36			
Tolerance	(1) 22-30 years old	79	4.28	.48	.77	.51	-
	(2) 31-39 years	102	4.33	.39			
	(3) 40-48 years old	76	4.36	.45			
	(4) 49+ years old	34	4.40	.38			
Integrity	(1) 22-30 years old	79	3.73	.71	2.87	.03	1-2
	(2) 31-39 years	102	3.99	.57			
	(3) 40-48 years old	76	3.85	.54			
	(4) 49+ years old	34	3.78	.64			

When Table 6 is analysed, it is determined that the perceptions of justice, empathy, tolerance and responsibility, which are the sub-dimensions of moral capital, and the general perceptions of moral capital of the teachers participating in the research do not show a significant difference according to the working time in the school where they are employed, but there is a significant relationship in the integrity sub-dimension. When the finding was analysed with Tukey test, it was determined that teachers between the ages of 31-39 had higher perceptions in the integrity sub-dimension than teachers between the ages of 22-30. When the findings obtained as a result of the qualitative interviews conducted to explain the similarity or difference of these findings are examined; P3 stated that “As age increases, the level of understanding children and consistency in behaviours improve due to experience. This can increase the ability to empathize with them. I think that, especially newly appointed teachers, cannot have this level of responsibility yet.” While P4 expressed his views as “I think that teachers with more life experience will have higher levels of moral capital, so I think that teachers with higher age will behave more consistently and justly than younger teachers.” P6 said, “Teachers’ moral capital can increase with time and life experiences. I think it can especially affect the integrity dimension,” stated the following opinion.

Whether the moral capital perceptions of the teachers show a significant difference according to the economic and social environment variable was analysed by ANOVA test and given in Table 7.

Table 7

Teachers' Perceptions of Moral Capital According to The Economic and Social Environment in Which They Grew Up

Moral capital and its dimensions	Economic and Social Environment	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	$F_{(3/288)}$	p	Meaningful Relationship
Moral Capital (General)	(1) Poor Level	48	3.89	.29	3.46	.03	2-3
	(2) Medium Level	212	3.84	.32			
	(3) Good and Very Good Level	31	4.00	.35			
Justice	(1) Poor Level	48	4.28	.56	.26	.77	-
	(2) Medium Level	212	4.27	.54			
	(3) Good and Very Good Level	31	4.34	.61			
Empathy	(1) Poor Level	48	4.62	.41	1.71	.18	-
	(2) Medium Level	212	4.50	.50			
	(3) Good and Very Good Level	31	4.62	.56			
Responsibility	(1) Poor Level	48	4.20	.42	5.60	.001	1-3, 2-3
	(2) Medium Level	212	4.20	.43			
	(3) Good and Very Good Level	31	4.47	.45			
Tolerance	(1) Poor Level	48	4.37	.41	2.73	.06	-
	(2) Medium Level	212	4.30	.44			
	(3) Good and Very Good Level	31	4.49	.38			
Integrity	(1) Poor Level	48	3.93	.48	1.49	.22	-
	(2) Medium Level	212	3.82	.63			
	(3) Good and Very Good Level	31	4.01	.70			

When Table 7 is analysed, it is determined that the perceptions of the teachers participating in the research on justice, empathy, tolerance, and integrity from the moral capital sub-dimensions do not show a significant difference according to the economic and social environment variable. However, it was determined that there was a significant difference in the responsibility sub-dimension and moral capital general perceptions. When the finding was analysed with Tukey test, it was determined that teachers who grew up in a good or very good environment had a higher perception than teachers who grew up in a medium level environment, and in the responsibility dimension, teachers who grew up in a good or very good environment had a higher perception of moral capital than teachers who grew up in both low and medium level environments. The question of whether teachers' perceptions of moral capital differ according to the social and economic environment in which they were raised, and what the reasons for this may be, was asked. When the participant views on this situation were analysed; P14 stated: *"Of course it differs because it is related to how they gain identity. A conservative environment may exhibit a more conservative attitude while making sense of emotional intimacy towards students. This may positively affect their empathy and tolerance."*

While P19 said, *“The environment in which a person is raised determines his/her ethical and moral values. This helps the formation of a person’s character. Therefore, the level of moral capital of teachers may vary according to this factor. The perception of a teacher who grows up in a good environment may be higher for this reason.”* P15 said, *“The moral capital of teachers may differ according to the economic and social environment in which they grow up. Teachers from an economically disadvantaged environment may be stronger in the empathy dimension by better understanding the difficulties of students. Teachers from more advantaged environments may be strong in terms of self-confidence and access to resources.”* While P12 stated that *“It is very normal that the economic and social environment in which one grows up affects moral capital because it is not possible for the moral capital of a person who grows up in a good or very good environment not to be affected by that environment. As an example, it can be said that a teacher who grows up in an environment where everyone knows how to read and write and has at least a university degree will be more consistent and fairer in his/her approach to his/her students. On the other hand, I think that a teacher who grows up in an environment with a poor social economic level may have problems at the point of acting justly.”* Whether teachers’ perceptions of moral capital show a significant difference according to the variable of commitment to traditions and customs was analysed by a t-test and given in Table 8.

Table 8

Teachers’ Perceptions of Moral Capital According to the Level of Commitment to Traditions and Customs

Moral capital and its dimensions	Adherence to Traditions and Customs	N	X-	SD	df	t	p
Moral Capital (General)	Less or Medium	231	3.82	.32	289	-5.00	0.001
	Tightly	60	4.05	.28			
Justice	Less or Medium	231	4.22	.53	289	-3.43	0.001
	Tightly	60	4.49	.57			
Empathy	Less or Medium	231	4.49	.49	289	-2.49	0.001
	Tightly	60	4.67	.49			
Responsibility	Less or Medium	231	4.18	.43	289	-3.46	0.001
	Tightly	60	4.40	.41			
Tolerance	Less or Medium	231	4.28	.44	289	-3.80	0.001
	Tightly	60	4.52	.33			
Integrity	Less or Medium	231	3.78	.62	289	-4.35	0.001
	Tightly	60	4.16	.52			

When Table 8 is analysed, it is seen that there is a significant difference in the moral capital sub-dimensions and general perceptions of the teachers participating in the research. When this finding was analysed with Tukey test, it was found that the perceptions of those who were strongly committed to traditions were higher in all dimensions than those who were at a low or medium level. When the findings obtained as a result of the qualitative interviews conducted to explain the reason for these findings are analysed; P1 stated that *“There may be some differences in terms of commitment to traditions and customs. There are differences especially in those who grew up in the eastern and western cities. A more traditionalist understanding in the east may increase their level of moral capital.”*, while P5 explained his views with the words *“People*

who adhere to traditions and customs may have a higher level of moral capital because they tend to accept unconditionally.” P11 “Under the influence of traditional values, teachers see their profession not only as a job but also as a duty to serve the society. Teachers who adhere to traditions usually receive strong support from family and society. This support can increase the motivation of teachers.” P12 “I can say that teachers who are firmly committed to traditions and customs may be more consistent in their behaviours and in this respect, their moral capital may be higher,” explained his views with his words.

Discussion

The aim of the study was to determine the levels of moral capital among teachers and to identify what actions should be taken to enhance teachers' moral capital. Additionally, the study sought to examine whether teachers' perceptions of moral capital varied according to various variables and to explore the reasons for these differences. In line with this, the findings obtained from the research were evaluated in the context of the relevant literature and empirical studies, and recommendations were developed based on the results. In the study, it was found that teachers' general moral capital perceptions were high. As a result of qualitative interviews, it was determined that teachers' high moral capital perception was related to their respect for their profession, their awareness of contributing to the development of their students, their commitment to the ethical and moral values required by the teaching profession, and their desire to be role models for their students. Teachers saw themselves as role models who adopted ethical and moral values and transferred these values to students. In the literature, it is seen that teachers' commitment to professional ethical rules is guided by their own moral compass (Daniel & Sapo, 2020), and that teachers generally see themselves as role models for students (Demir & Köse, 2016). Pratiwi and Susilowati (2025) conclude that individual morality affects fraud and unethical behaviours. In addition, it is found that there is a relationship between teachers' professional ethical behaviours and their levels of moral judgement (Sakin, 2007), and that their empathic tendencies increase as their perceptions of professional competence rise (Kayacı, 2021). Furthermore, Imanipour (2012) emphasises that teachers should adhere to ethical principles, considering their role in students' moral development. Sütçü and Oral (2021) state that most teachers love their profession, experience high professional satisfaction, and value their work. It is also stated that improving teachers' pedagogical competences has positive effects on morale (Nellitawati, 2020) and lasting effects on students (Meliha & Demir, 2014). In contrast to these findings, Benti and Tarekegne (2022) indicate that teachers' morale is low, mainly due to a lack of confidence in their professional competence. They also point out that teachers' morale is affected by various factors, such as their relationship with the school principal, relationships with colleagues, salary, workload, curriculum issues, and the level of community support for education and schools.

In this study, based on quantitative data, it was determined that among the sub-dimensions of teachers' moral capital perceptions, the empathy sub-dimension had the highest mean, and the integrity sub-dimension had the lowest mean. In this context, it was concluded that teachers' empathic skills were developed, but their behaviours might have been relatively inconsistent. Similarly, Kayıkçı and Uygur (2010) emphasise that teachers focus on justice, tolerance, respect, and responsibility as core ethical principles. Stojiljković et al. (2012) stated that teachers demonstrate a high level of empathy. Meyers et al. (2019) also state that teacher empathy involves an effort to deeply understand students' personal and social situations, sensitivity to both positive and negative emotions of students, and the ability to respond to these emotions with compassion. In the integrity dimension, it was concluded that although it was generally high, inconsistencies were sometimes experienced in grading and decision-making processes. However, it was seen that suggestions were needed to increase the overall perception and sub-dimensions of moral capital perceptions.

In this context, it is concluded that providing teachers with training on the concept of moral capital can increase their perceptions. It is also a supportive finding that the training programme implemented within the scope of Akgül's doctoral thesis can increase teachers' perceptions of moral capital. It is stated that improving the school climate is important in increasing the perception of moral capital by providing tolerance and a fair, supportive working environment. The research conducted by Hargreaves (1995) suggests that school cultures are associated with outcomes such as academic achievement and social cohesion and have positive effects on teachers. It was stated that improving the economic conditions of teachers and strengthening their psychological and social support would positively affect the empathy dimension, while cooperation with stakeholders could contribute to qualities such as tolerance, responsibility, and integrity. In addition, it was concluded that organising cultural and social activities and increasing teachers' professional prestige could increase their perceptions of moral capital in general. Bozyiğit and Kazak (2024) also state that teachers take more responsibility in a supportive environment with a positive school culture and climate. This may lead to the development of a sense of responsibility, which is one of the sub-dimensions of moral capital, and thus increase the perception of moral capital. Lee et al. (1999) draw attention to the importance of academic and social support provided by teachers for student achievement and school engagement. A supportive teacher believes in students' abilities, respects their thoughts, and encourages them to learn and take risks. Teachers' pedagogical competences are critical to creating a positive working environment and realising educational goals, as these directly affect work morale and motivation (Nellitawati, 2020).

In the study, it was found that married teachers' perceptions of the justice and responsibility sub-dimensions, as well as their overall perceptions, were higher than average. In explaining this result, it is concluded that married teachers develop more responsibility and empathy in their married life, experience feelings of tolerance and compassion more intensely, and therefore make fair behaviours a habit. Bulut and Düşmez (2014) state that the empathic skill levels of married individuals are higher on average than those of single individuals. Korkut (2019) finds that married teachers' perceptions of organisational happiness and justice are significantly higher than those of single teachers, which aligns with the current study. In a study conducted by Arvas (2020), it is stated that it is important for married people to behave in a fairer and more altruistic manner and to have high perceptions of responsibility and justice, both for their personal development and the quality of their relationships.

In the study, it was determined that teachers with 16 or more years of service had higher perceptions of responsibility than teachers with 1 to 5 years of service. As a reason for this situation, it is concluded that teachers are more satisfied at school due to taking more duties, they adapt better to the dynamics of the school, they establish a deeper bond with the students, and they act within the framework of integrity by recognising the socio-economic conditions of the environment well. Similarly, Kurşunoğlu and Tanrıöğen (2010) conclude that teachers feel more belonging and identify with their institutions as their working time in their schools' increases.

In the study, it was found that teachers in the 31-39 age range had a higher perception of honesty than those in the 22-30 age range. When teachers were asked the reason for this, it was found that as their age increased, approaching students and behaving consistently were considered more important due to experience. Zembat and Küsmüş (2020) conclude that teachers' classroom management skills and professionalism increase with age. Similarly, Gökyer and Koçak (2019) state that as teachers' age increases, the organisational citizenship behaviours they exhibit increase regularly, leading them to take more responsibility. Erdoğan and Aydınadağ (2013) conclude that as teachers' age increases, their institutional identification also increases. These results support the current research.

In the study, it was concluded that teachers' perceptions of moral capital and the responsibility sub-dimension differed according to the socio-economic environment in which they were raised. Additionally, it was determined that teachers who grew up in good and very good environments had higher general perceptions than those who grew up in medium-level environments. In the responsibility sub-dimension, the perception of teachers raised in good and very good environments was higher than that of teachers raised in low and medium-level environments. The environments in which teachers grow up shape their characters and behaviours, with moral, religious, and ethical principles profoundly influencing their lives. Şengün (2007) identifies key psycho-social factors that determine individuals' moral development, including heredity, environment, family, school education, peer groups, religion, mass media, economy, and culture. Within this framework, it can be concluded that the socio-economic context of teachers' upbringing significantly affects their perceptions of moral capital. Furthermore, teachers perceive religion as a primary source of moral values and highlight the importance of moral education (Siddiqui & Soomro, 2022).

In the study, it was concluded that individuals who were strongly committed to traditions had higher perceptions in all dimensions compared to those who were less or moderately committed to traditions. When teachers were asked about the reasons for this result, it was concluded that people committed to traditions behaved more empathetically and consistently. Looking at the literature, similar findings show that traditions contribute to the construction of personal character and promote values such as responsibility, care, and gratitude (Suyitno et al., 2023). Traditions provide a sense of stability and foresight in people's lives by offering a clear framework for how individuals behave in various situations, leading to more consistent behaviour (Revyakina & Sakharova, 2023).

Conclusions and Implications

The findings of this study reveal that teachers' perceptions of moral capital vary depending on various factors. Teachers' respect for their profession, awareness of contributing to students, commitment to ethical values, and understanding of being a role model are among the main factors contributing to high perceptions of moral capital. Variables such as marital status, socioeconomic environment, age, and time spent at school are also determinants in teachers' perceptions of moral capital. Especially married teachers and those with long-term experience have higher levels of moral capital, and their empathy skills are improved. In addition, it has been concluded that the environment in which teachers grow up shapes their ethical and moral values, and in this context, their commitment to traditions and customs positively affects their perceptions of moral capital.

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations have been developed to enhance the quality of education and support the professional development of teachers. First, it is suggested that future research should explore the concept of moral capital in greater depth by identifying the factors that influence it, examining its relationship with student achievement, evaluating the effectiveness of moral capital development programs, and adopting mixed-method research approaches. Teachers are encouraged to increase their awareness of moral capital, develop empathy, adhere to principles of fairness and consistency, engage in professional development opportunities, contribute positively to the school climate, and remain committed to cultural traditions and values. In addition, it is recommended that the Ministry of National Education design and implement policies that promote moral capital, revise teacher training programs to include ethical and moral dimensions, provide targeted training for school administrators, improve the overall school climate, strengthen support services for teachers, enhance their economic and social rights, and integrate traditional and cultural values into the educational system.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no competing interest.

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Semi-Structured Interview Form

- 1-What is the level of moral capital of teachers (Low-Medium-High)? How did you come to this conclusion? Can you give an example?
- 2- Do you think teachers' moral capital differs in terms of the dimensions of "justice, empathy, responsibility, tolerance, and integrity (displaying consistent behaviour)"? In which dimension do you think it may be higher or lower? How did you come to this conclusion? Can you give examples?
- 3- Do you think teachers' moral capital may differ according to gender? How did you come to this conclusion? Can you give an example?
- 4- Do you think teachers' moral capital may differ according to their marital status? How did you come to this conclusion? Can you give an example?
- 5- Do you think teachers' moral capital may differ according to their educational background? How did you come to this conclusion? Can you give an example?
- 6- Do you think teachers' moral capital may differ according to the type of school they are assigned to? How did you come to this conclusion? Can you give an example?
- 7- Do you think that teachers' moral capital can differ according to their working time in the school they are assigned? How did you come to this conclusion? Can you give an example?
- 8- Do you think that teachers' moral capital can differ according to the branches they are assigned? How did you come to this conclusion? Can you give an example?
- 9- Do you think teachers' moral capital may differ according to their age? How did you come to this conclusion? Can you give an example?
- 10- Do you think teachers' moral capital may differ according to their professional seniority? How did you come to this conclusion? Can you give an example?
- 11- Do you think the moral capital of teachers may differ according to the economic and social environment in which they are employed? How did you come to this conclusion? Can you give an example?
- 12- Do you think the moral capital of teachers may differ according to their commitment to the traditions and customs they are assigned? How did you come to this conclusion? Can you give an example?
- 13- What do you think can be suggested to increase teachers' moral capital? What kind of contributions can this situation offer to stakeholders? Can you give an example?

MORAL CAPITAL SCALE		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	I agree	Absolutely I agree
1	I have strong moral values.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I always tell the truth.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I make sure that my decisions are compatible with my values and beliefs.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I respect the beliefs and opinions of others.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I think I'm a fair man.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I base my judgement on justice and listen to the voice of my conscience.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I do not favour anyone in the expectation of benefit.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I put myself in the other person's shoes and try to understand them.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I give measured reactions to negative situations I encounter.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I do not reflect the problems I experience in my private life to my working life.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I share people's pain and joy.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I take responsibility in the execution of school activities.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I do not develop a negative attitude towards the student with whom I have a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I guide my students.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I try to do things that make a difference in my field.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I take care to use public goods (electricity, water, etc.) carefully.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I take into account the criticism directed at me.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I can overlook people's little mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5
19	I trust people.	1	2	3	4	5
20	I also try to understand people whose opinions I disagree with.	1	2	3	4	5

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