

# Leading with Virtue, Performing with Purpose: The Role of Happiness and Engagement in Educational Institutions

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## **Abstract:**

*Virtuous leadership, characterized by an ethical and human-centered approach, is crucial in influencing professional behavior and employee commitment, especially in educational systems where the performance of individual teachers directly affects the quality and effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. By understanding the psychological and motivational factors that shape this relationship, we can develop sustainable, human-focused management strategies. Therefore, this study aims to explore the connection between virtuous leadership and individual job performance, with particular emphasis on the mediating roles of happiness and job engagement. The investigation seeks to clarify how emotional and ethical aspects of the work environment can serve as indirect yet significant pathways to enhance performance in educational institutions. The research was applied in nature and involved a statistical population of 420 primary school teachers in Javanrood during the academic year 2024-2025. From this population, a sample of 202 teachers was selected using a convenience sampling method. The research utilized several validated tools: the Virtuous Leadership Questionnaire developed by Wang and Hackett, the Individual Job Performance Questionnaire by Paterson and Husband, the Job Engagement Questionnaire by Kanungo, and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire by Argyle and Lu. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and AMOS software. The results indicated that the model demonstrated good fit, with significant coefficients for the direct effects of virtuous leadership on both happiness and job engagement. Additionally, happiness was found to positively influence individual job performance, as did job engagement. The study also confirmed the indirect effects of virtuous leadership on individual job performance through the mediators of happiness and job engagement ( $t \geq 1.96$ ;  $P \leq 0.05$ ). Although virtuous leadership does not have a direct effect on individual job performance, the empirical findings confirm its positive and statistically significant impact through the mediating variables of happiness and job engagement.*

**Keywords:** *Virtuous leadership, Individual Job Performance, Happiness, Job Engagement, Primary School Teachers.*

## Background and Problem Statement

The quality and effectiveness of educational institutions greatly depend on the individual job performance of their teaching staff. This is especially true in primary schools, where teacher performance has a direct impact on achieving the goals of the educational system (Korsakienė, Stankevičienė & Nawal, 2024; Purwanto, 2022). Individual job performance refers to how well an employee fulfills their assigned responsibilities and contributes to the organization's overall objectives (Andrianto, Komardi & Priyono, 2023). The depth and scope of this concept highlight its crucial role in advancing institutional goals (Arifin, 2023). Therefore, identifying the factors that influence individual job performance is essential for improving educational outcomes across diverse societies, including Iran. To achieve successful performance outcomes, it is important to examine and understand the underlying determinants (Budur, 2024).

Among the key determinants of teacher performance, leadership behavior—particularly that of school administrators—plays a critical role. Leadership shapes employee behavior, facilitates organizational processes toward shared goals, motivates underperforming staff, enhances employees' skill sets, and fosters performance improvement (Özkan & Ardiç, 2025). One leadership style particularly suited to educational contexts is virtuous leadership, which emphasizes human virtues within the organization. Virtuous leaders demonstrate ethical commitment, uphold humanistic values, and make organizational decisions with moral awareness (Wang & Hackett, 2022). These leaders positively influence their subordinates' character and integrity (Özkan & Ardiç, 2025; Cameron, 2020).

By promoting coordination, organizational excellence, and leadership grounded in human dignity, virtuous leadership enhances organizational commitment (Budur, 2024) and fosters a shared sense of responsibility among employees and administrators (Adewal, 2025; Bahrani & Forootani, 2022). It improves leader-employee relationships (Cheraghi et al., 2022) and provides humane mechanisms for performance monitoring and accountability (Wang & Hackett, 2022). Research conducted by Hendriks et al. (2020) highlights virtuous leadership as a promising approach to enhancing employee well-being, which, in turn, fosters improved individual and organizational performance. Arifin (2023) further emphasizes the role of organizational leadership in enhancing teacher effectiveness and career advancement in primary education.

In addition to its direct impact on individual job performance, virtuous leadership is likely to influence performance indirectly through psychological (Ribeiro, Duarte & Gomes, 2025) and occupational factors (Budur, 2024). These mediating variables shape the emotional and professional conditions of teachers, affecting their performance outcomes. One such construct receiving increasing attention in both psychological research and human

resource management is happiness (Kaya, 2025). Happiness, which is influenced by organizational leadership (Vale, Ribeiro & Alves, 2025), includes elements such as positive emotions, reduced negative affect, and satisfaction with life and its various domains (Godwin, 2024; Murgas̆et al., 2022). It has a profound impact on psychological well-being and is closely linked to job-related parameters, including individual performance (Adnan Bataineh, 2019; Bellet, De Neve & Ward, 2024).

Empirical research on happiness in workplace contexts has demonstrated its positive associations with creativity and innovative performance (Vale et al., 2025; Kumari & Kaur, 2024; Khan & Abbas, 2022), organizational culture, and interpersonal relationships (Fitriana et al., 2022), as well as job productivity (Bellet et al., 2024) and overall job performance (Adnan Bataineh, 2019). Given the wide range of job-related variables associated with happiness (Vale et al., 2025; Fitriana et al., 2022), this construct may serve as an effective mediator between virtuous leadership and individual job performance (Deswal & Sheokand, 2025). Despite its potential significance, the mediating role of happiness in this context has received limited attention in both domestic and international studies, making it a critical focus of the present research.

Another important mediator is job engagement, which has emerged as a vital factor for achieving organizational goals in educational institutions (Steward, Brower, & Rea, 2024; Budur, 2024). Job engagement reflects the depth and quality of an individual's relationship with their organization, signifying their psychological membership and active participation (Zhao et al., 2025; Jyoti et al., 2020). It captures the extent to which employees are absorbed in and committed to their work, characterized by a high level of job acceptance and alignment with organizational values (Lambert et al., 2011). Virtuous leadership can enhance job engagement by fostering a deeper commitment to job roles and promoting positive evaluations of those roles, both of which are essential elements of job engagement (Özkan & Ardic̆, 2025; Steward et al., 2024). Research shows that job engagement is positively correlated with organizational commitment and high performance (Budur, 2024; Jyoti et al., 2020), as well as with innovation and productivity (Huang, Yuan & Li, 2019), job satisfaction (Varshney, 2020), and individual job performance (Wang et al., 2025; Matagi, Baguma & Baluku, 2022). Therefore, it is important to explore the extent to which job engagement mediates the relationship between virtuous leadership and teacher performance.

Despite the theoretical and practical significance of happiness and job engagement in educational contexts, their mediating roles have not been sufficiently studied in current research. There is a notable gap in understanding how these concepts function within the dynamics of leadership and performance in Iranian schools and beyond. Thus, this study

aims to investigate the relationship between virtuous leadership and individual job performance, focusing specifically on the mediating roles of happiness and job engagement. The conceptual model of the research is illustrated in the following figure:

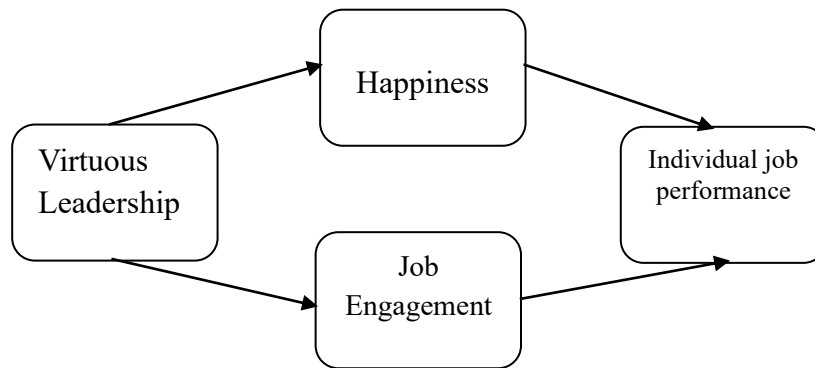


Figure 1. Research conceptual model

The present study investigates the following hypotheses:

H1: Virtuous leadership is positively associated with happiness.

H2: Virtuous leadership is positively associated with job engagement.

H3: Happiness is positively associated with individual job performance.

H4: Job engagement is positively associated with individual job performance.

H5: Virtuous leadership has an indirect positive effect on individual job performance through the mediation of happiness.

H6: Virtuous leadership has an indirect positive effect on individual job performance through the mediation of job engagement.

## Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, purpose-driven approach. It utilized a descriptive, non-experimental design based on structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore the relationships among key research variables. The methodological approach was correlational, focusing on testing a theoretically derived model without any experimental manipulation. The statistical population included all primary school teachers in Javanrood city (N = 420). Participants were chosen through simple random sampling, resulting in a final sample size of 202 teachers, determined using Cochran's sample size formula. Eligibility for participation required that individuals be currently employed in elementary education and possess at least one year of professional teaching experience.

The study incorporated both library-based methods to construct its theoretical foundation and a survey method for empirical data collection. Four standardized instruments were utilized:

1. **Virtuous Leadership Questionnaire:** To measure virtuous leadership, the study employed the Virtuous Leadership Questionnaire, developed and validated by Wang and Hackett (2016). This instrument consists of 18 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, designed to capture five foundational dimensions of virtuous leadership: courage (items 1–4), temperance (items 5–8), justice (items 9–11), prudence (items 12–15), and humanity (items 16–18). Each dimension reflects distinct moral and interpersonal attributes of leadership behavior. Psychometric evaluation conducted by Ghanbari and Eskandari (2017) confirmed the reliability of the scale in the Iranian context, reporting a high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.93, indicating robust measurement properties for empirical research. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha obtained in this questionnaire was 0.94.
2. **Individual Job Performance Questionnaire:** To evaluate individual job performance, the study used the Individual Job Performance Questionnaire, originally developed by Paterson and Husband (1970) and later translated into Persian by Arshadi and Shekarkan (2007). This instrument consists of 15 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale, measuring employees' fulfillment of job responsibilities and their contributions to organizational goals. The reliability of this tool has been confirmed in several Iranian studies: In the study by AslanpourJokandanet al. (2012), the reliability of the job performance questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's alpha and split-half methods, resulting in values of 0.86 and 0.79, respectively; Kordali (2009), as reported by Sa'atchi, Kamkari and Askariyan (2022), cited a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, indicating high internal consistency across various samples. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha obtained in this questionnaire was 0.90.
3. **Job Engagement Questionnaire (JIQ):** To assess job engagement, the study utilized the Job Engagement Questionnaire (JIQ) based on the theoretical model developed by Kanungo (1982). This standardized instrument consists of 10 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale, designed to measure the depth of employees' psychological and emotional involvement with their job roles. Reliability testing demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with Kanungo reporting internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ) and test-retest reliability ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ). Additionally, local validation conducted by T'ajobiet al (2015) in the Iranian context confirmed a high reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = 0.90$ , supporting the instrument's robustness for evaluating job engagement among educational professionals. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha obtained in this questionnaire was 0.83.



4. Oxford Happiness Questionnaire: To measure happiness, the study employed the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, developed by Argyle and Lu (1990). This inventory consists of 29 items, each rated on a 4-point scale (0–3), yielding total scores ranging from 0 to 87. The instrument captures five psychological dimensions: Life Satisfaction (items 1–6), Positive Affect (items 7–12), Health (items 13–18), Efficacy (items 19–24), and Self-Esteem (items 25–29). Argyle and Lu reported strong reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 and test-retest reliability of 0.78 over a seven-week interval. Local psychometric validation by Alipour and Nourbala(1999) examined the reliability and validity of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire and found that Cronbach's alpha was 0.93 and the split-half reliability of the test was 0.92. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha obtained in this questionnaire was 0.91.

Data analysis was conducted in two distinct phases. First, descriptive statistics were applied to summarize demographic and research variables, including measures such as mean, standard deviation, frequency distributions, and visual charts. In the second phase, inferential statistics were employed using SPSS-24 and AMOS software to perform structural equation modeling (SEM). Both the measurement and structural components of the model were evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships among the variables.

All procedures adhered to established ethical standards. Participants were fully informed of the research objectives and voluntarily consented to participate. Their personal information was treated with strict confidentiality, and no identifying data were disclosed at any stage of the study.

## Results

The descriptive analysis of the sample indicated a balanced gender distribution, with 46% of participants being male and 54% female. In terms of educational attainment, 66% of respondents held a Bachelor's degree, 32% had completed a Master's degree, and 2% possessed a Doctoral qualification. The participants' ages ranged from 22 to 59 years, with a mean age of 27.41 years and a standard deviation of 4.46 years. Regarding professional experience, the average teaching tenure was 10.23 years ( $SD = 4.92$ ), with individual experience varying from a minimum of 2 years to a maximum of 30 years. These statistics provide a diverse and representative profile of the population under study, establishing a reliable foundation for subsequent inferential analyses.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all research variables, including measures of central tendency and dispersion such as the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis. The results of the normality

test were also examined to confirm the suitability of the data distribution for further parametric analyses, particularly structural equation modeling.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Satisfaction	13.1024	2.92793	-0.355	0.355
Positive Affect	12.8293	3.32329	-0.165	-0.356
Health	9.7512	2.28412	-0.398	0.283
Efficacy	11.9805	3.09167	0.012	-0.003
Self Esteem	9.1659	2.52280	-0.106	-0.032
Courage	10.3122	3.86539	-0.315	-0.214
Temperence	8.1512	4.18465	0.057	-0.209
Justice	8.4390	4.42170	0.313	-0.506
Prudence	7.4537	3.79681	0.216	-0.213
Humanity	5.9951	3.60079	0.149	-0.642
Performance	20.1902	8.29055	-0.063	-0.556
Engagement	34.6878	5.86700	-0.058	0.084
Virtuous leadership	40.3512	15.64444	0.183	-0.466
Happiness	56.8293	11.34249	-0.228	0.515

To fit the model, examine the research hypotheses, and determine the relationship between the research variables, the Pearson correlation coefficient test was calculated.

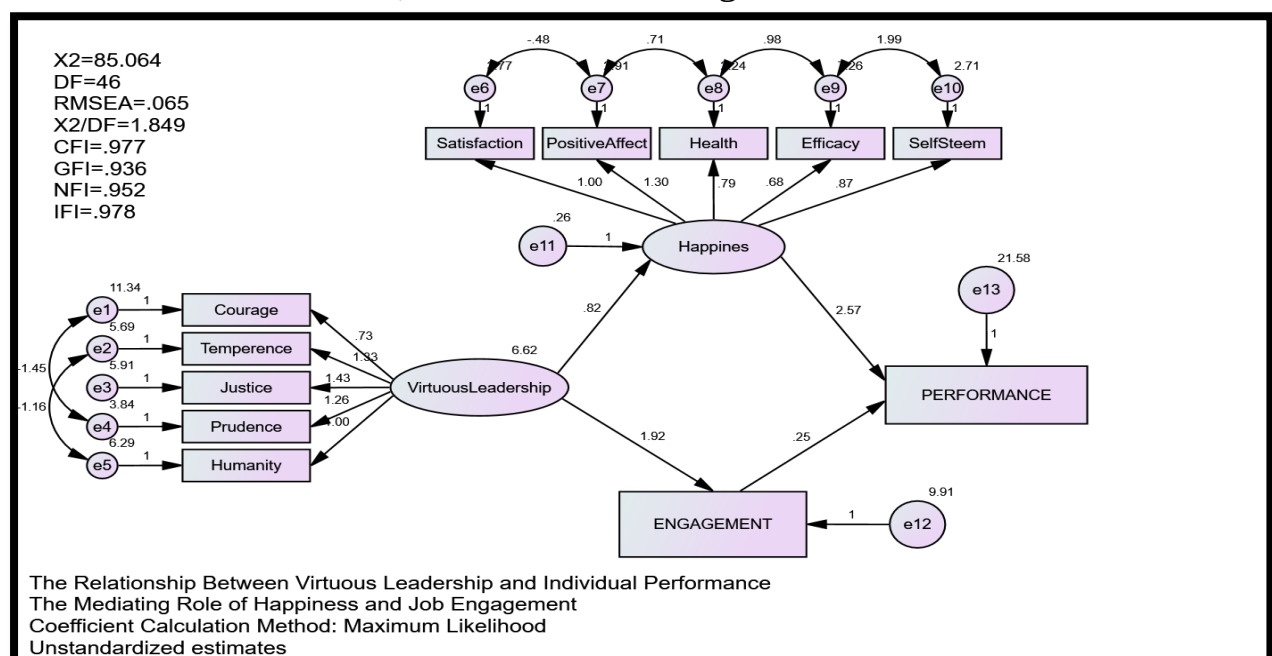
**Table 2.** Pearson's Correlation Matrix

	Satisf	Positiv	He	Effi	Self	Cou	Temp	Jus	Prud	Hum	Perfor	Engag	Virtu	Happ
	action	eAffect	alt	cacy	Self	rage	erence	tice	ence	anity	mance	ement	leade	rship
Satisf	1													
Positiv	.592**	1												
eAffect														
Health	.567**	.742**	1											
Effica	.371**	.410**	.507**	1										
cy														
Self	.575**	.623**	.568**	.625**	1									
Estee														
m														
Coura	.416**	.383**	.314**	.065	.257*	1								
ge														
Tempe	.554**	.696**	.612**	.328**	.635*	.393**	1							
rence														

Justice	.608**	.726**	.599**	.361**	.623**	.384**	.691**	1						
Prudence	.599**	.730**	.650**	.448**	.640**	.318**	.717**	.720**	1					
Humanity	.505**	.591**	.531**	.438**	.566**	.272**	.510**	.565**	.612**	1				
Performance	.659**	.682**	.599**	.432**	.645**	.481**	.630**	.645**	.637**	.681**	1			
Engagement	.592**	.711**	.616**	.360**	.583**	.490**	.677**	.710**	.717**	.611**	.729**	1		
Virtuous leadership	.685**	.799**	.691**	.416**	.695**	.600**	.851**	.867**	.857**	.742**	.781**	.817**	1	
Happiness	.775**	.845**	.830**	.729**	.838**	.358**	.701**	.727**	.764**	.656**	.752**	.713**	.818**	1

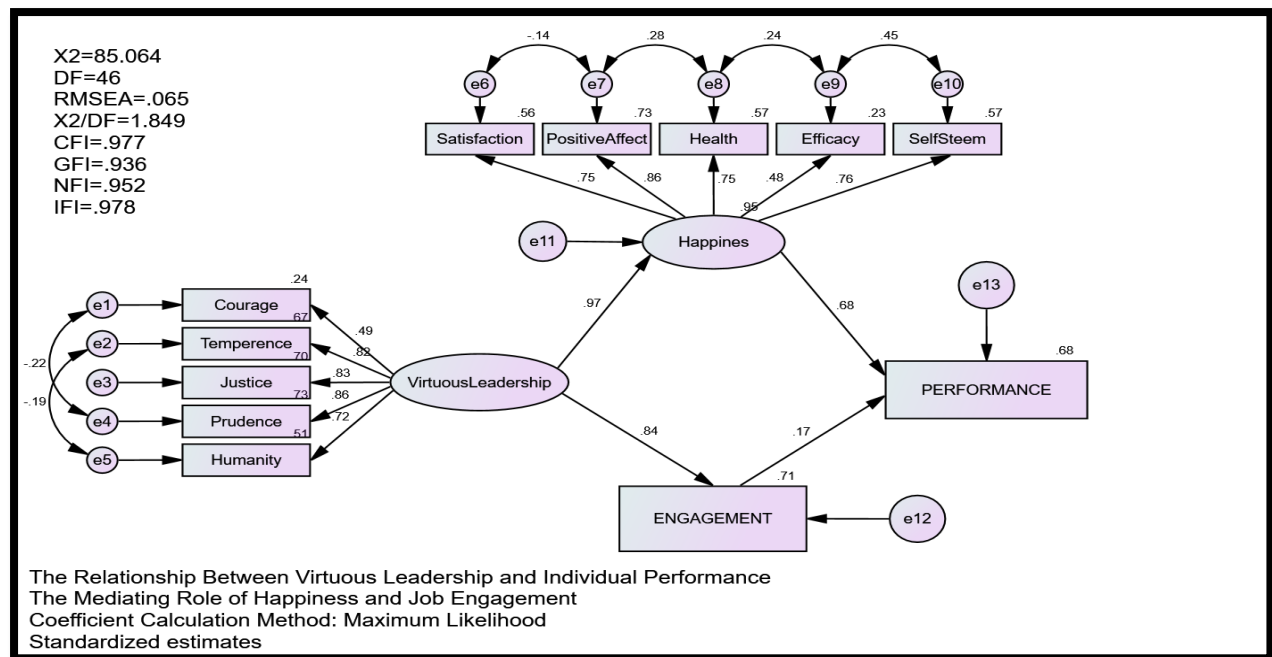
\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows a direct and significant correlation among the primary variables of the study. Since all research variables exhibit a positive and significant correlation with one another, structural equation modeling was utilized to test the conceptual model and examine the relationships between these variables. The results, presented in both unstandardized and standardized coefficients, are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.



**Figure 1. The structural relationships between virtuous leadership and individual job performance, highlighting the mediating role of happiness and job engagement, using unstandardized coefficients.**





**Figure 2. The structural relationships between virtuous leadership and individual job performance, highlighting the mediating role of happiness and job engagement, using standardized coefficients**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed structural equation model, a comprehensive set of fit indices was used. These indices included the Chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ), the ratio of Chi-square to degrees of freedom ( $\chi^2/df$ ), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI), and Parsimony Comparative Fit Index (PCFI).

The evaluation of these indices followed established methodological standards. An RMSEA value of 0.08 or lower indicates an acceptable model fit, while relative indices such as NFI, IFI, TLI, and CFI are deemed satisfactory if they reach or exceed 0.90 (Hulpia, Devos & Rosseel, 2009; Musek, 2007). These criteria provide solid guidance for interpreting the structural integrity and theoretical alignment of the proposed model.

**Table 3. Overall Model Fit Indices**

Fit Index	Acceptable Range	Value	Interpretation
Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ )	—	85.046	—
Degrees of Freedom (df)	—	46	—
$\chi^2/df$ (CMIN/DF)	< 3	1.849	Acceptable Fit
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.065	Acceptable Fit
GFI	$\geq 0.90$	0.936	Acceptable Fit
NFI	$\geq 0.90$	0.952	Acceptable Fit
IFI	$\geq 0.90$	0.978	Acceptable Fit

TLI	$\geq 0.90$	0.967	Acceptable Fit
CFI	$\geq 0.90$	0.977	Acceptable Fit
PNFI	$> 0.50$	0.664	Acceptable Fit
PCFI	$> 0.50$	0.681	Acceptable Fit

The results suggest that the structural equation model exhibits strong and acceptable goodness-of-fit, with all indices meeting or exceeding the conventional thresholds recommended by SEM researchers (e.g., Hulpia et al., 2009; Musek, 2007).

As indicated in Table 3, the model fits well with the research data, confirming the conceptual framework of the study. In addition to evaluating the overall fit indices, we also examined the standard beta parameters, path coefficients, and the corresponding t-values for each causal path, which are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Coefficients and significance of the effects of the research variables directly

Path (direct effect)			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Virtuous Leadership	→	Happiness	0.972	.081	10.162	***
Virtuous Leadership	→	Engagement	0.843	.163	11.784	***
Happiness	→	Health	0.754	.072	10.927	***
Virtuous Leadership	→	Humanity	0.716	---	---	---
Virtuous Leadership	→	Prudence	0.856	.105	11.955	***
Virtuous Leadership	→	Justice	0.835	.123	11.673	***
Virtuous Leadership	→	Temperence	0.821	.126	10.577	***
Virtuous Leadership	→	Courage	0.487	.108	6.750	***
Happiness	→	Performance	0.678	.360	7.141	***
Happiness	→	Efficacy	0.484	.100	6.812	***
Happiness	→	Positive affect	0.857	.109	11.931	***
Happiness	→	Satisfaction	0.747	---	---	---
Happiness	→	Self-esteem	0.757	.079	11.012	***
Engagement	→	Performance	0.175	.115	2.140	.032

The results of the structural equation modeling, presented in Table 4, confirm that virtuous leadership has a statistically significant and positive direct effect on both happiness ( $\beta = 0.97$ ) and job engagement ( $\beta = 0.84$ ). These values exceed the conventional thresholds for significance ( $t \geq 1.96$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ;  $t \geq 2.576$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ). Additionally, the path coefficients indicate that happiness makes a meaningful contribution to individual job performance ( $\beta = 0.68$ ), while job engagement has a more modest but still significant direct effect ( $\beta = 0.17$ ).

The mediation analysis further demonstrates that both happiness and job engagement significantly mediate the relationship between virtuous leadership and individual job performance, with happiness showing a notably stronger effect. A bootstrapping analysis using 5,000 resamples in AMOS enhanced the precision and stability of the estimates for the indirect effects, thus supporting the robustness of the model's mediational structure.

**Table 5.** Coefficients and significance of the effects of the research variables indirectly

Predictor Variable	Mediator Variable	Criterion Variable	Indirect Effect	Significance Level (p)	Mediation Status
Virtuous Leadership	Happiness	Individual Job Performance	0.65	0.000	Confirmed
Virtuous Leadership	Job Engagement	Individual Job Performance	0.14	0.000	Confirmed

As indicated in Table 5, the indirect path coefficient for the relationship between virtuous leadership and performance through Happiness was 0.65, while the corresponding coefficient through job engagement was 0.14. Both effects were statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Since zero is not included within the upper and lower bounds [2.276 – 2.978] of the confidence interval, the significance of these indirect relationships is established, confirming the mediational importance of these pathways. These findings provide empirical support for the hypothesized indirect relationships, which are further summarized across all tested hypotheses in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Summary of Hypotheses and Testing Results

No.	Hypothesis	Result
H1	Virtuous leadership is positively associated with happiness.	Confirmed
H2	Virtuous leadership is positively associated with job	Confirmed

	engagement.	
H3	Happiness is positively associated with individual job performance.	Confirmed
H4	Job engagement is positively associated with individual job performance.	Confirmed
H5	Virtuous leadership has an indirect positive effect on individual job performance through the mediation of happiness.	Confirmed
H6	Virtuous leadership has an indirect positive effect on individual job performance through the mediation of job engagement.	Confirmed

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to explore and develop a model of the structural relationships between virtuous leadership and individual job performance, with a particular focus on the mediating roles of happiness and job engagement. The results support the validity of the model and confirm the research hypotheses. These findings will be analyzed and interpreted in detail below, along with the results obtained.

The findings about **Hypothesis 1** decisively illustrate that virtuous leadership exerts a statistically significant and positively impactful influence on happiness. This conclusion is firmly supported by the results obtained from structural equation modeling, which reveal a noteworthy t-statistic and a robust positive beta coefficient. Such findings are in harmony with prior empirical research conducted by scholars such as Vale et al., (2025), Kumari and Kaur (2024), Zaim, Demir and Budur (2021), Schwepker and Dimitriou (2021), Wood et al. (2021), Koay and Lim (2021), Hendrikset al. (2020), and Cameron (2020).

In professional environments, happiness is shaped by a multifaceted array of influences, encompassing leadership competence (Kumari & Kaur, 2024), participative management styles, equity in organizational processes (Vale et al., 2025), technical expertise, the caliber of interpersonal interactions (Kaya, 2025), managerial support, and a nurturing, cooperative workplace atmosphere (Schwepker& Dimitriou, 2021). Each of these dimensions is fundamentally enriched by the core principles of virtue-based leadership. As articulated by Cameron (2020), this form of leadership cultivates a deep commitment to shared goals while empowering team members through a strong emphasis on ethical, social, and humanistic values.

Furthermore, Wood et al. (2021) emphasize that virtuous leaders exemplify unwavering dedication and insight; they inspire excellence in their teams while demonstrating a heartfelt concern for the well-being of each individual. In the realm of education, the effects of virtuous leadership are particularly pronounced, fostering not only enhanced intra-organizational relationships

(Kaya, 2025) but also more collaborative approaches to problem-solving (Vale et al., 2025). This supportive environment significantly boosts teacher motivation, ultimately leading to heightened levels of happiness among educators (Kumari & Kaur, 2024), as they find fulfillment and purpose in their professional lives.

The findings related to **Hypothesis 2** indicate that virtue-oriented leadership has a statistically significant and positive effect on job engagement. This conclusion is supported by a meaningful t-statistic and a positive beta coefficient in the structural equation model. Thus, the hypothesis is validated, aligning with previous studies conducted by Budur (2024), Steward et al (2024), Wang and Hackett (2022), Shahbazzad (2021), Ghanbari and Eskandari (2017), Wood et al. (2021), and Cameron (2020).

Job engagement arises from the emotional connection individuals have with their work, which is shaped by organizational mechanisms, particularly leadership practices (Budur, 2024). In educational settings, when leadership adopts a virtue-oriented approach, it reinforces this emotional bond and strengthens teachers' commitment. Such leadership, grounded in ethical values and respect for human dignity, acknowledges and affirms employees' needs, thereby enhancing their investment in their professional roles (Cameron, 2020).

From an organizational perspective, fostering job engagement is a priority for virtue-oriented leaders due to its impact on employee motivation and overall performance (Wood et al., 2021). These leaders view engagement not only as a means to achieve operational efficiency but also as a catalyst for personal growth, professional satisfaction, and cultural renewal (Steward et al, 2024). Their leadership goes beyond personal traits, emphasizing visionary direction, moral influence, and the empowerment of their followers (Adewale, 2020). By articulating inspiring visions, aligning employees with shared values, and motivating them to exceed expectations, virtuous leaders create a reciprocal dynamic that transforms followers into active contributors.

Through the articulation of compelling organizational visions, the reinforcement of shared normative frameworks, and the consistent encouragement of aspirational behaviors, virtuous leaders engender a reciprocal leadership dynamic that transforms passive compliance into active contribution. Within this interactive framework, job engagement functions both as an outcome and a diagnostic indicator of leadership effectiveness. Empirical evidence linking engagement to managerial competence and organizational well-being substantiates the assertion that virtue-oriented leadership operates as a pivotal lever for fostering teacher engagement and promoting sustained educational excellence (Cameron, 2020).

The findings related to **Hypothesis 3** compellingly demonstrate that happiness has a statistically significant and positive impact on individual job performance, confirmed through the structural equation model (SEM). The substantial t-statistic and positive beta coefficient robustly support this hypothesis. This outcome echoes the conclusions of Septiani, Sutarto & Utomo (2024), Nalipay, King and Cai, Y. (2024), Wang and Hackett (2022) and Kustiawan et al. (2022), as well as findings from Adeli Nasab et al. (2014), all of which highlight that happiness at work profoundly influences both task performance and turnover intention in meaningful ways.

A range of internal and external factors plays a critical role in shaping teachers' happiness (Farooq et al., 2024; Septiani et al., 2024). These include job conditions, leadership styles, perceived purpose, reward systems, and the overall organizational climate (Nalipay et al., 2024; Deswal & Sheokand, 2025). Each of these elements significantly impacts performance outcomes. As Godwin (2024) points out, true happiness stems from the presence of positive emotions, the absence of psychological distress, and satisfaction across various life domains—qualities that foster psychological stability and optimize occupational effectiveness.

Moreover, happiness is proven to enhance creativity (Farooq et al., 2024; Khan & Abbas, 2022) and job productivity (Bellet et al., 2024), while also promoting interpersonal cohesion and enriching organizational culture (Nalipay et al., 2024; Septiani et al., 2024; Fitriana et al., 2022). It equips individuals with the emotional resilience necessary to effectively confront workplace challenges (Adnan Bataineh, 2019). Together, these dynamic mechanisms vividly illustrate how happiness is not just an ancillary factor but a fundamental driver of individual job performance in educational settings.

The findings pertaining to **Hypothesis 4** compellingly demonstrate that job engagement exerts a statistically significant and positive influence on individual job performance. This conclusion is firmly backed by the structural equation model, which reveals a notable t-statistic and a positive beta coefficient. These results resonate with extensive empirical support from studies by prominent researchers, including Hoxha and Ramadani (2024), Korsakienė et al. (2024), Dadashi and Pali (2023), Stiglbauer and Batinic (2012), Zhang (2014), and Wickramasinghe and Wickramasinghe (2011).

Job engagement encapsulates the depth and nature of an individual's psychological connection to their work and organization. When this engagement reaches optimal levels, individuals not only internalize organizational values but also display a profound commitment to their roles, as emphasized by Lambert et al. (2011). Educators experiencing high job engagement perceive their profession as a source of honor and personal



identity, significantly boosting their motivation and passion for their tasks (Jyotiet al., 2020).

Moreover, job engagement enhances occupational engagement by cultivating a strong emotional attachment and intrinsic value towards one's work, leading to remarkable improvements in performance outcomes (Hoxha and Ramadani, 2024; Korsakienė et al., 2024). Research consistently shows that employees with elevated levels of job engagement tackle their responsibilities with heightened vigor and enthusiasm—key drivers of productivity (Wang et al., 2025; Dawley, Stephens & Stephens, 2005). As a pivotal attitudinal framework, job engagement is crucial for maximizing organizational effectiveness; as this effectiveness flourishes, individual performance follows suit.

This principle is particularly vital for educators, whose emotional experiences within the school setting have a direct impact on their connection to the profession, their alignment with its values, and their overall commitment (Jyoti et al., 2020). Additionally, Huang et al. (2019) underscore that job engagement positively correlates with innovation and job satisfaction, further reinforcing its essential role in elevating performance among educational professionals.

The findings supporting **Hypothesis 5** compellingly demonstrate that virtue-oriented leadership exerts a significant positive indirect effect on individual job performance through the mediating influence of happiness, as revealed by robust bootstrapping analysis. The positive beta coefficient powerfully substantiates this hypothesis, indicating that when teachers perceive their leaders as ethical, visionary, and supportive, their psychological well-being flourishes, leading to enhanced performance outcomes. Although the existing literature does not present identical models for direct comparison, this finding conceptually resonates with prior studies by Ribeiro et al (2025), Özkan and Ardıç (2025), Shahbazzad (2021), Ghanbari and Eskandari (2017), Adeli Nasab et al. (2014), Zaim et al. (2021), Schwepker and Dimitriou (2021), Koay and Lim (2021), and Cameron (2020).

Happiness profoundly shapes employees' interpretations of their organizational experiences and challenges, directly impacting their motivation, resilience, and performance (Deswal & Sheokand, 2025). Empirical evidence firmly establishes a strong correlation between mental well-being and overall job and life satisfaction (Murgaš et al., 2022). Conversely, the absence of this well-being can result in emotional disturbances, such as anxiety and depression (DiMaria, Peroni & Sarracino, 2020). Within this context, virtue-oriented leadership emerges as a powerful catalyst for positive interpersonal dynamics, moral integrity, and employee growth—elements that can drive transformative shifts in both organizational climate and individual perspective (Mirahmadi et al., 2021). Leaders who communicate a compelling mission and foster a collective sense of purpose

empower teachers to embrace a more optimistic and engaged approach to their roles (Koay & Lim, 2021).

Furthermore, as Angawi(2021) argue, this leadership style signifies an evolution of charismatic leadership known as "neocharismatic leadership," where behavioral authenticity and value-driven engagement profoundly enhance psychological well-being. In this dynamic framework, happiness not only represents the emotional health of teachers but actively fuels their performance, underscoring the vital importance of emotionally intelligent leadership.

The findings associated with **Hypothesis 6** reveal a compelling connection: virtue-oriented leadership not only influences individual job performance but also does so by enhancing job engagement, as evidenced by the robust bootstrapping results. This indirect effect is both statistically significant and positive, effectively validating the proposed hypothesis. While earlier research has not explored this specific mediational pathway in identical terms, these results resonate conceptually with the work of scholars such as Özkan and Ardiç (2025), Dadashi and Pali (2023), Hamedi et al. (2023), Bahrani and Forutani (2022), Cheraghi et al. (2022), Wang and Hackett (2022), Kustiawanet al. (2022), and Wood et al. (2021).

Virtue-oriented leadership cultivates emotional investment in the educational sphere by nurturing moral integrity, fostering psychological safety, and aligning with the core values of institutions—elements that significantly deepen teachers' engagement with their professional responsibilities. In the absence of ethical and empowering leadership, organizational performance—especially within the context of education—becomes increasingly susceptible to disruptions, particularly in times of adversity and challenge (Zhai et al., 2025).

Job engagement, a vital psychological construct, captures the degree to which teachers immerse themselves wholeheartedly in their tasks, pursue excellence with fervor, and respond proactively to managerial initiatives. As highlighted by Zhai et al. (2025), and Jyoti et al. (2020), employees' perceptions of their engagement serve as a direct gauge of the effectiveness of leadership practices. When educators feel a profound connection to their roles and derive personal meaning from their responsibilities, the influence of leadership becomes magnified, culminating in elevated job performance and overall satisfaction. These intricate mediational dynamic underscores the critical interplay between ethical leadership and engagement-driven performance outcomes within the educational landscape, illuminating the path toward a more committed and high-performing workforce.

This study encountered several methodological and contextual constraints that impacted data collection and the generalizability of its findings. **Key limitations** included administrative barriers that hindered access to official data, the lack of a comprehensive sampling frame, reliance on convenience

sampling, and incomplete survey responses. Additionally, the sample was restricted to elementary school teachers in Javanroud city, which could limit the broader applicability of the results due to the unique cultural context of the area.

To address these limitations, future research should consider employing probabilistic sampling methods and longitudinal designs that can capture variations in teacher performance across different professional stages. Additionally, incorporating factors such as job satisfaction, mental health, teaching style, and personality traits would enhance the modeling of performance in educational settings.

Practically, education authorities should focus on virtue-oriented leadership when recruiting and developing school principals. Promoting teacher well-being through happiness-oriented in-service training, targeted interventions for at-risk educators, and the distribution of resources on ethical leadership could provide significant benefits for both psychological resilience and instructional effectiveness.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the conduct or publication of this study.

### **Ethical Approval**

Before the data collection began, the study's objectives were clearly explained to all participants. They were assured that their personal information would be kept confidential. Each participant voluntarily completed and signed an informed consent form, which indicated their agreement to take part in the research.

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