

INVISIBLE THREADS: WEAVING LEADER'S BEHAVIORAL INTEGRITY, EMPOWERMENT, AND DEVIANT WORKPLACE BEHAVIOR IN PRE-TERTIARY SCHOOLING INSTITUTES

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of leader's behavioral integrity on deviant workplace behavior among pre-tertiary schooling institutes, with the moderating effect of employee psychological empowerment, and the mediation effect of employee-organization psychological distance. A structured questionnaire using purposive sampling technique employed to collect the data from 227 public school teachers of Balochistan and analyzed using partial least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4.1. The results showed that there was an inverse relationship between a leader's behavioral integrity and an employee's deviant workplace behavior, with the psychological distance between the employee and the organization acting as an intermediary. Furthermore, the findings indicated that leadership strategies, including behavioral integrity and employee psychological empowerment, mitigate aberrant workplace behaviors among teachers, hence cultivating a more conducive educational environment. Building trust and closing the psychological gap between employees and the organization through the leader's behavioral integrity can help employees align with the organization's goals. The finding offers practical insights for principals and the policymakers of the pre-tertiary schooling institutes to promote the training and capacity building session to enhance the leader's behavioral integrity in order to avoid the deviant workplace behavior, which will ultimately enhance the quality of education by teachers' performance in Balochistan, Pakistan.

1 INTRODUCTION

Education has been regarded as an essential component of socio-economic development, influencing human capital formation, poverty reduction, and sustainable growth (Becker &

Gerhart, 1996; Becker & Huselid, 1998). In new areas, education has been even more important for fixing structural problems and helping individuals move up the social ladder. There is a huge problem with unequal schooling in Pakistan, and

Balochistan is the province that is most afflicted. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS Digital Census, 2023b) and the Pakistan Economic Survey (Government of Pakistan, 2023) both reported that Balochistan had the lowest literacy rate in the country, at 44 - 47%, compared to the national average of 62 - 63%. Women in Balochistan are much less likely to be able to read and write, especially in rural areas. This indicates how unfair it is for men and women in different sections of the country. The high dropout rate, shortage of teachers, less facilities, and bad management made the school system even worsened (ASER 2023, 2024).

Deviant workplace behavior (DWB) among educators is a very important but not very well-studied factor that is making the quality of education in Balochistan worse. Deviant workplace behavior encompassed voluntary activities that deviate from organizational norms and negatively impacted the interests of the organization or its members (Bennett & Robinson, 2000, 2003; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). In the field of education, DWB encompassed absenteeism, inadequate professional dedication, theft of official time, and noncompliance with organizational requirements. These actions had a direct effect on the quality of teaching and the results of students' learning. Studies have shown that counterproductive work habits affect the efficacy and performance of organizations (Berry et al., 2007). In isolated and underfunded areas of Balochistan, where schools already have problems because they don't have enough teachers or good facilities, teacher deviation makes the already high dropout rate and poor student performance even worse. DWB is a problem for organizations and a need for growth. School administrators are very important in how teachers think and act. Leader's Behavioral Integrity (LBI) referred to the visible consistency between leaders' words and actions (Simons, 2002). LBI built trust, credibility, and moral standards in an organization. Research demonstrated that behavioral integrity fostered employee trust and mitigated adverse workplace behaviors (Simons et al., 2007). When school administrators demonstrated integrity in their conduct, teachers were more likely to view

decision-making processes as fair, which reduced deviant behavior. Moreover, leadership actions that promoted psychological empowerment (PE), a concept that included meaning, competence, self-determination, and effect (Spreitzer, 1997; Spreitzer et al., 1999), improved teachers' intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment.

Employee-organization psychological distance (EOPD) is an important theory that connects leadership to bad behavior at work. Psychological distance denoted the degree to which employees viewed themselves as emotionally and cognitively disengaged from their organization (Napier & Ferris, 1993). When employees felt that they were psychologically far from their leaders, they were less likely to feel sense of belonging and committed to their jobs. This made it more likely that they would behave in ways that were not helpful at work. Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Blau & Homans, 2017) asserted that when leaders exhibited fairness and honesty, employees responded with positive attitudes and actions, hence reducing psychological distance and deviance. In the school setting of Balochistan, leadership is exemplified by behavioral integrity, which consequently reduces EOPD and DWB.

The organization requires a leadership style which motivates employees and demonstrates moral values to achieve three objectives. The method should establish behavioral integrity as its main focus while providing teachers with increased authority. The study investigated fundamental research gaps by studying how four elements LBI, DWB, EOPD and PE connected with each other in Balochistan's educational system which remained underexplored. This research demonstrated leadership and organizational behavior theories through their application in a developing area which had been historically marginalized. The study results provided crucial information which school decision makers and educational officials needed to improve teacher participation and decrease workplace misconduct and raise literacy and educational standards in Balochistan.

2 Literature

The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory described how leaders established distinct connections with their followers which resulted in

either strong or weak relationship connections (Ashkanasy & O'Connor, 1997). Leaders developed strong LMX relationships when their followers established trustworthy connections which enabled them to receive organizational resources and support from their leaders in exchange for their commitment and active involvement. The process established an inner circle of selected followers who are viewed as trustworthy individuals who deserve extra duties. The remaining followers established a basic transactional relationship with their leader which resulted in their classification as members of the out-group. Social exchange theory (SET) stated that the social relationship value determined how people interacted instead of governing their conduct (Cropanzano et al., 2005; Yoichiro & Ireland, n.d.). The team members used this process for sharing their responsibilities and materials.

The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) system played a critical role in determining both operational efficiency and employee performance within organizations. The research demonstrated that strong relationships between people produce two outcomes which include greater managerial backing and increased dedication to showing respect and support (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Odle & Odle, 2014; Srivastava & Dhar, 2016; Walumbwa et al., 2011). The LMX framework established a connection between leader behavior and its results on their staff members who demonstrated trustworthy and productive employment conduct. The results of this process created an environment which encouraged people to achieve their goals. Teamwork became more difficult to achieve because LMX created obstacles for group members to interact with each other. Leaders who shown preference for specific teams created obstacles for team members because they distributed their resources and attention in an unbalanced manner which prevented the team from achieving a shared understanding of their objectives. The individualised method prevented teams from working together because it focused on personal study instead of group study.

2.1 Deviant Workplace Behavior

Robinson and Bennett (1995) stated that workplace deviance occurred when people did things on purpose that went against important rules of the company and could hurt the organization, its members, or both. This activity could be anything from small mistakes to serious crimes, such taking advantage of someone verbally, lying, or stealing someone else's work. Deviant workplace behavior, deemed misaligned with corporate objectives (Ones & Dilchert, 2013), could present as either legal or unlawful actions that violated society standards and jeopardised the welfare of others (Karelaia & Keck, 2013).

Robinson and Bennett (1995) classified workplace deviance according to two dimensions: the gravity of the behavior (trivial or serious) and its orientation (interpersonal or organizational). This theory divided deviance into four groups: personal deviance, political deviance, property deviance, and productive deviance. By knowing these groups, businesses could better deal with strange behaviors, which lowered the dangers to the health of the business and the well-being of its employees. DWB has been classified as both interpersonal and organisational deviance. Interpersonal deviance, which is a type of employee deviance, involved things like gossiping about coworkers and shifting blame on others. This occurred when individuals engaged in misconduct that directly impacted specific stakeholders, particularly the behavior of their peers (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2020). Organisational deviance occurred when someone did something that was clearly bad for the organization. Organisational deviance included both property deviance and production deviance. Deviant behavior in the workplace could be shown by being late all the time or missing work a lot (Judge et al., 2006; Pulich & Tourigny, 2004).

Deviant behaviors could occur in the workplace, directed at colleagues. Such behaviors could include mocking an individual, making insulting comments regarding ethnicity, race, or religion, executing malicious pranks, expressing hostile sentiments, exhibiting incivility, or humiliating a colleague in public. Organisational deviance sometimes encompassed behaviors that disturbed the workplace, including intellectual theft, unauthorised extended breaks, unexcused

tardiness, substance misuse during work hours, and insufficient effort (Bennett & Robinson, 2000, 2003).

2.2 Deviant Workplace Behavior in Education

Deviant Workplace Behavior (DWB) occurred when an employee broke the rules, policies, or moral standards of the company, which harmed the company in the end. When instructors did things that aren't conventional at school, they could have a tremendous impact on the school, the students, and the community as a whole (Ali Unal, 2012; Kotekar, 2017). Deviant behavior among educators manifested as absenteeism, lack of dedication, unethical conduct, neglect of responsibilities, or disengagement from professional duties. This kind of attitude was much worse in a province like Balochistan, where schools and other resources were already scarce. Students did not get the academic aid, advice, and direction they need to thrive if the teachers did not accomplish their duties successfully. This could cause pupils to do poorly, drop out, and, in the end, get lower grades (Kotekar, 2017). We need to fix the problem of teachers who don't do their jobs well because education is so vital for the growth of society. This would make the educational system better and help the province attain better results.

2.3 Leader's Behavioral Integrity (LBI):

Leaders are very important to the culture of a business because they set the moral tone, promote professionalism, and make sure that individuals take responsibility. Leaders' moral integrity is an important factor that affects how well workers do their jobs and how well the organization does. LBI was the difference between what leaders said they would do and what they really do (Simons, 2002). This was vital for making psychological contracts and developing trust. This alignment had a lot to do with integrity since it allowed followers to rate leaders, based on what they expected from them and how consistent they thought they would be in the future. Even though it was important, people still did not know what integrity really meant or how to use it. This meant that projects that focusing on leader integrity needed to take more precise efforts to move forward.

Palanski et al. (2011); Palanski and Yammarino (2007) asserted that integrity encompassed the congruence between one's assertions and one's conduct. This could have a huge impact on how individuals felt and how well they did their jobs. Managers had problems that made it hard for them to do their jobs, which could make other people think that there are problems and trust issues in the organization (Leroy et al., 2012; Palanski et al., 2011; Palanski et al., 2015). If employees thought that the words and actions of their executives did not match up, they started to think about the company's culture in a different way. This evaluation of first impressions was crucial for fostering engagement and maintaining organisational cohesion.

Research demonstrated that leaders who possessed emotional intelligence and trustworthy nature led their teams to view them as reliable and trustworthy leaders. The workplace environment created positive conditions which allowed employees to feel valued and appreciated. School leaders who demonstrated high moral standards established specific guidelines which teachers must follow to conduct themselves in a proper ethical manner. The direct result of this measure led to decreased chances of teachers engaging in unethical conduct.

H₁: Leader's behavioral integrity is negatively associated with deviant workplace behavior.

2.4 Employee-Organization Psychological Distance as mediator

The Construal Level Theory (CLT) demonstrated how people make judgments and decisions because it showed how psychological distance affected their cognitive processes. The Construal Level Theory (CLT) defined psychological distance as a collection of distances (spatial, Temporal, social, and hypothetical), which people used to assess events and concepts that lay beyond their immediate experience. Formulated by (Liberman and Trope 1998), Construal Level Theory (CLT) gained significance in management and organizational studies, elucidating how individuals, particularly managers and employees, comprehended information and made decisions on events or circumstances they had not directly encountered. Future-oriented activities such as

planning, budgeting, and decision-making were affected by the temporal, spatial, social, or hypothetical distance of an event.

The notion of psychological distance was significant in organizational studies, especially within the context of employee-organizational psychological distance (EOPD), as articulated by (Chen & Li, 2018; Li & Chen, 2019a). EOPD looked at different kinds of distance, such as spatial (the actual distance between people), temporal (the length of contacts), social (the quality of relationships between people), and other characteristics. It looked at how employees' view of these distances affected their motivation, how well they matched the goals of the organization, and how they made decisions. A high employee-organization psychological distance (EOPD) usually meant that employees did not agree with the company's goals and values as much, which could lead to decreased dedication and productivity (Li & Chen, 2019b).

At workplaces employee relationships created a psychological distance which determined their emotional state and their behavior patterning that led to their work engagement and productivity performance. Teachers who lack school integration experienced decreased job dedication and increased absenteeism. Employee job commitment and workplace belongingness grew through organizational support and leadership development which reduced unwanted behavior.

The relationship among psychological distance and deviant workplace behavior and leadership behavioral integrity existed as an established connection. EOPD established this relationship because it modified employee perceptions of how their work connects to organizational values and responsibilities (Chen & Li, 2018; Li & Chen, 2019). If teachers or staff felt a lot of psychological distance, they might not have been as engaged or might have acted negatively. But by lowering EOPD, individuals could feel more connected and devoted to their work, which could lead to professional responsibility and less of the behaviors listed above (Li & Chen, 2019).

H₂: Leader's behavioral integrity is negatively associated with employee-organization psychological distance.

H₃: Employee-organization psychological distance is positively associated with deviant workplace behavior

H₄: Employee-organization psychological distance mediates the inverse relationship between a leader's behavioral integrity and employees' deviant workplace behavior.

2.5 Leadership integrity and psychological empowerment in educational settings

Arnold et al. (2000) defined empowering leadership as a style of leadership that included giving employees control, letting them make their own decisions, boosting their confidence in their work, and getting rid of obstacles that made it harder for them to do their jobs. Empowering leaders not only delegated duties to employees, but also fostered an environment of trust, confidence, and respect. This culture naturally encouraged participation, creativity, and aggressive efforts to achieve the goals of the organization. This style of leadership was important in education because teachers were more likely to take responsibility for their work when they felt trusted and empowered by their superiors.

Hallinger and Kovačević (2022) emphasized the growing significance of shared leadership models in educational institutions. The new approach represented a major transformation from centralized decision-making which allowed teams to choose their own methods while making critical decisions and developing their own abilities. The model required leaders to act as coaches who provided assistance instead of functioning as traditional authority figures. Leaders who implemented this approach established better power-sharing systems in educational institutions through their activities which included sharing knowledge together with seeking input from others and engaging in collaborative discussions. Organizations had achieved proof through research that empowered leadership boosted motivation and performance at personal and team and organizational levels (Ahearn et al., 2004; C. Li et al., 2012; Rosen & Levy, 2013; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). The combined results of these studies demonstrated that empowerment functions as an essential leadership approach which enables leaders to create an environment

that combined individual autonomy with collective work and fresh concepts.

In schools, empowered leadership was a key part of making the workplace a good and engaging place to be. Teachers were more likely to feel appreciated and respected when school leaders allowed them independence, applaud their performance, and encourage them to work together (Çelik & Konan, 2020; Kim & Beehr, 2017; ozdemir et al., 2023; Vecchio et al., 2010). This sense of control was likely to enhance teachers' intrinsic motivation and their authority regarding pedagogical and administrative responsibilities. Moreover, recent empirical studies indicated that empowering leadership significantly predicted psychological empowerment and job satisfaction among educators (Karagianni et al., 2023; Lee & Chelladurai, 2017; Limon, 2022; Okçu et al., 2025).

Notably, these leadership behaviors could also work to mitigate negative dynamics in the workplace. If teachers were psychologically empowered and included in decision-making, the possibility of ostracism and disengagement in the organization became less likely (Okçu et al., 2025). As a result, empowering school leaders not only promoted positive teacher well-being outcomes but also worked to indirectly mitigate deviant workplace behaviors by improving teachers' association with their organization.

2.6 Psychological Empowerment as Moderator:

The growing difficulties of finding work and the competition between countries show how important human resources are for a business to be successful. To deal with these changes, employees need to be able to alter their jobs and work in an environment that encourages new ideas. This shows how important it is for employees to be engaged. Scholars have studied several ways to boost motivation throughout the years, and they have agreed that empowerment is one of the most important. Empowerment, which gives others the power to make decisions, boosts motivation and the performance of an organization.

Scholars like Hackman (1980), Hackman and Katz (2010), and Lewin (1951) helped to shape the idea of empowerment by showing how it could boost self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Empowerment could be comprehended in two dimensions: structurally, as the allocation of authority, and psychologically, as a core conviction in one's capacity to operate autonomously. Both frameworks, one emphasizing distributed power and the other intrinsic motivation, augmented an employee's sense of autonomy and efficacy.

Two foundational models, developed by Spreitzer (1995); Thomas and Velthouse (1990), elucidated the concept of empowerment by emphasizing four key components: meaningfulness, competence, self-determination, and impact. The factors demonstrated to which extent a person valued their work, their professional abilities, their level of independence, and their organizational authority, which led to increased job satisfaction and engagement. Psychological empowerment served as a performance improvement method which operated without needing monetary rewards. The process enabled individuals to understand their value which led to improved performance and helped them maintain work that matched their personal beliefs (Seibert et al., 2011). The combination of purpose and freedom created a state which produced intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction and employee commitment.

Psychological empowerment typically predicts positive results in organizations which include improved job quality and employee wellbeing and enhanced work performance. However, its effects depend on both contextual elements and cultural elements which include power distance (Tanriverdi et al. 2019 and Moin et al. 2023). The research found that high-performance work systems and psychological empowerment showed power distance cultural orientations which affected the empowerment-innovation relationship because empowerment has less effect in environments which exhibit high power distance (Li & Rasiah, 2025). The study demonstrated that contextual distance elements which include cultural power distance affect empowerment outcomes although it does not specifically examine EOPD because this

relationship shows that PE leads to EOPD moderation through empirical evidence (Li & Rasiah, 2025).

Studies showed that empowerment greatly increased job satisfaction in cultures with little power distance, where people were used to having freedom (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). Empowered individuals typically demonstrated enhanced job performance, more workplace engagement, and intensified dedication to organizational objectives (Spreitzer, 1996). Empowerment mitigated workplace concerns such as deviant behavior and enhanced organizational loyalty. Research, like

that conducted by Yao et al. (2024), Yao et al. (2013) substantiated that empowerment tactics enhance job satisfaction and staff retention, rendering it a significant tactic in the contemporary competitive workplace.

H5: Psychological empowerment moderates the relationship between leader’s behavioral integrity and deviant workplace behavior.

H6: Psychological empowerment moderates the relationship between leader’s behavioral integrity and employee-organization psychological distance.

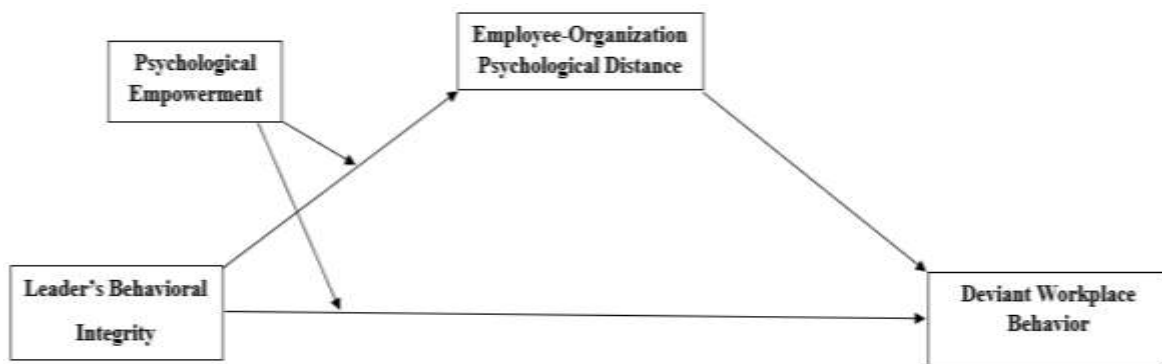


Fig 1: Proposed mediation moderation model.

3 Methodology

Researchers asserted that empirical information was deemed legitimate solely when it related to observable and quantifiable facts (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Hair Jr et al., 2014). This study aimed to assess the causes and consequences of LBI and DWB through the application of particular EOPD and PE in conjunction with quantitative data. The research adopted a positivist framework based on empirical epistemology and employed quantitative methods. A significant portion of prior research in leadership studies employed a quantitative methodology. The present research was underpinned by a significant corpus of literature, well-defined variables, and modern concepts. The present study sought to validate, corroborate, or contest the findings of prior researchers within a defined research setting, rather than employing an interpretive framework. This study utilized a quantitative framework to achieve its purpose.

Additionally, the benefits of utilizing the scientific method, which constituted the basis of positivistic inquiry. Hair Jr et al. (2014), Sekaran and Bougie (2016) asserted that employing a quantitative methodology entailed hypothesis verification, hence guaranteeing substantial reliability and validity. The use of the scientific method made it possible for other investigations to repeat the same results, which was very important for confirming a theory (Flew, 1987). The utilization of the positivist approach presented a distinctive research opportunity in Pakistan, namely in enhancing the perception of leadership and its impact on individual DWB in Balochistan.

The primary justification related to the expected audience for this research. The previous studies about leadership and DWB used quantitative methods as their main research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Hair et al., 2010). The research aimed to evaluate leadership through quantitative methods because the intended

audience included evaluators and academic institutions and journal editors and readers (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The present study required a quantitative research method which researchers selected as the most appropriate choice. This research study applied the positivist research framework while using a statistical method to examine the connection between leadership and teachers' DWB (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized a constructive approach and a quantitative methodology. This study was a cross-sectional analysis utilizing survey methodology to collect primary data. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) asserted that primary data was collected directly from the source of events or relevant variables to investigate a specific objective. Data collection occurred at a specified time with a standardized questionnaire to respond to the study enquiries (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The current methodology demonstrated significant generalizability and external reliability, as it was based on real market transactions.

The goal of this correlational study was to find connections or look at how different significant parts were related to each other. This research was correlational, aiming to identify or analyze correlations among several essential components. The independent variable in this study was the LBI, while the dependent variable was the DWB of public-school teachers. In this interaction, EOPD acted as a mediator while the PE acted as a moderator.

This study examined literacy rates throughout several regions of Pakistan, with particular emphasis on Balochistan, the province with the lowest literacy rate. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) (PBS Digital Census, 2023b) found that 60.65% of people in Pakistan could read and write. Punjab had the highest literacy rate of 66.25% among the four provinces, followed by Sindh with 57.54%. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has the highest literacy rate at 51.09%, while Balochistan had the lowest at 42.01%. On the other hand, Islamabad had a literacy rate of 83.97% (PBS Digital Census, 2023b). The 2023 digital census showed that literacy rates in Punjab, Sindh, and

Islamabad had gone up by 2.24%, 2.97%, and 2.48%, respectively, from the 2017 census. While Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan literacy rates had dropped down to 2.93% and 1.57%, respectively (PBS Digital Census, 2023b).

Balochistan consists of eight divisions: Kalat, Mekran, Nasirabad, Quetta, Sibi, Zhob, Loralai, and Rakhshan. The PBS Digital Census (2023a) indicated that the Quetta division had the greatest population in the province, amounting to 4.26 million, i.e., 28.6% of the overall population. The percentage shared of several divisions in Balochistan, listed in descending order, were as follows: Kalat had a population of 2.72 million (18.79%), Mekran 1.86 million (12.75%), Nasirabad 1.66 million (11.41%), Sibi 1.16 million (8.05%), Rakhshan 1.04 million (7.38%), Zhob 0.93 million (6.71%), and Loralai 0.87 million (6.04%), as detailed in Table 3.2. As per the PBS Digital Census (2023a) Quetta, Nasirabad, and Loralai had experienced population growth of 1.61%, 2.04%, and 0.04%, respectively. While Kalat, Mekran, Sibi, Rakhshan, and Zhob divisions had seen reductions of 1.21%, 0.68%, 0.27%, 1.30%, and 0.23%, respectively (PBS Digital Census, 2023a).

The PBS Digital Census (2023a) indicated that the Quetta division had the highest literacy rate in the province, at 51.68%. The literacy rates of several divisions in Balochistan, arranged in descending order, were: Mekran division at 47.69%, Loralai division at 39.89%, Kalat division at 38.72%, Rakhshan division at 36.84%, Sibi division at 34.70%, Nasirabad division at 32.59%, and Zhob division at 32.33%. The PBS Digital Census (2023a) and the 2017 census comparison indicated that the literacy rates in the divisions of Kalat, Nasirabad, Sibi, and Zhob had increased by 2.88%, 3.93%, 1.62%, and 0.04%, respectively. In contrast, the Quetta and Mekran divisions had witnessed reductions of 1.91% and 12.36%, respectively.

The study investigated people who worked at public schools throughout Balochistan Pakistan educational institutions. The researchers established criteria to select qualified participants who would complete the questionnaire according to standard survey research methods (Hair Jr et al., 2014). The researchers needed to obtain precise

data about Quetta division literacy rates because they needed evidence to identify their main challenges and develop effective solutions and monitor their advances and establish base for their policy decisions. G*Power analysis determined that at least 119 observations are required to achieve statistical power of 0.95 with an effect size of 0.15 and a significance level of 0.05 through three predictors. The PBS Digital Census (2023b) revealed that Quetta division Balochistan experienced a decline in its highest literacy rates because of decreasing educational attainment in recent years. Different districts within the division showed varying levels of literacy. The data showed that Quetta and Pishin had higher rates of performance while Chaman and Killa Abdullah showed lower rates of performance. The Quetta division conducted research because its different characteristics made it the ideal research site. The researchers developed data collection strategies which covered all four districts to achieve accurate results about literacy rates.

In summary, purposive sampling was the best method for this research in Balochistan because it allowed researchers to choose participants based on certain criteria. This ensured that the participants came from different places and groups. So, they gathered information from four districts in the Quetta division: Killa Abdullah, Chaman, Pishin, and Quetta. The literacy rate in these districts made them the best choice. This pick was selected because researchers couldn't go to all the districts because of time, access, and data limits. Subsequent studies may opt to examine additional districts. The study established a minimum objective of 227 educators from high schools and colleges within the designated districts. This method improved the study's ability to look at how LBI affected DWB and how PE modified things in a certain cultural setting.

The present study employed a structured questionnaire to examine the effects of LBI, EOPD, and PE on DWB among 227 public school educators across various regions of Balochistan. There were five parts to the questionnaire. Section A was about the educational background of both the district and the people who answered the questions. Part B discussed the things that made LBI work on its own (Simons et al., 2007). Section

C was about the mediator, with a focus on EOPD, which encompassed objective-social distance and spatial-temporal distance (Chen & Li, 2018b). Part D was made up of parts that were about the moderator, i.e., PE (Spreitzer, 1995). In Section E, was about the dependent variable, which was the DWB of public-school teachers in different parts of Balochistan (Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

3.2 Method

This study employed Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to examine the determinants affecting DWB. PLS-SEM was a methodology centered on variance, utilized for both forecasting and clarifying outcomes (Hair et al., 2018). It was suitable for small sample sizes, non-normative data, and formative data architectures, as noted by Hair Jr et al. (2014). The study utilized Smart PLS version 4.1 software. PLS-SEM, used for both the structural model and the measurement model. The measuring model evaluated validity and reliability. This study utilized factor loading (FL), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's alpha, and Composite Reliability (CR) to assess convergent validity. FL and AVE must be greater than 0.5, whereas CR and Cronbach's alpha must be at least 0.7 (J. Hair et al., 2018; Hair Jr et al., 2014). The Fornell-Larcker and HTMT tests showed that this study had discriminant validity. The SRMR measure (0.1 / 0.08), Chi-Square, and NFI (around 1) were used to check how well the model fits.

The last step was to look at the structural model by looking at the coefficient of determination (R^2), the cross-validated redundancy measure Q^2 obtained via blindfolding, and the path coefficient's statistical significance and relevance. The blindfold test was used to find out what Stone-Geisser's Q^2 value. Q^2 serves as the benchmark for evaluating the expected precision of the PLS path model. If Q^2 in the structural model exceeds 0, it signifies that the route model possesses predictive value (Hair Jr et al., 2014). The authors of this study employed the R^2 reference value to assess the model's adequacy about the included variables. An R^2 value of 0.25 was considered inadequate, 0.5 is moderate, and 0.75 is substantial. The permissible value of R^2 was contingent upon the

circumstances. An R_2 value of 0.10 is considered sufficient in various domains, including DWB forecasting (Hair et al., 2018). We employed a questionnaire survey to gather all the data. The questionnaire comprised five primary sections: demographic data and the assessment of factors affecting DWB via closed-ended questions. The poll employed a Five-Point Likert scale. Eutsler and Lang (2015) asserted that a Likert scale from 1 to 5 produces excellent outcome variability and minimal bias.

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The demographic profile of the respondents (N = 227) indicated a little greater proportion of male respondents (53.7%) compared to female respondents (46.3%). The predominant demographic of respondents was the 41-50 years

age group (37.4%), succeeded by the 31-40 years (26.0%) and 51 years and above (26.0%) cohorts, whereas merely 10.6% were under 30 years, indicating that the sample was primarily comprised of middle-aged individuals. Regarding educational qualifications, over half of the respondents had a Bachelor's/B.Ed. degree (50.7%), while 27.3% held a Master's/M.Ed. degree, 16.7% held an MS/M.Phil. degree, 1.3% held a PhD degree, and 4.0% held other professional degrees. The predominant respondents were married (88.5%), with lesser proportions being single (7.0%) and widowed (4.4%). The majority of responders possessed 6-10 years (29.1%) and 11-15 years (28.6%) of job experience, indicating substantial teaching expertise. A significant majority of the respondents were permanent employees (83.7%), whilst 16.3% were contractual employees.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics.

Characteristics	Description	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	105	46.3
	Male	122	53.7
Age	Below 30 Years	24	10.6
	31 to 40 Years	59	26.0
	41 to 50 Years	85	37.4
	51 and above	59	26.0
	Education	Bachelors /B.Ed	115
	Masters / M.Ed	62	27.3
	MS/M.Phil.	38	16.7
	PhD	3	1.3
	Other (Professional)	9	4.0
Marital Status	Single	16	7.0
	Married	201	88.5
	Widowed	10	4.4
Experience	Less than 1 Year	19	8.4
	1 to 5 Years	17	7.5
	6 to 10 Years	66	29.1
	11 to 15 Years	65	28.6
	16 to 20 Years	22	9.7
	21 to 25 Years	19	8.4
	26 Years and Above	19	8.4

Nature of Job	Permanent	190	83.7
	Contractual	37	16.3
Posted in Distt	Quetta	86	37.9
	Pishin	55	24.2
	Chaman	51	22.5
	Killa Abdullah	35	15.4

4.2 Structural Equational Modeling

Smart PLS was employed for structural equation modelling using a two-step methodology (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). This approach diminished the interactive influence of the structural model and measurement. A study was

conducted to assess the validity of the observed items and their corresponding constructs inside the measurement model. A composite structural model was later developed. The structural model was employed to investigate the link between exogenous factors and endogenous components.

Table 2: Confirmatory factor Analysis.

Construct		Outer Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Deviant Workplace Behavior	DWB 1	0.952	0.995	0.995	0.995	0.911
	DWB 2	0.955				
	DWB 3	0.954				
	DWB 4	0.956				
	DWB 5	0.956				
	DWB 6	0.953				
	DWB 7	0.957				
	DWB 8	0.953				
	DWB 9	0.956				
	DWB 10	0.950				
	DWB 11	0.956				
	DWB 12	0.952				
	DWB 13	0.955				
	DWB 14	0.953				
	DWB 15	0.958				
	DWB 16	0.956				
	DWB 17	0.954				
	DWB 18	0.957				
	DWB 19	0.952				
Employee-Organization Psychological Distance	EOPD 1	0.935	0.973	0.986	0.979	0.825
	EOPD 2	0.946				
	EOPD 3	0.953				
	EOPD 4	0.958				
	EOPD 5	0.952				
	EOPD 6	0.957				



	EOPD 7	0.925				
	EOPD 8	0.958				
	EOPD 9	0.451				
	EOPD 10	0.926				
Leader's Behavioral Integrity	LBI 1	0.953	0.985	0.985	0.987	0.907
	LBI 2	0.951				
	LBI 3	0.955				
	LBI 4	0.952				
	LBI 5	0.952				
	LBI 6	0.950				
	LBI 7	0.956				
	LBI 8	0.952				
Psychological Empowerment	PE 1	0.955	0.985	0.988	0.987	0.865
	PE 2	0.957				
	PE 3	0.950				
	PE 4	0.956				
	PE 5	0.619				
	PE 6	0.948				
	PE 7	0.949				
	PE 8	0.956				
	PE 9	0.952				
	PE 10	0.952				
	PE 11	0.956				
	PE 12	0.955				



4.3 Measurement Model

Following the instrument's modification, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was utilized to assess the model's fit to the data. The loadings of the study's variables are displayed in the table above. Factor loading computations should surpass 0.5, preferably exceeding 0.7 (Hair Jr et al., 2014). Multiple studies suggested that factor loading estimates must surpass 0.5 (Chang et al., 2013; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Hulland, 1999; Truong & McColl, 2011). Table 2 presents the item loadings and CR values. The study scales exhibited a Cronbach's alpha exceeding the required threshold of 0.70. All constructs demonstrated AVE values over the required threshold of 0.50, indicating strong convergent validity.

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Correlation ratio (HTMT) approach was employed to evaluate discriminant validity. Therefore, to determine the discriminant validity of the research variables, both the HTMT ratio and the Fornell-Larcker criterion were utilized. According to the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criteria, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) must surpass the correlations between the constructs. The square root of the AVE values for all constructs exceeded their correlation values, as indicated in Table 3, so confirming the attainment of discriminant validity. Additionally, Table 3 indicates that the HTMT values for each component are below 0.9, demonstrating sufficient discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2009).

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) approach.

Construct	DWB	EOPD	LBI	PE
DWB				
EOPD	0.783			
LBI	0.868	0.781		
PE	0.788	0.755	0.849	

Table 4: DV using Fornell and Larcker’s Approach.

Construct	DWB	EOPD	LBI	PE
DWB	0.954			
EOPD	0.779	0.908		
LBI	-0.859	-0.775	0.953	
PE	-0.780	-0.748	0.838	0.930

4.4 Assessment of Structural Model

The research model needs sufficient evaluation according to its SRMR score. The SRMR showed positive results because the saturated model showed 0.031 and the estimated model showed 0.036. Their findings match the recommendations of Gao et al. (2015) which stated that SRMR values must be remained under 0.080. Multicollinearity assessment used the variance inflation factor (VIF) as its measurement tool. The VIF output showed values that range from 1.122 to 4.147 which remained below the 5-threshold established by Hair et al. (2018). Multicollinearity issues do not exist in this situation. The researchers created a structural model to test their assumptions which required all used constructs to demonstrate reliability and validity. The researchers conducted a bootstrapping test by using 5,000 resamples according to the methodology established by Hair Jr et al. (2014), for hypothesis evaluation and model construction.

The results are depicted in Table 5 and Figure 2. The results corroborated hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, and H6 by providing substantial evidence for the relationships among leader's behavioral integrity (LBI), employee-organization psychological distance (EOPD), psychological empowerment (PE), and deviant workplace behavior (DWB), with coefficients (β) and statistical values as follows: ($\beta = -0.602, t = 5.794, p = 0.000$), ($\beta = -0.453, t = 3.962, p = 0.000$), ($\beta = 0.285, t = 2.609, p = 0.009$), ($\beta = -0.129, t = 1.963, p = 0.050$), ($\beta = 0.214, t = 2.297, p = 0.022$), and ($\beta = -0.179, t = 1.633, p = 0.103$) respectively. The moderating effect of PE on LBI and DWB (H5) was significant ($\beta = 0.214, t = 2.297, p = 0.022$). Conversely, the effect of PE on LBI and EOPD (H6) was not significant ($\beta = -0.179, t = 1.633, p = 0.103$), as illustrated in Table 5 and Figure 2. Consequently, H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 received support.

Table 5: Structural Model.

Hypothesis	β	STDEV	t - Value	P - Values	Decision
H1 LBI -> DWB	-0.602	0.104	5.794	0.000	Yes
H2 LBI -> EOPD	-0.453	0.114	3.962	0.000	Yes
H3 EOPD -> DWB	0.285	0.109	2.609	0.009	Yes
H4 LBI -> EOPD -> DWB	-0.129	0.066	1.963	0.050	Yes
H5 PE x LBI -> DWB	0.214	0.093	2.297	0.022	Yes
H6 PE x LBI -> EOPD	-0.179	0.110	1.633	0.103	No

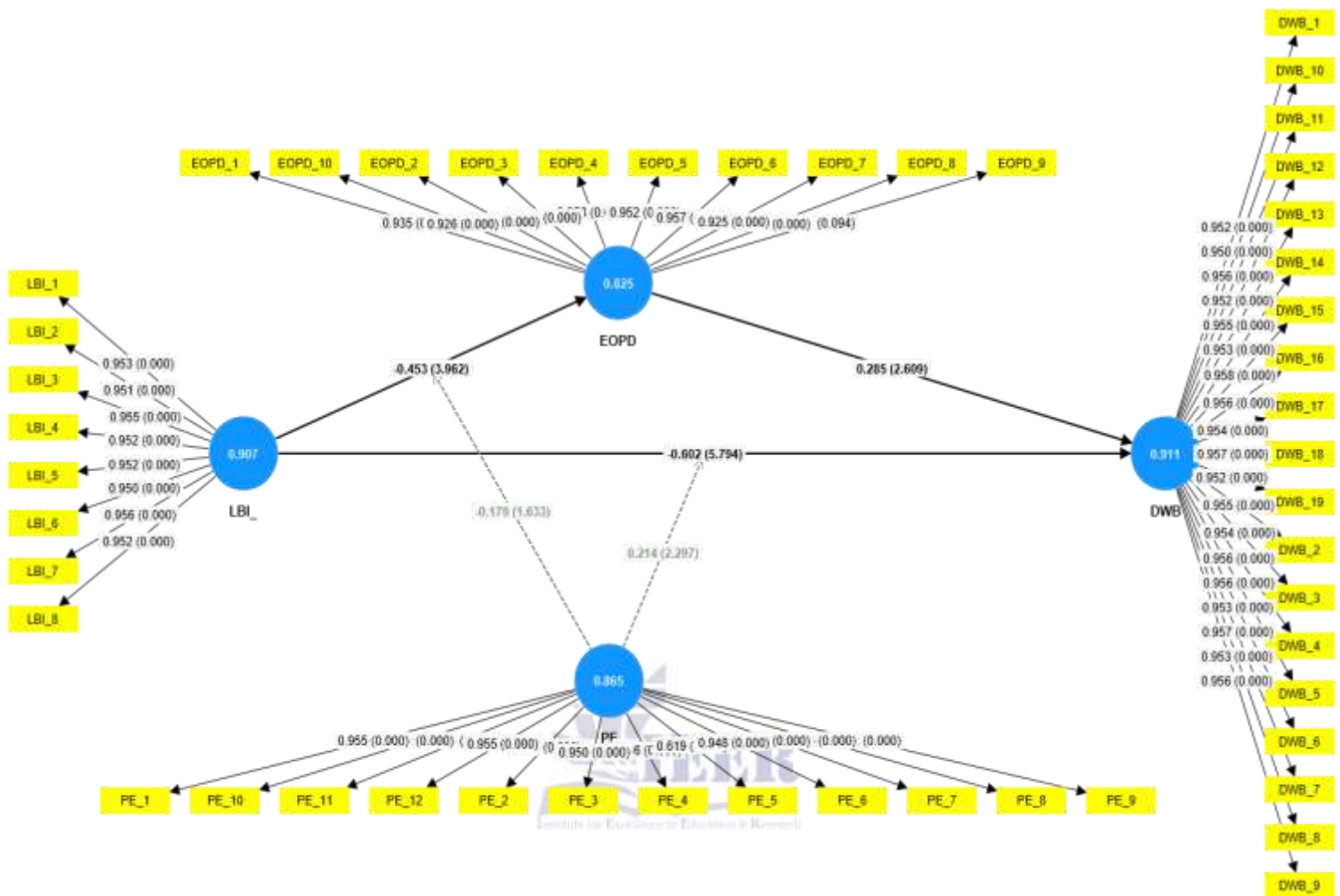


Fig 2: Structural model assessment.

4.5 Effect size and predictive relevance

Cohen's f^2 was employed to assess effect size and the predictive importance of variables inside the model, indicating the change in R^2 value after the removal of an exogenous construct. Cohen's f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 denote small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively, reflecting the magnitude of the effect (Hair et al., 2018). Table 6 illustrates that the total output f^2 ranges from 0.026 to 0.411. We do predictive

relevance analysis employing Stone-Geisser's Q^2 . The Q^2 score indicated the predictive significance of the independent variable about the dependent variable. The alternative approach for assessing in-sample prediction, as proposed by Hair et al. (2018, 2022), indicated that Q^2 signifies the model's predictive validity in Smart-PLS. The Q^2 score of 0.687 for DWB indicated that the exogenous construct could forecast the endogenous construct (table 7).

Table 6: Effect size and Multicollinearity.

Construct Relationship	f^2	VIF
EOPD -> DWB	0.137	2.795
LBI -> DWB	0.411	4.147
LBI -> EOPD	0.160	3.574
PE x LBI -> DWB	0.060	1.151
PE x LBI -> EOPD	0.026	1.122

4.6 Coefficient of determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for the DWB construct was standard ($R^2 = 0.787$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.784$). Seventy-eight percent of the variance in DWB was attributed to the factors of LBI, PE, and EOPD. The cutoff value was

established based on R^2 threshold values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 for endogenous constructs, classified as large, moderate, and minimal (Hair et al., 2018). The R^2 statistic assessed the explanatory capacity of the sample data but has not indicated predictive accuracy outside the sample.

Table 7: Coefficient of determination.

	R^2	R-square adjusted	Q^2
DWB	0.787	0.784	0.687
EOPD	0.642	0.637	0.498

4.7 PLS-predict (Out-of-Sample Prediction)

The clarification of R^2 and Q^2 as indicators of predictive capability was inadequately strong due to in-sample explanatory power, as noted by Dolce et al. (2017). Shmueli et al. (2019) advocated for the assessment of predictive ability using out-of-sample prediction, utilizing root mean squared

error (RMSE) and mean absolute error (MAE) for evaluation. Shmueli et al. (2019) contended that if most components in an endogenous construct exhibit minimal error in a linear model (LM), the model is likely to provide moderate predictive effectiveness (see table 8).

Table 8: Prediction Out of Sample (PLS-Predict).

Constructs	PLS-SEM_RMSE	LM_RMSE	Difference PLS-SEM - LM RMSE
DWB 1	0.665	0.927	0.891
DWB 2	0.649	0.952	0.881
DWB 3	0.688	1.017	0.867
DWB 4	0.644	1.020	0.892
DWB 5	0.686	0.962	0.864
DWB 6	0.648	1.019	0.900
DWB 7	0.670	0.927	0.869
DWB 8	0.665	0.922	0.867
DWB 9	0.658	1.128	0.869
DWB 10	0.657	0.938	0.901
DWB 11	0.668	1.032	0.887
DWB 12	0.656	1.066	0.889

DWB 13	0.663	0.950	0.884
DWB 14	0.681	0.926	0.858
DWB 15	0.651	1.018	0.900
DWB 16	0.645	0.979	0.905
DWB 17	0.693	0.918	0.844
DWB 18	0.648	0.963	0.895
DWB 19	0.690	0.947	0.862
EOPD 1	0.520	1.172	1.080
EOPD 2	0.538	1.097	1.046
EOPD 3	0.580	1.071	1.017
EOPD 4	0.518	1.142	1.093
EOPD 5	0.565	1.045	1.019
EOPD 6	0.545	1.135	1.048
EOPD 7	0.567	1.073	1.035
EOPD 8	0.535	1.116	1.062
EOPD 9	0.054	4.163	3.630
EOPD 10	0.550	1.077	1.039

5 Discussion

This research examined the direct, mediating, and moderating impacts of leader's behavioral integrity (LBI) on deviant workplace behavior (DWB), utilizing employee-organization psychological distance (EOPD) as a mediator and psychological empowerment (PE) as a moderator. The results have provided substantial validation for the suggested structural model, as five of the six assumptions were affirmed.

The findings reveal a substantial negative correlation between a leader's behavioral integrity and deviant workplace conduct ($\beta = -0.602$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that a rise in a leader's behavioral integrity is associated with a decrease in deviant workplace actions among employees (H_1). When leaders demonstrate their ideals, employees recognize fair and honest treatment, hence reducing unproductive behaviors. This discovery shows how important it is for leaders to be honest and ethical in order to encourage good behavior at work and stop bad behavior by employees.

It was also discovered that LBI had a significant negative predictive effect on EOPD ($\beta = -0.453$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that heightened behavioral integrity among leaders reduces the psychological distance between employees and their firm (H_2). When leaders are consistent and dependable in how they act, people feel more

connected to the company. This is because they feel valued and connected to the goals of the organization.

EOPD had a significant positive connection with DWB ($\beta = 0.285$, $p = 0.009$). Employees who feel less connected to their company are more likely to act in ways that are not acceptable (H_3). When people feel estranged or disconnected, their sense of duty and allegiance to the organization decreases, which makes them more likely to act in ways that are not normal. This result emphasizes the significance of psychological distance as a cognitive-emotional process that fosters deviant behaviors in the workplace.

The mediating variable of employee-organization psychological distance between LBI and DWB was confirmed ($\beta = -0.129$, $p = 0.050$). The indirect effect, however minor, retains statistical significance, so confirming partial mediation. This means that LBI has both a direct and an indirect effect on deviant behavior by making employees feel closer to the company (H_4). As a result, leader behavioral integrity has both a direct effect on deviance and a relational effect that makes the link between the employee and the organization stronger.

Studies show that psychological empowerment has a big effect on the relationship between LBI and

DWB ($\beta = 0.214, p = 0.022$). This suggests that the effect of leader's behavioral integrity on deviant conduct depends on the degree of employee empowerment (H_5). When employees feel psychologically empowered through meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact, leadership integrity has a stronger effect on reducing deviance. Empowered employees are more likely to be influenced by their leaders and to act in a way that shows integrity in return.

Despite expectations, psychological empowerment did not significantly modify the relationship between LBI and EOPD ($\beta = -0.179, p = 0.103$). This indicates that the impact of leader behavioral integrity on psychological distance is predominantly independent of the level of employee empowerment (H_6). Regardless of the degree of employee empowerment, the existence of consistent and dependable leaders is sufficient to reduce psychological distance. This result indicates that trust and credibility in a relationship may be more important than empowerment when it comes to psychological closeness.

The theoretical value of this study exists because there is a lack of empirical studies which investigate how psychological empowerment affects employee organizational psychological distance. The study results reveal non-significant H_6 moderation which aligns with earlier research showing that empowerment impacts relational distance assessment through different contextual elements that include cultural and organizational structural and normative components. Psychological empowerment research shows that this construct brings positive effects to workplace outcomes through improved employee wellbeing and work performance which researchers have proven in previous studies (Tanriverdi* et al., 2019; Moin et al., 2023). Empowering leadership shows that it affects employee behavior prediction through its interaction with psychological distance concepts which leads to an overlap with empowerment and organizational proximity perception frameworks (Yue et al., 2022). Psychological empowerment benefits from specific cultural distance elements which power distance represents because this relationship explains why some situations showed no significant moderation effects (Li & Rasiah, 2025).

This study makes a substantial contribution to the literature by showing that LBI is an important factor in reducing DWB, both directly and indirectly via preventing EOPD. PE has a beneficial effect on the link between LBI and DWB, but it doesn't change the link between LBI and EOPD. These results highlight the significance of reliable and consistent leadership in promoting corporate commitment and reducing negative employee behaviors. Organizations should focus on the creation of leadership training programs to strengthen LBI and boost employee empowerment, hence minimizing aberrant workplace behaviors.

5.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study has important effects on how education is run at the district level. The results of this study underscore the significance of leader integrity, since it is negatively correlated with employee workplace deviance. Companies need to work hard to promote leader integrity at every level of their organization. Because of this, businesses might try to hire and promote managers with high integrity. Furthermore, organizations ought to use all possible efforts to enhance the integrity of their leaders through training initiatives. Managers must foster a culture of integrity and authenticity within their organizations to facilitate this. This culture promotes risk-taking and idea-sharing among employees (Verhezen, 2010), simultaneously fostering the creation of innovative ideas and mitigating deviant behaviors in the workplace.

The research results demonstrate that EOPD functions as the mediator which links a leader's integrity to the occurrence of employee deviant behavior in work environments. The research demonstrates that EOPD functions as a vital mental process which leads to deviant workplace behavior therefore organizations need to focus on identifying the factors which lead to deviant behavior and use leader integrity training to improve their workplace culture. Training programs should prioritize fostering employees' commitment to ethical conduct over immediate behavioral outcomes associated with efficiency (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2020). Consequently, leaders possessing high integrity are more adept at

fostering a "can do" attitude towards morally courageous actions, such as reducing aberrant behavior in the workplace among their subordinates (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2020).

This study has revealed that increased psychological empowerment (PE) among employees can mitigate the adverse association between LBI and DWB. In this context, it is crucial for managers to focus on the buffering role of psychological empowerment, especially for individuals exhibiting low moral efficacy and workplace malfeasance. In addition, organizations that seek to lower workplace deviance should create a setting that encourages cooperation among employees and their supervisors to develop collective ethical standards (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2020). The implementation of performance evaluation systems creates a workplace environment which helps drive employee commitment thus decreasing the likelihood that workers will engage in actions which harm company interests. Organizations require a leadership environment which provides backing to leaders who can connect their followers' goals with organizational objectives (Gregory Stone et al., 2004; Jawahar et al., 2019). Organizations must acknowledge that discrepancies between the ethical perspectives of employees and management, coupled with ambiguity and insufficient oversight, may lead individuals to prioritize their self-interest, thereby harming the business. The top management team needs to create a diverse workforce across every organizational level because their current hiring practices promote a self-serving approach to establishing their performance objectives. Employees should be motivated to perceive themselves and management as "partners" who have aligned ethical perspectives and interests, ultimately collaborating to assist their firm in achieving its goals.

The research establishes the relationships among the study variables that further extends the leadership theory through its investigation of public secondary school in Balochistan. The existing research on leadership integrity mainly depends on studies from corporate environments and Western settings, which do not match the conditions found in public educational

institutions of developing countries. The research results demonstrate that integrity-based leadership functions in both settings through different psychological pathways.

5.2 Limitation and Future Research Directions

The research design based on cross-sectional data prevents researchers from establishing causal relationships between leadership integrity and psychological distance and deviant behavior. A longitudinal study may provide a comprehensive examination of causal linkages. The focus on certain Balochistan regions creates difficulties for applying research findings to different locations. Schools across the nation demonstrate distinct cultural environments and operational methods and resource availability. The use of self-reported data creates social desirability bias which affects research findings on sensitive topics including deviant behavior. More research should investigate methods for using multiple data sources and conduct objective assessments of behavior even though researchers have implemented measures to decrease this particular threat.

This study has identified prospective research directions that investigate the intricate relationship between leadership integrity and deviant behavior by analyzing the various mediators and indirect effects that connect the two. The study requires evaluation of how teacher professional development and management strategies affect teachers' trust and work habits throughout their careers. The study investigates how leadership behavior affects educational effectiveness in different teaching fields. Future research may be focused on how leadership integrity and psychological distance changes over time, particularly focusing on different leadership styles impact teacher performance. Also, a comparative analysis on public and private schools at different educational levels will bring new insight into the domain of deviant workplace behaviors. Moreover, the association between integrity and leadership behavior requires consideration of factors including employee trust in their organization and work satisfaction levels and their emotional state.

5.3 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the integrity of leadership behavior is crucial for mitigating misconduct among secondary school teachers in the workplace. This is accomplished both directly and indirectly, by psychological alienation between employees and the firm. Integrity leadership has even more of an effect when teachers are given more power. To sum up: Integrity in leadership is not just a good thing to have, but it is also an important part of an organization that affects trust, engagement, and behavior. Public schools may make the workplace professional, ethical, and productive by putting money into school leaders' integrity-based leadership, psychological empowerment, and relationship development. This is important to make sure that teachers act better, that the group stays together, and that the education that kids get is better.

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