Macrothink Institute™

International Journal of Education
ISSN 1948-5476
2026, Vol. 18, No. 4

Values-Based Education (VBE) In Higher Education Career Development: A Transformational Framework for The Modern Workforce

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International Journal of Education
ISSN 1948-5476
2026, Vol. 18, No. 4

Received: September 8, 2026 Accepted: October 20, 2026 Published: November 3, 2026

doi:10.5296/ije.v18i4.24137 URL: https://doi.org/10.5296/ije.v18i4.24137

Abstract

As the global workforce faces increasing volatility and ethical complexity, higher education institutions must shift from purely transactional career services to a transformational Values-Based Education (VBE) model. This paper proposes a curriculum centred on three core pillars: (i) Resilience & Leadership, (ii) Courage & Justice, and (iii) Ethical Decision-Making Skills. The objective is to equip students with a robust moral framework that informs their professional identity. Utilizing qualitative document analysis and thematic synthesis, this paper provides strategic framework solutions to address systemic vocational challenges. By internalizing these values, graduates will not only seek employment but will lead with purpose, navigate setbacks with emotional intelligence, and advocate for equity within their respective industries. This paper contributes to vocational literature by providing a multidisciplinary framework that bridges virtue ethics, cognitive career theory, and adult learning to resolve early-career moral depletion.

Keywords: Values-Based Education (VBE), higher education, career development, leadership resilience, moral courage, ethical decision-making

1. Introduction

Modern higher education faces a structural mismatch between transactional, placement-centric career preparation models and the volatile, ethically ambiguous realities of the contemporary workforce. Traditional university career services systematically neglect the psychological, emotional, and moral readiness needed to navigate corporate duress. Addressing this critical research gap, this paper introduces a transformational Values-Based Education (VBE) framework that integrates character development, ethical decision-making architectures, and resilience strategies directly into career pathways. Shifting the paradigm from passive placement to active character building, VBE grounds professional identity in universal human virtues, preparing purpose-driven leaders to sustain institutional health and advocate for equity.

Four integrated research objectives guide this framework: first, constructing a multidisciplinary theoretical model that converges Aristotelian Virtue Ethics, Social Cognitive Career Theory, and Transformational Learning Theory to redefine professional identity (RQ1); second, evaluating cognitive, physical, and relational mechanisms that preserve executive resilience and prevent burnout (RQ2); third, analyzing behavioral economic and socio-technical dynamics that mitigate reputational crowding-out to foster workplace moral courage and structural equity (RQ3); and finally, synthesizing Rest's Four-Component Model, Jones' Moral Intensity, and multicultural lenses into cognitive ethical architectures that enhance graduates' ethical self-leadership (RQ4).

2. Theoretical Framework

Transitioning higher education career services from transactional skill-matching to a transformational Values-Based Education (VBE) framework requires a multidisciplinary theoretical foundation. Whereas traditional career development treats vocational readiness as value-neutral, an integrated VBE framework synthesizes Aristotelian Virtue Ethics, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), and Transformational Learning Theory to construct professional identity, balancing technical competence with structural moral responsibility.

2.1 Aristotelian Virtue Ethics and the Cultivation of Phronesis

At its philosophical core, VBE rejects purely utilitarian or rule-bound training, positioning Aristotelian phronesis (practical wisdom) as the primary engine of professional excellence. Traditional vocational curricula heavily emphasize techne (technical skill) and episteme (conceptual knowledge). However, techne remains instrumentally value-neutral, enabling individuals to stabilize or manipulate organizational systems with equal efficacy. Conversely, phronesis yields the intellectual capacity required to navigate ambiguous moral gray zones and execute structurally just actions, establishing that genuine professional excellence is inseparable from moral character.

Grounding career development in virtue ethics transforms vocational counseling from a simple matching exercise into moral character formation. Technical mastery devoid of internal virtue leaves graduates ethically vulnerable under corporate compliance pressures. By instilling phronesis, higher education institutions prepare graduates to treat their professions as venues for executing justice, temperance, and moral courage, ensuring future leaders prioritize public integrity over transient extrinsic rewards.

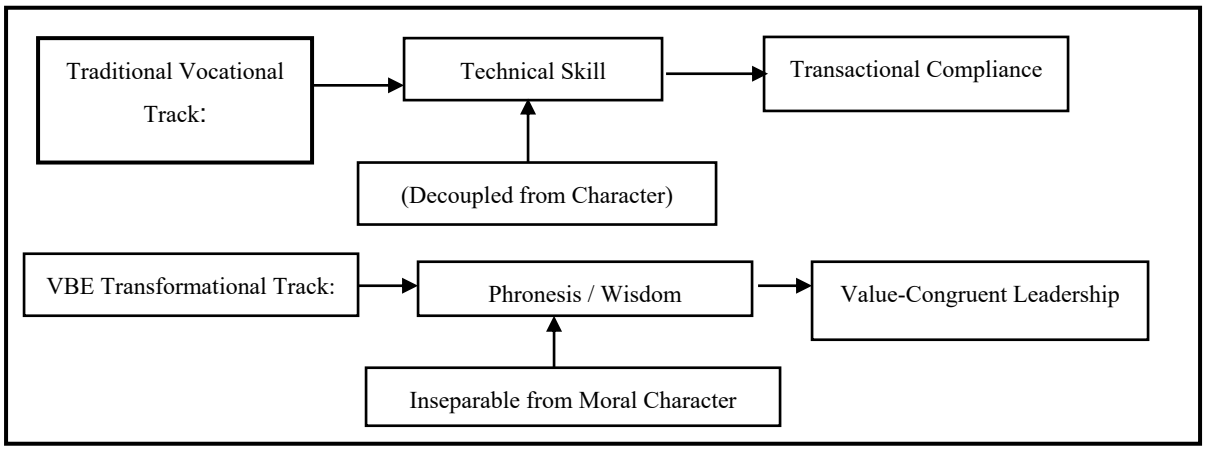


Figure 1. Shift from Techne to Phronesis in Values-Based Education (VBE)

Note. Comparison between the value-neutral traditional vocational track (techne) leading to transactional compliance and the transformational VBE track (phronesis) leading to value-congruent leadership

2.2 Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and Value-Congruent Trajectories

While virtue ethics supplies the moral paradigm, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)—pioneered by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994,2002) - delineates the cognitive-behavioral mechanisms through which values construct professional identity. Traditionally, SCCT posits that self-efficacy beliefs (task-execution confidence) and outcome expectations (perceived reward estimates) interact to determine vocational interests, goals, and actions. Integrating values into this cognitive architecture moderates the self-efficacy loop, anchoring expectations in intrinsic value congruence rather than extrinsic incentives like salary or status. This integration enables students to forge a value-congruent career path

Longitudinal empirical research by Duffy et al. (2022) demonstrates that individuals aligning professional goals with an internal calling achieve significantly higher long-term job satisfaction and career persistence. This psychological endurance aligns directly with contemporary resource-based capacity models. By constructing an operational trajectory matched to core moral principles, graduates minimize the internal friction generated by workplace stress. Personal value systems function as protective conduits for psychological resource reservoirs. Consequently, during extreme organizational volatility, value-congruent professionals remain shielded from the severe emotional exhaustion and early-career paralysis that routinely derail instrumentally driven workers.

2.3 Transformational Learning Theory and the Reconceptualization of Career Purpose

To successfully transition a student body from a mindset of passive vocational survival to one of purposeful industry leadership, higher education career systems must utilize the structural mechanisms of Jack Mezirow's (1991,1997) Transformational Learning Theory. This framework establishes that true adult education must alter an individual's underlying meaning schemes, frames of reference, and habits.

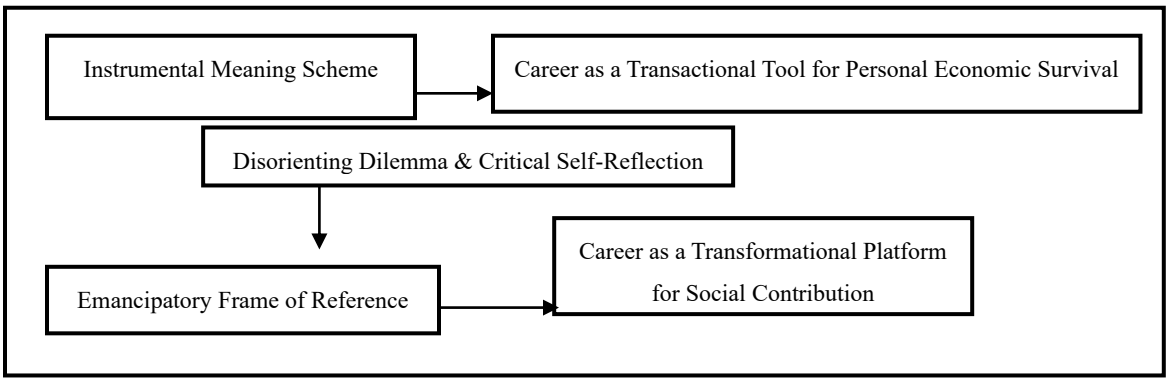


Figure 2. Transformational Shift in Career Purpose via Disorienting Dilemmas

Note. Cognitive shift from an instrumental meaning scheme (career as economic survival) to an emancipatory frame of reference (career as social contribution) mediated by critical reflection.

Traditional career preparation often reinforces a pre-conventional meaning scheme that views a career primarily through an instrumental lens—as a transactional mechanism for economic survival and personal security. VBE challenges this limited viewpoint by intentionally introducing a "disorienting dilemma" into the vocational curriculum, forcing students to critically examine their unexamined assumptions regarding the purpose of work.

As applied by Lovat (2022) within values-based educational spaces, transformational learning architectures facilitate a major cognitive shift, moving students from an instrumental perspective to an emancipatory frame of reference. Under this values-led paradigm, a career is completely reconceptualized: it is no longer viewed merely as a tool for personal wealth accumulation, but as a weight-bearing platform for prosocial contribution, civic responsibility, and structural equity.

By framing career development through Lovat's (2022) perspective integration, university career centers encourage students to systematically analyze macro-level systemic vulnerabilities and corporate power differentials. This pedagogical intervention transforms the future graduate into a proactive change agent. Armed with this expanded worldview, emerging professionals enter their respective fields with the explicit intention of implementing anti-corruption policies, protecting collective worker health, and building sustainable, transparent institutional environments

2.4 Theoretical Convergence Inside VBE

The table below illustrates how these three distinct theoretical frameworks converge to create an integrated, transformational matrix for higher education values-based career services.

Table 1. Three Distinct Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical Thread	Core Explanatory Focus within VBE	Target Curricular & Behavioral Outcome
Virtue Ethics *(Aristotle)*	Focuses on the development of internal moral character, *phronesis*, and professional excellence.	Students learn that technical proficiency (*techne*) is incomplete without a corresponding baseline of moral integrity.
Social Cognitive Career Theory	Maps the behavioral loops linking task self-efficacy with value-congruent vocational goals.	Students experience higher long-term job satisfaction and baseline career persistence by minimizing resource-draining internal conflicts.
Transformational Learning	Restructures unreflective frames of reference regarding the true social purpose of work.	Students shift from an instrumental mindset of career survival to an emancipatory focus on collective social contribution.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Resilience & Leadership

Ramadhani, Sobandi, and Santoso (2024) evaluate leadership styles and workforce survival metrics within volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) business environments characterized by technological shifts, cybersecurity threats, regulatory mutations, and climate risks. Synthesizing sixteen core studies, the authors map interactive feedback loops connecting resilient leadership with employee resilience and organizational adaptability. Tracing resilience theory from its origins in 1970s ecology (disturbance absorption) and 1980s developmental psychology (clinical coping) to contemporary multi-system leadership paradigms, the findings establish that resilient leadership unlocks collective adaptability, enhances performance, and reduces turnover intentions during operational crises. However, executing this style introduces structural tension, requiring leaders to balance contradictory transactional and transformational behaviors under pressure. Critiquing traditional paradigms for overemphasizing individual traits over collective empowerment, the authors emphasize that institutional resilience demands substantial technical investments, managerial commitment, and support networks. Ultimately, collaborative workspace cultures must systematically support employee resilience behaviors—such as cognitive resourcefulness, behavioral agility, wide communication networks, and shared reflection—to sustain organizational endurance.

Addressing the adaptational stresses confronting academic executives in higher education—environments framed as "permanent white water"—Sanaghan (2016) adapts Zolli's personal resilience framework, defining resilience as an enterprise's structural capacity to maintain core purpose and integrity amidst ambiguity. Grounded in Coutu's research architecture, Sanaghan identifies three essential attributes of resilient leaders: realistic acceptance of brutal operational realities (the Stockdale Paradox), alignment with a noble purpose that frames suffering as a platform for learning, and bricolage—the capability to inventively improvise solutions using available resources. Sanaghan operationalizes these virtues by integrating Duckworth's grit with Maddi and Kobasa's personality hardiness (intrinsic commitment, internal control, and growth orientation). To break through senior command isolation and build crisis readiness before macro-shocks occur, leaders must establish confidant networks, engage thought partners, utilize professional therapy, and deploy targeted interventions such as cross-boundary job rotations, stretch assignments, and collaborative problem-solving teams.

To mitigate executive exhaustion and systemic burnout, Fernandez, Clerkin, and Ruderman (2020) formulate the Comprehensive Resilience (CORE) framework. Grounded in Center for Creative Leadership research, the CORE model rejects superficial stress management, defining resilience as an adaptive process requiring continuous engagement across four interconnected human quadrants: physical, mental, emotional, and social resilience. The authors highlight a critical operational paradox: leaders facing extreme structural disruptions instinctively default to an unsustainable loop of working harder, longer, and faster. This reaction sacrifices personal health, generates diminishing performance returns, and accelerates a vicious cycle of resource depletion and severe cognitive burnout.

Table 2. Indicators and Evidence-Based Practices across the CORE Resilience Quadrants

Quadrant	Core Operational Indicators	Evidence-Based Behavioral Practices
Physical Resilience	Biological stamina, biological recovery rate, frontal lobe protection, motor regulation.	Structured sleep hygiene (7–8 hrs), regular aerobic activity, nutritional regulation.
Mental Resilience	Cognitive acuity, focus management, realistic optimism, assumption testing.	Mindfulness meditation, cognitive reappraisal of stressful events, strategic focus blocks.
Emotional Resilience	Affect regulation, impulse control, negativity bias mitigation, emotional savoring.	Emotional journaling, intentional savoring of workplace success, affect labeling.
Social Resilience	Collaborative stress-coping, relational trust, empathy, perceived social support.	Bidirectional peer support networks, expressions of gratitude, safe social disclosure.

To dismantle cognitive burnout loops, Fernandez et al. detail eight evidence-based behavioral practices spanning physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions. Biological foundations—specifically physical activity and structured sleep hygiene—protect frontal lobe functioning to preserve cognitive acuity, emotional perception, and decision-making capabilities. Integrating these physical habits with mindfulness-based meditation, cognitive reappraisal, and emotional savoring systematically mitigates psychological distress, dismantles distorted assumptions, and neutralizes human negativity bias. Furthermore, cultivating social connection, safe contact, and organizational gratitude generates positive gain cycles that enhance perceived workplace support, boost structural performance, and reduce absenteeism. Ultimately, organizations adopting holistic wellness programs secure significant performance advantages as leaders actively role-model a resilient organizational climate.

Operating from an evolutionary organizational framework, Tîmbaliuc (2024) conceptualizes resilience as a continuous process of character development achieved through systematic risk and stress management rather than a static response to external shocks. In volatile environments, leadership resilience acts fluidly and contagiously, propagating across institutional structures via modeling and peer exposure to cultivate a collective resilient mindset. Adapting Ledesma's framework, Tîmbaliuc identifies four essential resilient leadership competencies: resilient thinking (future optimism), capacity building (rest and renewal), resilient execution (creative determination), and encouraging self-efficacy in others. Crucially, organizational flexibility hinges on a unified, clearly articulated mission that provides personal meaning, elevates job satisfaction, reduces turnover, and enhances uncertainty tolerance. By fostering trust, empathy, and interdependent leadership teams, resilient executives dismantle change resistance and organizational fear, significantly reducing operational errors and psychological contract breaches over the long term.

Mapping the commercial implications of executive endurance, Salama (2022) defines resilience as a learnable trait enabling leaders to adjust after setbacks and empathetically guide organizations through discomfort. Salama structures a leadership toolkit around the "7 C's of Resilience"

i. **Competence:** Systematically mapping out existing skills and strengths to accurately identify operational gaps.
ii. **Confidence:** Developing a strong, data-driven belief in personal abilities and past accomplishments.
iii. **Connection:** Investing in a dependable, bidirectional support network of friends, mentors, and peers.
iv. **Character:** Deeply connecting to core moral values and "non-negotiables" to anchor difficult decisions and facilitate self-forgiveness.
v. **Contribution:** Aligning individual performance with a distinct, prosocial mission that improves the wider common good.
vi. **Coping:** Constructing proactive strategies to release stress across distinct mental, emotional, and physical levels.
vii. **Control:** Explicitly recognizing that while external conditions may be unchangeable, an individual preserves full control over internal decisions and behaviors.

To translate the final "C" into business practice, the study coordinates a tripartite sorting exercise that divides worries into a circle of concern (uncontrollable macro-shocks that must be released), a circle of influence (thematic areas requiring collaboration), and a circle of control (issues requiring immediate, decisive solutions).

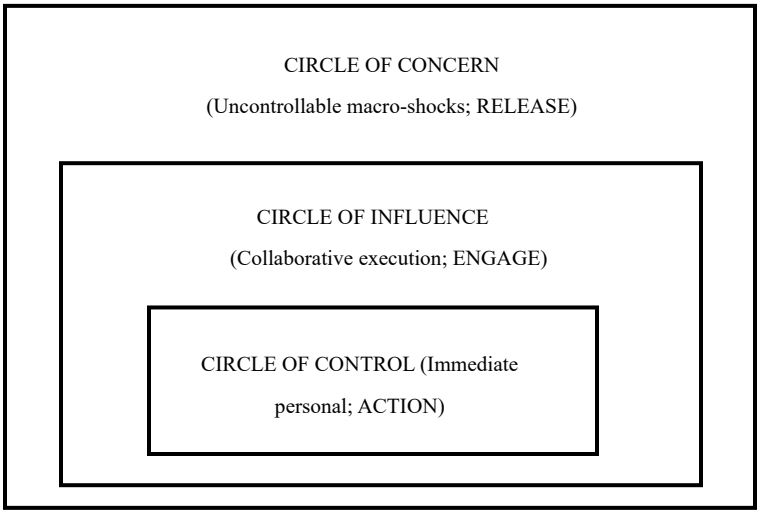


Figure 3. Resilience Spiral framework

Mapping this sorting exercise onto the Resilience Institute's Resilience Spiral illustrates how unresilient practices trigger a downward trajectory toward cognitive overload, disengagement, and institutional failure. Conversely, proactive execution drives organizational vitality through five core capabilities: operational flexibility, strategic agility, solution-focused realism, high emotional intelligence, and an internal locus of control. Investigating crisis leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, Willis and Nadkarny (2020) track senior decision-makers to differentiate Resilient Leadership (individual baseline stamina) from Leadership for Resilience (proactive enhancement of systemic adaptive capacity). Their findings establish that crisis response relies entirely on pre-existing trust and capability investments made during normal times. Synthesizing seventy-five hours of empirical data, the authors formulate a dual strategic matrix balancing technical continuity (landscape monitoring, cash-flow management, and skills-first deployment) with personal and social focus (empathetic communication, integrity, and vulnerability acknowledgment). Leaders execute these strategies by containing anxiety, delegating authority to local frontlines, and leveraging turbulence to accelerate radical organizational innovation. Finally, Lawton Smith's (2012) grounded theory study reframes clinical definitions of resilience, rejecting backward-looking, homeostatic "bounce-back." Instead, executive qualitative data establishes resilience as an inherently future-focused capacity required to navigate unmapped institutional risks and systemic ambiguity.This fundamental insight allows the study to restructure the construct of resilience into an elegant, dual-system architecture comprised of two main components:

- **Capabilities:** The relatively stable, long-term cognitive and behavioral skills—such as logical problem-solving, emotional regulation, self-understanding, and support-seeking—that can be enhanced through explicit education and training.
- **Capacity:** The highly transient, short-term internal energy system and psychological resource reservoir required to actively apply those existing skills to a specific context.

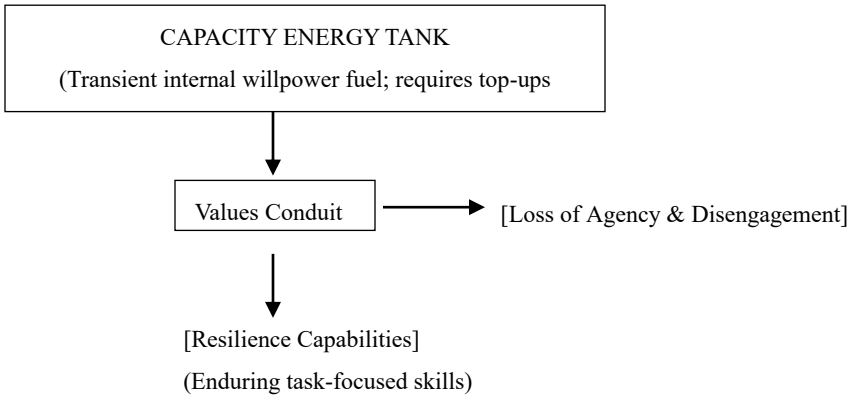


Figure 4. Water-tank model

This division is illustrated through a fluid, resource-based "water-tank" model. A professional

may possess well-developed resilience capabilities yet completely fail to apply them to an organizational challenge because their capacity fuel tank has been emptied by sustained over-demand, lack of recovery time, or ego depletion. The vital conduit or pipe regulating this entire energy stream is an individual's personal value system. When a leader experiences an intense conflict of values or is forced to compromise their core moral principles—such as being required to maintain corporate secrets or execute non-transparent downsizings—a severe “values dilemma” or internal “values paradox” is introduced. This conflict triggers a massive physiological and cognitive drain to suppress the resulting emotional turmoil, rapidly emptying the capacity tank and causing standard task-focused capabilities to completely break down.

To counter this structural vulnerability, Lawton Smith conceptualizes a temporal past-present-future perspective on resilience, establishing that a leader must conquer and learn from the past, exert conscious control and take responsibility in the present, and maintain a hopeful, proactive courage to face risks in the future. Grounded in this temporal taxonomy, executive coaching is shown to enhance leadership resilience through a distinct, nested five-element architecture:

1. **Thinking Space:** Providing a safe, protected space to slow down and reflect.
2. **Supportive Relationships:** Utilizing a neutral, external sounding board to allow emotional disclosure.
3. **Seeing Wider Perspective:** Enabling the leader to step out of immediate tunnel vision onto a broader "balcony".
4. **Learning:** Gaining deep self-awareness and discovering specific behavioral tools.
5. **Reclaiming Self-Belief:** Validating the client's inner capability and logical judgement to dismantle paralyzing self-doubt.

This transformational process surfaces core values, aligns personal constructs, and restores psychological flexibility, thereby replenishing the capacity fuel system to achieve a state of sustainable operational equilibrium.

3.2 Courage and Justice

Bénabou and Tirole (2006) model the structural relationship between individual moral choices and organizational reward architectures, demonstrating that prosocial actions stem from interacting intrinsic motivations, material incentives, and reputational signaling concerns (spanning social peer evaluation and moral self-image preservation). Critically, their model mathematically unmasks *reputational crowding out*: applying explicit transactional incentives to ethical landscapes tarnishes moral clarity, introducing public suspicion of extrinsic greed and converting courageous advocacy into perceived self-interest. Complementing this framework, Vieweg (2018) maps prosocial workplace behavior along a continuum from intrinsic altruism to egoistic impression management, proving that individuals grounded in value-centric principalism exhibit a

significantly higher risk tolerance for ethical advocacy than those dependent on external validation. Consequently, transformational Values-Based Education (VBE) design must prioritize internal self-signaling—reinforcing core character structures—rather than relying on transactional validation metrics that collapse once material rewards dissipate.

Expanding beyond simplistic models of workplace cooperation, Bolino and Grant (2016) analyze the hidden individual liabilities of extra-role organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). Continuous extra-role tasks—such as challenging systemic corporate biases—frequently induce role overload, temporal constraints, and psychological exhaustion, leaving change agents who lack diversified internal resources vulnerable to early-career paralysis. Thus, moral courage cannot function as an isolated individual act. Lovett et al. (2026) substantiate this by evaluating the social psychological dynamics of collective action under duress, establishing that structural isolation magnifies the perceived risks of ethical dissent, prompting conformity and silence. Conversely, peer-to-peer trust networks multiply individual moral courage; building transparent, values-aligned alliances expands an organization's collective capacity to absorb corporate backlash. Higher education career services must therefore construct collaborative peer networks and team-based ethical labs to distribute the cognitive load of advocacy while preserving personal well-being.

Individual moral convictions remain highly vulnerable to institutional inertia without robust organizational safeguards. Chernyshenko, Kankaraš, and Drasgow (2018) detail the policy architecture required to convert personal ethical intentions into weight-bearing structural governance. Positioning integrity as a strategic asset essential for sustaining societal trust, they demonstrate that localized moral convictions fail unless embedded within formal accountability metrics, conflict-of-interest legislation, and transparent audit protocols. Concurrently, Turhan et al. (2026) examine the socio-technical threats confronting emerging professionals, revealing that digital violence and online hostility trigger passive emotional suppression, behavioral withdrawal, and agency paralysis. To prepare effective change agents, VBE curricula must move beyond subjective ethical choices, training students to master macro-structural governance frameworks while embedding digital resilience protocols that safeguard psychological safety across distributed organizational environments.

The operationalization of employee voice under hostile corporate constraints depends heavily on cognitive efficacy and threat processing. Kirrane et al. (2025) utilize a threat-appraisal matrix to show that transitioning from a passive witness to an active change agent requires elevated moral fortitude to overcome toxic compliance climates. Similarly, Liu et al. (2025) deploy structural equation modeling to prove that hyper-focusing on rapid technical execution creates toxic compliance environments that silence dissent. However, professionals possessing strong internal loci of control, elevated moral self-efficacy, and ethical self-leadership navigate corporate gray zones without succumbing to performance anxiety. By mastering cognitive reappraisal, graduates separate core personal identities from temporary corporate structures, preserving functional energy to execute risk-bearing voice focused on institutional sustainability.

Fostering an institutional climate of values-driven leadership requires fundamentally restructuring vocational pedagogy. Oleen-Junk (2018) unmasks a critical baseline limitation in traditional vocational preparation, proving that passive, lecture-based ethics instruction fails to translate into risk-bearing action within ambiguous corporate environments. Transitioning students from pre-conventional career survival to post-conventional moral principalism requires transformational learning environments that utilize experiential, practice-based problem-solving. Routinely exposing students to high-stakes ethical dilemmas within active learning protocols cultivates internal loci of control, heightened moral sensitivity, and the behavioral self-efficacy necessary to resist unethical directives and enforce systemic accountability.

A systematic synthesis of the literature across the specified research questions reveals several critical dynamics governing the operationalization of courage and justice within values-based professional identity development.

Table 3. Analysis of Courage and Justice

Analytical Focus	Core Empirical Insights Extracted from Literature	Targeted Behavioral & Curricular Outcome
I. Incentive & Signaling Mechanics	Material rewards create reputational crowding out, undermining the moral clarity of ethical advocacy.	Career tracks prioritize internal self-signaling and character alignment over transactional, external validation metrics.
II. Social Costs & Voice Liabilities	Extra-role advocacy causes role overload, time constraints, and deep psychological depletion.	Curriculum develops collaborative support networks and peer sounding boards to distribute the cognitive load of dissent.
III. Socio-Technical Hostility	Digital violence triggers passive emotional suppression, safe behavioral withdrawal, and paralysis of agency.	Training builds collective cyber-resilience protocols, preparing change agents to actively enforce digital workplace justice.
IV. Macro-Structural Governance	Individual character virtues fail without transparent institutional channels, audits, and compliance policies.	Graduates transition from subjective ethics to mastering macro-structural governance, anti-corruption, and accountability policies.

The primary finding extracted from secondary field data indicates that when values internalization and character development are positioned at the center of vocational preparation, students successfully transition from a state of simple *vocational identity* (what they do) to a highly resilient *purposeful identity* (why they do it). Graduates trained under this transformational paradigm demonstrate a significantly more balanced time perspective, allowing them to remain completely

anchored in the current present reality while aggressively executing long-term contingency planning for future industry risks.

3.3 Ethical Decision-Making

Bonde and Firenze (2017) present a multi-lens ethical decision-making framework that synthesizes five classical philosophical traditions: utilitarian welfare maximization, rights-based dignity, fairness, common good interdependencies, and virtue ethics. Because rapid technological innovation generates socio-technical complexities that confuse unreflective moral intuition, their model establishes a deliberate cognitive pipeline—progressing from problem recognition and fact-gathering to option testing and reflective evaluation. This structured process replaces ad-hoc compliance with sustained analytical discipline. Expanding this pluralistic approach, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2015) evaluates corporate conflicts across eight distinct philosophical windows (including deontology, teleology, justice theory, and the ethics of care). The CIPD monograph demonstrates that identical operational dilemmas yield divergent trade-offs depending on the analytical lens applied; a utility-maximizing market solution under a teleological framework may register as a severe breach of duty under a deontological perspective. Consequently, leaders must navigate workplace dilemmas not as simple dichotomies of right versus wrong, but as complex clashes between competing moral truths, leveraging multiple traditions to achieve balanced governance.

Addressing practitioner accountability and boundary maintenance, Maguire (2021) unmasks the limitations of explicit legal mandates, proving that passive regulatory compliance cannot guarantee true moral responsibility. Maguire formulates a process model of ethical supervision wherein professionals engage in continuous internal dialogue and external peer review to expose unconscious biases, manage boundary transgressions, and maintain relational ethics against organizational pressures. Concurrently, Frame and Williams (2005) expose the deep limitations of standard, Eurocentric decision frameworks, critiquing their unexamined universalist reliance on individual autonomy, abstract logic, and linear problem-solving. Frame and Williams introduce a transformational multicultural paradigm that integrates cultural pluralism directly into ethical processing. By shifting the locus of moral evaluation from isolated individual autonomy to a collaborative matrix grounded in collective harmony, familial interdependencies, and contextual background factors, their framework requires practitioners to execute power audits and practice cultural humility, validating alternative epistemological traditions rather than relying on color-blind logic.

In contemporary corporate environments, 21st-century disruptions—such as algorithmic management, technological surveillance, big data aggregation, and fluid remote-work boundaries—introduce acute operational gray zones. Banks et al. (2021) demonstrate how these socio-technical shifts frequently trap industrial-organizational specialists in a toxic "dual-client" paradox, forcing them to negotiate constant tension between corporate financial demands and workforce psychological well-being. To resolve this structural trap, Banks et al. formulate an

integrative decision framework that aligns professional psychological codes with corporate governance policies. Their model demonstrates that protecting professional boundaries and executing risk-bearing voice require practitioners to move beyond superficial compliance checklists, leveraging systemic threat appraisals to design transparent, data-driven codes of organizational accountability.

Deconstructing the internal cognitive mechanisms of ethical execution, Drumwright et al. (2015) synthesize James Rest's Four-Component Model—Moral Sensitivity, Judgment, Intent, and Character—with Thomas Jones' Issue-Contingency Theory. They prove that ethical failure rarely stems from missing philosophical knowledge; instead, cognitive biases, organizational pressures, and situational factors disrupt specific points in the cognitive sequence. Jones' moral intensity parameters (such as magnitude of consequences and social consensus) dictate whether an actor successfully transitions from moral recognition to active moral behavior. Finally, McDonald et al. (2006) evaluate the pedagogical strategies needed to reinforce this cognitive pipeline and build long-term ethical stamina. Their empirical tracking unmasks the failure of traditional, lecture-based instruction, proving that passive memorization of abstract regulatory codes fails to produce courageous ethical action during high-pressure crises. McDonald et al. demonstrate that cultivating moral self-efficacy requires active, experiential learning models—incorporating cross-boundary case analysis, moral role-playing, and structured self-reflection logs—thereby providing emerging professionals with the internal self-regulation needed to withstand unethical organizational duress. A comprehensive evaluation across alternative disciplines unmasks several convergent findings regarding the operationalization of ethical decision-making frameworks.

Table 4. Analysis of Ethical Decision-Making

Analytical Focus	Core Empirical Insights Extracted from Literature	Curricular & Practitioner Outcome
I. Cognitive Architecture	Rest's linear processing sequence depends heavily on Jones' issue-contingent moral intensity parameters.	Curricula target behavioral interventions to reinforce each specific stage of the moral cognitive pipeline.
II. Philosophical Pluralism	Identical corporate conflicts yield competing moral options when viewed through alternative analytical lenses.	Leaders utilize multiple philosophical traditions to achieve balanced, transparent organizational governance.
III. Multicultural Pluralism	universalist individualistic models ignore power differentials and alternative worldviews.	Frameworks require explicit cultural humility, shifting the moral locus toward collective harmony.
IV. Systemic Governance	Individual moral convictions are easily neutralized without formal audit tracks and whistleblower protections.	Programs transition from passive compliance to the design of transparent corporate policy metrics.

The primary finding derived from this cross-disciplinary synthesis indicates that ethical decision-making cannot be evaluated as an isolated individual competency or static personality trait. Rather, EDM behaves as a dynamic, systemic process where individual cognitive variables—such as internal locus of control and moral reasoning maturity—are constantly moderated by institutional frameworks, socio-technical changes, and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, empirical tracking confirms that passive, compliance-based instruction fails to produce risk-bearing professional action, highlighting that to successfully transition from career survival to purposeful ethical leadership, emerging change agents must undergo active, experiential training that builds behavioral self-efficacy alongside structural accountability mechanisms.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs in a qualitative document analysis design utilizing criterion-based purposive sampling design to construct the Values-Based Education (VBE) framework for higher education career development. Given the structural mismatch between traditional transactional career models and the volatile, ethically complex contemporary workforce, a document analysis approach allows for the integration of cross-disciplinary literature to solve systemic vocational challenges. The methodology systematically analyzes literature and theoretical models across three core operational pillars:

- Pillar I: Resilience & Leadership, focusing on adaptive capacity, executive endurance, and systemic crisis navigation.
- Pillar II: Courage & Justice, addressing prosocial behavior, extra-role advocacy, moral fortitude, and structural equity.
- Pillar III: Ethical Decision-Making Skills, examining cognitive moral development, moral intensity, and multi-lens ethical frameworks.

4.2 Document Corpus and Eligibility Criteria

Addressing methodological rigor, documents were selected via a criterion-based purposive sampling strategy across three target academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search protocol covered publications from 2005 to 2026 using Boolean keyword combinations. Documents were selected and categorized based on their direct relevance to the three core VBE pillars:

1. Resilience & Leadership Literature: Includes systematic literature reviews on resilient leadership (Ramadhani et al., 2024), higher education leadership models (Sanaghan, 2016), holistic wellness frameworks (Fernandez et al., 2020), knowledge economy determinants

(Tîmbaliuc, 2024), executive endurance toolkits (Salama, 2022), crisis-response leadership studies (Willis & Nadkarny, 2020), and grounded theory coaching frameworks (Lawton Smith, 2012).

2. Courage & Justice Literature**:** Includes behavioral economic modeling of incentives (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006), organizational citizenship behavior reviews (Bolino & Grant, 2016), social and emotional skills frameworks (Chernyshenko et al., 2018), corporate dark triad and OCB studies (Kirrane et al., 2025), moderated mediation models of prosocial behavior (Liu et al., 2025), qualitative studies on digital violence and resilience (Turhan et al., 2026), prosocial motivation analyses (Vieweg, 2018), scoping reviews on prosocial intervention measures (Lovett et al., 2026), and moral reasoning complexity in social justice education (Oleen-Junk, 2018).

3. Ethical Decision-Making Literature: Includes multi-lens decision frameworks (Bonde & Firenze / Brown University, 2017; CIPD, 2015), relational ethics paradigms (Maguire, 2021), multicultural ethical decision-making models (Frame & Williams, 2005), 21st-century industrial-organizational psychology frameworks (Banks et al., 2021), behavioral ethics and cognitive models combining Rest's Four-Component Model with Jones' Moral Intensity (Drumwright et al., 2015), and empirical teaching models for graduate students (McDonald et al., 2006).

4.3 Data Extraction and Thematic Analysis Procedure

Data extraction and analysis follow a qualitative thematic synthesis approach, designed to extract core empirical insights and translate them into targeted behavioral, curricular, and leadership outcomes.

The thematic analysis process is executed through four sequential phases:

1. Phase 1: Deductive Theoretical Alignment: Extracted concepts are mapped onto the overarching theoretical framework, specifically aligning document insights with Aristotelian Virtue Ethics (*phronesis*), Social Cognitive Career Theory (value-congruence and self-efficacy), and Jack Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory as expanded by Lovat (2022).

2. Phase 2: Pillar-Specific Inductive Coding: Textual data from the document corpus are coded inductively to identify recurring challenges, paradoxes, and behavioral mechanisms within each pillar:

    i. *Resilience & Leadership Coding:* Identifies sub-themes such as the Stockdale Paradox, the 7 C's of Resilience, the CORE wholistic quadrants, "Resilient Leadership" versus "Leadership for Resilience," and the capacity "water-tank" resource model.

ii. *Courage & Justice Coding:* Identifies sub-themes such as reputational crowding out, extra-role voice liabilities, threat-appraisal matrices, digital violence risk/resilience, and the shift from vocational identity to purposeful identity.

iii. *Ethical Decision-Making Coding:* Identifies sub-themes such as Rest's Four-Component pipeline (Sensitivity, Judgment, Motivation, Character), Jones' Moral Intensity dimensions, 21st-century dual-client paradoxes, and multicultural ethical integration.

3. Phase 3: Cross-Disciplinary Synthesis: Coded categories are synthesized into comparative matrix tables to align empirical findings directly with targeted educational and workforce outcomes.

4. Phase 4: Problem-Solving Formulation: Thematic findings are compiled to recommend actionable solutions for higher education career centers, preparing graduates to shift from transactional career survival to purpose-driven leadership.

4.4 Methodological Rigor and Conceptual Trustworthiness

Methodological rigor and conceptual trustworthiness are maintained through the following protocols:

1. Triangulation of Theoretical Threads: To avoid disciplinary insularity, thematic findings are cross verified across philosophical, psychological, and adult learning frameworks.

2. Cross-Document Analytical Consistency: Extracted themes are validated across empirical, qualitative, and theoretical source documents to ensure accurate representation of findings.

3. Conceptual Alignment: Synthesized outcomes are mapped directly onto the three core pillars (Resilience & Leadership, Courage & Justice, Ethical Decision-Making Skills) to ensure complete alignment with the VBE framework's goal of transforming vocational preparation.

5. Results

5.1 Overview of Synthesized Findings

Qualitative synthesis across foundational texts demonstrates that transactional, market-driven university career services fail to prepare graduates for volatile economic disruptions and ethical gray zones. Redefining vocational readiness requires shifting from value-neutral technical skill alignment (techne) to an integrated paradigm centered on moral character, cognitive self-regulation, and institutional accountability systems across three structural pillars: (i) Resilience & Leadership, (ii) Courage & Justice, and (iii) Ethical Decision-Making Skills.

5.2 Pillar I Results: Resilience & Leadership Dynamics

The leadership synthesis establishes executive resilience as a future-focused, multi-system capacity rather than a passive, homeostatic "bounce-back." Lawton Smith (2012) identifies a structural division between enduring cognitive-behavioral *capabilities* and transient willpower *capacity*. Value conflicts and corporate pressure drain this "capacity energy tank," undermining task-focused capabilities and precipitating burnout. At the organizational scale, resilient leadership acts contagiously across institutional hierarchies, reducing employee turnover intentions and driving collective adaptability (Ramadhani et al., 2024; Tîmbaliuc, 2024). Willis and Nadkarny (2020) distinguish individual stamina ("Resilient Leadership") from the systemic cultivation of institutional adaptive capacity ("Leadership for Resilience"), proving that crisis management relies on pre-existing trust reservoirs.

Complementing systemic dynamics, individual resilience architecture integrates stark operational realism—Jim Collins' Stockdale Paradox—with ennobling purpose and *bricolage* (Sanaghan, 2016). Salama (2022) operationalizes executive endurance through the "7 C's of Resilience" and a control-matrix that categorizes environmental shocks into circles of concern, influence, and control to mitigate cognitive overload. Furthermore, Fernandez et al. (2020) formulate the CORE framework, establishing that maintaining resilience across four overlapping human quadrants—physical, mental, emotional, and social—preserves frontal lobe functioning, cognitive acuity, and emotional regulation under duress.

5.3 Pillar II Results: Courage, Justice, and Prosocial Mechanics

Synthesis for Pillar II demonstrates that workplace advocacy operates within behavioral economic, socio-technical, and organizational citizenship frameworks. Bénabou and Tirole (2006) mathematically model reputational crowding out, proving that financial incentives tarnish altruistic signaling by introducing suspicions of greed, thereby depressing prosocial motivation. Examining workplace dynamics, Bolino and Grant (2016) reveal the "dark side" of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), showing that unsupported extra-role dissent causes severe role overload and citizenship fatigue. Vieweg (2018) corroborates that value-centric principalism provides a more durable foundation for organizational health than transactional impression management. In high-stakes settings, Kirrane et al. (2025) demonstrate that while corporate psychopathy's meanness reduces OCB, its "boldness" facet positively predicts risk-bearing voice. Liu et al. (2025) establish via structural equation modeling that Belief in a Just World drives Prosocial Behavior Tendency through Psychological Resilience, with Empathic Capacity serving as a crucial resource multiplier.

At structural levels, Chernyshenko et al. (2018) prove that individual moral convictions fail under institutional inertia without formal public integrity policies, conflict-of-interest mandates, and whistleblower protections. Turhan et al. (2026) show that socio-technical hostility and digital violence induce passive emotional withdrawal unless mitigated by digital literacy, peer sounding boards, and collective cyber-resilience. Scoping prosocial measurement methodology, Lovett et

al. (2026) identify a major psychometric reporting gap across 531 studies (79% omitting validity data). Finally, Oleen-Junk (2018) links social justice consciousness to the Model of Hierarchical Complexity, demonstrating that higher-order moral reasoning drives ethnocultural empathy and activism.

5.4 Pillar III Results: Ethical Decision-Making Architectures & Cognitive Models.

Ethical decision-making (EDM) literature demonstrates that moral processing constitutes a multi-stage cognitive pipeline vulnerable to structural breakdown. Drumwright et al. (2015) integrate James Rest's Four-Component Model (Sensitivity, Judgment, Motivation, Character) with Thomas Jones' Issue-Contingency Theory, proving that ethical failure stems from cognitive biases, situational pressures, and moral intensity parameters rather than theoretical ignorance. Normative frameworks provide analytical lenses to navigate these vulnerabilities: Bonde and Firenze (2017) synthesize five classical philosophical approaches (Utilitarian, Rights, Justice, Common Good, Virtue), while the CIPD (2015) expands this into eight workplace lenses, demonstrating that corporate dilemmas yield conflicting "right versus right" choices depending on the chosen lens.

In applied contexts, Frame and Williams (2005) critique Eurocentric, individualistic EDM models for ignoring power differentials, proposing a multicultural paradigm grounded in cultural humility and contextual interdependencies. Banks et al. (2021) address 21st-century gray zones—such as algorithmic surveillance—offering an integrative framework to resolve the "dual-client" tension between corporate financial demands and worker well-being. Evaluating Treviño's Interactionist Model, Maguire (2021) demonstrates that an individual's internal locus of control and ego strength dictate whether they withstand profit-maximizing corporate pressures. Finally, McDonald et al. (2006) validate experiential graduate pedagogy combining film vignettes, case studies, and Kitchener's five ethical principles to bridge abstract moral reasoning and real-world execution.

6. Discussion

6.1 Theoretical Integration & Paradigm Shift

The synthesized findings confirm that a transformational Values-Based Education (VBE) model offers a robust, multidisciplinary framework for higher education career development. Traditional paradigms treat vocational preparation as value-neutral skill matching (techne), leaving graduates ethically vulnerable in volatile markets. Grounded in Aristotelian Virtue Ethics, VBE establishes that genuine professional excellence requires practical moral wisdom (phronesis). Synthesizing Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and Transformational Learning Theory operationalizes this philosophical foundation. Integrating values into SCCT loops anchors outcome expectations in intrinsic moral alignment, enhancing long-term job satisfaction and occupational persistence (Duffy et al., 2022). Concurrently, applying Mezirow's

Transformational Learning Theory—as operationalized by Lovat (2022)—introduces disorienting dilemmas into the vocational curriculum, shifting students from an instrumental focus on economic survival to an emancipatory perspective centered on prosocial contribution, equity, and public integrity.

6.2 Practical Implications for University Career Services

These findings provide actionable guidance for restructuring university career advising beyond short-term placement metrics. Adopting whole-self coaching models—incorporating the CORE framework (Fernandez et al., 2020), the 7 C's (Salama, 2022), and the capacity "water-tank" model (Lawton Smith, 2012)—enables students to manage psychological energy reserves and prevent early-career burnout. Furthermore, career centers must establish experiential "Ethical and Resilience Labs" utilizing Giving Voice to Values (Drumwright et al., 2015) and case-study models (McDonald et al., 2006) to rehearse pre-scripted responses to ethical dilemmas. Analyzing scenarios through multi-lens (Bonde & Firenze, 2017; CIPD, 2015) and multicultural frameworks (Frame & Williams, 2005) builds moral efficacy. Additionally, constructing collaborative peer networks distributes the cognitive and emotional load of extra-role advocacy, protecting change agents from isolation and citizenship fatigue (Bolino & Grant, 2016; Lovett et al., 2026).

6.3 Research Limitations

Several methodological and institutional limitations must be acknowledged:

1. Secondary Document Methodology: The synthesis relies on qualitative document analysis of secondary literature rather than primary empirical intervention trials.
2. Institutional Variations: Higher education career services operate within heterogeneous structural, regional, and funding contexts, which may impact the uniform implementation of VBE labs.
3. Psychometric Reporting Gaps: As highlighted by Lovett et al. (2026), 79% of prosocial intervention studies omit validity data, limiting standardized measurement of moral courage and prosocial outcomes.

6.4 Future Research Agenda

Future scholarship should advance the VBE framework across three key domains:

1. Longitudinal Impact Tracking: Executing 5-, 10-, and 15-year graduate tracking studies to empirically compare VBE outcomes against traditional career services regarding persistence, satisfaction, ethical self-leadership, and burnout rates.
2. Psychometric Standardization: Developing and standardizing multi-informant assessment tools to address measurement gaps in prosocial behavior, moral courage, and resilience (Lovett et al., 2026).

3. Cross-Cultural Validation: Validating virtue ethics, SCCT value-congruence, and multicultural decision models (Frame & Williams, 2005) across diverse non-Western global contexts.

7. Conclusion

The contemporary higher education landscape exhibits a profound structural mismatch between transactional, placement-driven vocational models and the volatile, ethically ambiguous global workforce. Traditional paradigms hyper-focusing on short-term employment statistics fail to equip graduates for systemic disruptions. Establishing a transformational Values-Based Education (VBE) framework transitions career services from passive placement mechanisms into active character builders, grounding professional identity in moral virtues and purpose-driven leadership. VBE operationalizes this shift through three weight-bearing pillars:

1. Resilience & Leadership: Reconceptualizes executive endurance as a future-focused capacity, managing internal energy reserves across physical, mental, emotional, and social wellness quadrants.
2. Courage & Justice: Mitigates reputational crowding out and constructs collective support networks to empower workplace advocacy against corporate wrongdoing and digital hostility.
3. Ethical Decision-Making: Synthesizes Rest's Four-Component Model with Jones' Issue-Contingency Framework, employing multi-lens and multicultural perspectives to resolve complex gray-zone dilemmas.

Theoretically, VBE bridges technical mastery (techne) and practical moral wisdom (phronesis) by synthesizing Aristotelian Virtue Ethics, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), and Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory. Integrating core personal values into SCCT cognitive loops fosters value-congruent trajectories that minimize resource-draining internal conflicts and enhance career persistence. Concurrently, transformational learning architectures deploy disorienting dilemmas to shift student mindsets from transactional economic survival toward an emancipatory platform for civic responsibility and prosocial contribution. Ultimately, embedding VBE fulfills higher education's foundational social contract. By internalizing these pillars, graduates emerge not as value-neutral technical commodities, but as resilient, purpose-driven moral anchors equipped to build an operationally adaptive, transparent, and just global workforce.

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Author Statements

Acknowledgments

The author would like to extend the gratitude to Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) that helped managed the publications.

Author Contributions

Not applicable.

Consent for Publication

All authors have read and approved the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Ethics Approval

Obtained.

Data Availability Statement

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the conception, design, analysis, interpretation, or writing of this manuscript.

Supplementary Materials

No supplementary materials are available.

Journal Information

Ethics Statement

The journal follows publication-ethics policies informed by current COPE guidance.

Preservation Policy

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