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Business Ethics and Legal Factors in MSME Development: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the development of research on business ethics and legal factors in micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) through a systematic literature review of Scopus-indexed publications. The study aims to identify the main themes and research trends in this field and to examine how business ethics and legal factors contribute to MSME development, sustainability, and business practices. Using the PRISMA 2020 framework, 75 articles published between 2017 and 2026 were selected from the Scopus database based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer to examine keyword co-occurrence, density, temporal trends, network relationships, and thematic clusters. The findings indicate that the literature is predominantly organized around business ethics, sustainability, corporate social responsibility, MSME development, and organizational governance. The overlay analysis reveals a shift from earlier research emphasizing ethical practices and governance toward emerging themes including sustainability, ethical leadership, ESG, innovation, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and eco-innovation. Legal and regulatory factors appear as a comparatively fragmented dimension, represented through tax compliance, financial reporting, certification, business law, regulatory compliance, and Islamic economic law. The network and thematic analyses further show that business ethics is closely connected with sustainability, leadership, governance, stakeholders, and innovation, whereas legal factors are more strongly associated with compliance, accountability, and institutional requirements. The study concludes that business ethics and legal factors represent complementary dimensions of MSME development and highlights the need for integrated research connecting ethics, legal compliance, governance, and sustainable MSME development.

Keywords: Business; Ethics; Governance; Legal; MSMEs; Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) constitute an important component of economic and social development in many countries. Beyond their contribution to employment and income generation, MSMEs play a significant role in local economic activity, entrepreneurship, innovation, and community development. However, the development of MSMEs is not determined solely by financial resources, market access, or technological capabilities. Increasing attention has been directed toward the behavioral, ethical, institutional, and regulatory dimensions that shape how small businesses operate and sustain their activities. Within this context, business ethics and legal factors have become increasingly relevant because MSMEs operate within environments characterized by relationships with employees, customers, suppliers, governments, communities, and other stakeholders. Ethical conduct and compliance with formal rules can therefore influence how MSMEs build trust, manage relationships, respond to risks, and pursue sustainable development (Abalala et al., 2021; Belas et al., 2026; Turyakira, 2018) .

Business ethics is particularly important because MSMEs frequently face decisions involving fairness, transparency, responsibility, employee treatment, customer relationships, and competition. Existing studies demonstrate that ethical considerations are embedded in the everyday management and decision-making of SMEs rather than being limited to large corporations. (Siraj et al., 2025; Suprianto, Arhas, et al., 2026; Turyakira, 2018) examined ethical practices among SMEs in developing countries,

while (Belás et al., 2020) investigated entrepreneurs' perceptions of the importance of business ethics. Subsequent research has connected ethical behavior with knowledge sharing, ethical competence, organizational performance, and employee outcomes (Enz et al., 2021; Mura et al., 2021; Onu et al., 2019) . More recently, ethical leadership and CSR have been examined in relation to employee performance and sustainable development, indicating that ethical values can become embedded within organizational leadership and management practices (Aftab et al., 2022; Atobishi & Podruzsik, 2025) . These developments suggest that business ethics is increasingly understood as an organizational dimension that may contribute to responsible and sustainable MSME development.

The importance of business ethics is also increasingly connected with sustainability, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) concerns. Research has demonstrated relationships between ethical and CSR factors and SME sustainability (Belas et al., 2022; Suprianto, Andi, et al., 2026) , while other studies have examined CSR implementation, business ethics, and ESG perceptions among SMEs (Zvaríková et al., 2024; Belas et al., 2024). The literature has further expanded toward contemporary issues such as digital transformation, artificial intelligence, Industry 4.0, and eco-innovation. (Kumar et al., 2020) examined Industry 4.0 technologies in relation to ethical and sustainable SME operations, whereas Kulkarni et al. (2024) investigated AI readiness in relation to social sustainability and business ethics among MSMEs. More recently, (Ferreras-Méndez & Ortega-Colomer, 2026) linked corporate ethics with eco-innovation among SMEs. This expansion demonstrates that ethical considerations are increasingly situated within broader processes of technological, environmental, and organizational transformation.

Alongside ethics, legal and regulatory factors provide an important institutional dimension of MSME development. MSMEs operate within formal requirements concerning taxation, financial reporting, licensing, certification, employment, consumer protection, environmental standards, and other regulatory obligations. Legal compliance can establish minimum standards for business conduct while also providing institutional certainty and accountability. Nevertheless, the existing literature appears to address legal factors through relatively specific and fragmented research streams. For example, (Msechu et al., 2024) examined compliance with IFRS for SMEs, while (Manyanga et al., 2025) investigated tax policy and tax compliance among SMEs. Other studies have addressed certification and socio-legal dimensions of business practices, while (Adam et al., 2023; Munawaroh et al., 2025) examined e-commerce adoption among handicraft SMEs from the perspective of contemporary Islamic economic law. These studies indicate that legal factors influence MSME practices through specific institutional mechanisms, but their relationship with broader ethical business practices remains insufficiently consolidated.

This fragmentation creates an important research gap. Existing studies have generated substantial knowledge concerning business ethics, CSR, sustainability, governance, and regulatory compliance, but these dimensions are frequently examined separately or within specific contexts. Consequently, there remains a need to synthesize how the literature collectively conceptualizes the relationship between business ethics, legal and regulatory factors, and MSME development. A systematic examination is particularly important because ethical conduct and legal compliance represent related but distinct dimensions of responsible business behavior. Ethical practices may extend beyond minimum legal requirements, while legal and regulatory frameworks establish formal institutional boundaries within which MSMEs operate. Understanding their intersection can provide a more comprehensive picture of the factors shaping sustainable and responsible MSME development.

Therefore, this study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of Scopus-indexed publications from 2017 to 2026 to map the development of research concerning business ethics and legal factors in MSME development. The study combines bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer with thematic synthesis to identify dominant themes, emerging research trends, conceptual relationships, and the position of legal and regulatory issues within the literature. Specifically, the study addresses two research questions: RQ1: What are the main themes and research trends concerning business ethics and legal factors in MSME development identified in the literature? and RQ2: How do business ethics and legal factors influence or contribute to MSME development, sustainability, and business practices? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to consolidate fragmented knowledge and provide a clearer research agenda for understanding ethical and institutional dimensions of MSME development.

METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to identify, examine, and synthesize the existing literature on business ethics and legal factors in MSME development. The review followed the PRISMA 2020 framework, which provides a transparent procedure for identifying, screening, assessing eligibility, and selecting relevant studies (Page et al., 2021) . The literature search was conducted using the Scopus database, with the search strategy formulated around three main concepts: business ethics, legal and regulatory factors, and MSMEs. The Scopus search was performed using the TITLE-ABS-KEY field with the following search string:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("business ethic" OR "ethical business*" OR "ethical practice*" OR "ethical behavior*" OR "ethical behaviour*" OR "corporate ethic*") AND ("law" OR "legal" OR "legislation" OR "regulation*" OR "regulatory" OR "legal compliance" OR "regulatory compliance" OR "legal environment" OR "regulatory environment" OR "legal framework" OR "regulatory framework") AND ("MSME*" OR "micro small and medium enterprise*" OR "micro and small enterprise*" OR "small and medium enterprise*" OR "SME*" OR "small business*" OR "microenterprise*" OR "micro-enterprise*").*

The search was limited to publications from 2017 to 2026, written in English, and classified as articles. The search and filtering process resulted in 75 documents that constituted the dataset for the review. Studies were retained when they were substantively related to business ethics, legal or regulatory factors, and MSME/SME contexts, while publications outside the defined document type, language, period, or research focus were excluded. The systematic selection process was conducted in accordance with PRISMA 2020 to ensure transparency and reproducibility (Page et al., 2021).

The bibliographic data from the 75 selected documents were subsequently analyzed using VOSviewer to map the thematic and conceptual structure of the literature. Bibliometric analysis is useful for identifying relationships among research concepts, examining the development of research themes, and visualizing the intellectual structure of a research field (Donthu et al., 2021; Van Eck & Waltman, 2010) . Keyword co-occurrence analysis was used as the principal mapping technique. For RQ1, density visualization was used to identify the most prominent research themes, while overlay visualization was used to examine the temporal development of these themes across the 2017–2026 period. For RQ2, network visualization was combined with thematic cluster analysis to examine the relationships among business ethics, legal and regulatory factors, sustainability, and MSME development. The thematic interpretation was conducted by examining the studies associated with the identified clusters and synthesizing their recurring concepts, research contexts, and findings. This combination of SLR, bibliometric mapping, and thematic synthesis allows the study to move beyond publication counts and keyword frequencies toward a more substantive understanding of the development, relationships, and research gaps within the field (Donthu et al., 2021; Snyder, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The systematic literature review identified 75 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2017 and 2026 addressing business ethics, legal and regulatory dimensions, and MSME-related issues. To identify the dominant themes and their development over time, the bibliographic data were analyzed using VOSviewer through keyword density visualization and overlay visualization. The density visualization was used to identify the most prominent thematic areas within the literature, whereas the overlay visualization was used to examine how the focus of research has developed across the publication period. The combination of these two analyses provides an overview not only of the themes that dominate the literature but also of the changing orientation of research on business ethics and MSME development.

1. Dominant Themes in the Literature

The keyword analysis of 75 Scopus-indexed publications reveals that research on business ethics and MSME development is concentrated around several interconnected themes, particularly business ethics, sustainability, SMEs, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, corporate governance, ethics, innovation, leadership, and circular economy. The density visualization shows that

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business ethics, sustainability, SMEs, and small and medium-sized enterprises form the most prominent areas in the intellectual structure of the reviewed literature. This indicates that ethical issues in MSMEs are predominantly discussed in relation to broader concerns of organizational sustainability and responsible business practices rather than as isolated ethical questions.

The density visualization demonstrates that the literature is concentrated around several interconnected concepts, particularly business ethics, SMEs, sustainability, corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainable development, corporate governance, ethics, leadership, innovation, and circular economy. Among these terms, *business ethics*, *SMEs*, *sustainability*, and *corporate social responsibility* occupy relatively prominent positions in the keyword landscape. Based on the Scopus keyword data, *business ethics* appears in 21 documents, followed by *SMEs* in 15 documents, *sustainability* in 14 documents, and *corporate social responsibility* in 11 documents. This pattern indicates that ethical issues in MSMEs are predominantly discussed in relation to broader questions of sustainability, responsible business conduct, organizational governance, and stakeholder relationships.

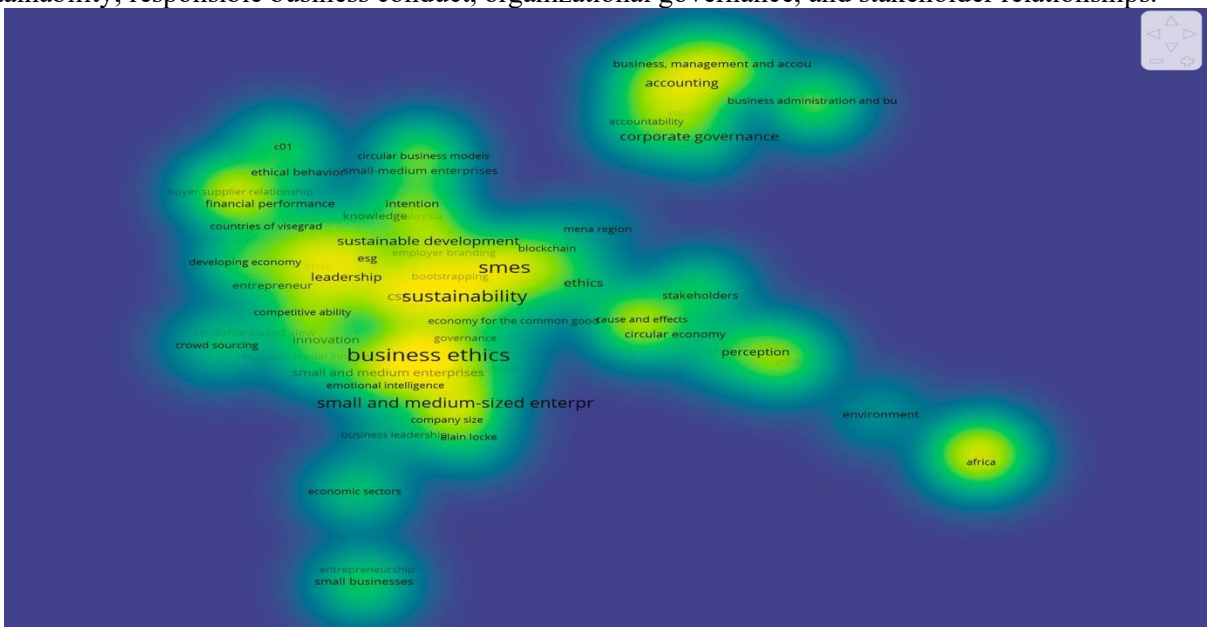


Figure 1: Density Visualization of Keywords in Research on Business Ethics and MSME Development

Source: VOSViewer Output, 2026

The prominence of business ethics in the density map reflects its continued importance as a dimension of MSME management and responsible business conduct. Earlier studies positioned ethics within everyday SME practices and decision-making, including ethical practices in developing countries (Turyakira, 2018) , entrepreneurs' perceptions of business ethics (Belás et al., 2020) , and ethical perceptions among employees of small retail firms (Rambe & Ndofirepi, 2017) . Subsequent research expanded this perspective toward ethical decision-making, ethical competence, knowledge sharing, and organizational performance (Abalala et al., 2021; Enz et al., 2021; Mura et al., 2021; Onu et al., 2019) . The strong proximity of *business ethics* to *sustainability*, *CSR*, and *SMEs* in the density map further indicates that ethical conduct is increasingly embedded within broader responsible-business agendas. This is reflected in studies linking ethical and CSR factors with SME sustainability (Belas et al., 2022), CSR with employer branding (Szegedi et al., 2023), and CSR, business ethics, and HRM with SME sustainability and ESG perceptions (Belas et al., 2024, 2025).

The literature also demonstrates an increasing integration of ethics with leadership, governance, innovation, and technological transformation. Ethical leadership has been examined in relation to CSR and employee performance (Aftab et al., 2022) , while more recent research connects ethical entrepreneurial leadership with sustainable development and competitive advantage (Atobishi & Podruzsik, 2025) and ethical leadership with CSR engagement through trust and organizational commitment (Lee et al., 2026) . The presence of *corporate governance* alongside business ethics further

indicates the institutionalization of ethical practices through accountability, transparency, and organizational decision-making (ElGammal et al., 2018) . At the same time, the literature has expanded toward technological and innovative contexts: Industry 4.0 technologies have been examined in relation to ethical and sustainable SME operations (Kumar et al., 2020) , blockchain in relation to business ethics and social sustainability (Ronaghi & Mosakhani, 2022) , AI readiness in relation to social sustainability and business ethics among MSMEs (Kulkarni et al., 2024) , and corporate ethics in relation to eco-innovation among SMEs (Ferreras-Méndez & Ortega-Colomer, 2026) . These developments indicate that business ethics is increasingly understood not merely as a normative principle but as an organizational dimension connected with sustainability, governance, leadership, innovation, and technological adaptation.

Overall, the density visualization identifies a thematic structure in which business ethics, sustainability, SMEs, CSR, governance, and responsible development form the central research landscape, while emerging themes such as ethical leadership, ESG, AI, innovation, and eco-innovation indicate the contemporary expansion of the field. This trajectory is also reflected in recent studies on sustainable leadership and performance (Raza et al., 2025) , sustainable SME models (Zvarikova et al., 2024) , and resilience in small businesses facing diverse crises (Kuran & Khabbaz, 2026) . At the same time, the literature shows increasing attention to contextual and normative dimensions of ethics, including religious and faith-based business ethics (Jiang, 2023) , ethical behavior and tax-evasion attitudes among Indonesian SMEs (Rachmat et al., 2025), and innovative and Islamic ethical MSMEs (Handayani et al., 2024) . Thus, the research landscape has evolved from a primary concern with ethical practices and business conduct toward a broader understanding of ethics as part of sustainable, responsible, innovative, and institutionally embedded MSME development.

2. Research Trends and Temporal Development

The publication distribution within the 75-document dataset provides further evidence of the growing scholarly attention to the topic. The number of publications increased from only one article in 2017 and two articles in 2018 to six in 2019, five in 2020, five in 2021, six in 2022, and eight in 2023. A substantial increase occurred in 2024, with 19 publications, followed by 16 publications in 2025 and 7 publications in 2026. Thus, 42 of the 75 documents, or 56%, were published during 2024–2026. This distribution indicates that research connecting business ethics, legal factors, sustainability, and MSMEs has gained substantial scholarly attention in the most recent period.

The overlay visualization provides additional insight into how the research agenda has evolved over time. The visualization indicates a progression from relatively established themes such as business ethics, corporate governance, sustainable development, and circular economy toward more recent themes involving sustainability, innovation, leadership, ESG, technological transformation, and ethical business practices.

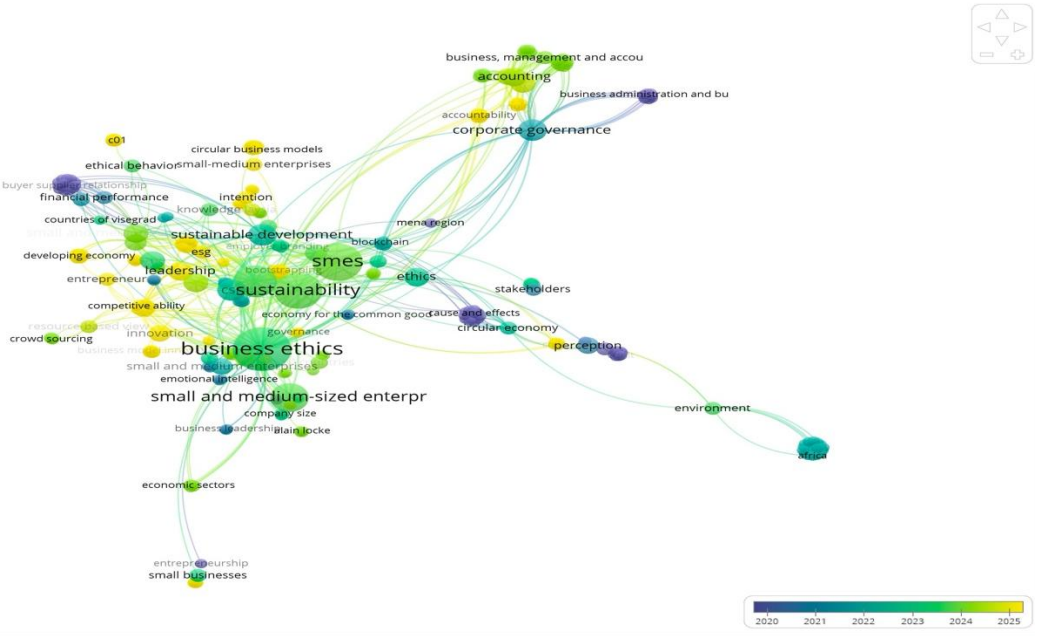


Figure 2: Overlay Visualization of Keyword Trends Based on Average Publication Year
Source: VOSViewer Output, 2026

The earlier thematic orientation is represented by research emphasizing ethical practices, governance, sustainable development, and responsible business conduct. Turyakira (2018), for instance, focused on ethical practices among SMEs in developing countries, while (ElGammal et al., 2018) connected corporate ethics with governance and social responsibility. These studies reflect an earlier research orientation in which ethical conduct was examined primarily in relation to organizational responsibility and governance.

The subsequent development of the literature demonstrates increasing attention to sustainable development and the integration of ethical practices with broader sustainability agendas. Belas et al. (2022) explicitly examined ethical and CSR factors in relation to SME sustainability, while (Ronaghi & Mosakhani, 2022) connected business ethics and social sustainability with blockchain technology adoption. These studies illustrate a transition from understanding ethics primarily as a behavioral or normative issue toward examining its relationship with organizational sustainability and technological change.

The more recent literature shows a further expansion toward leadership, ESG, innovation, digitalization, and emerging technologies. Belas et al. (2024) connected business ethics with CSR and ESG perceptions among SMEs, while Kulkarni et al. (2024) examined AI readiness in relation to social sustainability and business ethics. (Atobishi & Podruzsik, 2025) further linked ethical entrepreneurial leadership with corporate sustainable development and competitive advantage. The most recent study in the dataset by Ferreras-Méndez and Ortega-Colomer (2026) explicitly connects corporate ethics with eco-innovation among SMEs. Lee et al. (2026) likewise examines ethical leadership and CSR engagement through trust and organizational commitment.

The emergence of these newer themes suggests that the research agenda is expanding rather than replacing previous themes. Governance, sustainability, and ethical practices remain relevant, but they are increasingly examined through contemporary issues such as digital transformation, AI, innovation, ESG, and sustainable leadership. In this sense, the field appears to be moving toward a more integrated understanding of ethics in which ethical principles are connected to organizational capabilities and responses to technological, environmental, and social changes.

3. Thematic Synthesis of Business Ethics and Legal Factors

The analysis also reveals that legal and regulatory factors occupy a less consolidated position than business ethics, sustainability, and CSR in the research landscape. Although the search strategy included

terms related to law, regulation, legal compliance, and regulatory factors, these concepts appear mainly in specific contexts such as tax compliance, financial reporting, certification, business law, socio-legal issues, and Islamic economic law. For example, (Msechu et al., 2024) examined compliance with IFRS for SMEs, Manyanga et al. (2025) focused on tax policy and SME tax compliance, while (Hamzah et al., 2024; Munawaroh et al., 2025) addressed certification and Islamic economic law in relation to SME practices. This pattern suggests that legal factors have developed through several specialized research streams rather than as a unified thematic domain. In contrast, business ethics functions as a broader conceptual domain connecting ethical behavior, CSR, sustainability, leadership, governance, and responsible business practices. Thus, ethics and legal compliance overlap in MSME governance but represent distinct dimensions: ethical conduct extends beyond minimum legal requirements, whereas legal and regulatory frameworks establish formal standards and institutional boundaries for business activities.

Overall, the density and overlay analyses indicate three broad orientations in the literature: (1) ethics and responsible business, represented by business ethics, ethical practices, CSR, and ethical leadership; (2) sustainability and responsible development, represented by sustainability, sustainable development, circular economy, ESG, and environmental responsibility; and (3) organizational and institutional governance, represented by corporate governance, leadership, accountability, accounting, and compliance. The temporal pattern shows an expansion from earlier concerns with ethical practices and governance toward more recent issues involving sustainability, ESG, ethical leadership, innovation, digital transformation, AI, and eco-innovation (Turyakira, 2018; Aftab et al., 2022; Belas et al., 2022, 2024; Zvaríková et al., 2024; Kulkarni et al., 2024; Atobishi & Podruzsik, 2025; Ferreras-Méndez & Ortega-Colomer, 2026; Lee et al., 2026). Therefore, the literature is predominantly structured around the intersection of business ethics, sustainability, CSR, and MSME governance, while legal and regulatory factors remain a relevant but comparatively fragmented dimension addressed through specific institutional contexts. This finding provides the basis for the subsequent analysis of how business ethics and legal factors are connected to MSME development, sustainability, and business practices in RQ2.

4. The Relationship between Business Ethics, Legal Factors, and MSME Development

The keyword co-occurrence network shows that *business ethics* is positioned at the center of a dense network connecting sustainability, SMEs, sustainable development, ethics, governance, leadership, stakeholders, innovation, and corporate governance. This configuration indicates that business ethics is not treated in the literature as an isolated normative concept but is connected to organizational and developmental dimensions of MSMEs. In particular, the strong proximity between *business ethics*, *sustainability*, *SMEs*, and *sustainable development* suggests that ethical business practices are discussed as part of the broader process through which MSMEs pursue responsible and sustainable development. This interpretation is consistent with studies linking ethical practices and CSR with SME sustainability (Belas et al., 2022; Zvaríková et al., 2024), ethical leadership with CSR and employee outcomes (Aftab et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2026), and corporate ethics with eco-innovation (Ferreras-Méndez & Ortega-Colomer, 2026).

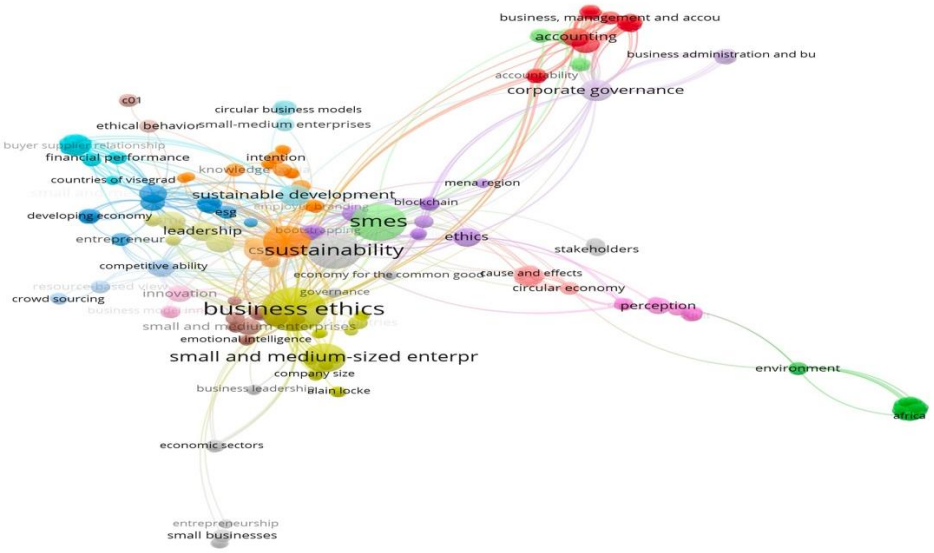


Figure 3: Keyword Co-occurrence Network of Business Ethics, Legal Factors, and MSME Development

Source: VOSViewer Output, 2026

The network also reveals that the contribution of ethics to MSME development operates through several interconnected mechanisms, particularly leadership, governance, stakeholder relationships, innovation, and sustainability. The connections among *leadership–ethics–sustainability*, *governance–business ethics*, and *stakeholders–ethics* indicate that ethical principles can become embedded in organizational practices through leadership and governance arrangements. (Aftab et al., 2022) demonstrate the relevance of ethical leadership and CSR to employee performance, while (Atobishi & Podruzsik, 2025) connect ethical entrepreneurial leadership with corporate sustainable development and competitive advantage. Similarly, (Ronaghi & Mosakhani, 2022) associate business ethics, governance, and social sustainability with technological adoption among SMEs. These findings suggest that ethical conduct contributes to MSME development not simply through compliance with moral norms, but through trust, accountability, stakeholder relationships, organizational commitment, innovation, and sustainability-oriented practices.

The legal dimension, however, appears more peripheral and fragmented in the network than business ethics and sustainability. Rather than forming one dominant cluster, legal-related issues are connected to specific institutional mechanisms such as accountability, accounting, compliance, governance, taxation, financial reporting, and regulatory standards. This pattern is consistent with studies examining IFRS compliance among SMEs (Msechu et al., 2024) , tax compliance and tax policy (Manyanga et al., 2025), and Islamic economic law in relation to digital business practices among SMEs (Munawaroh et al., 2025) . The literature therefore suggests that legal factors contribute to MSME development primarily by establishing formal rules, accountability mechanisms, reporting requirements, compliance obligations, and institutional boundaries for business activity, while business ethics provides a broader normative basis for responsible conduct. Taken together, the network indicates a complementary relationship in which ethics shapes responsible business behavior and stakeholder-oriented practices, whereas legal and regulatory mechanisms institutionalize minimum standards of compliance and accountability.

5. Thematic Cluster Analysis

The network structure identified 23 keyword clusters, indicating that research on business ethics and MSME development is thematically diverse. Rather than representing completely independent research streams, several clusters are interconnected through central concepts such as *business ethics, sustainability, SMEs, sustainable development, governance,* and *ethics*. Based on their conceptual

relationships, the clusters can be synthesized into several broader thematic orientations. The first relates to ethical and responsible business practices, encompassing business ethics, ethical behavior, CSR, leadership, and stakeholder relationships. The second concerns sustainability and responsible MSME development, reflected in sustainability, sustainable development, circular economy, environment, and ESG. The third concerns organizational and institutional governance, represented by corporate governance, accountability, accounting, and governance. A further thematic orientation concerns innovation and digital transformation, including innovation, blockchain, artificial intelligence, and technology-related business practices.

The thematic structure indicates that business ethics functions as a connecting concept across several research domains rather than as a narrowly defined subject. Its connections with sustainability, governance, leadership, innovation, and stakeholders suggest that ethical considerations are increasingly embedded in the broader organizational processes through which MSMEs create and sustain value. This interpretation is supported by previous studies in the dataset. Aftab et al. (2022) connect ethical leadership, CSR, and employee outcomes; (Belas et al., 2022; Dvorsky et al., 2024) link ethical and CSR practices with SME sustainability; while (Ferreras-Méndez & Ortega-Colomer, 2026; Kulkarni et al., 2024) extend the discussion toward AI readiness, social sustainability, and eco-innovation. The clusters therefore indicate a movement from viewing ethics as an individual or behavioral issue toward understanding it as an organizational capability associated with sustainability, innovation, leadership, and stakeholder-oriented practices.

From the perspective of the second research question, the thematic clusters also clarify the complementary position of legal factors. Legal and regulatory issues appear less centrally than business ethics but intersect with clusters related to governance, accountability, accounting, compliance, taxation, and institutional regulation. Studies on IFRS compliance among SMEs (Msechu et al., 2024) , tax compliance and tax policy (Manyanga et al., 2025), and Islamic economic law in SME digital commerce (Munawaroh et al., 2025) demonstrate how formal legal mechanisms shape specific business practices. Thus, the thematic synthesis suggests a complementary relationship: business ethics provides a broader normative orientation for responsible business conduct, while legal and regulatory mechanisms provide formal institutional requirements for compliance, accountability, and acceptable business practices. Together, these dimensions contribute to MSME development by shaping how enterprises interact with stakeholders, manage organizational responsibilities, pursue sustainability, and respond to changing institutional and market environments.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review examined the development of research on business ethics and legal factors in MSME development based on 75 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2017 and 2026. The findings show that the literature is predominantly structured around business ethics, sustainability, corporate social responsibility, MSME development, and organizational governance. The density and overlay analyses indicate a shift from earlier concerns with ethical practices and governance toward emerging issues such as sustainability, ethical leadership, ESG, innovation, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and eco-innovation. Business ethics is therefore increasingly positioned not only as a normative principle but also as an organizational dimension associated with responsible, sustainable, and innovative MSME development.

The review further shows that legal and regulatory factors remain comparatively fragmented, appearing through issues such as tax compliance, financial reporting, certification, business law, regulatory compliance, and Islamic economic law. Network and thematic cluster analyses indicate that business ethics is strongly connected with sustainability, leadership, governance, stakeholders, and innovation, while legal factors are more closely associated with compliance, accountability, and formal institutional requirements. These findings suggest that ethics and legal factors constitute complementary but distinct dimensions of MSME development, with ethics providing a normative orientation

and legal frameworks establishing formal standards and institutional boundaries. Future research should therefore develop more integrated frameworks examining how ethical conduct, legal compliance, and governance interact to support MSME sustainability, innovation, competitiveness, and resilience across different institutional and national contexts.

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