Ethical Leadership Practices of Principals for Goal Attainment in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

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Abstract. The study examined the ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in public secondary schools in Anambra State Nigeria. Four research questions guided the study and four hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted 6,382 teachers in 261 state government owned secondary schools in the six education zones of Anambra State. A sample size of 638 consisting 192 male and 446 female teachers was drawn using multi-stage sampling procedure. A researchers' developed instrument titled "Principals' Ethical Leadership Practices Questionnaire" (PELPQ) structured on a four point scale and validated by three experts was used for data collection. The internal consistency of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach's Alpha and this yielded reliability coefficients of 0.81, 0.86, 0.79, and 0.77 for the four parts of PELPQ and 0.81 for the entire instrument. Of the 638 copies of the instrument administered, 630 were retrieved and used for the analyses. Mean rating was used to analyze the research questions and t-test for testing the hypotheses. The findings of the study indicated that principals of public secondary schools in Anambra State adopt climatic, communicative, behavioural and decisional ethical leadership practices for goal attainment. Based on the findings, it was recommended that agencies controlling secondary education in the state such as the Ministry of Education and the Post Primary School Service Commission (PPSSC) should create an avenue through which principals who adopt ethical leadership practices in the schools will be encouraged. It was also recommended that secondary school principals should be trained to enable them display ethical leadership practices in the discharge of their administrative functions. This will help create a positive school climate which is an essential component for secondary school goal attainment.

Keywords: Leadership, Ethical Leadership, Leadership practices, Goal attainment

Introduction

Nations all over the world have realized that education is the solid foundation on which every development is built. This is because education helps nations to develop and harness their human and material resources. Without education, manpower resources of any society, Nigeria inclusive cannot be developed and this will hamper national development. Education in Nigeria has three levels; primary, secondary, and tertiary. The focus of this study is the secondary level of education.

Secondary education according to Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), (2013), is the education children receive after primary education and before the tertiary stage. The secondary education's broad goals of preparing people for useful living in the society and for higher education have made it imperative that it should among others, supply trained manpower, inspire its students with the desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence, raise the generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the view and feelings of others and respect the dignity of labour (FRN, 2004).

In secondary schools, the principal is the leader and gives the necessary leadership functions for the achievement of school goals. The principal as the leader is responsible for all that happens in the school. The principal is expected to adopt leadership practices in order to achieve the goals of secondary education. The leadership practices a principal adopts play an important part in determining and setting the climate of the school which may facilitate or hinder school goal achievement. Principals' leadership practices can be seen as those strategies and tactics principals adopt in the achievement of prospective school organizational goals. Principals' leadership practices perceived as ethical are considered as a source of motivation for the school.

Ethics according to Agbim (2018) refers to acceptable values that govern the conduct of a person, the members of a profession, or the actions of the organisation. An ethical leader is someone who can display trust, honesty, and integrity, fairness, concern, and respect for staff. With such leaders in position, staff rally around him in support and in order to achieve desired goals. This is because ethical leaders adopt practices that show respect for their employees' rights and constantly make effort to treat them fairly. Such leaders make efforts to develop a sense of justice in the organization by including their subordinates in the decision-making process (Demirdağ & Ekmekçiolu, cited in Obiekwe, 2019).

Ethical leadership practices can be seen as those behaviours displayed by ethical leaders while carrying out their leadership functions. Ethical leadership practices are important to long-term organizational success and goal attainment. Conversely, unethical practices can lead to a decrease in long-term organizational goal achievement and performance (Fritzsche, 2005). Being ethical is essential, and it is required at all levels of organisations, especially for those leaders who act as role models to their staff such as the principals. This is because ethical leadership builds trust, as people will follow a moral leader for they know they can trust him to take the right actions to achieve the desired outcome. Yilmaz (2005) developed four ethical leadership practices that leaders can adopt to achieve organizational goals. They include climatic ethics, communicative ethics, behavioural ethics, and decisional ethics.

Climatic ethics according to Bağrıyanık and Can (2017), is concerned with leaders creating an enabling environment for staff to work, encouraging and motivating staff to do their job, establishing clear rules, genuinely caring about, respecting and supporting subordinates and where possible ensuring that their needs are met at all times. Communicative ethics consist of practices such as the leader accepting his failures, not being selfish, being fair, being constructive in discussions, being patient, respectful, sincere, and modest in communicating with his staff. Behavioural ethics consists of practices like self-awareness, being veracious, honest, and courageous, protecting individual rights, and being respectful for values (Yılmaz, 2005). Decisional ethics deals with practices in terms of making morally correct decisions, being able to differentiate what is correct and what is wrong, and being ethical in making a decision concerning the management of the organization (Turhan, cited in Bağrıyanık & Can, 2017).

When principals adopt ethical leadership practices in the disposition of their duties, issues such as indiscipline, employee burnout, turnover, and poor attitude to work will be reduced thereby increasing effectiveness towards achieving school goals. According to Fleet (1999), unless a principal has the quality of personal honesty, he may never inspire his staff towards effectiveness and efficiency. Likewise, Arslantaş and Dursun (2008) noted that leadership practices perceived as ethical are considered as a source of motivation for the staff, in terms of increasing their performance, trust, and efficiency.

Unfortunately, the increasing wave of unethical practices that have engulfed every sphere of life and profession in Nigeria seem to have also gained access to educational institutions. It appears that most secondary school principals in Anambra State exhibit various forms of unethical practices. Some principals in the state seem to arrogate powers to themselves. These

principals in most cases fail to carry the teachers along in decision making and overall school management concerns, thereby undermining possibilities of achieving school organizational goals. Observable situations in public secondary schools in the state appear to suggest that principals do not foster an enabling environment for goal attainment within the schools. They seem not to genuinely support and care for teachers where necessary. When teachers who are at the forefront of the implementation of educational policies are not respected and carried along by school leadership, they may begin to see themselves as outsiders and will be more concerned with personal success than with the success of the school as a whole. This may be the reason for the observed persistent cases of disruptions in school activities emanating from lateness to school, cheating, bullying, insolence, insubordination, aggression, damage to school materials and facilities, failure to obey school rules to untidy dressing habits by students among others (Modebelu & Onyali, 2014; Mbonu, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

One of the ways through which principals can achieve school goals is by creating an effective and friendly learning community, one which is built and sustained by ethical practices such as honesty, tolerance, modesty, determination, righteousness, and flexibility. Unfortunately, leadership acts of most principals in Anambra State appear to be characterised by various forms of unethical practices. Teachers in secondary schools in the state complain of the harshness and rigid nature of principals as well as not being involved in important administrative decision making in the school. In situations where school administrative decisions are made independently by principals, teachers' commitment towards achieving educational goals becomes questionable.

There is also an increasing public outcry of dissatisfaction, resentment, and anger over the appalling state of moral ineptitude and backwardness in school development which has characterized secondary schools in Anambra State in recent times. There are also disciplinary cases such as lateness to school, cheating, bullying, damage to school facilities, and untidy dressing habits exhibited by both teachers and students in secondary schools in the state. These situations are capable of stalling school goal attainment and makes one wonder whether principals adopt ethical leadership practices for school goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State. This necessitated this study which examined the ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, the study examined the climatic ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State, the communicative ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State, the behavioural ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State, and the decisional ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:
1. What are the climatic ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What are the communicative ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State?
3. What are the behavioural ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State?
4. What are the decisional ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Male and female teachers do not differ significantly on the climatic ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. Male and female teachers do not differ significantly on the communicative ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State.
3. Male and female teachers do not differ significantly on the behavioural ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State.
4. Male and female teachers do not differ significantly on the decisional ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State.

Method

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study which was carried out in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. Four research questions guided the study and four hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. From a population of 6,382 teachers, a sample of 638 (192 males & 446 females) teachers representing 10% of the population was drawn using a multistage sampling procedure. A researchers' developed instrument titled "Principals' Ethical Leadership Practices Questionnaire" (PELPQ) which was validated by three experts was used for data collection. The questionnaire was structured on a four point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1. The internal consistency of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach's Alpha and this yielded reliability coefficients of 0.81, 0.86, 0.79, and 0.77 for the four parts of the PELPQ and 0.81 for the entire instrument. The instrument was considered reliable in line with Nworgu (2015), who stated that if the co-efficient obtained for an instrument is up to 0.70 and above, the instrument should be considered good enough to be used for a study. The direct administration and retrieval method was used for data collection. A total of 638 copies of the questionnaire were administered while 630 were retrieved and was used for data analysis. Mean was used to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test all the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. For the research questions, a mean rating of 2.50 and above was interpreted as agree while mean rating of less than 2.50 was interpreted as disagree. The null hypothesis was rejected where the p-value associated with the t-cal was less than 0.05 whereas the null hypothesis was not rejected where the p-value was greater than 0.05.

Results

Table 1. Mean ratings of the climatic ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment

The principal of my school:	Mean	SD	Remark
1. Encourages staff to do their job	2.75	0.70	Agree
2. Tries to propagate his personal ideas with love	2.92	0.76	Agree
3. Determines concrete objectives for the future	3.14	0.69	Agree
4. Is always willing to learn	2.75	0.70	Agree
5. Accepts the different ideas of staff	2.43	0.49	Disagree
6. Rewards the achievements of staff justly	3.14	0.69	Agree

7. Establishes the rules of the school clearly	3.02	0.76	Agree
8. Creates a free environment for discussion	2.84	0.71	Agree
9. Carries out his duty with a sense of responsibility	3.09	0.67	Agree
10. Creates an appropriate environment to reveal the creativity of staff	3.00	0.74	Agree

Data analysis on Table 1 shows that the respondents agree that principals adopt nine out of the ten listed climatic ethical leadership practices for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State. The nine practices include: encouraging staff to do their job (mean=2.75); tries to propagate personal ideas with love (mean=2.92); determines concrete objectives for the future (mean=3.11); always willing to learn (mean=2.75); rewards the achievements of staff justly (mean=3.14); establishes the rules of the school clearly (mean=3.02); creates a free environment for discussion (mean=2.84); carries out his duty with a sense of responsibility (mean=3.09); creates an appropriate environment to reveal the creativity of staff (mean=3.00). The respondents however disagree with item 5 (accepts the different ideas of staff, mean= 2.43) as part of the climatic ethical leadership practices adopted by principals.

Table 2. Mean ratings of the communicative ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment

The principal of my school:	Mean	SD	Remark
11. Accepts his faults whenever he is wrong	2.75	0.70	Agree
12. Demonstrates selfless behaviours to staff	2.46	0.53	Disagree
13. Behaves justly to staff	3.14	0.69	Agree
14. Participates in discussions about the school constructively and tactfully	3.02	0.76	Agree
15. Is patient with staff	2.84	0.71	Agree
16. Shows respect to others	2.77	0.69	Agree
17. Does not incite teachers to engage in rebellious activities	3.11	0.64	Agree
18. Judges staff on their personal characteristics	3.00	0.69	Agree
19. Shows gratitude for the services rendered to him	2.83	0.64	Agree

Analysis in Table 2 shows that out of the nine listed communicative ethical leadership practices, the respondents agree that principals adopt eight for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State. The eight practices include: accepts his faults whenever he is wrong (mean=2.75); behaves justly to staff (mean=3.14); participates in discussions about the school constructively and tactfully (mean=3.02); is patient with staff (mean=2.84); shows respect to others (mean=2.77); does not incite teachers to engage in rebellious activities (mean=3.11); judges staff on their personal characteristics (mean=3.00) and shows gratitude for the services rendered to him (mean=2.83). The respondents however disagree with item 2 (demonstrates selfless behaviours to his/her staff, mean= 2.46) as part of the communicative ethical leadership practices adopted by principals.

Table 3. Mean ratings of the behavioural ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment

The principal of my school:	Mean	SD	Remark
20. Can self-evaluate him/her self	2.44	.76	Disagree
21. Does not act in dishonest ways	2.58	.72	Agree
22. Behaves honestly to his/her staff	3.14	.69	Agree

23. Shows determination in school activities	3.02	.76	Agree
24. Always tells the truth in all conditions	2.84	.71	Agree
25. Is knowledgeable in school matters	2.86	.73	Agree
26. Protects individual right of the teachers	3.09	.67	Agree
27. Acts upon the principle of reality	3.00	.74	Agree
28. Shows respect for values of the society	2.79	.67	Agree

Results on Table 3 show that the respondents agree that principals adopt eight out of the nine listed behavioural ethical leadership practices for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State. Thus eight practices adopted by principals in Anambra State for goal attainment include that they: do not act in dishonest ways (mean=2.58); behave honestly to staff (mean=3.14); show determination in school activities (mean=3.02); always tell the truth in all conditions (mean=2.84); are knowledgeable in school matters (mean=2.86); protect individual rights of the teachers (mean=3.09); act upon the principle of reality (mean=3.00) and show respect for values of the society (mean=2.79). The respondents on the other hand disagree with item 20 (can self-evaluate themselves, mean= 2.44) as part of the behavioural ethical leadership practices adopted by principals.

Table 4. Mean ratings of the decisional ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment

The principal of my school:	Mean	SD	Remark
29. Is systematic in finding solutions to problems	2.75	.70	Agree
30. Never tries to take advantage of political issues in decision making	2.92	.76	Agree
31. Never tries to take advantage of religious issues in decision making	3.14	.69	Agree
32. Considers the moral aspect of available alternatives in finding a solution to problems	3.02	.76	Agree
33. Is open-minded when making decisions concerning the school	2.84	.71	Agree
34. Applies the common decisions efficiently	2.86	.73	Agree
35. Makes fair and balanced decisions	3.09	.67	Agree
36. Allows staff to participate in taking decision making in the school	3.00	.74	Agree

The analysis displayed in Table 4 indicates that the respondents agree that principals adopt all eight listed decisional ethical leadership practices for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State. The eight practices include: being systematic in finding solutions to problems (mean=2.75); never tries to take advantage of political issues in decision making (mean=2.92); never tries to take advantage of religious issues in decision making (mean=3.14), considers the moral aspect of available alternatives in finding a solution to problems (mean=3.02); being open minded when making decisions concerning the school (mean=2.84); applies the common decisions efficiently (mean=2.86); makes fair and balanced decisions (mean=3.09), and allows staff to participate in taking decision making in the school (mean=3.00).

Table 5. t-test comparison of the difference in male and female teachers mean ratings of the climatic ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment

Source of variation	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	P-value	Decision
Male	190	2.90	.29	628	.93	.35	Not Sig
Female	440	2.87	.28				

The results in Table 5 show that the mean score for male teachers (*M=2.90, SD=.29*) was not significantly greater than that of female teachers (*M=2.87, SD=.28*); *t (628).93, p=.35*. The null hypothesis of no significant difference between the two groups on the climatic ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State was therefore not rejected.

Table 6. t-test comparison of the difference in male and female teachers mean ratings of the communicative ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment

Source of variation	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	P-value	Decision
Male	190	2.90	.34	628	.18	.85	Not Sig
Female	440	2.91	.35				

The t-test analysis displayed in Table 6 shows that the mean for male teachers (*M=2.90, SD=.34*) was not significantly less than that of female teachers (*M=2.91, SD=.35*); *t (628).18, p=.85*. The null hypothesis of no significant difference between the two groups on the communicative ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State was therefore not rejected.

Table 7. t-test comparison of the difference in male and female teachers mean ratings of the behavioural ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment

Source of variation	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	P-value	Decision
Male	190	2.87	.29	628	.22	.82	Not Sig
Female	440	2.86	.30				

Table 7 shows that the mean for male teachers (*M=2.87, SD=.29*) was not significantly greater than that of female teachers (*M=2.86, SD=.30*); *t (628).22, p=.82*. Therefore the null hypothesis of no significant difference between the two groups on the behavioural ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State was not rejected.

Table 8. t-test comparison of the difference in male and female teachers mean ratings of the decisional ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment

Source of variation	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	P-value	Decision
Male	190	2.94	.32	628	.20	.84	Not Sig
Female	440	2.95	.35				

As shown in Table 8, the mean for male teachers (*M=2.94, SD=.32*) was not significantly less than that of female teachers (*M=2.95, SD=.35*); *t (628).20, p=.84*. This indicates that the null hypothesis of no significant difference between the two groups on the decisional ethical leadership practices adopted by principals for goal attainment in secondary schools in Anambra State was not rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that principals of secondary schools in Anambra State adopt nine out of the ten climatic ethical leadership practices for goal attainment in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This finding is line with that of Karaköse (2007) who in his study found that principals demonstrate ethical leadership practices at a high level. This finding is also consistent with Gülcan, Kılınç and Çepni (2012) and Sungu and Sağlam (2015), their results indicated that teachers rated school principals' display of ethical leadership practices to be high is their schools.

The present study also found that principals adopt eight out of the nine communicative ethical leadership practices for goal attainment in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Bellow (2012) and Yukl, Mathsud, Hassan, and Russia (2013). These studies found that principals are perceived to be fair, sincere, trustworthy, open, moral decision makers, and care for their staff as well as their students. These practices create a conducive scenario for all the stakeholders in the school system to work together in the attainment of school goals. The finding of this study is also in agreement with the findings of Ezeugbor (2015) and Obiekwe and Ezeugbor (2019). These studies showed that teachers perceived the four sub-scales (communicative ethics, climatic ethics, ethics in decision making, and behavioural ethics) of principals' ethical leadership practices to be high.

The finding of this study also shows that principals adopt eight of the nine behavioural ethical leadership practices for goal attainment in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The finding of this study is in tandem with Ezeugbor (2015), she confirmed that administrators' acceptance of faults, exhibition of selflessness, love, humility, justice, open decision making among others, inspires and invokes a positive climate within the school which is essential in school goal attainment. This finding is congruent with that of Eslamieh and Davoudi (2016). They found that that principals behavioural ethical leadership behaviours created a positive atmosphere for organizational success.

The finding of this study also shows that principals adopt all the eight decisional ethical leadership practices for goal attainment in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This finding agrees with Vogel, (2012) who found in his study that when school leaders are making fair and balanced decisions, sincere in maintaining the well-being of staff and allowing them participation in decision making, it encourages them to feel the values of togetherness with their leader and provide necessary support needed in achieving the school goals.

The findings of this study is however not in agreement with the findings of several other scholars such as Abg Hut (2005) and Zulkafli (2008). These scholars found that the level of ethical leadership practices displayed by principals for school improvement remained at a low level. This therefore makes it imperative that secondary school principals should always display ethical leadership practices in the discharge of their various administrative duties as this will position the school for goal attainment.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was therefore concluded that principals of secondary schools in Anambra State adopt the four dimensions of ethical leadership practices for the attainment of school goals. These practices are capable of creating a conducive atmosphere for

stakeholders in the school system to work towards achieving school organizational goals effectively.

Recommendations
Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are made:
1. Agencies controlling secondary education in the state such as the Ministry of Education and Post Primary School Service Commission (PPSSC) should create an avenue through which principals who adopt ethical leadership practices in the school would be encouraged. This will help promote ethical leadership values and culture which help position the school for goal attainment.
2. Secondary school principals should constantly display ethical leadership practices in the discharge of their administrative functions. This will help create a positive school climate which is an essential component for school goal attainment.

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