

PRINCIPALS' ETHICAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AS PREDICTOR OF TEACHERS' JOB PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DELTA STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated principals' ethical leadership practices as predictor of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 11,083 secondary school teachers in 489 public secondary schools in the 11 education zones of Delta State. The sample size for this study consisted of 918 teachers drawn using a multistage sampling procedure. Two sets of instruments titled "Principals' Ethical Leadership Practices Questionnaire (PELPQ)" and "Teachers' Job Performance Questionnaire (TJPQ)" were used for data collection. The instruments were validated by three experts, two from the Department of Educational Management and Policy, and one from the Department of Educational Foundations in the Measurement and Evaluation Unit, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Cronbach's alpha was used for a test of internal consistency of the instruments, which yielded overall coefficients of 0.80 for PELPQ and 0.86 for TJPQ respectively. The researcher, together with ten research assistants, collected data for the study using the direct approach method and 98% return was recorded. Simple regression was used to answer the research questions and test hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed, among others, that principals' ethical role-clarification practices is a strong and significant predictor of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. It was also found out that principals' ethical guidance practices is a moderate and significant predictor of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that Delta State Post Primary Education Board should organize annual seminar to enlighten and update the knowledge of principals regarding the engagement in ethical guidance practices to enhance teachers' job performance.

Keywords: Teachers, Principals, Ethical Leadership, Job Performance, Ethical Role-Clarification, Ethical Guidance

Introduction

The worth of any educational or school system lies in its ability to consciously achieve the purpose, goals, and objectives for which it is established. Teachers play key roles in achieving these by delivering instruction to impart the knowledge and skills students need to develop their full potential. Teachers build students' character by instilling the right values, norms, and belief systems that enable them to become morally upright and responsible citizens. Hence, teachers' performance of their job could result in achieving the goals and objectives of education.

Teachers' job performance involves carrying out work activities within and outside the classroom to achieve desirable results. Onyekwelu (2025) defined teachers' job performance as how members of the teaching staff carry out their roles and duties, complete required tasks and

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behave in the school environment. Teachers' job performance is the outcome of the efforts of teaching staff to implement curricular and co-curricular programmes in secondary schools. Nnebedum, Amobi and Obionu (2024) defined teachers' job performance as the act of carrying out tasks in accordance with the work description to achieve predetermined goals. Furthermore, Nnebedum et al. maintained that teachers' job performance is work-related activities undertaken by members of teaching staff to achieve predetermined goals. Contextually, teachers' job performance is the set of tasks and activities engaged in by teachers within a given time frame to attain the goals and objectives of secondary education.

Scholars have identified areas by which teachers' job performance can be assessed. Ubabuike, Nwodo and Nnebedum (2026) noted that teachers' job performance in secondary schools can be assessed through lesson and note preparation, instructional delivery, classroom management, student discipline, regularity and punctuality, attitude toward teaching, and participation in extracurricular activities. Teachers' job performance can be further assessed through mastery of subject matter, competence, commitment, leadership, supervision, student monitoring, class control, and disciplinary ability.

The job performance of every teacher is a major concern for principals and education stakeholders in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. There are worrisome reports of poor work attitude among teachers in Delta State, lateness to work, absenteeism and poor instructional delivery. This is corroborated by Ekwurube and Oparaji (2025) who noted that teachers' job performance are below expectations as evidenced by their lateness to work, poor knowledge of subject matter, poor relationship with school principals, low morale, absenteeism from work, dereliction of statutory duties, lack of zeal in record keeping, ingenuity in teacher-student relationship in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. Also, Alaribe, Ughamadu, and Okaforcha (2025) noted that there has been growing concern about the declining levels of teachers' commitment and performance, as evidenced by a lack of enthusiasm, poor attendance, reduced dedication to instructional duties, and minimal involvement in co-curricular activities in public secondary schools in Delta State. Sequel to this, Alaribe et al averred that despite government efforts through training, promotions and welfare programmes, many teachers in Delta State remain dissatisfied and demonstrate lack of performance. This worrisome trend, some scholars have argued can only be effectively mitigated through principals' provision of the right leadership.

Principals have the duty to lead, guide, conduct, direct, and motivate teachers to improve their job performance through various leadership practices. Shebli and Alhosani (2022) outlined the leadership practices as ethical leadership, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, transactional leadership, and participative leadership. This study focused on Ethical leadership.

The concept of ethical leadership practices has been explored by some scholars. According to Amobi, Chukwuogo and Ubabuike (2025), ethical leadership practices involve influencing subordinates' conduct so that they behave in accordance with the accepted norms, values, beliefs, and principles of an organization. The authors added that ethical leadership practices are demonstrated by principals who uphold essential values such as professional integrity, fairness, equity, inclusivity, and accountability within the school setting. Ethical leadership practices involve demonstrating morally upright behaviour to influence staff conduct and lead the affairs of an organization. Arinze, Egboka and Nwosu (2024) defined ethical leadership practices as the acts of leading by behaving in accordance with moral principles, setting clear standards for conduct, showing fairness in dealing with others, and considering the

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Unizik Journal of Educational Management and Policy (UJOEMP), Vol 7, No. 2, April, 2026. ISSN: 2276-7630
opinions of staff in running the daily affairs of schools to attain set goals. In this study, ethical leadership practices are concerned with demonstrating behaviour or actions that are consistent with moral principles such as integrity, fairness, concern for others, and accountability, to create a healthy atmosphere that fosters the attainment of set goals.

There are many dimensions of ethical leadership practices presented by different scholars. The different dimensions of ethical leadership practices as categorized by Kaduma (2024); Mseti, Lameck and Kinemo (2023) are power sharing, fairness, integrity, ethical guidance, role clarification, people orientation and concern for sustainability. This study focused on two dimensions of ethical leadership practices namely: role clarification and ethical guidance practices. The justification for choosing these two dimensions of ethical leadership practices is that no studies known to the researcher have covered these two dimensions and their impact on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Ethical role clarification practices involve giving clear guidelines and explaining each staff member's responsibilities. Anjar and Muhadjir (2024) stated that these practices specify what must be done, how to do it, and the expected results. They also noted that when staff clearly understand their tasks, they can focus better, face less confusion, and make fewer errors. These practices help teachers know their duties, avoid conflicts, and create a positive atmosphere that builds job performance. Role clarification fosters openness in describing performance goals and expectations, so followers know what is expected and when standards are met. Operationally, role clarification requires ethical leaders to be transparent and engage in open communication to clarify responsibilities, expectations, and performance roles. Principals who practice open communication are likely to ethically guide their staff.

Ethical guidance practices involve formulating and communicating a code of conduct to outline morally right and wrong behaviour within an organization. Dunu, Ughamadu, and Ezeaku (2025) posited that ethical guidance involves establishing norms and principles that form the basis of conduct among members of staff. Furthermore, Dunu et al. averred that ethical guidance practices involve explaining work principles and a code of conduct to enable members of staff to understand the expected behaviour in the school. In this context, ethical guidance in schools requires that principals explain clearly and specifically to the teachers the goals of the school, ethical conduct and behaviour expected of the teachers, and the likely consequences of unethical behaviour of the teachers.

The link between ethical leadership and teachers' job performance is supported by several studies. For instance, Malike, Awais, Timsal and Qureshi (2016) found that ethical leadership plays a key role in creating a positive organizational climate that enhance employees' job performance. O'Connell and Bligh (2009) similarly argued that ethical leadership practices are effective in creating an ethical or unethical climate in an organization which may result in positive or negative performance of employees. In the context of education, similar association has been found. Katranci1, Sungu and Saglam (2015) reported that principals' ethical leadership practices contribute to school effectiveness by fostering shared values, clarifying roles, and guiding teachers toward achieving organizational goals. The result of the work of Khokhar and Muhammad (2017) also showed significant direct positive relationship between ethical leadership and teacher's performance.

It has been observed that principals exhibit some undesirable behaviour that contradicts ethical leadership practices in public secondary schools. In Delta State, Eboka (2016) argued that secondary school leadership (principal) is responsible for the clear picture of the demoralized

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condition of teachers in which many teachers seemed to have lost the passion and commitment for the teaching profession and it has been identified as a major constraint militating against the growth of the education industry in the State. Okorji and Ubido (2021) noted that some principals are biased in handling staff affairs, giving preferential treatment to some teachers in public secondary schools in Delta State. There were reports in Delta State of poor teachers' performance characterized by poor classroom instruction, inappropriate adoption of teaching methods, poor use of teaching aids, poor supervision of students' extracurricular activities among others which might have led to examination malpractice, poor learning outcomes and increased student indiscipline, which could be attributed to unethical leadership practices of the school principals (Anho et al., 2022; Akporehe and Asiya, 2023). Based on this background, the study was undertaken to investigate principals' ethical leadership practices as predictor of teacher' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Statement of Problem

Teachers are widely regarded as the most crucial factors in students' learning, serving as the bridge between students and quality education. Teachers' job performance which includes teaching, classroom management, and other duties, is instrumental to achieving educational goals and, more specifically, in ensuring students' success in their examinations. However, when teachers fail to perform their roles diligently, it often results in poor academic achievement, indiscipline, truancy, and laxity among students. Teachers' job performance appears to be below expectations, as they exhibit undesirable work attitudes such as absenteeism, poor work attitudes, and laziness, which have contributed to poor quality performance. These shortcomings have led to examination malpractice, increased student indiscipline, and declining teaching and learning outcomes.

Poor teachers' job performance occurs under the oversight of school principals, who are expected to lead ethically by setting moral standards and fostering an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. Principals who are expected to motivate teachers and promote shared values, integrity and good conduct seem to engage in undesirable behaviour in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. Research has shown that ethical leadership by principals plays a key role in enhancing institutional effectiveness and improving teacher performance. Ethical leaders are known to promote integrity, role clarification, ethical guidance, among others, all of which contribute positively to the attainment of educational objectives.

Despite the theoretical connections between ethical leadership and teachers' job performance; there is a notable lack of empirical research addressing this issue in Delta State. Most studies on ethical leadership and its impact on teachers' job performance have been conducted in international contexts, with only a few carried out in other parts of Nigeria. To bridge this gap, this study investigated principals' ethical leadership practices as predictor of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine principals' ethical leadership practices as predictor of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. Specifically, the study determined:

1. Principals' ethical role clarification practices as predictor of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.
2. Principals' ethical guidance practices as predictor of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the predictive value of principals' ethical role clarification practices on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State?
2. What is the predictive value of principals' ethical guidance practices on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Principals' ethical role clarification practices do not significantly predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.
2. Principals' ethical guidance practices do not significantly predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Methods

A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The study was carried out in Delta State. The population of the study comprised all 11,083 secondary school teachers in 489 public secondary schools across the 11 education zones of Delta State. The study sample consisted of 918 teachers selected from the population using a multi-stage sampling procedure.

Two sets of questionnaires titled “Principals’ Ethical Leadership Practices Questionnaire (PELPQ)” and “Teachers’ Job Performance Questionnaire (TJPQ)” were the instruments used for data collection. PELPQ, which measured ethical leadership practices, was adapted from Mugizi, Mujuni, and Dafiewhare (2019). TJPQ was a standardized instrument adapted from Ali and Haider (2017) to measure teachers’ job performance. The face validation of the instruments were determined. The reliability of the research instruments were established and it yielded coefficient values of 0.80 for PELPQ and 0.86 for TJPQ.

The researcher, with the help of ten research assistants, administered the instruments to the respondents. The data collected were analyzed using simple regression to answer research questions and test hypotheses. The predictive values were interpreted using the designation of Best and Kahn (2003).

Research Question 1: What is the predictive value of principals' ethical role clarification practices as predictor on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State?

Table 1: The Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on Principals' Ethical Role Clarification Practice as Predictor of Teachers' Job Performance

| Model | N | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Remarks |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------|
| Ethical Role Clarification Practices | 902 | 0.764 | 0.584 | 0.583 | 0.71473 | Strong |

Table 1 revealed that the predictive value of principals' ethical role clarification practices on teachers' job performance is 0.764 with a coefficient of determination of 0.584. This shows that 58.4% changes in teachers' job performance could be attributed to principals' ethical role clarification practices practice. The regression coefficient r of 0.764 indicated that principals' ethical role clarification practices is a strong predictor of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Hypothesis One: Principals' ethical role clarification practices do not significantly predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Table 2: Simple Regression on Principals' Ethical Role Clarification Practices as Significant Predictor of Teachers' Job Performance

| Predictor | N | R | R ² | F | P-value | Remark |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-------|----------------|----------|---------|--------|
| Ethical Role Clarification Practices | 902 | 0.764 | 0.584 | 1261.906 | 0.000 | *S |

*Significant

Result in Table 2 indicates that the simple regression coefficient (R) is 0.764, while the R² is 0.584 showing that principals' ethical role clarification practices could make 58.4% changes in teachers' job performance. The $F(1/902) = 1261.906$ and the p -value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Therefore, since the p -value is less than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, principals' ethical role clarification practices significantly predict teachers' job performance in secondary schools in Delta State.

Research Question 2: What is the predictive value of principals' ethical guidance practices as predictor on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State?

Table 3: The Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on Principals’ Ethical Guidance Practices as Predictor of Teachers’ Job Performance

| Model | N | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Remarks |
|----------------------------|-----|-------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|----------|
| Ethical Guidance Practices | 902 | 0.530 | 0.281 | 0.280 | 0.93913 | Moderate |

As shown in Table 3, the predictive value of principals’ ethical guidance practices on teachers’ job performance is 0.530 with a coefficient of determination of 0.281. This shows that principals’ ethical guidance practices can account for 28.1% modification in teachers’ job performance. The regression coefficient r of 0.530 indicated that principals’ ethical guidance practices is a moderate predictor of teachers’ job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Hypothesis Two: Principals' ethical guidance practices do not significantly predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Table 4: Simple Regression on Principals’ Ethical Guidance Practices as Significant Predictor of Teachers’ Job Performance

| Predictor | N | R | R ² | F | P-value | Remark |
|----------------------------|-----|-------|----------------|---------|---------|--------|
| Ethical Guidance Practices | 902 | 0.530 | 0.281 | 352.183 | 0.000 | *S |

*Significant

Table 4 reveals that the simple regression coefficient (R) is 0.530, while the R² is 0.281 showing that principals’ ethical guidance practices could make 28.1% contributions to teachers’ job performance. The $F(1/902) = 352.183$ and the p -value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Therefore, since the p -value is less than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, principals' ethical guidance practices significantly predict teachers' job performance in secondary schools in Delta State.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the study showed that principals’ ethical role clarification practices is a strong predictor of teachers’ job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. The possible explanation for this finding is that principals’ ethical role clarification enables teachers

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understand their duties and how to execute them which contribute to the strong predictor of their job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. This agreed with the finding of Avwerhonyo and Sokoh (2024) which revealed that ethical role clarification practices had a strong positive relationship with employees' job performance. The agreement between the findings could be associated with similarity in geographical location. Principals' ethical role clarification reduce conflict and anxiety associated with misunderstanding of work demand and thereby create healthy work environment that leads to the strong predictor of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Further result indicated that principals' ethical role clarification practices significantly predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. The finding is in line with that of Avwerhonyo and Sokoh (2024) which showed that ethical role clarification practices had a significant relationship with employees' job performance. The finding supported that of Amawhe, Osazevbaru and Demaki (2023) which revealed that ethical role clarification practices significantly predict employees' job performance. The studies were conducted in Delta State which can contribute to the agreement between the findings. It is through ethical role clarification practices that principals can communicate to teachers how to use their time and resources to improve their job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

The finding of the study showed that principals' ethical guidance practices is a moderate predictor of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. This finding could be explained by the fact that principals' ethical guidance practices ensure teachers carry out their duties with integrity and moral values, which account for the moderate predictor of their job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. This disagreed with the finding of Mugizi, Mujuni and Dafiewhare (2019) which indicated that ethical guidance practices had a strong relationship with teachers' job performance in public and private secondary schools. The disagreement between the findings could be associated with differences in time span, geographical locations of the studies and differences in population (the present study was on public secondary schools while Mugizi et al. study covered both public and private secondary schools). Principals who engage in ethical guidance practices direct the behaviour of teachers to ensure that they discharge their responsibilities in professional manners that can improve their <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/ujoemp/index>

It was also revealed that principals' ethical guidance practices significantly predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. This finding upheld that of Arinze, Egboka and Nwosu (2024) which revealed that ethical guidance practices had significant relationship with teachers' job performance in public secondary schools. Principals' ethical guidance practices ensure teachers' compliance to rules and regulations set for conducting of work activities in the right ways that could significantly improve their job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it was concluded that principals' ethical leadership practices are positive and significant predictors of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. Principals' ethical leadership practices positively and significantly predict teachers' job performance through ensuring openness in describing performance goals and expectations, so teachers know what is expected of them and explaining clearly and specifically to the teachers, ethical conduct and behaviour expected of them, and the likely consequences of unethical behaviour in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. Teachers who are well informed of their roles and performance expectations and are enlightened about ethical conduct expected of them through the dimensions of principals' ethical leadership practices would respond by improving their job performance in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Principals should develop handbook that contains detailed information regarding ethical role clarification of teachers and teach them with the handbook to improve their job performance.
2. Delta State Post Primary Education Board should organize annual seminar to enlighten and update the knowledge of principals regarding the engagement in ethical guidance practices to enhance teachers' job performance.

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