



Original Article


Impact of Ethical Leadership Practices on Teachers' Psychological Safety and Performance: A Case of Primary School Heads in Karachi - Pakistan

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Abstract

This study investigated the level of effective ethical leadership practices of primary school heads from the perspective of teachers serving in Karachi schools. It also compared the effective ethical leadership practiced by primary school head from the perspective of teachers serving in Karachi schools in terms of their various demographics including gender, academic qualification, professional qualification, and locality of their schools. Using a quantitative exploratory method, it targeted the primary schools in each district of Karachi to approach the teachers currently serving in the respective primary schools. The findings of the study revealed that teachers perceive the effective ethical leadership practiced by primary school heads. However, this perception of teachers changed frequently based on their different demographic characteristics that led the study to infer a potential biasness displayed by the primary school heads while practicing their leadership. The study recommends awareness sessions and training programs for primary school heads to avoid their potential biasness.

Keywords: ethical leadership, teachers' performance, primary school teachers, psychological safety

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the ability of individuals to encourage and motivate others toward a common goal (Bolden, 2004). A leader is someone who can influence others and motivate them to achieve a shared objective (Aas, 2017). There are many different styles of leadership and each one can be effective in different situations and with different groups of people (Wuryani, et. al, 2021). According to Yukl (2013), leadership can take many forms, including formal leadership roles such as CEOs and managers, as well as informal leadership roles such as mentors and community activists. Effective leadership is essential for the success of any organization or community and it is a skill that can be developed and honed over time (Cote, 2017). School leadership refers to the ability of educators and administrators to guide and inspire students, teachers, and staff toward achieving the mission and goals of the school. Effective school leadership is essential for creating a positive learning environment, promoting academic achievement, and supporting the professional growth of teachers and staff. School leadership can take many forms, including principals, assistant principals, department chairs, and instructional coaches (Daniels & Hondeghem, 2019). Effective school leaders create a positive culture and climate that supports student learning and achievement and they work collaboratively with teachers and staff to ensure that all students have the support and resources they need to thrive (Döş & Savaş, 2015).

Research Objectives

- To investigate the level of effective ethical leadership practices of primary school heads from the perspective of teachers serving in Karachi schools.
- To compare the effective ethical leadership practiced by primary school head from the perspective of teachers serving in Karachi schools in terms of their various demographics (gender, academic qualification, professional qualification, and locality of their schools)

Hypotheses

- H₁: Teachers serving in primary schools in Karachi perceive that primary school heads practice ethical leadership
- H₂: The perception of teachers regarding the effective ethical leadership practice by heads, serving in primary schools in Karachi differ based on gender
- H₃: The perceptions of teachers regarding the effective ethical leadership practices by heads, serving in primary schools in Karachi differ based on the locality of their school
- H₄: The perceptions of teachers regarding the effective ethical leadership practices by heads, serving in primary schools in Karachi differ based on their different academic qualification
- H₅: The perceptions of teachers regarding the effective ethical leadership practices by heads, serving in primary schools in Karachi differ based on their different professional qualification
- H₆: The perceptions of teachers regarding the effective ethical leadership practices by heads, serving in

primary schools in Karachi differ based on their different age groups

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership Styles

According to Gill (2011), leadership is the “ability to inspire and guide others toward a common goal or vision. A leader is someone who can influence others and motivate them to achieve a shared objective” (p. 45). There are many different styles of leadership and each one can be effective in different situations and with different groups of people (Hassan, et al., 2021). Some of the most common leadership styles include Autocratic Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Servant Leadership, Democratic Leadership, Laissez-Faire Leadership, and Transactional Leadership. In the Autocratic Leadership style, the leader makes decisions without consulting others and has complete control over the group. This style can be effective in situations where quick decisions need to be made or where the leader has expertise in a particular area (Chukwusa, 2018). In the Transformational Leadership, the leader inspires and motivates followers to achieve a shared vision or goal. Transformational leaders empower their followers, encourage creativity and innovation, and foster a positive and supportive work environment. The Servant Leadership style prioritizes the needs and well-being of their followers and serves as a mentor and coach. Servant leaders listen to their followers, provide support and guidance, and empower them to achieve their goals (Song, et al., 2021).

According to Jan DeBell (2019), democratic leaders encourage participation and input from their followers in decision-making processes. Democratic leaders promote collaboration and teamwork and value the opinions and perspectives of all members of the group (Raupu, et al., 2021). In the Laissez-Faire Leadership style, the leader provides minimal guidance or direction and allows the followers to make their own decisions (Robert & Vandenberghe, 2021). Laissez-faire leaders trust their followers to take ownership of their work and make decisions that are in the best interest of the group. In the Transactional style of leadership, the leader focuses on setting clear goals, establishes performance metrics, and gives rewards and consequences for achieving or failing to achieve those goals. Transactional leaders are result-oriented and provide a clear guidance and feedback to their followers (Nurlina, 2022). Each of such leadership styles has its strengths and weaknesses and effective leaders often adapt their style to fit the needs of the situation and the group they are leading (Elkhwesky, et al., 2022).

Leadership Styles for School Heads

School heads, such as principals, vice-principals, and head teachers need to adopt leadership styles that are effective in promoting student learning and success Oco (2022), building strong partnerships with families and communities, and supporting the professional growth and development of teachers and staff (Shabani, et al., 2021). Some of the effective leadership styles include Transformational Leadership, Servant Leadership, Democratic Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Distributed Leadership, and Ethical Leadership. School heads who use a transformational leadership style inspire and motivate teachers, staff, and students to work towards a shared vision and common goals. They create a positive and supportive learning environment, encourage innovation and creativity, and provide opportunities for growth and development (Wang, 2019).

Servant leadership is a style that is well suited for school heads, as it prioritizes the needs and well-being of students, teachers, and staff. School heads who use this style act as mentors and coaches, providing support and guidance to their followers and empower them to achieve their goals (Poobalan & Talip, 2020). According to Sarid (2022), school heads who use a democratic leadership style seek input and participation from teachers, staff, and parents in decision-making processes. They value collaboration and teamwork and foster a culture of shared responsibility and ownership. Instructional leadership is a style that focuses on improving teaching and learning. School heads who use this style prioritize the professional growth and development of teachers, provide support and guidance on effective instructional practices, and promote a culture of continuous improvement (Dutta & Sahney, 2022). Distributed leadership style involves sharing leadership responsibilities across multiple stakeholders, including teachers, staff, and parents. School heads who use this style promote collaboration and collective decision-making and empower their followers to take on leadership roles and contribute to the school community (Berjaoui & Karami, 2020). Ethical leadership is a style of leadership that prioritizes ethical principles, values, and behaviors in decision-making and action. Ethical leaders act with integrity and are committed to doing what is right, just, and fair (Cansoy, et al., 2021). They hold themselves and others accountable for their actions and prioritize the well-being of their followers and the community.

Ethical Leadership in School

Ethical leadership is critical in schools because these leaders have a responsibility to model ethical behavior and decision-making for their students, teachers, staff, and the community (Buddhidhajo, 2022). Such leaders build trust and respect with followers by demonstrating integrity, transparency, and fairness in decision-making and actions. They promote a positive and ethical culture by setting clear ethical standards, communicating these standards to followers, and holding themselves and others accountable for their behavior (Romano, 2020). Ethical leadership plays a vital role in promoting student success by ensuring that schools are safe, supportive, and focused in the well-being of students (Khan & Waheed, 2019). Such leadership helps to develop responsible citizens by modeling ethical behavior, decision-making, and encouraging students to act ethically in their own lives. These leaders enhance the reputation of the school by demonstrating a commitment to ethical principles and values (İşik, 2020).

Ethical Leadership Styles for School Heads

Ethical leadership styles that school heads can use to develop an ethical environment in their school vicinity include Integrity-Based Leadership, Values-Based Leadership, Servant Leadership, Moral Leadership, and Authentic Leadership. Integrity-based leadership style emphasizes honesty, transparency, and ethical behavior. School heads who use this style are committed to act with integrity by upholding the ethical standards of the school community (Yazdanshenas & Mirzaei, 2022). Values-Based Leadership: Values-based leadership is a style that stresses on the importance of core values, such as respect, honesty, and responsibility. School heads who use this style promote these values and incorporate them in the decision-making processes (Stanley, 2022). Servant Leadership: Servant leadership is a style that prioritizes the needs and well-being of others. School heads who use this style act as mentors and coaches, provide support and guidance to their followers, and empower them to achieve their goals (Gultekin, 2020). Moral Leadership: Moral leadership is a style that emphasizes the importance of ethical decision-making and action. School heads who use this style prioritize ethical considerations and seek to make decisions that are in the best interest of the school community (Solinger, et al., 2020). Authentic Leadership: Authentic leadership style emphasizes self-awareness and transparency. School heads who use this style are honest and open about their values, beliefs, and intentions and they encourage their followers to do the same.

Ethical Leadership and Teachers' Psychological Safety

Ethical leadership can have a significant impact on teachers' psychological safety, as it creates an environment where teachers feel valued, supported, and safe to express themselves without fear of negative consequences (Ahmad & Umrani, 2019). Here are some specific ways that ethical leadership can affect teachers' psychological safety and create a sense of trust with teachers by demonstrating integrity, transparency, and fairness in decision-making and action.

When teachers feel that their school leaders are trustworthy, they are more likely to feel safe and secure in their work environment (Islam, et al., 2021). Ethical leaders encourage open communication and create a safe space where teachers can express their concerns, ideas, and feedback without fear of negative consequences. This helps to create an environment where teachers feel valued and supported. Ethical leadership of school promotes a positive and ethical culture where honesty, integrity, and fairness are valued. This creates an environment where teachers feel respected and appreciated for their contribution and fosters a sense of community among teachers by encouraging collaboration, teamwork, and shared decision-making. A supportive environment is created thereby, where teachers can feel connected and supported by their colleagues (Aftab, et al, 2022). These leaders support teachers' well-being by providing resources, support, and guidance to help them manage their workload, cope with stress, and maintain a healthy work-life balance. This creates an environment where teachers feel cared for and supported.

Ethical Leadership and Teachers Performance

Ethical leadership plays an essential role in shaping the performance of teachers. When school leaders exhibit ethical behavior and provide a positive ethical climate, teachers are more likely to engage in ethical behavior themselves, which can ultimately improve their performance. Ethical leadership can affect teachers' performance through role modeling by setting a positive example for teachers to follow, which can motivate them to behave ethically in their interaction with students, parents, and colleagues (Ahmad & Umrani, 2019). These leaders provide teachers with guidance and support when making ethical decisions, which can help them navigate complex situations with confidence and integrity (Limpo & Junaidi, 2023). Ethical leaders create a

positive ethical climate by setting clear expectations for behavior and encourage open communication, which can foster trust and respect among teachers to improve their performance. Addressing ethical violations through proactive approach and promoting ethical behavior can prevent issues from escalating and creating a negative impact on teacher performance (Iqbal et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative exploratory method to explore the perspectives of teachers regarding ethical leadership practices carried out by primary school heads. From this perspective, it targeted the primary schools in each district of Karachi to approach the teachers currently serving in their respective primary schools. One of the basic reasons to select each district in Karachi was to seek representation of both high socio-economic and low socio-economic regions in Karachi to explore the ethical leadership practices in a variety of contexts. Using systematic sampling technique, 700 primary school teachers, currently serving in 140 primary schools in Karachi were approached. The response rate was 95 percent, as 665 responses were received, out of which fifteen were rejected considering invalid responses and 30 were rejected while screening for outliers. The final dataset contained 620 responses for further analysis.

To gather the data from the chosen sample, an adapted instrument Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ), developed by Yukl, (2013) was used. A formal permission was taken from the developer of the instrument. This instrument contained 15 items with the property of 5-points likert scale, 1 being the least while 5 being the highest level of agreement. Before the data collection from the sampled participants, the adapted instrument was checked for face and content validation and internal consistency between the items. The result of pilot test was found satisfactory in terms of face and content validation and internal consistency. The internal consistency was measured via the Cronbach's Alpha test using SPSS and found the score to be more than .9. Thus, the data-collecting instrument was considered valid and reliable for further data collection from the sampled participants.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

The findings of the present study can be distributed into two parts, that is, descriptive statistics and inferential analysis. The descriptive statistics describes the characteristics of the participating teachers and their responses while the inferential analysis presents the response of the study objectives to confirm the hypothesized statements.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 describes the characteristics of the participating teachers in terms of their gender, academic and professional qualification, age and their schools locality in Karachi.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

	Gender		Professional Qualification		
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	
Male	128	20.6	ECCE	214	34.5
Female	492	79.4	ADE	92	14.8
			B.Ed.	314	50.6
			Age		
Karachi East	90	14.5	20-25 Years	198	31.9
Karachi West	106	17.1	26-30 Years	80	12.9
Karachi South	100	16.1	31-35 Years	254	41
Central Karachi	126	20.3	36 Years +	88	14.2
Korangi	98	15.8			
Malir	100	16.1			
	Academic Qualification				
B.A/B.Sc.	352	56.8			
M.A/B.S	196	31.6			
M.S/M.Phil.	72	11.6			
n= 620					

Table 2 describes the response of participating teachers in terms of mean, median, mode, standard deviation, variance, skewness, and kurtosis.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Response

Descriptive Statistics of Response	
Mean	3.38
Median	3.66
Mode	2.20
Std. Deviation	.94
Variance	.88
Skewness	-.34
Kurtosis	-1.05

Inferential Analysis

To test the hypothesized statements, various tests were applied. From this perspective, Table 3 presents the effective level of ethical leadership practiced by schools heads as perceived by the participating primary school teachers. The result of One-Sample Test shows that effective ethical leadership has been practiced by the school heads ($p = >.05$). Therefore, H1 of the study is supported by the findings.

Table 3

One-Sample Test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
ELQ	23.28	619	0	0.88
Test Value = 2.5				

Table 4 presents perceptions of teachers, regarding the effective ethical leadership practiced by heads, serving in primary schools in Karachi based on different gender. The result of independent sample test under Levene’s Test for equality of variances shows equal variances assumed. The p-value of .000 shows a statistically significant difference between the male and female teachers’ perceptions regarding the effective ethical leadership practiced by heads. The findings led the study to support the H2. Nevertheless, the increased mean value of female teachers = 3.48 (than that of male teachers = 2.96) displays that female teachers perceive the effective ethical leadership practiced by heads.

Table 4

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test		t-test			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
ELQ	Equal variances assumed	.355	.552	-5.74	618	.000	-.52326
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.87	204.25	.000	-.52326
Mean of Male= 2.96							
Mean of Female = 3.48							

Table 5 presents perceptions of teachers, regarding the effective ethical leadership practiced by heads, serving in primary schools in Karachi based on their schools’ different locality. The result of ANOVA shows a statistically significant difference p-value =.000. The findings led the study to support the H3. From this perspective, the significant difference was found between the schools located in Korangi, Malir and Central Karachi.

Table 5

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	133.906	5	26.781	39.585	.000
Within Groups	415.405	614	.677		
Total	549.311	619			

Similarly, the study found a statistically significant difference for the perceptions of teachers, regarding the effective ethical leadership practice by heads, serving in primary schools in Karachi differ based on their different academic and professional qualification and age groups (p -value = .000). Therefore, the findings of this study also support H4, H5 and H6.

Discussion

The findings of the present study are in line with the reviewed literature, as the study conducted by Islam, et al., (2021) found that when teachers found their school leaders trustworthy, they are more likely to feel safe and secure in their work environment. This study found that the practices of ethical leadership style were high in high socio-economic areas of Karachi and low in low socio-economic areas and semi-low socio-economic areas of Karachi. The reviewed literature suggests that ethical Leadership promotes good values and relationships among heads and teachers (Khalid, 2014; Vikaraman, et al., 2018). The study findings also show that the integrity of the heads is to be honest and truthful in all situations. Honest and ethical public-oriented heads make their teachers feel noble about their work performance. They put in tremendous effort in creating a professional bond (Ali, et al., 2021). School heads, including principals, vice-principals, and head teachers need to adopt leadership styles that are effective in promoting student learning and success and in building strong partnerships with families and communities, and supporting the professional growth and development of teachers and staff (Shabani, et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the findings of the present study reveal a potential biasness in practicing the ethical leadership by primary school heads.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the present study conclude that teachers perceive the effective ethical leadership practiced by primary school heads in the different locality of Karachi. However, this perception of teachers changed frequently based on their different demographic characteristics that led the study to infer a potential biasness displayed by the primary school heads while practicing their leadership. Therefore, this study recommends increasing and developing the standards of head teachers according to the ethical leadership standards. Effective Ethical Leadership practices of school heads should be standardized. School heads should establish clear expectations from teachers, encourage open communication, provide professional development, recognizing ethical behavior, and encouraging collaboration for all according to the ethical standards. Educational policy makers should develop policy and standard for heads teachers. Education training and development section provide opportunities of professional development that help them become more ethically aware and competent, to recognize and reward ethical behavior. Head teachers may develop a sense of ownership and commitment to ethical practices by participating in decision-making processes through training.

Competing Interest

The authors have declared no competing interest.

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