

# An Assessment of Level of Ethical Leadership Practices Among Academic Staff of Yobe State University Damaturu, Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

Today's organizations are facing the challenges of competing with each other due to globalization. Competitiveness of an organization depends on how the organization gain competitive advantage over others, and how its leaders influence their subordinates and ensure that they have a workforce with higher level of organizational commitment, which will ultimately lead to the success of organizations especially in education sector (higher educational institutions), hence, it is considered as backbone of development of any nation. This study examined the level of ethical leadership practices among academic staff of public universities in (YSU) Nigeria. Quantitative research design was used in this study, where a survey questionnaire was distributed among academic staff, total of 196 samples was used for the analysis. In order to analyze the data, statistical package for social sciences software (SPSS) version 25.0. The results indicate that ethical leadership is being practiced in YSU at a moderate level. Furthermore, organizational commitment was also perceived to be found at a moderate level. The study also found out that ethical leadership had positively and significantly influenced organizational commitment. Implication of this study is the contribution of ethical leadership practices in HEIs. Ethical leadership should therefore be applied and practiced by school leaders to improve the success of organizations and consequently improve the performance of HEIs in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *Ethics, Ethical Leadership, Commitment, Academics, Educational Administrators*

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## **Introduction**

Without the commitment of teachers, quality education is impossible and the high level of organizational commitment requires strong leadership, particularly in a developing countries (Mahmood, 2015). According to Buluc (2009), a leaders' major role in increasing employee commitment is to be accountable (Buluç, 2009). An academic administrator, therefore, has an important role to play in making teachers feel that they are part of the organization to work more efficiently (Oğuz, 2010). Ethical leadership is a clarion call due to the contemporary organizational crisis throughout the globe which is bedeviling prominent corporate organizations. However, HEIs also could not be an exception.

Every educational institution needs an effective leadership with strong soft skills to move teachers into the front line as an effort to achieve excellence in education. It is, therefore, an obligation of each school administrator to take responsibility to improve performance, implement continuous improvement while effectively managing the school, especially in the facet of teachers' commitment to meeting a sustainable development. Therefore, the objective of this study is to assess the level at which ethical leadership is being practiced among faculty members in public universities (YSU) in Nigeria.

### **1.1 Ethical Leadership**

The concept of ethical leadership is moderately new, however significant measure of research on the thought is developing (Bedi, Alpaslan, & Green, 2016; Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011; Yukl, Mahsud, Hassan, & Prussia, 2013) however, this is equally important because,

the period of the 21st century has seen economic downturns by numerous worldwide associations because of unethical practices (Khasawneh, Jawarneh, Abu-Alruzz, & Abdelghafour, 2016). It is especially in the midst of corporate scandals and moral slips that the broader public and interest groups in a company make the essential inquiry, in particular, who are corporate directors and are they moral. The concern for "ethical awareness" comes when the notion of leadership legitimacy is challenged and the public confidence in corporate governance is incredibly low (Katarina Katja Mihalie, Bogdan Lipicnik, 2010). Yasir and Mohamad (2016) also stressed that Principally, response to numerous corporate scandals fascinated scholars responsiveness to the topic (Yasir & Mohamad, 2016).

The philosophies, values, and beliefs of ethics and morality characterize the basis of organizational behaviour and thus formulate the footprint on which the leaders influence staff members in attaining the organization's goals. Bubble (2012), defines ethical leadership as a process of trying to influence employees by values, guiding principles and beliefs that are broadly bordering on accepted standards of organizational behaviour (Alshammari, Almutairi, & Thuwaini, 2015). But according to Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, (2005) ethical leadership is "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making" (Brown et al., 2005).

### **1.2 Ethical Leadership Dimensions**

Kalshoven et al. (2011) formed a multi-dimensional workplace ethical leadership (ELW) questionnaire that included seven various aspects

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of ethical leadership behaviour, including fairness, integrity, ethical guidance, a people orientation, power-sharing, clarification of roles and sustainability concerns, as clearly explained below:

Fairness refers to impartiality, treating others in a right and equitable manner, and making principled and fair choices. Fairness has become an essential form of ethical leadership behaviour since these leaders are selfless and have integrity, trustworthiness, and honesty, and reliability, they are equally responsible for their actions (Treviño et al., 2003; Brown *et al.*, 2005; De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2008). The second is power-sharing, which is described it as allowing followers to contribute in decision making and listening to their ideas and concerns. Moreover, power-sharing allows more control and less dependence on leaders for employees (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Brown et al. (2005) considered power-sharing as giving followers a chance to have a say by ethical leaders. The third dimension is role clarification asserts that responsibilities, expectations and performance objectives to be clarified. It allows employees to realize their expectations and to show if their performance is equitable. In addition, De Hoogh and Den Hartog, (2008) and Kalshoven *et al.*, (2011) stressed that it helps employees not to worry unnecessarily about unclear expectations and how employees can contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives meaningfully and effectively.

The fourth is people-orientation which contributes to genuine concern, respect, and support for employees, but also ensures that wherever possible their legitimate needs are met. In their respective studies, Treviño et al. (2003) & Resick et al. (2006) indicate that care for, respect and followers support has been frequently

mentioned and emphasized by the people-orientation dimension of ethical leadership. The fifth is integrity which denotes the consistency of words and deeds and the ability to keep promises. Behavioural integrity can be referred to as the alignment of words with actions, implying that what you say is consistent with what you do (Lemoine, Hartnell, & Leroy, 2018). The sixth is ethical guidance which helps to communicate on ethics and explain ethical rules, promote and reward ethical behaviour. Ethical leaders communicate ethical standards (Mo, Ling, & Xie, 2019; Treviño, Brown, & Hartman, 2003) However, this ethical guidance involves communicating ethics, clarifying ethical rules, promoting and rewarding employee ethical behaviour (Kalshoven et al., 2011). The last dimension is concern for sustainability this is related to leaders' attitudes towards environmental care and encouraging recycling. This includes the attention of leaders to sustainability issues, bearing in mind the results of their actions beyond the parameters of their own workgroup, and showing concern for society's welfare (Kalshoven *et al.*, 2011; López-González, Martínez-Ferrero, & García-Meca, 2019)

### **1.3 The Relationship between Ethical Leadership and Employees Organizational Outcomes Based on previous Studies**

In higher education institutions, the correlation between leadership styles and organizational commitment needs to be examined in order to enhance the efficiency of the school. The responsibility for achieving the objective of quality education rests with academic administrators who serve as leaders like any organization's directors who take administrative actions to fulfil evolving everyday climate. Higher education administrators need committed

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employees to assist them to attain their objectives efficiently. The degree of organizational commitment of the professors is influenced by the leadership style practiced by the academic administrators (Saeed, Gelaidan, & Ahmad, 2013).

Khasawneh, et al., (2016) in their study of ethical leadership practices among academic staff of public university in Jordan, suggested that further studies be conducted on relationship of ethical leadership with employees' outcomes such as organizational performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviour, and workplace deviance.

Past studies have shown that perceived higher work ethics will increase organizational commitment while lower work ethics will reduce organizational commitment (Wright, Hassan, & Yukl, 2014). Ethical leadership can increase organizational commitment and reduce unethical behaviours of subordinates to assist in the growth and development of both the organization and employees (Hassan & Wright 2014).

In the same vein Ilham Ismail and Yaakob Daud, (2014) acknowledged that ethical leadership influences the school engagement of the organization. The implication of this study is the contribution of ethical leadership to organizational commitment in schools, (Ismail & Yaakob, 2014). Chinwe et al. (2017) investigated the impact of Ethical Leadership on the commitment of employees in Nigeria: A study by Innoson Limited Enugu, Nigeria, Technical and Industrial Company. The study found out that, there is significant impact of ethical leadership elements towards organizational commitment.

## **Methodology**

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To serve the objectives of this research study, the researcher has chosen a quantitative method which is presumed to be suitable to conduct this study and furthermore, it was surveyed at a particular period of time. On top of it, many kinds of research undertaken for academic programs are time constraint so cross-sectional studies with a survey method are more preferred approaches (Saunders *et al*, 2012). Therefore, the quantitative method is the most common data analysis method, in which questionnaires are employed to collect quantitative data as directed in structural design (Bechor *et al*, 2010).

The population for this study were all academic staff of Yobe State University. Creswell (2005) stated, "a population is a group of individuals who have the same characteristic". this study was carried out using proportionate stratified random sampling. Stratified random sampling is defined as a form of sampling method by which the researcher divides the population into distinct sets called strata. Then a probability sample (often simple random sample) is drawn from every group (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). A sample of 196 academic staff were used in the study.

A survey questionnaire was used as the primary source of data in this study. The study questionnaire was adopted by established field scholars. The scale of ethical leadership measurement Kalshoven et al. (2011) developed a scale that was used.

In order to achieve the result through the data analysis process, (descriptive statistics, and inferential statistical analysis) statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 25.0) was used.

## **Results/Findings**

The objective of this research is identifying the level of ethical leadership practice among university academic staff. As earlier discussed in the previous chapters, the level of

ethical leadership in this study was found out through measuring 38 items of the seven (7) dimensions of ethical leadership.

**Table 1.1** Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Ethical Leadership Dimensions

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>Level</b>
Fairness	3.67	0.916	Moderate
Power-sharing	3.58	1.000	Moderate
Role clarification	3.74	1.021	Moderate
People orientation	3.73	0.776	Moderate
Integrity	3.75	0.970	Moderate
Ethical guidance	3.72	0.955	Moderate
Concern for sustainability	3.53	0.896	Moderate
<b>Ethical leadership</b>	<b>3.67</b>	<b>0.933</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Table 1.1 above portrays that all the seven (7) dimensions of ethical leadership are at a moderate level in the studied university. The highest mean score is integrity with 3.75, followed by role clarification with 3.74, then people-orientation and ethical guidance with 3.73 and 3.72 respectively. Next is power-sharing with 3.58 and the least is a concern for sustainability with the mean score of 3.53.

leadership is exercised in the institution. The findings imply that the existence of ethical leadership plays a significant role in building employee trust, legitimacy, and credibility and helps the organization to attain long-term strategic organizational goals. This is in line with the findings of Brown et al., (2005) & Khasawneh et al., (2016).

## Discussions

### To Determine the Level of Ethical Leadership among Academic Staff of the University

The first objective of this study is to find out the level of ethical leadership among the university academic staff. The level of ethical leadership in this study has been found to be at a moderate level with a mean score of 3.67. This is based on the perception of the academic staff of Yobe State University about their leaders. It indicates that a medium degree of ethical

Findings of this study show that based on the perception of academic staff, their leaders practice ethical leadership at a moderate level. The academic staff also believe that their leaders have integrity, where the findings show that the level of integrity is moderately highest level (3.75) compared to other sub-constructs. Hence, this means that the leaders in YSU are perceived to be keeping their words matched with their actions. This implies that the leaders also keep a promise. Hence, the leaders build trust between them and their subordinate based on their level of integrity. The finding above is supported by Khan, (2017) in his study of the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational

citizenship behaviour in public universities in Pakistan.

However, the finding regarding people-orientation is at a moderate level, which shows that academic staff feel that their leaders take time for personal contacts and care about them. However, the findings also show that leaders need to focus more on personal problems to further improve the level of people-orientation from moderate to high.

The next finding is that of fairness dimension, where the researcher found out based on the results that the academic staff feel that their leaders focus more on their self-achievement. However, it is suggested that the leaders should improve their communication with the academic staff under their leadership to increase the level of fairness. Hence, fairness is one of the good attributes of ethical leaders which signifies that the leader does not practice favouritism and doesn't hold employees accountable and responsible for issues they do not have control.

The findings of power-sharing indicate that academic staff also think that their leaders or immediate supervisors have characteristics of power-sharing, which encourage them to have a voice in the organization's decision-making process. Thus, there is also a perception that the directors do have a tendency not to review the decision based on staff feedback. Therefore, the leaders need to be more responsive and take everything into account in critical decision to further improve the level of power-sharing.

Role clarification results indicate that the leaders do give clarifications about responsibilities according to the academic staff. However, the level of role clarification at a moderate level is not encouraging at all,

therefore, clarification of employee's roles and expectations should be given more priorities to improve further. In fact, as the organization is newly established as stated earlier, there is a need for the leaders to set group standards to further strengthen coordination.

Ethical guidance findings show that the leaders do advise and guide staff on issues related to ethics. But based on scores recorded so far, it indicates that there is a need for the leaders to strengthen it further. The leaders should, therefore, further clarify, explain, and make sure that their employees adhere to the code of ethics. Precisely, the leaders need to take specific actions that will enhance ethical behaviour, and discussions about ethical standard among employees should be widened. It is recommended, that the organization should be engaged in a more open discussion on ethical code and behaviour and arrange conferences, forums and debates to further develop this standard.

Ethical leadership being perceived at a moderate level might not be encouraging, but this could be attributed to the fact that the university is new, as such, developing a better working environment would require more time. The leaders are therefore recommended to further improve the degree of trust, openness, the delegation of authority, communication, and empathy towards the problems of employees in order to further improve the level of ethical leadership.

The result of findings on concern for sustainability was found to be moderately lowest with the mean score of (3.53). The academic staff view their leaders as caring for the environment and showing concern for conservation aspects. They also feel that their leaders are less interested

in encouraging recycling, even though the North-east sub-region of the country is an Arid zone. Therefore, it is important that leaders have a decent practice to further boost sustainability concerns.

The findings of this research are affirmed by Khasawneh et al. (2016), who conducted another research among university lecturers in Jordan, their findings indicate that ethical leadership is practised in the university based on the perception of the academic staff. They also believed that ethical leaders have features such as fairness, trustworthiness, openness, and honesty in the higher institution which can help to attain organizational success. However, this result is also in line with previous studies which found out that ethical leaders are considered fair and trustworthy by their follower (Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Misati, 2017).

Similarly, Singh and Rathore (2014), shared a similar view in their analysis of ethical leadership in Indian universities, whereas they maintained that, “the organization is what the leader is” and the existence of ethical leadership in universities plays a vital role in influencing employees’ attitudes and behaviours.

The level of ethical leadership in YSU found to be at moderate level based on the findings of this study. However, this study used three level scale for the measurement of the level, because the researcher used six-point likert scale which made the researcher to used three scale for the measurement of level. But if five-point likert scale is to be used and five level scale for the measurement of level is considered, then the result will show that ethical leadership is at high level.

In this study, the seven dimensions of ethical leadership namely fairness, power-sharing, people-orientation, integrity, ethical guidance, role clarification, and concern for sustainability were found to have a positive and significant influence on the relationship between leaders and their subordinates in academia.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

It can be inferred from the above analysis that ethical leadership had a significant influence on the relationship among faculty members in a public university (YSU) in Nigeria. This implies that when a leader of a public university is ethical in terms of being fair, clarifies roles and responsibilities, people oriented, and has a concern for the sustainability of the environment, delegates duties, provide ethical guidance and has consistency in words and actions, based on norm of reciprocity, academic staff would willingly engage in extra-role behaviours’ such as organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, organizational performance will also keep improving, etc. Thus, complementing the positive feedback loop. The result of the study shows that ethical leadership is practised in public universities at a moderate level.

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