



ETHICAL AND VALUES EDUCATION DRIVEN LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION



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Abstract

This paper reviewed ethical and values education driven leadership, in higher education. The principles of ethical leadership, the Kantians ethical theory, the challenges to ethical leadership and re-engineering these challenges. The principles of ethical driven leadership in higher education ensures that governance, decision making, interpersonal relationships, align with moral values such as is focused on fairness, honesty and integrity which is a fundamental requirement in shaping a positive higher education institution. This study also reviewed ethical and value driven leadership in higher education informed by various ethical theories that influence ethical driven leadership. Out of all the ethical theories the focus of this paper was on the relevance of the Kantian ethical theory to the ethical and value driven leadership in higher education. Despite the importance of ethical and value driven leadership in higher education, some unethical behaviours and challenges abound. Challenges such as: managing finances responsibly, ensuring the responsible use of resources, including navigating conflicts of interest, promoting diversity and inclusion and upholding academic integrity, fostering a strong ethical culture, addressing potential conflicts between personal, plagiarism, organizational values, and manage situations where unethical behaviour occurs despite their best efforts among others. These challenges in ethical driven leadership in higher education has led famous administrators, organisations and higher institutions to fall from grace. This has highlighted the relevancy for ethical and values education driven leadership. Amongst other things, these unethical behaviours may also deter the smooth administration of the higher institutions, affect the quality of graduates from these institutions, reduce the competitive status of these graduates in the globalised world and hamper some of the goals of higher education. Suggestions for re -engineering the challenges of ethical leadership was proposed.

Keywords: Ethical and Values Education; Principles of Ethical Leadership; Kantian Ethical Theory; Challenges in Ethical Leadership.

Introduction

Ethical leadership is characterised with ethical values in the management functions in higher education. These ethical values that play a great role in the institutions, include fairness, honesty and integrity. The role of ethical and values education in leadership in higher institutions is for the leader to be able to guide governance, accountability, integrity in the decision-making processes and ensuring transparency. The Leaders' values may affect the institution's vision and mission in several aspects, such as research, curriculum development, and innovation goals. Institutional leaders should set an example through core values such as, guide moral reasoning, inclusion, decision making, wisdom, justice, fostering integrity and responsibility and helping to establish a supportive atmosphere amongst staff and students in higher institutions and other organisations. In addition, Ahmed (2023) and Zacarias and



Flores (2024) are of the opinion that ethical and values driven leadership fosters a collaborative environment where students and staff are expected to uphold the principles of ethics and values education and supportive behaviours that will lead to being able to fit into the globalised world.

Moreso, ethical driven leadership in higher education is not only about personal values but also creating institutional cultures. In addition, ethical and values driven leadership is essential in higher education because it may set the tone for ethical behavior, fosters a positive organizational climate, and promotes the mission of higher education. However, ethical and values driven leadership in higher education faces several challenges as they try to uphold policies, goals, moral principles, while performing their management functions in higher institutions. Leadership in Higher Education encompasses the roles and responsibilities of individuals in governance and administrative positions, such as university presidents, deans, and department heads, who influence the direction and priorities of their institutions. Udida, Bassey, Udofia and Egbona (2009) submitted that some individuals appointed as vice chancellors of some university are weak, not competent and lack administrative potentials; such appointees must possess administrative qualities and must lead ethically by example. The leader must have integrity, must be knowledgeable, and practice modern types of management leadership styles. He or she must be visionary and ready to adjust to situations in the system.

In contrast, Cumbo (2009) focuses on the leader when defining ethical leadership. A leader is considered ethical when inward virtues direct the leader's decision-making process. Followers simply are beneficiaries of a leader living a virtuous life. A leader is motivated not by influencing others but rather living by one's own virtues. The author states that virtues are amplified when the leader exhibits "imagination, compassion, empathy, and discernment. Yukl (2006) summarizes the ethical leader as one who promotes honesty, and mirrors his or her actions with their values and beliefs. Yet, common themes include the need for establishing trust and gaining ethical knowledge by way of study and application. Kyambade, Namatovu, Namubiru, and Muganzi, (2025), in their study, determined the degree to which Uganda's public universities feel obligated to adopt socially and ethical responsible leadership practices. They conducted a semi-structured interview with 22 leaders as participants from Uganda's public universities. They structured out four main themes from the thematic analysis of the gathered data. These themes are moral excellence in character, stakeholder collaboration, personal abilities and moral direction. The researchers discover that although the leaders are willing to act appropriately in accordance with social norms and ethics, they do not fully exercise the four dimensions, especially in developing and Orient countries.

Brigue and Orlu (2023), discusses how ethical leaders contribute to academic achievement by creating a supportive system that values fairness and respect. It examines the impact of leadership ethics on the organizational culture of schools, emphasizing the significance of transparency, open communication, and ethical decision-making. It also discusses the influence of leadership ethics on staff morale and engagement, highlighting the benefits of a positive work environment that values integrity and promotes professional growth. Finally, it explores the impact of leadership ethics on the overall reputation of a university system, emphasizing the significance of ethical leadership in attracting quality teachers, students, and community support. In conclusion, emphasizing on the importance of prioritizing leadership ethics, integrity in school development and highlight the need for educational leaders to embrace and embody ethical leadership principles to foster a positive, sustainable impact and provision insights into the significance of leadership ethics, integrity in school development and highlights the multifaceted ways in which ethical leadership contributes by creating a thriving and ethical educational institution are steps in the right direction. This paper reviewed ethical and values leadership in higher education, the principles, relevance of Kantians ethical theory to ethical and values driven leadership in higher education, challenges of ethical and values driven leadership in higher education and re-engineering the challenges of ethical and values driven leadership in higher education.

Principles of Ethical driven leadership in higher education

Ethical leadership in higher education emphasizes principles like accountability, integrity, honesty, respect and fairness to foster a trustworthy and positive environment. According to Monahan,

(2012). Wood, (2023); Lynn (2024), these principles guide leaders in making decisions that promoting a culture of trust, promotes ethical conduct and transparency and benefits the entire academic community. Furthermore, George Marshall proposed eight principles of ethical driven leadership as applied to higher education. They are: self-control, requiring high ethics from everyone, emphasizes personal courage, inclusiveness, prioritizing the public interest, task and employee-centeredness, recognizing talent, sensitivity and understanding (Trust). These principles guide leaders in making ethical decisions and offer a strong frame for academic administrators who seek guidance on how to implement ethical practices in higher education (Pops, 2006; Marcy, Gentry, and McKinnon, 2008).

Ethical principles guide decisions that affect faculty, students, administrative staff, and broader communities. In a global context, leaders must also navigate competing moral frameworks, intercultural dynamics, and the demands of international collaboration. Ethical and values education driven leadership is essential in higher education institutions because it establishes a solid ethical foundation, fosters an environment of integrity, and contributes to the institutions' long-term success and viability. It acts as a model for all stakeholders, motivating them to follow ethical concepts and values in their academic pursuits and institutional responsibilities (Gichuru, 2023).

In addition Jansen- van -Vuuren, Du- Plessis, Barnes, and Franz, (2025) stated that other core principle of ethical leadership example accountability, infer that leaders should take responsibility for their actions and their consequences. In higher education, this means that, ethical leaders should be answerable to students, faculty, staff, governing council, and the society. In addition, in terms of the principle of integrity, which means acting with transparency, consistency and honesty. In higher education, it models ethical behaviours in leaders through decision making and commitments based on non- personal gain and fairness. Furthermore, justice and equity means ensuring advancement for all individuals, ensuring fair treatment, opportunity and access, Practically, this can be addressed in higher education by systemic inequities in inclusion and belonging, student support, promoting diversity, admissions, funding and hiring. Moreso, respect for individual's states that the rights, dignity, and autonomy of every person should be values. In higher institutions, different perspectives in decision-making has to be encouraged. Also, encouraging listening actively and open dialogue. In terms Transparency Being open about processes, decisions, and outcomes. This can be achieved by leaders of higher education by communicating budgets, policies, challenges and changes to staff and faculty in accessible and understandable ways. Stewardship means managing higher institutional resources responsibly for sustainability in higher education, ethical leaders to reflect the mission and values of the institution make sustainable environmental, financial, and organizational choices. The principle of service orientation means prioritizing the needs of staff, faculty, students, the academic community, and society. In higher education, it focuses on the institution's educational goals, vision, mission and its broader responsibility to the good of the society. Furthermore, courage and moral imagination is viewed as having the strength to envision just alternatives and make tough ethical decisions. In higher education, it involves resisting pressures that compromise ethics, initiating transformative actions even when they are unpopular and speaking out against injustice. The principle of commitment to academic freedom and inquiry means supporting the right to teach, explore, publish ideas freely and responsibly. In higher education, this involves critical thinking, the free exchange of ideas and upholding the values of intellectual honesty.

The guiding principles in Leadership in academia is often confronted with difficult decisions involving resource allocation, academic freedom, personnel management, and institutional partnerships. Ethical leadership ensures that such decisions are guided by fairness, transparency, and accountability, rather than personal or political gain. This includes respecting the rights of faculty and students, ensuring access and equity, and upholding academic standards.

Relevance of Kantian's ethical theory to ethical and value driven leadership in higher education.

In higher education where the development of human intellect, moral character and freedom is central, Kantian ethical philosophy aligns closely with the missions and visions of ethical and values driven leadership. Immanuel Kant propounded the philosophy of Kantian ethical theory. Kant is the primary historical exponent of *deontological ethics*. Chilufya (2023) stated that *deontological ethics* is one of several models of ethics that can be applied in leadership. That each model has its own unique approach to defining ethical behavior. He observed that the other two broad ethical models are teleology and relationality-responsibility models. The deontological model is a moral theory which is based on the belief that actions should be judged based on whether they follow certain ethical duties or rules. Morality or Ethics is primarily about law, duty or obligation. In this model, leaders are expected to adhere to a set of moral rules and principles, regardless of the consequences of their actions. According to deontological ethics, what makes an action right or wrong are features of the action itself, not the consequences of the action.

The relevance of Kant's ethical principles to higher education are as follows: it emphasises impartiality and fairness. It improved accountability. It strengthens respect for justice, diversity and human rights. It promotes institutional legitimacy and trust. It provides a rational framework for resolving ethical dilemmas. It encourages principled decision-making and moral consistency. It offers a powerful and principled foundation for ethical and values-driven leadership in higher education. Its emphasis on respect for persons, duty and moral consistency and directly supports the responsibilities of academic leaders committed to institutional integrity and ethical governance. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) is the primary historical exponent of *deontological ethics*. According to deontological ethics, what makes an action right or wrong are features of the action itself, not the consequences of the action. Kantian ethical theory supports leadership styles supports the promotions of moral duty, individual's dignity and avoidance of manipulation. Thus, the transformational, servant and democratic leadership styles best align with Kantian's ethical theory.

According to Bowie (2000), the Kantian ethical principle that states that every individual must be treated as an end, not as a means. Emphasise respect for persons and human dignity. The ethical leadership implication states that ethical leaders must respect the voice, autonomy, and rights of staff, students and faculty. Furthermore, the Kantian ethical principle explains that in faculty evaluations and disciplinary actions Kantian ethics demands due process, fair treatment, and respect for individuals' dignity. In addition, the Kantian ethical principle also states that actions are ethical if done from a sense of duty, regardless of consequences. This emphasises integrity and moral duty. The ethical leadership implication states that higher education leaders should act ethically even when it is not inconvenient or unpopular. The principle states that upholding academic freedom in the face of political pressure, even if it risks reputation or funding. Furthermore, the Kantian ethical principle also states that ethical rules must be universally applicable. This is referred to as the principle of Fair Policy and universalizability. This principle emphasises that in ethical leadership, policies should be consistent, not based on favoritism or hidden agendas and fair. This can be in terms of hiring, admissions, or disciplinary policies which must be applied uniformly, avoiding double standards.

Moreso, the Kantian principle of respect for individuals includes supporting their rational autonomy, is referred to as autonomy and empowerment. It states that leaders should empower others to act ethically, think critically and participate in shared governance. This can be done by encouraging open dialogue on ethical issues, student participation in policy development and faculty governance. The Kantian Principle that states that truthfulness is a moral duty. Is also referred to as transparency and honesty. This implies that ethical leaders should be honest about institutional challenges, avoid manipulation and communicate openly. Being transparent about budget cuts or organizational restructuring, even when the message is difficult. Leaders who adopt a Kantian theory approach can create a just, ethical, and sustainable environment for their institution. Also, by embracing Kantian ethical theory in higher education leadership, it can create a more, equitable, just, and ethically grounded institution that prioritize the development of student, staff and faculty.

Challenges of Ethical and Values Driven Leadership in Higher Education

The challenges of ethical and values education driven leadership are caused by both internal and external factors. In developed countries, ethical and values-driven leadership in higher education faces numerous challenges, managing finances responsibly, ensuring the responsible use of resources, including navigating conflicts of interest, promoting diversity and inclusion and upholding academic integrity, fostering a strong ethical culture, addressing potential conflicts between personal and organizational values, and manage situations where unethical behavior occurs despite their best efforts. These challenges are increased by external pressures, such as budget cuts, government regulations, the expansion of technology such as the implications of artificial intelligence and other digital technologies; and developing a diverse workforce. Against this backdrop, higher education leaders are challenged to ensure that their institutions not only survive but thrive in the new international, IT-enabled, volatile and competitive environment now faced (Stükelberger , 2019, Geoge and Rose, 2023). And with this has come a significant growth in the complexity and span of responsibilities attendant to their leadership responsibilities. (Bajinath, 2017; Gichuru, 2023); Peterson, Robinson, and Rideaux, 2025).

However, in developing countries, among the challenges of higher education is the problem of unethical leadership. Some challenges exist that test the leadership capacities and values of higher institution administrators. Amongst the challenges include: challenges in academic dishonesty, data falsification, dishonesty in conducting and writing research (plagiarism), lectures not motivated by the administrator to teach well, frequent absenteeism from the institution by the administrator, providing insufficient materials and facilities for teaching and learning, ethical dilemmas in university administration, and the influence of globalization on ethical frameworks. (Stükelberger, 2019). In addition, corruption, cheating, plagiarism, issues like social diversity and social inequity and others. These challenges in organisational leadership in higher education have led famous organisations and higher institutions to fall from grace. This has highlighted the relevancy for ethical and values education driven leadership. Amongst other things, these unethical behaviours may also deter the smooth administration of the higher institutions, affect the quality of graduates from these institutions, reduce the competitive status of these graduates in the globalised world and hamper some of the goals of the Nigerian National Policy on Education concerning higher education. Furthermore, ethical leadership requires continuous vigilance, self-reflection, and courage to uphold principles even when faced with opposition. It is necessary for higher education institutions to address these challenges in order to maintain their integrity and efficiency.

Empirically, an overview on the challenges facing ethical leadership in higher education, drawing upon relevant studies are as follows: Political and Institutional Pressures, Resource Constraints, Conflict of Interest, Academic Freedom and Autonomy, Ethical and values Education and Training. In addressing these challenges requires a commitment to accountability, transparency and the development of ethical leadership competencies through training programmes and education (Yukl, 2006; Ostwal, 2017; Pityana) The challenge of political and institutional pressures in higher education is observed by the institutions operating within complex political and institutional contexts, which can create challenges to ethical leadership. Gichuru (2023) stated that political pressures, such as demands for accountability, can sometimes challenge the ethical decision-making of university leaders. These pressures may create conflicts of interest, also, compromising the leaders' ability to make decisions that prioritize ethical and values principles over political considerations. Furthermore, the challenge of resource constraints states that higher education often face resource constraints, including limited funding, budget cuts and increased competition for resources. These constraints can create ethical and values problems for leaders, as they may need to make difficult decisions regarding resource distribution and allocation.

Pityana, (2017); Brigue and Orlu (2023) ; Peterson et al. (2025) suggested that resource scarcity can lead to ethical challenges such as nepotism, favoritism, or compromising academic integrity in pursuit of financial sustainability. Conflict of Interest is another significant challenge for

ethical leadership in higher education is managing conflicts of interest. Higher education administrators may have multiple responsibilities and roles such as consulting, serving on corporate boards, or engaging in outside activities. These external engagements can create conflicts between the best interests of the university and personal interests. Peterson et al. (2025) argued that conflicts of interest can weaken accountability, trust, and the ethical decision-making process in higher education leadership. The challenge of academic freedom and autonomy states that higher education are committed to academic freedom and autonomy, which can sometimes pose challenges to ethical and values driven leadership. Academic freedom allows scholars to pursue teaching, research and expression without undue influence. However, Kori (2016); Hao (2025) suggested that the pursuit of academic freedom can sometimes clash with ethical and values obligations, such as avoiding plagiarism, responsible conduct of research and maintaining integrity in teaching evaluations. Ethical leaders must navigate the balance between responsible conduct in the pursuit of scholarly excellence and academic freedom. Ethical and values Education and Training is also a challenge for ethical and values driven leadership in higher education. This challenge lies in the provision of ethical and values education and training. Despite the importance of ethical and values driven leadership, there may be a lack of formal training and education on ethical and values education in higher education institutions. Stückelberger (2019) emphasized the need for comprehensive ethical and values education programmes that equip leaders with the skills, knowledge, and moral reasoning abilities necessary to navigate ethical challenges effectively.

Re- Engineering challenges in ethical and value driven leadership in higher education.

Strategies for Fostering and re-engineering ethical and values driven leadership in higher education are as follows:

- In ethical and values driven leadership, leaders should lead by example. and Administrators and faculty should demonstrate ethical behaviour in their own interactions and actions. Ethical leaders should promote ethical leadership training by Providing opportunities for administrators, faculty and staff to develop their ethical leadership skills. Also, leaders should establish a strong ethical culture and create a supportive environment where ethical conduct is encouraged and valued.
- Ethical leaders should encourage technology and online learning by adapting strategies to local infrastructure and culture. Also, tailor ethical education to the specific context and needs of the institution. Furthermore, Using encouraging the use of secure online assessment platforms and advanced plagiarism detection tools to address issues of academic dishonesty in online learning environments. The Promotion of cybersecurity awareness and digital ethics to teach students about the ethical implications of cybersecurity risks and technology use.
- Ethical leaders should encourage ethical reflection and engagement in higher educational institutions. This can be done by providing opportunities for community learning and service. In addition, they should engage students in meaningful service projects that challenge them to think about ethical responsibility and social justice and ethical responsibility. Furthermore, to foster integrity a culture of academic integrity, Promote honesty and respect for intellectual property. Encourage students to engage in ethical discussions and debates: Create spaces for students to explore ethical issues and develop their own values.
- Ethical leaders should advocate the integration of ethical and values education into the Curriculum of higher educational institutions. This can be achieved by incorporating ethics and values as core component into all disciplines. Also, by Using case studies and real-world examples to expose students to ethical dilemmas and challenges faced by professionals in various fields. In addition, by encouraging ethical reasoning and critical thinking: Develop students' ability to analyse situations, evaluate different perspectives, and make informed decisions. This will help to prepare students to become responsible and ethical leaders in their respective fields.



- The ethical leader should create a culture of integrity, establish clear ethical guidelines and frameworks. Develop institutional policies and codes of conduct that promote ethical behaviour. In addition, they should promote open communication and dialogue: Encourage staff, faculty and students to discuss ethical issues respectfully and openly. Ethical leaders should create ethical training programmes which should be implemented to provide staff, students and faculty with opportunities to learn about ethics and values and develop their ethical decision-making skills.
- Moreso, concerning financial management, higher education institutions are experiencing increased scrutiny regarding their financial practices. Leaders must ensure accountability, transparency, and responsible stewardship of resources while balancing the need for financial sustainability.
- Also, undermining the core values of higher education are, academic integrity, contract cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic misconduct. Leaders are to establish clear procedures and policies to address and prevent academic misconduct while fostering a culture of ethical honesty and ethical scholarship.
- Furthermore, the challenge of conflicts of interest include participating in research with potential financial gains, accepting gifts from vendors, or making decisions that benefit specific individuals or groups. The university leader's personal or professional interests should not clash with the institution's best interests.
- In addition, promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion is a critical ethical imperative for higher education institutions. To re-engineer this challenge, leaders must create inclusive environments, address systemic biases, and ensure that all members of the campus community feel respected and valued.
- Moreso, creating significant challenges for ethical leadership is external pressures, which includes budget reductions, government regulations, and the rapid pace of technological change. To re-engineer this challenge, leaders should remain true to their institutions missions and values and must navigate these pressures. Universities have a responsibility to use resources ethically, wisely, and sustainably. This includes reducing waste, managing energy consumption and promoting environmentally friendly practices.
- The challenge of ethical dilemma in decision making, that is making difficult decisions with no easy answers, can be re-engineered by leaders considering the potential consequences of their actions, preparing to weigh competing values and making decisions that are both practical and ethical.
- Furthermore, the challenge of creating a campus culture that embodies ethical values requires commitment from all members of the community and consistent leadership. This also, includes providing ethical training, modeling ethical behavior and encouraging open communication about ethical issues (Argyropoulou, 2015; Stükelberger, 2017 ; Gichuru, 2023). However, by re-engineering these challenges and actively working to address them, leaders in higher education can adopt a more ethical and values-driven environment that supports the academic goals, visions, and mission of higher education and also, contributes to a more equitable and just society.
- Fostering ethical leadership and integrity requires the active involvement of various stakeholders within an organization. Stakeholders, including employees, customers, shareholders, and the wider community, play a crucial role in promoting ethical leadership practices. By involving and engaging stakeholders, organizations can create a shared commitment to ethical leadership and integrity, thereby enhancing their reputation, stakeholder trust, and long-term sustainability.



Conclusion:

Ethical and values education driven leadership provides a synergistic combination of administrative and visionary leadership which serves to enhance the growth, culture, survival, and long-term viability of higher education institutions. The role of ethical leadership in decision making is also increasing with globalisation. Ethical decision-making in this context is not achieved through mere adherence to moral standards; instead, it requires inspiring and guiding others towards positive outcomes through internal and external complexity. By using the ethical theories and leadership styles. Ethical theorists believe that a good leadership refers not only to having the competence of a leader, but also to ethical transformation of people. The Kantian ethical theory for example, focuses on duty, universal principles, and respect for individuals, promoting ethical consistency and dignity in leadership practices. Unethical behaviours in decision making by the administrator, can prove dangerous for the higher institution. Since Ethical and values education has significant effect on leadership, re-engineering principles of ethical practices also have an impact on the development and quality of higher education institutions. Most institutions now focus on training and enriching their leaders ethically to enable the higher institutions continue to fulfill their goals, visions and mission well into the future.

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