



THE IMPACT OF ETHICAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION ON SECONDARY EDUCATION GOALS ATTAINMENT IN YAKURR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, CROSS RIVER STATE



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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of ethical school administration on secondary education goals attainment in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. One research question and hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. The study adopted correlation design. The population of this study comprises all the 17 public secondary school and 346 teachers in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State. Census approach was adopted in the study. An instrument titled “Ethical School Administration and Secondary Education Goals Attainment. Questionnaire (ESASEGAQ)” was used for data collection. The questionnaire was face and content validated by three research experts from the department of Educational Management, and from Measurement and Evaluation, faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar. The reliability was determined through Cronbach alpha technique and the index ranges between .88 - .90. The descriptive statistics output of the Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used to answer the research question, while the ANOVA and relative coefficient output of Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the analysis revealed that ethical school administration significantly predict secondary education goals attainment ($R=.638$). Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that ethical school administration statistically predict secondary education goals attainment in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State. This underscores the importance of integrity, fairness, transparency, and accountability in school leadership as critical determinants of educational outcomes. It was recommended that Cross River State Ministry of Education in collaboration with the management of secondary schools should organize regular training and capacity-building workshops on ethical leadership for school administrators to strengthen their commitment to ethical practices in order to enhance the attainment of secondary education goals in public schools.

Keywords: Ethical, School Administration, Secondary Education, Goals Attainment

Introduction

Secondary education is a crucial stage of formal education that comes after primary education and precedes tertiary or higher education. It generally serves students between the ages of 11 or 12 and 17 or 18, offering a comprehensive curriculum that includes academic subjects, vocational training, and



life skills. In Nigeria and many other countries, it is structured into junior and senior secondary levels, each lasting three years. Beyond preparing students for higher education, the objectives of secondary education include equipping school leavers with practical skills for the labor market, fostering human capital development, and promoting responsible citizenship and societal well-being (FRN, 2013; Etor et al., 2019; Obona et al., 2024). As noted by Obona and Etete (2019), achieving these objectives largely depends on the dedication and competence of teachers, who remain the most vital human resource in driving the success of secondary education in Nigeria.

Goals play a crucial role in all organizations, including educational institutions, by providing clear direction, enhancing the use of available resources, motivating stakeholders, and establishing standards for measuring performance. In the context of this study, goal attainment is understood as the achievement of predetermined educational objectives within a given period, ensuring that both individual and institutional inputs lead to measurable outcomes. Etor et al. (2019) highlighted three key elements of achieving school goals: enabling access to higher education, facilitating knowledge acquisition, and ensuring high-quality teaching and learning. Thus, secondary school graduates should be equipped with adequate skills and knowledge to either pursue tertiary education or enter the workforce. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004), as cited by Ndem and Egbai (2016), the broader aim of secondary education is to prepare students for further education and effective participation in society. Similarly, Ebete and Ejims (2020) stressed the need to produce capable graduates who meet national expectations, while Obona et al. (2024) noted that true goal attainment also includes academic success, personal growth, career or educational readiness, and alignment with the school's mission and vision.

School goal attainment can be evaluated by examining the quality of instruction, student discipline, academic achievement, and the acquisition of vocational or practical skills (Madukwe et al., 2024). Obasi (2018) highlighted that committed teachers demonstrate responsibility in both administrative and teaching roles, are prompt in performing duties, and actively seek professional development opportunities. After completing secondary education, students are expected to transition into various careers or pursue higher education to become financially independent and contribute meaningfully to national development. However, research shows that low levels of teacher commitment and poor goal attainment remain persistent challenges in Nigeria's secondary schools (Madukwe et al., 2024; Ofoha, 2011; Obona et al., 2024; Arop, Owan, & Ekpang, 2018; Amuche et al., 2014). Nyong (2013) noted that many secondary school graduates in Nigeria lack the essential vocational, technical, and entrepreneurial competencies expected of them. This gap contributes to the high rate of unemployment, particularly in Cross River State.

According to Arop et al. (2018), the quality of instruction in many schools is substandard, while Obona et al. (2023) reported unethical practices among teachers, such as absenteeism and poor interpersonal relations. Ekaette, Ekpenyong, and Owan (2019b) lamented that a significant number of graduates do not advance to tertiary education and instead fall into social vices like drug abuse and cultism. Madukwe et al. (2024) observed that secondary education goals in Nigeria have not been fully realized, as many graduates lack employable skills, while others become involved in anti-social behavior out of frustration. Similarly, Fehintola (2015) reported that students' academic outcomes frequently fall below expectations, despite significant investments by both the government and parents. In public secondary schools in Yakurr Local Government Area, the challenges are even more alarming. Many students either drop out or complete school without acquiring marketable skills, leading to outcomes such as street hawking, petty crime, or extreme poverty. Worsening this situation are systemic problems like overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate facilities, lack of motivation among staff, and poor learning conditions. These issues hinder students' comprehensive development across intellectual, emotional, and practical domains. Thus, the realization of secondary education objectives in the area is severely threatened. Addressing these problems requires urgent reforms like ethically driven school administration to ensure efficient school goals attainment.

Ethical school administration refers to the practice of leading educational institutions with integrity, fairness, and a commitment to moral principles that guide decision-making and interactions within the school community. It encompasses values such as honesty, transparency, accountability, respect, and justice, ensuring that school leaders act as role models and foster an environment conducive to ethical behavior among staff and students. According to Orunbon, Ifenaike, and Adeleke (2022), ethical leadership in schools involves characteristics like honesty, fairness, people orientation, power sharing, ethical guidance, role clarity, and concern for sustainability. Similarly, Gikonyo (2020) emphasizes that ethical leadership is critical in steering school managers toward value-based leadership, which significantly impacts effective school management. Furthermore, Maimela (2024) highlights that ethical school leadership promotes accountability and trust, essential components for the success and credibility of educational institutions. Some ethical principles in school administration are fairness, honesty, integrity, equality, impartiality, responsibility, organizational commitment, respect for human rights, adherence to the law, tolerance, and transparency (Şentürk, 2011).

Studies show that stronger ethical relationships between teachers and administrators boost trust and as a result, the school environment becomes more effective and focused, paving the way for the consistent attainment of its educational goals. Freeman and Stewart (2016) as cited in Wey-Amaewhule and Eberechi (2024) portray ethical leadership as exemplified behavior that guides others toward moral choices by prompting key ethical inquiries. Downe et al. (2016) argue that such leadership either springs from a leader's personal character thereby inspiring duplication, or from the formal policies and frameworks they establish to shape followers' conduct. Northouse (2016) outlines five foundational tenets of ethical leadership—respect, service, justice, honesty, and community building—that serve as its key indicators. Research further shows that ethical leadership correlates with positive staff outcomes, such as constructive attitudes and behaviors, alongside reduced workplace deviance and lower intentions to quit (Chen & Hou, 2016; Ng & Feldman, 2015).

In a study, Obiekwe et al. (2021) investigated the ethical leadership strategies principals use to achieve goals in Anambra State's public secondary schools. Employing a descriptive survey, they posed four research questions and tested four hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. From a total of 6,382 teachers across 261 schools, a stratified multi-stage sample of 638 (192 male, 446 female) was drawn. Data collection relied on the researcher-designed "Principals' Ethical Leadership Practices Questionnaire (PELPQ)," a four-point scale validated by experts. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for its four subscales ranged from 0.77 to 0.86 (0.81 overall). Of 638 instruments distributed, 630 were returned. Analysis via mean ratings and t-tests revealed that principals employ four ethical leadership dimensions—climatic, communicative, behavioral, and decisional—to drive goal attainment.

Wey-Amaewhule and Eberechi (2024) examined how principals' ethical leadership affects school administration in Rivers State's public secondary schools. Using a descriptive survey and a census of all 63 principals, they gathered data with a bespoke Likert-style questionnaire (62 responses). Reliability testing yielded Cronbach's alphas between 0.67 and 0.81. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) addressed three research questions, while z-tests evaluated three null hypotheses at $p < .05$. Findings indicate that principals' ethical practices enhance instructional administration and bolster teachers' performance and professional integrity.

Sikpi and Enoch (2022) explored the relationship between leadership core values and goal attainment in Bayelsa State's public universities. Their correlational design was driven by four research questions and hypotheses tested at a 0.05 level. The census-based sample comprised all 214 senior administrators (e.g., Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Bursars, Librarians, Deans, Department Heads). Two instruments—the Leadership Core Values of Public University Questionnaire (LCVPUQ) and the Goals Attainment of Public University Questionnaire (GAPUQ) were researcher-developed, validated, and yielded Cronbach's alphas of 0.86 and 0.79. Means and standard deviations summarized responses, and Pearson's correlation (SPSS v.25) tested hypotheses. Results demonstrated a significant positive correlation between leadership values and university goal attainment.

Madukwe et al. (2024) assessed the link between participatory leadership behaviors and goal achievement in Abia State's secondary schools using an ex post facto approach. Two research questions and one hypothesis ($\alpha = .05$) framed the study. Out of 303 schools across three zones, 160 principals were randomly selected. Data were collected via the self-designed "Participatory Leadership Behaviour and Goal Attainment Questionnaire (PLBGAQ)." Mean and standard deviation analyses addressed the research questions; multiple regression tested the hypothesis. They found that both participatory leadership and overall goal attainment were low, yet participatory behaviors significantly predicted schools' goal achievement.

Obona et al. (2024) investigated how management variables interact to influence goal attainment in Ikom LGA's public secondary schools, guided by three hypotheses at $p < .05$. A correlational design encompassing all 91 administrators (21 principals, 67 vice-principals) from 24 schools used a census sampling. The "Management Variables and Goals Attainment in Secondary Schools Questionnaire (MVGASSQ)," a 20-item scale validated by University of Calabar experts, showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82. Simple and multiple linear regressions revealed that both leadership style and facilities management significantly predict goal attainment in the area.

The reviewed studies have shown that ethical school administration positively influence the school goals attainment. However, most of these studies were conducted outside Yakurr Local Government Area in Cross River State, meaning their findings may not be applicable to this specific region due to its unique ethnic and geographical context. No existing study has examined how ethical school administration impacts secondary education goal attainment using the same sub-variables as the present research. This study therefore seeks to fill that gap and contribute new insights to the field.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary education holds a pivotal role within the educational framework of every nation, including Nigeria. As outlined in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), the objectives of secondary education include the development of skilled manpower, fostering excellence among students, and nurturing individuals capable of independent thought who respect the opinions and emotions of others. Accordingly, secondary schools serve as vital institutions in the personal development of learners and in promoting national socio-economic advancement.

Nevertheless, it was observed with concern that public secondary schools in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State face several challenges that impede the realization of these educational goals. These challenges manifest in overcrowded classrooms due to large student enrollment, rising cases of examination malpractice, declining academic performance, and increasing instances of indiscipline and disrespect towards school authorities. Additionally, the schools suffer from poor infrastructure, limited educational resources, and a shortage of vocational training programs—factors that collectively undermine students' career readiness and hinder the effective achievement of secondary education objectives.

In an effort to address these issues, the Cross River State Government, in partnership with key stakeholders, has implemented various interventions. These include investments in school infrastructure, the organization of teacher training programs, and the consistent payment of salaries. The M-Power initiative has also contributed by recruiting additional teaching staff to ease the burden on existing personnel. Despite these efforts, the expected improvements in educational outcomes have not yet been fully realized. It is within this context that the current study seeks to investigate whether ethical school administration relates to secondary education goals attainment in Yakurr Local Government Area.

Purpose of the study

The study Assessed the impact of ethical school administration on secondary education **goals attainment** in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study sought to examine whether: Ethical school administration predicts secondary education **goals attainment** in public schools in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State.

Research question

The following research question guided the study: To what extent does ethical school administration predicts secondary education goals attainment in public schools in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State?

Hypotheses

This hypothesis guided the study: Ethical school administration does not significantly predict secondary education goals attainment in public schools in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State.

Methodology

The study adopted correlation design. The population of this study comprises all the 17 public secondary school and 346 teachers in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State. Out of this number, 207 were male teachers while 139 were female teachers (Planning Research and Statistics Department: Secondary Education Board, Calabar 2025). These numbers formed the study population. The researcher adopted census method in selecting the entire population of schools and teachers in the area for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a 24 items questionnaire designed by the researcher. Titled “Ethical School Administration and Secondary Education Goals Attainment. Questionnaire (ESASEGAQ).” The questionnaires were structured on a four-point modified Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) and these responses were scored 1,2,3,4, as their weights. The questionnaire was face and content validated by three research experts from the department of Educational Management, and from Measurement and Evaluation, faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar. The reliability was determined through Cronbach alpha technique and the index ranges between .88 - .90. Statistically, the instruments were considered reliable for data collection. The researchers and seven trained research assistants engaged in the administration of the questionnaire. The copies of the questionnaire were administered and after some time, the researchers retrieved back all the copies for data analysis. The researchers record 100% return rate. The descriptive statistics output of the Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used to answer the research question, while the ANOVA and relative coefficient output of Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research questions

To what extent does ethical school administration predicts secondary education goals attainment in public schools in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State? The result is presented in Table 1. The result in table 1 showed that regression coefficient (R) of .638 and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of .407 were obtained. The R^2 ($R^2=.407$) meant that the variable of ethical school administration contributed 40.7% of the total variance in secondary education goals attainment in public schools in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State while the remaining percentage score 59.3% was predicted by other external factors outside ethical school administration.

Table 1

Summary of simple linear regression analysis showing the extent to which ethical school administration predicts secondary education goals attainment in public schools in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State

Model Summary

Mode 1	R	R Square	Square Adjusted R	Std. Error of Estimate	Decision
	.638 ^a	.407	.406	3.366	High Extent

- a. Dependent Variable: Secondary education goals attainment
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Ethical school administration

Test of Hypotheses

Ethical school administration does not significantly predict secondary education goals attainment in public schools in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State. The two variables in this hypothesis are ethical school administration and secondary education goals attainment. Simple Linear Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis and the result of the analysis is presented in **Table 2**. Table 2 showed that ethical school administration significantly predicts secondary education goals attainment as shown by the simple linear regression coefficient (R) of .638 and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of .407 obtained. The R^2 ($R^2=.407$) meant that the variable of school administration contributed 40.7% of the total variance in secondary education goals attainment while the remaining percentage score 59.3% was predicted by other external factors outside ethical school administration. This showed that the independent variable (ethical school administration) significantly predicts the dependent variable (secondary education goals attainment), $F 236.423, p (.000) < .05$. Referring to the coefficients in table 2, the unstandardized coefficient for ethical school administration is .825. This meant that for every point increase in secondary education goals attainment, there is .825 increase in ethical school administration scores from the questionnaire instrument used. Based on this result, the null hypothesis which stated that ethical school administration does not significantly predict secondary education goals attainment in public schools in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State is rejected.

Table 2

Summary of simple linear regression analysis showing how ethical school administration predicts secondary education goals attainment in public schools in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State (N=346)

Anova^a

							Decision
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	2679.404	1	2679.404	236.423	.000 ^b	Rejected
	Residual	3898.584	344	11.333			
	Total	6577.988	345				

*Significant $p < .05$; $R = .638$; $R^2 = .407$; Adj. $R^2 = .406$

Coefficients^a

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.165	1.045		3.028	.000
	Inclusive decision-making	.825	.054	.638	15.376	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Secondary education goals attainment

b. Predictors: (Constant), Inclusive decision-making

Discussion of findings

The finding of hypothesis one revealed that ethical school administration significantly predicts secondary education goals attainment in public schools in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria ($R = .638$). The finding is not surprising because ethical leadership promotes accountability, inclusiveness, and trust, which are essential for mobilizing staff and resources toward the achievement of educational objectives. It suggests that school administrators in the study area demonstrated integrity, fairness, and transparency which in turn inspire cooperation, reduce conflict,



and align the efforts of teachers and other stakeholders toward goals attainment. The implication of this finding is that the more school administrators adopt key ethical principles in administration of the school the more they will enhance institutional performance and efficient realization of set school goals.

The finding of this hypothesis agrees with similar findings of Sikpi and Enoch (2022) who explored the relationship between leadership core values and goal attainment in Bayelsa State's public universities. Results revealed a significant correlation between leadership values and university goal attainment. The finding supports that of Obona et al. (2024) that both leadership style and facilities management significantly predict goal attainment in the area. It further corroborates the findings of Madukwe et al. (2024) who assessed the link between participatory leadership behaviors and goal achievement in Abia State's secondary schools using an ex post facto approach. The study found that participatory behaviors significantly predicted schools' goal achievement.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study concludes that ethical school administration significantly predict the attainment of secondary education goals in public schools in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The results underscore the importance of integrity, fairness, transparency, and accountability in school leadership as critical determinants of educational outcomes. Therefore, fostering ethical practices among school administrators is essential for enhancing goal-oriented performance and promoting quality education at the secondary school level.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Cross River State Ministry of Education in collaboration with the management of secondary schools should organize regular training and capacity-building workshops on ethical leadership for school administrators to strengthen their commitment to ethical practices in order to enhance the attainment of secondary education goals in public schools.

Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by empirically establishing that ethical school administration is a significant predictor of secondary education goals attainment in public schools in Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State. It provides contextual evidence that ethical leadership practices such as fairness, transparency, and accountability directly influence educational outcomes, thereby offering a framework for educational policy reforms and leadership development programs aimed at improving school effectiveness in similar socio-educational settings.

Limitation of the Study

One key limitation of this study is its narrow geographical focus, as it was confined to only one local government area—Yakurr—out of the eighteen local government areas in Cross River State, Nigeria. This limited scope may affect the generalizability of the findings. Consequently, future research should consider a larger and more diverse sample across multiple local government areas to validate and extend the current findings.

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