



ETHICAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION IN PUBLIC SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE



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Abstract

The study examined Ethical Leadership Practices and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. Two research questions and two hypotheses were drawn. The study adopted a correlation research design. The population of the study consisted of 494 principals and vice principals across 247 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The sample size which stood at 494 respondents, was a census of the entire population. Stratified sampling technique was used to select the respondents, which comprise of 186 male and 308 female principals, across 247 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Two structured instruments titled "Ethical Leadership Practices Questionnaire (ELPQ)" and "Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools Questionnaire (SSAPSSSQ)" were used to elicit data from the respondents. The reliability of the instrument gave a Cronbach Alpha index of 0.82 and 0.80 which was considered reliable. The data gathered from the respondents were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Furthermore, t-transformation was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that, there is significant relationship between Integrity leadership practice, Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that, School administrators and educational leaders should undergo regular ethics training as part of their professional development. Such training should emphasize core ethical principles like integrity, Fairness and equity, transparency, accountability, and empathy.

Keywords: Administration, Ethical Leadership Practices, Fairness and equity, Integrity, Public Senior Secondary Schools, Sustainable

Introduction

In contemporary educational systems, ethical leadership has emerged as a critical component for effective and sustainable school administration. Ethical leadership practices refer to the demonstration of integrity, fairness, transparency, accountability, and respect in the management of educational institutions (Brown & Treviño, 2020). These practices are essential for nurturing a positive school climate, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, and promoting trust and ethical behavior among both staff and students. In public senior secondary schools, where leadership is often challenged by limited resources, policy inconsistencies, and social pressures, ethical leadership becomes even more vital in ensuring the delivery of quality education and achieving long-term secondary school goals (Okeke, 2022). The types of ethical leadership practices for sustainable school administration in public senior secondary schools includes; Integrity leadership practice, Fairness and equity leadership practice. Integrity leadership practice refers to the unwavering adherence to ethical principles, honesty, and moral values by school leaders in the administration of public senior secondary schools. It involves being truthful, transparent, consistent, and accountable in both words and actions. In the context of sustainable school administration, integrity fosters a trustworthy environment where teachers, students, and other stakeholders feel valued and respected. Leaders with integrity model the behavior they expect from others, setting high standards for accountability and fairness. According to Okoro and Ekwe (2023),

integrity is the backbone of ethical leadership in schools and plays a pivotal role in maintaining discipline, fostering mutual respect, and encouraging a shared commitment to educational goals.

Furthermore, integrity in school leadership enhances long-term planning and policy implementation, ensuring decisions are made not for immediate gains but for the sustainable development of the school. It promotes transparency in resource management, recruitment processes, and the enforcement of rules and regulations. As noted by Chinedu and Adebayo (2022), schools led by individuals with high levels of integrity are more likely to attract community support, retain qualified staff, and achieve better educational outcomes. In Rivers State, where public senior secondary schools often face challenges related to governance and resource allocation, integrity in leadership is crucial for ensuring that policies are implemented justly and equitably, laying a foundation for lasting institutional improvement.

Fairness and equity leadership practice refer to the consistent and impartial treatment of all individuals within the school environment, regardless of their background, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, or academic performance. In the administration of public senior secondary schools, fairness ensures that rules, opportunities, and disciplinary actions are applied uniformly, while equity goes a step further to acknowledge and accommodate the unique needs of diverse students and staff. School leaders who embody fairness and equity foster a culture of inclusion, reduce favoritism, and promote trust among stakeholders. According to Adeyemi and Uzoegwu (2023), equity-driven leadership enhances students' access to quality education and encourages staff motivation, both of which are essential for sustainable school growth.

Moreover, fairness and equity contribute significantly to conflict resolution, participatory decision-making, and a positive school climate. Leaders who prioritize these values are more likely to address systemic inequalities, advocate for the needs of marginalized groups, and distribute resources judiciously. This form of ethical leadership aligns with the principles of sustainable school administration by ensuring that all decisions are guided by justice and the well-being of the entire school community. As noted by Okonkwo and Hassan (2022), equitable leadership in public schools promotes long-term educational success by fostering a balanced and harmonious learning environment, ultimately supporting national development goals and inclusive education policies.

Sustainable school administration involves creating systems, policies, and practices that ensure the long-term viability and improvement of schools in ways that support academic excellence, equity, and responsible use of resources. Ethical leadership contributes significantly to sustainability by promoting inclusive decision-making, encouraging stakeholder participation, and ensuring that the educational environment remains just and supportive for all (Ede & Ogbonna, 2021). In public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, the adoption of ethical leadership principles is particularly important as these secondary schools serve a diverse student population and often face challenges such as inadequate funding, teacher shortages, and infrastructural decay.

The integration of ethical leadership practices into school administration leads to better policy implementation, enhances teacher motivation, reduces corruption, and improves the overall educational outcomes of students. Principals and school heads who exhibit ethical behavior set a tone for the entire school, positively influencing staff conduct and student discipline (Chinedu & Ojo, 2023). Moreover, ethical leadership enables school administrators to manage conflicts effectively, uphold human dignity, and create a conducive learning environment, all of which are crucial for achieving sustainable development in education.

Given the importance of ethical leadership in addressing administrative and moral challenges in public schools, it becomes necessary to explore how these practices influence school sustainability in Rivers State. This study is aimed at assessing the prevalence of ethical leadership practices and their impact on school administration, with a focus on identifying strategies that can enhance leadership effectiveness and promote sustainable educational development in public senior secondary schools. As Nigeria continues to align with global goals such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on quality education, ethical leadership remains an indispensable pillar for progress (UNESCO, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Ethical leadership plays a pivotal role in achieving sustainable school administration, particularly in public senior secondary schools where issues of accountability, integrity, transparency, and equity are frequently at stake. However, there are growing concerns that ethical leadership practices are not being fully implemented or adhered to in many public schools in Rivers State. Reports of favoritism, lack of transparency in decision-making, inadequate teacher motivation, and unethical behaviors such as embezzlement of funds, abuse of authority, and biased disciplinary measures have raised questions about the ethical standards upheld by school leaders. These issues not only hinder the growth and stability of secondary education but also compromise the moral and academic development of students, which are core objectives of sustainable education.

Furthermore, the absence of strong ethical leadership often leads to poor school climate, diminished staff morale, and low stakeholder trust. When school principals or administrators fail to lead by example—neglecting principles such as fairness, respect, and accountability—it creates a ripple effect of disillusionment and disengagement among teachers, students, and parents. In Rivers State, where public education faces numerous challenges including resource mismanagement and lack of inclusive decision-making, the need for ethical leadership becomes even more critical. Yet, despite policies advocating for integrity and best practices in educational leadership, the implementation remains weak and inconsistent across many senior secondary schools.

Given this context, there is an urgent need to examine the nature, extent, and effectiveness of ethical leadership practices in the administration of public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Understanding the link between ethical leadership and sustainable school administration will provide insights into how leadership behavior influences policy implementation, resource utilization, stakeholder engagement, and overall school performance. Addressing these issues is essential for the promotion of transparent, inclusive, and goal-oriented leadership that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and ensures long-term educational outcomes for future generations. Therefore, the researcher carried out the study to find out; What is the relationship between ethical leadership practices and sustainable school administration in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State? And to proffer solutions to the stated problems.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the ethical leadership practices and sustainable school administration in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Ascertain the relationship between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.
2. Determine the relationship between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were asked to guide the study.

1. What is the relationship between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State?

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant relationship between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlation research design. The area of the study was Rivers State. The population of the study consisted of 494 principals and vice principals across 247 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The sample size which stood at 494 respondents, which comprise of 186 male and 308 female principals, was drawn from the population using simple random sampling technique, from across 247 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Two structured instruments titled “Ethical Leadership Practices Questionnaire (ELPQ)” and “Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools Questionnaire (SSAPSSSQ)” were used to elicit data from the respondents. Each section was used to obtain information on the objectives which were designed in the pattern of four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with numerical values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The validation of the research instrument was determined using face and content validity. This was done by two experts from the Department of Educational Management, Rivers State University. The reliability of the instrument was established through Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient method. The reliability of the instrument gave a Cronbach Alpha index of 0.82 and 0.80 which was considered reliable. The researcher administered the questionnaire to the respondents with the help of two trained research assistants. All the copies of the instrument were administered and retrieved successfully. The data gathered from the respondents were analyzed Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Furthermore, t-transformation was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. T-cal value less than table value (1.96) were regarded as “accepted” while calculated hypotheses greater than the table value were regarded as “rejected”.

Result

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Relationship between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

Variables	N	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-cal	Remark
Integrity leadership practice	494	2573	60305	56935	0.83	High and Positive Relationship
Sustainable School Administration	494	2532	56299			

Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 shows the relationship between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. The analysis revealed that the correlation coefficient existing between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State is 0.83. This means that there is a high and positive relationship between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. This implies that, Integrity in leadership fosters a culture of trust between school administrators, teachers, students, and the community. Leaders who practice integrity are more likely to be accountable in resource management, policy implementation, and staff supervision. Integrity-driven leadership minimizes unethical behavior such as favoritism, misappropriation of funds, and examination malpractice. Leaders with integrity uphold rules and policies consistently, regardless of personal interests. Integrity-based leaders serve as role models to staff and students, instilling values such as honesty, diligence, and fairness.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State?

Table 2: Relationship between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

Variables	N	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-cal	Remark
Fairness and equity leadership practice	494	2672	54819	59556	0.81	High and Positive Relationship
Sustainable School Administration.	494	2584	46298			

Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 shows the relationship between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. Pearsson product moment correlation analysis revealed that the correlation existing between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State is 0.81. The correlation coefficient obtained indicates that there is a high and positive relationship between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. This implies that, fairness and equity in leadership ensure that the voices of all stakeholders—teachers, students, non-teaching staff, and parents—are considered in decision-making processes. Leaders who practice fairness eliminate favoritism, gender bias, or ethnic discrimination in staff deployment, student discipline, and resource allocation. Equity-driven leadership ensures that resources such as teaching materials, classrooms, and support programs are fairly distributed based on need. When school leaders treat all staff fairly in terms of recognition, promotion, and workload, it boosts morale and job satisfaction. Fair and equitable practices in handling student issues like assessment, discipline, and extracurricular opportunities promote a sense of belonging and motivation, which leads to better academic outcomes and reduced dropout rates.

Hypotheses Test

H0₁: 1. There is no significant relationship between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Table 3: t-transformation of the Relationship between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

Variables	N	r-cal	A	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
Integrity leadership practice.	494	0.83	0.05	20.63	1.96	Rejected
Sustainable School Administration.	494					

Source: Research Data, 2025

Table 3 shows the t-transformation of the relationship between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. the r-calculated value of 0.83 was subjected to t-transformation which yielded a t-cal value of 20.63. Since the t-

calculated value obtained is higher than the t-critical value (1.96), the null hypotheses was hence rejected. That is, there is a significant relationship between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Table 4: t-transformation of the Relationship between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

Variables	N	r-cal	A	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
Fairness and equity leadership practice	494	0.81	0.05	14.09	1.96	Rejected
Sustainable School Administration	494					

Source: Research Data, 2025

Table 4 shows the t-transformation of the relationship between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. The r-calculated value of 0.81 was subjected to t-transformation which yielded a t-cal value of 14.09. Since the t-calculated value obtained is higher than the t-critical value (1.96), the null hypotheses was hence rejected. That is, there is a significant relationship between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from table 1 shows the magnitude of relationship between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. It was revealed that correlation coefficient existing between the two variables was 0.83, indicating a strong positive relationship. The hypothesis showed that there is a significant relationship between Integrity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. This finding aligns with Okoro and Ekwe (2023) who posited that, integrity is the backbone of ethical leadership in schools and plays a pivotal role in maintaining discipline, fostering mutual respect, and encouraging a shared commitment to educational goals. Integrity in school leadership enhances long-term planning and policy implementation, ensuring decisions are made not for immediate gains but for the sustainable development of the institution. As noted by Chinedu and Adebayo (2022), schools led by individuals with high levels of integrity are more likely to attract community support, retain qualified staff, and achieve better educational outcomes. In Rivers State, where public senior secondary schools often face challenges related to governance and resource allocation, integrity in leadership is crucial for ensuring that policies are implemented justly and equitably, laying a foundation for lasting institutional improvement.

Secondly, the findings from table 2 shows that the relationship between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis showed that there is a strong correlation between Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. The tested hypothesis showed that the relationship existing between the two variables are significant at 0.05 alpha level. In relation to this finding, Adeyemi and Uzoegwu (2023) posited that, in the administration of public senior secondary schools, fairness ensures that rules, opportunities, and disciplinary actions are applied uniformly, while equity goes a step further to acknowledge and accommodate the unique needs of diverse students and

staff. School leaders who embody fairness and equity foster a culture of inclusion, reduce favoritism, and promote trust among stakeholders, equity-driven leadership enhances students' access to quality education and encourages staff motivation, both of which are essential for sustainable school growth. As noted by Okonkwo and Hassan (2022), equitable leadership in public schools promotes long-term educational success by fostering a balanced and harmonious learning environment, ultimately supporting national development goals and inclusive education policies.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concludes that, there is significant relationship between Integrity leadership practice, Fairness and equity leadership practice and Sustainable School Administration in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. Ethical leadership practices are fundamental to achieving sustainable school administration, especially in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. When school leaders uphold values such as integrity, accountability, fairness, transparency, and respect, they foster a culture of trust and excellence that directly influences the effectiveness of teaching, learning, and administrative efficiency. Ethical leadership is not just about compliance with rules; it is about modeling the right behaviors, making morally sound decisions, and treating all stakeholders—students, teachers, parents, and the wider community—with dignity and fairness. In an era where public education systems are faced with increasing demands and scrutiny, ethical leadership provides the moral compass that guides sustainable policies and practices, enabling schools to function with purpose, resilience, and long-term vision. Sustainable school administration depends not only on visionary leadership but also on the consistency with which ethical standards are practiced and enforced. In Rivers State, where public senior secondary schools often struggle with systemic challenges such as poor funding, lack of infrastructure, and staff dissatisfaction, the role of ethical leadership becomes even more crucial.

Recommendations

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

1. School administrators and educational leaders should undergo regular ethics training as part of their professional development. Such training should emphasize core ethical principles like integrity, transparency, accountability, and empathy. Through capacity-building workshops and seminars, leaders can be equipped with the moral reasoning and decision-making skills needed to address challenges ethically and uphold values that promote trust and fairness in school environments. Ethical education enhances leaders' ability to maintain consistent standards and inspire positive behavior in both staff and students.
2. Public senior secondary schools in Rivers State should adopt and consistently enforce a well-articulated code of conduct that outlines ethical expectations for administrators, teachers, and non-academic staff. This code should address key areas such as fairness in decision-making, the responsible use of power, nondiscrimination, and accountability. Having such a framework not only deters unethical practices such as favoritism and corruption but also fosters a transparent and inclusive administrative structure where stakeholders are treated equitably.

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