



## PRINCIPALS' APPLICATION OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHERS' PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN IMO STATE.



**Okonkwo, Bernadette. Ngozi. (Ph.D)**

School of General Education

Department of Educational Foundations

Benjamin Uwajumogu (State) College of Education Ihitte Uboma

zikaokonkwo@gmail.com

&

**Elezuo Gladys Chinyere (Ph.D)**

Benjamin Uwajumogu (State)

College of Education, Ihitte Uboma

### **Abstract**

*This study on principals' application of ethics for effective teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state stems from the researcher's concern on principals' and teachers' unethical practices and lackadaisical attitude to duty which invariably results to the falling standards of education in Nigeria. Three (3) research objectives and three (3) research questions guided the study. The descriptive survey design was used. The population for the study is 6,429 made up of 285 principals and 6144 teachers from all public secondary schools in Imo state. A sample size of 150 respondents were drawn using a simple random sampling technique. The sample size comprised of 30 principals and 120 teachers'. A 30-item questionnaire with a 4- point Likert scale was constructed by the researcher and used for data collection. In analyzing the data for the study, mean and frequency tables were used to answer the research questions. A mean score of 2.50 was adopted as the benchmark for acceptance/ rejection of the research questions. Findings revealed that principals' do not apply ethical leadership practices, team work strategies as well as code of conduct to ensure effective teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state. Based on the findings, it is recommended that State Education Management Board (SEMB) should organize training on ethical practices in school administration for principals and teachers.*

**Keywords:** *Ethical Leadership, teamwork, teachers' performance, code of conduct*

### **Introduction**

In Nigeria, public secondary schools are owned, managed and funded by local/ state governments and the federal government to achieve the objectives of preparing primary school leavers to cope with living in the society and certifying them for higher education. The secondary level of education is received after primary school by children between the ages of 11-18 years. The National Policy on Education, (FRN, 2014) stipulates that secondary education shall last for six years—the duration for Junior Secondary School (J.S.S.) is three years while that of Senior Secondary School (S.S.S) is also three years. The effective administration of secondary schools is crucial to the entire school system because it serves as a link between the tertiary and the basic education level. In order to reposition secondary schools to achieve their education objectives, it is expected that principals should anchor their leadership on ethical behavior, adopting the principles of team work and adherence to ethical code of conduct by teachers.

Ethics involves the choice between what is morally right and what is morally wrong. Ethics derives from the Greek word "ethos" which means character or moral behavior expected from an individual. Ethics are the principles of right and wrong that are accepted by an individual, a social



group, or society as a whole. implementing ethical leadership practices, involves enacting the acceptable behavior a leader wishes to exhibit, promote activities that are considered acceptable, and prohibit unacceptable behavior in the workplace environment. Therefore, application of ethical leadership determines the quality of education offered by the schools and service delivery considering the fact that when worker performance is less satisfactory than the expected, standards are affected.

In formal organizations such as a school or work place ethical behaviour are codified into a code of conduct to enable organization members to understand permissible ethical conduct in the performance of their duties and interaction with others. This view was buttressed by Ekankumo and Poyeri (2021) when they asserted that a clear cut ethical standard is the first step towards implementing ethical leadership practices, enacting the acceptable behaviour a leader wishes to exhibit, promoting activities that are considered acceptable, and prohibiting unacceptable behavior in the workplace environment. However, in Nigerian public secondary schools both principals and teachers have been accused of unethical practices such as lateness to work, lack of team work, truancy, poor teaching habits non-compliance with professional ethics etc. in the performance of their duties (Nwankwo, 2022; Aja-Okorie, 2016).

Realistically, the quality of education and students' performance depends on teachers' instructional tasks performance which is guided by ethics of the teaching profession. Teachers' professional ethics are the expected moral behavior, norms, rules and standards which set up boundaries for teachers' professional conduct. Therefore, teachers are expected to be guided by these norms and rules in their duties in the classroom and outside the classroom. These norms and rules are contained in the professional code of conduct. The codes usually contain abhorrence of vices such as sexual harassment of the opposite sex, bribery and corruption, nepotism, lateness to work, indiscipline, lack of fairness, injustice etc. The code of ethics are meant to guide teachers' behaviour and job performance. The reason of having a code of conduct is to have a guideline of behavior expected of everyone in the school irrespective of his status in the performance of his job and his relationship with other staff, students and outsiders. The lack of a code of conduct could lead to indiscipline and lack of a standard to assess someone's conduct in the school. Ekankumo and Poyeri (2021) in their study of secondary schools in Bayelsa state found a positive relationship between code of conduct and efficient teaching ability, leader ethical standard on work productivity of academic members in secondary school. In the same vein, Wey-Amaewhule and Eberechi (2024) found that teachers' are committed to ethical practices and their professional integrity, competence and accountability have positive influence on students' academic performance in senior secondary schools. In the secondary school system, teachers are responsible for instructional delivery and their effectiveness depends not only on their expertise and qualifications but also on the principal's ethical leadership in the attainment of school objectives.

Leadership is the ability to inspire or exercise influence on other persons in order to achieve stated objectives. This process of influence could be in an informal or formal setting. Therefore ethical leadership can be seen as the ability of the principal to stand as a model and a moral compass in influencing the staff and students in to achieve the school's educational objectives. According to Almandeel and Dawood (2019) ethical leadership practice is the act of leading others by exhibiting behaviors which are in accordance with moral principles and a clearly stated code of conduct. In this context an ethical leader is expected to be someone of high integrity, trust, dignity and honesty. To avert unethical practices in our secondary schools, it is imperative that the principals' employ ethical leadership model in driving optimal performance in secondary schools. Ethical leadership is crucial in fostering efficiency and effectiveness across various organizations because it fosters employees' confidence, commitment, job satisfaction and enhances their performance, thereby contributing to organizational stability and competitiveness (Kaduma, 2024). School principals have certain responsibilities, and they should be sensitive to ethical principles while making decisions. The ethical behavior of the school principal as a leader in a secondary school is very important and central in the execution of school objectives because he significantly determines the ethical standards at which his school will operate (Mendoza and Espiritu, 2024). According to Arinze, Egboka and Nwosu (2024) ethical leadership practices involves acting in line with moral principles, setting clear standard for



conduct, showing fairness in dealing with others and considering the opinions of staff in running the daily affairs of schools for attainment of set goals. Ethical leadership practices have many dimensions which could be applied to encourage subordinates to work hard towards the attainment of set goals. Ethical leadership practices as includes moral influence, collective decision making, integrity, fairness and justice.

Teachers are the backbone of teaching and learning in secondary schools. Without qualified professional teachers, the school's aims and objectives may not be realized. A professional teacher is someone who has been exposed to appropriate training or skills in a formal training institution which will give him or her the competence and confidence to impart knowledge and skills to learners placed under him or her. The training a teacher receives enables him or her to render quality teaching services to students. In this regard, teachers' performance can be rated or calibrated in terms of the outcome of the task executed by the teacher. Such tasks include planning the scheme of work, preparing lesson plan and delivery of lesson. Other tasks include classroom management, participation in staff meeting, serving in committees set up by the principal and ensuring that student keep to school rules. Teachers' job performance could be assessed by how well they discharge their responsibilities in terms of lesson preparation and delivery, discipline of students and execution of other official tasks assigned to them by the principals (Arinze et al 2024) Obiekwe and Mbanefo (2019) defined teacher job performance as the actual accomplishment by a teacher at a particular period in the school system. The poor performance of teachers can be attributed to several factors like the principals leadership style, exclusion in decision-making and non-adherence to teachers' professional code of conduct. Aja-Okorie (2016) observed that some secondary school teachers in Ebonyi State exhibit poor teaching habits, lack of dedication to duties and truancy. These poor habits to work could lead to low teachers' performance if they are not well managed.

Team work entails the cooperation, coordination and combination of efforts among the staff of an organization or institution to jointly achieve stated goals. In a secondary school a principal can encourage team work by ensuring that the views and efforts of teachers are synchronized in order to achieve a particular task. In this case members of the team work interdependently and collaboratively to achieve a desired outcome. Nwogbu cited in Nwokporo and Nwankwo (2024) observed that team work practices include giving teachers the opportunity to participate in decision making, setting up committees, collaborative discipline, team teaching and group delegated responsibility. Therefore, team work gives teachers the opportunity to participate in school administration and become more committed to school objectives. A study carried out in Edo State by Adeyanju (2012) assessed the relationship between principals' team work practices and teachers' job commitment in secondary schools. He found that principals' team work practices such as team work, participatory decision making greatly affect the attitudes of teachers' job performance in schools. This finding was corroborated by Arinze, Egboka and Nwosu (2024) who also found that there is a significant relationship between principals' application of teamwork principles and teachers' job performance in secondary schools in Anambra State. A similar finding was made by Nwokporo and Nwankwo (2024) that principals' collective/participatory decision making and the use of committee system practices determined to a greater extent teachers' job performance in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

The principal is the administrative head of a secondary school and he is responsible for its day-to-day administration. Being at the apex of the school administration, the secondary school principal is also charged with the supervision of teachers under him. Based on this, his experience and competence could determine the extent to which the school's objective will be accomplished because the principal is the leader and the central figure in the promotion of school effectiveness.

The complexities associated with his office are expanding daily and the application of ethics has been suggested as one of the strategies he needs to succeed in his duties. The principal's ethical leadership could significantly impact teachers' performance by enhancing trust, team work and adherence to professional code of conduct among teachers. According to Marion, and Nwafor, cited in Ezeani (2012), the tone the principal sets in his school administratively, dictates the level of cooperation in the school, level of respect or disrespect of staff by students and parents, the nature and scope of seriousness towards their work.



The implication of the principal's critical role is that the success of a school in meeting its objectives is highly dependent on the principals' application of managerial competencies and ethical leadership skills in the management of human and material resources. Despite the importance of the school principal in influencing educational outcomes, unethical practices persists in schools and the output in terms of teachers' job performance and students' academic achievement in external examination are still adjudged as quite low (Adepoju and Oluchukwu, 2011). And it would seem that ethics such as team work adherence to professional code of conduct, tolerance, trustworthiness, persistence, and prudence have not been fully imbibed by principals and teachers (Ladan, Garba, and Yero, 2023). Nwokporo and Nwankwo (2024) expressed a contrary view when they observed that the ethical leadership of principals significantly affect teachers performance in secondary schools. Specifically, they found that there is a significant relationship between office code of conduct and efficient teaching ability, leader ethical standard on work productivity of academic members in secondary schools.

### **Objectives of the study**

The general objective of this study is principals' application of ethical practices for effective teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state. Specifically, the study sets out to do the following:

- To ascertain how principals' apply ethical leadership influence effective teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state.
- To find how principals apply team work strategies to ensure effective teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state
- To find out how principals application of code of conduct ensure effective teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state

### **Research questions**

The study was guided by three research questions:

- How does principals' apply ethical leadership to influence effective teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state?
- How does principals' apply teamwork strategies to ensure effective teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state?
- How does principal's application of code of conduct ensure effective teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state?

### **Statement of the Problem**

Stakeholders in Nigeria's educational system have expressed concern on the poor commitment of secondary school principals and teachers to duty which has invariably resulted in underperformance of secondary school students in West African Examination Council Examinations (WAEC) and National Examinations Council (NECO) examinations. This declining standard of education in our public schools have forced many parents who want quality education to take their children to private schools. This poor commitment to duty can be linked to unethical practices in which principals and teachers have been indicted. Some of these unethical practices include poor work ethics, lack of consultations, non-adherence to teachers code of conduct, disobedience to laid down rules and regulations, lack of democratic approach in running schools, inequity, lateness to work, embezzlement of school funds, favouritism etc. Managing these unethical practices has become urgent because of their implications for the realization of school objectives. While speculations exist that principals and teachers are not professionally committed to their duties or ineffective in the performance of school tasks, the extent to which they apply ethical principles on their task performance is not quite clear.



**Methodology**

This study employed descriptive survey design. Three (3) research objectives and three (3) research questions guided the study. The population for the study is made up of 6,429 made up of 285 principals and 6144 teachers from all public secondary schools in Imo state. A sample size of 150 respondents were drawn using a simple random sampling technique. The sample size comprised of 30 principals and 120 teachers'. 30 item questionnaire titled "Principals' Application of Ethical leadership for Effective Teachers' Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Imo state" with a 4- point Likert scale was constructed by the researcher and used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was determined using test retest technique. In analyzing the data for the study, mean and standard deviation statistics were used to answer the research questions and a mean score of 2.50 was adopted as the benchmark for acceptance/ rejection of the research questions

**Results**

Research question 1:

How do principals' apply ethical leadership practices influence teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo State?

**Table 1:**

Mean scores of principals and teachers on how principals' ethical leadership practices influence teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state.

S N	Item statement	Principals'		Teachers'	
		Response	Remarks	Response	Remarks
1	Ensure staff meetings are held	2.68	Agree	2.58	Agree
2	Attend to staff challenges	2.07	Disagree	2.03	Disagree
3	Help to regulate staff / students conduct and behaviour	2.61	Agree	2.52	Agree
4	Supervises teachers' lesson note	2.40	Disagree	2.11	Disagree
5	Inspire teachers to be dutiful	2.53	Agree	1.98	Disagree
6	Always pass fair and moral judgment	2.10	Disagree	1.81	Disagree
7	Always punctual to work	2.67	Agree	1.97	Disagree
8	Provides adequate instructional materials for teaching	2.22	Disagree	2.01	Disagree
9	Teachers have easy access to the principal	2.57	Agree	2.53	Agree
10	Ensure teachers attend classes regularly to teach	2.53	Agree	2.17	Disagree
11	Influences the moral behavior of staff and students	2.40	Disagree	1.87	Disagree
	Pooled mean	2.43		2.14	

Data on Table 1 on how principals' apply ethical leadership practices influence teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state show that with high mean score on items nos. 1(2.68, 2.58) 3(2.61, 2.52) and 9(2.57, 2.53) for of principals and teachers respectively, it postulate that staff meetings are held, staff / students conduct and behaviour are regulated and as well, teachers have easy access to the principal. On the other hand, low mean scores recorded for item nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 11 (2.07, 2.03) (2.40, 2.11), (2.10, 1.81), (2.22, 2.01) and (2.40, 1.87) for both the principals and teachers reveal that principals do not attend to staff challenges, supervise teachers' lesson note, pass fair and moral judgment, provide adequate instructional materials for teaching and as well do not influence the moral behavior of staff and students. However, there are contrary opinion on item no 5, 7 and 10. In item 5, while the principals agree that they inspire teachers to be dutiful, results show that teachers disagreed with a low mean score of 1.98 On item 7 ( punctuality to work) teachers' result showed alow mean score of 1.97 that principals' are never punctual to work. The pooled mean of 2.43 and 2.14 respectively indicate that principals' do not apply ethical leadership practices to influence teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state

Research question 2: How does principals' apply team work strategies to ensure effective teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state?

**Table 2:** Mean scores of principals and teachers on how principals apply team work strategies to ensure effective teachers’ performance in public secondary schools in Imo state.

SN	Item statement	Principals’ Response		Teachers’ Response	
		X	Remarks	X	Remarks
	Principals apply the following team work strategies to ensure effective teachers’ performance in my school				
12	Shares information and ideas with teachers.	2.68	Agree	2.58	Agree
13	Forms committees to advise him on issues.	2.20	Disagree	1.92	Disagree
14	delegates his administrative duties to teachers	2.91	Agree	2.62	Agree
15	Respect staff opinion and takes advice from them	2.41	Disagree	2.31	Disagree
16	Ensure staff work together to achieve goals	2.43	Disagree	2.35	Disagree
17	Build trust on staff discharging his /her duty	2.21	Disagree	2.21	Disagree
18	appreciates work well done by teachers	2.40	Disagree	2.13	Disagree
19	Supervises teachers while lessons are ongoing.	2.45	Disagree	2.30	Disagree
20	Ensure collaborative approach in solving problems	2.31	Disagree	2.25	Disagree
	Pooled Mean	2.44		2.30	

A cursory look at data on table 2 shows how principals apply team work strategies to ensure effective teachers’ performance in public secondary schools in Imo state. The principals and teachers result indicated a high pooled mean score of (2, 68 2.58) (2.91, 2.62) respectively. On items 12 and 14 they agree that information and ideas are freely shared with teachers and that administrative duties are delegated. The low mean scores below 2.50 on item nos. 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 reveal that committees are not formed to advise principals on issues, staff opinions are not respected, staff do not work together to achieve goals, principals do not act on committee reports, teachers are not appreciated for the work well done, supervision is not carried out while lessons are ongoing and that principals do not ensure collaborative approach in solving problems. Pooled mean of 2.44 and 2.30 respectively indicate that principals do not apply team work strategies to ensure effective teachers’ performance in public secondary schools in Imo state

**Research question 3:** How does principals’ application of code of conduct ensure effective teachers’ performance in public secondary schools in Imo state?

**Table 3:** Mean scores of principals and teachers on how principals’ application of code of conduct ensure effective teachers’ performance in public secondary schools in Imo state.

SN	Item statement	Principals’ Response		Teachers’ Response	
		X	Remarks	X	Remarks
	Principals ensure application of code of conduct in the following ways;				
21	Teachers do not engage in discrimination in the classroom.	2.78	Agree	2.58	Agree
22	Teachers do not engage in physical abuse of students.	2.49	Disagree	2.34	Disagree
23	Teachers are punctual to work	2.51	Agree	2.72	Agree
24	Teachers are professionally qualified in their area of specialization	2.87	Agree	2.97	Agree
25	There is mutual respect and cooperation amongst teachers	2.80	Agree	2.87	Agree
26	Teachers’ assessment is done objectively.	2.31	Disagree	2.31	Disagree
27	Teachers are not involved in examination malpractices.	2.23	Disagree	1.98	Disagree
28	Teachers do not engage in bribery and corruption.	2.30	Disagree	2.31	Disagree
29	Teachers are frequently sent for workshops and Seminars	2.01	Disagree	1.89	Disagree
30	Teachers teach in line with the stated rules and guidelines	2.48	Disagree	2.11	Disagree
	Pooled mean	2.48		2.39	



Data in Table 3 show principals' application of code of conduct ensure effective teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state. The low mean scores of (2.49, 2.34) (2.31, 2.31) (2.23, 1.98) (2.30, 2.31) (2.01, 1.89) (2.48, 2.11) recorded on item nos.22, 26-30 for principals and teachers respectively indicate that teachers engage in physical abuse of students, teachers' assessment is not done objectively, teachers are involved in examination malpractices, teachers engage in bribery and corruption, teachers are not frequently sent for workshops and Seminars, and teachers do not teach in line with the stated rules and guidelines. While item nos 21, 23,24 and 25 has a high mean score of 2.78,2.51,2.87 and 2.80 for principals and 2.58, 2.72, 2.97 and 2.87 for teachers reveal that teachers do not engage in discrimination in the classroom, are punctual to work, are professionally qualified in their area of specialization and mutual respect and cooperation exist amongst teachers. Meanwhile the pooled mean of 2.48 and 2.39 respectively indicate that principals' do not apply code of conduct to ensure effective teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study reveal that principals' do not apply ethical leadership practices to influence teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state. This is in consonance with the views of Ladan, Garba and Yero (2023) who stated that tolerance, trustworthiness, persistence, and prudence are not fully implemented by principals and teachers in public secondary schools. The Principal's ethical leadership is imperative in order to inspire and influence teachers' effectiveness and commitment to their duties. This in turn will foster have a spillover effect on students' performance. It is worthy to note that principals' ethical leadership is lacking in many key areas such as supervision of teachers' lesson notes, punctuality to work, passing fair and moral judgment on issues brought to his attention, ensuring that teachers are not absent from classes and having influence on the moral behavior of staff and students. This finding contradicts the finding of Arinze, Egboka and Nwosu (2024) that there is strong relationship between principals' ethical guidance practices and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. No wonder Almandeel and Dawood (2019) noted that ethical leadership practice is the act of leading others by exhibiting behaviors which are in accordance with moral principles and a clearly stated code of conduct. In this context an ethical leader is expected to be someone of high integrity, trust, dignity and honesty.

Moreover, the study further reveals that that principals do not apply team work strategies to ensure effective teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Imo state. This finding runs contrary to the finding of Nwokporo and Nwankwo (2024) that principals' use collective/participatory decision making especially the committee system to enhance teachers' job performance in secondary schools. Team work presupposes that both principals and teachers work collectively to promote school objectives. When the teachers are denied the opportunities to participate in decision making they may become withdrawn from and become nonchalant in the performance of their duties. The study revealed that although principals share information and ideas with teachers they hardly form committees to advise them on issues. More importantly, principals neither respect the opinions nor ensure that staff work in collaboration to achieve school goals. This attitude could have negative implication on teachers' effectiveness and performance. Adeyanju (2012) in his study carried out in Edo State on the relationship between principals' team work practices and teachers' job commitment in secondary schools found that principals' team work practices such as team work, participatory decision making greatly affect the attitudes of teachers' job performance in schools

No wonder Marion, and Nwafor, cited in Ezeani (2012) decried that the tone the principal sets in his school administratively, dictates the level of cooperation in the school, level of respect or disrespect of staff by students and parents, the nature and scope of seriousness towards their work. Invariably, principals' working as a team with the teachers is necessary to achieve result.

Furthermore, this study also found that teachers engage in physical abuse of students and they are also involved in unfair assessment of student and examination malpractices. In addition, results reveal that teachers engage in bribery and corruption and they do not teach in line with the stated rules and guidelines. The implication of this finding is that teachers are do not adhere strictly with their professional code of conduct. This finding is in consonance with the findings of Aja-Okorie (2016) who



observed that some secondary school teachers in Ebonyi State exhibit poor teaching habits, lack of dedication to duties and truancy. This further explains the findings of Nwokporo and Nwankwo(2024) that there is a significant relationship between office code of conduct and efficient teaching ability, leader ethical standard on work productivity of academic members in secondary schools. The code of ethics is a detailed guide or standard to act as moral compass so that principals and teachers will not deviate from set standards in the performance of their duties.

### **Conclusion**

Secondary schools are established to prepare and equip students with necessary knowledge and skills that will help them in their future career. Therefore to achieve result, principals' ethical leadership which is one of the leadership models principals demonstrate to ensure a good working environment where effective teaching and learning can be achieved is needed. Principals' ethical leadership has been identified as a predictive factor which positively affects teachers' performance in public secondary schools and ultimately leading to improved student outcomes. It becomes imperative that principals of secondary schools should fully imbibe the principles and indices of ethical leadership such as the adoption of team work and participatory decision making to attain to the academic goals and objectives. Similarly, principals and teachers are lacking in the strict adherence to their professional code of conduct in the performance of their duties. Invariably the effectiveness of teachers in ensuring quality education delivery cannot be guaranteed.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results and findings derived from this study, the following recommendations can be made to improve ethical practices in public secondary schools in Imo state:

Resource persons can be invited to educate principals and teachers on the need to apply ethics and values in the school system

State Education Management Board (SEMB) should organize training on ethical practices in school administration for principals and teachers

State Education Management Board (SEMB) should play supervisory role on the principals to ensure they abide to the principles of professional ethics stipulated in the code of conduct.

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