Ethical Leadership Practices of School Heads and their Relationship and Influence on Teachers Moral, Productivity and Job Commitment

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100601361

Received: 02 July 2026; Accepted: 07 July 2026; Published: 20 July 2026

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the level of ethical leadership practices among school heads and their influence on teachers' morale, productivity, and job commitment within public elementary and secondary schools under the Schools Division of Iriga City. Adopting a descriptive-correlational research design, data were collected from two participant groups: school heads and teachers. The findings revealed that school heads demonstrate a very high level of ethical leadership practices across all evaluated categories, with Role Modeling and Ethical Behavior ranking the highest. Similarly, teachers exhibited a very high level of morale, productivity, and job commitment. Inferential analysis confirmed a significant positive relationship between the ethical leadership practices of school heads and key teacher performance outcomes. Based on these outcomes, an Ethical Leadership Enhancement Toolkit was proposed to sustain organizational trust, optimize performance, and foster inclusive school environments.

Keywords*:* Ethical leadership practices, school heads, teachers' morale, teachers' productivity, job commitment, educational leadership, school management.

INTRODUCTION

In today's evolving educational climate, the ethical conduct of school heads has emerged as a major factor influencing the professional experiences of teaching personnel. Ethical leadership—defined by Brown and Treviño (2006) as demonstrating normatively appropriate behavior through personal actions and interpersonal connections—fosters trust, supports employee well-being, and drives overall institutional success. Globally, this aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by advocating for fair, transparent, and decent working conditions.

Nationally, public school teachers face profound occupational issues; data from the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS, 2022) indicates that 4 out of 10 public school educators suffer from severe work stress caused by administrative overloads and inconsistent leadership styles. To counter teacher burnout and falling motivation, domestic legal policies like Republic Act No. 6713 (Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees), Republic Act No. 9155 (Governance of Basic Education Act), and DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 demand that school heads serve as moral exemplars who establish empathetic, transparent, and legally accountable environments.

Local studies in the Philippine context, such as work by Ancho and Villadiego (2022) on award-winning school heads, underscore that ethical leadership is not merely compliance but a transformative practice that shapes institutional identity. Conversely, as noted by Abdullah, Alias, and Hamid (2024), inconsistent governance can compromise teacher efficiency, whereas strong ethical frameworks reinforce job performance. This study addresses the critical need to mathematically analyze how specific dimensions of ethical leadership directly correlate with teacher outcomes. The study explores these dynamics through the lens of three baseline theories integrated into the Ethical Leadership Pathway Model: (1) Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977; Brown &

Treviño, 2023), positioning the school head as a visible moral agent whose ethical behaviors are observed and emulated by teachers; (2) Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), framing fair and respectful treatment as a leadership resource that prompts teachers to reciprocate with higher dedication; and (3) Self-Determination Theory (Deci et al., 2017), linking leadership integrity directly to the satisfaction of teachers' intrinsic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

METHOD

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design. Following frameworks established by Creswell and Creswell (2018), it deployed quantitative assessments to measure existing perceptions of ethical practices and statistically evaluate the correlation between leadership actions and teacher responses.

Participants & Setting

The participant scope comprised public elementary and secondary school heads and teachers operating under the administrative supervision of the Schools Division of Iriga City.

Sampling Frame & Size Justification. The sampling frame was extracted from the updated Personnel Services Itemization and Plantilla of Personnel (PSIPOP) registry provided by the Schools Division Office (SDO) of Iriga City. The total population pool of active public school teachers across the division was $N = 800$. To determine an academically rigorous sample size yielding a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, **Slovin's formula** was applied:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Substituting the known parameters ($N = 800$, $e = 0.05$), the calculated minimum sample size was $n = 267$ teachers. For school heads, **universal sampling** (census) was applied due to the tightly bounded population ($N = 45$), ensuring full institutional administrative representation across the division.

Selection Procedures. A **stratified random sampling** strategy was implemented for the selection of teacher participants. Schools were divided into two main strata: Elementary and Secondary. Within each educational stratum, individual teacher participants were picked utilizing a computerized random number generator corresponding to their personnel index codes, preventing selection bias and ensuring proportionate representation.

Response Rates & Non-Response Bias Mitigation: Out of the 267 teacher surveys distributed, 260 completed questionnaires were retrieved, marking a **97.3% response rate**. For school heads, all 45 instruments were successfully recovered (**100% response rate**). To verify that non-response bias did not affect the parameters, a wave analysis (extrapolation method) was conducted by comparing early respondents (week 1) against late respondents (week 3). Independent samples t-tests indicated no statistically significant difference between the means of the waves ($p > 0.05$), validating that the retrieved samples adequately represent the target population.

Demographic Profiles

The gathered individual demographic profiles encompassing age, gender, years of active teaching experience, highest educational attainment, and school assignment level are detailed below.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants ($n = 260$ Teachers; $n = 45$ School Heads)

Profile Variable	Classification	Teachers (n)	Teachers (%)	School Heads (n)	School Heads (%)
Age	21–30 years old	65	25.0%	0	0.0%

	31–40 years old	98	37.7%	8	17.8%
	41–50 years old	62	23.8%	22	48.9%
	51 years old & above	35	13.5%	15	33.3%
Gender	Female	192	73.8%	29	64.4%
	Male	68	26.2%	16	35.6%
Years of Experience	1–5 years (New)	72	27.7%	5	11.1%
	6–15 years (Mid-career)	114	43.8%	18	40.0%
	16 years & above (Veteran)	74	28.5%	22	48.9%
Educational Attainment	Bachelor's Degree	104	40.0%	0	0.0%
	Master's Units/Degree			15	
	Doctorate Units/Degree	131	50.4%		33.3%
				30	
		25	9.6%		66.7%
School Level	Elementary	166	63.8%	30	66.7%
	Secondary	94	36.2%	15	33.3%

Instrumentation & Data Collection

Data collection instruments included customized questionnaires validated using traditional educational research protocols (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019). Perceptions were scored on a 5-point Likert scale modeled after Likert (1932) (ranging from 1.00–1.79 as Very Low up to 4.20–5.00 as Very High). The input variables targeted five key leadership domains: (a) Integrity and Honesty, (b) Fairness and Justice, (c) Respect and Dignity, (d) Accountability and Transparency, and (e) Role Modeling and Ethical Behavior.

Data Analysis

Descriptive data were analyzed using weighted means, verbal interpretations, and statistical rankings. To build upon the initial bivariate assessments evaluated via the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r), a **Multiple Linear Regression Analysis** was performed to investigate the relative predictive strength of the distinct ethical leadership dimensions. Furthermore, **Independent Samples t-tests** and **One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)** were utilized to check for significant differences among participant subgroups (elementary vs. secondary; new vs. veteran teachers).

RESULTS

Level of Ethical Leadership Practices

As illustrated in Table 2, both populations perceived the ethical actions of school heads to be Very High across all dimensions, concluding with a Grand Mean of 4.56 for teachers and 4.94 for school administrators.

Table 2: Perceived Level of Ethical Leadership Practices

Categories	Teachers WM	VI	Rank	School Heads WM	VI	Rank	Average WM	VI	Rank
Role Modeling & Ethical Behavior	4.58	VH	1	4.98	VH	1	4.78	VH	1
Integrity and Honesty	4.57	VH	2	4.96	VH	2	4.76	VH	2
Fairness and Justice	4.56	VH	3.5	4.92	VH	4	4.74	VH	4

Respect and Dignity	4.56	VH	3.5	4.92	VH	4	4.74	VH	4
Accountability & Transparency	4.55	VH	5	4.92	VH	4	4.74	VH	4
Grand Mean	**4.56**	**VH**		**4.94**	**VH**		**4.75**	**VH**	

Integrity & Honesty Specifics. Within this category, "Admits mistakes and takes responsibility" achieved the highest average weight (WM = 4.80).

Fairness Specifics. Teachers highly valued impartial treatment and task allocation (WM = 4.57), while "Listens to all sides before making decisions" scored the lowest relatively (WM = 4.53).

Respect Specifics. "Respects the opinion of teachers" achieved the leading position among teachers (WM = 4.58).

Teacher Performance Outcomes (Morale, Productivity, and Commitment)

Teachers' Morale. Achieved a total mean score of 4.48 (Very High) among teachers and 4.90 among school heads. Having a positive attitude toward work emerged as the primary indicator (WM = 4.74 average), while "Experience high job satisfaction" scored lowest (WM = 4.64).

Teachers' Productivity. Scored Very High overall (Mean = 4.54 for teachers; 4.90 for school heads). Instructors scored highest at "Demonstrate effectiveness in teaching" (WM = 4.57), but displayed lower relative averages on "Consistently meet performance expectations" (WM = 4.51).

Inferential Bivariate Analysis

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation test indicated a statistically significant positive relationship ($p < 0.05$) between the level of ethical leadership practices displayed by school heads and the corresponding levels of teacher morale, productivity, and professional commitment. Consequently, the null hypotheses were rejected.

Multivariate Analysis: Predictive Power of Leadership Dimensions

To isolate the relative predictive variance of each distinct leadership domain, a Multiple Linear Regression model was constructed with the combined teacher outcomes (Morale, Productivity, Commitment) serving as the dependent criterion variable.

The model proved to be highly significant, $F(5,254) = 42.18, p < 0.001$, accounting for **45.3% of the absolute variance** ($R^2 = 0.453$) in teacher performance metrics.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Coefficients of Ethical Leadership Dimensions

Predictive Dimensions	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized β	t-value	p-value
(Constant)	1.120	0.241	—	4.647	< 0.001
1. Integrity and Honesty	0.285	0.072	0.264	3.958	**< 0.001**
2. Fairness and Justice	0.210	0.068	0.198	3.088	**0.002**
3. Respect and Dignity	0.115	0.071	0.095	1.620	0.106
4. Accountability & Transparency	0.180	0.065	0.172	2.769	**0.006**
5. Role Modeling & Ethical Behavior	0.312	0.075	0.298	4.160	**< 0.001**

The standardized coefficients indicate that **Role Modeling and Ethical Behavior** ($\beta = 0.298, p < 0.001$) holds the highest relative predictive capacity over teacher professional outcomes, followed directly by **Integrity and Honesty** ($\beta = 0.264, p < 0.001$). Conversely, when accounting for other domains, the individual predictive contribution of *Respect and Dignity* was not statistically significant ($p = 0.106$).

Subgroup Analyses

Elementary vs. Secondary Teachers: Perceptions of leadership practices were evaluated via an Independent Samples t-test between Elementary instructors ($M = 4.59, SD = 0.31$) and Secondary instructors ($M = 4.51, SD = 0.42$). A statistically significant variation was confirmed, $t(258) = 2.08, p = 0.038$, revealing that elementary teachers view the ethical choices of their leadership framework significantly more positively than their secondary peers.

New vs. Veteran Teachers: A One-Way ANOVA was calculated to trace whether teacher tenure influenced perceived morale and institutional commitment indices. The variance proved significant, $F(2,257) = 5.41, p = 0.005$. Post-hoc Tukey HSD tracking demonstrated that **New Teachers (1–5 years tenure)** recorded significantly lower baseline morale marks ($M = 4.22$) than **Veteran Teachers (16+ years tenure)** ($M = 4.61$).

Downstream Educational Impact: Student Outcome Measures

By cross-referencing public institutional databases under the SDO Iriga City framework, school-wide leadership ratings were checked against secondary school performance indicators, namely school-level **General Scholastic Averages (GSA)** and regional **National Achievement Test (NAT)** metrics. Schools managed by school heads matching the upper quartile of *Accountability and Transparency* and *Fairness and Justice* distributions yielded an average **4.2% higher student retention rate** and a **3.8% higher mean proficiency rating in NAT core literacy and science modules** relative to schools in the lower performing leadership quartile.

DISCUSSION

The empirical findings underscore that ethical leadership functions as a critical job resource. The exceptionally high evaluation of Role Modeling and Ethical Behavior (WM = 4.78) validates the structural assumptions of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977; Brown & Treviño, 2023). Because school heads operate as highly visible figures, their overt ethical actions establish an operational template for the entire school ecosystem. When leaders openly admit mistakes and assume responsibility (WM = 4.80), they build an environment of psychological safety. This supports contemporary findings by Obiekwe et al. (2024), which establish that principal accountability directly reduces workplace anxiety and fosters administrative trust. Furthermore, the significant correlation with teacher morale supports Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). As highlighted by Barth (2025), when teachers find themselves treated with fairness and respect, they experience a felt obligation to reciprocate by investing maximum professional effort. The slight disparity between highly positive internal work attitudes (WM = 4.74) and lower reported job satisfaction (WM = 4.64) mirrors systematic domestic challenges documented by Ramirez and Capili (2024), where institutional strain and heavy non-teaching loads often suppress satisfaction metrics despite a strong professional calling. This highlights that while teacher resilience and dedication are high, administrative support must be deliberately sustained. Ultimately, the strong statistical correlation confirms the core principles of Self-Determination Theory (Deci et al., 2017): school heads who govern with clear transparency, equality, and professional respect successfully satisfy teachers' intrinsic needs for autonomy and relatedness, leading to optimized productivity and institutional retention.

Theoretical Framework Alignment, Extensions, and Challenges

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977): *Strongly Supported.* The multiple regression output identifies *Role Modeling and Ethical Behavior* as the single most critical predictor of employee output ($\beta = 0.298$). This empirically reinforces that the school head operates as the critical moral agent from whom teachers acquire behavioral cues through observation.

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964): *Extended.* While traditional formulations suggest that exchange dynamics weaken during high stress, this research *extends* the model by demonstrating that ethical leadership buffers institutional strain. Even when heavy administrative overloads reduce raw job satisfaction (WM = 4.64), high ethical leadership keeps teacher productivity and commitment stable.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci et al., 2017): *Partially Challenged.* Self-Determination Theory suggests that interpersonal connection and relational care (*Respect and Dignity*) are primary drivers of intrinsic motivation. However, the multivariate regression indicates that *Accountability & Transparency* ($\beta = 0.172$) and *Fairness & Justice* ($\beta = 0.198$) have greater predictive weight than *Respect and Dignity* ($\beta = 0.095, p > 0.05$). This indicates that within the public education framework, structured equity and objective transparency are prioritized over interpersonal validation.

Comprehensive Study Limitations

1. **Common Method Variance & Social Desirability Bias.** The dependence on self-reported questionnaires could encourage overly positive self-assessments, particularly from school heads, whose self-rated mean reached 4.94. Future investigations should introduce multi-source 360-degree evaluations or observational scorecards to reduce this variance.

2. **Generalizability Constraints.** The study was limited to public schools within the **Schools Division of Iriga City**. The specific socio-economic profiles and administrative layouts of the Bicol Region mean these findings might not perfectly generalize to large metropolitan school divisions (e.g., NCR) or isolated island institutions.

3. **Cross-Sectional Constraints.** The quantitative data captures perceptions at a single point in time. It cannot determine long-term changes or confirm causality. Longitudinal designs tracking teacher morale through administrative leadership shifts are recommended.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Contextualized Examples of Effective Ethical Leadership

To grounding these findings within the Philippine public basic education setting, the following observed regional initiatives are highlighted:

Transparent MOOE Liquidation*:* High accountability is demonstrated when school heads display detailed breakdowns of **Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE)** funds on prominent Transparency Boards and hold open quarterly town halls with the Faculty Club and Parents-Teachers Association (PTA).

Merit-Based Growth (DepEd PRAISE System): Leaders manage institutional resources equitably by using objective evaluation rubrics for promotions, training nominations, and division rewards, actively countering the *bata-bata* (favoritism) system.

Collaborative School Governance: School heads practice participatory decision-making by discussing workload adjustments and schedules before finalize the School Improvement Plan (SIP).

Actionable Stakeholder Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings, the following targeted interventions are proposed:

For School Heads

- Institutionalize a monthly "Open-Door Consultation Hour" to address the lower relative evaluation of multi-perspective listening.

- Design intentional mentoring programs for early-career teachers (1–5 years experience) to address their lower recorded morale levels.

For Public School Teachers

- Participate actively in collaborative governance groups (e.g., School Governance Councils) and communicate workload challenges through institutional channels rather than choosing passive compliance.
- Incorporate the *Ethical Leadership Enhancement Toolkit* principles into classroom environments to support school-wide transparency and moral standards.

For Division Administrators (SDO Iriga City)

- Mandate the structured implementation of the proposed *Ethical Leadership Enhancement Toolkit* within regular Management Committee (ManCom) orientations for newly appointed principals.
- Conduct annual division-wide anonymous climate surveys to monitor and

  address structural leadership variations between elementary and secondary settings.

For Educational Policymakers (DepEd Central Office / NEAP)

- Re-examine the administrative and clerical workloads assigned to teachers under current basic education reforms to address the systemic strain that lowers job satisfaction.
- Incorporate dedicated modules on "Ethical and Moral Agency" into the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) principal certification tracks, shifting focus from purely technical competencies toward ethical leadership.

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