Ethical leadership practices among basic education school principals

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify the extent to which principals of basic education schools practise ethical leadership. The study used the descriptive analytical method. A questionnaire was applied to a sample of (270) male and female teachers. The study reached the following results: The degree of practising ethical leadership among the principals of cycle two schools was at a high level in the availability of ethical behaviour. Also, the degree of ethical behaviour practice and the degree of reinforcing ethical behaviour were medium. The study confirmed that the order of the ethical leadership dimensions were as follows: The availability of ethical behaviour ranked first followed by the dimension of reinforcing ethical behaviour in second place. The last dimension was ethical behaviour practice. The study also confirmed that there are no statistically significant differences in the degree to which principals practise the dimensions of ethical leadership according to the variables of gender and educational qualification. The study recommended the need to spread the ethical culture through programs and practical training courses in ethical leadership.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, basic education, principals, gender, educational qualification.

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1. Theoretical Framework

The world is different from before and now the world has its nature as a result of the great developments in the field of information technology and various administrative communications. Also, in light of the challenges that the world is witnessing in the twenty-first century, the changes have become successive and accelerating to great degrees. This is a reason for educational organizations and institutions to open to the outside world, and then these institutions underwent changes that included their organizational structures. This in turn forced leaders to pay attention to human elements and grant them full care as they are the most important strategic and basic resources in the institution.

Ethics represent the largest aspect that constitutes these elements because they control the behaviour and actions of individuals within institutions and organizations. This was confirmed by Hassan and Al-Ajmi (2010) in that ethics are like the bars on which they run and do not deviate as societies need ethical standards. Organizations need them to a great extent to control the work and continue to grow and prosper. So in the past few years, ethics and integrity have received an increasing amount of attention in the leadership field. Ethics and values are among the most important pillars of human societies. It is directly related to directing human behaviour. Values are related to ethics and principles, which are general and regulating standards for correct human behaviour. Just as nations advance through discord, institutions also elevate, develop and prosper if they have a high ethical system. Public institutions in the fields of teaching and learning are the starting point for achieving comprehensive development for the individual and society in various fields. Ethics play a major role in strengthening the link between the leader and employees, the employees' awareness of the ethical leadership practised by their leader may increase their confidence (Ruiz et al.,2011).

Ethical leadership is one of the leadership styles in which effectiveness is attested. As it has positive effects on employee behaviour patterns. Ethical leadership may contain several areas or standards such as ethical personal qualities, ethical administrative qualities, teamwork qualities and human relations qualities that affect significantly productivity and job achievement. These standards determine to what extent the administrative leader uses the ethical leadership style in the organization (Al-Qarni and Al-Zaydi, 2016). Interest in ethical leadership has increased as a result of the emergence of many crises in leadership in both the public and private sectors. It is known that ethics are the focus of leadership as it has a great impact on the used mechanisms and the achieved results of ethical leadership such as integrity, justice and other good qualities that attract humans according to Abu Nasser (2021) and Al-Enezi (2021).

Therefore, we find that the success of education institutions needs skilled and qualified principals because the entire community, in both its school and public sectors, depends on them. Principals are the ones who can practise strong leadership that ensures service and consideration for others. So, their success depends on the ethical commitment to achieving the desired goals (Al Shitwi & Al Hbeeb, 2017). Thus, ethical leadership has a set of elements which are the availability of ethical behaviour, ethical behaviour practices and promoting ethical behaviour.

Regarding the availability of ethical behaviour element, North House (2006) considered ethical behaviour as one of the main components of leadership since ethical behaviour is a necessity for the success of individuals as leaders in their organizations. Many models also confirmed that the process of paying attention to ethical issues is one of the basic elements of building leadership. This can be achieved by directing the administrative leader to pay attention to the basic ethical principles that must exist in the administrative leader, namely: respect, integrity, justice, honesty, patience, humility and honesty. Basic ethical principles include appreciating the ideas of others and placing justice issues at

the centre of his decisions. This can be reflected in their ethical practices towards institutions, which enhances the values of loyalty and belongingness (Atoom, 2020).

Regarding ethical behaviour practices, ethical practices require leaders to demonstrate the work of ethical behaviour in practice and theory through the leader's practice. Therefore, the leader must make ethics the main pillar and the strongest support of work in the organization. This is done through the practice of ethical behaviour in their personal life and all situations. Daft (2004) confirmed that workers and employees learn from the leader's practice of values and beliefs. Some of the most important components which characterize the behaviours and practices of an ethical leader as mentioned by Baji and Khababa (2021) are avoiding harm to others, respecting all rights of employees, staying away from deceit and lying, working in the spirit of the law and implementing it, love of others, defending others and keep them from harm.

Concerning promoting ethical behaviour, the promotion of ethical behaviour is considered one of the most sensitive dimensions. The leader promotes ethical behaviour through many things such as monitoring the behaviour of employees when departing from the required behaviours and punishing those who deviate from the required ethical behaviours. The leader can promote ethical behaviour as indicated by Knights (2015) by being a model through the work he does.

1.1. Research problem

Continuing the work and its development has become dependent on the sound and correct leadership of the human resource with its different orientations and natures. Ethical leadership is among the patterns that are characterized by its high ability to lead the organization in facing challenges and developments by influencing the character of employees and pushing them towards hard work (Mazhouda & Boukhloua, 2021). Therefore, ethical leadership is the first gate to success for any institution that aspires to grow and achieve goals. It is a leadership that achieves justice and transparency. Leadership that encourages joint teamwork, participation in decision-making, attention to employees and promoting their growth, and abandoning the traditional concept of leadership based on guardianship, hierarchy and authority of the centre. This can be according to an ethical, human frame, in which improving the performance of the institution and the quality of its production coincides with taking care of individuals, developing and motivating them and enhancing their role. This was confirmed by the Oman 2040 vision when it was built. It is reflected in community participation and respect for the opinions of others. The vision also focused on a possible knowledge society that would be a creative person who is proud of their identity and culture.

Therefore, ethical leadership has become of great importance in building educational institutions and organizations, especially schools. The practice of ethical leadership has become one of the things that no educational leader can stay away from. All work in the school is based on the satisfaction and comfort of the teachers at the school. It is necessary to have good treatment and great manners practised by the school principals on his staff. This was confirmed by many Arab and foreign studies, including the study of Al-Rumaidi and Badawi (2021), the study of Daradkeh and Al-Mutairi (2016), and the study of Qaouda and Salami (2020). In the Omani context, it is important to study how school principals pursue ethical leadership among school staff. Therefore, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do principals of basic education schools in the Sultanate of Oman practise ethical leadership from the teachers' points of view?

2. What is the order of the ethical leadership dimensions in the practice of basic schools' principals from the point of view of teachers and educators?

3. Are there statistically significant differences at the level of 0.05 in the practice of ethical leadership dimensions among basic education schools' principals according to gender and educational qualification?

1.2. The importance of the study

This study includes the theoretical frames for ethical leadership as a scientific and practical attempt to enrich and provide Omani and Arab literature with a modern and unique study according to the researchers' knowledge, which revolves around the degree of school principals' practice of ethical leadership. In addition to that, it includes a set of results, recommendations and conclusions that are reached through this study, to help policymakers in the Ministry of Education in Sultanate of Oman take some decisions related to ethical leadership and take some decisions in terms of training programs on this type of Leadership.

1.3. Terminology of study

Basic Education: The term (basic education) was given to alternative, non-traditional educational systems that include the years of the primary and preparatory stages, according to a method specifically designed to suit the conditions of the region in which it is applied, and according to the conditions of each region or each country that adopts this type of education (Ministry of education, 2022)

Ethical Leadership: Mcgee-Cooper (2013) defined it as leadership that is derived from a set of ethical values, which is based on providing help and assistance to others, achieving their goals and aspirations, getting to know individuals and providing assistance to them.

Dimensions of ethical leadership: It is a set of principles and attributes with which the leader deals with employees and is based on a set of principles and sincere human values of justice and non-discrimination and providing honesty and transparency with others in all situations (Abdul Salam, 2021).

2. Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the degree of ethical leadership practice and the order of the dimensions of ethical leadership among principals of basic education schools in the Sultanate of Oman from the teachers' and educators' points of view. Additionally, it aimed to Identify the statistically significant differences at the level of 0.05 in the practice of the principals and female principals of basic education schools in the dimensions of ethical leadership according to the variable of gender and educational qualification.

3. Method and Materials

3.1. Research design

To achieve the study objectives, the researcher followed the analytical descriptive research design.

3.2. Population and Sample

The main population represented the male and female teachers in basic education cycle two (5-12) schools. The total number was 14,147 teachers according to the statistics of the statistical book of the ministry of education for 2021. The study sample was chosen in a simple random way and consisted of 270 male and female teachers cycle two schools.

3.3. Data collection

Based on the reviewed literature, the researcher developed a questionnaire of three dimensions (eight items in each dimension) to measure the ethical leadership practices among school principals. The tool was presented to six referees. Based on the feedback received from the referees, the final questionnaire consisted of 20 items divided into three dimensions: availability of ethical behaviour with (6) items, practising ethical behaviour with (7) items and reinforcing ethical behaviour with (7) items. The researcher piloted the questionnaire with 60 male and female teachers from different schools in cycle two (5-12) schools. Then, the researcher measured Cronbach's alpha to ensure the reliability of the tool as. Table 1 represents the results.

Table 1. *Interpretation of the means of the questionnaire*

	Dimension	Items	Cronbach's alpha
1.	Availability of ethical behaviour	6	0.80
2.	Ethical behaviour practice	7	0.90
3.	Ethical Behaviour reinforcement	7	0.80
	overall	20	0.83

The reliability coefficient of all dimensions was high. This is confirmed by the overall mean obtained (0.83) according to the Cronbach Alpha which indicated the coherence of the questionnaire items.

3.4. Data analysis

The data was encoded by the well-known statistical packages program SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) after it was extracted from the excel program. The data of the five-point Likert scale was encoded in the results according to the following scale shown in table 2.

Table 2. *Interpretation of the means of the questionnaire*

Level	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Mean	1-180	1.81-2.60	2.61-3.40	3.41-4.20	4.21-5

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results of Research Question 1

The answer to the first question: To what extent do principals of basic education schools in the Sultanate of Oman practise ethical leadership from the teachers' points of view?

In order to answer the previous question, the means and standard deviations of the degree of practising the dimensions of ethical leadership in basic education schools in the Sultanate of Oman were extracted. The results of the ethical behaviour availability among principals of basic education schools are presented in table 3.

Table 3. *Means and standard deviations of the ethical behaviour availability*

No.	Items	Means	Std. deviation	Level	Order
1	The principal uses objectivity while evaluating school staff.	3.08	0.879	Medium	6
2	The principal applies the laws, instructions, and regulations found in the school regulations.	4.22	0.987	Very high	1

3	The principal has the capacity for patience and determination in achieving duties.	3.50	0.969	High	4
4	The principal is keen to set an example for the staff to follow.	3.20	0.897	Medium	5
5	The principal has integrity in dealing with others.	3.60	0.765	High	3
6	The principal seeks to achieve the vision and mission of the school.	4.21	0.967	Very high	2
	Overall	3.63	0.910	High	

Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations of the ethical behaviour availability. It can be concluded that the mean of ethical behaviour availability was (3.63) and a standard deviation of (0.910) which represents a high availability degree. So, item No. (2) "The principal applies the laws, instructions, and regulations found in the school regulations" in the first rank with a mean of (4.22) and a standard deviation of (0.987) which represents a very high availability degree. The researcher attributes this to the school principals' commitment to laws and regulations and not violating them due to fear of legal responsibility. Item No. (1) "The principal uses objectivity while evaluating the school's staff" received the last rank with a mean of (3.08) and a standard deviation of (0.879). The researcher attributes this to the dominance of human and social relations between principals and some teachers. These results confirm what Al Shitwi and Al Hbeeb (2017) stated about the fact that principals are those who can demonstrate strong leadership while also ensuring service and consideration for others. As a result, their success is dependent on their ethical commitment to achieving the desired results.

The results of the ethical behaviour practice among principals of basic education schools are presented in table 4.

Table 4. *Means and standard deviations of the Ethical Behavior Practice*

No.	Items	Means	Std. deviation	Level	Order
1	The principal encourages staff to be creative and innovative.	3.12	0.876	Medium	1
2	The principal develops a sense of responsibility and commitment to the work of the staff.	3.05	0.897	Medium	2
3	The principal supports the professional development of workers of all kinds.	2.99	0.945	Medium	3
4	The principal accepts criticism directed at them.	2.33	0.798	Very low	6
5	The principal gives authority in many types of work.	1.69	0.789	Low	7
6	The principal involves the staff in the decision-making process.	2.98	0.689	Medium	4
7	The principal distributes the work to the staff fairly.	2.88	0.879	Medium	5
	Overall	2.72	0.839	Medium	

Table 4 shows the Means and standard deviations of the Ethical Behavior Practice. It can be concluded that the mean of ethical behaviour practice was (2.72) and the standard deviation was (0.839) which represents a medium degree. Item No. (1) "The principal encourages staff to be creative and innovative was in the first rank with a mean of (3.12) and a standard deviation of (0.876) which represents a medium degree. , the researcher attributes this to the lack of appreciation of the principals for the importance of innovation and creativity and preoccupation with other matters. Item (4) " The principal accepts criticism directed to them" in the last rank with a mean of (1.69) and a standard deviation of (0.689). the researcher attributes this to individual decision-making.

These results are in agreement with North House (2006) who considered ethical behaviour to be one of the most important components of leadership because ethical behaviour is required for individuals

to succeed as leaders in their organizations. Also, the results are in agreement with Atoom (2020) who asserted that the practice of ethical behaviour strengthens the values of loyalty and belonging.

The results of the reinforcement of ethical behaviour among principals of basic education schools are presented in table 5.

Table 5. *Means and standard deviations of reinforcement of ethical behaviour*

No.	Items	Means	Std. deviation	Level	Order
1	The principal constantly encourages creative and innovative staff.	2.89	0.789	Medium	6
2	The principal thanks the staff for their career accomplishments	3.25	0.823	Medium	2
3	The principal often offers to help the staff.	3.30	0.734	Medium	1
4	The principal reinforces positive values among staff.	3.23	0.935	Medium	3
5	The principal presents the work of the staff honestly.	2.15	0.979	Low	7
6	The principal encourages staff in research and development.	2.99	0.735	Medium	5
7	The principal handles mistakes made by staff wisely and carefully.	3.19	0.790	Medium	4
	Overall	3.00	0.812	Medium	

Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations of reinforcement of ethical behaviour. It can be concluded that the mean of reinforcing ethical behaviour was (3.00) with a standard deviation of (0.812) which represents a medium degree. Item 3 "The principal often offers to help the staff" received the first place with a mean of (3.33) and a standard deviation of (0.634) which represents a medium degree of reinforcing ethical behaviour. The researcher attributes this to the good human relations between the staff and principals. As Ruiz et al. (2011) asserted, the relationship between a leader and the team is strengthened by ethics, and when staff are aware of their leader's commitment to ethical leadership, it may boost confidence.

Item 5 "The principal presents the work of the staff honestly" received the last rank with a mean of (2.15) and a standard deviation of (0.979). The researcher attributes this to the fact that the principals consider all work to be submitted in the name of the direct head of the school because they represent the school, and the staff are considered an employee working in the school.

4.2. Results of Research Question 2

The answer to the second question: What is the order of the ethical leadership dimensions in the practice of basic schools' principals from the point of view of teachers? To answer this question, the means and standard deviations of the dimensions of ethical leadership were extracted.

Table 6. *Overall Means and standard deviations of ethical leadership dimensions.*

	Dimension	Mean	Std. deviation	Level	Order
1.	Availability of ethical behaviour	6	0.80	High	1
2.	Ethical behaviour practice	7	0.90	Medium	3
3.	Ethical Behaviour reinforcement	7	0.80	Medium	2
	overall	20	0.83	Low	

Table 6 shows the overall means and standard deviations of ethical leadership dimensions. the dimensions of ethical leadership were ordered as follows: The first rank was the availability of ethical behaviour with a mean of (3.63) and a standard deviation of (0.768) which represents a high degree of practice. In second place was the ethical behaviour reinforcement with a mean of (3.00) and a standard deviation of (0.931), which represents a Medium degree of practice. the ethical behaviour practice in the last rank with a mean (2.72) and a standard deviation (0.879) which represents a medium degree of practice.

4.3. Results of Research Question 3

The answer to the third question: Are there statistically significant differences at the level of 0.05 in the practice of ethical leadership dimensions among basic education schools' principals according to gender and educational qualification? The results of the gender variable are presented in table 7.

Table 7. *Means, standard deviations, and the (t) value of the dimensions of ethical leadership according to the gender variable.*

Dimension	Gender	N	M	Std. deviation	t	Sig.
Availability of ethical behaviour	Male	130	3.55	0.753	3.34	0.89
	Female	140	3.68	0.789		
Ethical behaviour practice	Male	130	2.78	0.878	3.07	0.99
	Female	140	2.98	0.890		
Ethical Behaviour reinforcement	Male	130	2.60	0.996	3.32	0.109
	Female	140	2.87	0.889		
Overall	Male	130	2.97	0.862	3.65	0.120
	Female	140	3.17	0.856		

Table 7 shows means, standard deviations, and the (t) value of the dimensions of ethical leadership according to the gender variable. It is concluded that the level of significance in all dimensions of the questionnaire was more than (0.05). The first dimension is (0.89), the second dimension is (0.99) and the third dimension is (0.109). This indicates that there are no statistically significant differences based on the gender variable. The researcher attributes this to the nature of individuals and their living in one environment, which makes most of their traits in common.

The results of the gender variable are presented in table 8.

Table 8. *Means, standard deviations, and (t) value for the dimensions of ethical leadership according to the qualification variable.*

Dimension	Qualification	N	M	Std. deviation	t	Sig.
Availability of ethical behaviour	Bachelor	190	3.72	0.768	3.23	0.155
	Postgraduate	80	3.88	0.789		
Ethical behaviour practice	Bachelor	190	2.98	0.926	3.02	0.115
	Postgraduate	80	3.33	0.768		
Ethical Behaviour reinforcement	Bachelor	190	2.59	0.879	3.32	0.130
	Postgraduate	80	2.85	0.989		
Overall	Bachelor	190	3.09	0.857	3.45	0.113
	Postgraduate	80	3.35	0.848		

Table 7 means, standard deviations, and (t) value for the dimensions of ethical leadership according to the qualification variable. It was concluded that the level of significance in all dimensions of the questionnaire was more than (0.05) as follows: The first all dimension is (0.155), the second all

dimension is (0.115), and the third all dimension is (0.130). This indicates that there are no statistically significant differences based on the educational qualification variable.

When it comes to productivity and job success, ethical leadership can encompass a number of areas or standards, including ethical personal qualities, ethical administrative qualities, teamwork qualities, and human relations qualities. According to Al-Qarni and Al-Zaydi, (2016), these criteria determine how much an administrative principal employs an ethical leadership style within the school. However, in the Omani context, the results are different from what Al-Qarni and Al-Zaydi (2016) urged.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This study is limited to the ethical leadership topic which was investigated among cycle two teachers in the 2022/2023 academic year. The study reached a set of results. The degree of practising the dimensions of ethical leadership among the principals of basic education schools in cycle two schools was at a high level in the dimension of availability of ethical behaviour. The items of this dimension were at various levels (Very high - High - Medium), while the dimension of practising ethical behaviour was with a degree of medium practice. most of its items were at a medium level in terms of practice. the dimension of reinforcing ethical behaviour also was medium. most of its items were at a medium level. The study confirmed the order of the dimensions of ethical leadership dimensions was as follows: The dimension of availability of ethical behaviour was ranked the first with a mean of (3.63), followed by the dimension of reinforcing ethical behaviour with a mean of (3.00), and finally the dimension of practising ethical behaviour with a mean of (2.72). The study also confirmed that there are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance of 0.05 in the degree to which principals practice the dimensions of ethical leadership according to the gender and educational qualification variables.

Based on the findings of the study, there are several recommendations. First, it is recommended to integrate organizational culture in schools through intensive training programs and courses. Also, it is recommended that decision-makers promote religious values and behaviours in schools as being the basis of the first ethical component in leadership. Finally, it is recommended to provide training and develop leadership competencies in the field of ethical leadership.

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