

PRINCIPALS' PROFESSIONAL ETHICS ON EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS WITHIN THE CALABAR EDUCATION ZONE OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

ANAM, NANCY GODWIN

Department of Educational Management
Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies,
University of Calabar, Calabar.

anamnancy72@gmail.com

+2348062419901

ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of principals' professional ethics on educational management and supervision in secondary schools within the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. Three specific objectives guided the study: to examine the extent to which principals' adherence to professional ethics influences effective educational management, to investigate how principals' ethical conduct affects the supervision of instructional activities, and to identify the ethical challenges principals face in managing and supervising schools. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design with a population of 94 principals across the zone, all of whom were studied using the census method. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Principals' Professional Ethics on Educational Management and Supervision Questionnaire (PPEMSQ)," validated by experts in Educational Management, Measurement, and Evaluation. Reliability coefficients of .78, .79, and .84 were obtained using Cronbach's Alpha. Data were analyzed using frequency and percentage. The findings revealed that principals' adherence to professional ethics significantly enhances effective educational management by promoting fairness, transparency, accountability, and collaboration. Ethical conduct was also found to positively influence instructional supervision through fairness, honesty, and constructive feedback that foster teacher motivation and professional growth. However, the study identified several ethical challenges, including political interference, inadequate funding, external pressures, and conflicts of interest, which constrain ethical decision-making. The study concluded that professional ethics is essential for effective school leadership, management, and supervision. It recommended regular ethics training, adequate funding, and policy reforms to strengthen ethical leadership and improve educational outcomes in secondary schools.

Keywords: Professional Ethics, Educational Management, Instructional Supervision, Ethical Leadership, Secondary Schools.

Introduction

Professional ethics among school principals has become an increasingly important focus in the discourse on educational management and supervision. In contemporary educational systems, the ethical conduct of principals serves as a foundational pillar for promoting quality leadership, accountability, transparency, and effective learning outcomes. The principal's role transcends administrative control and instructional supervision; it encompasses modeling moral integrity, fostering a culture of trust, and ensuring that both staff and students adhere to ethical standards that support institutional growth and academic excellence. According to Adebayo and Uche (2022), professional ethics refers to a set of moral principles and codes of conduct that guide individuals in carrying out their professional duties responsibly and fairly. When applied to school leadership, it determines how principals make decisions, handle resources, and relate with teachers, students, and the community. Thus, the presence or absence of professional ethics can significantly influence the tone and quality of educational management and supervision in secondary schools.

Education as a social institution is value-laden; it not only imparts knowledge but also inculcates moral and civic virtues necessary for social cohesion and national development. Principals, as administrative and instructional leaders, serve as the moral compass of their schools. They are entrusted with the responsibility of managing resources, supervising teachers, and upholding the standards of professionalism. Ethical leadership in this context implies adherence to fairness, justice, honesty, accountability, respect for human dignity, and the promotion of an enabling environment for teaching and learning. Nworgu and Eze (2023) affirm that professional ethics in educational leadership ensures that principals act in ways that reflect integrity and a commitment to the core values of education. In contrast, unethical practices such as favoritism, corruption, negligence, and abuse of authority have been linked to declining performance, demotivation among teachers, and poor supervision of instructional processes in Nigerian schools. This concern underscores the relevance of examining the influence of principals' professional ethics on educational management and supervision.

Conceptually, professional ethics in education can be understood from several perspectives. From a moral philosophy standpoint, it embodies the virtue ethics approach, which emphasizes character and moral disposition as the core of ethical leadership (Okeke & Musa, 2021). A principal guided by virtue ethics demonstrates moral integrity and fairness in decision-making and ensures that every stakeholder is treated with respect and impartiality. Another perspective, the deontological view, focuses on adherence to duty and professional codes, suggesting that ethical conduct is grounded in compliance with established standards and regulations (Johnson & Adewale, 2020). For principals, this implies aligning administrative and supervisory actions with educational policies, ministry directives, and ethical codes set by professional teaching bodies. Meanwhile, the utilitarian perspective emphasizes that outcomes of ethical behavior are considered right if they

result in the greatest good for the greatest number (Singh & Adeyemi, 2023). This means that a principal's ethical actions should ultimately enhance school effectiveness, improve teacher morale, and foster positive student outcomes.

Globally, professional ethics has gained increasing recognition as a determinant of effective educational leadership. Studies conducted in the United States, United Kingdom, and Finland highlight the correlation between ethical leadership and school improvement (Hallinger & Bryant, 2021; Björk & Murphy, 2020). In Finland, for example, educational reforms emphasize leadership grounded in trust and moral accountability, where principals are expected to serve as ethical role models and instructional leaders. Similarly, in the United States, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards underscore ethics as a central component of leadership competence (Smith & Walker, 2022). These international frameworks recognize that without a firm ethical foundation, even well-trained principals may misuse authority or make decisions detrimental to school stakeholders. Research by Campbell and Johansson (2021) found that schools led by ethically minded principals tend to experience higher teacher satisfaction, reduced conflict, and improved student outcomes. This is because ethical leadership promotes transparency, open communication, and collective responsibility in decision-making processes.

In the African context, professional ethics in educational management has attracted growing scholarly interest due to challenges of corruption, political interference, and declining moral standards in public institutions. Leadership in African schools often faces competing pressures between personal interest, political loyalty, and professional duty. According to Amadi and Moyo (2022), ethical lapses among school leaders manifest in practices such as misappropriation of funds, favoritism in staff promotions, and disregard for accountability structures. Such unethical behaviors undermine teacher motivation and create distrust between staff and administrators. In Ghana, Mensah and Ofori (2021) reported that the success of school management largely depends on principals' ethical commitment to fairness and inclusivity in decision-making. Similarly, in Kenya, Otieno and Mwangi (2023) observed that ethical leadership practices such as transparency, participatory supervision, and respect for teacher autonomy foster collaboration and enhance instructional quality. Across sub-Saharan Africa, efforts to strengthen school leadership increasingly emphasize the integration of professional ethics into administrative training and certification programs.

In Nigeria, the issue of ethics in educational management has long been a subject of debate among policymakers, educators, and researchers. The Nigerian Teachers Registration Council (TRCN) stipulates a professional code of conduct requiring teachers and administrators to exhibit integrity, impartiality, and respect for learners' rights. However, research indicates persistent ethical lapses among school heads, including mismanagement of funds, examination malpractice, neglect of supervision duties, and nepotism in staff deployment (Okon & Ekpo, 2023). Educational leadership in many Nigerian secondary schools is therefore characterized by conflicting interests

and weak adherence to ethical standards. According to Adeyemi and Olayinka (2021), principals who demonstrate high moral integrity often manage their schools more effectively, as ethical leadership enhances organizational trust, teamwork, and a sense of purpose among teachers. Conversely, unethical practices lead to teacher demoralization, absenteeism, and poor instructional quality, all of which negatively affect students' performance and school reputation.

Effective educational management depends largely on the principal's ability to align administrative practices with ethical standards. Management, in the educational context, involves planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling resources to achieve institutional objectives. When guided by ethics, these functions are carried out transparently and fairly. For instance, ethical management ensures equitable distribution of resources, merit-based staff promotions, and open communication with stakeholders. Research by Ibrahim and Lawal (2022) revealed that schools where principals adhered to professional ethics recorded higher levels of staff satisfaction and organizational harmony than those where favoritism and authoritarianism prevailed. Similarly, Eze and Akpan (2021) found that ethical decision-making among principals enhances the effectiveness of instructional supervision, as teachers are more likely to comply with policies when they trust their leaders' fairness. Ethical management thus contributes not only to administrative efficiency but also to the psychological well-being and professional growth of staff.

Supervision, another critical aspect of school leadership, refers to the systematic process of guiding, supporting, and evaluating teachers to improve instructional quality. When grounded in professional ethics, supervision becomes a developmental process rather than a punitive one. Ethical supervision promotes respect, confidentiality, and constructive feedback, enabling teachers to identify their weaknesses and improve performance. Okoro and Bassey (2022) emphasized that ethical supervision enhances teacher confidence, encourages innovation, and strengthens the culture of accountability. Conversely, unethical supervisory practices, such as bias, intimidation, or negligence, can erode trust and hinder professional development. According to Aina and Obot (2023), when principals use supervision as a means of control rather than mentorship, teachers become resistant to feedback, resulting in stagnation in instructional quality. Therefore, the ethical disposition of principals directly influences the effectiveness of supervisory practices in schools.

Empirical studies further highlight the relationship between ethical leadership and educational outcomes. In a study conducted in South Africa, Mthembu and Dlamini (2020) examined the influence of principals' ethical behavior on teacher job satisfaction and found a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.05$). Teachers reported higher motivation and professional commitment in schools where principals demonstrated honesty, fairness, and transparency. Similarly, in Ethiopia, Alemu and Tadesse (2021) investigated the impact of ethical leadership on school performance using a mixed-method design involving 240 teachers. Their findings indicated that ethical decision-making by principals significantly improved teamwork, reduced conflict, and enhanced instructional supervision. In Ghana, Mensah and Ofori (2021) discovered that teachers'

perception of fairness and integrity in leadership was a key determinant of their willingness to engage in collaborative instructional practices.

In Nigeria, similar studies have produced consistent results. Ekanem and Udo (2022) conducted research on professional ethics and school management in Akwa Ibom State using a descriptive survey design. The study sampled 300 principals and teachers and found that ethical leadership practices such as accountability and transparency significantly predicted effective school management ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.05$). The authors concluded that adherence to ethical standards is essential for sustainable educational improvement. Another study by Yusuf and Ibrahim (2023) in Kaduna State examined ethical supervision and teacher productivity and found a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.05$). Teachers in schools with ethically grounded principals reported greater job satisfaction and professional growth. Furthermore, Okon and Ekpo (2023) identified corruption, nepotism, and lack of ethical training as major barriers to effective management and supervision in public schools. They emphasized that ethical reorientation and continuous professional development for school leaders are necessary for restoring trust and efficiency in educational administration.

In Cross River State, anecdotal and empirical evidence indicates that ethical issues remain a major challenge in school administration. Reports of financial mismanagement, examination malpractice, favoritism, and weak supervision have raised concerns about the ethical disposition of school leaders (Effiom & Archibong, 2022). Many principals struggle to balance administrative authority with moral responsibility, leading to decisions that compromise fairness and transparency. This has direct implications for teacher motivation, instructional quality, and students' academic performance. According to Eyo and Ekanem (2023), unethical practices among principals contribute to teacher frustration, poor communication, and lack of commitment to school goals. Conversely, schools led by ethical principals tend to exhibit greater organizational harmony, stronger professional relationships, and improved academic outcomes. This suggests that professional ethics is not just a moral obligation but a practical necessity for effective educational management and supervision.

The persistence of unethical behavior among school administrators despite existing policies and codes of conduct calls for deeper investigation. Although the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) and the Ministry of Education have introduced ethical guidelines and periodic evaluations, enforcement remains weak, and many principals operate with limited accountability (Okoro & Bassey, 2022). Furthermore, studies on ethics in school leadership in Nigeria have largely focused on tertiary institutions or urban centers, leaving gaps in understanding how ethical conduct shapes educational management and supervision at the secondary school level, especially in the Calabar Education Zone. There is therefore a need to examine the extent to which principals' professional ethics influence the overall management and supervision of schools in this context.

The ethical conduct of principals plays a pivotal role in shaping the organizational climate, determining the effectiveness of school management, and influencing teacher performance. Where ethics is prioritized, there is likely to be transparency, accountability, and mutual respect; where it is neglected, the consequences include mismanagement, low morale, and poor educational outcomes. Despite the existence of policies and codes of ethics, the gap between ethical principles and actual administrative practice remains wide in many Nigerian schools. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the influence of principals' professional ethics on educational management and supervision in secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. The findings are expected to provide insights that can guide policymakers, educators, and school administrators in promoting ethical leadership for improved educational outcomes.

This study aimed to examine the influence of principals' professional ethics on educational management and supervision in secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

8. Examine the extent to which principals' adherence to professional ethics influences effective educational management in secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State.
9. Investigate how principals' ethical conduct affects the supervision of instructional activities in secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State.
10. Identify the ethical challenges principals face in managing and supervising secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State.
10. To what extent does principals' adherence to professional ethics influence effective educational management in secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State?
11. How does principals' ethical conduct affect the supervision of instructional activities in secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State?
12. What ethical challenges do principals face in managing and supervising secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study population comprises all principals in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State is 94. The technique employed in this study is the census method. The instrument used for data collection is a questionnaire termed "Principals' Professional Ethics on Educational Management and Supervision Questionnaire

(PPEEMSQ)". The questionnaire was structured in a modified four-point Likert scale rating, ranging from Strongly Agree (SA - 4) to Strongly Disagree (SD - 1). Experts in Educational management, as well as measurement and Evaluation experts, validated the instruments for content and face validity. Cronbach's Alpha method was used to establish the reliability, which yielded coefficients of .78, .79, and .84 for the principals' adherence to professional ethics, influence effective educational management, principals' ethical conduct affects the supervision of instructional activities, and ethical challenges do principals face in managing and supervising. The research questions were answered using frequency and percentage.

Presentation of the result

Research question one: To what extent does principals' adherence to professional ethics influence effective educational management in secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State?

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of principals' adherence to professional ethics influence effective educational management (N = 94)

| S/N | Statement | N | SA | A | D | SD |
|-----|--|----|---------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1 | Principals' adherence to professional ethics promotes fairness and transparency in school management. | 94 | 72 (76.6%) | 18 (19.1%) | 3 (3.2%) | 1 (1.1%) |
| 2 | Ethical leadership by principals enhances teachers' motivation and job satisfaction. | 94 | 68 (72.3%) | 20 (21.3%) | 4 (4.3%) | 2 (2.1%) |
| 3 | When principals follow ethical standards, it improves decision-making and accountability in the school. | 94 | 70 (74.5%) | 19 (20.2%) | 3 (3.2%) | 2 (2.1%) |
| 4 | Observance of professional ethics by principals fosters trust and collaboration among school staff. | 94 | 66 (70.2%) | 23 (24.5%) | 3 (3.2%) | 2 (2.1%) |
| 5 | Adherence to professional ethics by principals contributes to effective conflict resolution within the school. | 94 | 64 (68.1%) | 25 (26.6%) | 3 (3.2%) | 2 (2.1%) |

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|----|---------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| 6 | The ethical conduct of principals significantly influences the overall effectiveness of school management. | 94 | 73 (77.7%) | 17 (18.1%) | 3 (3.2%) | 1 (1.1%) |
|---|--|----|---------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|

The results presented in Table 1 show respondents' opinions on the extent to which principals' adherence to professional ethics influences effective educational management in secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State. A large proportion of respondents, 95.7% (76.6% strongly agreed and 19.1% agreed), indicated that principals' adherence to professional ethics promotes fairness and transparency in school management, while only 4.3% disagreed. This suggests that ethical behavior among principals is widely viewed as vital for promoting transparency in administrative operations. Similarly, 93.6% (72.3% strongly agreed and 21.3% agreed) of respondents agreed that ethical leadership by principals enhances teachers' motivation and job satisfaction, indicating that adherence to ethical principles helps foster a supportive and motivated school environment. In addition, 94.7% (74.5% strongly agreed and 20.2% agreed) affirmed that when principals follow ethical standards, it improves decision-making and accountability within schools, highlighting the role of ethics in strengthening responsible leadership.

Furthermore, 94.7% (70.2% strongly agreed and 24.5% agreed) agreed that observance of professional ethics fosters trust and collaboration among staff, suggesting that ethical conduct builds positive interpersonal and professional relationships. Likewise, 94.7% (68.1% strongly agreed and 26.6% agreed) indicated that adherence to ethics contributes to effective conflict resolution, showing that ethical principles guide fair and balanced decision-making in resolving disputes. Finally, 95.8% (77.7% strongly agreed and 18.1% agreed) affirmed that the ethical conduct of principals significantly influences the overall effectiveness of school management. Overall, the findings reveal that the majority of respondents, over 93% across all items, believe that principals' adherence to professional ethics positively affects effective educational management in secondary schools within the Calabar Education Zone.

Research question two: How does principals' ethical conduct affect the supervision of instructional activities in secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State?

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of principals' ethical conduct affect the supervision of instructional activities (N = 94)

| S/N | Statement | N | SA | A | D | SD |
|-----|--|----|---------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| 7 | Principals' ethical conduct ensures fairness and objectivity during classroom supervision. | 94 | 69 (73.4%) | 20 (21.3%) | 3 (3.2%) | 2 (2.1%) |
| 8 | When principals act ethically, teachers are more receptive to feedback during instructional supervision. | 94 | 67 (71.3%) | 22 (23.4%) | 3 (3.2%) | 2 (2.1%) |
| 9 | Ethical behaviour by principals promotes transparency and trust in the supervision process. | 94 | 70 (74.5%) | 19 (20.2%) | 3 (3.2%) | 2 (2.1%) |
| 10 | Principals who uphold professional ethics encourage teachers to improve their instructional practices. | 94 | 66 (70.2%) | 24 (25.5%) | 3 (3.2%) | 1 (1.1%) |
| 11 | The ethical conduct of principals reduces conflict and misunderstanding during supervision sessions. | 94 | 64 (68.1%) | 25 (26.6%) | 3 (3.2%) | 2 (2.1%) |
| 12 | Principals' adherence to ethical standards enhances the overall effectiveness of instructional supervision in schools. | 94 | 72 (76.6%) | 19 (20.2%) | | |

The results presented in Table 2 show respondents' opinions on how principals' ethical conduct affects the supervision of instructional activities in secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State. A large proportion of respondents, 94.7% (73.4% strongly agreed and 21.3% agreed), indicated that principals' ethical conduct ensures fairness and objectivity during classroom supervision, while only 5.3% disagreed. This suggests that most respondents believe that ethical conduct by principals promotes impartial and balanced supervision practices. Similarly, 94.7% (71.3% strongly agreed and 23.4% agreed) of respondents agreed that when principals act ethically, teachers are more receptive to feedback during instructional supervision, indicating that ethical leadership fosters a positive and open learning environment. In addition, 94.7% (74.5% strongly agreed and 20.2% agreed) affirmed that ethical behaviour by principals

promotes transparency and trust in the supervision process, showing that adherence to ethical principles enhances credibility and confidence in school leadership.

Furthermore, 95.7% (70.2% strongly agreed and 25.5% agreed) agreed that principals who uphold professional ethics encourage teachers to improve their instructional practices, suggesting that ethical supervision inspires teachers' professional growth and commitment. Likewise, 94.7% (68.1% strongly agreed and 26.6% agreed) indicated that the ethical conduct of principals reduces conflict and misunderstanding during supervision sessions, implying that fairness and moral discipline help maintain harmonious relationships during instructional oversight. Finally, 96.8% (76.6% strongly agreed and 20.2% agreed) affirmed that principals' adherence to ethical standards enhances the overall effectiveness of instructional supervision in schools. Overall, the findings reveal that the majority of respondents, over 94% across all items, believe that principals' ethical conduct has a strong positive effect on the supervision of instructional activities in secondary schools within the Calabar Education Zone.

Research question three: What ethical challenges do principals face in managing and supervising secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State?

Table 3: Frequency and percentage of ethical challenges principals face in managing and supervising (N = 94)

| S/N | Statement | N | SA | A | D | SD |
|-----|--|----|---------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| 13 | Principals face pressure from external influences that affect their ability to make ethical decisions. | 94 | 71 (75.5%) | 19 (20.2%) | 3 (3.2%) | 1 (1.1%) |
| 14 | Limited resources and funding create ethical dilemmas in managing school affairs effectively. | 94 | 69 (73.4%) | 21 (22.3%) | 3 (3.2%) | 1 (1.1%) |
| 15 | Political interference often challenges principals' adherence to professional ethics in school management. | 94 | 72 (76.6%) | 18 (19.1%) | 3 (3.2%) | 1 (1.1%) |
| 16 | Principals encounter ethical difficulties when handling staff disciplinary issues fairly. | 94 | 66 (70.2%) | 23 (24.5%) | 4 (4.3%) | 1 (1.1%) |

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|----|---------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| 17 | Maintaining confidentiality during supervision and management activities poses ethical challenges for principals. | 94 | 65 (69.1%) | 24 (25.5%) | 3 (3.2%) | 2 (2.1%) |
| 18 | Conflicts of interest between personal relationships and professional responsibilities affect principals' ethical judgment. | 94 | 67 (71.3%) | 22 (23.4%) | 3 (3.2%) | 2 (2.1%) |

The results presented in Table 3 show respondents' opinions on the ethical challenges principals face in managing and supervising secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State. A large proportion of respondents, 95.7% (75.5% strongly agreed and 20.2% agreed), indicated that principals face pressure from external influences that affect their ability to make ethical decisions, while only 4.3% disagreed. This implies that external factors such as community expectations, political influence, and stakeholder interference often limit principals' ability to act ethically in decision-making. Similarly, 95.7% (73.4% strongly agreed and 22.3% agreed) of respondents agreed that limited resources and funding create ethical dilemmas in managing school affairs effectively, indicating that financial constraints make it difficult for principals to uphold ethical standards in resource allocation and school administration. In addition, 95.7% (76.6% strongly agreed and 19.1% agreed) affirmed that political interference often challenges principals' adherence to professional ethics, suggesting that political pressures frequently compromise their autonomy and ethical judgment in school management.

Furthermore, 94.7% (70.2% strongly agreed and 24.5% agreed) agreed that principals encounter ethical difficulties when handling staff disciplinary issues fairly, showing that enforcing discipline without bias or favoritism remains a sensitive ethical concern. Likewise, 94.6% (69.1% strongly agreed and 25.5% agreed) indicated that maintaining confidentiality during supervision and management activities poses ethical challenges, highlighting the difficulty of balancing transparency with privacy in school operations. Finally, 94.7% (71.3% strongly agreed and 23.4% agreed) affirmed that conflicts of interest between personal relationships and professional responsibilities affect principals' ethical judgment. Overall, the findings reveal that the majority of respondents, over 94% across all items, believe that principals face considerable ethical challenges in managing and supervising secondary schools in the Calabar Education Zone.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study revealed that principals' adherence to professional ethics has a significant positive influence on effective educational management in secondary schools within the Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State. The results showed that ethical conduct among principals promotes fairness, transparency, accountability, and collaboration in school

administration. This implies that principals who uphold professional ethics are more likely to foster trust, resolve conflicts objectively, and ensure smooth school operations. The likely reason for this finding is that adherence to ethical standards builds credibility and respect among staff, thereby creating a stable and productive working environment. This finding is in agreement with Okon and Ekanem (2021), who observed that ethical leadership strengthens school governance and enhances teachers' commitment to organizational goals. Similarly, Akpan and Bassey (2020) found that principals who demonstrate integrity and fairness influence teachers' attitudes positively, leading to improved school performance.

The study further revealed that principals' ethical conduct has a strong impact on the supervision of instructional activities. Respondents agreed that ethical principals ensure fairness and objectivity during supervision, promote transparency, and encourage teachers to improve their instructional practices. This suggests that ethical leadership creates an atmosphere of mutual respect and professional growth, where teachers are open to feedback and continuous improvement. The possible reason for this finding is that when supervision is guided by fairness and honesty, teachers perceive it as developmental rather than punitive. This finding supports the work of Eze and Obi (2022), who reported that ethical leadership enhances instructional supervision and teacher motivation. In the same vein, Udo and Etim (2020) affirmed that principals who adhere to ethical values inspire teachers' confidence, leading to higher instructional effectiveness and student achievement.

The study also revealed that principals encounter various ethical challenges in managing and supervising secondary schools. These include external pressures, political interference, inadequate funding, conflicts of interest, and issues related to confidentiality and fairness in disciplinary actions. This implies that despite their awareness of ethical principles, principals often face systemic and contextual factors that constrain their ability to act ethically. The likely reason for this result is the political and socio-economic environment within which schools operate, which often subjects principals to conflicting demands and limited autonomy. This finding aligns with the study of Abang and Umeh (2021), who found that political and financial pressures hinder principals from maintaining ethical standards in school management. Likewise, Nwosu and Ekpo (2020) reported that inadequate resources and external influence expose school leaders to ethical dilemmas that affect decision-making and organizational justice.

Conclusion

The study concluded that principals' adherence to professional ethics significantly enhances effective educational management and instructional supervision in secondary schools within the Calabar Education Zone. Ethical leadership promotes fairness, accountability, transparency, and trust among staff, leading to improved administrative efficiency and instructional quality. However, the study also established that principals face considerable ethical challenges such as

political interference, inadequate funding, external pressure, and conflicts of interest that may compromise ethical decision-making. Addressing these challenges is essential to strengthen ethical leadership and sustain effective school management in the study area.

Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Education should organize regular ethics and leadership training programs for principals to reinforce their understanding and application of professional ethical standards in school management and supervision.
2. Government and education authorities should ensure adequate funding and provision of resources to minimize the ethical dilemmas principals face due to financial constraints.
3. Clear policies should be implemented to reduce political interference and external pressures that undermine ethical decision-making in schools.
4. Principals should uphold confidentiality, fairness, and impartiality in all disciplinary and supervisory processes to build trust and credibility among staff.
5. Supervisory bodies should establish monitoring mechanisms to ensure that principals consistently adhere to ethical codes and maintain integrity in administrative practices.

References

- Abang, U., & Umeh, P. (2021). Political and financial pressures as constraints to ethical leadership among Nigerian secondary school principals. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Leadership and Management*, 8(2), 77–92.
- Adebayo, T., & Uche, V. (2022). Professional ethics and moral responsibility in school leadership: Implications for educational management in Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 11(1), 33–47.
- Adeyemi, A., & Olayinka, M. (2021). Ethical leadership and effective school management in Nigerian secondary education. *African Journal of Educational Administration*, 7(3), 54–70.
- Aina, K., & Obot, E. (2023). The impact of ethical supervision on teacher performance in secondary schools. *Journal of Instructional Leadership and Practice*, 9(2), 88–103.

- Akpan, J., & Bassey, E. (2020). Principals' integrity and fairness as predictors of teacher commitment in secondary schools. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Research and Development*, 6(4), 45–59.
- Alemu, T., & Tadesse, G. (2021). Ethical leadership and school performance: Evidence from Ethiopian secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Studies in Africa*, 9(2), 112–127.
- Amadi, C., & Moyo, L. (2022). Professional ethics and school leadership in sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges and prospects. *African Educational Management Review*, 10(1), 51–68.
- Björk, L., & Murphy, J. (2020). Moral leadership and ethical practices in school administration: A comparative perspective. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy*, 12(1), 1–15.
- Campbell, D., & Johansson, O. (2021). The role of ethical leadership in improving school outcomes: A cross-cultural study. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Studies*, 13(2), 99–115.
- Efan, E., & Archibong, P. (2022). Ethical challenges in school administration in Cross River State: Implications for educational supervision. *West African Journal of Educational Studies*, 8(1), 64–79.
- Ekanem, E., & Udo, P. (2022). Professional ethics and effective school management in Akwa Ibom State. *Journal of Educational Policy and Practice*, 10(3), 84–98.
- Eyo, A., & Ekanem, T. (2023). Unethical practices and their effects on teacher motivation in Cross River State secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Supervision and Leadership*, 12(1), 40–56.
- Eze, C., & Akpan, F. (2021). Ethical decision-making and instructional supervision among secondary school principals in Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Research and Ethics*, 9(2), 118–132.
- Eze, P., & Obi, N. (2022). Ethical leadership and teacher motivation: A study of instructional supervision in Nigerian secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Supervision*, 11(1), 73–88.
- Hallinger, P., & Bryant, D. (2021). Ethical leadership and school improvement: Global perspectives and implications. *Educational Management and Leadership Review*, 14(1), 25–41.
- Ibrahim, M., & Lawal, R. (2022). Professional ethics and staff satisfaction in secondary school administration. *Nigerian Journal of Education and Leadership Studies*, 8(2), 58–72.

- Johnson, K., & Adewale, S. (2020). Deontological perspectives on ethics and school leadership in Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Philosophy and Administration*, 5(4), 90–104.
- Mensah, K., & Ofori, D. (2021). Ethical commitment and participatory leadership in Ghanaian secondary schools. *African Journal of Educational Administration and Planning*, 7(1), 42–59.
- Mthembu, S., & Dlamini, T. (2020). Principals' ethical behavior and teacher job satisfaction in South African schools. *South African Journal of Educational Leadership*, 6(3), 121–136.
- Nworgu, B., & Eze, U. (2023). Professional ethics and integrity in educational leadership in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Professional Education Studies*, 10(1), 33–48.
- Nwosu, P., & Ekpo, A. (2020). Resource limitations and ethical dilemmas among Nigerian school leaders. *International Journal of Education and Accountability*, 8(2), 67–81.
- Okeke, J., & Musa, A. (2021). Virtue ethics and moral integrity in school leadership: The Nigerian experience. *Journal of Values and Education*, 9(1), 24–38.
- Okon, E., & Ekanem, P. (2021). Ethical leadership and teachers' organizational commitment in secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Management and Supervision*, 7(2), 96–111.
- Okon, J., & Ekpo, R. (2023). Ethical lapses and administrative challenges in Nigerian secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Administration in Africa*, 11(2), 80–97.
- Okoro, F., & Bassey, J. (2022). Ethical supervision and teacher performance in Nigerian secondary schools. *West African Journal of Educational Management*, 9(1), 55–70.
- Otieno, M., & Mwangi, K. (2023). Ethical leadership practices and instructional quality in Kenyan secondary schools. *East African Journal of Educational Leadership*, 12(1), 61–77.
- Singh, R., & Adeyemi, L. (2023). A utilitarian approach to professional ethics in educational administration. *International Journal of Moral Education and Leadership*, 10(2), 87–102.
- Smith, L., & Walker, G. (2022). Ethics as a core standard in educational leadership: Insights from the ISLLC framework. *American Journal of School Leadership*, 18(2), 51–67.
- Yusuf, T., & Ibrahim, A. (2023). Ethical supervision and teacher productivity in Nigerian secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Evaluation and Leadership*, 13(1), 27–43.