Ethical leadership in education

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Abstract: Ethical leadership is tantamount to accountable and uncompromised public service in the field of education. This study explored the ethical leadership styles of public secondary school heads in the country who were randomly selected. It was participated by 85 school heads and 85 teachers among the selected public secondary schools in the Philippines. The study employed phenomenological research in order to explore school heads' ethical leadership as they manage, supervise and administer day-to-day school operations. The study concluded that integrity, fairness, empathy and commitment to social justice were the major themes generated which represent contextualized meaning of ethical leadership in education. In this line the study recommended that school heads should create specific actions and program interventions to monitor higher level of work ethics as fruit of effective ethical leadership. In addition, the study recommended that future empirical analysis on the influence of ethical leadership to teachers' efficiency and competence should be pursued.

INTRODUCTION

Ethical leadership is a bedrock of transparent and accountable leadership in public offices. In this line, schools as social institutions, are also needing individuals who can lead and manage their operations on the basis of integrity, dignity, consistency, productivity, efficiency and holistic development. One of the primary intentions of school as formal venue of teaching and learning

process, is the total development of learners. Along this line, schools are also considered as breeding grounds of harmonious relationship among locals in the communities. The functions of schools and the administrators who are tasked to operate, govern and lead the school burdened with highest level of responsibilities and accountabilities.

Apparently, one of the apparent lines of good governance and administration in the public service is ethical leadership. Commonly, ethical leadership is a critical concept of leadership which emphasizes the promotion of fair, dignified and respectful environment. Be it the schools or any public or private institutions, ethical leadership is the foremost consideration of strong and good governance. As shown in the study of Fadis (2022), ethical leadership consists of proper organizational behavior, ethical values and characteristics which leaders are viewed to possess in leading the organization. Meanwhile, according to the study of Ilgan and Ekiz (2020) which concludes that there is a strong positive relationship between principals' leadership abilities and their ethical leadership behaviors as perceived by their teachers. In addition, Ehrich et al. (2015) discuss the centrality of ethical leadership where they show that ethics is a central consideration in how principal's led the school and practicing tasks in an ethical manner. Thus, Crawford (2017) discusses that school leaders and practitioners may not know their legal and ethical responsibilities toward anticipated school contexts and conditions.

In this line, ethical leadership is viewed as new form of leadership which school heads are expected to exhibit. The researchers consistently observed that most number of school heads whom they interacted with, put less emphasis on the value and practical importance of ethical leadership in school. In fact, the researchers also noted certain conditions, that numbers of school heads are deeply focused on the technical and procedural aspect of governance where ethical leadership may most often than not, has left behind or may be directly or indirectly ignored. These conditions plunge the interests of the researchers to pursue this current work. Adding to their interests in the administration of this present study is the absence of founded data through scholarly studies which studies ethical leadership of school heads. This study also conducted to fill this knowledge gap.

Research Objectives

This study explored school heads' ethical leadership styles as perceived by themselves and their teachers. The study specifically describe and identify the major indicators or factors that characterized ethical leadership styles of selected public secondary school heads in the country.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized phenomenological research in order to explore public secondary school heads' ethical leadership styles as perceived by themselves and their teachers. As defined by Umanailo (2019), phenomenological research is a design to dissect the human mind through observation and recognition informant against social reality that occurs in the community. Here, the study reasonably utilized phenomenological research on the basis that it attempted to access the thoughts and feeling of the participants in relation to the ethical leadership. So, proper

interpretations and analysis were made to articulate the results of the study and then conclusions were drawn.

Respondents and Locale of the Study

The subject respondents of the study were the 85 randomly selected public secondary school heads and 85 public secondary school teachers among selected public schools in the Philippines. The selection of the participants was based on the willingness of the school heads and teachers to participate in the study. The researchers posted a call for participants in their social media account.

Research Instrument

The researchers formulated guide questions which were arranged inductively. There were twenty (20) questions that represent participants' impression as to ethical leadership styles. In addition, similar questions were asked to the school heads-participants and teacher-participants. On the other hand, formulated guide questions were validated by three (3) experts in the field of school governance and administration. Expert-evaluators adapted scoring rubric to objectively validate the questions. Hence, based from the results of the validation, the same obtained a verbal rating of "Excellent," which signified that the questions were relevantly and excellently crafted in line with the research objectives.

Data Analysis

All answers, statements expressed by the participants were comprehensively transcribed. The researchers utilized Table of Qualitative Responses and Coding-Decoding Scheme to highlight the significant statements of the participants. Thus, thematic analysis was utilized in order to create or formulate the major themes and subthemes which reflect the participants' perceptions relative to ethical leadership.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Participants' perceptions on ethical leadership

School heads and teachers shared common perceptions and insights in relation to ethical leadership. There were four major themes the characterized participants' perceptions on ethical leadership: integrity, fairness, empathy and commitment to social justice. As to integrity, participants perceived ethical leadership as an adherence to moral and ethical principles mandated and provided by the government and settled by the society. Ethical leadership means morality and highly valued ethical principles that school heads follow ass public servants as well as teachers in the public service. The findings supported the study of Boydak Ozan et al. (2017) which reveals that positive opinion to ethical leadership along with integrity could be determining factors for good school governance. Apparently, the participants also expressed that they highly value the moral conduct as compass for transparent, responsible and accountable school governance. In fact, one of the school-head participants mentioned that:

> *"It is really incumbent upon my part as school head to set an example, to perform highly dignified and moral-based leadership in my school."*

Also, as articulated by one of the teacher-participants:

> *"Our duty to show and be epitome of moral-based society where we, as teachers should uphold integrity in public service in the field of education."*

On the other hand, fairness as second major theme as expressed by the participants contained idealism on equal treatment where justice to governance and administration specially on decision-making and interactions must be taken place to illuminate ethical leadership. Participants further elaborated that equitable treatment encompassed school heads' behaviors of applying the rules and policies consistently without bias, regardless on ranks, relationships and socio-economic status of the subordinates. The result supported the study of Arar et al. (2016) which reveals that significant relations are found among ethical leadership dimensions and decision make which leaders are expected to show. This shows that school heads and teachers highly perceived fairness as major point in dispensing ethical leadership in their respective schools. In fact, one of the school head-respondents expressed that:

> *"Equality is for good governance, being a school leader, I must exercise deeper sense of fairness to practically lead my teachers toward efficient public service in education.."*

Meantime, one of the teacher-participants expressed that :

> *"Fairness is what makes ethical leadership of school heads visible in the school. With equal treatment and fair decisions, we could be highly engaged to serve the public specially our learners."*

Further, school heads and teachers also expressed that empathy displays ethical leadership. The participants emphasize that ability to put emotional connection and active listening are vital to relate experiences and emotions logically in school governance and administration. Participants also highlighted that emphatic leaders build highly impactful ethical leadership thereby building strong relationships and foster supportive environment. In addition to this, participants highlight that active listening address their concerns which leaders practically offer in order to build responsive and inclusive working environment. The result affirmed the study of Kars and Inandi (201) which conclude that showing interests and appreciation in the organization established creative and supportive environment that caused for ethical governance and administration. As shown, one of the participants made mentioned that:

> *"Ethical leadership significantly builds strong empathy where we, as workers of the government should be responsive and sensitive to what we do so that we can provide quality-based education."*

Lastly, commitment to social justice is also perceived as major factor for ethical leadership. As such, commitment to social justice as perceived by the participants, is the dedication of school heads as leader to their values, vision, responsibilities and total well-being as public servants. They

also expressed that vision and purpose and long-term focus to providing quality-based education formed significant part of commitment to social justice. Reason behind this, is that learners and all stakeholders should receive highest form of public service in the field of education. Thus, the results affirmed the study of Berkovich et al. (2021) which concludes that commitment to social justice and organizational commitment significantly influenced efficient and effective school governance. Apparently, one of the school head-participants articulated that:

> *"An ideal state to effect ethical leadership is to have strong commitment to social justice coining public service because by the end of the day, quality education is what we look for."*

Ethical leadership encompasses integrity, fairness, empathy and commitment to social justice where school heads and teachers perceived to be the most pristine and genuine factor for effective and efficient school governance and administration. In obtaining

CONCLUSION

School heads and teachers highly perceived that ethical leadership is one of the fundamental elements for effective and efficient school governance and administration. They also emphasized that integrity, fairness, empathy and commitment to social justice were significant indicators or elements of ethical leadership. In this regard, when school heads acted on the basis of ethical leadership principles and concepts, sound school governance and administration could take place.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the formulation of specific actions and program interventions to be spearheaded by school heads where ethical leadership is at central point. The study further recommends exploration on the actual experiences and practices of school heads how they lead and manage the school acting on the merits of ethical leadership. Thus, the study also recommends to administer case studies about these practices and experiences.

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