

EXPLORING THE ETHICAL LEADERSHIP DIMENSIONS OF PRINCIPALS FOR ENHANCED SECONDARY EDUCATION GOAL ATTAINMENT IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the dimensions of principals' ethical leadership and their relationship with secondary education goal attainment in Anambra State. Specifically, it examined the relationship between principals' ethical people orientation, ethical guidance, and the realization of educational goals. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. A correlational research design was adopted. The study population comprised 7,548 teachers across 267 public secondary schools in Anambra State. Using proportionate stratified sampling, a sample of 614 teachers was selected. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled *Principals' Ethical Leadership Practices and Secondary Education Goal Attainment Questionnaire (PELPSEGAQ)*. The face and content validity of the instrument were ascertained by three experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation from the University of Calabar. Reliability was established using the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding coefficients ranging from 0.87 to 0.89. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was employed to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between principals' ethical people orientation, ethical guidance, and secondary education goal attainment in Anambra State. The study concluded that ethical leadership practices by principals are critical for achieving secondary education goals. Based on these findings, it was recommended that the Post Primary Schools Service Commission (PPSSC) should develop and enforce ethical leadership standards, alongside strong monitoring mechanisms, across public secondary schools. This would help ensure that leadership practices are consistently aligned with the attainment of educational objectives.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership, Principals, Ethical People Orientation, Ethical Guidance
Secondary Education, Goal Attainment

Introduction

Education plays a vital role in shaping individuals and building a better society. It is essential for reducing poverty, promoting equality, for the development of the nation, impacting its technological, political, and socio-economic growth (Obona et al., 2024). As contained in the National Policy on Education, an official document of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN, 2014), the Nigerian education system is structured into three main levels: Basic Education (which includes six years of primary school and three years of junior secondary school), Senior Secondary Education (three years), and Tertiary Education (such as universities, colleges of education, and polytechnics). Specifically, secondary education which is the focus of this study.

Secondary education in Nigeria refers to the stage of learning that follows primary education and comes before tertiary education. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014), it is divided into two levels: Junior Secondary School (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS). The junior level, which begins right after primary school, lasts three years and focuses on providing students with foundational knowledge, entrepreneurial skills, and preparation for further education. At the end of this stage, students take the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). The senior level also spans three years and builds on the junior level, preparing students to take the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and continue to higher education or other career pathways.

One of the critical challenges facing developing nations like Nigeria is how to address persistent problem of unemployment while striving to reduce poverty, create wealth, and foster socioeconomic progress (Obona et al., 2023). Education, particularly at the secondary level plays a critical role by equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, and values needed for personal growth, active citizenship, and lifelong learning (Ngene et al., 2025). According to Etor et al. (2019), the goals of education can be grouped into three main areas: access to higher education, acquisition of knowledge, and effective teaching and learning outcomes. Obona et al. (2024) further emphasize that secondary education also aims to prepare students for employment and to contribute to human capital development in Nigeria. Similarly, Okafor et al. (2024) highlight its function in empowering students with practical competencies and knowledge that enable them to become productive members of society. Etor et al. (2019) also note that by the time students complete secondary school, they are expected to have gained sufficient knowledge and skills to either gain admission into higher institutions or secure employment.

The preceding discussion underscores that secondary education is designed with specific, predefined goals to be achieved. Goals are clearly defined and measurable targets that guide the actions of individuals or institutions within a set timeframe, serving as a foundation for effective planning and implementation. In this study, the attainment of secondary education goals refers to the realization of established educational objectives within a stipulated period, evaluated through measurable outcomes. These outcomes include preparing students for higher education, equipping them with relevant and marketable skills, and instilling values that contribute to societal advancement. Etor et al. (2019) identified key components of goal attainment as access to tertiary education, knowledge acquisition, and the provision of high-quality teaching and learning experiences.

The concept of goal attainment also involves how effectively secondary schools fulfill their educational mandates through strategic administrative actions. According to Madukwe et al. (2024), indicators of goal achievement include the delivery of quality instruction, student discipline, strong academic performance, and the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. Etor et al. (2019) further emphasized that achieving educational goals in Nigerian secondary schools depends largely on the effective management of vocational and technical subjects, which prepares students for either higher education or direct entry into the workforce. Committed and dedicated teachers are also vital in this regard. Obasi (2018) noted that such teachers display professionalism in both teaching and administrative responsibilities, perform their duties promptly, and pursue continuous professional development. In a similar vein, Okoi et al. (2023) observed that school-managed income-generating activities contribute meaningfully to achieving educational goals, while Akanmu et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of visionary and effective leadership in driving schools toward success.

Moreover, Imhangbe and Sanni (2025), as well as Anunobi and Ogbonna (2025), identified strategic planning and quality supervision as essential to the successful realization of educational objectives in Nigerian secondary schools. Ebete and Ejims (2020) emphasized the need to produce competent graduates who align with national goals. According to Obona et al. (2024), secondary education goals include academic excellence, personal development, career readiness, and alignment with the school's mission and vision. Achieving these objectives is crucial not only for individual development but also for broader national aims such as poverty alleviation, economic growth, and social integration. Therefore, secondary school graduates should be well-equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to either pursue higher education or join the labor market productively.

However, despite its importance, the Nigerian secondary education system faces numerous challenges that obstruct the effective attainment of these goals. Arop et al. (2018) criticized the poor quality of instruction in many schools, while Obona et al. (2023) raised concerns about unethical behaviors among teachers, including absenteeism and poor interpersonal conduct. Similarly, Ekaette et al. (2019b) observed that many school leavers engage in social vices such as drug abuse and cultism. Madukwe et al. (2024) noted that several graduates lack employable skills, while others become involved in anti-social behaviors due to frustration. Fehintola (2015) also pointed out that students' academic performances often fall short of expectations. In the same vein, Obi et al. (2022) noted incidences of unacceptable behaviours absenteeism, lateness to school, teachers doing private business at official time, drug addiction, and loitering of staff in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

This situation is equally evident in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Many students complete their education without acquiring employable skills, resulting in outcomes such as street hawking, involvement in petty crimes, and extreme poverty. The problem is compounded by systemic challenges including overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of qualified teachers, poor infrastructure, lack of staff motivation, and inadequate learning environments. These issues impede students' holistic development—intellectually, emotionally, and practically. Additionally, some teachers display unprofessional conduct, such as habitual absenteeism, leaving school before official closing time, arriving late to work, showing disrespect to school authorities, or engaging in private business during official hours. Consequently, under such conditions, the achievement of secondary education objectives in the area is significantly jeopardized. Promoting ethical leadership practices may serve as a viable solution to enhance and ensure the effective attainment of secondary school goals in the region.

In this study, ethical leadership practices refer to the actions employed to influence the activities of others a proper manner in an organization. Arinze et al (2024) defined it as the act of leading by behaving in accordance with moral principles, setting clear standard for conduct in running the daily affairs of schools for attainment of set goals. Ethical leadership practices are the acts of influencing members of staff to exhibit good conduct and expected behaviour in carrying out their duties to achieve set goals (Dunu et al., 2025). These practices include integrity, fairness, and adherence to moral values that shape decision-making and interpersonal relations within the school environment. It includes key virtues such as honesty, transparency, accountability, respect, and justice, with school leaders expected to serve as ethical role models and cultivate a culture of ethical conduct among both staff and students. Orunbon et al. (2022) identify features of ethical leadership in schools as including honesty, fairness, a people-centered approach, shared power, moral guidance, clear roles, and attention to sustainability.

Ethical leadership practices help principals to exhibit good conduct that encourage the staff to act morally in the schools. Gikonyo (2020) underscores the importance of ethical leadership in guiding school administrators toward value-driven practices that enhance effective school governance. Maimela (2024) adds that ethical leadership practices fosters trust and accountability, which are fundamental to institutional credibility and success. Şentürk (2011) outlines several ethical principles relevant to school leadership, including fairness, honesty, integrity, equality, impartiality, responsibility, organizational loyalty, respect for human rights, compliance with legal standards, tolerance, and openness. Zhang and Dacanay (2024) noted that ethical leaders demonstrate noble moral values which motivate teachers to behave well in the workplace. The present study focuses on two specific aspects of ethical leadership practices: principals' ethical people orientation and ethical guidance.

Principals who demonstrate ethical people orientation show genuine concern for the professional growth and well-being of their teachers. In the course of their daily responsibilities, secondary school principals often implement various ethical leadership practices. As ethical leaders, they are characterized by their commitment to following established rules, accepting responsibility, and performing their duties with diligence. According to Arinze et al. (2024), staff orientation is a vital component of ethical leadership, where school leaders display a strong awareness of the professional aspirations and needs of their staff. This is evident in their attentiveness to staff matters, the respect and recognition given to teachers, and their consistent display of empathy and compassion. Shahab et al. (2021) emphasized that the people-oriented aspect of ethical leadership involves sincere care, respect, and support for subordinates, ensuring their needs are adequately met.

Several empirical studies have explored the implications of ethical leadership. Granjo et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between ethical orientation and components of teacher identity, such as perceived competence, psychological need satisfaction, commitment, and self-esteem. Utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM) on data collected from 643 Portuguese teachers, their results revealed that ethical orientation significantly influenced these factors both directly and indirectly, underscoring its relevance in fostering teacher commitment. In a related study, Sheikh et al. (2024) examined how teachers' personality traits influenced organizational commitment in universities in Lahore, Pakistan, with ethical orientation serving as a mediating factor. Using correlation and mediation analyses through SPSS, the study found that traits such as extraversion and conscientiousness were positively linked to organizational commitment, with ethical constructs—especially relativism—playing a mediating role.

Zehra et al. (2022) conducted a study in Karachi to determine the role of ethical leadership in shaping teachers' perceptions of their work environment and their organizational commitment. Based on responses from 560 elementary and secondary school teachers, analyzed using PLS-SEM and SPSS, findings showed a positive correlation between ethical leadership, a supportive work environment, and increased organizational commitment. Similarly, Li et al. (2020) studied ethical leadership in relation to work engagement among young university teachers. Employing SPSS, principal component analysis, and hierarchical regression, the study found that ethical leadership significantly predicted work engagement, with trust serving as a mediating variable.

In Turkey, Arisoy and Cömert (2021) explored the relationship between school principals' ethical leadership behaviors and teacher motivation. The study, which used a relational survey design and involved 298 teachers, employed statistical tools such as the Kruskal-Wallis test, Mann-Whitney U test, and Pearson correlation. Results revealed a moderate positive correlation between ethical leadership and teacher motivation, further confirming the significance of ethical leadership in educational settings. Mohamed and Hussein (2022) also found that ethical leadership, marked by fairness and selflessness, positively affected teachers' job performance in public secondary schools.

Ethical guidance by principals refers to the process of establishing behavioral expectations and promoting ethical conduct within schools. It involves modeling appropriate behaviors and articulating standards of integrity. According to Dunu et al. (2025), ethical guidance entails explaining work principles and codes of conduct to help staff understand expected behaviors. They also emphasized the use of reward and punishment mechanisms as tools to reinforce ethical practices. Abun et al. (2023) added that ethical guidance includes the communication of moral values and rewarding ethical behaviors. Similarly, Mseti et al. (2023) stated that ethical guidance involves promoting integrity, ensuring compliance, and outlining the consequences of unethical conduct.

Dunu et al. (2025) examined the relationship between principals' ethical leadership practices and teachers' job commitment in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study adopted a correlational design with a population of 7,248 teachers across 267 schools. A sample of 726 teachers was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. The results indicated a moderate but significant relationship between ethical guidance practices and teachers' job commitment. Ngene et al. (2025) also found that ethical leaders—who inspire, motivate, and foster ethical workplace cultures—significantly predict job commitment among non-teaching staff at the University of Calabar. In a related study, Obona et al. (2024) found a significant relationship between innovative administrative strategies and teachers' job commitment in secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State.

Obiekwe et al. (2021) investigated the ethical leadership practices of school principals in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria, and their impact on goal attainment. The study, which employed a descriptive survey design, involved 638 teachers from 261 public secondary schools, selected using a multi-stage sampling method. Findings showed that principals' ethical leadership practices—specifically climatic, communicative, behavioral, and decisional dimensions—were positively associated with goal attainment. Similarly, Madukwe et al. (2024) assessed the influence of participatory leadership behaviors on goal attainment in secondary schools in Abia State, Nigeria. Adopting an ex post facto design, the study sampled 160 principals from 303 public secondary schools across three education zones. The results revealed that participatory leadership significantly predicted school goal attainment.

Additionally, Obona et al. (2024) explored the relationship between management variables and goal attainment in public secondary schools in Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State, concluding that management variables significantly influenced school goal achievement. Cansoy et al. (2021) examined the mediating role of ethical climate in the relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction. The cross-sectional survey involved 641 teachers in Turkey. Using regression analysis and the bootstrapping technique to test mediation effects, the study found a positive relationship between principals' ethical leadership and teachers' job satisfaction, as well as a strong link between ethical leadership and ethical climate.

Statement of the problem

Secondary education is designed to achieve specific goals, including the development of skilled manpower, the promotion of academic excellence, the nurturing of individuals capable of independent thought, and the cultivation of respect for the rights, opinions, and emotions of others. It also aims to contribute meaningfully to national economic development. However, evidence suggests that public secondary schools in Anambra State have not effectively realized these goals. This is reflected in several critical indicators, such as consistently low academic performance among students—largely attributed to overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of qualified teachers in core subject areas like Mathematics, English, Physics, Chemistry, and Biology. In addition, many schools suffer from inadequate and non-functional facilities that are essential for effective teaching and learning, contributing to a growing rate of student dropouts. The researcher also observed a prevalence of undesirable behaviors among both staff and students. These include absenteeism, lateness, engagement in personal businesses during official hours by teachers, and general loitering. Some teachers also exhibit reluctance in accepting additional responsibilities, fail to prepare lesson notes, and do not complete their schemes of work or diaries before the end of the term.

These challenges call for urgent and strategic interventions to improve the quality of education in the state. Although the state government has introduced measures such as curriculum revisions, enforcement of a uniform academic calendar across schools, and the regular payment of teachers' salaries, these efforts have yielded minimal results. The persistence of these problems suggests that the root cause may lie in the quality of leadership within the school system. Specifically, the researcher suspects that a lack of ethical leadership is a key factor hindering the attainment of secondary education goals. Consequently, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between principals' ethical leadership and the attainment of secondary education goals in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the ethical leadership dimensions of principals for enhanced secondary education goal attainment in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the relationship between principals' ethical people orientation and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State.
2. Ascertain the relationship between principals' ethical guidance and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State.

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between principals' ethical people orientation and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State?
2. What is the relationship between principals' ethical guidance and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State?

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided study:

1. There is no significant relationship between principals' ethical people orientation and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State.
2. There is no significant relationship between principals' ethical guidance and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State.

Methodology

Correlational research design was adopted for this study. Barkha and Basnet (2023) defined correlational research design as the type that involves the examining the relationships between or among two or more variables in a single group, which can occur at several levels. Correlational design is appropriate for this study because the researcher collected data from the given sample of teachers to investigate ethical leadership dimensions of principals for and secondary education goal attainment in Anambra State. The study was conducted in Anambra State which is one of the five states in South-Eastern Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 7,548 teachers in the 267 public secondary schools in Anambra State. The sample for this study comprised 624 teachers drawn using proportionate stratified sampling technique. Two sets of instruments titled "Principals' Ethical Leadership Practices and Secondary Education Goal Attainment Questionnaire (PELPSEGAQ)" were used for data collection. The two sets of the instruments were structured by the researcher based on insight gained from literature and consultation with experts.

The instruments have Sections A, B and C. Section A focused on the demographic data of the respondents such as gender and age. Section B of the instrument was a 16 items that measured the sub variables of principal ethical leadership practices. Section C of the instrument was 8 items designed to measure secondary education goal attainment. The items are placed on a four-point rating of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The face and content validation of the instruments were determined by three experts in Educational Management, Test, Measurement and Evaluation, College of Education, University of Calabar. The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach alpha method. The data used for computing the reliability indices were obtained from the copies of the instruments administered and collected from 50 teachers in public secondary schools in Abia State. The choice of Abia State was because school principals and teachers in Anambra State and Abia State share similar characteristics and behaviour.

The data obtained were subjected to test for internal consistency using Cronbach alpha which was considered appropriate in order to determine the level of homogeneity of the items in the clusters. This yielded co-efficient index ranging between 0.87, and 0.89. Thus, the researcher considered the instruments to be reliable for the study. Direct delivery method used by the researcher and

supported by research assistants for data collection. A total of 624 copies of instruments were distributed and 614 copies of questionnaires were properly filled and successfully retrieved, indicating 98 percent return rate. Data analysis was conducted based on the null hypotheses that guided the study. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was utilized to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses, all of which were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. The strength of the relationships was interpreted using the correlation coefficient scale recommended by Alsagr (2021):

Coefficient	Interpretation
.00 - .19	Weak Negative Relationship
.20 - .39	Fair Negative Relationship
.40 - .69	Moderate Positive Relationship
.70 - .89	Strong Positive Relationship
.90 - .99	Very Strong Positive Relationship
1	Perfect Relationship

In taking decisions on the null hypotheses, if the p-value is equal to or greater than significant value of 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected but if p-value is less than significant value of 0.05, the null hypotheses was rejected. All data collected were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27.

Results

Research question one

What is the relationship between principals' ethical people orientation and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State? Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research question. The result is presented in table 1. Table 1 revealed that Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) of 0.81 was obtained. This showed that there is a strong relationship between principals' ethical people orientation and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State. This indicated that increase in principals' ethical people orientation led to strong positive increase in secondary education goals attainment.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between principals' ethical people orientation and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State (N=614)

Variables	\bar{X}	S.D	R	Decision
Principals' ethical people orientation	18.21	4.32		
Secondary education goals attainment	19.14	4.39	.81*	Strong Positive Relationship

*Significant at $p < .05$ $df=612$

Research question two

What is the relationship between principals' ethical guidance and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State? Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research question. The result is presented in table 2. Table 2 revealed that Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) of 0.79 was obtained. This showed that there is a strong relationship between principals' ethical guidance and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State. This indicated that increase in principals' ethical guidance led to strong positive increase in secondary education goals attainment.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between principals' ethical guidance and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State (N=614)

Variables	\bar{X}	S.D	R	Decision
Principals' ethical guidance	18.66	3.90	.79*	Strong Positive Relationship
Secondary education goals attainment	19.14	4.39		

*Significant at $p < .05$ $df=612$

Research hypotheses

Hypothesis one

There is no significant relationship between principals' ethical people orientation and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State. The two variables in this hypothesis are principals' ethical people orientation and secondary education goals attainment. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypothesis and the result of the analysis is presented in Table 3. Table 3 showed the correlation coefficient between principals' ethical people orientation and secondary education goals attainment. The correlation coefficient is statistically significant for secondary education goals attainment ($r = .81$, $p < .05$). Since $p(.000)$ is less than $p(.05)$, hypothesis one is rejected. The result of the analysis implied that there is a statistically positive significant relationship between principals' ethical people orientation and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State.

Table 3: Summary of correlation between principals' ethical people orientation and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State. (N=614)

Variables	\bar{X}	S.D	R	Sig.	Decision
Principals' ethical people orientation	18.21	4.32	.81*	.000	Rejected
Secondary education goals attainment	19.14	4.39			

*Significant at $p < .05$ $df=612$

Hypothesis two

There is no significant relationship between principals' ethical guidance and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State. The two variables in this hypothesis are principals' ethical guidance and secondary education goals attainment. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypothesis and the result of the analysis is presented in Table 4. Table 4 showed the correlation coefficient between principals' ethical guidance and secondary education goals attainment. The correlation coefficient is statistically significant for secondary education goals attainment ($r = .79, p < .05$). Since $p(.000)$ is less than $p(.05)$, hypothesis one is rejected. The result of the analysis implied that there is a statistically positive significant relationship between principals' ethical guidance and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State.

Table 3: Summary of correlation between principals' ethical guidance and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State. (N=614)

Variables	\bar{X}	S.D	R	Sig.	Decision
Principals' ethical guidance	18.66	3.90			
Secondary education goals attainment	19.14	4.39	.79*	.000	Rejected

*Significant at $p < .05$ $df=612$

Discussion of findings

The result of hypothesis one revealed that, there is a statistically positive significant relationship between principals' ethical people orientation and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State. This result may be attributed to the fact that secondary school principals in the study area show respect and dignity to the teachers' in the way he give them training and orientation on the job. As such the teachers are motivated to put in their best in discharging their duties. The implication is that the more principals exhibit ethical leadership toward people, the more the teachers are likely to remain committed to their duties which also enhance secondary school goals attainment.

The findings of this study are consistent with the assertion by Arinze et al. (2024) that staff orientation is a critical aspect of ethical leadership, whereby school leaders demonstrate a strong awareness of the professional aspirations and needs of their staff. Similarly, Shahab et al. (2021) emphasized the people-oriented dimension of ethical leadership, which involves genuine care, respect, and support for subordinates, ensuring their needs are adequately addressed. The present findings also align with those of Sheikh et al. (2024), who investigated the influence of teachers' personality traits on organizational commitment in universities in Lahore, Pakistan, with ethical orientation serving as a mediating factor. Through correlation and mediation analyses conducted using SPSS, their study revealed that traits such as extraversion and conscientiousness were positively associated with organizational commitment, with ethical constructs—particularly relativism—mediating this relationship. Furthermore, Mohamed and Hussein (2022) reported that ethical leadership characterized by fairness and selflessness significantly enhanced teachers' job performance in public secondary schools.

The result of hypothesis two revealed that, there is a statistically positive significant relationship between principals' ethical guidance and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State.

This result may be attributed to the role ethical leadership plays in setting clear behavioral standards, promoting accountability, and fostering a supportive school climate. It suggests that principals consistently communicate ethical values, enforce codes of conduct, and model integrity, which creates an environment where teachers and students are more motivated, disciplined, and aligned with institutional goals. This, in turn, enhances teaching effectiveness, student performance, and overall school improvement. The implication is that ethical guidance is a critical component of effective school leadership, and as such, school administrators should integrate ethics-focused training and policies into school management practices to strengthen the achievement of educational goals.

The findings of this study align with those of Mseti et al. (2023), who emphasized that ethical guidance involves promoting integrity, ensuring compliance with ethical standards, and clearly defining the consequences of unethical behavior. This reinforces the idea that ethical leadership is not only about modeling ethical behavior but also about establishing a framework that guides staff conduct. Similarly, Dunu et al. (2025) investigated the relationship between principals' ethical leadership practices and teachers' job commitment in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria, and found a moderate but significant relationship between ethical guidance and teacher commitment. These results are consistent with the present study, which underscores the influence of ethical leadership on staff motivation and loyalty.

Furthermore, Ngene et al. (2025) reported that ethical leaders who inspire, motivate, and cultivate an ethical workplace culture significantly influence job commitment among non-teaching staff at the University of Calabar. This supports the broader relevance of ethical leadership beyond the teaching faculty and aligns with the current study's findings on the positive outcomes of principled leadership practices. In addition, Obona et al. (2024) found a significant relationship between innovative administrative strategies and teachers' job commitment in secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, suggesting that ethical and innovative leadership approaches are crucial for fostering teacher dedication and organizational effectiveness.

The findings also corroborate those of Obiekwe et al. (2021), who explored the ethical leadership practices of school principals in Anambra State and their effect on goal attainment. Their study revealed that ethical leadership dimensions—specifically climatic, communicative, behavioral, and decisional—were positively associated with the realization of school goals. This reflects the importance of ethical conduct across multiple facets of leadership. Similarly, Madukwe et al. (2024), in their study involving 160 principals from 303 public secondary schools in Abia State, used an ex post facto design to assess the influence of participatory leadership on goal attainment. Their results confirmed that participatory leadership practices significantly predicted the achievement of school objectives. Together, these findings support the conclusion that ethical and participatory leadership are essential to achieving both teacher commitment and institutional goals.

Conclusion

This study explored the ethical leadership dimensions of principals for enhanced secondary education goal attainment in Anambra State. The findings revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between principals' ethical people orientation, ethical guidance and secondary education goals attainment in Anambra State. The study concluded that principals' ethical leadership significantly relates to secondary education goal attainment in Anambra State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Anambra State Ministry of Education should organize regular retraining programmes for principals focused on ethical leadership practices, including fairness, integrity, accountability, and respect for both staff and students. Such initiatives will help principals cultivate a positive teaching and learning environment, while also strengthening professional relationships among staff and students.
2. The Post Primary Schools Service Commission (PPSSC) should establish and enforce clear ethical leadership standards and develop robust monitoring mechanisms across public secondary schools. This will ensure that leadership practices are consistently aligned with the achievement of school goals.

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