

Ethical Leadership in Education: Exploring the Role of Secondary School Heads in Fostering Respect, Fairness, and Accountability

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the state of professional ethics in teaching through a qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with five secondary school leaders, including headmasters, a headmistress, and a rector from diverse secondary schools. These institutions varied in size, staffing levels, and educational mandates, offering a broad contextual understanding of ethical leadership in Tanzanian secondary education. The research aimed to investigate how professional ethics are understood, practiced, and enforced at the school leadership level. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed five interrelated themes: awareness of professional ethics, the importance of respect, ethical use of authority, responsible use of educational resources, and honesty in assessment and evaluation. While participants noted a general awareness of ethical codes among teachers, the practical enforcement of these standards varied significantly across institutions. Respect emerged as a foundational ethical value, fostering positive relationships, professional collaboration, and learner motivation. Ethical leadership was viewed as crucial in promoting fairness, transparency, and trust particularly through the appropriate exercise of authority and equitable use of institutional resources. Honesty in assessment and evaluation was emphasized as essential for maintaining the credibility and fairness of academic processes. The findings underscore the central role of school leadership in modeling, enforcing, and sustaining ethical practices within educational settings. The insights into lived experiences provided by this study contribute valuable understanding of how professional ethics shape institutional culture, teacher conduct, and overall educational integrity. These findings offer important implications for policy development, leadership training, and the integration of ethics into professional development programs for educators in Tanzania and similar educational contexts.

Keywords: Professional Ethics, Educational Leadership, Teacher Conduct, Ethical Practices, Secondary Education, Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are widely recognized as highly esteemed professionals entrusted with the critical role of shaping future generations. This responsibility necessitates not only technical and pedagogical competence but also a firm foundation of moral integrity and professional dignity. In this regard, heads of schools are particularly expected to uphold and model high moral standards, which are essential to maintaining the nobility and societal trust associated with the teaching profession. The commitment of secondary school heads to ethical and professional standards is fundamental to their leadership practice, ensuring that their behavior aligns with both institutional values and broader societal expectations. As Duze (2012) emphasizes, teachers are globally acknowledged as prime agents in implementing curricula and facilitating the teaching and learning process.

The teaching profession demands adherence to the highest standards of professional conduct and public service, with the primary responsibility centered on promoting the holistic development and well-being of students. According to Mark (1998), the core obligations of teaching professionals can be categorized into four principal areas: responsiveness to scientific and technological advancement, commitment to continuous professional development, respect for cultural values, and promotion of social justice, equality, and inclusion. These dimensions underscore the importance of staying abreast of educational innovations, engaging in lifelong learning, honoring cultural diversity, and fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Despite the profound significance of these professional values, it is imperative that teachers possess a thorough

understanding of the professional ethics and codes of conduct that guide their practice. This includes familiarity with regulatory frameworks established by ministries of education, professional licensing boards, and teachers' unions. Ethical awareness equips educators to navigate complex dilemmas, maintain impartiality, and make decisions that prioritize student welfare, educational equity, and fairness. The National Education Association (NEA, 2024) stresses that ethical awareness extends to understanding principles of justice, equity, and integrity in daily teaching activities.

Central to ethical conduct in teaching is the value of respect, which forms the bedrock of constructive teacher-student relationships and collegial collaboration. Educators are expected to model respectful behavior by acknowledging student voices, cultivating inclusive learning spaces, and treating colleagues and parents with fairness and dignity. As highlighted by *Edutopia* (2024), respect contributes significantly to trust-building, enhances student engagement, and supports effective classroom management.

Classroom authority, when exercised ethically, should be rooted in fairness, guidance, and transparent communication rather than authoritarianism. Ethical leadership involves establishing clear boundaries, maintaining consistency, and avoiding favoritism. *Education Week* (2023) warns that misuse of authority can diminish student morale and erode trust in the learning environment, whereas ethical leadership fosters student empowerment and nurtures accountability.

In addition, the ethical use of educational resources is essential. Teachers must ensure equitable access to learning materials, appropriately cite digital content, and integrate tools that genuinely support student learning. The NEA (2023) underscores the importance of fairness in resource distribution and the responsible use of public and digital content, particularly to avoid issues related to copyright infringement and digital overload.

Assessment practices must also reflect ethical integrity. They should be transparent, consistent, and accurately represent student achievement and progress. Practices such as favoritism, grade inflation, or biased evaluations not only undermine student confidence but also compromise the credibility of educational institutions. According to *Edutopia* (2024), formative assessments and opportunities for student self-reflection are key strategies for promoting honesty, fairness, and academic integrity in evaluation processes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological framework employed to investigate teachers' personal experiences with professional ethics and the code of conduct in Morogoro. It begins by outlining the research objectives and the rationale for selecting a qualitative approach. The chapter further elaborates on the sampling procedures, including the criteria used for participant selection to ensure a diverse and representative study sample. It also provides a detailed description of the data collection methods, with particular emphasis on semi-structured interviews, and explains the analytical techniques used to interpret the findings. Finally, the chapter addresses the ethical considerations observed throughout the research process, including confidentiality, informed consent, and adherence to research ethics.

Qualitative Approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, deemed most appropriate for exploring the awareness and experiences of teachers regarding professional ethics and the teaching code of conduct. Qualitative research is inherently inductive, involving the collection of rich, context-specific data that allows researchers to develop insights and conceptual understanding grounded in participants' lived experiences.

Unlike the quantitative paradigm, which is typically large-scale, structured, and reliant on numerical data, the qualitative approach enables in-depth exploration and nuanced interpretation of individual perspectives. This approach was selected for its capacity to capture the complexity and subjectivity of teachers' ethical awareness and conduct, offering a deeper understanding than statistical generalizations could provide.

Data Collection Method: Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection method. This technique provided the

flexibility necessary for participants to elaborate on their responses, while allowing the researcher to explore specific themes consistently across interviews. The semi-structured format struck a balance between guided questioning and open-ended discussion, which facilitated deeper engagement with participants.

Kumar (2005) argues that interviews are particularly effective when investigating complex and sensitive topics, as they enable the interviewer to clarify questions, establish rapport, and manage the emotional dynamics of the discussion. Nevertheless, interviews can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. They also carry the risk of interviewer bias, which in this study was mitigated through careful preparation of the interview guide and adherence to ethical research practices. While the qualitative interview method provided rich and detailed insights, the study acknowledges that a larger, quantitative sample could have enhanced the generalizability of the findings.

Sample Selection

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-random technique suitable for qualitative studies that require insight from individuals with specific knowledge or experience. The study focused on heads of secondary schools in Morogoro, Tanzania, due to their leadership roles and professional familiarity with ethical issues in education. This selection criterion ensured that participants could offer informed perspectives on the study's central themes.

The final sample comprised five participants—headmasters, headmistresses, and rectors—each with varying years of professional experience and representing schools of different sizes and curricular orientations. This diversity enriched the study by capturing a broad range of views and experiences related to professional ethics in educational leadership. Participant profiles, presented in the findings chapter, reflect varied leadership styles and institutional contexts, enabling the study to examine ethical practices in diverse school environments.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards to protect participant welfare and maintain the integrity of the study. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were fully briefed on the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their rights to confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were assured that all information shared would be used solely for academic purposes and would not be attributed to them in any published materials.

Additional ethical safeguards included conducting interviews in private, comfortable settings to ensure participants could express themselves freely and without coercion. Pseudonyms or participant numbers were used in the reporting of results to preserve anonymity. Furthermore, the study received ethical clearance from the relevant educational and research authorities prior to commencement.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews designed to elicit in-depth responses on key ethical themes, including awareness of professional ethics, respect within professional relationships, ethical use of authority, responsible management of educational resources, and integrity in assessment practices. These thematic areas were closely aligned with the study's research questions and provided a coherent framework for data collection and analysis.

Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the informed consent of the participants. Interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in capturing participants' views. In addition to audio recordings, field notes were taken during the interviews to document non-verbal cues and contextual observations, thereby enriching the interpretive depth of the data.

Data Validity and Reliability

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed to ensure data validity and reliability. Triangulation was used by comparing responses across participants to identify recurring

patterns and verify the consistency of findings. This approach helped to ensure that the conclusions drawn were not unduly influenced by any single individual's viewpoint.

Member checking was also conducted following preliminary data analysis. A summary of the key findings was shared with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations and to correct any possible misrepresentations. This process reinforced the authenticity of the research and supported its reflective rigor.

Furthermore, the research process was documented transparently, with detailed records maintained of data collection, coding, and analysis procedures. This transparency strengthens the dependability of the study and ensures that its findings are grounded in the lived experiences of the participants.

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings and themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews conducted with heads of secondary schools in Morogoro, Tanzania. The analysis is grounded in the experiences and reflections of the participants, aiming to offer a deeper understanding of how professional ethics are perceived and practiced in the educational leadership context.

To provide contextual clarity, a brief profile of each participant is introduced, followed by a comprehensive discussion of the dominant themes derived from the data. The study identified five core and interconnected themes concerning the practice and significance of professional ethics in secondary schools. These include: Awareness of Professional Ethics, Respect for Teachers, Ethical Use of Authority and Power, Responsible Use of Educational Resources and Honesty in Assessment and Evaluation

Participant Profiles

To provide context for the findings and themes explored in this study, it is important to present a brief profile of each participant. All five participants are heads of secondary schools in Morogoro Region and possess varied yet significant leadership experience. Their insights into professional ethics are shaped by the size, structure, and nature of the schools they lead. These profiles offer a lens through which their responses and perspectives can be better understood.

Table 1: Participants Overview

Participant	Position & School	Years in Position	No. of Academic Staff	Subjects Offered	Leadership Insights
Participant One	Headmaster, Kihonda Secondary School	10 years	60+	Sciences and Arts	Highly experienced leader with deep institutional knowledge; manages a large, diverse academic team; insights valuable for understanding long-term ethical leadership.
Participant Two	Headmaster, Mafiga Secondary School	8 years	70+	Sciences and Arts	Strong background in administration; leads a large, complex staff; promotes policy implementation and ethical culture across departments.
Participant Three	Headmaster, Alfa-Gems Secondary School	4 years	80+	Sciences and Arts	Young but dynamic leader; oversees large interdisciplinary staff; emphasizes collaboration, ethics, and professional development.

Participant Four	Rector, Saint Francis De Sales Secondary School	5 years	20	Sciences and Arts	Leads a small team with closer supervision; fosters accountability and ethical awareness in a tight-knit environment.
Participant Five	Headmistress, Carmel Secondary School	6 years	20+	Sciences and Arts	Focuses on mentorship and ethical leadership; encourages staff collaboration and continuous improvement.

Participant One – Headmaster, Kihonda Secondary School

Participant One has served as the Headmaster of Kihonda Secondary School for the past ten years, a tenure that reflects considerable experience and stability in educational leadership. Under his administration, the school has expanded to accommodate over 60 academic staff members who teach a wide-ranging curriculum encompassing both the sciences and the arts. His decade-long leadership has equipped him with a deep understanding of the school's operational dynamics, institutional culture, and ethical challenges. This extensive experience makes his contributions especially valuable in analyzing how professional ethics are understood and applied in a large and diverse school setting.

Participant Two – Headmaster, Mafiga Secondary School

With eight years of leadership experience, Participant Two currently serves as the Headmaster of Mafiga Secondary School. His extended tenure suggests a strong foundation in educational management and a sustained commitment to institutional development. The school employs more than 70 teachers, reflecting a large student population and necessitating a coordinated and disciplined teaching environment. The breadth of the curriculum—covering both arts and sciences—requires effective organizational skills and ethical leadership. His role involves fostering professional collaboration and ensuring adherence to ethical standards, positioning him as a key influencer in shaping the school's moral and professional climate.

Participant Three – Headmaster, Alfa-Gems Secondary School

Participant Three has been the Headmaster of Alfa-Gems Secondary School for four years. Although relatively new compared to other participants, he manages one of the largest schools in the study, with over 80 academic staff. The institution offers an extensive curriculum across science and arts streams, requiring the headmaster to coordinate complex academic programs while promoting consistency in ethical and professional standards. His leadership involves strategic planning, effective communication, and capacity building. His insights are particularly useful in understanding how newer leadership navigates ethical expectations and fosters a professional teaching culture in a large and evolving school environment.

Participant Four – Rector, Saint Francis De Sales Secondary School

Participant Four serves as the Rector of Saint Francis De Sales Secondary School and has been in this role for five years. The school has a relatively small teaching staff of 20, yet offers a balanced curriculum that includes both science and arts subjects. His dual responsibility for academic and administrative oversight allows for close engagement with staff and more direct influence on ethical practices. The smaller size of the school provides opportunities for personalized mentoring and targeted ethical development. His leadership approach emphasizes cohesion, professionalism, and a strong ethical foundation, making his perspective valuable in understanding how ethical standards can be nurtured within smaller educational settings.

Participant Five – Headmistress, Carmel Secondary School

Participant Five has been the Headmistress of Carmel Secondary School for six years. In her role, she oversees all aspects of school administration, academic performance, and discipline. The school employs over 20

academic staff, who deliver a diverse curriculum spanning both arts and sciences. Her leadership emphasizes professional accountability, integrity, and mentorship. She works closely with her staff to address ethical dilemmas and reinforce a culture of respect and responsibility. Her experience highlights how gender-sensitive and collaborative leadership contributes to ethical awareness and supports both teaching excellence and student development.

Awareness of Professional Ethics in Teaching

Awareness of professional ethics is a cornerstone of responsible and effective teaching. It enables educators to uphold essential values such as integrity, respect, accountability, and fairness within the school setting. This section examines participants' perceptions of teachers' ethical awareness and its influence on school leadership, classroom behavior, and the broader educational environment.

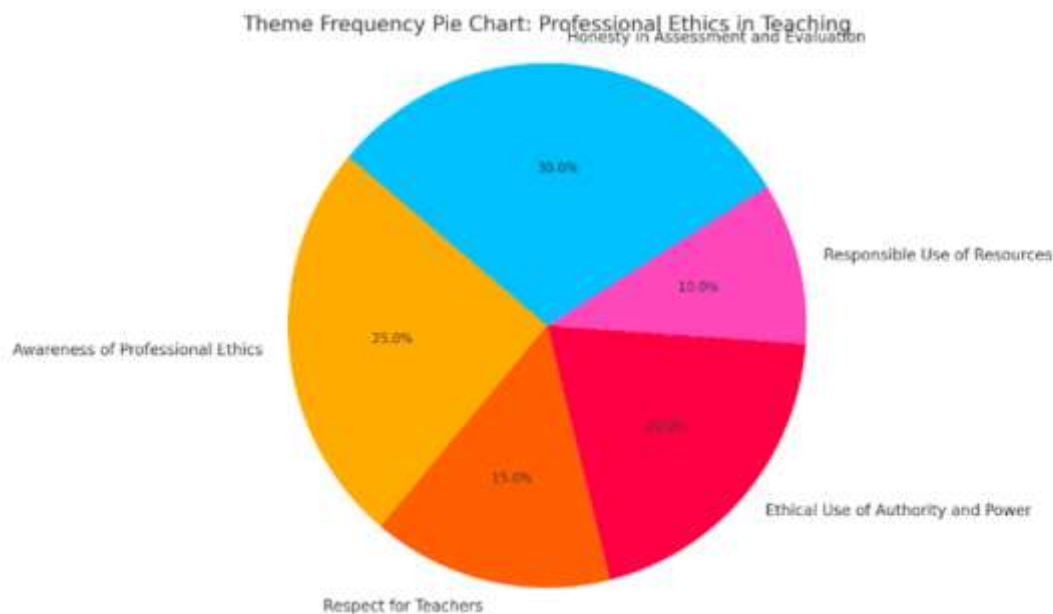


Figure 1: Theme Frequency Pie Chart

Theme Frequency Pie Chart

Figure 1 illustrates the frequency with which participants referenced key ethical themes during interviews. Each segment of the pie chart represents a recurring ethical concept such as integrity, professionalism, responsibility, respect, and ethical decision-making—highlighting the relative emphasis placed on each by the participants.

Linking the Chart to Participants' Perspectives

All participants indicated that teachers generally possess an awareness of the professional code of ethics, although the degree of understanding and application may vary between institutions. The frequency and distribution of ethical themes in Figure 1 affirm the centrality of ethical awareness in participants' discussions about professional conduct and school culture.

One participant provided a compelling reflection on the theme of professionalism, which appears prominently in the chart: *"Whenever I am at the school premises, I normally engage teachers to commit to professionalism in teaching by adhering to ethical principles, maintaining high standards, and continuously improving one's skills and conduct. By doing so, teachers positively impact students, colleagues, and the broader educational community. Therefore, I demonstrate professionalism which provides positive feedback as it earns respect, builds trust, and enhances the quality of education, ultimately shaping a positive and ethical learning community."* (Participant 3) This testimony demonstrates that ethical awareness is not only recognized by school leaders but also actively promoted as a lived practice. The participant's emphasis on continuous professional development, trust-building, and ethical leadership aligns directly with the dominant themes in Figure 1.

Respect for Teachers

Respect for teachers stands as a foundational pillar of ethical educational practice. It not only enhances teacher motivation and job satisfaction but also strengthens teacher-student relationships and contributes to a more effective and harmonious learning environment. This section presents participants' perspectives on the significance and impact of respect for teachers within school leadership and day-to-day operations.

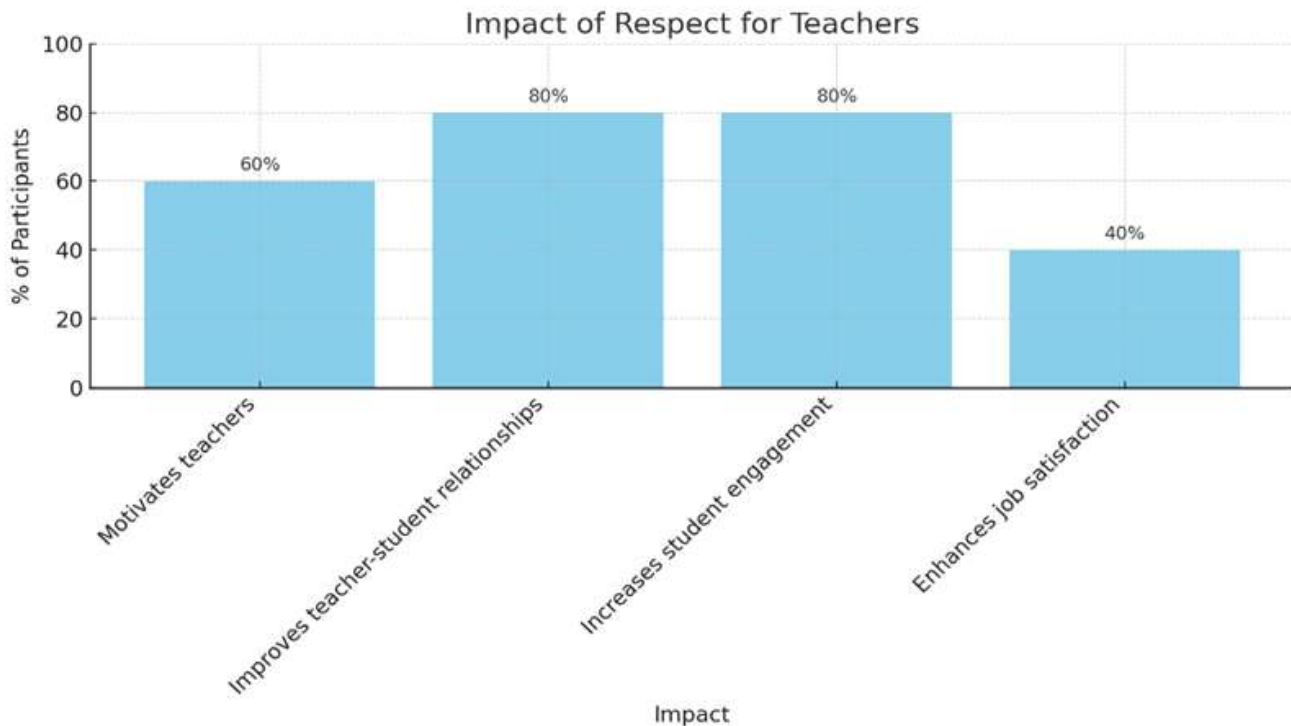


Figure 2: Impact of Respect for Teachers

Impact of Respect for Teachers

Figure 2 summarizes the participants' views on the outcomes associated with respecting teachers. The chart highlights several key impacts, including increased teacher motivation, heightened student engagement, stronger teacher-student relationships, and greater institutional trust and collaboration.

Thematic Analysis of Participants' Perspectives

Promoting Fairness, Dignity, and Inclusion

All participants emphasized that respect within school leadership requires the equitable treatment of all teachers, regardless of their background, abilities, or beliefs. It involves the protection of teachers' rights and the affirmation of their professional dignity in both instructional and administrative contexts. One participant noted: *"We head of school should always respect teachers during teaching and learning. By doing so, we actually install a fundamental ethical principle in them... by demonstrating respect for teachers we create a positive and empowering educational experience that enhances learning, motivation, and overall well-being."* (Participant 5) This viewpoint underscores the values of inclusivity, equity, and respect for professional integrity reflected in Figure 2.

Enhancing Motivation and Job Satisfaction

Three participants highlighted that when teachers are respected and appreciated by school leaders and students, their morale and dedication improve substantially. They argued that recognition and validation of their efforts enhance both professional satisfaction and performance: *"When teachers feel valued and respected, they are more motivated to perform their duties effectively, leading to higher job satisfaction and a greater commitment"*

to student success.”(Participant 2) This theme aligns with Figure 2, which identifies motivation and job satisfaction as prominent outcomes of teacher respect.

Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships

All participants agreed that mutual respect fosters a more communicative, disciplined, and cooperative classroom environment. Respect enhances the relational dynamics between teachers and students, improving the overall quality of teaching and learning. As one participant expressed: *“A culture of respect between teachers, students, and administrators fosters a supportive and inclusive classroom atmosphere where learning thrives and discipline issues decrease.”* (Participant 1) This observation correlates with the outcomes shown in Figure 2, particularly regarding improved student engagement and enriched learning environments.

Recognizing Teachers’ Contributions

Two participants emphasized the importance of acknowledging the contributions teachers make to the educational system. They argued that public recognition not only validates teachers’ roles but also strengthens institutional trust and educational excellence: *“Teachers play a vital role in shaping future generations, and acknowledging their hard work and dedication reinforces their professional dignity and encourages excellence in education.”*

(Participant 3) This sentiment mirrors the bar chart’s indication that institutional strength and educational success are tied to a culture of respect for educators.

Consequences of Disrespect

One participant warned that failure to respect teachers can have serious consequences for both morale and educational outcomes. Disrespect may lead to professional disengagement, burnout, and attrition: *“A lack of respect for teachers can lead to low morale, burnout, and high turnover rates, ultimately affecting the quality of education and students’ overall learning experience.”*(Participant 4) This warning aligns with the negative impacts illustrated in Figure 2, including reduced engagement and weakened institutional effectiveness.

Ethical Use of Authority and Power

The ethical exercise of authority and power is a critical component of leadership within educational institutions. This section explores participants’ perspectives on the responsible and principled use of authority, with Figure 3 visually representing the core values emphasized, such as fairness, integrity, transparency, and accountability.

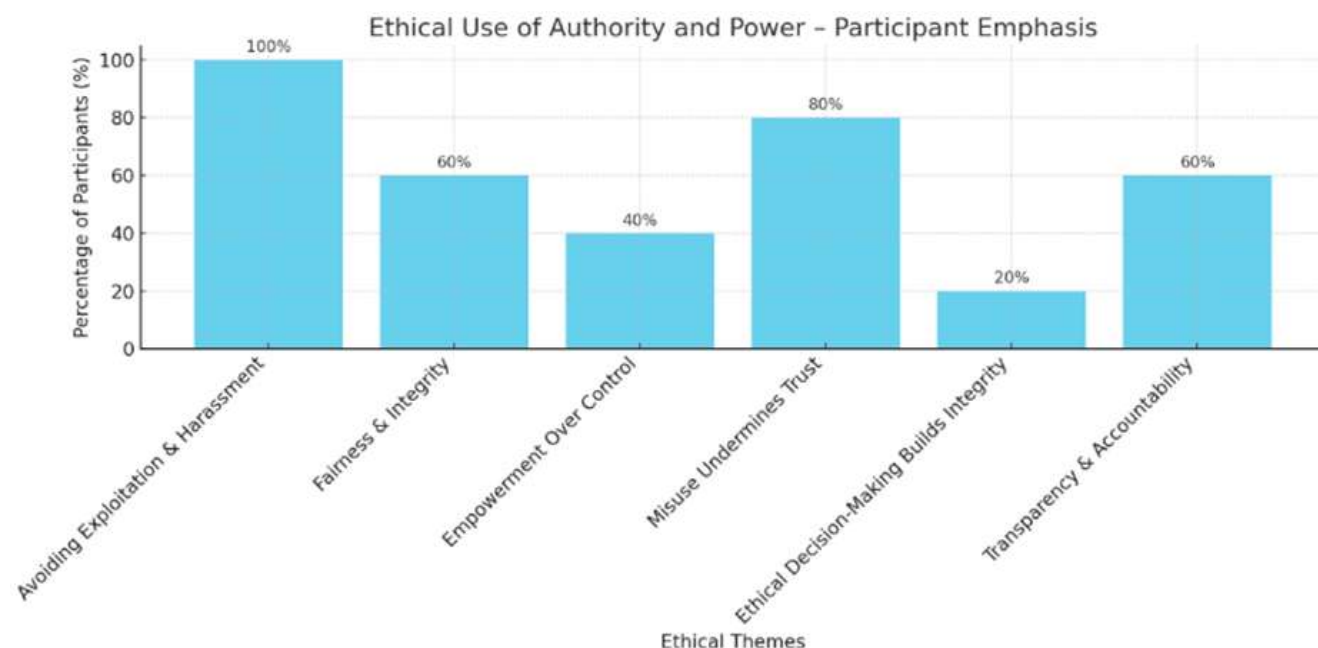


Figure 3: Ethical use authority and Power

Interpretation of Figure 3

The bar chart illustrates the frequency with which participants referenced various ethical leadership principles. Fairness and integrity were most frequently cited, followed closely by transparency and accountability, suggesting that these values form the foundation of ethical leadership in schools.

Participants' Perspectives and Link to Figure 3

All participants strongly agreed that educators and school leaders must avoid any form of exploitation, harassment, favoritism, or inappropriate relationships. Participant 1 highlighted the importance of role modeling in leadership, stating: *"Teachers hold a position of authority that comes with significant responsibility. Ethical use of authority means teachers are required to exercise power in a way that fosters trust, fairness, and a positive learning environment while avoiding misuse or abuse of influence."* This comment reinforces the chart's emphasis on *fairness and trust* as foundational elements of ethical leadership.

Participant 3, specifically stressed that the use of authority must be guided by fairness and integrity. They argued that leaders should make impartial decisions and treat all individuals with equal respect. As noted by one respondent: *"Those in leadership positions, such as teachers and school administrators, must use their authority ethically by making impartial and just decisions. Favoritism, bias, or personal interests should not influence their actions, as fairness fosters trust and respect in the educational environment."* This reflects the importance of integrity and impartiality, both prominently represented in the chart.

Two participants emphasized that power should be used to empower others, rather than control them. Ethical authority was associated with mentorship, guidance, and fostering independence. One participant explained: *"Ethical leadership involves guiding and supporting students and teachers rather than imposing strict control. When authority is used to encourage growth, provide opportunities, and foster a collaborative environment, it creates a positive and productive learning atmosphere."* (Participant 1) This insight aligns with the values of supportiveness and empowerment, as captured in Figure 3.

Four participants expressed concern over the negative consequences of power misuse, such as diminished morale, lack of trust, and institutional decline. As one participant observed: *"When leaders misuse their power whether through intimidation, discrimination, or unethical decision-making, it damages relationships, lowers teacher and student morale, and weakens institutional integrity."* (Participant 5) This underscores the need for ethical checks on authority and highlights the damage caused by unethical practices, supporting the chart's depiction of accountability and ethical discipline.

Another participant described how ethical leadership builds institutional credibility and nurtures respect among stakeholders: *"Leaders who consistently make ethical choices enhance the reputation of the institution and create a culture of responsibility. By setting clear ethical guidelines, educational leaders can ensure that policies and decisions align with moral and professional standards."* (Participant 4)

Lastly, three participants underscored the importance of transparency and accountability in maintaining ethical standards. One remarked: *"Leaders must be accountable for their decisions and actions, ensuring that their use of power is transparent and justifiable. Open communication, clear policies, and checks and balances help prevent the misuse of authority and maintain ethical standards in schools."* (Participant 2) This clearly links to Figure 3's highlighting of transparency and accountability as central to ethical authority.

Responsible Use of Resources

Table 2 presents a synthesis of participants' perspectives on the ethical and responsible use of school resources. The table highlights three major principles frequently emphasized in the interviews: equal distribution, efficient use, and transparency in resource allocation. These principles are vital for promoting equity, sustainability, and trust within the educational system.

Table 2: Responsible Use of Resources

Principles	Number of Participants Agreeing	Key Points
Equal distribution of resources	2	Ensures fairness and avoids bias
Efficient use of resources	3	Promotes sustainability and ethical allocation
Transparency in budgeting and allocation	4	Increases trust and reduces misuse of resources

Responsible Use of Resources

Table 2 presents a synthesis of participants' perspectives on the ethical and responsible use of school resources. The table highlights three major principles frequently emphasized in the interviews: equal distribution, efficient use, and transparency in resource allocation. These principles are vital for promoting equity, sustainability, and trust within the educational system.

Participant responses provided strong support for these principles. For example, Participant 3 emphasized the importance of ethical and efficient use of educational materials, technology, and funding. The participant stated: *"We should always be responsible in the use of resources in education by ensuring that materials, funds, and technology are utilized ethically, efficiently, and sustainably to support student learning and institutional integrity... By practicing responsible use of resources, teachers foster a culture of efficiency, fairness, and ethical responsibility..."* This view aligns closely with the principle of *efficient use of resources*, which was supported by three participants, emphasizing sustainability and ethical management practices.

Moreover, the principle of *equal distribution* was acknowledged by two participants. They stressed the importance of equitable access to resources for both students and teachers. Participant 2 remarked: *"Educational resources, including financial, material, and human resources, should be distributed equitably to ensure that all students and teachers have access to necessary tools for learning and teaching... Mismanagement or favoritism in resource allocation can lead to disparities in education quality and hinder student success."* This reflection reinforces the need for fairness and equality, as represented in the table, and underscores how unethical allocation can contribute to systemic inequalities.

The theme of *transparency* emerged strongly in participant narratives. Four participants emphasized that transparency in budgeting and allocation is crucial for reducing misuse and fostering accountability. As Participant 3 stated: *"Educational institutions must maintain clear policies and oversight mechanisms to ensure that resources are used for their intended purposes. Transparency in budgeting, procurement, and spending builds trust among stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and the broader community."* Transparency not only enhances trust but also acts as a deterrent to corruption and favoritism, supporting the view that open decision-making is essential in school management.

Additionally, Participant 5 introduced the idea of sustainability and long-term planning as integral to responsible resource use. This participant noted: *"Responsible resource use involves planning for the future by prioritizing sustainability. Schools should adopt environmentally friendly practices, minimize waste, and make long-term investments in infrastructure, technology, and training..."* This narrative further strengthens the argument for efficient and forward-thinking allocation of educational resources.

The principle of *accountability*, though not explicitly listed in the table, was frequently interlinked with transparency. Participants highlighted that open and honest decision-making processes ensure that leaders are held accountable, minimizing corruption and fostering integrity within institutions.

Honesty in Assessment and Evaluation

This radar chart compares key factors related to honesty in assessment and evaluation, based on the frequency

of emphasis in participant responses. The chart highlights the importance of fairness, accuracy, consistency, transparency, and accountability in maintaining integrity during evaluation processes.

Radar Chart: Honesty in Assessment and Evaluation

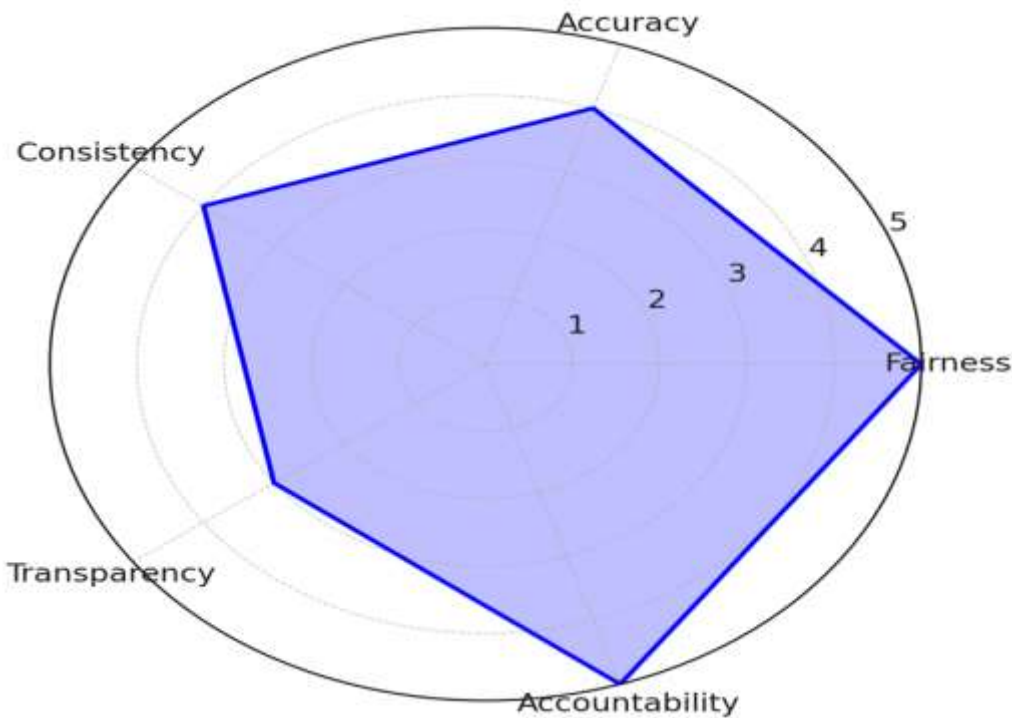


Figure 4: Radar Chart for assessing and evaluating honest

Radar Chart for Assessing and Evaluating Honesty provides a visual representation of the key ethical dimensions emphasized by participants regarding honesty in assessment and evaluation. The chart illustrates five core principles; fairness, accuracy, consistency, transparency, and accountability which emerged prominently across participant narratives. These dimensions are considered fundamental to ensuring integrity and credibility in educational evaluation processes.

Across responses, participants consistently highlighted that honesty in assessment serves as a cornerstone of academic integrity. For example, Participant 2 emphasized the importance of providing accurate, unbiased, and constructive feedback, noting: *“Honesty in assessment and evaluation is a fundamental principle in education, research, and professional practice. It ensures that the results of an assessment accurately reflect the true abilities, performance, and knowledge of individuals. Upholding honesty in assessment and evaluation promotes fairness, integrity, and credibility in any learning or professional environment.”*

Echoing this perspective, Participant 5 stressed that accurate assessments play a vital role in preserving institutional credibility and recognizing merit: *“When assessments accurately reflect an individual's abilities, they serve as reliable indicators of competence. If dishonesty prevails such as through grade inflation, cheating, or bias it erodes trust in institutions, qualifications, and professional credentials. Upholding integrity in assessments ensures individuals are recognized based on merit rather than manipulation.”* This perspective aligns with the radar chart, which places strong emphasis on accuracy and fairness as essential ethical pillars.

Moreover, two participants emphasized that fair, accurate, and consistent assessments are crucial for ensuring that evaluation outcomes genuinely reflect students’ capabilities, minimize bias, and foster institutional trust. These views correspond with the radar chart’s emphasis on consistency and transparency as critical ethical standards in assessment.

Adding to this, Participant 1 warned of the negative consequences of unethical evaluation practices: *“When dishonest practices such as favoritism, plagiarism, or falsification of results occur in assessments, they create an unfair playing field. Students or professionals who engage in unethical practices may receive undue*

advantages, while honest individuals suffer unjust disadvantages. Fair assessments promote equal opportunities, ensuring that recognition and rewards are based on actual performance rather than deception or privilege.” This testimony reinforces the importance of fairness and accountability in maintaining equity within the educational system.

On the aspect of developmental feedback, Participant 4 highlighted how honest evaluations contribute to personal and professional growth: *“Accurate assessments provide individuals with meaningful feedback that highlights their strengths and areas for improvement. When evaluations are conducted dishonestly—such as through inflated grades or misleading feedback—learners and professionals are deprived of opportunities to develop their skills. A commitment to honesty in assessments allows individuals to grow, improve, and achieve their full potential based on genuine performance.”* This response aligns with the radar chart’s emphasis on transparency and accuracy, both of which are vital for meaningful learning outcomes.

In reaffirming the role of institutional ethics, Participant 2 further emphasized the importance of accountability: *“Educational institutions, workplaces, and certification bodies rely on assessments to make important decisions regarding qualifications, promotions, and career advancements. If dishonesty is tolerated, it diminishes the credibility of institutions and their ability to make informed judgments. Upholding accountability in assessments not only maintains institutional integrity but also reinforces public trust in the fairness of the evaluation process.”*

Finally, Participant 3 underscored that ethical assessment practices nurture a broader culture of honesty and responsibility: *“When institutions and individuals prioritize honesty in assessment and evaluation, they set a standard for ethical behavior. Encouraging integrity in assessments discourages dishonest behaviors like cheating, falsification, and bias. A culture of honesty nurtures responsibility, preparing individuals to uphold ethical values in their academic, professional, and personal lives.”* This statement resonates with the chart’s focus on transparency and fairness as cultural values essential to ethical academic environments.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study emphasize the pivotal role of professional ethics in teaching, underscoring the significance of ethical principles in shaping a constructive educational environment. Insights drawn from semi-structured interviews with five Heads of Schools reveal a nuanced understanding of ethical awareness and its application among teachers. The discussion is organized around several central themes: awareness of professionalism, respect in education, ethical use of authority, responsible use of resources, and honesty in assessment. Each theme illustrates the interconnectedness of ethics in enhancing educational quality and integrity.

A consensus emerged from the participants that teachers possess a general awareness of the teaching code of conduct, although the extent of its application varies across institutions. The theme of *commitment to professionalism* was particularly prominent, with participants emphasizing the importance of adhering to ethical standards, maintaining high teaching standards, and committing to continuous professional development. As noted by Olatunji (2011) and Van Nuland and Khandelwal (2006), ethical behavior is foundational to both the dynamics within the classroom and the broader relationships between teachers, students, and society. Teachers, as role models, significantly influence students’ ethical development, encouraging them to make independent decisions and instilling values that students can apply throughout their lives (Laxmi & Paul, 2018).

Respect emerged as a fundamental element in the teacher-student relationship. Participants highlighted that when teachers feel valued and respected, their job satisfaction increases, which in turn enhances their commitment to fostering student success. Likewise, students who perceive their teachers as respected are more likely to actively engage in the learning process, improving their academic outcomes. Creating a respectful and inclusive classroom environment facilitates responsible academic behaviors and strengthens teacher-student relationships. Mihalas et al. (2009) and Frymier and Houser (2000) emphasize the complexity of building positive interpersonal relationships, with respect playing a crucial role in overcoming challenges and promoting an engaging educational experience. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) further assert that expressing warmth, care, and

respect helps cultivate an educative relationship that nurtures students' full potential.

The ethical use of authority emerged as a significant theme in school leadership. Participants emphasized that exercising authority with fairness, transparency, and integrity fosters trust, collaboration, and a positive learning atmosphere. In contrast, the misuse of authority can lead to disengagement, mistrust, and the erosion of the educational experience. Blasi (2005) and Narvaez and Lapsley (2005, 2009) suggest that ethical leadership is underpinned by a strong moral identity, shaped by social and cultural experiences. Leaders who model ethical decision-making instill a culture of integrity, ensuring that authority is used to support the development of both teachers and students.

The ethical and responsible use of resources—whether human, financial, or material—was identified as essential for ensuring equitable access to quality education. Participants highlighted the importance of transparency and accountability in resource distribution to mitigate bias and foster inclusivity. Resourcefulness was identified as a critical trait for teachers, allowing them to maximize available resources and provide high-quality education. This is particularly evident in countries like Finland, where teachers' resourcefulness is regarded as a key factor in the country's educational success (Kuusisto & Tirri, 2021). Similarly, the ability to adapt and combine diverse teaching strategies to meet students' needs is seen as crucial for fostering engagement and promoting effective learning outcomes (Collie & Martin, 2016).

Honesty and integrity in assessment practices were emphasized as fundamental to maintaining trust and credibility within educational systems. Participants stressed that fair, unbiased evaluations are essential for providing accurate feedback, supporting personal and professional growth among students, and upholding the integrity of academic institutions. Unethical assessment practices, such as favoritism or dishonesty, undermine fairness and demoralize students, ultimately damaging the educational environment. Vu and Dall'Alba (2014) argue that authentic assessment encourages students to critically reflect on knowledge, empowering them to develop both their personal and professional identities. By fostering a culture of honesty in assessment, schools can cultivate a deeper sense of integrity within both the teaching staff and the student body.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the interconnection of basic ethical components awareness and adherence to professionalism, respect, ethical leadership, responsible resource management, and integrity in assessment as fundamental to fostering a positive educational environment. These elements, when prioritized, contribute to the creation of supportive, respectful, and effective learning experiences for all stakeholders. Integrating ethical practices into the fabric of educational institutions, schools enhance the overall educational experience and uphold the integrity of the teaching profession.

Looking ahead, it is crucial to maintain continuous dialogue and reflective practices among educators and administrators. Such engagement plays a crucial role in strengthening and refining the ethical framework within the profession, ensuring that ethical principles remain central to educational practices and that the standards of professionalism are upheld in the face of evolving challenges in the educational landscape.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational institutions should organize regular training sessions and seminars that focus on real-world ethical dilemmas faced by teachers. These forums will provide opportunities for educators to discuss challenges and share strategies for maintaining ethical conduct in various situations. Teacher training programs should explicitly integrate professional ethics into both the theoretical and practical components of the curriculum. This integration will help future educators develop a strong ethical foundation from the outset of their careers.

Schools should create platforms for ongoing ethical discussions among teachers. Encouraging open dialogue and peer learning will foster a collaborative approach to addressing ethical challenges and reinforce a shared commitment to professionalism.

Schools must ensure that a clear and accessible code of conduct is in place and consistently communicated to all staff members. Regular reminders of the code's expectations will support teachers in upholding ethical standards.

Ethical behavior should be acknowledged and celebrated through awards and incentives. Public recognition of teachers who exemplify ethical standards reinforces the importance of ethics in education and motivates others to follow suit.

Both government and school leadership should provide continuous guidance and resources to support ethical adherence in educational settings. This includes offering support in the form of policies, resources, and training programs aimed at promoting ethics.

Establishing mentorship programs for new teachers can be highly effective in helping them learn ethical practices from experienced educators. Mentorship will provide a practical framework for navigating ethical challenges in the classroom and school environment.

School leaders should actively model ethical behavior in their daily practices. By demonstrating ethical decision-making, school leaders can inspire teachers to follow suit and reinforce the importance of ethics within the institution.

Schools should actively involve parents and the broader community in promoting ethical behavior. By fostering a partnership with parents, schools can create a culture of shared responsibility and accountability that extends beyond the classroom.

Ensuring that teachers feel valued and supported, both professionally and personally, is essential for encouraging long-term ethical commitment. Policies and practices that promote teacher well-being and job satisfaction contribute to an environment where ethical behavior thrives.

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