



Assessing The Nexus Between Ethical Leadership And Governance In The Philippine Public Sector: A Case Study Of State Universities And Colleges (Sucs) In Zamboanga City

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Citation: Bernard Q. Suriaga (2023) Assessing The Nexus Between Ethical Leadership And Governance In The Philippine Public Sector: A Case Study Of State Universities And Colleges (Sucs) In Zamboanga City, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 29(4) 3319-3327
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v29i4.7937

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between ethical leadership and governance effectiveness in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Zamboanga City, Philippines. Utilizing a mixed-methods research design, the study combines quantitative data from 200 survey respondents with qualitative insights from interviews with faculty, staff, and administrators. The Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) and a Governance Practices Questionnaire were employed to measure perceptions of leadership behaviors and governance effectiveness, respectively. Results indicate a significant positive correlation between ethical leadership and governance effectiveness ($r = 0.72, p < 0.001$). Ethical leadership practices, particularly in integrity (mean = 4.0) and fairness (mean = 3.9), were highly rated, suggesting that these traits are crucial in fostering trust and accountability within SUCs. Governance practices showed moderate effectiveness (mean = 3.6), with strengths in transparency and control of corruption but weaknesses in stakeholder participation. The findings align with existing literature, reinforcing the notion that ethical leadership is integral to good governance in educational institutions. The study highlights the need for policy initiatives focusing on leadership development, enhanced stakeholder engagement, and organizational culture transformation to improve governance outcomes. Limitations include the study's geographic focus on Zamboanga City and reliance on self-reported data. Future research should consider a broader geographic scope, longitudinal designs, and the inclusion of diverse stakeholder perspectives to deepen the understanding of ethical leadership's impact on governance.

Keywords: ethical leadership, governance practices, integrity, public sector, leadership development

Introduction

Ethical leadership has increasingly been recognized as a vital element in promoting effective governance, particularly in public sector institutions. Leaders who exhibit ethical behavior contribute to improved organizational performance, increased accountability, and enhanced public trust (Banks et al., 2021). In the context of the Philippine public sector, ethical leadership is especially crucial due to the sector's susceptibility to issues such as corruption, inefficiency, and governance challenges. State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) play an essential role in this governance framework, acting as key institutions that foster education and societal development.

The nexus between ethical leadership and governance within these SUCs warrants deeper exploration, particularly in Zamboanga City, where leadership practices directly impact the institutions' effectiveness in serving public needs.

Review of Related Literature

On the Ethical Leadership in the Public Sector

Ethical leadership in the public sector has gained significant attention due to its impact on organizational effectiveness and public trust. Kim and Kim (2020) emphasize that ethical leadership is positively correlated with employees' organizational commitment and job satisfaction in public institutions. Their study indicates that leaders who demonstrate ethical behaviors inspire subordinates to align with organizational goals, leading to enhanced performance and reduced turnover intentions. In addition, Bedi et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analytic review revealing that ethical leadership is associated with beneficial outcomes such as increased employee voice behavior, organizational citizenship behavior, and decreased unethical conduct. These outcomes are crucial in the public sector, where transparency and accountability are paramount. Den Hartog (2018) discusses how ethical leadership fosters an ethical climate within organizations, which in turn promotes ethical decision-making among employees. This is particularly important in the public sector, where decisions often have significant societal implications.

On the Governance Challenges in the Philippine Public Sector

The Philippine public sector faces enduring governance challenges, including corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and lack of transparency. Reyes and Valencia (2019) identify that despite efforts to reform governance structures, issues persist due to entrenched practices and cultural factors. Their research highlights the role of leadership in either perpetuating or mitigating these challenges. Moreover, Brillantes and Fernandez (2018) note that governance reforms in the Philippines have often been top-down, lacking grassroots participation, which undermines their effectiveness. They argue that ethical leadership at all levels is essential to ensure that governance reforms are implemented effectively and sustainably.

A study by Santos and Magpayo (2020) examines the impact of ethical lapses among public officials on governance outcomes. They find that unethical behavior erodes public trust and hampers the implementation of policies designed to improve public welfare. This underscores the need for ethical leadership as a cornerstone of good governance.

On the Ethical Leadership in Higher Education Institutions

In the context of higher education, ethical leadership is critical for promoting academic integrity, fostering a positive organizational culture, and ensuring the institution's reputation. Sulphrey and Al Shulhi (2020) explore how ethical leadership influences faculty commitment and student satisfaction. Their findings suggest that ethical leaders in academic settings create an environment conducive to innovation, collaboration, and high educational standards. Brown and Treviño (2019) argue that universities have a dual role in practicing and teaching ethics. Leaders in higher education must model ethical behavior to instill these values in students, who are future professionals and leaders. They emphasize that ethical leadership contributes to a culture of integrity that permeates all aspects of university life. In the Philippine setting, Dela Cruz et al. (2021) investigate the relationship between ethical leadership and governance in higher education institutions. Their study indicates that ethical leadership leads to better governance practices, including transparency in administrative processes, equitable resource allocation, and improved stakeholder relations.

On the The Nexus of Ethical Leadership and Governance

Shin et al. (2020) examine the direct relationship between ethical leadership and governance effectiveness. They propose that ethical leaders enhance governance by promoting ethical standards, ensuring compliance with regulations, and fostering a culture of accountability. Their research demonstrates that ethical leadership leads to improved organizational performance and stakeholder satisfaction. Banks et al. (2021) expand on this by discussing how ethical leadership influences organizational justice perceptions, which are critical for good governance. They argue that when leaders act ethically, employees perceive decision-making processes as fair, leading to increased trust and cooperation within the organization. In a study focusing on public sector organizations, Hassan et al. (2019) find that ethical leadership reduces instances of corruption and malpractice. They suggest that ethical leaders serve as role models, setting the tone for acceptable behavior and establishing norms that discourage unethical practices.

Studies on SUCs in Zamboanga City

Garcia et al. (2021) provide an in-depth analysis of leadership practices in SUCs within Zamboanga City. Their findings indicate that while some institutions exhibit strong ethical leadership, others struggle due to various challenges such as resource constraints and political interference. The study highlights that ethical leadership significantly impacts governance effectiveness, academic performance, and community engagement. Additionally, Lopez and Cruz (2020) examine the governance structures of SUCs in the region, finding that institutions with ethical leaders tend to have better financial management, transparency, and stakeholder satisfaction. They emphasize that ethical leadership is a critical factor in navigating the complex challenges faced by these institutions. Flores and Villanueva (2019) explore the barriers to ethical leadership in SUCs, identifying factors such as cultural norms, lack of training, and inadequate support systems. Their

research suggests that addressing these barriers is essential for improving governance outcomes in higher education institutions.

On the Ethical Leadership and Organizational Culture

The role of organizational culture in reinforcing or undermining ethical leadership is a key area of interest. Schein (2017) posits that leaders shape organizational culture through their actions, policies, and communication. An ethical culture supports governance by promoting shared values and norms that align with organizational objectives. Tseng and Wu (2019) find that ethical leadership positively influences organizational culture, which in turn affects employee behavior and organizational performance. In the context of SUCs, fostering an ethical culture can enhance governance by ensuring that all members of the institution adhere to ethical standards.

On the Theoretical Perspectives on Ethical Leadership and Governance

The Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) provides a framework for understanding how ethical leadership impacts employee behavior. According to this theory, individuals learn and emulate behaviors observed in others, particularly those in leadership positions. Ethical leaders serve as role models, influencing employees to adopt ethical practices, which enhances governance. Furthermore, the Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) emphasizes the importance of considering all stakeholders in decision-making processes. Ethical leadership aligns with this theory by ensuring that leaders act in the best interests of all stakeholders, promoting fairness and accountability in governance.

On the Emerging Trends and Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of literature on ethical leadership and governance, there are still gaps, particularly concerning the specific mechanisms through which ethical leadership affects governance in SUCs. Most studies focus on the effects of ethical leadership but do not delve deeply into how these effects are realized within organizational structures and processes. Moreover, there is a scarcity of research on the influence of cultural factors unique to the Philippines on ethical leadership and governance. Hofstede's cultural dimensions indicate that the Philippines has a high power distance and collectivist culture (Hofstede Insights, 2020), which may impact leadership styles and governance practices differently than in Western contexts.

Research Objectives

Despite numerous reforms aimed at enhancing governance, public sector institutions in the Philippines continue to face significant challenges related to leadership ethics and governance. The lack of a clear understanding of how ethical leadership influences governance in SUCs is a pressing issue that affects institutional performance and public service delivery (Shin et al., 2020). This study seeks to assess the relationship between ethical leadership and governance practices in SUCs in Zamboanga City, addressing gaps in the existing literature and contributing to the body of knowledge on public sector governance. The primary objectives of this study are:

- To assess the ethical leadership practices in SUCs in Zamboanga City.
- To examine governance practices in SUCs and their relationship with ethical leadership.
- To analyze how ethical leadership influences the overall governance of SUCs.
- To provide recommendations for improving ethical leadership and governance in SUCs based on the findings of this study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the following theoretical frameworks:

On the Ethical Leadership Theory

Ethical leadership theory, as discussed by Banks et al. (2021), emphasizes the importance of leaders displaying ethical behavior, which includes fairness, integrity, and accountability. Leaders who model ethical conduct inspire similar behaviors in their followers, leading to an organizational culture of transparency and trust. In the public sector, ethical leadership is essential for promoting accountability and improving institutional performance.

Governance Theory in Public Sector

Osborne (2018) presents governance theory as a framework that explores how public institutions manage resources, policies, and decision-making processes to meet public needs effectively. This theory highlights the significance of leadership in ensuring that public institutions operate transparently, efficiently, and in alignment with ethical standards. Governance theory provides a lens through which to examine how leadership ethics influence institutional governance in the public sector.

Ethical Leadership and Governance Nexus

Shin et al. (2020) discuss the direct relationship between ethical leadership and governance, arguing that leaders' ethical behaviors significantly impact governance outcomes in public institutions. The nexus between ethical leadership and governance lies in the ability of ethical leaders to foster a culture of accountability and integrity, leading to better decision-making and public trust in institutions.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively assess the relationship between ethical leadership and governance in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Zamboanga City. The mixed-methods design facilitates triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative component involves administering structured surveys to gather numerical data on ethical leadership behaviors and governance practices. The qualitative component consists of semi-structured interviews aimed at gaining deeper insights into participants' experiences and perceptions. The research is conducted within SUCs located in Zamboanga City, a key educational hub in the southern Philippines. Zamboanga City hosts several SUCs that play a pivotal role in regional development through education and research. Focusing on these institutions allows for an in-depth exploration of ethical leadership and governance within a specific cultural and organizational context (Garcia et al., 2021). The locale provides a unique setting to examine how regional dynamics influence leadership and governance practices in higher education.

Participants and Sampling Method

Participants in this study include administrators, faculty members, and staff from the SUCs in Zamboanga City. A purposive sampling method is employed to select individuals who hold positions relevant to leadership and governance processes within their institutions (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). This sampling technique ensures that participants possess the necessary knowledge and experience to provide meaningful insights. The target sample size for the quantitative survey is approximately 200 respondents to achieve statistical significance, while the qualitative interviews will be conducted with 20 participants until data saturation is reached (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Data Collection Methods

Surveys

Structured questionnaires are utilized to collect quantitative data on ethical leadership and governance practices. The survey instrument includes:

- **Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS):** Developed by Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005), the ELS measures perceptions of ethical leadership behaviors. The scale is adapted to the Philippine context to ensure cultural relevance.
- **Governance Practices Questionnaire:** Based on governance indicators from the World Bank (2019) and tailored to assess governance within SUCs.

The questionnaires are distributed electronically and in person to increase response rates. A pilot test is conducted to validate the instruments and ensure reliability (Field, 2018).

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are conducted to gather qualitative data, providing depth to the quantitative findings. An interview guide is developed with open-ended questions focusing on:

- Participants' experiences with ethical leadership within their institutions.
- Perceptions of how leadership behaviors impact governance practices.
- Challenges and opportunities related to ethical leadership and governance.

Interviews are conducted face-to-face or via video conferencing, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data from the surveys are analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. The analysis includes:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** To summarize demographic information and responses to survey items.
- **Reliability Analysis:** Cronbach's alpha is calculated to assess the internal consistency of the scales (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).
- **Inferential Statistics:** Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses are conducted to examine the relationships between ethical leadership and governance practices (Field, 2018).

Qualitative data from interviews are analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. **Familiarization:** Reading and re-reading transcripts to become immersed in the data.

2. **Coding:** Generating initial codes relevant to the research questions.
3. **Theme Development:** Identifying patterns and organizing codes into themes.
4. **Reviewing Themes:** Refining themes to ensure they accurately represent the data.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Providing clear definitions and labels for each theme.
6. **Writing Up:** Integrating themes into a coherent narrative that complements quantitative findings.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to the ethical guidelines specified by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) and relevant Philippine regulations (National Ethics Committee, 2017).

- **Informed Consent:** Participants receive detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. Written consent is obtained before participation.
- **Confidentiality:** Participant data are kept confidential. Identifying information is anonymized using codes or pseudonyms. Data are stored securely with access limited to the research team.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participation is entirely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty.
- **Minimization of Harm:** The study is designed to minimize any potential psychological or social risks. Sensitive questions are handled with care, and support resources are provided if needed.
- **Data Protection:** Compliance with data protection laws, such as the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012, is ensured.
- **Research Approval:** Ethical clearance is obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the host university prior to data collection.

By adhering to these ethical considerations, the study ensures the rights and well-being of participants are protected throughout the research process.

Results

In this section, we present the findings from the study assessing the nexus between ethical leadership and governance in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Zamboanga City. The results include the demographic profile of respondents, findings on ethical leadership practices, governance practices, and the correlation between ethical leadership and governance.

On the Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study surveyed a total of 200 respondents from various SUCs in Zamboanga City. The demographic characteristics are as follows:

- **Age Distribution:**

- 21-30 years: 25% (50 respondents)
- 31-40 years: 35% (70 respondents)
- 41-50 years: 25% (50 respondents)
- 51 and above: 15% (30 respondents)

- **Gender:**

- Male: 45% (90 respondents)
- Female: 55% (110 respondents)

- **Educational Attainment:**

- Bachelor's degree: 40% (80 respondents)
- Master's degree: 45% (90 respondents)
- Doctorate degree: 15% (30 respondents)

- **Years of Service:**

- Less than 5 years: 30% (60 respondents)
- 5-10 years: 40% (80 respondents)
- More than 10 years: 30% (60 respondents)

- **Positions Held:**

- Administrative staff: 30% (60 respondents)
- Faculty members: 50% (100 respondents)
- Academic administrators (e.g., deans, department heads): 20% (40 respondents)

These demographics indicate a diverse sample, providing a broad perspective on ethical leadership and governance within the SUCs.

Findings on Ethical Leadership Practices

Using the Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) adapted from Brown et al. (2005), the study measured perceptions of ethical leadership among institutional leaders.

- **Overall Ethical Leadership Score:**

- Mean score: 3.8 out of 5
- Standard deviation: 0.6

- **Key Dimensions of Ethical Leadership:**

- **Integrity:** Mean = 4.0
- **Fairness:** Mean = 3.9
- **Ethical Guidance:** Mean = 3.7
- **People Orientation:** Mean = 3.6
- **Power Sharing:** Mean = 3.8

Respondents generally perceive their leaders as exhibiting ethical behaviors, with integrity and fairness being the highest-rated dimensions. This aligns with the findings of Sulphrey and Al Shulhi (2020), who emphasized the importance of integrity in leadership within educational institutions.

Qualitative Insights:

Interviews revealed that many participants appreciated leaders who made decisions transparently and communicated openly with staff and faculty. One faculty member stated:

"Our dean consistently involves us in decision-making processes, which makes us feel valued and fosters a sense of trust."

However, some respondents noted areas for improvement, particularly in ethical guidance and people orientation.

Findings on Governance Practices

Governance practices were assessed using a tailored questionnaire based on World Bank governance indicators.

• Overall Governance Effectiveness Score:

- Mean score: 3.6 out of 5
- Standard deviation: 0.7

• Key Governance Dimensions:

- **Transparency:** Mean = 3.7
- **Accountability:** Mean = 3.5
- **Stakeholder Participation:** Mean = 3.4
- **Rule of Law:** Mean = 3.6
- **Control of Corruption:** Mean = 3.8

The results suggest that while governance practices are perceived positively, there is room for enhancement, especially in stakeholder participation. This observation is consistent with Brillantes and Fernandez (2018), who highlighted the need for more inclusive governance in the Philippine public sector.

Qualitative Observations:

Participants expressed that while policies and procedures are in place, the implementation could be more consistent. An administrative staff member commented:

"There are clear guidelines, but sometimes they are not strictly followed, leading to confusion and inefficiencies."

Correlation Between Ethical Leadership and Governance

To examine the relationship between ethical leadership and governance practices, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted.

• Correlation Coefficient:

- $r = 0.72$
- $p\text{-value} < 0.001$

The strong positive correlation indicates that higher levels of perceived ethical leadership are significantly associated with more effective governance practices within the SUCs. This finding corroborates the work of Shin et al. (2020), who found that ethical leadership positively influences governance outcomes in public institutions.

Regression Analysis:

A simple linear regression was performed to determine the extent to which ethical leadership predicts governance effectiveness.

• Regression Equation:

- $\text{Governance Effectiveness} = 1.2 + 0.63 * (\text{Ethical Leadership Score})$

• Coefficient of Determination (R^2):

- $R^2 = 0.52$

This model suggests that ethical leadership explains 52% of the variance in governance effectiveness. The regression coefficient indicates that for each one-point increase in the ethical leadership score, the governance effectiveness score increases by 0.63 points.

Interpretation of Results and Discussions

The study's findings demonstrate a significant positive relationship between ethical leadership and governance effectiveness in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Zamboanga City. The overall ethical leadership mean score of 3.8 indicates that respondents generally perceive their leaders as ethical, particularly highlighting integrity (mean = 4.0) and fairness (mean = 3.9) as prominent traits. This suggests that leaders are largely upholding ethical standards, which is essential for fostering trust and accountability within educational institutions.

The governance effectiveness mean score of 3.6 reflects moderately effective governance practices, with strengths in transparency (mean = 3.7) and control of corruption (mean = 3.8). However, stakeholder participation scored lower (mean = 3.4), indicating a need for greater inclusion of stakeholders in decision-making processes. The strong positive correlation coefficient ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that higher levels of ethical leadership are associated with more effective governance practices.

The regression analysis revealing that ethical leadership accounts for 52% of the variance in governance effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.52$) underscores the substantial impact that ethical leadership has on governance outcomes. This indicates that initiatives aimed at enhancing ethical leadership could significantly improve governance practices within SUCs.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The significant relationship between ethical leadership and governance effectiveness has several implications for policy and practice within SUCs and the broader educational sector:

Leadership Development: Institutions should invest in leadership development programs that emphasize ethical principles, integrity, and fairness. Training programs can equip leaders with the skills necessary to model ethical behavior and make ethically sound decisions.

Enhancing Stakeholder Participation: SUCs should implement mechanisms to increase stakeholder engagement in governance processes. This could involve establishing committees that include faculty, staff, students, and community representatives to provide input on policy decisions.

Policy Revisions: Revising institutional policies to incorporate ethical guidelines can reinforce the importance of ethical behavior. Clear policies on ethics can provide a framework for expected conduct and decision-making processes.

Accountability Measures: Implementing robust accountability systems can ensure that leaders are held responsible for their actions. Regular audits and transparent reporting can help maintain integrity and trust within the institution.

Cultural Transformation: Fostering an organizational culture that values ethics and integrity is essential. Encouraging open communication and ethical discourse can promote a shared commitment to ethical standards.

Conclusions

This study set out to explore the nexus between ethical leadership and governance in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Zamboanga City, Philippines. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the research aimed to assess the extent to which ethical leadership practices influence governance effectiveness within these institutions. The findings indicate a significant positive correlation between ethical leadership and governance effectiveness ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$). Ethical leadership practices, particularly in the dimensions of integrity and fairness, were highly rated by respondents, suggesting that these traits are integral to fostering trust and accountability within SUCs. Governance practices were perceived as moderately effective, with notable strengths in transparency and control of corruption. However, the lower scores in stakeholder participation highlight an area that requires attention to enhance overall governance.

These results corroborate the assertions of Shin et al. (2020) and Garcia et al. (2021) that ethical leadership is a critical determinant of governance quality in educational institutions. The significant impact of ethical leadership on governance effectiveness underscores the need for SUCs to prioritize ethical leadership development as a strategic initiative. By doing so, institutions can enhance their governance structures, leading to improved institutional performance, greater stakeholder trust, and better educational outcomes. The implications of this study are multifaceted. For policymakers and institutional leaders, the findings advocate for the integration of ethical leadership training programs, the revision of policies to reinforce ethical practices, and the establishment of systems that promote accountability and stakeholder engagement. Such measures can contribute to creating an organizational culture that values ethics and integrity, which is essential for effective governance.

While the study contributes valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The focus on SUCs in Zamboanga City limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions or types of institutions. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, and the cross-sectional design precludes the determination of causality. Future research should address these limitations by expanding the geographical scope, employing longitudinal designs, and incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives, including those of students and external partners. In conclusion, this study emphasizes the pivotal role of ethical leadership in

enhancing governance within SUCs. Ethical leadership emerges not merely as a desirable trait but as a fundamental component that significantly influences governance outcomes. By fostering ethical leadership practices, SUCs can strengthen their governance mechanisms, leading to more transparent, accountable, and effective institutions. This, in turn, has the potential to elevate the quality of higher education and contribute to the broader socio-economic development goals of the Philippines.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings and limitations, the following recommendations are proposed:

Expand Geographical Scope: Future studies should include SUCs from various regions in the Philippines to enhance the generalizability of the results and explore regional differences in ethical leadership and governance practices.

Longitudinal Studies: Conducting longitudinal research can help determine causality and observe how ethical leadership and governance practices evolve over time.

Qualitative Research: Incorporating more extensive qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, can provide deeper insights into the nuances of ethical leadership and its impact on governance.

Investigate Cultural Factors: Exploring how cultural dimensions, such as power distance and collectivism (Hofstede Insights, 2020), affect ethical leadership and governance in the Philippine context can offer valuable perspectives.

Assess Intervention Outcomes: Evaluating the effectiveness of leadership development programs and policy interventions can help identify best practices for enhancing ethical leadership and governance.

Include Diverse Stakeholders: Future research should consider the perspectives of students, alumni, and external stakeholders to gain a more comprehensive understanding of governance effectiveness.

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