Ubuntu and the Perceptions of Unethical Leader Conduct: A Case Study of Public Secondary School Leaders in Kenya

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Abstract: This paper extends and complements previous research on unethical leader behavior by examining the social and cultural perspectives that inform the understanding of objectional conduct among secondary school leaders in Kenya. The study used a social constructivist theoretical framework, and qualitative case study, and semi-structured interviews with school boards of governors, principals, and heads of department and school bursars. The findings revealed that cultural beliefs underpinned by the ubuntu ethic informed the school leaders' perceptions of unethical leadership behavior in the Kenyan secondary school contexts. Four sub-themes highlight acts that contradict the ubuntu values of altruism, humanness, care, and solidarity. They include disregard for community interests, neglect of care for one's kin, disregard for harmony, and elders' respect. The study concluded that western universal perspectives and definitions could not solely be relied upon to describe unethical leadership behavior in schools in non-Euro western contexts. The study contributes to the literature on unethical and ethical leadership by proposing a potential benefit in recognizing and incorporating non-western perspectives in exploring and defining the unethical leadership construct.

Keywords: *School leadership, unethical leader conduct, ubuntu, Kenya.*

Introduction

This paper reports on the socio-cultural perceptions of secondary school leaders' unethical leadership behaviour in Kenya and suggests that the unethical leadership construct is not limited to western defined ethical frameworks. The aim is to contribute to the growing body of literature on ethical and unethical leadership in school contexts and broaden the scope of empirical studies on unethical leadership research and moral leadership in schools (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 1994). They have been numerous reports of unethical leader conduct in organizations (Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission [EACC], 2019; Some, 2016; Wepukhulu & Namasaka, 2017) and school contexts (Boma, 2017; Iketchi & Akanwa, 2012; Nwikina, 2013; Wango & Gatere, 2016; Wanyama, 2016; Wanzala, 2016) in Africa. Leader values, characteristics, and leadership flaws are responsible for these occurrences (Moore & Moore, 2014). Subsequently, a vast literature on ethical leadership has grown (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Brown et al., 2005). In addition, there is a growing focus on leaders practicing honesty and looking out for the interests of their stakeholders (Sreedharan & Wakhlu, 2010) and a call for value-driven leaders guided by ethical and moral standards (Bashir & Hassan, 2019; Copeland, 2014). The leadership literature has emphasized that school leadership is a moral activity (Hodgkinson, 1991; Langlois & Lapointe, 2010) and has recommended theoretical models and ethical frameworks and ethics training for school leaders and teachers so that they can uphold ethics-oriented practice for ethical schools (Langlois & Lapointe, 2010; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 1994, 2014). Legal and institutional structures monitor and ensure better leaders and governance within institutions. In Kenya, for example, the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC), various legal acts, and codes of professional ethics exist to guide the conduct of leaders in all institutions (EACC, 2019).

Research on unethical leader conduct has been minimal (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Hassan, 2019). The few studies available offer mixed outcomes: Some have examined the antecedents, characteristics, and outcomes of negative leader behavior in corporate organizations (Lašáková & Remišová, 2015; Tepper, 2007). Most studies draw from intuition and conventional wisdom and not an ethical framework (Ünal et al., 2012). A few have emerged in school contexts (Blase & Blase, 2002, 2003; Milley, 2016; Sam, 2020). Studies in Africa are rare. The few available (Iketchi & Akanwa, 2012;

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Maphosa et al., 2012; Mfaume & Bilinga, 2017; Nwikina, 2013; Wango & Gatere, 2016) also link unethical leader conduct to the omission of principles and values defined within professional codes, policies, or laws derived from western defined ethics. This predominant literature demonstrates Euro-western notions of unethical conduct premised on the foundational theories which link objectional leader conduct to violation of ethical principles and legislation. According to Kezar (2004), these leaders have traits that are assumed to be "unchanging features that can be identified across culture, situations and context" (p. 114). In identifying leadership constructs, however, interpretations and contextual aspects such as circumstances and experience are crucial.

Several scholars (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Hassan, 2019; Resick et al., 2006) contend that there is a need to expand the scope of general studies on leadership because conceptions about ethical matters may not be uniform across cultures (Hofstede et al., 2010). Some researchers (Truong et al., 2016; Walker & Hallinger, 2015) have confirmed that social and cultural dimensions have an important influence on school leaders' beliefs and practices. For example, Truong et al. (2016) have shown that school leaders in Vietnam revealed the significant influence of Confucian values on their leadership practice. Empirical reflections on the influence of culture in defining unethical leadership conduct in organizations and specifically in school settings in Africa are rare, yet this knowledge is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of unethical leader conduct. Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2014) point out the need for a "deeper understanding of the unethical leadership construct, its content and conceptual boundaries" (p. 345). There is a contention that studies on unethical leader conduct could enable scholars to derive a solution that can curb its negative impact on employee wellbeing, trust, organization climate, and general growth of organizations (Bashir & Hassan, 2019; Oplatka, 2017; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Ünal et al., 2012; Zuber, 2015).

Moreover, within school contexts, leaders play an essential role in shaping the conduct of learners for society. Therefore, as exemplary persons in society, school leaders need to be of good conduct to achieve this purpose. Therefore, exploring local and contextual meaning attached to this construct is essential for recommending measures to minimize its occurrence and adverse effects in schools in Kenya.

Unethical leadership

Theoretical and empirical studies emphasize that school leadership is a moral activity (Greenfield, 2004; Hodgkinson, 1991; Langlois & Lapointe, 2010; Starratt, 1994). For this reason, as Begley (2006) avers, school leaders have a moral responsibility to uphold ethics, and this requires them to be cognizant of their beliefs and values, specifically about ethics, what is acceptable conduct and what is not when making decisions. The literature on unethical leadership informs the exploration of the unethical conduct construct. It draws attention to the moral qualities or traits leaders exhibit and their actions to influence the ethical conduct of followers and organization vision. Some studies consider ethical and unethical leadership [behaviours] as distinct (Kalshoven & Den Hartog, 2009) or as two opposites (Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2014). Tepper (2007) is emphatic that unethical leadership is associated with deviant leader behaviours that harm followers or organizations.

Several closely related studies have indirectly explored unethical leader conduct (Brown et al., 2005; Ünal et al., 2012). The studies describe reprehensible acts of leaders in varied ways: abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007) and toxic leadership (Kellerman, 2004; Lipman-Blumen, 2005), destructive leadership (Pelletier, 2010), narcissistic leadership (Higgs, 2009) and, bad leadership (Schyns & Schilling, 2013); flawed organization processes (Chandler, 2009); Dark or pseudo transformational leaders (Bass, 1998; Conger, 1990; Higgs, 2009; Kellerman, 2004), those who are manipulative: over-controlling, show disregard for rules, motivated by personal/selfish gain, and impose selfish goals upon others resulting in harm to organizations (Conger, 1990).

The literature on destructive leadership also informs our understanding of the unethical leadership construct (Aasland et al., 2010; Krasikova et al., 2013; Padilla et al., 2007; Pelletier, 2010). Krasikova et al.'s (2013) review of the literature concluded that destructive leadership encompasses "*harmful behaviours perpetrated by the leader and embedded in the process of leading*" (that undermine the legitimate interests of organizations (p. 1311). According to Padilla et al. (2007), destructive leadership is the product of three factors that enable the vice: a leaders' characteristics such as narcissism, charisma, and drive for power, as well as susceptible followers who act as conformists or colluders, and thus empower and cheering on the leader and their harmful actions. Finally, contextual factors, such as the environment, cultural norms, the absence of checks and balances, create a climate that enhances unacceptable behaviour.

More recent studies have directly explored the unethical leadership construct using an ethics framework (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2014; Lašáková & Remišová, 2015; Uhl-Bien & Carsten, 2007; Ünal et al., 2012). Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck's (2014) study examined the cross-cultural and cross-sectional commonalities and differences in the perceptions of unethical leadership among international executives from Western, Eastern, and Meta Eastern cultures in private and public sector organizations. While the study concluded that unethical leaders who violate rules, policies, and ethical principles, exemplified inappropriate values – were self-seeking, manipulative, dishonest, corrupt, self-centered, unfair, and without compassion (Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2014). The perspective of unethical leadership in Meta Eastern-Africa focused more on the vice of corruption. Ünal et al.'s (2012) review of studies on poor leadership

used the ethical framework of deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics. They concluded that unethical supervisors prioritized their interest above that of the organization and showed disregard for employee's rights and injustice.

Brown and Mitchell (2010) conceptualized unethical leadership as "*behaviours conducted, and decisions made by organizational leaders that are illegal and violate moral standards and those that impose processes and structures that promote unethical conduct by followers*" (p. 588). Unal et al.'s study above focused on the leader characteristics or traits and standards or legal ethos that are assumed to be universal for all. However, it goes beyond this to include systems established in organizations by leaders that promote unethical leader behaviors, a view that finds support in Trevino and Brown's (2005) study. According to Lašáková and Remišová, (2015), unethical leadership was deliberate and consisted of repeated harm done to individuals, organizations, or society both actively or passively through unethical behaviour or established processes in an organization. From this description, unethical leadership is an indirect influence that happens through deliberate acts of omission and neglect of established standards or rules or principles, self-interest above employee or organization interests which then provide fertile grounds for unacceptable conduct to thrive. It develops over time and becomes a distinctive style of a leader and indicates that leaders may encourage this vice directly or indirectly. Like in the previous studies, this definition focused on the person of the leader and their lack of compliance with established standards and legal frameworks.

A few studies have examined unethical leadership or leader behavior in schools (Blase & Blase, 2002, 2003; De Wet, 2010; Fidan & Koç, 2020; Milley, 2016; Sam, 2020). Sam's (2020) qualitative study used Optlaka's irresponsible leadership framework to examine teachers' perspectives of unethical leadership in the US. Absenteeism, disregard for others' dignity, power abuse, favoritism, indiscreet information sharing, and personal interest were examples of unethical leader practices. Likewise, Milley (2016) examined disciplinary hearing reports involving cases of sexual misconduct, financial lapses and, academic dishonesty in Ontario and British Columbia, Canada, and categorized the misdemeanors prevalent as bad, sad, or wrong leadership. Both studies demonstrate that unethical leader conduct had adverse effects on the followers because it created an environment that was not conducive for work. Fidan and Koç (2020) examined the perception of teachers on ethical and unethical leadership. The study showed that unethical leadership emerged in schools when the rules or legal frameworks were not influential enough, when the ethical climate was weak, and nurtured its presence to the extent of it diffusing to all organization members. Notably, none of these studies explored the social and cultural perspectives of unethical leadership. Only Arar's (2016) study of school principals and deputy school principals in Israel explored the influence of culture on leader conduct and unethical decision-making. This study revealed that culture and contextual demands, e.g., for harmony and social cohesions, strongly impacted leaders' adherence to professional codes and organization rules. Meaning that the leaders' ethical decisions were not isolated from their lived reality as they tried their best to conform to the expectations of their collectivist culture.

The few available studies in Africa (Muthiyane & Mudadigwa, 2021; Wango & Gatere, 2016; Serfontein & De Waal, 2015) commonly highlight the discrepancies in a leader's character, conduct, behavior, or decisions made versus established standards or frameworks from a Euro-western perspective. Wango and Gatere (2016) examined the fraudulent behaviors in secondary and primary schools among leaders in central office and schools. There was fraud, non-adherence to financial standards, no enforcement, no monitoring mechanisms as a follow-up on disciplinary action against followers implicated in fraud in schools due to the leader's inability to uphold the regulations and policies in schools. This study drew from the established legal frameworks or standards that define what is good and what is unacceptable. From the findings, it was evident that unethical leadership actions are associated with universal essential traits - personal values or characteristics of leaders that impact their preferences, perceptions of difficulties, and behaviour choices (Yukl, 2013).

The literature shows that liberal western normative traditions underline unethical leadership or conduct, or philosophical theories of deontology, utilitarianism (Rule-based ethics), and virtue theory (Brown, 2007; Knights & O'Leary, 2006; Ünal et al., 2012) which define how leaders ought to behave, and thus distinguish what is deemed ethical and what is not (Gallagher, 1999). Northouse (2019) adds that the virtue theory focuses on one's character, deontology, and teleology draw attention to behaviour.

Philosophers have challenged the assumptions of Western liberal ethical frameworks, which underpin the metanarratives propagated by modernism and which side-line other worldviews such as ubuntu (Mangena, 2016). Postmodernists have confronted their insistence on universal principles, rules, and models underlain by reason in defining ethical behaviour (Bauman, 1993; MacIntyre, 2007; Rorty, 1998). They claim that reality is subjective and not universal and thus support the view that different societies have competing narratives and thus no culture is preferable to another (Mangena, 2016). They claim that knowledge and social-cultural narratives of situations inform action and cannot be underrated (Lyotard ,as cited in Ross, 2019). They would argue that unethical leader behaviour cannot be described exclusively in terms of Euro-western universal principles (McDowell & Hostelttle, as cited in Mangena, 2016, p. 74) states when "truth is created by a specific culture and [it] exists only in that culture" (p.74). It suggests that discourses or truths are specific to contexts and not necessarily for all.

The communitarians also question the assumptions of western modernist liberal ethical frameworks for their obsession with individualism (MacIntyre, 2007; Rorty, 1998). They contend that the community demands a

commitment to the framework of values that people depend upon to make moral choices. It suggests that "people are socially constituted and continually penetrated by culture, by social and moral influence and by one another," meaning the collective influence impacts people (Etzioni, 1997, p. 219). Rorty (1998) concurs that truth about what is good and bad rests not with defined external texts but with the community that holds its narrative, beliefs, and myths about life. Therefore, there can be no absolute conception of social constructs, such as unethical leadership or unethical leader conduct. It implies that ethical principles that define moral conduct are particular to context and culture. Thus, universalist reason, which disregards varied contextual and life experiences (Benhabib, 2002), is problematic. Communitarians would argue that relying on western perspectives alone to define unethical leadership and conduct is inadequate because it leaves out consensual values or morals agreed upon in other cultural contexts. These assumptions inform the basis for this study which seeks to assess the cultural perspectives that inform an understanding of unethical leadership in secondary schools in Kenya, a non-western context. In the next section, the context in which school leaders in Kenya operate described, followed by examining how school leaders perceive unethical leadership.

Leading in Kenya's education context

Kenya is a developing country located south of the Sahara and is home to 46 cultural languages or groups. Three types of secondary schools exist – National, county, and sub-county schools that are more community-driven. The leadership of secondary schools is bureaucratic and represents the ideals inherited from British colonialism in 1964. The central government, headed by the Ministry of Education and Teachers Service Commission, is responsible for the education processes and activities of secondary schools in Kenya. At the school level, the board of governors takes the lead. The school principal, school heads of department, and school bursars are responsible for administering school activities. The government of Kenya has subscribed to the neoliberal approaches evident in the adopted global policies for education, e.g., previously the Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agenda, and currently the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including adherence to the provisions of the International Code of Conduct for Public Officials (United Nations [UN], 2002). Thus a Euro-western-oriented ethics framework or professional code of ethics is entrenched in school systems in Kenya. These require school administrators and teacher's commitment to prevent and address the ethical flaws within the education sector using established western derived frameworks such as the Teachers Service Commission code of conduct and ethics (2015) and education policies and laws that define acceptable and unacceptable professional conduct. Although secondary school leaders in Kenya work within varied cultural contexts and serve custodians of culture and community values, they are responsible for ensuring collective interests are met (April & Peters, 2011). Kenyan codes of ethics do not embrace or regard the traditional cultural values or ethics that define acceptable or unacceptable conduct within its context.

The growing influence of Ubuntu and its recognition as an ethic in sub-Saharan Africa is evident (Eze, 2015; Metz, 2018; Ramose, 2003) in the literature. In the ubuntu worldview, the value of honoring human or communal relationships is the foundation of the conduct of life shared in many African contexts (Nussbaum, 2003), such as the East, Central, and South Africa (Broodryk, 2006). It represents the lived experiences, observations, language and art, values and beliefs of Africans transmitted from one generation to the next and is embedded in relationships for the promotion of existence of people and the community and extend to the spiritual world (Muwanga-Zake, as cited in Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019, p.19). It is best captured in the maxim "Ngumuntu Ngabantu meaning', a South African word meaning a person is a person through other persons" (Shutte, 1993, p. 46), similarly expressed in Mbiti's (1990) statement, "I am because we are and since I am we are" (p.106). Within the context of leadership, "a leader is a leader because of other people" (Palsule & Mkhize, as cited in Metz, 2018, p.42), meaning that a leader's role in this context is carried out within a context of relationships or collaboratively with others for the common good of the community (Msila, 2008). The Ubuntu ethic defines the do's and dont's, and thus, ethical conduct is integral in the way of life in African contexts since this is grounded in the African worldview. An ethical or good leader in African contexts is a custodian of culture, community values and ensures that collective interests are satisfied (April & Peters, 2011) because the "collective will of people… is central in the African understanding of good leadership" (Mangena, 2011, p. 106). Thus "communal or group rationality" (Mangena, 2016, p. 75) is prime, and considerations about the community are central in every leader's deliberation because they are part of a broader context of relationships. Since communal life is a norm and way of life, members [school leaders] must acknowledge the humanity of others (Ramose, 2003) and conform to defined principles or virtuous characteristics that enhance communal values, goals, relationships, and the role of their followers (Mangena, 2011). As community members, leaders should embrace the virtues of communal living. Nussbaum (2003) avers that to work with the community interest at heart; leaders must strive to collectively build a community where care, "compassion, reciprocity, harmony and humanity" thrives (p. 2) working with the community interest at heart for its common good). To this, Mkhize (2008) adds *"social justice, righteousness, care, empathy for others and respect"* (p. 28). Upholding these values allows the leaders to meet - meet communal expectations. Thus, African leaders' acts are described as ethical or unethical based on their adherence or not to the African ethics, values, and expectations.

Although some studies indicate that the acceptance of modernization in postcolonial states in Africa has led to the distortion of ethical, cultural values (Salawu, 2012), the available literature on Ubuntu and leadership actions is thin. A few scholars (Metz, 2007) have argued that the ubuntu values are not unique to the African contexts and relate them to

the prominent western ethical theories such as "Hobbesian egoism and Kantian respect of persons" (p.322). A few studies have explored Ubuntu and its link to management in organizations in Africa (Mangaliso, 2001). Others have explored the link between ubuntu and servant leadership and found that the two had overlaps (Brubaker, 2013). In their study of schools in South Africa, Msila (2008, 2012) confirmed the prevalence of ubuntu principles in leadership and advocated for its incorporation in school leadership preparation programs. However, ubuntu cultural attitudes on the definition of unethical behavior in African and Kenyan secondary schools remains unknown. Mathooko (2013) stated: "the ideas and beliefs of African society that touch on ethical conduct have not been given elaborate investigation and clarification and thus stand in real need of profound, and extensive, analysis and interpretation" (p.2). There is a need to investigate the normative concerns that characterize unethical leadership or the significance and influence of ubuntu ideals that guide judgments about unethical leadership in African and Kenyan school contexts. Benhabib (2002) emphasized that knowledge of how the universal and cultural meet in postcolonial contexts is essential to navigating through how the two perspectives ought to live with each other. This study aims to contribute to the empirical literature on unethical leader conduct, also referred to as dark leaders conduct, by examining the perspectives of unethical leader behaviour in non- Euro-western education contexts to inform policy measures for improving ethical practice and minimizing unethical leader behaviour within school contexts in Kenya.

Methodology

Research Goal

This study explored the perceptions of unethical leadership among secondary school leaders in Kenya. It drew on a social constructivist interpretive theoretical framework that assumes multiple realities constructed about a phenomenon and that knowledge is subjective and constructed through interaction within social contexts (Patton, 2015). The author adds that the social constructivist perspective allows the researcher to focus on social and cultural constructions and inform participants' experiences. Knowledge is not free from the social and cultural interpretations within contexts (Patton, 2015). A single case study was used because of the interest in meaning and patterns of thought regarding the phenomenon of interest (unethical leadership) by participants (Merriam, 1998) across multiple sites (five schools) in the location of study. The research question is below.

RQ: What cultural perspectives inform understanding of unethical leader conduct in secondary schools? (*See the research questions in Appendix*)

Sample and data collection

A purposive sampling strategy specifically, criterion sampling and snowballing, was used to identify information-rich contexts and participants (Patton, 2015). In the beginning, the Kenya Secondary School Heads Association (KESSHA) identified eight school principals for a focus group discussion on unethical leadership based on the following criterion:

· five years' experience in a provincial school with an approved school board of management

· leading a school with a student population of 250 or above.

· a mix of girls, boys-only schools, day, boarding, urban and rural locations to increase the variety of participants.

Later, four school principals (Principal, A, B, C, D) from the group, upon request, volunteered their schools and staff for further interrogation through semi-structured interviews. A fifth district school (Principal E) was identified later through snowballing its unique characteristics. A total of 30 participants, mainly school leaders in different levels of school administration, participated: principals (5), HODs (15), chairpersons of BOMs (5), and school bursars (5) drawn from public secondary schools in the targeted province of Kenya. The Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand Faculty of Education Human Ethics Committee, and the National Council for Science and Technology, Kenya, approved the study. There was informed consent from schools and participants before engagement. The privacy and confidentiality of the participants were guaranteed. The researcher ensured a good rapport and a welcoming environment to allow for the ease of discussions. In addition, the support of an advisory group consisting of education officials from the Ministry of Education sought to ensure that potential legal and ethical issues did not overlap in the study.

The researcher collected data using focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, which lasted for 40-45minutes each. The literature review on cultural values, morals, ethics, and unethical leader behaviour and the initial focus group discussion results with school principals formed the basis for the interview protocol. It was used as a guide to ensure systematic flow and comprehensive coverage (Gray, 2014). The interview protocol was reviewed by experts and practicing school leaders outside the study context to ensure that the questions aligned to the main research question and that areas of interest were covered (Merriam, 1998). The Participants were encouraged to openly discuss their experiences based on the topic: "drawing on your cultural understanding and experience, what do you perceive to be unethical leader conduct and why? Follow-up questions served as prompts and were used to seek clarification from the participants about the descriptions shared. The responses were recorded and later transcribed with the participants' consent. To corroborate the semi-structured interviews, documentary reviews were undertaken (Yin,

2017) for purposively selected items, e.g., policy documents, professional codes of ethics, integrity reports, and other relevant African moral; and cultural literature to provide contextual information and to explore the principles and values that inform definitions of unethical leader conduct.

Data analysis

The participants cross-checked and endorsed transcribed data, then then it was uploaded into the NVIVO 8 computer software for storage, categorization, and comparison of data (Zamawe, 2015). Data was read and then subjected to thematic analysis, "a process of identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns" within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Braun and Clarke's (2006) four-step process data familiarization, coding, searching for themes, and reviewing them was followed. An inductive process was essential to draw meaning from the values and beliefs illuminated by the participants to ensure that the findings are embed in the contextual descriptions. After the sifting of transcripts and the coding of the interview data using an issue-based approach began. The reliability test was carried out for the coding process because researcher triangulation was necessary for enhancing credibility and rigor. The researcher used the initial code frame to review data stored in the NVIVO software. Two colleagues with knowledge and experience in leadership and education read some of the transcripts and coded the data independently. Their outcome was compared with the initial code frame to see how far they agreed or not. The intercoder reliability was arrived at using the formula: the number of agreements divided by agreements plus disagreements (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each outcome was discussed and agreed upon, followed by amendments. The 83 % attained surpassed the 80 % standard rate of reliability advanced by Miles and Huberman; thus, the coding process was reliable. The data analysis process continued, i.e., categorization of data followed then sub-themes merged to form broad theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006), African cultural perspectives of unethical leadership with four categories: disregard for communal values of care, disregard for care of one's kin, disregard for harmony, disregard for elders' counsel. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended strategies: member checks, triangulation, and maintaining an audit trail enhanced the study's trustworthiness.

Findings

The ubuntu cultural value was the predominant theme in the findings. Four sub-themes of the ubuntu ethic drawn from across all the 30 participants in this study emerged from the participant's response to the following question: "Drawing on your cultural understanding and experience, what do you perceive to be unethical leader conduct and why?. The results indicated that when school leaders failed to conform to the following values, they were perceived to engage in unethical leader conduct: (i) care for the community interests 63%; ii) care for one's kin 70%; (iii) value for harmony 70%; and (iv) respect of elders 47%. Although presented separately, these perspectives overlap and are not entirely distinct from each other. The findings indicate that the secondary school leader's perceptions of unethical leader conduct stem from their cultural values drawn from the social context.

Table 1 : Participants response to the theme: African cultural perspectives of unethical leadership themes

Participants (N=30)	Response to the theme	Frequency	Percent
Disregard for care for community interests	Agree	19	63
	Not agree	11	37
Disregard for one's kin	Agree	21	70
	Not agree	09	30
Disregard for harmony	Agree	21	70
	Not agree	09	30
Disregard of Elders counsel	Agree	14	47
	Not agree	16	53

Disregard of care for community interests

The participants indicated that leaders' acts or decisions were unethical if they failed to demonstrate care or an altruistic response to the needs and interests of members of the larger community: bursars 100%, principals 80%, heads of department 40%, and boards of governors 80 %.

> One day, as a school leader, traders from around the community found their way into the school and were selling wares to students openly without regard for the school policy and permission from the school administration. What was surprising was that many of these traders were related to the school board members. The office ordered them to leave, but a big uproar from the community claimed it was unacceptable. `In their view, the school head cared less about their plight. They believed that they had a right to sell their wares because the school belonged to the community. The school administration should support the needs of the traders as community members and meet the community needs. Indeed, there were murmurs that this was

not the ideal leader for the school because of this stance. The community elders had to be involved in discussing and resolving the matter. [Principal, A]

Notably, Principal A's decision to adhere to a school policy to keep the community traders out of school ran counter to the community expectations and values of solidarity, care, or concern for the welfare, interests of others, and the general community, an act perceived to be unethical. Furthermore, the leader's sole decision without the inclusion of community members was not acceptable. The leader intimates that such an act demonstrated one's indifference to the predicament of community members, which led to a conflict.

Disregard for care of one's kin

For most participants, leader's conduct was unethical when their acts portrayed a lack of care and concern for one's kin: bursars 100%, school principals 80%, heads of department 47%, Boards of governors 100% each with varied descriptions.

> In community-driven schools, the community demands that the school employ their kin because they donated land for the school development or are related to one of the school leaders. If a leader fails to honor this, maintaining relations with the community is not easy. [HOD E]

> When a worker dies, the community expects the school leader to consider a member of the deceased's family, daughter, or son for employment to show empathy or care for the loss of the employee. The community frowns upon leaders who ignore this expectation. [Board member, C]

The above participant's cases illustrate that failure to prioritize kinship relations in decisions for employment or to demonstrate empathy or compassion in the workplace was a disregard for the communal expectations of care for the welfare or general solidarity with family in times of strife. It is unethical since it is a disregard for demonstrating the humanness required of all community members because it advances the community's interests.

Showing disregard for an elder's counsel

According to the participants, a leader's conduct was unethical when they disregarded the cultural value of respect of elders and for authority in the community: the bursars' 60 percent, principal's 60 percent heads of department 40 percent and, the boards of governors' 40 percent.

> When some of the support staff come late to work and are asked why they arrive late to work, their response is, "you are my child and, my in-law, do not talk to me like that." They expect+ that more consideration should be given to them because they are elderly community members. If this is not recognized, they frown and even instigate discussions over this with other community elders....they say they need to be supported; otherwise, more conflicts arise in the community. [Bursar C]

> Leaders are assumed to be disrespectful when they disregard the advice of the elderly, who are valued, community members. [Board Member, A]

Board member A and Bursar C's examples illustrate that the failure by school leaders to recognize the pace of elderly members of the community through consultations in decision making, honoring them, and avoiding confrontations was perceived unethical. Elders were revered because they were custodians of the community values and wisdom. Adherence to this expectation seemed to assure ethical outcomes in the community**.**

Disregard for harmony

The participants' account showed that when leaders' acts and decisions depicted a disregard for harmony, it was unethical: school principals 100%, Bursars 80%, Boards of governors 60%, and Heads of department 53%.

> In an encounter with a problematic teacher, the only option available was to recommend his sacking. It was a difficult decision because upholding the workplace policy would negatively affect the accused teacher. The community was vigilant and observing every action and decision taken. Being accused of "finishing their son" could have harmed my family, well-being, and the community. When a leader enforces a required policy to influence behavior, it can lead to much conflict. Because the community cherishes healthy connections and harmony, the accused person is not aided or cared for by the community standards. When leaders steer clear of traditional African practices, they are setting themselves up for failure. When a leader upholds a mandatory policy to influence action, it sometimes creates much tension. The accused person is not helped or cared for because the community values care good relationships and peace. Leaders are chastised by their peers when they reject traditional African ways of peacemaking. [Principal, A]

> In a rare but very delicate case, a female staff member, whose husband was also a staff member in the school, lured a student into a love relationship. This matter needed a peaceful resolution because their marriage was at stake, and the matter was highly explosive. The option of adhering to the TSC code of regulations was likely to cause more trouble for this family and disrupt the students learning. The student was told not to engage further in the relationship. The senior female staff counseled the staff member and cautioned her against this engagement while dissuading them from spilling the beans because if the husband got wind of it, the problem could worsen. If the legal route been opted for, the community and would have blamed the leader for not promoting peace and harmony and thus unethical. [Principal, B]

Principal A's account illustrates that when a leader's acts and decisions fail to acknowledge the value of harmonious relationships or peace in resolving conflict, it was a breach of the cultural value of harmony and care. While Principal B's acknowledged that the teacher's act was wrong, adherence to the policy resolution to the conflict was likely to clash with communal expectations. A disregard for cultural ways that promote harmony and restoration of the parties involved, i.e., the student's interests and the staff member's marriage, was deemed unethical. The leader indicates that failure to consider the likely consequences of one's actions/ decisions for its impact on harmony and cohesion in the school, family, and community was wrong. Thus, adhering to the expectations of the professional ethics code of conduct was likely to result in disharmony and disruption of communal relationships.

Another participant stated.

> Incidences involving theft and drunkenness issues among staff are typical. Inviting the concerned staff before a welfare group or the area chief and clan elders helps keep the tempers cool. Most of the time, the problems in the workplace become clan issues. When one fails to engage the clan or community on these matters as the leader, they get into loggerheads with the community because this will be unethical. As a leader, there will be no peace with the clan. This approach is vital for the sake of harmony in the community. [Principal, B]

Principal B perceived that failure to show regard for the communal ethic of care and harmony in the school as required of all community members was unethical. Furthermore, it was unethical to disregard the consultative approach to decision making as the community highly valued it for the promotion of harmonious living through acts such as engaging the accused, the clan, and other community elders in the event of trouble and helped build consensus and restore order and peace for harmony in the community.

Discussion

This study sought to explore the cultural perceptions of secondary school leaders in Kenya regarding unethical leader conduct. The findings showed that unethical behavior was evident among the secondary school leaders, which corroborates the results of the previous studies in this field (Milley, 2016; Sam, 2020), which revealed that unethical leaders' behaviors harm individuals, relationships, and organizations.

The study revealed that the cultural obligations to the ubuntu ethic formed the standard by which leaders were judged as unethical in the secondary school contexts in Kenya. It corroborates the following studies (Hofstede et al., 2010; Truong et al., 2016; Walker & Hallinger, 2015), emphasizing that cultural values influence a leader's practices and workplace beliefs. It especially aligns with Hofstede et al.'s (2010)collectivist cultural perspective and how it frames the perspectives of Africans in the workplace.

Unethical leader conduct was perceived to be those acts or decisions that were offensive to the communal African humanistic cultural values and beliefs enshrined in customs, traditions especially those that failed to promote the community's wellbeing. The lack of communal attention in caring for one's kin, disrespect for harmony, disregard for elderly counsel, and lack of care for the community and its interests. This finding does not support previous research or definitions of unethical leadership (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2014; Lašáková & Remišová, 2015; Sam, 2020; Ünal et al., 2012). Instead, these focus on non-conformity to legal or regulatory frameworks, specific traits and behaviors grounded with a western perspective and driven by an informed by the individual agency to direct their decisions and acts to set or defined traits and characteristics.

Furthermore, perceived secondary school leaders' perspectives on unethical leadership emerged from several notions: how a leader meets and responds to communal beliefs, values, and interests; how they influence the role of their followers, and how followers affect them in line with Ubuntu cultural beliefs, values, and principles. It implies that ubuntu concepts pervade Kenya's secondary school leadership settings, interactions, and workplace. The study demonstrates that several factors influence the Kenya secondary school leaders' views on unethical leadership: including how a leader interacts with and responds to communal beliefs, values, and concerns; how they influence the role of their followers, and how followers influence them in line with Ubuntu cultural beliefs, values, and principles. Prior studies had noted this (April & Peters, 2011; Broodryk, 2006; Mangena, 2011; Mkhize, 2008; Msila, 2008, 2012; Nel, 2008; Nussbaum, 2003). The findings also corroborate Msila's studies, which found that ubuntu ethics inform school leaders' tasks, engagements, and responsibility in African contexts.

Interestingly, the findings from this study demonstrate that some of the expectations of reasonable conduct exemplified in western derived professional ethics codes that the school leaders use were at odds with the ubuntu communal ethic. For example, the values of cohesion or harmony, care for one's kin and the community contradicted the professional ethics code requirement for leaders to avoid conflict of interest – perceived as good conduct. The school leaders believed that this requirement promoted unethical leader behaviour. The school leaders believed that this requirement promoted unethical leader behaviour. Furthermore, it corroborates Arar's (2016) study findings, which showed that professional ethics codes conflict with the demands for upholding collectivist harmony, making leaders predisposed to unethical action.

The study shows that the perspectives of unethical leadership behaviour in secondary school in Kenya come from the collective communal values of Ubuntu, which represents a communal expectation required of all members of the community to live harmoniously, care for all members, and the community interests. For example, disregard for harmony and care for one's kin were the two most predominant values in this study. While this result has not previously been established or described, the behaviors identified in this study stand in contradiction to the ubuntu ethic, or maxim, "a person is a person through other persons" (Shutte, 1993, p. 46), similarly expressed in Mbiti's (1990) statement "I am because we are and since I am we are" (p. 106). It espouses the expectations for a community mindset, communal based living, love and care for humanity, human care, universal brotherhood, or interdependent nature of man and sense of community (Broodryk, 2006; Metz, 2014; Muyingi, 2013; Shutte, 2001). It further contravenes the ubuntu ethic, which requires that the African leaders and all community members live communally, share, care, show sensitivity to the needs of others, live in harmony, engage in reciprocal relationships because man is assumed to need another. Thus, relationships are the foundation of a sound community (Muyingi, 2013). Nussbaum's (2003) statement that leaders in African contexts must uphold the following values of ubuntu care, "compassion, reciprocity, harmony and humanity" to thrive (p. 2) applies.

The findings of this study corroborate the communitarian ethicists' perspective (Etzioni, 1997; MacIntyre, 2007; Rorty, 1998) and other studies (Grint, 2000; Knights & O'Leary, 2006) which contend that perspectives about both good and inappropriate behaviour come from communal discourses. For example, MacIntyre (2007) contends that virtuous acts and definitions of good and moral truths are discerned from within communities and in contexts of relationships and not solely by agents or codes. The view also seems to align with the post-modernist scholars' view that discourse is specific to the context. It implies that universal principles and standards do not always apply when defining ethical and immoral behavior in all situations. It stands in stark contrast to the predominant literature, premised on a single agent's rationale and thoughts on good and evil.

This paper illuminates the tensions prevalent within post-colonial contexts underlain by both liberal and communitarian ethics advanced (Bhabha, 1994). One prominent tension evident here is that the school leader, in many cases, gives priority to ubuntu ethics or moral values over professional ethics because of the requirement to remain loyal or maintaining ties with the community and to its expectations, community-enhancing harmony, taking care of the family or kins interests, being caring and meeting community interests. These allow readers to reflect on the implication of hybridity on school leaders who continually negotiate their way through the demand for loyalty from both fronts.

Conclusion

This case study investigated the perceptions of unethical leader behaviors held by secondary school leaders in Kenya and explored explicitly if these conceptions were derived from an African contextual or social-cultural perspective, i.e., values and beliefs. It demonstrated that secondary school leaders in Kenya operate within a cultural and social context underlain by the ubuntu ethic, which defines the moral values and conduct of the community. The school leaders, as custodians, have a responsibility to uphold the ubuntu ethic regardless of the professional expectations at the workplace. Consequently, the leader's actions sometimes contradict defined professional conduct and are construed to be unethical conduct.

The study contributes to the unethical and ethical leadership literature by proposing that knowledge about ethics is socially derived and understood within contexts. Thus, social-cultural factors, such as beliefs and values, inform leadership practice and perceptions about unethical leadership but are not always universal. The experiences of school leaders in non-western contexts provide a new perspective and should contribute to the global debates on this matter, especially on what informs ethical leadership practice.

Recommendations

This research data provides ground for further interrogation of how the ubuntu cultural values inform the perspectives of unethical leader conduct and other leader practices in non-western contexts or multicultural contexts. Research in primary schools, universities, and other African contexts to get a broad and enriched view about the influence of culture/ ubuntu ethic in informing unethical leader conduct in education contexts. The research can also target national and private schools left out in this study either as a standalone or a comparative study to provide more insights into this phenomenon. The study highlights the capacity of the ubuntu ethic for informing conduct within schools in Kenya

and Africa and especially for dealing with the moral challenges in schools today. Education policymakers and education managers need to acknowledge the existence of two moral perspectives in the context of Kenyan schools, i.e., Euro-western, and African perspectives, and provide a platform for exploration and re-negotiation of their interconnection as Benhabib (2002) suggests conversations are needed to explore how the two moral and cultural forms should interact with one another for posterity. A framework for integrating ubuntu cultural and community derived ethical perspectives into western derived western perspectives on which the school functions and ethos is based necessary. It has the potential to boost and inculcate the collective effort to tackle moral and ethical issues within school contexts. This perspective can explore measures for managing conduct within multicultural or similar education contexts. It should be discussed with policymakers, stakeholders and subjected to a review from time to time, given the changing contextual needs and values. More training can be done at teacher training institutions and at a professional level to engage this concept further for secondary school leaders.

Limitations

Notwithstanding the valid information about unethical leader conduct, the conclusion of this case study is limited in its generalizability for two reasons: first, the participants may not have shared more profound experiences due to the sensitive nature of the research. Secondly, the research focus was limited to school leaders in four public schools in one province of Kenya.

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Appendix

The Questionnaire

1. Please share some unethical behaviour/ conduct issues from experience as a school leader.

2. Describe what/ who was involved & how it was resolved?

3. Explain why it is labelled unethical?

4. Explain the cultural perspectives, beliefs that were involved in this encounter, if any, and which made it wrong/bad from the cultural perspective,

5. Explain if and why the community would have given this more weight as an issue?

6. What other unethical issues are prevalent among leaders that have a cultural undertone.

7. Would this be considered more severe than the unethical issues that touch the workplace regarding the code, law, or policy?

8. How would this issue be interpreted from a cultural perspective?

What are some of the expectations of conduct for leaders in this community? Give reasons?