

The Philosophy of Leadership for Principals' Administrative Strategies and Teachers' Job Performance

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Abstract

The philosophy of leadership offers a reflective foundation for understanding how school principals' values, beliefs, and administrative strategies influence teachers' job performance. This study examined the intersection between philosophical leadership principles and practical administrative behavior in the management of educational institutions. Drawing insights from transformational, servant, and ethical leadership theories, the study explored how a principal's vision, decision-making style, and interpersonal relations shape teacher motivation, instructional effectiveness, and professional satisfaction. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews from principals and teachers across selected secondary schools in Owerri. Quantitative analysis measured the correlation between leadership strategies such as participatory decision-making, supervision, communication, and motivation and key indicators of teachers' job performance, while qualitative insights provided a deeper understanding of the ethical and philosophical orientations guiding principals' actions. Findings revealed that leadership grounded in human-centered and value-driven philosophy significantly enhances teachers' productivity, commitment, and classroom engagement. Conversely, autocratic and inconsistent administrative practices diminish morale and hinder effective teaching. The study emphasized that the success of any educational system depends not only on technical management skills but also on the moral and philosophical depth of leadership. Consequently, the paper recommended continuous leadership training programs that integrate philosophical reflection with practical administrative competence.

Keywords: Philosophy of Leadership; Administrative Strategies; Transformational Leadership; Educational Management; Ethical Leadership.

Introduction

Leadership has long been regarded as the cornerstone of effective organizational functioning, particularly within educational institutions where the dynamics of learning, growth, and human development converge. In educational settings, leadership is not confined

to the coordination of resources or the enforcement of regulations; rather, it represents the art of guiding teachers and students toward a shared vision of excellence and moral purpose (Bush, 2020). The school principal, in this respect, serves as both an administrator and a moral exemplar whose leadership philosophy influences the ethos, performance, and productivity of the entire institution. As Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins affirm, effective school leadership is second only to classroom instruction in influencing student outcomes, primarily through its impact on teacher motivation and professional engagement (Harris, and Hopkins 2020).

Philosophically, leadership in education embodies the integration of rational organization and moral purpose. Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* practical wisdom illustrates the need for leaders to act not merely with technical competence but with ethical discernment aimed at the common good (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Irwin, 1999). This philosophical grounding is crucial because education itself is a moral enterprise aimed at nurturing both intellect and character. Hence, a principal's administrative strategies must reflect a balance between managerial efficiency and ethical leadership, aligning institutional goals with the personal and professional well-being of teachers.

Despite the recognized importance of leadership in school management, many educational institutions continue to experience declining teacher morale, low motivation, and diminished productivity due to poor leadership practices (Akinola & Lawal, 2022). The prevalence of autocratic and non-participatory leadership styles often undermines collaboration, weakens teacher commitment, and erodes trust within the school community. In many cases, principals exercise authority without philosophical reflection on the ethical implications of their administrative decisions, leading to discontent and alienation among teachers. The absence of value-driven leadership diminishes teachers' sense of purpose, reducing their willingness to innovate and contribute meaningfully to the educational mission (Okon & Etim, 2021).

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between principals' leadership philosophies, their administrative strategies, and teachers' job performance. Specifically, the study seeks to explore how the moral and philosophical orientations of principals influence their decision-making processes, communication patterns, supervisory practices, and motivational strategies, and how these, in turn, affect teachers' efficiency, job satisfaction, and classroom effectiveness. By linking leadership philosophy with administrative behavior, the study aims to illuminate the deeper ethical and existential dimensions of educational leadership, showing that effective management must be grounded in a coherent vision of human flourishing and institutional purpose.

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

What are the dominant leadership philosophies guiding principals' administrative strategies in secondary schools?

- How do principals' administrative strategies influence teachers' motivation and job performance?
- To what extent does the ethical and philosophical orientation of school leaders shape the overall school climate and teacher productivity?
- What leadership approaches best promote collaboration, creativity, and commitment among teachers?

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 The Philosophy of Leadership

Leadership, in its philosophical sense, transcends the mere exercise of authority or administrative control; it is fundamentally a moral vocation rooted in the pursuit of the common good and the flourishing of others. The philosophy of leadership thus interrogates not only *how* leaders act, but *why* they act their guiding beliefs, ethical commitments, and understanding of human purpose. As Burns observes, leadership is most authentic when it transforms both the leader and the led, elevating them to higher levels of motivation and morality. From a **classical philosophical perspective**, Plato envisioned leadership as the stewardship of the *philosopher-king* a ruler guided by wisdom and virtue rather than personal ambition (Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Shorey, 1968). Plato's concept underscores the idea that knowledge divorced from moral vision is inadequate for governance. Similarly, Aristotle advanced the notion of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) as the defining quality of the good leader, emphasizing moderation, virtue, and the rational pursuit of the common good (*Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Irwin, 1999). St. Thomas Aquinas later developed this idea further by situating leadership within the framework of *natural law*, arguing that true authority must reflect divine reason and the moral order intended for human flourishing (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, Q.90).

In the **modern era**, Immanuel Kant (1785) emphasized autonomy and moral duty as central to ethical leadership. For Kant, leadership must respect the inherent dignity of persons, treating individuals as ends in themselves rather than as means to institutional goals (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*). Contemporary paradigms such as **transformational** and **servant leadership** extend these philosophical insights into organizational contexts. Transformational leadership, as posited by Bass and Riggio (2006), seeks to inspire moral growth and self-actualization among followers through vision and shared purpose. Servant leadership, articulated by Greenleaf, places moral responsibility, empathy, and service at the heart of leadership practice (Greenleaf 1977). In the **educational sphere**, these philosophical orientations find expression in the ethical dimension of leadership. School principals are not merely administrators but moral agents shaping a community of learning. Ethical leadership in education emphasizes fairness, care, and integrity as the guiding principles of administrative conduct (Starratt, 2017). Hence, the philosophy of leadership in schools is a call to harmonize managerial competence with moral insight, ensuring that administrative decisions contribute to the holistic development of both teachers and learners.

2.2 Administrative Strategies in School Leadership

Administrative strategies are the practical expressions of leadership philosophy the tangible mechanisms through which principals operationalize their ethical and managerial convictions. Effective educational administration integrates both strategic and human dimensions to foster an environment conducive to learning and professional growth. Key administrative strategies include **instructional supervision**, which ensures the alignment of teaching practices with curricular goals and pedagogical standards (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2018); **delegation**, which distributes responsibilities equitably and fosters a

sense of ownership among teachers; and **communication**, which sustains transparency and trust within the school community. **Motivation**, whether through recognition, professional development, or participatory decision-making is central to maintaining teachers' morale and engagement (Herzberg, 1968).

Strategic planning and **resource management** are also essential components of school leadership. As Hoy and Miskel (2013) note, successful principals anticipate future challenges and align institutional resources with educational priorities. These strategies must, however, be informed by the leader's ethical framework to prevent efficiency from overshadowing humanity. Leadership styles vary across contexts. **Transformational leadership** emphasizes vision and empowerment; **transactional leadership** focuses on task performance and reward structures; **democratic leadership** promotes inclusivity and shared governance; **autocratic leadership** centralizes authority; and **laissez-faire leadership** minimizes direct intervention (Northouse, 2022). Among these, transformational and democratic approaches have been found most conducive to teacher motivation and innovation, especially when grounded in trust and mutual respect.

2.3 Teachers' Job Performance

Teachers' job performance is a multidimensional construct encompassing the efficiency, quality, and creativity with which educators fulfill their professional duties. It reflects not only instructional competence but also commitment, punctuality, classroom management, and the ability to inspire learning outcomes (Akinyemi & Bamidele, 2021). Indicators of effective performance include lesson preparation, teaching innovation, assessment practices, and positive student engagement. Several factors influence teachers' performance. These include **motivation, work environment, professional development opportunities**, and the **leadership style** of school administrators (Okon & Etim, 2021). A supportive leadership climate characterized by recognition, dialogue, and ethical consistency tends to enhance teachers' enthusiasm and sense of belonging. Conversely, environments marked by rigidity, favoritism, or lack of communication reduce morale and productivity.

From a philosophical standpoint, teachers' performance is not merely a function of compliance but of participation in a shared moral vision. When teachers perceive that their contributions are valued and aligned with a purpose greater than personal gain, they experience a deeper sense of vocation and meaning in their work what Gabriel Marcel would describe as *availability* or self-giving presence to others. Hence, teacher performance thrives where leadership affirms human dignity and mutual responsibility.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The study draws upon several leadership and motivation theories to explain the relationship between leadership philosophy, administrative strategies, and teachers' job performance.

Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006) posits that leaders who inspire, intellectually stimulate, and show individualized consideration foster higher levels of commitment and creativity among followers. In educational settings, transformational principals act as catalysts for teacher empowerment and pedagogical innovation.

Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982) emphasizes the adaptability of leadership behavior according to followers' competence and commitment. This flexibility reflects Aristotle's notion of *phronesis*, the practical wisdom to discern the right action for each circumstance. Integrating these frameworks suggests that leadership philosophy acts as the moral and conceptual foundation from which administrative behavior emerges. A principal's worldview shaped by ethical, ontological, and epistemological convictions directly influences their strategic choices and, consequently, teachers' motivation and effectiveness. Leadership, when grounded in moral philosophy and practical wisdom, transforms administration into a form of ethical stewardship aimed at realizing the full potential of both teachers and learners.

3 Principals' Leadership Philosophies and Their Influence

The study revealed that principals' leadership philosophies significantly shape the moral atmosphere, decision-making processes, and relational dynamics within schools. Principals who grounded their leadership in humanistic and ethical values such as respect, justice, and care fostered an environment of mutual trust and professional commitment among teachers. These leaders demonstrated what Aristotle termed *phronesis* (practical wisdom), the capacity to balance moral virtue with pragmatic decision-making for the common good (*Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Irwin, 1999). In such schools, leadership was perceived not merely as a managerial function but as a vocation of service, aligning with Greenleaf's (1977) concept of servant leadership that prioritizes the growth and well-being of followers.

Conversely, principals who exhibited authoritarian or transactional tendencies often reduced leadership to rule enforcement and compliance, neglecting the ethical dimension that sustains communal harmony and teacher motivation. Kant's moral imperative that individuals be treated as ends rather than means—provides a philosophical critique of such leadership styles. In the absence of reflective and ethical reasoning, leadership risks degenerating into domination rather than direction (Starratt, 2017). The findings thus affirm that a principal's internalized values—whether grounded in service, justice, or personal ambition manifest visibly in administrative decisions, staff relations, and institutional culture. Principals influenced by transformational ideals tended to articulate a shared vision and inspire teachers toward collective achievement. Their decisions were participatory, reflective, and ethically attuned, suggesting that leadership philosophy functions as the moral compass that guides administrative conduct. This finding echoes Burns' assertion that authentic leadership must elevate both leader and followers to higher levels of moral consciousness.

3.1 Administrative Strategies Employed by Principals

The findings identified five major administrative strategies commonly employed by principals: **instructional supervision, delegation, effective communication, motivation, and participatory decision-making**. Principals who prioritized instructional supervision enhanced pedagogical quality and accountability among teachers, consistent with Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon's view that supervision is central to instructional improvement. However, the manner in which supervision was conducted whether supportive or punitive was a decisive factor in determining teacher response. Delegation emerged as a vital strategy for fostering ownership and shared responsibility. When principals trusted teachers with

meaningful roles, teachers exhibited greater initiative and professional confidence. This reflects McGregor's *Theory Y* assumption that workers are inherently motivated and capable of self-direction when properly empowered. On the contrary, principals who monopolized decision-making fostered passivity and resentment, reflecting *Theory X* tendencies that assume teachers require control.

Effective communication also appeared as a cornerstone of successful school administration. Open, transparent, and dialogical communication enhanced collegiality, while poor communication bred misunderstanding and alienation. Motivation—through recognition, professional development, and fair appraisal was another key determinant of teacher satisfaction. Principals who implemented Herzberg's *Motivation–Hygiene Theory* effectively addressed intrinsic motivators such as achievement and recognition, leading to higher job fulfillment.

3.2 Impact on Teachers' Job Performance

It is clear that there is a relationship between leadership philosophy, administrative strategies, and teachers' job performance. Principals who espoused servant or transformational leadership philosophies nurtured environments where teachers exhibited greater instructional creativity, punctuality, and emotional commitment. Teachers reported heightened enthusiasm and a sense of belonging when they perceived their leaders as just, transparent, and supportive. This finding is consistent with Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins, who assert that effective school leadership indirectly influences student outcomes through its positive effect on teachers' motivation and engagement (Harris, and Hopkins 2020).

Schools where principals exhibited autocratic or inconsistent administrative practices recorded lower levels of teacher satisfaction and higher rates of absenteeism and turnover. Teachers in such environments described leadership as coercive rather than inspirational, leading to what Marcel would call “disincarnation” a detachment from one's work and vocation. From a philosophical lens, this alienation reflects the moral failure of leadership that prioritizes control over communion.

Transformational leadership theory provides a conceptual explanation for these findings: by inspiring shared purpose and intellectual stimulation, transformational principals elevate teachers' sense of professional identity. Similarly, Herzberg's model elucidates how intrinsic motivators—such as recognition and responsibility drive sustainable job performance more than extrinsic factors. Thus, effective leadership in education is both ethically grounded and human-centered, facilitating teacher flourishing as an intrinsic good rather than a mere instrument for institutional success.

4. Implications for Educational Leadership

The findings of this study illuminate profound implications for the philosophy and practice of educational leadership. They demonstrate that effective school management cannot be divorced from the moral and philosophical foundations upon which leadership is built. Leadership in education is not merely a matter of administrative competence or technical expertise; it is fundamentally an ethical vocation grounded in the pursuit of truth, justice, and the flourishing of the human person (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.90). This section

discusses the implications of the findings for educational administrators, policymakers, and teacher development within the broader framework of moral and transformational leadership.

4.1 Re-envisioning Leadership as a Moral and Philosophical Enterprise

Educational leadership must be re-envisioned as an act of moral stewardship rather than mere managerial control. The study confirms that the principal's moral philosophy whether grounded in service, justice, or utilitarian expediency inevitably shapes the school's ethical climate and the motivation of teachers. Hence, the cultivation of philosophical and ethical consciousness among school leaders is essential. As Starratt argues, ethical leadership involves *care, justice, and critique* care for the persons one leads, justice in decision-making, and critique of institutional structures that hinder human dignity. Principals should therefore engage in reflective practices that allow them to discern the ethical dimensions of administrative decisions (Starratt 2017). This moral awareness aligns with Aristotle's *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, which enables leaders to balance competing values and pursue the common good (*Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Irwin, 1999). By grounding leadership in moral philosophy, principals transform their administrative role into a vocation of service that inspires teachers toward excellence.

4.2 Integrating Philosophical Reflection into Leadership Training

One of the key implications of this study is the need to integrate philosophical and ethical reflection into leadership preparation programs. Many current training modules emphasize technical efficiency budgeting, supervision, and performance appraisal while neglecting the deeper moral and existential dimensions of leadership. However, as Fullan insists, sustainable educational change depends on leaders who act from a sense of *moral purpose* (Fullan 2019).

Educational leadership institutes should therefore include courses on moral philosophy, ethics of care, and philosophical anthropology. Such integration will enable future principals to appreciate leadership not as a power dynamic but as a relational and moral responsibility. By cultivating self-awareness and ethical reasoning, school leaders become capable of aligning administrative practices with the intrinsic dignity of teachers and learners.

4.3 Enhancing Teacher Development through Ethical Leadership

The study reveals that teachers' job performance is deeply intertwined with the moral tone set by school leadership. Ethical and transformational leadership creates an environment where teachers find meaning and dignity in their work. This has implications for teacher development programs, which should encourage collaboration between teachers and administrators in creating shared ethical visions for the school.

According to Greenleaf the servant leader's first duty is to ensure that those served "grow as persons." Thus, principals must intentionally design professional development initiatives that nurture teachers' intellectual, moral, and emotional capacities. Programs emphasizing mentorship, collegial dialogue, and recognition of excellence promote a culture of mutual growth. Teachers who feel valued and ethically supported are more likely to internalize the school's mission and contribute meaningfully to students' formation.

6. Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated that leadership in education is not merely an administrative or managerial undertaking but a profoundly philosophical and moral vocation. The findings underscore that the principal's leadership philosophy whether informed by virtue ethics, deontological duty, or transformational service inevitably shapes teachers' motivation, commitment, and professional excellence. Leadership, when reduced to procedural control or bureaucratic efficiency, forfeits its higher purpose: the cultivation of a moral community in which teachers and learners alike can flourish. Thus, the philosophy of leadership must be understood as the *animating spirit* of educational management a moral compass that guides all administrative action toward the common good.

Philosophically, this study affirms Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) as central to effective educational leadership. The principal's capacity to discern the right course of action in complex, value-laden situations embodies the virtue of prudence, which integrates moral insight with situational intelligence (*Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Irwin, 1999). Similarly, Aquinas' conception of law and moral order situates leadership within the framework of reason and the divine good (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.90–94). The educational leader, therefore, acts as both rational guide and moral steward, harmonizing institutional objectives with ethical imperatives.

The study also supports the transformative models of leadership articulated by Greenleaf and Burns, emphasizing that true leadership seeks to elevate followers to higher levels of morality and motivation. Transformational and servant leadership theories converge in their recognition of human dignity and relational interdependence values indispensable to the educational context. A principal, who listens, empowers, and models integrity not only enhances teacher performance but also contributes to the moral regeneration of the school as a community of learning and virtue.

However, the research also reveals enduring challenges: inadequate communication, inconsistent motivation, and the persistence of authoritarian tendencies in leadership. These failures are not merely administrative flaws but ethical lapses that undermine the ontological dignity of teachers. As Kant reminds us, every person must be treated as an end in themselves, never merely as a means to institutional goals. Hence, educational leadership must be grounded in respect for human freedom, moral autonomy, and participatory collaboration. In conclusion, the philosophy of leadership invites a reorientation of educational management from a paradigm of control to one of moral responsibility and relational trust. The effectiveness of principals' administrative strategies depends not only on technical proficiency but on the moral vision that animates their practice. Educational systems that prioritize ethical formation in leadership development will produce principals who, like Aquinas' "wise governors," lead not by coercion but by reason, virtue, and example. Such leadership transforms schools into spaces of moral and intellectual formation where teachers find fulfillment, students encounter purpose, and the community at large benefits from the radiance of authentic educational stewardship.

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