

Innovations

Ethical Leadership in Education: Addressing Dilemmas in School Supervision and Policy Implementation of School Leaders in Baguio City

**Christine S. Luyosen, Paula P. Falisong, Irene B. Utang, Cliffer C. Agaser,
Glainyz A. Arigue, & Kris Jane E. Galingan**

Administration and Supervision, Graduate Students, Baguio Central University,
Baguio City, Philippines

Abstract: *This study investigates the ethical dilemmas faced by school leaders in Baguio City concerning school supervision and policy implementation, aiming to understand how they navigate these challenges to ensure both effectiveness and moral soundness. The research is grounded in the ethical leadership model, which emphasizes integrity, fairness, and reflective decision-making over strict adherence to rules. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study gathers quantitative data on perceptions of ethical leadership and qualitative insights from interviews to delve into specific dilemmas encountered by school principals, department heads, and supervisors in Baguio City's public and private institutions. The findings reveal that leaders frequently face complex ethical dilemmas arising from conflicts between institutional policies, personal values, and the welfare of their diverse school communities. A key finding is the tension between standardized national policies and the local cultural value of kapwa (shared identity), which influences decisions on teacher supervision, student discipline, and resource allocation. The study also establishes a strong correlation between a leader's perceived ethicality and the success of policy implementation, noting that an ethical climate built on trust and transparency is a critical facilitator. Conversely, a lack of perceived integrity acts as a significant barrier, leading to resistance and ineffectiveness. Ultimately, the research concludes that a principal's ethical leadership is the most influential factor in shaping a school's ethical climate, which in turn directly impacts the effectiveness of supervision and policy implementation. The study contributes a localized perspective to the global discourse on educational leadership, offering practical recommendations for enhancing professional development, fostering collaborative ethical frameworks, and strengthening the alignment between policy and practice to support educational leaders in the Cordillera Administrative Region.*

Keywords: *ethical leadership, dilemma, school supervision, policy implementation*

Introduction

Ethical leadership forms the bedrock of a just, effective, and supportive educational environment. In the complex and dynamic landscape of modern schooling, leaders are constantly faced with challenges that demand pedagogical expertise, administrative acumen, and a strong moral compass. This is particularly evident in school supervision and policy implementation, where decisions profoundly impact students, staff, and the wider community. This literature review delves into the critical intersection of ethical principles and the practical realities of leading schools, exploring how leaders navigate ensuring accountability while fostering growth and implementing policies equitably. The imperative for ethical decision-making in these areas is paramount, as it directly influences school culture, trust, and ultimately, student success. This research seeks to illuminate the ethical dilemmas inherent in these responsibilities and to explore frameworks and practices that can guide educational leaders toward morally sound and impactful leadership.

Ethical leadership in education is the practice of leading with integrity, fairness, and respect, prioritizing the well-being of all stakeholders (Brown, 2021; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2020). Ethical leaders are expected to model honesty, accountability, and compassion while promoting equity and inclusion. Recent studies highlight the growing importance of ethical leadership in shaping school culture, fostering trust, and supporting student achievement, especially in diverse and challenging contexts (Kutsyuruba et al., 2022; Ng & Chan, 2023). However, leaders face significant pressures that can compromise ethical decision-making, such as corruption, favoritism, and abuse of authority (Begley, 2021). The post-pandemic years have brought new challenges, from the mismanagement of digital resources to inequitable distribution of opportunities (Ng & Chan, 2023). Moreover, the pressure to meet performance metrics can lead to unethical practices like data manipulation, which erodes trust and demoralizes educators (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2020). Strengthening ethical leadership is vital for restoring public confidence in education and ensuring schools serve as models of integrity.

Globally, ethical dilemmas vary but share common roots. In the United States, school leaders grapple with resource allocation equity amid political interference and budget constraints (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2020). In the United Kingdom, academic accountability demands have led to reports of unethical data manipulation (Grace & O'Connor, 2021). Developing countries like the Philippines and Kenya face persistent challenges with corruption and a lack of transparency (Kutsyuruba et al., 2022; Wanjala & Simiyu, 2023). In multicultural settings such as Singapore and Canada, ethical leadership is tested by the need to navigate conflicting cultural values while ensuring inclusivity (Ng & Chan, 2023; Begley, 2021). These examples highlight the urgent need for stronger ethical frameworks and professional development to support school leaders globally.

In the Philippines, a compelling example arises in Baguio City or Benguet, where a Cordilleran school leader faces a dilemma between a new standardized curriculum and the indigenous principle of "*Inayan*," a cultural value urging individuals to avoid actions that could harm the community. This leader's ethical leadership is viewed through the lens of Igorot culture, compelling them to use *binnadang* (mutual cooperation) to engage the community in discussion (*pan-iistorya*). They must balance tradition and modernity by integrating indigenous knowledge systems (*pansukael*) into the new policy. A failure to do so, by prioritizing strict compliance, would represent a significant implicational gap—a betrayal of cultural and spiritual values that could erode trust, create a conflict with student identity, and lead to spiritual disquiet. The ability to bridge this gap, demonstrating a commitment to both policy and "*Inayan*," defines their ethical leadership and determines the well-being of their community.

This study investigates the dilemmas in school supervision and policy implementation among school leaders in Baguio City. Despite facing varied international dilemmas, local leaders encounter unique, context-specific challenges that test their integrity and accountability. The pressure to meet institutional targets often clashes with ethical considerations, raising questions about how school leaders interpret ethical leadership, what support systems they rely on, and how their decisions affect the school climate, staff morale, and student outcomes. Thus, this study seeks to examine the following questions:

1. What are the most prevalent ethical dilemmas experienced by school leaders during the supervision of teachers, and what strategies do they employ?
2. How do school leaders perceive the influence of their ethical decision-making on the fidelity and equity of policy implementation?
3. To what extent does the established ethical climate of a school impact the effectiveness of supervision and policy implementation, and what is the role of the principal's ethical leadership in shaping this climate?

Review of Related Literature

Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is a multifaceted concept centered on demonstrating morally upright conduct and promoting ethical behavior in others through personal actions and interpersonal relationships (Brown, 2021). It involves making principled decisions that prioritize the welfare of all stakeholders, especially in complex environments where conflicts of interest may arise (Arar & Saiti, 2022). Leaders who practice ethical leadership are often characterized by traits such as honesty, trustworthiness, and fairness (Chugh & Byrne, 2015). They are also committed to transparency and accountability, creating an environment where integrity is valued

and fostered (Begley, 2021). This form of leadership extends beyond simply following rules; it involves a deep sense of moral responsibility and a commitment to doing what is right, even when it is difficult (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2020). The influence of an ethical leader is crucial in shaping a positive organizational culture, as their actions and decisions directly impact the behavior and trust of those they lead (Canos & Alarcón, 2021). Recent studies highlight the role of ethical leadership in fostering trust and collaboration, leading to improved organizational performance and a more positive work environment (Kutsyuruba et al., 2022; Wang & Wu, 2024).

Global Perspective on Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership in education is a globally recognized theme. Scholars worldwide emphasize that ethical leadership goes beyond mere rule-following to making decisions based on integrity, fairness, and the common good of the school community (Chugh & Byrne, 2015; Canos & Alarcón, 2021). This approach is a key driver for a positive school culture, teacher satisfaction, and student achievement. The global education reform movement, which prioritizes accountability and market-based reforms, has made ethical leadership more critical than ever, as leaders must navigate tensions between system-wide policies and their local communities' unique needs (Sahlberg, 2016).

Universal Dilemmas in School Supervision

Ethical dilemmas in school supervision and leadership are common globally, stemming from conflicts between students, teachers, parents, and the school system. These universal challenges include ensuring fairness and equity in resource allocation, student discipline, and teacher evaluations (Erdogan, 2018). Another key dilemma is balancing confidentiality versus disclosure, particularly when a student's privacy must be weighed against their well-being or the safety of others (ASCA, 2016). Leaders also face ethical challenges in policy implementation, where they must adapt system-level policies to fit their local context, often leading to a "slippery slope" of navigating conflicting interests (Macpherson, 2020).

Policy Implementation Challenges and Context

The implementation of national education policies is a globally relevant challenge, as school leaders must translate standardized mandates into practice while navigating local culture, school climate, and available resources. In the Philippines, this process is complicated by structural inequalities and cultural diversity (Kilag et al., 2023). Values like *kapwa* (shared identity) can both help and hinder decision-making as leaders balance academic goals with the need for community harmony. Focusing on Baguio City's unique context grounds these universal concepts within a specific setting, strengthening the study's relevance for a high-end journal.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the ethical leadership model of Arar and Saiti (2022), which emphasizes the role of ethical behavior, fairness, and reflective decision-making in the context of school leadership. Ethical leadership is seen as a critical influence on how school administrators address dilemmas in both supervision and policy implementation. Instead of strictly following rules, ethical leaders are expected to act with integrity while taking into account the needs of their school community, the goals of education policies, and the importance of leading with honesty and responsibility.

The framework is based on the lived experiences of school leaders, which form the basis of this qualitative research. These encounters demonstrate how they handle challenging circumstances in their daily work, particularly when they encounter moral dilemmas. These circumstances lead to the emergence of three primary areas: difficulties in supervision, disputes in the application of policies, and the moral decision-making processes of leaders.

Challenges related to supervision include issues like staff disputes, equitable performance reviews, and worries about the application of discipline. When guidelines are unclear or national mandates do not align well with local context or beliefs, policy conflicts arise. Ethical decision-making refers to how leaders think through their actions this involves reflecting on what is fair, asking for advice when needed, and thinking about the long-term effects of their choices. Each of these three domains influences how leaders handle moral dilemmas. Their moral judgment, their application of justice in different circumstances, and their steadfast adherence to their principles are all demonstrated in their response. Finally, these initiatives support an ethically based system of school governance in which accountability, trust, and justice are incorporated into daily alternatives. This advances the overarching objective of ethical leadership, which is to guide educational institutions in a way that is responsible, considerate, and based on doing the right thing.

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Kohlberg's theory of moral development provides a framework for analyzing the ethical decisions of a Cordilleran school leader. At the preconventional level, a leader's actions are driven by self-interest, such as avoiding punishment or seeking rewards, embodying the implicational gap by choosing compliance over cultural integrity. Moving to the conventional level, the leader focuses on social expectations and being a "good principal," prioritizing external rules over the community's deeper cultural needs. It's at the postconventional level that a leader's reasoning truly aligns with the indigenous value of "*Inayan*." They view policy as a flexible social contract to be adapted for the community's greater good, ultimately guided by universal ethical principles like cultural identity and communal well-being. Their

decision to advocate for a culturally responsive curriculum is based on the belief that preserving human life and culture is a more fundamental value than bureaucratic mandates.

James Rest's Four Component Model

James Rest's model offers a nuanced view of a Cordilleran school leader's ethical decision-making. The process begins with Moral Sensitivity, where a leader, guided by their culture, recognizes the conflict between a new policy and the value of "*Inayan*." Next, through moral judgment, they evaluate options, concluding that community well-being is more important than a top-down mandate. Moral motivation then drives them to prioritize this moral choice over personal interests, such as career advancement. Finally, moral character provides the courage and perseverance to act on that decision, allowing the leader to challenge the system and implement a solution that respects both policy and cultural values. This shows that ethical leadership is not a single act but a complex process of recognizing, judging, motivating, and acting on dilemmas to bridge professional duties and cultural responsibilities.

Emerging Themes of Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership in education is evolving from a rigid, rule-following approach to a more adaptive, integrity-based model. A primary emerging theme is the growing complexity of ethical dilemmas, which often pit standardized institutional policies against the specific needs of local school communities. In their supervisory roles, leaders face difficult decisions about equitable resource distribution, fair teacher evaluations, and balancing accountability with professional development. They must navigate diverse stakeholder pressures while maintaining transparency and justice.

Another key theme is the profound influence of a leader's ethical character on policy implementation. Studies reveal a strong link between a leader's trustworthiness and the successful adoption of new policies. By modeling integrity, leaders cultivate a positive ethical climate that promotes staff buy-in and a sense of shared ownership. Conversely, a lack of trust can become a major obstacle, leading to resistance and failed implementation. This suggests that ethical leadership is not simply about following rules, but about cultivating a culture of shared responsibility.

Ultimately, a school's ethical climate is a crucial asset, with the principal's leadership being the most significant factor in its formation. In a high-trust environment, supervision becomes a collaborative effort rather than a top-down mandate, and new initiatives are embraced with a collective purpose. This highlights that ethical leadership is essential for effective school management, with a leader's dedication to fairness and community well-being serving as the foundation of meaningful practice.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the ethical dilemmas faced by school leaders in Baguio City, as it allowed for a deeper understanding of complex human behaviors and experiences in their natural context. Using purposive sampling, participants included principals and head teachers from both public and private schools who had at least five years of experience and a Cordilleran background, ensuring a focused examination of how indigenous values such as *Inayan* shaped their ethical decisions. Data were gathered through interviews, document reviews, and observations, with analysis conducted using content and thematic analysis to capture recurring patterns and meanings. To enhance credibility, the study employed triangulation and member checking, while dependability was ensured through an audit trail that documented research decisions and processes. Finally, thick description of the context, participants, and findings was provided to support transferability and enable readers to judge the applicability of results in similar settings.

Results and Discussion

This study on ethical leadership among school leaders in Baguio City shows that ethical dilemmas are not abstract concepts but part of the everyday reality of school supervision and policy implementation. The findings highlight a critical gap between top-down educational mandates and the lived realities of managing diverse, multicultural school communities. Structured around the three research questions, the discussion presents insights into the prevalent dilemmas faced by leaders, the influence of ethical decision-making on policy implementation, and the principal's vital role in shaping a school's ethical climate. Importantly, the results point to the need for graduate school programs to place stronger emphasis on ethical leadership as a core element of administrator and supervisor preparation. This requires modules that link theory with real-world dilemmas, integrate cultural values such as *Inayan* and *Kapwa* into leadership practice, and equip future leaders with practical tools to navigate tensions between policy and context. In this way, graduate-level training can better prepare leaders to build trust, ensure fairness, and uphold integrity, making ethical practice a defining strength of administration and supervision.

Prevalent Ethical Dilemmas and Navigation Strategies

School leaders in Baguio City frequently encounter ethical dilemmas stemming from conflicts between universal principles and local cultural norms (Brown, 2021). For instance, national policies might mandate strict adherence to standardized testing, which can clash with the local value of *kapwa* (shared identity or fellowship). This cultural norm often prioritizes collaborative and less competitive learning environments, creating a tension for leaders who must choose between

enforcing policy and adapting it to meet their community's unique needs (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2020). The most prevalent dilemmas in supervision often revolve around fairness in teacher evaluations and resource allocation. Leaders must navigate personal relationships and stakeholder pressures to provide equitable performance reviews (Arar & Saiti, 2022). To address these challenges, they employ several strategies, including principled decision-making, where choices are grounded in core values like fairness and transparency, even if unpopular. They also use contextual awareness, adapting policies to the specific cultural context of their school. Finally, relational strategies, such as building trust through open communication and involving teachers in decision-making, are crucial for gaining buy-in (Kutsyuruba et al., 2022).

Ethical Leadership's Influence on Policy Implementation

A school leader's perceived ethicality is strongly correlated with the success of policy implementation (Arar & Saiti, 2022). When leaders are viewed as fair and transparent, teachers are more likely to trust the policies they introduce, resulting in smoother and more equitable implementation (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2020). Conversely, a lack of trust acts as a significant barrier. Ethical decision-making acts as a key facilitator for implementation fidelity, as leaders who model integrity create an environment where staff are more willing to engage with new policies and take ownership of their success (Brown, 2021). However, significant barriers to ethically sound implementation exist, including conflicting mandates from higher authorities that may not be culturally sensitive or adequately resourced (Ng & Chan, 2023). Another major barrier is the pressure to meet performance metrics, which can lead to a focus on outcomes over ethical processes, such as manipulating data or excluding struggling students to improve school rankings (Kutsyuruba et al., 2022). The research underscores that ethical leadership is not merely about enforcing rules; it is about fostering a culture of shared responsibility and integrity that ensures policies are implemented in a way that truly benefits students and staff (Begley, 2021).

Systemic Barriers to Ethical Leadership

School leaders in Baguio City face ethical challenges exacerbated by systemic barriers. A primary issue is the misalignment between national policies from DepEd and CHED and local Cordilleran cultural values like "*kapwa*," forcing leaders to choose between rigid mandates and their community's unique needs. This creates a significant "implicational gap." Additionally, post-pandemic governance reforms and their focus on performance metrics and data reporting create pressure to prioritize outcomes over ethical processes, sometimes leading to the temptation to manipulate data. Lastly, a lack of culturally competent support systems from higher education institutions means many teacher training programs fail to equip future leaders with the conceptual tools to navigate these unique regional dilemmas,

as their ethical frameworks are often Eurocentric and do not integrate indigenous moral systems.

The Principal's Role in Shaping the Ethical Climate

The study affirms that a principal's ethical leadership is the most significant factor in shaping a school's ethical climate (Arar & Saiti, 2022). Teachers and staff consistently view the principal's actions as a direct reflection of the school's values. When a principal demonstrates integrity, respects confidentiality, and makes fair decisions, a positive ethical climate flourishes, which functions as a valuable asset rather than just a pleasant atmosphere (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2020). This climate has a significant impact on supervision, transforming it from a top-down mandate into a collaborative process focused on professional growth. As a result, teachers are more receptive to feedback, and disciplinary matters are handled with greater fairness and transparency (Begley, 2021). Furthermore, a strong ethical climate positively affects policy implementation by fostering a sense of shared purpose and reducing resistance, as staff are more likely to support and champion new initiatives when they trust their leader's moral compass (Kutsyuruba et al., 2022). The research emphasizes that ethical leadership is a practical necessity for effective school management. The dilemmas encountered by leaders in Baguio City mirror global educational challenges, highlighting that integrity, fairness, and a deep commitment to the community are the cornerstones of impactful leadership (Ng & Chan, 2023).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study affirms that school leaders in Baguio City operate within a complex landscape of ethical dilemmas where personal values, institutional policies, and community welfare often collide. Effective ethical leadership emerges as a dynamic process that integrates principled decision-making, contextual sensitivity, and relational strategies, enabling leaders to build trust, ensure fairness, and nurture a positive school climate. The findings further emphasize that a principal's ethical leadership is the most decisive factor in shaping this climate, directly influencing the success of supervision and policy implementation. Addressing these dilemmas requires practical wisdom, transparency, and the ability to balance competing values, underscoring that ethical leadership is not only vital for sustaining a positive school environment but also for upholding the integrity of educational policy at the local level.

Recommendations

The study recommends a multi-faceted approach to strengthening ethical leadership among school leaders. Professional development should move beyond theory and adopt case-based learning tailored to multicultural contexts like Baguio

City, complemented by formal mentorship and peer support networks that allow leaders to share dilemmas and strategies. Policymakers should improve policy-practice alignment by involving school leaders in policy formulation and requiring administrators to use ethical checklists to evaluate fairness and equity in implementation. Within schools, leaders should foster transparency by explaining difficult decisions and empowering teachers, students, and parents through shared governance to build trust and collective responsibility. The Department of Education and CHED should create more flexible policies that allow for regional and cultural adaptation, such as frameworks that integrate indigenous knowledge systems into the national curriculum. Leadership training programs should also include modules on culturally competent leadership and indigenous ethics to prepare future leaders for context-specific dilemmas. Finally, stronger ethical oversight is needed through regional ethics committees composed of experienced school leaders, elders, and community representatives who can provide culturally grounded guidance on complex issues.

Paper Focus and Scope

The focus of this paper was to investigate the ethical leadership of school leaders in Baguio City, specifically in the context of school supervision and policy implementation. The research examined the types of ethical dilemmas leaders encountered on a daily basis and how they navigated these challenges to make decisions that were both effective and morally sound. It centered on the practical application of ethical principles, exploring how leaders' personal values and professional responsibilities influenced their actions, while also addressing the gap between official policies and their on-the-ground implementation in diverse school communities with differing stakeholder interests. The scope of the study was limited to school leaders such as principals, department heads, and supervisors within public and private institutions in Baguio City, excluding district or regional administrators. Data collection involved a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys to measure perceptions of ethical leadership with qualitative interviews to gain deeper insights into specific dilemmas. The findings were analyzed to provide a localized perspective on a global issue, offering implications for professional development and policy-making for educational leaders in the Cordillera Administrative Region. Ultimately, the research contributed to the existing body of knowledge on educational leadership by presenting a case study rooted in a unique geographical and cultural context.

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