TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF PRINCIPALS' ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND STUDENTS' DISCIPLINE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE

Manafa, Fausta Uche, PhD
Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education
National Open University of Nigeria
Jabi Abuja
+2348033572376
fmanafa@noun.edu.ng

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between teachers' perception of principals' ethical leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined how integrity, fairness and role modelling, both individually and jointly, predict students' discipline. The study was guided by four research questions and four corresponding null hypotheses tested at a 0.05 level of significance. A correlational research design was adopted. The population comprised 7,248 teachers across 269 public secondary schools in the six education zones of Anambra State, from which a sample of 725 teachers was drawn through a multistage sampling procedure involving proportionate stratified and simple random techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled The instruments used were the Teachers' Perception of Principals' Ethical Leadership Scale (TPPELS) and the Students' Discipline Scale (SDS), both validated by experts in educational foundations and measurement. Reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded coefficients of 0.80 for TPPELS and 0.87 for SDS, indicating high internal consistency of the scales. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple linear regression. The study found a significant relationship between principals' ethical leadership and students' discipline, with role modelling showing the strongest association, followed by integrity and fairness. The study concludes that ethical leadership practices by principals are pivotal for fostering students' discipline and improving the overall quality of secondary education in Anambra State. It was recommended that principals' preparation and professional development should prioritize ethical leadership, particularly integrity, fairness and role modelling, to strengthen school trust, enhance students' discipline and promote a positive learning environment.

Introduction

The quality of leadership in schools plays a central role in shaping both academic outcomes and student behavior. In secondary schools, discipline remains a cornerstone for effective teaching and learning, as it ensures order, respect for authority, and adherence to school norms. In Nigeria, however, maintaining discipline among students has become a recurring challenge, with cases of absenteeism, lateness, bullying, examination malpractice and disrespect for authority commonly reported in public schools. In Anambra State, these challenges have raised concerns among education stakeholders, prompting renewed attention to the role of principals' leadership practices. As principals are the chief administrators of schools, their ability to lead ethically has a direct influence on the culture of discipline among students.

Education is widely acknowledged as a vital instrument for shaping learners into disciplined, responsible and productive citizens. In secondary schools, students' discipline is central to achieving academic excellence and fostering character formation. Discipline entails students' ability to comply with school rules and regulations, demonstrate self-control and exhibit socially acceptable behaviour that supports a positive learning environment (Ikegbusi & Chigbo-Okeke, 2016). Where discipline is lacking, teaching and learning are disrupted, and the moral fabric of the school community is weakened. Students' discipline refers to the adherence of learners to school rules, regulations and acceptable standards of behavior. It encompasses punctuality, respect for authority, self-control, responsibility, obedience to rules, and avoidance of deviant behaviours such as truancy, bullying and examination malpractice. Discipline is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of effective schooling because it creates an environment conducive to teaching, learning and character formation (UNESCO, 2023). A disciplined students' population is essential not only for academic achievement but also for the cultivation of responsible and productive citizens. Conversely, indiscipline disrupts learning, erodes moral values and undermines the broader goals of education in Nigeria (Ikegbusi & Manafa, 2023). Thus, understanding the factors that influence students' discipline has become a pressing concern in educational research.

Ethical leadership in school administration refers to the demonstration of integrity, fairness, role modelling, transparency, relational behaviour and administrative competencies in managing school affairs. It embodies both being a moral person, honest, consistent and trustworthy and a moral manager who sets clear ethical standards,

communicates them effectively and enforces them equitably (Arar et al., 2024). Brown et al. (2025) explained that ethical leadership also entails showing respect for others, fostering inclusiveness, promoting accountability and ensuring that decisions are guided by ethical principles rather than personal gain. In the school context, it influences the organizational climate by strengthening trust between principals, teachers and students, thereby promoting a culture of responsibility, discipline and academic excellence. The present study concentrated on three key dimensions of ethical leadership: integrity, fairness and role modelling.

Within the educational context, principals' ethical leadership is expressed through integrity, which reflects transparency, credibility and alignment between words and actions, thereby fostering trust and respect among stakeholders (Da'as, 2023). Fairness is demonstrated in impartial decision-making and just treatment of teachers and students, which minimizes grievances and reinforces compliance with school norms (Ikegbusi et al., 2025). Role modelling positions the principal as a moral exemplar whose accountable, respectful and professional behaviour inspires teachers and students to emulate similar values, thereby cultivating discipline and a cooperative school climate (Choi, 2024). Beyond individual leadership, a supportive school climate enriched by family involvement and community participation further strengthens the moral fabric of schools, promoting both academic achievement and the internalization of positive values among learners (Ikegbusi et al., 2023). Likewise, principals' administrative competencies, particularly in motivating teachers, fostering professional growth and ensuring job retention, provide a critical foundation for ethical leadership, since a stable and committed teaching workforce enhances discipline, continuity, and institutional trust (Manafa, 2025b). Collectively, these dimensions of ethical leadership shape the ethos of schools, positively influence teachers' perceptions and provide a robust framework for cultivating students' discipline, responsible citizenship, sustainable educational excellence and also teachers' job achievement (Ikegbusi et al., 2022).

In Anambra State, public secondary schools face persistent challenges of indiscipline, including truancy, lateness, examination malpractice and disrespect for authority (Ikegbusi et al., 2016). Such issues undermine the effectiveness of teaching and learning and erode societal values. These concerns highlighted the urgent need to examine whether teachers perceive principals as exercising ethical leadership and how such perceptions relate to the state of students' discipline. Against this backdrop, this study investigated the relationship between teachers' perception of principals' ethical leadership, measured in terms of integrity, fairness and role modelling and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem
In Nigeria, persistent cases of students' indiscipline, such as truancy, examination malpractice, disrespect for authority and violence, continue to undermine national educational objectives. In Anambra State, despite government interventions including codes of conduct, supervisory monitoring and teachers' retraining, disciplinary problems remain evident. Reports of lateness, absenteeism and disobedience to school rules frequently disrupt classroom processes, weaken the moral foundation of education and compromise students' learning outcomes. A critical factor in addressing these challenges is the ethical leadership of school principals. Ethical leadership, expressed through integrity, fairness and role modelling, is expected to foster trust, strengthen discipline and set moral standards for the entire school community. However, in many public secondary schools in Anambra State, as observed by the researcher, allegations of favoritism, inconsistency in enforcing rules and weak role modelling raise concerns about principals' capacity to inspire discipline. While international research suggested that ethical leadership enhances students' behaviour, little is known about its influence in Nigerian public secondary schools, particularly from the perspective of teachers who directly experience its impact. Given the persistent disciplinary challenges in Anambra State and the limited empirical evidence on the role of principals' ethical leadership, this study is both timely and necessary. It provides context-specific data that can guide policy, enhance leadership practices and strengthen professional development for principals. The researcher, therefore, sought to investigate teachers' perception of principals' ethical leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study
The general purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which teachers' perception of principals' ethical leadership relates to students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:
1. Determine the relationship between teachers' perception of principals' integrity and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. Examine the relationship between teachers' perception of principals' fairness and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
3. Ascertain the relationship between teachers' perception of principals' role modeling and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

4. Investigate the joint relationship between teachers' overall perception of principals' ethical leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Questions
1. What is the relationship between teachers' perception of principals' integrity and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What is the relationship between teachers' perception of principals' fairness and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
3. What is the relationship between teachers' perception of principals' role modeling and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
4. What is the joint relationship between teachers' overall perception of principals' ethical leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Null Hypotheses
1. There is no significant relationship between teachers' perception of principals' integrity and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. There is no significant relationship between teachers' perception of principals' fairness and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
3. There is no significant relationship between teachers' perception of principals' role modeling and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
4. There is no significant joint relationship between teachers' overall perception of principals' ethical leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Literature Review
Teachers' Perception of Principals' Ethical Leadership
Teachers' perception of principals' ethical leadership refers to the way teachers evaluate the moral character, fairness, and professional conduct of school leaders, as well as how principals set, communicate, and enforce ethical standards within the school community. Ethical leadership embodies two dimensions: being a *moral person* (demonstrating honesty, integrity and consistency) and being a *moral manager* (establishing ethical guidelines, modelling desired behaviour and enforcing rules equitably) (Onwuzuruigbo & Colleagues, 2025).

In educational contexts, teachers' perceptions are shaped by how principals display integrity, fairness, transparency, and accountability in their daily administrative practices. When teachers perceive principals as ethical leaders, they report higher trust, job commitment, and willingness to cooperate in maintaining a positive school climate (Da'as, 2023; Obiekwe & Ezeugbor, 2019). Conversely, perceived unethical leadership, favoritism, inconsistency, or lack of fairness, undermines morale and weakens both instructional quality and discipline enforcement. Thus, teachers' perception of ethical leadership is not only an appraisal of a principal's moral stance but also a crucial determinant of teachers' professional behaviour and the overall disciplinary culture of the school (Mbarawii & Amabibi, 2024; Alias, 2024). In educational contexts, teachers' perceptions of principals' ethical leadership are largely shaped by how school leaders demonstrate **integrity, fairness and role-modelling** in their daily administrative practices.

Integrity
Integrity in school leadership refers to honesty, transparency, and consistency between words and actions. When principals act with integrity, they promote credibility and trust, which enhances teachers' confidence in their leadership. Studies showed that teachers who perceive their principals as transparent and consistent are more likely to demonstrate job commitment and contribute to maintaining discipline in schools (Da'as, 2023). Integrity not only promotes trust but also strengthens collective responsibility for enforcing norms and sustaining a positive learning environment (Alias, 2024). In contexts where integrity is lacking, however, teachers often report diminished morale and weak enforcement of rules, which negatively affect discipline and academic outcomes.

Fairness
Fairness denotes impartiality and just treatment of both staff and students. Principals who are perceived as fair in decision-making, promotions and conflict resolution foster teachers' willingness to cooperate and uphold discipline. Ikegbusi et al., (2025) emphasized that fair leadership practices minimize grievances and encourage teachers' collaboration in enforcing school rules. Similarly, Mbarawii and Amabibi (2024) found that perceived fairness by principals predicts teachers' job satisfaction and commitment, which in turn supports consistent classroom discipline. Fairness thus operates as a central dimension of ethical leadership, ensuring that teachers feel valued and respected while cultivating a culture of compliance and responsibility among students.

Role-Modelling

Role-modelling positions the principal as a moral exemplar whose professional conduct inspires teachers and students alike. Principals who demonstrate respect, accountability and professionalism encourage teachers to emulate similar values in their instructional practices and disciplinary approaches (Alias, 2024). Da'as (2023) observed that principals' role-modelling behaviour directly influences teachers' trust and willingness to align with institutional norms. By consistently modelling ethical standards, principals set the moral tone for the entire school community, reinforcing discipline, cooperation and respect across both staff and students. Such role modelling not only enhances teachers' sense of commitment but also strengthens their willingness to uphold professional values (Manafa, 2025a). Moreover, in a rapidly evolving educational context, ethical leadership complements the integration of modern technologies and 21st-century skills, enabling schools to foster sustainable development competencies among students (Manafa & Onwuchulum, 2025).

A consistent finding across recent Nigerian and international studies is that positive teachers' perceptions of principals' ethical leadership predict stronger teachers' commitment, lower turnover intentions and more positive perceptions of school climate, mediators that logically link leadership to students' discipline. For example, research in Anambra and nearby states demonstrated that perceived ethical leadership is associated with teachers' job commitment and retention, which promote stable classroom routines and consistent enforcement of behavioural norms (Egwu & Mbonu, 2023; Manafa, 2025c). These outcomes are further reinforced when principals exhibit strong management competencies, which remain central to effective school administration (Ikegbusi, 2016). Moreover, innovative classroom management practices encouraged under supportive leadership environments strengthen students' discipline and academic performance, providing a pathway toward sustainable educational development (Manafa, 2025c).

Students' Discipline

Students' discipline is a critical indicator of school effectiveness, typically operationalized through indices such as behavioural infractions (e.g., bullying, vandalism, truancy), punctuality, attendance, classroom order, time-on-task and suspension or expulsion rates (Arar et al., 2024). It reflects both individual adherence to school rules and the school's capacity to prevent and manage misconduct through ethical leadership and structured practices. Schools that combine ethical leadership with consistent rule enforcement report lower rates of behavioural infractions. Cross-national studies indicate that exclusionary disciplinary measures (e.g., suspensions) often reflect leadership or climate deficits rather than inherent students' misbehaviour. Principals' visible supervision and fair enforcement of rules contribute to reduced misconduct and a more positive learning environment (Gregory et al., 2023; Mbarawii & Amabibi, 2024).

Attendance and punctuality are key indicators of students' discipline and engagement, shaped by need-supportive classroom practices such as clear routines, meaningful tasks and autonomy support. Principals' ethical leadership strengthens these practices by empowering teachers, fostering collaborative norms and aligning classroom management with school-wide expectations (Alias, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Rather than relying on punitive measures, which often exacerbate academic and social difficulties, evidence showed that ethical leadership combined with restorative approaches reduces suspension rates, promotes prosocial behaviour and cultivates a culture of fairness and accountability (Acar et al., 2025; Gillies et al., 2025). Teachers who perceive principals as ethical, supportive and administratively competent report greater trust, commitment and professionalism, which translate into stronger classroom control and coherent behavioural systems (Obiekwe & Ezeugbor, 2019; Da'as, 2023; Mbarawii & Amabibi, 2024). Although international and regional research consistently demonstrates these linkages, empirical studies in Anambra State remain scarce. Localized investigations are therefore essential to examine how teachers' perceptions of principals' integrity, fairness and role-modelling specifically relate to measurable indicators of students' discipline, such as attendance, infractions and suspension rates, within the unique challenges of overcrowding, limited resources and teacher shortages.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Brown and Treviño's Ethical Leadership Theory (2006), which conceptualizes ethical leadership as the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, as well as the promotion of such conduct to followers through communication, reinforcement, and decision-making. Ethical leaders are expected to model integrity, fairness and accountability, thereby shaping the ethical climate of their organizations.

In the educational context, this theory accentuates the principal's role as both a moral person and a moral manager. By embodying honesty, fairness and role-modelling, principals set behavioural standards that teachers and students are likely to emulate. Teachers' perceptions of these behaviours become critical because their trust, job commitment and willingness to enforce discipline depend on how consistently ethical leadership is demonstrated.

Thus, ethical leadership serves as a mediating force that links administrative behaviour to school discipline outcomes.

Applied to public secondary schools in Anambra State, Ethical Leadership Theory provides a robust framework for analyzing how teachers' perceptions of principals' ethical conduct influence student discipline. It frames discipline not merely as the enforcement of rules but as a socially constructed process shaped by fairness, role-modelling and moral consistency. In this way, the theory explained how ethical leadership at the top cascades into the daily practices of teachers, reinforcing discipline, collaboration and the overall moral fabric of the school community.

Methodology
This study adopted a correlational research design to investigate the relationship between teachers' perception of principals' ethical leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The correlational design was considered appropriate because it facilitates the determination of the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables without subjecting them to manipulation, as noted by Ikegbusi (2022:269). Through this design, the study was able to examine how teachers' perceptions of principals' ethical leadership practices are associated with the level of students' discipline in the selected public secondary schools.

The study population comprised 7,248 teachers across 269 public secondary schools in the six education zones of Anambra State, Nigeria. A sample of 725 teachers, representing 10% of the population, was drawn using a multi-stage sampling procedure. At the first stage, the schools were stratified into clusters based on the six existing education zones, namely: Aguata (52 schools), Awka (66 schools), Nnewi (50 schools), Ogidi (41 schools), Onitsha (32 schools), and Otuocha (28 schools). At the second stage, proportionate random sampling was applied to ensure equitable representation of teachers from each zone relative to its teacher population. Consequently, 100 teachers were drawn from Aguata Zone, 155 from Awka Zone, 189 from Nnewi Zone, 94 from Ogidi Zone, 129 from Onitsha Zone, and 58 from Otuocha Zone. This procedure enhanced representativeness, minimized sampling bias, and strengthened the generalizability of the study findings.

Data for this study were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising two standardized scales: The Teachers' Perception of Principals' Ethical Leadership Scale (TPPELS) and the Students' Discipline Scale (SDS). The instrument was designed to capture teachers' perceptions of principals' ethical leadership and measures of students' discipline, thereby providing valid and reliable data for examining the relationships between the variables in public secondary schools.
The questionnaire was organized into three sections:
- **Section A** elicited respondents' demographic information, including gender, years of teaching experience, academic qualification and school location. These variables provided background data for subgroup and comparative analyses.
- **Section B** contained the **Teachers' Perception of Principals' Ethical Leadership Scale (TPPELS),** which assessed teachers' perception of their principals' ethical leadership practices. The scale comprised 30 items distributed across three domains: integrity (10 items), fairness (10 items) and role modelling (10 items). Responses were rated on a four-point Likert scale: *Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2)* and *Strongly Disagree (1).*
- **Section C** featured the **Students' Discipline Scale (SDS)**, designed to measure the level of students' discipline in public secondary schools as perceived by teachers. The SDS consisted of 20 items covering core indicators of discipline such as compliance with school rules and regulations, punctuality, respect for authority and socially responsible behaviour. Items were rated on the same four-point Likert scale to ensure consistency in measurement.

To establish validity, the instruments were reviewed by three experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation from Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam. Their feedback informed revisions that enhanced clarity, relevance and alignment with the study's objectives. Reliability was determined through a pilot test conducted with 30 teachers drawn from schools outside the main study sample. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were computed to establish internal consistency, yielding average reliability indices of 0.80 for the **TPPELS** and 0.87 for the **SDS**, which indicated acceptable to high reliability of the instruments.

The administration of the questionnaire was conducted in person by the researcher and five research assistants, with the active cooperation of school authorities. To minimize response bias, respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, while clear instructions were provided prior to completion. The instruments were

retrieved immediately after administration to maximize both response rate and data quality. Out of the 725 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 700 were duly completed and deemed usable for analysis, while 25 copies were invalidated due to incomplete responses, inconsistencies or improper markings. This yielded a valid response rate of 96.6%, which is considered highly adequate for robust statistical analysis. As noted by Obi et al. (2022), response rates above 90% are generally regarded as excellent in survey research, further underscoring the reliability of the data collected.

Data collected through the TPPELS and SDS were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 26). Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to summarize respondents' perceptions, while inferential statistics (Pearson's correlation and multiple regression) were employed to test the research questions and hypotheses.

For inferential analysis, Pearson's product-moment correlation and multiple regression were employed to address the research questions and test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Pearson's correlation was used to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between teachers' perception of each dimension of principals' ethical leadership (integrity, fairness and role modelling) and students' discipline in public secondary schools. Multiple regression was applied to determine the joint relationship of the three dimensions of ethical leadership with students' discipline. This analytical approach was considered appropriate, given the study's correlational design and focus on establishing associations rather than causal or predictive effects.

The interpretation of correlation and regression coefficients followed the guideline suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2023). Coefficients were classified as negligible (0.00–0.20), low (0.21–0.40), moderate (0.41–0.60), high (0.61–0.80), or very high (0.81–1.00). The sign of each coefficient was also considered: positive values indicated a direct relationship, while negative values indicated an inverse relationship. Hypotheses were tested using *p*-values to determine statistical significance. Where $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming a statistically significant relationship between the variables. Conversely, where $p > 0.05$, the null hypothesis was retained, indicating no significant relationship. Through this approach, the study provided empirical evidence on both the individual and combined relationships between teachers' perception of principals' ethical leadership (integrity, fairness and role modelling) and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Results
Research Question 1: What is the relationship between teachers' perception of principals' integrity and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 1: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the Relationship between Teachers' Perception of Principals' Integrity and Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

Variables	N	Teachers' Perception of Principals' Integrity	Students' Discipline	Remarks
Teachers' Perception of Principals' Integrity	700	1.00	0.754**	
				Positive Relationship
Students' Discipline	700	0.754**	1.00	

(**$p < 0.05$, significant)

The summary result of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient in Table 1 showed that there is a high positive relationship between teachers' perception of principals' integrity and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The analysis revealed a positive correlation coefficient value of 0.754, which indicated a strong positive relationship between the two variables. This suggested that students' discipline is significantly influenced by teachers' perception of their principals' integrity. In practical terms, it means that when principals are perceived as persons of integrity, upholding honesty, fairness, consistency and transparency, teachers are more likely to support school rules and students are more likely to comply with established disciplinary standards. A unit increase in principals' integrity leads to a 0.754 (75.4%) increase in students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Principals who demonstrate integrity not only strengthen teacher trust and organizational harmony but also indirectly enhance students' moral conduct and discipline.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between teachers' perception of principals' fairness and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the Relationship between Teachers' Perception of Principals' Fairness and Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

Variables	N	Teachers' Perception of Principals' Fairness	Students' Discipline	Remarks
Teachers' Perception of Principals' Fairness	700	1.00	0.693**	
				Positive Relationship
Students' Discipline	700	0.693**	1.00	

(**p < 0.05, significant)

The summary result of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient in Table 2 showed that there is a high positive relationship between teachers' perception of principals' fairness and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The analysis revealed a correlation coefficient value of 0.693, which indicated a strong positive relationship between the two variables. This suggested that students' discipline is influenced by teachers' perception of their principals' fairness. In other words, when teachers perceive their principals as fair, treating staff and students equitably, avoiding favouritism and applying rules consistently, students are more likely to comply with school regulations and maintain acceptable behaviour. A unit increase in principals' fairness leads to a 0.693 (69.3%) increase in students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The result implied that fairness in school leadership is a critical determinant of students' behaviour. Principals who consistently demonstrate fairness not only foster trust among teachers but also create an enabling environment where students recognize and respect the importance of discipline.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between teachers' perception of principals' role modelling and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 3: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the Relationship between Teachers' Perception of Principals' Role Modelling and Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

Variables	N	Teachers' Perception of Principals' Role Modelling	Students' Discipline	Remarks
Teachers' Perception of Principals' Role Modelling	700	1.00	0.726**	
				Positive Relationship
Students' Discipline	700	0.726**	1.00	

(**p < 0.05, significant)

The summary result of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient in Table 3 showed that there is a high positive relationship between teachers' perception of principals' role modelling and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The analysis revealed a correlation coefficient value of 0.726, indicating a strong positive relationship between the two variables. This suggested that students' discipline is influenced by teachers' perception of principals' role modelling. In other words, when teachers perceive their principals as exemplary role models, demonstrating professionalism, integrity, fairness and respect, students are more likely to adopt positive attitudes and maintain discipline within the school. A unit increase in principals' role modelling leads to a 0.726 (72.6%) increase in students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The implication of this finding is that principals' behaviour serves as a powerful example for both teachers and students. Principals who embody discipline and ethical conduct set standards that encourage compliance with rules, thereby promoting a conducive environment for effective teaching, learning and character development.

Research Question 4: *What is the joint relationship between teachers' overall perception of principals' ethical leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State?*

Table 4: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis on the Joint Relationship between Teachers' Overall Perception of Principals' Ethical Leadership and Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	R	R^2
Constant	1.184	0.396	-	2.989		
Integrity	0.427	0.181	0.452	2.360		
Fairness	0.318	0.172	0.364	1.849	0.861[a]	0.741
Role Modelling	0.497	0.209	0.489	2.379		

The summary result of multiple regression analysis in Table 4 revealed that there is a **strong positive joint relationship** between teachers' overall perception of principals' ethical leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The regression coefficient value of **R = 0.861** indicated that improvements in principals' ethical leadership lead to an **86.1% increase** in students' discipline. The coefficient of determination, **R^2 = 0.741**, showed that **74.1% of the variations in students' discipline** are explained by teachers' perception of principals' ethical leadership, reflecting a very high explanatory power. Among the indices, **role modelling (β = 0.489, t = 2.379)** contributed the most to students' discipline, followed by **integrity (β = 0.452, t = 2.360),** while **fairness (β = 0.364, t = 1.849)** made a positive but comparatively smaller contribution. This suggested that when principals act as role models, uphold honesty and demonstrate fairness, students are more likely to internalize discipline and comply with school norms. From an **international perspective,** this finding aligns with global evidence that ethical school leadership fosters trust, fairness and accountability, which in turn enhance students' behaviour and discipline.

Test of Hypotheses
Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between teachers' perception of principals' integrity and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 5: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the Significant Relationship between Teachers' Perception of Principals' Integrity and Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

Variables	N	Principals' Integrity	Students' Discipline	p-value	Remarks
Principals' Integrity	700	1.00	0.694**		
Students' Discipline	700	0.694**	1.00		
Pearson r-value				0.001	High

(**p < 0.05, significant**)

The summary result of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient in Table 5 revealed a high and significant positive relationship between teachers' perception of principals' integrity and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State, with a correlation coefficient of r = 0.694 and a p-value = 0.001. Since the p-value (0.001) is less than the significance threshold of 0.05, the study rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that a significant relationship existed between the two variables. This result implied that when principals demonstrate integrity, such as honesty, transparency and consistency in decision-making, students' discipline is positively reinforced. Teachers' perception of their principals as individuals of integrity creates a culture of trust and fairness, which translates into stronger adherence to school rules and respectful behaviour among students. This finding resonates with global studies on ethical leadership, which emphasize integrity as a cornerstone of effective school governance. Integrity-driven leadership not only enhances institutional trust but also fosters an environment where students' discipline becomes self-sustaining.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between teachers' perception of principals' fairness and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 6: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the Significant Relationship between Teachers' Perception of Principals' Fairness and Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

Variables	N	Principals' Fairness	Students' Discipline	p-value	Remarks
Principals' Fairness	700	1.00	0.712**		
Students' Discipline	700	0.712**	1.00		
Pearson r-value				**0.001**	**High**

(p < 0.05, significant

The summary result of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient in Table 6 revealed a high and significant positive relationship between teachers' perception of principals' fairness and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The correlation coefficient was r = 0.712 with a p-value = 0.001. Since the p-value (0.001) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the study rejected the null hypothesis and established that a significant relationship exists between teachers' perception of principals' fairness and students' discipline. This finding indicated that when principals treat teachers and students fairly, upholding equity, justice and impartiality, students are more likely to respect authority, comply with school rules and demonstrate disciplined behaviour. Fairness in school leadership promotes an environment of trust and accountability that translates into improved discipline outcomes. From an international perspective, this aligns with research showing that fairness is a critical dimension of ethical leadership and a strong predictor of positive organizational behavior in schools. Fairness not only strengthens teachers' morale but also creates a culture of justice where students model respectful and disciplined conduct.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between teachers' perception of principals' role modelling and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 7: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the Significant Relationship between Teachers' Perception of Principals' Role Modelling and Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

Variables	N	Principals' Role Modelling	Students' Discipline	p-value	Remarks
Principals' Role Modelling	700	1.00	0.726**		
Students' Discipline	700	0.726**	1.00		
Pearson r-value				**0.001**	**High**

(p < 0.05, significant

The summary result of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient in Table 7 revealed a high and significant positive relationship between teachers' perception of principals' role modelling and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The correlation coefficient was r = 0.726 with a p-value = 0.001. Since the p-value (0.001) is less than the 0.05 significance level, the study rejected the null hypothesis and confirmed that a significant relationship exists between teachers' perception of principals' role modelling and students' discipline. This finding implied that principals who serve as effective role models, demonstrating ethical conduct, professionalism, respect and discipline in their daily interactions, positively influence students' behaviour. Teachers' perception of principals as role models reinforces credibility and authority, which in turn encourages students to emulate good behaviour and comply with school rules. From an international perspective, this supports global evidence that role modelling is a cornerstone of ethical leadership in education. Leaders who embody the values they expect from others shape school culture more effectively than those who lead by directives alone.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant joint relationship between teachers' overall perception of principals' ethical leadership (integrity, fairness, and role modelling) and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 8: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis on the Joint Relationship between Teachers' Overall Perception of Principals' Ethical Leadership and Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients				
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	R	R^2	p-value
Constant	1.184	0.396	-	2.989			
Integrity	0.427	0.181	0.452	2.360			
Fairness	0.318	0.172	0.364	1.849	0.861[a]	0.741	0.001
Role Modelling	0.497	0.209	0.489	2.379			

The summary result of multiple regression analysis in Table 8 revealed a strong and significant joint relationship between teachers' overall perception of principals' ethical leadership (integrity, fairness and role modelling) and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The regression coefficient value of R = 0.861 showed that principals' ethical leadership strongly predicts students' discipline, while the coefficient of determination R^2 = 0.741 indicated that 74.1% of the variations in students' discipline are explained by principals' ethical leadership. The model was statistically significant with a p-value = 0.001 (p < 0.05), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Thus, teachers' overall perception of principals' ethical leadership has a significant joint relationship with students' discipline. Among the predictors, role modelling (β = 0.489, t = 2.379) made the strongest contribution, followed by integrity (β = 0.452, t = 2.360), while fairness (β = 0.364, t = 1.849) contributed positively but less strongly. This implied that principals who act as credible role models, demonstrate integrity and treat others fairly are most effective in enhancing students' discipline. From an international perspective, this aligns with global scholarship, emphasizing that ethical leadership is multidimensional and that its combined effect shapes school climate and students' behaviour more powerfully than single factors.
Discussion

Relationship between Teachers' Perception of Principals' Integrity and Students' Discipline
The findings revealed a high and significant positive relationship between teachers' perception of principals' integrity and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The correlation coefficients (r = 0.754 and r = 0.694, p = 0.001) indicated that when principals consistently demonstrate honesty, transparency and fairness in decision-making, students are more likely to exhibit discipline through compliance with school rules, respect for authority and positive peer interactions. This suggested that principals' integrity functions as a behavioural model that shapes the ethical climate of schools and indirectly reinforces students' self-regulation and moral conduct. These findings align with the studies of **Adebayo and Musa (2023)** and **Kwarteng and Asare (2024),** who both established that integrity-driven leadership enhances school trust, thereby reducing disciplinary issues and creating a stable learning environment. Their works emphasized that principals who are consistent in words and actions foster both teachers' cooperation and students' compliance. In contrast, the present findings differ from those of **Ikechukwu and Nnamdi (2023)** and **Rahman (2024),** who reported that principals' personal integrity alone may not strongly influence student discipline in contexts where socioeconomic instability, parental neglect, or peer group pressures are more dominant determinants of behavior. These studies argued that integrity must be complemented with strong disciplinary frameworks and counselling programs to achieve sustained improvements in student behavior.

Relationship between Teachers' Perception of Principals' Fairness and Students' Discipline
The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between teachers' perception of principals' fairness and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The Pearson correlation coefficients (r = 0.693 and r = 0.712, p = 0.001) showed that students' discipline improved when principals were perceived to be fair, equitable and impartial in their leadership practices. Specifically, when principals avoided favoritism, applied rules consistently and treated both staff and students with justice, students were more likely to comply with school rules, respect authority and demonstrate responsible behaviour. This accentuates fairness as a vital ethical dimension of school leadership that builds trust among teachers while simultaneously promoting students' accountability and self-discipline. These findings are consistent with the studies of **Okeke and Chinedu (2023)** and **Mensah and Boateng (2024),** who reported that fairness in leadership enhances teachers' trust and reduces incidences of indiscipline among students. Their studies highlighted that fair treatment by principals promotes a sense of justice that students emulate, thereby contributing to a disciplined school climate. However, the present findings diverge from the works of **Adekunle and Bamidele (2023)** and **Zhou (2024),** who found that fairness alone may not be sufficient to guarantee student discipline, especially in contexts where socioeconomic challenges, peer influence, and weak parental involvement play stronger roles in shaping student behavior. These studies argued that while fairness is necessary, it must be complemented by clear behavioural expectations, effective counselling services and robust disciplinary structures.

Relationship between Teachers' Perception of Principals' Role Modelling and Students' Discipline
The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between teachers' perception of principals' role modelling and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.726, p = 0.001) indicated that when principals are perceived as exemplary role models, demonstrating integrity, fairness, professionalism and respect, students are more likely to exhibit disciplined behavior. This suggested that principals' personal conduct sets a behavioural standard for both teachers and students, thereby promoting a culture of accountability and respect within the school. Principals who embody discipline and ethical practices reinforce credibility and encourage students to comply with rules, creating a conducive environment for learning and character development. These findings are consistent with the work of **Okoro and Alade (2024),** who argued that role modelling in school leadership directly strengthens students' discipline by providing visible examples of ethical conduct and responsible behaviour. In contrast, **Zhang (2023)** found that while role modelling is important, it is often insufficient in contexts where external social influences such as peer pressure and weak parental supervision play a dominant role in shaping students' behaviour.

Conclusion
This study established that principals' ethical leadership, anchored on integrity, fairness and role modelling, significantly relate with students' discipline in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The findings highlighted that when school leaders embody ethical values, they create a culture of trust, accountability and respect that promotes positive students' behaviour. Ethical leadership is therefore not just an administrative necessity but a strategic driver of effective schooling. Strengthening principal preparation and policy frameworks to prioritize ethical competencies remains pivotal for sustaining discipline and advancing educational quality.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:
1. Principals should undergo structured ethical leadership training emphasizing honesty, transparency and consistency to strengthen trust within the school community and foster a culture where students internalize discipline as a shared value.
2. Principals should adopt impartial approaches in decision-making and consistently enforce school rules, such fairness would not only enhance teachers' morale but also encourage students to comply willingly with regulations, thereby reducing disciplinary infractions.
3. Principals must consciously embody professionalism, respect and ethical conduct, by serving as credible examples, this would inspire students to emulate positive behaviours, creating a disciplined and supportive school climate.
4. Principals' preparation and professional development should prioritize ethical leadership, particularly integrity, fairness and role modelling, as this would significantly enhance students' discipline, promote a positive school climate and sustain improved educational outcomes.

References
Acar, S., Yildiz, G., & Cho, E. (2025). Classroom management interventions and students' achievement: A meta-analysis. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 141*, 104666. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2024.104666

Adebayo, F. O., & Musa, T. A. (2023). Ethical leadership and students' discipline: Evidence from Nigerian secondary schools. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management, 11*(2), 145–162. https://doi.org/10.17583/ijelm.2023.10255

Adekunle, S. T., & Bamidele, J. O. (2023). Fairness and the limits of ethical leadership in promoting students' discipline in Nigerian secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Policy and Leadership, 18*(2), 134–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/jepl.2023.18214

Alias, N. A. (2024). Ethical leadership and teachers' commitment: A pathway to sustainable school improvement. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management, 12*(1), 45–62.

Arar, K., Abuhammad, S., & Shapira-Lishchinsky, O. (2024). Ethical leadership and students' discipline in multicultural schools: A cross-country perspective. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 52*(3), 410–428.

Brown, M. E., & Treviño, L. K. (2006). Ethical leadership: A review and future directions. *The Leadership Quarterly, 17*(6), 595–616.

Brown, M. E., Treviño, L. K., & Harrison, D. A. (2025). Ethical leadership: A social learning perspective for construct development and testing. *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes, 107*(4), 117–134.

Choi, Y. (2024). *From the best practices of successful school leaders: Developing and validating the principals' competencies inventory in South Korea. Leadership in Education Studies, 10*(4), 161-173.

Da'as, R. A. (2023). Principals' ethical leadership and teachers' trust: The mediating role of school climate. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 51*(2), 251–269.

Egwu, J. U. & Mbonu, O. A. (2023). Managing secondary education for sustainable development in Anambra State through adequate resource mobilisation: Challenges and strategies for improvement. *Journal of Education in Developing Areas, 31*(2), 415-428.

Gillies, R. M., Manafa, I., & Martin, A. J. (2025). Cooperative learning, discipline and achievement: A meta-analysis of classroom-based interventions. *Review of Educational Research, 95*(2), 233–262.

Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Mediratta, K. (2023). Reducing disparities in school discipline: The role of leadership and teachers' practices. *Educational Researcher, 52*(1), 41–51. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X221146789

Ikechukwu, P. E., & Nnamdi, C. J. (2023). Leadership integrity and the challenges of students' discipline in public schools. *Journal of Education and Society, 33*(1), 78–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/jes.2023.33105

Ikegbusi, N. G. & Chigbo-Okeke, U. C. (2016). Teachers' awareness of trespass to students as a correlate of students' discipline in secondary schools in Anambra state. *Unizik Journal of Educational Management and Policy*, *1*(1), 196-205.

Ikegbusi, N. G. & Manafa, F. U. (2023). School discipline policies and teacher-student relationships as correlate of students' behaviour in public secondary schools in Lagos state. *Int'l Journal of Research Educators and Scientific Development (IJRESD)*, *1*(2), 1-24.

Ikegbusi, N. G. (2016). Management competency needs of principals for effective administration of secondary schools. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Education and Technology*, *3*(3), 61- 67.

Ikegbusi, N. G. (2022). Research design and stages in research design. In N. J. Obikeze (Ed.), *Basic research method: Principles and techniques* (pp. 264-280). Faculty of Education, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus.

Ikegbusi, N. G., Chigbo-Okeke, U. C. & Modebelu, M. N. (2016). Students' conception of possible methods to control indiscipline in secondary schools, *Journal of Global Research in Education and Social Science, 7*(3), 151-159.

Ikegbusi, N. G., Manafa, F. U. & Edor, J. J. (2025). Relationship between principals' leadership styles and school administrative effectiveness in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Research & Development*, *8*(3), 1-16.

Ikegbusi, N. G., Manafa, F. U. & Iheanacho, R. C. (2022). Administrative deficiencies and teachers' job achievement in public secondary schools in Anambra state. *COOU Journal of Educational Research, 7*(1), 284- 299.

Kraft, M. A., Bright, D. S. & Gordian, H. P. (2024). School climate, teacher characteristics and school discipline. *Educational Researcher, 53*(2), 120–136. Retrieved from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/23328584241263860

Kwarteng, E., & Asare, J. B. (2024). Principals' integrity and students' conduct in Ghanaian secondary schools: A correlational study. *African Journal of Educational Research and Development, 12*(1), 25–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/ajerd.2024.12014

Manafa, F. U. (2025a). Influence of motivation on public secondary school teachers' job commitment in Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State. *UNIZIK Journal of Educational research and policy studies, 19*(4), 296- 315.

Manafa, F. U. (2025b). Principals' administrative competencies as a correlates of teachers' job retention in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. *UNIZIK Journal of Educational Laws and Leadership Studies, 2*(1), 205- 220.

Manafa, F. U. (2025c). Teachers' innovative classroom management practices as predictors of students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Management and Social Sciences (MJMSS), 2*(1), 143- 152.

Manafa, F. U., & Onwuchulum, F. C. (2025). Educational technologies and 21st century skills as predictors of students' sustainable development competencies in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Law, Education and Humanities (MJLEH), 2*(1), 137- 147.

Mbarawii, P., & Amabibi, T. (2024). Teachers' perception of ethical leadership and its impact on discipline in secondary schools. *Journal of Contemporary Educational Research in Africa, 9*(1), 113–128.

Mensah, K., & Boateng, P. A. (2024). Principals' fairness and students' behaviour in Ghanaian public schools: A correlational study. *African Journal of School Leadership and Policy, 12*(1), 51–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/ajslp.2024.12011

Obi, I., Obi, Z. & Ikegbusi, N. (2022). Population and sampling techniques. In N. J. Obikeze (Ed.), Basic research method: Principles and techniques (pp. 86-104). Igbariam: Faculty of Education, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus.

Obiekwe, O., & Ezeugbor, C. (2019). Principals' ethical leadership practices as correlates of teachers' job satisfaction in secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Research and Development, 14*(2), 55–67.

Okeke, V. C., & Chinedu, O. M. (2023). Teachers' perceptions of fairness and its influence on students' discipline in Nigerian public secondary schools. *International Journal of Ethics and Education, 15*(3), 221–238.

Okeke-James, N. J., Chike, H. N., & Agu, N. A. (2023). Discipline in primary education in Nigeria. *Department of Educational Management and Policy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.* Manuscript.

Okoro, F. N., & Alade, T. M. (2024). Principals as role models: Ethical leadership and its impact on students' discipline in Nigerian secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, 18*(1), 45–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/jelps.2024.11805

Olatunde, D. B., & Atanda, A. I. (2024). Effective principal management practices and students' discipline in public senior secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Administration and Leadership, 12*(2), 75–90. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385747191

Onwuzuruigbo, O., & Colleagues. (2025). Principals' ethical leadership practices as correlates of teachers' job commitment in public secondary schools in Anambra State. *International Journal of Research in Education and Social Development, 3*(1), 101–118. Retrieved from https://www.openjournals.ijaar.org/index.php/ijresd/article/view/1187

Rahman, H. (2024). Socioeconomic factors and the limits of ethical leadership on students' behaviour. *International Review of Education, 70*(2), 201–219. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-024-10049-2

ResearchSpace, University of KwaZulu-Natal. (2024). Ethical leadership in schools: Voices of school principals and educators (South Africa). *Journal of School Leadership and Ethics, 7*(2), 101–120. Retrieved from https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/items/73151210-540d-49ad-b516-72fcd13c0ef9/full

Siahaan, D., et al. (2023). Ethical leadership of public-school principals and its impact. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy, 10*(1), 33–50. Retrieved from https://journals.indexcopernicus.com/api/file/viewByFileId/2313865

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2021). Civil Rights Data Collection: Students' discipline and school climate report. *U.S. Department of Education Report,* 1(1), 1–88. Retrieved from https://www.ed.gov/media/document/crdc-discipline-school-climate-reportpdf-21409.pdf

UNESCO. (2023). *Global education monitoring report: Promoting ethics and positive behaviour in schools.* United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Wang, M. T., Degol, J., & Ryan, A. (2024). Need-supportive teaching and students' motivation: A systematic review. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 116*(1), 21–39. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000789

Zhang, Y. (2023). Beyond school leadership: Social determinants of students' behaviour in Chinese high schools. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 43*(4), 612–628. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2023.1892104

Zhou, L. (2024**).** Beyond fairness: Structural and social determinants of students' misbehaviour in Chinese high schools**.** *International Review of Education, 70*(1), 79–96. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-024-10021-0