



Exploring the Relationship between Ethical Leadership and Job Commitment of Non-Teaching Staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

Ngene Adaku Ngozi ^{1*}, Ogban Doris Emmanuel ², Ojeka John Ashibene ³, Ogbudu Gloria Ada ⁴, Oweikpodor Vera Gbaeprekumo ⁵

¹ Department of Educational and Policy Management, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nigeria

²⁻⁴ Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar, Nigeria

⁵ Department of Educational Management and Foundations, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

* Corresponding Author: Ngene Adaku Ngozi

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Abstract

Ethical leaders are individuals who inspire, motivate, and cultivate an ethical workplace culture that promotes the well-being of employees. In response to the growing concern over ethically questionable practices, interest in ethical leadership has increased significantly among scholars, particularly regarding its potential influence on employee commitment. This study examined the relationship between ethical leadership and job commitment among non-teaching staff at the University of Calabar. The research adopted a correlational design and was conducted within the University of Calabar, located in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria. The study population comprised 123 non-teaching staff drawn from three major administrative units: Registry, Bursary, and Library. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select the participants. Data were collected using a 16-items questionnaire developed by the researcher, titled Ethical School Leadership and Staff Job Commitment Questionnaire (ESLSJCQ). The questionnaire was structured on a four-point modified Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). Its face and content validity were confirmed by three experts from the Departments of Educational Management and Measurement & Evaluation at the Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar. To ensure reliability, a pilot test was conducted with 50 non-teaching staff from the University of Cross River State (UNICROSS). The internal consistency of the instrument was assessed using the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding reliability coefficients ranging from 0.88 to 0.92. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics and simple linear regression analysis (SPSS Version 21) were used to answer the research questions. Hypotheses were tested using ANOVA and regression coefficients at the 0.05 level of significance, analyzed with SPSS Version 27. Results were presented in tabular form. The findings indicated that ethical leadership significantly predicts job commitment among non-teaching staff at the University of Calabar. The study concluded that ethical leadership is a vital factor in enhancing staff commitment. Specifically, when university leaders demonstrate integrity, fairness, transparency, and respect, non-teaching staff are more likely to be punctual, dedicated, and willing to go beyond their assigned duties. Based on these findings, the study recommends that the University of Calabar institutionalize regular ethical leadership training for all senior administrative staff. Such training should emphasize core values like integrity, fairness, and accountability, as a strategic means of strengthening job commitment among non-teaching personnel.

Keywords: Ethical, School Leadership, Job Commitment, Non-Teaching Staff, University

Introduction

University non-teaching staff are personnel tasked with crucial administrative, technical, and support duties that keep the institution running efficiently, even though they are not directly engaged in teaching. These roles encompass positions such as administrative assistants, librarians, ICT experts, accountants, clerks, and security staff.

Their work involves a wide range of responsibilities, including managing institutional records, overseeing financial operations, maintaining campus facilities, and providing logistical and technical support to academic programs. The overall functionality and success of a university are closely tied to the commitment of these employees. Job commitment (JC) has attracted considerable interest from both researchers and practitioners, resulting in multiple definitions (Lee & Cha, 2015, as cited in Mitonga-Monga *et al.*, 2024). A common conceptualization frames JC as a psychological bond between employees and their organization, emphasizing work behaviours and the willingness to remain (Meyer & Allen, 1990; Mitonga-Monga & Flotman, 2018; Obona *et al.*, 2024) ^[17, 22]. In this study, non-teaching staff job commitment refers to the extent to which administrative and support personnel feel emotionally and psychologically connected to their university, as evidenced by their loyalty, sustained effort, and alignment with its goals. It entails the performance of assigned duty so as to meet predetermined objectives (Madukwe *et al.*, 2024) ^[12]. Meyer and Allen (1990) identified three core dimensions of JC—*affective*, *continuance*, and *normative*—which remain the most widely referenced components (Mitonga-Monga, 2020, as cited in Mitonga-Monga *et al.*, 2023) ^[18, 19]. *Affective* commitment denotes an employee's emotional attachment and sense of belonging to the institution, driving active engagement (Onukwu, 2020, as cited in Obona *et al.*, 2024) ^[22]. *Continuance* commitment reflects a determination to stay based on the perceived absence of better alternatives, making departure seem too costly. *Normative* commitment arises from a sense of moral obligation or duty, whereby employees feel they ought to remain because it is the right and honorable choice. Together, these three dimensions influence staff behaviour and play a crucial role in determining how effectively institutional goals are met (Obona *et al.*, 2024; Fayda-Kinik, 2022; Mitonga-Monga & Flotman, 2018) ^[23, 3, 17].

In every organization, when staff are committed, they contribute significantly to organizational stability, efficient service delivery, and the realization of educational goals. However, a lack of commitment from can negatively impact progress, overall goals attainment. In the university setting, non-teaching staff can demonstrate affective commitment by genuinely identifying with and taking pride in the institution's mission, continuance commitment by remaining because of the significant financial or professional costs they would incur if they left, and normative commitment by feeling a moral obligation to reciprocate the support and opportunities the university has provided. Recent literature reveals a troubling decline in teachers' performance, marked by historically low morale and a significant rise in absenteeism (Egbo *et al.*, 2025). A considerable number of teachers consistently arrive late and leave before the official closing time (Difoni *et al.*, 2025) ^[4]. Additionally, many lack the necessary skills to safeguard sensitive student and staff information, increasing the risk of data breaches, unauthorized access, and mishandling of confidential records (Iyaji *et al.*, 2024) ^[10].

It has been observed that many non-teaching staff at the University of Calabar, Cross River State, exhibit low levels of job commitment. This is evident in their indifferent attitudes, such as showing little emotional attachment to the institution, arriving late to work, demonstrating minimal

enthusiasm, and treating students and colleagues with disregard. Some staff openly pursue alternative job opportunities or engage in personal businesses during official working hours, suggesting they do not value their current positions despite the prevailing economic uncertainty. Additionally, widespread daily issues like absenteeism, loitering, poor record-keeping, and neglect of duties indicate a weakened sense of moral responsibility toward the university's objectives. Collectively, these behaviours compromise administrative efficiency and obstruct the achievement of the university's institutional goals.

Given the ongoing challenge of poor job commitment among non-teaching staff, ethical leadership presents a viable and sustainable solution. It promotes a work environment characterized by fairness, respect, accountability, and transparency. By addressing the root causes of low commitment—such as perceived injustice, lack of recognition, and mistrust—ethical leaders can foster a climate of integrity and trust that encourages greater loyalty, engagement, and productivity among staff. Furthermore, this heightened sense of commitment reduces the likelihood of employees leaving the organization (Imam & Kim, 2022; Xu, Loi & Ngo, 2016) ^[9].

In the context of this study, ethical school leadership refers to the exercise of school leadership based on core ethical values such as integrity, fairness, transparency, accountability, respect, empathy, justice, and a dedication to the collective well-being. Brown and Treviño (2005) as cited in Mitonga-Monga *et al.* (2023) ^[19] described as the demonstration of normatively appropriate behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, as well as the promotion of such conduct among followers through open communication, reinforcement, and sound decision-making. According to Tracy (2016) ^[28], ethical leadership entails behaviors that can cultivate employees' sense of responsibility, tolerance, integrity, and honesty. Ethical leaders are perceived to exhibit actions that align with societal and organizational norms, evident in how they interact with others and make decisions (Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005 as cited in Mitonga-Monga *et al.*, 2023; Ibrahim & Mayende, 2018) ^[19, 8]. As noted by Hartog (2015) ^[7] and Mitonga-Monga (2020) ^[18], ethical leaders are trusted, principled, and fair decision-makers who possess the competencies necessary to lead with moral clarity and purpose.

Fundamental ethical principles include honesty, equality, impartiality, responsibility, commitment to the organization, respect for human rights, compliance with legal standards, tolerance, and openness (Şentürk, 2011) ^[27]. According to Madukwe *et al.* (2024) ^[12], leadership practices such as participatory decision-making, shared governance, system thinking, and delegation of responsibilities create a goal-oriented atmosphere for efficient goal attainment. Guided by values such as integrity, honesty, fairness, and empathy, ethical leaders consistently prioritize doing what is right over what is merely convenient. Employees who perceive their leader as trustworthy are more likely to be actively engaged and aligned with the organization's mission and values. They willingly devote their job commitment to support both the organization and a leader who embodies honesty, respect, and selflessness.

Ethical school leadership and job commitment

Numerous studies underscore the crucial role of ethical leadership in improving staff job commitment. Obona *et al.*

(2024) ^[22] conducted a study in 16 public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, to explore how innovative leadership practices—such as digital communication, empowerment, and supervision—affect teachers' job commitment. From a sample of 272 out of 838 teachers, data were gathered using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using Pearson correlation at a 0.05 significance level. Results indicated a significant positive link between all three strategies and teachers' job commitment. Sabir (2021) ^[25] investigated how teachers in Punjab, Pakistan perceive ethical behaviors in school leadership and their influence on teacher commitment. The study, which included 320 teachers and tested the Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ), found a significant positive association between ethical leadership and teacher commitment. While age and gender had no effect, seniority influenced perceptions. Ethical leadership particularly enhanced teachers' commitment to both the profession and teaching.

Also, Özdoğan and Sarier (2024) ^[25] performed a meta-analysis of 47 empirical studies with 18,423 participants to assess how principals' ethical leadership affects teachers' organizational attitudes and behaviors. Using a random effects model, they found strong positive impacts on organizational trust, justice, motivation, job satisfaction, and overall commitment. In another study, Zaki (2022) ^[29] explored the relationship between ethical leadership and teacher job satisfaction among 374 secondary school teachers in Kedah, Malaysia. Utilizing three standardized tools (ELW, JSS, TCM-ECS-R), she applied multiple statistical tests. Findings revealed that ethical leadership significantly boosted job satisfaction, and both variables strongly predicted organizational commitment.

Abuzaid (2018) ^[1] studied employees in 13 Jordanian commercial banks and discovered that ethical leadership positively influenced affective and normative commitment, though not continuance commitment. Similarly, Mitonga-Monga *et al.* (2023) ^[19] reported from a South African steel firm that ethical leadership correlated positively with stronger employee commitment. Mbarawii and Amabibi (2024) ^[14] examined 731 teachers from public secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria, using stratified random sampling and reliable Likert-scale questionnaires. Analysis showed that principals' ethical behaviors in collaboration and accountability significantly enhanced teacher job commitment, with accountability having a particularly strong effect.

Additionally, Mishra and Tikoria (2021) ^[21] studied 537 doctors in Indian hospitals and found that ethical leadership significantly improved the organizational climate, which then positively influenced doctors' job commitment. The study used SEM to confirm this indirect relationship, indicating that leadership shapes workplace culture and thereby commitment. In another study, Bhandari and Subedi (2024) ^[2] surveyed 391 employees in Nepalese cooperative societies using convenience sampling. Their analysis, using Hayes's PROCESS Macro for mediation, showed that ethical leadership significantly affected job commitment, with leadership trust fully mediating the relationship. This suggests that ethical behavior builds trust, which then enhances employee commitment. In a study, Santiago Torner (2025) ^[26] analyzed data from 448 professionals in Colombia's electricity sector to investigate the mediating role of work self-efficacy in the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment. Ethical

leadership increased affective and normative commitment and the "investment" aspect of continuance commitment, with self-efficacy explaining much of this effect.

Statement of the problem

Stakeholders at the University of Calabar expect non-teaching staff to exhibit strong job commitment, reflected through punctuality, adherence to official work hours, and active involvement in institutional responsibilities beyond their designated roles such as voluntary participation in student welfare activities or campus maintenance. However, personal observations and informal assessments conducted over the last two academic sessions across major administrative units (including the Registry, Bursary, and Library, Estate Division), showed that a significant number of non-teaching staff are falling short of these expectations. Many have consistently reported late to work, taken unscheduled or extended breaks, and failed to complete assigned tasks promptly. This issue is particularly severe in departments that interface directly with students, where irregular attendance and a lack of extra-role behavior have resulted in delays in processing documents, prolonged maintenance issues, and general inefficiency in critical service delivery. Feedback from departmental heads also indicates that existing corrective measures such as informal counseling and repeated verbal reminders have yielded minimal results.

In an attempt to address these challenges, the university management has implemented several strategies, including routine performance evaluations, periodic in-house training on institutional values, and the introduction of a modest "Employee of the Month" reward scheme. Despite these interventions, staff low commitment remains prevalent, highlighting the limitations of procedural and motivational strategies when not backed by strong leadership. It is against this backdrop that the current study is necessitated, to explore whether the adoption of ethical leadership practices by administrators could serve as a more effective approach to enhancing job commitment among non-teaching staff and restoring service efficiency across the institution.

Purpose of the study

The study explored the relationship between ethical leadership and job commitment of non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study sought to find out whether: Ethical school leadership predict the job commitment of non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State.

Research question

The research is guided by the following question: To what extent does ethical school leadership predict the job commitment of non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State?

Hypotheses

This hypothesis guided the study: Ethical school leadership does not significantly predict the job commitment of non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State.

Methodology

The study adopted correlation design. The research area is University of Calabar, situated in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria. The population of the study was

123 non-teaching staff across three major administrative units (Registry, Bursary, and Library) in University of Calabar (UNICAL). A convenience sampling technique was used to select the participants. The instrument used for data collection was a 16 items questionnaire designed by the researcher. Titled "Ethical School Leadership and Staff Job Commitment Questionnaire (ESLSJCQ)". The questionnaires were structured on a four-point modified Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) and these responses were scored 1,2,3,4, as their weights. The questionnaire was face and content validated by three research experts from the department of Educational Management, and from Measurement and Evaluation, faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar.

To establish the reliability of the research instrument, a trial test was first carried out on 50 non-teaching staff selected from University of Cross River State (UNICROSS). The reliability was determined through Cronbach alpha technique and the index ranges between .88 - .92. Statistically, the instruments were considered reliable for data collection. The researchers carried out the administration of the questionnaire to the respondents. The copies of the questionnaire were

administered and after some time, the researchers retrieved all copies of the completed questionnaires back for data analysis. The descriptive statistics output of the Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used to answer the research questions, while the ANOVA and relative coefficient output of Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance with the help Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 27. The results are presented in tables.

Results

Research questions

To what extent does ethical school leadership predict the job commitment of non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State? The result is presented in Table 1. The result in table 1 showed that regression coefficient (R) of .379 and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of .144 were obtained. The R^2 ($R^2=.144$) meant that the variable of ethical school leadership contributed 1.44% of the total variance in job commitment of non-teaching staff while the remaining percentage score 98.56% was predicted by other external factors outside ethical school leadership.

Table 1: Summary of simple linear regression analysis showing the extent to which ethical school leadership predict the job commitment of non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Square Adjusted R	Std. Error of Estimate	Decision
1	.379a	.144	.137	3.874	Low Extent

a) Dependent Variable: Job commitment of non-teaching staff

b) Predictors: (Constant), Ethical School Leadership

Test of Hypotheses

Ethical school leadership does not significantly predict the job commitment of non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State. The result is presented in Table 2. The result in table 2 showed that ethical school leadership significantly predict the job commitment of non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State, as shown by the simple linear regression coefficient (R) of .379 and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of .144 obtained. The R^2 ($R^2=.144$) meant that ethical school leadership contributed 1.44% of the total variance in job commitment of non-teaching staff, while the remaining percentage score 98.56% was predicted by other external factors outside ethical school leadership. This showed that the independent variable (ethical

school leadership) has significant impact on the dependent variable (job commitment of non-teaching staff), $F_{20.348, p(.000)} < .05$. Referring to the coefficients in table 2, the unstandardized coefficient for ethical school leadership is .520. This meant that for every point increase in job commitment of non-teaching staff, there is .520 increase in ethical school leadership scores from the questionnaire instrument used. Based on this result, the null hypothesis which stated that ethical school leadership does not significantly predict the job commitment of non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State, was rejected while the alternate hypothesis accepted. This showed that ethical school leadership significantly predict the job commitment of non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Summary of simple linear regression analysis showing how ethical school leadership predict the job commitment of non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State.

Anova ^a						
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Regression	305.432	1	305.432	20.348	.000b	Rejected
Residual	1816.227	121	15.01			
Total	2121.659	122				

*Significant $p < .05$; $R = .379$; $R^2 = .144$; Adj. $R^2 = .137$

Coefficients ^a				
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
1 (Constant)	8.352	2.311		3.613
Ethical school leadership	0.52	0.115	0.379	4.511

a) Dependent Variable: Job commitment of non-teaching staff

b) Predictors: (Constant), Ethical school leadership

Discussion of findings

The finding of hypothesis one revealed that ethical school leadership significantly predict the job commitment of non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State. This finding is not surprising because leadership behavior greatly influences employee attitudes, especially in environments where staff morale and motivation are closely tied to how fairly and respectfully, they are treated. It suggests that the administrators model integrity, promote transparency, and foster trust, all of which are essential for cultivating a sense of purpose and responsibility among non-teaching personnel. In contexts where staff feel valued and supported by morally upright administrators, they are more likely to show loyalty, diligence, and a willingness to go beyond basic duties. The implication of this finding is that institutional efforts to improve job commitment should prioritize the development of ethical leadership capacities among university leaders, as this approach addresses the root causes of disengagement more effectively than procedural reforms alone.

The finding corroborates that of Sabir (2021) ^[25] investigated how teachers in Punjab, Pakistan perceive ethical behaviors in school leadership and their influence on teacher commitment. The study found a significant positive association between ethical leadership and teacher commitment. The finding also aligns with that of Obona *et al.* (2024) ^[22] who conducted a study in 16 public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, to explore how innovative leadership practices—such as digital communication, empowerment, and supervision—affect teachers' job commitment. The result indicated a significant positive link between all three strategies and teachers' job commitment. Also, the finding support those of Özdoğru and Sarier (2024) ^[24] who found strong positive impacts on organizational trust, justice, motivation, job satisfaction, and overall commitment. Additionally, it corroborates those of Mishra and Tikoria (2021) ^[16] who studied 537 doctors in Indian hospitals and found that ethical leadership significantly improved the organizational climate, which then positively influenced doctors' job commitment. The study used SEM to confirm this indirect relationship, indicating that leadership shapes workplace culture and thereby commitment.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that ethical leadership plays a critical role in enhancing the job commitment of non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar. The evidence indicates that when university leaders exhibit fairness, transparency, accountability, and respect in their leadership practices, non-teaching staff are more likely to demonstrate punctuality, dedication, and a willingness to engage beyond their core responsibilities. Despite the introduction of various institutional strategies to boost staff commitment, it is the ethical conduct of leaders that appears to have the most profound influence. Therefore, fostering ethical leadership among senior administrators is essential for improving staff morale, strengthening service delivery, and ensuring the overall effectiveness of university administrative operations.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that the University of Calabar management should institutionalize

regular ethical leadership training for all senior administrative staff, focusing on integrity, fairness, and accountability, as a strategic approach to fostering higher levels of job commitment among non-teaching personnel.

Contribution to knowledge

To date, limited empirical research has explored the relationship between ethical leadership and job commitment of non-teaching staff, especially within the context of Nigerian universities. This study contributes meaningfully to the emerging body of knowledge on ethical leadership by providing confirmatory evidence that perceived ethical leadership significantly influences staff job commitment. Specifically, it establishes that ethical leadership is a strong predictor of job commitment among non-teaching staff in the University of Calabar. The findings underscore the critical role of leadership behavior beyond routine administrative procedures in shaping staff attitudes and enhancing performance. This study offers a fresh perspective for institutional management and enriches the broader discourse on leadership and organizational behavior in higher education.

Gap and Recommendation

Despite the acknowledged importance of ethical leadership in fostering commitment among non-academic staff, there is a noticeable gap in the literature. Specifically, no study to date has been found that focused solely on the impact of ethical leadership on non-teaching staff job commitment in the University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. This presents a significant limitation in understanding the unique dynamics and challenges faced by this group.

Furthermore, the present study was limited to only 123 non-teaching staff at the University of Calabar (UNICAL), selected through a convenience sampling technique. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable to other populations or occupational groups. To enhance the generalizability of these findings, it is recommended that future studies adopt a similar quantitative approach with a larger and more diverse sample of non-teaching staff within UNICAL and across other federal universities.

Data availability

The data cannot be made available to protect the anonymity of the participants.

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Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors

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