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## Perceptions of Leadership Ethics of Principals in Saudi Arabian High Schools

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate Saudi Arabia's school principals' perceptions of their leadership ethics. In this investigation, the leadership ethics principals were considered in the following 14 items. The survey instrument was distributed to all 263 principals in the 263 high schools in Saudi Arabia. Each of the principals was asked to review, complete, and return. In Saudi Arabia, all schools are segregated by gender as well as by geographical population. Of the 263 surveys distributed, 238 surveys were reviewed, completed, and returned. This equates to 90.5% of the total amount of Saudi principals asked to complete the survey. The data found that the overall average of the perception of leadership ethics principals in Saudi Arabian high school was 4.26. The data also showed there was no statistically significant difference between male and female principals, between the number of years of principal experience who answered the questions, or between the highest of educational degrees they completed regarding their principal leadership ethics.

**Key word:** Behaviors; Ethics indicators; Principals-leadership

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### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate Saudi Arabia's high school principals' perceptions of their

leadership ethics. Numerous researchers (Hoyle, 2005; Candoli, Cullen, & Stufflebean, 1997; Dipaola & Stronge, 2003) have documented that the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) Professional Standards set forth eight standards for principals. These eight standards are: leadership and culture, policy and governance, communications and community relations, organizational management, curriculum planning and development, instructional management, human resources management, and ethics of leadership. At the same time, ethics of leadership has eight indicators following exhibiting multiculturalism, understanding the role of schooling in a democratic society, demonstrating integrity, modeling moral ethical standards, promoting values, promoting democracy and civic responsibility, safeguarding diversity of religion and ethnicity, and coordinating community agencies to support child welfare.

Dipaola and Stronge (2003) reported that the ethics of leadership include the following: A principal is required to be able to demonstrate effective multicultural and ethnic understanding as well as sensitivity regarding such issues. The principal also needs to be able to clearly articulate what the role of public schooling looks like in a democratic society. In addition, the principal must exhibit appropriate ethical standards and personal integrity, as well as be able to model such standards and integrity.

Regarding this standard, Hoyle (2005) stated that a principal is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, with fairness, and in an ethical manner. Principals should demonstrate integrity, dedication, humility, openness, creativity, honesty, forward-thinking competence, inspiration, intelligence fairness and assertiveness. According to Thornton (2009) leadership ethics must be honest, integrity, fairness, following rules and laws, and being true to your values. Leadership ethics should be an integrated part of every training program that leaders participate in. Other four important characteristics of

leader were suggested by (Erickson, 2006): honesty, foresight, competence, and the ability to inspire

Okoro (2012) examined the employers assessment of work ethics required of university employers. He found that the following are required of university Employers: Promptness to work official assignments, usual to work and other official engagement, creativity and discretionary guide in handling situation in the office, thoroughness and diligence level at work, judgmental values of other people work without bias, idleness in the office among others.

Piotrowski and Guyette (2013) studied a survey of 263 dissertations in business ethics over the prior decade from 2003 to 2012. They found that the majority of dissertations focused on a narrow range of contemporary domains, i.e., moral awareness & development, values, leadership, pedagogical issues in business education, ethical climate, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and undergraduate business instruction. Topics like whistle-blowing, Sarbanes-Oxley Act (dealing with fraudulent financial activity), and corporate scandals were not major areas of focus. Moreover, issues like outsourcing, employee abuse, workplace safety, and tax evasion were rarely selected as dissertation topics. These results indicate that graduate-level students tend to focus on a limited range of business ethics issues and are neglecting some very important ethical concerns in the business world.

According to Judy (2003) the college of South Carolina uses Invitational Education which shifts the focus onto the students and stresses connectedness, cooperation, and communication. It is a student-centered model of teaching and learning rather than an instructor-centered one; students are more engaged in the learning process which in turn leads to more effective teaching and learning. This model stresses respect for all people—students and faculty—and offers teacher educators a foundation for preparing students for ethical and moral leadership in the classroom. It also centers on trust, optimism, and intentionality. Intentionality is a key idea in Invitational Education as it implies a choice and desire to be respectful, trustworthy, and optimistic. Instructors intentionally plan experiences for students that encourage reflection and questioning while affirming academic integrity. These inquiry-based, active learning, and student-centered experiences facilitate a strong sense of leadership and ethical behavior for future teachers.

Gregory (2010) reported that there are five basic principles in ethics theory:

- a) Altruism: A basic concern for others,
- b) Utilitarianism—do what is best for the greatest number of people,
- c) Philosopher Immanuel Kant,
- d) Communitarianism—shoulder your responsibilities, seek the common good,
- e) Rawls justice as fairness.

Eddy, Murphy, Spaulding and Chandras (2012) discussed a crisis related to ineffective and failed

leadership practices. The authors propose new leadership practices that directly confront unethical, failed and out-of-date methods. The purpose of this article is to highlight several areas in which enhanced or new leadership practices are necessary, provide selected examples of egregious incidents of executive wrong-doing, and offer recommended leadership practices for the campus of the 21st Century. They found that leadership in higher education needs to take new directions in order to be effective. At the center of this discussion is that leaders set the tone for the ethical climate of their institutions. An ethical code must be established and any violations need to be properly addressed. But strong leadership also requires a team effort so that various campus groups share in the governance. Modern leaders must be aware of new directions in higher education and take new directions with regard to collaboration, but also accountability, privatization, international education, distance education, volunteerism and community outreach, and be able to address multiculturalism. But pivotal to all of these leadership themes is a strong ethical foundation.

The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2002) provides the following guidance:

Tomorrow's educational leaders must be able to work with diverse groups and to integrate ideas to solve a continuous flow of problems. This requires patience and perspective, the exercise of judgment and wisdom. It also demands sensitivities to other cultures and highly developed communication skills. It requires personal values that integrate the ethical dimensions of decision-making with those of a more technical variety.

According to Caldwell, Shapiro and Cross (2007) a test case where an admissions officer at a college must decide who to award a merit-scholarship to base largely on their test scores. One is a minority student, a Hispanic male, and the other is a white female student. Both are very accomplished and talented; the female student has higher scores but the college president insists that the Hispanic male be awarded the scholarship because of pressure from the board and outside groups. The admissions officer has to make an ethical decision about what to do in this case. The author suggested that several lenses using Multiple Ethical Paradigms approach consisting of four lenses or perspectives justice, critique, and ethics of the profession.

Abdghani, Hussan and Jusoff (2009) reviewed the literature on the topic of how leaders with a strong ethical mind and ethical behaviors can help build and improve the moral and ethical development of their organizations, including educational institutions. This test case follows 302 lecturers (120 males and 186 females) from five polytechnics in Malaysia. The research is based on 22 items on a survey given to the lecturers that covered the dimensions of motives, character, and empowerment. Using numerical techniques including regression analysis, this study finds that ethical leadership comprises two dimensions, namely empowerment and character/motive. The key finding is that lecturers' job involvement can be

increased when ethical leadership of heads of department is increased thus affirming the importance of having leaders with high moral and ethical stature.

Understanding the influence of the principals' perceptions of their leadership has been a growing body of a research in the United States. Adding a study to investigate this concept in Saudi Arabia provided research regarding a multicultural approach.

### 1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Four research questions were addressed by this study. They include an overall question and three sub-questions:

Overall question:

How do Saudi principal leaders perceive their leadership ethics?

Sub-questions:

a) Is there a difference between male and female principals regarding their leadership ethics of principals?

b) Are there differences in leadership ethics of principals based on the number of years of their principal experience?

c) Are there differences in leadership ethics principals between the highest of educational degrees they completed?

### 2. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Interpretation of the study was subject to the following limitations:

a) The study was limited to high school principals in Saudi Arabia; therefore the findings did not describe other populations.

b) The study analyzed leadership ethics reported by principals, therefore, the findings were based on perceptions.

c) The study was limited to only principals serving in schools in the 2015 school years; therefore, the findings did not describe principals from other years.

### 3. METHOD OF THE STUDY

Each of the principals was asked to review and complete the instrument. This survey contains 14 statements. This survey used a five-point Likert scale response: strong agree =5, agree = 4, neither agree nor disagree = 3, disagree = 2, and strong disagree = 1.

### 4. SAMPLE

This survey instrument was distributed to all 263 principals in the 263 high schools in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, all schools are segregated by gender and geographical population. I received 238 surveys which were 90.5 percent of the total amount of Saudi principals.

**Table 1**  
Overall Statistics Including the Number of Principals and Percentage of Saudi Principal Who Answered the Survey by Gender

Gender	Distributed		Returned		Percent out of returned
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	
Male	109	41.5	94	39.5	86.2
Female	154	58.5	144	60.5	93.5
Total	263	100	238	100	90.5

Table 1 illustrates the number of gender and percentages for principals who answered the question about principal leadership ethics in Saudi Arabia high schools. There were 144 female principals which were 60.5% of the total amount of Saudi principals. On the other hand, there were 94 male principals which were 39.5% of the total amount of Saudi principals. More need to be said about what this might mean. The ratio of 2:3 for response difference is a difference is important and unwise to ignore.

**Table 2**  
Overall Statistics Including the Number of Principals and Percentage of Saudi Principal Who Answered the Survey by Working as a Principal

Years of experience	Frequency	Percent
0-1 year	7	2.9
2-5 years	24	10.1
6-10 years	28	11.8
11 or more years	179	75.2
Total	238	100.0

Table 2 shows the number of years' experience and percentages for principals who answered the question about principal leadership ethics in Saudi Arabia high schools. There were 179 principals who had 11 or more years of experience which was 75.2% of the total amount of Saudi principals. There were 28 principals who had 6-10 years experience which was 11.8% of the total amount of Saudi principals. There were 24 principals who had 2-5 years experience which was 10.1% of the total amount of Saudi principals. On the other hand, there were 7 principals who had less than one year experience which was 2.9% of the total amount of Saudi principals.

**Table 3**  
Overall Statistics Including the Number of Principals and Percentage of Saudi Principal Who Answered the Survey by the Highest Level of Education

Degree	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor degree	167	70.2
Master degree	47	19.7
Doctoral degree	24	10.1
Total	238	100.0

Table 3 shows the number of the highest level of education and percentages for principals who answered the question about principal leadership ethics in Saudi Arabian high schools. There were 167 principals who had a bachelor degree which was 70.2% of the total amount of Saudi principals. There were 47 principals who had a master degree, which was 19.7% of the total amount of Saudi principals. There were 24 principals who had a doctoral degree which was 10.1% of the total amount of Saudi principals.

**Question 1: How do Saudi principal leaders perceive their leadership ethics?**

The researcher found based on the answers given in the completed surveys that in Saudi Arabia the principals appeared to agree with this survey. All of the questions answered regarding the survey showed scores above 4.00 or higher. These Saudi principals appeared to perceive that they set personal examples aimed at creating a standard of excellence for all those around them to follow.

To support the answer, the researcher reported the mean response, the standard deviation and rank for each of the 14 leadership constructs studied and the overall total for each it.

**5. DISCUSSION OF THE QUESTIONS**

**Table 4**  
**Average and Ranking of Saudi Principals Who Answer the Questions About Principal Leadership Ethics of the Perception of Principal Leadership Ethics**

	Statements	Mean	Ranking	Std. deviation
Q1	I have a good understanding of ethics and moral leadership	4.00	14	.902
Q2	I understand and appreciate cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity.	4.03	13	.859
Q3	I monitor the cultural health of the school	4.50	2	.767
Q4	I understand the role of education in promoting a democratic society.	4.16	11	.830
Q5	I am the primary educational leader at the school.	4.27	7	.839
Q6	I promote multicultural appreciation and ethical understanding of people.	4.29	6	.887
Q7	I am responsible for encouraging the ethical and moral conduct of staff.	4.38	4	.801
Q8	I adapt educational programs to the needs of the diverse student body.	4.17	10	.895
Q9	I uphold a personal set of ethics and morals and use these to provide a role model in the school and in public.	4.50	1	.667
Q10	I encourage teachers and staff to involve students in community projects that promote the welfare of all members of society.	4.26	8	.828
Q11	I encourage teachers and staff to promote moral and ethical values in the classroom and the community.	4.35	5	.724
Q12	I integrate cultural and religious awareness, diversity training, and topics on ethical behavior in the professional development program for staff.	4.45	3	.771
Q13	I coordinate social agencies and human social services to help students grow and develop ethical behaviors and a core of values.	4.12	12	.878
Q14	I collect feedback from students, parents, and community members about what it means to behave in an ethical manner.	4.21	9	.874
	Average	4.26		.823

Table 4 illustrates the overall averages for principals who are working in high schools in Saudi Arabia. This data relates to the perception of principal leadership ethics in Saudi Arabian high schools. The overall average of the perception of principal leadership ethics in Saudi Arabian high schools was 4.26. The highest averages were as follows:

- a) Question number 9, which asked whether I uphold a personal set of ethics and morals and use these to provide a role model in the school and in public, had a 4.50 average.
- b) Question number 3, which asked whether I monitor the cultural health of the school, had a 4.50 average.
- c) Question number 12, which asked whether I

integrate cultural and religious awareness, diversity training, and topics on ethical behavior in the professional development program for staff, had a 4.45 average.

- d) Question number 7, which asked whether. I am responsible for encouraging the ethical and moral conduct of staff, had a 4.38 average.
- e) Question number 11, which asked whether I encourage teachers and staff to promote moral and ethical values in the classroom and the community, had a 4.35 average.
- f) Question number 6, which asked whether I promote multicultural appreciation and ethical understanding of people, had a 4.26 average.

- g) Question number 5, which asked whether I am the primary educational leader at the school, had a 4.27 average.
- h) Question number 10, which asked whether I encourage teachers and staff to involve students in community projects that promotes the welfare of all members of society, had a 4.26 average.
- i) Question number 14, which asked whether I collect feedback from students, parents, and community members about what it means to behave in an ethical manner, had a 4.21 average.
- j) Question number 8, which asked whether I adapt educational programs to the needs of the diverse student body, had a 4.17 average.
- k) Question number 4, which asked whether I understand the role of education in promoting a democratic society, had a 4.16 average.
- l) Question number 13, which asked whether I coordinate social agencies and human social services to help students grow and develop ethical behaviors and a core of values, had a 4.12 average.
- m) Question number 2, which asked whether I understand and appreciate cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity, had a 4.03 average.
- n) Question number 1, which asked whether I have a good understanding of ethics and moral leadership, had a 4.00 average.

**Question 2: Is there a difference between male and female principals regarding their leadership ethics of principals?**

The investigator found that there was not a difference between male and female principals regarding their principal leadership ethics. To support this answer the researcher used an independent sample *t*-test which determined if there were any differences between groups on the 14 leadership constructs. The researcher reported descriptive statistics for each group (mean, standard deviation), *t*-value, significance level, and effect size (eta squared).

**Table 5  
t Test to Know the Significant Difference Between Male and Female Who Answered the Overall Standard About for Principal Leadership Ethics Each Group**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.
Total Q	Male	94	54.90	6.087	0.543	236	0.587 Non Sig.
	Female	144	55.35	6.477			

Table 5 shows that there was not a significant difference in principal leadership ethics between male and female principals.

**Question 3: Are there differences in leadership ethics of principals based on the number of years of their principal experience as measured by the Leadership Practice Inventory?**

To support the answer to this question, the researcher used the following evidence based on an analysis of variance (ANOVA) which was conducted to explore the differences between groups.

**Table 6  
An Analysis of Nonparametric to Know the Significant Difference Between the Number of Years of Principal Experience Who Answer the Questions About Principal Leadership Ethics**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	184.456	3	61.485	1.552	0.202
Within groups	9272.132	234	39.624		Non Sig.
Total	9456.588	237			

Table 6 shows that there was not a significant difference between the number of years of principal experience who answers the questions about principal leadership ethics.

**Question 4: Are there differences in leadership ethics of principals between the highest of educational degrees they completed?**

The investigator found that there was not a significant difference in principal leadership ethics between the highest of educational degrees they completed. To support this answer, the researcher used an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to explore differences between groups.

**Table 7  
An Analysis of Nonparametric to Know the Significant Difference Between the Overall of Educational Degrees Who Answered the Questions About Principal Leadership Ethics**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	2.214	2	1.107	0.028	0.973
Within groups	9454.374	235	40.231		Non Sig.
Total	9456.588	237			

Since all the data above showed only a 0.05 there was not a significant difference in principal leadership ethics between the highest of educational degrees they completed.

**CONCLUSION**

To further clarify the outcome of this research the following conclusions are provided:

- a) The data found that the overall average of the perception of principal leadership ethics in Saudi Arabian high schools was 4.26.
- b) The highest averages were question number 9, which asked whether I uphold a personal set of ethics and morals and use these to provide a role model in the school and in public, had a 4.50 average.
- c) The researcher found that the lowest averages were question number 1, which asked whether I have a good

understanding of ethics and moral leadership, had a 4.00 average.

d) The investigator found that there was not a significant difference between male and female principals regarding their principal leadership ethics.

e) There was not a significant difference between the numbers of years of principal experience who answers the questions about principal leadership ethics.

f) There was not a significant difference in principal leadership ethics between the highest of educational degrees they completed.

This investigation was valuable because it can aide others, such as the Ministry of Education and the colleagues of the principals, in understanding how those principals were able to develop their current leadership ethics that have made them successful in their positions. For example, this investigation showed that the principals found ways to coordinate social agencies and human services to help each student grow and develop as a caring informed citizen.

This investigation also provides an increased knowledge about the Saudi principals' ethics which may also help to influence the Ministry of Education's relationship with each of the principals. Saudi principals see themselves as working hard to create a unique and ideal image of what they want their school system to become. They see themselves as being able to get those around them excited about the possibilities regarding their future, yet remaining objective in the process.

Based on this study, principals should exhibit Multiculturalism through understanding value systems, ethics and moral leadership, and know the role of education in a democratic society. Principals must work hard at being accessible to as many individuals and groups as possible. Principals should take on the consideration accessible and approachable to large number of staff both in the central office and in the schools.

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