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EXPLORING ETHICAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN FIVE RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE LUBOMBO REGION OF ESWATINI: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

BY

JIMSON NTANDO MAHLALELA

A thesis submitted in the fulfilment of the academic requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the Faculty of Humanities: School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Supervisor: Dr P.E. Mthembu

July 2025

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare this thesis as originally mine and the product of my own. This thesis has never been presented to any college or university for academic credit. All the information sourced from other authors has been acknowledged.

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STATEMENT BY THE SUPERVISOR

I, Dr P.E Mthembu, as the candidate's supervisor, agree to the submission of this thesis.

Name: Dr Pinkie E Mthembu

Signature: … …….. Date…17/07/2025……

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank the Almighty God for granting me the gift of Life, Grace, Love and Mercy. Without which it would have been impossible to navigate through this academic journey. Thank you, Lord.

The completion of this study would not have been possible without the support I received from my supervisor Dr Pinkie Mthembu who patiently guided and motivated me towards the completion of my work: I am much indebted to her for the kind of support and astuteness she demonstrated since she took over as my supervisor. Thank you very much Dr Mthembu. I also thank Prof S E Mthiyane, my first supervisor with whom I started this Journey. Thank you, Prof.,

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DEDICATIONS

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Ncamsile, my two sons, daughter, nine sisters and my two brothers who are my source of pride. They missed my presence when they needed it most. In addition, I wish to thank my Parents Mr Elmon Ndumanyane Mahlalela and Mrs Alice Tivetile Mahlalela, whom by God's grace have lived to see this great achievement. Thank you so much for your love, care and encouragement throughout my academic life. Lastly and most importantly, I thank the Almighty God for granting me the gift of life, guidance, strength and perseverance to complete this project.

THANK YOU, LORD!!!!!

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore ethical leadership in the Lubombo region of Eswatini as perceived and practised by school principals. The study was qualitative and case study, using the interpretive paradigm. The study employed ethical leadership, the African philosophy of ubuntu and the Stakeholder theories as lenses through which to explore the ethical leadership practices of school principals. The Lubombo region has 39 rural high schools and a population of 39 principals, 39 deputy principals and 39 chairpersons, totalling 117. The sample size was fifteen, comprising five principals, five deputy principals and five chairpersons of school committees. The study revealed that principals of schools, deputy principals and chairpersons of school committees are aware of the importance of ethical leadership in schools. It also exposed some unethical behaviours in which principals of schools find themselves, such as embezzlement of school funds, maladministration of examinations and intimate relations with learners and subordinates. The study further revealed the drivers behind such behaviours as theft, pressure to shine and moral decadence. This highlights the need for measures and policies to address and prevent such practices within the school system. These include regular audits, regular inspections, hiring of bursars, strengthening of training programmes for school principals and punishment of offenders. The study recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training implement regular school audits to minimise unethical behaviours among school principals. The ministry should also develop policies that track school financial resources to ensure proper and accountable utilisation of scarce available resources budgeted for education.

Keywords - Ethical leadership, interpretive paradigm, unethical behaviour, school principals.

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to record that I have carried out language editing of a doctoral thesis by Jimson Mahlalela entitled**, Exploring ethical leadership practices of school principals in five rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini: A multiple case study.**

Yours sincerely

Crispin Hemson

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ACRONYMS

ACC	ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION
AG	AUDITOR GENERAL
APU	AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY OF UBUNTU
DoBE	DIRECTOR OF BASIC EDUCATION
ECOS	EXAMINATION COUNCIL OF ESWATINI
EDSEC	EDUCATION SECTOR POLICY
ELT	ETHICAL LEADERSHIP THEORY
EPA	ESWATINI PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION
FPE	FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION
MOET	MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
PAC	PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE
REO	REGIONAL EDUCATION OFFICE
SACE	SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR EDUCATORS
SGB	SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES
SMT	SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM
SNAT	SWAZILAND NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS
SPC	SWAZILAND PRIMARY CERTIFICATE
TSC	TEACHING SERVICE COMMISSION
USAID	UNITED STATE AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and background to the study

Ethical leadership is fundamental in promoting a responsible organisational culture, tackling ethical challenges, and advancing equitable, responsible and sustainable practices (Anheier & Knudsen, 2023; Ghafourifard et al., 2022; Kristijono et al., 2022). An ethical leader upholds morals of high standards, demonstrates honesty and integrity, as well as serving as role models, thus cultivating accountability and trust (Al Hadhrami et al., 2022; Ghanem, 2018; McKimm & McLean, 2020). Schools are no exception, and, as such, educational stakeholders expect school principals to behave ethically while deciding on conflicting or competing situations (Jenlink & Jenlink, 2015). This expectation strengthens the significance of ethics and increases the accountability of principals. However, contentious ethical practices among school principals have also been reported in the media.

Basically, ethical leadership concentrates on what is truthful or not truthful, values, standards and norms that are tolerable to the community, as well as displaying a life full of integrity and in service of the common good (Grigoropoulos, 2019; Özan, Özdemir & Yirci, 2017). A manager who behaves in an ethical manner easily gains the support of his or her employees as this creates an environment of trust, and the employees embrace the conviction that their leader would act ethically in any circumstance (Özan, Özdemir & Yirci, 2017).

The Eswatini Government General Orders state that civil servants shall be prohibited from conducting their duties if they have allegedly been involved in any misconduct or if they are being investigated by the police for fraud. That person shall receive or be paid half of the normal salary during the period of interdiction. If found guilty, he or she shall be discontinued, and he or she shall be prohibited from the service (Swaziland Government General Order, 1975). This is also applicable to the schooling context.

The Teaching Service Act, No.1, of 1982, section 23 (1) states that: “Devoid of prejudice to some extra regulation, any individual who: (a) If not in the progression of his official responsibility incorrectly, whether right or wrong, through their person or by any other

individual and somewhat method of any kind inspires or tries to encourage whatever pronouncement of the directive. (b) In association, using the exercise by the organisation of their duties or obligations insubordinately provides to the commission evidence which he recognises to be deceitful or ensures or disbelieves to be factual or which he distinguishes to be fabricated by motive of the exclusion of some substance, the individual will be guilty of wrongdoing then shall be sentenced and will be fined E1, 000 – or twelve-months incarceration or both" (Swaziland Government, 1982).

The two aforementioned documents, the Eswatini Government General Orders and the Teaching Service Act, clearly demonstrate that the Eswatini Government demands that public servants should be ethical, accountable and trustworthy whilst executing their duties. Hence, it is applicable to school principals as they are expected to subscribe to ethical leadership principles. Principled management is essential in maintaining workers' attitudes and behaviours in any organisation. Principled management prioritises the well-being of stakeholders, fostering shared values for both organisations and society. Ethical leaders are expected to display exemplary conduct to other institutions and for their leaders to emulate (Hameed et al., 2023; Hosseini & Ferreira, 2023).

Stouten et al. (2013) emphasise that, while ethical behaviour is a collective responsibility among all stakeholders, school leaders, particularly principals, bear a significant burden in fostering a positive ethical climate. The expectation for these leaders extends beyond mere compliance; they must actively cultivate an environment that promotes constructive behaviours and attitudes among teachers, students, and the broader community reflecting diverse perspectives. This endeavour requires moral astuteness, where leaders articulate the benefits of upholding strong moral standards and highlight the repercussions of unethical conduct (Stouten et al., 2013). Effective moral leadership involves establishing clear values and creating a framework of incentives and appropriate penalties to ensure accountability for ethical behaviour among staff members. Through this action, principals can inspire a culture of integrity permeating the entire educational environment. This proactive approach does not only enhance the ethical landscape of the school but also prepares students to navigate a diverse world with strong moral foundations (Hosseini & Ferreira, 2023).

Appreciation of the significance of ethical leadership in education, particularly within the context of Eswatini, is important due to the scarcity of literature on ethical leadership in the country. Perhaps the limited literature and research on ethical leadership could be a contributory factor to the apparently increasing unethical conduct among some Eswatini school principals. Reports of fraud, embezzlement of funds, misappropriation, maladministration and sexual relations with learners and subordinates inundate the local media. In particular, Tshabalala (2017) reveals that, in the Kingdom of Eswatini, a number of school principals have been subjected to forensic audits resulting from mismanagement and misappropriation of funds allocated to schools. In an attempt to curb this, efforts have been made by the Government of Eswatini through the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to provide professional development to principals of schools through a program known as Personnel, Organisational, Money and Instructional Management (POMI). Through this programme, principals undergo financial management training. However, challenges around the management of school finances in the Kingdom of Eswatini persist (Kunene, 2018; Tshabalala, 2017).

The Auditor General's Report for the year 2019/2020 reveal that, from audited schools, 14 had been referenced to have a staggering E40 million, R40 million in South African currency, unaccounted for. In fact, the Principal Secretary (PS) of MoET maintained that the total amount was expected to be returned. The school principals appeared before the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on the stipulated date for questioning, with the understanding that, if their responses were not satisfactory, they could be jailed (Auditor General's Report, 2019). Ultimately, the sentence was dismissal of the principals who were found guilty of mismanagement of school funds. Similarly, Kunene (2018) reports that at least five principals are dismissed annually for charges related to misappropriation and embezzlement of school funds.

The auditor general's report for the year 2020/2021 revealed that a school principal failed to account for over E1 million (Auditor General's Report, 2021). The persistent unethical practices among school principals in Eswatini, as highlighted by Myende et al. (2020), exemplifies a broader trend of misconduct within Africa's public sector. This situation is not isolated and exclusive to Eswatini. Kapilima (2024) reinforces the view that unethical leadership permeates various African nations, indicating a widespread failure in governance.

Iheanachor and Etim (2022) further elaborate on the ethical dilemmas that exacerbate this crisis, suggesting that the changing realities in Africa's public sector demand urgent reforms. Thus, the ongoing unethical behaviour among school principals remains a critical issue requiring immediate and focused attention.

On issues of admissions of learners in schools, The Times of Swaziland, dated 21/01/2012, published a story entitled, 'BLUE (pseudonym) high school rejects pupil from BLUE primary.' When responding to such allegations, the high school principal claimed that his school was not compelled to admit all pupils from its feeder primary school (Times of Swaziland, 2012). Conversely, the principal justified their decision by arguing that the rejected pupils were poor performers in preference to those who are either high performers or are sponsored by parents who have financial muscle. The actions of this high school principal could be seen as being directly against the Education Sector Policy provisions, which state that preference should be given admissions into high schools from feeder primary schools to eliminate logistical barriers in the dissemination of basic education (Government of Swaziland, 2011).

Corruption or unethical leadership practices are also evident in the maladministration of external examinations, where principals assist learners in writing or copying during examinations. For example, a principal of one of the primary schools assisted learners in copying grade seven examination (this examination marks the exit point from primary level to secondary level) and has been banned for life from ever administering the Swaziland Primary Certificate (SPC) examinations (Eswatini Government, 2017). This was also reported by the Times of Swaziland dated 22/01/2017 titled 'Head teacher helped pupils copy' (Times of Swaziland, 2017). After intensive investigations, the administrator was found guilty of having assisted pupils who sat for one of the previous year's SPC examinations. The principal was not only banned but also faced disciplinary action from the MOET, and eventually was also dismissed from the service.

Clearly, ethical leadership, accountability and trustworthiness are diminishing in the leadership fraternity of schools. The expectation is that it should be inculcated in the minds of school leaders reasonably enough to ensure appropriate ethical management within school setups. This dire situation necessitates further exploration. Hence the aim of this study is to critically

examine the ethical leadership practices of school principals in five rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini.

1.1.1 Personal and professional motivation

The researcher has been a teacher for six years, a deputy principal for three years and a principal of a rural school for over a decade now. My own observations reveal some ethical lapses in the administration of schools in Eswatini. It became apparent to me that some of these unethical issues were orchestrated by the school principals themselves. One such observation includes the automatic progression of learners from form 3 (grade 10) to form 4 (grade 11). This is much against the dictates of the policy of the Ministry of Education and Training, which states that, for learners to be admitted in form 4 (Grade 11), they must have passed the external examination offered by the Examinations Council of Eswatini. However, principals of schools collude with parents and learners and flout the procedure, thereby facilitating learners to proceed without having passed the examination. This occurs in exchange for money or sexual favours.

Furthermore, drawing upon my extensive experience as an educator and principal, it became increasingly evident that ethical lapses have significantly undermined the integrity of school administration in the region and in the country at large. Another observation of serious concern is the tendency of school principals to charge additional fees over and above the fees paid by the Government. This is much against the policy of the Ministry of Education and Training and is often motivated by wishes for financial gain.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The pervasive issue of unethical leadership among school principals constitutes a critical crisis threatening the integrity and efficacy of education in Eswatini. Principals are entrusted as ethical leaders and moral managers, tasked with establishing, practicing, and communicating ethical standards to foster a positive school climate. Empirical literature confirms that ethical leadership is fundamental, directly shaping staff attitudes, ensuring job satisfaction, motivating teachers, and driving school success (Adeoye, 2020; Ahmed & Khan, 2023; Al-Khaled & Fenn, 2020; Bansal & Kumar, 2018). Conversely, dismal and unethical leadership is a primary cause

of educational failure, corroding teacher morale and leading to low student achievement (Cheteni & Shindika, 2017).

Despite the legal and professional mandate for principals to adhere to strict ethical codes (Grigoropoulos, 2019), persistent reports of misconduct, including misappropriation of funds, theft, and other malpractices, continue to emerge from Eswatini's schools (Tshabalala, 2017). This misconduct severely undermines the educational process and irrevocably erodes the trust of students, parents, and the broader community (Dladla, 2020). The problem is particularly acute given the principal's pivotal role in shaping the school's ethical environment.

This crisis is not isolated to Eswatini but reflects a broader, distressing trend across the African continent, with documented parallels in Lesotho, Uganda, and South Africa regarding financial impropriety and ethical failures in school governance (Dladla, 2020; Myende, Samuel & Pillay, 2018; Rangongo, Mohlakwana & Beckmann, 2016). This pattern underscores a universal challenge, highlighting an urgent need for a deeper, contextual understanding of the factors driving unethical practices in educational leadership.

However, a significant research gap persists. While the global importance of ethical leadership is well-articulated (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Engelbrecht et al., 2017), there is a critical scarcity of empirical studies that investigate this phenomenon within the unique, often disadvantaged context of rural high schools in Eswatini. The specific socio-economic pressures, geographic isolation, and distinct cultural dynamics of rural areas like the Lubombo region likely present unique challenges, dilemmas, and manifestations of unethical leadership that remain largely unexplored. Existing literature fails to adequately address the root causes, specific malpractices, and contextual pressures these principals face when navigating ethical dilemmas and punitive measures.

Therefore, this study addresses this urgent academic and practical void. It moves beyond general pronouncements on the importance of ethics to empirically investigate the understanding, practices, root causes, and enactment challenges of ethical leadership among principals in Eswatini's rural high schools. By filling this gap, the research will contribute vital context-specific knowledge to the body of literature and provide practical, actionable

recommendations for enhancing ethical governance and restoring trust in these critical educational institutions.

1.3 The purpose for the study

The purpose of this study was to critically examine the understanding and practices of ethical leadership of school principals in five rural high schools within the Lubombo region of the kingdom of Eswatini. This study aimed to unveil the underlying causes of these ethical violations and investigate the socio-cultural, institutional, and personal factors contributing to such behaviours among school leaders. Through engaging with the lived experiences of principals, deputy principals, and other stakeholders, the research sought valuable insights into ethical leadership dynamics in rural settings.

Understanding and embracing ethical leadership principles proved crucial for cultivating a conducive learning environment. Ethical leaders exemplify integrity and accountability, setting a positive standard for both staff and students. The findings from this study will inform the development of professional training programmes tailored to enhance ethical understanding and practice among school leaders. Through addressing these ethical challenges, the study aimed not only to foster individual and institutional growth but also to contribute to the establishment of a culture rooted in transparency, accountability, and ethical governance within the Lubombo region's educational landscape.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The aim of the study was to determine the understanding of ethical leadership, practices, dilemmas and challenges faced by school principals in rural high schools in Eswatini.

The study at hand was guided by the following research objectives:

1.4.1 To investigate the importance of ethical leadership in schools' management.

1.4.2 To identify and fully describe possible malpractices/unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals.

1.4.3 To investigate the root causes of these unethical practices/malpractices by principals of schools.

1.4.4 To identify challenges and pressures encountered by school principals when enacting ethical leadership surrounding the regulations and punitive measures.

1.4.5 To unearth ways to reduce or eradicate these malpractices.

1.5 Research questions

The following research questions guided the study at hand:

1.5.1 Why is ethical leadership important in schools' management?

1.5.2 What are the possible forms of malpractices/unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals and how do they manifest?

1.5.3 What are the root causes of these unethical behaviour/malpractices?

1.5.4 What are the challenges and pressures faced by school principals in or when enacting ethical leadership surrounding the regulations and punitive measures?

1.5.5 How could unethical practices be reduced or eradicated within the profession?

1.6 Significance of the study

The research is of critical importance to policymakers. The persistent ethical lapses among school leaders indicate a need for robust policies that govern and monitor school administrations. The findings could inform the Ministry of Education and Training and the Teaching Service Commission about the inadequacies in current policies or the need for new regulations prioritising ethical conduct. By identifying prevalent unethical practices and their root causes, this study can guide policymakers in crafting interventions to enhance accountability and ethical standards within the educational framework of Eswatini.

Additionally, the findings may have significant implications for future researchers. The scarcity of empirical studies focusing specifically on ethical leadership in the context of rural high schools in Eswatini showcases a gap in the existing literature that this research aims to fill. By

providing a comprehensive analysis of ethical practices among school principals, it encourages further scholarly inquiry into related topics, such as the impact of ethical leadership on student outcomes or comparisons with practices in urban school settings.

Parents and community members are also important stakeholders who will benefit from the outcomes of this research. Ethical leadership in schools directly impacts on the quality of education and the overall environment in which students learn. By promoting ethical behaviour among school leaders, the study will contribute to creating a more conducive learning environment, ultimately benefiting students and their families. Parents can be assured that their children are being educated in institutions led by individuals who are committed to ethical principles, integrity and accountability.

Finally, the overarching social significance of this study cannot be overlooked. In an era of growing scrutiny regarding public sector integrity, addressing ethical issues in educational leadership would not only improve the educational sector but would also serve as a cornerstone for a broader societal trust. Cultivating ethical leaders in schools could have a major contribution to developing future citizens who value integrity and ethical conduct, thus reinforcing the moral fabric of the society at large. The significance of this study extends beyond theoretical contributions; it also has some practical implications for the various stakeholders in the education sector.

1.7 Definition of key terms

In this section selected terms: Ethics, Leadership, Ethical leadership, and Rurality, are explained and clarified.

1.7.1 Ethics

Ethics is a philosophical term which originated from the Greek word “Ethos”, which means one’s character in as far as morality is concerned, what is expected by society regarding one’s behaviour, and whether it is within the accepted norms or not (Manyaka & Sebola, 2013). Ethics can also be defined as the study of moral principles that influences one to decide whether a certain conduct or action is right or wrong (Warner, 2011; Tang, Bavik, Chen & Tjosvold, 2015). It is the study of preferences that individuals make and the consequences of those preferences, to ascertain whether choices are good or bad (Warner, 2011).

Tang et al. (2015) assert that ethics has to do with who leaders are and what leaders do, and that ethics concerns the behaviour of leaders and the virtuous of their behaviour. In decision making, ethical issues directly or indirectly influence the process. The path chosen by leaders as a response to any circumstance at hand is influenced by ethics.

Ethics is defined as the study of moral values and the process of examining the moral standards of a person or society, to determine whether these standards are rational or irrational in order to apply them to concrete situations and issues (Allahar, 2021). Ethics entails a framework of socially acceptable norms, morals, and values that control the actions of individuals (Manyaka & Sebola, 2013). In the current study, ethics refers to the moral values and standards guiding school principals' leadership decisions, shaping their actions and accountability to students, staff, and the broader community in Lubombo.

1.7.2 Leadership

Leadership may be defined as the group process involving the interaction of at least two people in order to achieve a goal while bonded by the team spirit, the people's desire to think, feel and act in harmony towards achieving a common goal (Delia, 2018). Bello (2012) defines leadership as a process whereby an individual transfers his or her influence to a group of individuals to realise a mutual goal (Bello, 2012). In the current study, leadership refers to how school principals influence their teams in rural high schools, fostering collaboration and shared values to achieve common educational goals.

1.7.3 Ethical leadership

Gabriunas (2017) defines ethical leadership as a concept of management that denotes the leaders who incorporate ethics into their personal lives and in their roles as managers of their organisations. Ethical leadership deals with what is perceived to be right, values, norms and standards that are acceptable to society, living a life of integrity and in service of the common good (Grigoropoulos, 2019). Ehrich et al. (2015) view ethical leadership as a societal interpersonal practice which is about moral reason for education and that it is an ever changing and a progressive activity rather than just a loyalty to a system of moral codes enshrined in formal policy statements. Ethical leadership ties very close to the philosophies of equity and care for all learners and ensuring the realisation of the learner's interests (Ehrich et al., 2015;

Geribo, 2025). Mthiyane (2018) adds that the concept of ethical leadership in the education sector is connected to justice, ethically based regulation professional judgement, moral reasoning, ethic of caring for learners, justice, sound administration and ethically based self-regulation. An ethical leader is characterised by actions which are ethically based, morally consistent and value driven. He argues though that this is not a simple thing to be realised because school principals subscribe to different paradigms of leadership (Mthiyane, 2018). In the current study, ethical leadership refers to the principles and practices of school principals in rural high schools, emphasising integrity, accountability, and service to the common good within their educational environments.

1.7.4 Rurality

Hlalele (2012) asserts that there is no common definition of rurality, stating that it is not easy to comprehend the term because of its in exactness and some inevitable errors when comparing rural and urban. Rural settings are faced with challenges that impact negatively in the attainment of quality education (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). They are usually associated with low levels of education, low learner achievement and unfavourable policy environments (Chikoko & Khanare, 2012).

However, a distinct definition of rurality is the one that expresses it as 'a condition of place-based homeliness shared by the people with common ancestry or heritage and who inhabit traditionally and culturally defined areas or places statutorily recognised to be rural' (Chigbu, 2013). In the current study, rurality refers to the distinct cultural and social characteristics of rural communities within the Lubombo region, influencing the leadership practices and ethical standards of school principals.

1.8. Chapter overview

This thesis is structured into seven chapters, each building on the foundation of the research. Chapter One introduces the study by outlining the context and background, presenting the statement of the problem, articulating the study's purpose, and detailing research questions and objectives. It highlights the significance of the study and discusses key concepts related to ethical leadership.

Chapter Two reviews relevant international, continental and regional literature that addresses the conceptual issues surrounding ethical leadership, providing a comprehensive overview of existing knowledge, including conceptualising ethical leadership, importance of ethical leadership and dimensions of ethical leadership.

Chapter Three explores the theoretical frameworks supporting the research, including ethical leadership theory, the African philosophy of ubuntu, and stakeholder theory. It also explains the relevance of the theories to the present study.

Chapter Four delves into the study's methodology, situating it within qualitative research and the interpretive paradigm. It outlines the research design, sites, data generation methods, and analysis strategies while addressing trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations.

Chapter Five covers the presentation of data that were collected from 15 participants comprising of five principals, five deputy principals, and five school committee chairpersons. The data presented is in verbatim quotes from the participants as well as some drawings from what the participants mentioned.

Chapter Six deals with the analysis and discussion of findings as presented in Chapter Five. It highlights the key data that address the research questions and discusses whether the research questions were met sufficiently based on comparisons with previous literature that interprets the results in the context of existing literature and theories.

Chapter Seven summarises the research, draws conclusions from the findings, and offers recommendations, contributions to knowledge, implications for further research and lessons learnt from the study. This marks the end of the thesis on exploring ethical leadership practices of school principals in the Lubombo region of Eswatini.

1.9 Summary

This chapter provides a structured overview of the study, beginning with an introduction and background that contextualises the research within its field. It identifies the core problem the study aims to address, outlining the specific issues that necessitate investigation. The purpose of the study is articulated, emphasising its relevance and potential contributions to existing knowledge. Clear objectives are set, guiding the research direction, while research questions are formulated to probe deeper into the subject matter. The significance of the study is

highlighted, detailing its importance for various stakeholders, including academics, practitioners, and policymakers. Limitations are acknowledged, recognising potential constraints that may affect the research outcomes, alongside delimitations that define the scope and boundaries of the study. Key terms are defined to ensure clarity and understanding throughout the research process. Finally, an overview of the chapters is provided, summarising the structure and flow of the study. This comprehensive framework not only sets the stage for the ensuing research but also underscores the study's relevance and rigour in addressing the identified problem. Overall, this chapter lays a solid foundation for the research, ensuring that readers grasp its significance and context.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the introductory part of the study, where the background, the statement of the problem, the purpose and rationale of the study are covered. The objectives of the study, as well as the research questions, are also discussed. Subsequently, the key concepts and the significance, limitations, and delimitations of the study are explained. Finally, there is an outline of the overall structure of the thesis. In this chapter, a review of international, continental and national literature related to ethical leadership is undertaken. The literature review is themed around the objectives of the study. These are: to investigate the importance of ethical leadership in schools' management, to identify and fully describe possible malpractices and unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals, to investigate the root causes of these unethical practices/malpractices by principals of schools, to identify ethical challenges and pressures encountered by school principals when enacting leadership surrounding the regulations and punitive measures and, finally, to unearth ways to reduce or eradicate these malpractices.

2.2 Review of related literature

According to Crawford, Burkholder, and Cox (2020), a literature review is significant in research. This is so because it enables the researcher to put together scientifically the already existing knowledge on the topic. It permeates the study into a broader outline of the related literature, model and study, revealing gaps of knowledge (Crawford, Burkholder & Cox, 2020). They also add that the literature review shows how addressing what is not known by the researcher could improve knowledge in that discipline, identifying the research designs used to address the phenomenon of interest and gathering evidence to support the choice of methodologies. Snyder (2023) further states that writers obtain exposure to the enquiry, hypothesis and findings from other studies, in order not to re do what has already been done but to broaden and get deeper into the problem at hand. Moreover, researchers have to make discoveries of areas within the problem that need serious attention from other studies. In this case researchers get to know about what is to be researched (Kraus et al., 2022). The researcher

is to discover and draw connections, agreements, inconsistencies, and disagreements between various research results by making comparisons (Lawani & Ilegbedion, 2024).

2.3 Conceptualising ethical leadership

Lim and Weissmann (2023) state that the process of assessing and choosing the optimal course of action by principles of morality and standards is known as ethical decision-making. It entails assessing the possible outcomes of many options and choosing to act consistently with one's convictions in ethical standards, both personally and professionally (Lim & Weissmann, 2023). Making ethical decisions is a crucial ability that both individuals and organisations should have because it ensures that decisions are equal, just and fair (Alhaidan, 2024). The particulars of the issue, the parties involved, and one's ideas and values are some variables that affect one's ability to make ethical decisions (Lim & Weissmann, 2023).

Ethical leadership involves making decisions based on values to achieve the kind of future they aspire to have; since values transcend settings and experiences, values offer a more flexible way to make decisions (Thaba et al., 2016). Making decisions is based on moral considerations, and considering how actions may affect others is the core aspect of ethical decision-making. This is what shapes a leader's personality and elevates them in the eyes of all stakeholders, earning them respect and integrity (Knights, 2022). Additionally, in moments of serious predicaments, ethical leaders are able to remain largely composed and confident while communicating with others. In this regard emotional intelligence is critically needed.

Values and morals are key to ethical leadership, as espoused by Knights (2022), who notes that the concept of ethical leadership encompasses leaders who prioritise moral values, demonstrate integrity, and make decisions guided by ethical considerations. Ethical leaders are role models. They inspire trust and respect and promote ethical behaviour within their organisations (Ahmed & Khan, 2023). The authors further argue that ethical leadership is critical in shaping behavioural norms within organisations and call for further research to validate the construct. On the same note, Bedi et al. (2016) demonstrate a positive correlation between ethical leadership and the behaviour of subordinates, such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction and performance (Al-Khaled & Fenn, 2020). It further identifies individual and context-related factors that have an influence on the impact of ethical behaviours (Martin et al.,

2022). A school cannot function in a vacuum as a public institution, but certain actions that it makes affect or involve the stakeholders. This means that the community must be directly or indirectly informed about processes occurring in the school (Okanda, 2022). Consequently, it takes an ethical principal to embrace this ideal undertaking.

Drawing from the above literature, one notes that principals of schools need to understand and practise ethical leadership. This is so because it forms an integral part of leadership as it takes into consideration both the interests of the school as an organisation and the other stakeholders as well, that is the parents and the learners. Additionally, school principals need to be role models to both the educators and to the learners.

2.4 School leadership ethical issues

The concept of ethical leadership involves its conceptualizations, practices, and lived experiences. School heads were required to display upright moral character to model behaviours and attitudes, such as honesty, fairness, and trust, for their subordinates (Ahmed, 2023). Consequently, staff were compelled to rely upon, depend on, and emulate this ethical character. This reliance also implies a significant risk: subordinates are likely to follow and emulate an unethical leader. Such leaders display deceitful conduct that may mislead their staff, ultimately leading to negative consequences for the school. Conversely, ethical leaders must be characterised by selflessness as they execute their duties honestly and accountably. Over and above the drive of influencing others, ethical leadership entails driving the best interest of the subordinates (Branson & Gross, 2014). Thereby, avoiding being a sole leader, the head teacher needs to exercise a democratic style of leadership catering for parents, teachers and learners. In this vein the leaders' values, personally, may be in conflict with what is the best interest of the learner (Arslan et al., 2024). For instance, a school going learner might have fallen pregnant, when the head teacher's personal beliefs are against such, but may also recognise that it is in the best interest of the learner to have her studies completed. Moreover, it is on the head teacher's perception to view what is the "best interest of the child" in relation to authority and politics that may be contrary to ethical leadership.

Branson and Gross (2014), when discussing ethical leadership in education, emphasise that ethical leadership is undoubtedly a matter of head teachers. The head teacher is guided by

administrative policies in the execution of his or her duties. These policies touch base on issues of decision making, staffing and management of school finances. Decisions taken by leaders need not be personal, though they may be related to personal traits, and may be transient as well as be biased (Caldwell & Anderson, 2017), though they should be taken out of positive interest. Branson and Gross (2014) argue that all judgements should be characterised by ethics, empathy, and sustainability, and should be for the good of the organisation. Such kind of ethical resolutions need to be cognisant of learners' cultural and political backgrounds, the socio-economic status of families and even the environmental conditions (Branson & Gross, 2014). Therefore, head teachers have to address and attend to these needs responsibly. From such literature above, it can be drawn that the ethical leadership should be based on the needs of the stakeholders. Head teachers have a task to always be considerate and have the learners, parents and teachers at heart, embracing the 'walk the talk' principle as opposed to the 'talk the walk', being cognisant of the fact that subordinates are copying the behaviour of the leader. And copying an ethical behaviour could yield more positive outcome for the school than the outcomes from copying an unethical behaviour.

2.5 Ethical leadership dimensions

According to Kalshoven et al. (2011), ethical leadership has several dimensions. The first one is fairness, which is a very important principle for head teachers. Head teachers should show uprightness together with fairness (Brown et al., 2005). It is understood that leaders who treat their subordinates fairly and with respect are likely to receive their subordinates' reciprocation (Grimani & Gotsis, 2022). There are general steps which leaders rendering fairness have to follow, which are accounting, self-introspection and recommendations (Weaver et al., 2005; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Waggoner (2010) advises that whenever an ethical leader receives a rumour, he or she has to question it before judging. Ethical leaders inspire trustworthiness amongst their followers by creating a free and enabling environment for the staff (Li et al., 2024). They make fair choices, they are honest and trustworthy, they treat all staff members equally and are accountable for all their actions (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020).

The second one is that ethical leaders allow subordinates to make contributions in decision making, and they listen to their ideas and concerns (Li et al., 2024). On the same note, Yukl (2006) suggests that sharing of power allows subordinates to take control of their actions to a

certain extent and makes them to be less dependent on their leaders (Yukl, 2006). The characteristic of being a humble leader comes with being polite and upright, unlike being bossy and rude, forcing subordinates to submit. Instead, the leader should be competent and caring so as to win respect (Khoza, 2011).

Thirdly, ethical leaders are transparent and practice role clarification, otherwise known as open communication (Brown et al., 2005). They clearly spell out responsibilities, expectations, and performance goals, and, as such, subordinates become clear about what is expected from them and also know when their performance is at an acceptable level (Martin et al., 202l). Brown et al. (2005) proceed to state that in this case, the staff has clear guidelines and rule for operations and are not frustrated by ambiguous instructions. Leithwood and Harris (2010) add that ethical principals delve much on the strategic aspect, which are the school vision together with the mission, and clearly explain it to all stakeholders. Head teachers with such traits are welcoming to outsiders (Leithwood & Harris, 2010). When analysing an open-door policy practised by ethical leaders, it is discovered that followers gain trust. The literature above emphasises that fairness of leadership is important as it has the ability to ignite the reciprocity of subordinates. Subordinates are likely to put in some more efforts on dedication to work if they see that their leader is not practising favouritism, acts transparently and values open communication. I am of the view that it is one thing for leaders to talk to subordinates because they believe they have something important to communicate (downward communication) and on the other hand leaders contact subordinates as they have the understanding that subordinates play a major role in the institution. Such communication is termed as a bottom-up kind of communication. Consequently, acknowledging the views of subordinates may help in establishing the principles of one vision which may be clearly shared together, depicting the consideration the leader upholds on the followers.

2.6 Being a moral person

It is believed that subordinates first accept and welcome the leader, then follow the vision (Maxwell, 2014), meaning that subordinates do not start by going for what is offered but start by the leader who offers an enabling environment. In other words, subordinates embrace and welcome their supervisor before accepting their supervisors' envisioning. Therefore, the initial

mark of a leader who is ethical is that of a morally upright person, for which it is a subordinate's insight with someone who is considered of a human character (Wang &Tang, 2021).

2.6.1 Personal character

There are four traits according to Kalshoven et al. (2011) which are: "agreeableness, openness, extraversion and conscientiousness. " The first trait, agreeableness, describes one who is not greedy, kind, accommodating and thoughtful. Again, being open is being one person who has insight and is inquisitive and inventive. The third trait, extraversion, defines one who is instrumental, enthusiastic, vigorous, and open (Shahab et al., 2021). Fourthly, the conscientiousness trait defines someone as being responsible, dutiful, determined and dependable. Within the four traits, there are two traits which are closely related to a main leadership character, which are agreeableness and conscientiousness (Brown & Trevino, 2006, concurring with Kalshoven et al., 2011).

"Agreeableness " depicts the propensities of being generous, trusting and thoughtful about interests all stakeholders. Likewise, persons with high intensities of being agreeable are those who are compassionate, kind to others and willing to share their authority. Furthermore, Yates (2011) states that persons with elevated levels of being agreeable are likely to employ fruitful strategies for the assistance of others. Usage of productive strategies constitutes an important element of ethical leadership (Grimani & Gotsis, 2022), and those leaders rated high in conscientiousness are self-disciplined, well organised and goal-oriented. Yates (2011) remarks that this may lead to a capability of defining "leader-follower constructive interactions", which suggests an ability of operating as reward contingent supervisors, thereby influencing worker conduct with attitudes. Moreover, those leaders inclined in conscientiousness display personal traits defining ethical leaders. An example can be that they give careful thought whenever they are to take an action, and they also stick to their right mandate, and appropriately execute their duties not for their personal interest but also for those of others (Shahab et al., 2021).

2.6.2 Personality and leader effectiveness

West et al. (2015) posit that the first major stream of research in this area reflects a long-standing fascination with the personality traits of those who become leaders. From this broader

leadership research evidence, they have unveiled core personality traits associated with leadership effectiveness, as follows:

High energy level and stress tolerance. These are leaders who have the drive to work effectively and tirelessly for long (West et al., 2015). These leaders never get distracted when there are struggles, stresses and disturbing issues. They are able to maintain steadiness exceptionally. Their thoughts are usually calm in times of predicaments, and in that event, transfer that calmness and confidence to other people. I am of the view that their calmness in volatile situations is a result of their ethical character; they are not afraid of anything negative that might be exposed.

Self-confidence. These leaders believe that they can be effective in difficult situations and give those they lead a sense of efficacy and confidence. They are confident and optimistic in the face of complicated scenarios. They are likely to face and deal with complicated, difficult situations rather than denying or avoiding them (West et al., 2015). However, caution should be exercised because extreme self-assurance or self-confidence can, perhaps, sometimes render them susceptible to making judgements that may turn out to be detrimental to the organisation.

Internal locus of control. West et al. (2015) assert that these leaders believe that what obtains around them is under their control than in the control of some external forces, and they feel they can influence and take control of events. This is linked to the tendency to be proactive rather than passive. They also think and believe that they can influence, inspire, encourage and motivate others and win their support to the endeavours at hand. The researcher believes this trait may tend to frustrate the leader in a school situation nowadays, because there are a lot of external forces influencing the operations of schools, such as political and economic forces.

Emotional maturity. These leaders are mature emotionally, they are not prone to touchiness, irritation, outpourings and moodiness. Their optimistic nature together with their positive attitude make them always communicate their positive insights to their followers. Such leaders have the knowledge about themselves relating to their strengths and weak points, together with responses to trying circumstances.

Personal integrity (West et al., 2015). Principals with this quality have consistency between espoused values and behaviour; they have trustworthiness, dependency and reliability. These

are leaders who always keep promises to their followers. They do not use their powers mainly for their self-centredness. I am of the view that these are actually ethical leaders whom the society needs.

Social powered motivation. This is a trait in which one seeks to have power mainly to attain the organisation's aims, as well as to improve the development, innovation and development of subordinates.

Achieving alignment. High achievement orientation is linked to leadership effectiveness, but this is not a linear relationship in the sense that leaders with a very high achievement orientation can become insensitive to the outcome of their wants on the people around them who may feel forced by their leader's ambition (West et al., 2015).

2.6.3 Trait versus process

Trait-based leadership is often encapsulated in statements like "She is a born leader " or "He was born to lead " (Yukl, 2006), suggesting that leadership is inherently tied to specific traits. Yukl (2006) emphasises that the trait approach focuses on a leader's personal attributes, such as personality, motives, values, and skills, assuming that some individuals are naturally endowed with leadership qualities that others lack (Masianoga & Chakauya, 2023). Kelly (2011) supports this view in her discussion of eight leadership theories, highlighting the "Great Man " theory, which posits that leadership is an innate capacity, and that outstanding leaders are born, not made. According to Kelly, some people inherit qualities that make them more suitable for leadership roles. This contrasts with the perspective that leadership is a process, suggesting that leadership is something that can develop over time, not just an inherent trait. The trait-based viewpoint implies that only a select few people, born with special talents, can be leaders (Yukl, 2006).

However, Mangena (2011) critiques this idea, arguing that leadership is not solely defined by an individual's innate qualities but can also be shaped by external factors, including the environment. He asserts that favourable environments cultivate effective leaders, and that even someone with the inherent ability to lead could be corrupted by a toxic, unethical environment. Mangena concludes that great leaders are made, not born (Mangena, 2011). I contend that both the belief in innate leadership and the idea that leaders are shaped by their environment

contribute to the development of good leadership. In my view, it is easier to groom a person with moral values into a great leader than it is to help someone from a corrupt background who lacks ethical principles.

Furthermore, I believe that good leadership demands considerable effort and hard work, and that a nurturing environment is essential to cultivating leaders of integrity. For this reason, I argue that ethical leadership within communities and organisations is crucial to instilling ethical values that will benefit future generations, creating a foundation for future leaders to grow from.

2.6.4 Moral manager dimension

Alongside the moral person trait, Khan and Bauman (2020) introduced another aspect of ethical leadership, known as the moral manager. A moral person embodies qualities like honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness. While these traits are vital, ethical leadership is further distinguished from traditional leadership styles by the moral manager dimension (Khan & Bauman, 2020; Raja et al. 2024). This dimension highlights the proactive behaviours that an ethical leader employs to influence followers' actions and beliefs about ethics. These behaviours include setting high-performance expectations, role-modelling actions that align with social norms and benefit the collective, using reinforcement systems to ensure accountability for appropriate behaviour, and treating people fairly and with respect (Eisenbeiss, 2012; Naidoo, 2012). According to Piccolo et al. (2012), a moral manager ensures that ethics are prioritized, actively sharing and utilizing ethical principles to motivate followers, holding them accountable for their actions. Moral managers work to show followers the ethical way to act by making ethical decisions and rewarding desirable outcomes (Lasthuizenet al., 2025).

Several authors (Brown et al., 2005; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Piccolo et al., 2010) have identified three key components of the moral manager dimension of ethical leadership: (1) The leader's role in setting and modelling ethical standards through visible actions, communication, and reinforcement; (2) Reinforcing ethical standards using rewards and discipline (Solinger et al., 2020); and (3) Facilitating two-way communication regarding both the positive and negative aspects of ethics and integrity (Brown et al., 2005; Moore et al., 2019). This

communication involves emphasizing the ethical components of decisions, tasks, and situations, clarifying expectations and norms, and providing guidance on appropriate actions (Moore et al., 2019). A leader's credibility emerges when they practise what they preach.

Effective leadership requires strong morals coupled with efficacy because a leader must resolve conflicts within people's value systems and enhance their awareness. According to Ciulla, a good leader maximizes productivity and achieves optimal results without compromising ethical standards (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2021). While several external factors contribute to this achievement, the leader must first establish a solid ethical foundation. Only after this can they potentially practise good leadership (Waggoner, 2010; Al Halbusi et al., 2021). Therefore, it is essential for ethical leaders to be mindful of how their decisions and actions may be interpreted by followers. Leaders should avoid any behaviour that could be perceived as inconsistent with moral norms, values, and rules, and should be ready to explain their decisions and actions if necessary (Kuenzi et al., 2020).

Ultimately, the moral manager dimension of ethical leadership emphasises the importance of setting clear ethical standards, ensuring accountability, and maintaining open communication, all of which contribute to fostering a culture of ethics within an organisation. Ethical leaders are expected not only to exemplify ethical behaviour but also to actively shape the ethical behaviour of their followers, ensuring that decisions and actions align with shared values and principles.

2.7 Global perspective of ethical school leadership

Lim and Weissmann (2023) argue that, in today's interconnected world, where rapid changes are occurring, ethical leadership in schools plays a crucial role in shaping the future of education. As globalisation and diversity continue to increase within educational systems, school principals are confronted with complex challenges. These challenges not only involve promoting academic excellence but also developing a strong ethical foundation for their schools (Lim & Weissmann, 2023). Ethical leadership in schools transcends traditional boundaries and integrates principles such as integrity, fairness, and social responsibility, which are essential for creating inclusive and enabling learning environments. This section aims to

provide a global perspective on ethical leadership in schools, examining its significance and impact across various cultural, social, and educational contexts.

In the USA, Wafa (2012) explored the application and development of an ethical framework in decision-making among rural elementary school principals in Pennsylvania. The study sought to investigate the ethical decision-making experiences of these principals during a particularly challenging period. Here, the term "ethical dilemma" refers to situations where moral values or principles conflict, requiring a decision to be made. To understand the perspectives of the school leaders in a rural setting, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted, alongside the distribution of a demographic questionnaire. The findings indicated that these districts, which serve communities with varying views on the purpose of education, face considerable stress due to low tax bases, insufficient funding, and unfunded federal mandates for accountability. This situation led to several ethical dilemmas (Wafa, 2012). The principals were caught in a dilemma, trying to balance state mandates with local needs, often resulting in the mismanagement of available funds. One way to address this issue might be to adopt and implement ethical leadership principles.

Al-Omari and Algaseem (2020) investigated the link between moral leadership and the overall well-being of organisations, focusing on school principals in Jordan. This study surveyed 393 teachers to assess the ethical leadership of school administrators in Jordan and its impact on organisational health, as perceived by the teachers. The findings revealed a strong correlation between ethical leadership and organisational health. Additionally, the study showed that the ethical leadership behaviours, as viewed by Jordanian teachers, were positively associated with aspects of organisational health. This result is logical, as the behaviours exhibited by administrators under ethical leadership are those most likely to foster organisational health within schools (Al-Omari & Algaseem, 2020).

Sharmini (2021) conducted a study on the ethical leadership practices and trust among public school leaders in Malaysia. The study, using a mixed-methods approach, examined how primary and secondary school teachers in Malaysia perceived the ethical leadership of their principals and the level of trust they had in them. The study found that integrity was the strongest predictor of trust-building in the school context. A morally consistent, reliable, and trustworthy leader was seen as essential in fostering trust among teachers, which, in turn,

contributed to effective school leadership (Sharmini, 2021). This relationship between leader integrity and trust was supported by Engelbrecht et al. (2017), who found a significant positive correlation between these two variables.

The earlier section discussed ethical leadership practices and trust in the context of public-school leaders in Malaysia. Extending this exploration to rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini would provide a more localised and specific understanding of ethical leadership practices within a different educational and cultural environment. The rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini may face unique challenges and dynamics not addressed in the USA and Malaysian contexts.

Governments and organisations globally recognize the importance of fostering positive behaviours in their workforces, investing considerable resources to achieve this goal, which ultimately leads to enhanced employee performance (Johnson & Brune, 2021). Despite these efforts, research has revealed numerous instances of moral failures among organisational leaders, which have resulted in the collapse of both for-profit and nonprofit organisations, such as WorldCom and Enron (Mehnaz et al., 2020). Ethical bankruptcy has extended beyond profit-driven sectors and has now permeated educational institutions as well. Evidence suggests that ethical challenges in the educational sector are becoming more prevalent, including issues like financial misappropriation and sexual harassment (Bondestam & Lundquest, 2020).

In the same vein, Johnson and Brune (2021) found that organisations that prioritise ethical practices and invest in leadership development programmes see improved employee performance, while also cultivating a strong ethical culture. Kalshoven et al. (2016) also found a positive relationship between ethical leadership and various performance indicators, including employee productivity, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment. This underscores the importance of ethical leadership in driving positive outcomes for both employees and organisations.

When applied to the context of school leadership, the findings from Johnson and Brune (2021) and Kalshoven et al. (2016) can be related to the ethical leadership practices of school principals. Principals who prioritise ethical leadership and invest in leadership development programmes for their staff are likely to experience improved teacher performance. This, in turn,

contributes to creating a strong ethical culture within the school. Positive outcomes such as increased teacher productivity, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment, as highlighted by Kalshoven et al. (2016), are more likely to occur in such environments.

Ethical leadership in schools also plays a key role in shaping the school's ethical culture and promoting positive outcomes for both teachers and students (Johnson & Brune, 2021). Principals who demonstrate ethical leadership are more likely to create an inclusive and supportive environment where teachers feel valued and empowered to do their best. This, in turn, can positively affect student learning outcomes and overall school success (Johnson & Brune, 2021). Therefore, the importance of ethical leadership in driving positive outcomes for both employees and organisations, as demonstrated by Johnson and Brune (2021) and Kalshoven et al. (2016), is equally relevant in the context of school leadership. Principals who embody ethical leadership practices can foster a positive and thriving school culture, ultimately benefitting not only staff and students but also other stakeholders.

Ogunsanya et al. (2019) examined the unique ethical challenges faced by leaders in educational institutions, focusing on issues like fairness, integrity, and the responsibilities of educational leaders toward students, staff, and the learning environment. The research emphasises the importance of principled decision-making and ethical conduct in educational leadership. Similarly, Hannah et al. (2018) investigated the relationship between ethical practices and teacher effectiveness in educational settings. Their study found that teachers who adopt ethical behaviours and maintain high moral standards contribute to improved student outcomes and overall school performance (Hannah et al., 2018). The research highlights the significance of ethical conduct, not only among organisational leaders but also among educators within the school system. Based on this, the researcher argues that principled decision-making and ethical conduct in educational leadership are crucial for the principals of schools, teachers, students, and other stakeholders.

Although leadership has been a focus of research for decades, there remains a global leadership crisis, which is largely characterized by ethical failures within organisations. Reports of scandals involving leaders in both the public sector and corporate sector have increased interest in studying ethical leadership (Toumeh & Ayoush, 2024). The financial crisis that affected the global community caused significant physical and psychological harm due to unethical

practices, but this was only the beginning of the exposure of a growing number of scandals in the political, industrial, religious, media, and educational sectors (Branson & Gross, 2014). The surge in literature on ethical leadership seems to be both a natural reaction to the disastrous effects of unethical practices and a genuine call to focus on a leadership model that can counter unethical behaviour (Goswami & Agrawal, 2023; Rutherford & Wightman, 2021). This dual motivation is understandable, considering both the devastating consequences of unethical leadership practices and the benefits that ethical leadership brings.

2.8 Literature on ethical leadership within the African continent

Cheteni and Shindika (2017) assert that, like other continents, Africa has witnessed a significant decline in trust towards leaders. Corruption and poor governance are widespread, and the blame largely lies with those in positions of leadership. African literature on ethics tends to focus more on the private sector, neglecting the public sector, despite the fact that issues within the public sector directly impact the general population (Cheteni & Shindika 2017). For instance, unethical practices within the Department of Education affect the delivery of quality education to students, who, as a result, may fail to become productive citizens, continuing unethical practices. Beyond the global concerns such as unethical institutional practices, Africa faces additional challenges, including poverty, inadequate healthcare, lack of resources, and political instability, all of which exacerbate an already critical situation. Many African schools suffer extreme deprivation due to corruption, maladministration, and other factors (Cheteni & Shindika 2017).

Ethics has always been central to leadership, but unfortunately, many contemporary scholars, educators, and practitioners have not given this matter the attention it deserves, leading to numerous organisational scandals (Branson & Gross, 2014). As a result, providing ethical leadership becomes an essential responsibility for leaders, especially considering such scandals. Werner (2011) argues that the issue of ethics and ethical behaviour has gained significant attention worldwide, including in Africa. Temple (2011) supports this view, noting that corruption is regarded as the primary cause of Africa's social and economic problems. Van Zyl (2015) and the Corruption Watch Reports (2016, 2018) indicate that unethical conduct has reached alarming levels in South Africa, which contradicts ethical leadership, whose core focus is on good governance, leadership, and management. Furthermore, Sam (2021) and Yuan et al.

(2023) suggest that no matter how prosperous a country or organisation may be, if its operations are plagued by dishonesty, high fraud rates, misappropriation and embezzlement of public funds, lack of accountability, and constant falsification of documents, such a society or organisation is destined to fail.

Werner (2011) states that every organisation has a duty to its shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, and the broader community. Similarly, Engelbrecht et al. (2014) emphasise that ethical leadership involves considering the interests of followers during decision-making processes and ensuring the well-being and growth potential of employees. As a result, employees are more likely to be dedicated to their organisations when they trust their leaders, who exhibit credible and trustworthy behaviour (Hilton et al., 2024; Suifan et al., 2020). Engelbrecht et al. (2017) assert that leaders who are perceived as credible are more likely to establish a high level of trust with their subordinates. Moreover, Engelbrecht et al. (2017) maintain that ethical leaders who take moral perspectives, prioritize trustworthiness, and value integrity are inherently caring. These leaders are consistently honest and fair in their decision-making and actions. They are also considerate of the welfare of their subordinates while prioritizing the achievement of organisational goals (Ete et al., 2021). Ethical leaders must demonstrate traits such as reliability, fairness, morality, and care (Masianoga & Chakauya, 2023).

Additionally, Werner (2011) argues that the behaviours of leaders should align with the organisation's code of ethics, ensuring that both leaders and employees adhere to established ethical rules and values. Ethical leaders must be principle-centred, both personally and professionally (Werner, 2011). They must demonstrate a high level of care and concern for the communities they serve when making decisions. Furthermore, ethical leaders should openly discuss their actions and not wait for problems to arise before they consider implementing ethical conduct (Malik et al., 2016). Cheteni and Shindika (2017) and Johnson and Brune (2021) assert that ethical leaders must educate their subordinates about the importance of ethics in forums such as workshops, meetings, and seminars, to engage in ethical discourse and ensure that subordinates are well-supported. They further argue that leaders should carefully make organisational decisions that are aligned with ethical values and ensure that the right decisions are always grounded in ethics. Additionally, Bello (2012) argues that an organisation's success

depends on cultivating strong relationships built on respect and trust. Ethical leaders must understand that trust and respect are vital components of success and that these qualities grow from a foundation of integrity, honesty, fairness, equity, justice, and compassion.

Regarding character, Moore et al. (2019) maintain that a moral leader consistently demonstrates good character, honesty, trustworthiness, and a concern for the well-being of subordinates. Furthermore, such a leader is approachable to those they lead. Engelbrecht et al. (2014) contend that ethical leaders should make fair and principled decisions, serve as role models for ethical behaviour, and recognize and reward ethical behaviour among their subordinates. An ethical leader's fair and caring treatment, as well as open communication, fosters trust, which subordinates are more likely to reciprocate. In essence, everyone in an organisation is responsible for upholding the highest ethical standards.

On the subject of role modelling, Oumer (2017) asserts that leaders, by virtue of their positions, must act as role models, demonstrating ethical behaviours in their interactions with the community. Nzimakwe (2014) suggests that what benefits the organisation also benefits the leader, and what is embarrassing for the followers of the leader reflects poorly on the entire organisation. Oumer (2017) emphasises the relationship between the organisation and its employees, arguing that organisations led by ethical leaders serve as models for ethical leadership to other organisations. Oumer further argues that ethical leadership cultivates credibility and respect for both the leader and the organisation. Werner (2011) adds that organisational leaders have a moral duty to advance the interests of employees by providing them with career opportunities, job security, good working conditions, and skills development. Sugianingrat, Yasa, Sintaasih, and Subudi (2017) argue that ethical leaders who demonstrate and promote ethical standards that resonate with followers' expectations typically gain their confidence, as these followers appreciate the ethical behaviours of their leaders. As a result, followers commit their energy to achieving the organisation's goals and feel secure under the leadership of an ethical leader. It can be inferred that, when leaders ensure that subordinates are ethically led, they are simultaneously ensuring the organisation's success, as these subordinates will fully apply themselves toward realising organisational goals.

Similarly, Engelbrecht et al. (2014) argue that ethical leaders inspire their followers through an ethical vision and provide employees with the freedom to take initiative in the workplace. As

previously mentioned, employees who feel their leader is fair and considerate tend to support their leader by putting in extra effort and becoming more actively engaged in their work (Engelbrecht et al., 2017; Qian et al., 2017). Werner (2011) notes that team building has gained popularity among organisational leaders, as it aims to improve relations among organisational members, boost productivity, and align employees' efforts with the organisation's goals. When employees perceive their leader as fair and considerate in their treatment, they are more likely to put in additional effort and become more engaged in their work (Engelbrecht et al., 2017; Qian et al., 2017).

Nzimakwe (2014) asserts that leaders who embrace ubuntu emphasise and model the importance of respecting individuals. Oumer (2017) argues that followers are more inclined to follow ethical leaders because they trust that their leader will always do what is right for them. Ethical leaders also place value on teamwork and support for one another. Therefore, ethical leadership is of great importance in various organisations (Oumer, 2017). Engelbrecht et al. (2017) suggest that leaders who demonstrate integrity leave their subordinates with no choice but to trust them.

In Ghana, Ampomah (2021) conducted a survey with 370 respondents from senior high schools in the Northern Region of Ghana to explore how ethical leadership by heads of schools and teachers' professional beliefs affect students' academic progress. The study found that both teachers and students, as well as the entire school organisation, depend on the ethical leadership practices of school heads and strong professional principles. The study revealed that three core ethical leadership attributes of school heads were trust, honesty, and mentorship. These findings underscore the importance of ethical leadership in ensuring positive outcomes, although African countries still have substantial room for improvement in this regard.

Most African countries suffer from maladministration, the misuse of public funds, and corruption (Cheteni & Shindika 2017). In South Africa, a landmark Constitutional ruling found that President Zuma had misused public funds for personal enrichment. Cheteni and Shindika (2017) argue that the decline in ethical leadership within public entities is a serious problem that must be addressed immediately. Botswana is not much different from other African countries in this regard. Sebudubudu (2014) noted that unethical practices also exist in the public sector of Botswana. These practices include organized white-collar crime involving

senior private business leaders, politicians, and senior government officials, who engage in deals benefiting their families. In an attempt to combat these unethical practices, the Botswana government established well-known institutions such as the Office of the Auditor General and the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime (DCEC) Act (Gabriel, 2013). The creation of these bodies that monitor and assess ethics within the public sector emphasises the importance of ethical leadership and helps raise awareness among leaders about the need to act ethically (Sebudubudu, 2014).

Cheteni and Shindika (2017) examined the extent of ethical leadership practices in African public utilities, noting that high levels of corruption have been reported in such institutions. They found significant differences in the perceptions of managerial moral conduct between South Africa and Botswana, with South African leaders being seen as weaker moral managers compared to those in Botswana. South African leaders were perceived as more prone to corruption and unethical actions than their counterparts in Botswana. Although Cheteni and Shindika (2017) did not explain the reasons for this difference, the contrasting histories of the two nations may provide some insight. South Africa's violent human rights violations and the legacy of apartheid stand in stark contrast to Botswana's less turbulent past, which may influence ethical behaviours. This highlights the impact of contextual factors on ethical conduct.

In 2005, the South African government introduced the Batho Pele Principles, which translate to "people first", as part of its effort to promote ethical practices in public administration (Cheteni & Shindika 2017). These principles aimed at improving the performance of government officials and ensuring they adhere to ethical standards. However, Raga and Taylor (2005) express a differing opinion, arguing that this legislation alone would not resolve unethical behaviour. They believe that it is essential to instil appropriate attitudes and virtues in public officials to guide their behaviour. They emphasise the importance of integrity training to ensure that officials could provide ethical, accountable, and efficient services. Tamunomiebi and Orianzi (2019) also support this perspective, noting the need for such training. From a researcher's point of view, it is vital that such training also considers the diverse nature of society, the complexity of leadership, and the unique contexts in which these officials work.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as in many other African nations, both public and private institutions suffer from corruption and maladministration (Peterson et al., 2001). Peterson et al. (2001) also identify gender and age as significant predictors of ethical beliefs in the DRC. However, Cheteni and Shindika (2017) pointed out that there remains a lack of empirical research on ethical culture, job retention, and performance in the DRC. Research on ethical leadership within the DRC is still limited, creating a significant gap in the literature. To fully understand the nature of ethical leadership in African schools, it is important to grasp the context of leadership within these schools. A brief discussion of African schools' issues, including maladministration and corruption, provides a backdrop. Oduol (2021) highlights the need for induction strategies and training for school heads in developing countries, stressing that many school heads in Africa, due to a lack of adequate training, struggle to meet the demands of their roles. Bush and Oduro (2006) emphasise this point by discussing the lack of leadership capacity, particularly among newly appointed heads in Kenyan schools, and argue that induction programmes are necessary. This raises the question: how do untrained individuals end up in leadership positions? Could it be beneficial to offer leadership courses at the college level that address both school and ethical leadership? A common issue across African schools is the absence of formal requirements for teachers to become trained managers (Malone, 2020).

Across Africa, any qualified teacher can be appointed as a school principal, which opens the door for individuals who may lack the essential leadership skills, including those required for ethical leadership, to take on these important roles. In Eswatini, for example, any qualified educator can be appointed as a principal. In many African nations, appointments to leadership roles depend on factors like political connections (Kenya), payment for the position (South Africa), or even gender and age (DRC) (Peterson et al., 2001). This creates a leadership crisis, as the selection process does not prioritize the qualities necessary for the role. Ethical leadership is not considered in the appointment process, and there is no prior ethical leadership training for prospective school leaders. In Ghana, although teaching experience and qualifications are considered when selecting leaders, formal training for school principals is still lacking (Bush & Oduro, 2006). Seychelles stands out as an exception among African

nations. According to Bush and Oduro (2006), Seychelles partners with the University of Lincoln (UK) to offer leadership training at the Master's level for school leaders.

The lack of leadership training in most African countries has serious consequences for ethics in education (Malone, 2020). The image painted is one of an ill-prepared leader who is appointed to a principal role without proper training, and sometimes without being a competent teacher themselves. These leaders are tasked with making decisions about finances but may not have the financial expertise to do so. They are expected to make ethical decisions and influence their subordinates to behave ethically, but without the necessary training and induction for these duties. Such appointments often result in disastrous outcomes (Rabie & Abdul, 2020), as appointees are often not equipped to manage effectively. Reports of unethical practices within Nigeria's education system, such as corruption, casual attitudes toward work, overcrowded classrooms, and mismanagement of funds, have been widely documented (Ajayi, 2024; Osuji, 2020).

It is evident that the leadership challenges faced by African school principals differ from those experienced in more developed countries like the USA, UK, and Australia. The ethical dilemmas faced by African school principals are unique, and many of the challenges they encounter are more complex. For instance, African school principals must address issues like students' inability to pay school fees, shortages of educational materials and facilities such as classrooms, lack of staff accommodation, long student commutes, and the use of English as the medium of instruction (Bush & Oduro, 2006). Moreover, they must contend with political turmoil, as seen in North Africa (Lagi et al., 2011), disease outbreaks such as Ebola in the DRC, religious conflicts in countries like Nigeria, Sudan, and the Central African Republic, gender stereotypes in Ghana (Inkoom, 2010), unemployment, malnutrition in countries like Ethiopia, Malawi, and Somalia, and child labour (Agezo & Christian, 2002). These issues add to the burdens faced by school leaders in developing countries, which are primarily found across the African continent. As many African school leaders lack the necessary training and experience to handle these ethical challenges, their struggles are compounded (Malone, 2020).

In addition to the challenges posed by a lack of proper leadership training, African school leaders also face a difficult working environment. Bush (2006) identified six contexts critical to education in African countries: the demographic context, economic context, resource

context, context of violence, health context, and cultural context. These contexts cover the conditions in which education systems in African countries operate and emphasise the challenges that educators and school leaders face. The demographic context, for instance, refers to the population structure, which includes issues like the devaluation of girls' education in some African societies due to traditional beliefs. This is particularly true in countries like Ghana and Nigeria (Inkoom, 2010). Additional issues in this context include high dropout rates and teenage pregnancies, which school leaders must manage. Bush (2006) further describes the economic context as related to financial matters, where many African nations struggle with limited educational budgets and fragile economies. African countries are particularly vulnerable to global economic shifts, which often further strain their education systems. This leads to the resource context, which addresses shortages in material and human resources, as well as teaching and learning materials (Bush, 2006). Despite Africa's vast natural resources, issues like inequality, inequity, and poor leadership have exacerbated shortages in infrastructure, educational materials, and educators, thereby affecting the education system.

Bush and Oduro (2006) illustrate that African schools often lack basic equipment, have inadequately trained staff, and serve students who are impoverished, hungry, and affected by HIV/AIDS. Given these challenges, the Commonwealth Secretariat emphasises the importance of leadership in schools, stating that the head of a school plays a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness of the school (Bush & Oduro, 2006). Without effective leadership, school leaders can become overwhelmed by their responsibilities. A study in one rural South African district found numerous unethical practices among school principals, including self-serving behaviours, corruption, favouritism, and neglect of duties (Mthembu, 2017). This study revealed that some principals hired their own companies to work at their schools, accepted bribes, managed their schools as private businesses, and engaged in other unethical practices such as trading teaching positions for cash or sexual favours and practicing nepotism. The study also found that principals often spent considerable time absent from their work.

On the other hand, a study by Meyiwa (2023) identified ethical school leaders in South Africa who were guided by principles of integrity, fairness, and empathy, though they faced challenges from external factors like socioeconomic conditions, political interference, particularly from teacher unions, and a lack of support from the Department of Basic Education

and other stakeholders. Despite these challenges, these leaders remained committed to principles like shared decision-making, accountability, and responsibility. Their leadership was informed by a vision of ethical leadership, characterized by foresight, empowerment, humility, listening to others, and making moral decisions, all underpinned by justice, integrity, and honesty (Meyiwa, 2021).

Similarly, Maimela (2023) emphasised the importance of principals embodying ethical leadership in order to build trust and accountability within their schools. He suggested that principals align their actions with the needs of the school community, rather than focusing on their self-interest. His study revealed that favouritism and nepotism hindered principals from holding their staff accountable, resulting in power imbalances within schools.

In conclusion, the studies by Mthembu (2017), Meyiwa (2021), and Maimela (2023) collectively recognize the challenges faced by school leaders and propose solutions. These include addressing unethical behaviours such as bribery, nepotism, and neglect of duties. The research advocates principals to embrace ethical values, engage in collaborative decision-making, and demonstrate accountability, responsibility, empathy, and care in their leadership. It also stresses that ethical leadership should be guided by moral principles, with school leaders serving as models of trustworthiness, integrity, and accountability, thereby fostering a culture of trust within their school communities (Maimela, 2023; Meyiwa, 2021; Mthembu, 2017).

2.9 Literature on ethical leadership in Eswatini

Not much has been written on ethical leadership in Eswatini in general and in Eswatini schools, as observed by Masina (2015). Masina found that practicing ethical leadership is significant for smooth operational procedures within the schools. School leadership is expected to be exemplary and to show subordinates the worth of living within the dictates of ethical values. He states that role modelling in leadership influences the followers to emulate the conduct of the leader. In the case of a school, when an ethical behaviours is transferred to teachers, the teachers in turn transfer it to learners and thus they are influenced to be morally upright. The study by Masina also revealed that the school principal as a head of the institution is the one from which all ethical behaviour should be expected, so it can subsequently be taken up by the other stakeholders. Findings also indicated that the principals from these two schools do

promote ethical leadership through ways such as being exemplary at work, empowering the staff, and sounding warnings to students. The conclusions of the study also revealed that there are some factors which are a hindrance to the practice of ethical leadership in schools. These factors included substance abuse and intimate relationships amongst members of the school community. Masina further argues that the lack of literature could contribute to the rise in such incidences. Reports of scandals in schools and in other departments within the public and the private sector are regular within the print media, as highlighted in the introduction. The researcher agrees with Masina in that the shortage of empirical studies on ethical leadership in Eswatini could be responsible for the escalation of cases of unethical behaviour among officials, including school principals.

It appears that principals in the Kingdom of Eswatini are wanting in as far as the practice of ethical leadership is concerned. Literature suggests that it could be a result of principals often being hired without any prior knowledge or exposure to leadership skills and competencies, for example, financial management. This results in them being vulnerable to engaging in unethical practices related to the handling of school finances (Dlamini, 2018; Kunene, 2018). Consequently, some school principals have undergone serious audits as a result of allegations of mismanagement and misappropriation of school funds (Tshabalala, 2017). According to The Kingdom of Eswatini Ministry of Education and Training reports, on average, five school principals are sacked every year after being found guilty of embezzlement and misappropriation of school funds (Kunene, 2018).

To address these challenges, it is crucial to implement comprehensive training programmes for school leaders that focus on financial management practices. This will provide principals with the skills and competencies necessary to uphold ethical standards and effectively manage institutional resources in alignment with established financial guidelines (Myende et al., 2020; Yasin & Mokhtar, 2022). Furthermore, the lack of effective training for principals and school governing bodies can lead to significant issues concerning accountability and financial management, ultimately affecting the quality of education and governance within schools.

2.10 Ethical school leadership

According to Ehrich et al. (2015), ethical leadership in schools is necessary. School principals and educators are expected to account to the rest of the stakeholders and to each other. Generally, there is a worldwide demand for educational practitioners (principals and teachers) to be accountable (Kogan, 2022). Angus (2006) defines ethical leadership in schools as a societal, interactive practice which is about the principled purpose of education. This principled approach is further supported by Begley (2012), who argues that ethics is not merely rigid compliance with formalised moral codes or institutional policies, but rather an evolving and dynamic practice rooted in foundational moral principles. Along the same line of thinking, ethical leadership can be explained as a double pathway process that involves self-ethical behaviour and influence on ethical behaviour (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Thus, I am inclined to the view that principals of schools and educators are to dynamically and endlessly apply ethics through different frameworks of ethical leadership so as to achieve inclusivity and equity, and further to adhere to codes and principles of policies, and to communicate ethical leadership to other stakeholders in education. The definition of ethical leadership by Angus (2006) above suggests that ethical leadership is about relations, because it involves a social and relational practice.

The ethical leader appreciates that relationships which are positive are a treasure in all organisations, and as such all organisation strive for same. Good relationships founded on trust and respect rather than on mere agreement are determining factors of organisational success. Leadership involves interpersonal skills and the interactions of humans. When interacting with others, ethical leaders ought to be fair, honest, caring, just and principled, taking steady decisions and transmitting the value of ethics to their subordinates (Greenfield, 2004; Brown & Trevino, 2006). While working with teachers, learners, parents and other various stakeholders in the school, an ethical principal encourages ethical behaviour among them, as suggested by Leithwood and Harries (2010), when they stated that school principals have to set an ethical climate by the way they communicate and the way they conduct themselves (Leithwood & Harris, 2010). This action makes it ethical to be a role model, a custodian and a communicator of ethics who is bound to be accountable for decisions taken.

Accountability and social trust are the trait for ethical leadership (Branson & Cross, 2014; Yukl et al., 2013). Ethical principals ought to be accountable for any decision they take and also, expect their subordinates reciprocate with accountability. This should not be antagonistic with how they have influenced their subordinates to behave in an ethical manner. Accountable leaders attract social trust, and because the social trust of leaders is low worldwide (Mishra & Mishra, 2013), it is vital for ethical leaders to strive to improve same by being ethical and, ensuring the involvement of all the stakeholders and taking on board the community values when taking decisions. I am of the view that these two traits, accountability and social trust, can be realised by engaging the community, giving feedback and reasons for whatever decisions are taken and as well as soliciting ideas from the community before reaching a conclusion on any matter. This demonstrates the values of democratic decision making. School principals must endeavour to involve teachers and learners and acknowledge and embrace the rights of all involved. The various stakeholders within the school community ought to be respected, appreciated, well-treated and have their opinions respected (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). This is in line with the ethic of care, which is rationally motivated, but also with the ethic of justice, which is about the fairness and equal treatment of all persons (Starratt, 2014).

The ethics of justice is believed to be dependent on one's willingness to act justly, and justice itself is understood to be the community's choice to shape and direct its actions in a fair manner (Starrat, 2014). Ethical school leaders are to take into consideration the two types of justice as vital to be able to let go of their own rights in favour of public interest. They have to give equal treatment to people and act justly in accordance with the expectations of the community.

A framework by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) gives a valuable heuristic for the study of ethics in the leadership fraternity of education. This framework advances that the four types of ethics, the ethic of care, critique, justice and profession are interrelated. The ethic of justice is more about social justice and human rights. The ethic of justice cannot be fully operational without caring about relations and some knowledge on the teaching profession. Additionally, the ethic of critique and an ethic of the profession require an ethic of caring if they are to pay attention on the focus on the worth of relations. The above paradigms, as I perceive them, are crucial in dealing with ethical dilemmas faced by principals of schools while executing their duties in their respective schools.

Shapiro and Gross (2013) stress that the ethic of justice is concerned about laws, codes of conduct and rules. They further noted that some ethicists are not so satisfied with the analytical and rational style of the ethic of justice. Employing critical theory, these ethicists take into consideration also the ethic of critique.

This ethic (ethic of critique) draws from the critical theorists who criticise hierarchies in social relationships and institutions (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). The ethic of critique demands that school principals should consider existing policies and practices as an option to expose injustices or exploitations that are rooted in social structures. Then they must address injustices and make the social practice responsive to the demands of the community (Starrat, 2014). Congruently, because school leaders are professionals in the education sector, they are bound to attend to the needs of their communities that are within their jurisdiction. The ethic of profession requires that school principals adhere to the principles of the professional codes of conduct. These includes formal codes of ethics, written standards of profession and community standards (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). Therefore, principals of schools must draft their personal ethical codes and make sure that they align well with the codes of the profession. Even though conflicts may arise in these fields, school principals must have the intention of making decisions that are oriented to the interests of learners. Most of the time, school principals are expected to make decisions, and this becomes problematic and hard especially when faced with ethical dilemmas. School principals' ethical decision-making and leadership ability needs some courage and risk taking, especially where there is some opposition. Courage is needed to enable an ethical practice to be enjoyed by all parties and it can be diplomacy, willpower and street-smartness (Palestini, 2012).

The complex tasks of school principals and how they impact on ethical issues are mentioned in the literature on leadership. Besides being complex in the way they are, schools are characterised by instabilities, they are situations that erupt, and they are connected to ethical leadership and that demonstrates the magnitude of the complexity in the responsibilities of school management and leadership (Clarke, 2016). In emphasising the complexity in the responsibilities in school leadership, Clarke (2016) points to contracting autonomy and accountability as a phenomenon that leads to the complexity of school leadership. I consider that the demand for accountability and the autonomous status of schools are antagonistic

concepts that manifest as complexity within the school leadership functions. This agrees with Reyes-Guerra et al. (2014), who describe the relation between accountability and autonomy as the paradox of the Americans. The question that arises is, how can one be fully autonomous and still give an account for decisions endorsed? Though autonomy may conflict with the opinion that an ethical leader has to take into consideration the views and values of stakeholders before a decision is taken, being accountable is one of the traits of ethical leadership. Clarke (2016) points out that school principals have been urged to use the distributed or shared leadership style nowadays, but the responsibility for whatever has been decided still rests upon the school principal.

Hallinger (2009) states that the concept of instructional leadership has been modified by other types of leadership, such as distributed leadership. This type of leadership is described as including the delegation of duties to other teachers by the principal but with overall responsibility resting on the principal. Relating to ethics, ethical leaders influence followers to behave ethically, and, by so doing, they share or distribute roles. This comes naturally to ethical leaders. And because ethical leaders are accountable for what had been decided by their followers, it is their responsibility to have subordinates accounting to them for their behaviour.

Clarke (2016) furthers his contention on the complexity of the roles of school principals by revealing the notion of "values dualities". This entails school principals striving to balance the values of individual versus the values of the masses, loyalty to teachers versus loyalty to parents, compliance versus professional autonomy, self-determination versus social responsibility and local needs versus system priorities. This highlights the complexity of school leadership and the value dualities involved in making ethically implied decisions. Fullan and Kirtman (2019) note that leaders are expected to constantly and consistently offer "once-and-for-all answers " to scenarios that are "complex, rife with paradoxes and dilemmas ". As ethical leaders make good decisions to benefit all, it becomes important that school principals are armed with all the necessary skills to enable them to come up with solutions to fit in the complex context they find themselves in. On the other hand, Bush (2020) perceives leadership and management as a means for taking charge and directing what is happening in schools. Because school principals are to account for whatever happens in their schools, there tend to be inertia in that principals control whatever is happening at their place of work (Bush,2020).

However, controlling what is obtaining in an organisation may antagonise the ethic of care and justice as it is not in line with professional and personal values of ethical leadership. In addition to training school principals to be in control of schools and to direct what is happening, they ought to be trained to be exemplary by being role models and being communicators of ethics to teachers, learners and to the community at large. Therefore, when considering this idea, then leadership is not about controlling subordinates, instead is a way of influencing them (Bush, 2020). This aligns with the characteristics of ethical leaders as those who influences.

The principal, as an ethical leader, is ever concerned about ethical leadership in every circumstances, inclusive of conditions of extreme rurality. Such school principals employ ethical tactics in managing the various phases in harsh times (Reinard, 2007). Caldwell and Anderson (2017) refer to this as the moral nature of leadership. This emphasises the moral responsibility that a leader possesses which comes with the moral trust from subordinates. The words "moral" and "trust" are popular in ethical leadership literature. Moral responsibility should not only be limited to the present times, but it should also cater for generations to come (Friedman, 2008) in such a way that adds value in the long run. In order for a principal to be trusted, he or she must be worthy of the trust, and this can be gained when honesty is exhibited, but not as a once off thing.

However, when practising ethical leadership, there are antagonistic pressures which result from ethical dilemmas. These pressures include understanding the needs of every member of staff who are underperformers (e.g., using compassion and mercy) vs the rights of the learners, the school and the community, and secondly, following rules and regulations (e.g., using a zero-tolerance policy) vs compassion and kindness (Cranston et al., 2006). To overcome these tensions, it calls for ethical leaders to show care or use the ethic of care, even when this may be against the school rules.

Norberg and Johansson (2007) conducted a study in Sweden on educational leadership, in which the school principals pointed out main ethical quandaries. These include misbehaving learners and staff, the discontentment of learners in school, and numerous quandaries brought about by parents and principals. Tensions arose when professional loyalty for principals was challenged, especially when they had to make a choice of whom they have to side with, between an educator and a learner. This may involve a clash between the professional and personal

values of the principals. The study found that dilemmas faced by principals are learner-related, and this is in line with other studies by Cranston et al. (2006) and Dempster and Berry (2003) as well as Begley (2006), whose study of schools in Canadian and America discovered that most school leaders focus on learners' best interests.

When school leaders face complex challenges, they sometimes resort to short-term, self-serving solutions—a regrettable choice that undermines trust and long-term success. Burns (2010) emphasizes that effective leadership is inherently ethical; only those who recognize this connection can make morally grounded decisions, which foster transparency and staff buy-in. While existing literature highlights the importance of ethics in leadership, it often neglects practical implementation strategies. Transformational leadership theory (Anderson & Anderson, 2010) partially addresses this gap by emphasising visionary change and process stewardship, yet ethical leadership goes further. It ensures that schools thrive even in adversity, such as in rural or high-poverty contexts, by prioritising integrity over expediency. Principals must move beyond theoretical ideals and actively model ethical decision-making, creating a culture where moral principles guide actions not just policies. Only then can schools overcome systemic challenges sustainably.

When taking into consideration the ubiquity of transformation, the uncertainty of the future and turbulence above stability, Clarke (2016) draws from Parks (2005) who classifies the schools' problems as either technical and swamp. Technical issues are those problems that are perceived to be straight forward and simple and could be resolved in a common or traditional manner, usually drawing on readily available knowledge. Problems like late coming and absenteeism are very good example of technical problems. These problems can be resolved by means of the attendance policy of the school. Nevertheless, solving these issues which are regarded as technical requires some experience and a bit of training (knowledge at hand) and application of ethical leadership principles, lest they become magnified and uncontrollable situations.

Fullan (2008) describes the swamp issues as adaptive; they do not have obvious solutions and can result in imbalance when trying to solve them. Furthermore, Fullan (2008) labels them as politically charged because answers are hard to identify. Therefore, swamp problems demand

ethical leadership skills in order to be dealt with. However, that does not fully guarantee that there would be no disequilibrium in addressing the problems.

The ambiguity, complexity, volatility and unpredictability of the challenges in schools is similar to VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity), as described by Horney, Pasmore and O'Shea (2010). An answer to such problems is the establishment and practice of authentic leadership (Duignan, 2012). To this, Clarke (2016) concurs and goes on to prove that ethical leadership incorporates authentic leadership and extends beyond the acquired knowledge and just skills of management. In my view, the swamp issues in schools need to be dealt with by application of ethical leadership principles.

Clarke (2016) points out that leaders can be situational and adaptive and be able to manoeuvre their way to success irrespective of uncertainties. This is evident in that even though most schools are prone to VUCA, still there are schools which are regarded as successful schools. Principals of successful schools have a way of acclimatizing to the conditions in which they live in, hence their successes. Resilience, the ability to endure uncertainty has long been overlooked, yet it empowers school leaders to navigate inevitable challenges and turn difficulties into opportunities for success. Furthermore, Clarke (2016) underscores how principals could utilize negative capabilities by taking up the position of an observer on one hand and on the other hand being a participant, in a position to endure uncertainties and anxieties, equipped with training, focusing on process and drawing on research and literature that reports on the experiences of leaders who solve complex issues. The personalised training, caring and tolerance could be regarded as personal values which resonate with the qualities of ethical leadership and are principles of human relations (Clarke, 2016).

Ciulla (2014) emphasizes that ethics fundamentally concerns human relationships, adding complexity to ethical leadership. Since each individual possesses unique values, beliefs, and perspectives, interpersonal dynamics become challenging to navigate. This relational dimension particularly complicates school principals' work, as they must reconcile diverse viewpoints while maintaining ethical standards. The inherent variability in human perceptions and priorities creates a fertile ground for misunderstandings. Effective school leadership thus requires not just moral clarity but also exceptional relational skills to harmonise these differences and foster productive working relationships amidst inevitable interpersonal

tensions. Ciulla (2014) continues to state that "ethics is the heart of leadership", this is in agreement with Toor and Ofori (2009), who argue that any form of leadership that is deficient of ethical behaviour is toxic, destructive and dangerous. School leaders do not only deal with relations amongst themselves, learners, subordinates and the community but also the relation among subordinates, among learners and the community and among subordinates. Therefore, taking charge of such relations in as far as management is concerned demands ethical leadership skills in order to come up with good and acceptable decisions.

Some issues which are both central to ethics and to leadership have been identified by Ciulla (2014). These issues are inclusive of moral obligations to justice, self-interest, duty, self-discipline, competence and greater good. Over and above all these ethical issues mentioned above, which principals are supposed to deal with, morality takes a centre stage (Ciulla, 2014). This is exemplified by how those in leadership are expected to be highly moral or exhibit a higher moral standard than their followers. This high moral standards which leaders are expected to match should be at the same level as the moral responsibility which leaders have to exhibit (Calwell & Anderson, 2017). Caldwell and Anderson (2017) further state that good relations among humans are not always an easy thing to attain; a lot of conflicts erupts because of differences in cultures, races, preferences, languages, culture and religions, which add to the complexities within the school environment.

Branson and Gross (2014) reveal that in the sphere of education, there are many uncommon complex situations, and they are always challenging in nature and demand instant decisions. As I see it, no one can come up with an instant right choice or decision other than an ethical leader.

By illuminating the complexity in the responsibilities of school principals' leadership roles, I hope to demonstrate that the schooling environment is naturally unpredictable and is lacking certain facilities that enable effective leadership. Therefore, one searches for a leadership style that can be effective and suitable in such situations, a style that makes leaders take instantly decisions for the good of all stakeholders. I am of the view that such leadership is none other than ethical leadership.

2.11 Importance of ethical leadership in school management

Engelbrecht, Heine, and Mahembe (2017) suggest that ethical leaders are more likely to foster a high level of trust with their followers. They argue that leaders who adopt an ethical perspective and uphold values such as integrity and trustworthiness are inherently caring. Ethical leaders are committed to being honest and fair in both their duties and in making decision (Mendoza & Espiritu, 2024). Additionally, they demonstrate mindfulness and consideration for the welfare of their subordinates while prioritizing the achievement of organisational goals. This view is particularly relevant in the context of school management, where ethical leadership plays a crucial role. Ethical leaders not only preach their values but also embody them, avoiding a reactive approach to promoting ethical conduct (Malik, Awais, Timsal, & Qureshi, 2016).

Cheteni and Shindika (2017) emphasise that ethical leaders must engage their followers in ethical discourse by creating platforms for discussion and using reinforcement to support key ethical messages. They further argue that ethical decision-making requires leaders to make choices aligned with ethical values, ensuring that the right decisions are those that adhere to ethical principles. Oumer (2017) similarly asserts that leaders, due to their positional authority, are automatically regarded as role models. As such, they must consistently exhibit an ethical behaviour so as to influence both the community and the rest of the stakeholders (Wang et al., 2025). Nzimakwe (2014) reinforces this point by noting that the well-being of the organisation is intertwined with that of the leader. Any embarrassment faced by the leader ultimately reflects poorly on the entire organisation. Therefore, ethical leadership ensures that organisational goals are met while also safeguarding the welfare of employees. So ethical leadership is important in that it takes care of the main mandate of the organisation and, in the process, does not neglect the value of the subordinates.

Oumer (2017) stresses the significance of organisation/employee relations and further argues that ethically led organisations serve as exemplars of ethical leadership, setting a standard for other organisations to follow. Ethical leadership, according to Oumer, cultivates credibility and fosters respect for both the leader and the organisation. Werner (2011) and Johnson and Brune (2021) add that leaders of organisation are morally obliged to prioritize the interests of their employees by offering career advancement opportunities, assurance of job security, and safe

and favourable working conditions, while also helping employees develop their skills. However, despite these noble efforts, employees may sometimes respond negatively, particularly those who are difficult to please, which can diminish the impact of the ethical leadership initiatives.

Sugianingrat, Yasa, Sintaasih, and Subudi (2017) argue that ethical leaders who embody ethical principles that align with the expectations of their followers are more likely to earn the trust and confidence of their subordinates. This trust is built upon the ethical behaviour displayed by the leader. As a result, followers tend to commit themselves to the achievement of organisational goals, feeling secure under the management of an ethical individual. In the context of school management, this implies that, when school principals exhibit ethical behaviour, teachers, students, and parents are more likely to respect and support them. Such respect facilitates the fulfilment of the expectations placed upon them, ultimately leading to better outcomes for the school. Engelbrecht et al. (2017) and Qian et al. (2017) support this view, suggesting that when employees perceive their leaders as fair and considerate, they are motivated to exert additional effort and become more engaged in their work. It stands to reason, therefore, that, in the case of schools, if the principals are ethical in their dealings, the teachers, learners as well as the parents are bound to respect the principals, thereby delivering as expected of them and consequently enhancing the desired results of the school.

Nzimakwe (2014) highlights that leaders who practice ubuntu emphasise respect for others, fostering an environment where mutual respect is central. Oumer (2017) further contends that followers find it easier to follow an ethical leader because they trust that the leader will always act in their best interests. Ethical leaders prioritize teamwork and mutual support, thus making ethical leadership a critical issue across various organisations, including schools. Engelbrecht et al. (2017) align with this by stating that leaders who demonstrate integrity compel their subordinates to trust them. Ethical principles such as honesty, justice, respect, responsible citizenship, and loyalty may present challenges in the short term but offer substantial long-term benefits, as noted by Turhan (2021). Thus, embracing ethical leadership principles, despite their challenges, is essential for the betterment of the school community.

Schools serve as an ideal environment for both students and other stakeholders to apply and internalize ethical principles in their daily lives. Teachers and administrators play a pivotal role

in shaping future generations and instilling moral values (Langlois & Tanguay 2020). Mendes (2003) observes that students spend more time in schools than at home, and during this time, they develop their identity by observing and imitating their principals and teachers. As a result, schools are crucial in raising morally conscious individuals, contributing to the creation of a peaceful and prosperous society.

Hassan et al. (2013) argue that organisational leaders have a responsibility to uphold the highest standards of ethical behaviour, as leaders who lack ethical conduct can be harmful, destructive, and even toxic to society (Leroy et al., 2015; Chou, 2024). Given these assertions, it is clear that ethical leadership holds significant importance in schools. Ethics are central to leadership because they guide the process of influencing followers or subordinates to achieve goals while shaping the values, climate, and culture of an organisation (Ete et al., 2021). Therefore, a leader's ability to ethically influence others is a key measure of effective leadership. Ethical conduct instils a sense of truth and positively impacts the behaviour of those who follow, as noted by Wu (2021).

The ethical dimensions of leadership have garnered increasing attention in both academic and practical literature (Hilton et al., 2023). They define ethical leadership as the correct conduct of leaders, which they actively promote to their followers. This interest in ethical leadership has led to a growing body of scholarly work exploring the effects that ethical leadership may have on organisations (Guo, 2022; Shehzad et al., 2022). Numerous empirical studies have documented the relationship between ethical leadership and factors such as job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviour (Guo, 2022; Hilton et al., 2023; Zaim et al., 2021). The connection between ethical leadership and job satisfaction has been confirmed in various studies (Al-Khaled & Fenn, 2020; Ete et al., 2021).

Reports highlighting the unethical conduct of educators, as discussed in the introductory chapter, have received widespread publicity (Arslan et al., 2024; Sam, 2020). Society has become increasingly aware of the existence of unethical and even toxic leaders who exploit gaps in management systems to fulfil personal desires at the expense of their organisations and employees (Sam, 2020). The ethical scandals that have plagued major corporations, such as those involving the misrepresentation of financial performance, the misuse of company resources, and illegal marketing practices, have sparked public concern and ignited debates on

business ethics (Winston & Ryan, 2008). Scandals within the banking sector and the oil industry, in particular, have raised significant public awareness, emphasizing the importance of ethical leadership in organisational practice (Eisenbeiss, 2012).

It seems that the ethical dimension of leadership is now more critical than ever. Eisenbeiss (2012) emphasises the importance of altruism in ethical leadership, defining ethical leaders as individuals who engage in virtuous behaviours that benefit others while refraining from actions that could cause harm. This ethical restraint resonates with Shahab et al. (2021), who stress the importance of respecting the rights and dignity of others as an essential characteristic of ethical leadership. These views highlight the ongoing significance of ethical conduct in leadership roles, particularly within organisations that shape society, such as schools.

The increasing public exposure of unethical behaviour in organisations has led to a surge in research on business ethics within organisational psychology (Göçen, 2024; Martin et al., 2022). Numerous theories and frameworks have been developed and tested to understand why individuals make unethical decisions in the workplace (Trevino et al., 2014). Organisations are expected to take responsibility by demonstrating ethical governance and promoting ethical leadership throughout all levels of their hierarchy (Mayer et al., 2009). However, much of the current research on ethical leadership is grounded in a Western, empirical, descriptive perspective. The commonly accepted definition of ethical leadership, which involves demonstrating acceptable behaviour and promoting such behaviour to followers, lacks specificity regarding the norms that ethical leaders should follow (Eisenbeiss, 2012). Researchers like Giessner and van Quaquebeke (2010) have called for a stronger integration of both normative and descriptive approaches in ethics research, emphasizing the need to define the relevant norms that guide ethical leadership (Eisenbeiss, 2012).

Further findings on ethical leadership (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020; Vikaraman et al., 2020) has emerged due to the significant impact that leaders have on the behaviour of employees and, in turn, on the overall performance of organisations (Masianoga & Chakauya, 2023; Moore et al., 2019; Rabie & Abdul 2020). Ethical leadership plays a crucial role in addressing moral issues and encouraging ethical behaviour among employees. According to Moore et al. (2019), ethical leaders are obligated to set a moral example for their followers. Studies examining ethical leadership suggest that it is strongly associated with employees' pro-social behaviour,

productivity, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment (Guo, 2022). Research also indicates that ethical leaders inspire high levels of commitment and trust, while promoting desirable behaviours among their followers (Khan & Bauman, 2020). Positive correlations have been found between ethical leadership and various outcomes, such as employee in-role and extra-role performance (Detert et al., 2007; Kalshoven et al., 2011), satisfaction with the leader, and employees' willingness to report issues to management (Guo, 2022). Ethical leadership is also linked to employee voice behaviour (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009), an ethical climate, and increased job satisfaction (Neubert et al., 2009). Furthermore, it is associated with employees' motivation to exert extra effort and with leader effectiveness (Toor & Ofori, 2009; Neves, 2025), along with positive perceptions of job characteristics such as task significance and autonomy, as well as higher employee trust and commitment (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Neubert et al., 2009).

In exploring leadership styles, researchers have identified various types such as transactional, transformational, servant, and authentic leadership, each with its own unique characteristics and values (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Brown & Trevino, 2006; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Ethical leadership stands out primarily because of its emphasis on moral judgment, moral management, moral perception, and moral impression (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Ethical leadership is closely tied to self-actualisation, moral relationships, moral perception, and impartial dealings (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Ethical leadership is founded on the personal qualities and characteristics of a leader that employees perceive as acceptable, such as honesty and fairness. Resick et al. (2006) describe ethical leaders as people-oriented, with a focus on respecting and supporting their subordinates, genuinely caring for their well-being, and, where possible, addressing their needs (Kalshoven et al., 2011). Acting appropriately within this context means adhering to general expectations for how leaders should behave in the workplace. Being 'normatively appropriate' means that leaders must be fair, honest, principled, and trustworthy in taking responsibility for their actions, and using rewards and punishments where necessary to hold subordinates accountable for their behaviour (Piccolo et al., 2012).

Brown and Trevino (2006) assert that ethical leaders should embody qualities that align with normative ethical principles such as honesty, fairness, and trustworthiness. These leaders must

make principled decisions and consider the ethical implications of those decisions. Ethical leaders demonstrate moral management, actively communicate ethical standards, reward ethical compliance, and refuse to compromise ethical values for short-term organisational gains (Brown et al., 2005; Piccolo et al., 2012).

Masianoga and Chakauya (2023) propose that leaders become more credible, legitimate, and attractive as ethical role models by engaging in behaviours that indicate altruistic motivation, thereby fostering ethical behaviours in their followers. If school principals exhibit such ethically appropriate conduct, it is likely to encourage ethical behaviour among educators and learners who share the school environment as a transactional space.

Ethical leaders contribute to creating a fair and trustworthy atmosphere, which, in turn, encourages ethical and pro-social behaviour among employees (Stouten et al., 2012). Acting with fairness and trustworthiness has been linked to higher integrity levels among employees (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Ete et al. (2021) highlight integrity as a key characteristic of ethical leadership, which plays a crucial role in implementing codes of conduct, policies, and support structures aimed at fostering fairness and trust within organisations. An ethical leader serves as a moral role model who motivates subordinates to exhibit moral behaviour by providing coaching and guidance, as well as using rewards and sanctions to encourage ethical compliance (Mayer et al., 2011). This means that ethical leaders not only talk about ethics but also demonstrate it through their actions. Additionally, ethical leaders are decision-makers guided by virtuous qualities such as integrity, honesty, determination, humility, tolerance, enthusiasm, courage, and responsibility qualities that are worthy of emulation by their followers (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009; Mayer et al., 2011).

De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) argue that an ethical leader must proactively communicate what constitutes ethical and unethical behaviour, be transparent, and openly share information with subordinates. By providing constructive and helpful feedback, these leaders help followers understand the expectations required to succeed within the organisation or school environment. Such feedback also boosts followers' self-efficacy, as ethical leaders clarify how their actions and tasks contribute to the achievement of organisational goals (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Furthermore, ethical leaders are characterized by their honesty, care for others, and ability to make balanced decisions (Trevino & Brown, 2006). They set clear ethical standards

and communicate them consistently to their followers, treating them with respect, keeping promises, involving them in decision-making, and clarifying expectations and responsibilities (Kalshoven et al., 2011).

Eisenbeiss (2012) identifies four key ethical orientations in ethical leadership: (1) humane orientation, (2) justice orientation, (3) responsibility and sustainability orientation, and (4) moderation orientation. These orientations represent leadership attributes commonly found in social science literature on leadership. However, a comparison of ethical leadership research with broader leadership literature reveals that much of the focus has been placed on humane and justice orientations, with less attention given to responsibility, sustainability, and moderation orientations (Eisenbeiss, 2012). The humane orientation emphasises treating others with dignity and respect, viewing them as ends in themselves rather than as means to an end. It reflects a leader's full acknowledgment of others' rights, compassion, and concern for their well-being. Existing studies on ethical leadership address aspects of humane orientation by highlighting leader altruism, respect for others' rights and dignity, and a people-oriented leadership approach (Kalshoven et al., 2011).

Ethical leadership also involves making consistent, fair decisions without discrimination (Eisenbeiss, 2012; Yukl, 2010). Research suggests that for procedures to be considered fair, they must be applied consistently across individuals and time, free from bias, and based on accurate information (Eisenbeiss, 2012). The justice orientation is expressed through a leader's commitment to consistent decision-making, respect for diversity, and fair treatment of individuals, regardless of factors such as gender, nationality, religion, political beliefs, or socio-economic status. Justice is regarded as a core element of ethical leadership (Eisenbeiss, 2012; Northouse, 2010). Johnson (2009) also underscores justice as a central principle of ethical leadership, as it results in the fair and equal treatment of others (Eisenbeiss, 2012).

The responsibility and sustainability orientation reflects leaders' long-term perspectives on success, emphasizing their concern for societal and environmental well-being (Eisenbeiss, 2012). This orientation involves a leader's sense of duty toward themselves and the community, focusing on long-term organisational performance, evaluating the impact of decisions on society and the environment, and considering the needs and interests of future generations (Kalshoven et al., 2011; Eisenbeiss, 2012). It highlights a leader's commitment to broader,

long-term goals that serve the common good, especially in relation to setting organisational objectives.

The moderation orientation, as described by Eisenbeiss (2012), involves self-restraint and humility, helping to balance the actions of leaders. This principle is expressed through a leader's ability to control their emotions and personal desires, as well as to thoughtfully balance organisational goals with stakeholder interests. Leaders with a moderation orientation aim to balance conflicting objectives, such as financial profit with social responsibility, or short-term goals with long-term objectives. In essence, moderation strives to balance the competing interests within an organisation while adhering to ethical standards (Eisenbeiss, 2012).

Eisenbeiss (2012) critiques existing ethical leadership literature, arguing that the construct of ethical leadership remains conceptually vague, particularly within Western-centric frameworks. He points out that the most commonly accepted definition of ethical leadership in the social sciences is based on "normatively appropriate behaviour", which does not specify the norms leaders should follow when promoting ethical conduct to their followers. This definition is intentionally vague because what is deemed appropriate can vary across different cultures and organisational contexts. Nevertheless, Eisenbeiss contends that ethical leadership does not always align with prevailing organisational norms, agreeing with Ashforth et al. (2008), who suggest that not all organisational values are inherently moral.

Eisenbeiss further argues that existing ethical leadership research largely derives from a Western perspective and fails to account for the principles and values held by other cultural clusters. For example, Northouse (2013) identifies five principles of ethical leadership: respect, service to others, justice orientation, honesty, and community building. However, Eisenbeiss asserts that these principles, derived from Western cultures, offer a narrow, one-dimensional view of ethical leadership. He argues that Eastern cultures, for example, may emphasise different values and principles that are crucial to ethical leadership (Eisenbeiss, 2012).

Much of the empirical-descriptive research on ethical leadership in social sciences has built upon the work of Brown et al. (2005, 2006), using their definition of ethical leadership and related measurement tools (Detert et al., 2007; Mayer et al., 2009; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009; Piccolo et al., 2010). This body of work emphasises the importance of justice and fairness

within leadership. Brown et al. (2005) and Kalshoven et al. (2011) include impartiality and principled decision-making but reject favouritism as key elements of ethical leadership. Northouse (2018) similarly identifies justice as a fundamental component of ethical leadership, while Johnson (2005) emphasises the significance of justice in ensuring that others are treated fairly and equally.

Eisenbeiss (2012) argues that most approaches to ethical leadership have focused on the interpersonal dynamics, particularly examining how ethical leaders exercise their power and influence. While using ethical methods to influence others is essential, it is not sufficient for achieving true ethical leadership (Eisenbeiss, 2012). For example, school principals may treat their staff and students ethically by acting with fairness and compassion, promoting both their personal and professional growth. However, these same leaders might set and communicate unethical goals, such as expecting outstanding results in the short-term without adequate resources or a well-thought-out strategy. In such cases, the unrealistic expectation of achieving exceptional results without sufficient support or infrastructure is immoral, as it may inadvertently drive educators to resort to dishonest practices, such as focusing solely on exam results rather than fostering the holistic development of students. To fully understand ethical leadership, research should pay more attention to the leadership component of setting ethical goals. Al-Khaled and Fenn (2020) suggest that ethical leaders are concerned with the methods used to achieve goals, not just the outcomes. Ethical leadership moves beyond seeking quick solutions for immediate, short-term results, recognizing that such approaches may harm the organisation and its reputation in the long run.

When setting ethical goals, the four central principles of ethical leadership—humane orientation, justice orientation, responsibility and sustainability orientation, and moderation orientation—are highly relevant. These principles serve as foundational elements in various leadership approaches, particularly in influencing others and setting objectives (Brown et al., 2005; Resick et al., 2006; Ferdig, 2007; Johnson, 2009; Kalshoven et al., 2011). While social scientific research on ethical leadership has rarely explored responsibility and sustainability orientation in depth, it has primarily focused on efficient resource management (Kalshoven et al., 2011). However, Ferdig (2007) offers a broader understanding of sustainable leadership, suggesting that such leaders go beyond self-interest, considering the long-term viability of

interconnected systems. Sustainability, rooted in the responsible use of environmental and socio-economic resources, advocates preserving these resources for future generations rather than depleting them in the short term (Brown, 2014).

The responsibility and sustainability orientation particularly pertains to the leadership aspect of goal setting and decision-making, reflecting the leader's concern for long-term success, community welfare, and environmental protection (Brown, 2014: Eisenbeiss, 2012). I believe that the principles of responsibility and sustainability are as crucial as humane and justice orientation in ethical leadership. Therefore, all four central principles of ethical leadership should be considered to fully address the complexities of ethical leadership. Furthermore, Mangena (2011) notes that Western interpretations of ethical leadership tend to focus primarily on the qualities and roles of individual leaders. In contrast, African concepts of ethical leadership emphasise both the leader's role in promoting communal and group interests and the role of those they lead. Ncube (2010), in her work on ubuntu as a transformative leadership philosophy, argues that the post-colonial African state has caused significant social problems, including conflicts, failures, scandals, and corruption, all of which have contributed to the suffering of the general population, particularly women. Ncube attributes these issues to a lack of good leadership, asserting that Africa's challenges stem from insufficient ethical leadership. She proposes ubuntu as a solution to these problems, outlining principles such as modelling the way, communal enterprise, shared vision, change and transformation, interconnectedness, interdependence, empowerment, collectivism, solidarity, and continuous integrated development. These values, she believes, can cultivate and nurture good leadership in Africa.

Ncube advocates transformative leadership in Africa, rooted in the philosophy of ubuntu (Ncube, 2010). According to her, ubuntu leadership requires leaders to act as role models, setting an example for others to follow. Malunga (2009) expands on this idea, noting that, as role models, leaders legitimize their relationships with others by demonstrating African values such as honesty, sincerity, truthfulness, compassion, empathy, dignity, and respect. This leadership philosophy emphasises the need for leaders to embrace these values, which are foundational to building trust, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that the leader's actions align with the collective well-being of the community.

Ubuntu is recognized as the ethical foundation of African societies, offering guidance in various settings (Mangena, 2011). Mkhize (2008) extends this view, describing ubuntu as a process of becoming fully human and advocating for a way of being that emphasises social justice, empathy, respect, and conscientiousness. In a more refined sense, Bekker (2008) frames ubuntu as embodying compassion, reciprocity, and dignity.

While Ncube's assertion that ubuntu is a solution to Africa's challenges, it is also recognizable that its abstract nature, requires practical application. One key element of ubuntu is empathy for others, yet observable that some individuals exploit leaders who show such empathy. This presents a challenge, suggesting that, while ubuntu provides a moral compass, it must be complemented with a structured ethical framework. However, it is believed that the four central ethical orientations proposed by Eisenbeiss (2012), i.e., humane orientation, justice orientation, responsibility and sustainability orientation, and moderation orientation can work in tandem with ubuntu to address the broader issues facing Africa, particularly in the context of Eswatini's schools.

Building on Ncube's (2010) findings, Mangena (2011) explored the ethical theory best suited for post-colonial African leadership. His study draws on Martin Prozesky's ten characteristics of ubuntu, which include toughness, gentleness, hospitality, rejecting aggression, avoiding excessive competitiveness, bearing no grudges, and demonstrating resilience (Prozesky, 2003). Mangena (2011) argues that many of the leadership challenges facing Africa require not just ubuntu as a general transformative philosophy, as Ncube (2010) suggests, but as a specific ethical guide aimed at promoting the common good of the entire community. He emphasises that ethical leadership is urgently needed in Africa to address issues like despotism, violence, ethnic conflicts, and corruption. These challenges also manifest in the leadership and management problems seen in schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini.

While Mangena concurs with Ncube's view on the necessity of ubuntu for transforming African leadership, he identifies gaps in Ncube's application of ubuntu to address the leadership challenges in post-colonial Africa. Mangena (2011) points out that Western approaches to ethical leadership focus primarily on the leader's qualities and role, while African perspectives highlight the leader's role in promoting communal interests and the role of those they lead. He contends that Western leadership philosophies, grounded in efficacy and

individual outcomes, do not align with African values, which prioritize the collective benefit of the community over individual gain (Mangena,2011).

Mangena further elaborates on the qualities of ubuntu that can be utilized to build a leadership ethic capable of transforming post-colonial African leadership. He acknowledges that while Ncube's six principles of ubuntu: (1) modelling the way, (2) communal enterprise and shared vision, (3) change and transformation, (4) interconnectedness, interdependency, and empowerment, (5) collectivism and solidarity, and (6) continuous integrated development, are vital for transforming African leadership, they need to be contextualized to fully address how ubuntu can bring about meaningful change (Mangena, 2011).

Mangena emphasised that African leaders should not be seen as "great men" but as servants of the people. Servant leadership, at its core, is about serving others, and the only authority that merits allegiance is that which is voluntarily and knowingly given by followers in response to the leader's demonstrated commitment to servitude (Song, 2020). In the framework of servant leadership, the leader's attention is directed more toward the development and well-being of followers rather than the economic objectives of the team or organisation. The main motivation of a servant leader is to foster empowerment, growth, and nurturing among followers.

A key trait of ethical leaders is a deep concern for others. Research by Liden et al. (2008), as well as Walumbwa et al. (2010), explored the positive impact of servant leadership on organisational outcomes. They found significant relationships between servant leadership and improved followers' organisational citizenship behaviour, self-efficacy, commitment to the leader, and a positive perception of the justice climate within the organisation (Liden et al., 2008; Walumbwa et al., 2010). These findings align with the principles of ethical leadership, reinforcing the importance of caring for others.

It is important to note that while Western leadership philosophies encourage leaders to exert influence and make decisions that affect others, leadership in Africa is viewed differently. In African contexts, leaders are expected to follow the collective will of the people (Mangena, 2011). This means that leaders must share a vision with their followers, a vision that is reflected in ubuntu philosophy (Mangena, 2011). I agree with Mangena's perspective on African leadership, but I also believe that elements of Western leadership, where leaders influence

others and make impactful decisions, should be considered when developing a new ethical leadership philosophy for Africa.

In his book: *Experiential approach to organisational development*, Donald Brown states, "Change is coming down upon us like an avalanche, and most people are utterly unprepared to cope with it; tomorrow's world will be different from today's, calling for new organisational approaches" (Brown, 2014, p. 1). This underscores the need for "great" or "super" leaders to help navigate periods of change. Effective leadership plays a crucial role in influencing processes, shifting subordinates' attitudes and values, boosting followers' self-efficacy beliefs, and fostering the internalisation of the leader's vision through empowerment strategies (Resick et al., 2006).

The literature suggests that ethical leadership is vital for establishing and maintaining a positive relationship between an organisation and its employees. When an organisation is led ethically, employees tend to invest in the success of the organisation. In a school context, students, teachers, and parents will support the principal's vision and contribute to the school's success. Furthermore, ethical leadership fosters trust. Teachers and students will trust the administration because they recognize that the principal respects their rights and dignity.

2.12 Malpractices or unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals

Unethical behaviours within organisations are actions that violate universally accepted moral or social standards and diverge from these norms (Kilduff et al., 2016; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Zacarias & Flores, 2024). These behaviours include organisational deviance, exploitation, flattery, mobbing, discrimination, favouritism, violence, insults, sexual harassment, selfishness, gossip, bigotry, corruption, bribery, neglect of duty, and violations of courtesy rules (Aydın, 2017; Fidan & Koç, 2020; Sam, 2020). Even though public employees are bound by legal regulations, such unethical actions can still occur while they fulfil their organisational responsibilities. The increase in unethical behaviours within organisations can lead to significant negative consequences for any type of organisation (Wang & Yang, 2016; Ahmed & Ishfaq, 2024). In schools, which are vital components of the social system, these unethical behaviours contribute to the degradation of the institution. The growth in unethical actions, coupled with a loss of ethical values, disrupts the efficient functioning of schools,

leading to dissatisfaction within the organisation and ultimately causing degeneration (Recepoğlu, 2020). Consequently, it can be argued that, while adherence to professional ethics positively influences the school climate, the presence of unethical behaviours can severely damage it. This degeneration, brought about by unethical actions, results in various challenges for teachers, other school staff, students, parents, and especially school principals. These challenges can undermine progress and reduce the effectiveness of educational organisations.

Unethical behaviours in schools can manifest in various forms. These include favouritism by school administrators, such as hiring relatives, passing students who do not deserve it, accepting gifts, physical and verbal harassment, discrimination based on race, language, or religion, embezzlement of school funds, using one's position to harm others, and abuse of power (Mthembu, 2017). Furthermore, corruption in schools often takes the form of bribery for student placements, examination credits, or covering up misconduct (Chikoko, 2008; Kanyongo, 2005). Singh and Twalo (2015) highlight that, when employees steal or misappropriate organisational assets, they tarnish the school's reputation and the education system as a whole. This can lead to an inflated budget and inefficiencies. Munge et al. (2016) stress that school leaders, as financial managers, are responsible for safeguarding school funds and ensuring they are used effectively and efficiently. They argue that educational administrators must use available resources prudently to achieve institutional objectives. However, mismanagement of funds can lead to embezzlement, diversion of resources from priority projects, and other forms of misappropriation (Mustaf et al., 2013).

It is crucial for educational administrators to emphasise the ethical principles of the school to both employees and students, reinforcing these principles in their actions. Administrators should be practitioners of these values and apply them consistently to all members of the school community (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020). Unethical behaviour by education administrators can damage the organisational structure and impede communication between staff members, resulting in conflicts among educational stakeholders. Thus, it is essential for education administrators to avoid unethical conduct and adhere to ethical principles.

Abuse of students is another serious issue in schools, where both physical and sexual abuse is perpetrated by school principals and teachers (Campbell et al., 2015). This form of abuse is described by Brock et al. (2014), Davids and Waghid (2016), and Corruption Watch (2018) as

a significant ethical concern, particularly when teachers commit sexual violence against female students. This directly contradicts the idea that a school leader should be an ethical role model, responsible for the welfare of students. A commitment to the well-being of students aligns with the ethics of care and justice (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). The rights of students must be respected, and in accordance with the ethical responsibility of leaders, there is no room for abuse. In line with the in loco parentis principle, teachers are responsible for protecting students as parents would, and they should not engage in harassment. Disturbingly, some reports indicate that sexual harassment in schools is also directed towards boys (Mthiyane & Mudadigwa, 2021).

Consequently therefore, unethical behaviours in schools, such as discrimination, corruption, and abuse, have significant negative impacts on the functioning of the institution. The erosion of ethical values can disrupt the school environment, causing dissatisfaction among staff, students, and parents. To foster a healthy and effective school climate, educational leaders must emphasise and practise ethical principles consistently, ensuring that all individuals in the school community are treated with respect and dignity.

2.13 Root causes of unethical practices or malpractices by principals of schools

A critical synthesis of the literature reveals that the root causes of unethical leadership among school principals are not isolated incidents of individual failure but are deeply embedded within a complex, interconnected system of personal, organisational, and systemic factors. The sources collectively paint a picture of a multifaceted problem where internal motivations intersect with external pressures and structural enablers.

At the most fundamental level, a cluster of scholars point to inherent personal and psychological drivers as a primary source. Butts (2012) anchors this in basic human emotions, identifying greed, envy, anger, and jealousy as core motivations. This is not merely about impulsive actions; as Manjunatha and Maqsud (2013) elaborate, individuals are often fully conscious of their unethical choices but are driven by a calculated pursuit of personal gain, ambition, and insatiable desires. This concept of calculated self-interest is powerfully echoed by Dwangu and Mahlangu (2015), who identify the desire to accumulate wealth as a significant driver, and by the Corruption Watch Report (2018), which explicitly names self-interest as a

key barrier to ethical leadership. This synthesis suggests a concerning trend where personal enrichment is prioritized over professional integrity. However, Ampofo (2020) introduces a crucial nuance to this discussion, arguing that some principals engage in unethical behaviour only to the extent they believe does not threaten their self-concept as a person of integrity. This creates a significant gap in understanding the psychological mechanisms of moral disengagement and the internal justifications leaders employ to reconcile unethical acts with a positive self-image.

Beyond individual proclivities, the literature converges on powerful external pressures and perverse incentives that push otherwise ethical individuals toward misconduct. A significant theme is the immense pressure to meet academic and departmental targets. Dladla (2020) and Osuji (2020) directly link this pressure to unethical outcomes, suggesting that the blame culture for student failure creates an environment where cheating and other malpractices are rationalized as necessary for survival. This aligns seamlessly with the arguments of Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011), who, though writing in a corporate context, provide a critical analytical framework: leadership itself can create conditions that unwittingly encourage unethical behaviour by setting unrealistic goals. This synthesizes a critical cause-and-effect relationship: systemic pressure for performance (from departments, communities, or political structures) can corrupt ethical decision-making, making principals not just perpetrators but also victims of a flawed system. This is further compounded by the intrusion of political interests, which Manyaka and Nkuna (2014) identify as a key driver that shifts focus from collective organisational success to personal and political gain.

The persistence of these behaviours is fundamentally enabled by a failure of organisational and systemic safeguards, a gap that multiple sources highlight. A major synthesised theme is the absence of robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Dladla (2020) identifies "inadequate monitoring at all levels" as a direct trigger, while Van Niekerk (2003) provides a deeper analysis, identifying a crippling "lack of political will" and insufficient legal deterrents. This relationship is critical: without strong enforcement, legislation, and a genuine fear of repercussion, particularly for leaders with political connections, unethical behaviour is allowed to flourish with impunity. This systemic failure is exacerbated by a lack of ethical clarity and reporting channels. Salawu (2012) and Manyaka and Sebola (2013) argue that the absence of

a clear, actionable ethical framework for public servants creates ambiguity and allows misconduct to go unchallenged. Dladla (2020) adds that the absence of secure and reliable reporting platforms actively hinders the establishment of an ethical culture, allowing corruption to remain hidden.

Furthermore, a synthesis of the work by Magak (2013), Nyakanyanga (2019), and Hlongwane and Bhengu (2025) reveals a practical, yet often overlooked, competency gap. These authors posit that financial mismanagement and the resultant unethical behaviours are frequently not born of malicious intent but from a sheer lack of skills in budgeting, accounting, and auditing. The relationship they highlight is between a structural deficiency, the common absence of professional bursars or accountants in schools, and the prevalence of financial maladministration. This suggests that a portion of unethical practices may be addressed not only through punitive measures but also through capacity building and structural support, a perspective that adds important depth to the discussion dominated by intentional malfeasance.

Consequently, the literature in this section synthesizes to show that unethical leadership is not a simple problem with a single cause. It is the product of a dangerous interplay between individual moral failings (greed, self-interest), immense external pressure (performance targets, political interests), and systemic enablers (inadequate monitoring, lack of frameworks, absence of consequences, and skill gaps). The critical gap this synthesis reveals is a lack of research on how these factors specifically interact within the unique, resource-constrained context of rural high schools, where these pressures and structural weaknesses are likely amplified. Understanding these dynamic relationships is essential for developing effective, multi-faceted interventions that move beyond blaming individuals to fixing the systems that allow such behaviour to thrive.

2.14 Challenges and pressures encountered by school principals when enacting ethical leadership surrounding the regulations and punitive measures

A synthesis of the literature reveals that the challenges principals face in enacting ethical leadership are part of a pervasive, global crisis of trust affecting leadership across all sectors, thereby creating a uniquely pressurized environment for school leaders.

The foundational challenge is established by Ciulla (1995) and Fulmer (2004), who frame the issue not as an isolated educational problem but as a widespread societal phenomenon where leaders consistently disappoint a public whose desire for ethical exemplars intensifies accordingly. This creates a critical contextual pressure for school principals: they are expected to be moral paragons within a broader culture where ethical leadership is perceived to be in short supply. This overarching crisis of confidence is empirically substantiated by Brown and Treviño (2006), Sama and Shoaf (2007), and Treviño and Brown (2006), a synthesis of whose work shows that relentless media coverage of scandals in business, government, and even religious institutions has bred public confusion and cynicism. For a school principal, this means they operate under intense scrutiny and must combat a pre-existing deficit of trust, making their ethical enactment a high-stakes endeavour.

Furthermore, a review of the literature enables one to identify a dangerous behavioural contagion effect within organizations led by unethical figures. Mohiuddin and Hossain (2016) argue that, in such environments, employees are not only likely to mimic questionable behaviour but may also exploit the leader's lack of ethics. This creates a specific relational challenge for a principal: their ethical failures can rapidly corrupt the entire school's climate, while their ethical stance must constantly counteract this potential for negative mimicry. This highlights a significant gap in the literature regarding the specific strategies principals can use to insulate their staff from these broader societal and organizational pressures.

The sources further converge on the idea that the causes of ethical lapses are multifaceted and systemic. Sumah (2018) provides a crucial framework for synthesizing these pressures, identifying three interrelated factors: the political-economic environment, professional ethics and legislation, and cultural influences. This framework connects directly to the challenges principals face. For instance, political pressures can manifest as demands for certain academic results, while weak legislation or a lack of clear ethical codes (a professional factor) can create ambiguity. This synthesis suggests that principals are not failing in a vacuum; their ethical dilemmas are often triggered by complex, external forces that are beyond their direct control.

However, a critical gap emerges between the identification of these macro-level problems and the micro-level reality of a school principal. While Chetini and Shindika (2017) posit ethics education as a solution for public officials, and Mayer et al. (2009) correctly note that empirical

research on ethical leadership is still emerging, the literature synthesized here lacks a focused discussion on the unique regulatory and punitive pressures specific to the education sector. The sources ably describe the global "what" of the ethical crisis but leave a gap in exploring the "how"—specifically, how the interplay of national regulations, school governing body mandates, and punitive measures for non-compliance creates a complex web of pressures that either supports or hinders a principal's ability to lead ethically on a daily basis.

2.14.1 Political and economic environment

Sumah (2018) suggests that unethical behaviour is significantly shaped by the political and economic environment. In countries where economic activity is tightly regulated and limited, the power and authority of officials in decision-making increase, which creates a higher likelihood of corruption. In such environments, individuals are often willing to offer bribes or payments to bypass restrictions. The potential for corruption is particularly high when officials, operating under strict regulations, are given discretionary power in decision-making (Sumah, 2018).

Goel and Nelson (2005) highlight a connection between monetary policy and corruption, noting that countries with well-regulated financial systems and minimal informal economies or black markets tend to experience less corruption. In contrast, nations with poorly regulated financial sectors are more prone to corrupt activities. Dimant (2014) argues that the effectiveness of public administration plays a critical role in determining how conducive the environment is for corruption. This efficiency is influenced by the quality of regulations and permits, as unclear or ineffective regulations can exacerbate corruption. According to Shava and Mazenda (2021), ethical behaviour within the public sector can only be efficient if policies supporting it are well-implemented and directly address relevant issues. Sumah (2018) also notes that corruption is driven by the low wages of public administration employees, who may resort to unethical practices, such as accepting bribes, to improve their financial situations. Consequently, the socio-economic conditions of government officials significantly contribute to the prevalence of corruption.

2.14.2 Professional ethics and legislation

The lack of professional ethics and insufficient laws regulating corruption as a criminal offence, as well as the inadequate prosecution and sanctioning of such activities, significantly contribute to the rise and spread of corruption. Sumah (2018) argues that ineffective sanctioning of unethical behaviour exacerbates the problem, as it creates an environment where corrupt actions can continue without consequence, leading others to believe that such behaviours are permissible. This lack of accountability perpetuates a cycle of unethical conduct. Sumah further notes that the absence of professional ethics is particularly problematic, as administrations in certain regions, especially in developing countries, take considerable time to develop or modify their ethical standards. In some cases, ethical and professional standards evolved rapidly to align with those in developed democracies, while in others, they remained entrenched in outdated systems. In developing countries, milder forms of corruption are often viewed as acceptable and justified, contributing to an environment where ethical behaviour is not adequately prioritized.

2.14.3 Habits, customs, tradition and demography

Corruption is also facilitated in areas where there is insufficient legal infrastructure or political will to enforce transparent operations in both politics and the economy. When legislation is vague or incomplete, allowing for varied interpretations, unethical behaviour becomes more widespread (Sumah, 2018).

In terms of customs, traditions, and demographic factors, Sumah (2018) argues that different countries exhibit varying attitudes toward corruption. For instance, European nations are divided between those with a strong intolerance for corruption in the North and those in the South, where corruption is more socially accepted. This cultural difference can be traced to the historical and political contexts of these regions, with some countries having a long history of prosecuting corruption, while others, particularly former socialist states, have accepted it as part of their cultural legacy. In some societies, offering a gift as a "thank you" for services rendered is seen as a courteous gesture, while in others, such actions are regarded as unethical or even corrupt. Such distinctions are heavily influenced by local ethics and moral perspectives, which can differ significantly across regions and countries.

Furthermore, certain forms of corruption are tied to informal social security systems, particularly in less developed countries where formal legal structures are lacking. In regions such as Southern Europe, where the influence of extended families remains strong, the family unit often provides the main source of social security. This familial structure has contributed to the prevalence of nepotism, cronyism, and patronage, particularly in countries like Italy, Greece, Albania, and Bosnia, where individuals are expected to demonstrate loyalty and reciprocate the benefits they receive from their families or communities (Sumah, 2018).

2.15 Reducing or eradicating malpractices and unethical behaviour among school principals

To reduce or eliminate unethical practices among school principals, it is essential to find ways to address these issues effectively. Nzimakwe (2014) suggests that the principles of ubuntu should serve as a foundation for tackling a wide range of leadership challenges. These principles include shared responsibility, collaborative decision-making, and participatory leadership. On the other hand, Bhatti (2007) emphasises the need for compatibility between the values held by leaders and those embraced by their followers. These values must be ethically sound and practical for implementation in the specific context.

Friedman (2008) highlights the importance of ethical leaders recognizing and respecting the inherent value of all aspects of life (Qin, 2025). Werner (2011) and Bello (2012) suggest that an ethical organisational culture should be cultivated to guide members away from unethical conduct and malpractice. This ethical culture should be established at all levels within the organisation, starting with those in leadership roles. Consistent reinforcement of ethical organisational culture can serve as a deterrent against unethical practices.

Werner (2011) adds that leaders must recognize that ethical conduct in organisations is influenced by a range of factors, as individuals enter organisations with their own distinct values and beliefs. As such, leaders must ensure that all employees understand that ethical behaviour is a core value, and they are expected to demonstrate ethical conduct at all times, regardless of their position. Importantly, the leader must align the interests of various stakeholders to secure support for common organisational goals.

Bello (2012) proposes the regular communication of ethical standards, as well as the implementation of clear guidelines on rewards and punishments, to ensure adherence to ethical norms. In line with this, Gucel, Tokmak, and Turgut (2012) suggest that punishments for unethical conduct can act as a deterrent, discouraging principals from engaging in malpractice. Ugurlu (2017) also asserts that introducing concepts of ethics, justice, and loyalty to school principals and teachers can increase ethical awareness in school management.

To further strengthen ethical conduct, ethical committees should be established at provincial, district, and school levels, with the responsibility of overseeing the application of ethical principles in schools. These committees would monitor the actions of school principals and ensure that any behaviours that deviate from ethical guidelines are identified and addressed. Appelbaum et al. (2017) support this idea, suggesting that such committees would be instrumental in ensuring that ethical principles are followed, and unethical behaviours are addressed in a structured and systematic manner.

2.15.1 Leadership ethics and good governance

Leadership ethics is closely connected to effective governance (Klettner et al., 2014). According to Othman and Rahman (2014), certain characteristics of ethical leadership, such as accountability, responsiveness, integrity, fairness, transparency, and responsibility play a vital role in promoting good governance within an organisation.

2.15.2 Accountability in leadership

Accountability is an essential component of ethical leadership (Othman & Rahman, 2014). Just as other stakeholders are accountable for their actions, leaders must also be held accountable. According to Othman and Rahman (2014), accountability involves factors such as the duties and responsibilities of leaders, their roles within the organisation, the separation of duties, and their ethical decision-making. When leaders are held accountable for their ethical decisions, it reduces the likelihood of them engaging in unethical practices for personal gain (Melo et al., 2020). Accountability policies ensure that leaders face consequences when they act unethically, especially when they violate policies, regulations, or laws, which helps deter others from engaging in similar unethical behaviour (Othman & Rahman, 2014). On the other hand, if unethical leaders are not held accountable for their actions, the organisation risks becoming

one that either tolerates or even endorses unethical conduct. This acceptance can lead to further unethical actions by other stakeholders and may even result in a culture either explicit or implied where unethical behaviour becomes a strategy to achieve organisational goals (Mackencidy, Bity & Mansor, 2025).

2.15.3 Responsiveness in leadership

Responsiveness in leadership is a reactive trait. Ethical leaders who are responsive address problems promptly and work to overcome challenges, being transparent in sharing information about their actions with relevant stakeholders (Othman & Rahman, 2014). One advantage of responsiveness is that quick action can reduce the risk of unethical behaviour within an organisation, contributing to a more ethical environment overall (Khalifa et al., 2016). When leaders are responsive, it demonstrates their concern for the organisation's well-being and their active participation in promoting good governance practices to enhance ethical standards.

Additionally, responsiveness is crucial for good governance, as it helps improve the way leaders manage the organisation. Leaders who lack concern for the organisation or its outcomes are less likely to act swiftly when dilemmas or issues arise. They may disregard the issue or delegate it to others (Othman & Rahman, 2014). Conversely, ethical leaders who care about the organisation's success are more likely to take immediate action to ensure it operates efficiently, effectively, and ethically. This responsiveness helps the organisation continue functioning smoothly and work towards achieving its goals. In this regard, responsiveness can be seen as an essential characteristic of ethical leadership.

2.15.4 Transparency in leadership

In the context of leadership ethics and good governance, transparency refers to the openness in sharing information with relevant stakeholders. This encompasses matters like conflicts of interest, decision-making processes, and other related aspects of information sharing (Othman & Rahman, 2014). Transparency also involves how leaders are perceived in terms of honesty, openness, and trustworthiness (Othman & Rahman, 2014). For leaders to be considered transparent, they must thoroughly fulfil their responsibilities regarding decision-making and ensure that information is appropriately shared with stakeholders.

Moreover, transparency contributes to the ethical framework and good governance, as it can serve as a mechanism for accountability. When leaders know that their decisions will be made public to stakeholders, they are likely to realise that any unethical behaviour or decision-making will also be disclosed (Han, 2017). Establishing transparency within an organisation can enhance its engagement in good governance practices. If leaders lack transparency, stakeholders may, rightly or wrongly, suspect that there is something being concealed, such as unethical conduct (Hadziahmetovic et al., 2022). This perception can undermine trust in the leaders and the organisation, leading to further complications. However, it is important to note that not all instances of non-transparency necessarily indicate unethical behaviour. Organisations that maintain transparency are more likely to be seen as ethical and trustworthy by stakeholders (Othman & Rahman, 2014).

Drawing from the above literature on transparency, one concludes that transparency is important in organisations. In a school situation the principal has to be transparent to all the stakeholders: parents, learners and educators. Principals are to report on critical issues and progress in all the spheres of the school. Drawn from the literature above, this act may have positive effects in as far as accountability and trust are in the school system. The stakeholders would perceive the school principal as a trustworthy person, there by reciprocating the act, thus fostering effectiveness in the school.

2.16 Summary

The forgoing chapter is on the review of international, African and regional literature on ethical leadership in schools. The review of literature is guided by the research objectives, which commenced by tackling the significance of reviewing literature in research, which is subsequently followed by literature on the importance of ethical leadership in school management, malpractices and unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals, root causes of unethical practices or malpractices by principals of schools, challenges and pressures encountered by school principals when enacting ethical leadership surrounding the regulations and punitive measures, and, lastly, literature on ways of reducing and eradicating malpractices/unethical behaviour among school principals.

The next chapter is on the theoretical frameworks used as a lens in guiding the study.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed international, continental and regional literature on ethical leadership in relation to the study's objectives. The present chapter is on discussion of the theoretical frameworks in which underpins the study. Three theoretical frameworks, namely underpin the study: the ethical leadership theory (ELT) advanced by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), the African philosophy of ubuntu (APU) advanced by Khoza (2011) and lastly, the stakeholder theory (SHT) advanced by Freeman (1984). These theories underpinning the study are explained below, and subsequently how they are relevant to the study is justified.

3.2 Theoretical framework

Rutherford (2000) states that the term "theory" has got numerous different meanings in various knowledge domains, fields, disciplines depending on the approaches employed and the context of observation. The word theory has its origins from the Greek word "theoria" which has something to do about "speculation" or "contemplation".

According to Rutherford (2000), a theory is an orderly organised, systematic and formalised expression of previous observations and it is predictive, has some logic and can be tested. Scientific theories are not absolute, they are subject to modifications, corrections or inclusion in a yet wider theory (Fox & Meyer, 1995). Fox and Meyer (1995) further state that a theory is an explanation of reality to be able to make predictions. Simply put, theory refers to a kind of explanation or elucidation of an occurrence or a happening. For example, Leedy and Ormrod (2012) describe a theory as a body of ideas and principles organised in an orderly manner, which has an intention to explain a particular phenomenon. Thus, a theory elucidates why and how something or an occurrence function and happens the way it does and why and how things happen the way they do.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) avow that theories can build up knowledge which is scientific in nature and in conformity with the following criteria: firstly by, giving an clarification about observed relations regarding their connections to a phenomenon; secondly,

being in line or conforming with an already established body of knowledge and the observed relationships; thirdly, by providing a way for authentication and revision; and lastly, by inspiring more inquiry in fields that require some further investigations. Consequently, as a matter of fact, for a collection of ideas and claims to be referred to as a theory, the system should show steadiness. That is, it should not change over a very long period, it should show consistency and some logic, i.e. the various parts should be linked in an easily understandable way, and they should be non-contradictory. Lastly, the system should be consistent in that it should not be contradictory (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Likewise, Garrison (2000) explicates that a theory is an orderly, comprehensible collection of thoughts, models and concepts, with the aim of deriving meaning, to interpret, to explain and to influence and direct the way things are done. Drawing from the above presented definitions, one is inclined to the thought that a theory is a point of reference for attacking what is not known in a specific field and can be constructed to explain an occurrence.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a theoretical framework is a comprehensible elucidation of a phenomenon or an event. It offers a scholarly perception of the problem being investigated, and the findings are interpreted using it as a base or point of reference. It offers a lens to help the investigator to comprehend and give an explanation of the phenomenon under investigation. Moreover, Johnson and Christensen (2012) are of the view that it clarifies how a phenomenon happens and why it operates as it does. It also helps in making sense of the existing knowledge by integrating it into the study.

3.3 Ethical leadership theory – Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005)

This model is based on four ethics: these are the ethic of justice, the ethic of critique, the ethic of care and the ethic of the profession, as advanced by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005). These four are discussed below.

3.3.1 The ethic of justice

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) posit the ethic of justice as that which is about laws and rights. They further emphasise that educationalists and ethicists from this school of thought have influenced approaches to educational leadership and education as a whole. Furthermore, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) affirm that this ethic of justice directs that schools should

inculcate principles, especially those of respect for liberty, equity and justice, into the minds of their stakeholders. Acar, Kaya and Sahin (2012) uphold that, even though ethical leaders may envision the realisation of their goals success as their focus, they also ensure that they do their work in a just manner, taking into consideration principles of honesty and upholding ethical standards.

In accentuating the importance of the model of justice, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) are of the impression that the ethic in question may consider other issues. These issues are inclusive of amongst others, such as the fairness of rules, laws, policies and equity versus equality; whether laws are to be followed in all situations, and if exceptions are to be considered, under what circumstances; and the fundamental rights of persons against the good of the community at large. Principals of schools, therefore, are expected to uphold and operationalise educational policies and laws, applying such to all in a fair manner, thereby avoiding partiality in their execution of their duties.

The significance of the ethic of justice becomes evident when school principals of decide on issues related to the misconduct of educators and learners. Shapiro and Stefkovich further state that, more often than not, this ethic serves as a base for legal principles and standards. Thus, Olivier (2012) suggested that subordinates do not direct much of their interest to leadership, but they are interested in seeing the execution of justice. The lawfulness of people's behaviours is occasionally relative. In line with the above view is the affirmation that what is perceived as legal in some areas may be regarded as not legal in other places. This poses a pertinent question of what route ought to be taken if the law is not right. Perhaps the answer could be, to turn to ethics for a just and fair resolution.

3.3.2 The ethic of critique

This ethic originates from critical theory (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005), which stresses that schools may have or may breed inequities similar to those in societies. They propose that teachers have to understand that their classrooms are both political and educational locations as well. Therefore, ethics should not be a choice for individuals or relativism but a way of life deriving its roots in the principles that are not in favour of unnecessary suffering and exploitation of the human race. Mncube (2012) avows that subordinating learners and their

voices violates their constitutional rights to democracy and justice, as they have a right to state what they are thinking and also a right to be listened to and be taken seriously. Smit, Cronje, Brevis and Vrba (2007) emphasise that managers should take note of the conduct of subordinates because the behaviour they display may be a potential problem. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) elaborate that the ethic of critique is possibly a route towards egalitarianism. Smit, Cronje, Brevis and Vrba (2007) argue that decisions which are ethical have to take on board impartial, fair and equal distribution of gains or benefits and sacrifices or costs amongst everyone within the organisation, be it groups or individual. In the present study, this last concept is fitting considering that school principals need to operate in a fair and just manner that does not sustain exploitation in the workplace and that school principals have to ensure that the voices of their followers (learners, parents and teachers) are aired without fear of victimisation and as such treated in a fairly and justly manner in the workplace. Furthermore, the interests of students need to be given precedence as they are the major purpose for the establishment of schools as learning institutions. In Eswatini high schools, there is a representative group for learners known as school prefects, which serve to represent and advance the learners' opinions in the schools. Most Eswatini high schools do have prefects but, sadly, they are not capacitated enough to carry out their assignment, that of representing the interests of their peers on matters touching upon their rights. There is a need for improvement because the ethic of critique remains applicable and essential because the opinions of learners have to be taken into consideration. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) assert that, through the critical analysis of social class and the distribution of resources, having taken into account divisions of wealth and power, there is the possibility that more knowledgeable, moral and sensitive school principals may be prepared.

Furthermore, Kalshoven and Hartog (2011) assert that leaders who are ethical ought to provide the teachers, parents and learners with a clear channel through which they could voice their concerns and these could allow the followers to take part in the decision-making process. This could be a way towards assisting in solving the problems of schools. Mncube (2012) is of the notion that decision making in organisations should be inclusive of everyone, all the stakeholders.

3.3.3 The ethic of care

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) contend that this ethic is vital for both scholars and educational leaders. However, it is more significant to school principals and/or leaders of schools, who are often expected to make decisions which are moral in nature. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) suggest that one of the main functions of a school is to provide care to its pupils. Owens and Ennis (2005) also agree with Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) that a teacher's ethic of care demands being receptive to the interests of the learners and should show that teachers are interested in building up good relationships and rapport with learners. Shapiro and Stefkovich further suggest that an ethic of care proposes an alternative dimension and possible means of responding to the complexities of moral challenges clouding educational leaders while executing their daily duties. Principal of schools have to be vibrant leaders who are ever prepared to take into account other stakeholder's suggestion when making important decisions (Greany, 2024). Additionally, this ethic requires that the participants in the decision-making process should be aware of the outcome of the decisions and the possible counter actions before actually implementing the decisions at hand (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005).

Additionally, Engelbrecht et al. (2017) posit that leaders who hold up to ethics in their practices show care, fairness and honesty to other people. They are be devoted to all forms of communication and involve other stakeholders in the course of making decision. This suggests that principals who are ethical have to have the interests of all stakeholders by shunning unethical conduct such as stealing from the school coffers, maladministration, misappropriation of school funds, sexual encounters with learners and subordinates, embezzlements of school funds and any form of dishonest behaviour. While avoiding these unethical behaviours, dilemmas and tensions may arise. However, Kimber and Campbell (2014) suggest that principals of schools are expected to bring solutions whenever they are conflicting ideas resulting from circumstances wherein the ethics of the profession may antagonise the expectation of their work. This they can achieve by applying the principles of the ethic of care, for example, by taking care and helping a learner who is involved in illegal activities within the school premises.

Furthermore, Kimber and Campbell (2014) posit that a majority of the problems and dilemmas encountered by principals in schools are related to the learners and educators. Shapiro and

Stefkovich (2005) suggest that leaders must go for solutions that prove that they are concerned about the other stakeholders whenever they are making decisions. Leaders can foster employee's work engagement by modelling ethical leadership, sharing moral values, and practising honesty, fairness and caring (Engelbrecht et al., 2014). Engelbrecht et al. (2014) further argue that leaders who practice ethical leadership are caring; above that they now and then get involved in ethical discourse together with their subordinates and other stakeholders such as the learners and parents in schools. Yates (2014) emphasises that leaders who are ethical should advance participation, fairness and collegiality when making decisions. This suggests the centrality of the concept of care to the leadership style of the school principal.

The ethic of care could be compared with the ethic of justice. Strike (1999) makes a distinction between the ethic of care and that of justice, stating that the ethic of care is more about relations and nurturing while that of justice is more on fairness and equal treatment. This concurs with the views of some scholars who are feminists, who regard that the ethic of justice is imbedded on dominance and patriarchy inherited from the Western traditions (Adhikari, 2023). The productive process has since taken precedence over the reproductive process; as a result, care and nurturing was considered as inferior to the ethic of justice until feminists' scholars started to put emphases on social responsibility in light of injustice (Adhikari, 2023). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) reveal that the ethic of care makes the environment to be conducive for engagements of trust, empowerment and loyalty. This promotes the ethic of care to the centrality of the decision-making process. This could warrant the creation of a moral society, which is possible considering that the ethic of care is linked to social justice.

Noddings (2002) emphasises the importance of the ethic of care and puts it in the public domain by placing care at the higher point on the pyramid of educational needs. Following this, care is considered as the primary task for schools and the foundation of successful education. Even though the ethic of care is linked with feminist scholars, as evidenced by its origins, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) highlight that both women and men confirm importance and relevance in ethical leadership in schools.

According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016), training in school leadership has been influenced by military and business models. School principals are trained on understanding and embracing hierarchy within the educational institutions and also to keep order by formulating policies,

rules and standards to be observed and ensuring that they are really followed, as advocated for by the ethic of justice. However, the ethic of care demands that principals of schools should be taught to take into consideration voices of the different stakeholders and be accommodative thereby avoiding the top-down approach (Tang et al., 2015). Backing up the above-mentioned sentiments Noddings (2002) explicates that caring is an important ethic as it touches upon numerous concerns and needs for the school as whole.

Utilitarianism is linked to the ethic of care. The ethic of care is part and parcel of the public domain because it is associated with utilitarianism, which concerns itself with happiness of the majority as opposed to the minority (Tyler, 2014). Consequently, principals of schools need to deeply think of the effects of their decisions and try to ascertain whether the decisions are for the greater good or not, and will benefit the majority or not.

The ethic of care embraces the notion that the principals of schools have to take care of the members of staff and also care for the learners as well, being cognisance of the consequences of any actions and decisions about to be taken (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). The ethic of care advances to the discussion of empowerment, trust and loyalty as concepts. It addresses questions like, who will be the beneficiaries of the decisions to be taken? Who will be the victims of the actions that and decisions that I take? What could be the long-time effects and or consequences of my decisions? These should always be on the principal's mind while executing his or her duties. I am of the view that if principals of schools can place high regard to the ethic of care and take into account the above-mentioned questions, there could be no room for unethical behaviours within their domain.

3.3.4 The ethic of the profession

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) conclude that the combination of the justice, care, critique and the profession ethics addresses the range of moral challenges which principals of schools may encounter whilst carrying out their duties. These serve as a compass which acts as a guide in the course of executing their duties. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) emphasise that professional ethics requires an evolving process whereby principals of schools need to draft and develop their own professional codes of conduct. Consequently, they have to adhere to the code of

conduct enacted by their professional associations; in the case of Eswatini, this is the Eswatini Principal Association (EPA).

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) further indicate that ethical codes put up by the Government and the associations are hard to be operationalised because they are not in harmony with what is exactly obtaining on the ground. In other words, there is a mismatch between the codes of conduct and what is encountered by the principals on a day-to-day basis. In stressing their point, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) borrow from Lebacqz (1985) and Nash (1996), respectively, that the codes of ethics put up by the professional bodies serve as guiding posts for the principals, which demand the highest moral standards of the profession, hence offering a hypothetical picture of the desired moral character of both the profession and of being professional.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) go on to state that, due to the typical disjuncture and /or disharmony in what is in the rules and policies for school principals to follow and what is really obtaining on the ground or what is happens in schools and communities, it is necessary for school principals to integrate their own personal and professional codes. In addition, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) accentuate the need to be cognizant of the expectations of the community whenever they make decision. Notably, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) also add that, when principals of schools develop their own personal and professional codes, they need to know what is going to work for them as professionals and also know what is going to work for the other stakeholders within the community as well.

Additionally, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) posit that school principals have to come to grip with conflicting dictates of the ethical codes of professional bodies and of the State. Whenever this arises, the decision that have to be ultimately taken should prioritise the interest of learners, because of their importance in the educational domain. As a matter of fact, such issues as of theft from the school coffers, maladministration, misappropriation of school funds, and embezzlement of school funds directly affect in a negative way the interest of learners, thus disadvantaging the learners and bringing the name of the profession into disrepute.

All educators at all levels of education are expected to be guided and influenced by a code of ethics crafted with an intention to assist in the guidance in professional conduct in the education

sector (Brown et al., 2006). Consequent to the assertion by Brown, Bessette and Chan above, I believe that the ethical leadership theory by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) is relevant to the study. This is because it gives a frame of guidelines for what is regarded as virtuous ethical leadership. It is also my belief that employing these different ethics within this paradigm approach can ameliorate the ethical leadership practices of principals of schools in rural settings.

Begley (2006) critiques Shapiro and Stefkovich's (2005) view that leaders' ethical approaches vary significantly. To reduce this variability, Begley proposes a structured application of ethical frameworks: first employing critique (analysing power structures), then care (considering relationships), followed by profession (evaluating standards), and finally justice (ensuring fairness). This sequential model provides leaders with a systematic method for ethical decision-making while acknowledging the complexity of moral leadership

Begley (2006) considers that the ethic of critique enables comprehension of the situation, inclusive of the views of those who are voiceless and without representation. What should follow is the ethic of care, because it assesses the situation in a humane manner. The ethic of justice maximises the benefits for everyone and advocates the respect of the rights for every individual. However, I am of the belief that taking a specific sequence when enacting ethical outlines is not of much importance in a school situation. What is of importance to me, as already highlighted, is that school principals should ensure that the best interest of the learners is given priority whenever a decision is to be taken. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) uphold the view that principals of schools who apply professional judgment make use of ethics of the profession when taking into consideration the best interest of the students. Shapiro and Gross (2013) are in agreement with the notion that the ethics of the profession prioritises the learners in any of the decision-making processes. However, Begley (2012) goes on to state that educational leaders should not deviate from their ethical predispositions and their own values and be respectful and sensitive to other people's as well as their orientations. Additionally, Begley (2012) believes that actions towards resolving ethical dilemmas should be guided by values. As mentioned in the previous chapter, leadership is a process of persuading others to get to understand and agree on what ought to be done and the way of doing it. So, for the principals

of schools to be able to influence teachers, learners and parents, they must have some understanding and be sensitive to their values.

3.4 The African philosophy of ubuntu

In exploring ethical leadership practices of school principals in Eswatini in an effective manner, I am also using the African ethical framework of leadership, ubuntu as a lens. This ethical framework was put forward by Khoza in 2011. Khoza (2011) proposed an ethical framework, known as ubuntu, which has its roots in African philosophy. Ubuntuism illuminates the deep link between an African's spiritual being and social being as being a moral expression. Ubuntu advances the idea that leaders should serve their followers and that resolutions should be taken after a consensus. Khoza (2011) also expresses how humanity is important to the spirit of ubuntu and the significance of reverence for someone else.

Explicating this, Khoza shows generosity, kind-heartedness, the realisation that humans depend on each other, the need for competence and caring from those who are in leadership as well as that humans are spiritual in their intent and practical. There is a strong emphasis on how one's being and another's being are crucial in making a collective being and that collective being cannot come into existence without individuality. Hence, ubuntu strongly hinges on the humanist approach, which states that a person is a person because of other persons.

For a long time, African humanism has been expressed orally (Khoza, 2011), but recently, there has been an appreciation of the great depth and breadth of the proverbial wisdom in African humanism. As a result, there has been an increase in empirical study of African humanism. This study endeavours to contribute to the growing literature that touches on African humanism, the African philosophy of ubuntu. Ubuntu falls in the context of both ethical philosophy and rational philosophy and is theistical as it recognizes God as the first cause of being (Khoza, 2011). In light of this, ubuntu assumes that naturally mankind are moral or ethical beings.

Ubuntu is part of a number of philosophies that support the dignity and worth of all, as it has the capability to determine right and wrong. Khoza (2011) clarifies that ethical values are successfully determined by making references to universal human qualities, in other words, ubuntu. Humanists are in agreement that there are differential factors that enable us to

distinguish between humans from animals. These traits, according to (Khoza, 2011), are thought and reason, language and culture, consciousness and critical awareness, sense of chronological time and change. Therefore, ubuntu is shown to affect our understanding of who we are. For example, ubuntu governs our morality, epistemology, ontology and politics.

Intellectual exchange between Africa and the West in the previous era was distorted by the thought that Africans were less than humans and were downgraded to slavery, harsh physical work, oppression and exploitation. As a result of slavery, their value systems were considered inferior, and any attempt to show and prove their intellectual ability to their captures would be met with wrath (Khoza, 2011). This resulted in African philosophies being viewed as inferior to those of the West. And yet, the researcher believes that should not be the case because every race ought to be accorded the respect that it deserves.

Khoza (2011) is of the idea that, in philosophical terms, ubuntu is the statement of being the "I am" in all of us. This shows that one draws a sense of being from others, we are only persons because of other persons. So, it is not possible for humans to live as a collective if there are no individuals, which comes with an innate ethical sense. The opposite is true, that it is not possible for an individual to live if there are no other people. Consequently, one has a social, ethical responsibility derived from individual moral judgement that is nurtured through interaction with others in the community. Further, ubuntu demonstrates that we are united by the Almighty and our ancestors are ever-present, and we have inherited what we have from them.

Illustrating the potential of ethical leadership in the light of ubuntu, Tutu (2005) wrote, to say that as far as ubuntu is concerned, it is not a virtuous thing to advance on the ladder of success through aggressive means and prosper at the expense of others. At the end of it all, our aim is social and communal harmony and well-being. The principles of ubuntu are against a statement which says, "I think, therefore I am." Rather ubuntu advances the statement which says, "I am a human because I belong, I participate, and I share." Anything that undermines this sought after good is to be avoided at all costs. Rage, resentments, revengefulness, and even success through aggressive competitiveness are corrosive to this good.

Supplementing Khoza (2011), Van Binsbergen (2001) used the Zimbabwean word 'hunhu' in exchange for the word ubuntu. He expresses 'hunhu' or ubuntu as a worldview incorporating the values, beliefs and images of pre-colonial Southern Africa that has lasted until this time. Van Binsbergen (2001) asserts that 'hunhu' is a signpost or a road map that is useful for the present and the future social, economic and political life in modern environments. This means that 'hunhu' or ubuntu is the ethical yardstick or benchmark of African nations that provides an ethical guide to the African man and woman in any context (Mangena, 2007).

The dignity of persons can be seen by how ubuntu shows that all people can decide on what is right and what is wrong (Khoza, 2011). This agrees with what ethics are, as they are defined as a concept that has to do with respect for the rights of others (Shapiro & Stefkovichs, 2011), what is right or wrong (Fraenkel et al., 2012) and what is acceptable behaviour and what is an unacceptable behaviour (Brown et al., 2005). This strengthens ubuntu as a lens to explore the ethical leadership practices of school principals in rural settings. The topmost trait or feature of ubuntu is the idea that no one can exist as a human being in isolation (Khoza, 2011). Interconnectedness is significant for social living and is a foundation of group and individual morality.

Khoza (2011) stresses that modern leadership styles in governments and organisations tend to be lacking in elements of humanness rooted in ubuntu. Yet, there is a need for ubuntu in the much-desired ethics that can produce good leaders (Khoza, 2011). Ubuntu shares resemblances with ethical leadership because they both advance the awareness of what is important, good and right, and raise followers into leaders, prioritising the organisation's interests over and above their own (Khoza, 2011; Naidoo, 2012).

The detailed discussions of attuned leadership and African humanism follow under the following sub-headings: being, humanness, individualism, compassion, moral necessity, and commonwealth.

3.4.1 *Being*

Khoza (2011) argues that ubuntu is a statement of being – the 'I am' in all of us. Khoza goes on to clarify that, even though people are living separate lives as a human race, they draw their purpose for existence from the collective; thus, for one to be a person, it is through other people.

Additionally, Khoza suggests that the spirit of the Almighty God connects us to one another in things that are thought to be acceptable, which were also valued by our ancestors who lived before us, accepting that we live because of those around us while our ancestors in their graves remain in our minds. This becomes obvious when something good has happened to someone, or someone has realized or realised a remarkable achievement; they would sometimes say; I wish my late parents were here to see and share my joy and success.

The world is known to consist of, among other things, human and non-human, and it classifies human beings as basically social in nature. Ubuntu is of the thought that knowledge accrues from generation to generation. Therefore, it is our collective knowledge founded on traditions that are culturally handed down and derived from the world as well as from ourselves (Khoza, 2011). Furthermore, Khoza (2011) is of the opinion that logic must, by the nature of collective human existence, be based on communication principles such as clear and orderly discourse and rules of induction and deduction.

Furthermore, there is no world that is outside the perspicacity of men since we, as a human race, we inhabit a human frame of thought, motion and expression from our ancestors which we pass unto future generations, though with some modifications and developmental experiences accrued in the present time. Khoza (2011) asserted that Africans tend to admire and look up to elders, but the setback is that, because of lack of formal education or positions in academies, they are often disregarded by the educated as mere repositories of folklore. Ubuntu makes a significant contribution to indigenous ways of knowing and being, and is rooted on the basic values of love, caring, sharing and compassion, ensuring that there is a happy family (Broodryk, 2006). Ubuntu emphasises the value of respect for others, caring, unselfishness, helpfulness, sharing and a sense of community (Khoza, 2011). Ubuntu assumes that human beings are moral by nature and that it would not be possible for humans to exist collectively or even individually without an innate ethical sense (Khoza, 2011). Naturally, no one can steal from their fellows without feeling a sense of guilt, this is a proof that our spiritual being connects with our social being. The important element or trait of ubuntu is that one cannot live and be fruitful as a human being when he is in isolation from others. Hence, Khoza (2011) maintains that interconnectedness occurs in two ways, as the basis of individual living and as a precondition of social living and group morality.

Moreover, Khoza (2011) affirms that ubuntu advocates that people acknowledge their humanity by recognising the humanity of others. Simply put; by showing respect for the people around you, you are given the same respect in reciprocity. Msila (2014) backs Khoza's (2011) idea that ubuntu is a shared experience, solidarity and collective experience which has an implications for the development of people and organisations. Mangena (2011) supports Khoza's (2011) claim that ubuntu is a spirit of oneness and togetherness, where individuals help one another to advance the improvement of institutions.

Ubuntu incorporates ethical leadership and is thereby relevant to most sectors and societies (Khoza, 2011). It promotes communal decision-making through open communication and engagement, which is one way to mitigate conflicts between groups. In line with ubuntu principles, the South African Department of Basic Education put up a *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (Department of Education, 2001), which promotes educational strategies rooted on ideas of building consensus and understanding differences through the exchange of ideas, dialoguing, in nurturing a culture of communication and participation in schools.

This requires leadership's commitment to ensuring that there is a chance for dialogue and a culture of communication and participation. The *Manifesto of Values, Education and Democracy* (Department of Education, 2001) further suggests that availing opportunities for dialogue amongst the different stakeholders builds confident, inquiring and empowered citizens. In essence this is what ethical leadership is all about.

3.4.2 Humanness

Khoza (2011) defines humanness in a leader as the quality of being human, considering the whole of humankind as a group. Within ubuntu, humanness defines comprehensive relationships that are expressed in the phrase "a person is a person through other people".

In a nutshell, the leader can only realise organisational goals through his/her subordinates. Khoza (2011) maintains that the ethic of humanness suggests that each person owes his/her existence to others since all human species draw their being from the collective. The foregoing assertion echoes Msila's (2008) view that leadership that adopts ubuntu in management ensures that other stakeholders are embraced in the workplace. Khoza (2011) clarifies that to be humane

is to show kindliness to other living beings, either people or animals. The ethic of humanness suggests that humanity is the caring species. To clarify the significance of the ethic of humanness, Khoza (2011) argues that humanness in leaders is demonstrated through their ability to be able to sympathise and empathise with subordinates because the success of the leader is reliant on the subordinates, while subordinates rely on their leader for the direction. The leader-follower relationship draws on the collective spirit of humanity as a whole to meet the organisation's goals (Khoza, 2011).

Ubuntu discourages the actions of leaders that are done with the intention of gaining some accolades. Instead, leaders have to subscribe to ubuntu and avoid silencing or intimidating the voices of others for the good of all. The *Manifesto of Values, Education, and Democracy* (Department of Education, 2001) similarly advocates the significance of respect as a precursor in communication for teamwork for organisational success.

Humanness in a leader signals decency and integrity, which are the essential traits for the establishment of cohesion and unity within the organisation. The ethic of humanness assumes that leaders owe their status and power to their followers (Khoza, 2011). Therefore, the success of leaders is dependent on the reception they get from the subordinates. The way in which some African leaders, principals of schools and other leaders from other sectors conduct themselves has undermined the wonderful attributes that ubuntu embraces and promotes, that is to guide behaviours. Instead, they have resorted to dictatorship, egoism, corruption, and abuse of power, to the detriment of their organisations and to the detriment of their subordinates.

Despite the foregoing view, Msila (2008) upholds that ubuntu is very significant for numerous institutions in society, and schools are no exception. Ubuntu advocates the development of an inclusivity culture towards the attainment of organisational goals. Likewise, Khoza (2011) maintains that ubuntu has universal significance and can teach a lesson to the world. Msila (2008) argues that an ubuntu leadership style embraces a shift from hierarchically structured management relationships and introduces an inclusive and supportive style of leadership in which the collective solidarity of the group is used and respected.

The foregoing is also in line with the *Manifesto of Values, Education, and Democracy* (Department of Education, 2001), which states that ubuntu has a place in the education system

because it is based on African mores: "*I am human because you are human*". The manifesto further states that the values of ubuntu and human dignity are underpinned by compassion, kindness, altruism and respect. These attributes should not be lacking in ethical leadership in schools, hence the relevance of the ethic of humanness to this study.

3.4.3 Individualism

Ubuntu assumes that, though as humans we have different lives, we are highly dependent on each other. Therefore, the individual is a locus of community consciousness (Khoza, 2011). This indicates that there is an interdependence between human beings and demonstrates that the dis-similarities within the human species complement the areas of deficiency in others rather than cause conflict.

Khoza (2011) asserts that those in a position of power need to realise that their role is to use their influence, power and capacity to empower others. Additionally, leaders should perform their duties having in mind that their subordinates expect their leaders not only to demand work to be done optimally but also expect prioritisation of their well-being. In agreement with Khoza's (2011) assertion, Nzimakwe (2014) states that ubuntu is the foundation for basic values, which shows/ manifests itself through the respect, harmony, hospitality and caring demonstrated in the way leaders conduct themselves.

Khoza (2011) affirms that ubuntu is about morality and humility; therefore, leaders who embrace ubuntu philosophy do not see themselves above their subordinates; instead, they strive to provide quality service to them. In essence, the ubuntu philosophy-driven leadership shares some commonalities with servant leadership in this regard, since ubuntu-driven leaders see themselves as community servants.

The foregoing assertion challenges leaders on the issue of individualism; leaders are not expected to be aloof but to co-exist with others. It provides an understanding that individual persons owe their being to those around them and further indicates that those in power have a duty to develop those under their leadership without expecting any form of repayment.

Like Khoza (2011), Nzimakwe (2014) asserts that ubuntu embodies a tradition of the involvement and participation of ordinary members of society in decision-making processes. Furthermore, ubuntu emphasises the importance of respect and places value on teamwork and

supporting each other. Hence, Khoza (2011) argues that the leaders of any organisation in the modern era need to continuously reflect on their relationships (such as the leader-follower relationship) and sympathise and empathise with their subordinates as they depend on them for the provision of direction.

Eranil and Özbilen (2017) corroborate Khoza's (2011) views and further contend that leaders embracing ubuntu provide the creation of production and learning space. Simply put, leaders focus on the empowerment of their subordinates so that they become more effective at their work. Khoza (2011) opines that leaders who uphold ubuntu promote the sense of serving people with integrity and accountability. Accordingly, ethical leaders should always be in constant communication with their subordinates and exchange ideas with them. Khoza (2011) demonstrates that all human beings have something to add towards the growth of others since the individual is a significant organ of the community. In addition, Khoza (2011) avers that it is natural and right for subordinates to expect fair treatment from their leaders and consider their well-being, as much as they expect them to be committed and effective while performing their tasks.

School principals as leaders need to know that their positions in society are about empowering rather than depriving society. This assertion demonstrates that ubuntu bases leaders-follower relationships on a deeply respectful view that stresses common humanity, which is a result of the leader's ability to treat others as human beings (Khoza, 2011). Significantly, the commitment of a leader to treating others with dignity and respect results in a healthy leader-follower relationship and trust, which is an essential trait for a leader's success. Khoza (2011) proposes that it is vital for the leadership to consult and engage with stakeholders now and then, seeking to achieve rational and compassionate mandates. Leadership should also intend to comprehend the aspirations of subordinates. Khoza (2011) contends that the essential qualities of a leader who forges trust among members in a ubuntu-driven organisation are persuasion, communication, cohabitation, accommodation, and accountability because, when these qualities are well managed, they breed goodwill and confidence within an organisation, consequently, limiting any chances of unethical conducts.

3.4.4 *Compassion*

Khoza's (2011) perspective of compassion refers to feeling sympathy or pity for the suffering that others experience. Further, it refers to a wider perspective of compassion that is about the loving and understanding accorded to others. In a nutshell, Khoza (2011) suggests that as a people, we share pain with those who are directly affected. We try to show the pain they are feeling, and we share it with them intuitively. But we can never know quite how much of our intuition is accurate, though we can try to establish this through talking and the give and take of mutual understanding. Compassion is underpinned by empathy (Khoza, 2011). We act out of compassion, based on an understanding of our common human condition, recognising our morality and our dependence on each other.

In addition, Khoza (2011) posits that empathy, as the essential part of compassion, is a one-way expression of personal feeling that applies to others. In essence, as people, we express compassion towards others once we learn about their inner states. Khoza (2011) maintains that it is not easy for leaders to comprehend exactly what their subordinates think. Instead, they need to assume, making assumptions based on what they see the subordinates do. Sometimes, leaders assume that their subordinates are experiencing some challenges due to their performance as they execute their duties. In short, compassion is intuitively grasped. Khoza (2011) asserts that compassion is not rehearsed but engulfs us either instantly or, after some time, dawns slowly in our minds, but what matters is that we all feel it.

It is important to note that compassion, as an expression of humanness, requires a heartfelt response to another person's predicament (Khoza, 2011). Leaders have to understand that the fact that they are leaders they require that they see their subordinates as their responsibility. And they have to care for their subordinates. In addition, leaders need to empathise or to be in the shoes of their subordinates when they need their sympathy. Khoza (2011) states that when leaders show compassion towards their juniors, that compassion is reciprocated.

Khoza (2011) states that leaders need to make efforts to understand the situations of their subordinates, and that promotes love of one another within the organisation. Khoza (2011) draws wisdom from an old adage that we need to treat others as we would love to be treated, which resonates well with the Christian belief that you should love your neighbour as you love

yourself, to emphasise the significance of compassion. Leaders' ought to respect the rights of their subordinates and treat them fairly (Eranil & Özbilen, 2017). When leaders demonstrate respect and treat their followers fairly, they earn the trust and respect of their subordinates in reciprocity. Treating followers fairly is a symbol of compassion since compassion is about inclusivity and treating others fairly and with respect (Khoza, 2011).

Furthermore, Khoza (2011) contends that as human beings, we derive our sense of being from empathy, which leads to compassion, and this compassion is all-inclusive and is reciprocal. Every human being needs compassion from others around them. To highlight the importance of compassion, Khoza (2011) affirms that compassion is more than acting out of feeling pity for those in difficult or suffering; instead, it is extended to others out of loyalty towards the community of human beings. Hence the phrase "we are because of others"; to deny this is likened to denying oneself. Khoza (2011) further argues that the African community spirit preaches that human beings need to acknowledge that they depend upon one another and, without depending on one another, they could be understood as inhuman. Khoza (2011) stresses that there is no need for a leader to stand alone. Instead, they need to work in partnership with their subordinates for the common good.

Nzimakwe (2014) believes that ubuntu is the base of values that are manifested through the spirit of caring, hospitality, harmony, and respect. Additionally, Khoza (2011) highlights the commonality that underpins the ethic of care with ubuntu because they both promote fair treatment and compassion as the bases for unity and trust. And for organisation to succeed they need these qualities, the ethic of care and ubuntu.

Khoza (2011) further argues that leaders' not being dependent on their subordinates is the same as denial of their being. This clearly suggests that when the leaders see themselves as not part of the collective, their relationship with their subordinates becomes strained. Thus, subordinates lose trust and commitment to serving their leader and the organisation. Furthermore, subordinates lose trust in the leader's decision-making ability as far as fairness is concerned and, as a result, they tend to question the leader's decision-making. It is common knowledge that a leader who is not in contact with the subordinates can hardly understand their needs and can hardly consider their interests in a fairly manner. Thus, disconnecting themselves from the collective. As a result, Khoza maintains that when leaders lack compassion, they

disconnect themselves from the collective (Khoza, 2011). The exercise of ubuntu by leaders when pondering on issues of decision-making is essential. Congruent to Khoza's (2011) argument, Rao (2018) avers that there are some commonalities in ethics that call for individuals to carry out introspection. Thus, leaders increase their knowledge of self, their values and the values of others to establish a culturally proficient organisation.

3.4.5 Moral necessity

Khoza (2011) opined that humans are special because they are moral creatures. Ubuntu assumes that humans are naturally moral because it would not be possible for humans to exist collectively or even individually without that innate sense. However, Khoza (2011) is quick to state that, even though humans are ethically centred, that does not mean they are not fallible, and they will always act morally; instead, he contends that virtues have authority over the entire being. In essence, Khoza (2011) argues that, despite some human beings' unethical behaviours, that does not erase the truth that, naturally, the human race is virtuous. Khoza, goes on to state that as far as ubuntu is concerned, humans are founded in unity. This shows that altruism is essential in ensuring that our unity as a people is sustained. Consequently, the unity that we enjoy as a people is demonstrated by acts of integrity and decency towards one another. Hence, Khoza (2011) affirms that people exist by reciprocating selfless gestures to others.

Furthermore, the philosophy of ubuntu emphasises worth and dignity of all people, recognizing that it has its foundation in that people are able to make a distinction between what is right and what is not right. This could be achieved by appealing to the general human traits, which are inclusive of emotional intelligence and being rational (Khoza, 2011). The unity that we enjoy as a people or as a human race is a result of our capability to show and prove that we are concerned about the welfare of others as citizens, and they in turn return such concern. Leaders who are proponents of ubuntuism know that subordinates have to be taken care of and be respected in order earn respect from them in return. Additionally, these leaders show some intellectual abilities and care in order to gain respect of the followers (Khoza, 2011). Leaders have to be at all times humble and not be bossy subordinates in order to convey messages of decency and hope that can easily ignite elements of trust within the fraternity of subordinates.

The African philosophy of ubuntu upholds perfect ethical standards. Qualifying this assertion, Khoza (2011) takes a leaf from the well-known Former President South Africa, Nelson Mandela, to lay out the wisdom and understanding of ubuntu when explaining what hospitality entails. Perspicaciously, Khoza identifies when Mandela talks about the 'stranger principle' and comparing it to the dictates of the Christian principle which says love thy neighbour as you love thy self, "you don't know this person who comes to your doorstep in need of sustenance, yet, because they are human, like you, kindness and generosity will be extended to them". Khoza (2011) supposes that a stranger can be genuinely accommodated in a community as a result of the ubuntu driven principle which makes us to regard a stranger as a fellow human being. The foregoing supposition is resonated by Mihelič et al. (2010), as they hypothesise that ethics is the code of moral principles or values that propels individuals' or groups' action concerning what is right and what is wrong. Accepting someone who needs some assistance is a good thing to do and it is regarded as amoral act. Therefore, it is important for ethical leaders to practice moral management skills by disseminating some information on ethics, rewarding subordinates on according to how compliant they are in as far ethics are concerned.

Additionally, ethical leaders have to keep in mind that it is their obligation to address the organisational interest in as far as morality is concerned. Sharing of messages of morality with stakeholders in cognisant of the fact that organisational effectiveness is a result of concerted effort of the stakeholders (Tang et al., 2015). Leaders who are deficient in integrity and who attach less or no value in the interests of their followers are bound to fail. Accordingly, Khoza (2011) affirms, 'humbleness in a leader is a facet of human decency and probity'; so, the attitude of an organisational leader is a determinant of success. Organisational Leaders can draw some insight from St. Augustine's famous quotation which says: "*It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men angels*". As a matter of fact, the above quotation is a reminder to leaders that they have to attach a great deal of respect to their position and serve their organisation. In that way they will earn some respect and commitment of the employees, this will benefit all stakeholders and a healthy working climate.

As a people, we are existing as a commonwealth, the way we relate to one another is influenced by social norms, the way we understand our selves depends on how we understand the people around us (Khoza, 2011). Simply put, Khoza (2011) deduces that, as individuals, we have

compassion for one another, so as to realise that we are living our lives collectively because a life of an individual is related to lives of others because of emotional intelligence or empathy that exists naturally within ourselves as a people. Therefore, the community in which we live in is the foundation of our social being and moral nature.

Khoza (2011) argues that behaving morally is an important and necessary part the 'being' of being human and is not an add-on produced by ideology, history, religion, culture, tradition, or any other outcome of the past or present. Additionally, he says because of being human, an individual's moral sense is an acknowledgement of the authority of virtue over human interactions. As moral beings, lack of virtue in our relations could be a choice, though, if the authority of virtue is not chosen, this may be at the cost of consciences. Lastly, Khoza (2011) emphasises that moral necessity demands a leadership style that is entirely directed towards the common good. Moreover, he surmises that virtue is a beacon of leadership. Hence, as ethical beings, we need to do our utmost to attain the common good status and shun unethical practices in our leadership styles. Consequently, this is ethical leadership.

3.4.6 Commonwealth

The last feature of the Attuned Leadership Model by Khoza (2011) is a commonwealth. He is of the idea that people know that they owe their survival to the commonwealth of other people, and as human beings, we are searching for the meaning of who we are in our relationships with other people. More so, because current studies show people are prone to be concerned about circumstances faced by other people.

Khoza (2011) avows that this is where we begin to view situations with a moral lens; we start to invoke within ourselves abilities that ignite compassion to provide answers. Commonwealth accentuates the link or the relationship between common actions that are common and communal benefits. Commonwealth refers to collective and valued activities of the community. Therefore, ubuntu is the force that drives away differences within people, in the event ensuring that common visions and actions are realised (Khoza, 2011). In direct contrast, Western individualism is not reasonably embedded within the nature of humans or in their relations. It overlooks the significance of common humanity based on reason and, for lack of any single term, spirituality, compassion, social awareness and emotional intelligence (Khoza, 2011). But

the meaning that Africans attach to personhood is recognising that our person is more than individual personality but is our social being in the eyes of others. Coming to leadership, I believe a school principal with ubuntu is available to others, affirming of others and does not feel threatened that others are able and good. Ubuntu is the core of being human. Khoza (2011) stresses that a good leader is a leader who appreciates that the success of others does not diminish his own success but adds to the good of the commonwealth. A leader generates trust because what glues the relationship between leader and followers is, simply, trust. A leader practices introspection and self-renewal. This suggests the fact that man cannot live in isolation.

Ubuntu means that each individual expression is ideally expressed in relationship with others, and it is a concrete manifestation of human interconnectedness. Respect entails listening to the other person, and it also involves humility, honesty and treating others as you want them to treat you (Khoza, 2011). Furthermore, good leadership strives to fulfil the common good. Leadership is efficacious when the followers embrace the vision and strive for transformation as well. A leader who embraces ubuntu will see the public good as not just an aggregation of individual benefits but as a gain for the whole community that is greater than the sum of its parts (Khoza, 2011).

The tremendous power of ubuntu resides in its very simple formulation that every person's being is dependent on every other. In Africa, smiling and laughing is a very basic behaviour, especially within the ubuntu lifestyle. Empathy is not only related to the dimension of compassion but also belongs to the dimension of respect. In Africa, the idea of humanism has been identified variously as ubuntu. Based on African humanness, once people have a true understanding of themselves, they can gain a better understanding of others and so create more effective business and personal relationships. Ubuntu is about reviving the aspects of being human in leadership. These aspects include respect for the other, helpfulness, sharing, caring, unselfishness, and a sense of community. It is an all-embracing intellectual, emotional, spiritual and psychological acknowledgement of commonality. Generally speaking, ubuntu provides a compass for the direction of ethical leadership.

3.5 Limitations of the African philosophy of ubuntu

As with any other system, the African philosophy of ubuntu has some drawbacks and is discussed as follows.

3.5.1 The African philosophy of ubuntu is based on unrecorded practices

One major challenge of this theory is that it is not written down and that it is mostly transmitted from one generation to the next through storytelling (Afrocentric Alliance, 2001). Successive generations learn about ubuntu through direct interaction within local communities. Unlike the Western and Eastern ideologies, which are well documented, the African philosophy of ubuntu does not have an ancient written tradition, which makes it very difficult for the younger generations to fully practise it.

3.5.2 Insufficient information dissemination and sensitisation about the ubuntu philosophy

Although this philosophy is associated with positive attributes, it is not well disseminated to people within African societies. Subsequently, some people have less knowledge about it, or they do not know anything about its foundational concepts. This is noticeable in towns and suburbs in urban centres where different people with different socio-cultural backgrounds and without extensive and ancient family ties live together. Western and Eastern cultures have documented their philosophies and have disseminated them into educational systems, but in schools, for example, training is still based on foreign ideologies, and African theories are not taught. Thus, big business in Africa is still dominated by theories that were created within and for individualist cultures that do not match the communal culture of an African society (Lutz, 2009).

3.5.3 The ubuntu philosophy is negatively associated with some archaic African traditional rituals, customs and practices

Some African traditions have outlived their usefulness in modern societies but may persist, nevertheless. Practices such as witchcraft are still prevalent amongst African societies, and organisations need to take cognisance of this. Other challenges in the African context include envy, where traditional practices tend to discourage individual initiatives (Afrocentric Alliance,

2001), as Africans rate social achievement above personal achievement (Lutz, 2009). Anybody who aspires to excel above the expectations of the community would be looked down upon as an alien.

3.5.4 African ubuntu philosophy is challenged by the proliferation of foreign ideologies

The ubuntu philosophy articulates such important values as respect, human dignity, compassion, solidarity and consensus, which demands conformity and loyalty to the group. However, modern African society is constituted of people from different cultures and backgrounds. Thus, understanding and practising some of the principles of ubuntu have become problematic due to multicultural challenges and the proliferation of foreign ideologies.

3.6 Stakeholder theory

The third and the last theory that underpins my study is stakeholder theory. According to this theory, as proposed by Freeman (1984), organisational managers have an obligation to develop and put into place procedures that meet the needs of all parties involved, align those needs, and guarantee the long-term viability of the organisation. Stakeholder theory also offers the chance to reconsider how value generation and trade are conceptualised (Freeman, 2010). Furthermore, Freeman (2010) argues that the stakeholder approach is consistent with the concept of organisational integrity, since organisational integrity serves as a binding element between the firm and its stakeholders. Consequently, a lack of organisational integrity is likely to have severe consequences for various stakeholders and the ability of the organisation to be effective.

Gilbert and Rasche (2008) posit that stakeholder theory explains how organisations take into consideration the interests of all stakeholders. It identifies the people who are impacted by an organisation's operations and how they affect the goals that the firm has for its business. Many academic fields have a lengthy history with this theory (Richter & Dow, 2017). Stakeholders were divided into three categories by Fassin (2009): true stakeholders, stake watchers, and stake keepers. The organisation owes a duty and moral commitment to its true stakeholders, who have a meaningful investment in it and legitimate claims to power and influence.

The stake watchers, according to Fassin (2009), do not truly have a stake themselves but act as proxies or intermediaries who protect the interests of real stakeholders. They are made up of

several associations that serve as watchdogs and defend the rights of consumers, the environment, and shareholders. Their influence stems from their representation of actual stakeholders' interests. The organisation is under no moral or legal obligation to look out for the interests of the stake watchers who control it. Regulators like governments, courts, regulatory bodies, the press, and the media are critical stakeholders. These serve as the guardians. They can impose obligations both externally and indirectly, but they remain completely autonomous of the organisation. Stake watchers include the press, courts, government agencies, and the media (Fassin, 2009).

In stakeholder theory, stakeholder relations are crucial (Hatami & Firoozi, 2019). According to the stakeholder hypothesis, society will back an organisation if it offers benefits, especially in the case of sustainability initiatives and operations. According to Freudenreich et al. (2020), the primary responsibility of the organisation is to coordinate value generation for and with stakeholders in accordance with the shared purpose. Grieve and Mitchell (2020) posit that clients are more likely to transact with an organisation and accept its services if they see that the organisation is dedicated to tackling social, environmental, and governance issues.

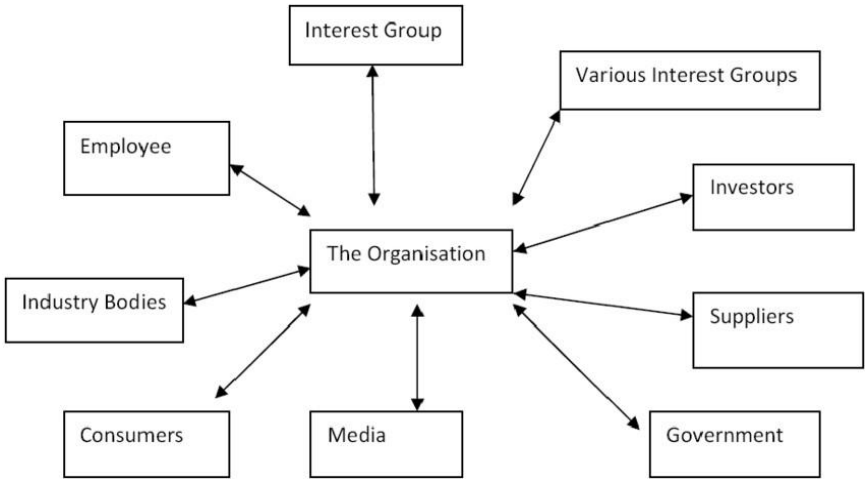

Figure 3.1 Stakeholder Schematic Diagram (Freeman, 2010)

3.6.1 Application of the theory to the study

Stakeholder theory provides a comprehensive framework for exploring the ethical leadership practices of school principals in the context of the current study. In this particular case, the stakeholders would encompass various groups such as students, parents, teachers, administrative staff, local community members, educational authorities, and potentially other organisations or entities involved in the functioning of rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. By considering stakeholder theory, it becomes possible to analyse the impact of the principals' leadership practices on the different stakeholder groups and their respective interests.

Applying stakeholder theory to the study provides valuable insights into how the school principals' ethical leadership practices align with the needs and expectations of the diverse stakeholders. It allows for the examination of how the principals engage with and prioritise the interests of stakeholders, manage potential conflicts among different stakeholder groups, and make decisions that uphold the overall well-being of the school community. Additionally, the theory can facilitate an assessment of the extent to which ethical leadership practices contribute to the sustainability and ethical functioning of the schools, as well as the perceived value generated for the stakeholders.

However, while the stakeholder theory offers a robust framework for understanding the dynamics of ethical leadership within the school context, it also presents certain limitations in framing the findings of the study. One notable limitation is the complexity of identifying and prioritising the diverse array of stakeholders in the school environment (Richter & Dow, 2017). The theory may not provide clear guidance on how to effectively balance the often-conflicting interests of different stakeholders, particularly in a setting as multifaceted as rural high schools. Additionally, while the theory emphasises the importance of considering stakeholder interests, it may not offer specific guidance on how to measure the effectiveness of ethical leadership practices or the level of stakeholder satisfaction (Freeman, 2010). This can pose challenges in translating the theory into actionable recommendations for enhancing ethical leadership in the specific context of the rural high schools in Eswatini.

While stakeholder theory offers a valuable lens for examining the ethical leadership practices of school principals and their impact on various stakeholders, its application in this study should be complemented with an understanding of its limitations and the need for additional frameworks or approaches to comprehensively capture the intricacies of ethical leadership within the school setting. However, it is also clear that ignoring the principles of stakeholder theory can present ethical leadership challenges for a rural school principal. Here are some potential challenges that may arise:

Lack of accountability: Ignoring stakeholder interests may lead to a lack of accountability towards the community, parents, learners, and other parties affected by the school's decisions. This can result in a breakdown of trust and credibility, making it difficult to maintain a positive relationship with stakeholders, thus affecting the progress of the school.

Negative impact on reputation: Failure to consider stakeholder interests can lead to decisions that negatively impact the school's reputation within the community. This could result in decreased support from the community, which is crucial for the school's success and overall well-being.

Limited community engagement: Ignoring stakeholder interests may hinder the principal's ability to effectively engage with the community. This can lead to challenges in garnering support for initiatives, implementing changes, and nurturing the positive relationships that are essential for the school's success.

Ineffective risk management: By not considering the interests of all stakeholders, the principal may overlook potential risks and challenges that could have been identified through stakeholder engagement. This can lead to poor decision-making and a lack of proactive risk management, ultimately harming the school and its community.

Conflict and resistance: Ignoring stakeholder interests may lead to conflicts and resistance from various groups within the school community. This can create a challenging environment for the principal, making it difficult to lead effectively and implement necessary policies and changes.

Loss of stakeholder support: Failure to recognise and address stakeholder interests may result in a loss of support from key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, students, and community

members. This loss of support can impede the principal's ability to successfully lead the school and achieve its vision and mission, thereby jeopardising educational goals.

In conclusion, neglecting the principles of stakeholder theory can lead to a range of ethical leadership challenges, including diminished accountability, damaged reputation, limited community engagement, ineffective risk management, conflicts, resistance, and loss of stakeholder support for the rural school principal. Therefore, it is paramount to take on board the principles of stakeholder theory in practising ethical leadership in schools to avoid risking the above-mentioned challenges.

3.7 Justification for the Integrated Theoretical Framework

The integration of Ethical Leadership Theory (ELT), the African Philosophy of Ubuntu (APU), and Stakeholder Theory (SHT) provided a uniquely comprehensive and contextually robust lens for the study, directly addressing its objectives while underscoring its originality. Individually, each theory offered valuable but partial insights. ELT provided a structured, multi-ethical framework encompassing justice, critique, care, and profession to analyse leaders' moral reasoning and behaviours. APU rooted the study in the socio-cultural and communal values specific to the Eswatini context, emphasizing interdependence, compassion, and collective well-being. SHT ensured that the analysis extended beyond the principal to include the complex web of relationships and duties owed to learners, parents, teachers, and the community.

The combination was logically necessary and original, as no single theory could have adequately framed the study's aim to explore the understanding, practices, dilemmas, and challenges of ethical leadership in that specific setting. ELT's Western-derived frameworks, while useful, risked imposing external norms without accounting for the African communal ethos that fundamentally shaped local conceptions of ethics and authority. APU alone, though culturally vital, lacked the structural mechanisms to analyse fiduciary responsibilities, accountability, and the management of conflicting stakeholder interests. SHT provided the analytical tool to identify whose interests were being served or neglected but required the moral compass of ELT and APU to evaluate whether those interests were being addressed ethically.

Together, this integrated ELT-APU-SHT model created a multidimensional lens that allowed the research to investigate importance and identify malpractices by evaluating actions against universal ethical principles (ELT), communal values (APU), and obligations to specific groups (SHT). It unearthed root causes and challenges by examining whether unethical practices stemmed from a failure

of personal ethics (ELT), a breach of communal bonds (APU), a neglect of stakeholder duties (SHT), or the intense pressure arising from their intersection. Furthermore, it proposed ways to eradicate malpractices by developing solutions that were not only procedurally sound (via ELT and SHT) but also culturally resonant and community-owned (through APU). Furthermore, this tripartite framework was particularly original given the profound lack of empirical evidence on ethical leadership in Eswatini's rural schools. It moved beyond applying a single Western theory and instead constructed a novel, culturally situated analytical tool that captured the intricate realities of school leadership in the Lubombo region, making a significant contribution to the field.

3.8 Summary

This chapter discussed the theoretical frameworks in which the study is underpinned. These are the ethical leadership theory advanced (ELT) by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), the African philosophy of ubuntu (APU) by Khoza (2011) and the stakeholder theory by Freeman (1984). The relevance of the three theories to the study and their limitations were also discussed. The next chapter addresses the methodology of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology used to investigate the ethical leadership practices of school principals in five rural high schools in the Lubombo Region of Eswatini. It sets out the philosophical assumptions underpinning the study, the design and methodological orientation, and the techniques used for sampling, data generation, and analysis. The study adopts a qualitative multiple case study design, guided by an interpretivist paradigm. It further explains how participants and schools were selected, the methods used to gather data, and how the analysis was conducted. The chapter concludes by outlining the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness, the ethical standards followed, the limitations encountered, and a summary of the methodological choices. Each element was carefully designed to support the aim of understanding ethical leadership as experienced by school leaders and stakeholders in under-resourced rural contexts.

4.2 Research paradigm

This study was grounded in the **interpretivist paradigm**, which fundamentally shaped its philosophical assumptions, methodological choices, and analytical approach. **Interpretivism** emphasizes understanding the subjective meanings individuals assign to their experiences. Creswell (2013) describes interpretivism as a perspective where researchers seek to make sense of the meanings that participants ascribe to the world around them. Rather than seeking universal laws, interpretivist researchers explore complexity, context, and multiple realities. They rely on participants' narratives and subjective interpretations, recognizing that meanings are socially and historically constructed.

Bryman (2014) elaborates that interpretivism arose as a reaction against the positivist belief in an objective, observable reality. He argues that social science must grasp the subjective meanings individuals attach to their actions, as opposed to seeking cause-and-effect explanations. Researchers within the interpretivist tradition prioritize understanding how people interpret their world, acknowledging that reality and truth are continuously co-constructed through social interaction. Thus, this philosophical stance calls for deep

engagement with participants, attentive listening, and openness to the multiplicity of meanings that emerge through dialogue.

Ontologically, interpretivism asserts that reality is subjective, socially constructed, and multiple, shaped through individuals' interactions, experiences, and perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In line with Bryman's (2014) perspective, truth is not absolute but is intersubjectively created within specific historical and social contexts. The researcher and the phenomenon studied are interconnected; the researcher's own background, experiences, and positionality inevitably influence the inquiry. Consequently, knowledge claims are dynamic and negotiated through continuous researcher–participant interaction.

Dialogue between the researcher and participants was central to this study. Through this **dialectical engagement**, deeper, more nuanced understandings of ethical leadership practices were constructed. Every interpretation was situated within the specific institutional, social, and historical contexts of the participants, who included **school heads, deputy principals, and chairpersons of school committees**. The study, therefore, addressed the ontological question of how these educational leaders understood and navigated ethical leadership within their distinct environments. Given the researcher's own experience as a school head, reflexivity, member checking, and debriefing strategies were employed to minimize potential biases and enhance the study's trustworthiness.

Epistemologically, the research was based on the premise that knowledge is not objectively discovered but co-constructed through interaction between the researcher and participants (Lincoln et al., 2011). Epistemology, concerned with the theory of knowledge, seeks to answer questions such as "What is knowledge?" and "How do we acquire it?" (Couper, 2020). Potter (2017) extends this view by emphasizing the importance of understanding the justification, scope, and limitations of knowledge claims. In this study, knowledge was considered contextually situated and relational, constructed through ongoing dialogue with participants. Grix (2004) similarly asserts that meaning is not passively discovered but actively shaped through the interplay between human consciousness and environment, reinforcing the study's interpretivist approach.

Building **trust and rapport** with participants was essential to ensure authenticity in the data collection process. Participants were encouraged to express themselves openly and honestly in an environment that valued all responses, whether positive or negative. Full information about the study's objectives, ethical standards, and participants' rights was provided from the outset, ensuring informed consent, which was formalized through signed consent forms.

Axiologically, the study acknowledged that research is inherently value-laden. Axiology refers to the role of researchers' values and ethics in shaping inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In line with Creswell's (2013) and Denzin et al.'s (2011) interpretations, axiology recognizes that researchers' moral commitments, cultural norms, and aesthetic judgments influence all phases of the research process. Throughout this study, ethical principles – such as respect for participants' dignity, confidentiality, transparency, and integrity – were upheld. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand, gatekeeper permission from the Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini, and participant consent was formally secured. Confidentiality was preserved through the use of pseudonyms, member checking was used to validate interpretations, and rigorous academic integrity was maintained to prevent misrepresentation of participants' accounts.

Methodologically, the study employed a qualitative, multiple case study design to investigate ethical leadership as a complex, context-bound phenomenon. This approach allowed for in-depth engagement with participants' lived experiences and facilitated a holistic understanding of ethical leadership practices in rural education settings. More discussion on the methodology is discussed in the following sections. Ethical leadership, as a socially embedded and value-driven phenomenon, cannot be fully captured through detached measurement. Instead, it must be interpreted through the narratives of those who enact and witness it in context.

Drawing from the above discussion, the interpretivist orientation provided a coherent foundation for using in-depth qualitative methods to uncover rich, nuanced understandings of social processes and to generate insights that are meaningful within specific cultural and institutional contexts. In the case of Eswatini, the cultural setting is deeply influenced by communal values, traditional authority structures, and respect for hierarchy, factors that shape leadership practices and stakeholder expectations in schools. The socio-cultural fabric of rural communities in the Lubombo Region includes a strong emphasis on collective responsibility,

respect for elders, and adherence to established norms. These cultural underpinnings influence how ethical leadership is understood and enacted by school leaders, and how such leadership is judged by community stakeholders. Recognising these contextual specificities was critical to interpreting the meaning of ethical behaviour in school governance, an integral part of the study's interpretive framework. This approach was appropriate for exploring how leadership is experienced and enacted within the real-life complexities of rural school contexts.

4.3 Research design

The research adopted a qualitative multiple case study design to explore the ethical leadership practices of principals in rural high schools in Eswatini. A case study is a detailed, in-depth investigation of a bounded system, phenomenon, or event within its real-life context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). It is particularly suited for answering "how" and "why" questions in educational research, especially when the focus is on understanding complex social processes and meanings. The study drew from the four seminal scholars who conceptualised the case study design. These authors' conceptualisations are discussed below.

Stake (1995) argues that case study research prioritises the uniqueness and complexity of the case itself, focusing on the particular, rather than on the general. Stake's approach is grounded in a constructivist paradigm, which values the experiences and perspectives of those involved in the case. His focus on "understanding the case" rather than merely describing it supports the study's aim of gaining insights into how ethical leadership is enacted, perceived, and influenced by contextual realities in each school. Stake (1995) also emphasizes the interpretive nature of case studies, making his approach especially useful for research grounded in subjective meaning-making.

Merriam (1998) defines a case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit." Her emphasis on the holistic and context-specific nature of case studies aligns closely with the goal of this research, which was to gain a deep, comprehensive understanding of how ethical leadership is enacted in rural schools. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also stress the importance of case studies in educational research for understanding practice and informing improvement. This approach prioritises depth of understanding over breadth and focuses on meaning-making in context.

Creswell and Poth (2018) describe a case study as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. The emphasis on the integration of multiple data sources reinforces the study's approach to triangulation and thematic development (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Yin (2018, p. 15) offers a more structured and analytical perspective, defining case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident." This approach reinforces the need for rigorous design and the inclusion of multiple data sources to ensure validity and depth. His emphasis on case selection, data triangulation, and analytical generalisation directly supports the study's methodological rigour and strengthens the credibility of insights drawn from each individual case.

By incorporating these four perspectives, the study drew on the strengths of case study methodology: depth, context sensitivity, and an appreciation for complexity and uniqueness. They provided the theoretical grounding for an interpretive, holistic, and participant-focused design and contributed the procedural rigour and clarity needed for robust research design and execution.

The multiple case study design enabled a collective approach, where five rural high schools were studied as distinct yet related cases. This allowed the researcher to examine both the uniqueness of each school's leadership practices and the common themes that emerged across cases. The strength of the multiple case study lies in its capacity to reveal patterns, insights, and theoretical constructs that may not be visible in a single case (Yin, 2018).

Each school served as a bounded system characterised by specific leadership structures, governance practices, and socio-cultural contexts. With multi-case research design, the study achieved depth and breadth in understanding ethical leadership in rural educational settings. This approach also supported the interpretivist paradigm of the study by privileging context, meaning making, and participant perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In conclusion, the qualitative multiple case study design provided a methodologically rigorous and contextually sensitive framework for exploring ethical leadership in rural Eswatini schools.

It allowed for the collection of rich, in-depth data and supported the study's goal of generating practical and theoretical insights. The selection of entire schools as individual cases was a deliberate methodological decision that aligns with the principles of a multiple case study design. Each school functions as a unique organisational and social unit with its own leadership structures, governance processes, community relationships, and contextual challenges. By treating schools as bounded cases, the researcher was able to capture the interplay between individual behaviours and institutional dynamics that is essential for a comprehensive understanding of ethical leadership. This approach allowed for the exploration of how policies, norms, and stakeholder expectations influence leadership practices at the school level. It enabled the researcher to conduct in-depth within-case analysis, examining the ethical leadership landscape in each school as an independent unit of inquiry. Rather than comparing the schools to one another, each case was treated separately to preserve its unique context and to support triangulation. This strengthened the richness and credibility of the findings by allowing each school to contribute distinct insights into ethical leadership.

4.4 Research methodology

A qualitative methodology was adopted because it provides the tools and flexibility needed to explore complex, socially constructed phenomena like ethical leadership. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore participants' experiences, beliefs, and interactions in depth and in their natural settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach was especially appropriate given the need to engage with school leaders and stakeholders in their own environments, discussing sensitive topics such as ethics, power, and leadership.

The methodology was inductive and emergent. Instead of beginning with hypotheses, the researcher sought to generate insights from the data, guided by the participants' lived experiences. This was particularly useful in understanding ethical leadership, which may manifest differently across schools due to variations in institutional culture, leadership style, and community expectations. The methodology allowed for flexibility in data collection and interpretation, enabling the researcher to adapt to emerging insights while maintaining a clear focus on the research questions.

4.5 Research population and sampling

A population refers to a group of individuals or objects that share similar characteristics (Engel & Schutt, 2013). Islam and Aldaihani (2022) define a population as a group made up of individuals, which can include people, events, or anything of research interest with common traits. In this study, the population consisted of rural high school principals, deputy principals, and chairpersons of school committees in the Lubombo Region. The region had 39 rural high schools, so the population included 39 principals, 39 deputy principals, and 39 chairpersons. As the study was qualitative and followed a case study design, the focus was not on the number of respondents but rather on the depth and quality of the responses provided. Table 4.1 presents a summary of the study's population.

Table 4.1 Populations of the Research

Participants	**Population**
Principals	39
Deputy Principals	39
Chairpersons	39
Total	**117**

The study population included school principals, deputy principals, and school committee chairpersons from five public rural high schools in the Lubombo Region. These three categories of participants were chosen because of their direct involvement in school leadership and governance, and their collective insights into the ethical dimensions of decision-making and school management.

4.5.1 Sampling of schools and recruitment criteria

Sampling in qualitative research involves intentionally selecting participants who can offer rich, relevant insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Creswell (2014) defines a sample as a subset of a population used to understand the characteristics of the broader group. Similarly, Maree (2007) describes sampling as the process of selecting a portion of the population for study, while McMillan and Schumacher (2010) emphasize that it involves identifying participants from whom meaningful data will be collected. The choice of sampling method depends on the research methodology employed (Cohen et al., 2011; Petty et al., 2012).

Purposive sampling was employed in this study, aligning with the qualitative research tradition of seeking depth over breadth. In purposive sampling, participants are deliberately selected because they possess specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Cohen et al., 2011; Wahyuni, 2012). Creswell (2007) affirms that this method enables researchers to select individuals and sites that can best illuminate the central research problem. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) and Petty et al. (2012) highlight that purposive sampling strengthens research credibility by focusing on information-rich cases.

In collaboration with the Regional Education Office (REO), five rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini were identified based on criteria such as rural location, accessibility, the presence of functioning school governance structures, and experienced leadership teams. Schools were selected to ensure variation in context while maintaining the rural focus of the study. Following ethical approval and school identification, participants were recruited through direct contact with the school principals, followed by detailed briefings provided to deputy principals and chairpersons of school committees.

The selection criteria for participants were specific: principals were required to have more than five years of leadership experience, while deputy principals and school committee chairpersons needed a minimum of two years of experience in their respective roles. This ensured that participants had sufficient exposure to leadership practices and governance dynamics to offer meaningful reflections on ethical leadership.

Each participant received an information sheet outlining the study's objectives, ethical considerations, and participation requirements. Informed consent was secured through signed

consent forms before any data collection activities commenced. In total, 15 participants were purposively selected, three from each of the five schools, comprising the principal, deputy principal, and chairperson of the school committee. This sampling strategy ensured a balanced dataset, rich in diverse experiences yet focused on a common rural educational context. Table 4.2 presents a summary of the study's sample.

Table 4.2 Summary of the Sample of Subjects

Participants	**Sample**
Principals	5
Deputy Principals	5
Chairpersons	5
Total	15

The selection of the five specific schools was a deliberate process designed to identify information-rich sites that were archetypal of the rural high school context in Lubombo, particularly those confronting common ethical leadership challenges. Collaboration with the Regional Education Office (REO) was crucial, as their institutional knowledge helped identify schools that were not only accessible but also representative of the region's socio-economic and operational realities. The core rationale was to ensure that these sites exhibited the typical pressures faced by rural schools, such as resource constraints, complex community dynamics, and governance pressures that naturally give rise to ethically charged decision-making scenarios for leaders.

Schools were chosen to provide variation within this rural typology, including differences in student population size and specific local challenges, to capture a breadth of contextual experiences without diluting the focus on common rural ethical dilemmas. This approach ensured that, while each school was unique, all were quintessential examples of Lubombo's

rural educational landscape, thereby guaranteeing that the data collected would be deeply relevant and richly illustrative of the ethical leadership challenges pervasive across the region.

4.6 Data generation methods

According to Myers (2013), data generation methods are the ways employed by researchers to produce data from a qualitative study. There are five major methods for data generation as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2010); these are semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, observations, audio-visual tools and document reviews, which are appropriate techniques for case study research (Myers, 2013). However, this study employed semi-structured interviews as data generating method.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary data generation method used in this study was semi-structured interviews. This qualitative technique is particularly suitable for exploring participants' perspectives in depth while allowing the flexibility to probe for clarification and elaboration (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews are more than just a tool for collecting data—they are a social encounter through which knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and the participant. Conceptually, interviewing enables the researcher to access the inner world of participants, their thoughts, meanings, beliefs, and practices that are embedded in specific contexts (Brinkmann, 2013).

Semi-structured interviews are guided by a set of pre-determined open-ended questions but offer the freedom to diverge from the schedule to follow interesting responses or unexpected directions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, one-on-one, face-to-face interviews were used to encourage openness, trust, and personal reflection, particularly given the sensitive nature of ethical leadership. These individual interviews provided a confidential space for participants to articulate their experiences, moral dilemmas, and values without fear of judgment or repercussions.

Fifteen interviews were conducted across five rural high schools, involving principals, deputy principals, and school committee chairpersons. Each session lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was held in a private and familiar school environment to promote participant comfort and engagement. The face-to-face modality was particularly important in the cultural

context of Eswatini, where interpersonal connection, non-verbal communication, and respect are highly valued aspects of dialogue (Mathebula, 2015).

Other data generation methods were considered but deemed less appropriate for the aims and setting of this research. Focus group discussions were excluded due to the potential influence of power hierarchies between participants, which could inhibit honest dialogue or introduce social desirability bias (Barbour, 2007). Open-ended questionnaires were seen as too limited for capturing complex ethical issues and lacked the immediacy and depth that real-time interaction provides. Non-participant observation was not feasible given the often covert and intangible nature of ethical decision-making, which rarely unfolds in predictable, observable ways. Document analysis was also not feasible due to restricted access to sensitive school records and the limited availability of policy documents at the school level.

Therefore, semi-structured interviews, conceptualised as dialogic, interactive, and situated in relational ethics, offered the most appropriate and effective means to generate rich, credible, and contextually grounded data on ethical leadership in rural Eswatini schools

4.7 Data analysis

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to analyse the qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a flexible and accessible method of analysing qualitative data that emphasises identifying, examining, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). This method was selected because of its flexibility and suitability for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning across a dataset. The analysis followed six key phases, each of which is explained in detail below.

This approach is well-suited to exploratory research seeking to uncover the meanings participants assign to their experiences and practices. Reflexive thematic analysis also acknowledges the active role of the researcher in identifying and interpreting patterns, aligning well with the interpretivist paradigm guiding this study (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The analysis process followed six recursive steps:

1. **Familiarisation with the data:** The researcher immersed themselves in the dataset by reading and re-reading all transcripts, Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and initial notes were made to capture first impressions and early ideas. This stage ensured a deep and intuitive understanding of the data before formal coding began (Braun & Clarke, 2022).
2. **Generating initial codes:** The researcher began systematic coding by identifying and labelling relevant features of the data that were pertinent to the research questions. This phase involved both semantic (explicit) and latent (underlying) coding to capture surface meanings and deeper assumptions.
3. **Searching for themes:** Once initial coding was complete, the researcher grouped related codes into potential themes. This phase marked the beginning of interpretive analysis, moving from data to theory-driven meaning-making (Nowell et al., 2017).
4. **Reviewing themes:** Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and distinctiveness. This involved two levels of checking: first, reviewing coded extracts for each theme to confirm they formed a coherent pattern; second, reviewing the themes in relation to the entire dataset to verify they captured the dominant narratives. Some themes were merged or separated, and sub-themes were developed where needed.
5. **Defining and naming themes:** Each theme was clearly defined in terms of its scope, focus, and relevance to the research questions. Names were chosen to reflect the core meaning and analytic purpose of the theme. The themes were then mapped out to demonstrate relationships between them and the overall research framework.
6. **Producing the report:** The final step involved weaving the themes into a coherent narrative. Each theme was described in detail, supported by illustrative quotes from participants. The researcher's interpretation was integrated with the study's conceptual and theoretical framework, linking empirical data with existing literature and relevant theories.

Throughout this process, the researcher maintained a reflexive stance—acknowledging his own positionality as a school principal and critically engaging with how the background might shape interpretations (Berger, 2015). A reflexive journal was kept to document analytical decisions

and ensure transparency. This systematic yet flexible approach to data analysis allowed for a rich, contextually grounded interpretation of ethical leadership in rural schools.

4.8 Establishing trustworthiness of the study

In order for research findings to be useful, especially in the field of education, they must be viewed as credible, dependable, and legitimate by a range of stakeholders including researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and the public. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed the concept of trustworthiness as a framework to demonstrate the rigor of qualitative research. Their framework includes four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria ensured that the findings of this study are robust, transparent, and meaningful.

4.8.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the accuracy and truth-value of the findings as perceived by the participants and readers. It is established when the findings authentically represent the experiences of those involved in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tobin & Begley, 2004). To enhance credibility in this research, multiple strategies were employed: prolonged engagement with the study sites, triangulation of data sources (interviews with school principals, deputy principals and school committee chairpersons) and member checking. Member checking involved returning transcripts and preliminary interpretations to participants for verification, thereby ensuring alignment between their views and the researcher's representation. Additionally, peer debriefing was conducted with academic colleagues to critically evaluate the coding and theme development process, adding a layer of external scrutiny and enhancing interpretive credibility.

4.8.2 Transferability

Transferability, as defined by Nassaji (2020), refers to the extent to which a study's findings can be applied to other similar settings or contexts. Tuval-Mashiach (2021) further explains transferability as the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to different contexts or conducted among different respondents. Lankshear and Knobel (2006) emphasize that transferability is achieved by creating detailed and rich descriptions of the contexts. Bistch (2005) and Tobin & Begley (2004) also highlight that transferability refers to

the extent to which qualitative findings can be applied to other settings with different participants. Transferability addresses the extent to which findings can be applied to other settings. While generalisation is not a goal of qualitative research, providing rich, thick descriptions enables others to assess whether the findings resonate with their own contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tobin & Begley, 2004). In this study, detailed accounts of the school settings, participant roles, and contextual influences were provided to support transferability. Thick description allows other researchers, educators, and policymakers to judge the potential applicability of the findings to similar rural education contexts.

4.8.3 Dependability

Dependability, as described by Gabuza (2015), refers to the situation where, if a study were repeated in the same context, with the same methods and participants, similar results would emerge. However, Walby (2015) contends that absolute repetition in qualitative research is challenging, as studies reflect specific realities at the time of data collection, and those contexts may evolve over time. Petty et al. (2012) adds that dependability relates to how easily a study can be replicated or repeated. According to Yin (2012), dependability concerns the degree to which readers can trust that the findings genuinely reflect the researcher's interpretation. A study is considered dependable if its results can be replicated under similar conditions and with comparable participants (Cope, 2014). Dependability warrants the constancy of the research findings and is assessed based on the standard of how the research is conducted, analysed, and presented.

Dependability also concerns the consistency and repeatability of the research process. It requires that the research process be logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To address dependability, a detailed audit trail was maintained throughout the research, documenting methodological decisions, data collection procedures, analytic memos, and coding frameworks. Peer debriefing and committee feedback further enhanced the dependability of the findings by ensuring the analytic process was transparent and grounded in the data.

4.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability ensures that the research findings are derived from the data and not from researcher bias or predisposition. It is supported by provision of an audit trail and reflexive engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tobin & Begley, 2004). To ensure confirmability, this study maintained an extensive archive of raw data, transcriptions, coded extracts, and a reflexive journal. The journal captured personal reflections, evolving insights, and methodological decisions, providing transparency into the influence of the researcher's positionality and values on the research process. Confirmability was further reinforced by triangulating findings across participant groups and data sources, ensuring that interpretations were firmly anchored in the participants' accounts.

Audit trail and reflexivity

An audit trail was central to maintaining the transparency of the study. It included comprehensive records of interviews, coding structures, and theoretical memos. According to Sandelowski (1986), an audit trail enables other researchers to trace the logic of the inquiry and assess its consistency. The author emphasised that a study is auditable when the decision trail is clear and coherent. Keeping this detailed documentation ensured that the path from raw data to conclusions was systematic and replicable.

Reflexivity, described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as essential to qualitative research, was practiced through journaling and regular reflection. The researcher recorded both personal insights, acknowledging how their role as a school principal might shape interactions, interpretations, and ethical sensitivities. This continuous engagement with one's positionality enhanced the integrity and transparency of the entire research process (Berger, 2015; Tobin & Begley, 2004).

By systematically applying Lincoln and Guba's trustworthiness criteria and integrating reflexivity throughout the research process, this study ensured that its findings are credible, contextually rich, and analytically sound.

4.9 Ethical considerations

Ethics is fundamentally concerned with questions of right and wrong (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). Ethical issues encompass both the subject matter of research and the methods

used to investigate it, ensuring they align with moral standards (Zhang, 2020). The significance of ethical behaviour is rooted in the researcher's responsibility to respect others and work toward fairness (Drolet et al., 2023). Levitt et al. (2018) highlight that researchers must protect participant anonymity by using numbers or pseudonyms and ensure that case studies represent composite rather than individual depictions.

For this study, ethical clearance was obtained from the university, and permission to conduct research in schools was sought from the Kingdom of Eswatini's government through the Ministry of Education and Training, with the university's assistance. The study proposal was submitted to the Ministry of Education, as required before receiving authorization to research within Eswatini's schools. Letters were sent to school principals by the Ministry to inform them about the research, and participants were asked to sign informed consent forms after being fully briefed about the study's purpose and data collection procedures. It was emphasized that participation was voluntary, and participants had the freedom to withdraw at any time. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, which is a core principle in social research (Levitt et al., 2018).

In terms of ethics, the study adhered to four key principles outlined by Leedy and Ormrod (2014): ensuring no harm or risk to participants, clear communication of results and honesty with professional colleagues, obtaining informed participation, and respecting participants' right to privacy.

4.9.1 No harm or risk to participants

Markham and Buchanan (2017) describe harm in a research context as anything that may cause distress to participants, such as physical, psychological, emotional, or embarrassing. Polonsky and Waller (2011) argue that research should minimize potential harm to participants. To ensure no harm occurred, participants were informed about the study in advance, and counselling services were available, if necessary, after participation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). However, in this study, no significant harm requiring counselling was noted. Some participants showed mild discomfort when responding to ethical questions, but these feelings were alleviated by reassurances about the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Additionally, to avoid harm, participants were reminded that their names and school identities

would not be disclosed to any external parties. Instead, pseudonyms were used for all participants and schools (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

4.9.2 Communicating results and honesty

Research must be conducted with utmost honesty, as integrity is fundamental to the research process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). As such, the study was guided by the principle of honesty, ensuring that all parties involved in the study were kept informed throughout the research process. No participant was left uninformed, and communication with all stakeholders was maintained throughout the study. This openness ensured transparency and trust among all involved.

4.9.3 Informed participation

Informed consent is a vital ethical principle, ensuring that participants are given clear, explicit information about the study and are free to choose whether to participate (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, participants were fully briefed on their rights and participation in advance, allowing them to decide whether they wished to participate. Consent forms were provided for participants to sign, confirming that they understood the nature of the study and the conditions of their involvement. The consent letter emphasized that participation was voluntary, and that there were no risks involved. Furthermore, participants were assured that they could withdraw at any point without facing any negative consequences. The letter also outlined that no payment would be given for participation, and that the identities of participants and their schools would remain confidential and anonymous in all reports and academic work related to the study.

4.9.4 Right to privacy

Anonymity and confidentiality are crucial to ensure that research findings are both high-quality and objective (Eungoo & Hee-Joong, 2023). To maintain privacy, the identities of participants and their schools were not disclosed in the study. Leedy and Ormrod (2014) recommend various techniques to protect participants' identities, such as using pseudonyms, which was applied in this study. Additionally, raw data was not made public online to further safeguard privacy. Interviews were conducted in private settings, such as the offices of school principals

and deputy principals, to ensure that no one could overhear or observe the proceedings. These ethical considerations ensured that the study adhered to high standards of ethical research practice, fostering a trustworthy and respectful environment for participants.

4.10 Limitations and Delimitations of the study

Limitations refer to the factors that restrict or constrain a study, often beyond the researcher's control (Akanle et al., 2020). These limitations shape how the study is planned, considering constraints like access, time, participants, and finances (Cohen, 2018). Limitations can stem from various aspects of research design and methodology, impacting how the data is interpreted (Simon & Goes, 2013). They are unexpected issues that arise during the research process, which are beyond the researcher's control and can limit the scope and outcomes of the study (Simon & Goes, 2013). In qualitative research, limitations often relate to validity and reliability (Simon & Goes, 2013).

The study faced several limits, primarily due to its qualitative nature and small sample size. First, the findings may not be generalisable to all rural schools in Eswatini, as the study focused on only five rural high schools in the Lubombo region. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data from principals and stakeholders may have introduced biases, as participants might have refrained from discussing sensitive ethical issues touching upon themselves. Furthermore, the contextual variability among schools could limit the consistency of the findings. These factors necessitate caution when interpreting the results and their broader implications for ethical leadership practices in educational settings.

A key limitation of this study is that the case study relied solely on semi-structured interviews without including observations, meaning the findings reflect participants' reported perceptions. This reliance on self-report introduces the possibility of bias, selective recall, and socially desirable responses, and prevents confirmation of whether stated practices align with actual school realities. To mitigate this limitation, the study used probing questions to elicit detailed, concrete examples, encouraged participants to reflect on specific experiences, and triangulated the interview data with findings from the literature review to strengthen credibility and enhance the confirmability of the conclusions. Also, the study included a diverse range of participants

such as deputy principals and school committee chairpersons, who offered broader perspectives, and their insights.

Delimitation, in a research study, refers to the boundaries set by the researcher to define the scope and focus of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The study delineated specific boundaries to focus its exploration on the ethical leadership practices of school principals in five rural high schools within the Lubombo region of the kingdom of Eswatini. By concentrating solely on these institutions, the research intentionally excluded other educational settings, such as public primary schools, public urban high schools, and privately operated primary and high schools. This delimitation was crucial for ensuring a concentrated examination of ethical leadership in a specific context, giving way to a deeper comprehension of the unique challenges and dynamics faced by rural school leaders. The geographical limits of the study provided a focused lens on the socio-cultural and institutional variables influencing ethical behaviour in these schools. Furthermore, the research spanned from January 2020 to December 2023, facilitating a thorough investigation over a substantial timeframe. However, this boundary might have excluded insights into changes in ethical leadership practices beyond this period. Through these delimitations, the study aimed to generate rich qualitative data while recognising that the findings may not be applicable to other educational contexts or locations.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodological foundations and research procedures that guided the study. It justified the choice of an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative multiple case study design. The sampling strategies, data generation methods, and thematic analysis process were explained in depth. Measures to ensure trustworthiness and address ethical concerns were described. Together, these methodological choices supported the study's goal of generating rich, contextual insights into ethical leadership in rural Eswatini. The next chapter presents the findings that emerged from this rigorous and reflective research process.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA PRESENTATION

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter dealt with the research design and methodology of the study. The current chapter sets out the presentation of themes and sub-themes from data that were collected from 15 participants comprising of interviews from five school principals, five deputy school principals, and lastly from five school committee chairpersons. Thematic analysis relates to each of the research objectives. The title of the study is exploring ethical leadership practices of school principals of rural high schools in the Lubombo region in Eswatini. The research objectives are recited as follows: a). To investigate the importance of ethical leadership in school's management; b). To identify and fully describe possible malpractices/unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals; c). To investigate the root causes of these unethical practices/malpractices by principals of schools; d). To find out challenges and pressures encountered by school principals when enacting ethical leadership surrounding the regulations and punitive measures; e). To unearth ways to reduce or eradicate unethical malpractices in schools. The chapter commences with the demographic profile of the participants. After which the identified themes, subthemes and the associated narratives of the participants are included.

5.2 Demographic characteristics of the participants

Table 5.1 presents the profile of the participants according to age, gender, and level of experience.

Characteristic	**Frequency**		**Percentage**		**Totals**
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	
	7	8	47	53	15(100%)
Totals	7	8	47	53	
Age					

40-45	2	1	13	7	3(20%)
50-55	5	5	33	33	10 (66%)
70-80	0	2	0	13	2 (13%)
Totals	7	8	47	53	15 (100%)
School Leadership Role					
Principals	3	2	20	13	5(33%)
Deputy Principals	3	2	20	13	5(33%)
School Chairpersons	1	4	7	27	5(33%)
Totals	7	8	47	53	15(100%)
Experience in school leadership					
Below 2 years	0	0	0	0	2(12%)
2-4years	0	1	0	6	1(6%)
4-6years	2	2	12	12	4(24%)
6-10years	2	3	13	20	5(29%)
Above 10yrs	3	2	18	12	3(29%)
Totals	7	8	47	53	15(100%)

Table 5.1 Demographic characteristics of participants. Source: Field Data 2023

Table 5.1 captures the socio demographic characteristics of the study participants. Data was generated with five (5) school principals, five (5) deputy principals and five (5) school committee chairpersons. As per the data captured in the table, a total of 8(53%) of the participants were females and 7 (47%) were males. The age distribution above notes that 3

(20%) of the participants were in the bracket of ages 40 to 45 years. The category 45-50 years of age had 0 (0%) while 50-55years had 10 (66%) participants. Furthermore, participants and the above 70 years of age category had 2 (13%). Most of the participants were over 50 years of age. Within their leadership roles, the table indicates that the majority of the participants (67%) were principals or deputy principals while 5 (33%) were school committee chairpersons. Regarding years of experience, 12 (80%) percent had above 6 years' experience in school leadership.

5.3 Presentation of findings

The findings are presented in accordance with the Research Questions and the associated themes that emanated from the data. The verbatim narratives from the participants are include for each identified theme

Table 5.2 Research questions, corresponding themes and sub themes

Research Questions	Corresponding themes	Sub-themes
1. Why is ethical leadership important in school management?	5.1.1Understanding Ethical Leadership	▪ Adherence to rules ▪ Fairness ▪ Morally uprightness ▪ Stakeholder involvement
2. Why is ethical leadership important in school management?	5.3.2 Importance of ethical leadership in schools' management.	▪ Promotion of Accountability. ▪ Enabling the Team to Work towards One Goal. ▪ Elimination of Riots. ▪ Ensuring Discipline. ▪ Maintaining Good Structure and Progress.
3. What are the possible forms of malpractices/unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals and how do they manifest?	5.3.3 Malpractices exhibited by school principals.	▪ Embezzlements of funds. ▪ Maladministration of Examination. ▪ Sexual Misconduct.
4. What are the root causes of these unethical behaviour/malpractices?	5.3.4 Root causes of these unethical practices by principals of schools.	▪ Low salaries. ▪ Pressure to Shine. ▪ Lack of Supervision.
5. What are the challenges and pressures faced by school principals in or when enacting ethical leadership surrounding	5.3.5 Challenges and Pressures faced by school principals in when enacting ethical leadership.	▪ Lack of Competence in Accounting ▪ Outdated and Unworkable Policies

the regulations and punitive measures?		
6. How could unethical practices be reduced or eradicated within the profession?	5.3.6 Reducing and or Eradication of Unethical Practices in schools.	▪ Refresher courses. ▪ Regular audits. ▪ Inspections of School. ▪ Recruitment of School Principals. ▪ Hiring of Bursars. ▪ Rewarding Good behaviours.

5.3.1 Theme 1: Understanding ethical leadership

Most of the participants demonstrated their understanding of ethical leadership as adhering to laid down principles or guidelines, being fair, show justice to all, having sympathy and empathy, moral uprightness, stakeholder involvement, love, respect and being honest in all dealings, while executing their duties.

5.3.1.1 Adherence to rules

Participant in the study demonstrated their understanding of ethical leadership as that type of leadership in which laid down principles of doing things are followed to the letter. In other words, things are by the book. Principal 4 who is from school D mentioned the following:

> *My understanding is that firstly the basis of everything are the regulations the guidelines as we find some of them in the school rules and regulations and the accounting act, there is that law that guides us on a daily basis that is that framework. Firstly, we have to abide by the law and that professionally we have an obligation to help Swazi children and the communities we are serving, so we should give that our best, ethically we want to be honest in carrying out our duty, to me it's about honesty that you must carry out your duties with honestly as far as possible and the best way you can.* (Principal 4, School D).

It appears from the submission of principal 4 that being ethical has to do with adherence to rules, guidelines and laws. Additionally principal 3 from school C added,

> *I understand it to be conforming to the acceptable professional standards of conduct. This means being a good communicator, having respect for others and being*

exemplary. That is, you live up to a set standard by the Ministry of Education and to the set standards by the ethics of the professional that you are. So, you respect the ethics and the values of the profession. Yes, rules and regulations and the policies. Policies of the ministry of education because we are in the education system set by the ministry." (Principal 3, School C).

The evidence from principal 3 is that conforming to acceptable professional standards, good communication skills and respect for others is an indelible part of ethical leadership. Principal 1 from school A and principal 2 from school B forth the dimension of integrity:

"It's when they refer to leadership with integrity. Leadership with integrity in a sense of adherence to laid down principles on how to operate. That is taking into account all morals and values involved. "(Principal 1, School A).

A disciplined leader with integrity and consistent with decision making. Yes, fairness and must be accommodative to handle all kinds of situation. Must also have empathy that is being able to put yourself into that person's shoes. Be honest and maintain a good relationship with your stakeholders; that include teachers, students and their parents and the community at large. (Principal 2, School B).

From the above narratives ethical leadership is leadership with integrity, being accommodative, having empathy and must be able to ensure the existence of a healthy relation with stakeholders which are learners, teachers, parents and the community.

Principal 5 from school E talked about respect, honesty, justice and servanthood. Stressing that it is important to respect the people being led so that a team is built. The principal suggested:

So, this ethical leadership is important because it guides you on how to run or lead the school. I like the word lead than manage. Yes. So, the concept of ethical leadership is about respecting the people you are working with. Yes, it's all about respect and team building, because the major goal is to make the learners pass. And also, to be honest. When they tell you private matters, you have to be honest with them, guiding them and supervising them. And also, justice. Showing justice to all, not justice to few and not justice to others. So, you have to be fair. That is ethical leadership. Because you are in service, you are providing service to all. There are stakeholders in the school which

include parents and teachers, so you are providing service. So, you serve them, you are a servant.

Principal 5 from school E brought about the concept of servanthood, serving the subordinates with respect, justice and without being partial. Principal 5 went on to stress that ethical leaders have to be honest to the subordinates as one carries the duty of supervising them. Findings from the principals seem to suggest that principals of school understand ethical leadership to have something to do with adherence to rules, guidelines and laws. Additionally, being honest as far as possible. Conformation to acceptable professional standards, good communication skills and respect for others. Ethical leadership is leadership with integrity, being accommodative, having empathy and maintenance of a good relationship with stakeholders which are parents, learners, teachers and the entire community learners. It is about servanthood, serving the subordinates with respect, justice and without being partial. Ethical leaders have to be honest to the subordinates as they carry out the duty of supervising.

In a similar way deputy school principals agreed with the principals and said

> *"it entails somebody who is morally upright. This means besides being self-disciplined, he can exhibit discipline to others, those are his subordinates. He should do this with love because being a leader doesn't mean you should be bossy, but you have to nature even those that are weaklings because they need to be natured. So, to me this person would be somebody who keeps time, abide by the rules and regulations that are there as probably stipulated by the ministry of education and, who try to enforce them in his institution. In a nutshell, that's who he is to me. It should actually be somebody who lives an upright life, a non-suspicious life, rather a respectable life and who is respectful even in the community. (Deputy Principal 1, School A)*

Drawing from the above quote, it is evident that an ethical leader should actually be exemplary to the subordinates through showing respect, avoiding dictatorship and being bossy in the work place but instead be a mentor to the people being led. And while doing that he or she should not deviate from laid down rules and regulations guiding the institution.

5.3.2.2 Fairness

Ethical leaders are characterized by being fair and impartial while executing their duties. This was noted by principal 2 from school 2.

> *Yes, fairness and must be accommodative to handle all kinds of situation. Must also have empathy that is being able to put yourself into that person's shoes. Be honest and maintain a good relationship with your stakeholders; that include educators, learners, guardians and the entire community* (Principal 2, School B).

Principal 5 from school E talked about respect, honesty, justice and servanthood. Stressing that it is important to respect the people being led so that a team is built. The principal put it

> *So, this ethical leadership is important because it guides you on how to run or lead the school. I like the word lead than manage. Yes. So, the concept of ethical leadership is about respecting the people you are working with. Yes, it's all about respect and team building, because the major goal is to make the learners pass. And also, to be honest. When they tell you private matters, you have to be honest with them, guiding them and supervising them. And also, justice. Showing justice to all, not justice to few and not justice to others. So, you have to be fair. That is ethical leadership. Because you are in service, you are providing service to all.*

Over and above what the participants had put forward, deputy Principal 3 of School C mentioned the idea of being non-discriminatory as one of the attributes of ethical leadership. The deputy principal said

> *Honesty and integrity are inseparable they go hand in hand. Somebody who is honest and does the right things in spite of either he is being seen by people or not. That person does the right thing all the time. Abides by the principles accordingly and to the latter. There's also fairness. You must be fair, whenever you make decisions, they must be fair. You should not discriminate. Whether this one is a relative, a friend or you have a soft spot for the other. When making decisions or disciplining one must be very much fair.* (Deputy Principal 3, School C*).*

From the above quote it is apparent that fairness, honesty, integrity and doing the right thing irrespective of whether you are seen or not and being non-discriminatory is what describes an ethical leader or ethical leadership.

Deputy Principal 4 from school D said

> *First and foremost an ethical principal must be honest, disciplined with good morals. I believe that if the principal has these things, it helps him or her to lead with integrity as he/she is a real leader he is supposed to lead teachers, support staff and the children.so whatever the principal does he is going to do things leading by example and being fair to everybody. A good principal must be a good listener and a good communicator too; it helps the principal to be able to talk to anyone and the staff must be able to talk to anyone and is not far-fetched from the things that are happening in the school. May be if the principal is not a good communicator or may be people are scared of talking to the principal somethings may happen and he wouldn't know because is not somebody who is easy to communicate with. So, he needs to acquire the skill of listening to other people.*

From the above quote by deputy principal 4 from school D, it is seen that an ethical leader is one who is honest and exemplary. A principal who is a good listener and a good communicator who is leading according to laid down policies and procedures not practicing favouritism to other people.

Participants involved in the study demonstrated their understanding of ethical leadership as that type of leadership where leaders adhere to laid down principles or guidelines, being fair, showing justice to all, sympathy and empathy as well as love, respect and being honest in all dealings, while executing their duties.

5.3.2.3 Morally uprightness

Moral standing is an expected trait of an ethical principal, he or she should do the work without compromising the standards and uphold high level of professionalism. Principal 3 from school C had this to say,

To ethical principal I expect him to be professional, to honest in his job he does not dodge his work, find that he does no attend work he is just at home for no reason, and is honest in his job, does not steal. You can't be stealing if you are ethical. (Principal 3 from School C).

In a similar way deputy school principals agreed with the principals

It entails somebody who is morally upright. This means besides being self-disciplined, he can exhibit discipline to others, those are his subordinates. He should do this with love because being a leader doesn't mean you should be bossy, but you have to nature even those that are weaklings because they need to be natured. So, to me this person would be somebody who keeps time, abides by the rules and statutes which are laid down there probably stated by the ministry of education and training and, who try to enforce them in his institution. In a nutshell, that's who he is to me. It should actually be somebody who lives an upright life, a non-suspicious life, rather a respectable life and who is respectful even in the community. (Deputy Principal 1, School A).

Additionally, from the above quote, there is the dimension of being morally upright, living a non-suspicious life, loving and being non-bossy, and being one who nurtures subordinates.

Over and above what the participants had put forward, deputy principal 3 of School C mentioned the idea of being non-discriminatory as one of the attributes of ethical leadership. The deputy principal said,

I believe is a principal who is honest. Honesty and integrity are inseparable. Somebody who is honest and does the right things in spite of either he is being seen by people or not. That person does the right thing all the time. Abides by the principles accordingly and to the latter. There's also fairness. You must be fair, whenever you make decisions, they must be fair. You should not discriminate. Whether this one is a relative, a friend or you have a soft spot for the other. When making decisions or disciplining one must be very much fair. (Deputy Principal 3, School C).

Chairperson 1, who came from school A, shared the same sentiments and added the issue of appearance, that even the appearance of the principal should tell a lot and an ethical principal should not be a sex pest. The Chairperson (1) put it like this,

> *I will answer your question using an illustration. Let me make an example of an ethical pastor who runs a church. Firstly, this pastor will have a welcoming spirit to his fellow congregates. Secondly, he will teach them rules and guidelines of his ministry. This pastor will not then be sexually involved with other people's wives and/or the youth of his church. Yes and, he will strictly lead and teach by the principles given in the bible not the worldly teaching. We can also make an example of an ethical mother/wife. An ethical wife is a woman who focuses on making her home warm and things that brings value to her home. She takes care of her home, children and husband. She does not gossip with her neighbours. Looking at these two examples, we can say that an ethical leader is someone who does things by the book and does only acceptable things. His/her appearance will speak volumes as well.*

5.3.2.4 Stakeholder involvement

Principal 1 from school A and principal 2 from School B brought forth the dimension of integrity and they put it like this;

> *It's when they refer to leadership with integrity. Leadership with integrity in a sense of adherence to laid down principles on how to operate. That is taking into account all morals and values involved." (Principal 1, School A). "A disciplined leader with integrity and consistent with decision making. Yes, fairness and must be accommodative to handle all kinds of situation. Must also have empathy that is being able to put yourself into that person's shoes. Be honest and maintain a good relationship with your stakeholders; that include teachers, learners, guardians/parents and the entire community* (Principal 2, School B).

Drawing from this quote one is inclined to the thought that ethical leadership is leadership with integrity, being accommodative, having empathy and capable of sustaining healthy relations within stakeholders which are learners, teachers, parents and some members of the community, learners, teachers, parents and the community at large.

Principal 5 from school E talked about respect, honesty, justice and servanthood. Stressing that it is important to respect the people being led so that a team is built. The principal suggested:

> *Ethical leadership is important because it guides you on how to run or lead the school. I like the word lead than manage. Yes. So, the concept of ethical leadership is about respecting the people you are working with. Yes, it's all about respect and team building, because the major goal is to make the learners pass. And also, to be honest. When they tell you private matters, you have to be honest with them, guiding them and supervising them. And also, showing justice to all, not justice to few and not justice to others. So, you have to be fair. That is ethical leadership. Because you are in service, you are providing service to all. There are stakeholders in the school which include parents and teachers, so you are providing service. So, you serve them, you are a servant.*

Concurring with other participants, Deputy Principal 5 from School E, emphasised the idea of collaborating with stakeholders and working towards the achievement of the mission and vision and inline to the national goals. The deputy principal said,

> *According to my own understanding, firstly, the principal has to be exemplary. Secondly, he must have a mission and focus on the objectives set to achieve through the learners and it must be in line with the national goals. Also, the principal must work hand in hand with the teachers, school committee, learners and the community at large and should have an open-door policy* (Deputy Principal 5, School E).

The above quote by deputy principal 5 from school E suggests that an ethical leader is vision and mission driven and must be exemplary at all times. Additionally, stakeholder involvement and practicing an open-door policy is important trait of an ethical leader.

Adding to what had already been said, Deputy Principal 2 from School B mentioned that an ethical school principal is one who prioritises the welfare of subordinates. Principal 2 said, *A principal should lead by example, be disciplined, be a good listener so that he can be able to listen to his subordinates and also prioritise the welfare of his subordinates.* (Deputy Principal 2, School B).

The above quote reveals that ethical leadership is understood to be leading exemplary, being a good listener and also taking care of subordinates by prioritizing their needs. Chairpersons of school committees were also in agreement with the principals and deputy principals in as far as conceptualizing ethical leadership is concerned. What became glaring on their responses is the idea of stakeholder involvement and non-discriminatory actions of ethical leadership practitioners. Chairperson 2 from school B voiced out her understanding,

> *In my own thinking, I believe that ethical leadership is that the leader should have sympathy towards all the people under him/her, towards learners' parents and teachers. Number one thing is that he/she should have sympathy. Another think maybe he/she should be patient, should have an ear to listen to all the concerns of the subordinates, again he should be an honest person and be able to take decisions without exercising partiality, should not discriminate.* (Chairperson 2 School B).

This quote is sharing the same sentiments with one of the deputy principals, in highlighting the stakeholder involvement, and giving an ear to learners, teachers, parents, school committee and government. Also, what could be drawn from the quote is that an ethical leader ought to be patient.

> Additionally, chairperson 3 from School C said, "*In my opinion they have transparency, they do things without any suspicion, secondly, they involve the people they are working with, so that if there are any suspicions. If there maybe any suspicions and they investigate they will find out that you are clean, there is nothing wrong you doing. Secondly, they involve the people they are working with, so that if there are any suspicions there are able to defend him or clear his/ her name on that issue* (Chairperson 3, School C).

From this quote, one is inclined to the sentiments that transparency and stakeholder involvement is key to ethical leaders.

Chairperson 4 from School D had this to say,

> *When we talk of an ethical leader, we talk of someone who should be a humbled person, cooperative with subordinates, for example in a school situation he/she should be, free*

in welcoming teachers, welcoming even to the parents as well as the learners. They should know that when we go to our leader, he /she is going to welcome us and listen to what we say, he/she should use the open-door policy. Subordinates should know and feel that their leader is going to welcome us and attend to our concerns if possible. He should not be an aloof leader, should cooperate with all the stakeholders, school committee, teachers as well as with the learners. He/she should take suggestions from stakeholders, and should practice open communication, up and down communication. (Chairperson 4 School C).

This quote emphasises the idea of stakeholder involvement and open communication as key to ethical leadership practitioners. It stands to reason therefore that ethical leadership is all inclusive, and emphasises cooperation and the consideration of ideas from subordinates.

Participants involved in the study demonstrated their comprehension of ethical leadership as the type of leadership where leaders adhere to laid down principles or guidelines, being fair, showing justice to all, sympathy and empathy, morally uprightness, as well as love, respect and being honest in all dealings, while executing their duties, as well as leading with integrity and exhibiting a non-discriminatory spirit. Furthermore, they revealed the idea of collaborating with stakeholders allowing up-down communication and working towards the achievement of the broader aim, which is its mission and vision of the school/organisation and the education sector.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Importance of ethical leadership in schools' management

It was evident during the interviews that the participants knew and were quite aware of the importance of ethical leadership in encouraging access, fair and equity in educational inputs for everyone, regardless of circumstance or background. Creation of an ethical environment by school principals conveys a sense of behaviours, values, norms, and attitudes founded on openness, fairness and respect. During the interview sessions, participants put forward that ethical leadership is very crucial in the promotion of accountability, enabling the team to work towards one goal, elimination of riots, misconceptions, ensuring discipline and maintaining good infrastructure and progress.

5.3.2.1 Promotion of accountability

Ethical leaders ought to be accountable as they execute their duties. Principal 4 from school D advanced these sentiments,

> *I believe that you have to be accountable to your staff as a leader, as I say that I even use consultative leadership, must consult, involve, don't hide anything, I believe that as a leader you must make leaders, teachers must know how you do things because they themselves will be leaders* (Principal 4, School D).

From this quote, one gathers that accountability is an integral part of ethical leadership, and additionally is the sense of involving the stakeholders and working in transparency.

Close to the concept of accountability is leading an exemplary life as a school principal, mainly because the eyes of the learners, teachers and parents are always on the principal. On this one principal D had this to say,

> *Firstly, you are the example that is desirable in our communities, I believe that most learning for kids other than telling them what to do, come by observing you, how you behave and how you carry yourself, personality, respect for them, doing your work honestly, being exemplary how you treat others, being non-dodging. I am a believer of the kind of leadership that says lead from the front. That is why I continue to teach, that one class is ok, I don't like that kind of leadership that forces people to do something you never touch as a leader yourself. I always make sure that I have at least one class. So, it is part of my principles that you must lead by example.* (Principal 4, School D).

Principals who practise ethical leadership, over and above being accountable, should be living an exemplary life. They ought to be always cognisant of the fact that the subordinates are looking up to them and so it is important that they lead by example, and be hands on, in the task of teaching, thus eliminating the "talk the walk" syndrome.

Principal 5 from School E added on the issues of accountability and leading by example, he put it this way: *You walk the talk there. You don't talk the walk; you walk the talk. Another thing I can say is accountability.* (Principal 5, School E).

Principals of schools who are accountable should not preach what they do not practice, they should always be hands on in teaching, not just telling the teachers to do what they themselves are afraid to do or touch. From the quote, one deduces that it is important for the head of school to have at least one class to teach, much against what is now the norm that principals do not teach.

Adding on the issue at hand, principal 5 from school E brought the dimension of goal driven leadership stating that ethical leadership is important in that it aids the school to realize its goals. The principal puts it like this,

> *So, this ethical leadership is important because it guides you on how to run or lead the school. It is important, because if leadership is not done well, the goals that you set out to achieve cannot be achieved. So, you work with people, you influence them. That's why as a leader you must have that charisma to make them do the things they are supposed to do. That's it. Let me end it there before I ruin it.* (Principal 5, School E).

This quote by principal 5 from school E makes one to be inclined to the thought that being an ethical leader helps in driving towards set goals of the school. And that the importance of stakeholder involvement remains vital because leaders have to influence stakeholders towards achieving organisational goals.

Submitting on the importance of ethical leadership deputy principal 4 from School D talked about realisation of organisational goals as well. The deputy principal had this to say;

> *It helps the institution, if he has all these qualities everybody is able to work towards one goal because even the leader practices fairness. The leader subscribes to the principles of honesty so there it's easy to achieve the organisational goal because every body works together, they work as a team.* (Deputy Principal 4, School D).

As with the sentiments of principals the above quote by deputy principal 4 from school D highlights the importance of achievement of organisational goals through sound ethical leadership. The idea of pulling together with stakeholders towards achieving set goals is important.

Still on the issue of promotion of accountability deputy principal 3 from school C talked about accountability as abiding by the objectives of rules and applying them accordingly. The deputy principal put it like this,

> *follow them to the letter, the rules and regulations of the school or institution. I must abide by the rules. The honesty, fairness and accountability revolve around observing the objectives of the rules and applying them accordingly.* (Deputy Principal 3, School C).

5.3.2.2 Enabling the team to work towards one goal

Deputy principal 5 from school E brought the idea of stakeholder relation, stating that this type of leadership is important in the involvement of stakeholders towards achievement of organisational goals. This is what he said

> *It's important because every organisation has stakeholders. Once you work alone the objectives would not be matched. Also, it helps building up the principal as well because should you lack on some aspects, members of your stakeholders will easily tell you to shape up through the open-door policy. One way or the other, they help you towards achieving your goals through the learners. Basically, stakeholders are a wing of the administration.* (Deputy Principal 5, School E).

The above sentiments by deputy principal 5 from school E gives the notion that ethical leaders should have an open-door policy to allow stakeholders to give suggestion on how the organisation ought to be ran to achieve its goals. Another important aspect is that of allowing stakeholders to complement the principal's weaknesses for purposes of improving.

5.3.2.3 Elimination of riots

Deputy principal 5 from school E added that if leaders do not practice ethical leadership, they risk running the organisation without the involvement of some stakeholders, and this may result in the decline in learner's outcome and sometimes riots may erupt. This is how he drove his point,

> *I will give a few instances. Some head teachers run the schools solo and disregard all other stakeholders to the extent that some members of the school committee resign. That*

leads to results dropping as well and riots arising. There is a number of departments that needs to be run in a school, and if the principal wants to do everything by himself, some other departments will suffer, hence riots can arise. So ethical leadership eliminates riots. (Deputy Principal 5 School E).

From the above quote one deduces that if the principal is not taking stakeholders on board, he or she is risking decline in results and eruption of riots. Ethical leaders are collaborative and appreciate efforts of stakeholders in schools. In this way riots and other unpleasant outcomes are avoided.

5.3.2.4 Ensuring discipline

School Chairperson 4 from School D highlighted that ethical leadership is important in maintaining discipline in school and bringing satisfaction to the parents. This is what she said:

On the importance of working with or having an ethical school principal, the school will have discipline, the parents become happy about the principal, they are sure he will take their ideas. Even though these days there are a lot of drugs in schools, corporal punishment has been banned so it's tough in schools these days learners bring drugs to schools. (Chairperson 4 School D).

Ethical principals run schools in a disciplined manner, all the stakeholders become disciplined, especially the learners. Parents are satisfied with the principal's leadership style and they cooperate with the principal in cases of discipline, even in the era where corporal punishment is banned is schools.

5.3.2.5 Maintaining good structure and progress

Chairperson 3 from School C brought the idea of having good institutional structures and visible progress, attributing that to proper management of finances. This she said adds to the importance of having an ethical school principal. This is how she put her point,

I think that it helps the school retain a good structure and their progress is seen. If the person does things the right way it means the school will progress and he/she will be able to manage the finances. If they say the money is going to be used for certain things

it has to be used just for that and if there is any left, they have to come back and use it for something else. (Chairperson 3 School C).

From this quote one can say that if the principal of a school is ethical, the school will develop its infrastructure and this development will be seen by all. The school fees will be used in accordance to the budget. In other words, being ethical is important in as far as adherence to the budget is concerned, which is very important.

5.3.3 Theme 3: Malpractices (unethical behaviours) exhibited by school principals

Participants of the study revealed numerous unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals while executing their duties. These malpractices could be categorised under the following themes, namely, embezzlement of funds, maladministration of exams, sexual relation with learners, subordinates and members of the community. The findings are presented under these headings;

5.3.3.1 Embezzlements of funds

This form of misconduct was cited by the participants as the most prevalent form of unethical behaviour among school principals. This was identified by all the participants across the board signalling how rooted the challenge is within the school system. Some of the participants called such an act as misuse of school funds, misappropriation and theft. This comes in different forms. During the in-depth interviews with school principals one of them had this to say:

> *Yes there is a lot starting from admissions, spaces are sold. You, part with a lot of money, you find that to get a space for a child one has to part with around E3000.00. Another issue is poor spending of school funds, you find that the principal buys from expensive suppliers, being noneconomic in spending.* (Principal 1, School A).

This finding seems to suggest that some principals of schools are using their positions to benefit from parents by selling spaces and they use unvetted powers in spending school fees.

Still on the issue of school funds principal 4 from school D brought about the issue of ten percent commission and said,

> *It is true that for some of the suppliers, the procurement staff after you have given them a tender; the issue of feeling like throwing back to compensate the extra miles*

sometimes the principals go through because we are unable to claim for all the travels that we make. So, I don't demand or ask for the commission but if they give, I take it. I can't lie but I don't take it from the local business persons who supply things like cleaning material firewood and small things and staff. So, for those people around I don't take it because I know people, but for those big guys, those of textbooks and stationery and the big things as you know them, if they see that, sir, you have travelled, I take it I know it's wrong it's corruption, but we are thrown into the deep end, we are not appreciated for the work we do, we are not renumerated well enough and the conditions we are working under are very tough, so if as long as I will not disadvantage the school in any way. I am a Christian but I might admit that I am tempted to take that money. And I don't want to think that this is unique for this department, it happens in every department. (Principal 4, School D).

The above quote brings to light the issue of ten percent which is paid back to the principal after every purchase made. This issue, unethical as it is, does happen. Additionally, deputy principal 3 from school C added to the issue of ten percent (10%) and said *There are challenges with finances because principals collude with the suppliers and get some 10% which they never declare.* (Deputy Principal 3, School C).

The above finding gives the impression that the ten percent given back by suppliers has to be declared to the school committee and subsequently used for the benefit of the school. However, principals of schools do not declare the money; instead, they use it for their own personal needs.

On the same issue, deputy principal 5 from School E had this to say,

It happens. You find that the head teacher conspires with the school's chairperson and sideline the other members of the school committee. I know one school, whereby the principal literally burnt down his office to erase evidence of his embezzlement of funds. He had connived with the school's chairperson. (Deputy Principal 5, School E).

Drawing from the above quotes it is apparent that some principals of school embezzle school funds by taking bribes from desperate parents and also receiving ten percent (10%) from suppliers of every goods supplied to the schools. Procedurally, this ten percent (10%) should

be declared to the school committee, but principals do not declare it; they use it for personal errands.

(i) Theft from the school coffers

In what could be referred to as direct theft from the school coffers, principals literally take school funds for personal use. They either take the money from the petty cash which is readily available in schools or make some purchases of own items. On the issue of personal purchases, principal 5 from school E said,

> *It's un-ethical for a head teacher to take monies of the school to buy an asset of more than R30 000.00; that headteacher went to a garage and bought a car. So, that was unethical, its theft mister, because if you are in a public office, you are not alone. There's a school committee and chairperson who has to account for the money. But this particular headteacher just took the cheque and bought the car. So, this was un-ethical. Another thing that I thought I would cover, is the issue of affairs, love affairs with your staff.* (Principal 5, School E).

The same sentiments were echoed by the school committee chairperson who stated that they have heard about principals who embezzle school funds:

> *Principals have school funds at their disposal that is petty cash and money in the bank, end up being tempted to use these funds on their personal needs. For an example, a principal can buy supplies for the schools and include his/her supplies and have it all paid by the school's money.* (Chairperson 1, School A*).*

This assertion by the participant seem to suggest that school principals directly use school funds to purchase their own things.

Sharing almost similar sentiments chairperson 3 from school C said,

> *The head teacher is in charge of school fund and also has some needs, so he can be tempted to steal funds because there is a lot of money he handles and sometime I heard that when they buy things for the school, he buys his own things. I once heard people say usually when buying for the school, they can also buy for personal use also they ask for discounts so that they take money into their pockets. For example, something*

for E60000.00 can be inflated to the E70000.00 and then the E10000.00 will go into the head teacher's pocket. (Chairperson3, School C).

In addition to the above assertion chairperson 4 from school D mentioned that, *What I have heard is that it is said that principals of schools embezzle school funds.* (Chairperson 4, School D). Another chairperson concurred with the rest of the participants and further stated that some principals are even hauled to court as a result of this action. The chairperson said, *I have heard about mishandling of school funds by the principals and some even appear in court for that.* (Chairperson 5, School E).

From the above quotes it is revealed that some school principals do get into the temptation of taking money from the school coffers and use the money for their own needs or for their own personal benefits. They purchase their own goods like cars and building material. And this is not a good thing. However Principal 2 from school B held a different view from the rest. The principal said,

> *I want to reserve the comment that principals use the money on their personal needs though, they rather lack on record keeping and keeping the proper documentation to account for it. For an example, I have sent this teacher to buy something for the school, and he didn't bring back the receipts, yet that money spent has to be accounted for with receipts. With this and the ethics in mind about handling something that is not yours, I strongly believe that they don't use the money on their personal needs, it's just lack and poor record keeping on the side.* (Principal 2, School B).

Principal 2 from School B stressed that principals of schools never use money from school coffers for their own personal gains. Principal 2 continued to say,

> *I have a reservation when it comes to mishandling funds. I strongly believe that they do not use it for their personal needs, rather they misplace receipts then fail to account for it. Also, the expectations of the school account financials are just too high. For an example, let's say you want buy a cow and feed the children, they expect you to get 3 different quotations and that's not practical.* (Principal 2, School B).

Principal 2 from school B seemed to shift everything to unworkable financial policies and mere mishandling of receipts. This principal gave the impression that not all principals are unethical, instead they could be trapped by flouting accounting procedures like keeping the receipts.

(ii) Misappropriation of funds

On the issue of misappropriation of school funds, the participants, specifically the principals, were of the view that it is not possible to avoid it, because they are compelled by the prevailing situation, whereby the Government as the main sponsor is not honouring its obligation, that of paying in time. So, principals of schools find themselves having to meet present needs with what is available. Principal 4 from School D had this to say,

> *There is a time when you overlook the written down laws and the things of robbing Peter to pay Paul we do it, as you may be aware that for the whole of this term there has been no food at all in schools, we had to buy it, we know that according to the accounting rules and regulations we have been misappropriating but we have taking money to buy food, because in my schools if there is no food, the learners simple move out of school, there is no school after lunch if there is no food.* (Principal 4 School D).

This was corroborated by Principal 1 from School A, who put it like this

> *The issue of misappropriation is something we cannot avoid; it should now be regulated as to how it ought to be done. Can I really stay in school and let problems occur just because I do not want to misappropriate, no. Government is the cause, it's the Government who does not pay in time*. (Principal 1 School A).

In summary to the issue surrounding school funds, it was clear that this challenge was prevalent in the school system and different stakeholders had a perspective on it. The sentiments of the participants are also backing the many reports usually published by the auditor general wherein principals of schools are brought under scrutiny and some go through litigation to explain on issues of embezzlement and misappropriation in how they spend the school funds.

5.3.3.2 Maladministration of examinations

Closely related to the issue of financial misconduct, the issue of maladministration of examinations also received a lot of remarks among the participants, who appeared to be quite

conversant with the issue at hand. In this regard, all principals and their deputies were well aware of this issue of maladministration of examinations and its occurrence in school environments. The school principal of School D bluntly labelled such behaviour as wrong. The principal put it like this:

> *On the issue of maladministration of exams, assisting learners to copy is very wrong. Concerning the issue of external exams, I make sure I follow the guidelines from the examination council to the letter. I do not want to compromise; I don't give extra time after the stipulated exam time has elapsed.* (Principal 4: School, D).

Commenting on the same issue of maladministration of exams Principal 1 from school A had this to say:

> *Another thing is the issue of examinations; one may think the school is performing well yet learners are assisted(copying). Some teachers have an art of opening the examination scripts, some have a way of accessing the subject codes and get the exam papers. They use these papers to teach and drill their leaners to pass the examinations. They do this as early as the year begins because the exams are set two years before they are written. The teacher teaches using the examination paper for the three terms covering the whole paper. Such learners are easily spotted at tertiary, in most cases they fail to continue with their studies because they are not used in working.* (Principal A, School 1).

Still on the same issue deputy principal 4 from school D commented as follows:

> *I heard one time that one principal, during exam all the learners wrote the exam, exam papers were sealed as usual and taken to the principal's office. During the marking time, the markers spotted an anomaly of two answer scripts for one candidate. Upon investigations it was discovered that the principal himself opened the envelope and took out a script of a bright learner and gave it to his girlfriend to copy and when they sealed the envelope, they put both papers and that is how they were caught. This was clear that something wrong really happened which was very un-ethical for the principal to do that because during exam is where everyone must sure case their talents, so they*

should be given fair chances. So, what they did was very unethical. And it amounted to assisting learners to copy which is unethical. (Deputy Principal 4: School, D).

On the other hand, some deputy school principals mentioned that they are the ones taking care of examinations and they make sure that such is done with all the confidentiality it deserves. They have never had an experience of such:

> *Yes. In the school I was in, I was part of the panel that was organising the exams. The exams were treated with confidentiality, all the rules were followed, no wrong paper was ever opened, no assisting of learners. I have only read of such malpractice in the media that such a thing has happened." (Deputy Principal 3: School, C).* This then concurs with what the chairperson of school A mentioned: "Y*es, it happened and it mostly begins with the principals who are dishonest, conniving with their teachers who have failed to teach the whole syllabus. In most cases, the teachers are the ones that lack on the teaching part which them compels the head teacher to open the exam papers for students to copy*. (Chairperson 1, School A).

In addition to the already mentioned issues of examinations, chairperson 2 from school B added that assisting learners to copy implicates the principals themselves because they are the ones who are custodians of the keys to the strongrooms:

> *On the issue of examinations, we have heard over the radio that learners have copied the exams, I have never experienced such, but we have heard that they open the papers. This is a difficult question for me because what I know is that examination papers are opened in front of the learners during the examination time, I don't know then when the principals open the papers, from where does they get the papers? If they have access to the strong rooms then this can happen that the principal may take up the paper and give it to subject teachers so that they may revise it before it is written.* (Chairperson 2, School B).

Summarizing the issue of maladministration of examinations, one is inclined to the thought that the participants are aware of such misconduct by their colleagues and most fingers point at the principals as culprits. They are thought to be pressured to engage on such a misconduct. This they do by either by opening the papers and assist the whole class or they assist favourites

candidates, and girlfriends. Now there is a new phenomenon in which they access subject codes and use technology get hold of the papers they want and proceed with their shenanigans. The participants bluntly referred to this act as wrong and unacceptable.

5.3.3.3 Sexual misconduct

Thirdly, it the issue of sexual misconduct. The participants during data collection period mentioned sexual misconduct as theme number three. On this issue some principals of schools engage in sexual relations with learners, teachers, support staff and sometimes with members of the communities they are serving. This then makes schools to be ungovernable, in that it creates rifts within the learners, if learners are involved in such love affairs and within the staff if teachers are involved. Principal 1 from school A mentioned the following:

> *Other thing you find the principal having love affairs within the school, love affairs with learners and teachers. You find that the dignity of the school principal is at stake because of his actions. Because if there are things which are a talk within the school, yet they are this bad, it jeopardizes the school. Principal having a love affair with a teacher, the teacher talks about the principal anyhow in the staffroom, because to her he is a boyfriend, not a principal, so she does not respect the principal. This eventually leads to formation of groups (gossip groups), those who are friends to the teacher end up not giving the office the honour it deserves. This leads to division among the staff, some teachers become untouchables. This hits the school in a negative way to the extent that the work of the school is affected at the end.* (Principal 1: School, A).

On the same issue of sexual relations, principal 4 from school D said,

> *Ok, in almost all the schools I have been to, including the school where me and you taught, I have seen and I have known of cases of where some teachers having relationship with learners. I consider it very unethical and very wrong; it happens. Even in my present school and not it alone in my other previous schools it's there. In fact, there has never been a school which has never had a case or two, in the other schools I have seen even the female teachers in relationships with boy learners, and that I take it to be very wrong.* (Principal 4, School D).

Still on the issue of sexual relations deputy principal 5 from school E had this to say: *"This is abuse of power through extortion. For an example, if a school has contract teachers and time for renewal of their contracts comes, the head teacher asks to be paid in kind or any other means possible."* (Deputy principal 5, School E). Additionally, on the same issue, the deputy continued to say "*Yes, I had forgotten about that one, it happens. Most head teachers take advantage of school prefects since they work close to them and they tell them what is happening in the school and the community. That creates a window for him to get one as his girlfriend. Even with the homosexuals.* (Deputy principal 5 School E).

In addition to this deputy principal 4 from School D referred to this act as abuse of power. The deputy put it like this:

> *That's a very painful situation where by the abuse of power comes in, it's a bad thing for somebody to use his or her power on somebody who is vulnerable at that moment, yes because it's something else to find yourself not being sure if tomorrow you will be able to earn some money for your children. With the situation that we have here in this kingdom, whereby some teachers have to renew their contracts yearly or sometimes after two years, so when that time comes it is a norm that headteachers have to vouch in for you, that you must get your contract renewed as a teacher. So, if the headteacher abuses his power or her power on the teachers it's very painful because some headteachers you find them, they are saying what is it that am I going to get if I renew your contract. That is a very sad thing because everybody needs a job, and under no circumstance one should find himself or herself in a situation where by he/she has to do something that he is not willing, but, because of the need for the job then he/she has to find himself doing things he/she does not like just because the principal requires him or her to do so.*
>
> *In the cases of learners, that's is lack of good morals because I don't understand how a principal for that matter should find himself in a situation like falling for a child because as a principal all the children in the school are under his or her responsibility. The future of those children is in the hands of that principal, it's a very sad situation to find that a principal is attracted to these young children; I believe it's part of a not being a well-disciplined person*. (Deputy Principal 4 School D).

In this regard the school chairperson 4 from school D had the following to say: "*It's a tragedy, the very school leaders who are elected to look after our children are the same people exploiting the learners and bringing the school leadership name into disrepute. While I have never been in a school where that has happened, we hear it from other schools within the region and also in the media. It's not just unethical, also evil."* (Chairperson, 4: School, D).

Another chairperson 5 from school E labelled such a behaviour as abuse of power, "*I have heard that some principals get involved in sexual misconduct with the teachers as well as the students. That's basically abusing his power. So, he has affairs with the teachers and students. They fail to be the role models that they should be and fathering the students have affairs with other people's wives from the community. One even had a child with someone's wife." (Chairperson, 5: School, E).*

However, chairperson 1 from school A brought the dimension of love as a two-way process saying that even the girls are the one who make moves towards the teachers thus tempting the males. The chairperson put it like this *"Having sexual relations with students would be the second challenge. It has been observed, however, that nowadays students are the ones who initiate the affairs with the teachers and, most teachers and principals get tempted and say yes to it".* (Chairperson, 1: School, A).

Additionally, chairperson 4 from school D added the issue of teenage mothers who are learners and the issue of sexual relations as a two-way relation as an exacerbating factor to the habit of sexual relation with learners. The chairperson had this to say,

> *On the issue of principal-learner relationship, it's bad conduct, bad morals, that leads principals to propose love to learners who are of the age of his own children. On the part of the teachers is the age group, young male teachers and young female teachers, the group age of the teachers and leaners is the same especially these days because even teenage mothers are now allowed to go back to school. Some other thing is money, taking advantage of orphaned and vulnerable children who are in dire need of money. These children are tempted and the teachers are tempted as well.* (Chairperson, 4: School, D).

The views from the participants show that the habit of sexual misconduct is ongoing and is a well-known issue within the school system and principals, particularly male principals, do commit this kind of misconduct. Participants described it as an abuse of power and decline of morals in the part of the principal. This they said is very bad, in that, in some cases, the victims find themselves under financial pressure, hence succumb to the demands of the principals who take advantage of the victims' vulnerability at that particular time.

5.3.4 Theme 4: Root causes of these unethical practices/malpractices by principals of schools.

Another key theme which emerged throughout the period of visits to the sites to collect data for the study were from what the participants believed to be the root causes of the unethical practices by the school leadership. A wide range of issues were identified, and the following were the key themes which features across the triangulated data collection process: These themes are now explored in detail in the section below: low salaries, pressure to shine and lack of supervision.

5.3.4.1 Low salaries

Low salaries have been mentioned by most participants as one of factors fuelling unscrupulous behaviours within the cohort of principals of schools. The low salaries force principals of schools to live a life that does not match their positions. This then forces them to find ways of uplifting themselves, hence they resolve to engage in embezzling school funds. Principal 4 had this to say, "*The salaries that we get as principals are very low, we are forced to run the schools with our own resources, for examples we use our own cars to run the errands of the schools."* (Principal 4: School, D). The principal continued to say, "*We are not appreciated for the work we do; we are not renumerated well enough and the conditions we are working under are very tough"* (Principal 4: School, D).

Principal 4 from school D was echoed by principal 3 from school C who said,

> *The misconducts related to money comes about because of the pressure with the standard of living and of course poor salaries, because you cannot be a principal and*

not affording to drive or buy a car. You find that all the teachers have cars, the principal will automatically be under pressure to buy a car.

Principal 3 from school C said*, "The temptation stems from wanting to uphold a status. That is buying a car and raising the standard of living using the school funds.*(Principal 3: School, C).

From the above quotes one deduces that the standard of living for school principals is low, yet they consider themselves as high-ranking persons, hence they resort to or they feel pressured to get extra money to match their perceived class. They are tempted to steal from the school coffers to cover up for the low salaries. Another factor that was mentioned by some of the participants is the issue of benefits. School principals do not have benefits like car allowances, housing allowance and travel allowances as compared to their counterparts in the private sector. Echoing these sentiments, chairperson 3 from school C said,

> *With the case of mishandling of the funds, you find that it's not really mishandling, but the principal is trying to compensate himself for the job that he does because he gets low wages as to his job description. I'm saying this because some principals struggle yet they are in managerial positions and their fellow managers of other organisations get paid quite a lot. So, the principals then try to match that standard. It's just an example because principals do not have benefits.* (Chairperson 3, school C).

Additionally principal 2 from School B added on the issue of allowances, citing as an example, the housing allowance for school principals as very little as compared to their counterparts from other sectors.

> *So basically, our welfare as principals is not taken care of. Imagine being given E600.00 as whole principal and be expected to pay rent with that money. What kind of a place can one get to live in with that kind of money? That shows they don't care about our welfare. Such things then cause us to see the salaries to be not enough.* (Principal 2, School B).

Allowances given to school principals are very low and this is basically what is derived from the above quotes.

Still on the issue of salaries due to principals of schools, the deputies were in agreement with the principals, citing that in most cases school principals share their resources with the schools, resources like cars, they run the school errands using their personal cars, this gesture therefore renders their salaries not enough for their personal needs. Deputy principal 4 from School D put it like this,

> *Principals for me they end up sharing their salaries with the school, I talked about their cars running the schools, if the cars break the school does not service the car, if it breaks, the school does not fix it. So, it means the principal from his salary is also running the school with own money.* (Deputy principal 4, School D).

However, deputy 5 from school E had a different view on the issue of salaries, saying that even if principals can get more money in terms of salaries the problem would still be there. "*People never get satisfied with money. Even if they can get a million, it will appear as if it's nothing. People need to be disciplined."* (Deputy principal 5, School E). The sentiments by deputy principal 5 from school E suggests that principals are financially in disciplined, that is why they steal from the school coffers. If they were disciplined, they would not do that, they would avoid stealing from the school coffers.

Some chairpersons of school committees concurred with the opinion that the principal's salaries are low, yet their work load is too much, and that is the reason for theft from the school fees. *Headteachers do a lot of work yet they get low wages. Their salaries do not meet their personal needs and all teachers complain about the same thing.* (Chairperson 1, School A).

Additionally, Chairperson 5 from School E had this to say regarding the issue of salaries,

> *With the case of mishandling of the funds, you find that it's not really mishandling but the principal is trying to compensate himself for the job that he does because principals get low salaries as compared to their job description. I'm saying this because some principals struggle, yet they are in managerial positions and their fellow managers of other organisations get paid quite a lot.* (Chairperson 1, School A).

Drawing from the above quotes it is apparent that schools 'principals are lowly paid and they do not have enough allowances commensurate to their position. Thence they find themselves

forced to take from the school coffers to compensate themselves for the hard work they are doing and to match the standard of their counterparts from the private sector.

5.3.4.2 Pressure to shine

Principals of schools find themselves in great pressure to shine when results for their schools are announced, especially the external examinations – mainly because, if the school performs badly, then the principal is to blame. So, principals of schools find themselves having to employ unscrupulous means to succeed. On this issue, principal 3 from school C shared the following sentiments,

> *It is my thought that what, now that the ministry has started to take note of. In the past they have been grading us wrongly, I can say that. The issue of having the top performing schools, not looking at the ground because if you have not levelled the ground so that all people take offs at the same pace and same rate, then you will be able to judge them at the end there. So now that the results are no longer publicised, things have changed. Back then everyone wanted to shine because results were announced publicly. That was the main cause. Everyone wanted to shine and be out there. So, when principals realised that they had a weak group of students, they would then try their best in assisting students to copy. That is because we are rated according to the results not according to the capability of the children."* (Principal 3, from School C).

This quote by principal 3 from school C suggests that some principals do get tempted to assist learners during examinations so that the school gets good results. The principals then get credit for performing well, this is because if the school performs badly, all the blame goes to the principal, they are accused of underperforming, there by risking their images.

The issue of pressure to shine was also emphasised by deputy principal 4 from school D. The deputy principal put it this way,

> *After mentioning the challenges that I have mentioned that principals go through in running the schools, at the end of it all there is an obligation to succeed they feel they have an obligation to shine and yet you find that the input that was involved is not enough and yet at the end of it all the principal wants to shine so that they can see him*

or her as somebody who has done well and yet it is not the true reflection of what exactly is happening in the school having said that the principal will feel obliged to do some malpractice there, on the exams and not being honest of the true reflection of what happens in the school thus fiddling with exams and doing all the wrong things so that he can come out shinning as somebody who has done very well and yet it is not true." (Deputy Principal 4, School D).

On the same issue Chairperson 2 of School B said,

I think that one is done so that the school may shine, the principal wants that, because as it is announced that all learners have passed it is a credit to the principal. This is the very reason why they open examination papers. (Chairperson 2 from School B).

One deduces from the quote that the pressure to shine for principals is very high, and it pushes the administrator to employ dishonest ways to succeed or other means including malpractices in order to get good results and escape the wrath of the employer and at the same time gain respect from fellow colleagues. Other participants labelled such an action as wrong.

5.3.4.3 Lack of supervision

Participants during the in-depth interview voiced out that another root cause of unethical behaviour is lack of supervision by the inspectors and auditors. The inspections and the audits which are carried out in schools are not regular and, if they are carried out, they are not about how can we help, instead they are about finding faults, worse now that audits have become victimizing tools. Commenting on this issue during the interview principal 1 from School A said,

Some schools are never audited, some schools are never visited, they are untouchables, we do not know whether they are feared or is something to do with bribery, the audit itself no longer serves the original purpose, to help as to how money is ought to be used. It is now used as a tool to victimize the principals. (Principal 1, School A).

Emphasizing on the same point principal 4 from School D commented *There's no monitoring and there's no in-service training (Principal 4, School D).* Deputy principal 1 from school A said

there is lack of supervision because there is a gap between the schools and the ministry, and auditing only takes place when the principal retires. It is only then that such cases of mishandling funds get to be discovered. If supervision was actively practised maybe termly or what, you would find that the mishandling of big funds like millions, get to be reduced to may be E5000.00. (Deputy 1, School A)

Additionally, deputy principal 3 from School C also had this to say,

There is less supervision on their part. The Regional Education Office is up there and never visiting schools. There's lack of supervision tools for the principals, they are just all by themselves. No one questions them as of why they are in or out. (Deputy 3, School C).

Also, deputy principal 4 from school D echoed the rest of the participants and said,

I believe the root cause is carelessness on the part of the Ministry of Education. There is no frequent inspection of how the schools are run, there should be an inspection of how the schools are run. If there is any inspection that is done by the ministry normally it's about the teaching and learning, checking teachers if they do their work, they go to class, are there good results? How are they going to achieve good results that is the only thing that is done? The inspection that is done by the ministry is never about how can we help you, where can we add some support for you to be able to run the school and give good results. So, we can say its lack of positive inspection from Government. (Deputy 4, School D)

Deputy principal 5 from School E added and said,

Yes, it's true. However, I have noticed that auditors target specific principals after suspecting something. I have witnessed such at my school when it was time for the previous principal to retire. These auditors wanted to be bribed on the tiniest thing. Corruption has really crept into the system. Regular auditing can, however, minimize such cases. (Deputy 5, School E).

Echoing the principals and the deputy principals, the chairpersons voiced out that the habit of irregular visits for audits and inspections by the Ministry of Education and Training opens a gap for the principals to fall into the temptation of unethical conducts. Chairperson 1 from

School A said, *One factor that perpetrated that was the lack of inspectoral supervision.* (Chairperson 1, School A). Still on the issue of regular audits, chairperson 3 from School C put it,

> *Audits should be done yearly to avoid misappropriation of funds or even after 6 months. They, should be considerate, understand people and let the head teacher explain some transactions instead of rushing to say misappropriation. Sometimes the money has not been stolen but used somewhere else.* (Chairperson 3, School C).

Drawing from the above quotes, the issue of lack of regular inspection or audits does exacerbate the habit of mishandling school funds. If audits and inspections were regular, such habits as mishandling, misappropriation and theft could be picked up early enough, thereby avoiding loss of huge sums of money. Coming up also is the issue of assistance from the inspectors. Inspectors should conduct inspection targeting at helping school principals rather than fault finding inspection. In-service trainings for school principals are lacking, and principals are in need of this service because the in-service department somehow plays the supervisory role in schools while helping with new innovations within the ministry.

5.3.5 Challenges faced by school principals in or when enacting ethical leadership

When sharing on challenges and pressures faced by school principals in or when enacting ethical leadership surrounding the regulations and punitive measures meted by the Government, participants came out with these themes, namely; lack of competence in accounting and outdated and unworkable policies. These two themes are discussed in detail:

5.3.5.1 Lack of competence in accounting

Participants in the study mentioned that the reason for the continued challenge that sees them as unable to do things by the book is that principals are lacking accounting skills. When they get promoted to principalship they are trained for only five days on how to handle school finances and get to be audited by someone who has been trained for years. Even the five days training comes after a long time since the appointment to the position, then one starts to appreciate retrospectively as to how things ought to be done.

Principal 4 from the School D stated this way,

We don't have accounting background. Very often we pay the companies remotely, so you find that the receipts are misplaced because now you have to travel solely for receipts, these receipts they get lost. I personally lost some receipts after I renovated the office. So, the genuine mistakes of losing some receipts do occur, not that you have stolen the money, Then, auditing will pick that, then you get arrested and eventually expelled. It's a pity that the in-service thing is dying down. But what we went for at Thokoza for in-service training, I found it helpful, I got to appreciate some of the things and how they are actually done." (Principal 4, School D).

Sharing the same sentiments with principal 4, Principal 3 from School C mentioned that,

Yes, I very much agree with that, principals of schools are not capacitated in as far as handling public funds, they are not. When you talk about handling funds, that's money involved. Also, the handling of paperwork and records. This is because they are only given 5 days to learn how to handle such and yet they get to be audited by auditors who were trained for more than 3 years. Obviously, they will find faults. Alternatively, take the principals for a least one-year training. Principals get to be appointed into the leadership positions and not given guidelines and no training. Because even the existing guidelines needs to be explained in details. (Principal 3, School C).

Adding to the voices of the principals, deputy principal 3 from School C said,

Some of them they lack proper training on the part of managing school funds. You find that some of them have misappropriated the money not that they have used it for their own personal gains. You find that they actually used the money on sporting activities, buying of supplies but fail to keep the proper documentation. Once you misplace a receipt of a certain purchase, you are on fire. You build school classrooms and don't involve the school committee and ministry; you are in fire. So, some of those problems are the root causes and are due to lack of proper training. With an exception to those who are hell burnt because they want to enrich themselves with the school funds. The training itself is very important because teachers are trained to teach. (Deputy Principal 3, School C).

The same sentiments were also voiced out by deputy principal 2 from the School B, when he said, *Yes, that's the first reason; it's difficult to handle the school funds which are quite a lot. Some are just not well educated on how to handle the big funds.* (Deputy Principal 2, School B).

What has been voiced out by the principals and deputy principals was also echoed by chairperson 3 from school C, who somehow blamed the Government, saying, *Why is the government not employing bursars instead of letting the head teacher manage the finances? The head teacher is not trained to handle finances so it will be appropriate to deal with bursars.* (Chairperson 3, School C).

However, chairperson 1 from School A presented an opposite view from the rest of the participants, stating that it is not true that principals lack competence on money management skills; instead, it's just being dishonest in their part. The chairperson said,

> *No, that's not true. Teachers are educated on money management, just like all teachers are educated on leadership even though some do not get to be leaders, basically, it's dishonesty and lack of respect for the job.* (Chairperson 3, School C).

Drawing from the quotes of the participants, one is inclined to the assertion that school principals lack the accounting background to help them pay attention to the intricacies of handling funds. The five days which they get after being appointed is just not enough to fully capacitate them for the huge task of handling funds. So, there is a great need for the in-service department to revise the way they are carrying out these training programmes for school principals in handling finances. However, there is a dissenting voice, which is pointing at dishonesty on the part of principals rather than the lack of capacitation; notably, the different view does not come from the principals themselves but from one of the chairpersons.

5.3.5.2 Outdated and unworkable policies

Some of the participants in the study identified old policies and unworkable policies as a challenge in the work of the principals. These policies are said to be unworkable and pose a huge challenge, thus frustrating the whole school system. Most often than not principals find

themselves breaking these policies hence the wrath of the Ministry of Education and the PAC. The principal from school D aired their view this way,

> *But to the other demands from the ministry, I can't say I am perfect enough, my challenge is with the discrepancies and the expectations that is written down vs the practice, we find ourselves playing hide and seek with the inspectors, mainly those inspectors who have never been administrators. There is a clash between policy and practice. For example, the policy says there should be no stick but practice needs it because it shortens the process of discipline because we don't have time to follow the procedure for positive discipline.* (Principal 4, School D).

Sharing the same sentiments, principal 5 from School E said,

> *Another factor that contributes to malpractice it's the unfriendly policies. These policies are not workable. Now there are even a lot of circulars that we living under, so many circulars that are even confusing. So, with the policies, one could ask, is it me who is not doing okay or the policies are just harsh? Because the policies are formulated by the board in boardrooms and we as principals must implement them. But some of these policies are not easy to implement at the ground level, at schools. How can they say, by the way that I have to comply with financial accounting regulation of 1992?*
>
> *How many years has it been? It's been 30 years now and yet they still say I have to comply with petty cash regulation of year 2000. Such is unworkable. For an example, school guide and regulations date back to 1981. Education Act as well, 1981-1982. You see, headteachers get penalised over something that was written 30 years ago, yet things have changed. This is all because the Ministry of Education is not vibrant, is not relevant and not bringing in new policies that are friendly to us so that we can comply. What can you do with a regulation that dates back to year 2000?"* (Principal 5 School E).

Adding to the issue of policies, principal 2 from School B said,

Government also imposes with her policies. For an example, when you want to send learners back home because of outstanding fees, the government says no, the money cannot be asked from the learners. And that is the only way of getting fees paid. Things just get worse. This is a challenge mostly in rural areas because in urban areas don't care much about what the government say. If their rule says when schools open, student should have paid fees, they just want that and it happens that way. (Principal 2 School B).

Sharing the same sentiments, Principal 3 from school C said,

There is a gap between the principals/head teachers and their employer, which is the ministry of education. When it comes to formulation of policies, rules and laws that governs the operations of the schools. So that is a main challenge because as a leader or an ethical leader, you have a certain plan on how you would run your school, then you find that the ministry comes with policies and rules overnight. This poses great interference.

For an example, let's say you had planned to send students back home due to their outstanding fees, the Ministry will just say no. Recently they say in such cases we should take parents to the courts, which is a long process. This is just not applicable and not practical at all. Even with the issue of discipline in schools, the laid down procedure for it is just not practical. It cannot be that when you have to dismiss a learner, the director or PS has to come to school, it's just not it. These policies are really not practical, and they lead to all the challenges we have. (Principal 3 School C).

School principal 1 from School A brought about the issue of inconsistencies of policies applied by the Auditor General and the internal audit.

Some queries are a result of the clash about the expectation of the auditor general and the internal audit. The expectations clashes, for example, on the analysis book, the auditor general says this and internal says that. The usage of petty cash internal has its own way and auditor general has own take on that. So, principals are queried because they have used the style of one instead of the other. Now you are told that this is a case,

then you tend to wonder as who told me in the first place, they would tell you that that the law says this and that, for an example can I really stay in school and let problems occur just because I do not want to mis-appropriate, no. Government is the cause, it's the Government who does not pay in time, and is the cause of these issues then what should we do then? (Principal 1 School A).

School chairperson 4 from School D made reference to the policy that barred principals from sending learners home to fetch school fees and the tendency of Government to pay school fees very late.

The issue of late payment of the OVC fund poses a problem because there are a lot of these children, this makes the running of the schools to be impossible, no chalks, no desks, schools are dilapidated so principals of schools then take other routes which are against the laws. When headteachers send learners to ask for money from homes Government is against this. This then forces principals to take short cuts which are against the law thence the wrath of the PAC. (Chairperson 4, School D).

School chairperson 4 from School D further said the laws are hard to follow. The chairperson put it like this:

It's a difficult thing this one, some of this is political, grievances of teachers are not meet by Government. You find that they are complaining about houses, or salaries and their well fair. When they make certain request, they are never listened to and request are never met and they then resort to short cuts yet short cuts are against the law hence arrests. The laws are hard to follow, inspectors do not come out clear, issues of three quotations which are hard to follow. School Chairperson 3 from School C made an example on how the policy that barred corporal punishment in schools affects the operations, "*There are a lot of drugs in schools, corporal punishment has been banned so it's tough in schools these days. Learners bring drugs to schools.* (Chairperson 3, School C).

In the light of these old policies, together with unworkable policies the principals find themselves forced to find alternative ways to circumvent, in a quest to get things done within the school. This is mainly because the school has to run and be seen running smoothly, more

so because all the stakeholders expect to see schools operating smoothly. In that event the Government and the PAC come in hard on the principals accusing them of bending the rules and flouting the procedures. This poses a dilemma on the part of the principals, the unworkable policies versus the wrath of the Government, which may be dismissal from the profession.

5.3.6 Reducing and or eradication of unethical practices in schools

Refresher courses, regular audits, close supervision by inspectors, issue of recruitment of school principals, hiring of bursars, rewarding good behaviour and punishment of culprits, are themes that were extracted from what the participants put forward as ways through which unethical practices exhibited by school principals could be reduced or eradicated.

5.3.6.1 Refresher courses

Participants in the study pointed out that school principals need to be taken for refresher courses to keep them reminded of what is expected of them. Some even mentioned that there should take up a course at college level on ethics and financial management, and principals themselves must be willing to learn.

Principal 4 from the School D mentioned that,

> *One other thing that could be helpful are refresher courses, it's a pity that the in-service thing is dying down. Issues of refresher courses, hiring of bursars are very important and could be very helpful. Even you as a headteacher endeavour to learn more on the issues surrounding money.* (Principal 4, School D).

Echoing principal 4, principal 3 from the School C said,

> *In-service and proper in-service, not what we are currently having. Because in-service means you keep on educating the person. What is happening right now is that they are giving us a glimpse, not even an introduction to it. They say you need these tools, but you are not given the information on how to use them in-depth. That is what can be improved.* (Principal 3, School C).

Still on the same issue, deputy principal 5 from the school E emphasised on the point of a course at college level. The deputy put it like this, *"Firstly, there should be regular trainings,*

workshops and in-service for principals. Also, there should be a course for teachers on financial management, at college level." (Deputy Principal 5, School E).

Additionally, deputy principal 3 from School C had this to say,

> *The training itself is very important because teachers are trained to teach. Then to be principal, they turn to observe how the previous principal did things, just like a child learns from his father. If his father does not exhibit good character, the child will learn just that. So is a teacher who inspires to be principal, he will emulate the principal whom he had worked with, hence he will commit errors.* (Deputy Principal 3, School C).

Deputy principal 2 from School B talked about principals having to be motivated to do the right thing through regular workshops. The deputy principal put it like this,

> *Regular workshops must be conducted where they can be constantly reminded of their roles and how to execute them ethically. This can take away or minimize their level of temptation as most of them would get to be encouraged to do what is right.* (Deputy Principal 2, School B).

Deputy principal 4 from the School D emphasised on the issue of need for training and said,

> *It is also important to train them, maybe they are trained once yes, they are trained but the trainings must be more often especially because when they transit to this position, they get to manage finances and is not everybody who does well when it comes to that. I also heard about principals mismanaging money. but every time I read about it, I turned to wonder if really principal got some training or some workshop or some in-service about administration, and how to handle finances. Because once a teacher is appointed to the position of the principal, he takes up the duties of handling finances which needs serious good training for them to perform well. Sometimes you find that the headteacher is in trouble because of some receipts that the principals have lost which are major receipts that are very important and this puts him in a situation where he could be thought of as someone who takes school funds and use them for his own purposes. And yet may be is because is lack of training on how to handle finances, and*

receipts and accountability of every cent from school coffers. (Deputy Principal 4, School D)

Chairperson 4 from the School D also commented, *There should be teachings, workshops to say from now onwards this is the way to go.* (Chairperson 4, School D).

Participants of the study were of the view that training, courses and teaching of school principals on ethical conducts could serve as way to reduce unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals. A course at college level on finances and ethics could also help school principals to avoid some of the mistakes they find themselves to have committed. Refresher courses by the in-service department can also serve as a way to help out in the problem of capacitation.

5.3.6.2 Regular audits

Regular audits have been cited as one of the ways to reduce and or minimize unethical conducts among the principals of schools. Principal 5 from School E said,

> *Internal auditors are there to help us and guide us and to grow us so that we can be in a position to handle this administration because these are public funds. But we as principals we are never called for a workshop where these auditors can come and workshop us, tell us as of what we should fix. They complain about petrol.* (Principal 5, School E).

School chairpersons were also of the idea of regular audits for schools. Chairperson 3 from School C and Chairperson 1 from School A share the similar sentiment, *Audits should be done yearly to avoid misappropriation of funds or even after 6 months.* (Chairperson 3, School C).

Chairperson 1 put it like this, *this can be minimised by having regular audits, maybe yearly not just when the principal is retiring* . (Chairperson 1, School A). Additionally, chairperson 2 from School B said, *"On the idea of auditors visiting the schools now and then, I agree with that, the auditors should now and then come for inspection so that the books can be up to date.* (Chairperson 2, School B).

Chairperson 5 from School E also said, *Auditors are the ones who help the most. When it comes to fund mishandling, auditors must be involved from the onset. That's very important.*

(Chairperson 5, School E). Closely related to the issue of audit is the present system of transaction money. This was lauded by chairperson 1 from school A, who put it like this,

> *There is a new system that encourages transparency between the head teacher and the chairperson of the school. Its operation entails zero disposal to actual funds of the school since all kinds of fees and monies to be paid are deposited directly to the banks. Any transactions the principal does reflect on the school's chairperson and vice-chairperson. When the principals need to buy supplies as per his head of department's request, he does not go ahead without having met with the school committee and agree on it.* (Chairperson 1, School A).

Drawing from the views of the participants, regular audits of schools from as early as possible are vital and should be a way to minimise unethical behaviours among school principals, as opposed to waiting until the principal is due for retirement before they are audited, and to ensure that things are done as per the expectations.

5.3.6.3 Inspections of schools

Some of the participants in the study were of the idea that regular inspections by the inspectors from the Ministry of Education could be a way through which unethical behaviours of principal could be minimized or eradicated.

Deputy principal 4 from School E presented the idea this way,

> *It could be the inspections, inspections should be regular, Inspection that says how can we help you, not a fault-finding inspection. What is it that you need? How can we help you so that you may achieve even higher results. the ministry also does not do the controlling, visiting the schools may be termly yes and work with the schools, I mentioned that when the Ministry comes to schools, it should not be about finding faults on the principals or school leadership of the school but rather to say how can we help you so by following up or even awarding the principals if they have done well.* (Deputy Principal 4, School D)

In addition to the above-mentioned quote, Deputy Principal 3 from School C voiced out an idea of a supervision tool for the principal, he put *There's lack of supervision tools for the principals,*

they are just all by themselves. No one questions them as of why they are in or out. There should be a supervision tool for principals. (Deputy Principal 3, School C).

Deputy principal 4 from school D also added by mentioning a need to control the principals. The deputy principal said,

> *There is this way of doing things, that of controlling, you have to have ways of controlling. The ministry of education should have ways of controlling the principals. If the ministry also does not do the controlling, visiting the schools may be termly yes and work with the schools, I mentioned that when the ministry comes to schools, it should not be about finding faults on the principals or school leadership but rather to say how can we help you not a fault-finding inspection.* (Deputy Principal 3, School C).

Chairperson 4 from school D added a voice on the subject of inspection and said, *"Another solution could be addition of inspectors because the number of inspectors is low."* (Chairperson 4, School D).

Drawing from the above quotes of the participants it is evident that if schools could be visited on regular basis and be controlled by the inspectors, unethical behaviours by school principals could be minimized, which could help the schools.

5.3.6.4 Recruitment of school principals

On hiring or recruitment of principals, some participants mentioned that there is a need to ensure that the person is ready to take up the position, citing that current school principals must be involved in the recruitment exercise. Principal 5 from School E had this to say,

> *First of all, is the recruitment of the headteachers. I know that the deputies must be at least 4 years deputizing. But they should look if the person is really ready to be a principal? If he is knowledgeable in terms of the health of the school, appraising the deputy principal for the headship post. That's where it lacks. Because now it's all about a person cramming and going there and just do listing with the TCS and find that they were not practically ready to lead the school. That can be a solution.* (Principal 5, School E).

Deputy principal 3 from School C added,

> *Also, the principal's recruitment interviews must be intensified, such that they tackle issues that have to do with day to day running of the school. Asks questions like how you are going to run the school and make sure that the school performs.* (Deputy 3, School C).

The exercise for recruitment of school principals ought to be intensive so as to recruit deserving individuals for the post. Involvement of present school principals should be a way to go, to ensure that the recruit is ready for the huge task of leading the school and also to handle the large sum of money belonging to the school. Principals of schools feel like they should have a say as to who should take up the position. In other words, they want to be consulted during the recruitment exercise.

5.3.6.5 Hiring of bursars

As one way to minimize some of the problems seen in schools, especially when it comes to the issue of money, is the hiring of bursars in schools, as mentioned by some participants, because principals of schools are teachers in their making not accountants. Airing a view on the issue principal 3 from School C stated, *My suggestion would be that the employer takes away these duties from the principals and actually hire bursars of the school.* (Principal 3, School C).

From the above quote, it is apparent that school principals need to be assisted by school bursars who will concentrate of handling the funds and apply their expertise.

Principal 4 from School D added and said, *Issues of refresher courses, hiring of bursars are very important and could be very helpful. Even you as a headteacher you should endeavour to learn more on the issues surrounding.* (Principal 4, School D)

Additionally, Chairperson 3 from School C said, *Why is the government not employing bursars instead of letting the head teacher manage the finances? The head teacher is not trained to handle finances so it will be appropriate to deal with bursar.* (Chairperson 3, School C). However, Principal 1 from School A held a totally different view from the other participants, The principal stated that

> *Employment of bursars won't help much, this is shifting the responsibility, the main issue in schools is money that is not paid in time, that's it. If money is there, it is paid in time the problems will clearly come out that the principal is just mischievous.so the*

issue of bursars, the country is battling with a high wage bill that is if the SG will pay those bursars the wage bill will shoot up, and if the school pays the bursars, then the school fees will shoot up. This will not solve a thing more so because the current secretaries are doing a good job on that. (Principal 1, School A).

Hiring of bursars of schools is seen by some participants as a solution to some of the financial challenges faced by school heads because the bursars are skilled in handling finances, though this has financial implications in as far as salaries are concerned. However, one principal highlighted that the present situation where secretaries are doing this job is acceptable, because schools do not have money to pay the bursars.

5.3.6.6 Rewarding good behaviour

Some participants brought about the idea of rewarding those that are doing well as one way that could possibly minimize some unethical behaviour among school leaders. Deputy principal 1 from School A had this to say,

Have good behaviours being rewarded so that others can copy and follow suit. We need incentives to promote ethical behaviours just like how we encourage students with the gifts they get during speech day as reward for their hard work. I think that can play a huge role in promoting ethical behaviour. (Deputy principal 1, School A).

Deputy principal 4 from School 4 added to this idea,

By following up or even awarding the principals if they have done well, you see, if they can have a good event and share with other principals that in this school, we have so many learners, so much money but he did well, good incentives and be awarded, may be that can encourage the principals to work hard, good motivation, good incentives for principals would help principals to recollect themselves try by all means to do well, and try ...when they come to check I must be found to be clean. That would help to eradicate. (Deputy Principal 4, School D).

Chairperson 1 from School A said,

Also, the head teacher should support the teachers and supply them with all they need to achieve high results. Lastly, when the school attains good results, teachers should

be given incentives and be acknowledged for their hard work and motivated through outings and other means possible. (Chairperson 1, School A).

So, rewarding good behaviour and giving out some incentives to those that have done well is seen by some of the participants as a way of encouraging ethical behaviours among school principals.

5.3.6.7 Stern punishment for culprits

Punishment and public humiliation of offenders have been suggested by some participants, especially the chairpersons, as a way to help eradicate or minimize unethical behaviour of principals. Chairperson 2 from School C put it like this:

> *I believe for this habit to come to an end, when the teacher is caught or found to have done this, he /she should be taken to the school and be humiliated in front of the learners, teachers, school committee and parents, thereafter taken to jail. There should not be covered or hidden or protected for wrong doing. The culprits should be exposed, because the habit of not exposing them send a wrong message to the public that all principals do this wrong thing yet it's not all the principals. He should be exposed; let it be known that teacher so and so has done this.*(Chairperson 2, School B).

Chairperson 5 from school E raised the education of parents regarding the conduct of teachers, so that they may have a say. The chairperson put it like this, *Parents must be taught as well as of how teachers must conduct themselves so that they can be able to reprimand them; at the same time cooperate with them.*(Chairperson 5, School E).

In summary, unethical behaviours can be minimized by continuous teachings and reminders they can never be totally eradicated as observed by deputy principal 1 from School A,

> *You can never eradicate them. The big problem is the mind-set, the environment that we are living has changed and times have changed. I scratch out the term eradicate because we can never eradicate unethical behaviour. We can only try to make it better by using more of the faith institutions and preach hard like Noah so that people can perhaps repent and do what is right. Same thing with ethics, faith system can help to*

improve them. In educational systems, we need supervision and reminders." (Deputy 1, School A).

Refresher courses, regular audits, close supervision by inspectors, issue of recruitment of school principals, hiring of bursars, rewarding good behaviours and punishment of culprits, all these put together could be ways to help minimize and possibly eliminate some of unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals.

5.4 Chapter summary

The chapter covered the presentation of data collected from the 15 participants. These participants comprised five principals, five deputy principals and five school committee chairpersons. The data was collected from in-depth interviews with all the participants. The data from the individual in-depth interviews was analysed through thematic analysis and presented in themes which address that research objectives. The key themes that were identified and described in this chapter include the importance of ethical leadership in schools' management; unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals; root causes of these unethical practices by principals of schools; challenges, pressures encountered by school principals and mitigation and eradication of unethical practices in schools. The next chapter deals with analysis and discussion of the findings as outlined in the foregoing chapter. It highlights the data that addresses the research questions and discusses whether the research questions were addressed sufficiently, as well as connected to the relevant literature.

CHAPTER SIX

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

The foregoing chapter presented the thematic data from the five school principals, five school deputy principals and five school committee chairpersons. This current chapter is about the analysis and discussion of findings as detailed in the previous chapter five. It highlights whether the research questions were met sufficiently based on comparisons with previous literature. For the purposes of clarity of analysis, the research objectives are as follows: a). To investigate the importance of ethical leadership in school's management; b). To identify and fully describe possible malpractices/unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals; c). To investigate the root causes of these unethical practices/malpractices by principals of schools; d). To find out challenges and pressures encountered by school principals when enacting ethical leadership surrounding the regulations and punitive measures and e). To unearth ways to reduce or eradicate these malpractices.

6.2 Reflexive thematic analysis of findings

Reflexive thematic analysis is one of the widely used thematic analysis methods, when demonstrating and interpreting the interconnected nature of qualitative findings in educational research. It presents an easily manageable way of examining, interpreting and deriving meaning from set of qualitative data and relaying some information about meanings of certain patterns (Joy, Braun & Clarke, 2023). In the context of this research study, this method was considered to be key in indicating the possible relations of the themes and subthemes of the current study. The depiction of the reflexive thematic analysis is captured in figure 6.1.

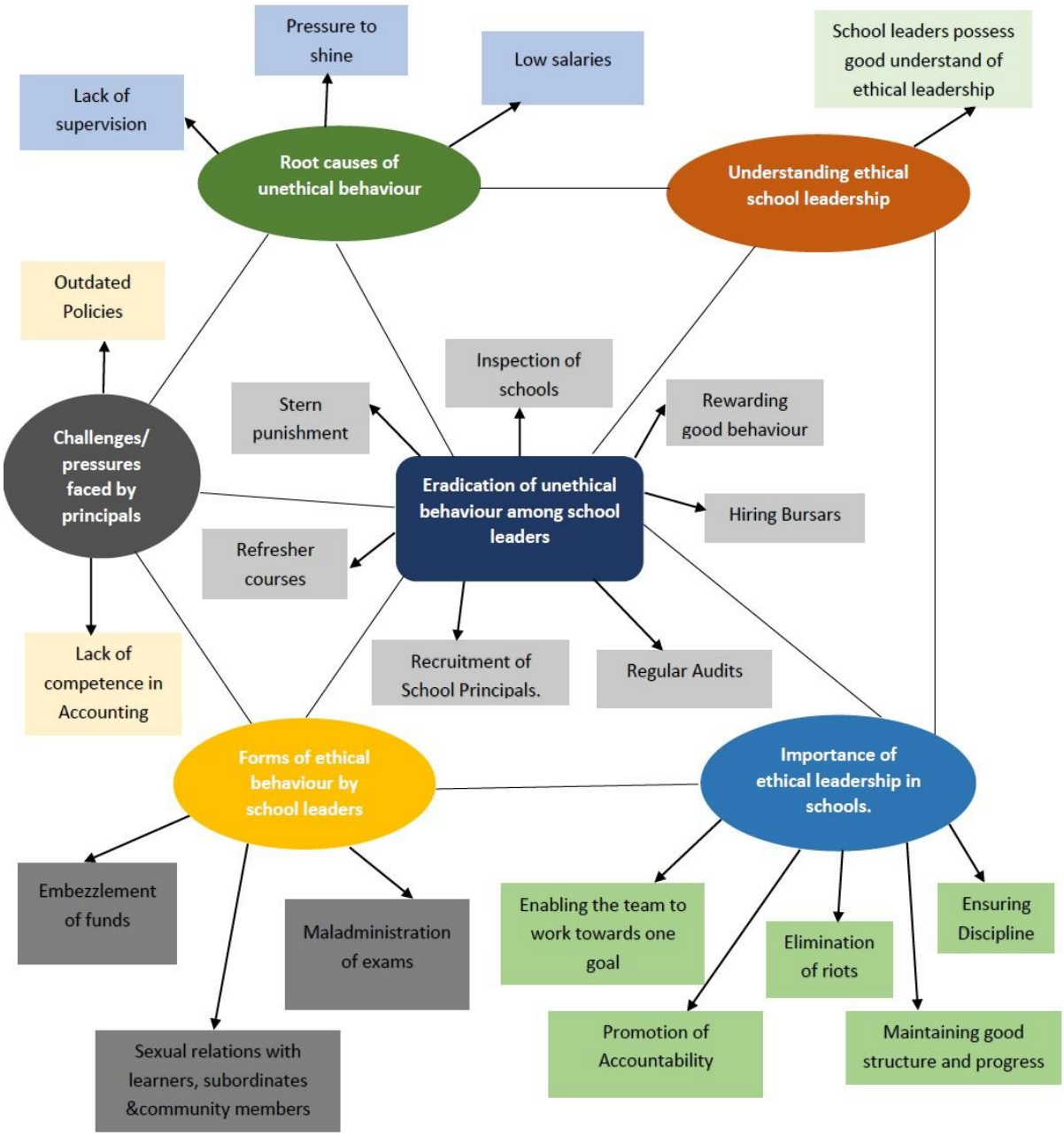

Figure 0.1 Reflexive thematic analysis of the findings (based on field work, 2023)

Almost all the participants seemed to know about the subject of ethics, and they understand ethics and ethical behaviour in the school environment. There is evidence of root causes of the unethical behaviours by school leaders in Lubombo region's high school environments. The

participants mentioned root causes of unethical behaviours such as low salaries, lack of supervision and the demand to produce good results.

Furthermore, there are challenges which also facilitated and promoted the emergence of unethical behaviour and these included lack of competence in accounting and some outdated or ill structured rules to follow. Due to the challenges, there are quite a number of specific forms of unethical behaviours that are exhibited by school leaders including: embezzlement of funds, maladministration of exams and sexual relation with learners, subordinates as well as members of the community. The evidence of such forms of unethical behaviour triggered an exploration into whether participating school leaders were fully aware of the importance of ethical behaviour in school environments. Consequently, just as the participants have good understanding of the concept in question, they were able to clearly articulate the value of ethical behaviour in school leaders, which included: promotion of accountability; enabling the team to work towards one goal; elimination of riots; ensuring discipline and maintaining good school progress. At the centre of it all, the variable that was seen as affecting and influencing the rest of the variables was the eradication of unethical practices within the school leadership profession. The evidence of the study suggested from interviews with head-teachers such that the following factors are critical in this regard: refresher courses; regular audits; inspections of school; recruitment of school principals; hiring of qualified bursars; rewarding good behaviours and stern punishment for culprits.

The reflexive thematic analysis of the current study reveals several insights into the practice of ethics by school principals in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. Similar to the study by Sumah (2018), the current findings suggest that the political and economic environment is vital in terms of role in shaping ethical behaviour of leaders of schools. The findings indicate that low salaries and lack of supervision contribute to the emergence of some practices which are not ethically inclined, for example: embezzlement of school funds and sexual relations with learners, subordinates, and community members. This aligns with Sumah's (2018) assertion that the low salaries of public administration employees can drive them to engage in unethical behaviours to improve their financial position. In contrast to the findings made by Goel and Nelson (2005), the current study suggests that the regulatory environment within the school system may not be as effective in deterring unethical behaviours. The findings reveal that

outdated or ill-structured rules, as well as a lack of competence in accounting, further facilitate the emergence of unethical practices among school leaders. Furthermore, the current study's findings corroborate what already exists in literature regarding the importance of ethical leadership in promoting accountability, team cohesion, and school progress. In line with the views expressed by Branson and Gross (2014), the study participants were able to clearly articulate the value of ethical behaviour in school leaders. This emphasises the necessity for deeper knowledge and internalisation of ethical principles among school leaders, as noted by Chetini and Shindika (2017). In the same vein as the arguments made by Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011), the current study findings suggest that the pressure to produce good results and excel may contribute to the adoption of unethical practices by school leaders.

6.3 Analysis of the findings as per the objective of the study

In this section the findings of the study are analysed in the context of the research objectives. The analytical discussion will offer effective critique against literature previously reviewed in the earlier chapters of the study.

6.3.1 Importance of ethical leadership in school management

Participants demonstrated their understanding of ethical leadership, which they typically described as leadership where leaders adhere to laid down principles or guidelines, being fair, show justice to all, sympathy and empathy as well as love, respect and being honest in all dealings, while executing their duties. This is consistent with other characterisations identified by scholars such as Engelbrecht, Heine and Mahembe (2017), Mohiuddin and Hossain (2016) and Werner (2011), whose definitions of ethical behaviour centres around values, beliefs, assumptions, rules and values that govern the boundaries of moral life and in school context.

The majority of the head teachers during the collection of data considered that ethical school leadership was critical in encouraging access to educational resources for everyone in a fair and equitable manner, regardless of circumstance or background. Such views appear to be consistent with the assertion by Engelbrecht et al. (2014), who state that leaders who are ethical are bound to take principled and fairly good decisions and model an ethical life for emulation of ethical conduct and recognize and give reward to subordinates who behave in an ethical way. This is further corroborated by Engelbrecht et al. (2017), who stress that ethical leaders

are likely to develop a great level of trust as they relate with their subordinates, regardless of background. Additionally, Engelbrecht et al. (2017) assert that leaders who value the moral dimension, integrity and trustworthiness show a great deal of care to their subordinates. It was also submitted that ethical leadership promotes the creation of an ethical environment wherein school principals communicate positive attitude, good behaviours, fairness, openness, all of which are based on respect (Engelbrecht et al., 2017).

This is also in line with the writings by Brown et al. (2005) and Kalshoven et al. (2011), who use concepts like fairness and non-discrimination when they expound the concept of ethical leadership. This is also what is advocated for by ethical leadership theory, advanced by Shapiro and Stefkovich, which suggests that the ethic of justice includes, amongst others the fairness of policies, laws and rules, whether these are unquestionable or not, and, if amendments are to be made, under what conditions? The ethic of justice, according to Shapino and Stefkovich also includes the notion of equity versus equality and the right of an individual against the good of the bigger community.

Furthermore, it is consistent with the theory of African philosophy of ubuntu advanced by Khoza (2011). This philosophy is advancing the notion that leaders are servants of their followers and that whatever has to be decided should be a result of a robust agreement. It advocates generosity, kindness, the acknowledgement that people need one another for survival, and values competency and care as crucial traits to those who are in leadership as well as the dignity and worth of all.

Furthermore, accountability, according to participants, relates to the African philosophy of ubuntu. In this theory, Khoza (2011) is of the idea that leaders who embrace the principles of ubuntu advance the sense of servanthood, this they do with accountability and integrity. Additionally, Khoza (2011) asserts that there are vital traits of leaders who advocate trust in employees of organisations driven by ubuntu; these are persuasion, accountability, accommodation, cohabitation, and communication. Moreover, the participants echoed Freeman's stakeholder theory in that it advances accountability to all stakeholders. Further, they stated that ignoring stakeholder interests may lead to a lack of accountability towards all the parties affected by the school's decisions. This leads into breakdown of credibility and trust, resulting in difficulty in maintaining a positive relationship with stakeholders. In the above

assertions it is clear that the majority of the school principals who participated in the study were aware of the importance of ethical school leadership.

Findings of the study highlight a stark contrast between the principals' awareness of ethical leadership principles, rooted in African philosophy and stakeholder theory, and the persistent ethical challenges they face, such as embezzlement and maladministration as shared by the principals of schools during interviews. Root causes, including low salaries, performance pressures, inadequate supervision, and a lack of accounting competence, reveal systemic flaws that undermine accountability. Despite a commitment to integrity, these challenges illustrate the complexities of fostering ethical behaviour in schools, necessitating comprehensive policy reforms and enhanced support for leadership.

6.3.2 Unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals

The second research objective focused on the identification and description of possible malpractices/unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals. In response to this research objective, participants of the study revealed numerous unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals while executing their duties. These malpractices could be categorised under these thematic areas: embezzlement of funds, maladministration of exams, and sexual relations with learners, subordinates and members of the community.

Regarding embezzlement, misappropriation and theft of funds, the findings were that embezzlement was viewed as the most prevalent form of unethical behaviour among school principals. This was identified by all the participants across the board, signalling how rooted the challenge is within the school system. Some of the participants called such an act as misuse of school funds, misappropriation and theft. Such findings are consistent with Aktan (2021), Aydın (2017), Baykal (2014), Fidan and Koç (2020) and Sam (2021), who claim that within school environments there is widespread corruption and unethical behaviour, including but not limited to mismanagement of funds, through improper control of financial records, pilfering of cash, fraud, theft and misappropriation. The sentiments expressed by the participants are also consistent with the assertion by Mthembu (2017), who concluded that embezzlement of school money is one of the unethical conducts exhibited by school principals.

Furthermore, theft from the school coffers where principals literally take school funds for personal use, was reported as rampant. Just like theft, misappropriation of school funds was also raised as a key unethical act prevailing in schools within the Lubombo region. Such findings are also a far cry from the expectation noted by Munge et al. (2016), who posit that school leaders as financial managers must make sure that monies belonging to the school are secured and are spent efficiently and effectively for the benefit of the school. They argue that is the responsibility of the school principal to cautiously and smartly utilise available money and other resources for realisation of the objectives of the institution. Poor or mismanagement of resources can lead to misappropriations, embezzlement and diversion of funds from projects of top priority (Mustaf et al 2013). In summary, on the issue surrounding school funds, it was clear that this challenge was prevalent in the school system and different stakeholders had a perspective on it.

In terms of the ethical leadership theory, a number of the pre-requisites of the theory appear to have been violated by school leaders, despite indication of their awareness to the requirement of good ethics in school leadership. The ethic of justice as proposed by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) is based on human rights and laws. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) assert that principals of schools therefore are expected to uphold and operationalise educational policies and laws, applying such to all in a fairly manner there by avoiding partiality in their execution of their duties.

With regards to maladministration of examinations, the findings revealed that this unethical behaviour was prevalent in schools. Principals of schools were identified as the main culprits. This form of misconduct received many remarks from the participants, who appeared to be quite conversant with the issue at hand. In this regard, all principals and their deputies were well aware of this issue of maladministration of examinations and its occurrence in school environments. The participants bluntly labelled this act as wrong; this behaviour gives way to undeserving students to pass and proceed to the next level. The observation by the participants corroborates those of Mthembu (2017) and Dladla (2020), who observe that some school principals are procuring learners to proceed to the next levels or to the next classes even though they do not meet the requirements to proceed to the next level. Additionally, these observations by the participants are in line with those of Chikoko (2008) and Kanyongo (2005), who label

this as one of the corrupt practices taking place in schools, where learners are granted examination credits to cover up for wrong doings.

This is against the ethic of justice embedded in the ethical leadership theory, advanced by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005). They avow that this ethic stipulates that educational institutions like schools have to inculcate values, such as those for respect for liberty, justice and equity. Acar, Kaya and Sahin (2012) uphold the view that, while ethical leaders regard attainment of aims and objectives as their main goal they have to ensure they perform their tasks within the dictates of ethical standards, justice and honesty. Furthermore, the findings of the study include key themes and subthemes including embezzlement of funds and maladministration of exams. Such unethical behaviour cannot be viewed as errors but deliberate acts that defy not only general ethical norms but also set of rules and regulations. The findings therefore give evidence of deliberately failing to follow the ethics of justice as defined by ethical leadership theory (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005).

This is also against the principles of ubuntu as advocated by Khoza (2011). Ubuntu advances respect, which is inclusive of paying attention to other people's views and also includes treating others as you would love them to treat you, with humility and honesty (Khoza, 2011). The honesty part within ubuntu philosophy is deficient in those principals of schools who practice maladministration of examinations. Maladministration of examinations is also against the stakeholder theory which teaches the importance of meeting the needs of all parties and attaching the concept of organisational integrity. The act of maladministration of examinations and malpractices in the form of assisting learners to copy, diminishes the organisational integrity and also tramples on the rights of the learners and parents as major stakeholders.

Sexual harassment directed to learners, teachers, members of support staff and members of the community was also mentioned by the participants as one of the malpractices exhibited by school principals. These sentiments are in line with those mentioned by Campbell, Andersen, Mutsikiwa, Pufall, Skovdal, Madanhire and Gregson (2015). They contended that exploitation of students is witnessed on a regular basis in schools, learners are abused physically and sexually by school principals and teachers. On the same note Brock, Brundige and Furstenau (2014), Davids and Waghid (2016) and Corruption Watch (2018) declare that sexual violence

by teachers towards school girls is a disturbing ethical lapse in some schools. This is great violation of the ethics of justice, of care, and that of profession embedded on the ethical leadership theory by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005). Wherein the ethic of justice is about human rights and laws, so engaging in a sexual relationship with learners is a gross violation of the learners' rights. With regards to the ethic of care, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) emphasise that caring for learners is the primary responsibility of any school. Therefore, to be involved in sexual relation with learners is proof enough that the principal does not care for the learners. About the ethic of profession, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) state that principals of schools have to establish their own personal and professional codes of conduct, ensuring that the ethic of justice is included. They also need to take into consideration the professional codes of conducts from their professional associations. Thus, if a principal of a school is in a sexual relationship with a learner, he or she is breaking the codes of conduct for the position and the teachers' associations.

This also against the principles of ubuntu as promoted by Khoza (2011). Ubuntu advances respect for all, honesty, treating others as you want them to treat you and humility. Ubuntu promotes what is right, good and important and also ubuntu stresses the importance of helpfulness, sharing, respect for others, caring, unselfishness and sense of community (Khoza, 2011). So, a principal who engages in sexual relations with learners shows that he is not caring for the learners, he is actually selfish and disrespectful. And all these are against the principles of ubuntu.

Lastly, involving oneself (principal) in sexual relations with learners is against the principles of stakeholder theory which promotes interests of stakeholders in an organisation. Learners' interests in schools should be prioritised because they are major stakeholders in a school's settings. So, if the principals of schools are in a sexual relationship with learners, then where is the interest of the learners? And where is the interest of the parent? Moreover, the stakeholder theory promotes organisational integrity; when school principals are involved in sexual relationships with learners, the integrity of the school diminishes.

6.3.3 Root causes of these unethical practices/malpractices by principals of schools

Regarding the objective to reveal the root causes of unethical practise within the school, three key issues came up, being, low salaries, pressure to excel and lack of supervision. Low salaries were mentioned by most of the participants as one of the reasons which drives school principals into unethical behaviours. As described in the findings, low earnings forced principals of schools to live a life that they believe does not match their positions. To make up for the gap, principals are drawn to embezzling school funds. This corroborates the views of Schurr et al. (2012) and Ampofo (2020) when they write that some school principals get to be involved in unethical activities to be able to keep up a certain level of class. The latter clearly suggests that peer pressure comes to play here; principals want to meet a particular standard which principals innately set for themselves and are pressured to keep up with and maintain at all costs. Closely to that is the issue of self-gain and self-interest which is in line with Manjunatha and Maqsud (2013) and Maicibi and Yahaya (2013) when they stated that leaders are driven by downright greed, high ambitions, personal gain and self-interest. It was revealed by some participants that school principals do not have benefits like car allowances, housing allowance and travel allowances compared to their counterparts in the private sector and they swim in perpetual debt. This is supported by the UNESCO (2010) report where it states that where public officials earn low salaries especially in the educational environment this creates a situation where embezzling school funds or teachers charging illegal fees can easily arise (UNESCO, 2010). Moreover, Sumah (2018) suggests that low salaries strongly influence public officers to engage in corrupt activities. They get involved in unethical behaviours, such as receiving bribes to improve their financial status.

Notably, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) avow that this professional ethics requires an ever-changing process that would enable principals of schools to enact personal and professional codes that would include the ethic of justice. Hence, principals of schools have to take into consideration what is put forward by the professional associations like the Eswatini Principals Associations (EPA) and Swaziland Association of Teachers (SNAT) as codes of conducts. Additionally, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) assert that the best professional judgment by school leaders reflects the interest of school community as very important in all ethical decisions taken, with the students at the centre of this process.

Furthermore, principals of schools find themselves in great pressure to produce excellent results for their schools are announced, especially the external examinations. The background to it is that if the school performs badly the principal is heavily blamed. The finding indicate that some principals then find themselves having to employ unscrupulous means to succeed. Such findings may be linked closely to Dladla (2020) and Osuji (2020) who surmised that some unethical practices exhibited by school principals are partly due to pressure to attain high departmental targets, poor monitoring at all levels and greediness.

It was also revealed during the in-depth interview with principals that lack of supervision was a major cause of unethical behaviour. It was revealed that the inspections and the audits which are carried out in schools are not regular and if they are carried out, they are not about how can we help, instead they are about finding fault. This is worse now that audits have become victimizing tools. Similarly, Van Niekerk (2003) and Salawu (2012) argue that where there is lack of political will in fighting unethical behaviours such as corruption in public entities, major problems in fighting unethical behaviour will become rampant. By not providing adequate deterrents within the legal system, enhancing government enforcement mechanisms and enacting legislation to provide a framework for dealing with litigation, public officials will engage in unethical behaviour simply because there they are likely to suffer very little retribution if any (Van Niekerk, 2003 & Salawu, 2012).

The unethical behaviour of principals, no matter the root cause, is against the ethic of justice, the ethic of care, and the ethic of profession embedded in the ethical leadership theory by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), in which the ethic of justice is based on rights and laws. So, stealing from the school coffers is an infringement of the rights of learners and other stakeholders and that touches upon justice and law. With regards to the ethic of care, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) hold, that schools have the responsibility of caring for the learners.

Therefore, to pad one's pockets with money from the school coffers shows that the principal is caring less for the learners. About the ethic of the profession, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) assert that school principals should develop their own personal and professional codes that have to be inclusive of the ethic of justice and, also, they need to consider the professional codes of

ethics established by professional associations. Thus, if a principal of school is involved in any unethical behaviour due to whatever reasons, he or she is violating the codes of conduct for the position.

This is also against the principles of ubuntu as promoted by Khoza (2011). Ubuntu advances respect for all, humility, honesty and treating others fairly. Ubuntu promotes what is right, good and important and also Ubuntu stresses the importance of respect for others, unselfishness, sharing helpfulness, and a sense of community (Khoza, 2011). Additionally, it is a bad thing to be efficacious as a result of aggressive means and being successful at the detriment of other people (Tutu, 2005). Therefore, a principal of school who is involved in any unethical behaviour due to whatever reasons, is violating the principles of ubuntu which are respect, caring and unselfishness.

Lastly, involving oneself (principal) in unbecoming behaviour within the school system is against the principles of stakeholder theory, which promotes interests of stakeholders in an organisation. Learners' interests in schools should be prioritised because they are major stakeholders in a school system. So, a school principal acting unethically jeopardises the interest of all the stakeholders of the school and also harms the integrity of the institution.

6.3.4 Challenges and pressures faced by school principals when enacting ethical leadership

School principals operating within contexts such as the Lubombo region face profound challenges in enacting ethical leadership, with significant pressures stemming from structural and systemic deficiencies. A primary obstacle is the widespread lack of competence in financial management among principals. As revealed in the study, many receive only minimal training, often as brief as five days in accounting and resource management, before being placed in roles where they are responsible for substantial budgets and must undergo audits by professionals with extensive formal training in finance. This discrepancy creates a practical and ethical vulnerability. These findings align with the work of Magak (2013) and Nyakanyanga (2019), who directly link a deficit in financial, accounting, budget and audit skills to mismanagement within secondary schools. The problem is further exacerbated, as noted by these scholars, by the absence of professional bursars, auditors, or accountants at the school level, leaving

principals without adequate support and increasing the likelihood of unintentional mismanagement or ethical violations.

Compounding the issue of skill deficiency is the pervasive challenge of outdated and unworkable policies, some reported to be over thirty years old. Principals frequently encounter regulations that are misaligned with contemporary operational realities, forcing them into an ethical bind: adhere to impracticable directives and compromise school functionality or deviate from official procedures to achieve necessary outcomes, thereby risking formal reprimand from oversight bodies such as the Ministry of Education and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). This systemic failure resonates with Dimant's (2014) assertion that the competence of public administration, heavily influenced by the quality and relevance of its regulations, directly affects the potential for misconduct. Inefficient and ambiguous policies, as Dimant argues, create fertile ground for corrupt practices to emerge. This view is corroborated by Sumah (2018), who contends that unethical behaviour is amplified by incomplete or ambiguous legislation that is open to widely varying interpretations. When principals are compelled to "circumvent policies in the quest to get things done," as the study participants stated, they become vulnerable to accusations of flouting procedure, even when their intentions are oriented toward school improvement.

However, the study also uncovered a counter-narrative. A minority of participants rejected the notion that incompetence was the primary driver of unethical behaviour, asserting instead that some principals engage in misconduct such as diverting funds for personal gain under the deliberate pretext of lacking skills or blaming outdated policies. This perspective finds support in the work of Butts (2012) and Manjunatha and Maqsud (2013), who identify jealousy, greed, envy, and a desire for personal gain as core motivators for unethical actions, often undertaken with full awareness of their wrongfulness.

These multifaceted pressures create a direct conflict with foundational ethical frameworks. The Ethic of Justice, as articulated by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), which emphasises the fair and equitable application of rules, laws and policies, is undermined when the rules themselves are perceived as unfair or unworkable. Principals are expected to uphold policies "in a fairly manner," yet the system itself often makes this impossible, placing them in a no-win situation.

The ethic of critique calls for challenging the status quo, wherein school principals should not only merely circumvent flawed regulations but openly challenge outdated such regulations or policies. Furthermore, the Ethic of the Profession, which calls for a merging of the ethics of justice, critique, care, and the profession itself, is compromised in such an environment. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) acknowledge the potential for "discord or incongruity" between formal codes and on-the-ground realities, suggesting the need for principals to develop personal codes. However, as the study implies, this should never serve as a justification for unscrupulous means.

The philosophy of Ubuntu, as advocated by Khoza (2011), offers a further lens through which to critique these justifications for misconduct. Ubuntu, which prioritises communal welfare and selflessness, is fundamentally violated when a principal prioritises personal interest, whether through deliberate theft or through neglect born of incompetence over the needs of the learners and the community. This aligns with the stakeholder theory of Freeman (1984; 2010), which posits that organisational leadership has a fiduciary responsibility to all stakeholders. Misconduct, under any pretext, harms these stakeholders learners, parents, and the community – and represents a severe breach of organisational integrity, which Freeman argues is essential to the stakeholder relationship.

In conclusion, the literature and findings reveal that the pressures on principals are not merely operational but exist at the crux of profound ethical tension. They are caught between a systemic failure to provide adequate training and relevant policies, as noted by Magak (2013), Nyakanyanga (2019), Dimant (2014), and Sumah (2018), and the constant demand to demonstrate unwavering personal integrity, as required by the Ethic of Justice, the Ethic of Profession, Ubuntu, and Stakeholder Theory. This analysis underscores that ethical leadership requires navigating these pressures with transparency and a commitment to challenging flawed systems rather than being subdued by them.

6.3.5 Reducing and or eradication of unethical practices in schools

It is a finding of this study that unethical behaviours can be minimised by continuous teachings and reminders, refresher courses, regular audits, close supervision by Inspectors, careful

recruitment of personnel for the position of school principalship, hiring of bursars, rewarding good behaviours and chastisement of culprits. All these put together have been advocated by those involved in the study as possible ways that could be possible interventions towards minimisation and possibly elimination some of unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals.

6.3.5.1 Refresher courses

Participants in the study pointed out that school principals need to be taken for refresher courses to keep them reminded of what is expected of them. Some even mentioned that they should take up a course at college level on ethics and financial management. The study revealed that refresher courses, trainings and teachings of school principals on ethical conducts could serve as way to reduce unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals. This is in line with the suggestion by Werner (2011) and Bello (2012) that there should be an inculcation of an ethical organisational culture which should supposedly guide members against unethical conduct or any form of malpractice within the organisation. They further state that the ethical organisational culture should be taught at all levels within the organisation starting from those at the management, and this ought to be continuous. Bello (2012) adds that the communication on ethics should be frequent. Still on the issue of the teaching of ethics to principals, this corroborates the assertion by Ugurlu (2017) and Johnson and Brune (2021), who stated that presenting concepts of ethics, justice and loyalty and investing in leadership development programmes targeted to principals of schools and educators can have the much-needed impact towards contribution to ethical awareness in school governance and improvement in performance.

6.3.5.2 Regular audits

Regular audits have been cited in the study as one of the ways to reduce and or minimise unethical conducts among the principals of schools. Participants were of the view that regular audits of schools from as early as possible are vital for minimisation of unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals. This citation by the participants corresponds to the assertion by Othman and Rahman (2014), who are of the view that leaders need to be held accountable

because, by so doing, the likelihood that they find themselves involved in unethical behaviour is bound to decrease.

6.3.5.3 Inspections of schools

The study revealed that regular inspections by the inspectors from the quality assurance department of the ministry of education and training could be one way through which unethical behaviours of principal could be minimised or eradicated. Participants in the study feel that if schools could be visited on regular basis and be controlled by the inspectors, unethical behaviours by school principals could be minimised. Similar to the study by Sumah (2018), the current findings suggest that regular inspections of schools by the Ministry of Education and Training could be an effective way to minimise unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals. The participants in the study believe that increased oversight and control through regular inspections could deter principals from engaging in unethical practices. This aligns with Sumah's (2018) assertion that the degree of effectiveness in administration, especially public administration, is partly influenced by the way the regulations are crafted and the extent to which monitoring is applied can have great influence in the prevalence of corruption.

6.3.5.4 Recruitment of school principals

Some participants in the study highlighted the importance of ensuring that a candidate is genuinely prepared to take on the role of principal. They emphasised that current school principals should be involved in the recruitment process, which contrasts with the current practice where any teacher can become a principal, if they hold the minimum requirement degree and pass the oral interview. This practice reflects the assertion of Bush and Oduro (2006) and Christie (2010), who note that, in many African countries and schools, there are no formal requirements for a teacher to be trained as a manager, meaning any person who possesses a teaching qualification can be given a principalship position. This situation allows individuals without essential leadership skills, let alone ethical leadership, to assume leadership roles, which can have serious consequences (Malone, 2020). Unlike the findings of Manyaka and Nkuna (2014), the present study suggests that the recruitment process for school principals should be more rigorous and involve the current principals in the selection processes. Participants argue that the current practice of appointing principals solely based on an oral interview is flawed and may contribute to unethical behaviours. These findings highlight the need for a more thorough, competency-based approach in selecting school principals to ensure that those in leadership positions are adequately equipped for the role.

6.3.5.5 Hiring of bursars

Those participating in the current study revealed that one way to minimise some of the problems seen in schools especially when it comes to the issue of money is hiring of bursars in schools, because principals of schools are teachers in the making not accountants. Hiring of bursars for schools is seen by some participants as a solution to some of the financial challenges faced by school heads though this may come with some financial implications in as far as salaries are concerned. However, some participant refuted this view and said that all that is needed is that principals have to be honest.

The findings of the current study suggest that appointing bursars to oversee the financial management of schools could help alleviate the financial challenges faced by school principals and reduce the likelihood of unethical practices, such as fund embezzlement. This supports the views of Magak (2013) and Nyakanyanga (2019), who argue that many secondary schools

experience financial mismanagement issues due to a lack of skills in accounting, budgeting, and auditing. As a result, many schools operate without professional oversights from accounts officers or bursars, which contributes to these financial problems. However, some participants in the study raised concerns about the financial costs associated with hiring of these officers (bursars and accountants). They emphasised the importance of carefully evaluating the costs and benefits of this approach to ensure that the decision would be financially sustainable for schools, highlighting that while the idea of hiring bursars is seen as a potential solution to financial difficulties and unethical practices, a balanced assessment of the financial implications is essential to determine whether the benefits outweigh the expenses.

6.3.5.6 Rewarding good behaviours.

Some participants brought about the idea of rewarding those that are doing well as one way that could possibly minimise some unethical behaviour among school leaders. So, rewarding good behaviour and giving out some incentives to those that have done well is seen by some of the participants as a way of encouraging ethical behaviours among school principals. In the same vein as the arguments made by Wang et al. (2021), the current study findings suggest that rewarding and incentivising ethical behaviours among school principals could be an effective strategy to promote ethical leadership. The participants believe that recognizing and acknowledging principals who demonstrate high ethical standards could encourage others to emulate such behaviours. This approach aligns with the concept of the "moral person" in ethical leadership, where the leader's personal character together with motivation are critical in shaping ethical norms within the organisation (Wang et al., 2021).

6.3.5.7 Stern punishment for culprits

Punishment and public humiliation of offenders have been suggested by some participants of the study as a way to help eradicate or minimise unethical behaviour of principals. These sentiments are in line with Gucel et al. (2012) who suggested that there should be punishment of members displaying unethical conduct. This may serve as a deterrent to any principals, who would find themselves in the ditch of malpractice.

In conclusion, to effectively reduce or eliminate unethical practices by school principals, adopting the principles of ethical leadership theory, African philosophy of ubuntu, and

stakeholder theory could be highly beneficial. Ethical leadership theory, proposed by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), is based on four key ethics: the ethic of justice, the ethic of critique, the ethic of care, and the ethic of profession. The ethic of justice focuses on fairness, equity, and respect for rights, urging leaders to operate within the boundaries of justice, honesty, and ethical standards. I believe that, if school principals consistently follow the ethic of justice in their work, unethical practices can be significantly reduced or entirely eradicated. The ethic of critique, rooted in critical theory, emphasises that ethics should not be seen as a personal choice or relativism, but as a social discourse grounded in opinions that reject unnecessary human suffering and exploitation, especially towards students. If school principals were to embrace this philosophy, unethical behaviours would likely decrease.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) further contend that the ethic of care is important, not just for scholars only but for educational leaders who are often required to make moral decisions. According to them, the chief assignment of a school is to ensure that its learners are taken care of. Therefore, school principals must apply the ethic of care when fulfilling their duties. I argue that, if principals follow this ethic closely, unethical practices can be minimised or even eradicated. The final ethic, the ethic of profession, emphasises that professional ethics are grounded in the personal and professional codes established by professional associations. I believe that adherence to such codes of conduct could significantly reduce unethical behaviours among school principals.

The philosophy of ubuntu, which emphasises generosity, kindness, and the understanding that humans depend on each other, is another useful framework. Ubuntu assumes that humans are naturally moral beings and stresses the importance of caring, helpfulness, sharing, respect for others, unselfishness, and a sense of community (Khoza, 2011). It posits that ethical behaviour is innate in all people, and that human beings cannot exist, either individually or collectively, without an inherent sense of morality (Khoza, 2011). Based on this, Nzimakwe (2014) suggested that ubuntu principles should serve as the foundation when addressing leadership issues. Therefore, if school principals could adopt ubuntu as a guiding principle in their leadership practices, it is likely that unethical behaviours would be minimised or even eradicated.

Lastly, stakeholder theory, proposed by Freeman (1984), focuses on the responsibility to establish procedures that meet the needs of all stakeholders, align them, and ensure the long-term sustainability of an organisation. This theory takes into account the interests of all parties involved, as well as the overall integrity of the organisation. In the case of a school, the interests of learners and parents should be prioritised, meaning that actions such as embezzling school funds, engaging in inappropriate relationships with students, or manipulating examinations would be prevented, as they would directly violate the interests of stakeholders. I argue that if school principals follow the principles of stakeholder theory, unethical practices would be significantly minimised.

Consequently, through integrating ethical leadership theory, the African philosophy of ubuntu, and stakeholder theory into the practices of school principals, it is possible to foster a more ethical and responsible leadership environment. These approaches, grounded in justice, care, professional conduct, moral behaviour, and stakeholder interests, offer a comprehensive framework for reducing unethical practices in school management. If principals embrace these theories, there is a strong possibility that unethical behaviours, such as financial misconduct, abuse of power, and exploitation of students, can be substantially minimised or entirely eradicated, leading to a more ethical and effective educational system.

6.4 Emerging findings of the study

This part of the study reveals some of new and emerging trends discovered in the study which has not been reviewed in literature are discussed.

Maladministration of examinations: The current study discovered that in the high schools within the Lubombo region maladministration of examinations by school leaders was a key emerging but critical factor. It was voiced by a good number of the participants in the study that some school principals were active culprits in this highly unethical practice. They are thought to be pressured to engage on such a misconduct. This they did by either opening the examination papers and assisting the whole class or they assist favourite's candidates; now there is a new phenomenon where they access subject codes and technologically get hold of papers of choice and proceed with their shenanigans. According to Cizek (2001) cheating is "any action that violates the rules for administering a test, any behaviour that gives an examinee

an unfair advantage over other examinees, or any action on the part of an examinee or test administrator that decreases the accuracy of the intended inferences arising from the examinee's test score or performance." Administrators being widely involved in the cheating process is a shocking phenomenon. A close analysis of literature on examination malpractice indicate that the majority of malpractice falls on the laps of learners due to usage of technology (Stogner et al., 2012) as well as invigilators, but rarely do principals in high school examinations get fully involved in such illegal practices. Furthermore, it is usually an issue well researched at tertiary education level and not so well researched at school level in Africa (Stephens et al., 2010). This marks an emerging finding that may require further investigation beyond the current study as it destroys the integrity of the entire local education sector. Another key theme identified that emerged from the participants during the period of data collection was sexual misconduct. On this issue, some of the principals were reported as having undue sexual relations with learners, teachers and sometimes with members of the communities they are serving. This then makes schools to be ungovernable in that it creates rifts within the learners, if learners are involved in such love affairs, and rifts within the staff if teachers are involved.

The views from the participants show that the habit of sexual misconduct is ongoing and is a well-known issue within the school system and school leaders, particularly male principals do commit this kind of misconduct. According to Magwa (2014), sexual misconduct is catastrophic and is actually a sign of dismal failure to protect learners, this translates to grave violation of the teachers' protective responsibility to learners. Furthermore, the most common offenses related to sexual delinquency are that of teachers on learners (Kinyaduka & Kiwara, 2013). The cases of head teachers to learners as was revealed in the study are available as shown in Likando (2014). However, when they occur, these reflect a total failure of the ethical system within a school set up.

Some of the major themes came in the section for reducing and or eradication of unethical practices in schools. In this regard, the strategies to eradicate these malpractices as suggested by the participants are refresher courses, regular audits, close supervision by inspectors, addressing the recruitment of school principals, hiring of bursars, rewarding good behaviour and punishment of culprits.

Regular audits: these have been identified as a key strategy to reduce or minimise unethical conduct among school principals. School chairpersons also support the idea of conducting regular audits for schools. Participants in the study believe that initiating audits early in the academic year is essential for minimizing unethical behaviours among school principals. Similarly, Kaguri et al. (2014) suggest that improving policies to track school financial resources is necessary to address financial management issues in secondary schools. This would ensure the proper, adequate, and accountable use of scarce resources allocated for education. The process involves the regular auditing, monitoring and evaluation of financial records for the school, with school heads serving as internal financial managers. This approach aims to guarantee transparency and accountability in the use of school funds and to prepare financial reports that can inform necessary remedial actions (OECD, 2017).

Regular inspections: some participants also suggested that regular inspections by the Ministry of Education and Training could serve as another method to minimise or eliminate unethical behaviours among school principals. They argued that routine visits and oversight by inspectors would help curb unethical actions. Kaguri et al. (2014) support this idea, emphasizing the importance of regular and comprehensive inspections of school ethical procedures and financial practices to address unethical behaviours.

Recruitment of school principals: regarding the recruitment processes of school principals, the study highlighted the need to ensure that candidates are adequately prepared for the role. Participants pointed out that current school principals should be involved in the recruitment process to ensure that potential candidates are well-suited for the position. Nyakanyanga (2019) stresses that insufficient skills in school finance, accounting, budgeting, and auditing hinder the performance of school principals, making it difficult for them to manage effectively, which can ultimately lead to failure. Therefore, training and development are crucial to ensure that principals are well-equipped with the knowledge and skills required for their roles.

Hiring of bursars: in terms of financial management, some participants suggested hiring bursars as a way to address the financial challenges schools face, particularly regarding money management. They argued that principals, who are primarily educators rather than accountants,

would benefit from the expertise of professional bursars. Although hiring bursars may incur additional costs, some participants viewed this as a necessary investment to improve financial management in schools. Edmund and Lyamtan (2018) support this view, noting that the lack of professional accountants or skilled bursars makes it difficult for schools to maintain accurate accounting records, compile financial reports, identify operational errors, and collect school fees from parents.

Another approach to reducing unethical behaviour discussed by participants was rewarding good behaviour. They suggested that recognizing and rewarding school principals who demonstrate ethical conduct could serve as an incentive to encourage ethical practices. By providing tangible rewards or incentives for good performance, participants believed that school principals would be motivated to maintain high standards of ethics. Phylisthers et al. (2018) argue that, for school heads to develop adequate financial management skills, they must be provided with training and support to become knowledgeable and effective in managing school finances. Headteachers who consistently demonstrate ethical behaviour should be recognised and rewarded to reinforce positive practices.

6.5 Chapter summary

The chapter highlighted the key data that addressed the research questions and discussed whether the research questions were met sufficiently based on comparisons with previous literature. Reflexive thematic analysis of findings was carried out to establish the interconnected relationships among the themes. The findings were also analysed through the lenses of the theoretical framework chosen for the study. The discussion of findings also followed the themes that were generated during data presentation. The next chapter is on the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on analysing and discussing the findings presented in Chapter Five. It highlighted key data that addresses the research questions and assessed whether these questions were adequately answered by comparing the results with existing literature. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to explore the interconnections between themes, and the findings were interpreted through the lens of the theoretical frameworks used in the study, namely ethical leadership theory, the African philosophy of ubuntu, and stakeholder theory.

This chapter presents the summary, reflections, conclusions, recommendations, contributions to knowledge, implications for further research, and lessons learned from the study. The research explores ethical leadership practices of school principals in rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. The study's objectives include: a) Investigating the significance of ethical leadership in school management; b) Identifying and fully describing unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals; c) Examining the underlying causes of these unethical practices; d) Investigating the challenges and pressures faced by school principals in implementing ethical leadership within the context of regulations and punitive measures; and e) Identifying strategies to reduce or eliminate unethical practices in schools.

7.2 Summary

This research report comprises seven chapters, each serving a distinct purpose in contributing to the overall study on ethical leadership practices of school principals in rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study, outlining the background, problem statement, purpose, objectives, rationale, significance of the research, and an overview of key terms used throughout the report. This chapter sets the stage for the research, establishing the context and providing clarity on the terminology that will be used in the study.

Chapter Two presents a review of the international, African, and regional literature on ethical leadership in schools. The literature review is organised around the research objectives, starting with the significance of reviewing literature in research. The chapter progresses by discussing the importance of ethical leadership in school management, followed by an exploration of the malpractices and unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals. It also addresses the root causes of these unethical practices, the challenges and pressures school principals face when enacting ethical leadership in relation to regulations and punitive measures, and finally, the ways to reduce or eradicate unethical behaviours in schools. This review serves as the foundation for understanding the theoretical and practical implications of ethical leadership in the context of school management.

Chapter Three focuses on the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. These include the ethical leadership theory (ELT) proposed by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), the African philosophy of ubuntu (APU) as discussed by Khoza (2011), and the stakeholder theory (ST) advanced by Freeman (1984). The chapter outlines the relevance of these theories to the research, explaining how each provides a unique perspective on leadership and ethics, and their application to the context of school leadership. It discusses the key tenets of these theories and how they guide the investigation into the ethical practices of school principals in rural schools in Eswatini.

Chapter Four outlines the research design and methodology used in the study. It begins by explaining why the interpretive paradigm was selected as the appropriate lens for the research. This paradigm emphasises understanding the meaning and experiences of individuals within their social contexts. The chapter provides a detailed justification for using a qualitative methodology, which is suitable for exploring the complex and subjective nature of ethical leadership. The case study approach is described as the research design, with a focus on the specific context of rural schools in Eswatini. The research population and sample are also discussed, with a focus on the selection of participants, which includes principals, deputy principals, and school committee chairpersons. Additionally, the chapter details the data generation methods used, such as in-depth interviews, and explains the approach to data analysis, specifically thematic analysis. The chapter also addresses the issues of

trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the limitations of the study, providing transparency regarding the research process.

Chapter Five presents the findings of the study, which were collected from 15 participants, including five principals, five deputy principals, and five school committee chairpersons. The data was gathered through in-depth interviews, and the analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The chapter presents the key themes identified from the interviews, which include the importance of ethical leadership in school management, unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals, the root causes of these unethical practices, the challenges and pressures faced by principals when implementing ethical leadership in line with regulations and punitive measures, and the ways to mitigate or eradicate unethical practices in schools. Each theme is thoroughly described and discussed in relation to the research objectives, providing insights into the ethical challenges and practices of school principals.

Chapter Six builds upon the findings presented in Chapter Five and analyses the data in relation to the research questions. This chapter assesses whether the research questions were adequately addressed by comparing the findings with the existing literature. Reflexive thematic analysis is employed to explore the relationships between the identified themes and provide a deeper understanding of the data. The chapter also integrates the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter Three to analyse the findings, applying ELT, African philosophy of ubuntu, and ST to interpret the results. This analysis helps to contextualise the findings within broader theoretical perspectives, enhancing the overall understanding of ethical leadership practices in rural schools.

Chapter Seven, the final chapter, serves as the culmination of the study. It begins with an introduction that restates the purpose and objectives of the research, providing a brief overview of the motivation behind investigating ethical leadership practices in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. This chapter also includes reflective insights, acknowledging the limitations and challenges encountered throughout the study. The reflection ensures transparency in the research process, allowing for a clearer understanding of the research journey. A summary of the methodology is provided, giving an overview of the research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques, ensuring that the study is reproducible, and its credibility is maintained.

The chapter goes on to reflect on the key components of the study, justifying their inclusion in the report and ensuring a coherent conclusion. The reflective insights help to contextualise the study's findings, drawing connections between the research objectives, methodology, and outcomes. The chapter also discusses the conclusions drawn from the study, offering recommendations for improving ethical leadership practices in schools. These recommendations are based on the findings and aim to contribute to the improvement of leadership practices in rural schools in Eswatini. Additionally, the chapter highlights the contributions of the study to knowledge in the field of ethical leadership and its potential impact on the professional development of school principals.

Furthermore, the chapter discusses the implications of the study for future research, suggesting areas where further exploration is needed to better understand ethical leadership in school settings. It emphasises the importance of continued research into ethical practices, particularly in rural and resource-constrained educational contexts. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing the lessons learned throughout the study, providing valuable insights for researchers and practitioners alike. These lessons contribute to a better understanding of the ethical challenges faced by school principals and offer guidance for addressing those challenges in the future.

7.3 Reflective insights

In this section, the research reflects on several key components of the study building a platform to justify the conclusion and recommendations given.

7.3.1 Summary of the purpose of the study

The researcher in this study aimed to determine the ethical leadership practices of school principals in five rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. The study highlighted several unethical practices observed in school management, such as the automatic progression of learners from grade 10 to grade 11 without meeting the required criteria set by the Ministry of Education. These principals often collude with teachers engaged in illicit activities, evading prosecution and dismissal. These unethical behaviours among principals undermine the core purpose of schools in teaching, learning, and instilling values in students. The erosion of ethical behaviour affects school administration, leadership, and management. The study highlighted

the disciplinary measures taken against principals found guilty of fraud, maladministration, theft, and sexual harassment.

Despite the potential consequences, principals continue engaging in unethical practices, raising the question of why they persist. The researcher suggests the need for additional or new initiatives to address this problem and explores potential strategies for their implementation within schools. The study recognised the challenges principals face in balancing ethical leadership with meeting the demands of various stakeholders. This potentially contributes to the disregard of certain policies. The research aims to shed light on ethical leadership practices, dilemmas, and the overall state of principals in five rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini.

The specific objectives pursued by the study are recited as follows: a) To investigate the importance of ethical leadership in school's management; b) To identify and fully describe possible malpractices/unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals; c)To investigate the root causes of these unethical practices/malpractices by principals of schools; d) To find out challenges and pressures encountered by school principals when enacting ethical leadership surrounding the regulations and punitive measures and e) To unearth ways to reduce or eradicate these malpractices.

7.3.2 Summary of methodology

The methodological section of the study outlines the approach used to investigate ethical leadership in schools, detailing the research paradigm, design, population, sample, and sampling techniques. In this case, the research adopted an interpretivist paradigm, which was ideal for gaining a deep understanding of participants' perspectives on ethical leadership practices in schools within Eswatini. The objective of the study was to explore stakeholders' views on ethical leadership behaviours in the context of rural high schools. A qualitative research methodology was selected, and a multiple case study design was employed. This design enabled the collection of data from five rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini, allowing for comparisons, contrasts, and the identification of patterns within the data. The goal was not to generalise the findings but rather to develop a comprehensive understanding of each case while also considering broader contextual factors. The study

population included all rural high school principals, deputy principals, and chairpersons of school committees in the Lubombo region, totalling 117 individuals. Purposive sampling was used to select five schools and participants, with a focus on experienced principals who possessed relevant knowledge about ethical leadership. The final sample consisted of 15 purposively chosen participants, comprising five principals, five deputy principals, and five school committee chairpersons.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, and the data was analysed using thematic content analysis, following a six-step process. The research specifically focused on rural high schools in the Lubombo region and did not include other school types such as primary, urban, or private schools. The data was generated over a four-year period from July 2022 to December 2023. It is important to highlight that the emphasis of this qualitative study was on the quality and depth of responses rather than the number of participants.

7.3.3 Reflective insights on limitations of the study

Despite the rigorous methodology employed in this multiple case study, there were several limitations encountered during the research process. First is the methodological limitation of the study to be generalised to the rest of Eswatini and internationally due to the small sample size and the specific context of the Lubombo region. Secondly, reflecting on the overall quality and scope of this study, it is important to acknowledge the methodological limitation discussed earlier (see *Limitations of the Study*), where data were drawn exclusively from semi-structured interviews without the support of classroom observations. As noted in that section, the absence of observational data means that the findings are based on participants' reported perceptions rather than verified leadership practices, which may introduce bias or selective recall. However, the study addressed this limitation by using probing questions, encouraging detailed reflections, and triangulating interview insights with existing literature to strengthen confirmability. Additionally, the inclusion of a diverse range of participants, including deputy principals and school committee chairpersons, helped provide broader and more balanced perspectives, further enhancing the credibility of the conclusions despite this constraint.

Thirdly, during this study, financial challenges posed a significant limitation, further complicated by the distance between Eswatini and the University of Witwatersrand. To address

this, the researcher arranged accommodation near the university, reducing the need to travel from home for research weekends and supervisory meetings. Online platforms were also used as a cost-effective alternative to minimise travel and accommodation expenses. Time was another constraint, as the researcher, being a school principal, had significant administrative duties, which left limited time for the study. To overcome this, the researcher minimized leisure time and worked overtime to fulfil the study objectives. Additionally, due to time and resource constraints, the study was limited to the Lubombo region. These factors highlight the challenges faced in conducting research, but the researcher made efforts to mitigate their impact on the study.

Also, the four-year duration of the study (January 2020–December 2023) was not an intended extension but a necessary response to circumstances beyond the researcher's control. Periods of mandatory social distancing due to COVID-19 limited face-to-face interactions and reduced access to schools, making it difficult to engage participants in a timely and consistent manner. In addition, episodes of political unrest in Eswatini created instability and disrupted normal school operations, further constraining safe and practical access to research sites. These combined factors required the research timeline to be adjusted to ensure that data collection proceeded ethically, responsibly, and with due regard for participant safety.

Lastly, another limitation of the study is that the different cases were treated independently and not subjected to cross-case comparison. Although this approach supported triangulation by allowing each case to serve as an independent source of evidence, it also limited the study's ability to identify broader patterns or relationships across contexts. As a result, the findings remain context-specific and may not reveal potential commonalities that cross-case analysis might have uncovered.

7.3.4 Summary of findings

In this section, the summary of the findings from the five objectives of the study is presented in a consecutive format. The objectives are recited as follows a) To investigate the importance of ethical leadership in school's management; b) To identify and fully describe possible malpractices/unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals; c) To investigate the root causes of these unethical practices/malpractices by principals of schools; d) To find out

challenges and pressures encountered by school principals when enacting ethical leadership surrounding the regulations and punitive measures and e) To unearth ways to reduce or eradicate these malpractices.

7.3.4.1 Importance of ethical leadership in schools' management

The research investigated participants' understanding of ethical leadership in school management and their awareness of its significance. Most participants displayed a thorough understanding of ethical leadership, recognizing it as adhering to principles like fairness, justice, empathy, honesty, respect, and following guidelines in their leadership roles.

In schools, ethical behaviour was seen as the obligation of all members of the school community to uphold these values, beliefs, and rules. Participants emphasised the vital role of ethical leadership in ensuring that educational resources are accessible to everyone, irrespective of their background or personal circumstances. Ethical leadership was further described as a tool for fostering an environment in which principals effectively communicate values, norms, and behaviours rooted in respect, openness, and fairness. Throughout the interview process, participants also emphasised the various benefits of ethical leadership. They noted that it encourages accountability, fosters teamwork toward common objectives, helps resolve conflicts, ensures discipline, and contributes to the upkeep and development of school infrastructure. Overall, the research findings highlighted that participants demonstrated a deep awareness of the importance of ethical leadership in school management. They acknowledged its positive impact on creating an inclusive and conducive learning environment, enhancing trust, accountability, and discipline, as well as building credibility and respect for both the school leader and the institution itself.

7.3.4.2 Unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals

The second objective of the research aimed to identify and describe the unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals. The findings revealed several malpractices in various thematic areas, including embezzlement of funds, maladministration of exams, and engaging in sexual relationships with learners, subordinates, and members of the community. Embezzlement of funds emerged as the most prevalent unethical behaviour among school principals, according to all participants in the study. This behaviour was described as the misuse, misappropriation,

and theft of school funds. Theft from the school coffers, where principals steal school funds for personal use, was reported as a rampant issue. Likewise, the misappropriation of school funds was highlighted as a prevalent unethical act within schools in the Lubombo region.

The research revealed a significant prevalence of unethical behaviour related to the embezzlement and misappropriation of funds among school principals. These findings highlight the urgent need for measures and policies to address and prevent such practices within the school system.

7.3.4.3 The root causes of these unethical practices/malpractices by principals of schools

The objectively low salaries were mentioned by the majority of the participants as one of the causes of unethical behaviours among school principals. As described in the findings, low earning force principals of schools to live a life that they believe does not match their positions. To make up for the gap principals would be drawn to embezzling school funds. Furthermore, principals of schools find themselves in great pressure to excel when results for their schools are announced, especially the external examinations. The background to it is that if the school performs badly the principal is heavily blamed. The finding indicate that some principals then find themselves having to employ unscrupulous means to succeed.

The findings revealed that principals lacked strict supervision, and this was a cause of unethical behaviour. It was revealed that the inspections and the audits which are carried out in schools are not regular and if they are carried out, they are not about how can we help, instead they are about finding faults and even victimisation.

7.3.4.4 Challenges and pressures encountered by school principals when enacting ethical leadership surrounding the regulations and punitive measures

The study revealed that school principals face significant challenges and pressures when trying to demonstrate ethical leadership within the scope of regulations. One of the main issues identified is the lack of competence in accounting, which hinders principals from effectively managing finances. This lack of competence is attributed to insufficient training, with principals reportedly receiving only five days of training before assuming their roles, making them ill-prepared to handle complex financial matters. Additionally, the study suggests that some principals may misuse funds under the pretext of incompetence.

In addition to the issue of competence, the study highlighted the obstacles posed by outdated and unworkable policies, which create frustration and drive principals to bypass or break these policies in order to accomplish necessary tasks within their schools. This, in turn, can lead to repercussions from the Ministry of Education and other governing bodies. The implications of these findings are significant, indicating a need for improvements in the training and support provided to school principals, particularly in the areas of financial management and policy implementation. Addressing these challenges could lead to more effective and ethical leadership within schools, ultimately benefiting the entire education system**.**

7.3.4.5 Ways to reduce or eradicate these malpractices

Based on the input provided, several key themes and strategies have emerged as potential ways to reduce and possibly eradicate unethical behaviour among school principals. These include refresher courses, regular audits, close supervision by inspectors, recruitment of school principals, hiring of bursars, rewarding good behaviour, and stern punishment for culprits. Participants emphasised the importance of continuous learning and professional development for school principals.

Refresher courses, workshops, and in-service training were recommended to keep principals updated on ethical conduct and financial management. The implementation of regular audits, both internal and external, was highlighted as a crucial measure to minimise unethical behaviour. The involvement of auditors and regular inspection of school finances can help deter misappropriation of funds.

Participants also suggested that regular inspections and close supervision by the Ministry of Education and Training could serve as a deterrent to unethical conduct among principals. These inspections should focus on support and guidance, rather than fault-finding. There was a call for a more robust recruitment process for school principals, ensuring that candidates are adequately prepared for the role. Interview processes were recommended to assess candidates' readiness to handle the day-to-day running of the school.

Furthermore, some participants suggested relieving principals of financial responsibilities by hiring bursars for schools. This measure aims to address financial challenges and lessen the

temptation for principals to mishandle funds. It was proposed that ethical behaviour should be incentivised through rewards. By acknowledging and rewarding ethical conduct, principals may be motivated to maintain high standards of behaviour.

Suggestions were made to enforce strict consequences for unethical behaviour, including public humiliation and legal repercussions. Participants also highlighted the importance of parental involvement in addressing teachers' conduct. While these strategies offer valuable insights, it is important to recognise that eradicating unethical behaviours entirely may be challenging due to changing societal norms and mindsets. However, by implementing a combination of the proposed measures, such as continuous education, oversight, and strict consequences, it is possible to significantly minimise unethical conduct among school principals.

7.4 Conclusion based on findings

In conclusion, this research highlights the importance of ethical leadership in schools management. Participants demonstrated an understanding of ethical leadership, recognising its role in promoting fairness, justice, empathy, honesty, respect, and adherence to guidelines. Ethical leadership was seen as crucial in creating an inclusive educational environment, establishing trust, promoting accountability, maintaining discipline, and ensuring progress within schools.

However, the research also revealed the prevalence of serious unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals. Embezzlement of funds was identified as the most prevalent unethical behaviour, with principals misusing, misappropriating, and stealing school funds. This highlights the need for measures and policies to address and prevent such practices within the school system. Overall, this research emphasises the significance of ethical leadership in schools and the need for leaders to uphold ethical principles and values. By doing so, they can create a positive and inclusive educational environment and ensure the proper utilisation of resources for the benefit of all stakeholders.

7.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings in the exploration of ethical leadership practices of school principals in rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini, the following recommendations can be made:

7.5.1 Recommendations for action to the Ministry of Education and Training

1. The Ministry of Education and Training should implement regular audits of schools to minimise unethical behaviours among school principals. The ministry should also develop policies that track school financial resources to ensure proper and accountable utilisation of the scarce available resources budgeted for education.
2. Education inspectors should conduct regular and comprehensive inspections of school ethical procedure and financial process to frustrate unethical practices. This will help to minimise unethical behaviours by school principals.
3. Training and development programmes should be provided by MOET to principals of schools to equip them with the necessary skills in school finances, accounting, budgeting, and auditing.
4. MOET may inculcate ethical expectations and values into the school culture by incorporating them into policies, procedures, and daily practices. This can include recognizing and rewarding ethical leadership behaviours and addressing unethical behaviours promptly and appropriately.
5. MOET should develop and implement policies that promote ethical leadership practices among school principals. These policies should be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure their effectiveness in promoting ethical leadership practices.
6. MOET may establish a system for reporting unethical behaviours by school principals. This system should be accessible to all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and students, to ensure that unethical behaviours are reported and addressed promptly.
7. Education inspectors may conduct regular and comprehensive inspections. Education inspectors should visit schools on a regular basis and establish a system of thorough inspections to monitor ethical procedures, financial processes, and the overall conduct

of school principals. This can act as a deterrent to unethical behaviour and promote compliance with established guidelines.

7.5.2 Recommendation for action to the Teaching Service Commission

1. The TSC may provide training and professional development opportunities for school principals on ethical leadership, financial management, and accountability. These programmes can enhance their understanding of ethical principles, equip them with the necessary skills to manage school funds responsibly, and promote ethical decision making.
2. The TSC may develop and enforce clear codes of conduct for school principals, outlining expectations for ethical behaviours, including the handling of finances, relationships with subordinates and students, and adherence to professional standards. This can provide a framework for ethical decision-making and guide principals in their daily actions.
3. The TSC may review and strengthen the recruitment and selection processes for school principals. It should prioritise candidates with a demonstrated commitment to ethical leadership and financial integrity and consider involving current principals in the recruitment process to identify suitable candidates.
4. The TSC may collaborate with external organisations with relevant external organisations such as anti-corruption agencies to develop partnerships and initiatives focused on promoting ethical leadership practices and preventing unethical behaviours.
5. The TSC may thoroughly use behavioural assessment tests such the OCEAN test, among others, in the recruitment exercise, to ensure that candidates for principal positions possess the necessary skills, behaviour, personalities and readiness for the role. This can help to prevent teachers who have the potential to become unethical leaders from being hired in the first place.
6. The TSC may prioritise training and development programmes for head teachers to enhance their understanding of their roles and responsibilities, particularly in financial management. Given that no specific training exists for novice head teachers, this may

be crucial to help them acquire the necessary skills to handle financial matters effectively and promote accountability.

7.5.3 Recommendation for action to the Auditor General's Office

1. School bursars may be employed by the Accountant General's office. A modified reporting structure where the school bursar's principal supervising authority is the AG's office will have an effect of deterring rampant financial mismanagement in schools.
2. The Auditor General's office may implement stricter financial oversight mechanisms, such as regular audits and inspections, to detect and prevent embezzlement or misappropriation of funds. This can help create a culture of transparency, accountability, and responsible financial management within schools.
3. The Auditor General's office may issue specific regulations and best practices in school finance management. This may include guidelines for the full involvement of school-based committees to oversee the financial management of schools. These committees should include representatives from the school community, such as parents, teachers, and students, to ensure transparency and accountability in the financial management of schools.
4. The AG may utilise software that seeks to collect all financial transactions from all schools. This, coupled with a policy which compels all transaction to be captured, may reduce the incidence of blatant embezzlement of school funds by principals.

7.5.4 Recommendation for action to the Examination Council of Eswatini

The Examination Council of Eswatini may engage officers to administer all examinations, as opposed to entrusting school principals with the full administration of examination. This may lessen the temptation of school principals to open examination papers before the exam period and may increase the integrity of examinations.

7.5.5 Recommendation for action to schools

1. School principals should prioritise the development of ethical leadership practices and create a culture of transparency, accountability, and professionalism. They should lead by example and promote ethical decision-making within their schools.
2. School inspectors may ensure the school committee function is active. As part of this activity, financial decision making in schools should be a shared responsibility involving all key members of the school committee.
3. Non-profit entities campaigning against sexual and domestic violence should be allowed regular visits in schools to sensitise teachers and learners to what constitutes illegal sexual behaviours by members of staff in authority like principals and teachers.

7.6 Contribution to knowledge

This study makes an original and significant contribution to the field of educational leadership by providing the first dedicated empirical investigation into the ethical leadership practices of high school principals in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. It directly addresses a critical gap in the literature, as ethical leadership within the specific socio-cultural and administrative context of Eswatini has been severely under-researched. The research offers four distinct contributions: novel empirical evidence, deep contextual understanding, a robust theoretical innovation, and actionable implications for policy and practice.

First, it generates crucial empirical evidence by documenting how principals in a rural setting comprehend and enact ethical leadership, thereby providing a foundational data set for a region with a pronounced research deficit. Second, it delivers a contextual understanding of the specific manifestations of unethical behaviour such as fund embezzlement, sexual misconduct, and examination maladministration within the unique pressures of Eswatini's rural schools, thereby moving beyond generic descriptions to situated analysis.

The study's most assertive theoretical contribution, however, is the development and application of the integrated ELT-APU-ST analytical model, which synthesises Ethical Leadership Theory (ELT), the African philosophy of Ubuntu (APU), and Stakeholder Theory (ST). This model is original and constitutes a substantial advancement over applying any single theory in isolation. A mono-theoretical approach would have provided a limited and potentially

reductive analysis. For instance, ELT alone might have focused narrowly on leader behaviors without accounting for the communal obligations central to the African context. Ubuntu alone, while vital for contextualising communal ethics, lacks the structural framework to analyse fiduciary responsibilities to specific stakeholder groups. ST alone offers a strategic view of managing stakeholder interests but can overlook the profound moral-ethical dimensions of leadership conduct.

The ELT-APU-ST model's originality and power lie in its integrative capacity. It provides a multi-dimensional lens that reveals how ethical leadership is fractured not merely by individual moral failure but by the complex interplay between a leader's personal ethics (ELT), their violation of communal bonds and human dignity (Ubuntu), and their breach of fiduciary duty to students, parents, and the state (ST). This tripartite framework offers a far more comprehensive, robust, and critically incisive explanation of ethical breakdowns than any single theory could achieve.

Finally, the study moves beyond diagnosis to offer concrete, evidence-based recommendations for policy reform and professional development. Through aligning its findings with established literature on corruption in educational management, it strengthens the global validity of such research while providing locally relevant strategies to promote ethical leadership and combat financial and sexual misconduct. This work thus establishes a new benchmark for research in this field and provides a replicable model for analysing ethical leadership in similar contexts globally.

7.6.1 Contribution to policy and practice

The findings from this research contribute to policy and practice in several ways: The findings from the study on ethical leadership practices of school principals in the Lubombo region of Eswatini have several potential contributions to policy and practice in addressing unethical behaviours and promoting ethical leadership. These contributions include:

Contribution to policy and practice: The findings of this research contribute significantly to policy and practice in several key areas. The study on the ethical leadership practices of school

principals in the Lubombo region of Eswatini offers valuable insights into addressing unethical behaviours and promoting ethical leadership. These contributions are outlined as follows:

Development of ethical leadership policies: This research emphasises the need for policies that clearly define and promote ethical leadership in schools. Educational authorities can develop comprehensive guidelines and standards that set clear expectations for the behaviours and values of school principals. Policies should focus on principles such as fairness, justice, empathy, honesty, love, respect, and adherence to ethical standards. By establishing clear norms and guidelines, these policies can help prevent unethical practices, foster a culture of ethical leadership, and ensure that principals lead with integrity and responsibility.

Strengthening financial management policies: The study identified embezzlement and misappropriation of funds as significant unethical practices among school principals. This underscores the need for policies that reinforce financial management practices in schools. Education authorities can create policies to enhance transparency, accountability, and proper record-keeping of financial transactions. These policies may include measures such as implementing regular audits, offering financial management training for school principals, and ensuring that schools employ qualified bursars or accountants. These steps would help improve financial oversight, reduce instances of financial misconduct, and promote ethical financial management in schools.

Regular inspections and monitoring: The research highlights the role of regular inspections by the Ministry of Education and Training in minimizing unethical behaviour by providing external oversight. Policies should be established to ensure that inspections are conducted at regular intervals and cover various aspects of school management, including ethical procedures and financial practices. By enforcing routine inspections, educational authorities can deter unethical conduct, identify areas for improvement, and take timely action to address any emerging issues. This approach promotes accountability and ensures that schools operate in compliance with ethical standards.

Inclusion of ethical leadership training: The findings stress the importance of ongoing training and development for school principals in ethical leadership practices. Policies can be implemented to require or encourage school principals to participate in training programmes

that focus on ethical leadership, financial management, and accountability. Such training will equip principals with the skills and knowledge necessary to lead with integrity, make ethical decisions, and promote ethical practices within their schools. This initiative ensures that principals are well-prepared to handle the complexities of school leadership in an ethical manner.

Strengthening recruitment processes: The study emphasises the importance of ensuring that school principals have the necessary skills and qualifications to perform their duties effectively. Policies should be developed to strengthen the recruitment process, ensuring that only qualified individuals are selected for principal positions. This can include involving current principals in the selection process and setting clear guidelines and criteria to assess candidates' competencies in ethical leadership, financial management, and accountability. By improving recruitment processes, education authorities can ensure that only capable and ethical individuals assume leadership roles in schools.

Involvement of school principals: The research also highlights the value of involving current school principals in the recruitment process. By doing so, the selection process will better reflect the practical needs and challenges of school leadership. Policies should be crafted to incorporate input from serving principals in the hiring process to ensure that candidates meet the specific needs of schools. This approach guarantees that prospective principals possess the right skills and experience, particularly in financial management and ethical leadership.

7.6.2 Methodological contribution

While the study on ethical leadership practices of school principals in the Lubombo region of Eswatini adopted a qualitative research methodology, it is important to consider the methodological contributions that this study has made in its chosen approach. While it is valid to discuss potential contributions that could be made through alternative quantitative methods, I will focus on the contributions of the qualitative methodology used in this study.

In-depth understanding:

The study's adoption of an interpretive qualitative research paradigm allowed for an in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions of ethical leadership in school principals. This

methodology enabled the exploration of the complexities and nuances of ethical leadership behaviours and delve into the underlying meanings, values, and perspectives of the stakeholders involved. It provided rich and detailed insights that may not have been captured through quantitative approaches.

Contextual Relevance:

By conducting a multiple case study design in the specific context of rural high schools in the Lubombo region, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of ethical leadership practices within this particular setting. Qualitative research methodologies excel in capturing contextual factors and providing a holistic view of the phenomenon under investigation. By focusing on a specific geographic region and using qualitative methods, the study was able to capture the unique challenges and dynamics of ethical leadership in rural schools, contributing to a more contextually grounded understanding.

Participant perspectives:

Qualitative research methodologies, such as semi-structured interviews, allowed participants to share their personal experiences, perspectives, and perceptions in their own words. By centring on participant voices, the study fostered a deeper understanding of the participants' accounts and individual experiences with ethical leadership practices. This methodological approach prioritised the subjective viewpoints and insights of the stakeholders involved, ensuring their perspectives were represented and considered.

In-depth data analysis:

Thematic content analysis, applied to the qualitative data collected in this study, facilitated a thorough and systematic examination of the interview data. This analysis technique helped to identify recurring themes, patterns, and connections within the data, contributing to a meaningful interpretation of the findings. The qualitative methodology provided the flexibility to explore and analyse the data in-depth, uncovering nuances, and generating comprehensive insights.

In conclusion to the section, the study's adoption of qualitative research methodologies made valuable contributions by providing an in-depth understanding of ethical leadership practices, capturing contextual relevance, prioritizing participant perspectives, and facilitating a rigorous analysis of the data. While quantitative methods have their own merits, the qualitative approach chosen for this study allowed for rich insights, which would have been challenging to capture using quantitative methods alone.

7.6.3 Theoretical contribution

One significant theoretical contribution of the study is its exploration of how school principals in Eswatini define and understand ethical leadership. The study's findings align with established definitions of ethical leadership, highlighting principles such as fairness, justice, empathy, honesty, respect, and adherence to guidelines. This enriches the existing literature on ethical leadership by providing insights into how these principles are interpreted and practised by school principals in Eswatini.

Another important contribution is the identification and detailed description of unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals in Eswatini. The study revealed that embezzlement of funds, exam maladministration, and inappropriate relationships with learners, subordinates, and community members are prevalent unethical behaviours among principals. These findings deepen the understanding of the unethical practices that can emerge in school environments and underscore the need for policies and measures to address and prevent such actions.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the literature by focusing on ethical leadership practices within the context of rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. It provides valuable insights into the specific ethical challenges and practices faced by school leaders in this region, offering a foundation for future research on ethical leadership in other parts of Eswatini or internationally. Thus, the theoretical contributions of this study enhance the understanding of ethical leadership in school principals and serve as a basis for further research and interventions aimed at promoting ethical behaviour in educational leadership within Eswatini.

7.7 Implications for research

The areas discussed in this section were viewed as having an impact on further research that might be necessary at different levels to ensure that the problem of lack of ethical behaviour in schools is strategically resolved at policy and practices level.

7.7.1 Implications for policy

On the strength of the findings from the research, some implications for policy and policymakers in Eswatini can be drawn:

Strengthening financial oversight and accountability:

Policies should be developed and implemented to enhance financial oversight mechanisms in schools. This includes regular audits, inspections, and the establishment of clear guidelines for financial management. National bodies like the Parliament and education policy makers should work together to ensure that these policies are formulated and enforced effectively.

Implementing ethics training and professional development programmes:

Policies should be put in place to mandate ethics training and professional development programmes for school principals. This can help equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to promote ethical leadership practices. Associations for school principals should collaborate to develop and implement these programmes.

Enforcing codes of conduct for school principals:

Policies should establish clear codes of conduct outlining expected ethical behaviours for school principals. These codes should cover areas such as financial management, relationships with subordinates and students, and adherence to professional standards. Education Policy makers and Principals Associations should work together to ensure the enforcement and regular review of these codes of conduct.

Strengthening collaboration with external organisations:

Policies should encourage collaboration between educational bodies and external organisations, such as anti-corruption agencies and non-profit entities, to address unethical behaviours in schools. The parliament and education policy makers can facilitate partnerships and initiatives that promote ethical leadership practices and prevent misconduct.

Creating channels for reporting unethical behaviours:

Policies should establish accessible and confidential reporting mechanisms for unethical behaviours in schools. This can encourage stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and students, to report concerns and ensure that appropriate action is taken. School inspectorate and regional education offices may work together to establish and maintain these reporting channels.

In summary to this section, it is crucial for national bodies like the Parliament, MOET policy makers, regional education office, principals' associations, and local communities to collaborate in implementing and enforcing policies that promote ethical leadership practices in schools. By addressing these implications, policymakers can contribute to creating a culture of transparency, accountability, and ethical behaviour within the education system of Eswatini.

7.7.2 Implications for MOET

In the light of the findings of the study the following are streamlined as implications for the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Eswatini:

Strengthening financial oversight and accountability measures:

The prevalence of unethical behaviour such as embezzlement of funds highlights the need for MOET to enhance financial oversight mechanisms within the school system. This can include implementing regular audits, strengthening internal control systems, and providing training to school principals on financial management and accountability.

Developing and enforcing ethical leadership policies:

MOET should establish clear policies and guidelines that define ethical leadership expectations for school principals. These policies should cover areas such as financial management, professional conduct, and relationships with subordinates and students. Regular training and workshops should be provided to ensure that principals understand and adhere to these ethical leadership standards.

Strengthening pre-service and in-service training for school principals:

MOET should review and enhance pre-service and in-service training programmes for school principals to include modules on ethical leadership practices. This can help build their capacity to understand and implement ethical leadership principles in their day-to-day management and decision-making.

Implementing a whistleblower protection programme:

MOET should establish a formalised programme that encourages and protects whistleblowers who report unethical behaviours within the school system. This can include creating anonymous reporting channels, investigating reported incidents promptly, and providing protection to those who come forward with credible information.

Introducing ethical leadership as a component of school accreditation:

MOET can incorporate ethical leadership practices as a component of the school accreditation process. Schools that demonstrate a commitment to ethical leadership should be recognised and rewarded, while those with a history of unethical practices should be subjected to additional monitoring and support to ensure improvement.

Enhancing oversight and accountability mechanisms:

The involvement of higher authorities, such as Educational Inspectors or the Auditor General's office, in monitoring and evaluating ethical leadership practices in schools is crucial. MOET should consider involving these stakeholders in the research process to gain additional insights into the challenges and opportunities for ethical leadership in schools. By strengthening

oversight and accountability mechanisms, MOET can contribute to improving the credibility and effectiveness of ethical leadership practices in schools.

Promoting a culture of ethical leadership:

MOET should prioritise the promotion of a culture of ethical leadership within the education system. This can be achieved through the development and dissemination of codes of conduct and ethical guidelines for school principals, teachers, and other education stakeholders. By creating a shared understanding of ethical behaviour and expectations, MOET can foster a culture that values and rewards ethical leadership practices.

7.7.3 Implications for public finance management

The research findings highlight the critical need for improved public finance management in schools in the following ways:

Strengthening the role of the Auditor General:

The findings underscore the importance of the Auditor General's involvement in monitoring and auditing school funds actively and constantly. The Auditor General plays a crucial role in examining financial records, identifying irregularities, and preserving accountability. It is imperative to enhance the authority and resources of the Auditor General's office to effectively carry out these duties and ensure compliance with public financial regulations.

Empowering and collaboration with anti-corruption agencies:

The research findings indicate that unethical behaviours such as embezzlement and misappropriation of funds are prevalent among school principals in various ways. To combat these, anti-corruption agencies such as the Eswatini Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) should be actively involved in investigating and prosecuting cases of corruption and unethical behaviour in schools. This involvement will send a strong message that such actions will not be tolerated and promote a culture of transparency and integrity in schools of Eswatini.

Implementing a watertight accounting process:

The research highlights the need for a robust accounting process for school funds. This includes clear guidelines and procedures for financial transactions, regular audits, and strict adherence to financial regulations. Implementing a watertight accounting process will help prevent opportunities for embezzlement and misappropriation of funds, ensuring that school resources are used for their intended purpose, benefiting the learners and the whole educational system.

Training and capacity building:

It is essential to provide training and capacity building programmes for school principals and other stakeholders involved in financial management. These programmes can enhance their understanding of ethical financial practices, ensure compliance with financial regulations, and develop skills in financial planning, budgeting, and accountability. By equipping school leaders with the necessary knowledge and skills, the likelihood of unethical behaviours can be reduced.

Stakeholder involvement:

The findings suggest that the research could have been enhanced by including the views of Educational Inspectors and other higher authorities who play a role in overseeing school management. Involving these stakeholders in future research and decision-making processes can provide additional insights into ethical leadership practices and contribute to the implementation of stronger financial management strategies.

Collaboration with community members:

Building partnerships and collaboration with community members can enhance financial transparency and accountability in schools. Engaging parents, community leaders, school committee members and other stakeholders in financial oversight and decision-making processes can create a sense of shared responsibility and promote ethical practices in the management of school funds.

Creating awareness and fostering a culture of ethics:

It is crucial to create awareness among school principals, teachers, and staff about the importance of ethical leadership and financial integrity. This can be done through training sessions, workshops, and regular communication emphasizing the consequences of unethical behaviour and the benefits of maintaining high ethical standards.

Whistleblower promotion and protection:

Implementing mechanisms to promote and protect whistleblowers who report unethical practices is essential. Whistleblowers play a crucial role in exposing corruption and unethical behaviours. Ensuring their protection can encourage individuals to come forward and report any wrongdoing without fear of possible danger or retaliation. This is critical for sensitive cases like sexual misconduct, examination malpractice as well as financial mismanagement.

Regular monitoring and evaluation: Establishing a system for regular monitoring and evaluation of financial management practices in schools can help stakeholders identify areas of concern and take corrective actions promptly. This can include regular audits, internal reviews, and surveys to gauge the effectiveness of financial management processes and identify any potential risks or weaknesses.

Strengthening policy frameworks: It is crucial to review and strengthen existing policies and regulations related to financial management in schools. This may involve revising guidelines, enacting new laws, or developing comprehensive policy frameworks that address the specific challenges identified in the research. Policy frameworks should provide clear directives on financial management, ethical behaviour, and accountability, with consequences for noncompliance.

Through implementing these implications, Eswatini can improve public finance management in schools, mitigate unethical behaviours, and promote a culture of transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership in the education sector.

7.7.4 Implications for further study

Based on the findings of the study on ethical leadership practices of school principals in the Lubombo region of Eswatini, there are several implications for further study and potential areas of research. Here are some suggestions for further study:

1. **Mixed-Methods Prevalence Study:** A crucial immediate follow-up to this qualitative investigation would be a large-scale, sequential mixed-methods study to quantify the prevalence and geographic distribution of the identified unethical practices, particularly financial misappropriation, sexual misconduct, and examination maladministration across all regions of Eswatini. The first phase would involve developing and administering a statistically rigorous survey to a representative sample of principals, teachers, and school committee members to measure the perceived frequency and types of malpractices. The second, qualitative phase would then conduct in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of respondents from the survey to explore the underlying causes, contextual pressures, and systemic facilitators of the most commonly reported issues, providing a powerful evidence base for national policy intervention.

2. **Development and Testing of an Ubuntu-Based Ethical Leadership Training Module:** Given the study's finding that principals often lack adequate preparation and the demonstrated relevance of Ubuntu philosophy to the local context, a future study should focus on the design, implementation, and evaluation of a bespoke professional development module. This intervention study would involve collaboratively developing a training curriculum grounded in the principles of Ubuntu (e.g., reciprocity, communal responsibility, human dignity) and integrated with practical financial governance and ethical decision-making scenarios. Its effectiveness would be tested through a quasi-experimental design, comparing the ethical reasoning, leadership practices, and financial management competencies of a group of principals who receive the training against a matched control group who do not, thereby providing empirical evidence on culturally responsive training efficacy.

3. **Impact of Ethical Leadership on School Performance:** Future research should investigate the causal relationship between demonstrably ethical leadership practices and tangible school performance indicators. A longitudinal study could track schools led by principals identified as ethical leaders versus those who are not, measuring outcomes such as academic achievement trends, student dropout rates, teacher retention and job satisfaction, and overall school climate health. This would provide compelling

data to convince policymakers and stakeholders that ethical leadership is not merely a moral imperative but a strategic one directly linked to improved educational outcomes.

4. **Effectiveness of Ethics Training Programmes:** Beyond developing new modules, research is needed to systematically evaluate existing and new ethics training programmes for school principals. This study would assess the long-term impact of such training on principals' understanding of ethical dilemmas, their confidence in addressing misconduct, and, most importantly, the sustainability of behavioural change in their daily practice. Pre- and post-intervention assessments, coupled with follow-up observations, would determine which programme components are most effective.

5. **Ethical Leadership in Different Educational Contexts:** A comparative analysis should be conducted to explore how ethical leadership is understood and enacted across diverse settings within Eswatini, such as urban versus rural schools, public versus private institutions, and secondary versus primary schools. This research would identify the unique contextual factors, resource disparities, and community dynamics that either enable or hinder ethical leadership, allowing for more nuanced and targeted support strategies.

6. **Strategies for Addressing Unethical Behaviour:** Research must move beyond identifying problems to rigorously testing solutions. A study should investigate the comparative effectiveness of various strategies for preventing and addressing unethical behaviours. This could involve analysing the utility of different accountability mechanisms (e.g., whistle blower policies), the implementation challenges of ethical codes of conduct, and the role of mentorship and support systems in protecting and promoting ethical principles.

7. **The Role of School-Based Committees in Financial Management:** Given the critical role of governance, a focused study should investigate the effectiveness of School Development Committees (SDCs) and other school-based bodies in providing genuine oversight. This research would examine models of committee involvement in financial decision-making and auditing, identifying best practices for enhancing transparency,

building committee capacity, and preventing unethical financial practices through robust local governance.

8. **Assessing the Effectiveness of External Oversight Mechanisms:** The study's findings on outdated policies and inadequate audits necessitate a review of external oversight. Research should assess the effectiveness of bodies like the Auditor General's office and the Ministry of Education's inspection unit in detecting and deterring misconduct. This would involve evaluating the frequency, thoroughness, and follow-up procedures of audits and inspections, and their perceived impact on principals' behaviour, leading to recommendations for strengthening external accountability.

9. **Investigating the Impact of Code of Conduct Enforcement:** Finally, a policy analysis study should examine the impact of formally enforcing a clear, updated, and well-disseminated code of conduct for school principals. This research would analyse the consequences of strict versus lax enforcement, exploring how a robust disciplinary framework contributes to establishing clear ethical expectations, promoting a culture of accountability, and ultimately reducing instances of unethical practices in schools.

These research topics can provide valuable insights into ethical leadership in schools, explore the factors that influence ethical behaviours, and offer guidance on how to address unethical actions among school principals. By focusing on these areas, further research can contribute to the development of effective policies and practices that promote ethical leadership and enhance educational outcomes.

7.8 Lessons learnt

This study explored the ethical leadership practices of school principals in the Lubombo region of Eswatini, focusing on how school leaders conceptualise, practice, and experience ethical leadership, and its implications on their leadership roles in five rural high schools. Using a qualitative multiple case study design, the findings suggest that ethical leadership is primarily associated with self-actualisation, moral relationships, moral perception, and impartial decision-making (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Ethical leadership is grounded in the personal

characteristics and qualities of the leader, such as honesty and fairness, which are considered normatively appropriate by their followers.

Resick et al. (2006) describe ethical leaders as being people-oriented, emphasizing the importance of leaders engaging in open and frequent communication with all employees about ethics and ethical standards. Ethical behaviour should be integrated into everyday processes and procedures within the organisation, as employees look to leaders to model and promote ethical conduct (Brown, Trevino & Harrison, 2005; Brown, 2007). In light of these findings and key themes, the study also reveals several lessons to be learned from the ethical leadership practices of school principals.

Ethics can be defined as a set of principles and values used to determine what is right or wrong. These principles are essential for any leader who seeks to lead with integrity. What is considered right or wrong is typically guided by the set of beliefs held by a specific group or community. In schools, ethics are particularly important because they promote interconnectedness, accountability, responsibility, and humanity, which is often embodied in the African concept of ubuntu.

Another key lesson from this study is the significance of ethical leadership in schools, particularly in benefiting the learners and other stakeholders. An ethical leader is not only someone who adheres to moral principles, but also someone who actively works to improve the well-being of all members of the school community. Ethical school leadership involves creating an environment conducive to learning for students and teaching for educators, fostering the idea of ubuntu by encouraging mutual support and care among all individuals in the school. Ethical leadership also requires resolving problems fairly, understanding the importance of confidentiality, and showing empathy towards others. The study reveals that an ethical leader is akin to a parent to both teachers and learners, guiding and caring for their welfare.

The research also found that a religious upbringing can positively influence ethical leadership. Participants noted that leaders grounded in faith systems are often able to maintain moral uprightness, even when faced with challenges such as the lack of basic financial management skills among other stakeholders, which may make them vulnerable to exploitation. A leader

with a strong religious foundation is likely to demonstrate ethical values such as love, humility, joy, peace, and self-control. Ethical leaders, therefore, lead in a way that reassures their followers that they are cared for and heard. Additionally, ethical leadership aims to foster a safe environment for nurturing future leaders and instilling the essential values of being a compassionate human being, guided by ubuntu.

Both ethics and spirituality or religious upbringing are deeply rooted in ubuntu, a philosophy that values community, humanity, and the well-being of every individual. A leader who embraces Ubuntu is seen as an ethical leader, one who acts in the best interests of the community. The findings also highlight that school principals and educators are regarded as pillars of hope for rural communities. The future of rural populations depends on the ethical influence of school principals who are sensitive to the needs of their communities. Since an ethical leader serves as an example to others, it is crucial for school principals to be ethical in order to improve the lives of rural community members.

A significant lesson learned from this study is the importance of the "walk the talk" principle. School principals are role models not only to teachers and students but also to the broader community. Their character is critical, especially in rural communities, where overcoming challenges such as poverty and illiteracy require strong and ethical leadership. When school principals demonstrate ethical behaviour, they inspire the community and guide them towards positive change.

The study also revealed that school principals in rural communities are often trusted figures. A principal who is transparent, communicates openly with all stakeholders, treats them with respect and equality, and is trusted by the community, fosters ethical behaviour among their followers. Trust is a fundamental element in ethical leadership, as it binds leaders to their followers and is a precondition for creating a professional and ethical environment. Trust is also vital in ensuring the professionalism of teachers, as it serves as the foundation for organisational and leadership success. Thus, trust is an essential component that helps ensure ethical standards are upheld across the school community.

The research further pointed out the importance of in-service training as a key tool for combating unethical behaviour among school principals. However, the study found that the

Ministry of Education is not doing enough to support in-service training for school principals on ethics. Many participants expressed concern about the lack of ongoing training on ethical leadership practices, which they believed would enable school principals to lead with integrity and avoid engaging in unethical conduct. To ensure that rural school principals are effective in their roles and refrain from unethical leadership practices, it is crucial for the Ministry of Education to enforce in-service training programmes that focus on ethics.

However, as Mahmoudia and Özkan (2015) assert, in-service training alone cannot bridge the gap between where educators and school principals are and where they should be with respect to ethics and ethical leadership. In-service training must be complemented by effective ethics compliance monitoring. The study found that the lack of monitoring was one of the major challenges contributing to unethical practices in schools. The absence of regular oversight makes it difficult to hold school principals accountable for their actions, leading to an environment where unethical practices can thrive. It is suggested that striking a balance between in-service training and robust monitoring can positively influence the ethical behaviour of school principals and foster a culture of integrity within schools.

Another lesson from the study is the difficulty faced by school principals in adhering to outdated policies. While school principals may wish to comply with existing policies, these policies often do not reflect the rapid changes and developments that have occurred in the education sector. Technological advancements, such as the electronic transfer of funds, have made many traditional policies irrelevant. As a result, it becomes challenging to follow policies that were designed to address issues that no longer exist. The study suggests that new policies must be developed to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in the contemporary educational landscape.

The study also highlighted the selfishness and self-centeredness exhibited by some school principals, who prioritise their personal needs over the welfare of their schools. These principals often abuse their power for personal gain, which undermines their ability to discipline educators or address issues of misconduct. Selfish behaviour, such as engaging in inappropriate relationships with learners, staff members, or community members, embezzling funds, and mismanaging examinations, harms the school and tarnishes its reputation. The study

emphasises that such unethical practices must be avoided by school principals, as they do not benefit the school or its stakeholders.

Finally, the study underscores the importance of strengthening monitoring processes by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to address and prevent unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals. Regular monitoring by school inspectors and auditors is critical in ensuring that school principals comply with ethical standards and follow proper procedures. The findings indicate that closer scrutiny and effective monitoring mechanisms can play a significant role in curbing unethical behaviour and promoting ethical leadership in schools.

7.9 Chapter summary

In this final chapter, the researcher made a reflective journey, drawing upon the key components of the study on exploring the ethical leadership practices of school principals in five rural high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. This final chapter brought together the key components of the study, providing a reflective overview and justifying their presence in this conclusion. It has covered reflective insights, a summary of the study aims and methodology, analysis of the findings, conclusions, recommendations, contributions, and implications. The study has achieved its goals. The researcher hopes that this study will contribute to positive change and establish a solid foundation for future investigations, ultimately promoting ethical leadership practices which are envisaged to benefit school principals, educators, the Ministry of Education, learners and various stakeholders in the rural high schools of the Lubombo region of Eswatini.

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APPENDIX 1: SCHOOL COMMITTEES CHAIRPERSONS' PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

University of Witwatersrand

Private bag

Johannesburg

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Jimson Mahlalela– Student no: 2295412 and I am a PhD student at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project and I am Exploring Ethical Leadership Practices of School Principals in five Rural High Schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. As part of this project, I would like you to take part in an interview. This activity will take about 20 minutes. With your permission I would also love to record the interview using a digital device. You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research and there are no disadvantages for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to.

The information sought will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identification information and the information you give to me will be held securely and not be disclosed to anyone else. I will be using pseudonyms to represent your participation in my final research report. If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. And also, it will be sent to the Ministry of Education and Training, as it has granted permission for the study to be carried out. If you wish to get a summary of this report I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non- Medical),

telephone +270117171408 or my supervisor; Dr Pinkie Mthembu Contact: + 27845817544, Email pinkie.mthembu@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

J.N.Mahlalela

Contact: +268 76420521, Email: jimsonmahlalela@yohoo.com or 2295412@wits.ac.ca

APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Principals' Participants Information Sheet

University of Witwatersrand

Private bag, Johannesburg

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Jimson Mahlalela– Student no: 2295412 and I am a PhD student at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project and I am Exploring Ethical Leadership Practices of School Principals in five Rural High Schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. As part of this project, I would like you to take part in an interview and also allow me to do document analysing. This activity will take around 25 minutes for interview while the document analysis will last for 15 minutes. With your permission I would also love to record the interview using a digital device. The official documents to be analysed are the Admission Book and Admission file.

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research and there are no disadvantages for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The information sought will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identification information and the information you give to me will be held securely and not be disclosed to anyone else. I will be using pseudonyms to represent your participation in my final research report.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to get a summary of this report I will be happy to send it to you. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non- Medical), telephone +270117171408 or my supervisor; Dr Pinkie Mthembu Contact: + 27845817544, Email pinkie.mthembu@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely, J.N.Mahlalela

Contact: +268 76420521, Email: jimsonmahlalela@yahoo.com or2295412@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX 3: DEPUTY PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Deputy Principals' Participants Information Sheet

University of Witwatersrand

Private bag

Johannesburg

Dear Sir/ Madam,

My name is Jimson Mahlalela– Student no: 2295412 and I am a PhD student at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project and I am Exploring Ethical Leadership Practices of School Principals in five Rural High Schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini.

As part of this project, I would like you to take part in an interview, answering a questionnaire, and to allow me to do document analysing. This activity will take around 20 minutes. With your permission I would also love to record the interview using a digital device. The questionnaire will be hand delivered to you and official documents will be analysed, which are the Admission Book and Admission file. You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research and there are no disadvantages for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The information sought will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identification information and the information you give to me will be held securely and not be disclosed to anyone else. I will be using pseudonyms to represent your participation in my final research report. If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to get a summary of this report I will be happy to send it to you. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non- Medical), telephone +270117171408 or my supervisor; Dr Pinkie Mthembu Contact: + 27845817544, Email pinkie.mthembu@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely, J.N.Mahlalela

Contact: +268 76420521, Email: jimsonmahlalela@yahoo.com or 2295412@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX 4: SCHOOL COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

School Committee Chairpersons' Consent Form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to be a participant in my voluntary research project titled: Exploring Ethical Leadership Practices of School Principals in five Rural High Schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini.

I, _____ give my consent for the following:

Permission to be interviewed

I would like to be interviewed for this study. YES/NO

I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don't have to

answer all the questions asked. YES/NO

Permission to be audiotaped

I agree to be audiotaped during the interview. YES/NO

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that

- My name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotape.

- All the data collected during this study will be destroyed 6 years after completion of my project.
- Direct quotations may be used in reporting results.

Sign_____ Date_____

APPENDIX 5: PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Principals' Consent Form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to be a participant in my voluntary research project titled: Exploring Ethical Leadership Practices of School Principals in five Rural High Schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini.

I, _____ give my consent for the following:

Permission to review documents Circle ONE

I agree that the Admission File and Admission book can be used for this study only. YES/NO

Permission to be interviewed

I would like to be interviewed for this study. YES/NO

I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don't have to

answer all the questions asked. YES/NO

Permission to be audiotaped

I agree to be audiotaped during the interview or observation lesson YES/NO

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only YES/NO **Informed Consent** I understand that:

- My name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time. ▪ I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotape
- All the data collected during this study will be destroyed 6 years after completion of my project.
- Direct quotations may be used in reporting results.

Sign_____ Date_____

APPENDIX 6: DEPUTY PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Deputy Principals' Consent Form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to be a participant in my voluntary research project called: Exploring Ethical Leadership Practices of School Principals in five Rural High Schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini.

I, _____ give my consent for the following:

Permission to be interviewed

I would like to be interviewed for this study. YES/NO

I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don't have to

answer all the questions asked. YES/NO

Permission to be audiotaped

I agree to be audiotaped during the interview or observation lesson YES/NO

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only YES/NO

Informed
Consent I
understan
d that:

- My name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.

- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time. ▪ I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotape.
- All the data collected during this study will be destroyed 6 years after completion of my project.
- Direct quotations may be used in reporting results.

Sign_____ Date_____

APPENDIX 7: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Instruments

Interview Guide for School Committee Chairpersons

1. What is your understanding of the concept of ethical leadership?
2. What does an ethical leader do?
3. Explain some of the major challenges with regard to responsibilities of principal in ethical leadership in schools.
4. Without giving names of the people, would you please share some experiences you have either seen, heard or observed that you regard as unethical in the schools. Please elaborate.
5. What are the forms of malpractices/unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals and how do they manifest?
6. What are the root causes of these unethical behaviour/malpractices?
7. Why do principals of schools continue to be involved in unethical behaviour against the stringent regulation and punitive measures?
8. What should be done to reduce or eradicate these unethical conducts?
9. What are the possible solutions you would propose to ensure the challenges are minimized?

APPENDIX 8: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Instruments

Interview Guide for School Principal

1. Describe your understanding of the concept of ethical leadership?
2. Detail your experiences regarding ethical leadership in schools.
3. What do you think are the characteristics of the principals regarding ethical leadership?
4. Explain some of the major challenges with regard to responsibilities of principal in ethical leadership in schools.
5. Without giving names of the people, would you please share some experiences you have either seen, heard or observed that you regard as unethical in the schools. Please elaborate.
6. What are the forms of malpractices/unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals and how do they manifest?
7. What are the root causes of these unethical behaviour/malpractices?
8. Why do principals of schools continue to be involved in unethical behaviour against the stringent regulation and punitive measures?
9. What should be done to reduce or eradicate these unethical conducts?
10. What are the possible solutions you would propose to ensure the challenges are minimized?
11. Which coping strategies do you propose to manage ethical leadership in the schools?
12. In your opinion, is practicing ethical leadership in rural school a challenge as opposed to urban and semi urban school? Please elaborate.

APPENDIX 9: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR DEPUTY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Instruments

Interview Guide for Deputy School Principal

1. What do you think are the characteristics of the principals regarding ethical leadership?

2. Explain some of the major challenges with regard to responsibilities of principal in ethical leadership in schools.

3. Without giving names of the people, would you please share some experiences you have either seen, heard or observed that you regard as unethical in the schools. Please elaborate.

4. What are the forms of malpractices/unethical behaviours exhibited by school principals and how do they manifest?

5. What are the root causes of these unethical behaviour/malpractices?

6. Why do principals of schools continue to be involved in unethical behaviour against the stringent regulation and punitive measures?

7. What are the possible solutions you would propose to ensure the challenges are minimized or eradicated?

8.

APPENDIX 10: LETTER TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

P O BOX 28 SITEKI

The Director

Ministry of Education and Training

PO Box 39

Mbabane

Dear Madam

SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

My name is Jimson Mahlalela, a student at the University of Witwatersrand (student no: 2295412), and studying towards a Doctor of Philosophy of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy. As an academic requirement I have to conduct a research study. My research study is titled: Exploring Ethical Leadership in five Rural High Schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. Consequently, I request for permission to conduct this study in 5 rural high schools in the Lubombo region, namely Matsetsa, Ngcina, Mpolonjeni, Nyetane, Ndzangu High Schools. My study targets the principals of the schools. Your permission for this study to take place will go a long way in highlighting key issues associated with ethical leadership as practised by head teachers in Eswatini schools.

Thank you

J Mahlalela

APPENDIX 11: LETTER FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini

Ministry of Education & Training

Tel: (+268) 2 4042491/5
Fax:(+268) 2 404 3880

P. O. Box 39
Mbabane, ESWATINI

03rd March, 2022

Attention:
Head Teacher:

Matsetsa High School	Ngcina High School
Mpolonjeni High School	Nyentane High School
Ndzangu High School	

THROUGH
Lubombo Regional Education Officer

Dear Colleague,

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO COLLECT DATA FOR UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND STUDENT - MR. JIMSON NTANDO MAHLALELA

1. The Ministry of Education and Training has received a request from Mr. Jimson Ntando Mahlalela, students at the University of Witwatersrand that in order for him to fulfill his academic requirements at the University of Witwatersrand he has to collect data (conduct research) and his study or research topic is: ***"Exploring Ethical Leadership in five Rural High Schools in the Lubombo Region of Eswatini, A Multiple Case Study"***. The population for his study comprises of principals from the above mentioned schools. All details concerning the study are stated in the participants' consent form which will have to be signed by all participants before Mr. Mahlalela begins his data collection.

2. The Ministry of Education and Training requests your office to assist Mr. Mahlalela collect data virtually from the above mentioned schools in the Lubombo region as well as facilitate for the support he needs in his data collection process. Data collection period is one month.

DR. N.L. DLAMINI
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & TRAINING
DIRECTORS OFFICE
07 MAR 2022
P.O. BOX 39
MBABANE H100
ESWATINI

cc: Regional Education Officer - Lubombo
Chief Inspector - Secondary/High
Head Teachers of the above the Schools in the Lubombo Region
Dr. Siphiwe Mthiyane - Research Supervisor

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