



CHETANA
International Journal of Education (CIJE)

Peer Reviewed/Refereed Journal
ISSN : 2455-8279 (E)/2231-3613 (P)

Impact Factor
SJIF 2024 - 8.029



Prof. A.P. Sharma
Founder Editor, CIJE
(25.12.1932 - 09.01.2019)

[Conference Special-NTMAE-24]

Fostering Excellence in Higher Education Inclusive and Ethical Leadership for Education Excellence

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First draft received: 14.05.2024, Reviewed: 19.05.2024, Final proof received: 19.06.2024, Accepted: 24.06.2024

Abstract

Inclusive and ethical leadership in education is paramount for fostering excellence and ensuring equitable outcomes for all students. It involves fostering an environment where every student, regardless of their background, abilities, or difference, feels valued, respected, and included. This paper delves into the multifaceted dimensions of inclusive and ethical leadership within educational settings, emphasizing its importance in promoting diversity, equity, and excellence in higher education. By examining the principles, practices, and challenges associated with inclusive and ethical leadership, this paper offers insights into how educational leaders can cultivate environments that prioritize the holistic development and success of every learner. Drawing upon research, theoretical frameworks, and real-world examples, this paper advocates for a transformative approach to leadership that embraces inclusivity, ethical decision-making, and a commitment to social justice in pursuit of educational excellence.

Keywords: *inclusive leadership, ethical leadership, education, excellence in higher education etc.*

Introduction

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world – **Nelson Mandela**

Education is a fundamental pillar of society and its quality profoundly affects individuals and communities. In recent years, the importance of inclusive and ethical leadership in educational institutions has been increasingly recognized. Inclusive leadership includes the principles of equality, diversity, and social justice, while ethical leadership includes the principles of integrity, fairness, and accountability. This paper delves into the connection between inclusive and ethical leadership and educational excellence.

Ethical Leadership

Being a leader means taking responsibility for the success of others. One of the keys to doing well in any profession is living ethically, inside and outside of work. The only way for a leader to demonstrate the importance of ethics to others and the organization is to teach by example.

For education leaders, the goal is to promote fair and equitable access to education resources for everyone, regardless of situation or background. Achieving this goal requires creating an ethical climate that communicates a sense of values, norms, behaviours and attitudes built on respect, openness and fairness. Understanding the importance of ethical leadership in education is the first step to serve as a model for all members of the education community.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals' code of ethical conduct for school leaders' states education leaders must be committed to helping every student succeed "by acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner." The association's 10 recommendations for education leaders include:

- Guide all decisions with students' well-being and success as the fundamental value.
- Respect the principle of due process and honour the civil and human rights of everyone.
- Live honestly and with integrity, abiding by all laws at all times.

- Implement the policies, rules and regulations of the administration, but work to correct those that are inconsistent with sound educational principles.
- Never use the influence of the position for personal gain.

The principles, beliefs and values of right and wrong characterize the basis of organizational behaviour, thereby formulating the pedestal on which leaders influence employees to achieve organizational goals (Al-sharafi & Rajiani, 2013). Bubble (2012) further defines ethical leadership as the process of influencing employees through values, principles, and beliefs that border considerably on accepted norms of organizational behaviour. These definitions outline an essential element of ethical leadership. Studies on ethical leadership have shown increasing importance for organizational practice (Hsin-Kuang, Chun-Hsiung & Dorjgotov, 2012). Neubert, Wu, and Roberts (2013) argue that the collapse of organizations such as Lehman Brothers and Enron is a telling indicator of the importance of ethical behaviour. This is because the lack of ethical behaviour in organizational practice is likely to damage employee morale, thus creating a need for regulation by the government based on ethical leadership. According to Rehman (2011), it is evident that the competitive nature of business in the global market has shaped the trajectory of the exponential expansion of ethical behaviour. As a result, the expanding range of ethical concerns in contemporary businesses is the biggest indicator of ethical leadership needs (Ung Hee, Hye Kyoung, & Young Hyung, 2013).

Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership involves creating an environment where each individual feels valued, respected and empowered to contribute to their full potential. Emphasizes the recognition and acceptance of diversity in all its forms, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and ability. Inclusive leaders foster a culture of belonging and actively promote equity and social justice in their organizations.

The role of ethical leadership in education

Ethical leadership in education revolves around the principles of honesty, integrity, transparency and accountability. Educational leaders must adhere to high ethical standards in decision-making, resource allocation, and interactions with stakeholders. By modelling ethical behaviour, leaders instil trust among staff, students, parents and the wider community.

Challenges in practicing inclusive and ethical leadership

Despite its importance, practicing inclusive and ethical leadership in education presents several challenges. These may include resistance to change, systemic barriers, implicit biases, and competing priorities. Educational leaders may encounter resistance from entrenched systems and individuals unwilling to embrace diversity or uphold ethical standards. Additionally, they may face ethical dilemmas that require careful consideration and moral courage to navigate. Overcoming these challenges requires

dedication, perseverance, and a commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

Strategies for promoting inclusive and ethical leadership:

To promote inclusive and ethical leadership in education, leaders can adopt different strategies:

- Provide ongoing training and professional development: Offer diversity, equity and ethical decision-making training and professional development opportunities to increase leadership awareness and skills.
- Establish clear policies and procedures: Create and implement policies and procedures that prioritize inclusivity, equity, and transparency in all aspects of educational leadership and management.
- Engage with stakeholders: Actively engage with a variety of stakeholders, including students, educators, parents, and community members, to understand their perspectives, needs, and concerns.
- Create mechanisms for reporting and resolving ethical issues: Create clear channels for reporting and resolving ethical issues and complaints, and ensure that all members of the education community feel empowered to speak up and seek resolution.
- Foster a culture of reflection and continuous improvement: Encourage leaders and employees to engage in regular reflection, self-evaluation and dialogue on issues of diversity, equity and ethics, thereby fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

The impact of inclusive and ethical leadership on educational excellence

When educational leaders adopt inclusive and ethical leadership practices, they create environments that foster academic excellence, student well-being, and community engagement. By valuing diversity, promoting equality and upholding ethical standards, leaders foster a culture of trust, collaboration and innovation that improves teaching and learning outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, inclusive and ethical leadership is indispensable for achieving excellence in education in the 21st century. By prioritizing diversity, equity, integrity, and accountability, educational leaders can create inclusive learning communities where all individuals thrive. Moving forward, it is imperative that educational institutions invest in developing and nurturing inclusive and ethical leaders who can lead with vision, compassion and integrity.

This paper serves as a foundational exploration of the critical intersection between inclusive and ethical leadership and its impact on educational excellence. Further research and practical applications are necessary to deepen our understanding and implementation of these principles in educational settings.

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