

Impact of Teachers' Ethical Leadership Behaviour: A Students' Perspective

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Abstract

Good leaders are known for their guidance, inspiration, motivation and for providing direction to the followers towards the right directions of life whether in social or in work life. They act as facilitators and mentors for guiding followers' behaviour and actions. The ethical component of leadership behaviour makes their job more answerable towards actions and decisions they take. The Ethical leadership behaviour focuses on constructive use of social power in making decisions, taking good actions and positively influencing followers.

This paper is an attempt to understand the concept of ethical leadership, its key elements and student's perception on ethical leadership behaviour towards their teachers in their academic organizations and also the way it influences their attitude towards actions and decisions they take. This is an empirical research study based on student's perceptions studying in institutes of western Uttar Pradesh including Mathura, Agra and Aligarh region. Weighted average agreement score was used for analysis of the data. The findings suggest students have a mixed feeling regarding exhibiting the art of ethical leadership by their teachers and hence this paper underlines the need for improving the ethical leadership skills in contemporary scenario.

Keywords: Ethics, Ethical Leadership, Perception, Teachers' Behaviour and Actions

Introduction

Leading an ethical pattern of life is the need of every person living on this earth. It is expected individuals

behave in such a way so that their personality should reflect a perfect blend of decency, beauty and morality at different stages of life (McCurdy, 1998). Individuals are obliged to comply with the moral values, living in the society by exchanging love, companionship, contentment and harmony (Thiroux, 1980; Neuman, 1994).

The concept of "ethics" relates to the principled values, rules and regulations in understanding right and wrong behaviours and attitudes in deciding what is good or bad, just or unjust. (Schultz and Irner, 2005; Nolan, 1993; Jones, 1995; Martin, 1985). Ethical values are, faithfulness, integrity, impartiality, precision, reverence, patience, responsibility and guts (Moorhouse, 2002). Many research studies carried in the area of leadership prove how much significance has been given to this subject.

The superior image of leadership in educational settings is necessary in understanding the ethical environment and quality of human interaction prevailing in such institutions. In recent years codes of ethics for professionals in many disciplines are essential.

Although educators may be bound by many codes of ethics established by government and various professional associations so as to govern themselves by the highest of standards. The first step towards creating an ethical environment for oneself, one's subordinate and above all as an ideal for students in establishing a personal code of ethics to manage oneself in the professional capacity of an educational leader.

This will allow their students to adopt ethical values and norms easily and to display the right set of professional behaviour in their life. The emphasis of this paper is to talk

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about the significance of ethical leadership for teachers and educational Institutions from the outlook of students with respect to their teachers as ethical leaders. A teacher as an ethical leader can help his students in developing and living an honorable life.

Concept of Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is demonstrated as “An expression of normatively suitable conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the encouragement of such conduct to followers through the means of two-way communication, reinforcement, and a sound decision-making” (Brown, Trevino & Harrison, 2005).

Ethical leadership based on Brown, Trevino and Harrison (2005) includes normatively accepted behaviour of leaders which is expected to be similar and reliable among subordinates. Ethical leaders use their social power adequately in making transparent decisions and influencing others.

According to Cumbo (2009) “A leader is considered ethical when inner qualities direct the leader’s decision-making process and style and followers simply take benefits of a leader, breathing an honorable life. The author believes the qualities are enlarged when the leader demonstrates “imagination, consideration, empathy, sensitivity and discernment”.

Teachers as ethical leaders must reveal a high level of honesty and integrity which helps the students to trust them as value based leaders and integrate with their vision. These are significant and essential components of leadership to lead ethically. The moral fiber and integrity of the teacher are central personal characteristics directing students’ ethical belief, morals, and decisions.

Teachers who are ethical are people-oriented and also aware of how their behaviour and decisions impact not only their colleagues but also building the moral character of their students. The most vital quality of a teacher as an ethical leader is to encourage the students to pursue their goals by respecting the goals of others, find out the difference between right and wrong and stand up for their own beliefs and values. Motivating involves making them learn how to engage others in an intellectual and emotional commitment as a leader making both (leader and follower) parties uniformly accountable in the achievement of a common goal. Teachers as ethical leaders help their students in obtaining a sense of personal capability of allowing them to be self-sufficient. Teachers through their behavior demonstrate how to take up the responsibility for their own actions with zero tolerance for ethical violations.

Elements of Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership starts by perceiving and conceptualizing the world around it. This calls for unbiased judgment and action. Ethical leadership must be exercised in identifying and utilising the human potential and providing the equitable opportunities to all followers to build mutual trust, understanding and healthy relationships. For better development of ethical leadership, following essential elements are required to be incorporated, giving respect to others, reflecting the high level of integrity, serving the needs of followers, fostering long lasting relationships bound by mutual trust and displaying the righteousness of attitude and behaviour. Figure 1 indicates the vital elements of ethical leadership behaviour.

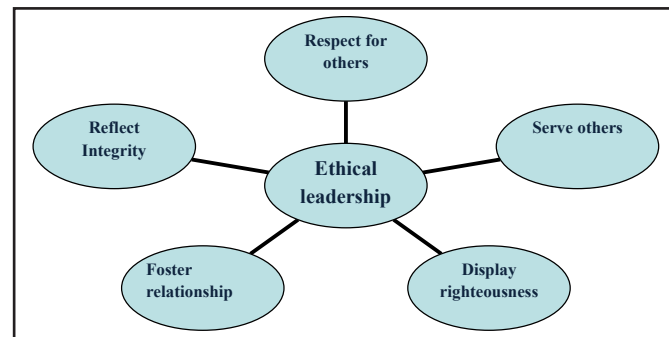


Fig. 1: Elements of Ethical Leadership

Ethical leaders give respect to all the followers, take good care and have a greater degree of concerns towards the needs of their followers. They display their honesty and high level of integrity through their actions, behaviour and decisions they take. Value based leaders understand the needs and expectations of their followers and serving those needs without fail by providing equitable workplace opportunities. They care for their relations and not making invalid and biased decisions at the cost of happiness and feelings of their followers.

Research emphasizes true and effective leaders are those who care and have concern for their people and their needs, interests and expectations before any consideration of their self-interests (Bello, 2012). The true organizational leaders should cheer employees by leading through examples; they are responsible for defining organizational norms and values to their followers and live up to hopes and persuade their followers to accept same (Bello, 2012).

Many organizational surveys claimed employees desire to be connected with bosses who are honest, believable, and courteous and fair (Bello, 2012; Collins, 2010; Kouzes and Posner, 2007). Organizations can better attract and retain employees when employees find the opportunity

to work for truly conscientious and principled employers (Bello, 2012; Bower, 2003; Collins, 2010; Upadhyay and Singh, 2010).

Ethical Leadership: Guiding Principles for Teachers

Teachers must be guided by their own personal code of ethics not only cover their professional behaviours but also personal behaviours required for working institutions in creating a positive impact on students attitude, perception and overall behaviour towards the different socially formed units including family, friends and other associations. In academic context, a strong personal code of ethics must be practised and emphasis must be given to the development and practice of core values resulting in responsible and authentic behaviour of student's fraternity. Among the various values of teachers, some of the essential values may include wisdom, vision, moral fiber, communication, work ethics, service, knowledge and obligation. According to few research studies in academic context, teachers as academic leaders need to think about how their decisions will affect other people (colleagues and students) apart from looking for their own benefits. They should also have a great moral responsibility in keeping the ethical upbringings of educational institutions.

Significance of Teacher's Ethical Leadership Behaviour

A teacher needs to be an ethical leader for serving the interest of not only the students or institution but also benefiting the society at large. In most of the social cases, it has been observed students imitate the behaviour and style of their teachers in their life and learn from the experiences they had with their teachers. In many societies, it is believed that the teacher is one of the leading factors in guiding the behavioural, emotional and moral growth of students (Bello, 2012; Collins, 2010).

For a teacher practicing the art of ethical leadership it is concomitant to have the following essentially:

Satisfying Fundamental Human Needs: Being just, truthful and moral is one of the basic human needs for mental and social satisfaction to the people. Every student desires for teachers who are fair, honest and ethical in their decisions and practices.

Building Credibility: A teacher whose behaviour is driven by moral values is respected in the schools and colleges not only by the student's community even by the management and administration of that organization.

Uniting People and Leadership: In an educational institution, values and conduct are common thread binding the students with their teachers and teachers with their management towards achievement of one common goal including character and behavioural development of students and their social up gradation.

Developing Quality Decisions: One's destiny is the sum totals of all the decisions one takes in course of his/her life. The same is applicable for teachers also. A teacher who takes honest, fair and transparent decisions towards his/her duties and responsibilities in his/her respective institution commands respect and dignity among students and enjoys good results and also holds his head among colleagues.

Long Term Gains: Institutions and teachers guided by the principle of ethics and values are beneficial in the long run, though in the short run they may face financial losses. They are the dark horse who beat others on the basis of purity of their overall decisions and quality of their actions.

Securing the Society: Leanings about the ethics and values and applying these honestly helps in building sound structure of the society. For healthy survival of society, the leaders produced by the educational institutions will play the most prominent role in present and in future. So in process of building and producing the leaders, the component of ethics from the teachers' side will play the central role.

Review of Literature

Many studies have analyzed the influence of certain variables including age, gender, religion, nationality, professional status, personality and training on sensitivity and ethical conduct. Research indicates a strong relationship between ethical conduct and job well performed, an ethical leader should emphasize on describing, understanding, learning and promoting ethical behaviour in organizational settings. Studies describe their personality; personal belief system and religion play a major role in governing their ethical conduct (Collins 2000; Ford and Richardson 1994). Researchers believes that in the organizational context, 'ethical behavior' is an encompassing category relating a collection of behaviours occurring in organizational context including leadership, followership, organizational citizenship, decision-making, and communication (Collins 2000; Trevino et. al. 2006).

For understanding the origin of ethics and impact of ethical behaviour, all above factors need to be studied broadly. This review of literature presents a brief overview

of role of gender, age, career stage and academic status in influencing ethical attitudes.

Gender

The effect of gender on ethical perceptions and attitudes has been widely debated in literature.

Carol Gilligan (1982) developed a theory about moral reasoning based on view of Kohlberg (1984). Gilligan in one of his well-known study explained men and women have a different moral orientation in life. Men opinioned moral issues are concerned with identifying and valuing rights and wrongs and for women, it is care and concern towards others. Men's perceptions revolve around respect for formal rights of others. According to the ethics of care, it relates with responsibility and relationships. In this context, the work of Betz et al. (1989) is worth mentioning which highlights the concern of men with money and promotion, whereas women are keenly interested in relationships and helping others. Borkowski and Ugras (1998) carried out meta-analysis of 47 empirical studies related to ethics and business and validate the significant relationship between gender and ethical conduct. This study confirms the fact; women have comparatively more ethical attitudes than men in social and organizational context. However, this does not guarantee women to be more ethical, but they use to react more ethically to fictitious dilemmas and in different contexts. In academic context female teachers are expected to be more ethical than their male counterparts.

It is worth noting not all studies validate such differences. For instance, Kum-Lung and Teck-Chai (2010) did not find any significant differences in male and female attitudes towards business ethics. Further studies also failed to find gender differences in ethical decisions or conduct (Valentine and Rittenburg 2007; Geiger and O'Connell 1999). The influence of gender has been studied from many perspectives. However, sufficient literature regarding the influence of gender on the decisions to include ethics in higher education was not found. Despite this, gender may be considered as a significant variable that could explain quality of ethical conduct and decision in academic context.

Age, Career Stage, Academic Status and Ethical Attitudes

The literature advocates in determining and shaping values, age and career stage are influential factors. Research found younger managers as compared to their older executives used to assign less importance to trust

and honour, and place more importance to money and advancement. (England, 1978). Machiavellian scores were found to be significantly higher under the age of 24 than those aged 24 or over, supporting the results of Meisling, Preble Ruegger and King (1992) study. It was also found students falling under the age group of 40-plus years were the most ethical, followed by the 31-40 age group, the 22-30 age group and those 21 years of age and under. Although, only 40 students were studied and tested in the 40-plus age group. However, it can be concluded age appears to have a significant impact upon how people perceive the importance and use business ethics.

Apart from the age, the academic status also impacts the use and implementation of values and ethics in making day to day decisions. In one of the study, college fresher's and juniors were found to be more justice-oriented (fairness and equality) than seniors or those who completed their MBA course and tend to be more utilitarian (maximize benefits/minimize costs) in their approach to ethical dilemmas (Borkowski and Ugras, 1992). Researchers concluded this difference lie due to idealism on the part of the former groups and series of experiences from the employment for the latter. Ethical studies also revealed as people mature, they use to lay less emphasis on selfish interests and their concern for others increases. However, it is not certain, whether it is age or the accumulating work experiences associated with age cause individuals to adjust their ethical positions as they move through different stages of life and experience diverse situations.

The objective of this study is to examine up to what extent teachers demonstrate ethical leadership behaviours. The study aims at assessing students' perception as to whom they aspire most for grabbing ethicality in their day to day life, to explore major factors leading to ethical leadership. This makes an assessment of existing level of ethical leadership existing among teachers according to students' view point.

Research Methodology

The study was carried out as a descriptive survey and the self administered questionnaire consisting of 24 items was given to students from technical and management institutes for understanding their perception towards teachers' ethical leadership behaviour in their respective educational institutions. The study was carried out in 2016-2017 academic year. The data were gathered through research instrument developed for the purpose. The ethical leadership scale is graded as 1 for strongly disagree, 2 as disagree, 3 as neutral, 4 as agree and 5 as strongly agree. The reliability and validity of the

questionnaire have been checked through Cronbach alpha and average variance extracted (AVE) respectively. The Cronbach alpha of these 24 items with sample size 131 was 0.716 and the value of AVE is 0.556. Both the values establish the reliability and validity of the scale.

The population of this study is composed of the students studying in technical and management courses in institutes of western Uttar Pradesh region because of respondent’s accessibility, i.e., Mathura, Agra and Aligarh region. The total sample size for this study is 250 chosen conveniently from the population and 131 of the questionnaires were

handed back. The age group of respondents lies between 18 to 20 and above including both males and females. It was sometimes convenient and most of times difficult to take honest feedback from respondents on the various parameters of ethical leadership behaviour, as it was observed in certain instances ,students became biased while evaluating their teachers on the ethical leadership scale.

During the survey the efforts were made to understand the perception of students regarding the leadership attributes including honesty, building trust, transparency in decisions, integrity, personal discipline, and interpersonal skills etc.

Table 1: Respondent Profile

Gender	N	%	Stream	N	%	Age Profile	N	%
Male	71	54.19	Technical	54	41.22	Less than 18	22	16.80
Female	60	45.81	Management	77	58.77	18 – 21	64	48.85
						21 and Above	45	34.35

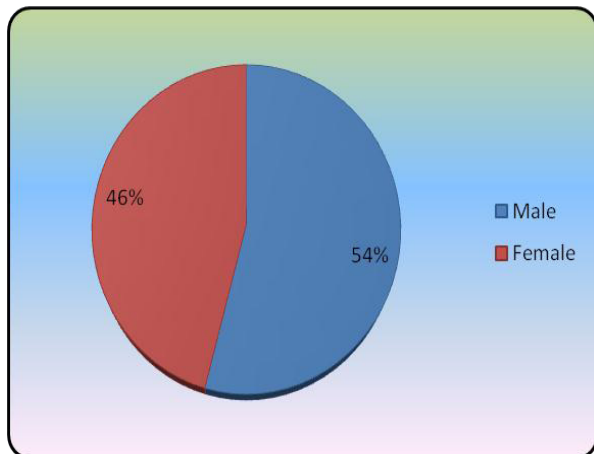


Fig 2: Gender Profile of Respondents

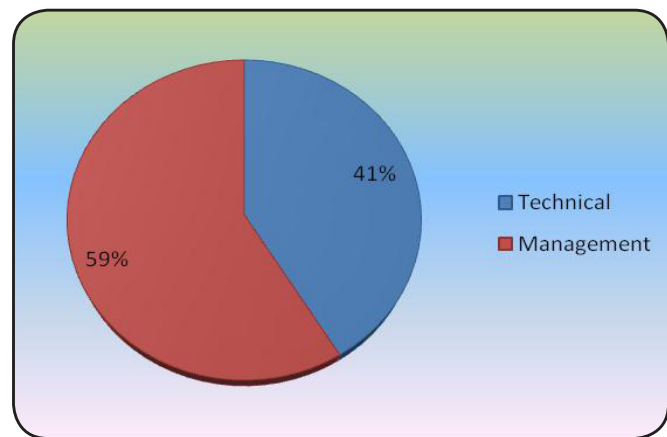


Fig 4: Educational Background of Respondents

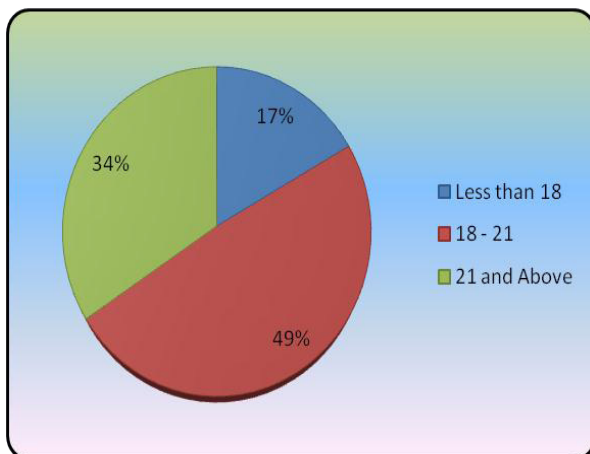


Fig 3: Age Profile of Respondents

Analysis

Firstly, this study presents student’s perception regarding which they aspire for learning ethical behaviour in their life. As can be seen in Table 2, for most of the students after parents (WASS 4.08), teachers (WASS 3.72) play a major role in cultivating ethical behaviour in them in present scenario and they hardly give any significance to public figures (WASS 1.69). It means for developing a moral fiber in their personality and attitude, teachers truly play a vital role. Teachers are identified as role model for shaping and influencing their students’ behaviour in academic institutions.

Table 2: Students' Perception as to Whom they Aspire Most for Grabbing Ethicality in their Day to Day Life

		Highly Agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed	Highly Disagreed	WAAS
1	Parents	51	52	21	2	5	4.08
2	Near Family Members	15	28	39	22	27	2.86
3	Teachers	49	36	15	22	9	3.72
4	Society	12	22	31	24	42	2.53
5	Public Figures	3	6	23	14	85	1.69

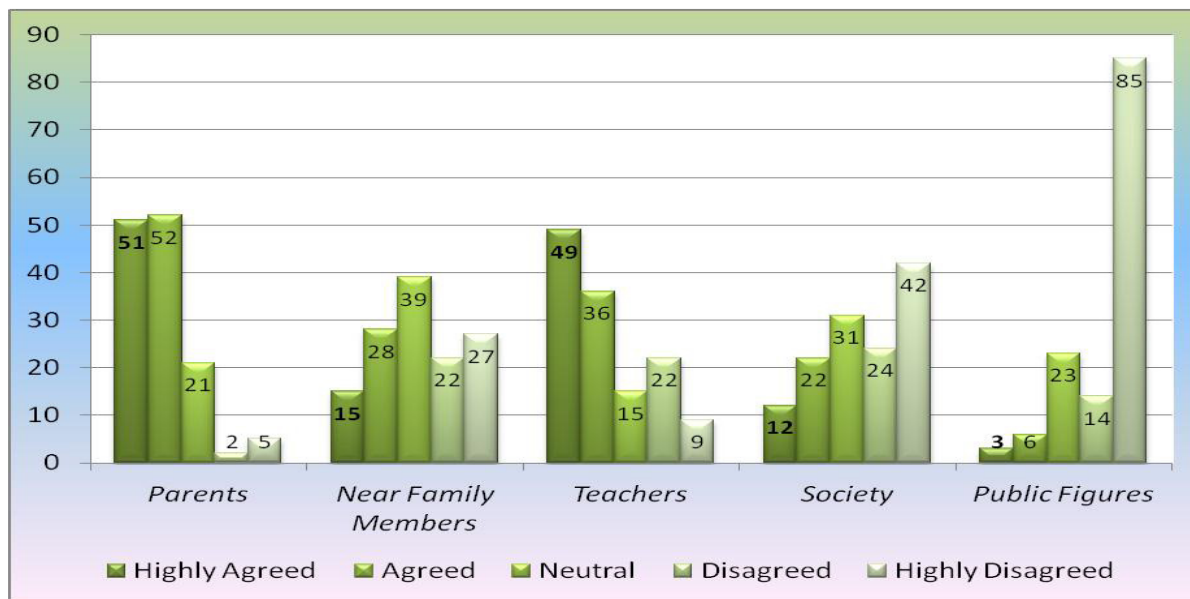


Fig. 5: Students' Perception as to Whom they Aspire Most for Grabbing Ethicality in Their Day to Day Life

Study also analyzed the perception of students regarding influence of major factors that constitute ethical leadership behaviour. As is visible in Table 3, students agreed on all the parameters of ethical leadership behaviour but they relate more with “reflect integrity” (WASS 3.86) and

“Display righteousness” (WASS 3.83). It means for them high level of integrity and displaying appropriate degree of righteousness is significant as compared to other elements for being value based leaders in life.

Table 3: Students' Perception as to Attribute Being Major Factor in Ethical Leadership

		Highly Agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed	Highly Disagreed	WAAS
1	Respect for others	29	29	36	18	19	3.24
2	Serve Others	32	45	31	19	4	3.63
3	Reflect Integrity	41	54	19	11	6	3.86
4	Foster Relationship	34	29	34	19	15	3.37
5	Display Righteousness	45	44	23	13	6	3.83

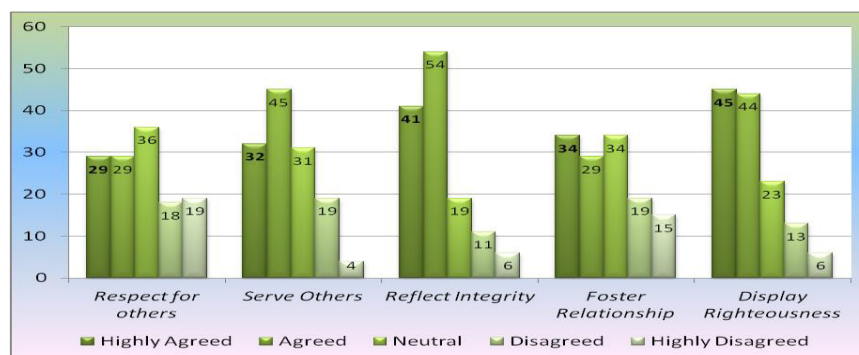


Fig. 6: Students' Perception as to Attribute Being Major Factor in Ethical Leadership

Third segment of study measures the students' perception towards their teachers that whether teachers are able to affectively exhibit ethical leadership behaviour on diverse attributes. The perception has been measured through likert scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 corresponds to "Highly ineffective" and 5 to "Highly effective". As can be seen in Table 4, students are of the opinion their teachers are able to exhibit ethical leadership behaviour and gave top five ranks to punctuality, set themselves as example,

respecting the values of society, devotion to work and teachers as path makers with weighted average agreement score 'WASS' 3.89, 3.82, 3.76, 3.31, 3.11 respectively. Moreover, students feel that their teachers are relatively ineffective in building collaboration with them, accepting different ideas, brining credibility and respect both for the students and to the organization; with least WASS of 2.15, 2.24, and 2.30 respectively.

Table 4: Students' Perception as to Assessment of Teachers on Various Attributes of Ethical Leadership

S. No.	Attributes	Highly Effective	Effective	Neutral	Ineffective	Highly Ineffective	WASS	RANK
1	Punctuality	52	42	14	16	7	3.89	1
2	Fairness / Impartiality	4	23	33	26	45	2.35	10
3	Devotion to Work	32	33	26	24	16	3.31	4
4	Focus on building Ethical Orientation among Students	16	29	24	22	40	2.69	7
5	Social Concern	9	26	23	23	50	2.40	9
6	Truthiness	11	32	19	14	55	2.47	8
7	Trust Building among Students	6	23	29	22	51	2.32	11
8	Bringing credibility and respect, both for students and to the organization	3	22	33	26	47	2.30	12
9	Building collaboration among the students	15	11	21	16	68	2.15	14
10	Setting example of how to do the things	41	49	22	14	5	3.82	2
11	Not only a Destination Announcer, but a path maker	33	23	21	33	21	3.11	5
12	Striving to increase his professional efficiency	22	22	29	39	19	2.92	6
13	Respecting the values of the society	29	69	13	12	8	3.76	3
14	Accepting different ideas of his students	13	16	9	44	49	2.24	13

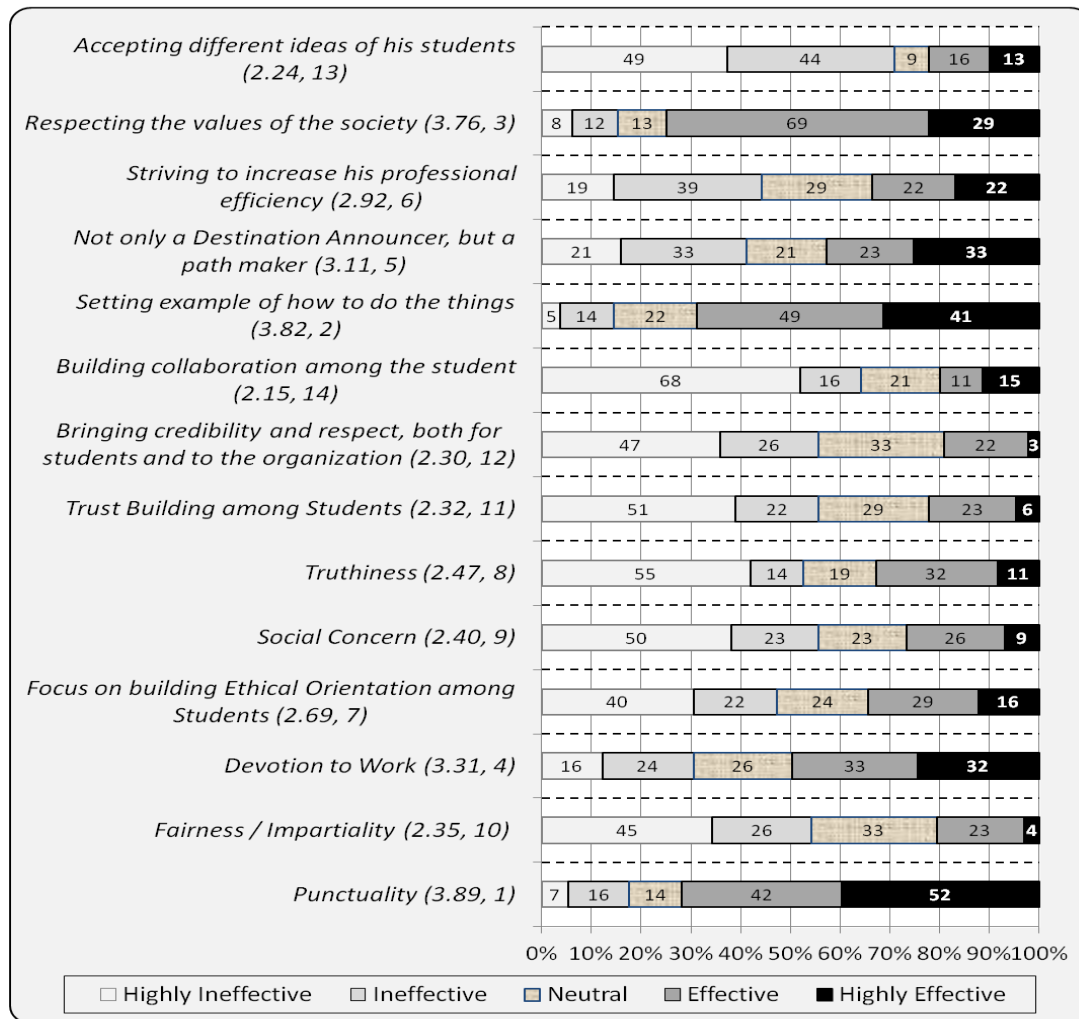


Fig. 7: Students' Perception as to Assessment of Teachers on Various Attributes of Ethical Leadership

(Figures in parenthesis indicate Weighted average agreement score 'WASS', and "Rank" assigned on the basis of WASS)

Discussion and Practical Implications

This study found teachers were sufficiently attentive of their responsibilities such as carrying out their teaching responsibilities with punctuality and devotion, treating their students fairly and encouraging them for being thoughtful, patient and humble, which all together consists of "communicative and ethical climate".

It was seen students used to aspire more with their teachers after their parents. Thus, teachers carry greater responsibility on their shoulders in inculcating ethical leadership behaviour among students. As has been observed students relate with all the mentioned factors that make up ethical leadership behaviour but they gave

more value to righteousness and honest behaviour.

As concluding remarks it can be said teachers play a vital role in cultivating ethical leadership behaviour among their students and for building an ethical culture at working institutions. Teachers are expected to be a good role-model for students by demonstrating ethical behaviours at and out of institution, because the students will act upon what they accumulate from their teachers. Hence, in conformity with the basic ethical principles, teachers should be full of patience and impartial towards every student. The reputation of an educational institution is not only the responsibility of its administrators and management people but also the onus lies on its teachers. Therefore, teachers should accept the principles of ethics and replicate them in their behaviours to recommend their students follow their lead by building collaboration with their fellow students, bringing credibility and developing respect for the institution they belongs to.

As ethical leaders, teachers are expected to be equitable and consistent among their students and should use their academic and social power satisfactorily in making transparent decisions and influencing morally the behaviour and life of students.

This study is practically useful as it helps to understand the role of teachers as ethical leaders. It is believed that for building a healthy society and strong nation, role of teachers comes first. They guide and inspire the youth to make good efforts to build a healthier society and empower the nation. Every educational institute is having a dream of converting their students into effective transformational leaders, but at the same time, enlightening the ethical component of leadership is also the need of hour.

It is also advised that the course curriculum of educational institutes should include the in-depth study of business ethics including aspects of good governance and ethical leadership, ethical followership, and the ethical conflict management (Veveve, 2014). Having group discussions, simulations of unethical behaviour situations, etc. may help in understanding the significant aspects of leadership ethics.

In continuation of research in the similar area, future researchers are advised to conduct similar type of studies in other geographical locations and sectors also, while expanding the sample size and making the efficient use of survey, observations and interview and other data collection techniques. An ethical leadership scale developed on different dimensions of communicative, climatic, behavioural and decision making ethics can also be used to assess respondents' opinion more comprehensively towards ethical leadership behaviour in organizational context.

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