Ethical Decision- Making in the Context of Education: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to provide an extensive analysis of several studies on how to make ethical decision- making in the context of education. A systematic literature review was used in order to gather data from related studies, literatures and researches support the present study. The data analysis was qualitative in nature; hence it provides a clear presentation of concepts/ideas in ethical decision making by categorizing and comparing papers according to various salient features. There were three (3) major findings of the study; (1) ethical decision making of school administrators/principals, (2) ethical decision making of teachers in the teaching and learning process and (3) students' decision-making in education for sustainability-related school activities. The school administrators and teachers must uphold high moral values (professional code of ethics), implement fair and unbiased decision-making, develop ethical leadership in managing the school, and incorporate effective decision making in addressing ethical dilemmas. In addition, students/learners should also develop their decision-making skills in order to be equipped and achieve positive outcomes based from their own decision.

Keywords: *ethical decision making, ethical leadership, decision making strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Ethical decision making and leadership succession planning have been long standing areas of professional interest in leadership roles as a school leader. The most common definition of ethical decision making was "a process that begins with individuals' recognition that a given action or situation has ethical content and continues as individuals evaluate the action's ethic, form behavioral intentions and engage in actual behavior" (Barnett & Valentine 2004).

According to Brown, Treviño (2006) and Tortola (2021) what should leaders do or the qualities or characteristics they should have to be ethical do little to help a leader make good decisions about ethical dilemmas. Rather, a better understanding of the ethical decision-making process that leaders should follow has potential to help them avoid bad behaviors and negative consequences that can result in scandals and worse. Behaviors such as embezzling, collusion, coercion, stealing, political favors, or lying can destroy an organization's reputation and cause pain for many innocent people

The leader integrates personal values and leadership ethics with legally mandated organizational and professional standards which also require a commitment to ethical leadership and inclusiveness. A leadership dilemma occurs when the administrator faces an incident or situation requiring his/her leadership and decision-making abilities and the administrator is unsure of which competing frameworks should be applied to solve the problem or guide others to solve the problem. An ethical leadership and decision-making approach include social justice ethics as an essential part of educational justice. Emotion may also be involved as the leader reflects on the present dilemma and how the dilemma

relates to his/her own personal code of ethics and values (Gardiner et.al, 2014, Tortola, 2021).

Further, school leaders and their leadership teams are involved in the process of decision making on a daily basis. Their work is often complex and arduous as they deal with a range of competing demands from stakeholders who include parents, staff, students, community groups, employing authorities and often other principals. Ethical decision-making was mostly done by the school principal/administrator; hence he/she is the main person who holds big responsibilities and obligations in all school's operation and management. Thus, he must integrate his/her managerial skills with codes of ethics on which all staff has agreed.

In light of the proposition all school personnel, especially the teachers of course, are responsible for creating and maintaining a community conductive to academic, emotional and social learning, to promote good values and standards that ensure everything and everyone in the school building function according to the highest ethical standards (Harsh and Casto, 2007, Luzano, 2024).

Moreover, decision-making also plays a vital process in students' everyday life. Their ability to discuss issues from multiple viewpoints as well as underlying personal and societal values of each option are very important factors that will also influence their decision skills. Thus, ethical decision-making plays a crucial role in the context of education which school administrators/principals, teachers and students are primarily involved. In this study, a systematic literature review was conducted in exploring the ethical decision making in the context of education.

METHODOLOGY

This systematic literature review was conducted through a qualitative approach in which the data was obtained through online searching for several related studies, academic journals, articles, and published research on the ethical decision making in the context of education. The methodological systematic review design was utilized to have a thorough analysis on the content of the study. There was a total of 60 full-text articles evaluated for eligibility, but the final selection yielded 40 articles fitted for the study. All the related studies are considered as very significant data in order to conceptualize this systematic literature review.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study after thorough reading analysis was done. Similar results and findings, which depict relevance to ethical decision making in the context of education were organized and categorized. In this study, three (3) major categorization was determined; (1) ethical decision making of school administrators/principals, (2) ethical decision making of teachers in the teaching and learning process and students' decision-making in education for sustainability-related school activities.

Table 1 shows various researches on ethical decision making made by the school administrators/principals. There are twenty (20) researches which revealed that school administrators/ principals play a vital role in the decision making and upholds high moral standards as an educational leader.

Table 1

The impact of ethical decision-making of school principals/administrators in managing the school

References/Literature Cited	Methodology	Conclusion
1. Spicer (2009)	Qualitative (Explorative Research)	Ethical leadership and decision-making approach support administrators engaging in reflection and seeking justice through understanding the conflict in values proposed by competing arguments. Ethical leadership includes the value of culturally proficient and social justice sensibilities for equity. Public administrators can engage more self-consciously in a type of practical reasoning that more closely mirrors the adversarial character of legal arguments in the justice system to understand both sides before seeking resolution.
2. Karakose T. (2017)	Quantitative Research	The findings of the study revealed that school principals have a key role in managing schools because they are the main decision makers, they are school leaders, and they have more responsibilities than the other staffs have. Hence principals' ethical behaviors and decisions directly affect school climate positively. Principals must follow codes of ethics and always think of students first in decision making. In such an ethical school environment success is a definite outcome of the educational process. In this study, it was found that among elementary school principals, perceived self-efficacy for moral leadership was higher than perceived self-efficacy for instructional leadership along with perceived self-efficacy for management leadership.

3. Simpson et.al, (2009)	Quantitative Research	School administrators must rise to a higher moral ideal that does not enfranchise some while Disenfranchising others. This is best accomplished through mutual respect and concerted efforts Between charter school leaders and their counterparts in traditional school districts.
4. Armagost et.al, (2013)	Qualitative Research	Researchers found that modeling moral agency is important for encouraging others to engage their own moral agency in the best interests of all children; despite efforts to engage in collaborative decision-making, principals are often faced with the reality that they are the ones to absorb the cost of decisions; and moral agents need to become wide-awake to the ethical issues and challenges that permeate their day-today work lives.
5.Sabre, et.al, (2015)	Qualitative Research	The study concludes that type of ethical dilemma and the level of moral intensity of the ethical dilemma can influence the decision-making process. In addition, a contingency model for ethical decision-making by educators is proposed for further study and possible use in professional education programs. It is expected that findings will help inform planning courses in ethics education and add a new dimension to the discussion of ethical dilemmas in school communities.
6. Green and Walker (2009)	Qualitative Design	The result indicated that a formalistic (rules-based) predisposition within teams was negatively related to collective unethical decisions whereas a utilitarian (focuses on outcomes and consequences) orientation was positively related to unethical decisions.
		Empirical studies of misconduct and misbehavior in educational organizations demonstrate that ethical decision making is significantly influenced by organizational factors, including visible ethical leadership, socialization and communication processes, the presence of policies, procedures, structures and processes to deal with risks to integrity, as well as the integrity and adherence to ethical values of the individuals that work in the organization
7. Pearsall and Ellis (2011)	Quantitative Design	The role of specific organizational factors in ethical decision making in academic and corporate scientific research are needed to help leadership create an environment that is more supportive of research integrity.

8. Lefkowitz et.al, (2009)	Quantitative Design	The perceptions that school leaders create are based on the results of their decision-making practices for students, staff and the community. All of these stakeholders hold school leaders ultimately accountable for the results of the moral and ethical nature of their decisions.
9. Geller (2010)	Qualitative Design	Schools must incorporate professional learning in decision making into their professional practice, the role that ethical decision making can play in nurturing leadership capacity at all levels of the school organization, and the role that effective ethical decision making practices can play in building dynamic and transparent school cultures.
10. Tyler (2014)	Qualitative (Case Study)	
11. Leonarder (2016)	Qualitative Design	
12. Begley and Johansson (2008)	Qualitative Research	The study reveals in the context of administration and management with a focus on decision making. describe the increased difficulties faced by school leaders and their teams in terms of encountering situations where 'consensus cannot be achieved rendering obsolete the traditional notions of problem solving.

13. Menzel et.al, (2012)	Qualitative Design	Researchers have all shown through their research that ethical skills and ethical perspectives need to be developed, nurtured and cannot be taken for granted.
14. Mc Cabe et.al, (2013)	Qualitative Design	The result of the study shows that that school leaders' ethical decision-making and leadership abilities require courage and risk-taking in the face of opposition
15.Hollins (2012)	Qualitative Design	Therefore, culture in school learning is necessary to build trust and integrity in school administrators' processes and practices;
16. Fiore and Joseph (2013)	Qualitative Research	Findings inform educational leadership curriculum and instruction by indicating leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions for ethical decision-making within positive school cultures.
17. Spicer (2009)	Qualitative (Case study)	Reflection and contemplative learning, which for some leaders may include spirituality, was a core dimension of ethical leadership. School leaders and other organizational leaders have the capacity to engage in critical thinking and reflection applying or discussing their own ethical leadership and decision-making approaches. Discussion of one's own ethical leadership and decision-making in a collaborative organizational setting could enhance cultural sensitivity and awareness of school processes and practices in student data analysis, school policy and procedures, faculty development, and extra-curricular support.
		The ethical decision-making process that administrators use not only affects them personally, but it can also impact staff, faculty, students, parents, communities, and the overall ethical climate of the organization.
18.Gardener and Tenuto (2015)	Qualitative Study	Work environment is important because they can influence individuals to make bad decisions, and leads to the conclusion that employers need to be aware of environmental factors and influences within their organization because these factors can be more influential to their employee than social norms.

19.Starrat (2004)	Qualitative Research	
20.Assiri (2018)	Mixed Method Research	The study found that the overall extent to which school leaders practice the ethics of educational leadership to make decisions was classified as "always occurs". The findings showed that there were statistically significant differences between participants with different gender and school levels in the overall and all dimensions of the extent to which school leaders practice the ethics of educational leadership to make decisions, while there were not statistically significant differences between the groups of the participants with different teaching experience. The qualitative findings provided some common factors that influence school leaders' practice of making ethical decisions. These factors were explained based on two concepts, including management knowledge and leadership skills as well as the context of school's culture.

The research design of the related studies and researches was mostly qualitative research and case study. In general, the school administrators/ principals' nature of work is often complex and arduous as they deal with a range of competing demands from stakeholders who include parents, staff, students, community groups, employing authorities and often other principals. As the head of the school, ethical decision-making was mostly done by the school principal/administrator; hence he/she is the main person who holds big responsibilities and obligations in all school's operations and management.

School principals and administrators must develop ethical leadership so that all school personnel, of course, are responsible for creating and maintaining a community conductive to academic, emotional and social learning, but the principal is the primary architect and promoter of the values and standards that will ensure that everything and everyone in the school building function according to the

highest ethical standard. This section concludes that establishing written ethical codes for school administrators may help them to make decisions with integrity, fairness, and in a more ethical manner especially about personnel issues.

As shown in table 2, teachers also made an ethical decision in the teaching and learning process. The ten (10) literature cited and references from different researches describes that in the day-to-day journey of teachers, they are bombarded with many problems or challenges in educating the young minds of the learners.

Table 2
Ethical decision making of teachers in the teaching and learning process.

Literature Cited	Methodology/Research Design	Conclusion
1.Atjonen (2012)	Quantitative Analysis	The findings of this study highlight the importance of positive and ethical mentoring of teaching practices. The study indicates the need for mentor teachers to be trained in ethical practices of supervision. The implications of such training go beyond student teaching. All teachers, veteran and new, can benefit from ethical mentoring practices. All can be reflective teachers who continue to develop their decision-making skills, professional knowledge, and performance.
2.Chan, et.al, (2006)	Qualitative (case study)	The study found out that a framework of making ethical decisions, overviews of codes of conduct, and examinations of case studies of ethical and unethical behaviors must become intentional components of leadership education curricula. The use of case studies is an excellent tool in teaching the process of analyzing and understanding behaviors, respecting the perceptions of others, and progressing from self-awareness to self-reflection and eventually, self-critique. Finally, educational leadership faculty must serve as role models for those entering the field.
		This study concludes that, when faced with making a decision addressing an ethical dilemma, teachers/ educational leaders prefer a particular ethical leadership style. Knowledge of ethical leadership style is beneficial for leaders to understand the process, they utilize when faced with difficult choices.
3.Chikeleze et.al, (2017)	Qualitative Research	Ethical decision making in schools and recommended creating a climate that rouses and inspires the moral and ethical dimensions of living, learning and teaching. Reasons to explicitly discuss ethics in the classroom, as well as challenges to doing so have been noted. The ethics of critique, justice, caring, profession, and community can be tapped as a wellspring for school administrators and teachers who endeavor to create rich ethical environments that nourish the development of the hungry minds and bodies of children throughout their
4.Corley and Mathur (2014)	Qualitative Study	

K-12 schooling.

| 5.Ehrich, L. (2011) | Qualitative Research | Based on the data analysis and the wider literature we identify several strategies that may help to minimize the impact of ethical dilemmas. These include the importance of sharing dilemmas with trusted others; having institutional structures in schools that lessen the emergence of harmful actions occurring; the necessity for individual teachers to articulate their own personal and professional ethics; acknowledging that dilemmas have multiple forces at play; the need to educate colleagues about specific issues; and the necessity of appropriate preparation and support for teachers. Of these strategies, providing support for teachers via professional development is explored more fully. |
| 6. Ozan, et.al. (2015) | | The findings of the study reveal that as the year of seniority increases, more teachers think that administrators act within the ethical standards. Teachers' opinions about school administrators' ethical leadership behaviors do not differentiate according to the teachers' gender variable. However; in terms of branch variable, a significant difference is observed in teachers' opinions about their school administrators' ethical leadership behaviors when they faced with an ethical problem. Class teachers' opinions are more positive than branch teachers' opinions regarding school administrators' ethical leadership behaviors.

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As a result, teachers' classroom controls decision strategies were categorized into self-directed, |

7. Lee, K. (2015)	Qualitative (Case study)	Student-directed, situation-directed and organizational-directed strategies. Each strategy contained tactics to educate, correct and prevent student from causing discipline problems. Secondly, respondents' processes of decision-making were described as a pattern that progressed from personal involvement, to collaboration and finally transfer in relation to the perceived level of seriousness in the discipline problem.
8.Shapiro and Gross (2008)	Quantitative Research	The result of the study reveals that respondents highlighted a list of unfavorable conditions and top six obstacles to personal decision-making of teachers; (a) Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs); (b) negative work culture; (c) social-cultural differences; (d) negative teacher-student relationship; (e) managing students with Learning Disabilities (LD); and (f) parental involvement
9. Wagner P.(2009)	Qualitative Research	The study reveals that possibilities for thinking outside the box in terms of morally informed and effective teachers' decision-making strategies aimed at securing organizational commitment and shared vision. It also presents multiple theories of ethics, demonstrating how they inform decision making and culture building in school districts. Incorporates a range of in-text learning aids, including figures that clarify and critique ideas, a complete glossary, and end-of-chapter activities and questions.
10. Mahony (2009)	Qualitative Research	Developing sound professional development programs would help teachers understand more fully 'some rather silly current orthodoxies concerning moral relativism' Moral relativism refer to the belief 'that no universal standard exists by which to assess the truth of an ethical proposition.

Despite with all the obstacles that they had encountered, they find courage to often experiment with a multitude of ideas in the hope of discovering a favorable solution. Most teachers faced difficulties in disciplining the learners and because of this ethical decision making are very crucial in handling diverse learners.

Further, the related studies and literature shows that ethical decision making has strongly influenced the teacher's

role. Teachers integrate varied strategies in making decisions and had different coping mechanisms. They always think outside the box for the common good of everybody. They also have different point of views on how their school administrators, practice ethical decision making. In addition, continuing professional growth and development among teachers is very beneficial in helping them to have a sound decision making.

The next table presents ten (10) related studies on students' decision making in education for sustainability related school activities. As shown from the data gathered its focus on integrating sustainability-related issues in extracurricular activities. It displays a promising learning opportunity to optimally foster students' decision-making. The studies that concentrate primarily on decision-making as a quantitatively measurable competence were predominant.

Table 3. Students' decision making in education for sustainability related school activities

References/Literature Cited	Methodology	Conclusion
Nicolaou, et.al. (2009)	Quantitative Study	The study that examines the students' development of decision-making and environmental concern with the aid of computer-based and scaffold learning activities. Students' decision-making, improved through the learning activity with a larger gain in score among the highest performing group.
Bögeholz, et.al (2013)	Quantitative Design	Through the implementation of a computer-based intervention, this study investigates the effect of decision-making strategies for decision-making in the context of sustainability. Using knock-out criteria when making a decision was found to be more comfortable for students than performing a full trade-off.
Kim, M. & Tan, H. (2013)	Qualitative Design	This study explores possibilities for interdisciplinary problem-solving processes among secondary school children using environmental challenges. The relevance and certainty of information as well as the development of respectful relationships were taken as important criteria for students' joint decision-making. The study aims to explore how students' decisions are interlinked with their personal values. SSIs' social dimension was an important factor for students' decision-making.
Paraskeva-Hadjichambi (2015)	Qualitative Design	This study examines the effect of decision-making strategies, combined with reflection on others' decision-making processes, on students' decision-making in the context of sustainability. Moreover, the elements of self-regulated learning are from interest. Self-regulated learning has a positive effect on students' decision-making.

Gresch, H. **(2017)**	Quantitative Study	The study aims to understand how students frame their decision about SSIs such as building a power plant. Findings support the use of frames as conceptual tools and shed light on the importance of personal experiences when making decisions
Levine, S. & Calabrese, A. (2012)	Qualitative Study	The study investigates concept mapping as a learning strategy in order to promote students' decision making in the context of sustainability. Equipping students with relevant concepts is highly beneficial for their conceptual knowledge. Enabling students free mapping conditions is highly beneficial for their argumentation.
Eggert, et.al (2017)	Qualitative Study	The study aims at understanding the role of data and evidence in students' decision making about SSIs. Prior knowledge was a major factor in students' decisions. When using further information, students aren't inevitably linking scientific contributions with strong evidence.
		The study explores the effectiveness of a group discussion approach on students' decision-making in a sustainability-related context. A comparison of pre- and posttest comments reveals a general shift to higher-level responses subsequent to the discussion
Emery, et.al (2017)	Qualitative Research	The study examines the effect of a computer program on students' decision-making and reasoning in a sustainability-related context. The group using the computer program has better posttest scores (partially) than the control group regarding the use of evidence when making decisions.
Grace M. (2009)	Quantitative Research	
Siegel, M.A. (2006)	Quantitative Study	

In addition, the related studies revealed the exploration of decision-making's differing notions would be beneficial to students gaining self-confidence and develop logical reasoning which includes the conceptualization as a systematic process that chiefly takes place within the spectrum of personal reasoning and a competence that explicitly embraces the consideration of other's values and perspectives.

Moreover, one important implication can be drawn upon this literature review on students' decision making that there must be an effective planning and implementation of learning activities. While advocating that student perform as critical citizens in education, sustainable decision related issues, practitioners equally need to provide an adequate educational context.

This implication might be of a structural nature, such as allowing students the time and space to inquire into self-chosen environmental, economic or social problems within their local environment. It might also imply acquiring new subject knowledge to jointly explore and discuss students' solution approaches.

CONCLUSION

Ethical decision-making receives much attention in educational theory, practice and research. In the context of formal education, positive outcomes of shared decision-making are very important for all school principals, teachers, and students/learners together with the stakeholders. In the part of administrators and teaching staff, moral leadership is essential for every organization of all types and in all corners of society. Administrators and teachers play a significant role as leaders and role models for today's students but future leaders. To create a morally virtuous community, ethical leadership must be consistently practiced because it's about

doing ethical duties to society which contributes a lot in achieving the department goals and objectives successfully.

Nevertheless, equipping students with the capability to perform considerate decision-making is a key in building and shaping one's personality. In this context, sustainable development, decision-making is required for the processing of information and the implementation of sustainable action. School activities in education for sustainable development offer a suitable avenue for students to develop good decision-making strategies.

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