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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Ethical Leadership: Perceptions of Instructors and Academic Leaders of Western Cluster Public Universities of Ethiopia

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Abstract
The major purpose of the study was to assess the ethical leadership perceptions of academic leaders and instructors in the Western Cluster universities of Ethiopia. To this end, qualitative study was employed to collect data for the purpose. Data were collected from instructors, department heads, college deans, academic vice president, and ethics officers of western cluster universities and then thematically analyzed to identify important constructs of ethical leadership. The study found out that, the conceptions of ethics by the public universities was largely dominated by the notions of adherences to laws. Accordingly, the study recommends that, the leaders in Western Cluster public universities need to revisit their practices that affected the perceptions and develop a wider understanding of ethical leadership that goes beyond adherence to rules and regulations and be able to see the ethical and moral element of the leadership. Moreover, they are expected to understand their respective institutions and develop effective communication systems. This could be more realized by introducing mechanisms of developing leadership skills including leadership development programs to lead today's modern organizations effectively.

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INTRODUCTION

Several ancient philosophical and spiritual literatures witnesses that the ethical concern of leadership is not a recent phenomenon. For example, the Bible emphasizes strong concerns about the moral goodness in the selection of leaders. Moreover, the issues of ethical leadership are evident in the philosophical literatures of distant past times such as Plato's. Ethical leadership has gained recognition as a distinct style of leadership very recently. However, ethical scandals are prominent in 'virtually every type of organizations' (Brown & Treviño, 2006). As a result these days, ethical leadership has regained importance among scholars and organizations. The series of unethical acts and scandals are being practiced in all types of organizations (Treviño & Brown, 2006; Sinha & Mishra, 2011, Mihelič, Lipičnik, & Tekavčič, 2010). There are no exceptions for Higher Education Institutions. Unethical acts are manifested in HEIs in various forms such as student loan, charges of plagiarism, and falsified research (Hanson, 2009) nepotism, favoritism and kinship discriminations.

Beyond the harmful effects of its absence per se, ethical leadership in higher education institutions is of a paramount importance for its various reasons. Hanson, (2009) identified some of these reasons and concluded that "Most decisions in Highe Education Institutions involve moral issues by their nature. Educational leaders, therefore, cannot treat such decisions as simple day to day activities. They are rather required to make ethical judgments, and be ethical in dealing with such issues of moral implications. HEIs are responsible for all rounded development of their students including ethical behavior. In this premise, HEIs and their leaders are responsible not only for the development of skills and acquisition of knowledge but also for the moral development of their students.

Ethical leadership is better learned not by interesting lectures by instructors rather by closing observing the behaviors of the educational leaders' and instructors. This is to mean that what influences more is the 'actions rather than words". Therefore, higher education institutions' leaders need to exercise ethical leadership not only in words but also in actions. Besides, those faculty members who hold either a formal or informal positions often make decisions on issues involving ethical dilemmas. As a result, ethical leadership becomes inescapable agenda of HEIs. In affirming this, Novak (2002,p.4) stated that "The question is not whether or not educational leaders have to deal with ethical tensions. That they do is a given. The question is how well can educational leaders survive and grow as they deal with ethical issues".

For the above reasons thorough understanding and practice of ethical leadership in the HEIs is apparent. That is, HEIs need to develop understanding and practice of ethical leadership. In this regard, Trevino (cited in Brown & Treviño, 2006) recommends that "HEIs need to be consistent and proactive in incorporating ethics into their leadership agenda" (2006, p. 608).

Despite global and universal quest of ethical leadership, the individual antecedents of Ethical leadership remain largely unknown there is no agreement among scholars as to what constitutes ethical leadership (Treviño, Jordan, Brown, & Finkelstein, 2011). Besides, the lack of adequate research in the area of ethical leadership makes the identification of its constructs difficult and sometimes attributed to the nature of the concept itself by large.

As the concept of ethical leadership is built on the idea of ethics and morality which are extremely susceptible to subjective and contextual interpretations, ethical leadership is not perceived similar across different social and cultural clusters. The researchers' view point, in this regard, loosely corresponds with the constructionists' beliefs of the reality in that humans construct a reality and attach a meaning through various social, economic and political interactions (Hickman & Couto, 2006). To this end, some scholars emphasize on the individual leaders ethics in defining ethical leadership, while others focus on either the ethics of the decision making process or the ethics of the organizational culture (Ferrell, 2009). As a result, defining ethical leadership in a single and universally accepted manner becomes hardly possible. Consequently, ethical leadership has been defined in a number of different ways.

Conceptualization efforts so far in the area mainly taken into account the Western perspective and hence, overlooked viewpoints, principles or values of other communities than the western (Rhode, 2006). Therefore, understanding the concept of ethical leadership in line with the existing literature alone could be deceptive and hence endeavors to understanding of ethical leadership beyond relying on the existing literature and involve its exploration within a particular social and cultural context is necessary.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore the perceptions about ethical leadership and its constructs from the view point of educational leaders and instructions in Western Ethiopian Universities. Therefore, the knowledge gained by the study may help to identify how ethical leadership is perceived in public universities. It may also help the academic leaders and instructors of the Western public universities to conceptualize how ethical leadership is perceived and develop themselves in line with the expectations and values of ethical leadership.

Accordingly, the following basic research questions were raised to guide the overall activities of the study:

- How do instructors, educational leaders and ethical officers perceive ethical leader in western cluster public universities?
- How do instructors, educational leaders and ethical officers perceive ethical Decisions in western cluster public universities?
- How do instructors, educational leaders and ethical officers perceive ethical institutions in the western cluster public universities of Ethiopia?
- What are the ethical leadership values in the western cluster public universities?

The Research Design and Methodology
The assumption of the study corresponds with the constructionists' beliefs of the reality that humans construct a reality and attaches a meaning through various social, economic and political interactions (Hickman & Couto, 2006). Hence, in order to better understand a given social phenomenon or concept, it is wise and objective to understand the social, political and cultural aspects of the context.

In this study qualitative research method in which data were collected from participants in a natural setting and then inductively organized to construct themes and meanings of ethical leadership was applied. A case study integrated with the data transferability process was also applied. Selection of this particular design was

made based on the nature of the problem under investigation that it needs detailed and thorough understanding of the context. Besides, the transferability was carried out to obtain additional constructs of ethical leadership from other but similar Universities.

Semi-structured interview was used to collect the required data for it is a flexible tool enabling multi-sensory channels to be used. It provides an opportunity to get a detailed data from the relatively smaller numbers of participants. Hence, in this study serious of semi-structured interviews were made. The interview guide and the interview items were designed based on rigorous literature review.

Accordingly, 20 sessions of semi structured interviews were held with the participants. Each of the interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcribed interviews formed the text for data analysis.

Prior to the interviews, interview protocols were designed based on the extensive search of literature on ethical leadership. Accordingly, participants were asked four major questions which took them through a narrative explanation of their perceptions of ethical leadership such as (1) what is ethics for you? Or how do you perceive it? (2) Think of any leader(s) you consider as an ethical among those you have ever worked with or working with now, and tell me what personal qualities do you think make you feel the person is (are) ethical ? (3) What do you understand about the concept of ethical decision making? What methods should be in place to ensure ethical decision making? (4) When can we say our organizational culture is ethical? What specific components should be in place?

Moreover, at the end of each interview session, the participants were asked to comment on the topic. This is to obtain any relevant issue to the topic that might be overlooked during the interview and an issue which the participants found essential. In addition to the interview items, the interview protocol consisted of the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of the responses and the procedures of the interview that consists of ethical considerations. In the introductory phase of the actual interview sessions, we introduced ourselves and the purpose of the study. Besides, we indicated that tape recorder is used to ensure that everything in the interview will be appropriately recorded.

In the actual interview sessions, in addition to the tape recorder, we took notes of the responses of the participants so as to avoid the risk of data loss in case of possible technical failures in the tape recorder. The notes also assisted the transcription process in which there was a hard of listening what the participants were actually saying from the tape player. Generally adequate data were collected to address the basic research questions raised to guide the study.

Then data collected through interview by tape record and taking short notes was carefully transcribed in line with the questions pauses to each and every interviewee. Having the data transcribed, it was checked by playing the recorded data that everything is properly and accurately transcribed.

To ease the transcription process, we have tagged a unique code along with the profile of participants. The word file containing the profile of the participants was also prepared to identity the interviewees.

Instructors, Academic leaders and ethical officers in Jimma University were involved in the study. The respondents for the study

were purposefully selected from the instructors, educational leaders and ethics officer, of Jimma University. Since the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how ethical leadership is being perceived, participants for a specific purpose were selected to help the researcher understand the problem and the research question (Creswell, 2009; Louis Cohen, 2007).

Accordingly, one department head from each of the six colleges and the two institutes found in the university were interviewed. An academic staff member, from each of the colleges also was included in the interview. Two deans were included in the study too. The vice president for academic and research from JU was also interviewed. The inclusion of academic staff members, and department heads from each of the Colleges and Institutes is to provide an opportunity for the varying perceptions of ethical leadership that might exist within the sub cultures in the university. The department heads, the deans and vice presidents for academic affairs and research were believed to provide ethical leadership perspective
from the point of view of the educational leaders, while the academic staff members

were believed to show the perspectives of ethical leadership from the view point of the larger academic staff. Therefore, comprehensive and balanced understanding was possible based on the insights that cannot be either generated from a single group of participants.

The demographic information of the participants is summarized in table 1. The ages of the participants ranged from 28-59 with an average age of 41 years. Two of the participants were females. Eighty five percent of the participants were holding second degree, while two of the participants were PhD holders. Regarding their academic rank, the majority of the participants were lecturers while three of them were assistant professors and the rest 3 are associate professors. One of the participants was a full professor. The participants have served in the university from 3 to 30 years.

Table 1: Demographic information of the Participants

Sex		
sex	*Frequency (f)*	*Percentage (%)*
Male	*17*	*85*
Female	*3*	*15*
N	*20*	*100*
Age		
Age	*Frequency (f)*	*Percentage (%)*
20–29	*3*	*15*
30–39	*8*	*40*
40–49	*3*	*15*
50–59	*5*	*25*
60 and above	*1*	*5*
N	**20**	**100**
Educational Qualifications		
Level	*Frequency (f)*	*Percentage (%)*
BA/BSc/LLB/MD	*1*	*5*
MA/MSC/MPH	*17*	*85*
PhD/D.Ed.	*2*	*10*
N	**20**	**100**
Academic rank		
Rank	*Frequency (f)*	*Percentage (%)*
Lecturer	*14*	*73.7*
Assistant professor	*4*	*21.1*
Associate professor	*2*	*10.5*
Professor	*1*	*5.3*
N	**19**	**100**
Years of services in the university		
years	*Frequency (f)*	*Percentage (%)*
2_3	*3*	*15*
4_6	*5*	*25*
7_10	*5*	*25*
11 and above	*7*	*35*
N	**20**	**100**

The demographic characteristics of the participants clearly show that they are matured, experienced and qualified so that the information they will be valuable to understand how ethical leadership is perceived.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative researchers argue that in the process of qualitative research, research design, data collection and data analysis are concurrent and continuous processes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). To this,

qualitative data analysis is not perceived as a separate phase as in quantitative research. It is rather an integral part of the rest (Bryman & G. Burgess, 2002). In qualitative data analysis, unlike the quantitative one, the focus on text rather than on numbers is the most important feature of qualitative analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Though there are several ways of qualitative data analysis, in this study, two levels of data analysis were used. The first is text based categorization and the second one is categorization of the texts in to themes. Qualitative analysis

technique recommended by Auerbach & Silverstein, (2003) is also used.

The data collected through semi structured interview were transcribed. Then the transcribed documents were carefully studied to identify relevant items to the pre-determined research concerns. And hence, relevant items from each of the interviews were identified. Then repeated ideas were identified from each of the relevant items and categorized under four research concerns. These repeated ideas were further categorized in to themes and sub themes. Figure 1 below portrays the data analysis process used.
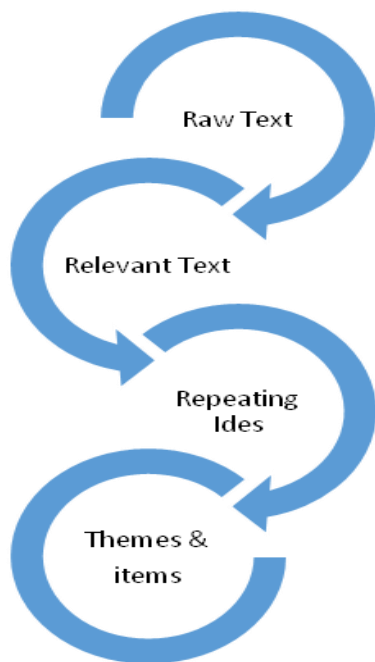
Figure 1: The Process of Data Analysis

Finally, major themes and sub themes along with relevant items were generated. Consequently, four major and several sub themes were generated around the four research concerns initially identified. However, the sub themes were modified based on the comments of the experts.

With regard to issues related to validity, reliability and transferability in qualitative research, several strategies can be used to enhance the researcher's ability to assess the accuracy of findings as well as convince readers. Accordingly, in this research member checking, peer debriefing, expert review and transferability were used

to check the validity, reliability and transferability of the research endeavor.

Member checking refers to sending the transcriptions of the interviews back to all the participants seeking for their validations of the accuracy of the text data with that of the interviews. They were explained the purpose of the particular member checking and its significances for the study along with the how of the checking process. It helped to make sure that there are no obvious mistakes made during transcription. In member checking process, all except two members checked and validated the transcriptions and sent it back. All of them confirmed that the transcriptions were accurately made, except one participant who has made further elaboration of an issue to minimize misinterpretation while two others added some points that were overlooked during the interview. This helped the researchers to ensure the reliability of the research (Creswell, 2009).

Peer debriefing involves locating a person (s) who review and ask questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resound with people other than the researcher to add validity to the account. Therefore, debriefing was also employed to check the validity of this study (Creswell, 2009). Accordingly, three peers, teaching in the department of Educational Planning and Management were given the list of the themes along with specific relevant statement of the participants from which the themes were generated. After they have reviewed the document, productive discussion was made with them which helped to modify our focus in light of the study concerns. This paved the way out for the analysis. Some issues were, however, matters of perspective, from which we looked at the interview data, and hence total agreement was not expected. This is because, "in interviewing, there might be as many different interpretations of the qualitative data as there are researchers" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 149) despite focusing on very important issues.

To ensure content and face validity, expert review was conducted. Experts were given the questions along with the refined major themes and sub themes from which the question items were generated. Moreover, they were clearly communicated the purpose of expert review. Accordingly, the experts commented on the questions by comparing with the themes. As a result validity and reliability of the study was improved.

With regard to qualitative generalization, qualitative researchers have generated a term *transferability* to describe theoretical constructs that can be extended beyond a particular sample and yet respect cultural diversity. The purpose of transferability, however, is not to generalize the findings of the research to another context, as it is usually done in the quantitative. It is rather to find out constructs that might exist in different sub cultures. In this research, transferability is done in line with the purpose of the study. Since, the purpose of the study was to assess perceptions of ethical leadership in public universities of the western cluster as perceived by the participants exploring the perceptions of ethical leadership in, at least, each of the sample universities prior to assessing the practices and ethical leadership was important. However, doing so was unrealistic technically, financially and even from a methodological point of view looking for a methodological way out was necessary and it was transferability. Accordingly attempt was made to get data from 6 public universities such as WU, MTU, AU, MU, AAU, BDU through 7 colleagues.

Having reached consensus with 6 of the colleagues except one, questionnaires were emailed to them along with a letter elaborating the purpose of the transferability and the procedures of the task. Of the 6 colleagues, three of them sent back their comments: Aggregately, the three friends have confirmed that the themes are applicable in their contexts too. However, a participant from MU indicated that, "it might not be realistic to expect an ethical policy from the infant university like theirs" and recommended that the questionnaire item should be designed in such a way that participants from these universities are not forced to rate the items. Besides, a friend from MTU suggested that "it is better to include ethical issues related to gender". She believed that, the leaders sometimes do things in favor of a gender or they might try to create a sexual relationship by exploiting their positions. Accordingly, fellow participant comments were considered to make essential modifications.

RESULTS

The results of the study are presented based on text based themes and specific statements of the participants. The research concerns such as ethical organizational context, ethical behaviors of individual leaders, ethical decisions and ethics as Synonym to law and the domain of relationship are used as a major heading where as the themes and the sub themes are also treated under proper topic.

With regard to the study participants perception of *Ethics /Ethical leadership as a synonym to adherence to laws and domain of relationship,* it was found that the participants of the study perceive ethics mainly as a synonym to adherence to laws, rules and regulations; quality of working against accepted standards; acting according to professional standards. Ethics was also perceived as the domain of relationship or value in a relationship. That is, being fair, respectful, good and transparent to others in a relationship. It was also perceived as to *be /behave to the level of others' expectations.*
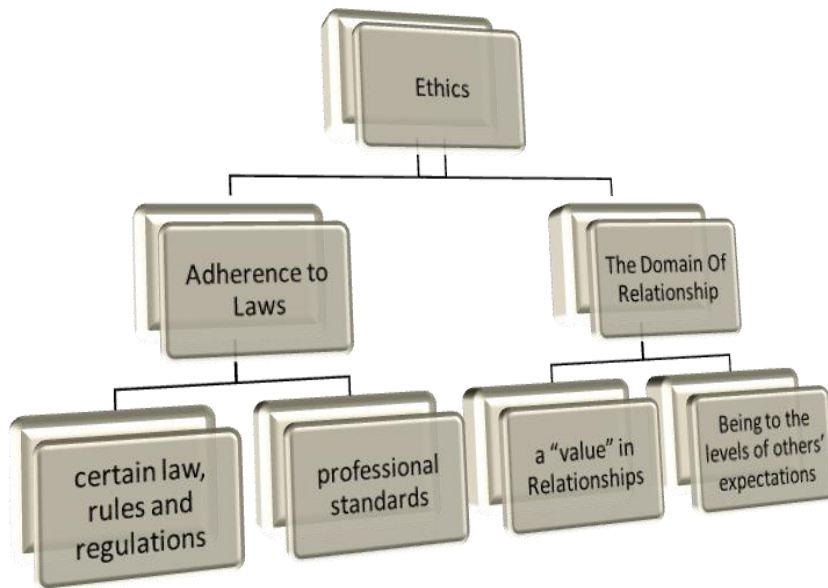
Figure 2: The diagrammatic representation of the perceptions of participants about ethics

The other major category of the perception of ethical leadership is the *ethical behavior of individual leaders*. In this regard, ethical leaders' behaviors were perceived by the participants as fairness, impartial, nondiscriminatory and equal treatment of all people in an organization; not-preoccupied and biased with prejudice; recognizing and respecting the diversity of the people in an organization. (Figure 2)

It was also found out that ethical leaders are with such behaviors of **Commitment** to the organizational goals attainment and **dedication** to the satisfaction of the interests of their clients. Ethical leaders were also perceived as people of Integrity (reliable) who are trustworthy and honest. Transparency and loyalty were also identified as qualities/behaviors of ethical leaders. With regard to skills the participants underlines that ethical leaders are also good listeners. Moreover, the ethical leaders are perceived as those leaders who are an *Ethical Model*, who

respects the ethical policy, rules and regulations of the institutions and exhibit appropriate behaviors. Those who hate corruption and refrain from any wrong deeds. Ethical leaders were also perceived as participatory and democratic who often involve employees in organizational activities and decisions. They never impose rather persuade others by providing communicate pertinent information on the importance of implementing decisions.

Ethical leaders were also perceived as those who *respect people and their opinions* regardless of their background. They respect the opinions' of other people even if it is different from theirs. Ethical leaders are those leaders who understand their duties and responsibilities and discharge *them with sense of Accountability:* that they are committed to carry out their duties and responsibilities and work within the boundary of their authority. Ethical leaders are also associated with the notion of *Altruism* in the way that they are not self-

serving i.e working for the benefits of others than themselves.

The other dimension related to perception of ethical leaders is the way the work as per the existing *rules and regulations*. The participants perceived ethical leaders is this regard as those who understand organizational rules and regulations and work as per the rules and regulations and ethical policy of the organization. This is reflected in how they treat people. Those who treat people in the organization as per the rules and regulations without any bias and subjectivity were perceived as ethical leaders. They are also *committed to do the right thing even if they are under pressure to do otherwise.* Ethical leaders are identified as *open minded and optimist* that they positively accept criticisms and try to correct. They positively accept and deal with compliances of employees and customers and take corrective measures.

Concerning the *ethical decisions* as one of the measure of the ethical leadership, the participants identified it as the quality to *Adhere to Rules and Regulation of the organization and* free of bias. Ethical decisions are believed to be made based on sufficient information i.e *Data driven analysis of the consequences of* the decisions on the employees, environment and society at large ahead of time. Moreover, ethical decisions are perceived as those which involve *balancing multiple interests* such as organizational and individual interests and conflicting interests of sub sections. Ethical decisions are made aiming at *enhancing organizational performances.* They are also *timely i.e.* made at the right time.

Ethical Organizational Context   -   is characterized by *Fairness and equity.* Organizational context is perceived as the extent that rules, guidelines and policies are formulated on the principles of equal treatment where promotion, rewards and assignments, etc are impersonal and done only based on free of bias and double standards in treating different segments of the organizations, for example, departments, colleges, units and etc.

Organizational ethical context was also perceived as *Transparent* that is there exists clear decision making procedures, rules and regulations well communicated to the employees. Where employees are also given opportunities to discuss, and decide on the problems the organizations are facing and becoming part of the solution.

Ethical leadership in the context of organizations is perceived as the presence of *Ethical policy in which* both ethical and unethical activities are clearly identified; every member of the institution clearly understands, and the consequences of violating the ethical policy. *Institutional arrangement* for ethics was also perceived as an important component of ethical organizational context which refers to existence of formal organ (body) to ensure the implementation of ethical policy capable of monitoring the implementation of the ethical policy.

In light of the *Service to the society,* institutions that has positive outputs to long term plan of serving the community*,* harmony with the external environment as well as friendly and healthy relationship with the community, society and environment were also identified as an essential ingredients of the ethical context of the organization. Besides, ethical context of an organization are expected to *promote ethical atmosphere* by discouraging

unethical behaviors, encouraging open discussions on ethical issues, exhibiting intolerance to unethical acts.

Ethical organizational contexts are also believed to have *Multicultural-friendly environment:* leaders in the organization recognize the diversity of people in the organization and people are not intimidated for their socio-cultural background, language, ethnic origin, religion, gender, political affiliation, etc. All people in including the leaders in the organization respect the diversity.

DISCUSSION
The purpose of this section is not to organize the thematic concepts into theoretical constructs as it usually done in the grounded theory. The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore the perceptions of academic leaders and instructors of western public universities of Ethiopia. And some of the important issues themes identified were discussed in light of the existing literature.

Compliance to Laws vs Ethical Leadership - Adherence to laws, rules and regulations was perceived by the majority of the participants as an indicator of ethical leadership. Most of the participants have identified adherence to laws, rules, and regulations as important ingredient to the definition of ethics, ethical leaders, ethical decisions, and ethical organizational cultures. This might remind us the notion of "በሀግ አምላክ" that might simply translated as "…for the sake of gods of law") in our society. People, particularly in the past, use it to stop something illegal or any criminal acts and/or attempts. In Ethiopia there is a tradition and belief that "when you call the names of 'gods of law' let alone a person, even rivers/non humans shall react and obey". For the sake of

"gods of law", refers to the law-creators. To researchers' understanding, such an emphasis to laws could be attributed to the social, cultural, political and religious mindsets of a society that respect to rules and regulation is one of the major values to define ethics and ethical leadership.

Ancient Ethiopia is characterized by its possession of laws and government (Houston, 2008). Ethiopia has a long history of governments in the form of monarchs, in which the kings were the absolute sources of laws for the land. The kings were believed to be the direct appointees of God and hence, the laws they make were considered to be from God and absolute (Laphiso, 1985). Donald Levin, referring to ancient writers indicates that the monarchial system of the by then richest and the super power Ethiopia were built in the manner that the law by the kings is abiding and loyal people could accept (Levin, 1993). For this reason, the laws were standards of moral, ethics and actions.

The participants' perceptions of ethics mainly as adherence to laws could be attributed to such historical roots of laws abiding society. And hence, in societies, where laws are considered as a minimum standard of action, there could be an enormous connection between the concepts of the rule of law and ethics (Trevin˜o & Nelson, 2011). The explanations as to the extent of and reasons for such connections in our society perhaps need further scientific investigations; it is possible to say the perception of ethics and ethical leadership as adherence to laws is reasonable and is strongly connected with the history, sociology, leadership or any other social perspectives of the county.

Ethics and ethical leadership, however, cannot be a synonym for the concept of ethics unless operationally defined. This is

because, there exists "many standards of conduct agreed upon by society and not codified in law (Trevinõ & Nelson, 2011, p. 20)". For example, one of the participants mentioned that physicians cannot create an affair with their patients within the period of therapy interaction (IWFR). This sounds valid from the ethical point of view because the action may be prohibited in codes of ethics, however, what can we do in terms of law if a physician is known to have such an affair with her/his patients? Nothing. Therefore, it can be concluded that the act is legal but unethical. At times, some laws t by themselves migh be unethical. According to Trevinõ and Nelson:

> [R]acial discrimination was legal in the United States for a long time. But racial discrimination was and is highly unethical. Similarly, many companies do business in developing countries with few, if any, laws regulating environmental pollution or labor conditions. They can ''legally'' pollute the air and water in these countries. (2011, p. 20)

This illustrates that there are a number of unethical behaviors and practices which are not bound by laws. Therefore, acting upon laws or rules and regulations alone doesn't ethics. We argue that being an ethical is a supra concept that display "a commitment to right behaviors and right actions" that includes compliance to laws but goes beyond and includes compliance with generally accepted principles involving honesty, fairness, social responsibility, and so forth in which law is considered as a sub set.

To sum up, ethics needs the ability and willingness to see and imagine the consequences of our actions beyond the court rooms and to take into account such golden values listed in Kohlberg's universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity, and equality of the human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons among others (Kohlberg, 1971). In Ethiopia too, there are values, norms, and moral standards found in all of the nations, nationalities, and peoples the concepts of which extended beyond compliance to laws. To cite some of the few for instance, the concepts of "Newur"[1] and "Safuu"[2] that could provide an outstanding insight in this regard. Therefore, though respect to laws and regulations are among major indicators of ethical behavior that leaders need to exhibit, ethics goes beyond mere respect to laws, rules and regulations and requires leaders to explore and fit into the higher level expectations.

Equal and Fair Treatment - Every one of us needs to be fairly and equally treated. This is a human nature. As the participants of the study indicated now and again, they expect their leaders to treat them fairly and equally; they need decisions to be made on the basis of principles of fairness and equal treatment; they need the organizational context in general to be fair and all its benefits to be accessed equally. Equal and fair treatment, as the participants pointed out, is essential particularly in diversified society like ours. People, in a diversified setting usually perceive fairness as benefits gained as compared to the other individuals/groups. One of the participants described a person she thought ethical as follows: "He deals with people /subordinates/ without any

discriminations". Farnham as cited in (Robin, 2009), identified perceived lack of fairness and equity as the most important reason for a trust gap between employees and management. Fairness here means giving credits where it is appropriate, being objective and impartial in evaluations and thereby subsequent rewards (Robin, 2009). To be fair, leaders need to recognize and protect the rights and interests of all the employees (Robin, 2009). This is a crucial strategy by which leaders can develop trust of the followers.

Leaders, particularly those at the top, are expected to play a crucial role. According to one of the top leaders who have participated in the study, "biased treatment of individuals or groups affect the whole institution" (IWTT, 06/02/2014). For him, fairness and actions as per the rules and regulations are important. Top leaders, therefore, must meet the expectations of their office. That is, being an ethical model for lower level leaders under his/her command as well as the subordinates. As a result, other leaders and followers can learn to be ethical in terms of fair and equal treatment of their employees by being a model or exemplary (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005).

Most of the participants, particularly teachers have identified fairness and equity as important ingredients of ethical leadership but not the sole responsibility of the positional leaders. Since, "Ethical leadership is a shared process, members at all levels of an organization or community have the responsibility to participate in the process of creating fairness and equity" (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007). One way of doing this is protecting leaders not to exploit our hatred or our greed. Here, an important note is that, it is necessary to develop firm principles of fairness and equity that should never substituted for being favored at the cost of others. But if

the people in organizations are able not to make themselves susceptible to the manipulation of unethical leaders by letting them exploit their gluttony, the devil is then in us (Freeman, 2009).

The responsibility of creating an atmosphere in which fairness and equity reigns goes to both leaders as well as employees, though the degree differs. The problem here might be what if the rules and regulations by themselves are unfair? Participants of the study also indicated that, fairness and equal treatment are not simply about how individual leaders treat their employees. It rather goes beyond the individual leader's behaviors and includes the fairness of the rules, regulations. Equity and fairness, therefore, needs to look into the existing rules and regulations in addition to their proper implementation.

In this regard, one of the participants of the study pointed out that, "In an ethical organization, there should not be double standards in treating work groups or departments" (IWGIT, 01/01/2014). Similarly, another participant said "When we are talking about the rules and regulations, firstly the rules and regulations themselves should be accepted by all as rules and regulations and then must be maintained and enacted (IWTDB, 03/01/2014).

In this regard, policies of an organization, among other things, should be objective and based on the principles of equal treatment and fairness (IWNZ, 03/01/2014). Doing so, at least helps to monitor the behaviors and actions of the leaders against the standards set. But, if the rules and regulations or any other ways of doing things are not objective, they will pave way to different interpretations that might result unfair treatment. And hence checking the existing rules and regulations against the general principles of fairness

and evaluating their objectives might rescue people from unfair practices of leaders.

In sum, faire and equal treatment manly perceived as treatment of people in an organization without discrimination i.e. application of rules and regulations equally to all people in the organization. Moreover, lack of fairness and equal treatment is not only attributed to the behaviors and acts of the individual leaders but also the system of organization itself and the rules and regulations used to guide actions. Dealing with fair and equal treatment, therefore, require looking into the fairness and objectivity of the working rules and regulations themselves in addition to the behaviors of the individual leaders. The rules, regulations and the ethical guidelines should be designed in line with the general principles and expectations by taking in to account multiple interests of an organization, employees and the community at large. Besides, there must be formal structures and institutions to monitor the implementations of the ethical policies minimize or eliminate unethical practices.

Multiculturaly Friendly Environment - The participants of the study have shown their concern for ethical leadership that respects the diversity in the work place. One of the participants stated as "For me an organization is ethical if people in the organization are not intimidated of their socio-cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, political, gender, etc. background". They need respect for their diversified cultural backgrounds. They need a working environment that accommodates and recognizes multiple of cultures existing among the workforce in an organization. Such a working environment is labeled as a *multicultural friendly environment.*

The presences of multiple cultures in the work place and the need for their considerations have their own implications on the "adjustments that employees will make within an organization" as well as on their perceived view of fairness and equal treatment they are receiving from the organization and its leaders. The extent to which employees adjust themselves within an organization, according to (Connerley, 2005, p. 3) depends on "the organization's tolerance for ambiguity, the demand for conformity, and the value placed on diversity, cultural fit, and acculturation".

By multicultural friendly environment, we are referring to the multicultural perspective as defined by Connerley (2005). This perspective seeks to provide a conceptual framework that recognizes the complex diversity of a plural society while, at the same time, suggesting bridges of shared concern that bind culturally different persons to one another (Connerley, 2005, p. 4). Multicultural friendly environment, therefore, is a working or a living social or physical environment that recognize a diversity we are endowed with and strengthen the ties that we have in common as well. By multicultural environment, the situation should take in to account not only the narrower issues of ethnicity or nationality but also other within group variables such as sex, age, economic, educational, religion and so forth. For multicultural environment, the leaders' multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills were perceived important. Multicultural friendly environment in this study, therefore, is perceived as implementing rules and a regulation that protects any type of discriminations and treats all regardless of linguistic, ethnic, religious, sex, race, etc differences and fosters mutual understanding to contributes towards organizational goal achievements.

contribution in flashing light on how ethical leadership is perceived in public universities.

CONCLUSION

In this particular study perception of ethical leadership in the Western Cluster Universities was explored in light of ethical behaviors, ethical decisions and organizational context for ethical practices. Based on the data gathered and analyzed as well as the discussions made in light of the existing literature, It can be concluded that ethical leadership is perceived as respect to laws, rules and regulations, fair and equal treatment of individuals in an organization, and also existence of a system that discourages unethical practices and behaviors through well developed system of monitoring and evaluations. Moreover, ethical organizations are those organizations where there is friendly environment that fosters multicultural and diversified personalities.

The study, however, has limitations that worth mentioning. In this study a semi structured interview was carried out with instructors, department heads, college deans, ethics officers and vice president for research and academic affairs of Jimma University and the responses of all the participants were analyzed aggregately and Cross-case Comparisons of the perceptions of teachers and the educational leaders was not made. Besides, the study was carried out in Jimma University and the rest of Public Universities in the particular cluster were approached trough the data transferability process the aforementioned. Though data transferability is recommended by qualitative researchers as an important mechanism to explore additional themes within different contexts, the researchers believe that the findings and the analysis made have significant

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