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PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS' ETHICAL LEADERSHIP, ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCE, AND POLICY ADHERENCE AS PREDICTORS OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNANCE: EVIDENCE FROM IKEJA LOCAL GOVERNMENT, LAGOS STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence on transparency and accountability among public administrators in Ikeja Local Government, Lagos State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 150 respondents through a validated self-designed questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted to establish the validity and reliability of the instrument, while multiple regression analysis was employed for data analysis. The findings revealed that policy adherence had a positive and significant effect on transparency and accountability. However, ethical leadership and administrative competence exhibited significant negative effects, suggesting that deficiencies in the implementation of ethical standards and administrative practices, as well as possible institutional and political constraints, may undermine their expected contributions to transparency and accountability. The regression model explained 21.3% of the variation in transparency and accountability, indicating that other governance and institutional factors also influence these outcomes. The study recommends strengthening mechanisms that ensure the effective implementation of ethical standards, improving the quality and accountability of administrative processes through targeted capacity-building initiatives, and institutionalizing policy adherence through robust compliance monitoring and evaluation systems. These measures will enhance transparency, reduce administrative malpractice, and promote good governance at the local government level.

Keywords: *Ethical Leadership, Administrative Competence, Policy Adherence, Transparency, Accountability*

Introduction

Transparency and accountability are universally recognized as fundamental pillars of good governance and effective public administration. They serve as critical mechanisms through which governments demonstrate responsibility in the management of public resources, implementation of public policies, and delivery of services to citizens. Transparency refers to the openness of governmental processes, decisions, and information, enabling citizens to access relevant information concerning public affairs. Accountability, on the other hand, requires public officials to justify their actions and accept responsibility for the outcomes of their decisions and conduct. Together, these principles enhance institutional legitimacy, strengthen public trust, improve service delivery, and promote sustainable socio-economic development.

In many developed countries, transparency and accountability have been institutionalized through strong administrative systems, independent oversight mechanisms, and effective public sector reforms. Countries such as Sweden, Canada, and the United Kingdom have established robust frameworks that promote ethical conduct, administrative professionalism, and compliance with established regulations. These frameworks are supported by digital governance initiatives, open government policies, and performance management systems that enhance public access to information and ensure that public officials remain accountable for their actions. Consequently, such countries continue to record relatively high levels of

public trust, government effectiveness, and institutional integrity.

In contrast, many developing countries continue to face significant governance challenges that hinder the realization of transparency and accountability. Weak institutional structures, political interference, corruption, inadequate professional capacity, and poor enforcement of regulations often undermine governance processes and reduce public confidence in government institutions. As a result, citizens frequently experience limited access to public information, weak service delivery systems, and inadequate accountability mechanisms. These challenges have heightened concerns regarding the capacity of public institutions to achieve good governance objectives and effectively respond to the needs of the populace.

Nigeria exemplifies many of these governance challenges despite several administrative reforms aimed at improving transparency and accountability. Over the years, the government has introduced initiatives such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA), the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and various anti-corruption programmes to strengthen public sector accountability. Nevertheless, reports continue to reveal persistent concerns relating to corruption, financial mismanagement, limited public access to government information, weak enforcement of audit recommendations, and inadequate compliance with administrative regulations. These issues continue to erode public trust and weaken confidence in governance institutions.

Within the public sector, public administrators occupy a strategic position in promoting transparency and accountability because they are responsible for implementing government policies, managing public resources, coordinating administrative activities, and ensuring the delivery of public services. Their decisions and actions directly influence the extent to which governance processes remain transparent and accountable. Consequently, the effectiveness of public administration depends largely on the professional conduct, ethical orientation, competence, and regulatory compliance of public administrators.

In this study, the role of public administrators is conceptualized through three key dimensions: ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence. Ethical leadership refers to the demonstration of integrity, fairness, honesty, and moral responsibility in administrative decision-making and public service delivery. Ethical leaders promote transparency by encouraging openness, discouraging corrupt practices, and fostering a culture of accountability within public institutions. Administrative competence relates to the knowledge, skills, expertise, and managerial capabilities required for effective policy implementation, resource management, decision-making, and service delivery. Competent administrators are better positioned to ensure procedural compliance, accurate reporting, efficient resource utilization, and effective governance outcomes. Policy adherence refers to the extent to which public administrators comply with established laws, regulations, administrative procedures, and government directives in the execution of their responsibilities. Consistent adherence to policy frameworks strengthens institutional accountability, reduces opportunities for abuse of discretion, and enhances public confidence in government operations.

The importance of these dimensions is supported by both theoretical and empirical literature. Good Governance Theory emphasizes that effective governance depends on transparency, accountability, rule compliance, and responsible public administration. Similarly, Principal-Agent Theory suggests that accountability mechanisms are necessary to ensure that public officials act in the interest of citizens rather than pursuing personal or political interests. However, the principal-agent gap remains a major challenge in many developing countries where weak oversight structures and institutional deficiencies create opportunities for administrative misconduct and governance failures. This situation highlights the need to examine how the attributes and conduct of public administrators influence transparency and accountability outcomes.

Empirical studies have reported mixed findings regarding the relationship between administrative characteristics and governance outcomes. While some studies suggest that ethical leadership, professional competence, and regulatory compliance significantly improve transparency and accountability, others indicate that institutional weaknesses, political influence, and systemic corruption often limit the effectiveness of these administrative attributes. These inconsistencies suggest the existence of contextual factors that may shape governance outcomes differently across administrative settings. More importantly, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence jointly influence transparency and accountability within local government administration in Nigeria.

This gap is particularly important because local governments represent the tier of government closest to the people and play a critical role in grassroots development and public service delivery. Yet concerns regarding transparency, accountability, and administrative effectiveness remain prevalent across many local government councils. Against this background, this study examines the influence of ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence on transparency and accountability in Ikeja Local Government, Lagos State, Nigeria. The study seeks to provide empirical evidence that will contribute to the understanding of governance practices and offer practical recommendations for strengthening accountability mechanisms, improving administrative performance, and enhancing public trust in local government administration.

Hypotheses

H_{01}: Ethical leadership has no significant effect on transparency and accountability in public administration.

H_{02}: Administrative competence has no significant effect on transparency and accountability in public administration.

H_{03}: Policy adherence has no significant effect on transparency and accountability in public administration.

Literature Review

Concepts

Public Administrators

The concept of public administrators refers to individuals operating within government agencies or non-elected public bodies who are responsible for translating political decisions and public policies into practical action (Poocharoen & Wong, 2020). Public administration is widely viewed as the implementation of government policy and the academic discipline devoted to studying that implementation (Peters & Pierre, 2022). Public administrators including managers, directors, and staff at local, regional, and national levels organize, direct, and control government operations to ensure that public goals are achieved efficiently, equitably, and in accordance with the rule of law (Rosenbloom, 2021). They play a critical role in sustaining transparency, accountability, and ethical governance, which are essential for building public trust and promoting good governance (Agbodike, Nweze, & Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2019; Kim, 2020).

Despite their central role, gaps remain in both theory and practice. Existing studies have largely focused on general aspects of accountability and transparency, with limited attention to how specific administrative dimensions such as ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence shape transparency and accountability outcomes (Maseko & Surujlal, 2021). In developing countries such as Nigeria, persistent administrative opacity and weak accountability mechanisms highlight the need for empirical examination of these linkages (Ewa & Eseneyen, 2025). Moreover, while digital transformation and integrated data systems are emerging as enablers of transparency and administrative efficiency, their role in enhancing competence and policy adherence among public administrators remains underexplored (Oviasuyi & Uwague, 2023). Consequently, this study aims to fill these theoretical and empirical gaps.

Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership refers to the process through which leaders demonstrate normatively appropriate conduct through their actions, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making while promoting such behaviour among followers through communication, reinforcement, and ethical role modeling (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005). It is grounded in social learning theory, where leaders influence subordinates by exhibiting moral behaviour that encourages integrity, fairness, and accountability (Babalola et al., 2020). Ethical leaders create organizational climates of trust and justice, which foster transparency, collective responsibility, and moral courage (Resick et al., 2021). In the public sector, ethical leadership is particularly critical because leaders are custodians of public resources and are expected to uphold principles of equity, honesty, and transparency in service delivery (Ng & Feldman, 2023).

However, despite the growing scholarly attention on ethical leadership, certain gaps remain unaddressed. Most previous studies have examined ethical leadership in private or corporate settings, with limited empirical evidence from the **public administration** context, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. Furthermore, while ethical leadership has been linked to employee behaviour and performance, fewer studies have explored its direct influence on **transparency and accountability** in governance systems. Lastly, the interaction of ethical leadership with **administrative**

competence and **policy adherence** in enhancing accountability remains underexplored. This study seeks to fill these critical gaps.

Administrative Competence

Administrative competence refers to the ability of public officials to effectively plan, organize, coordinate, and implement government policies and programs to achieve institutional goals (Boyne, 2020). It encompasses technical, managerial, and interpersonal skills that enable administrators to perform their duties efficiently and make sound decisions in the public interest (Kim & Park, 2021). Administratively competent leaders exhibit problem-solving abilities, professional judgment, and a strong understanding of bureaucratic processes that enhance service delivery and institutional accountability (Okafor & Onuigbo, 2022). In contemporary governance, administrative competence is viewed as a vital determinant of organizational performance, transparency, and citizen trust, particularly in developing nations where governance systems are often constrained by inefficiency and corruption (Amoako & Frimpong, 2023).

Despite its recognized importance, significant gaps persist in the literature. Most existing studies have concentrated on administrative competence as a driver of performance or service efficiency, with limited emphasis on its direct relationship with transparency and accountability in public administration. Furthermore, few studies have examined how administrative competence interacts with ethical leadership and policy adherence to promote good governance. In the Nigerian context, empirical evidence on the role of administrative competence in strengthening transparency mechanisms remains scarce. This study, therefore, seeks to fill these theoretical and empirical gaps.

Policy Adherence

Policy adherence refers to the extent to which public administrators and institutions comply with established governmental rules, regulations, and policy directives during the implementation process (Mutinda & Ngugi, 2021). It entails strict observance of policy guidelines, legal frameworks, and administrative procedures that ensure public officials act consistently with prescribed standards and institutional objectives (Adeniran & Olayiwola, 2022). High levels of policy adherence enhance predictability, efficiency, and accountability in governance, thereby fostering public trust and confidence in government institutions (Zafarullah & Huque, 2020). Conversely, weak adherence often results in policy inconsistency, corruption, and inefficiency in service delivery, especially in developing nations where political interference and administrative bottlenecks are prevalent (Olowu & Awotokun, 2023). Effective policy adherence, therefore, is not merely a procedural obligation but a governance mechanism that ensures the faithful execution of public policies and sustains transparency and accountability in public administration.

Despite its importance, empirical research on policy adherence remains limited. Most studies focus on policy formulation and evaluation, while little attention has been given to the compliance and implementation dimensions that determine policy effectiveness. Moreover, in the Nigerian context, there is a paucity of studies examining how policy adherence interacts with ethical leadersh**ip** and administrative competence to enhance transparency and accountability. This study aims to bridge these theoretical and contextual gaps.

Transparency and Accountability

Transparency and accountability are central pillars of good governance and public sector integrity. **Transparency** refers to the openness of government processes, decisions, and the availability of information to the public, enabling citizens to understand and evaluate administrative actions (Fox, 2021). **Accountability**, on the other hand, entails the obligation of public officials to explain and justify their actions, decisions, and use of public resources, and to face consequences for misconduct or inefficiency (Meijer, ’t Hart, & Worthy, 2022). Together, transparency and accountability enhance trust in government, reduce corruption, and improve service delivery by ensuring that decisions are made ethically and in the public interest (Ewa & Eseneyen, 2025).

In practice, transparent systems promote openness through access to information, participatory decision-making, and effective communication channels, while accountability ensures compliance with rules and performance standards (Amoako & Frimpong, 2023). However, gaps persist in both theory and empirical research. Most studies emphasize anti-corruption and fiscal control mechanisms, but limited attention has been given to how **ethical leadership, administrative competence,** and **policy adherence** jointly influence transparency and accountability. Moreover, few context-specific studies have examined these relationships within **Nigeria’s public administration,** where institutional weakness and political interference often undermine

governance quality. This study seeks to bridge these gaps by providing empirical evidence on these linkages.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theories **Good Governance Theory** and **Principal–Agent Theory** both of which provide conceptual lenses for understanding transparency and accountability in public administration.

Good Governance Theory, propounded by the **World Bank (1989),** emphasizes the principles of transparency, accountability, participation, efficiency, and rule of law as essential conditions for effective public administration and sustainable development. The theory posits that the performance of public institutions depends on the ethical quality, competence, and policy compliance of public officials (Kaufmann & Kraay, 2002). In this study, Good Governance Theory is relevant because it highlights how **ethical leadership, administrative competence,** and **policy adherence** collectively foster transparent and accountable governance processes. It underscores that public administrators' behavior and institutional integrity are central to achieving public trust and responsive governance.

Principal–Agent Theory, developed by **Stephen Ross (1973)** and further advanced by **Michael Jensen and William Meckling (1976),** explains the relationship between principals (citizens or government authorities) and agents (public administrators). The theory argues that agents may pursue self-interest unless effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms are in place. Its relevance to this study lies in explaining how ethical leadership and administrative competence mitigate information asymmetry and agency loss through transparency and adherence to policies.

However, gaps remain as prior studies have rarely integrated these two theories to explain how administrative behaviour shapes **transparency and accountability** in developing contexts such as Nigeria. This study bridges that gap by combining both frameworks to provide a holistic understanding of governance effectiveness.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies across different contexts have explored how ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence contribute to transparency and accountability in public governance. In developed countries, much of the research has focused on institutional leadership ethics and governance performance. For instance, a study conducted in the United States by Brown and Mitchell (2021) examined 412 public administrators using structural equation modelling (SEM) and found that ethical leadership significantly enhanced accountability through improved decision transparency. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Griffiths and Evans (2020) analyzed 356 respondents in local government agencies using multiple regression and discovered that administrative competence was positively correlated with procedural transparency and effective service delivery.

In developing economies, the trend also reflects a growing concern for leadership ethics and governance standards. In South Africa, a quantitative study by Moyo (2024) involving 250 government employees used regression analysis to evaluate accountability mechanisms in the National Health Insurance scheme. The results indicated that ethical leadership and adherence to governance controls had a significant positive influence on transparency outcomes. In Zambia, Ngalande and Phiri (2023) conducted a survey of 736 school managers and accounts officers using descriptive and inferential statistics and reported that 75% compliance with established procedures was associated with improved financial accountability in public schools.

In Nigeria, empirical investigations have yielded consistent findings but revealed notable gaps. Egbiki, Dakare, and Lawal (2024), in their study of 288 managers from public interest entities using linear regression, found that ethical leadership positively influenced transparent disclosure and overall governance effectiveness ($\beta = 0.445$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, Oladimeji (2024) surveyed 165 civil servants in Kwara State using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) and confirmed that ethics and accountability significantly enhanced organizational performance, moderated by perceived organizational support. However, these studies largely examined these constructs independently rather than in an integrated framework.

The major gap, therefore, lies in the limited empirical research that jointly examines the interrelationships among ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence as multidimensional determinants of transparency and accountability, particularly in the Nigerian public sector. Most studies have emphasized ethical leadership or administrative competence in

isolation, while the interactive effects and mediating pathways remain underexplored in governance research.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the effects of ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence on transparency and accountability among public administrators in Ikeja Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of data from respondents at a single point in time and facilitated the empirical examination of causal relationships among the study variables using statistical analysis. Specifically, the study investigated whether ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence significantly predict transparency and accountability in public administration.

The population of the study comprised all public administrators working in various departments of Ikeja Local Government Area, including directors, heads of departments, senior officers, and middle-level administrative staff actively involved in policy formulation, coordination, and implementation. Based on official staff records obtained from the local government administration, the total population consisted of 240 administrative personnel.

To determine the sample size, the study employed the Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula at a 5% level of precision:

n= {N}/{1+N(e)^2}
where:

n = sample size

N = population size (240)

e = margin of error (0.05)

Substituting the values into the formula:

n= {240}/ {1+240(0.05) ^2}

n= {240}/ {1+0.60}

n= {240}/ {1.60}

n=150
Accordingly, a sample size of 150 respondents was selected for the study. After determining the sample size, a stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation of all relevant departments within the local government. The population was first divided into strata based on departmental affiliation, including Administration, Finance, Works, Health, Education, and Planning. Thereafter, the sample was proportionately allocated to each department according to its share of the total population, and respondents were randomly selected within each stratum. This procedure enhanced representativeness and reduced sampling bias.

Data were collected using a structured, self-designed questionnaire. The instrument was organized into four sections corresponding to the study variables. Section A captured respondents' demographic information, while Sections B, C, and D measured the independent variables of ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence, respectively. Section E measured the dependent variable, transparency and accountability.

Ethical leadership was operationalized as the extent to which public administrators demonstrate integrity, fairness, honesty, and ethical conduct in decision-making and administrative processes. Administrative competence referred to the knowledge, skills, capabilities, and managerial effectiveness of public administrators in carrying out their official responsibilities. Policy adherence was defined as the extent to which public administrators comply with established policies, rules, regulations, and administrative guidelines in the discharge of their duties. Transparency and accountability were operationalized as a single governance construct reflecting openness, answerability, responsibility, and integrity in public-sector administration. The decision to combine transparency and accountability into one dependent variable was based on their conceptual interdependence, as transparency facilitates access to information and openness in governance, while accountability ensures that public officials are answerable for their actions and decisions. Together, they represent a comprehensive measure of good governance and administrative integrity.

All questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The questionnaire items were

developed based on established literature relating to ethical leadership, administrative competence, policy adherence, transparency, and accountability in public administration.

To improve the quality of the research instrument, a pilot survey involving 15 respondents, representing 10% of the study sample, was conducted among administrative personnel in a neighbouring local government area within Lagos State that was not included in the main study. Feedback from the pilot study was used to refine the wording, clarity, and structure of the questionnaire items.

The validity of the instrument was established through face and content validity procedures. Three academics specializing in public administration and two experienced practitioners in public-sector management reviewed the instrument and assessed its relevance, clarity, comprehensiveness, and suitability for measuring the study constructs. Their recommendations informed subsequent modifications to the questionnaire. Construct validity was further assessed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), which confirmed that the measurement items loaded appropriately on their respective constructs.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to determine the internal consistency of the measurement scales. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable, indicating satisfactory reliability of the instrument.

Data collection was conducted through both physical administration and electronic distribution of questionnaires to maximize participation and reduce non-response bias. Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the objectives of the research, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before data collection commenced.

The completed questionnaires were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and responses. Multiple regression analysis was employed to test the study hypotheses and determine the predictive effects of ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence on transparency and accountability.

The regression model was specified as:

$$\mathbf{TA=\beta 0+\beta 1EL+\beta 2AC+\beta 3PA+\varepsilon}$$

Where:

TA = Transparency and Accountability (composite dependent variable)

EL = Ethical Leadership

AC = Administrative Competence

PA = Policy Adherence

$\boldsymbol{\beta_0}$ = Constant term

$\boldsymbol{\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3}$ = Regression coefficients

$\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}$ = Error term

The model was estimated to test the following null hypotheses:

H_{01}: Ethical leadership has no significant effect on transparency and accountability in public administration.

H_{02}: Administrative competence has no significant effect on transparency and accountability in public administration.

H_{03}: Policy adherence has no significant effect on transparency and accountability in public administration.

TABLE 1: MODEL SUMMARY ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS' ETHICAL LEADERSHIP, ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCE, AND POLICY ADHERENCE AS PREDICTORS OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNANCE: EVIDENCE FROM IKEJA LOCAL GOVERNMENT, LAGOS STATE

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.462[a]	.213	.197	1.00525	.213	13.206	3	146	.000	2.185

a. Predictors: (Constant), POLICY ADHERENCE, ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCE, ETHICAL LEADERSHIP
b. Dependent Variable: TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

SOURCE: FIELD WORK, 2025 (SPSS VERSION 21)

The model summary reveals the overall effectiveness of the regression analysis assessing how ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence influence transparency and accountability among public administrators in Ikeja Local Government, Lagos State. The correlation coefficient (R = 0.462) indicates a moderate positive relationship, meaning improvements in these administrative factors are associated with higher transparency and accountability levels. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.213$) shows that the predictors jointly explain 21.3% of the variation in transparency and accountability, while the adjusted R^2 (0.197) confirms that 19.7% of the variance remains significant after accounting for sample size, suggesting a stable and reliable model.

The standard error of 1.00525 indicates that the model's predictions are reasonably accurate for social science data. The F-statistic (F = 13.206, p = 0.000) confirms the model's statistical significance, implying that the combined predictors meaningfully influence transparency and accountability. The Durbin–Watson value (2.185) suggests no autocorrelation, ensuring the reliability of the estimates.

In conclusion, the model demonstrates that ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence moderately but significantly predict transparency and accountability in Ikeja Local Government. Nonetheless, since about 79% of the variation is unexplained, other contextual factors such as organizational culture or political influence warrant further investigation.

TABLE 2: ANOVA ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS' ETHICAL LEADERSHIP, ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCE, AND POLICY ADHERENCE AS PREDICTORS OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNANCE: EVIDENCE FROM IKEJA LOCAL GOVERNMENT, LAGOS STATE

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	40.036	3	13.345	13.206	.000[b]
	Residual	147.538	146	1.011		
	Total	187.573	149			

a. Dependent Variable: TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY
b. Predictors: (Constant), POLICY ADHERENCE, ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCE, ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

SOURCE: FIELD WORK, 2025 (SPSS VERSION 21)

The ANOVA result assesses the overall significance of the regression model linking ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence to transparency and accountability among public administrators in Ikeja Local Government, Lagos State. The **regression sum of squares (40.036)** represents the variation in transparency and accountability explained by the predictors, while the **residual sum of squares (147.538)** indicates unexplained variation. With **3 degrees of freedom** for regression and **146 for residuals,** the model effectively partitions the total variance **(187.573)** into explained and unexplained components.

The **mean square for regression (13.345)** compared to the **mean square residual (1.011)** yields an **F-value of**

13.206, which is statistically significant at **p = 0.000.** This significance level, being less than 0.05, confirms that the combined effect of ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence significantly predicts transparency and accountability. Hence, the null hypothesis that these factors have no joint influence is rejected.

In essence, the ANOVA results validate the overall model, showing that the selected administrative and ethical dimensions meaningfully explain variations in transparency and accountability within Ikeja Local Government. This indicates that improving leadership ethics, administrative competence, and adherence to policy enhances public sector accountability and openness.

TABLE 3: COEFFICIENTS ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS' ETHICAL LEADERSHIP, ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCE, AND POLICY ADHERENCE AS PREDICTORS OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNANCE: EVIDENCE FROM IKEJA LOCAL GOVERNMENT, LAGOS STATE

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.643	.956		3.812	.000	1.754	5.533					
	ETHICAL LEADERSHIP	-1.029	.211	-.458	-4.886	.000	-1.445	-.613	-.221	-.375	-.359	.614	1.628
	ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCE	-.413	.176	-.185	-2.340	.021	-.762	-.064	-.179	-.190	-.172	.865	1.156
	POLICY ADHERENCE	1.112	.209	.495	5.316	.000	.699	1.526	.160	.403	.390	.621	1.611

a. Dependent Variable: TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

SOURCE: FIELD WORK, 2025 (SPSS VERSION 21)

Table 3 presents the regression coefficients showing the effects of ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence on transparency and accountability among public administrators in Ikeja Local Government Area, Lagos State. The intercept value (B = 3.643, p < 0.001) indicates the estimated level of transparency and accountability when all predictor variables are held constant.

Ethical leadership has a negative and statistically significant effect on transparency and accountability (B = -1.029, t = -4.886, p < 0.001). This implies that, holding other variables constant, a one-unit increase in ethical leadership is associated with a 1.029-unit decrease in transparency and accountability. Although this finding contradicts theoretical expectations, it may suggest that ethical leadership practices alone are insufficient to enhance transparency and accountability in the presence of institutional constraints such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, political interference, weak monitoring mechanisms, or corruption. It is also possible that ethical leadership is not effectively translated into governance outcomes within the local government context.

Administrative competence also exhibits a negative and statistically significant effect on transparency and accountability (B = -0.413, t = -2.340, p = 0.021). This indicates that a one-unit increase in administrative competence leads to a 0.413-unit decrease in transparency and accountability. The finding suggests that administrative competence may not automatically result in improved governance outcomes, particularly

where organizational structures, accountability systems, or institutional practices limit its effectiveness.

Conversely, policy adherence has a positive and statistically significant effect on transparency and accountability ($B = 1.112$, $t = 5.316$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that a one-unit increase in policy adherence results in a 1.112-unit increase in transparency and accountability. The finding demonstrates that compliance with established rules, regulations, and administrative procedures strengthens openness, responsibility, and accountability in governance.

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all predictors are below 2, indicating the absence of multicollinearity. Overall, the results suggest that policy adherence enhances transparency and accountability, while ethical leadership and administrative competence exhibit significant negative relationships with the dependent variable.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that ethical leadership has a significant negative effect on transparency and accountability among public administrators in Ikeja Local Government Area ($\beta = -0.458$, $p < 0.001$). This finding is contrary to the dominant position in the literature, which suggests that ethical leadership promotes openness, trust, integrity, and responsible governance. Studies by Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005), Kim (2020), and Griffiths and Evans (2020) reported positive relationships between ethical leadership and accountability outcomes in public organizations. The negative relationship observed in this study suggests that ethical leadership may not necessarily translate into improved transparency and accountability within the local government context. A plausible explanation is that institutional constraints such as political interference, bureaucratic bottlenecks, weak monitoring systems, and entrenched patronage networks may undermine the effectiveness of ethical leadership practices. Thus, even where leaders demonstrate ethical conduct, broader organizational realities may limit their capacity to influence governance outcomes positively.

The findings further revealed that administrative competence has a significant negative effect on transparency and accountability ($\beta = -0.185$, $p = 0.021$). This result also diverges from previous studies that associate managerial competence with improved governance effectiveness, transparency, and service delivery. Prior research has consistently shown that competent administrators are better equipped to implement policies, manage resources efficiently, and strengthen accountability mechanisms. However, the negative coefficient obtained in this study suggests that competence alone may be insufficient to guarantee transparent governance. In highly bureaucratic environments, competent administrators may prioritize operational efficiency and administrative control over openness and public disclosure. Additionally, institutional pressures and organizational cultures may constrain the extent to which administrative competence contributes to accountability outcomes.

In contrast, policy adherence exhibited a significant positive effect on transparency and accountability ($\beta = 0.495$, $p < 0.001$). This finding supports both theoretical expectations and empirical evidence from previous studies. Compliance with established rules, regulations, and administrative procedures promotes consistency, fairness, and openness in decision-making processes. The result aligns with studies by Zafarullah and Huque (2020) and Adeniran and Olayiwola (2022), which found that adherence to formal governance frameworks strengthens accountability mechanisms and enhances public trust. The finding suggests that policy adherence remains a critical instrument for improving transparency and accountability within local government administration.

Overall, the findings indicate that while policy adherence serves as an effective mechanism for promoting transparency and accountability, the benefits of ethical leadership and administrative competence may be constrained by contextual and institutional factors within Ikeja Local Government Area. These results underscore the importance of strengthening governance structures, enforcement mechanisms, and organizational accountability systems to ensure that leadership ethics and administrative capabilities translate into improved governance outcomes.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study advances knowledge on **public sector governance, transparency, and accountability** by empirically examining the influence of **ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence** within the context of **Ikeja Local Government, Lagos State, Nigeria**. Unlike previous studies that often treated these variables separately, this research integrates them into a single analytical model, providing a more holistic understanding of

administrative behavior and governance outcomes in local government settings.

The findings reveal that **policy adherence** significantly enhances transparency and accountability, while **ethical leadership** and **administrative competence** show negative but significant effects. This contrasts with evidence from developed countries, where these constructs typically yield positive outcomes, thereby highlighting the **context-dependent nature** of governance practices in developing economies.

Methodologically, the study contributes by applying **multiple regression analysis** and a **validated self-designed questionnaire** to measure administrative constructs in a local government context offering a replicable model for similar research in subnational institutions. Theoretically, it enriches the application of **Good Governance Theory** and **Principal–Agent Theory** by showing how policy adherence serves as a mediating mechanism that strengthens accountability and mitigates agency problems. Overall, the study adds fresh empirical and theoretical insights to the literature on governance reform in developing nations.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its valuable insights, this study is not without limitations. First, the research was limited to **Ikeja Local Government Area of Lagos State,** which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other local governments or regions in Nigeria with different administrative structures or socio-political dynamics. Future studies could expand the geographical scope to enhance external validity.

Second, the study relied on **self-reported data** collected through questionnaires, which may be subject to **response bias,** social desirability bias, or inaccurate self-assessment by respondents. Although efforts were made to ensure anonymity and objectivity, some responses might not fully reflect actual administrative practices.

Third, the study employed a **cross-sectional design,** capturing data at a single point in time. This limits the ability to establish causal relationships between the variables. A longitudinal design could provide deeper insights into how changes in ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence influence transparency and accountability over time.

Lastly, the study focused on only three predictor variables. Other factors such as organizational culture, political interference, and digital governance were not included, which may also significantly influence transparency and accountability. Future research should incorporate these dimensions for a more comprehensive understanding.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study examined the effects of ethical leadership, administrative competence, and policy adherence on transparency and accountability among public administrators in Ikeja Local Government Area, Lagos State. The findings revealed that policy adherence exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on transparency and accountability, indicating that compliance with established rules, regulations, and administrative procedures strengthens openness, responsibility, and accountability in governance. In contrast, ethical leadership and administrative competence were found to have significant negative effects on transparency and accountability. These unexpected findings suggest that the presence of ethical leadership and administrative competence alone may not be sufficient to improve governance outcomes within the local government context. Institutional challenges such as political interference, bureaucratic rigidities, weak accountability systems, and ineffective enforcement mechanisms may limit the capacity of ethical leaders and competent administrators to promote transparency and accountability. The study therefore concludes that policy adherence remains the most effective governance mechanism for enhancing transparency and accountability in Ikeja Local Government Area, while broader institutional reforms are required to ensure that ethical leadership and administrative competence translate into positive governance outcomes.

Recommendations

1. **Ethical Leadership**

   Given the significant negative effect of ethical leadership on transparency and accountability, local government authorities should identify and address institutional barriers that may hinder the effectiveness of ethical leadership practices. Efforts should focus on strengthening oversight mechanisms, reducing political interference, and promoting a culture that enables ethical leaders to translate ethical values into transparent and accountable governance outcomes.

2. **Administrative Competence**

In view of the significant negative relationship between administrative competence and transparency and accountability, capacity-building programmes should be redesigned to integrate accountability, transparency, and public service ethics into professional development initiatives. This will ensure that administrative competence contributes not only to operational efficiency but also to improved governance outcomes.

3. **Policy Adherence**

Since policy adherence was found to have a positive and significant effect on transparency and accountability, local governments should strengthen compliance monitoring systems, internal control mechanisms, and periodic audits to ensure consistent implementation of policies, rules, and administrative procedures that promote transparent and accountable governance.

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