

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ethical leadership, good governance and employee commitment: Testing a moderated mediation model in public universities of Ethiopia

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This paper uses a survey design based on cross-sectional data from 186 academic staff of four public universities representing four generations of universities in Ethiopia. The study finds that ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee commitment and such relationship is mediated by perceived good governance practices in the public universities. However, there is no moderated mediation effect of university type (generation) affecting the relationship of good governance and employee commitment. The study is quite novel in bringing good governance as a mediator into the relationship between ethical leadership and employee commitment in higher education institutions particularly in the public university context.

KEYWORDS

employee commitment, ethical leadership, Ethiopia, good governance, public universities

1 | INTRODUCTION

Ethics is a moral principle that decides how a person consistently behaves, when not being watched by others. Since ancient times, ethics has caught the fascination of philosophers and the general public. Coming from an old Greek word “ethos,” it basically focuses on man's virtuous life (Bauman, 2018). Every human being has certain virtues and it is expected to be reflected in their behavior. Verse 21 of chapter 3 of Bhagavad Gita (an ancient Hindu literature) tells whatsoever a highly placed person does; the same is done by others. It means people follow the examples set by their leaders. The modern “ethical leadership” has a direct source of this virtue ethics as advocated by Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle (Bauman, 2017; Sison et al., 2012) and Bauman (2018) confirmed ethical leadership as synonymous with virtuous leader. Plato's idea of philosopher-king is a virtuous leader who is well-educated and trained. Based on the education system and socio-cultural context of each country, the degree of endorsement of ethical leadership aspects varies considerably (Martin et al., 2009).

Several research studies on ethical leadership have been conducted in the realm of both public sector (Asencio, 2019; Lu & Guy, 2014; Young et al., 2019) and private sector (Agha et al., 2017; Celik et al., 2015; Rizwan et al., 2017; Schwepker Jr., 2019). But in the

context of educational organizations, ethical leadership studies have its own relevance due to the fact that educational institutions play a vital role for the development of ethical behaviors. During primary years, teachers lay the foundation of children's ethical premises. During this period students' learning on ethical behaviors merely depend upon simple instructions, stories or examples. But in higher educational institutions, adult students and also employees can refine their ethical behaviors from the examples set by their own educational leaders. It has been argued that most studies on ethical leadership of educational leaders have focused on lower educational institutions (Acar et al., 2012; Rizwan et al., 2017; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). However, the ethical dimensions of educational leaders in the context of higher institutions have been paid less attention, resulting in less research output (Everson & Bussey, 2007; Hanson, 2009; Singh & Rathore, 2014).

There are several studies on ethical leadership that have come up linking ethical leadership with various concepts like employee commitment (Agha et al., 2017; Celik et al., 2015; Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers, 2016), job satisfaction (Celik et al., 2015; Rizwan et al., 2017), individual performance (Schwepker Jr., 2019), organizational justice (Acar et al., 2012), social justice (Everson & Bussey, 2007), job engagement (Lu & Guy, 2014), organizational citizenship behavior (Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers, 2016), good governance (Naidoo, 2012;

Okagbue, 2012) etc. However, this study brings novelty in examining good governance as a mediator into the relationship between ethical leadership and employee commitment in the higher education sector. Moreover, a study on ethical leadership, good governance and employee commitment in the context of Ethiopian higher educational institutions has its own relevance for Ethiopia, due to its massive tertiary education sector reforms. An earlier study conducted by Amsale et al. (2016) only assessed the degree of ethics of educational leaders and Rani and Abdie (2017) only restricted their study to explore the relationship between ethical leadership and employee commitment. The motivation for this study is to fill this research gap, albeit partly by examining the impact of good governance into the relationship between ethical leadership aspects and employee commitment in the context of Ethiopian public universities. Examining such relationships will not only strengthen the existing theoretical foundation of ethical leadership, but also check the effectiveness of good governance practices in an African context. In order to study this relationship, we have also included university type (generation of the university) as the moderator variable. Overall, the uniqueness of this study can be ascertained from two angles – firstly, the moderated mediation role of good governance into the relationship between ethical leadership and employee commitment has been investigated; secondly, this is the first study concerning such relationships in the context of Ethiopian higher educational sector. Moreover, theoretically the study has put weights for a multi-dimensional ethical leadership model.

In order to address the vacuum in existing literature and realize the research objectives, the remaining sections are outlined as follows: In the next section, the theoretical framework leading to the foundation of the research model is presented, followed by related literature review and hypotheses development. Next, the article presents briefly the used methodology, followed by a presentation and discussion of empirical results and its implications. Finally, the article concludes by acknowledging the research limitations and offering a springboard for future research options.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is built upon a multi-dimensional concept of ethical leadership as given by Kalshoven et al. (2011). The most frequently used model of ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005) is a normative model. They define ethical leadership as behavior, which is appropriate and reflected in personal action and inter-personal relationship. Such behavior also passes to the followers by means of communication, reinforcement and decision making. This definition clearly aims to inculcate normative ethical dimensions in both self and followers (Shakeel et al., 2019). Some other authors also contributed to multi-dimensional aspects of ethical leadership (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Resick et al., 2006). Based on various studies, Kalshoven et al. (2011) proposed seven dimensions of ethical leader behavior namely fairness, power sharing, role clarification, people orientation, integrity, ethical guidance and concern for sustainability.

The first three dimensions (fairness, power sharing and role clarification) are also supported by earlier scholars (Brown et al., 2005; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Fairness dimension demonstrates how leaders maintain integrity in treating their colleagues. Their choices are fair and free from favoritism and that is why their behaviors are trustworthy. Power sharing dimension of ethical leadership demands a decentralized decision-making process. The leader listens and accommodates various ideas of the followers. Resick et al. (2006) called it an empowering dimension of ethical leadership. Maintenance of transparency in communication is the root of the third dimension (role clarification) of ethical leadership. For the subordinates, the ethical leader must clarify the performance expectations and so also related responsibilities. Kalshoven et al. (2011) argue that due to this dimension, subordinates contribute to organization's goals. The fourth-dimension people orientation entails how much a leader is caring and supportive to the subordinates (Resick et al., 2006; Treviño et al., 2003). The subordinates usually trust a leader if the leader genuinely heeds to the needs of the former. The fifth dimension is integrity, which is normally defined as upholding strong moral principles. But Kalshoven et al. (2011) viewed it from an individual's behavior. It mainly indicates the consistency between what a leader speaks and what he does. Scholars like Yukl (2006) and Simons (2002) also think in the same line. The sixth-dimension, ethical guidance mainly denotes awareness as well as promotion of ethical behaviors. Brown et al. (2005) argue that ethical leaders act as mentors for the employees if they face any ethical issues and Treviño et al. (2003) urge for using reinforcement (reward or punishment) to enable the subordinates responsible for their action. The last dimension, concern for sustainability was added by Kalshoven et al. (2011) and they described it as leaders' care about the environment. Their argument for this inclusion was in line with opinions of earlier scholars like Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) and Hargreaves and Fink (2004). By the conceptualization of Kalshoven et al. (2011), concern for sustainability mainly contains the items like actions of the leaders towards protection of environment and emphasizing recycling of materials in organizational functioning. In a study conducted in various manufacturing industries in Pakistan, Islam et al. (2020) exhibited the impact of ethical leadership on organizational green human practices. In a most recent study, similar impact of ethical leadership on employees' green work behaviors has also been reported by Ahmad et al. (2021). Arguably, concern for sustainability dimension exhibits the ethical leader's commitment towards its immediate environment in every aspect of governance.

With such robust ethical behavioral dimensions, the educational leaders could affect the governance of their institutions. In Ethiopian context, the higher education sector witnessed galloping growth, particularly after the fall of the Derg regime in 1991. From only three public universities in 1986, Ethiopia has now more than 45 universities, spreading across four generations of growth. Bishaw and Melesse (2018) assert that the large expansion has been marred by construction of adequate facilities. There is also an existence of an autonomous body called Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) to audit the relevance and quality of higher

education offered by the institutions in Ethiopia. This step is a part of the Ethiopian education and training policy focusing on teachers' qualification, management and leadership, autonomy and accountability, stakeholders' participation and many more (HERQA, 2007). From both leadership and accountability perspective, governance in Ethiopian public universities is not at a satisfactory level (Lerra & Oumer, 2017). Ethical leadership style in Ethiopia mainly hinges on adherence to law, prompting Amsale et al. (2016) to recommend a wider perception on ethical leadership dimensions for better organizational governance.

Along the 7-fold dimension of ethical leadership, this study also used good governance indicators as a mediator variable. In a simple language, governance is the exercise of decision-making power for the management of a nation's affairs (Mishra & Momin, 2020), and in an organizational context, it is also the process and result of taking decisions within that particular organization. For better development, all the institutions and departments are important and the national government plays a fundamental role in integrating all (UNO, 2016). Hence, in applying the modified Worldwide Governance Index (WGI) in the context of higher educational institutions, the broad good governance policies percolate down to institutions and further down to departments. The six indicators recommended by the World Bank (voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption) are coming under three headings namely political governance, economic governance and institutional governance. Kaufmann et al. (2007) argued for the usefulness of these aggregate indicators due to its coverage and frequent practices by policy makers and academicians. Moreover, the 6-fold Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) has also been used in measuring good governance in higher education sectors by scholars like Brannelly et al. (2011), Zaman (2015) and many. Henard and Mitterle (2009) argue that for governance in the tertiary education sector, accountability is highly important because in public funded institutions, there must be a value for money. The leaders of the public universities must be answerable to the stakeholders for any omissions or commissions. It also entails the existence of freedom of voice within the campuses. Political stability dimension mainly points to perceptions about governments' fragility (Zaman, 2015) and it also contains politically motivated violence and irregular activities. Government effectiveness, the next dimension measures the degree to which societal needs are met by maintaining various processes and institutions (Albritton & Bureekul, 2009) and also includes the quality of services delivered without any interference (Zaman, 2015). Regulatory quality dimension takes into account the organization's ability in

formulating and implementing sound policies. The last two dimensions: rule of law and control of corruption are coming under institutional dimensions of governance. In the context of higher educational organizations, rule of law measures the confidence of the stakeholders that the leaders follow the rules and procedures. On the other hand, control of corruption dimension measures the perceptual prevalence of corrupt activities marring the implementation of policies (Zaman, 2015).

Lastly, the outcome variable of this study is employee commitment and the researchers have used three-components model of Meyer and Allen (1991). The three components (affective, normative and continuance) of employee commitment were also used in higher educational sectors by several scholars (Fako et al., 2018; Wilkins et al., 2017). The three components measure emotional attachment (Wilkins et al., 2017), moral obligation (Meyer & Allen, 1997) and economic choice (Zhang et al., 2017) of employees in an organization.

3 | HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Figure 1 presents the proposed research model. The authors have framed three hypotheses taking the three constructs namely ethical leadership (independent), employee commitment (dependent), good governance (mediating) and a moderator variable, university type.

3.1 | Ethical leadership and employee commitment

Allen and Meyer (1996) argue that commitment is a psychological link between leaders' style of influencing and employees and consequently it decides employee's separation from or continuance with the organization. There is no doubt about the role of leadership in contributing to employee commitment within an organization (Jackson et al., 2013; Wayne et al., 2009). Several studies are available linking ethical leadership behavior to employee commitment (Asif et al., 2019; Celik et al., 2015; Rizwan et al., 2017). Den Hartog and De Hoogh (2009) established a positive relationship between ethical leadership behavior and the affective and normative component of employee commitment. However, they found a negative correlation with the continuance component. But other scholars established a positive relationship of ethical leader behavior with all the three components of employee commitment. For example, in the context of Nigeria, Agha et al. (2017) corroborated the positive and significant

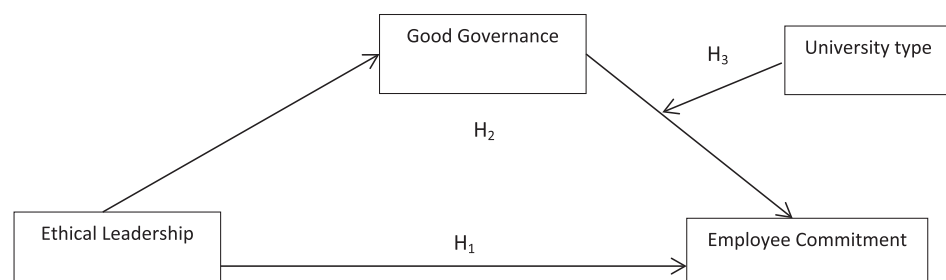


FIGURE 1 Research model

relationship of ethical leader behaviors with all the three components. Similar results have also been reported in educational sectors in Pakistan (Rizwan et al., 2017) and Ethiopia (Rani & Abdie, 2017). Based on above studies, we hypothesize:

H1. *Ethical leadership has a positive and statistically significant impact on employees' commitment.*

3.2 | Ethical leadership, good governance and employee commitment

Like all leadership, ethical leadership is also a behavioral style, but good governance is broadly related to governing within policy frameworks. On discussion about leadership and governance, Asamoah and Yeboah-Assiamah (2019) envision "people" and "common welfare." Hence, in an organizational context, the most important job of a leader is to ensure good governance practices, so that various stakeholders' interests can be protected and promoted. Whether in micro (organization) or macro (society) context, there are a fair number of studies depicting a link between leadership and good governance (Bhuiyan, 2012; Nicholas-Omoregbe et al., 2016). However, taking a particular leadership style (ethical) and good governance, scholarly works are less. But scholars like Farazmand (2002) and Maguire (1997) identified the leaders' disregard to ethics in governance practices leading to massive scandals both in public and private sectors. In the context of Nigerian local government system, Enwereonye et al. (2015) argue for ethical leadership and good governance. However, they have conceptualized good governance as transparent, responsive, effective and accountable. For promoting good governance in South African public sectors, Naidoo (2012) emphasized the need for ethical leadership and curbing of corruption. Like any other sector, for higher education also, corruption in governance is a hurdle for development. For curbing corruption and ensuring better governance, Heyneman (2004) suggested some reforms in the educational sector and to make "quality assurance" mandatory (Heyneman, 2013). An ethical leadership is expected to provide good university governance by measuring the quality of educational services through external reviewers (Heyneman, 2013). In Ethiopian higher education context, there is the presence of HERQA, but a proper study on ethical leadership and good governance has not been done.

On the other hand, there is no direct study available regarding the relationship between good governance practices and employee commitment. But a careful analysis of good governance dimensions reveals that it is a powerful determinant of employee commitment. The most important link of employee commitment is with accountability. Suppose the organization leaders decide to bring certain changes in structure or policy or governance practices in order to answer the changing needs of the society. In order to implement such changes, the top management must convince the employees of the organization. If an employee feels a scarcity in accountability and transparency; then he may choose not to continue with the organization. On the other hand, if the top leaders are accountable and transparent about the practices, then the employee may prove to be more

committed to the realization of the planned goals of the organization. In this regard, Rainey (2014) has rightly observed the importance of communicating the goals, rules and regulations to the employees for their support and commitment. Coming to the dimensions of economic governance, one can notice a strong vice-versa relationship between organization performance (effectiveness and efficiency) with commitment of the workers. Menzel (2005) opined that performance is conditioned on an ethical environment, which is more likely to enhance individual performance and commitment. The institutional dimensions of governance like rule of law and lack of corruption also enhance employee commitment. It is necessary for an organization to curb corruption for enhancing the level of employee commitment (Barling & Phillips, 1993; Hijal-Moghrabi et al., 2017). Kumasey et al. (2017) corroborated the correlation between code of ethics and employee commitment in the context of Ghana public sector employees. On the basis of above literature review, we hypothesize:

H2. *Perceived good governance has a positive and statistically significant mediation impact on the relationship between ethical leadership and employee commitment.*

Moreover, organization type can be a factor for good governance and employee commitment. Mathieu and Zajac (1990) identified organization related variables as antecedent to commitment. It is commonly perceived that governance varies across organizational contexts. Institutional fragilities affect good governance. In Ethiopia, currently four generations of universities exist. The earlier generations of universities (1st and 2nd) have better physical facilities in terms of infrastructures, well qualified teachers and moreover they are in good locations of the country. On the other hand, most new generation universities (3rd and 4th) are marred with various issues like funding, infrastructure, staffing and more (Van Deuren et al., 2016). There is also a visible brain drain of well qualified staff from new generation universities to better managed old generation universities (Ashcroft & Rayner, 2011; Semela, 2011). These organizational factors posit challenges to the governance of an organization. Hence, we hypothesize:

H3. *University type has a positive and statistically significant moderated mediation impact on the relationship between perceived good governance and employee commitment.*

4 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a cross-sectional survey design to collect data from academic staff of four universities of Ethiopia. The selectively chosen organizations (Addis Ababa University, University College of Education, Kotebe, Ambo University and Addis Ababa University of Science and Technology) represent four generations of universities in Ethiopia. From each university, we have randomly chosen 50 academic staff to participate in the survey, making the total number of respondents 200. The minimum sample size calculation for the model is based on the G-power software for three variable multiple regression with $\alpha = 0.01$, power = 0.95 and effect

size = 0.20. The minimum sample size thus calculated is 82. To get meaningful results from CFA, Jackson (2001) suggested the sample size to be 160. So, our sample size of 200 is well above the suggested size. Once sample size is decided, we have followed equal sampling procedure to have equal representation of the sample employees for comparison purposes. The survey instrument was mainly designed on three constructs (ethical leadership, employee commitment, perceived good governance) besides some demographic queries like age, gender, educational qualifications and years of experience. Except for the perceived good governance scale, we have used the already validated instruments for seven-dimensional ethical leadership behaviors (Kalshoven et al., 2011) and three-dimensional employee commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1996). But for perceived good governance scale, we have developed our own questionnaire. For doing so, we have adopted the six dimensions of WGI. Taking these indicators, we conducted interviews on purposively selected 50 academic and subject experts from all the four generation universities. A profile of the interviewees has been provided in Table A2. The researchers introduced the participants with the definitions of six dimensions of good governance and invited them to give their opinions. These opinions were recorded and transcribed using Atlas.ti software. Taking such results, a list of 48 items across six dimensions were developed, which was subsequently submitted to a group of seven new subject experts for further validation. We used Delphi technique and one of the researchers performed the role of the facilitator. On the basis of six dimensions of WGI, for 22 items, consensus was reached in the third round. We also conducted a pilot study on 20 academicians to check the working of the instrument. The reliability score (Cronbach's alpha) of 20 cases was quite satisfactory. However, for better understanding some statements were more simplified. All the items in the questionnaire were anchored in a scale of 1 to 5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). For three constructs, separate instruments were printed and handed over to the enumerators for data collection. To avoid the common method bias (CMB), we instructed the enumerators to implement the three instruments separately at different points in time (Podsakoff et al., 2003). For that purpose, three separate instruments were designed. In the first phase, respondents filled the question items on ethical leadership along with control variables. In the second and third phase, the respondents filled the good governance and employee commitment instruments. We have also used Harman's single factor test (Harman, 1960). The test results revealed no such bias as for all the three constructs. The single factor extraction had a 47% maximum variance explained. A total of 192 questionnaires were returned and due to some unfilled responses and outliers, we dropped six response sheets, thus making a total of 186 valid responses. The whole process of data collection was done during the period of November 2018 to October 2019.

5 | RESULTS

5.1 | Respondent's demographic profile

Of all the total respondents, around 56% are male and the rest 44% are female, making it a little gender biased in sample size (Table A1). Concerning the age of the respondents, 97.3% are within the age of 40. It

indicates that respondents are young and quite vigilant about the leadership and governance practices in their respective organizations. The respondents are academic staff and obviously expected to be quite educated. But, as far as their highest qualifications are concerned, around 17% hold PhD degrees. Of the total respondents, 71.5% have 5–10 years of work experience in their respective organizations while 13.5% have more than 10 years of work experience. These figures are good enough to narrate the perceptions about their commitment, ethical practices of top leadership and ongoing governance practices.

5.2 | Descriptive statistics

Table 1 offers the mean, standard deviations (SD) and Cronbach's alpha scores of all the three constructs used for this study.

The high mean values of all the constructs (above 3) indicate that the respondents respond favorably. All the SD values are less than 1.00 and indicate that the responses did not fluctuate much across the mean values. For every construct, there must be an internal consistency among the measuring items (Hair et al., 1992; Zikmund, 1994) and can be known by checking Cronbach's alpha value. By referring to the recommendations of Gliem and Gliem (2003), our study reports very good ($\alpha > 0.80$) internal consistency for ethical leadership construct and high ($\alpha > 0.70$) internal consistency for other two constructs.

5.3 | Reliability and validity

Table 2 offers the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) of all the three constructs. As Cronbach's alpha is not a strong measure of reliability, we have looked into the CR which should be above 0.70 (Hair et al., 1992; Nunnally, 1978) and our study reports it in a range of 0.84 to 0.88. To establish the convergent validity, we have also checked the AVE. Fornell and Larcker (1981) opine that it is a measure of variance captured by a construct in relation to the amount of variance caused by measurement error and should ideally be above 0.50. All the three AVEs in this study are in the range of 0.52 to 0.74. Table A3 offers CR and AVE scores of all the dimensions across the three constructs. This study also measured the discriminant validity by comparing the square root of AVE with inter-construct correlations. Ideally correlation between a pair of variables should be less than the square root of AVE of each pairing variable. Table 2 also offers the results of discriminant analysis. For example, the correlation between ethical leadership and perceived good governance is 0.50,

TABLE 1 Mean, SD and alpha value of constructs ($N = 186$)

Constructs	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha (α)
Ethical leadership	3.44	0.70	0.88
Employee commitment	3.44	0.93	0.77
Perceived good governance	3.72	0.95	0.78

Constructs	CR	AVE	EL	GG	EC
Ethical leadership (EL)	0.904	0.524	0.724		
Perceived good governance (GG)	0.848	0.540	0.501	0.735	
Employee commitment (EC)	0.799	0.746	0.271	0.579	0.864

Note: The square root of AVE is shown boldly on the diagonal (last three columns). Non-diagonal elements are the latent variable correlations (LVC); all correlations have $p < 0.001$.

TABLE 2 Composite reliability, AVE and discriminant validity of constructs

Model fit statistics	Recommended value	EL	GG	EC
CMIN/DF	≤ 3.00	562/289 = 1.944	575/215 = 2.67	542/275 = 1.971
P-value	> 0.05	< 0.01	< 0.001	< 0.01
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.94	0.94	0.92
TLI	≥ 0.95	0.96	0.95	0.96
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.04	0.05	0.04
SRMR	≤ 0.05	0.03	0.04	0.04

TABLE 3 CFA model fit results

which is less than the square root of AVE of ethical leadership and perceived good governance (0.724 and 0.735 respectively).

5.4 | Model fit

To establish the model fit of all the three constructs, we have run confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using Jamovi software. Table 3 offers the CFA results of the three constructs used for this study. The indicators with factor loadings over and above 0.70 are retained for the final analysis. CR (0.70) is also considered for this purpose. For hypothesis testing through structural equation modeling, certain assumptions need to be checked. Accordingly, we checked for outliers, missing values and also any correlations of all the three study constructs with the control variables (Hair et al., 2010; Islam et al., 2015). We did not notice any significant correlation between control variables with any observed variable. Table 2 offers the correlation values among the study variables.

Wheaton et al. (1977) argued for p -value to be more than 0.05, but Marsh and Hocevar (1985) stressed for chi-square divided by degree of freedom (CMIN/DF) as a better measure and should be less than three. Our research result has not confirmed to the standard p -value, but CMIN/DF is less than three for all the three constructs. We have also checked other fit indices like Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root-mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The ideal values for CFI and TLI should be above 0.90 and 0.95 respectively (Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Bollen, 1989). This study result reports both the values well above the standard. The RMSEA value should be equal or less than 0.08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993) and in our results, it is in a range of 0.04 to 0.05 for all the three constructs. A good fit is indicated if SRMR is less than 0.05 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011; Lacobucci, 2010). SRMR is also a better index being independent from sample size (Chen, 2007). For all the three constructs in this study, SRMR is below 0.05.

TABLE 4 Path estimates

Relationship	Estimate	SE	z	p
EL -> GG	0.537	0.091	5.88	< 0.001
GG -> EC	0.878	0.025	34.17	< 0.001
EL -> EC	0.141	0.03	4.03	< 0.001
R^2 (employee commitment)	0.89			

5.5 | Hypotheses testing

As stated earlier, this study has taken three hypotheses concerning a direct relationship, mediating relationship (indirect effect) and also moderating effect. Table 4 offers the path estimates of various relationships.

The first hypothesis is related to the direct effect between ethical leadership and employee commitment indicates EL -> EC ($\gamma = 0.141$, $p < 0.001$). Our result supported the first hypothesis due to significant p -value. The indirect effect (on 10,000 bootstrap samples) of ethical leadership on employee commitment through perceived good governance is the multiplication of 0.537 (EL -> GG) and 0.878 (GG -> EC), resulting in 0.472. The p -value for both EL -> GG and GG -> EC are significant (Table 4). Hence, the indirect effect is also significant. So, our study also supports the second hypothesis. The third hypothesis deals with a moderated mediation model and to test this, we have used model 14 of Hayes Process Macro (Hayes, 2018), where the relationship between mediating variable (perceived good governance) and dependent variable (employee commitment) is affected by a moderating variable (university type). The purpose of the moderated mediation model is to see whether the mediation effect is dependent upon the level of the moderator (Hayes, 2018), that is, generation of the universities in Ethiopia. The interaction effect is statistically significant indicating interaction between university type and perceived good governance; the conditional effects are also significant at different

values of the moderator. The direct effects and indirect effects of the moderator are found to be statistically significant as the value zero does not fall in between lower (LLCI = 0.031) and upper bound confidence intervals (ULCI = 0.407). The confidence levels of interaction terms are statistically different from zero. The interaction variable is positive and statistically significant ($p = 0.02$). The R^2 change indicates that there is some moderation effect (0.003). However, on the basis of 10,000 bootstrap samples, the conditional interaction effect of moderating mediation is not statistically significant as zero value falls in between lower (LLCI = -0.069) and upper bound confidence intervals (ULCI = 0.001) indicating absence of moderating mediation. Hence, this study rejects the third hypothesis.

The variability in the dependent variable as explained by the model is 89% indicates that the ethical leader behavior and good governance practices are powerful predictors of employee commitment in public universities of Ethiopia.

6 | DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is 2-fold. First, the researchers want to measure the mediating effect of perceived good governance practices in ethical leadership behavior and employee commitment (academic staff) of public universities of Ethiopia. Second, the researchers also wanted to know whether the university type (generations of universities) had the moderating mediation impact on perceived good governance. The theoretical context of the study is guided by multi-dimensional ethical leadership behaviors (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2009; Kalshoven et al., 2011), six-dimensional WGI and three-dimensional employee commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1996).

The results indicated the positive and significant relationship between ethical leadership and employee commitment. This result is a corroboration to the earlier studies (Celik et al., 2015; Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2009; Rizwan et al., 2017) exploring the effect of ethical leadership behavior on employee commitment. However, our study reports a low path coefficient (0.14) between ethical leadership and employee commitment. One possible reason could be we have not segregated the three components of employee commitment. There might be a very low or negative relationship of ethical leadership with the continuance component of employee commitment. Den Hartog and De Hoogh (2009) also established the same relationship. There is also another reason why we doubt the relationship between ethical leadership and the continuance component. Because, in a recent study conducted on Ethiopian universities, Haileyesus et al. (2019) exposed the growing academic staff turnover. Notwithstanding the cause of low path coefficient between ethical leadership and employee commitment, this study urged the need for improvement in ethical behavior of public university leaders in Ethiopia.

The second hypothesis testing result reveals that good governance practices successfully mediate in between ethical leadership and employee commitment. The indirect effect of perceived good governance is high (0.47), because the path coefficient between ethical leadership and good governance (0.53) and good governance and employee

commitment (0.87) are large. The total effect is much more than the direct effect. This is a partial mediation as the direct effect is also significant in spite of the presence of a significant mediator variable. However, this study further insights about the high path coefficient between good governance practices and employee commitment. Governance practices like accountability, effectiveness, and rule of law, control of corruption and more are powerful predictors of commitment and these good governance practices are resulting from ethical practices of university leaders. Scholarly contributions from Hijal-Moghrabi et al. (2017) and Barling and Phillips (1993) also suggested curbing corruption for promoting employee commitment in an organization.

The third hypothesis is concerned with moderated mediation. Our result shows the mediator (perceived good governance) is not moderated by university type. For expansion of the higher education system, obviously there is a massive growth in the number of public universities. But many new universities located in remote areas have limited infrastructural facilities (Van Deuren et al., 2016). It was expected that old generation universities having better location and physical facilities would have different effects on the outcome variable than new generation universities. But our study established that, due to the moderator, the change in R^2 is very low (0.003). The index of moderating mediation which is the slope parameter is not statistically significant. Thus, the evidence suggests that there is no moderating mediation, indicating no moderating impact of university type on the relationship between good governance and academic staff commitment. It means good governance practices have nothing to do with types of universities in terms of location, vintage, physical facilities and more.

7 | THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

In this study, all the seven dimensions of ethical leadership model of Kalshoven et al. (2011) has been retained. In that way, our study supported a multi-dimensional model. This study reveals that ethical leadership positively affects the academic staff commitment in public universities of Ethiopia. This effect is increased to a high level due to the successful mediation of good governance practices by the leaders. Hence, it is necessary to understand the importance of good governance practices like accountability, effectiveness, rule of law, curbing corrupt practices and more, along with ethical leader dimensions. This would allow the researchers to focus more upon good governance practices adopted by the ethical leaders in not only higher education institutions but also in other public sector organizations. The present study has also negated the moderating role of university type in the relationship of good governance and employee commitment. It means good governance practices have nothing to do with organizational location, vintage and physical facilities.

8 | PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results also have implications for the government of Ethiopia, who is vigorously pursuing to expand the higher educational sector.

They should not worry about the location of setting up institutions. They can go to the peripheral regions for opening the institutions. But the government should be cautious enough in choosing the leaders for such institutions. The leaders must exhibit the ethical leadership behaviors and they can be trained on the practices of good governance. A holy marriage between ethical leadership and good governance practices can provide synergy to the organization as well to the government. It would generate a high level of academic staffs' commitment and consequently take the higher educational institutions to the path of academic glory.

9 | CONCLUSION

The study examined the mediating impact of perceived good governance on the relationship between ethical leadership and employee commitment; and the moderating mediation impact of university type (generation of the university) on perceived good governance in selected public universities of Ethiopia. For the three constructs used, this study adopted the multi-dimensional leadership theory (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2009; Kalshoven et al., 2011), worldwide governance index and three components of employee commitment theory (Allen & Meyer, 1996). A total of 186 valid responses from academic staff of four public universities (representing four generations of universities) participated in the survey. Out of three hypotheses constructed, two hypotheses are supported by the evidence. The hypothesis relating moderating mediation could not be accepted. There is a significant positive relationship between ethical leadership and employee commitment. The effect becomes larger due to successful mediation of good governance practices. However, this study ruled out the moderating effect of university type (generations) on perceived good governance. The explanatory power of the model (89%) indicates the importance of ethical leadership and good governance practices adopted by the ethical leaders. The outcomes of this study are useful for the researchers in understanding the value of good governance and ethical leadership in ensuring employee commitment in other organizations.

10 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH OPTIONS

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. First, this study used the perceptions from academic staff of four public universities in Ethiopia. The data collection has not considered perceptions of non-academic staff, to that extent it acts as a limitation. Hence, one should be careful while generalizing the research results for all types of employees in public sectors. Second, this study has collected data using a 5-point Likert-type scale. The actual situations or feelings could have been better captured by administering some qualitative instruments like key informant interviews or focus group discussions. Though we had conducted 50 interviews of academic staff, it is limited to validate the good governance scale only. Therefore, future research should be conducted by a judicious mix of both quantitative and qualitative

approaches. Future research also can take the data from both academic and non-academic staff to understand the effect on the outcome variable. This study used six-dimensional WGI. But there is another popular good governance theory having eight-dimensions. It has additional dimensions like participation, and consensus. Hence, one can explore the change in effects by taking more good governance dimensions. Finally, another offer can be made to check other determinants of employee commitment across the ethical leadership theory. Methodologically, we used model 14 suggested by Hayes (2018). There are several other possibilities of moderation which we have not explored.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy restrictions.

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APPENDIX A.

TABLE A1 Socio economic profile of respondent teachers

Attributes	Frequency	%	Attributes	Frequency	%
Gender			Educational qualifications		
Male	104	55.9	PhD	31	16.7
Female	82		Masters	107	57.5
Total	186		Others	48	25.8
Age in years			Work experience		
20–30	109	58.6	<5 years	27	14.5
30–40	72	38.7	5–10 years	133	71.5
40–50	5	2.7	10–15 years	17	9.1
Total	186	100.0	15–20 years	8	4.3
			>25 years	1	0.5

TABLE A2 Socio-economic profile of interviewees (N = 50)

Attributes	Frequency	%	Attributes	Frequency	%
Gender			Educational qualifications		
Female	13	26.0	MA/MSc	29	58.0
Male	37	74.0	PhD	21	42.0
Age in years			Job title		
30–40	11	22.0	Lecturer	24	48.0
40–50	38	76.0	Sr. Lecturer	1	2.0
50–60	1	2.0	Asst. Professor	23	46.0
Total	50	100.0	Assoc. Professor	2	4.0
Generation of universities					
1st	12	24.0			
2nd	15	30.0			
3rd	10	20.0			
4th	13	26.0			

TABLE A3 Reliability and validity of the dimensions of constructs

Dimension/Construct	Cronbach alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
Ethical leadership				
Fairness	0.743	0.764	0.851	0.656
Power sharing	0.819	0.827	0.873	0.580
Role clarification	0.912	0.914	0.934	0.740
People orientation	0.893	0.897	0.921	0.701
Integrity	0.803	0.836	0.884	0.720
Ethical guidance	0.930	0.930	0.943	0.703
Concern for sustainability	0.837	0.838	0.902	0.754
Good governance				
Voice and accountability	0.742	0.783	0.849	0.653
Stability	0.750	0.762	0.801	0.684
Effectiveness	0.806	0.864	0.858	0.674
Regulatory quality	0.783	0.895	0.898	0.815
Rule of law	0.760	0.792	0.814	0.690
Control of corruption	0.803	0.865	0.869	0.626
Employee commitment				
Affective	0.771	0.822	0.848	0.584
Continuance	0.726	0.769	0.744	0.608
Normative	0.799	0.807	0.868	0.622