

MODERATION OF ETHICAL CLIMATE ON THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIORS

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Abstract

The ethical scandals reported in many public organizations coupled with the need for employees to exert more extra efforts signifies the needs for more studies on the link between ethical leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB) in the public sector organizations particularly in Nigeria. This study examined the moderation effects of Ethical Climate on the relationships between Ethical Leadership and OCB. A survey of structured questionnaires was used in obtaining data from 180 local government leaders/supervisors and their subordinates in Nigeria. The findings revealed that Ethical Leadership and Ethical Climate both positively predict OCB. Additionally, the study found that Ethical Climate moderated the positive relationships between Ethical Leadership and OCB. The study concluded that Ethical Leadership and Ethical Climate exerts influence in promoting OCB, such that the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB on employees is more stronger when the ethical climate higher than when ethical climate is low in the organization.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, ethical climate, organizational citizenship behavior, Nigeria, public sector

1.0 Introduction

Ethical scandals reported in many public organizations coupled with the inabilities of organizational leaders to exhibit more citizenship behaviours signified the needs for more studies on the link between ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB) particularly in Nigeria. Accordingly, the inability of many leaders to demonstrate appropriate conducts in organizations had influence many authors to be more interested in understanding the effect of ethical leadership on employees behavior (Al Halbusi, Williams, Ramayah, Aldieri, & Vinci, 2019). Furthermore, scholars in their attempt to address the growing number of misconducts and other unethical behaviors in organizations and advance pro-social behaviors (Al Halbusi, Ruiz-Palomino, Morales-Sánchez, & Abdel Fattah, 2021; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Mayer, Kuenzi, & Greenbaum, 2010) considered the role of ethical leadership as important panacea. Moreover, studies on the effects of ethical leadership in promoting employees positive behaviors that enhances organizational effectiveness have been helpful over the years (Khan, Yasir, Yusof, Bhatti, & Umar, 2017; Şenyurt & Dinc, 2015). However, these studies were mostly conducted in Pakistan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, China. While, Africa and particularly Nigeria where the study is needed the most considering the growing number of ethical issues was left unexplored.

Local governments as government at the grassroot level are responsible for the provision of certain goods and services to local populace. They also serve as important training grounds for future leaders. According to Okechukwu (2012) the Nigerian system of local government

has for years been engulfed by leadership crisis, as a result of recurrent unethical behaviors of many public officials within the local government councils. These unethical behaviors and actions of the officials have invariably created a leadership crisis that adversely affected the quality, quantity of goods and services they provided. Considering the importance of OCB as a critical factor in enhancing organizational effectiveness, studying OCB at local government level is imperative. Nevertheless, empirical studies on the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB in organization are scanty. Consequently, results from the few studies conducted revealed inconsistent findings. For instance, while some studies (Aloustani *et al.*, 2020; Khan *et al.*, 2017; Şenyurt & Dinc, 2015), revealed significant direct relationship between ethical leadership and OCB. However, on the other hand, other empirical studies (Huang, Qiu, Yang, & Deng, 2021; Jeon, Park, Choi, & Kim, 2018; Yates, 2011), found no significant direct relationship between ethical leadership and OCB. Thus, further empirical studies are required to clarify the actual link between ethical leadership and OCB (Yates, 2011). In view of these mixed and inconclusive findings, the need for a moderating variable is required. Therefore, to address this gap the present study considered ethical climate as a potential moderator. The moderating effect of ethical climate on the positive relationship between ethical leadership and OCB within the context of Nigerian local government is yet to be explored. Accordingly, investigating these relationships will provide a clear understanding of the link and also provide additional theoretical and empirical support on how ethical climate can buffer the effect of ethical leadership on OCB at local government level. Therefore, this study intends to examine the moderating effect of ethical climate on the ethical leadership and OCB relationships within the context of local governments in Nigeria.

To achieve the main objective of this empirical study, the study was organized in to five sections. Apart from the background upon which the study was situated, the second part reviewed relevant literature on OCB, ethical climate and ethical leadership leading to the development of hypotheses. In the third section, the method employed in conducting the study was described. In the fourth section, results were presented and detailed discussion and implications were all highlighted. Lastly, the study ended with concluding remarks, limitations and suggestions for further studies.

2.0 Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Leaders are always considered to be a key source(s) of ethical guidance for their subordinates/employees in organization (Brown, Trevino & Harrison, 2005). Ethical leaders regarded as principled, fair and just decision-makers who always care about their subordinates/employees and other people in the broader society. They behaved ethically in both their personal and official or professional lives. Brown, Trevino, and Harrison (2005) defined ethical leaderships as '*the leaders' demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making*'. Ethical leadership has been considered to be an important factor that influence employees positive behaviors in organization (Ko, Ma, Kang, English, & Haney, 2017). Ethical leaders also promote both employees ethical behaviors and job related performance (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Additionally, apart from creating positive behaviors in organizations, ethical leaders also discourage employees misconducts (Mayer *et al.*, 2010), and provides conducive environment for employees to display OCB (Avey, Palanski, & Walumbwa, 2011). Ethical leaders regarded as principled, fair and just decision-makers who always care about their

subordinates/employees and other people in the broader society. They behaved ethically in both their personal and official or professional lives.

Theoretically, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986) postulate that people acquired new behaviors by observing and imitating others they considered as role model. In organization, employees/subordinates of ethical leader are most likely tends to imitate his/her ethical norms, behavior and actions they considered good and are beneficial to them and the organization (Ko *et al.*, 2017). Because, ethical leaders in organization do make ethical standards very clear to their subordinates by encouraging them to do the right things. Therefore, through these social learning processes as advocated by (Bandura, 1977), employees can learn and be motivated to engage in performing OCB that benefits others within the organization.

Empirical studies revealed inconsistencies on the link between ethical leadership and OCB whereby some studies like (Aloustani *et al.*, 2020; Khan *et al.*, 2017; Şenyurt & Dinc, 2015), found significant direct relationship between ethical leadership and OCB. Nevertheless, other empirical studies (Huang *et al.*, 2021; Jeon *et al.*, 2018; Yates, 2011), revealed that no significant direct relationship between ethical leadership and OCB. At local government level, it is expected that ethical leaders can inspired, motivate their followers by treating them fairly, showing them concern. In return, the employees/followers will be more likely move to exhibit extra performance inform of OCB. Based on the above discussion the first hypothesis was developed.

H1: Ethical leadership is positively associated with OCB

2.1 Moderation of Ethical Climate

According to Victor and Cullen (1988) ethical climate refers to the '*prevailing perceptions of typical organizational practices and procedures that have ethical content*'. This definition suggested that ethical climate is an important aspect of organizational life that critically determines what a good or bad behavior is in organization. Studies on ethical climate revealed that ethical climate is an important factor that exerted significant influences on several variables including organizational performance (Sabiou, Ringim, Mei, & Joarder, 2019), employee misconducts (Mayer *et al.*, 2010). Job satisfaction (Chinomona, Popoola, & Imuezerua, 2017), organizational commitment (Zehira, Muceldili, & Zehir, 2012), among others. Research also documented that ethical climate is positively related to OCB (Aloustani *et al.*, 2020; Leung, 2008; Younis & Elsaid, 2019). Additionally, the study of Çavuş and Develi (2017), attested that ethical climate has a significant positive relationship with some dimensions of OCB including civic duty, humility and sportsmanship. Moreover, Leung (2008) found that perception of high level of ethical climate (caring and law-and code) in organization is associated positively with OCB.

Apart from the direct relationship between ethical climate and OCB, as seen above, this study proposed that ethical climate will moderate the positive relationship between ethical climate and OCB, because good ethical climate within the organization(s) usually tends to create desirable employees attitudes and behaviors that promote extra role performance in form of OCB. Previous empirical studies proved that ethical climate moderate some relationships. For instance, the studies of Zehira *et al.* (2012) and Nafei (2015) shows that the relationship

between job satisfaction and commitment was moderated by ethical climate. However, the recent study of Yaqub, Mahmood, Azhar, and Adnan (2021) do not empirically support the moderation of ethical climate on the relationship between resilience and personality on organizational commitment.

Theoretically, the direct relationship between ethical climate and OCB coupled with the moderation of ethical climate on the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB can be explain from the perspective of social information processing SIP theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). According to SIP theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), people utilize cues and information within their surroundings so as to understand on how to appropriately behave or act in that environment. Mayer *et al.* (2010) supported that ethical climate can serve as a cue that enable employees to know the type of acceptable or unacceptable behavior(s) within their environment (organization). The ethical climate also provides other employees with the information on the appropriateness or otherwise of the behaviors they see in their organizations. These perceptions allowed employees to think and consider what behaviors are appropriate, important and likely rewarded and what behaviors are not. Consequently, ethical climate help employees to determine the appropriate ways to act and behave in organization. Thus, perception of high ethical climate in organization will promote the likelihood of employees to engage in more OCB. Drawing on SIP theory and the previous studies on ethical climate discussed above, it is expected that ethical climate will be related to OCB and can also moderate (buffer) the link between ethical leadership and OCB.

H2: Ethical climate is positively associated with OCB

H3: Ethical climate will moderate the positive relationship between ethical leadership and OCB such that the relationship is stronger when ethical climate is high than when it is low.

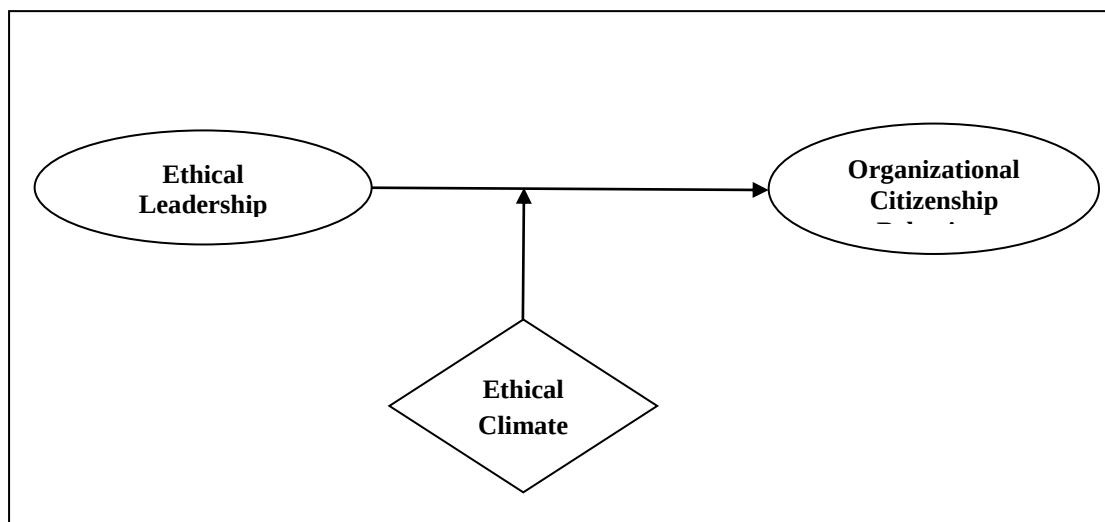


Figure 1: *Research Model*

3.0 Method

3.1 Participants and procedures

The total of 180 respondents participated in this study. They comprise 90 supervisors who are heads of departments, sections and units and their respective 90 subordinates. The supervisors were asked to nominate at least one or two subordinates that worked under them and whom they can assess their OCBs. Data was collected using a cross-sectional approach (one shoot). Leaders/ supervisors rated their subordinates' OCBs using five points Likert's scales, while the subordinates also responded to questions on their perception with leaders' ethical behaviors and ethical climate in their respective organizations.

3.2 Measures

All the measures used in this study were adapted from previously validated and reliable studies.

3.2.1 OCBs: considering the cultural sensitivity in the nature of OCB, this study used ten (10) items developed and used in Nigeria by Amah (2017). The items captured both questions on OCB directed at individual and OCB directed on organization(s) respectively.

3.2.2 Ethical leadership: Ethical leadership was measured using ten (10) items from Brown *et al.* (2005). These items were used by previous studies and were found very reliable in measuring ethical leadership across culture.

3.2.4 Ethical climate: Ethical climate being the moderator was measured in this study with items from Victor and Cullen (1987). The scale captured the four dimensions of ethical climate including: *benevolence, laws & rules, independence and instrument*.

4.0 Results and Analysis

Partial Least Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM) using Smart PLS 2.0 was used in testing all the hypotheses. Thus, the study assessed both the measurement model and the structural model as recommended (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019; Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012).

4.1 Measurement Model

In assessing the psychometric properties of the adopted scales, as recommended the present study examined and evaluated all the individual item reliabilities, internal consistency reliability and discriminant validity. For the individual item reliability the result of outer loadings as shown below in Table 1 revealed the items loadings of 0.50 were all retained. For the internal consistency reliability the study used composite reliability to ascertain its reliability. Here, the recommendations of Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2011) and Bagozzi and Yi (1988) that composite reliability must be 0.70 and above was applied. Results in Table 1 shows that the composite reliability of OCB is 0.934, ethical climate 0.936 and lastly ethical

leadership was 0.914. Therefore, the results of all the three major constructs are within the acceptable level.

Table 1: *Measurement Model showing Loadings, Composite Reliability and AVE*

Latent Constructs	Items	Loadings	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Organizational Citizenship Behaviors	OCB1	0.731	0.934	0.520
	OCB2	0.744		
	OCB3	0.663		
	OCB4	0.672		
	OCB5	0.755		
	OCB6	0.724		
	OCB7	0.780		
	OCB8	0.716		
	OCB9	0.743		
	OCB10	0.717		
	OCB11	0.781		
	OCB12	0.761		
Ethical Climate	ECL1	0.703	0.936	0.593
	ECL2	0.826		
	ECL3	0.820		
	ECL4	0.723		
	ECL5	0.753		
	ECL6	0.765		
	ECL7	0.718		
	ECL8	0.788		
	ECL9	0.798		
	ECL10	0.798		
Ethical Leadership	ETL1	0.700	0.914	0.521
	ETL2	0.821		
	ETL3	0.813		
	ETL4	0.656		
	ETL5	0.702		
	ETL6	0.767		
	ETL7	0.768		
	ETL8	0.743		
	ETL9	0.732		
	ETL10	0.531		

For the discriminant validity, average variance extracted (AVE) was used to ascertain the validity. Here also recommendation of Fornell and Larcker (1981) was followed. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981) adequate discriminant validity is achieved by comparing the

correlations among the constructs and the square root of AVE. As recommended the square root of AVE must be higher than the correlations among the constructs. Table 2 shows that the square root of AVE was all higher than the correlations among the constructs. This confirmed that adequate discriminant validity was also attained in this study.

Table 2: *Discriminant Validity*

	Ethical Leadership	Ethical Climate	OCB
Ethical Leadership	0.722		
Ethical Climate	0.419	0.770	
OCB	0.468	0.238	0.721

In general, the measurement model of the present study was satisfactory and had provided sufficient support for the reliabilities and validity assessments.

4.2 Structural Model Results

In the assessment of structural model, both model 1 (main model) and model 2 (interaction model) were evaluated by applying bootstrapping procedure using 5000 bootstrap sample and 180 cases (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014).

The results of direct relationship (main effect) as presented in Table 3 Model 1 revealed that ethical leadership exerted significant positive relationship on OCB ($\beta = 0.373$; $t = 4.755$; $p < 0.01$). Thus, hypothesis1 was substantiated. Accordingly, ethical climate also exerted strong significant positive relationship on OCB ($\beta = 0.506$; $t = 6.773$; $p < 0.01$). Here also hypothesis 2 was substantiated.

Table 3: *Structural Model with Path Coefficient*

Relationship	Model 1 (Main Effects)	Model 2 (Interaction Effects)	Decision
Ethical Leadership -> OCB	0.373***	0.376***	Supported
Ethical Climate-> OCB	0.529***	0.506***	Supported
Ethical Leadership x Ethical Climate		0.102**	Supported
R ²	0.755	0.765	Substantial
Q ²	0.382	0.393	

Following the assessment of the significance of path coefficient of the main model, next, the values of R-square (R²), predictive relevant (Q²) and effect size was also examined. Results as presented in Table 3 indicated that the main model explained about 75.5% of the total variance in OCB. Thus, suggesting that ethical leadership and ethical climate explained 75.5% of the variance in OCB. According to Hair *et al.* (2011) this value obtained is considered as *substantial*. For the predictive relevant (Q²), result in Table 3 shows that 0.382 was the value obtained. This suggested that the model has predictive relevant because the 0.382 is greater than zero.

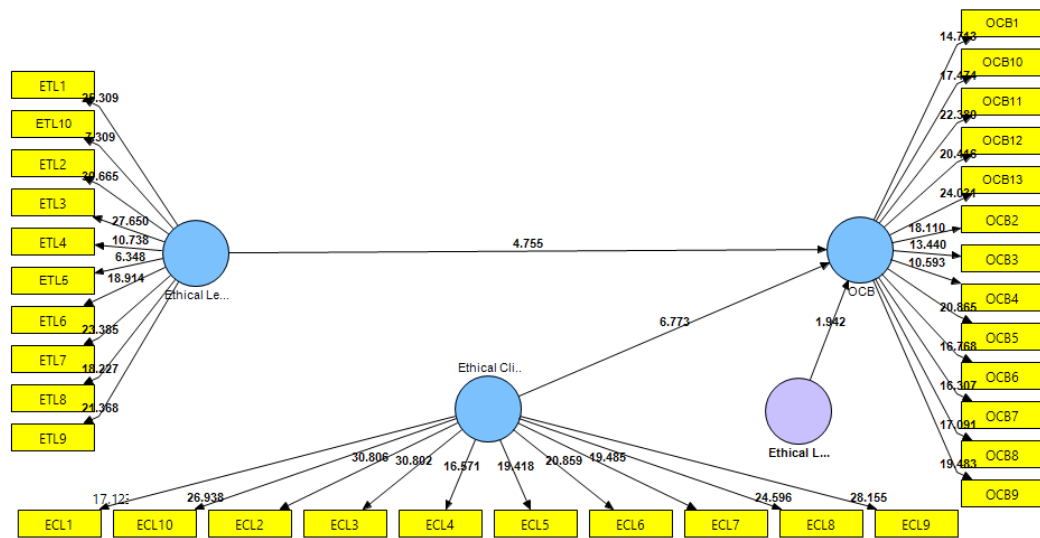


Figure 2: *Structural Model with interaction*

4.3 Testing the Moderating effect of Ethical Climate

Product-indicator approach using PLS SEM was used in testing the moderating effect of ethical climate in the present study. First, the direct relationship was examined. Where, ethical climate was incorporated as an independent variable. Secondly, interaction term was created by multiplying the products of each indicator of moderating variable and exogenous latent construct. Thirdly, estimation of the standardized path coefficient was examined to ascertain the significance of interaction effect (see, Table 3 Model 2). Finally, the strength of the moderating effect was ascertained using Cohen's (1988) formula.

Recall that hypothesis 3 of the present study predicted that ethical climate would moderate the positive relationship between ethical leadership and OCB such that the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB will be more stronger (i.e. more positive) when ethical climate is high than when it is low. Accordingly, result of the interaction effect in Model 2 as shown in Table 3 revealed a significant interaction effect between ethical leadership and ethical climate ($\beta = .102$; $t = 1.932$; $p < 0.05$). Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported. Moreover, Figure 3 shows the pattern of interaction between ethical leadership and ethical climate in predicting OCB. As seen, the Figure 3 depicts that the effect of ethical leadership on OCB is more stronger (i.e. more positive) when ethical climate is high than when it is low.

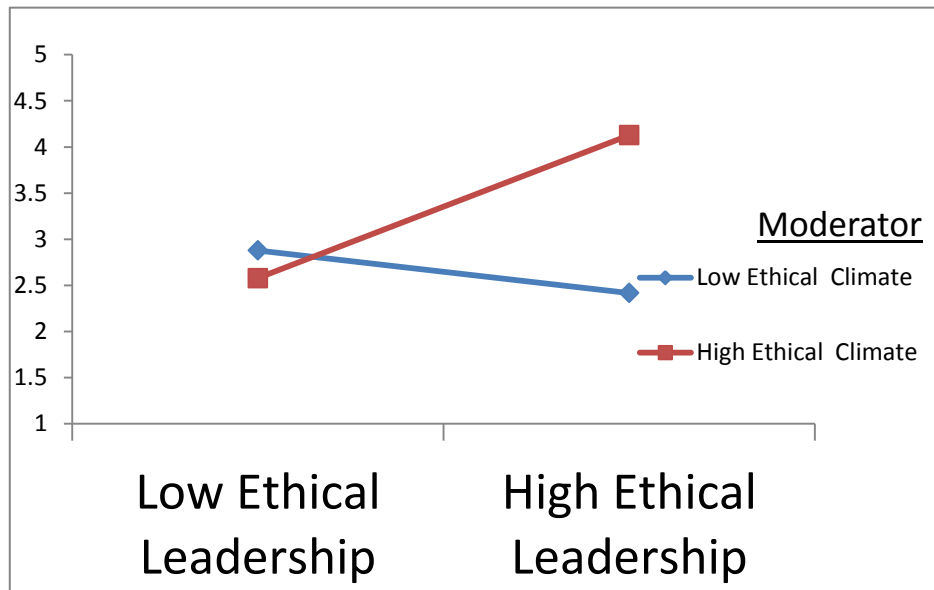


Figure 3: Interaction between Ethical Leadership and Ethical Climate in predicting OCB

With regard to the strength of the moderating effect, result (0.043) as shown in Table 4 indicated small effect size as suggested by Cohen (1988). The interaction model as depicted in Table 3 also explained 76.5% variability in OCB and a Q^2 value of 0.393.

Table 4: Effect Size

Relationships	Model	R^2	R^2	F^2	Effect Size
		Included	Excluded		
Ethical Leader -> OCBs	Main Model	0.755	0.679	0.310	Medium
Ethical Climate-> OCBs	Main Model	0.755	0.719	0.147	Small
Ethical Leader x Ethical Climate	Interaction	0.765	0.755	0.043	Small

5.0 Discussion

The main objective of this study was to examine the moderation effect of ethical climate on the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB. Consistent with the first hypothesis, the result found a significant positive association between ethical leadership and OCB. This finding suggested that when ethical leaders exhibit altruistic rather than selfish behaviors, inspired, motivate their followers by treating them fairly, showing them concern. In return, their employees/followers will be more likely move to exhibit extra performance inform of OCB. The result is consistent with previous studies (Aloustani *et al.*, 2020; Khan *et al.*, 2017; Şenyurt & Dinc, 2015) that found significant positive relationship between ethical leadership and OCB. Additionally, the present result contradicted other empirical studies (Huang *et al.*,

2021; Jeon *et al.*, 2018; Yates, 2011), that revealed no significant direct relationship between ethical leadership and OCB.

The second hypothesis (H2) postulated that ethical climate is positively related to OCB. As expected, significant positive relationship between ethical climate and OCB was found in the present study. This result is also consistent with previous empirical findings (Aloustani *et al.*, 2020; Leung, 2008; Younis & Elsaid, 2019). This also suggested that perception of good ethical climate in organization enhances the employees to engage in more OCB that benefit both the employees and the organization.

Finally, it was hypothesized (H3) that ethical climate will moderate the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB such that the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB will be more stronger (i.e. more positive) when ethical climate is higher than when it is low. Accordingly, result of the interaction effect between ethical climate and ethical leadership was significantly substantiated. The finding suggested that ethical climate buffer the positive relationship between ethical leadership and OCB in local government.

5.1 Implications for Theory and Practice

This study has a number of theoretical and practical implications. First, the study provides empirical support for the moderating effect of ethical climate on the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB in local government. The findings proved that ethical climate buffer the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB. Therefore, managers need to create and develop ethical climate in organization. This can be achieved by making the organization became an ethical environment where the HRM practices, policies and other procedures are ethically incline and highly visible so that employees can learn from their experience and the experience of other via the rewards and punishments. Through this the employees can be enlightened and be more aware of the ethical issues and behaviors that buffer OCB.

Secondly, this study established that ethical leadership exerted a direct significant positive influence on OCB. This clearly demonstrated that ethical leadership directly promotes OCB in organization. Therefore, as suggested by social learning process that ethical leaders can served as role model to their subordinates and influence their behaviors when they (leaders) demonstrate altruistic behaviors, the subordinates emulate them and demonstrate more OCB. Consequently, this result provide additional empirical support within the domain of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986). Considering the benefits and effectiveness of ethical leadership in promoting OCB in organization, managers particularly at local government level can encourage ethical leadership behaviors by training, developing, evaluating and rewarding all forms ethical behaviors. Again, organization can use selection process in employing people with good moral standards, integrity and concern for others.

Furthermore, this study contributed to ethical climate literature by establishing empirical support for the direct relationship between ethical climate and OCB. Drawing on social

information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), this study provide a theoretical explanation on the direct relationship between ethical climate and OCB as well as the moderating effect of ethical climate. Therefore, organizations can enhance ethical climate and OCB by establishing a clearly written ethical policy that specify what behaviors are accepted and what are not within the organization. Moreover, it will also specify what behavior required rewards or punishments that reinforce ethical behavior in form of OCB.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

Despite the contributions provided, this empirical study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, data for this study was collected from Nigerian local government employees comprising of administrators/managers who are head of departments/units and their respective subordinates. Therefore, the findings may not be generalized for other public sector organizations at states/regions and the federal government levels. In this regard, the sample is limited, therefore, future studies using data from the states/regions and federal government will address this limitation and give room for possible generalization of the findings. Secondly, like many studies, the data used in the present study is cross sectional. Therefore, the study was unable to make causal conclusions. Future studies using longitudinal approach or experimental studies will allow for clear understanding of the direction of causality. Thirdly, considering that it was the employees/subordinates that rated their leaders' ethical leadership scale and organizational ethical climate (predictors), therefore, there may be concern for same-source issues. Although measures were taken to avoid common method bias, like allowing the supervisors to rate OCB, still it is impossible to rule out employees over-rating or under-rating issues in their responses. Therefore, future studies measuring predictors and outcomes using multiple or different sources will also minimize this concern.

5.3 Conclusion

The current empirical study adds to the literature by spotlighting the link between ethical leadership and ethical climate to OCB and more specifically how ethical leadership and ethical climate interact to predict OCB. The interaction between ethical leadership and ethical climate in predicting OCB as seen in Figure 3 suggested that the effect of ethical leadership on OCB is more stronger (i.e. more positive) when ethical climate is higher than when it is low.

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