ENHANCING ETHICAL CONDUCT IN THE CODIFICATION AND EDUCATION OPTIONS: A CASE OF VHEMBE DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY

By

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DECLARATION

I, *Thanzi Thenga,* Student N0. 17017967 declares that ***Enhancing Ethical Conduct in VDM in the Codification and Education Options*** submitted to the Department of Public & Development Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Commerce and Law at the University of Venda, has not been submitted previously for any degree at this or any other university. I confirm that it is my original work and that all sources I have consulted or quoted have been duly acknowledged through references.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my family. Your unwavering support, sacrifices, and encouragement have been the foundation of my journey. Thank you for believing in me and inspiring me to achieve my dreams. I also dedicate this work to my mentors and friends who have inspired and supported me. Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to those who strive to bring about positive change through education and research- May this work contribute meaningfully to that cause.

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"U lenga azwi ambi usa swika" A Venda Proverb

ABSTRACT

The study examined the importance of the ethical conduct of municipal officials in promoting a code of conduct for municipal officials through education. In strengthening the code of conduct for Local Government Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, chapter 12, Schedule 1, and Schedule 2 provide the code of conduct for municipal employees; the Code of Conduct for municipal employees is similarly described in Schedule 5 of the Local Government Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998. Its objective is to promote an environment rich in ethical and moral standards and behaviour. Unethical behaviour is delinquent conduct that affects organizations locally and globally, with ill implications for the societies they serve. Unethical conduct manifests in various forms, including coercive, destructive, deceptive, intrusive, secretive, manipulative, and exploitative conduct. The Limpopo Province has an eminent, recent history of unethical public service conduct involving large-scale tender-related corruption. Based on this concern, this study aimed to enhance ethical conduct regarding coding and education options in the Vhembe District Municipality. An integrated mixed-method research method was used in this study. The target population is municipal officials, and 30 VDM officials were sampled. Simple random sampling was employed in this study. Data collection was based on a Likert scale, and self-administered questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were adopted. The data analysis was based on descriptive and inferential quantitative methods, while the qualitative data was thematically analysed. Digital support from the latest SPSS and Microsoft Excel software was used to manage the statistical data and compute standard deviations, whereas NVIVO was used to build themes. The findings of this study revealed that while the municipality has a code of ethics in place, codification and education are effective options to enhance the ethical conduct of municipal officials. This study concludes by recommending strategies to promote ethical codes in municipal settings.

Key Concepts: *Code of Conduct, Ethics, Ethical Conduct, Municipality, Unethical Conduct.*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
AO	Accounting Officer
AGSA	Auditor General South Africa
ASGISA	Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa
BNG	Breaking New Ground
GEAR	Growth Employment and Redistribution
GNU	Government of National Unity
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MSA	Municipal Systems Act, 32 of 2000
NACS	National Anti-Corruption Strategy
NDP	National Development Plan
NGP	New Growth Path
NPA	National Prosecuting Authority
PAA	Public Audit Amendment Act
PAIA	Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000
PDA	Protected Disclosure Act
PRECCA	Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SWOT	Streng, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

SIU	Special Investigating Unit
VDM	Vhembe District Municipality

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aims to enhance ethical conduct in VDM regarding codification and education options and recommend strategies to promote ethical conduct. Ethics is a concept resurrecting itself, and much discussion and speculation surrounds it. There is a concern that society is losing sight of how critical ethical matters are. Shava and Mazenda (2023) reiterate that ethics must be viewed as universal concepts at the core of human existence which entails the notions of good and which are inherent in all communities. Kidder an eminent ethical thinker and head of the Institute of Global Ethics, stated that "we are raising an entire generation of people without their built-in sense of ethics" (Cormer & Schwartz, 2017). This confirms that ethics are perceived as integral in shaping the behavioural conduct of employees in private and public institutions.

In South Africa, the Local Government: Municipal Structural Act, 117 of 1998 indicates that the leading role of the district municipalities is co-ordination for local municipalities to achieve their developmental mandate. Section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic, 1996, states that public administration must be guided by fundamental values and principles, such as a high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained, ensuring that effective and efficient use of resources is promoted and maintained, public administration must be accountable and development-oriented among others. These values and principles must apply to all spheres of government, namely, national, provincial and local. Furthermore, Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic, 1996 outlines the objectives of local government as providing democratic and accountable government for local communities, ensuring sustainable provision of services to communities, and promoting social and economic development.

Section 153 of the Constitution indicates that it must be developmental for the local government to achieve the objectives set in Section 152 (a) to (e). In this manner, values to uphold the standard of ethical conduct are regarded as significant in achieving the purpose of local government.

Globally, although municipalities are considered instrumental in community development and poverty alleviation, they are regularly confronted with challenges that negatively impact their performance. Since 1995, South Africans have noted an increased perception of poor governance in municipalities and the incompetencies of local government practitioners (Kalonda & Govender, 2021). The literature review (Shava and Mazenda, 2023; Masiya, Davids and Mangai, 2021; Murimoga and Musingafi, 2014) also share the statement mentioned above that apart from the limited resources that municipalities receive from the government to fund basic services, maladministration is regarded as the primary factor that fuels the incompetencies of municipal officials. The failure of municipalities to satisfy the community's aspirations is partly blamed on the behavioural conduct of municipal officials. Singo (2018) also reiterates that the South African public sector is characterised by various manifestations of unethical conduct which negatively affect its performance. The ethical codes of conduct determine if public sector employees fulfil their obligations in conformity with constitutional values as mentioned in Section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic, 1996.

Therefore, this study examines the promotion of codification and education options of ethical codes and their influence on the moral conduct of municipal officials in Vhembe District Municipality (hereafter referred to as VDM).

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

VDM is a Category C Municipality established in 2000 in the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (Act No. 117 of 1998). The district comprises four (4) local municipalities: Thulamela, Makhado, Musina and Collins Chabane. VDM is predominantly rural. Between the years 2016 to 2018, the District had an average population of 1402 779 (2021/22, Vhembe IDP). According to the 2018/2019 & 2021/22 Vhembe Integrated Development Plan (IDP), 56.2% of the population lives below the poverty line. There are 382 357 households, of which women head 51%, and children head 7 740 households. The profile of Vhembe reveals that the Municipality is under-developed. The number of formally employed people is 67.20%, 16.1% are unemployed, while the remaining are in informal employment. The number of people employed in Vhembe increased from 62,100 in 2008 to an estimated 98,800 in 2018 (VDM IDP, 2020). Although it has been documented that municipalities contribute significantly to the development of the community and ensure that the welfare of citizens is taken into consideration, researchers have raised a concern that in recent years, municipalities have been characterised by poor governance.

Murimoga and Musingafi (2014) state that municipalities are supposed to be the epicentre of initiating and maintaining local development by providing quality services to their local citizenry. Like other municipalities in South Africa, the VDM is regularly confronted by service protests due to their dissatisfaction with service delivery by the Municipality. Magagula, Mukonza, Manyaka and Moeti (2022) raised a concern that the District Municipality is responsible for servicing people who depend on the local government's capacity to deliver services. The District Municipality is rural-based, which means there are fewer resources for the community to be self-sustainable; as such, they rely heavily on the municipalities to meet their needs and demands. This is another indication that VDM is still struggling to meet some overarching development goals, such as the creation of employment, improved health system, redress of inequality, and enhanced education system, among others.

The developmental mandate requires municipalities to structure their administration budgeting and planning processes to prioritise service delivery. According to Vye-Doorgapersad and Ababio (2010), for local government to realise its mandate, municipalities need to intensify the implementation of ethical guidelines for councillors and municipal officials. Unfortunately, Masiya, Davids and Mangai (2021) alluded that since 1994, most municipalities in South Africa have been characterised by allegations of poor performance. The National Development Planning (NDP, 2012) Vision 30 serves as a blueprint for achieving the mandate of local government being a developmental state, and advocates for the highest regard of ethical standards in the public sector.

The VDM is also not immune to challenges of ethical conduct by its officials. The findings by the Auditor General Report (2019/2020) indicate that VDM encounters numerous challenges of unethical conduct by its municipal officials, such as wasteful expenditure, failure to prevent unauthorized and irregular expenditure, non-compliance to rules, lack of accountability, fraud, kickbacks, corruption, mismanagement, incapacity, lack of monitoring and oversight amongst other. The literature review (Glasser and Wright, 2020; Mafunisa, 2020; Lawton and Macaulay, 2014) indicates a heightened perception of the challenges of good governance in most South African municipalities. Although the challenges of good governance vary depending on the type of municipality, metropolitan municipalities or those in urban areas are far better resourced than district municipalities.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Koma (2012), unethical conduct perforated most South African municipal, provincial and national departments. The statement confirms that the decline of ethical conduct by municipal officials and councillors occurs despite the government developing progressive policies to deal with ethical transgressions within municipalities. Since 1995, the government has attempted to instil the culture of good governance through the Constitution of the Republic, 1996, Local Government: Municipal System Act, 32 of 2000, National Development Plan, 2012, Public Audit Amendment Act 5 of 2018, Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 56 of 2003, National Corruption Strategy, Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act 12 of 2004 among others. Disoloane (2012) states that the behaviour and conduct of municipal officials are always of interest to the community. The community expects municipal officials to act by acceptable standards as required by ethical codes that regulate their function. Also, promoting the community's general welfare depends on the municipality's performance in ensuring that quality, sustainable services are achieved.

The Auditor General Report (2023/2024) findings reveal that VDM has been involved in ethical transgressions, mainly in corruption. Since the establishment of the Municipality, there has been a heightened perception of corruption manifested in the form of fraud, non-compliance with financial regulations, lack of accountability by municipal councillors, and kickbacks. Furthermore, the Auditor General's Report~~s~~ of 2023/2024 confirmed that VDM is notable in repeated transgressions such as non-compliance with legislation, irregular expenditure, poor internal controls, and poor procurement management, which continue to weaken the enforcement of oversight and accountability frameworks

This problem statement is also supported by the NDP (2012) Vision 2030, which aims to alleviate poverty and address inequality and economic growth issues to build a capable state in South Africa. This plan is regarded as a blue-print for development. The Constitution of the Republic, 1996 mandates local government to be development-oriented. The NDP further stipulates that building a developmental state will require, among others, a high regard for ethical conduct. Chapter 14 of the NDP indicates that for the government to promote good governance in its echelon, leaders should fight the rampant corruption that features regularly in the media.

District municipalities are also expected to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Agenda 2063 (Goal 3), emphasising that Africa should be characterised by good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law. This implies that the public administration in local government should be led and serviced by people who respect the rule of law to enforce ethical conduct. In this manner, codification and education options are necessary to create an ethical environment that enables the realisation of SDGs (SDG, 2063).

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aims to enhance ethical conduct in VDM regarding codification and education options and recommend strategies to promote ethical conduct.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of the study:

- To analyse the extent of ethical codes in Vhembe District Municipality.
- To identify causes and effects of ethical transgression by municipal officials at Vhembe District Municipality.
- To determine the role of education in capacity building for ethical competence in Vhembe District Municipality.
- To determine the challenges the municipal council faces in combating unethical conduct in Vhembe District Municipality.
- Recommend strategies that Vhembe District Municipality can use to enhance ethics, codes and training for municipal councillors and officials.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions of this study are as follows:

- What is the extent of ethics in the Vhembe District Municipality?
- What are the causes and effects of unethical conduct in Vhembe District Municipality?
- What is the role of education and training in ethical conduct for municipal officials at the Vhembe District Municipality?
- What challenges do municipal officials face in combating unethical conduct in the Vhembe District Municipality?
- What strategies can be used to promote ethical conduct in Vhembe District Municipality?

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study are expected to shed light on the relevance of enhancing ethical conduct in the codification and education options. The findings may also help municipal officials self-evaluate their functioning within the codification and education options. This will assist them in combating unethical conduct in the VDM. Section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic, 1996 outlines values and principles that guide how public administration must be conducted to be responsive to the mandate of the local government as in Section 152 of the Constitution. In this manner, codification and education options fulfil some important democratic values that must be adhered to and inculcate ethical values in municipal officials. For example, some of the important values are that; a high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained, efficient, economic and effective use of resources must be promoted. In this manner, the ongoing education about codes of conduct will conscientiously inform municipal officials about the implications of non-adherence to ethics.

Furthermore, this study will assist the government and community in acquiring knowledge on the codification and education options and their influence on the behavioural conduct of municipal officials. Furthermore, the findings may contribute to current knowledge and lay the groundwork for future research in related domains.

1.8 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), delimitation refers to establishing boundaries to various areas or groups. Although other local municipalities within the VDM are experiencing the same challenges of behavioural conduct by officials, only the District Municipality was selected as the focus of this study. The findings will be generalised to other local municipalities that encounter challenges of codification and education options and the influence on municipal officials.

1.9 DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

The operational concepts of the study are defined below:

1.9.1 Code of Conduct

Krishnamurthy (2021) asserts that Codes of Conduct are general guides to decisions about those actions; they specify actions in the workplace. Codes of Conduct contain meaningful examples of appropriate behaviour. Mafunisa (2008) indicates that the Code of Conduct is a significant mechanism for regulating public officials' behaviour in fulfilling their ethical obligations. In this manner, education and codification options will assist municipal officials in performing the functions of the office in good faith, diligently, honestly, and transparently.

Furthermore, municipal officials will act in such a way that the spirit, purport and objects of Section 50 of the Constitution of the Republic, 1996 are promoted, act in the best interest of the municipality and in such a way that the credibility and integrity of the municipality is not compromised. The Code of Conduct can function as a professional statement expressing public service commitments to a specific set of moral standards. Therefore, the codes of ethics require public officials to have high ethical standards and alert them to act within the parameters of expected conduct by employers and the public.

1.9.2 Codification

According to Cambridge Dictionary, codification refers to ‘’the act, process, or result of stating the rules and principles applicable in a given legal order to one or more broad areas of life in the form of a code’’ http//www.dictionary.cambridge.org. Lindner and Chene (2014) also assert that ethical codes require formalisation and implementation in the institution's formal systems. Effective implementation depends on the awareness of those to whom the codes apply. In this study, codification implies that senior managers in the municipalities must be trained about the importance of ethical conduct in an individual’s actions. Codification ensures that officials know ethical codes are embedded in the institution's systems through education as another option for effective implementation. For example, the MSA prescribed codes of conduct aligned explicitly with the municipal council and other officials on how they should behave when executing their duties.

Therefore, without codification, there is no guarantee that the policy will remain consistent. Knowledge and awareness of the ethical codes by municipal officials will ensure that good governance is attained and also minimise unethical conduct by municipal officials.

1.9.3 Ethics

Tibay (2023) views ethics as rules or standards governing an institution's employees' moral conduct. Mafunisa (2001) also maintains that ethics deals with values relating to human conduct concerning the rightness or wrongness of actions and the goodness or badness of the motives and ends of such actions. Rightness refers to what ought to be or what is approved of, and wrongness to what ought not to be or what society disapproves of. The MSA requires municipalities to provide services to the local community efficiently and effectively. In this context, municipal officials must adhere to ethical principles such as accountability, honesty, transparency, probity, efficiency and effectiveness. In South Africa, Section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic, 1996, prescribed democratic values as a guide for the moral conduct of public sector officials.

This implies that codification and education options are necessary to create and maintain awareness of the impact of ethics in municipal governance. The Auditor General Reports (2023/2024) painted a gloomy picture of the financial state of most municipalities in South Africa. The mismanagement of financial resources remains a concern for the Auditor General’s office as the challenges continue unabated, which, in turn, have negative implications on municipal performance.

1.9.4 Ethical Conduct

Fejzullah and Batalli (2019) describe ethical conduct as when the institution or organisation prescribes a set of codes to guide the actions of individuals to conform with ethical values or principles. Ethical conduct refers to a strong desire to do the right thing, especially when behaving ethically imposes financial, social or emotional costs. Surveys taken by the Josephson Institute reveal that, regardless of profession, almost all people believe that they are, or should be, ethical. In South Africa, each level of government, from national, provincial to local, must adhere to codes of conduct for professionalising the public sector.

This means municipal officials within VDM must have choices for ethical dilemmas. They should follow ethical values to ensure the municipalities' optimum performance.

1.9.5 Unethical behaviour

Veetkazhi, Kamalanabhan, Malhotra, Arora and Mueller (2020) conceptualised unethical behaviour as ''consciously controlled or unconsciously driven pro-self or pro-other behaviour that violates existing societal moral norms''. Studies on unethical behaviour found that employees search for social or business cues. Jha and Sing (2020) maintain that ethical standards define the boundaries of behaviour by demarcating acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and making it clear to their employees. Ethical behaviour means adherence to the moral norms written in the codes of conduct, whereas violating these moral norms is considered unethical. Pillay (2020) states that unethical behaviour is wilful or careless behaviour that violates or diverges from the rules anticipated to inform an expected pattern of behaviour in a specific situation. Even though it is a sign of moral decay, unethical behaviour can only be viewed as a sign of a poor work ethic since it relates to job performance.

In other words, unethical behaviour might include stealing from or misusing public property and accepting unapproved outside employment while working for the government. In South Africa, Glasser and Wright (2020) raised concerns about unethical conduct as the cause of poor financial management in most municipalities, which has negatively impacted the delivery of services.

1.10 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The study will be comprised of five chapters as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction and Background of the Study

This chapter will cover the introduction and general background of the study. This chapter presents the problem statement as the reason for conducting research, justification of the study, main aims and objectives, research questions, overview of research methodology, definition of operational concepts and organisation of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The chapter reviews the relevant literature to learn about Enhancing Ethical Conduct in municipalities' Codification and Education Options. The theoretical framework underpinning the promotion of ethical conduct and training was presented and discussed and its implementation and evaluation since its adoption. The literature review includes the theoretical framework and highlights the legislative framework that forms the basis of codification and education options and their implementation.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter identified the research design employed and the case study that forms the basis of this research. The research approach, population, sampling, data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations were covered in detail. The mixed method approach guides how the data was collected. The target population of this study was formed from the overall number of individuals with the characteristics intended by this study. Sampling was deduced from the municipal officials, target population of this study. Data analysis was done based on quantitative and qualitative methodology. Ethical considerations followed ethical principles and practices that the study observed.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

Chapter four focuses on the discussion, analysis, and presentation of the study findings. The data collected was analysed and interpreted to align with the aim and objectives of this study.

Chapter Five: Findings, Recommendations and Conclusions

In this chapter, the preliminary propositions of the study are assessed, and the outcomes of the other chapters are also brought to bear on the subject matter. The chapter will also offer recommendations to enhance service delivery to the indigents based on the Batho Pele principles by employees at the VDM.

1.11 SUMMARY

This chapter serves as an orientation of this study. The introduction and background highlight the importance of codification and education in municipalities. The codification and education options are regarded as an action-orientated plan aligned with other government policies to enforce a culture of ethical conduct in municipal officials. The Constitution of the Republic, 1996 mandated that municipalities be developed to eliminate poverty and bridge the inequality gap within communities. The problem statement highlights the municipality's challenges towards enhancing ethical conduct. The aims, objectives, research questions, delimitations, significance of the study, and definition of operational concepts are covered in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The study aimed to enhance ethical conduct in VDM regarding codification and education options and recommend strategies to promote ethical conduct. This chapter provided an empirical and theoretical literature review that relates to the research questions and objectives of the study. The literature review was drawn from secondary data based on journals, books, articles, the internet, municipal documents and legislations that guide ethical conduct in the municipality. In this chapter, the theoretical framework that formed the basis of the analysis and understanding of the concept of enhancing ethical conduct in municipalities was highlighted. Furthermore, the chapter conceptualises ethical and unethical conduct and its effect on the municipality's performance. The legislation guiding ethical conduct and its position in local government are presented and discussed.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework offers the idea or collection of linked ideas that underpin the study's foundation. To investigate a specific problem or issue, a conceptual model is developed for potential approaches or action plans. Salawu, Shamsuddin and Bolatitio (2023) describe the theoretical framework as one of the significant aspects of research as it prescribes, predicts, and connects the relationships between variables. Ethics is informed by different theoretical frameworks such as virtue theory, deontology theory, egoism theory, and utilitarianism, amongst others. The aforementioned theories will be presented and discussed. However, deontology and virtue theories are the pillars of this study. The rationale for these two theories will be indicated as to why it is appropriate for ''Enhancing codification and education option in VDM'' as follows:

2.2.1 The Deontological Theory

The Deontological Theory is based on a person's obligation to duty or morality (Lungisa & Nzewi, 2023). Based on this theory, orientation should be more about a person's actions than their character. Public officials must conduct themselves morally in public service delivery according to ethical principles and values that align with the position or office. This theory exists in two categorical approaches: rule and action deontology. Rule deontology dominates the public administration perspective regarding behavioural conduct by emphasising constitutional principles or regime values. Individuals should follow the pre-set standards to identify acceptable behaviour in all circumstances (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2006). The Constitution of the Republic, 1996, outline the democratic values that must be adhered to in public administration as measures to strengthen public servants' ethical behavioural conduct and actions.

The responsibility approach emphasizes ethics as a universal moral standard. This suggests that people should endeavour to be good no matter what situation they find themselves in. The core tenet of this theory is to treat others as one wishes to be treated (Singo, 2018). Deontology theory requires individuals to be conscientious not to act in a way that hurts others while fulfilling their obligations. In this manner, the official will be encouraged to comply with ethical guidelines as violations will compromise quality service delivery to communities. The deontology philosophy is founded on rules and is dominant in public administration. It emphasises adherence to constitutional principles or regime ideals. According to Denhardt and Denhardt (2006), people should adhere to pre-determined norms to determine appropriate behaviour in all situations. (2021) maintains that ethics is stressed as a universal moral standard in the responsibility approach. This implies that people should strive to be decent in every circumstance. Its core premise is to treat others in the same way that one would like to be treated. Furthermore, Singo (2018) asserts that the challenge is that deontology emphasises processes in adherence to rules as the basis of ethical conduct without a clear indication of consequences or motives behind the action. Therefore, the theory has been criticized for failing to consider the limitations of laws, regulations, and standards in ensuring an ethical atmosphere. People's willingness to follow and adhere to rules and procedures determines their effectiveness. The persistent perception of fraud, corruption, poor management, and scandals demonstrates that the deontological theory alone cannot address ethical behaviour issues.

In the context of the transgression of ethical conduct within the District Municipality, this theory interprets that a public sector official should, as per his or her position in office, use all reasonable capacity to adhere to the Code of Conduct as indicated in Schedule 2 of the MSA. The Code of Conduct conforms with democratic values, emphasising that public servants must uphold the highest ethical standards when performing their duties. The District Municipality has ethical codes informed by legislative guidelines and policy frameworks such as Batho Pele principles to professionalise its entity.

Since 1994, with the new democratic dispensation, South Africa has promulgated several legislations and policy frameworks to guide public servants and municipal officials in an ethical direction. Also, whistle-blowing is encouraged to let senior management know that transgressions of ethics exist within the echelons of the Municipality. This will enable senior management to investigate the allegations and take action. For example, the Whistleblower Protector Act protects municipal officials who report acts of unethical conduct from reprisal by perpetrators. According to Udayarkumar and Babu (2021), deontology assesses what is morally right regarding one’s duty with less regard to character.

An individual official is expected to conduct and act within the organisation's norms or rules. Individuals must uphold a predefined set of principles as a standard for acceptable behaviour in all situations. Within the field of Public Administration, rule deontology holds prominence, as it underscores adherence to constitutional principles and regime values. Deontology is inherently rule-based, focusing on a duty-centered perspective that views ethics as grounded in universal moral principles. This approach emphasizes the importance of maintaining ethical conduct irrespective of the circumstances, guided by the fundamental principle of treating others as one wishes to be treated.

2.2.1.1 Rationale for Deontological Theory

The rationale is that the deontological theory is based on rules and codes of conduct to regulate the behaviour of public officials. Codes of conduct, legislation, and regulations guide the obligations of municipal officials to strengthen professionalism. These ethical codes are derived from societal and democratic values guiding public administration; professionalism hinges on individuals following the rules and procedures of that particular entity. In South Africa, Section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic of 1996 prescribes democratic ethical values as a prerogative for good governance for the public sector. Furthermore, legislations such as the Local Government: Municipal Financial Management Act 56 of 2003, Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 32 of 2000, Public Audit Amendment Act, 25 of 2018, Local Government: Municipal Structure Act, 117 of 1998 and the NDP, 2012 framework provide relevant guidelines for municipal officials to act in accordance with rules. Some acts, such as the Public Audit Amendment Act, will henceforth enforce the consequences of a lack of compliance with the rules.

The theory emphasises that public official's actions should only be carried out based on the individuals' responsibilities. Therefore, the behavioural conduct must comply with the prescribed rules and regulations espoused by the government. Furthermore, it will help the researcher understand that the theory does not involve justice and beneficence; instead, it only focuses on fulfilling the 'duty' to everybody involved, whether fair or just. The concern is that the theory has limitations as municipalities face challenges and ethical dilemmas daily, although rules are in place. In South Africa, ethical rules and codes of conduct are embedded in various government legislations, but corruption, fraud and kickbacks continue to haunt public service.

2.2.2 Virtue Theory

Virtue theory originated from Socrates, a Greek philosopher, but Aristotle is regarded as the father of Virtue theory. He expounded this theory in his book ''Nicomachean Ethics'', which emphasises a person's character as a motivator to do good or bad. Virtue theory focuses on forming moral character and virtues to direct ethical action. Unlike deontology, a rule-based system, virtue ethics consists of developing qualities such as wisdom, honesty, integrity, fairness, courage, liberality, and temperance (discipline) as necessary elements of ethical standards. Aristotle claimed that these virtues are practical and not theoretical as there is a perception that they impact only on character and not action. Nicholaides and Dudla (2023) argue that people seek to conduct themselves well as their moral values drive them, although it is not always easy. Considering the virtuous list as indicated earlier, ethical principles are based on virtues. For example, wisdom is needed to discern right or wrong, liberty deals with the will to act, and courage is required to report and deal with wrongdoing among others.

Furthermore, Nicholaides (2019) mention that virtues such as honesty, fairness, and integrity remain the ethical principles of good character that any employee wants to be perceived as such. Therefore, municipalities can establish an atmosphere where virtue qualities motivate moral behaviour and are absorbed automatically rather than being enforced by promoting a culture of virtue through education and codification. The aforementioned statement is true, but education and codification are key in creating awareness that will serve as the basis for reasons and shape the character.

2.2.2.1 Rationale for Virtue Theory

The Virtue theory is regarded as the ''mother'' of all theories as it conscientises the inner person, which posits one's character. The deontological theory relies on rules encompassing virtues, qualities, or principles. By incorporating these virtues and qualities into organizational structures, codes of conduct, and regulations, codification ensures that moral standards are aspirational and practical. The

Constitution of the Republic, 1996, is comprehensive in its measures to enforce good governance. Legislations and policy frameworks, as well as rules, were promulgated to address ethical conduct in organisations, but what is a concern is that the unethical conduct in municipalities, public service and the private sector continues amidst those legal frameworks. On the other hand, training in ethical codes influences one's character to make an alternative choice when confronted with a conflict of interest. Training in virtues is essential in fostering these values through ongoing instruction, seminars, and awareness campaigns. In this manner, virtue theory became practical as it forms the framework for ethical codes and principles of good governance and motivates how one should conduct oneself.

2.2.3 Utilitarianism Theory

According to utilitarianism, a consequentialist ethical theory supported by thinkers like John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, the action that maximizes overall happiness or utility is ethically correct (Tseng & Wang, 2021). Applying this theory to improve moral behaviour in the VDM necessitates concentrating on choices and regulations that maximise benefits for most citizens. Codification and utilitarian-based educational alternatives can help solve ethical issues in the municipality, such as poor management, a lack of transparency, and unethical behaviours. Codifying ethical codes creates precise rules that put the public interest ahead of individual or political benefit, guaranteeing justice and accountability.

Additionally, education is essential for developing ethical consciousness and directing public servants toward utilitarian decision-making. Ethical training programs can instil ideals of honesty, accountability, and fairness by teaching officials how their actions will affect the community. Public authorities must realize that contrary to the utilitarian goal of promoting happiness, unethical behaviours like nepotism and embezzlement damage society over time and erode public trust. To be implemented successfully, ethical education must be inclusive and participatory, involving all parties involved, including residents, community leaders, and municipal employees, to uphold ethical norms as a group (Yukl, 2013c).

2.2.4 Egoism

Egoism theory posits that individuals act in their self-interest and that such behaviour can lead to societal benefits if aligned with ethical frameworks (Rachels, 2012). In the VDM context, egoism can significantly enhance ethical conduct by promoting self-interest that is aligned with codified ethical standards and education. Codifying ethical principles, such as clear policies on financial management, resource allocation, and service delivery, can create a framework that appeals to individuals' desire for reputation and career advancement. For instance, employees may adhere to ethical conduct to gain recognition or avoid punitive measures, which aligns their self-interest with organizational goals (Shaw, 2016).

Education options such as workshops and ethical training programs, can instil a deeper understanding of the long-term benefits of ethical behaviour, such as increased trust and organizational stability, which ultimately serve individual and collective interests (Harrison, 2018). By integrating egoism into these strategies, the municipality can encourage employees to view ethical conduct not as a constraint but as a pathway to personal and professional growth. For example, leaders who embody ethical behaviour can inspire subordinates through role modelling, creating a culture where ethical conduct becomes a norm that benefits individuals and the institution alike (Treviño & Nelson, 2021).

Furthermore, education can highlight how unethical practices, such as corruption or nepotism, undermine the municipality's functioning, ultimately harming employees' self-interest reliant on a stable organization. Therefore, leveraging egoism theory within codification and education can align personal motivations with ethical objectives, fostering a more accountable and efficient municipal system.

2.3 IMPORTANCE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Downe, Cowell and Morgan (2016) argue that ethical conduct concerns the standards of conduct of all public office holders, including provisions about financial and commercial activities, and that high ethical conduct is essential for effective government. The high ethical conduct standards are a cornerstone of good governance. As a key aspect of good governance, good ethical conduct is predicated upon responsiveness towards people's needs and demands and the ability to link a democratic equation with efficiency and equity as core principles (Oketch, 2016). Additionally, the key abilities of ethical conduct can be classified within the three main headings: integrity, accountability and standard management.

The Corruption Watch Report (2021) has revealed that the most common forms of corruption at a local level are bribery (18%), procurement irregularities (21%), employment corruption (12%), abuse of power (23%), and embezzlement of funds (26%). Most of the whistle-blowers alleged that nepotism, bribery, and disregard for policies and laws are standard practices that implicated officials and were also rarely called to account. This affirms that municipal officials in South Africa struggle to deal with ethical dilemmas that confront them daily, a notion that Singo (2018) supports in that municipal councillors and officials are beleaguered under the challenges of ethical dilemmas.

Cooper and Menzel (2013) assert that ethical behaviour cannot be defined outside of formal rules and regulations that guide the conduct of public officials. Thebe (2017) avers that legislation may also have flaws, in which case a person's conscience is the only safeguard they may rely on. This explains why moral issues exist and why people are frequently unsure of what to do or which direction to go. People's lack of education or training in the codes of conduct considered to be morally upright leads to moral ambiguity and double standards which determine how the municipality performs. Zhu, Norman, Peng and Sosik (2004) support the assertion that ethics is fundamentally concerned with the effect of an individual's actions on others to promote institutional performance.

The literature review (Yukl, 2013; Rhadika, 2012) agrees that ethics in public administration are not a temporary concept but a reality, meaning that municipal officials' roles are salient to the public; therefore, they are obliged to be ethically upright as expected, by the people who voted them into power. This affirms that sound ethical conduct in municipalities determines good governance; failure to uphold the highest standards of ethics and professionalism results in poor governance.

2.3.1 Accountability

Accountability is an ethical notion involving the right behaviour. It deals with the duties of persons and organisations in their acts towards other people and agencies (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017). The idea is applied in real-world contexts, particularly when discussing governance and management structures in both public and commercial organisations (Oketch, 2016). The phrase is frequently used interchangeably with principles related to account-giving requirements, such as accountability, responsibility, and answerability. The community deserves to be assured that government responsibility and local resources are not abused. Local communities cannot rule themselves directly; thus, councillors must be chosen to act in their place. The municipal council has the power to rule but lacks the knowledge and abilities to carry out the necessary operational and administrative responsibilities. Coopers and Menzel (2013) maintain that public officials need competency skills and knowledge to apply ethical codes professionally. The municipality should ensure that officials are educated and trained to harness the action competently.

The South African Local Government Association Report (SALGA, 2019) describes that the preamble of the Code of Conduct for Municipal Councillors emphasises the accountability of the councillors towards the community and how each functional role should be executed. Accountability is one of the cornerstones of municipal governance.

2.3.2 Training and Educating Options of the Code of Conduct

According to Makalela and Moloto (2023), training and education options on the Code of Conduct remain important for enhancing policy implementation and compliance. Good governance in municipalities requires that municipal officials adhere to values that promote accountability, responsiveness to the community's demands and inputs, integrity, efficiency, and transparency, amongst others. Training becomes an ongoing learning process to equip municipal officials with knowledge and skills of what is expected of them when fulfilling their obligations. Education, although broad, serves to create awareness regarding moral values that guide the behavioural conduct of municipal officials.

The code of conduct provides guidelines for public officials and employers of what type of ethical behaviour is expected of them. Code of Conduct is the municipal council's key instrument to ensure that the municipality is accountable to the needs and demands of the community (de Visser, 2021. In municipal settings such as VDM, the codes of conduct are seen as an instrument for instilling a culture of ethical behaviour amongst municipal officials. Furthermore, codes legally indicate the spirit in which public officials should perform their duties, the action to avoid conflict of interests, and the terms of public officials' personnel conduct and private interest.

Menzel (2014) argues that ethical codification provides a framework for consistent policy implementation and compliance within municipalities. By establishing clear ethical standards, municipalities can ensure that employees understand their obligations and the implications of their actions. This leads to more coherent and effective policy execution, as supported by research indicating that ''ethical frameworks improve compliance rates among public servants''. Codification also enables the councillors to act against the perpetrator of unethical conduct because behavioural standards are formalised in the systems. The SALGA Report (2019), which provides guidelines on the roles of councillors, highlights how each role should be conducted to realise good governance within the municipality.

2.3.3 Integrity

Integrity is one of the mechanisms to prevent and detect corruption acts and investigate and sanction them, which are in place within the local administration and used systematically. It is against the law for municipal officials to knowingly solicit or accept political donations from those conducting business or attempting to do business with the local government. Employees with authority over local government contracts cannot serve on political fundraising committees. The difference between these dimensions is that compliance-based is when local government officials ensure they work within given legislations of public finance and good governance. While integrity focuses on ethical leadership and openness (Matyana & Sibiya, 2025).

Communication enhances the dissemination of important information, policies, processes, and advice on ethical standards to members, employees, the public, other persons and organizations with whom the council is associated and encourages listening, conversation and feedback. The Ethics Institute conducted a study in 2022 that found that government employees, including municipal officials, still had confidence in the PSC. The reviewed training manual entitled ‘’Unlawful Instructions and Handling of Ethical Dilemmas in the Workplace" confirms that the government is committed to dealing with issues of ethical dilemma that confront employees daily (PSC Annual Report, 2023).

2.3.4 Promoting Good Governance

Mafunisa (2000) argues that municipalities are the closest government institutions to the people and, as such, must maintain the highest levels of accountability, transparency, and fairness. Good governance in municipalities is directly linked to ethical behaviour, which ensures that decisions are made in the public interest rather than for personal gain or political favouritism.

2.3.5 Preventing Corruption

Corruption is a significant challenge in South African municipalities, often resulting in the misallocation of resources and diminished service delivery. According to Transparency International (2020), codifying ethical standards is a preventive measure against corruption, outlining acceptable behaviours and practices for public officials. Ethical guidelines can deter corruption by establishing clear consequences for unethical behaviour, thus fostering a culture of integrity within municipalities. Codification and education options ensure that ethical codes, besides Constitutional legislations and policy frameworks serving as a guide, are formalised in the systems that govern municipalities. This will enable municipalities to use them as benchmarks for ethical conduct instead of unethical conduct.

De Visser, Beukes, Steytler and Chigwata (2021) conducted a survey on ‘’Combating Corruption in Local Government in the Western Cape” and found that corruption in most municipalities occurs in the areas of supply chain management, human resources, human settlements, land use and building control. In the aforementioned areas, embezzlement or wasteful expenditure becomes a norm. Some municipalities’ unethical conduct continues because the internal control system cannot detect fraud, kickbacks, bribery and extortion. Also, political interference is alleged to have worsened municipal officials' behavioural conduct, resulting in flouting rules and policies to promote individual interest over public interest.

2.4 CONTEXTUALISING UNETHICAL CONDUCT AND ITS IMPACT ON MUNICIPALITY PERFORMANCE

A municipality’s capacity to provide services effectively and efficiently is severely weakened by unethical behaviour, endangering institutional integrity and public confidence. Common instances of unethical behaviour that result in resource misallocation, subpar service delivery, and financial mismanagement include corruption, nepotism, and maladministration (Mafunisa, 2008). In addition to undermining openness and accountability, these actions foster an atmosphere of impunity in which public servants put their interests ahead of the general welfare (Van der Waldt, 2015). Additionally, when wrongdoing is accepted, employees may feel demotivated or helpless, negatively affecting employee morale (Pillay, 2018). Productivity and the execution of development projects meant to enhance community well-being are thus hampered.

Since the Venda Building Society debacle, the VDM (VDM) deposited R360 000 000 million into the mutual bank, which was against the MFMA, putting the Municipality in a dire state regarding financial management. This implies that training in ethical codes is key for good governance at VDM. The concern with most South African municipalities is that every year, the Auditor General reports that few municipalities have clean audits and the majority face unclean audits to the detriment of service delivery. The literature on enhancing ethical conduct through codification and education reveals both consistencies and contradictions. A consistent finding across studies is the importance of ethical codes in guiding behaviour. Huberts (2018) highlights that clear ethical codes establish benchmarks for accountability, while Mafunisa (2020) emphasizes their role in deterring corruption within South Africa's public sector. Contradictions arise regarding the effectiveness of enforcement. Pillay (2016) argues that weak institutional frameworks undermine the implementation of ethical codes, making them symbolic rather than functional. In contrast, Sekerka *et al.*,(2009) assert that proper enforcement mechanisms significantly enhance compliance when coupled with regular training. These differing views raise questions about whether enforcement gaps are due to systemic failures or a lack of political will.

Building on these perspectives, another area of contention lies in the adaptability of ethical frameworks to diverse socio-cultural contexts. Rossouw and Van Vuuren (2017) suggest that when universally applied, ethical principles risk overlooking cultural nuances and local governance challenges, such as those in rural municipalities like VDM. In contrast, Huberts (2018) maintains that universal ethical codes, grounded in principles of transparency and accountability, provide a necessary baseline for all institutions, irrespective of their context. This divergence raises critical questions about the balance between global ethical standards and localized adaptations: To what extent should ethical codes accommodate cultural diversity without compromising their foundational values? And how can this balance be effectively implemented in under-resourced municipalities? The role of leadership further complicates the debate. Pillay (2016) identifies ethical leadership as pivotal in fostering a culture of integrity and ensuring adherence to codified standards. Heywood (2019) critiques this view, arguing that leadership alone cannot address systemic corruption and that broader institutional reforms are necessary. These opposing perspectives provoke essential questions: Can ethical leadership independently drive ethical transformation, or does it require a symbiotic relationship with institutional reforms? Moreover, what mechanisms can ensure that ethical leadership trickles down to lower levels of administration in contexts like Vhembe?

Lastly, the evaluation of ethical interventions reveals inconsistencies. Some studies highlight the success of ethics education and codification in improving compliance and accountability (Sekerka *et al.,* 2009), while others question their measurable impact due to the absence of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Mafunisa, 2020). This gap points to the need for empirical studies that evaluate long-term outcomes and explore whether ethical interventions lead to sustained behavioural change or merely superficial compliance. These contradictions underscore the importance of integrating empirical research with practical solutions tailored to specific challenges in municipalities like Vhembe.

The challenge is that when people lose faith in the municipality's ability to meet their requirements, unethical behaviour has a cascading effect that weakens governance structures and reduces public engagement. Ethical leadership and adherence to governance principles, like accountability and openness, are crucial for restoring and maintaining municipal success. Improving municipal effectiveness and public trust requires addressing unethical behaviour with strong legislative frameworks and cultivating an integrity-based culture.

2.4.1 Unethical Conduct in the Political and Governmental Form

Political unethical conduct is the misuse of authority by public servants and politicians for their benefit. Politically unethical behaviour occurs when an elected or appointed political officeholder commits a crime for their benefit. Bribery, extortion, nepotism, cronyism, patronage, influence peddling, graft, and embezzlement are all included (Keightley, 2011). In South Africa, unethical conduct in the political and governmental sphere is still a significant issue that undermines public trust, governance, and economic advancement. Widespread issues include corruption, nepotism, and the misappropriation of public funds, especially in state-owned businesses and government agencies. High-profile incidents exemplify "state capture," in which private interests undermine public institutions for their benefit, including the Gupta family's control over state affairs under Jacob Zuma's presidency (Madonsela, 2016).

Furthermore, the Auditor-General's reports regularly highlight improper spending and a lack of accountability at the municipal and provincial levels (AGSA, 2022). These practices erode citizens' confidence in government, exacerbate inequality, and impede service delivery, especially in healthcare, housing, and education. Weak enforcement of ethical standards, coupled with political interference, perpetuates this cycle of misconduct. While the government has initiated reforms, including establishing the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) and implementing whistle-blower protections, systemic change remains slow, mainly due to a lack of political will and internal resistance (PSC, 2021). Addressing this issue requires strengthening oversight mechanisms, fostering a culture of accountability, and ensuring that ethical conduct is prioritized at all levels of governance.

In this high political position, unethical conduct is facilitated by friends involved in procuring goods and services for government departments, assisting friends with the smuggling of drugs, and money laundering, not restricted to these activities. Furthermore, Keightley (2011) notes that sometimes it is the misuse of government power for other purposes, such as the domination of public servants who abuse their positions to provide favours to family, friends and contacts.

2.4.2 Unethical Conduct in the Economic Form

The word ‘economics originates from the Greek words *oikos,* meaning ‘house’ and *nemein*, meaning ‘manage’. Therefore, economics is the science of household management, where the household may vary in size from an individual’s home to a country. Besides the management of the economy, other issues of economics seek to describe, explain, analyse and predict a variety of phenomena such as economic growth, unemployment, inflation rate, trade, the prices of different goods and services, money, interest rates and business cycles (Mohr, 2011).

In South Africa, unethical conduct, particularly in its economic manifestation, has been a recurring problem threatening public confidence in institutions and economic prosperity. Among the significant problems that have afflicted both the public and private sectors are corruption, fraud, and the improper use of public funds. For example, governance and economic stability have been severely undermined by state capture, which is the practice of private corporations manipulating governmental institutions for financial advantage (Madonsela, 2019). Furthermore, unethical business activities that deter foreign investment and worsen inequality include corporate fraud, tax evasion, and price fixing (Chipkin & Swilling, 2018).

Vulnerable communities frequently lack access to essential services in the public sector due to tender irregularities and the misappropriation of funds for community development projects, prolonging poverty (Auditor-General South Africa, 2020). In addition to compromising moral standards, these acts impede South Africa's pursuit of sustainable development, as delineated in its NDP. A comprehensive strategy is needed to address these issues, including strengthening public accountability systems, encouraging moral leadership, and strictly enforcing anti-corruption laws (Reddy, 2020). In the context of unethical conduct, active and passive corruptive activities may transpire in the economic sphere, on which the financial situation of the country has an important implication that directly has an impact on the economic growth, the foreign exchange rate, as well investment by the people and institutions, both nationally and internationally into the economy of the country. Economic factors such as limited resources influence the demands and wants for goods and services.

Therefore, the transgression of ethical conduct in municipalities results in community frustration and dissatisfaction and affects the well-being of society.

2.4.3 Unethical Conduct in the Social Sphere

According to Bruce (2014), unethical conduct manifests as a "pre-modern idea" that refuses to distinguish between a public leader and public resources and is linked to interpersonal connections, built-in friendship, family, and broader ethnic ties. This means that unethical conduct emerges in society because of the population's prior institutions, such as social contact and sympathy for family, relatives, and friends. People strive to succeed in society, and groups compete for the most expensive goods and services for their families. On the other hand, the cost of living is rising, and the unemployment rate is high. People in society are afraid of losing their lives if they denounce and expose corrupt people.

In South Africa, misconduct in its social form is still a significant problem in several cultural customs and conventions. Bribery, nepotism, and fraud are examples of corruption that have permeated both the public and private sectors and eroded institutional efficacy and confidence (Gumede, 2022). Because people in underprivileged communities frequently turn to illegal activity to survive, social inequality makes unethical behaviour even worse, and feeds cycles of poverty and social instability (Smith, 2020). The disregard for vulnerable groups, such as women and children, who commonly experience institutional discrimination and gender-based violence, is another example of unethical behaviour (Mokoena, 2019). The social acceptance of some immoral practices, including racism and xenophobia, which fuel social division and conflict, exacerbates these problems (Gumede, 2022). Strong ethical teaching, strict legal enforcement, and developing an inclusive and accountable culture are all necessary to combat unethical behaviour in South Africa.

According to Kaptein (2021), the country's social fabric risks further deterioration ‘’if we do not work together to confront these ingrained practices of unethical conduct’’. The South African Council of Education also shares concerns regarding diverting public monies meant to maintain school buildings, upgrade learning resources, and feed students being used for personal gain (Serfontein & De Waal, 2015). The foreword by President Ramaphosa during the launch of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) in 2018 noted that corruption has a devastating effect on the government's performance. Unethical conduct is part of the human condition, which, if left unchecked, will become endemic when it becomes an identifying mark of a society or its institutions. It raises serious questions about the character and foundations of the society in which it thrives. Kaptein (2021) states that the decline of moral values in government remains a challenge that society faces, even if it is partly inherited from the past. Unethical conduct is tremendously destructive to any community because it causes societal disintegration.

In South Africa, the outcome of municipal elections in 2016 was influenced by the public perception of the gross unethical conduct of municipal officials. The moral decay was perpetrated by greed, wanting to satisfy personal interests over the public. These are some of the conflicts of interest that confront municipal officials daily. It is always based on a "get rich quick" mentality, leading to widespread moral decay, especially in bribery or fraud. Unethical conduct is linked to various illegal activities such as influence peddling, drug trafficking, ghost worker theft, robbery, and other significant and minor offenses.

2.5 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK AND MECHANISMS TO ENSURE ETHICAL CONDUCT IN SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, the Parliament prescribes various legislations to guide the actions and behaviour of the public. These legislative frameworks, codes, and independent bodies are integral to ensuring ethical conduct in South Africa, particularly in the public sector. Since 1994, the government has embarked on various frameworks to guide the behavioural conduct of government employees, including the local government. This study will only discuss the following legislative frameworks, policies and strategies to ensure the codification and education of ethical conduct in South African municipalities:

2.5.1 Constitution of the Republic, 1996

The cornerstone of South African law is the Constitution of the Republic, 1996, which is the supreme law of the country, the most important law that reigns over all other laws and policies (Humby, Kotze, Du Plessis, Naude, Freedman, Coetzee, Bellengere, Karels, Keevy & Letsaolo, 2015). The Constitution of South Africa lays the foundation for ethical conduct in public administration. The key sections that regulate the code of conduct for municipal officials include:

Section 195 which outlined the basic values and principles governing public administration, emphasised the following:

- A high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained.
- Public administration must be accountable.
- Transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible, and accurate information.
- Resources must be used efficiently, economically and effectively.

Section 181: Establishes independent institutions supporting constitutional democracy, including the Public Protector, who investigates maladministration and unethical conduct in public bodies. Humby *et al.,* (2015) contend that these institutions are critical in protecting citizen's rights, promoting good governance, and maintaining ethical conduct in both the public and private sectors. These institutions are expected to function without interference from the government, political parties, or private interests.

Levin (2010) maintains that the developmental state is possible and indispensable to developing countries like South Africa, as is the mandate given to local government in Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic. This statement confirmed that local government, as the closest government to the people, must be people-centred. Chapter 13 of the NDP (2012) advocates highly of the developmental state, where people should hold public officials accountable to achieve a capable state. This is in support of the Constitution, which regards the local government to serve as a transformative role to redress the inequities of the apartheid in South Africa.

The local government is perceived as one of the instruments to realise a capable state where everyone can harness their efforts to participate in socio-economic activities. This requires municipalities to adhere to Chapter 2 of the Constitution (Bill of Rights), which maintains that the people living in South Africa have a right to be served with respect for their inherent dignity. Sections 9 and 14 of the Constitution in the Bill of Rights stipulate that everyone is equal before the law, has the right to equal protection, and has the right to privacy, which includes the right not to have their possessions seized. Section 195 of the Constitution further outlines democratic values to be adhered to in public administration. The public servants must adhere to a high ethical standard for good governance (Constitution of the Republic, 1996).

This implies that the people of South Africa have a right to be served free from unethical conduct and that government officials must respect the Bill of Rights in carrying out their functions. All administrators in the organs of the state, in every sphere of government, and public enterprises must ensure that their functions and duties are performed according to a high standard of professional ethics by utilizing state resources in an efficient, economical, and effective manner.

2.5.2 Public Protector Amendment Act, 23 of 2003

The Public Protector Amendment Act (hereinafter will be referred to as PAA) adjusts the provisions of the Public Protector Act, 23 of 1994. The amendment aimed to strengthen the Public Protector's Office and clarify roles and responsibilities to address gaps in the act. These changes are designed to reinforce the institution’s independence and effectiveness in investigating and addressing maladministration, abuse of power, and corruption in public administration, aligning with constitutional provisions and public expectations. Individuals may lodge complaints about suspected malpractice or unethical decisions, and the necessary investigation should be instituted.

In Section 182(1) of the Constitution, a provision is made for appointing a Public Protector (before this, an office with related functions existed and was known as the Office of the Ombudsman to fulfill this role. The Public Protector has the power, as regulated by national legislation: a) to investigate any conduct in state affairs or in the public administration in any sphere of government that is alleged or suspected to be improper (unethical); b) to report on the conduct; and c) to take appropriate remedial action (Disoloane, 2012). In addition, Section 182 (2) states that the Public Protector has additional powers and functions prescribed by national legislation. The Public Protector must be accessible to all people and communities.

Van Niekerk and Olivier (2012) state, "The Public Protector can furthermore report on improper conduct, and such reports must be open to the public unless prohibited by national legislation." The Public Protector's broad mandate focuses on investigating and correcting improper and prejudicial conduct in state affairs and its power, and it is the sole agency that enforces the Executive Members Ethics Act, 1998, and the Executive Ethics Code. The Public Protector's role in anti-corruption is also recognised in the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Act, 2004, the Protected and Disclosures Act, 2000, and the Public Finance Management Act, 1999 (Madonsela, 2010 & DPSA, 2003).

2.5.3 Local Government: Municipal System Act, 32 of 2000

The Municipal System Act, 32 of 2000, provides a framework for the organization and operation of municipalities in South Africa, emphasizing the importance of ethical conduct in local government. The Act mandates that municipalities adhere to accountability, transparency, and ethical behaviour principles in all their operations. Municipal councillors and officials must act with integrity, ensure proper financial management, and serve their communities effectively. The Act aligns with the broader regulatory framework included in the Municipal Structure Act, 117 of 1988, including the Public Finance Management Act, which promotes good governance practices (Republic of South Africa, 2000).

Ethical conduct is integral to maintaining public trust and preventing corruption at the municipal level, ensuring that municipalities fulfill their developmental role while safeguarding the interests of their residents (Agbin, 2018). Schedule 1 of the MSA: Codes of Conduct for Municipal Council requires that municipal council disclose their interests, must not use their position or privilege to acquire assets or resources for personal gain, must not accept gifts, rewards, or favours to satisfy their personal interests. They must adhere to the codes of conduct for their employees, which must align with national ethical standards; failure to do so will result in disciplinary action. The CoGTA has collaborated with SALGA, the Ethics Institute, and the Moral Regeneration Movement to strengthen the code of conduct in local government. The aforementioned organisations assist local government in advising and training municipal officials on ethical codes (CoGTA Report, 2020).

2.5.4 National Development Plan, 2012

Since the introduction and implementation of the National Development Plan, observations and evaluations have been made at different times for different challenges and objectives to assess the plan's effectiveness in achieving its specified objectives. Mr Lehohla, the former Statistics General’s keynote address in 2018, revealed that although the NDP has progressed, the country has gone backward regarding economic growth (Statistics South Africa, 2018). During the launch of the NDP, although it was acknowledged that the apartheid government contributed immensely to service delivery backlogs, the unethical conduct of government employees worsened the condition. The retarded growth is alleged to have been caused by corruption and maladministration in the public sector.

Furthermore, Mr Jeff Radebe, former Minister of the Presidency, also confirmed during the NDP launch that corruption and maladministration in the public sector are manmade rather than systematic. Poverty reduction and inequality challenges are based on the human element as the primary perpetrator of unethical conduct in government (Radebe, 2015). He further articulates that the NDP is premised on finding solutions for good governance. Altman, an economist and

Commissioner in the National Development Commission Office, emphasizes that public service corruption is why the NDP target has not been met. The concerns of corruption as a threat to Vision 2030 resurfaced in most keynote addresses related to the NDP. The NDP aims to strengthen the capacity of institutions tasked with preventing, detecting and prosecuting, such as the Auditor General, public protector, Special Investigating Unit (SIU), and National Prosecuting Authority (NPA).

Municipalities such as Vhembe District are expected to implement the NDP targets through the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), which is key to socio-economic development. Chapter 14 of the NDP emphasizes that for the government to achieve the overarching goals, it needs to unify efforts to fight unethical conduct in all spheres of government. Every sphere of government is expected to align its socio-economic target with the NDP's overarching goals. Yet, the municipalities struggle to be responsive to the ideals of the NDP (NDP, 2012). Bambo (2022) also adds that the ‘’general deterioration in the audit outcome of municipalities, and failure of the municipal council to act effectively in the remedy of this performance, has begun to draw the interest of various stakeholders in and around municipalities.’’ This confirms that South African municipalities face challenges in service delivery due to poor performance.

2.5.5 Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 56 of 2003

Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003 (as amended by Promotion of Local Government Affairs Act 91 of 1983) intends to *secure sound and sustainable management of the financial affairs of municipalities and other institutions in the local sphere of government; to establish treasury norms and standards for the local sphere of government; and to provide for matters connected in addition to that.* Section 128 under Chapter 12 of this Act focuses on ‘Compliance to be monitored’, which entails that the accounting officer of a parent municipality must: (a) Monitor whether the accounting officer of any municipal entity under the sole or shared control of the municipality has complied with sections 121(1) and 126(2); (b) establish the reasons for any non-compliance: and

(c) promptly report any non-compliance, together with the reasons for such non-compliance, to the council of the parent municipality, the relevant provincial treasury and the Auditor-General.

The MFMA emphasises the accountability of municipal councillors and managers in upholding principles of good governance for the sustainability of financial management. The quality of service in municipalities is determined by how funds are used. Glasser and Wright (2020) assert that most municipalities in South Africa are in financial distress, meaning that the municipalities are struggling to satisfy the needs and demands of their communities due to resource constraints. Unfortunately, this situation has negative implications for achieving the mandate of the local government, which is to be developmental. For example, in Vhembe District Municipality's Venda Building Society (VBS) saga, R300 million was deposited into Mutual Bank, a practice that contradicts MFMA measures. This practice put the Vhembe District Municipalities in dire financial distress, negatively affecting service delivery since 2018. The lack of compliance with financial regulations positioned the District Municipality to be featured regularly in national, provincial and local mass media with fraud and kick-backs allegations.

2.5.6 White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997

In 1997, during the post-democratic dispensation, the South African Public Service Administration developed the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (WPTPS) 1997. The WPTPS developed an initiative to strengthen service delivery in the public sector, which includes local government. The *Batho Pele* is the Sotho word, which means ''People first'', which is related to the Ubuntu concept. Local government is mandated to provide an array of public services to the community closest to its proximity. The service providers are the municipal officials at the forefront of service delivery, and they are municipal officials. They are in constant contact with the community daily. Therefore, the Batho Pele Principles is a South African political initiative introduced during the Mandela Administration due to challenges the disadvantaged Black communities encountered during apartheid rule. The Batho Pele's objective is to redress past injustices that adversely affect service delivery in most municipalities in South Africa, particularly district municipalities. The goal of every government is to enhance life for its citizens through fulfilling the promises made during electioneering campaigns (Molobela, 2024).

Ganesh & Rampersad (2018) assert that the Batho Pelo Principles have eight (8) principles that serve as the foundation for committed and excellent service provision through access, consultation, openness, timeously, courtesy, service standards, redress, and value for money. Municipal officials are expected to be responsive to the needs and demands of the community, the public should be treated with respect, and there must be courtesy when engaging with the public. The public must be given access to opportunities available at the municipality, such as employment and filling out indigent forms. Service standards are to be communicated to the community, and communication is open and transparent so that the community can make informed decisions. Molobela (2023) contends that the Batho Pele principles aim to enhance equal access and opportunities by providing government services while addressing historical imbalances and disparities. There must be value for money through the provision of quality services. In this manner, if the municipal fails or cannot provide service as promised, there must be redress, whether there is an apology to the community for not fulfilling the promise.

2.5.7 Public Audit Amendment Act, 5 of 2018

The National Assembly passed the Public Audit Amendment Act 2018 (PAAA) due to financial mismanagement and escalating corruption, particularly in municipalities. The PAAA empowers the AGSA to take corrective action when municipalities disobey the AGSA's recommendations, and the PAAA aims to strengthen the AGSA's authority. The AG can also refer matters to relevant public bodies for further investigation, such as Hawks, the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), or disciplinary bodies. It empowers the Auditor General of South Africa to hold accounting officers (AOs) personally liable if they fail to comply with the remedial action taken by the AGSA or fail to recover any wasteful, irregular, and fruitless expenditure. The AG has been given powers to take any appropriate remedial action and issue a certificate of debt, as prescribed; where an accounting officer or accounting authority has failed to comply with remedial action, the AG can ask the accounting officer to pay back the money. Furthermore, granting the AGSA powers to take remedial action makes the AG'S recommendations legally binding and compulsory for the auditees to implement (PAAA, 2018).

If any auditee disputes the remedial action or certificate of debts, he/she can approach the courts to have the remedial action or certificate of debts set aside. The PAAA further introduces several changes which seek to enhance the efficiency and independence of the AGSA. Therefore, it is hoped that the PAA will strengthen accountability from senior and junior municipal officials. The Public Amendment Act aligns with broader anti-corruption frameworks, such as the national anti-corruption frameworks, such as the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, by fostering ethical governance and protecting public resources. It also serves as an important tool in improving service delivery and restoring public confidence in government institutions.

2.5.8 Protected Disclosure Act, 26 of 2000

The Protected Disclosure Act 26, 2000 (PDA) originates from the Bill of Rights in the Constitution, also known as the whistle-blower protection law. PDA provides procedures in which public and private employees disclose information about unlawful and corrupt conduct by their employers or fellow employees. The employer is obligated to protect employees who disclose acts of unethical conduct by corrupt government officials. Although assented to in 2000, this Act is hardly ever utilised to protect the “whistle-blowers”, which renders it ineffective (South Africa, 2000). This act encourages honest employees to raise concerns and report wrongdoing within the workplace without fear of their colleagues. The fear of colleagues is often far greater than the protection of honest employees. The employees are also afraid that senior ranking officials are sometimes involved in unethical conduct, so they hardly have anyone to trust (Rajin, 2017). Even in a court of law, a copy of the docket must be provided to the accused to prepare the trial, and in this way, the names of witnesses are compromised.

Naidoo (2013) also agrees that whistle-blowers are unwilling and reluctant to disclose because of the fear of victimization and harassment by their colleagues. This often happens, regardless of the promises made by employers, due to recent amendments which clearly state that confidentiality must be maintained and the identity of the person to whom disclosure is made, as well as factors to be considered, would be whistle-blowers.

2.5.9 National Anti-Corruption Strategy, 2020

The NACS, launched in 2020, is a comprehensive framework aimed at combating corruption across all sectors of society including public, private, and civil society. The President, Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa, in the preamble of the NACS, indicates that corruption, where it occurs, symbolises a decline in the nation’s value system. The NACS represents a collaborative effort by the South African government, civil society, and the private sector to foster a culture of integrity and accountability. One of the objectives of the NACS is to prevent corruption before it happens. Through NACS, it is hoped that society will have zero tolerance for corruption by reporting such actions to the relevant authorities (Ramaphosa, 2020). This involves enhancing ethical conduct in both public and private sectors through education, awareness campaigns, and establishing a robust ethical framework. The strategy emphasizes the role of collaboration between the government, civil society, businesses, and individuals to create a united front against corruption. It also aligns with the country’s constitutional values of fairness, justice, and equity.

2.5.10 Ethics Institute of South Africa

In South Africa, the Ethics Institute of South Africa (EthicsSA), is an independent organisation that deals with ethics concerning leadership, products and services. This institute is essential to encouraging and guaranteeing moral behaviour among public servants. With a focus on government organizations and public employees, EthicSA promotes an ethical culture in both the public and commercial sectors. To promote ethical leadership, Deon Rossouw, the Chief Executive Officer of EthicSA, highlights that in local government, compliance with ethics is the cornerstone of safe, just, and prosperous communities. EthicsSA collaborates closely with governmental organizations such as SALGA, CoGTA, and the Moral Regeneration Movement Organisation. In this manner, it assists public officials in corporate cultures and offers training, guidelines, and tools (Rossouw, 2023).

Furthermore, EthicsSA assists in developing and enforcing codes of conduct for public officials, ensuring that these codes align with national legislation such as the Public Service Act and the MFMA. These codes typically address issues such as conflicts of interest, corruption, and the proper use of public resources. The institute conducts ethics training programs and workshops for public servants to raise awareness about ethical challenges in the workplace and provide guidance on navigating these challenges. This includes handling conflicts of interest, bribery, and the ethical implications of decision-making (Rossouw, 2023).

2.5.11 The King IV Report on Corporate Governance

The King IV Report on Corporate Governance emphasises the importance of ethical leadership, corporate citizenship, and transparency in enhancing governance (King, 2016). In the VDM context, the codification of ethical conduct can provide a clear framework for ethical decision-making and accountability. According to the King IV Report, organizations should integrate ethics into their governance structures, which can be achieved through comprehensive policies and regular training (King, 2016). In municipalities, especially in areas like Vhembe, promoting ethical behaviour among employees and officials is critical to reducing corruption and improving public service delivery. Furthermore, education on ethics in the public sector can foster a culture of accountability, transparency, and professionalism (Mantzaris, Pilla & Jarbadhan 2022). By codifying ethical standards, the municipality can create an environment where employees understand the expectations around ethical behaviour and the consequences of misconduct (King, 2016). Public sector organizations in the district must also develop mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing ethical conduct (Cloete, 2019). Implementing these practices will ensure that public officials adhere to the principles of honesty, integrity, and fairness (Mafini & Loury, 2018). Ultimately, by aligning with the King IV principles, the VDM can improve its governance and enhance its service delivery to the community.

2.5.12 Public Service Act, 1994

The Public Service Act (1994) emphasizes ethical conduct as a cornerstone of public service operations, underscoring the importance of integrity, transparency, and accountability in all government institutions. In the VDM, ethical standards play a critical role in the codification and education of public servants, ensuring that practices align with legal and moral obligations. Codification efforts aim to systematize ethical guidelines, making them accessible to all employees to promote consistent adherence to ethical principles (Matyana & Sibiya, 2025). Furthermore, education options such as training and workshops are vital in equipping employees with the knowledge to identify and resolve ethical dilemmas in the workplace. (Sibanda, 2019). The PSA and the public service regulations provide clear guidelines on receiving gifts to ensure ethical conduct and prevent conflicts of interest. These provisions prohibit receiving gifts for official acts, gifts that can be seen as influencing their official duties or decisions. The PSA also stipulates that if a public official receives a gift while performing their duties, they must declare it according to the prescribed rules. According to the Public Service Regulations, 2016, any gift, benefit, or donation with a value of R350 or more must be disclosed by servants. This includes monetary and non-monetary gifts received in the course of official duties.

Naidoo (2021) remarks that this approach enhances public trust and strengthens governance in the municipality. By integrating these measures into daily operations, the municipality ensures that ethical considerations are embedded in decision-making processes and service delivery. The Public Service Act, through its provisions, supports these efforts by providing a framework for ethical behaviour across government institutions. Codification and education are paramount to instill a culture of effective moral values in municipalities. Matyana and Sibiya (2025) opined that local government ethics are vehicles for prosperous service delivery and must be based on compliance and integrity.

2.5.13 Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act 12 of 2004

The Prevention and Combating of Corruption Activities Act (PRECCA) requires that institutions put efforts into preventing corruption. In South Africa, one of the causes of poor performance of municipalities is blamed on mismanagement of finances due to corruption. PRECCA is regarded as a cornerstone of combating corruption at the national, provincial, and local levels. The objectives of PRECCA are to provide investigative measures regarding corruption and related corrupt activities, as well as to establish and endorse a register to place certain restrictions on persons and enterprises convicted of corrupt activities relating to tenders and contracts. Schubenburg (2024) contends that the Act seeks to create a culture of accountability and transparency in the public and private sectors.

2.5.14 Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000

The Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) is a legislation that allows access to any information held by the State, and any information held by private bodies. All spheres of government must comply with PAIA in their dealings with information. In the Local Government sphere, the Office of the Municipal Manager is responsible for all aspects of governance, such as ensuring compliance with statutory requirements and implementing policies, processes and procedures. The Municipal Manager is also the Information Officer who should ensure that information is accessible to the public. The Act is an essential tool for realizing the Constitutional objectives of transparency and open government in South Africa. The community must have the right to access information regarding service delivery such as; water, electricity, knowledge of government programmes and budgeting.

Manyana and Sibiya (2025) describe compliance with these guidelines as essential in fostering a responsive, accountable public service that serves people's interests. Such a culture of ethics improves the efficiency of governance and bolsters citizens' confidence in local government initiatives.

2.6 SUMMARY

This chapter presented literature regarding ethical conduct in municipalities in South Africa and its influence on governance. Legislative frameworks and mechanisms to ensure ethical conduct in South Africa were presented and discussed. In 1995, the national government transformed public service by introducing an array of legislative policies, strategies, and alternative mechanisms to strengthen ethical codes in all spheres of government. The glimpse from these discussions highlighted cases of ethical dilemmas against politicians, governmental officials, and individuals who live and work within the community, as well as against owners and directors of small and large business enterprises. Moreover, it seems as if corruption occurring within one sector receives help from people from different spheres, meaning that many acts of corruption are interlinked.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The major goal of this chapter is to describe the research techniques that the researcher employed to conduct the investigation. This chapter's major goal was to outline the research methods the researcher employed or adhered to when conducting the investigation. The chapter covered the research paradigm, design, strategy, and study area. The study population, sampling method, sampling size, data collecting, pilot study, data analysis, and ethical issues were covered in this chapter. This chapter covered the research paradigm, research design, research strategies, and study area. The project's population, sampling strategy, sample size, data collecting, pilot study, data analysis, and ethical issues were examined.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm refers to a set of common beliefs and agreements researchers share about how problems should be understood and addressed (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). From the various research philosophies that Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) have identified, this study follows a pragmatist paradigm. The choice of this paradigm is based on its flexible and practical approach to research, where the focus is on the research question itself and the use of methods that best address the problem, rather than adhering strictly to either positivist or interpretivist traditions. Pragmatism allows for integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, supporting the collection and analysis of data from multiple perspectives to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research issue.

3.2.1 Pragmatism Paradigm

Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) indicate that the pragmatism paradigm allows the exploration of the interconnectedness of experience, knowing, and acting in the research. Pragmatism paradigm enables researchers to overcome the difference between theory and action and give voice to those affected by the organizational processes. Panhwar, Ansari, and Shah (2017) maintain that the pragmatist paradigm seeks to understand the organizational processes by documenting the actions and experiences of the participants under investigation. This can be achieved through triangulation of what respondents say and what can be observed.

Creswell & Plano Clark (2018) indicate that triangulation involves combining multiple methods, data sources, or theoretical perspectives to enhance the credibility and validity of the research findings. Triangulation allows researchers to cross-verify information and gain a more holistic understanding of the research problem, reducing the biases associated with relying on a single method or data source Creswell (2020) notes that pragmatism assumes that multiple realities must be combined adequately based on an approach (qualitative and quantitative). This study adopted the pragmatism paradigm. The data collected was triangulated to complement the analysis. The instruments used were questionnaires and interviews to get the respondents' opinions, attitudes and experiences about the phenomenon of ethical codes.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

McCombes (2019) maintains that research design is also called research strategy. The research design is a framework that involves methods and procedures to collect, analyse, and interpret data. This means that the research design guides the research planning by outlining what procedures to follow. Herein is a summary of the research design and methodology, showing how the study has been conducted to meet the goals and objectives. The operant research design and approach are discussed and reflected in the study based on the study's goal and application of methods of interest. This study has used an explanatory sequential integrated mixed-method research design (Figure 2) below. This design is deemed appropriate because of its ability to explain the current phenomenon in question (Berman, 2017). Firstly, the researcher collected and analysed the qualitative data. This resulted in the derivation of themes that were used in construction of a quantitative instrument (questionnaire) which was then used in phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Figure 2: Schematic presentation of an exploratory sequentially integrated Mixed method research.

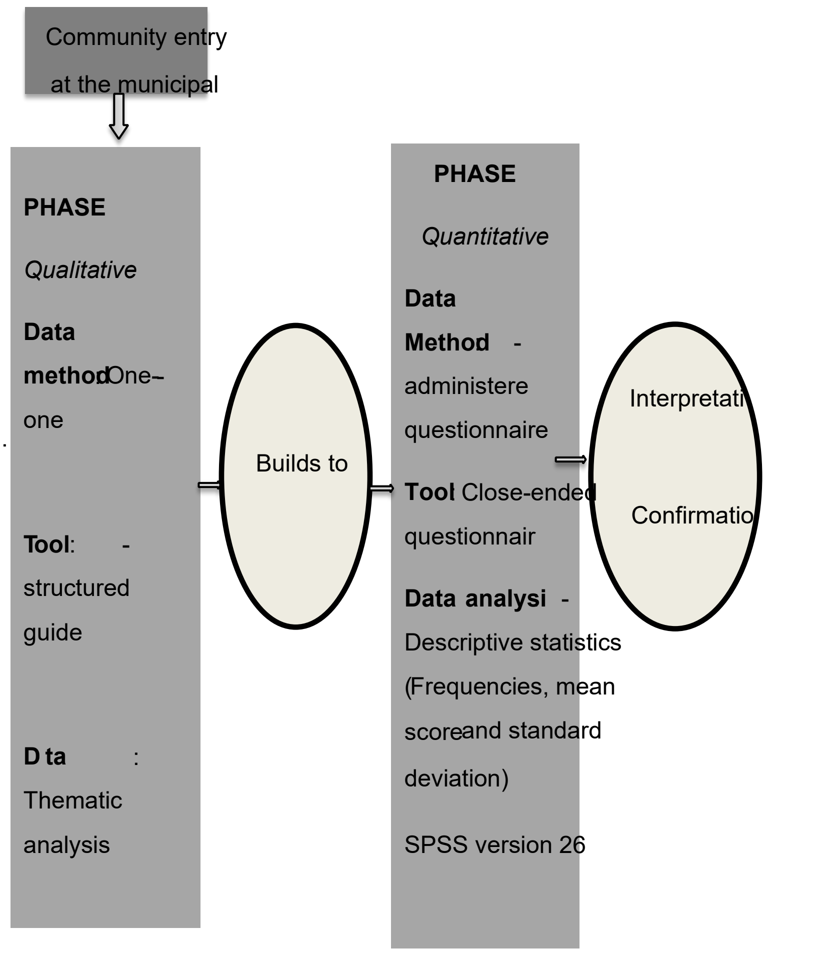


Figure 2: Schematic presentation of an exploratory sequentially integrated Mixed method research

3.4 RESEARCH METHOD

There are different types of research approaches, namely qualitative and quantitative. This study only employed the mixed method, which entails statistically engaging with data in answering the researcher's question and curiosity as follows:

3.4.1 Mixed Methods Research

This study adopted mixed methods research as relevant for research design. It is regarded as the organised inquiry about phenomena through the collection of numerical data and execution of statistical, mathematical or computational techniques mixed with interpretative and in-depth data acquisition and management techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Mixed methods research collects, analyzes, and integrates quantitative and qualitative research data within the same study or in a series of studies to better understand the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The pragmatic finding of this study was to aid in addressing the study's objectives by determining the extent to which VDM succeeds in enhancing its ethical conduct climate, analysing the role of education in the moral conduct of municipal officials.

3.4.1.1 Rationale for Adopting Mixed Methods

The rationale for using mixed methods is combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than either approach alone (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Using this research method, the researchers constructed accurate/ relevant, factual statements to elucidate the situation of concern. Mixed research method provide a complementary perspective as it combines two methods, which produces a holistic picture that allows for divergent views.

3.5 STUDY AREA

Ramabitsa (2014) refers to the study area as the geographical space that comprises individuals, communities, organizations, human products, and incidents, as well as the conditions around which the population of interest exists. The Vhembe district Local Municipality makes up the study area for this study. The district is in the Northern part of Limpopo Province, which shares borders with Capricorn and Mopani District municipalities in the eastern and western directions. The sharing of borders extends to Zimbabwe and Botswana in the Northwest and Mozambique in the southeast through the Kruger National Park, respectively, as indicated in Figure 3 below. The district covers 27 969 148 square km of land with a total population of 1,393,949 people, according to Stats SA, 2016 Community Survey.

Figure 3: Vhembe District Municipality Map

Source: VDM 2019/20 IDP Review.

3.6 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

Bryman (2016) refers to the population of the study as the sum of objects or subjects within an area. A population in research is a group of individuals or elements that share similar characteristics. According to Berman (2017), a population is a group of humans who share characteristics such as gender, age, orientation, belief systems, and circumstances that interest the researcher. The target population in this study consisted of municipal officials from VDM.

3.7 SAMPLING

Clark, Foster, Bryman and Sloan (2021) refer to sampling as choosing study respondents from a larger population. It involves selecting individuals or items to participate in a research project. Tanderhoost (2016) also describes sampling as picking units (for example, persons or organizations) from a population of interest so that findings can be generalized to the population from which samples were taken. In this study, municipal officials from VDM were sampled because they have knowledge of codes of ethics and they were exposed to training on codes as a requirement in MSA. Sampling must undergo processes such as sampling method and procedure, sample size and inclusion criteria as follows:

3.7.1 Sampling Method and Procedure

This study adopted simple random sampling to select the respondents. Babbie (2021) defines simple random sampling as an approach since every respondent in the population has an equal chance of being selected. Moreover, this sampling method allows for the selection of many respondents. This method was used to sample from the overall population of 954 municipal officials at VDM, using Slovin's formula to divide the overall sample size of 30 respondents amongst the selected local municipalities based on population proportion to allocate respective sample sizes for each municipality (Datta, 2018). According to (Ellen, 2023), the Slovin sampling is appropriate when it is impossible to study an entire population (such as the population of the VDM), a smaller sample is taken using a random sampling technique. Slovin's formula allows a researcher to sample the population with a desired degree of accuracy. Slovin's formula gives the researcher an idea of how large the sample size needs to be to ensure a reasonable accuracy of results. Slovin's formula assisted the researcher in calculating the sample size, which is necessary to achieve a specific confidence interval when sampling a population. This formula is used when the researcher does not have enough information about the target population's behaviour (or the distribution of a behaviour) to know the appropriate sample size otherwise. For example, at VDM, different departments deal with different functions and influence behavioural conduct in different manner. Each department has to filter down the ethical codes for its members through training to create awareness of the value of adhering to moral codes and the effect on their behavioural conduct.

3.7.2 Sample Size

This study's sample size comprises 30 VDM officials who are at the forefront of ensuring that legislation and policy frameworks guiding the municipal officials are adhered to. A sample size of 30 participants was adopted, considering the expected setback in the accessibility of the officials required by the targeted public service facilities. According to Sharma (2020), "a minimum of 30 observations is sufficient to conduct significant statistics." This implies that the thirty (30) sample size is enough for a trusted confidence interval.

Inclusion criteria

This study included municipal officials in service at the VDM.

3.8 DATA COLLECTION

According to Flick (2018), data collection is the selection and production of materials to analyze and comprehend phenomena, social fields, subjective and collective experiences, and the process of making meaning. The choice of data collection methods depends on the research problem and population being studied. Data collection is a procedure that describes the techniques and measuring tools to be utilised in performing a research project (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018). The researcher collected data through closed-ended and open-ended questions in the form of self-administered questionnaires and interviews.

3.8.1 Research Instruments

According to Taherhoost (2021), research instruments are tools used to collect data in research such as questionnaires and interviews. The data collection of this study was based on a questionnaire and an interview guide. Questionnaires allowed the subject under study to be discussed statistically and in a generalizable manner. Before data collection, the researcher prepared a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of a list of all conceivable subjects to be responded to, mainly through Likert scales. On the other hand, the qualitative data collected through semi-interviews was analysed using themes, and the data collection instrument was designed per the study’s constructs. Data was collected from 30 respondents at the municipality office premises. Each one of the respondents completed their questionnaire in the presence of the researcher to enable clarification if the need arose, as well as answer interview questions presented through the interview guide. Respondents were given a maximum of 30 minutes to complete all the questionnaires.

3.9 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity refers to the extent to which a research instrument measures what it is intended to measure. It ensures that the results accurately represent the concept under investigation, providing meaningful and credible outcomes. On the other hand, reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of a research instrument in measuring a concept. The pre-testing process was undertaken to gauge the validity and reliability of the data collection instruments. The researcher employed validity content to measure adequate coverage of the research topic by linking the instruments' content elements for correspondence with the study's objectives (Vakili & Jahangiri, 2018). The relationship between different items in each instrument predicted to measure the same construct was evaluated for a clear indication of consistency or the reverse to quantify reliability using internal consistency (Viladrich, Angulo-Brunet & Doval, 2017).

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) contend that data analysis involves organizing, describing, understanding, accounting for, and explaining data and making sense of data regarding the participants' definitions of the situation. Various methods are used to analyze data in research depending on whether it is quantitative, qualitative or mixed. To analyse statistical content, the researcher used descriptive and inferential analysis. The latest Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel software were used to manage the statistical data and compute standard deviations for digital support. Chi-square analysis calculated correlations between variables and linear regression to predict the effect of the cause on the variables. The findings were presented using tables, graphs, distributions, and charts. For the qualitative data, the researcher used thematic analysis to compute thorough findings that were thematically presented and interpreted.

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Clark, Bryman, and Sloan (2021), ethics is a set of moral principles proposed by an individual or group, which is then widely accepted and offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most appropriate conduct between the researcher and the respondents. Protecting participants' rights, upholding integrity, and abiding by the values of beneficence, respect for humans, and justice are all part of ethical issues in research (Resnik, 2020). Informed consent must be acquired, confidentiality and anonymity must be ensured, and participant damage must be prevented by carefully planning research to reduce risks. Ethical research techniques also involve being truthful when gathering, analysing, and reporting data to avoid falsifying or manipulating results. Furthermore, picking participants fairly and distributing risks and benefits equally is crucial. Research gains credibility and trust when ethical guidelines are followed (Bryman, 2016).

The following research ethics were followed during the study:

3.11.1 Permission to Conduct Research

Ethics was addressed in both internal and external institutions. The University of Venda's Research Ethics Committee provided institutional ethics approval. Before data collection began, authorisation from the VDM was requested. The announcement of the study to the community was requested from both of these offices. Creswell (2021) states that obtaining ethical permission before the start of a research project is critical to ensuring that the study's activities adhere to the norms and regulations that govern research.

Research is meant to be beneficial, but it can potentially be harmful, necessitating an ethical evaluation of the project to guarantee that no respondents are hurt. Rubin and Wright (2017) contend that it is morally required to introduce the study to the study area to ensure that respondents and those responsible for any activity in the study area are aware of the study's benefits and risks (refer to Annexure B & D)

3.11.2 Informed consent

Babbie (2021) describes informed consent as one of the principles of research ethics. The aim is for human participants to enter the research freely. Consent should be obtained before the participant enters the research (prospectively), and there must be no undue influence on participants to consent. The minimum requirements for consent to be informed are that the participant understands what the research is and what they are consenting to. The researcher informed the respondents about the general nature of the study, including the expected duration of their participation time, the interview process, potential benefits and drawbacks, and potential dangers to which the respondents may be exposed so that they can make an informed decision about whether to participate in the study. The University of Venda's universal informal consent Form (Annexure ''D'') containing information about the survey was distributed to selected respondents for signing before data collection.

3.11.3 Confidentiality

According to (De Vos, 21), confidentiality refers to the obligation of researchers to prevent unauthorized access to data collected from participants. Confidentiality means that the researcher must always treat the information provided by the respondents with care because respondents have a right to privacy with their personal information. The researcher must ensure that the information supplied will not be shared with anybody other than the right. Also, all details given by the respondents remained confidential and not accessible to unauthorised individuals or groups. The respondent was assured that the information shared with the researcher would not be shared with anyone. Confidentiality is useful as respondents freely participate and are open about code of conduct issues within their environment.

3.11.4 Voluntary participation

In this study, the researcher did not compel the target population to participate, no matter how important participation was. This was covered during the respondents' sampling. The researcher explained the processes and indicated that those reluctant to participate because they were uncomfortable with the setting, or any proceeding, had a choice to decide (Rubin and Wright, 2017). Working with voluntary respondents was safer because they were open and spontaneous during data collection. Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole (2013) maintain that participation should always be voluntary; respondents should not participate against their own will.

3.11.5 Non-Malfeasance

Non-maleficence, as described by Ajuwon (2020), describes that the researcher should avoid performing the study in a dangerous environment or causing injury to the respondents' emotions, bodies, and minds during the research process. No study can guarantee that it is free from any harm; it has the potential to injure respondents physically, emotionally, or psychologically. For example, enhancing codification and education options in municipalities is a sensitive topic that can harm some respondents emotionally. VDM's allegations about the VBS saga still haunt some senior managers involved. Therefore, the researcher respected the respondents' opinions and exercised objectivity. Kumar (2014) also notes that scrutinizing a study's setting and procedures always aids in reducing respondent damage, emotionally or physically.

3.11.6 Beneficence

The researcher highlighted any anticipated benefits in the study to the respondents at this stage. The respondents will also be notified if no immediate or delayed benefits are expected. Compensation is not a bad practice, and it is often necessary to keep respondents engaged in follow-up sessions, as Flick (2018) described. Respondents said that when incentives are not given and there are no apparent benefits, such as immediate solutions to problems.

3.12 SUMMARY

The chapter focused on the research methodology to depict the research procedures through which the researcher conducted the study. The research approach and design, as well as the study area, study population, sampling procedure and size, data collection method, data analysis, and ethical considerations, were discussed in this chapter. The following chapter will present the data presentation, analysis, and interpretation to obtain the findings.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of the study, which were collected through both face-to-face interviews and questionnaires. As previously indicated, 30 Vhembe District Municipality (VDM) officials participated in face-to-face interviews. In addition, quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires to supplement and validate the findings. The qualitative data gathered from interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis as Creswell (2018) outlined. A frequency distribution table displays the frequency of quotations linked to each identified theme across participants. Key quotations from the most prominent themes are also presented to provide context and depth.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics, with results presented through graphs, tables, and pie charts. The findings are organised according to the three main themes, each addressing the five core objectives introduced in Chapter 1. For each theme, the presentation of findings is followed by interpretation and discussion by the researcher.

4.2 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The following section presents data that were collected using a self-administered questionnaire:

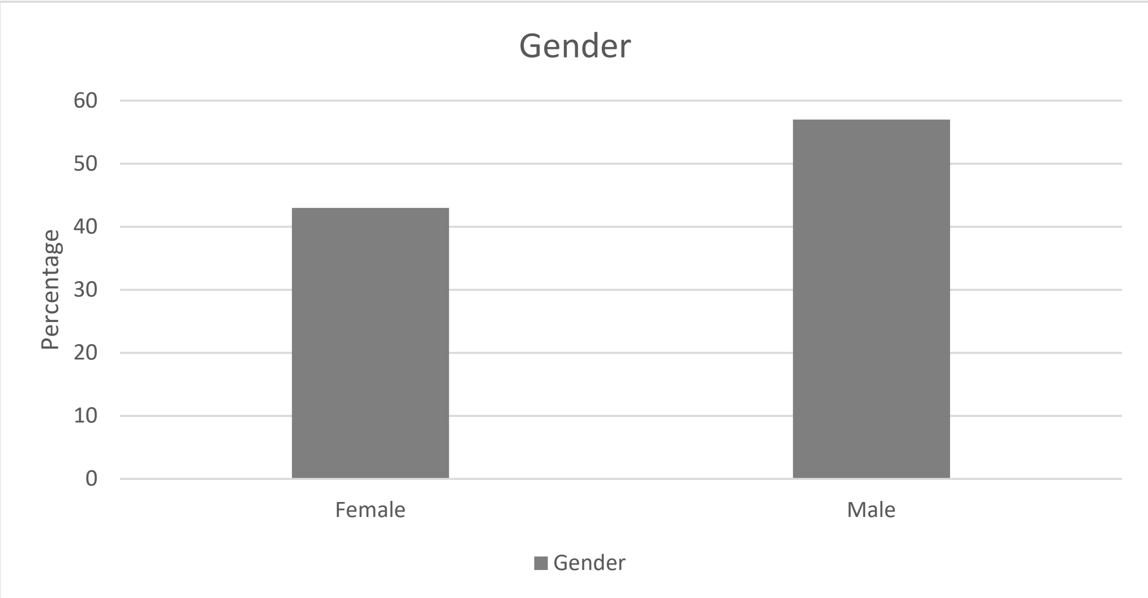
4.2.1 SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Demographic data presents detailed information, which includes age, gender, education, ethnicity, experience, and occupation.

4.2.1.1 Gender of research respondents

The research respondents were asked to indicate their gender on the questionnaire. The indication of gender on the questionnaire assisted the researcher in having a clear understanding of how many females or males responded to the study.

Figure 4.1: Percentage of females and males who responded in the study

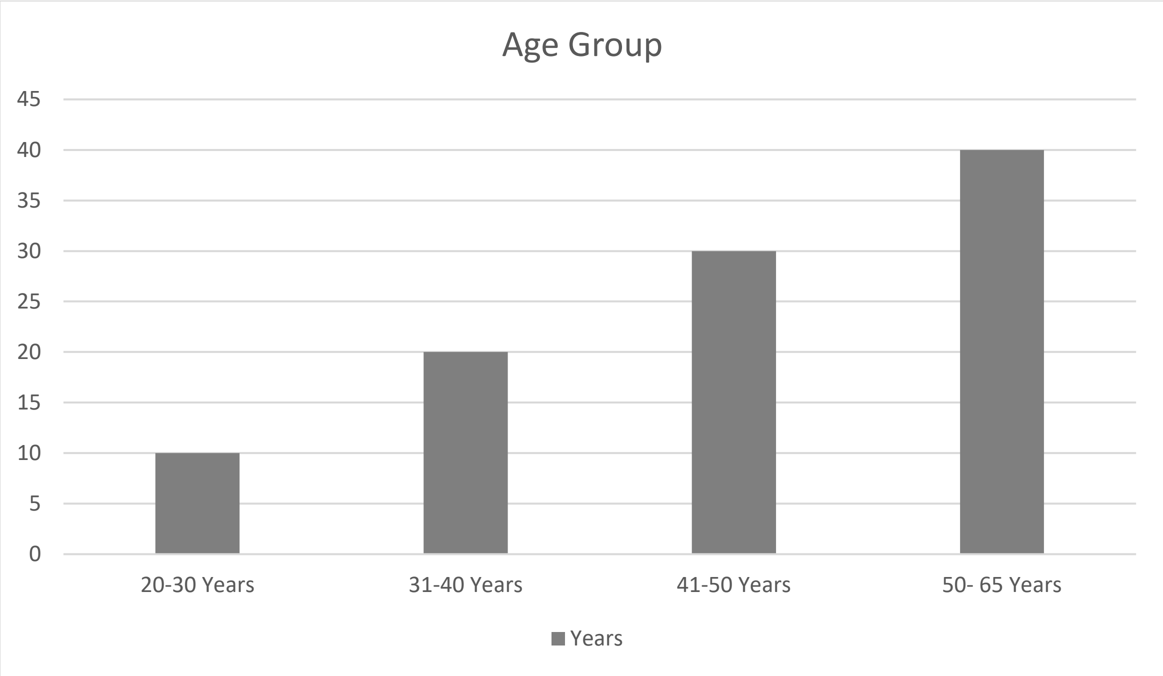


Source: Author

Figure 4.1 indicates that out of 30 selected respondents, the highest number were males with 57%, followed by females with 43%. The results indicated that male officials are more concerned about the issue of ethical conduct in the municipality workplace than female officials. The researcher also assumed that some female respondents might be reluctant to participate due to fear of victimisation.

4.2.1.2 Age group of the respondents

Figure 4.2 Percentage of Respondents' Age group

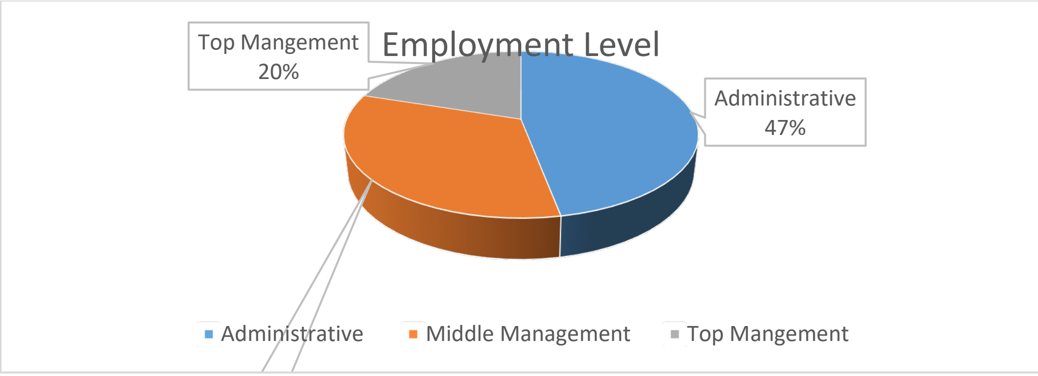


Source : Author

The respondents were requested to indicate their age group on the questionnaire ranging from 20 up to 65 years. Figure 4.2 indicates that most of the respondents were between the age of 50-65 years 40% followed by the second-largest respondents being aged 41-50 years (30%), followed by 31-40 (20%) and the last group being 20-30 (10%). Although all age groups acknowledged that they know ethical codes, most of the older respondents take ethical conduct in the workplace more seriously than the young generation.

4.2.1.3 Employment level of the respondents

Figure 4.3 Employment Level

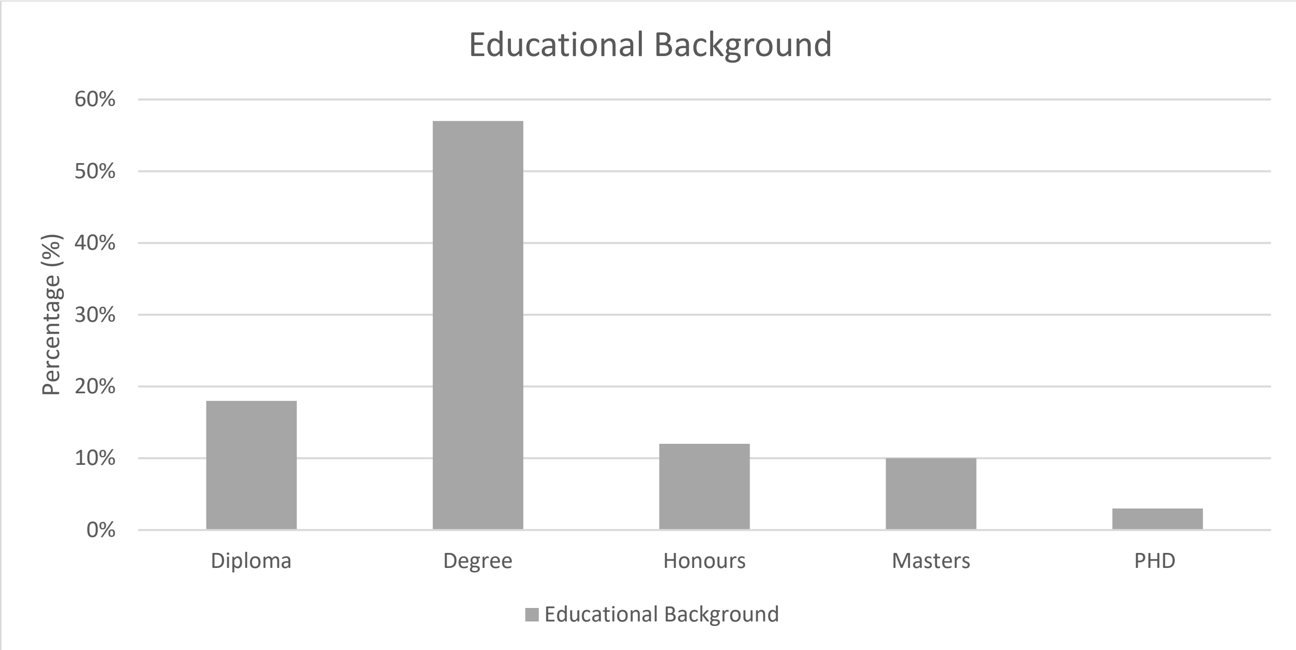


Source: Author

The research respondents were asked to indicate their employment level. The group was divided into three categories, namely administrative, middle and top management. The groups were selected using purposive sampling where each employment level had knowledge and experience of the subject under study. Based on Figure 4.3, most of the respondents (47%) were in the administrative section, followed by the middle management (33%) and lastly, the top management with 20%. The outcomes indicate that the administrative category was present for the survey, followed by middle and top management. The top management category was most unavailable due to back-to-back meetings with internal and external stakeholders.

4.2.1.4 Educational background of the respondents

Figure 4.4

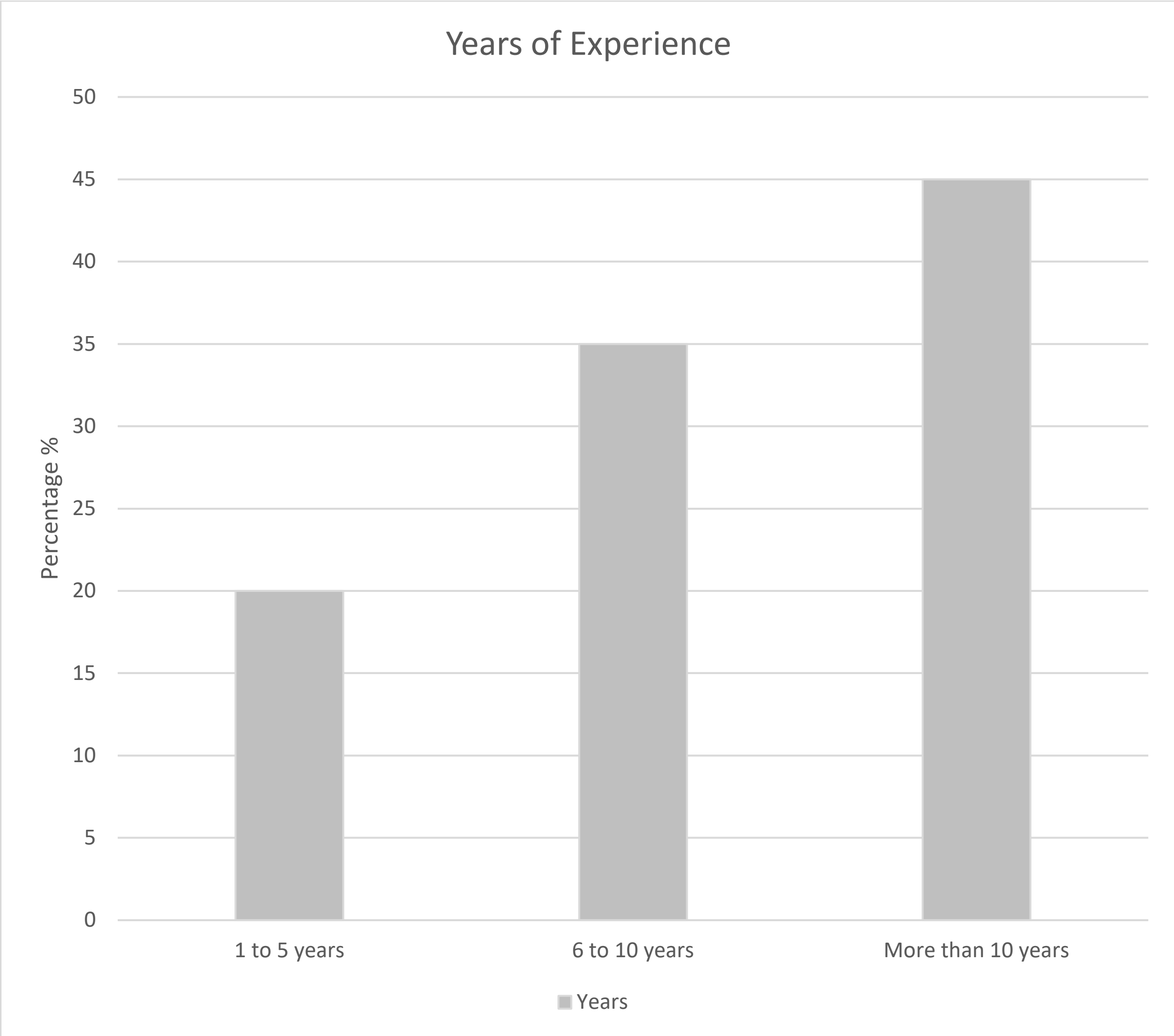


Source: Author

Figure 4.4 indicates the educational background of the respondents. Respondents were asked to indicate their educational background, which is divided into 5 categories namely: Diploma, degree, honours, master and lastly, PHD Figure 4 shows that most of the Respondents have a Degree (57%), followed by those with a diploma (18%), Honours (12%), Masters (10%) and lastly PHD with (3%).

4.2.1.5 Experience level of respondents

Figure 4.5



Source : Author

Figure 4.5 Indicates the number of experiences that the respondents have. The majority of the respondents (45%) have more than 10 years, followed by respondents who have 6 to 10 years of experience (35%) and respondents with 1 to 5 years amounted to (15%).

4.2.2 SECTION B: CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE (MANAGERIAL POSITIONS)

This section included an open-ended questionnaire for respondents holding managerial positions. Managers are responsible for creating and maintaining an ethical climate within their units. In this manner, they must enhance ethical conduct in the codification and education option. The outcomes are as follows:

4.2.2.1 Understanding of the concept of ethical conduct

All the respondents answered the question. The respondents indicated that they had insight into what ethical conduct was. Respondents answered the question from different viewpoints; some answered the question using the general explanation, while others defined ethical conduct from an academic perspective. For example, one of the respondents, N0 (2) at an administrative level, defined *ethical conduct as a behaviour that matches accepted moral principles and standards. In contrast,* another respondent defined *ethical conduct as the right and wrongdoings in the workplace.* Different definitions from respondents were similar in alignment with the idea that ethical conduct has to do with how a person conducts himself/herself in the workplace. The conceptual definition of ethical conduct is in line with Mafunisa's (2000) view, which states that ethical conduct involves conducting oneself with integrity, avoiding corruption, and ensuring that public power is exercised responsibly. Furthermore, some respondents indicated that ethical conduct in the workplace is important because it builds trust, confidence, accountability, efficient service delivery, reputation, and credibility.

4.2.2.2 *What measures does the municipality currently have to promote transparency and accountability in decision-making related to codification and education?*

The researcher wanted to know if respondents were aware of any measures by the municipality to promote transparency and accountability in decision-making related to codification and education. The frequency table below explains how the respondents tackled the question:

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Code of Conduct	3	50%
Transparency Frameworks	2	33.3%
Anti-corruption Measures	1	16.6%

Source: Author

1). Code of Conduct was another significant theme. Fifty percent of the respondents mentioned a code of conduct as one of the measures the municipality has in place. This shows that ethical decision-making is most frequently governed by formal codes outlining permissible activities for municipal authorities.

2. Transparency Frameworks were mentioned by 33.3% of respondents, making them one of the more frequently cited measures related to promoting transparent decision-making. This indicates that many participants know the municipality's efforts to implement policies that support openness, including public access to information, transparent procedures, and visibility in decision-making. However, since this figure still represents less than half of the respondents, awareness or recognition of such frameworks may not be widespread across the municipality. Most respondents indicated that *Effective transparency frameworks are critical for building public trust and ensuring that decision-making processes are open to scrutiny. They enable citizens to be informed and involved, potentially leading to improved governance and greater civic participation*.

3. Anti-corruption measures: Few respondents noted anti-corruption mechanisms, with 16.7%. This demonstrates that there is some effort to incorporate the public in decision-making, however not as highly emphasised as transparency frameworks. One of the respondents indicated that involving the public in decision-making is critical to enhancing accountability and building trust between the municipality and the people it serves. It empowers community members to voice their views and influence policies that affect their lives.

The municipality appears to prioritise transparency, although there is still space for improvement in terms of public engagement and anti-corruption measures. Although ethical rules exist, training and instruction on them may be insufficient. Auditing is mentioned by fewer respondents, which may indicate that the supervision methods are not as visible or widely communicated.

4.2.2.3 Can you describe any instances where ethical dilemmas arose in codification or education planning? How were they addressed?

Respondents were asked to describe a situation where ethical problems arose in codification or education planning and how the municipality addressed those problems. Most respondents indicated that their ethical problems are corruption and nepotism. The respondents indicated that most officials are involved *in corruption or nepotism.* One respondent indicated that the municipality had weak anti-corruption mechanisms in previous years.

Scholars like Klitgaard (1988) provide a formula to explain corruption:

C = M + D – A, where **C** is corruption, **M** is monopoly power, **D** is discretion, and **A** is accountability. According to Naidoo (2012), nepotism negatively affects organizational culture and productivity. It creates an unfair advantage for a select few at the expense of others who might be more deserving based on skills or experience. This problem was addressed by implementing strong anti-corruption policies and practices, including protecting whistleblowers. In South Africa, whistleblowers are protected by the ***Protected Disclosures Act (PDA) of 2000.*** This Act protects whistleblowers who expose misconduct from being fired, demoted, or subjected to other negative consequences. In the event of retribution, whistleblowers may pursue legal action. Furthermore, the Act eliminates the risk of retaliation and encourages employees to report information about unethical behaviour by offering safeguards to protect their identity.

Senior Managers are expected to lead by example.They must promote a high standard of professional ethics and develop ethical programs that align with the Constitution of the Republic, 1996.

4.2.2.4 What steps are taken to prevent conflicts of interest in allocating resources for codification and education initiatives?

The respondents were asked to share steps to prevent conflict of interest in allocating resources. Some senior managers *indicated that there is a mandatory disclosure where employees must disclose any financial, family, or personal interests that might affect their decisions*. These declarations allow the early detection of possible conflicts and implementing corrective actions.

According to David Morris Blog dated 23 August 2024, a conflict of interest is a situation in which a person or party has incentives that could prevent them from fulfilling their obligations non-biasedly. Conflict of interest is "a set of circumstances that creates a risk that a secondary interest will unduly influence professional judgment or actions regarding a primary interest. In contrast to the secondary interest, which is focused on personal gains such as financial gain, family relationships, or career progress, the primary interest relates to obligations such as public duty and legal obligations that form part of unethical conduct or ethical dilemma that confronts municipal officials. Academics emphasise that conflicts of interest do not always indicate unethical behaviour, but they pose a risk to integrity that should not be ignored. Resolving such conflicts through disclosure, recusal, and openness is essential to uphold moral principles during decision-making.

Respondents also indicated that they have independent oversight and audits**.** The municipality has internal and external audits, which monitor how resources are allocated and spent. It was further indicated that the ***Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA)*** plays a vital role in auditing public institutions, ensuring that funds for codification and education initiatives are used as intended and highlighting any discrepancies that might suggest a conflict of interest. Lastly, senior managers mentioned that *independent committees or bodies frequently supervise the distribution of resources to guarantee equity*. These committees usually comprise people from several sectors (government, civil society, education experts, etc.), which lessens the possibility that any individual or group will dictate decisions for their benefit.

4.2.2.5 Through experiences, do you think consequence management is one of the effective tools for enforcing ethical conduct on the officials?

In this instance, respondents who are senior managers were asked to describe their experience with whether consequences management is one of the effective tools for enforcing ethical conduct on the officials. Consequences Management refers to the coordinated approach implemented by an institution to react and reduce the effect of possible and identified threats to the institution. All 6 senior managers who were respondents indicated that *consequences management is a valuable strategy for making authorities act morally*. They further indicated that *since they joined the VDM, consequences management has been put in place to deal with officials involved in corruption and other unethical behaviours that impact the integrity of the municipality.*

Consequence management involves addressing both positive behaviours, such as ethical conduct, compliance, and high performance, and negative behaviours, such as misconduct, policy violations, or underperformance. It is not limited to disciplinary action or punishment but also includes recognition and rewards for good behaviour. When applied consistently and transparently, consequence management becomes an effective tool for reinforcing accountability, promoting ethical behaviour, and enhancing overall organisational performance.

In recognition of this, the Vhembe District Municipal Council, along with senior and general management structures, has taken steps to strengthen the internal control environment. This has been done by reviewing and expanding internal policies, conducting capacity-building workshops, and enhancing monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure that both compliance and performance are tracked and addressed appropriately.

4.2.2.6 *In your training, do you encourage whistleblowing for unethical conduct amongst officials?*

The senior managers agreed that *during the training, they encourage officials and other stakeholders to whistle-blow on any unethical conduct amongst officials*. It was further indicated that *through whistleblowing, individuals can bring attention to unethical activity that might go unreported or unnoticed.* Municipalities ensure accountability by providing a platform for whistle-blowers, thereby holding wrongdoers accountable for their acts. It was further indicated that during the training, officials are made aware of the Protected Disclosure Act (26 of 2000) that protects them as whistle-blowers. This Act protects employees from occupational detriment to maintain openness and promote an ethical culture within companies, whistleblowing is crucial in exposing fraud, corruption, power abuse, and other types of wrongdoing.

4.2.2.7 How do you perceive the role of education in promoting ethical conduct among municipal officials within the VDM?

Senior Managers responded to the question by *indicating that the municipality holds programs to raise awareness of ethical standards; this includes training programs where municipal officials are trained to understand the ethical standards, policies, and legal obligations they are required to uphold.* Through these programs and continuous professional development, officials become aware of relevant Acts such as the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA), the Public Service Act, and the Code of Conduct for municipal staff members. It was further indicated that *the Municipality fosters ethical collaboration and teamwork. Through this ethical collaboration, learning among the municipal officials is encouraged to work together* *toward maintaining high standards of conduct by ensuring ethical practices in all the departments they serve.*

To develop a culture of integrity, accountability, and transparency within the VDM, education is critical in fostering ethical conduct among municipal authorities. Education is a weapon for prevention and correction; it gives officials the information, abilities, and moral frameworks they need to make moral decisions and abstain from wrongdoing.

4.2.2.8 What mechanisms are in place to codify ethical standards and guidelines for various aspects of municipal governance in the Vhembe District?

The mechanisms in place to codify ethical standards and guidelines for various aspects of municipal governance in the Vhembe district include: the Municipal Code of Conduct, Municipal Finance Management Act, and Public Services Integrity Management Framework. Regarding the municipal code of conduct, which bears the idea that every municipality is required to adopt a code of conduct for staff members, this code outlines the ethical obligations of municipal officials, which include honesty, integrity, conflict of interest and accountability, Respondent 3 stated: "*code of conduct for municipal staff members serves as the foundation for ethical behaviour across all the municipal operations".* In addition, Respondent 5 indicated that "*the code of conduct for councillors also provides ethical guidelines directed explicitly to the councillors, addressing issues such as transparency, public service delivery and proper use of municipal resources.*

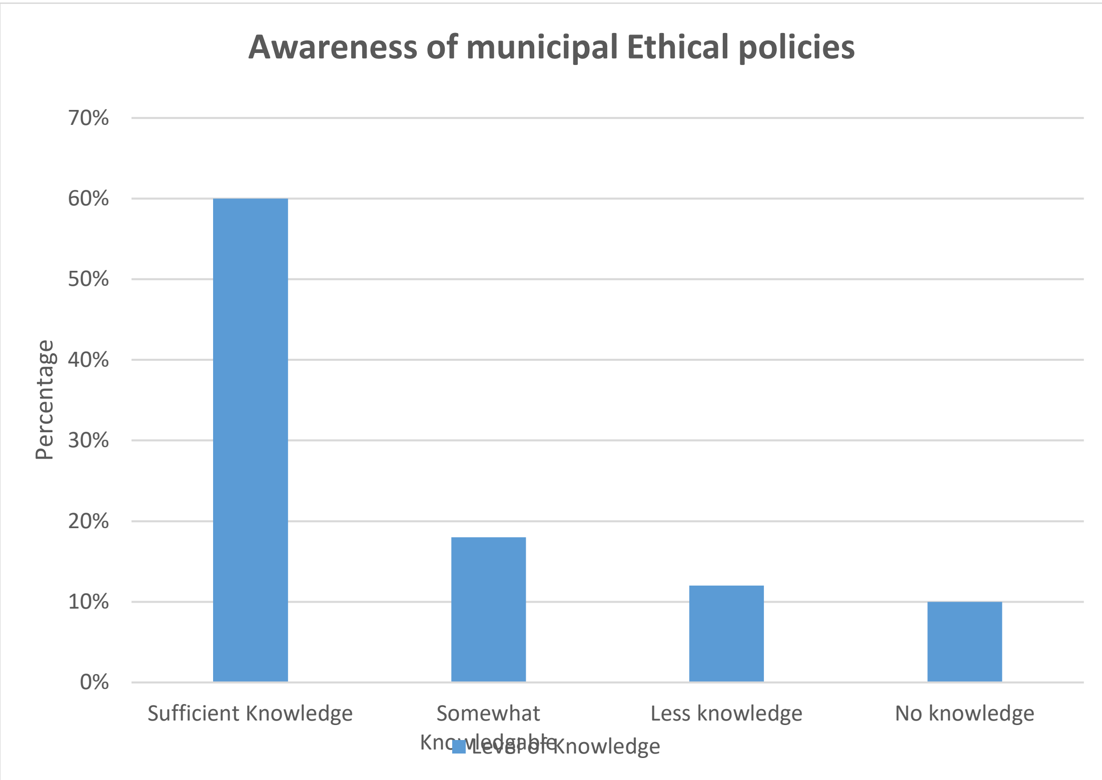
Another theme is the application of the Municipal Finance Management Act, which implies the disciplinary procedures for municipal officials who engage in financial misconduct and establishes legal consequences for unethical actions such as fraud and unauthorised spending. Respondent 2 indicated that *"the municipal officials working with municipal finances should adhere to MFMA regulations to prevent mismanagement, fraud and corruption.*

A key element raised by respondents in promoting ethical conduct within the municipality was the implementation of governance frameworks that guide professional behaviour. For instance, Respondent 4, a senior manager, referenced the Public Service Integrity Management Framework, noting that it outlines ethical standards for all public servants, including those at the municipal level. This framework addresses essential areas such as conflict of interest management, gift and hospitality disclosures, and post-employment restrictions. Such provisions are designed to promote integrity, transparency, and accountability in public service, and were highlighted as a foundation for ethical governance practices within the municipality. It was further indicated that important aspects such as conflict of interest management, gift disclosures, and post-employment restrictions are covered in the public service integrity management framework.

4.2.3 SECTION C: LEVEL OF AWARENESS REGARDING ETHICAL CONDUCT

This section assesses the municipal officials' level of awareness regarding the codification and education options.

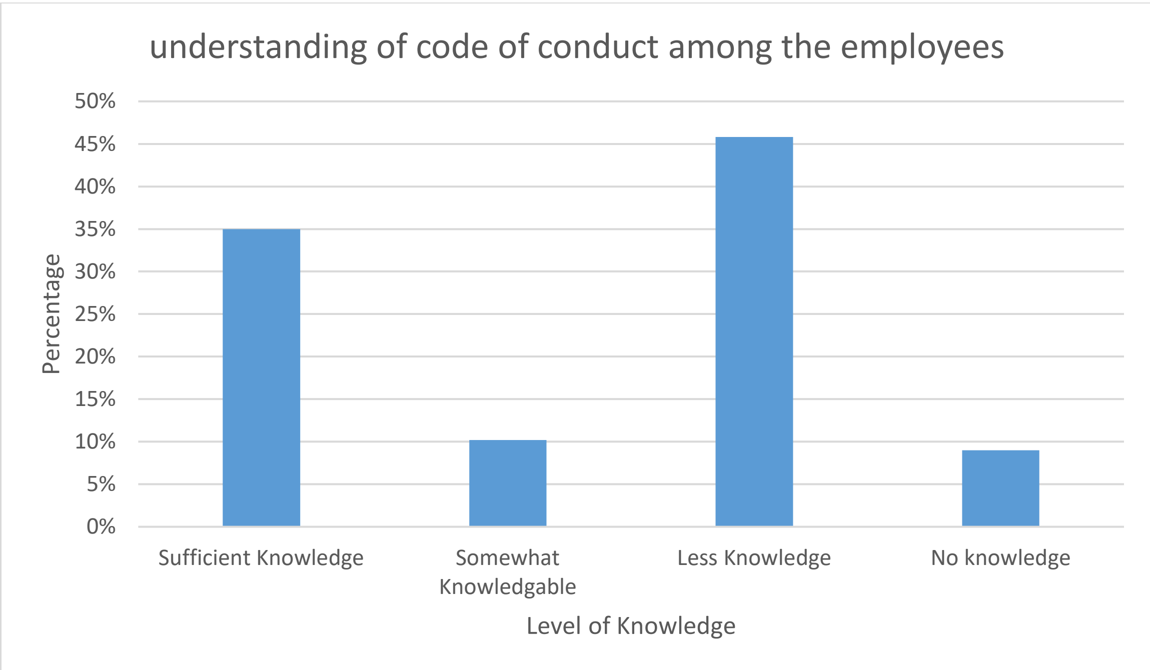
Figure 4.6: Awareness of Municipal Ethical Policies?



Source: Author

Figure 4.6 indicates that 10 % do not understand ethical conduct, and 60% indicated that they have sufficient knowledge of it. However, 12% indicated they have less understanding of ethical conduct, and 18% were somewhat knowledgeable. Top management must encourage the Vhembe district officials to invest some time in knowing ethical conduct. After the interview, it was revealed that it is not common for the VDM to educate fellow public officials about ethical conduct. It was indicated that it is rare for the municipality to hold programs about ethical conduct

Figure 4.7 understanding of code of conduct among the employees

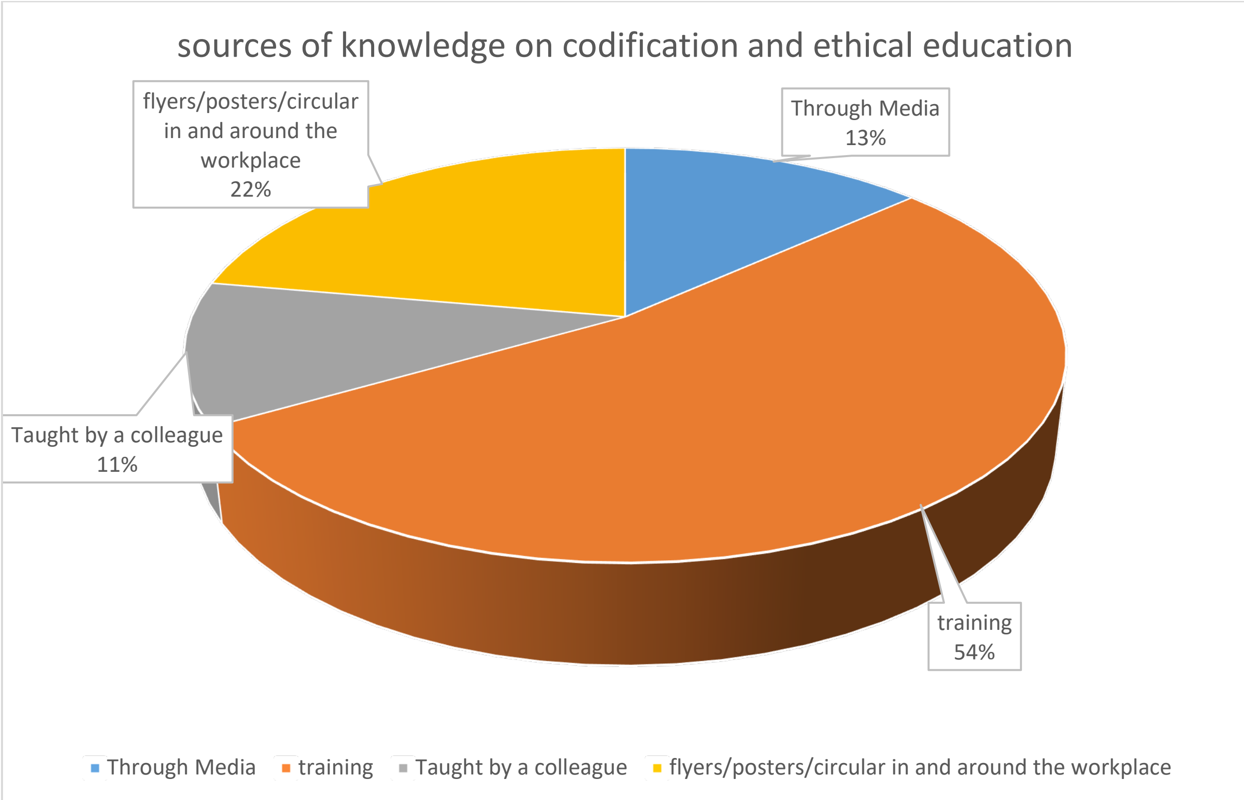


Source: Author

Figure 4.7 indicates municipal officials' knowledge of the codification and education options within the VDM. According to the figure above, 35% of the respondents have a sufficient understanding of the codification and the education options, and 10% of the respondents indicated that they partially understand the codification and education options. These respondents have an essential awareness but lack a deep insight.

According to the figure 4.7 , nearly half of the respondents (45%) admitted having limited knowledge of the codification and education options, which is the largest segment of respondents. A small portion of respondents indicated that they have no knowledge of the codification and education options available within the Vhembe District Municipality (VDM). This lack of awareness raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of internal communication and the accessibility of information related to policy and training initiatives within the municipality.

Figure 4. 8 Sources of knowledge on codification and ethical education?

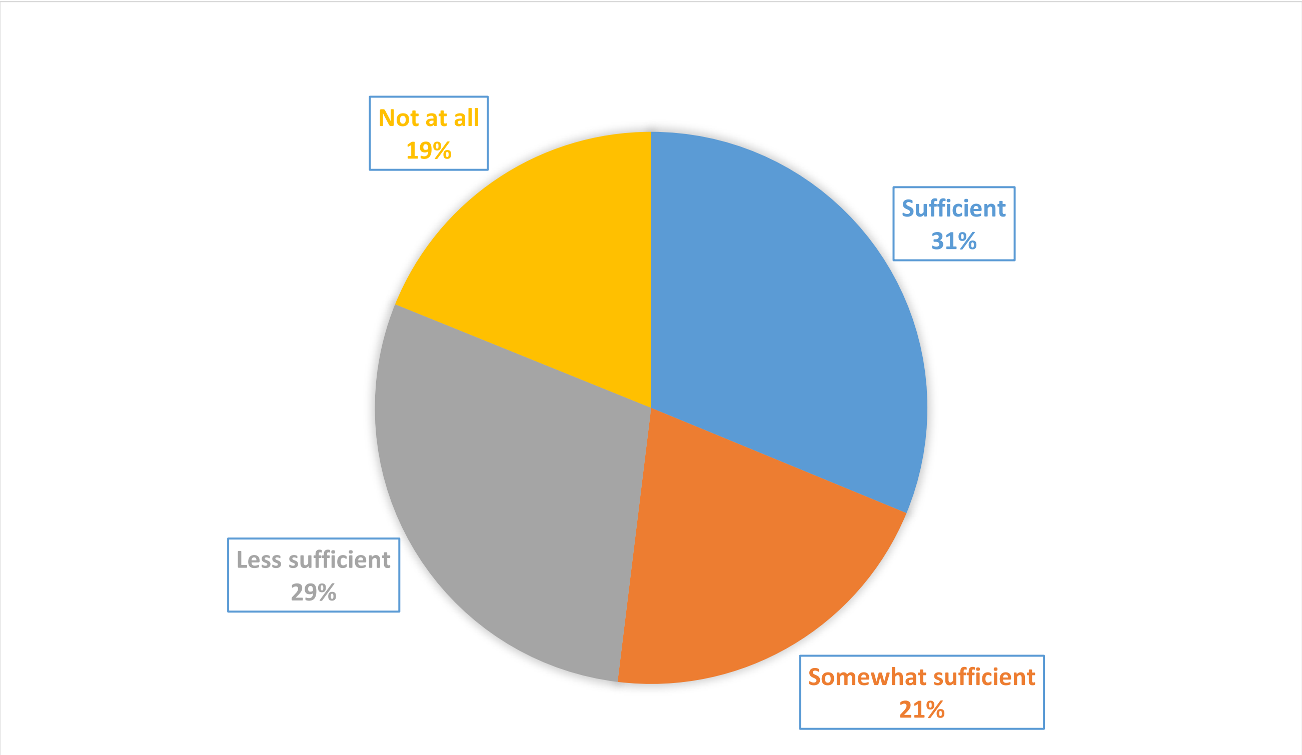


Source: Author

Figure 4.8 reveals that 54% learned about ethical conduct through training conducted by the VDM in the past, whereas 22% indicated that they learned about it through flyers/posters and circulars in and around the workplace. However, 13% learned about ethical conduct through the media, and 11% of the respondents were taught by a collegue. Although the results indicate that most of the respondents were made aware of these terms through training, it is concerning that many respondents knew them through media and flyers.

The follow-up interview indicated that the municipality still needs to work in making sure that all the municipal officials are well-trained in ethical conduct in the workplace to avoid unethical conduct by the municipal officials.

Figure 4.9 Understanding the role of ethical conduct within the vhembe district municipality

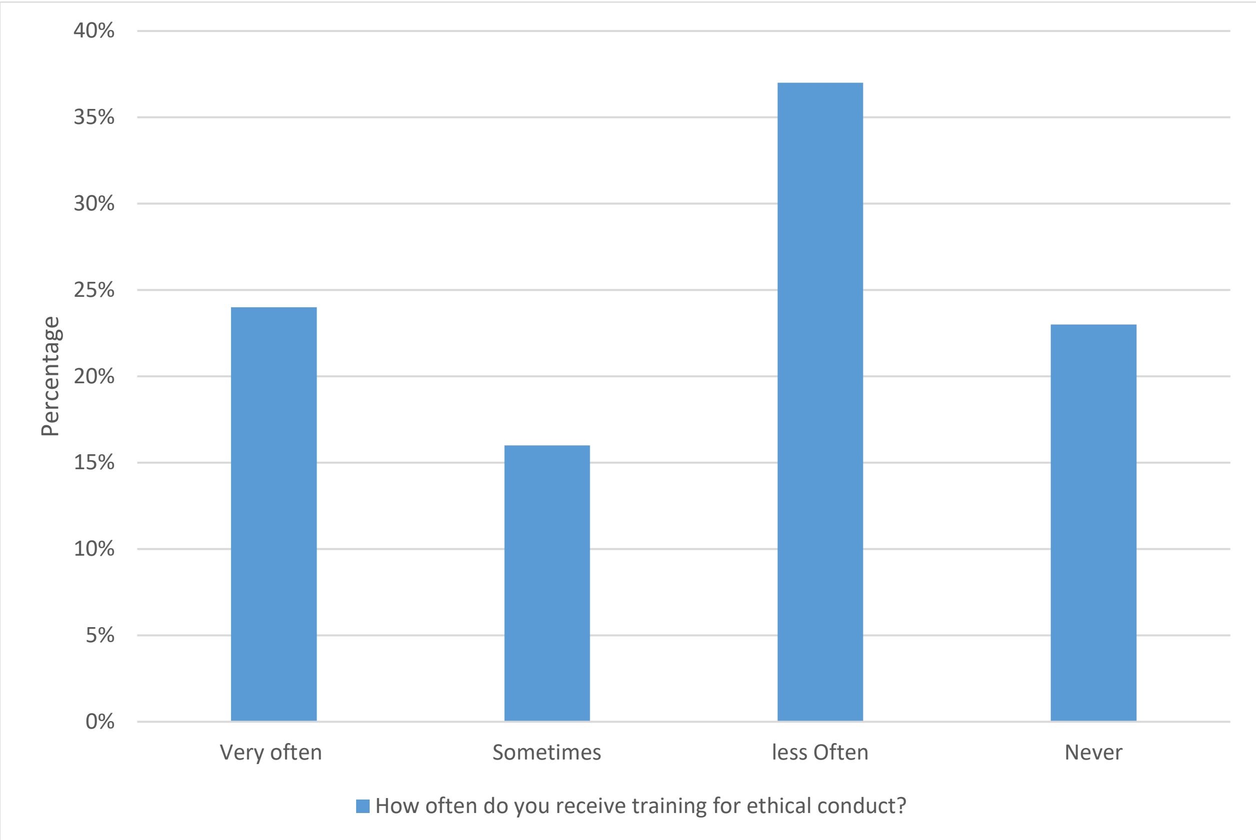


Source: Author

Based on Figure 4.9, there was a high number of respondents. 52% (31%+21%) that seem to understand the role of ethical conduct in the context of VDM.These results indicate that more than half of the respondents are minimally aware of ethical expectations from them, which is a positive sign for fostering an ethical culture within the VDM. However, 48% (29% + 19%) of the respondents have less sufficient or no understanding of the role of ethical conduct. The results indicate that a significant portion of municipal officials may be unaware or unclear about ethical conduct standards, which poses a serious challenge in implementing governance practices.

Although 52% of the respondents show a moderate to considerable comprehension of ethical conduct, there is a problem with the 48% of respondents who have little to no understanding.

Figure 4.10 frequency and importance of ethical conduct training in professional settings



Source: Author

Figure 4.10 indicates that out of 30 respondents, 37%, the largest group, indicated that *they seldom receive training on ethical conduct*. The results reveal that while the municipality is trying to train, many officials are not getting regular training on ethical conduct. This poses a serious concern as a lack of frequent training may lead to gaps in adhering to ethical guidelines.

However, according to the results, almost a quarter (24%) of the respondents received training on ethical conduct. This group mainly included senior managers and other municipal officials, where ethical compliance is the order of the day. However, 23% of the respondents indicated that *the municipality is still behind with ethical training as they have never been trained since joining the municipality.* This raises serious concerns about the municipality's commitment to ensuring that officials are well-equipped to hold ethical standards. It also reflects the limited resources or lack of emphasis on ethical training in certain areas.

Figure 4.11 Impact of recent ethics training on understanding and preventing corruption

Source: Author

Figure 4.11 reveals that out of 30 respondents, 23 were asked to share their views on how helpful the last training was regarding ethical conduct, and 56% indicated that the previous training they received was useful. The data revealed that the relevance of the training aligned very well with municipal officials' roles and responsibilities.Furthermore the data shows that training effectively enhanced their understanding of ethical conduct. One of the respondents indicated that, in my opinion, the last *training I had on ethical conduct significantly improved my knowledge of corruption prevention. It provided practical insights on recognising ethical challenges, the impact of corruption on public service, and ways to prevent and address it.*

Thirty-one percent of the respondents indicated that the last training they received was less helpful.This reveals that the 31% felt that the training they received was slightly beneficial but could be improved, especially in making ethical conduct more applicable to real-world situations.

Table 4.11.1: Are policies in combating corruption popular in your institution?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree (5)	8	26.7%
Agree (4)	12	40%
Neutral (3)	5	16.7%
Disagree (2)	3	10%
Strongly Disagree (1)	2	6.7%

Source: Author

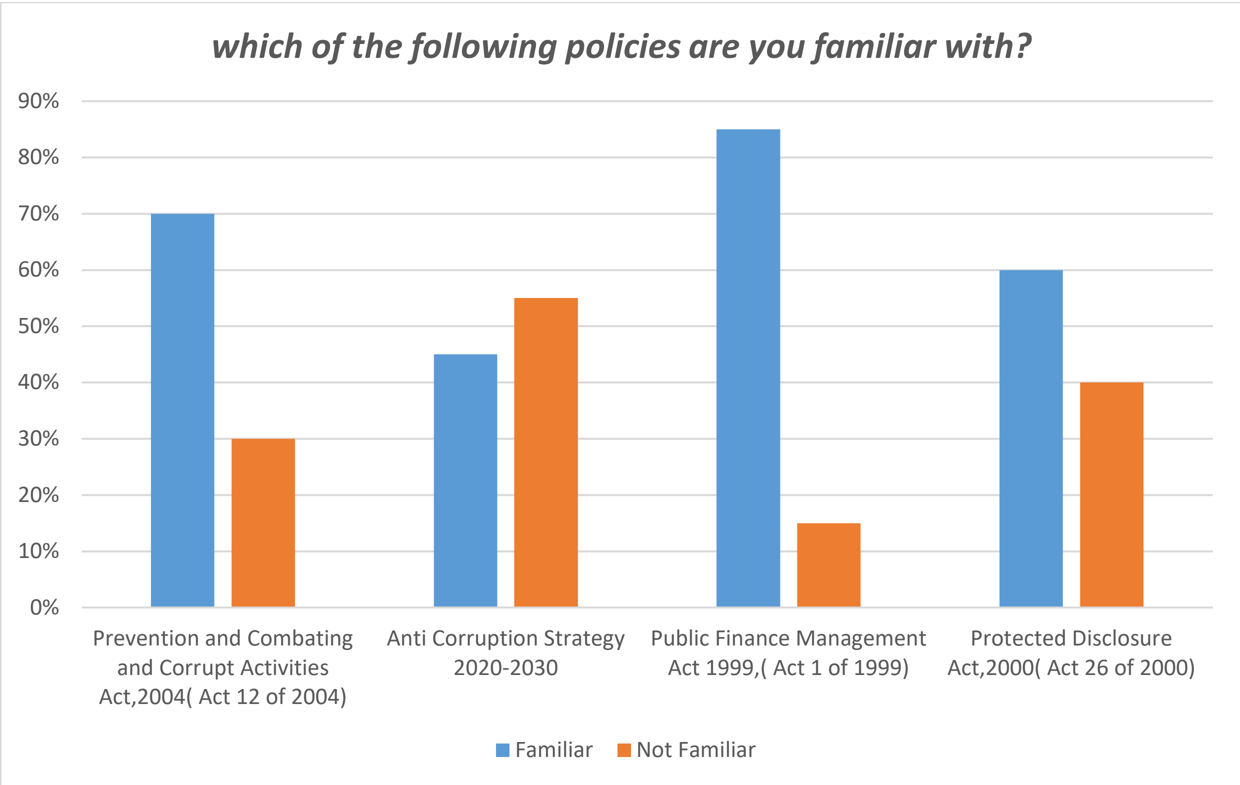
According to the frequency table above, 26.7% strongly agree that policies in combating corruption are popular within the VDM. In comparison, 40% of respondents agreed, bringing the total to 66.7% who either strongly agreed or agreed that anti-corruption policies are well-known within the municipality.This illustrates a strong idea that anti-corruption policies are widely known and supported by officials of VDM. This illustrates a strong perception that anti-corruption policies are widely known and supported by officials of VDM. Responses suggested that awareness of these policies is particularly common among officials in departments such as supply chain management, finance, and senior management.

A smaller group of respondents *(16.7%) indicated that they want to remain neutral, revealing that they may be uncertain about the popularity of the anti-corruption policies within the VDM.* This data suggests that the policies might be known but not actively applied by the municipal officials of the VDM.

Furthermore, 10% of the respondents disagreed and 6.7% of the respondents strongly disagreed that these policies are well-known within the VDM. These respondents indicated that *these anti-corruption policies are not recognized or are ineffective in practice, indicating these policies are there but not applied.* What surprises me is that in most offices, there are posters about policies used to fight corruption.

This raised the question: Are the Vhembe District officials who disagreed or strongly disagreed simply unaware of these anti-corruption policies?

Figure 4.12 Which of the following policies are you familiar with?



Source: Author

- ***Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act, 2004 (Act 12 of 2004)***

The graph above indicates that 70% of the respondents are familiar with the Act, which indicates that most municipal officials know the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act in the Vhembe district. One of the respondents indicated that the PCCAA has been acknowledged for its all-encompassing approach to making corrupt behaviour illegal and for bringing South Africa's anti-corruption legislation into compliance with global norms.

- ***Anti-Corruption Strategy Framework 2020-2030***

The graph indicates that out of 30 respondents, 45% indicated familiarity with the Anti-corruption Strategy framework 2020-2030. The respondents indicated that *the policy is relatively new and that there has not been enough communication about the strategy*. The plan advocates for ensuring public servants follow stringent standards of behaviour to professionalise the public sector.

It emphasises a proactive approach, focusing on prevention through good governance, transparency, integrity management, accountability, and early detection of potential corrupt practices. Public service ethics regulations are strictly enforced, appointments are made based on merit, and ethical behaviour is continuously trained.

- ***Public Finance Management Act 1999, (Act 1 of 1999)***

Most respondents mainly recognise the PFMA; 85% indicated that they are aware of and familiar with the act. The respondents indicated that *the PFMA is important for financial oversight and management, and municipal officials working in finance or governance roles are well-informed about this legislation.* A vital instrument for improving South Africa's public financial management, the PFMA is in keeping with fiscal discipline, good governance, and public accountability.

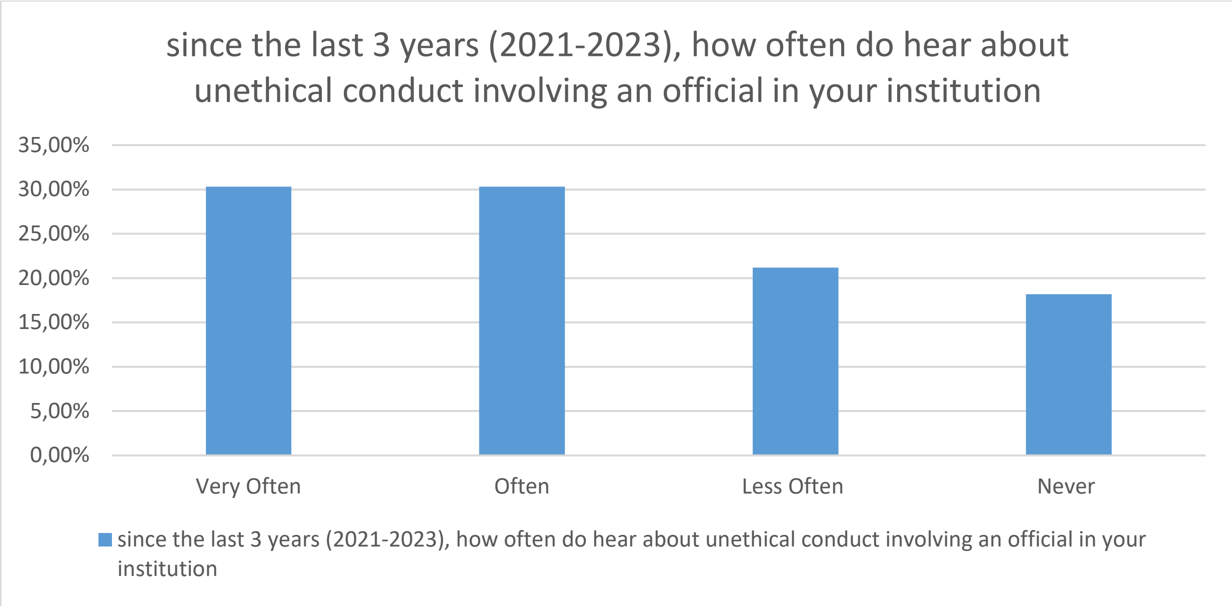
However, ongoing efforts are required to resolve implementation challenges and ensure its goals are effectively achieved. Despite the PFMA's security measures, corruption and financial mismanagement continue to be significant challenges in South Africa, indicating that the Act cannot solve systemic governance issues independently without strong leadership and enforcement.

- ***Protected Disclosure Act, 2000 (Act 26 of 2000)***

Around 60% of the respondents indicated their familiarity with the Protected Disclosure Act which protects those who report unethical conduct in the workplace. Respondents indicated that *even though they are familiar with the Act, they are afraid to report such cases to senior management because there have been scenarios where some of the whistle-blowers were killed or threatened by reporting the unethical conduct of some municipal officials*. One of the respondents pointed out a scenario where a junior official became aware of financial mismanagement by a senior manager. The official reported the matter to the higher management, and he was then threatened with dismissal and other career-damaging consequences, indicating that this has made municipal officials refrain from reporting unethical conduct by other municipal officials.

4.2.4 SECTION D: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CODIFICATION AND EDUCATION OPTIONS IN ENHACING ETHICAL CONDUCT OF MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS.

Since the last 3 years (2021-2023), how often do you hear about unethical conduct involving an official in your institution? Figure 4.13 below reveal the frequency in which municipal officials heard about unethical conduct amongst the colleagues.



Source: Author

Figure 4.13 revealed that 63.6% (30.3%+ 30.3%) of the respondents have heard about unethical conduct that involved municipal officials within the Municipality. Respondent number 5 indicated *that since joining the Municipality in 2019, unethical conduct continues to be reported.* This reveals a great concern about ethical issues within the VDM. The responses further revealed that a notable portion (43.4%) feel that the issue of unethical conduct occurs less frequently or not at all. Judging from the results, there might be underlying problems with officials' moral conduct. Further investigation, transparency campaigns, and perhaps introducing or strengthening ethical norms and training could all benefit the Municipality.

Table 4.13.1: How often do you hear about disciplinary processes being undertaken for offences that violate ethical conduct (Either arrest, hearing, dismissal or court proceeding underway)?

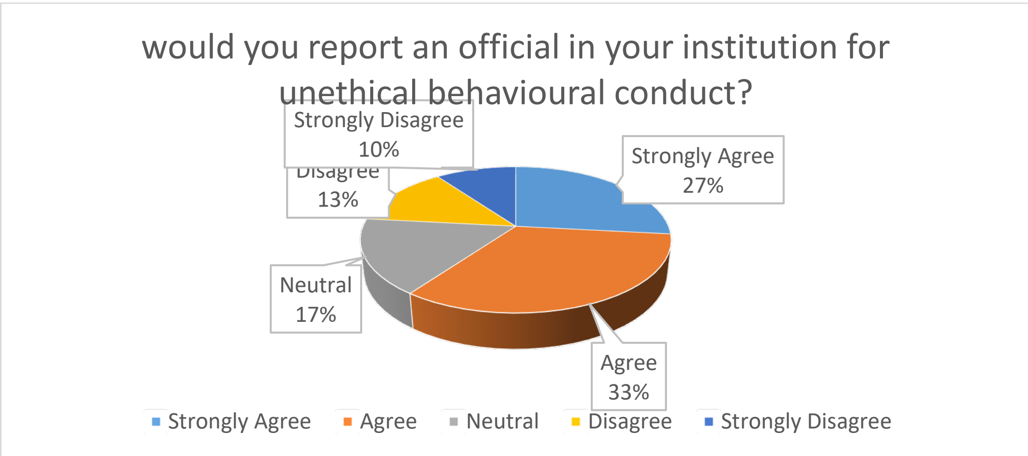
	Responses	Frequencies	Percentage
	Very Often	08	26.7%
	Sometimes	12	40%
	Less Often	06	20%
	Never	04	13.3%

Source: Author

According to the results, 26.7% of the respondents indicated that they always hear about disciplinary processes being undertaken, whereas 40% indicated that not always but sometimes. A smaller percentage (20% and 13.3%) revealed that disciplinary processes are less or never undertaken; respondent 6 indicated a lack of transparency in such processes, *further indicating that ethical violations by Vhembe municipal officials are not always addressed.*

The general governance of the municipality is in danger when disciplinary actions are not implemented or visible. Failure to act against unethical behaviour can encourage more transgressions and give officials the confidence to act corruptly or unethically without worrying about the repercussions. This gradually undermines the institution's efficacy and the community's trust.

Figure 4.14 Would you report an official in your institution for unethical behavioural conduct?



Source: Author

Based on Figure 4.16, Sixty percent of the respondents (33% + 27%) indicated that they are willing *or can report any unethical misconduct by the Vhembe municipal officials. Furthermore, it is stated that the Protected Disclosure Act will protect them from officials practising unethical behaviour within the municipality*. Respondent 12 indicated that *the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Activities Act must report corruption and maladministration. She went on to say that while public officials generally behaved in a high manner, corruption by public servants was typically* *extremely nuanced. Therefore, it is necessary to design a comprehensive strategy for preventing corruption.*

Any disclosure made in good faith to the employer is a protected disclosure. In this regard, any disclosure made in good faith in Section 6 of the PDA, substantially by any procedure authorised by the employee's employer for reporting or otherwise remedying the impropriety concerned, is protected.

There's some uncertainty with some respondents, 16.7 % of the respondents indicated that they want to remain neutral. Respondents expressed concerns about safety and a lack of clarity regarding the reporting procedures. 23.3% of those who disagree or strongly disagree indicated a significant minority that is hesitant due to fear of retaliation, indicating that they distrust the reporting mechanisms. Respondents 20 and 17 stated that *there have been instances where prior reports of unethical behaviour have gone unanswered, creating the impression that reporting is pointless.* Fostering an ethical organization culture where everyone feels safe acting when they witness misbehaviour requires addressing the concerns of this minority.

Table 4.14.1: Which ethical incidents have you heard about in the last 3 years (2021-2023) involving an official in your institution?

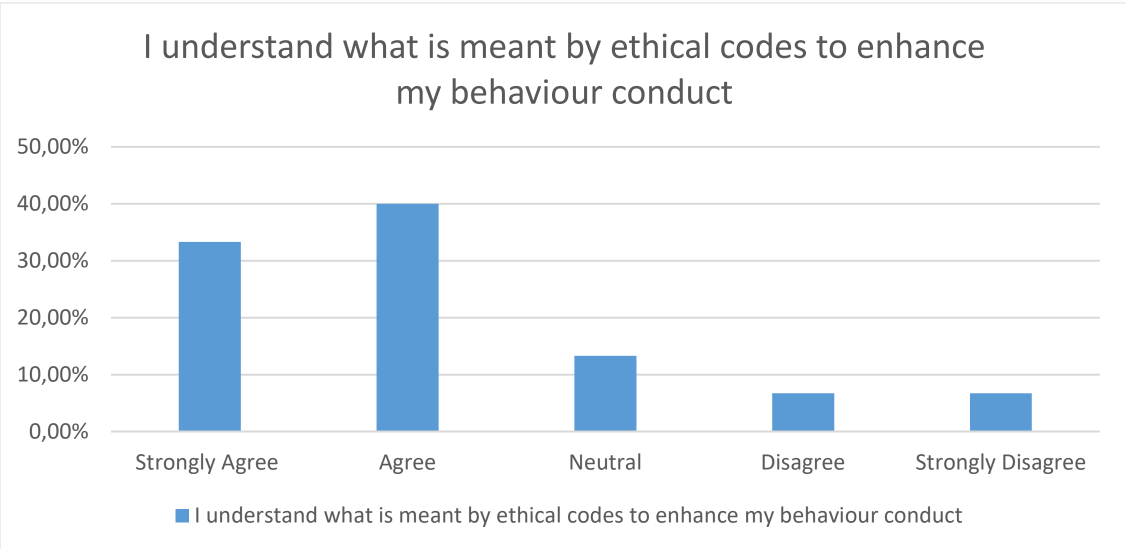
Ethical Incident	Frequency	Percentage
Bribery involving the department's functions	10	43.3%
Kickbacks (Misallocation of resources/Funds)	8	33.3%
Patronage (Appointment/rewarding of non-qualifying)	12	40%
Nepotism and cronyism (favouring relatives/Friends)	15	50%
Flouting rules and procedures for good governance	18	60%
Embezzlement (Direct stealing of resources/funds)	9	30%

Source: Author

According to the table, the flouting of rules and procedures for good governance, which constitutes 60%, was the most frequently reported incident. It was noted that there's a significant concern about compliance with ethical regulations within the VDM. Nepotism and cronyism were the second most common issues within the VDM. Nepotism can be defined as the preferential treatment given to a member of an official's family, again ignoring meritorious considerations (Grobler and Joubert, 2004). Arasli and Tumer (2008a) defined cronyism as giving undue preference to politicians, particularly to cronies known as close friends of long standing, especially in appointing a position or office regardless of their qualifications.

Kickbacks, which constituted 33.3% and embezzlement, which covered 30%, were the least incidents; even though the frequency was less, this still raises concerns about the financial integrity and resource misallocation within the municipality. This data indicates that some VDM officials direct funds or resources to the public for personal or external gain. Kickbacks often involve misallocating public resources such as tenders given to entities or individuals who offer financial benefits in return. All this undermines trust and accountability

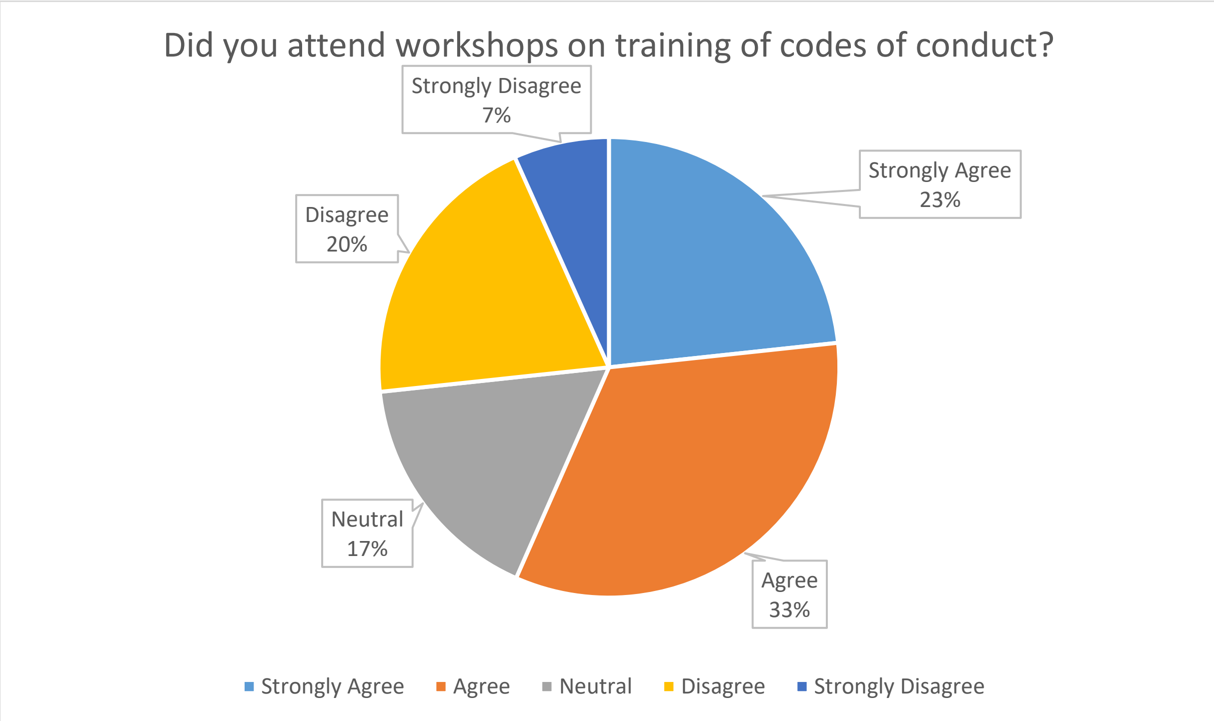
Figure 4.15 **I understand what ethical codes mean to enhance my behaviour and conduct.**



Source: Author

Figure reveals that with 73.3% (33, 3% + 40%) of the respondents that either "Strongly agree' or "Agree", the respondents indicated that they do understand what is meant by ethical codes and how it enhances their behaviour. Also, 13.3% of the respondents chose to remain neutral indicating that they feel unsure or indifferent about the role of ethical conduct in shaping the behaviour of the VDM officials. A minority group of 13.4% either “disagree” or “Strongly Disagree”, indicating that they do not fully grasp or accept the relevance of ethical standards.

Figure 4.16. Did you attend workshops on training on codes of conduct?



Source: Author

According to figure 4.16, 56% of the respondents indicated that they once attended workshops on code of conduct training. This has revealed that most respondents have had some training in this area. However, this number of respondents also reveals that the exposure to these training sessions, though beneficial, may not be universal within the VDM.

Also, 17% of the respondents remain neutral; this indicates that they are unsure or indifferent about whether they attended such workshops, potentially revealing incomplete understanding or recall of such training sessions. 26% of the respondents indicated that they have not participated in any of the training about codes of conduct, this has suggested gaps in the training rollout or access within the institution. It could also reflect limitations in the institution's outreach or encouragement efforts, meaning some employees may be unaware of the availability or importance of such training. This gap presents a critical area for improvement, as ensuring widespread access to code of conduct training is essential for fostering a cohesive understanding of ethical expectations within the organization.

4.3 SUMMARY

This chapter covered the responses from respondents who participated in data collection through mixed methodology research in VDM. This chapter guides data presentation, interpretation, and analysis by the aims, objectives, research questions, and literature review. Data is presented in graphs, tables, and pie charts. The respondents show that policies and acts are in place within the Municipality to enforce ethical values. Despite training in Codes of Conduct, which involves various legislations and policies for ethical values, there is still a gap between educational awareness of maintaining high ethical standards, which raised the notion that the Municipality needs to strengthen its education and codification options to inculcate a culture of ethics.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reported the study's significant findings, recommendations, and conclusions. The findings were drawn from data presentation and interpretation in Chapter 4. Findings summarize that despite the availability of legislation and policy frameworks on code of conduct for municipal officials, education and training options remain an area of concern. These findings also align with ethical theories such as deontological and the egoism theory. In deontology, knowledge of rules, such as virtue theory, is paramount to the character that motivates individuals to choose between right and wrong. Integrating theories in codification and education options can assist the Municipality in enforcing ethical codes effectively. Finally, the Constitution of the Republic, Section 152 of the Constitution, 1996, prescribes that all citizens have a right to local governments that fulfill their obligations effectively and efficiently for the benefit of the community. By adhering to democratic values such as ensuring high ethical standards, municipalities will attempt to satisfy the community's aspirations by providing quality service delivery that promotes social and economic development.

5.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was carried out by answering the following five objectives

(1) To analyse the extent of ethical codes in VDM.
(2) To identify causes and effects of ethical transgression by municipal officials at VDM.

(3) To determine the role of education in capacity building for ethical competence in VDM.
(4) To determine the challenges the municipal council faces in combating unethical conduct in VDM.
(5) Recommend strategies that VDM can use to enhance ethics, codes and training for municipal councillors and officials.

Overall, the presenter is of the view that the objectives of the study were met, and that the research questions of the study were answered. Participants of this study provided the data that has allowed these results to be achieved.

5.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

5.3.1 The Extent of Codification and Options in VDM

The findings of this study highlighted a strong understanding of ethical conduct within the VDM, often aligning with academic and practical definitions. Statements from most participants displayed a high level of knowledge of moral conduct. Most respondents viewed ethical conduct as adherence to oral principles, integrity, and accountability, echoing similar frameworks in the literature, such as Mafunisa's emphasis on public integrity. Ethical conduct was vital to trust, service efficiency, organization performance and credibility. The VDM struggles to satisfy the needs and demands of the community due to poor service delivery, which negatively characterises the Municipality.

The findings revealed that good governance is a prerequisite for ethical decision-making because it facilitates accountability. The ethical codes of conduct are key for municipal officials to make alternative choices when confronted with ethical dilemmas. Municipal officials should be able to discern between right and wrong. Respondents indicated that they were aware of policies and acts to promote ethical conduct and confirmed that training and education options were conducted. In this manner, VDM provides training and education on codes of conduct to its officials to deal with ethical dilemmas that they encounter daily. This indicates that most municipal officials are familiar with anti-corruption legislation and policies. The concern was that 31% of the respondents indicated that the last training they received was less helpful and should be improved to address dilemmas related to their duties. Furthermore, training and education focus more on senior managers than officials at lower ranks. In this manner, the researcher understood why flouting of rules constitutes 60%. This high percentage reflects the high rate of manifestation of unethical conduct, which compromised the provision of quality service delivery.

5.2.2 The Role of Municipal Leadership in Enforcing Ethical Conduct

Ethical conduct refers to the principles of accountability, transparency and fairness to ensure good governance and public trust. The respondents highlighted that the "Implementation of ethical standards" within the Municipality is inconsistent and lacks consequence management. Leadership is expected to create an ethical environment to enforce a culture of ethical adherence. Thus, the findings of this study can conclude that the municipality bears the highest responsibility in ensuring proper ethical standards are followed by the municipal officials. In ensuring proper ethical standards, the findings disclosed that the municipality operates alongside its workers to inform the officials of the ethical standards but lacks the leadership will to enforce ethical codes. These ethical codes ensure officials perform duties with integrity and in the public's interest. Ethical standards in public service are crucial for preventing corruption and enhancing service delivery. During the interview, it was indicated that although legislative imperatives are in place, weak oversight by leadership results in shortcomings that render effective implementation inadequate.

5.2.3 The Effectiveness of Codification and Education Options in Promoting Ethical Conduct within the VDM

This study's findings noted that some municipal officials knew of a Code of Conduct within the Municipality. Still, their understanding of the content and practical application was limited as most municipal officials considered these codes formalities rather than actionable guidelines.

The 2024 National Elections results attest that democratic values are salient for sustainable quality service delivery as public interests must be promoted over personal interests. The public expects a government that promotes the well-being of its citizens through being responsive to their needs and demands. Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic, 1996 obligates the local government to be a developmental state. The Constitution prescribed the objectives of the local government sphere as to provide a democratic and accountable government for local communities, ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner, promote social and economic development, promote a safe and healthy environment, and encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in matters of importance to local government. These objectives can only be fulfilled if municipalities in South Africa become purpose-driven in their endeavour to achieve the mandate. One of the key purposes is to maintain the highest ethical standard when executing their obligations.

The rampant corruption reported in various Auditor General Reports (2022/2023) shows that different municipalities are battling with challenges of ethical conduct. CoGTA Report (2019) found that transgression of ethical conduct in VDM was mainly caused by weak oversight, wasteful expenditure, and lack of political will, which resulted in under-development as much-needed resources were diverted to satisfy personal interests over public interests. The egoism theory maintains that an individual is motivated to make decisions based on selfishness. The ANC-led government was constantly blamed for practicing nepotism, where jobs were reserved for senior managers, councillors and some municipal officials' relatives, friends and comrades. This showed that the action taken was motivated by self-interest over the majority interest.

Training sessions on ethics were inconsistent and often not aligned to address particular challenges that municipal officials face, for example, challenges of sexual harassment, insubordination, verbal harassment and bullying of junior staff by the senior staff. Where training was offered, it provided awareness of the importance of ethical codes, mainly at professional level. Still, it lacked long-term impact due to insufficient follow-up and continuous education for long-term learning. Integration of virtue, deontology, utilitarianism, and egoism theories will highlight how each theory influences municipal officials in handling ethical dilemmas.

5.3 CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ETHICAL CODES IN VDM

During data collection, the participants revealed that municipal officials know ethical codes. Some challenges to effective implementation are internal and external. The critique of the literature review reveals that ethical codes are complex and challenging to interpret, which negatively affects implementation by municipal officials. Ethical conduct forms the cornerstone of good governance and service delivery in public administration. The VDM, located in Limpopo Province, South Africa, is ideal for examining the intersection between the codification of ethics and education options to foster ethical behaviour. Although the national government continues to develop legal imperatives to prevent unethical behaviour in the public sector through several laws, regulations and policy instruments, it has rendered limited results. The following are identified as contributory factors for ineffective implementation of ethical codes:

5.3.1 Structural and Systematic Inefficiency

One of the respondents indicates that they often witness acts of unethical conduct but fail to report them to senior management due to system that is not favourable for reporting. This challenge includes "*fear of retaliation for reporting unethical behaviour*", whereby municipal officials are often reluctant to report unethical behaviour due to fear of reprisal. The Protected Disclosure Act (2000) safeguards whistleblowers, but its implementation is inconsistent. According to De Graaf and Paanakker (2015), weak whistleblower protections undermine efforts to identify and address corruption. Corruption remains a significant issue in many municipalities.Systemic corruption erodes ethical standards and undermines service delivery. In the VDM, reports of financial mismanagement and misuse of resources illustrate the difficulty in upholding ethical practices when governance structures are weak. Another challenge the VDM faces is a “*lack of ethical leadership”* where the Municipality cannot enforce ethical codes rather than just mere ‘’lip service’’ by senior management. Ethical leadership plays an important role in modeling and upholding ethical behaviour the lack of ethical leadership leads to poor decision-making and reduced accountability. Municipal leaders sometimes prioritize personal or political interests over the public good, weakening institutional integrity.

During the interview, it was further highlighted that the municipality faces *“Inadequate training and awareness,*” citing that municipal officials often lack the training required to understand and apply ethical standards. Huberts (2018) notes that a lack of ethics education creates gaps in the ability of staff to identify and address ethical dilemmas. In VDM, the irregularity of training programs limits the effective dissemination of knowledge on ethical codes.

Lawton and Macaulay (2014**)** argue that ethics training is frequently undervalued in public institutions, leading to a lack of awareness about institutional ethical policies and governance standards, this lack of prioritisation results in widespread ignorance of ethical codes and principles. In most cases, politicians implicated in corrupt activities are neither arrested nor prosecuted, while only a few public servants seem to be sacrificial lambs. For example, the Batho Pele principles are frequently cited as a foundation for public service ethics in the South African setting. Scholars point out that, especially in rural towns like VDM, a lack of alignment between policy and practice makes it difficult to implement them (Mafunisa, 2020). This discrepancy calls into question the effectiveness of codified ethical norms in fostering integrity and accountability.

5.3.2 Existing Gaps from Ethics Literature Review

The literature critique aims to critically evaluate and synthesize existing research on enhancing ethical conduct in VDM in the codification and education options. It highlights significant trends, debates, gaps, and theoretical underpinnings, offering a comprehensive understanding of enhancing ethical conduct in VDM in the codification and education option. The practical application of these strategies often reveals gaps in implementation, enforcement, and cultural alignment. Although the literature underscores the importance of codification and education in enhancing ethical conduct, several gaps remain unaddressed. This critique of the literature examines the theoretical underpinnings, empirical evidence, and existing gaps in the study of ethical conduct enhancement in the VDM.

5.3.2.1 Theoretical Foundation on Ethics

Deontological and consequentialist theories are often incorporated into ethical frameworks. While consequentialism assesses the morality of activities based on their results, the deontological perspective emphasises following the laws and obligations. Critics contend that these theories fail to address the intricacies of public administration, where contextual elements like socio-economic inequality, political meddling, capacity building, and resource limitations frequently influence ethical decision-making.

5.3.2.2 Empirical Evidence

Numerous studies emphasize how education promotes moral behaviour. For example, Sekerka *et al.,* (2009) stress the value of ethics education in improving moral thinking and lowering unethical behaviour. There is little proof of extensive ethics education initiatives in the VDM that are adapted to the difficulties faced by the area. This disparity emphasizes the need for context-specific training programs covering nepotism and corruption. Furthermore, according to a study by Pillay (2016), codes of conduct are frequently seen as symbolic rather than useful instruments. In VDM, a culture of impunity, inadequate monitoring systems, and weak institutional frameworks all work against enforcing ethical codes. These results demonstrate the disparity between the codification of ethics and its practical application in fostering ethical behaviour.

5.3.2.3 Contextual Relevance

Existing studies often adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, neglecting the socio-cultural and economic dynamics unique to rural municipalities like Vhembe. Context relevance is crucial when examining municipal ethical conduct, especially in rural settings like the VDM. A standardized or universal approach to ethics is frequently used in existing literature, which ignores the distinct socio-cultural and economic circumstances that influence moral behaviour in various areas. For example, in Venda culture, the concept of ‘’*nduvh*o’’ means honouring the traditional leader with gifts. In Western culture, it is called bribery and aligned with the egoism theory, which is against the prevailing culture in that area. The implementation and reception of ethical codes and educational programs are influenced by rural municipalities' cultural perspectives, which include limited resources, traditional leadership systems, and differing degrees of community engagement. For example, there may be a gap between policy and practice because of the communal character of rural communities and the individualistic ethical standards enshrined in formal frameworks. Furthermore, economic hardships in rural areas can exacerbate unethical practices such as nepotism and favouritism, as individuals prioritise survival over institutional guidelines.

Research also shows that the efficacy of ethical education programs is limited since they frequently overlook the cultural norms and literacy levels of rural public employees (Huberts, 2018). For instance, training programs created for metropolitan towns could not be relevant to rural staff members with distinct obstacles and limitations. This "one-size-fits-all" strategy compromises the ability of ethics programs to encourage real behavioural change. According to academics like Mafunisa (2020), adding regional ethical standards to formalized frameworks may increase their applicability and acceptability among rural stakeholders. Therefore, addressing the socio-cultural and economic realities of areas like Vhembe is essential to develop significant and long-lasting ethical interventions.

5.3.2.4 Integration of Theory and Practice

There is a limited exploration of how theoretical frameworks can be effectively integrated into practical ethics training programs. Integrating theory and practice in ethics training programs remains a critical gap in public administration research, particularly in rural municipalities. While theoretical frameworks, such as deontological ethics and consequentialism, offer valuable insights into the principles of ethical decision-making, their practical application often faces significant challenges. Scholars argue that theoretical constructs must be contextualized to address real-world issues like corruption, nepotism, and poor service delivery. The egoism theory if integrated into the training of ethical codes in the municipal environment, can assist in conscientizing officials about the detriment of self-interest versus collective goals.

In the public sector context, ethics training should not merely focus on imparting abstract principles but also emphasize their application in day-to-day decision-making processes. For example, Huberts (2018) highlights the importance of case-based learning, where real-life scenarios bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical action. Mafunisa (2020) also raised a concern that many training programs in rural areas, such as the Vhembe District, rely on generic modules that fail to consider local socio-economic dynamics and administrative challenges. This lack of contextualization undermines the effectiveness of training and diminishes its potential to foster ethical behaviour. Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence on the long-term impact of ethics training programs that integrate theoretical frameworks.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE ETHICAL CONDUCT

The study noted some strategies that can be used to enhance ethical conduct within the VDM; this can be improved by implementing a combination of robust codification and strategic education initiatives. The following strategies are recommended to enhance ethical conduct:

5.4.1 Developing a Comprehensive Ethics

The VDM's unique difficulties and cultural dynamics must be addressed by employing an amended ethics code. Conflict of interest policies, which encourage municipal officials to publicly disclose any potential conflicts of interest before performing duties in a manner that personal interests would influence, can be incorporated into an individual ethics code. Anti-corruption measures can significantly enhance ethical governance within the VDM by establishing anti-corruption units. This unit can help investigate, monitor, and address corruption cases. A good example is the City of e-Thekwini Municipality, which has successfully reduced procurement fraud by emphasizing the need for independent anti-corruption bodies within local governance to enforce them. The VDM must strengthen its internal audit function by empowering the internal audit team to regularly check on financial transactions, procurement processes, and project implementation. Van Vuuren (2014) underscores the role of audits in identifying irregularities and promoting accountability.

5.4.2 Training of Ethical Codes of Conduct Frameworks

The VDM must strengthen the legal frameworks, meaning that the municipal policies must align with national anti-corruption laws such as South Africa's Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act (2004). Furthermore, the municipality must have a zero-tolerance policy approach where corruption leads to immediate suspension and investigation. Sibanda (2017) argues that firm policies deter corrupt practices in public institutions. The VDM must also provide mandatory training for all municipal staff, focusing on identifying and resisting corrupt activities within the municipality.

According to Huberts (2014), education improves staff's ability to identify and confront corruption. Improving ethical conduct in the VDM requires a multifaceted strategy combining strong leadership, education, and codification. The municipality can enhance governance and public trust by establishing strong ethical codes, offering frequent training, and cultivating an accountable culture. By incorporating these tactics into municipal operations, ethical standards will become ingrained in daily decision-making and service provision. Therefore, regular training programs focused on ethics and integrity can equip municipal officials with the knowledge and skills to make ethical decisions. These programmes should include case studies, interactive sessions and discussions on real-world scenarios to provide practical insights.

5.4.3 Ethics Surveys

Effectively managing ethics in municipalities includes a few basic prerequisites when conducting a survey. The primary issues are knowing and understanding what constitutes ethical behaviour and what is considered unethical. An accurate ethics assessment can be done with a web-based ethics survey which surfaces employees' perceptions and experiences of ethics in the workplace. The results will highlight the municipality's ethical strengths, threats, opportunities and weaknesses (SWOT) analysis on the position of the Municipality regarding ethics implementation. The SWOT analysis can scan how the municipal environment adapts to strategies that enhance the moral conduct of officials. In this manner, the municipal council will be able to identify and prioritise actions to improve ethics regarding the identification of clear goals and actions to create an ethical workplace and culture. Ideally, this strategy needs to include six focus areas, setting ethical standards, setting up an ethics committee, building ethical awareness; measuring and monitoring ethical status, acting to improve ethical behaviour and reduce unethical conduct; and maintaining an ethical culture.

5.4.4 Whistle-Blower Protection

Whistle Blower Protection aims to protect whistle-blowers who expose unethical practices, which is crucial for maintaining integrity in municipalities. Ensuring that individuals can report unethical behaviour without fear of retaliation encourages transparency and accountability. Public servants need to know the basic principles and standards they are expected to apply to their work and where the boundaries of acceptable behaviour lie. According to Van Vuuren (2017), despite the legislative framework, Whistle-blowers often face retaliation, including harassment, career damage, and even physical threats. This is an area of concern in creating an ethical environment with zero tolerance for corruption, maladministration, fraud, and kickbacks, among others.

This Act aims to protect whistle-blowers, but municipalities like VDM still struggle to enforce it, where local power dynamics often override legal provisions. For example, the Venda Building Society (VBS) saga, where two whistle-blowers were killed, still haunts municipal officials and serves as a deterrent to report any unethical transgressions as a result. A concise, well-publicised statement of core ethical standards and principles that guide public service, for example, in the form of a code of conduct, can accomplish this by creating a shared understanding across government and within the broader community. The ethical environments demand zero tolerance for unethical conduct, as Chapter 14 of the NDP indicates that achieving a capable state will require zero tolerance for corruption. The media in South Africa is dominated by resignations of municipal staff members who opted to resign rather than face reprisal.

5.4.5 Ethical Leadership

The data analysis indicates that although there are rules and policy frameworks to instill a culture of ethical conduct, training and education options are mainly for senior management. Transgression of ethical codes mostly happened at the forefront of service, such as when junior municipal officials regularly interacted with the public. This implies that leadership overlooks the junior officials who are hands-on with service delivery. Furthermore, the findings indicate that 31% of the respondents raised a concern that there is a need for management to familiarise every municipal official with the importance of codification and education. This implies that leadership overlooks the junior officials who are hands-on with service delivery.

Local governments operate politically and must interpret laws and legal frameworks when fulfilling their obligations. The leader must lead by example by ensuring transparency and accountability. Singo (2018) contends that ethical leadership is based on a leadership-follower exchange in which constant communication upholds the organisation's integrity. The Constitution of South Africa requires that the highest standards of ethics be adhered to when doing his or her duty. This shows that leadership should put the necessary infrastructure in place by emphasizing codification and education options in the Code of Conduct.

During the interview, some VDM municipal officials indicated they are afraid to report misconduct for fear of reprisal. The graph above (Figure 4.13) displays different legislation of anti-corruption measures that VDM is familiar with; unfortunately, some regard it as lip service as no action is taken against perpetrators. Ethics management should reflect leadership's commitment to dealing with ethical dilemmas. Consequence management should be applied to ensure that offenders do not commit the same mistake repeatedly. Thusi and Selepe (2023) describe that the lack of accountability and consequence management has negatively impacted good governance in the local government sphere, putting the provision of basic services at risk. The VDM was no exception; in 2016, the Municipality experienced the most destructive service delivery protests to the extent that the Tsonga-speaking requested their own municipality, hence Collins Chabane Local Municipality. The protesters blamed the VDM for failing to keep its promise of equal distribution of services. Furthermore, it was alleged that VDM only provided service to Venda-speaking communities, which was motivated by selfishness.

Ethical leadership is based on mutual understanding and an attempt to satisfy both parties. Responsiveness is one of the ethical dimensions that the leader should consider. The councillors and municipal managers should have handled the dissatisfaction of the Malamulele community and diffused tension by listening to their concerns. CoGTA (2017) reports that the local government does not have a strategy to engage the residents in a usual way but pays attention when and where there is violence. The tension would have been resolved through communication and minimizing protests. Northouse (2010) asserts that ethical leadership must ensure fairness and equal treatment of communities. Another example of ethical leadership was highlighted in the VBS saga. The non-compliance issue within municipalities is seen in the VBS saga in VDM. The unethical conduct was caused by leadership, which deposited Municipality funds in the mutual bank, which is against the MFMA. In this manner, ethical leadership encourages non-compliance with the municipal environment's rules, which questions the notion of education and training in ethical codes.

5.4.6 Enforcing the Code of Ethics

Enforcing a robust code of conduct within the VDM is critical in promoting ethical conduct and ensuring accountability in public administration. Establishing a clear, comprehensive code of conduct helps guide employees and public officials, providing them with standards for expected behaviour and decision-making. This code should be well-communicated and enforced consistently across all municipal levels to create a culture of integrity. Regular training and awareness programs should be implemented to ensure effectiveness, educating employees about the code's provisions and the consequences of non-compliance. Additionally, mechanisms for reporting unethical behaviour, such as whistle-blower protection, must be established to foster transparency and trust within the municipality.

The municipality should also integrate the code of conduct into performance evaluations to hold employees accountable. This, alongside periodic reviews, will help identify potential gaps in the code or its application. By enforcing the code, the municipality can create a more ethical work environment and restore public confidence in its operations. Integration of ethics into performance management enhances compliance with codes of ethics (Bruce, Redick & Demir, 2024). Organizations can actively enhance ethical decision-making through effective performance management strategies. A well-designed performance management system that prioritizes ethical considerations encourages employees to align their decision-making processes with the organization's core values, reducing the likelihood of unethical behaviour and fostering a culture of integrity.

5.4.7 Alignment of Training and Practice

Future ethical management in Vhembe will require integrating ethical training into municipal employees' development programs, ensuring that every individual, from leadership to entry-level positions, is equipped with the knowledge and tools to navigate ethical dilemmas effectively. Educational programs targeting public officials and citizens will foster a culture of ethics where the importance of doing what is right over what is convenient is emphasized. In addition, collaboration with national and provincial institutions will help strengthen ethical guidelines and policies, providing local government leaders with clear pathways to resolve conflicts, mitigate corruption, and maintain public trust.

Incorporating technology, such as online platforms for training and reporting ethical breaches, will enhance accessibility and efficiency in monitoring and enforcing ethical standards. Furthermore, promoting citizen participation in ethical oversight will lead to more inclusive decision-making and increased public confidence. Ethical management will also be supported by regular evaluations of existing practices, allowing for continuous improvement and the adaptation of policies to emerging challenges. This dynamic approach to ethical conduct, supported by a solid educational framework, will ensure that VDM remains committed to fostering a future transparent, accountable, and ethically responsible governance system.

5.5 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

Chapter One served as the study's foundation. An overview of the study's introduction provided the background on what enhances ethical conduct in the codification and education options. Chapter One (1) laid the foundation for the study by presenting a comprehensive overview of the ethical challenges faced by VDM and their impact on governance and service delivery. The problem statement reveals the challenges of the VDM and other municipalities and explains the origin. Objectives and the research questions were formulated as the basis for the research questions. The aim of the study became a key in directing the discussions and formulation of questions. It highlights the need for enhanced ethical conduct through codification and education, emphasising the importance of addressing corruption and promoting good governance in local government. The chapter frames the study's objectives and scope, allowing subsequent chapters to explore theoretical, methodological, and practical solutions to the identified problems.

Chapter Two (2) focused on a literature review where the conceptualising of the topic under study was contextualised. Theoretical frameworks were presented and analysed to place the phenomenon of ethical codification and education options into perspective. There are several theories for ethics, but in this study, the deontology theory and the virtue theory were adopted as appropriate, and the rationale behind them was given. The concern is that municipalities operate in a professional dimension, where the deontology theory is more pronounced due to rules, policy frameworks, and legislation. Deontology emphasises the adoption of rules as paramount in ensuring that professionals adhere to moral values that promote good governance. The legislation and policy frameworks to strengthen professionalisation with high ethical standards within municipalities were discussed. The concern is that although legislative frameworks and policies to enforce ethical conduct are in place, transgression of ethical conduct continues at VDM, which criticises the promotion of deontology without integrating with virtue-based principles.

Chapter Three (3) highlighted the research methods, research design, study area, population, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations of this study. The municipal officials were the target population; sampling was randomly done as the researcher views that the results could be generalized to the whole population of the Municipality. This study adopted the mixed research methodology to enhance ethical conduct in VDM regarding codification and education options. The research instruments used were Questionnaire and semi-interviews.

Chapter Four (4) outlined the data presentation, interpretation, and analysis of data. The data presented was based on an empirical investigation of enhancing ethical values through adhering to codes of conduct and training. Data collection was done using quantitative and qualitative research methodology. The data presentation was aligned with the objectives of this study. The responses from participants were presented using graphs, tables, and narratives. The narrative of this chapter concludes that the VDM still grapples with the challenges of implementing policies and acts to deter unethical conduct of municipal officials. Some participants highlighted that the other contributory factor is the lack of consequence management, which results in the continuous practice of ethical transgression.

Chapter Five of the study argues that functional and well-governed local municipalities will play a key role in addressing systemic inequality in our country and will contribute towards the realisation of socio-economic rights for the people of South Africa. Failure to uphold professionalism within municipalities and adhere to ethical standards has inevitably led to the current dysfunctionality of most municipalities around the country. For example, ethical transgression costs are notable in VDM in in-service delivery. From 2016 to 2018, the VDM faced numerous service delivery protests in which Vuwani residents engaged in government asset destruction, such as the burning of schools, vandalism, and stoning of motorists.

5.6 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The research findings only addressed improving ethical behaviour in the Vhembe District through education and codification. According to the study's outcomes, it would be more beneficial to independently cross-examine topics like handling the repercussions of unethical behaviour in the future. Crucially, a thorough investigation into different South African municipalities is required. For instance, comparing towns with different Auditor General Reports and political parties in power might provide valuable insights into the difficulties in enforcing ethical norms. Additionally, comparative studies can examine the varying degrees of application of different legal frameworks and other ethical norms, such as the King IV Report, and their awareness above and beyond the code of conduct in respective municipalities.

Also, research could focus on developing context-specific frameworks for enhancing ethical conduct in rural municipalities, such as the VDM. When indicating that future research should focus on developing tailored, context-specific ethics education programs that incorporate theoretical and practical components, ensuring their relevance and sustainability in diverse administrative settings. This includes exploring indigenous ethical systems such as Ubuntu, which in Venda is translated as ‘’Vhuthu’’. Ubuntu has become a daily language in the Venda community, from home to school and when children play with others. Ubuntu means an individual cannot survive alone; therefore, treat others, including strangers, with care and love. The Batho Pele principles can be best utilised to enforce Ubuntu between the community and municipal officials and amongst themselves as staff members. The virtual theory calls for discipline, temperament, respect, and honesty, which is related to Ubuntu theory. This indigenous philosophy can also be integrated with formal codification to address local socio-cultural dynamics (Mafunisa, 2020). New methodologies like participatory action research could engage public servants and community stakeholders in co-creating ethical policies and training programs.

Future studies could also investigate the role of digital tools, such as e-learning platforms, in delivering accessible ethics training. Practical applications of this research may involve piloting context-specific codes of conduct and training programs tailored to the unique challenges of resource-constrained municipalities. Furthermore, cross-regional comparative studies can identify best practices that may be scalable across different municipalities. These efforts could significantly improve accountability and service delivery in the public sector (Pillay, 2016).

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ANNEXURE ‘A’ : **SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

ENHANCING ETHICAL CONDUCT IN VHEMBE DISTRICT IN THE CODIFICATION AND EDUCATION OPTIONS

SECTION A: OFFICIALS’ DEMOGRAPHICS

** Answer all the questions by ticking in the correct boxes*

1. **Please indicate your gender**

□ Male

2. **Please indicate your age category**

□ Below 30 years

□ 31- 40 years

3. **Please indicate your official employment level**

☐ Administrative

☐ Middle management

4. **Level of education**

□ Diploma

□ Honours

□ Doctorate

5. **For how long have you been employed in public sector?**

□ Less than 3 years

□ 3-5 years

□ Female □

41- 50 years

□ Over 51 years

□ Management

□ Degree

□ Masters □

Post-Doctoral

□ 6-10 years

□ Over 10 years

SECTION B: LEVEL OF AWARENESS REGARDING ETHICAL CONDUCT

** Tick a box for the correct device selection*

What is your level of knowledge of ethical conduct?		
1	Sufficient knowledge	
2	Somewhat knowledgeable	
3	Less knowledge	
4	No knowledge	
What is your level of understanding of codification and education options?		
1	Sufficient knowledge	
2	Somewhat knowledgeable	
3	Less knowledge	
4	No knowledge	
If knowledgeable, how did you learn about these concepts?		
M	Through the media	
T/W	Through training/ workshops	
C	I have been taught by a colleague	
F/P/C	Flyers/ posters/ circulars in/ around the workplace	
How much do you understand the role of the ethical conduct in the context in the Vhembe Municipality?		
1	Sufficiently	
2	Somewhat	
3	Less	
4	Not at all	
How often do you receive training for ethical conduct?		
1	Very often	
2	Sometimes	
3	Less often	
4	Never	
In your own view, how helpful was the last training you received to your understanding of the ethical conduct in combatting corruption?		
1	Very helpful	
2	Helpful	

3	Less helpful					
Are policies in combating corruption popular in your institution? **SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree*		**SA**	**A**	**N**	**D**	**SD**
Which of the following policies are you familiar with?						
Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act,2004 (Act 12 of 2004)						
Anti-Corruption Strategy Framework 2020-2030						
Public Finance Management Act, 1999 (Act No. 1 of 1999)						
Protected Disclosure Act, 2000 (Act 26 of 2000)						

2 SECTION C: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CODIFICATION AND EDUCATION OPTIONS IN ENHACING ETHICAL CONDUCT OF MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS

Since the last 3 years (2021-2023), how often do hear about unethical conduct involving an official in your institution?						
1	Very often					
2	Sometimes					
3	Less often					
4	Never					
How often do you hear about disciplinary processes being undertaken for offenses that violates ethical conduct (Either arrest, hearing, dismissal or court proceeding underway)?						
1	Very often					
2	Sometimes					
3	Less often					
4	Never					
Would you report an official in your institution for unethical behavioural conduct? **SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree*		**SA**	**A**	**N**	**D**	**SD**
Have you ever reported an official in your institution for transgression of ethical conduct? **SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree*		**SA**	**A**	**N**	**D**	**SD**
Which of the following ethical incidents have you heard about in the last 3 years period (2021-2023) that involved an official in your institution? **select all that apply*						

1	Bribery involving the department’s functions					
2	Kickbacks (Misallocation of resources/ funds)					
3	Patronage (Appointment or rewarding of non-qualifying officials; for loyalty)					
4	Nepotism and cronyism (Favoring relatives or personal friends)					
5	Flouting of rules and procedures for good governance (not adhering to regulations, lack of compliance to procedures for ethical conduct)					
6	Embezzlement (Direct, gradual stealing of resources/ funds)					
I understand what is meant by ethical codes to enhance my behaviour conduct. **SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree*		**SA**	**A**	**N**	**D**	**SD**
Did you attend workshops on training of codes of conduct? **SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree*		**SA**	**A**	**N**	**D**	**SD**
How often do you attend workshops related to enforcing ethical behaviour of officials?						
Do you think training of ethical codes is effective in enhancing the conduct of officials.						
Do you think there is consequence management for officials who transgressed ethical codes?						

End of questions
Thank you for your time to respond to this questionnaire

3

MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS' INTERVIEWS: (MANAGERIAL POSITIONS)

a) To contextualise ethics in the codification and education options of municipal officials.

1) How do you define ethical conduct within the context of codification and education options in the VDM?

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2) What measures does the municipality currently have in place to promote transparency and accountability in decision-making related to codification and education?

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3) Can you describe any instances where ethical dilemmas arose in the process of codification or education planning? How were they addressed?

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4) What steps are taken to prevent conflicts of interest in the allocation of resources for codification and education initiatives?

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5) Through experiences, do you think consequence management is one of effective tool for enforcing ethical behavioural conduct for officials?

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6) In your training, do you encourage whistle-blowing of unethical conduct amongst officials?

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b) To recommend strategies on the modalities of codification and education options on ethical conduct within the VDM

1) How do you perceive the role of education in promoting ethical conduct among municipal officials within the VDM?

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2) What mechanisms are in place to codify ethical standards and guidelines for various aspects of municipal governance in the Vhembe District?

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3) In your view, do you perceive strategies for enhancing codification and education options are effective to instil a culture of ethical conduct within municipal officials?

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4) Are there any existing best practices or models for codifying ethical conduct within municipal policies that could be recommended to enhance ethical conduct?

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THANK YOU

ANNEXURE ''D'': **CONSENT FORM**

Researcher

I, Thanzi Thenga, a student at the University of Venda, am engaged in research entitled: ***Enhancing Ethical Conduct in the Codification and Education Options: A Case Study of Vhembe District Municipality.*** I am conducting this research project for my master's degree at the University of Venda under the Department of Public and Development Administration, Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law. My supervisor is Dr. A.T. Singo and my Co-Superviser is Dr M.M Nekhavhambe. Upon investigating this, the study intends to gain insight into the role of the Vhembe district in enhancing ethical conduct in the codification and education options. Your participation in this research will benefit community members and municipalities, particularly VDM and South Africa. The findings could be used to enhance ethical conduct for improved service delivery because of collaboration between the District Municipal officials and community members.

***2.* Participant:**

I---give my consent to be interviewed by Thanzi Thenga. It has been explained to me that my name as a respondent will be anonymous, as stated in the ethical clearance. As a respondent in this research study, I am required to observe the following ethical standards:

- My name will not be mentioned during discussions.
- Participation is voluntary and there is freedom to withdraw without penalty.
- Raw materials will be kept under lock to ensure confidentiality.
- Information regarding the interview will only be used for this study.
- A summary of the research study will be available to me if requested.

Respondent's signature--Date---------------------

Researcher's signature---Date---------------------

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION

ANNEXURE ''E'': **EDITORIAL LETTER**

207 Smit Street
Braamfontein Gate
Johannesburg
2017

27 January 2025

To whom it may concern

Letter confirming Dissertation editing

This is to certify that the dissertation titled "Enhancing Ethical Conduct in Vhembe District Municipality in the Codification and Education Options" by Thanzi Thenga, student number 17017967 has been edited and proofread for grammar, spelling, punctuation, overall style, and logical flow. The edits used the "track changes" feature in Microsoft Word, giving the author final control over whether to accept or reject effected changes before submission, provided the change I recommended is caused to the text, the language is of an acceptable standard.

Kind regards

Mr Thabo Molaba

Email: ThaboMo@joburg.org.za
Tel: 011 375 6312

ANNEXURE ''F'' **– UHDC CLEARANCE FORM**

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:
Mr T Thenga

STUDENT NO:
17017967

PROJECT TITLE: Enhancing ethical conduct in Vhembe district municipality in the codification and education options.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: FMCL/24/PDN/04/0507

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr TA Singo	UNIVEN, Public and Development Administration	Supervisor
Dr MM Nekhavhambe	UNIVEN, Public and Development Administration	Co-Supervisors
Mr T Thenga	UNIVEN, Public and Development Administration	Investigator – Student

Type: Masters Research
Risk: Straightforward research without ethical problems (Category 1)
Approval Period: July 2024 – July 2025

The Research Ethics Social Sciences Committee (RESSC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions
While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following.

- The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the REC:
  - Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project.
  - Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
  - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the REC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made to the REC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the REC retains the right to:
  - Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project.
  - To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
  - withdraw or postpone approval if:
  - Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected.
  - It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented.
  - The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately.
  - New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions A it necessary

ISSUED BY:
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Date Considered: June 2024

Name of the RESSC Chairperson of the Committee: Prof TS Mashau

Signature

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
2024 -07- 05
Private Bag X5050
Thohoyandou 0950

ANNEXURE ‘’G’’ – **TURNITIN REPORT**

ENHANCING ETHICAL CONDUCT IN VHEMBE DISTRICT IN THE CODIFICATION AND EDUCATION OPTION

ORIGINALITY REPORT

12%	9%	6%	9%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to University of Venda Student Paper	4%
2	univendspace.univen.ac.za Internet Source	2%
3	repository.nwu.ac.za Internet Source	1%
4	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
5	Submitted to University of South Africa Student Paper	<1%
6	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	<1%
7	Submitted to Walter Sisulu University Student Paper	<1%
8	repository.up.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
9	Submitted to University of Limpopo Student Paper	<1%