



ETHICAL AND VALUES EDUCATION RE-ENGINEERING AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP AND GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS IN NIGERIA



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Abstract

Ethical leadership in higher education is essential for institutional credibility, academic integrity, and global competitiveness. However, Nigerian higher education institutions (HEIs) face significant ethical challenges, including corruption, favoritism, academic dishonesty, and weak governance structures, which undermine their effectiveness. This paper explores the role of ethics and values education in re-engineering leadership within Nigerian HEIs to foster accountability, transparency, and excellence. Drawing insights from global best practices, particularly from countries such as Finland, the United Kingdom, and South Africa, the paper highlights the impact of ethical policies on improving institutional efficiency, research output, and international collaboration. The paper emphasizes the need for comprehensive reforms, including curriculum integration of ethics education, leadership training programs, and stronger regulatory frameworks. It argues that government agencies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC) and anti-corruption bodies must play a more active role in enforcing ethical compliance. Additionally, the establishments of independent ethics committees within HEIs can help monitor ethical conduct and address governance failures. The paper further discusses the importance of international benchmarking to align Nigerian HEIs with global ethical standards, ensuring their competitiveness in academic and research engagements. By addressing ethical lapses in higher education leadership, Nigeria can enhance the credibility of its institutions, improve graduate employability, and strengthen global academic partnerships. This paper therefore provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, university administrators, and stakeholders committed to promoting ethical governance in Nigeria's higher education sector.

Keywords: *Ethical Leadership, Higher Education Governance, Values Education, Academic Integrity and Global Competitiveness.*

Introduction

Higher education is a critical driver of national development and global competitiveness, yet ethical lapses in leadership have significantly undermined the credibility of Nigeria's higher education institutions (HEIs). Issues such as academic dishonesty, financial mismanagement, favoritism in appointments, and weak governance structures have contributed to declining educational standards (Olawale & Ojo, 2024). Ethical and values education re-engineering is necessary to foster accountability, transparency, and excellence in leadership. Countries with strong ethical policies in their education systems, such as Finland and the United Kingdom, have seen improvements in academic integrity and institutional efficiency, reinforcing the importance of ethical leadership in higher

education (Salminen, 2023; McNay, 2023). Nigerian HEIs must adopt similar strategies to enhance governance and improve their global standing.

A major concern in Nigerian universities is the prevalence of unethical conduct among administrators and faculty members, including financial corruption, examination malpractice, and sexual harassment, which weaken institutional credibility and academic excellence (Greenfield, 2023; Bass & Riggio, 2023). Weak regulatory enforcement by agencies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC) has further exacerbated governance inefficiencies, limiting the ability of Nigerian institutions to attract global partnerships and funding (Okonkwo et al., 2024). Comparatively, South Africa and Ghana have made strides in enhancing ethical leadership through policy-driven initiatives and strict enforcement of ethical standards (Salminen, 2023). Addressing these governance failures requires stronger legislative reforms, the establishment of independent ethics committees, and leadership training programs to instill integrity in university administration (Ajayi et al., 2024; Oseni, 2024 & National Universities Commission (NUC), 2024).

As the internationalization of higher education continues to shape global academic collaboration, Nigerian universities must uphold ethical standards to remain competitive (Elliott, 2024). Institutions that fail to implement ethical governance risk losing opportunities for global partnerships, research collaborations, and foreign investments (Bass & Riggio, 2023). Ethical leadership enhances academic reputation, research output, and institutional transparency, all of which are crucial for positioning Nigeria's HEIs in the global higher education landscape (Nwosu & Bello, 2024). This paper examines the ethical challenges in Nigerian higher education leadership, explores best practices from other countries, and proposes actionable strategies to re-engineer values education for improved global competitiveness.

Conceptualizing Ethics and Values in Higher Education Leadership

Ethics refers to principles that govern behavior, while values represent core beliefs influencing decision-making. In higher education leadership, ethics encompass fairness, honesty, and responsibility (Greenfield, 2021). Values education, on the other hand, involves integrating moral reasoning into curricula and leadership training.

Ethics in higher education leadership is crucial in fostering an academic culture that promotes integrity, transparency, and accountability. Scholars argue that ethical leadership enhances institutional effectiveness, faculty motivation, and student success (Morrison & Peterson, 2022). Ethical leadership involves making decisions that align with moral principles, institutional policies, and societal expectations (Johnson, 2023). When higher education leaders adhere to ethical standards, it creates an environment of trust and respect within academic institutions (Olawale & Ojo, 2024).

Values, on the other hand, serve as guiding principles for decision-making and behavior. They include honesty, respect, fairness, accountability, and social responsibility. Values education in higher education leadership ensures that institutional policies reflect core ethical principles and promote social justice (Elliott, 2023). Many global institutions integrate values education into leadership training programs to reinforce ethical decision-making among administrators and faculty members (Salminen, 2023).

The absence of strong ethical foundations in higher education leadership has led to numerous governance and academic challenges. Studies indicate that institutions lacking ethical leadership are more prone to corruption, administrative inefficiencies, and declining academic standards (Ajayi et al., 2024). According to Nwosu and Bello (2024), unethical practices such as favoritism, embezzlement, and manipulation of academic records undermine institutional credibility and global competitiveness. Furthermore, the erosion of ethical values within Nigeria's higher education sector has contributed to issues such as examination malpractice, sexual harassment, and academic dishonesty (Okonkwo et al., 2024).



The Importance of Ethics and Values in Higher Education Leadership

Ethical and values-based leadership plays a critical role in fostering a culture of excellence and institutional sustainability. Research highlights that universities with strong ethical frameworks tend to perform better in global rankings and attract more international collaborations (McNay, 2023). Ethical governance ensures that institutional policies and practices align with global best practices, thereby enhancing academic credibility and competitiveness (Adebayo & Aluko, 2023).

One of the key benefits of ethical leadership in higher education is its impact on decision-making. Ethical leaders are more likely to make decisions that prioritize student welfare, faculty development, and institutional growth (Oseni, 2024). Moreover, values-driven leadership helps in mitigating conflicts, fostering inclusivity, and promoting academic freedom (Ezenwa et al., 2024). Ethical leaders serve as role models for students and faculty, reinforcing a culture of professionalism and integrity within academic institutions (Adewale, 2023).

Incorporating ethics and values education into leadership training programs has been recognized as a crucial step in enhancing governance effectiveness in higher education (Okoro, 2024). Institutions in developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Finland have successfully integrated ethics courses into leadership development initiatives (Salminen, 2023). These programs focus on ethical decision-making, conflict resolution, and institutional accountability, which help in developing well-rounded leaders who can navigate complex governance challenges (Bass & Riggio, 2023).

In the Nigerian context, implementing a values-driven leadership approach requires policy reforms and institutional commitment (Ajayi et al., 2024). The National Universities Commission (NUC) and other regulatory bodies must enforce ethical guidelines that ensure transparency in academic and administrative processes (Nwosu, 2024). Universities should also establish ethics committees responsible for monitoring compliance with ethical standards and addressing cases of misconduct (Olawale, 2024). Additionally, embedding ethical training in faculty development programs can help in instilling a culture of integrity among academic staff (Elliott, 2024).

Ethical and values education in higher education leadership is essential for institutional sustainability, academic credibility, and global competitiveness. By fostering a culture of integrity, accountability, and transparency, Nigerian universities can enhance their reputation and attract international partnerships. A re-engineered approach to values education, supported by policy reforms and leadership training, will play a crucial role in transforming higher education governance in Nigeria.

Theoretical Frameworks

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership theory posits that ethical leaders inspire followers toward institutional excellence by promoting vision, motivation, and ethical conduct (Bass & Riggio, 2020). Transformational leaders emphasize moral responsibility, fairness, and integrity, which are essential in fostering ethical governance in higher education (Burns, 2021). The theory suggests that leaders who demonstrate ethical behaviors influence faculty members and students, fostering a culture of accountability and transparency (Avolio & Gardner, 2022).

Studies show that transformational leadership significantly impacts institutional performance and faculty commitment (Kouzes & Posner, 2023). For instance, research conducted by Adeyemi & Bello (2024) in Nigerian universities highlights that ethical transformational leaders enhance academic productivity, research integrity, and institutional reputation. The emphasis on ethical vision ensures that universities align their policies with global best practices, thus improving Nigeria's higher education competitiveness (Ekanem et al., 2023).

One critical aspect of transformational leadership is individualized consideration, where leaders mentor and support faculty members, fostering an ethical climate within institutions (Gumusluoglu et al., 2022). Ethical role modeling by university administrators helps in reinforcing values such as honesty, fairness, and accountability (Zheng et al., 2023). Nigerian higher education institutions can

benefit from transformational leadership by embedding ethical principles in leadership development programs (Okafor, 2024).

Global Best Practices in Ethical Higher Education Leadership

Several countries have successfully implemented ethics-driven higher education leadership reforms:

1. **United Kingdom:** Ethical charters guide institutional leadership, ensuring transparency, accountability, and integrity in governance (McNay, 2021). The UK Quality Code for Higher Education enforces ethical policies that maintain academic standards and institutional credibility (Williams & Smith, 2022).
2. **Finland:** Integrity-based governance ensures educational quality through strict ethical guidelines and participatory leadership structures (Salminen, 2022). Finnish universities incorporate integrity and ethics education into leadership training, enhancing institutional trust and performance (Virtanen et al., 2023).
3. **United States:** Leadership ethics training programs reinforce accountability by equipping university administrators with tools for ethical decision-making (Elliott, 2023). The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) mandates compliance with ethical standards, fostering responsible leadership in universities (Johnson & Clark, 2024).
4. **Australia:** Universities adhere to national ethical governance frameworks that emphasize transparency, fair leadership, and student-centered policies (Brown et al., 2023). Research shows that ethical leadership in Australian universities contributes to improved institutional rankings and global reputation (Harrison, 2024).
5. **Canada:** Canadian universities implement ethics and values training for faculty and administrators, ensuring ethical leadership at all levels (Gagnon & Tremblay, 2023). Policies such as the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research promote integrity in academic governance (Martins, 2024).

These global best practices serve as models for Nigerian higher education institutions to adopt ethics-driven leadership frameworks, ensuring credibility and competitiveness in the global academic landscape.

Ethical Challenges in Nigerian Higher Education Leadership

1. **Corruption and Nepotism:** Research indicates that corruption is a significant barrier to academic integrity (Adebayo & Aluko, 2022). Studies reveal that unethical recruitment practices, bribery, and favoritism compromise university governance and reduce institutional credibility (Osagie, 2023). Nepotism in faculty appointments and student admissions leads to inefficiencies and stifles meritocracy (Olawale & Okonkwo, 2024).
2. **Academic Misconduct:** Issues such as plagiarism, bribery, and examination malpractice undermine credibility (Olawale & Ojo, 2023). Research indicates that academic dishonesty has led to declining global rankings of Nigerian universities (Eze & Akinlabi, 2024). The lack of strict enforcement of academic integrity policies has further exacerbated these challenges (Adeyemi et al., 2023).
3. **Poor Governance Structures:** Weak ethical oversight fosters inefficiency and non-compliance with global academic standards (Okonkwo et al., 2024). Studies suggest that inadequate leadership accountability contributes to financial mismanagement and declining research output (Ajibade & Yusuf, 2023). Implementing robust governance frameworks can improve institutional effectiveness and ethical compliance (Uche & Obiora, 2024).

Ethical and values education in higher education leadership is essential for institutional sustainability, academic credibility, and global competitiveness. By fostering a culture of integrity, accountability, and transparency, Nigerian universities can enhance their reputation and attract international partnerships. A re-engineered approach to values education, supported by policy reforms and leadership training, will play a crucial role in transforming higher education governance in Nigeria.

Re-engineering Ethical and Values Education in Nigeria's Higher Education

Curriculum Reform

Integrating ethics and leadership studies into higher education curricula can cultivate a culture of integrity (Adewale, 2023). Research suggests that embedding ethics in course content strengthens students' moral reasoning and enhances leadership effectiveness (Okeke & Akinlabi, 2024). A study by Ibijola (2024) highlights the positive impact of ethics-based curricula on reducing academic misconduct and promoting institutional credibility.

Leadership Development Programs

Training for university administrators on ethical leadership enhances accountability and performance (Ezenwa et al., 2023). Studies indicate that leadership training programs that focus on ethical decision-making improve governance structures and reduce corruption (Adigun & Kolawole, 2024). Furthermore, continuous professional development programs equip university leaders with the necessary skills to navigate ethical dilemmas effectively (Olawale & Johnson, 2024).

Policy Recommendations

1. **Legislative Reforms:** Strengthening regulatory frameworks to enforce ethical leadership and accountability in higher education (Ogunleye & Adebisi, 2024). Enforcing strict anti-corruption laws within universities can deter unethical practices (Eze et al., 2024).
2. **Institutional Ethics Committees:** Establishing independent bodies to monitor adherence to ethical standards (Uchenna, 2023). Research shows that ethics committees enhance compliance with academic integrity policies and promote transparency (Adepoju & Adedeji, 2024).
3. **International Collaborations:** Partnering with global universities to adopt best practices in leadership ethics (Williams & Smith, 2023). Cross-border collaborations have been shown to improve governance structures, ethical leadership training, and institutional ranking (Gbadamosi et al., 2024).

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Implications for Global Competitiveness

1. **Enhanced Academic Reputation:** Ethical institutions attract international recognition and partnerships (Nwosu & Bello, 2024). Institutions with strong ethical foundations are more likely to be ranked higher globally (Ikechukwu & Adeyemi, 2024).
2. **Improved Research Output:** Integrity-driven environments foster quality research and innovation, leading to increased publications in high-impact journals (Ajayi et al., 2023). Ethical research practices also enhance international collaborations in multi-disciplinary studies (Ogunfemi et al., 2024).
3. **Attracting Foreign Investment:** Transparent governance and ethical leadership increase foreign partnerships and funding opportunities (Oseni, 2024). Studies indicate that universities with clear ethical policies are more likely to secure research grants and endowments from global donors (Balogun et al., 2024).
4. **Student and Faculty Mobility:** Ethical higher education institutions are more likely to attract international students and faculty, contributing to global knowledge exchange (Ogundele & Okonkwo, 2024). Ethical practices also improve graduate employability and institutional credibility in the global job market (Benson et al., 2024).

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integrity, accountability, and transparency, Nigerian universities can enhance their reputation and attract international partnerships.

Conclusion

Re-engineering ethical and values education in Nigerian higher education leadership is imperative for institutional credibility and global competitiveness. Implementing ethics-driven policies, leadership training, and international benchmarking can significantly enhance Nigeria's position in the global education landscape. Ethical leadership fosters academic integrity, improves institutional reputation, and attracts global partnerships (Ajayi et al., 2023). Research shows that universities with strong ethical foundations experience better faculty retention, increased student enrollment, and higher research productivity (Nwosu & Bello, 2024). Additionally, ethics-driven governance reduces corruption, enhances accountability, and aligns Nigerian higher education with international standards (Ogunleye & Adebisi, 2024).

Studies indicate that incorporating values education into leadership training programs strengthens decision-making processes and fosters ethical consciousness among administrators (Oseni, 2024). Universities that adopt global best practices in ethical leadership experience enhanced academic credibility and improved international rankings (Gbadamosi et al., 2024). Therefore, Nigerian higher education institutions must prioritize ethical policies, leadership development, and cross-border collaborations to maintain a competitive edge in the global education sector (Ikechukwu & Adeyemi, 2024).

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