



ETHICAL VALUES IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



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Abstract

This study examines the significance of ethical values in school administration in Nigeria for Sustainable National Development. The study highlights issues and challenges facing school administrators in upholding ethical values for sustainable national development in Nigeria. The paper emphasizes the importance of ethical leadership, transparency, integrity and accountability in promoting a positive school culture and ensuring quality education. The study also identifies key issues, such as resources constraints, cultural and societal, school climate corruption, favoritism, and lack of accountability and neglects the need for training and support to enhance administrators' ethical decision-making that promotes organization goals and objectives. Future research should focus on developing transparent, fair, and inclusive ethical leadership training that align with supporting achievement of educational goals in Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethical Values, Ethical leadership, Issues, Challenges, school administrator

Introduction

Ethics is generally refers to the principles of morality and conduct that guide how individuals make decisions and interact with others. Ethics as a systematic study is concerned with the nature of good and bad, right and wrong, justice and injustice, duty and obligation (Mbagwu, 2018). It is a branch of philosophy that explores right and wrong, good and bad, and the reasoning behind moral judgments (Branston, 2025). Ethics helps individuals determine what is morally acceptable and guides them in making right choices that align with their values and societal norms. Ethics deals with the guidelines or rules of conduct by which we aim to live, work and socialize.

Ethical values have a fundamental role to play in education in Nigeria for sustainable development in shaping the moral compass of individuals and fostering responsible citizens towards accomplishment of educational goals. Incorporation of ethical principles into school administration, educational institutions can empower school administrators to make informed decisions, contribute positively to society, and lead fulfilling lives (Nishantha, 2023). Ethical values are fundamental to effective school administration for promoting a culture of integrity, transparency, and accountability for the better administrative environment.

School administrators are very crucial for the successful and effective management of a school in Nigeria for sustainable development. The Federal Republic of Nigeria stated in the National Policy of Education (NPE,2014) document that the goals of education is to produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient administrators at all levels of our educational system; encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in administrators; help administrators to fit into social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals; provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations; and enhance administrators - teachers' commitment to the academic profession (Elbanna,(2023). However, to carry out these roles efficiently, it means that all administrators must be professionally trained and inculcated with the ethical values and code of conduct of the administrative profession, no profession can stand without clearly defined the ethics.

According to TRCN (2013) administration deals with the molding of character of humanity based on a set of solid, tested and proven ethical framework that guarantees the very best atmosphere and trust in the administrative process. In order for effective management of schools, administrators must maintain good working ethics and high moral standards to achieve its objectives and goals school system. In Nigeria, school administrators face numerous challenges in upholding ethical values which including among others, resource constraints, inadequate training, corruption, favoritism, and lack of accountability. This study aims to discuss the issues and challenges of ethical values in Nigerian school administration, emphasizing the importance of ethical leadership in promoting quality education.

Concept of Ethical Values

Ethical comes from the Greek ethos "moral character" and describes a person or behavior as right in the moral sense - truthful, fair, and honest. Also the word is used for people who follow the moral standards of their profession (Vocabulary.com, 2025). Ethical values guide the way that administration is done - what is considered acceptable or desirable behaviour, above and beyond compliance with laws and regulations. Ethical values are refers to as principles and beliefs that guide individuals and organizations in making decisions and evaluating actions as morally right or wrong. Ethical values serve as the foundation for ethical behavior, helping to shape personal character and promote social cohesion in school. Ethical values can stem from various sources, such as cultural, religious, philosophical, or personal beliefs. While the specific ethical values held by individuals and groups may differ, some common themes include honesty, fairness, responsibility, respect, and compassion. By adhering to ethical values, administrators can navigate complex moral dilemmas, maintain their integrity, and foster positive relationships with colleagues in the course of goals accomplishment. Nishantha (2023) noted that ethical values serve as a guiding force for individuals to make decisions that align with their principles and beliefs. They enable individuals understand the consequences of their actions and provide a framework for ethical decision-making. Kocaba & Karaköse (2009) noted that when ethical values are integrated into an individual's life, they promote a sense of accountability and responsibility, encouraging them to act in the best interests of themselves and others in ensuring that organizational goals are being achieved.

Ethical behaviour therefore occurs when one acts with equity, fairness and impartiality and respects the rights of others, or simply put, when one does what is morally right. According to Manuel, Claire, Thomas and Michael (2012), implementation of ethical values referred to well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues.

Ethical Values in School Administration in Nigeria

In Nigerian school administration, ethical values such as integrity, fairness, respect, etc, for individual rights are crucial. These values are also emphasized in the national ethics outlined in the Nigerian Constitution, including discipline, integrity, and dignity of labor, social justice, and religious tolerance. Effective school administrators should demonstrate these values in their interactions with students, teachers, parents, and the community at large, fostering a positive, conducive and equitable learning environment for national development.

According to Well & Emerole (2023) ethical values in school administration refer to principles and beliefs that guide school leaders' decision-making and actions, ensuring fairness, integrity, and accountability within the school community. These values are crucial for fostering a positive school culture and promoting ethical behavior among all stakeholders, including students, teachers, and staff. The application of ethical values to school administration refers to the practical implementation of moral principles and standards in various aspects school system, including personal and professional settings. Ethical Values in School Administration guide decision-making, behavior, and interactions with others, promoting conducive environment for teaching and learning as highlighted below:



Integrity in School Administration

Integrity is a fundamental value in school administration that encompasses honesty, transparency, and consistency in actions and decisions. School administrators with integrity are likely act with honesty, truthful in communication with students, staff, and the community. The administrator with integrity demonstrates transparency, maintain consistency, and apply rules, policies, and procedures fairly and consistently in discharging his /her duties. Administrators take responsibility by acknowledging and learn from mistakes.

Fairness and justice in school administration

Fairness and justice are essential principles in school administration, ensuring that students, staff, and the community are treated with equality and respect. Fairness and inclusivity in leadership require leaders who treat all staff equally and prioritize fairness foster a sense of unity and teammate spirit among them. This strengthens relationships and ensures that all individuals feel valued thence enhances overall collaboration and trust. Begley & Johansson (2008) maintain that ethical leadership, including fairness and respect, is directly linked to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment in educational settings. However, School administrators who take into consideration fairness and justice his/her administration should ensure rules and policies are applied equally to all students and staff, treat individuals with respect in the sense that value diversity, inclusivity, and show empathy are promoted, make informed decisions based n evidence, facts, and clear criteria, provide opportunities for feedback thereby encouraging open communication and consider diverse perspectives.

Responsibility and accountability in school administration

Accountable leadership holds oneself and others accountable for actions, decisions, and outcomes. Responsibility and accountability are crucial aspects of school administration, ensuring that administrators are answerable for their actions, decisions, and outcomes. School administrators should be responsibility. He /she ensures ethical Leadership in school system by providing direction, guidance, and support to students, teachers, and staff can leads to better academic and personal outcomes, making informed ethical decisions that benefit students and the school community, managing resources effectively to support student learning and well-being, prioritizing student safety, well-being, and academic success, providing clear explanations for decisions and actions, regularly evaluating and assessing policies, programmes, and practices, identifying areas for improvement and implement changes where necessary.

Respect and Empathy in School Administration

Ensuring respect and empathy in school administration by school administrators foster a positive and supportive environment for students, staff, and the community to achieve their goals. School administrators who demonstrate respect and empathy, recognize and appreciate individual differences, cultures, and perspectives, hear and understand concerns, needs, and ideas from students, staff, and parents, show compassion thereby demonstrate care and understanding for students and staff facing challenges and creating an environment where everyone feels welcome, valued, and supported hence fostering a positive work environment, boosting staff morale and job satisfaction. By prioritizing respect and empathy, school administrators can create a supportive and inclusive environment, ultimately benefiting students, staff, and the broader community.

Professionalism and Confidentiality in School Administration

Adhering to professional standards, engaging in ongoing professional development, and demonstrating a commitment to lifelong learning are necessary in ensuring effective school administration. Professionalism and confidentiality play a key role in school administration, ensuring that administrators maintain a high level of integrity, respect, and trust. Professionalism in School administration portrays demonstration of knowledge, skills, and expertise in educational leadership, acting with honesty, fairness, and ethics in all interactions with stakeholders, treating students, staff, and



the community with dignity and respect, taking responsibility for actions, decisions, and outcomes. On the other hand, confidentiality is maintained by protecting sensitive information about students, staff, and the community by holding private meetings to discuss sensitive issues, ensuring that personal information is not disclosed without consent, maintaining accurate and secure records, adhering to relevant laws and regulations fostering strong, respectful relationships with stakeholders. By prioritizing professionalism and confidentiality, school administrators can maintain a high level of trust, respect, and integrity, ultimately benefiting students, staff, and the broader community.

Needs For Ethical Values In School Administration

Ethical leadership is a management concept that signifies the leaders who integrate ethics in their personal lives and their roles as organisational managers (Orunbon, Ifenaike, & Adeleke, 2022). Ethical values play a crucial role in school administration, guiding decision-making, behavior, and interactions with students, staff, and the community. Ethical values guide the way that school system is done in terms of what is considered acceptable or desirable behaviour, above and beyond compliance with laws and regulations. It may be that the school's values are implicit rather than explicit (Branston, 2025). The values inform the education organisation's ethics policy. This sets out the organisation's commitment to high ethical standards and how this will be governed, implemented and monitored (Sakiman & Yasin, 2023). Here are some ways ethical values are promoting school administration for sustainable national development.

Promotion and Maintenance of Rules and Regulations

A good and well managed educational system reforms the people who in turn reform the entire society by upholding the ethics of the system. The most important responsibility of any administrator is to have an ethical perception of school administration. School administrators typically work in different educational institutions; they are responsible for overseeing administrative tasks in educational institutions by making sure that the organization runs according to the expected rules and regulations.

Creation of Positive and Productive Learning and Work Environment

A good working environment creates a safe, supportive, and respectful atmosphere for students and staff. By embracing ethical values, school administrators can create a positive and productive learning environment that benefits students, teachers, and the broader community. Ethical values, such as honesty, integrity, and respect for others, are essential for building strong relationships, creating a sense of purpose, and living a meaningful life.

Helping in Making informed Decision

Transparent decision-making involves stakeholders in decision-making processes and providing clear explanations for decisions. Ethical values serve as a guiding force for school administrators to make decisions that align with their principles and beliefs. They help school administrators understand the consequences of their actions and provide a framework for ethical decision-making. When ethical values are integrated into an administrator's life, they promote a sense of accountability and responsibility, encouraging them to act in the best interests of themselves and others. The importance of ethical values cannot be overemphasized, according to Kocaba and Karaköse (2009) ethical values are principles guiding human behavior, emphasizing morality, fairness, and responsibility. They shape individual and organizational conduct, influence decision-making in school organization.

Issues and Challenges of Ethical Values in School Administration

Pijanowski (2022) stated that ethics in educational leadership is concerns understanding the rules, understanding how your actions affect other people and the system as a whole. There are a number of ethical issues challenges in education that can be addressed and ameliorated. Stakeholders in school administration are often associated very closely with such ethical issues in schools because of

their direct involvement, while others may be a as result of how the education system is being organized. Some issues and challenges are identified and discussed below:

- **Resource Constraints:** Limited resources can lead to difficult decisions, testing administrators' commitment to ethical values. This can directly hinder school administrators' ability to promote ethical values in Nigerian schools, impacting their effectiveness in implementing programs and policies, hindering the ability of school administrators to maintain ethical values by limiting their capacity to implement and enforce ethical standards, provide necessary support for staff and students, and to create a positive learning environment. Consequently, leads to a decline in ethical behavior within the school community. Adequate funding allows for professional development programs for teachers and staff on ethical conduct, conflict resolution, and student discipline. Without sufficient resources, these programs may be underfunded, understaffed, or completely absent, leading to a lack of training and support for maintaining ethical values (Bashir & Dalhatu 2014). More so, inadequate funding can result in dilapidated infrastructure, lack of essential resources and a generally less positive school environment. This can create a breeding ground for unethical behavior, as students and staff may feel disempowered and frustrated. Inadequate funding may force school administrators to rely on external funding sources, which can come with strings attached and potentially conflict with the school's ethical values. This can create an environment where the school's priorities are compromised, leading to a decline in ethical behavior (Nwangwu (2017).
- **School Climate:** A negative or disrespectful school climate can undermine ethical values associated with lack of respect for students, teachers, and administrators showing an environment where ethical principles are not prioritized. School climate profoundly influences how administrators apply ethical values (Nwangwu, 2017). Positive school climate is characterized by mutual respect, trust, and a shared sense of purpose, fosters a culture where ethical behavior is naturally encouraged and expected. Conversely, a negative school climate, marked by conflict, disrespect, and a lack of trust, can make it challenging for administrators to uphold ethical values and can even lead to unethical decisions (Nwangwu, 2017). Positive school climate facilitates ethical decision-making, administrators are more likely to make ethical decisions with the support of colleagues, students, and parents. It encourages transparency and accountability where decisions are made openly and everyone is held accountable for their actions, fostering ethical practices. Unfriendly environment creates pressure to compromise ethics which can create a sense of pressure to compromise ethical values to achieve short-term goals or satisfy external demands, mistrust and conflict, making it difficult for administrators to work collaboratively and uphold ethical standards. School climate is not just an environmental factor but a powerful force that shapes the ethical decisions and actions of school administrators.
- **Ethical dilemmas:** Ethical dilemmas often involve conflicting values and competing interests, making it difficult to determine a clear "right" or "wrong" course of action. This complexity can challenge administrators' preconceived notions about morality and encourage them to consider a wider range of perspectives. In some cases, ethical dilemmas can expose inconsistencies or contradictions within existing ethical frameworks. This can lead administrators to question the absolute nature of certain moral rules and develop a more nuanced understanding of ethics. In a situation of ethical dilemmas administrators can be encourage to reflect on their own values and beliefs. They may realize that their personal values are not always aligned with the values of others, or that their own understanding of ethics is incomplete. Ethical dilemmas also provide a structured way for administrators to practice ethical decision-making. They can learn to identify the relevant ethical issues, analyze the situation, consider the consequences of their choices, and develop strategies for resolving the dilemma. **Corruption and Nepotism:** Corruption and nepotism significantly undermine the promotion of ethical values in schools. By prioritizing personal gain or connections over merit and integrity, these practices erode trust, lower academic standards. Unfair practices in hiring, promotion, and resource allocation undermine

trust and fairness in school system (Nwankwo, 2016). This can lead to a decline in the quality of education, as resources are mismanaged, qualified individuals are overlooked, and unethical behavior is tolerated.. Corruption and nepotism create an environment of mistrust between students, teachers, and administrators, making it difficult to foster a culture of honesty and ethical conduct. When appointments and promotions are based on favoritism rather than merit, unqualified or under-qualified individuals may be placed in positions of authority, leading to a decline in the quality of teaching and learning (Arome & Rabi (2017). Corruption can lead to the misappropriation of funds intended for educational resources, resulting in inadequate infrastructure, poor-quality materials, and a lack of necessary support for students and teachers. When administrators engage in corrupt practices, it sends a message that such behavior is acceptable, making it harder to instill ethical values in students. Corruption and nepotism can tarnish the reputation of the school and the entire education system, leading to a loss of public confidence and support (Isabu, 2024). When teachers and students feel that merit and hard work are not valued, it can lead to a lack of motivation and a decline in academic performance. Corruption and nepotism constitute a problem to national development by exacerbate social inequalities by limiting opportunities for those who lack the right connections, further undermining the principles of fairness and equal opportunity.

- **Lack of Accountability:** The issue of lack of accountability presents significant challenges for school administrators in fostering ethical values in school system. The manifestation of this unethical behavior can be observed in disregard for rules, lack of transparency, and inconsistent enforcement of school policies. Without accountability, rules and policies may be applied inconsistently thereby creating a sense of unfairness and undermining the legitimacy of ethical guidelines. When administrators are not accountable, they may be less transparent about their decisions and actions. This lack of transparency can breed suspicion and resentment, making it harder to build a culture of ethical awareness and responsibility in the school (Dangara, 2016). Hence, such acts may be perpetuated thereby discourage those who want to uphold ethical standards (Ineye-Briggs, 2025). At times, lack of accountability may be linked to inadequate training and support for administrators in understanding and implementing ethical guidelines. If administrators are not equipped with the knowledge and resources to promote ethical values, they may struggle to do so effectively (Dangara, 2016).
- **Favoritism and Bias:** Favoritism and bias can significantly hinder school administrators' efforts to promote ethical values in several ways: Favoritism and bias can lead to unfair treatment of students, teachers, and staff, creating a culture of inequality. It can result in unequal access to opportunities, resources, and support. Favoritism and bias can erode trust in school administrators and the education system. Students, teachers, and staff may perceive that decisions are made based on personal relationships or biases rather than merit or need. This can negatively affect student learning where of inequitable education is permitted, invariably can lead to unequal educational experiences and outcomes, demoralization and disengaging from schooling (Rasheed, 2016). In addressing the above challenge there is need to establish clear policies and procedures that promote fairness and equity. Unfair treatment of students and staff based on personal relationships or biases creates a toxic school environment.
- **Inadequate Training:** According to Begley & Johansson (2008) insufficient training and support for administrators in ethical decision-making and conflict resolution can lead to poor governance and ethical dilemmas. Lack of training for school administrators can significantly hinder the promotion of ethical values within a school system. Without proper training, administrators may struggle to recognize, address, and prevent unethical behavior, potentially leading to a culture of low ethical standards and even contributing to a hostile environment. Inadequate understanding of ethical principles (Sakima & Yasin, 2023). Nevertheless, professional development and training in ethics are crucial for school administrators. These programs can equip them with the knowledge, skills, and awareness necessary to foster a positive, ethical, and effective learning environment for all.

- **Cultural and Societal Influences:** Cultural norms and societal expectations can influence administrators' ethical decision-making, sometimes conflicting with professional values. Culturally, parents and the wider community play a crucial role in shaping a child's understanding of ethics and values of their immediate environment. Situations where parents and community members fail to value ethical behavior or actively promote it, it can be no issue for schools to establish a strong ethical culture. Sometimes students and families may perceive school policies and practices as unfair, biased, or discriminatory, leading to distrust and undermining ethical behavior. This can create a sense of injustice and resentment, making it harder to instill ethical values and promote a positive school climate. In addressing the issues administrators should Cultivate cultural sensitivity by actively seeking to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds within the school community, including their values, beliefs, and practices (Kocaba, & Karaköse, 2009).
- **Lack of Clear Policies:** Unclear policies and procedures can create ambiguity, making it challenging for administrators to uphold ethical values school system. A lack of clear ethical policies in schools creates several challenges for administrators in promoting ethical values. Without defined guidelines, it becomes difficult to establish clear expectations, hold individuals accountable, and ensure consistency in addressing ethical issues. This can lead to ambiguity, confusion, and ultimately, undermines the school's efforts to foster a culture of integrity. Without defined policies, communication to students, staff, and parents what constitutes ethical behavior in various situations will be challenging. Lack of clear guidelines makes it difficult to handle situations involving unethical behavior among students, staff and community at large, such as cheating or discrimination. Administrators may struggle to determine the appropriate course of action, leading to inconsistent responses and a perception of unfairness.

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role that ethical leadership plays in shaping the educational system and contributing to sustainable national development. The issues and challenges discussed underscore the need for school administrators to prioritize ethical values such as integrity, transparency, accountability, and fairness in their decision-making and actions. Ethical leadership is essential for promoting a positive school culture, academic excellence, and sustainable national development. School administrators in Nigeria face various challenges, including financial constraints, corruption and nepotism, favoritism and bias, inadequate training, and lack of clear policies, which can undermine ethical values.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are proffer to tackle the issues and challenges of ethical values in school administration in Nigeria for Sustainable national development.

- The stakeholders in education should endeavour to establish clear policies and procedures that promote transparency, accountability, and fairness.
- Every school administrator needs to be aware of issues challenging their profession and receive adequate training to able to tackle them in their duties and responsibilities.
- The stakeholders in education should encourage a culture of integrity, where ethical behavior is valued and rewarded.
- Government address issues of corruption and nepotism by promulgating more strict punishment for offenders and be ready to implement them without favouritism and nepotism and also create a safe and supportive environment for whistleblowers to report corrupt practices without fear of retaliation.
- School administrator should prevent favoritism and bias to promote a culture of ethical values that ensure fairness and equity, and provide a positive learning environment for all.
- Government should endeavour to foster a supportive learning environment that encourages respectful communication, empathy, and constructive conflict resolution.



- Government Policy reforms are necessary to promote ethical values and address the challenges faced by school administrators.
- Government in addressing the financial constraint requires a commitment to providing adequate funding and resources to support the school's ethical mission.

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