



ETHICS AND VALUES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA



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Abstract

This study investigates the role of ethics and values in the management of higher education institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria, and their contribution to sustainable national development. Specifically, it aims to examine how ethics influence management practices, assess the impact of institutional values on administrative effectiveness, and evaluate the contribution of ethical and value-based management to sustainable development in tertiary institutions within the state. The study population comprised staff from three major tertiary institutions: University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, totaling 10,700 staff members. Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample size of 386 was determined, with questionnaires purposively administered to academic and non-academic staff in administrative roles. Data collection employed a structured questionnaire with a 4-point Likert scale, yielding a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.84. Data analysis was conducted with the aid of IBM SPSS Statistics version 27, using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation to test three null hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level. Findings reveal significant positive relationships between ethics and management effectiveness, institutional values and administrative performance, and ethical management with sustainable national development. The study concludes that ethics and values are crucial to the effective management of higher education and are vital drivers for sustainable national development in Rivers State. Despite these positive influences, challenges persist in uniformly applying ethical standards across all administrative levels. Consequently, the study recommends strengthening ethical training, institutionalizing value-based management practices, and integrating ethics into governance frameworks to enhance administrative accountability and promote sustainable development in higher education.

Keywords: *Ethics, institutional values, higher education management, administrative effectiveness, sustainable national development.*

Introduction

Higher education is widely acknowledged as a critical driver of national development, innovation, and socio-economic transformation. In Nigeria, as in many developing countries, the quality and effectiveness of higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly being scrutinized, not only in terms of academic excellence but also in relation to the ethical and value-driven practices underpinning their management. The nexus between ethics, values, and educational management has gained renewed attention in light of persistent issues such as corruption, leadership failure, poor resource allocation, declining academic standards, and general societal moral decay (Omoniyi, 2013; Obanya, 2014). These challenges call for a reassessment of the ethical foundations and core values guiding the governance and operations of HEIs in Nigeria, especially in their role in fostering sustainable national development. Ethics refers to a system of moral principles that govern the behavior of individuals and organizations. It is the discipline concerned with what is morally good and bad, right and wrong (Fagothey, 2000). In the context of education, ethics involves the application of these moral principles in decision-making processes, professional conduct, policy implementation, and institutional behavior (Strike & Soltis,



2009). Values, on the other hand, are enduring beliefs or ideals shared by members of a culture about what is good or desirable and what is not. They influence behavior and serve as broad guidelines in all situations (Schwartz, 1992). In educational institutions, values such as integrity, accountability, equity, excellence, and respect form the basis for ethical practice and institutional credibility (Ajayi, 2016). Management in higher education refers to the planning, organizing, leading, and controlling of academic and administrative resources to achieve institutional goals. Effective educational management must integrate ethical principles and values into leadership styles, administrative procedures, and pedagogical practices (Adepoju, 2018).

The absence of ethics in the management of higher education can lead to consequences such as examination malpractices, favoritism in staff promotion, embezzlement of funds, falsification of academic records, and the general erosion of trust in educational institutions (Ogbogu, 2011; Okebukola, 2020). Such unethical practices hinder the capacity of HEIs to produce well-rounded graduates equipped with the competencies and character necessary for meaningful contributions to national development. Sustainable national development is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987). It encompasses economic growth, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and strong institutions governed by the rule of law and ethical standards (United Nations, 2015). In Nigeria, achieving sustainable development hinges heavily on the quality of education and the values instilled in the youth. HEIs are expected to serve as incubators for ethical leadership, innovative thinking, and national rebirth. However, these institutions can only fulfill this transformative role if they are themselves managed with a high level of ethical consciousness and value-orientation (Ibukun, 2009; Nwadiani, 2010). The significance of exploring ethics and values in the management of higher education is underscored by the increasing decline in public trust and confidence in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Reports of sexual harassment, bribery, mismanagement of funds, lack of transparency, and the politicization of academic appointments have become commonplace (Adeosun & Oladipo, 2017). These vices not only undermine institutional effectiveness but also perpetuate a culture of impunity and mediocrity among graduates. A society cannot expect to achieve meaningful development when its institutions of higher learning are plagued by unethical practices and value disorientation. Moreover, ethics and values provide the framework for responsible leadership, effective policy implementation, and accountability in higher education. Embedding these elements into the core of educational management promotes a culture of excellence, discipline, and innovation—qualities essential for nation-building. The study of ethics and values in this domain thus holds critical importance for re-engineering the Nigerian educational system toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2016). Therefore, the essence of the study is to examine Ethics and Values in the Management of Higher Education for Sustainable National Development in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Statement of Problems

The management of higher education institutions in Nigeria faces critical challenges stemming from a persistent erosion of ethics and a decline in core institutional values. These issues have significantly undermined the credibility, effectiveness, and developmental impact of the nation's tertiary institutions. Despite the crucial role of higher education in driving sustainable national development, the absence of strong ethical principles and value-based management has led to widespread inefficiencies and declining academic integrity. One of the foremost problems is the prevalence of unethical practices in educational management, such as favoritism, nepotism, bribery, falsification of academic records, embezzlement of funds, sexual harassment, and manipulation of admissions and grading systems. These unethical actions compromise institutional credibility and hinder the achievement of academic excellence (Ogbogu, 2011; Okebukola, 2020).

Secondly, there is a lack of institutional commitment to core values such as accountability, integrity, transparency, discipline, and excellence. Many higher education institutions have failed to integrate these values into their administrative processes, decision-making structures, and leadership frameworks. This deficiency has resulted in weak governance systems, diminished public trust, and



poor service delivery in tertiary institutions (Ajayi, 2016). Another major concern is the inadequate ethical orientation of educational leaders and administrators, many of whom demonstrate limited understanding or commitment to value-based leadership. The failure to model ethical behavior at the top often cascades into systemic dysfunction, promoting a culture of impunity, mediocrity, and moral decay within campuses (Obanya, 2014; Nwadiani, 2010). Additionally, the disconnect between institutional management and the national goal of sustainable development poses a significant challenge. The ethical crisis in universities and colleges directly affects the quality of graduates, making them ill-equipped to contribute meaningfully to economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social transformation (UNESCO, 2016). When higher institutions neglect ethical education and value-based leadership, they fail in their mandate to nurture responsible citizens and innovative thinkers.

Furthermore, there is insufficient policy enforcement and regulatory oversight to ensure adherence to ethical standards in the management of higher education. Existing frameworks, such as those from the National Universities Commission (NUC), are often weakly implemented, allowing unethical behaviors to flourish unchecked (Adeosun & Oladipo, 2017). These issues collectively reveal a critical gap in the ethical and value-oriented management of Nigerian higher education institutions. If left unaddressed, they will continue to undermine the developmental goals of the country and perpetuate a cycle of academic dysfunction, moral decay, and institutional failure.

Thus, essence this study lies in understanding how the absence or weakness of ethics and values in the management of higher education has become a barrier to achieving sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

Therefore, the following objectives are raised to guide the study:

To examine the role of ethics in the management of higher education institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

To assess the influence of institutional values on administrative effectiveness in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

To evaluate how ethical and value-based management in higher education contributes to sustainable national development in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses, which were tested at the 0.05 significance level, were developed to guide the study:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between ethics and the management of higher education institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between institutional values and administrative effectiveness in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between ethical and value-based management and sustainable national development in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study population comprises staff members from three prominent tertiary institutions in Rivers State: the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT), Rivers State University (RSU), and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE). According to data from the UNIPORT Human Resources Department (2023), RSU Administration Office (2023), and IAUE Registrar's Office (2023), the estimated staff population in these institutions are 5,000, 3,200, and 2,500 respectively, bringing the total to 10,700. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula at a 0.05 significance level. The formula is stated as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$



Where; n= the sample size N= Population size e= level of significance, which is 0.05 Given the above formula, the sample size is computed as follows:

$$n = \frac{10,700}{1 + 10,700(0.05)}$$

$$n = \frac{10,700}{1 + 10,700 \times (0.0025)} = \frac{10,700}{1 + 26.75} = \frac{10,700}{27.75} = 385.59$$

Table 1: Sample Size Distribution of Staff in Selected Institutions in Rivers State:

S/N	School Name	Staff Population	Proportion (%)	Sample Size
1	University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT)	5,000	46.73%	180
2	Rivers State University (RSU)	3,200	29.91%	115
3	Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE)	2,500	23.36%	91
	Total	10,700	100%	386

Source: Field Survey, 2025; UNIPORT HR Department (2024); RSU Administration Office (2024); IAUE Registrar’s Office (2024).

A structured questionnaire was employed as the primary instrument for data collection, and purposive sampling was utilized to administer it specifically to academic and non-academic staff occupying administrative and managerial positions. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items in total: five items were developed to address each of the three research objectives, while six items were designed to test the hypotheses by capturing data on both dependent and independent variables. Each item in the questionnaire was measured using a 4-point Likert scale, with the following response options: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). This format was adopted to avoid neutral responses and ensure more decisive input from respondents. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted, and the results yielded a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.84, indicating a strong level of internal consistency. The data gathered from the field were analyzed with the aid of IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics, including percentage mean and standard deviation, were used to answer the research questions. The demographic data of respondents, especially their sex, were presented using graphical representations for clarity and ease of interpretation. Inferential analysis was carried out using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation technique to test the null hypotheses and to examine the significance and strength of the relationships between the variables. Additionally, the study was substantiated with secondary data sourced from scholarly articles, peer-reviewed journals, textbooks, and institutional reports. These sources provided a strong theoretical and empirical foundation to support the analysis and interpretation of the primary data collected.

Data Presentation

Table 2 : Distribution and Retrieval of Questionnaire from Selected Institutions in Rivers State

S/N	School Name	Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaires Retrieved
1	University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT)	180	172
2	Rivers State University (RSU)	115	110
3	Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE)	91	88
	Total	386	370

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

A total of 386 questionnaires were administered across the selected institutions using purposive sampling techniques. These were distributed among academic and non-academic staff with administrative and managerial responsibilities. Out of the 386 distributed copies, 370 were successfully retrieved and found usable for analysis, representing a high retrieval rate.

Data Analysis

Table 3: Age distribution of the respondents

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	220	59.5	59.5	59.5
	Female	150	40.5	40.5	100.0
	Total	370	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS output 2025

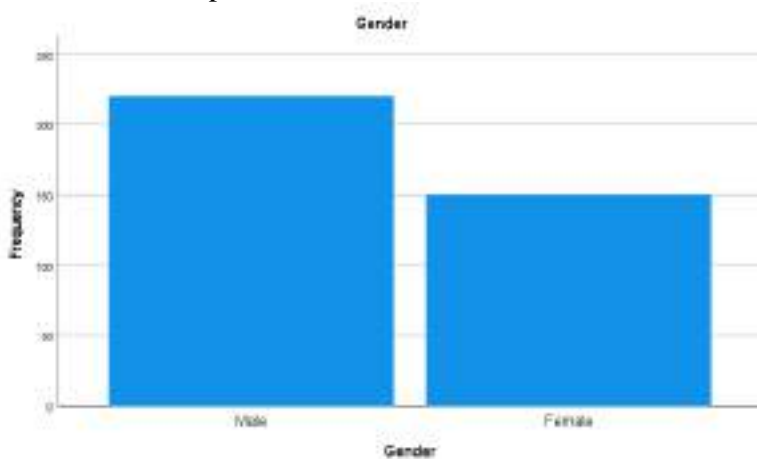


Figure 1 gender distribution of the respondents

Source: SPSS, OUTPUT 2025

Table 4 objective 1: To examine the role of ethics in the management of higher education institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

S/n	Items	SA(4) F%	A(3) F%	D(2) F%	SD(1) F%	Total	Mean	Stan.D
1	Ethical standards are strictly upheld by management in my institution.	202(54.6)	82(22.2)	60(16.2)	26(7.0)	370	3.24	0.97
2	Leadership decisions in my institution are guided by ethical principles.	190(51.4)	103(28.1)	61(16.5)	16(4.3)	370	3.26	0.99
3	Ethical misconduct is adequately addressed and sanctioned in this institution.	212(57.3)	50(13.5)	62(16.8)	46(12.4)	370	3.16	1.10

Source: SPSS output 2025



The analysis of Table 4 shows that 54.6% strongly agreed and 22.2% agreed that ethical standards are strictly upheld, with a mean of 3.24 and standard deviation of 0.97. Also, 51.4% strongly agreed and 2.8% agreed that leadership decisions are guided by ethical principles, with a mean of 3.26 and standard deviation of 0.99. Furthermore, 57.3% strongly agreed and 13.5% agreed that ethical misconduct is adequately addressed, with a mean of 3.16 and standard deviation of 1.10. These results indicate a high perception of ethics in institutional management, though with slight variations in response.

Table 5 objective 2: To assess the influence of institutional values on administrative effectiveness in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

S/N	Items	SA(4) F%	A(3) F%	D(2) F%	SD(1) F%	Total	Mean	Stan.D
4	The core values of my institution promote accountability and transparency.	148(40)	113(30.5)	61(16.5)	48(13)	370	2.98	1.04
5	Institutional values influence the efficiency of administrative processes.	182(49.2)	142(38.4)	36(9.7)	10(2.7)	370	3.34	0.76
6	Administrators in this institution uphold and model institutional values.	160(43.2)	7(20.8)	39(10.5)	94(25.4)	370	2.82	1.23

Source: SPSS output 2025

Table 5 reveals that 40% strongly agreed and 30.5% agreed that institutional core values promote accountability and transparency, with a mean of 2.98 and standard deviation of 1.04. About 49.2% strongly agreed and 38.4% agreed that institutional values influence administrative efficiency, reflected in a higher mean of 3.34 and a lower standard deviation of 0.76. However, only 43.2% strongly agreed and 20.8% agreed that administrators uphold institutional values, with a lower mean of 2.82 and a higher standard deviation of 1.23. This indicates moderate influence of institutional values on effectiveness, with some inconsistency in value modeling by administrators.

Table 6 objective 3: To evaluate how ethical and value-based management in higher education contributes to sustainable national development in Rivers State, Nigeria.

S/n	Items	SA(4) F%	A(3) F%	D(2) F%	SD(1) F%	Total	Mean	Stan.D
7	Ethical leadership in higher education enhances national development efforts.	204(55.1)	109(29.5)	35(9.5)	22(5.9)	370	3.34	0.88
8	Value-based management contributes to the long-term success of educational goals.	217(58.6)	87(23.5)	57(15.4)	9(2.4)	370	3.38	0.83
9	My institution's commitment to ethics	209(56.5)	66(17.8)	70(18.9)	25(6.8)	370	3.24	0.98



supports sustainable development in Nigeria.							
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Source: SPSS output 2025

Table 6 shows that 55.1% strongly agreed and 29.5% agreed that ethical leadership enhances national development, with a mean of 3.34 and a standard deviation of 0.88. Also, 58.6% strongly agreed and 23.5% agreed that value-based management supports long-term educational success, with a mean of 3.38 and a standard deviation of 0.83. Furthermore, 56.5% strongly agreed and 17.8% agreed that institutional ethics support sustainable development, with a mean of 3.24 and standard deviation of 0.98. Overall, ethical and value-based management is perceived to significantly contribute to sustainable national development in Rivers State.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 7 Ho1: There is no significant relationship between ethics and the management of higher education institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Correlations			
		h01 ind	ho1 dep
h01 ind	Pearson Correlation	1	.860**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	370	370
ho1 dep	Pearson Correlation	.860**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	370	370

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS output 2025

Table 7 shows a strong positive correlation (r = 0.860) between ethics and the management of higher education institutions in Rivers State, with a significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.01. This indicates a statistically significant relationship at the 0.01 level. Decision: Reject the null hypothesis (Ho1) and conclude that ethics significantly influence the management of higher education institutions in Rivers State.

Table 8 Ho2: There is no significant relationship between institutional values and administrative effectiveness in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria

Correlations			
		ho2 ind	ho2 dep
ho2 ind	Pearson Correlation	1	.959**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	370	370
ho2 dep	Pearson Correlation	.959**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	370	370

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS output 2025



Table 8 reveals a very strong positive correlation ($r = 0.959$) between institutional values and administrative effectiveness, with a significance value of 0.000, which is below the 0.01 threshold. This indicates a statistically significant relationship. Decision: Reject the null hypothesis (Ho2) and conclude that institutional values significantly influence administrative effectiveness in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Table 9 Ho3: There is no significant relationship between ethical and value-based management and sustainable national development in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Correlations			
		ho3 ind	ho3 dep
ho3 ind	Pearson Correlation	1	.965**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	370	370
ho3 dep	Pearson Correlation	.965**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	370	370

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS output 2025

Table 9 indicates a very strong positive correlation ($r = 0.965$) between ethical and value-based management and sustainable national development, with a significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.01. This confirms a statistically significant relationship. Decision: Reject the null hypothesis (Ho3) and conclude that ethical and value-based management significantly contributes to sustainable national development in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the study provide insightful evidence on the significant roles of ethics, institutional values, and value-based management in the administration of higher education and national development in Rivers State, Nigeria. Regarding objective one, data from Table 4 indicate that a majority of respondents perceive that ethical standards are strongly upheld in their institutions, with 54.6% strongly agreeing and 22.2% agreeing (mean = 3.24, SD = 0.97). Leadership decisions guided by ethical principles received similar agreement (51.4% SA, 2.8% A; mean = 3.26, SD = 0.99), while ethical misconduct is seen as adequately addressed (57.3% SA, 13.5% A; mean = 3.16, SD = 1.10). This suggests a generally positive perception of ethical management. These findings align with the assertions of Brown and Treviño (2006), who emphasize that ethical leadership fosters organizational trust and performance. The hypothesis test (Ho1) shows a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.860$, $p < 0.01$), confirming ethics significantly influence institutional management.

Objective two (Table 5) explores the influence of institutional values on administrative effectiveness. Results show that 40% strongly agreed and 30.5% agreed that core values promote accountability and transparency (mean = 2.98, SD = 1.04). Furthermore, 49.2% strongly agreed and 38.4% agreed institutional values enhance administrative efficiency (mean = 3.34, SD = 0.76). However, only 43.2% strongly agreed and 20.8% agreed that administrators uphold these values consistently (mean = 2.82, SD = 1.23), indicating some challenges in leadership modeling. This moderate yet significant influence resonates with Oduro and Sam (2021), who found that institutional values are vital for administrative efficacy but require consistent leadership demonstration. The hypothesis test (Ho2) confirms a very strong relationship ($r = 0.959$, $p < 0.01$) between institutional values and administrative effectiveness.

For objective three (Table 6), respondents strongly agreed that ethical leadership enhances national development (55.1% SA, 29.5% A; mean = 3.34, SD = 0.88) and that value-based management



contributes to long-term educational success (58.6% SA, 23.5% A; mean = 3.38, SD = 0.83). Moreover, 56.5% strongly agreed that institutional ethics support sustainable development (mean = 3.24, SD = 0.98). These findings support the idea that ethical governance in education promotes sustainable development, consistent with the framework by Sachs (2015) who links ethical management with sustainable progress. Hypothesis Ho3 testing showed a very strong correlation ($r = 0.965$, $p < 0.01$), affirming ethical and value-based management's role in national development.

Key Findings:

Ethics significantly influence the management of higher education institutions in Rivers State. Institutional values strongly impact administrative effectiveness in tertiary institutions. Ethical and value-based management significantly contributes to sustainable national development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that ethics and institutional values play a critical role in the effective management of higher education institutions in Rivers State. Ethical leadership not only enhances administrative effectiveness but also significantly contributes to sustainable national development. However, challenges remain in consistently modeling these values across all administrative levels. Therefore, reinforcing ethics and values within educational management is essential for achieving sustainable development goals in the region.

Recommendations

Educational institutions should strengthen ethical training and enforcement to ensure consistent adherence to core values across all administrative levels. Tertiary institutions must institutionalize value-based management practices to enhance administrative effectiveness and accountability. Policymakers should prioritize integrating ethics and values into higher education governance to support sustainable national development.

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