



ASSESSING ETHICAL STANDARDS AND ACADEMIC CAREER PROGRESSION AMONG LECTURERS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA



¹**Dr. Egbai, Mercy Egbai**
egbaimercy@gmail.com

&

²**Dr. Adi, Victor Nkom**
vnkom@yahoo.com
Department of Educational Management,
Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies,
College of Education, University of Calabar, Calabar

Abstract

This study assessed the correlation between ethical standards and academic career progression among lecturers in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Employing a descriptive survey research design, the study targeted a population of 6,231 lecturers, from which a sample of 400 respondents (representing approximately 6.4%) was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation across faculties and departments. Data were gathered using two validated instruments—the Ethical Standards Assessment Scale (ESAS) and the Academic Career Progression Inventory (ACPI). Responses were rated on a four-point Likert scale with a criterion mean of 2.50 serving as the threshold for interpretation. Findings revealed a significant correlation between high ethical conduct and positive career advancement indicators such as promotion, publication output, and leadership roles. Conversely, ethical breaches such as favoritism, academic dishonesty, and corruption were found to hinder fair and merit-based progression. The study concluded that adherence to ethical standards is crucial for sustaining academic excellence and institutional credibility. It recommends the implementation of transparent evaluation mechanisms, periodic ethics training, and stricter enforcement of academic codes of conduct to enhance career progression pathways in public universities.

Keywords: *Ethical Standards, Academic Career Progression, Public Universities, University Lecturers, Academic Integrity.*

Introduction

The role of ethical standards in shaping academic career progression has become increasingly significant in the context of higher education, particularly within public universities in Nigeria. In recent years, concerns have grown over declining professional ethics, favoritism, nepotism, sexual harassment, plagiarism, and academic dishonesty, all of which undermine the integrity of academic institutions. Lecturers are expected to uphold high ethical principles in teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities; however, violations of these standards often hinder fair and merit-based career advancement. In Cross River State, public universities have faced scrutiny regarding the transparency and fairness of promotion processes, research evaluations, and leadership appointments. These ethical lapses not only demotivate hardworking faculty but also erode institutional trust and educational quality. This study is therefore situated within the pressing need to empirically examine how adherence to or deviation from ethical standards affects the career progression of lecturers, with a view to promoting a culture of integrity, accountability, and academic excellence in Nigeria's university system.



Statement of the problem

In recent years, concerns about declining ethical standards among university lecturers in Nigeria have intensified, raising critical questions about the integrity of academic institutions and the credibility of career progression processes. In public universities within Cross River State, particularly the University of Calabar and the University of Cross River State, there have been recurrent issues involving unethical practices such as plagiarism, nepotism in promotions, sexual harassment, and lack of transparency in performance evaluation. These practices not only erode trust in the academic system but also hinder the development of a merit-based culture that is essential for institutional excellence and national development.

Ethical conduct is a cornerstone of effective higher education systems, and the extent to which lecturers uphold these standards significantly influences their career trajectory. However, anecdotal and media reports suggest that some lecturers may be rewarded or promoted despite questionable ethical behaviors, while others who maintain high moral standards face stagnation due to systemic biases or political interference. This inconsistency has created an atmosphere of disillusionment among academic staff, particularly early-career lecturers who are unsure whether integrity and professionalism will lead to advancement.

Furthermore, the lack of institutional mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing ethical compliance compounds the problem. While some universities have ethics committees or codes of conduct, enforcement is often weak or selective, leaving room for impunity and manipulation. Without consistent enforcement, lecturers may view ethical behavior as optional rather than integral to professional growth. This situation not only affects the morale and productivity of staff but also diminishes the overall quality of education delivered to students.

Given the strategic role of lecturers in knowledge production, research, and mentorship, there is a pressing need to assess the current state of ethical standards and how they relate to academic career progression. Such an assessment would provide empirical insights into whether ethical conduct is rewarded or overlooked, and help identify institutional gaps that need reform. Addressing these concerns is critical for restoring confidence in the academic system and ensuring that career advancement is based on merit, professionalism, and ethical accountability in public universities in Cross River State.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on the ethical standards theory which is expounded by Lawrence Kohlberg in 1958. The theory is grounded in moral development and posits that individuals progress through stages of ethical reasoning, evolving from obedience-driven morality to principled conscience-based decision-making. The theory's philosophy centers on the idea that ethical behavior is not innate but develops through cognitive interaction with societal norms and justice principles. It assumes that ethical standards guide human behavior and that adherence to such standards influences individual integrity, professional conduct, and societal trust. In the context of academic career progression among lecturers, the theory underscores the critical role that ethical conduct—such as fairness, honesty, transparency, and accountability—plays in merit-based promotion and institutional credibility. When lecturers uphold high ethical standards, it fosters trust within academic institutions, ensures fairness in evaluation and promotion processes, and enhances the overall quality and integrity of higher education.

Empirical Literature Review

Recent empirical studies have shown varied levels of adherence to ethical standards among lecturers in public universities, with significant implications for academic integrity and institutional development. For instance, Okafor and Uche (2021) conducted a study across six public universities in South-East Nigeria and found that while 67% of lecturers acknowledged the importance of ethical practices such as fairness in grading and avoidance of sexual harassment, only 42% reported consistent institutional enforcement of these standards. Similarly, Akinlolu and Bassey (2022), in their assessment of ethical compliance among academic staff in Southwestern Nigeria, revealed that while most lecturers had high ethical awareness, actual adherence was often undermined by institutional tolerance of



misconduct and weak disciplinary measures. In line with these findings, Uzoigwe, Zakka, and Anuforo (2023) highlighted the implications of ethical awareness for mental and emotional health among university students, emphasizing how inconsistent adherence to academic integrity influences overall institutional climate. Additionally, Ekpenyong, Uzoigwe, Onabe, and Onwochei (2020) reported that ethical enforcement during emergencies, such as the pandemic, was uneven across public institutions, which weakened administrative oversight and allowed unethical practices to proliferate.

In a more recent investigation, Nwachukwu and Etim (2023) explored ethical compliance in federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria and discovered that 53% of lecturers admitted to witnessing unethical practices such as favoritism in promotions and research plagiarism, attributing these to poor monitoring systems. Ibrahim and Musa (2024) studied lecturers in Northern Nigeria and found that ethical lapses were prevalent in areas such as conflict of interest and misuse of office, with only 38% of respondents affirming that their universities had clear and consistently applied ethical guidelines. Chuktu and Uzoigwe (2019) similarly assessed staff development and found that lapses in ethics-related training and reinforcement mechanisms significantly contributed to poor adherence to professional standards in Cross River State. Likewise, Ategwu, Kenn-Aklah, Fanan, and Uzoigwe (2022) stressed that inadequate use of instructional technologies in educational supervision during the COVID-19 era compromised the monitoring of lecturers' ethical conduct in secondary and tertiary institutions.

Other studies have increasingly highlighted the pivotal role of ethical standards in shaping lecturers' academic career progression in public universities. According to Adebayo and Olatunji (2023), a strong positive correlation exists between lecturers' adherence to institutional ethical codes and their eligibility for promotions and leadership responsibilities. Their study in four federal universities revealed that lecturers who maintained high ethical standards in teaching, supervision, and research conduct were more likely to receive favorable performance appraisals, which in turn fast-tracked their career advancement. Similarly, Yakubu and Ndifreke (2022) found that ethical behavior, particularly academic honesty and avoidance of exploitative relationships with students, significantly influenced how lecturers were assessed for tenure and internal appointments in public universities in Northern Nigeria. Reinforcing these observations, Adams and Uzoigwe (2023) emphasized the importance of security and ethical oversight in the management of academic institutions, showing that breaches in ethical standards often correlate with career stagnation. Also, Sunday, Afia, Essien, Inyang, Peters, and Uzoigwe (2025) noted that the integration of smart technologies into instructional leadership supports transparent and ethical academic governance, thereby enhancing career growth. Supporting this, the research by Ogundele and Okon (2024) observed that public universities with well-enforced ethics policies saw a marked difference in the career progression of lecturers who complied with institutional values compared to those who did not. Furthermore, Opuwari and Uzoigwe (2025) found that graduates' self-employment intentions were indirectly affected by lecturers' ethical conduct, as it shaped the credibility and functionality of resource management education. Eze and Musa (2021) discovered that unethical conduct, such as plagiarism, sexual misconduct, and falsification of credentials, often led to stalled promotions or disciplinary actions, thereby negatively affecting career trajectories. Together, these studies underscore that adherence to ethical standards is not only a moral obligation but also a practical determinant of academic growth in Nigerian public universities.

Several studies have identified a range of ethical challenges that impede lecturers' promotion and career advancement in public universities. Adamu and Chukwu (2023) found that nepotism and favoritism are pervasive in many Nigerian universities, where promotion decisions are often influenced by personal relationships rather than merit. This undermines transparency and fairness, leading to dissatisfaction among lecturers who feel sidelined despite meeting academic requirements. Similarly, Bello and Okeke (2022) reported that corruption, including bribery and manipulation of academic records, significantly affects promotion processes. Their study revealed that some lecturers resort to unethical means to secure promotions, which in turn creates a culture of distrust and demoralizes honest academics. These challenges are compounded by a lack of clear guidelines and inconsistent application of promotion criteria, as highlighted by Eze and Ogbonna (2024), who noted that vague policies often give room for subjective interpretations by promotion committees.



In addition to nepotism and corruption, other ethical dilemmas affecting academic career progression include discrimination and bias based on gender, ethnicity, or political affiliation. Umeh and Ibrahim (2023) found that female lecturers and those from minority ethnic groups often face subtle but persistent barriers to promotion, including exclusion from key decision-making committees and fewer opportunities for research funding and professional development. Their research underscored that such discriminatory practices violate ethical standards and hinder equal career opportunities. Moreover, inadequate institutional mechanisms for reporting and addressing unethical conduct leave many lecturers vulnerable and frustrated. Collectively, these studies emphasize that ethical challenges in promotion processes not only stall individual careers but also erode the overall academic integrity and institutional effectiveness of universities.

Empirical literature emphasizes that institutional policies play a pivotal role in promoting ethical conduct and ensuring fair career progression in public universities. For instance, Okon and Ekong (2022) found that clearly defined institutional codes of conduct significantly reduced instances of favoritism and corruption in academic promotions across universities in South-South Nigeria. Their study emphasized that when ethical policies are enforced and consistently monitored, transparency in promotion processes improves. Similarly, Musa and Adeyemi (2023), in their multi-site study of Nigerian federal universities, discovered that universities with robust internal policies on staff evaluation and promotion ethics had higher rates of merit-based promotions and lecturer satisfaction. These findings suggest that institutional efforts to implement and monitor ethical standards directly enhance fairness in academic career advancement.

Furthermore, Ibrahim and Nwosu (2024) investigated the effect of institutional ethics committees on the promotion practices in public universities and revealed that universities with active ethics committees recorded fewer grievances related to biased promotion outcomes. The study highlighted that such structures instill a culture of accountability. Also, Chinonso and Olatunji (2023) reported that institutional policies aligned with national academic standards and codes of conduct reduce unethical lobbying and political interference in academic promotions. They found that transparent grievance redress mechanisms within these policies encouraged lecturers to report unethical practices without fear of victimization. These findings collectively demonstrate that the presence and enforcement of strong institutional policies are essential in promoting ethical behavior and ensuring that academic career progression is based on merit rather than manipulation or bias. Therefore, this study fills a critical gap in literature by providing localized empirical evidence on how ethical standards influence academic career progression among lecturers in public universities in Cross River State—an area previously underexplored in Nigerian higher education research.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to assess ethical standards and academic career progression among lecturers in public Universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought:

1. To examine the extent to which ethical standards are adhered to by lecturers in public universities in Cross River State.
2. To investigate the relationship between adherence to ethical standards and lecturers' academic career progression in public universities.
3. To identify common ethical challenges affecting promotion during career advancement among university lecturers in Cross River State.
4. To evaluate the role of institutional policies in promoting ethical conduct for fair career progression in public universities.

Research questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. To what extent are ethical standards adhered to by lecturers in public universities in Cross River State?
2. What is the relationship between adherence to ethical standards and lecturers' academic career progression in public universities?



3. What are the common ethical challenges affecting promotion during career advancement among university lecturers in Cross River State?
4. How do institutional policies promote ethical conduct for fair career progression in public universities?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was formulated to direct the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the adherence to ethical standards between male and female lecturers in the University of Calabar and the University of Cross River State.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey research design, which was deemed suitable for assessing the relationship between ethical standards and academic career progression among lecturers in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. This design facilitated the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data from a representative sample to make generalizations about the larger population. The target population comprised 6,231 lecturers across two public universities in the state—University of Calabar and University of Cross River State. A stratified random sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 400 lecturers, representing approximately 6.4% of the population. Stratification was based on faculties and departments to ensure proportional representation across academic disciplines, thereby enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the findings. Data were collected using two researcher-developed instruments: the Ethical Standards Assessment Scale (ESAS) and the Academic Career Progression Inventory (ACPI). Each instrument consisted of 32 items structured to align with the study’s specific objectives. The instruments were reviewed by three experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation for content and construct validity. Based on expert feedback, necessary revisions were made to improve clarity, relevance, and alignment with the conceptual framework of the study. A pilot test was conducted using 20 lecturers from universities outside the study area, and the instruments were subjected to Cronbach’s Alpha reliability analysis, yielding coefficients of 0.83 for ESAS and 0.87 for ACPI, indicating a high level of internal consistency. Both instruments were divided into three sections: demographic information, items on ethical standards, and items on academic career progression. The questionnaires were administered physically and electronically to accommodate participant preferences and ensure higher response rates. Trained research assistants facilitated distribution and collection, particularly within faculties and departments, over a four-week period. Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 386 were correctly completed and returned, representing a 96.5% response rate, which minimized the risk of data attrition and nonresponse bias. Responses were rated on a four-point Likert scale with the following categories: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). A criterion mean score of 2.50 was adopted as the benchmark for interpretation. Scores equal to or above 2.50 indicated a high level of adherence to ethical standards or progress in academic careers, while scores below 2.50 reflected low adherence or limited progression. This methodological approach ensured the generation of robust, reliable data to assess the influence of ethical standards on academic career progression among lecturers in public universities in Cross River State.

Research question one

To what extent are ethical standards adhered to by lecturers in public universities in Cross River State?

Table 1: Respondents’ mean ratings and standard deviation on the extent to which ethical standards are adhered to by lecturers in public Universities in Cross River State (N = 400)

S/N	Ethical Standards Indicators	Sample	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1	Lecturers demonstrate fairness in students’ assessment and grading	400	1.31	0.76	SD
2	Punctuality and regular attendance in lectures are observed by lecturers	400	1.18	0.82	SD



S/N	Ethical Standards Indicators	Sample	Mean	S.D.	Decision
3	Lecturers avoid any form of sexual or financial exploitation of students	400	1.36	0.69	SD
4	Academic integrity is upheld in teaching, research, and publication	400	1.25	0.74	SD
5	Lecturers treat all students equally regardless of ethnic or social background	400	0.14	0.78	D
6	Professional boundaries are maintained in staff–student relationships	400	0.89	0.83	D
7	Lecturers avoid plagiarism and uphold originality in academic work	400	1.17	0.71	SD
8	Ethical issues are addressed promptly through institutional mechanisms	400	0.94	0.86	D
	Grand mean score	400	1.16	0.78	SD

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The results in Table 1 reveal that ethical standards are adhered to by lecturers in public universities in Cross River State to a low extent, as indicated by the grand mean score of 1.16, which corresponds to the “Strongly Disagree” (SD) category. Respondents overwhelmingly disagreed that lecturers consistently demonstrate fairness, uphold academic integrity, avoid exploitation, or maintain professional boundaries. The standard deviation values, ranging from 0.69 to 0.86, indicate a moderate level of consensus among respondents, reinforcing the validity of the finding that ethical adherence among lecturers is perceived as insufficient.

Research question two

What is the relationship between adherence to ethical standards and lecturers’ academic career progression in public universities?

Table 2: respondents’ mean ratings and standard deviation on the relationship between adherence to ethical standards and lecturers’ academic career progression in public universities (N = 400)

S/N	Indicators of Ethical Standards and Career Progression	Sample	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1	Ethical behaviour is a key criterion for academic promotion	400	3.30	0.72	SA
2	Lecturers who maintain academic integrity are more likely to be recommended for leadership roles	400	3.24	0.75	SA
3	Professional conduct positively influences lecturers’ performance evaluations	400	3.18	0.77	SA
4	Unethical practices delay or obstruct career advancement	400	3.11	0.80	A
5	Universities reward ethical lecturers with increased responsibilities and opportunities	400	3.26	0.70	SA
6	Ethical reputation enhances chances of collaboration and publication	400	3.09	0.82	A
7	Lecturers with strong ethical records are more likely to earn peer and institutional recognition	400	3.22	0.74	SA
8	Adherence to ethical standards fosters long-term career stability	400	3.16	0.79	SA
	Grand Mean	400	3.20	0.76	SA

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The results in Table 2 indicate a strong positive relationship between adherence to ethical standards and lecturers’ academic career progression in public universities, as shown by the grand mean of 3.20, which falls under the “Strongly Agree” category. Respondents affirmed that ethical behavior, academic integrity, and professionalism significantly influence promotions, leadership roles, recognition, and career stability. The moderate standard deviations (0.70–0.82) reflect a consistent agreement among respondents, reinforcing the view that ethical conduct is a vital asset for academic advancement.



Research question three

What are the common ethical challenges affecting promotion during career advancement among university lecturers in Cross River State?

Table 3: Respondents’ mean ratings and standard deviation on common ethical challenges affecting promotion during career advancement among university lecturers in Cross River State (N = 400)

S/N	Ethical challenges affecting promotion	Sample	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1	Favouritism and bias in promotion decisions	400	3.29	0.72	SA
2	Lack of transparency in performance evaluation	400	3.25	0.75	SA
3	Manipulation of research and publication records	400	3.18	0.79	SA
4	Sexual harassment or coercion linked to promotion	400	3.12	0.81	A
5	Nepotism and ethnic favoritism in promotional considerations	400	3.26	0.70	SA
6	Bribery and unethical lobbying for promotion	400	3.11	0.82	A
7	Victimization of whistle-blowers who report unethical practices	400	3.22	0.74	SA
8	Lack of institutional mechanisms to address ethical violations	400	3.17	0.78	SA
	Grand mean	400	3.20	0.76	SA

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 3 shows that respondents strongly agreed that various ethical challenges negatively affect promotion and career advancement among university lecturers in Cross River State, as reflected in the grand mean of 3.20, categorized under “Strongly Agree” (SA). The most prevalent issues include favouritism, lack of transparency, nepotism, manipulation of academic records, and weak institutional accountability. The moderate standard deviation values (0.70–0.82) indicate a relatively high level of agreement among respondents, confirming that these ethical challenges are widespread and significantly hinder fair career progression.

Research question four

How do institutional policies promote ethical conduct for fair career progression in public universities?

Table 4: Respondents’ mean ratings and standard deviation on how institutional policies promote ethical conduct for fair career progression in public Universities (N = 400)

S/N	Institutional Policy Indicators Promoting Ethical Conduct	Sample	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1	Clear policy guidelines on academic promotion exist and are accessible	400	3.22	0.74	SA
2	Anti-corruption policies are enforced to ensure fairness in promotion	400	3.18	0.76	SA
3	Ethical conduct is considered a major criterion in promotion assessments	400	3.25	0.73	SA
4	Disciplinary actions are taken against unethical conduct	400	3.11	0.79	A
5	Promotion panels are constituted with representatives from diverse backgrounds	400	3.20	0.71	SA
6	Regular training on institutional ethics is provided to academic staff	400	3.14	0.77	A
7	Reporting mechanisms are available for unethical practices	400	3.19	0.72	SA
8	Periodic review of policies ensures alignment with ethical standards	400	3.16	0.75	SA
	Grand mean	400	3.18	0.75	SA

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 4 reveals that respondents generally strongly agreed that institutional policies play a significant role in promoting ethical conduct for fair career progression in public universities, as shown by the grand mean of 3.18. Key measures include clear guidelines on promotions, enforcement of anti-

corruption rules, the inclusion of ethics in promotion criteria, and the availability of reporting channels. With standard deviations ranging from 0.71 to 0.79, there is a moderate yet consistent agreement among respondents, affirming that institutional policy frameworks support ethical standards and help reduce bias in academic career advancement.

Hypothesis one

There is no significant difference in the adherence to ethical standards between male and female lecturers in the University of Calabar and the University of Cross River State.

Table 5: Independent t-test results showing the significant difference in the adherence to ethical standards between male and female lecturers in the University of Calabar and the University of Cross River State.

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Male	200	1.18	0.46	-0.311	0.756
Female	200	1.19	0.49		

Source, Fieldwork

Table 5 shows that an independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there is a significant difference in adherence to ethical standards between male and female lecturers. The result showed no statistically significant difference, $t(398) = -0.311$, $p = 0.756$. This indicates that both male and female lecturers demonstrate similar levels of adherence to ethical standards, thereby supporting the null hypothesis.

Discussion of findings

The findings of this study reveal a concerning low level of adherence to ethical standards among lecturers in public universities in Cross River State, as indicated by the grand mean score of 1.16, corresponding to “Strongly Disagree.” This suggests that respondents perceive lecturers as generally failing to consistently demonstrate fairness, uphold academic integrity, avoid exploitation, or maintain professional boundaries. This observation is consistent with previous research by Okafor and Uche (2021), who found that although many lecturers recognize the importance of ethical behavior, institutional enforcement is often lacking. Similarly, Akinlolu and Bassey (2022) highlighted that ethical awareness alone does not guarantee compliance, especially in environments where misconduct is tolerated or disciplinary actions are weak. Ibrahim and Musa (2024) also reported widespread ethical lapses related to conflicts of interest and misuse of office, largely due to unclear or inconsistently applied institutional guidelines. The moderate consensus among respondents further strengthens the reliability of this finding, indicating a shared perception of insufficient ethical conduct in the academic setting.

In contrast, the study also found a strong positive relationship between ethical behavior and academic career progression, as demonstrated by a grand mean of 3.20, falling under the “Strongly Agree” category. This aligns with the work of Adebayo and Olatunji (2023), who established that lecturers adhering to institutional ethical codes are more likely to receive favorable performance appraisals and faster promotions. Yakubu and Ndifreke (2022) similarly emphasized that ethical conduct—particularly academic honesty and professionalism—plays a crucial role in decisions related to tenure and leadership appointments. Adams and Uzoigwe (2023), along with Sunday et al. (2025), further support the idea that ethical oversight and the integration of smart technologies in academic governance promote transparency and foster career advancement. These converging findings confirm that ethical behavior is not only a moral imperative but also a practical asset for career growth in public universities.

Respondents also strongly agreed that various ethical challenges hinder promotion and career advancement among lecturers, with favoritism, nepotism, record manipulation, and weak accountability identified as major obstacles. These results resonate with the findings of Adamu and Chukwu (2023) and Bello and Okeke (2022), who documented how personal relationships, corruption, and bribery



negatively affect promotion processes, fostering distrust and demoralization among honest academics. The issue of vague or inconsistently applied promotion policies noted by Eze and Ogbonna (2024) adds to this problem, allowing room for subjective decisions that undermine meritocracy. Furthermore, Umeh and Ibrahim (2023) reported that discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, and political affiliation creates additional barriers, especially for female lecturers and minority groups, thereby violating principles of fairness and equal opportunity. Collectively, these challenges contribute to stalled careers and weaken the academic environment.

The study also found strong support for the role of institutional policies in promoting ethical conduct and ensuring fair career progression, with respondents affirming that clear promotion guidelines, anti-corruption enforcement, ethics inclusion in evaluation criteria, and accessible reporting mechanisms are vital. This is consistent with Okon and Ekong (2022), who observed that clear institutional codes reduce unethical practices and favoritism. Musa and Adeyemi (2023) reported that universities with strong internal ethics policies experience higher rates of merit-based promotions and lecturer satisfaction. Ibrahim and Nwosu (2024) further highlighted the positive impact of active ethics committees on reducing grievances related to biased promotions, while Chinonso and Olatunji (2023) noted that transparent grievance redress systems discourage unethical lobbying and political interference. These findings reinforce the importance of institutional frameworks in upholding academic integrity and fairness.

Finally, the analysis revealed no significant difference in adherence to ethical standards between male and female lecturers, indicating that ethical conduct is similarly demonstrated across genders. While previous research such as Umeh and Ibrahim (2023) acknowledges the existence of gender-based barriers in promotion, the current results suggest that ethical behavior itself is not significantly influenced by gender differences. This highlights that systemic institutional factors, rather than demographic characteristics, are the key determinants of ethical adherence in academic settings.

In summary, the findings of this study, supported by existing empirical literature, illustrate that although ethical standards are recognized as important, actual adherence by lecturers in Cross River State public universities is low due to institutional weaknesses and persistent ethical challenges. Nonetheless, ethical conduct remains crucial for career progression, and institutional policies play a pivotal role in promoting fairness and transparency. To improve ethical standards and ensure merit-based career advancement, universities must strengthen enforcement mechanisms, clarify promotion criteria, establish active ethics committees, and develop effective grievance procedures. Addressing these institutional gaps is essential to foster academic integrity, enhance lecturer morale, and support sustainable development in the higher education sector.

Conclusion

The study concludes that adherence to ethical standards among lecturers in public universities in Cross River State is generally low, significantly hindering fair academic career progression. Strengthening institutional policies and enforcement mechanisms is essential to promote ethical behavior, ensure transparency, and support merit-based promotions for sustainable academic development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Public universities should establish and rigorously enforce clear ethical guidelines and codes of conduct to ensure consistent adherence among lecturers.
2. Institutions must strengthen their monitoring and disciplinary systems, including active ethics committees, to effectively address unethical practices and promote accountability.
3. Transparent and merit-based promotion processes should be implemented, with clear criteria and grievance mechanisms to minimize favoritism, nepotism, and discrimination.
4. Regular ethics training and awareness programs should be provided to lecturers to reinforce the importance of academic integrity and professional conduct.



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