



INDISPENSABLE ROLE OF ETHICAL EDUCATION AMONG LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS: RE-ENGINEERING HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA



Owen-Amadi, Patience Ogechi

Department of Educational Management,
Faculty of Education University of Port Harcourt,
Port Harcourt

&

Ezeala, Irochi Lazarus

Department of Educational Management,
Faculty of Education University of Port Harcourt,
Port Harcourt

Abstract

This paper critically examined indispensable role of ethical education among leaders and followers: re-engineering administration of higher institutions in Nigeria. Drawing from the topic, ethics are the principles that guide to make a positive impact through decisions and actions, which plays an important role not only in our personal lives but also in our possessions. From the study, re-engineering higher institution involves fundamentally rethinking and radically redesigning the structure, processes and systems of universities and colleges to achieve significant improvements in key performance areas. Therefore, ethics encompasses the moral principles and values that guide the conduct of individuals and institutions within the academic sphere. To concur with the above, Institutional leadership and individuals should see credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability as important aspects of ethics in higher institutions. There are ethical theories that guided the work and advocate a holistic re-engineering of ethical consciousness within higher institutions. The theories of this study anchored in Kohlberg's stages of moral development, Bazerman's behavioral ethics and supported by UNESCO education reports, the discourse evaluates the current ethical lapses and explores strategies for instilling sustainable value systems across higher institutions in Nigeria. The study concluded that Professional ethics in higher institution is a moral duty to follow in day-to-day professional life. These professional ethics is essential for building trust and credibility with clients, colleagues and the wider community. It was suggested that Nigeria Higher Institutions should collaborate with UNESCO, World Bank, and other international bodies for funding ethical re-engineering administration of higher institutions in Nigeria.

Key Words: Ethics, Credibility, Dependability, Conformability, Transferability, Re-engineering

Introduction

Ethics is based on 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. Ethics (also called moral philosophy), the discipline concerned with what is morally good and bad and morally right and wrong, the term is also applied to any system or theory of moral values or principles. Ajayi et al (2019) believed that ethics deals with such questions at all levels. Ethical comes from the Greek Word ethos means "moral character" and describes a person or behavior as right in the moral sense truthful, fair and honest. Sometimes the word is used for people who follow the moral standards of their profession. In the legal context, ethics defines how individuals choose to interact with one another.

National Ethics and Integrity Policy Framework. (2020) opined that ethics are the principles that guide to make a positive impact through our decisions and actions. Ethics play an important role not only in our personal lives but also in our possessions. Ethics are defined as rules of conduct and has

been defined as a state of mind and emotions affecting the attitude and willingness to work. Ethics is the degree of enthusiasm and willingness with which all the workers of an organization set out to perform the assigned work or responsibility with zeal and sincerity (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2021). This paper objectively highlighted the importance of handling the issues of ethics in higher education and the confrontation of their social responsibilities in relation to institutional administration. There is need to implementation of the legal and ethical responsibilities has to do directly with the stage of development and the image of civil society. Ethics today is very difficult, one of the effective ways to maintain a high level of morale and integrity among public officials is the setting up of good professional standards.

The 21st-century global knowledge economy demands more than technological advancement and curricular expansion it calls for an ethical renaissance. As nations grapple with moral erosion, corruption, leadership deficits, and weakened institutional integrity, education particularly higher institution must transcend knowledge transfer to become a cradle of ethical reformation. In Africa, and Nigeria in particular, the call for ethical and values education re-engineering is not merely timely, it is urgent. The foundational assumption is clear: national development cannot thrive where moral bankruptcy prevails (Kohlberg, 2016).

Ethical education encompasses all aspects of education that relate to ethical considerations, aiming to instill responsible and meaningful learning. It involves teaching students about right and wrong (ethics) and the guiding principles that shape their actions (values). Components are promoting ethical reflection, understanding ethical principles, developing critical thinking, and fostering a positive classroom environment (Okebukola, 2020).

Re-engineering Higher Institution

Re-engineering higher institution involves fundamentally rethinking and radically redesigning the structure, processes, and systems of universities and colleges to achieve significant improvements in key performance areas. This includes everything from curriculum and teaching methods to administrative processes and technology integration, all with the goal of better serving students and the broader community in a rapidly changing world.

Core Concepts of Re-engineering Higher institutions: (Omole & Odeyemi, 2021)

Fundamental Rethinking

Re-engineering requires moving beyond incremental improvements and challenging the core assumptions and practices of traditional higher institution.

Radical Redesign

This involves not just tweaking existing processes, but fundamentally redesigning them to achieve dramatic improvements in efficiency, effectiveness, and student outcomes.

Strategic Alignment

Re-engineering should be aligned with the overall strategic goals of the institution and the evolving needs of the industry and society.

Focus on Outcomes

The redesign process should prioritize student learning outcomes and ensure that graduates are well-prepared for the demands of the modern world.

Integration of Technology

Information technology plays a crucial role in re-engineering, enabling new approaches to teaching, learning, and administration.

Continuous Improvement



Re-engineering is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process of assessment, adaptation, and improvement.

Ethics in Higher institution

In higher institution, ethics encompasses the moral principles and values that guide the conduct of individuals and institutions within the academic sphere. It involves fostering a culture of integrity, honesty, and responsibility, ensuring fair and equitable practices in teaching, research, and administration. Ultimately, ethics in higher institution aims to cultivate responsible citizens and professionals who contribute positively to society (Onuka & Amoo, 2021).

It will be readily admitted that the prevailing standards of Ethical behavior of Public employees in our country are not high enough, and demand considerable improvement. Disclosures and demand considerable improvement. Disclosures of many 'affairs' and 'scams' involving both political and administrative executives have Shaken the confidence of the people in the morality and rectitude of their rulers. The charges of corruption favoritism, nepotism and many more, and there is demand for the zero tolerance to deal with such cases. The expanding size of the government and the increasing impact of it on people's lives call for high ethical standards on the part of Government employees. Moreover, Public official are expected to furnish examples of correct behavior as their actions have a necessary impact on the character of the community.

Key aspects of ethics in higher institution: (Tade, 2023)

Academic Integrity

This includes upholding honesty in academic work, avoiding plagiarism, and promoting responsible research practices.

Professional Ethics

This focuses on the conduct of faculty, staff, and students in their roles, emphasizing ethical decision-making and responsible behavior.

Ethical Culture

This refers to the overall environment within the institution, promoting values like respect, fairness, and accountability in all interactions.

Social Responsibility

Higher institution institutions play a role in shaping students' understanding of their responsibilities to society and promoting ethical leadership.

Ethical Frameworks

Institutions may develop specific codes of ethics or guidelines to address ethical dilemmas and promote responsible practices.

Promoting Ethical Conduct

This includes providing education and training on ethical principles, fostering open discussions about ethical issues, and establishing mechanisms for reporting and addressing ethical violations.

Addressing Ethical Lapses

Higher institution institutions must have clear procedures for dealing with unethical conduct, ensuring accountability and promoting a culture of integrity.

Importance of Ethics in Higher institution:

Maintaining Academic Standards



Ethical conduct ensures the validity and reliability of academic work, safeguarding the value of credentials.

Fostering Trust

Ethical practices build trust among students, faculty, staff, and the wider community.

Shaping Responsible Citizens

Exposure to ethical principles and dilemmas prepares students to make sound judgments and contribute to a just and equitable society.

Promoting Research Integrity

Ethical considerations are crucial in research, ensuring responsible data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Enhancing Institutional Reputation

Institutions with strong ethical cultures are more likely to be respected and trusted.

By prioritizing ethics, higher institution institutions can fulfill their mission of preparing students to be knowledgeable, responsible, and ethical members of society.

Empirical studies reveal alarming ethical challenges in higher institution institutions ranging from examination malpractice, sexual harassment, academic fraud, certificate racketeering, nepotism in appointments, to research plagiarism (Tade, 2023). The implication is that these institutions risk becoming breeding grounds for societal dysfunction rather than platforms for national transformation. According to UNESCO (2020), Africa remains one of the regions where ethical training is either absent or superficially addressed in teacher training, curriculum development, and institutional management. The Nigerian university system, although boasting of rich intellectual traditions, has been encumbered by moral compromises and managerial inefficiencies. The 2021 National Universities Commission (NUC) policy audit observed that less than 35% of Nigerian universities actively implement formal ethical orientation for students and staff. UNESCO. (2016) identified that credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability are important aspects of ethics in higher institutions.

Credibility

Credibility is simply the quality of being believed or accepted as true, real, or honest. Personal credibility is about trust, respect, and being believable. A leader's credibility is typically defined in terms of the degree of employee confidence, belief, and acceptance towards the leader. While personal credibility applies to everyone in the workplace, it is especially important for leaders. Why is that? Because, if your employees do not believe in you as their leader, you just cannot be effective as a leader. Under these circumstances, employees will simply comply with rules but will not work towards the common goal and will not put in their best efforts. Their morale will be low and customer service will be poor. Lack of leadership credibility creates employee distrust and disengagement thus impacting the reputation of the organisation and also its profitability. Studies have shown that the credibility of the leader influences employee engagement which in turn impacts the organization's productivity and performance UNESCO. (2020).

While credibility has many facets, in most cases it is judged simply by comparing what you say with what you do in your day-to-day behaviour. Leaders that say one thing but do another won't have the authenticity and credibility that's essential to be an effective leader in today's environment. But being trustworthy is not the only contributor to your credibility as a leader. The other very important component of credibility is the perceived competence of the leader – i.e., people's faith in your knowledge, skills, and ability to do your job and get the job done as a leader.

Employees form such opinions or perceptions not just through direct interaction with you but also through indirect observation of your actions and performance. And these perceptions are extremely important in this hyper connected age, when vast amounts of information about you is easily accessible



in the public domain. So basically, your credibility as a leader is important because employees want to have the assurance that when you are managing them and assessing their performance, you are yourself competent and trustworthy.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the ability to be counted on to meet commitments and deadlines. Being in a leadership position often means that your actions have direct consequences for those around you. As such, it is important to consistently follow through on the commitments you make to others and to honour agreed upon timelines. Not only does this facilitate trusting relationships between you and your direct reports, it may also represent a key enabler of employee engagement and productivity. When employees know they can rely on their leader, it allows them to carry out their work confidently and effectively. This is why dependability has been found to be particularly useful during times of change, as dependable leaders can help mitigate the ill effects of uncertainty by providing employees with stability and consistency.

Showing colleagues, direct reports, and clients that they can depend on you is a critical leadership skill. Great leaders are dependable. Research has shown that dependability is a key factor in performance, as leaders who are dependable are more inclined to ensure the timely execution of strategic initiatives. Leaders also set the tone for which workplace behaviors are desirable and acceptable. Therefore, leaders who demonstrate dependability in their own work communicate that keeping up with deadlines is a valued quality that others should also aspire to. A culture of dependability fosters high achievement across the organization, and research shows that employees who are more dependable perform better than their less dependable coworkers.

Conformability

Leadership "conformability" generally refers to a leader's capacity to adapt their approach, style, or behavior to different situations and followers, fostering a positive and productive environment. It encompasses flexibility, empathy, and the ability to recognize and respond to diverse needs and preferences within a group. Essentially, it's about being able to adjust one's leadership style to effectively guide and motivate different individuals and teams, rather than adhering rigidly to a single approach.

A conformable leader understands that different situations and individuals require different approaches. They can shift from a directive style to a more collaborative or supportive style as needed. This involves being open to new ideas, feedback, and changing circumstances. A conformable leader doesn't get stuck in their ways, but rather adjusts their strategies based on the context. Understanding and responding to the needs and emotions of followers is crucial for effective leadership. Conformable leaders are attuned to the perspectives of others and tailor their communication and support accordingly. The ability to assess the situation, understand the dynamics of the group, and choose the most appropriate leadership style is a key aspect of conformability. This includes recognizing when a more hands-on approach is needed or when a more hands-off approach is appropriate UNESCO. (2020).

Conformable leadership aims to create a positive and engaging environment where individuals feel motivated and supported. By adapting their approach, leaders can foster trust, commitment, and a sense of shared purpose. A leader might use a more authoritative style when dealing with a crisis or when working with new, inexperienced team members. In contrast, they might adopt a more collaborative approach when working with experienced team members on complex projects. Conformable leadership can lead to increased employee engagement, improved team performance, and a more positive and inclusive work environment.

Transferability

Leadership transferability refers to the concept that leadership skills acquired in one context can be effectively applied and utilized in other, potentially very different, situations or industries. It highlights the idea that certain core leadership abilities, like communication, motivation, and problem-solving, are valuable across various settings.

Certain skills are consistently recognized as transferable, including (UNESCO, 2020).

1. **Communication:** The ability to clearly convey information and ideas is crucial in any team or organization.
2. **Motivation:** Inspiring and encouraging others to achieve goals is a universal leadership trait.
3. **Delegation:** Effectively assigning tasks and responsibilities is essential for efficient teamwork.
4. **Problem-solving:** The capacity to identify and resolve issues is valuable in any leadership role.
5. **Strategic Thinking:** The ability to plan and make decisions for the long-term benefit of the group is a key transferable skill.
6. **Adaptability:** The capacity to adjust to changing circumstances and new challenges is vital in any context.
7. **Teamwork:** Working collaboratively with others to achieve common goals is a fundamental leadership skill.

In today's dynamic and fast-paced world, the need for effective leadership is more crucial than ever before. Leadership, as a transferable skill, has the power to transcend industries and fields, enabling individuals to drive change and promote safety. While management focuses on maintaining processes and ensuring efficiency, leadership takes a broader approach, inspiring teams, fostering innovation, and cultivating a culture of safety and growth. Change is a constant force that impacts all industries. Whether it's technological advancements, market shifts, or organizational transformations, the ability to lead through change is vital. While management often focuses on maintaining stability and ensuring operations run smoothly, leadership thrives in navigating uncertainty and driving successful transitions.

Leadership encourages individuals to embrace change by inspiring vision and purpose. Effective leaders create a compelling narrative around change, fostering a sense of urgency and motivating their teams to adapt and innovate. They empower others by delegating authority, fostering collaboration, and promoting open communication. By developing leadership skills, professionals can become catalysts for change in any industry or field, driving innovation and propelling organizations forward.

Theoretical Review

Theory of Moral Development

This study is anchored on Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, which postulates that moral reasoning progresses through six developmental stages under three major levels pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional (Kohlberg, 2016). His framework is crucial in understanding how ethical reasoning can be cultivated progressively within educational systems.

Behavioral Ethics Model

Bazerman's Behavioral Ethics Model, which reveals the psychological gaps between knowing what is right and doing what is right. It exposes how unconscious biases and institutional culture contribute to ethical failures (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2021). UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Reports, which affirm that education for sustainable development must include moral literacy, civic values, empathy, and ethical reasoning as core competencies for learners (UNESCO, 2016). Nigeria's National Ethics and Integrity Policy Framework (2020), which provides a blueprint for instilling values such as human dignity, discipline, integrity, patriotism, and professionalism in public life including educational systems.

Empirical Review



A survey by Omole and Odeyemi (2021) involving 600 undergraduates across six Nigerian universities revealed that 71% admitted to engaging in or witnessing examination malpractice. A qualitative study by Okebukola (2020) emphasized the lack of institutionalized ethical frameworks in university administration as a major catalyst for academic fraud. Tade (2023) conducted ethnographic research in South-West Nigeria, establishing strong links between poor ethical cultures in universities and declining societal trust in tertiary education outputs. A cross-national study by Ajayi et al. (2019) on “Ethics and Governance in Africa identified institutional leadership behavior as the most critical predictor of ethical compliance.

Conclusion

Professional ethics in higher education is a moral duty to follow in our day-to-day professional life. These professional ethics is essential for building trust and credibility with clients, colleagues and the wider community. It also helps to maintain the integrity and reputation of the profession, and ensures that professionals are held to account for their action. When public administrators act ethically, they demonstrate a commitment to transparency and accountability which can be help to prevent corruption and ensure that decisions are made in the best interest of the students. Finally ethics in higher education administration promotes the developments of a strong organizational culture for healthy environment in educational system.

Suggestions

1. Policy Reforms: The Federal Ministry of Education should make ethical literacy mandatory across all higher institution.
2. Capacity Building: Train faculty on ethical facilitation using contextual and experiential learning methods.
3. Digital Monitoring Systems: Leverage technology to detect and prevent academic dishonesty.
4. Global Collaboration: Nigeria Higher Institutions should collaborate with UNESCO, World Bank, and other international bodies for funding ethical re-engineering projects.
5. Stakeholder Engagement: Alumni, employers, religious bodies, and civil society should be co-opted into ethics mainstreaming processes.

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