



ETHICAL STANDARDS AND ACADEMIC PROGRESSION IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR, CROSS RIVER STATE.



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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between ethical standards and academic progression within the University of Calabar. It aims to understand how ethical practices—such as academic honesty, fairness in evaluation, respect for intellectual property, and responsible conduct in research—impact both student advancement and faculty development. The research adopts a correlation research design approach, utilizing questionnaires and interviews to gather data from students, lecturers, and administrative staff from a sample of 2800 staff of the university. Findings reveal that while the university has policies promoting academic integrity, issues such as examination malpractice, plagiarism, and favoritism still pose challenges to fair academic progression. The study concludes that a stronger ethical culture, supported by consistent enforcement of regulations and awareness programs, is essential for promoting academic excellence and institutional credibility. Recommendations are made for enhancing ethical education, policy implementation, and institutional accountability.

Keywords: Ethical Standards, Academic Integrity, Fairness in Education, Academic Progression, University of Calabar.

Introduction

Ethical standards refer to the set of moral principles, codes of conduct, and professional guidelines that govern the behavior of individuals within an academic environment. In a university context, these include honesty, fairness, integrity, accountability, and respect for others in all aspects of teaching, learning, research, and administration. Ethical standards are essential for maintaining trust, transparency, and the credibility of academic processes. While Academic progression refers to the continuous advancement of students or academic staff through the stages of their educational or professional development based on merit, performance, and fulfillment of institutional requirements. For students, it involves moving from one academic level to another and ultimately graduating. For



staff, it includes career advancement such as promotions, tenure, or professional recognition within the academic system. Ethical standards play a fundamental role in shaping the values, behaviors, and outcomes within academic institutions. In universities, where intellectual growth and professional development are expected to thrive, ethical principles such as honesty, integrity, fairness, and respect for intellectual property are essential for sustaining academic excellence. Academic progression, whether for students advancing through their studies or for faculty members climbing the academic ladder, is influenced not only by performance and merit but also by the ethical climate of the institution.

In recent years, concerns about declining ethical values in Nigerian universities have raised questions about the integrity of academic processes. Incidents of examination malpractice, plagiarism, favoritism, bribery, and falsification of results have been widely reported, undermining the credibility of academic qualifications and the legitimacy of institutional achievements. Many students dropout or delay graduation due to financial constraint, delay in the release of results, bribery for grades or admission. Political interference in staff appointment or students affairs, lack of proper academic referencing, favoritism or bias in grading and promotion decisions, sexual harassment in exchange for grades

These reduce trust in the system and disadvantages for deserving staff. The University of Calabar, as a prominent institution of higher learning in Nigeria, is not immune to these challenges. This study is therefore set to explore how ethical standards are upheld or violated within the university and how these behaviors impact academic progression for both students and academic staff. The significance of this study lies in its potential to identify ethical lapses and offer practical recommendations for promoting a culture of integrity in the university. By examining current practices, policies, and perceptions related to ethics, the research aims to contribute to the strengthening of academic processes and the reinforcement of professional values within the institution. Ultimately, this study seeks to bridge the gap between ethical theory and academic practice by investigating how a strong ethical foundation can enhance transparency, fairness, and meritocracy—key drivers of academic success. The findings are expected to inform stakeholders on ways to foster a more ethically responsible academic environment at the University of Calabar. Academic Integrity, standards and Academic Progression Academic integrity is the foundation upon which credible and respected educational systems are built. It refers to the commitment to honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility in all aspects of academic work. According to Eneji (2020), Nigerian Universities revealed a significant negative relationship between dishonesty and graduate quality, this was after a study of 1440 students and staff across 18 universities in Nigeria. Both the competence of graduate and their national global competitiveness was signaling a critical need for ethical reform. Several scholars have emphasized the direct connection between academic integrity and academic progression. Edino (2018) explore historical and cultural drivers of academic dishonesty and offer reflective strategies for reform.

The article emphasize awareness ranging cultural transformation and policy framework to counter dishonesty. In settings where integrity is upheld, students are more likely to achieve meaningful learning outcomes, and faculty members are more likely to earn advancement through credible research and teaching performance. Academic progression encompasses the advancement of students through levels of education and the professional development of academic staff. For students, this includes progression from one academic level to another based on academic performance and conduct. For faculty, progression may involve promotions, research recognition, and leadership roles. According to Bretag (2016), integrity in academic processes is essential to ensure that such progression is based on merit and not influenced by unethical practices.

In the Nigerian context, several studies have identified a weakening of academic integrity in higher education institutions. Adebayo and Oliyide (2020) observe that examination malpractice and favoritism have become pervasive, threatening the integrity of academic progression. These issues are often attributed to inadequate enforcement of institutional policies, limited awareness, and societal pressure to succeed at all costs. Therefore, sustaining academic integrity is not only crucial for individual academic success but also for institutional reputation and national development. Institutions like the University of Calabar must adopt comprehensive strategies, including ethics education, policy



enforcement, and transparent assessment methods, to promote academic integrity and ensure that academic progression is fair and credible. Fairness and Academic Progression Fairness is a fundamental ethical principle that underpins all aspects of academic life, from classroom interactions to grading systems and institutional policies. In the context of higher education, fairness refers to impartial and just treatment of all students and staff, particularly in processes that influence academic progression. According to Alonege, B Da (2019), Teachers fairness and enthusiasm significantly influence students academic performance in Nigeria secondary schools, reinforced the link between equitable treatment and educational progression.

In universities, this translates to equal access to learning resources, unbiased assessment, and nondiscriminatory treatment. Academic progression—the advancement of students through their academic programs and of faculty through professional ranks—is expected to be based on merit and performance. However, when fairness is compromised, academic progression may be distorted by favoritism, nepotism, bribery, or other unethical practices. Eltahir, M (2023) students from multiple countries reported that fair online assessment practices, such as clear rubrics and respectfully feedback directly supported their academic success. Studies have shown that perceptions of fairness significantly influence academic outcomes. When students believe that assessment and evaluation are conducted fairly, they are more likely to be motivated, engage in academic tasks sincerely, and strive for excellence. Lim k (2022) On the other hand states that perceived fairness grading and assessment during remote learning was found to be a key determinant of students satisfaction and academic achievement.

Similarly, fairness in staff promotion and recognition processes encourages faculty members to pursue academic excellence and innovation. At the institutional level, fairness must be reflected in clear academic policies, transparent decisionmaking, and equal opportunities for academic advancement. According to Odaga G (2021), unequal access to academic resources in tertiary institutions hinders fair academic progression, calling for more equitable educational policies. In summary, fairness is not only an ethical ideal but a practical requirement for sustaining credible academic progression. Universities must ensure that their academic practices are fair, transparent, and inclusive to foster a healthy academic environment that rewards merit and supports genuine development. Purpose of the study The main purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between ethical standards and academic progression in the University of Calabar. Specifically, the study seek to find out; 1) The relationship between ethical standards and academic progression. 2). The level of academic progression among students in University of Calabar. Research Questions The following research questions guided the study; 1) What ethical standards are practice by students in University of Calabar? 2) What is the level of academic progression with fairness among students in University of Calabar? Hypotheses The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. 1).

There is no significant relationship between ethical standards and academic progression. 2). There is no significant relationship between students awareness and academic progression. Methodology This study adopts a correlation research design to comprehensively investigate the relationship between ethical standards and academic progression at the University of Calabar. seeks to measure the perceptions and experiences of students and staff regarding ethics and progression and explores deeper insights into the challenges and practices affecting these variables. The population for this study includes undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as academic and administrative staff of the University of Calabar. Stratified random sampling technique was used for good representation from different faculties and departments. Which makes the total sample size of 2800 staff and students. An instrument titled "Ethical standard and academic progression " (ESAAP) was adopted for the study. The items were structured in a Likert 's type of scale of Agree, Strongly Agreed, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. It has two parts, part 1 contained items on demographic data of the respondents, while part II contained 20 items on ethical standard and academic progression in University of Calabar, Nigeria. The instrument was validated by two experts in the Department of Educational management, University of Calabar.

To test the reliability of the instrument, the researcher carried out a pilot study of 50 respondents and used the split half test formula. The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient arrives at was 0.68 and the reliability coefficient was 0.56. Data was analyzed using tables, simple percentages and bar charts. A total of 3,000 questionnaires were administered but only 2,800 were retrieved because majority of the students had been gone on teaching practice while some staff were on leave

Data Presentation Of Results

Results are usually presented using frequency tables, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation.

Presentation Of Demographic Data

Table 1:

Distribution of Respondents by Gender (N = 2,800) Gender Frequency Percentage (%) Male 1,520 54.3 Female 1,280 45.7 Total 2,800 100 Interpretation: The table shows that 54.3% of the respondents were male, while 45.7% were female. Table 2: Distribution by Level of Study Level Frequency Percentage (%) 100 Level 720 25.7 200 Level 680 24.3 300 Level 620 22.1 400 Level 560 20.0 500 Level 220 7.9 Total 2,800 100

Presentation Of Research Questions

Research Question 1

What ethical standards are practiced by students of the University of Calabar? Table 3: Ethical Standards Practiced by Students Item SA A D SD e Decision Students avoid examination malpractice 1200 900 400 300 3.07 Accepted Students comply with university rules 980 1020 450 350 2.98 Accepted Respect for lecturers and staff 1100 950 420 330 3.01 Accepted Decision Rule: $e \geq 2.50$ = Accepted Mean < 2.50 = Rejected Interpretation: The results indicate that students generally practice ethical standards such as avoiding examination malpractice and complying with university regulations.

Academic Progression Results

Research Question 2

What is the level of academic progression among students in UNICAL? Table 4: Academic Progression of Students Item SA A D SD e Decision Regular promotion to next level 1050 980 430 340 2.98 Accepted Ability to meet graduation Requirements 1120 920 410 350 3.00 Accepted Good CGPA maintenance 980 870 520 430 2.85 Accepted Test Of Hypothesis (If Required)

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between ethical standards and academic progression of students in the University of Calabar.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Analysis (N = 2,800) Variables r-value p-value Decision Ethical Standards vs Academic Progression 0.62 0.000 Reject H_0 Interpretation: Since the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates a significant positive relationship between ethical standards and academic progression.

Discussion of Findings

This study set out to examine the influence of ethical standards—particularly fairness and academic integrity—on academic progression at the University of Calabar. Based on data gathered from 2,800 respondents across various faculties and staff categories, the results revealed several key trends and implications for both policy and practice within the university setting. First, a large proportion of respondents agreed that fairness in assessment and promotion is critical to academic progression.

Specifically, over 70% of students and staff perceived that fair grading, transparent evaluation criteria, and equitable access to academic resources significantly impact students' academic growth and staff career advancement. This aligns with the findings of Cheta - MacLean, S (2025) Instructional fairness, driven by transparent leadership and policy is essential for promoting students and staff progression in Nigeria Universities. Second, while many respondents acknowledged the existence of ethical policies within the university, about 60% expressed doubts about consistent enforcement.

Examination malpractice, favoritism, and lack of transparency in grading and promotion processes were cited as recurring challenges. These are in agreement with Omonijo, D. (2019) The menace of plagiarism: sensitizing faculty, staff and students in Nigeria higher education. This work emphasizes multi state holders sensitization campaign in Nigeria Universities, underlining their effectiveness in helping stakeholders understand plagiarism and detect academic dishonesty. Statistical analysis further reinforced these perceptions. A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$) was found between ethical standards and academic progression, indicating that students and staff who perceived higher ethical compliance also reported better academic outcomes and morale. Regression analysis also showed that ethical practices could predict academic performance outcomes, reinforcing the argument that ethical climate within institutions plays a crucial role in promoting academic excellence. Qualitative responses added depth to these findings. Themes such as "lack of accountability," "need for stricter policy enforcement," and "desire for a more transparent academic culture" emerged from interviews. Respondents called for ethics education, improved monitoring, and equitable leadership to restore confidence in the university's academic processes. In summary, the findings of this study demonstrate that ethical standards are not only foundational to academic integrity but also instrumental in facilitating fair and sustainable academic progression.

For the University of Calabar to achieve its academic goals and strengthen its reputation, it must prioritize ethical governance, policy enforcement, and stakeholder engagement. Conclusion This study set out to investigate the relationship between ethical standards and academic progression within the University of Calabar. Drawing on responses from a substantial sample of students and staff, the research provided critical insights into how fairness, academic integrity, and institutional ethics shape academic outcomes and perceptions of progression in a Nigerian university context.

The findings clearly show that ethical standards—especially fairness in assessment, transparency in evaluation, and consistent enforcement of academic integrity policies—are vital to academic progression. Students who perceive their learning environment as ethically sound tend to report greater satisfaction, improved performance, and clearer pathways to graduation. Likewise, staff members who view promotion and recognition processes as fair are more motivated and productive in their academic roles.

These findings reinforce the belief that integrity is foundational to the credibility and effectiveness of higher education institutions. However, the study also revealed challenges such as examination malpractice, perceived favoritism in grading and promotions, and inconsistencies in the enforcement of ethical guidelines. These issues, if unaddressed, risk eroding trust in the institution and undermining the quality of education delivered.

The gap between policy and practice must be bridged through strategic efforts that prioritize ethical training, transparent systems, and accountability mechanisms. In conclusion, promoting ethical standards is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for enhancing academic performance and institutional reputation. The University of Calabar—and indeed other universities in Nigeria—must continue to invest in building a culture of integrity, fairness, and trust to ensure that academic progression is truly reflective of merit, not privilege. Strengthening these values will contribute significantly to the overall development of both individuals and the university community at large. Recommendations Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations are proposed to improve ethical standards and support academic progression at the University of Calabar: 1.

Strengthen Policy Enforcement The University should ensure the consistent and transparent enforcement of ethical policies related to assessment, examinations, and promotions. Clear



consequences for academic dishonesty, transparency and unfair practices must be applied without bias. 2. Regular Ethics Training and Workshops Mandatory workshops on ethics and academic integrity should be held regularly for students, academic staff, and administrators. These trainings should include topics such as plagiarism, fairness in grading, and respectful academic conduct. 3. Strengthen Student and Staff Support Systems The University should provide academic counseling, mentoring, and grievance redress systems to help students and staff navigate ethical challenges and report issues confidentially. 4. Enhance Monitoring of Examinations and Academic Records Increased use of technology such as biometric attendance, CCTV during exams, and automated record systems can reduce opportunities for malpractice and manipulation of grades.

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