



ETHICAL ISSUES INTERFERENCE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA



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Abstract

This study examines ethical issues interference in the management of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study and the population of the study comprise of 2500 representing 1200 academics and 1300 non-academic staff of the public universities in Benue State. The sample comprised of 500(240 academic and 260 non-academic) representing 20% of the total population. A researcher structured 10-item questionnaire titled “Ethical Issues interference and Management of Public Universities Questionnaire (EIIMPUQ)” was used for data collection. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire. The instrument was validated and a reliability coefficient of 0.84 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions and the null hypotheses were tested using t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that ethical interference has an influence in the management of public universities in Benue State in the area of appointment of administrative heads to a great extent. The study concluded that ethical issues interference and management is complex. It was recommended that the academic and non-academic staff should note that university is citadel of knowledge where individuals are entrenched with skills, knowledge and capacity to nurture and develop potentials and should be void of personal interest, nepotism, favoritism, corruption and compromise of academic integrity and Heads of unit should be involved in the recruitment process.

Keywords: Ethical issues interference, Management, Administrative Heads, Recruitment, Public Universities

Introduction

Educational institutions are regarded as citadel of knowledge, where individuals are entrenched with skills, knowledge and capacity to nurture and develop their potentials. It is considered as a wheel for societal development and economic empowerment of the individuals which help in the development of critical thinking. The university as a centre for learning cannot be over emphasized. It is globally known as the peak of tertiary level of education which consists majorly of two categories of staff, the academics and the non-academics. The system has been marred by ethical interferences. Management of public university has been a subject of concern in recent times. The institutions are facing numerous ethical issues such as nepotism, favouritism, corruption, financial misappropriation, quality of service delivery and academic integrity (Ogundipe, 2020, Okolie, 2020). These numerous ethical issues have significant implications on the quality of managerial services provided by the public universities.

Public universities are institutions of higher learning primarily funded by public means, through national or state government. They are owned and operated by the federal or state government (Altbach,

2018). Public university has the mission to provide access to higher education for all qualified staff, students, regardless of ethnicity, background, and financial means (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2020). They are also expected to provide public services. These public services have been abuse with dishonesty, compromise of standards and bringing in of ethical interferences into appointment of administrative heads, elections/appointment into positions and recruitments. The appointments and elections of academic and non-academic staff into positions are becoming issues of war and this is eaten deep into the governance of public universities.

Ethical issues interference refers to potential conflicts that may arise in an organization causing imbalance. There is a high level of political tussle, ethnicity, religion, and economic weights interferences prevalent in the education system (Okeke, 2017). In public universities, ethical interference refers to the influence of external factor on the decision-making process or the moral principles guiding an organization which include biases and discrimination, nepotism, favouritism, academic integrity among others, they are behavioural patterns that undermine integrity of the educational system. According to Beauchamp and Childress (2019), ethical interference refers to intervention of external factors on decision-making processes, potentially compromising the integrity and autonomy of individual or organizations. This is further supported by Emmanuel (2018) that added that ethical interference could manifest in various ways, to include political, financial, and social influences. This study streamlined its study to interference in the area of appointment of administrative heads and recruitment. Ijinda (2024) noted that political interference in the management of public universities in Nigeria was frightening and causing setbacks for the universities in that powers had been reserved. These interference could be detrimental to effective management. However, the Nigerian university system is noted to be plagued by several problems that hinder it from achieving its expected goals. One factor that has negatively impacted university management in the country is ethical interference (Ogunode, 2020). Ogunode further submits that this practice was seriously jeopardizing the managements of universities in Nigeria. The public universities have been designed to function with political officer holders or politicians in the country and this is somehow having serious effect on the management.

Management is regarded as the process undertaken by one or more individuals to coordinate the activities of others in order to achieve results not achievable by one individual acting alone (Olatunde, 2023). By this definition, it means for the objectives of an organization to be achieved, others are crucial. The chief executive needs others in the institution; this is why there should be equity and fairness. Bua (2020) refers to management as a problem solving process of effectively achieving organizational goals and objectives through efficient use of scarce resources in a changing environment. Management however involves planning, controlling, coordinating and motivating. The aspect of management in this context involves appointment of administrative heads and recruitment process to mention a few among others.

Administrative Heads in public universities are those responsible for overseeing various aspects of the university's operations. These include Heads of Departments (HODs), Deans of Faculties/Colleges/Schools, Coordinators of Centers, Units and Directors. In the university setting, the positions of HODs, Coordinators of Centers, Units and Directors are subject to appointment by the Chief Executive (Vice-Chancellor) except the deanship positions which are conducted through elections and these positions have been interfered by ethical issues. Olufade (2017) supports this claim by adding that the appointments could be influenced by political considerations, such as loyalty to the administration, old times' sake in the form of old students and alumni. In this case, most times ranks and experiences are overlooked; this however could breed discontent, distrust among staff, and feeling of resentment towards colleagues. Johns (2017) opines that it could lead to increase turnover among staff and leading to decrease productivity. Another ethical interference is the area of recruitment where unqualified personnel's are given employment against qualified ones.

Recruitment refers to applicants for job positions in an organization. Arikewuyo and Adegbesan (2009) opines that a good recruitment programme is one that is properly planned and well operated and poor recruitment efforts could lead to selection of poor applicants. However, Olatunde (2023), refers to



recruitment as activities designed to attract numbers and quality of personnel needed to carry on work of educational organization such as the university. Olatunde noted that they must be of quality not just any kind. It means qualified staff should be engaged no matter the influence from any power. In the same vein, Ekundayo and Ajayi, (2019) observed that universities these days are not totally free from the ethical interferences because government of the day, governing councils, ethnicity, all plays crucial roles in recruitment. It has been observed by the researchers that the opinions of Deans and HODs often times do not matter when it comes to appointments and recruitments of personnel.

Statement of the Problem

Ethical issues interference has become a plague in public universities. Universities which are supposed to be a place for critical thinking, intellectual competition and advancement of knowledge for the purpose of problem solving is gradually becoming a place for nepotism, partiality, bias, discrimination and place for preferential treatment. The norms of the university are gradually being eroded, that is the area of all round academic excellence. It has become difficult this day to see just anyone given appointment without knowing someone, someone making a referral and or someone close maybe by virtue of family, alumni, friends, ethnicity and from same language. These ethical practices have been linked to poor decision-making, ineffective leadership, lack of creativity, rebellion, non-chalant behaviour to duties and decreased morale among staff. Specifically this study is set to examine the influence of ethical issues interference on the management of public universities in Benue State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of ethical issues on the management of public universities in Benue State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the extent to which ethical interference in the appointment of administrative heads influence management of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the extent to which ethical interference in the recruitment process influence management of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. what is the extent to which ethical interference in the appointment of administrative heads influence management of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria?
2. what is the extent to which ethical interference in the recruitment process influence management of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff on the extent to which ethical interference in the appointment of administrative heads influence the management of public universities in Benue State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff on the extent to which ethical interference in recruitment process influence the management of public universities in Benue State.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The study was carried out in the public universities in Benue State with the population of 2500 representing 1200 academic and 1300 non-academic staff of the public universities in Benue State. 20% of the total population was sampled according to Uzoagulu (2011) who stated that if the population is known and made up of different groups, each group receives allocation based on its proportion to the population. The sample was 500 representing 240 academic and 260 non-academic staff selected through proportionate sampling technique to ensure fair representation of the sample relative to the population while simple random

sampling was used to select the number of staff required from each of the sampled university. The research instrument used for data collection is a 10-item questionnaire titled “Ethical Issues Interference and Management of Public Universities Questionnaire (EIIMPUQ)”. The instrument has two clusters. Cluster A on the extent to which ethical interference influence the appointment of administrative heads in public universities in Benue State, Nigeria and B on the extent to which ethical interference influence recruitment process in public universities in Benue State, Nigeria. The instrument was validated by two experts, one in Educational Administration and Planning and another in Measurement and Evaluation, all from the Department of Educational Administration and Planning and Department of Guidance and Counselling, Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi, respectively. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, the instrument was administered to 30 academic and non-academic staff in a public university in Nasarawa state. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Crombach Alpha, which at the end gave an overall reliability coefficient of 0.84 making it high and reliable for the study. The data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while hypotheses were tested using t-test tested at 0.05 level of significance. The four point rating scale of Very Great Extent (VGE) 4, Great Extent (GE) 3, Low Extent (LE) 2, and Very Low Extent (VLE) 1 were used in determining the mean scores of each item on questionnaire. The item were considered having great extent when the mean score was 2.50 and above and low extent when it was less than 2.50. When the calculated t-value was less than the critical value; the null hypothesis was therefore not rejected.

Results

Research Question One: what is the extent to which ethical interference in appointment of administrative heads influence management of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean response scores of the extent ethical issues interference influence appointments of Administrative Heads and management of public Universities in Benue State.

S/N o.	Item	Academic Staff 240		Non-Academic Staff 260		Mean	Decision
		$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD		
	Extent to which ethical interference in the appointment of administrative heads influence management						
1.	Ethnicity plays major role in appointment of administrative heads, this could affect management	2.74	0.82	2.84	0.92	2.79	GE
2	Favouritism plays major role in the appointment of administrative heads this could influence management of the institution	2.55	0.91	2.66	0.89	2.61	GE
3	When nepotism is allowed in the appointment of	2.73	0.85	2.87	0.91	2.80	GE



	administrative heads this could affect effective management						
4	Seniority is not considered when appointing administrative heads, thereby causing contempt this can affect management	2.92	0.88	2.65	0.86	2.79	GE
5	Appointment of administrative heads are not merit-based this could have effect on management of the university	2.41	0.90	2.21	0.91	2.31	LE
	Grand mean	2.67	0.87	2.65	0.90	2.66	GE

In Table 1, the mean rating of academic staff range from 2.41 to 2.92 while that of non-academic staff range from 2.21 to 2.87. The mean rating of items 1,2,3, and 4 are of great extent except item 5 which is low extent. However, the grand mean were 2.67 and 2.66 which represent great extent. Therefore, both the academic and non-academic staff are of the opinion that ethical interference influence appointment process in public universities in Benue State in terms of ethnicity favouritism, nepotism and not giving experience priority.

Research Question two: what is the extent to which ethical interference influence recruitment process in public universities in Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean response scores of the extent ethical issues interference influence recruitment process and management of public Universities in Benue State

S/N o.	Item	Academic Staff 240		Non-Academic Staff 260		Mean	Decision
		$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD		
	Extent to which ethical interference in the recruitment process influence management of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria						
6.	Bringing ethnicity into recruitment process could have negative influence on the management	2.61	0.87	2.52	0.86	2.57	GE
7.	when recruitment process are not merit-based, the quality of staff engaged may be below standard thereby having serious influence on the management	2.77	0.88	2.70	0.88	2.74	GE
8.	When nepotism is allowed in in the recruitment process, management may be	2.69	0.69	2.54	0.77	2.62	GE



	jeopardize						
9	If recruitment process is clouded with unclear criteria, this could be detrimental to the management	2.81	0.91	2.62	0.84	2.72	GE
10	Bringing tribalism into recruitment could bring lack of order and this could have negative influence management	2.54	0.81	2.75	0.83	2.65	GE
	Grand mean	2.68	0.83	2.63	0.84	2.66	GE

The mean rating on table 2 ranged from 2.57 to 2.74. The mean rating of all the items 6 to 10 are of great extent with a grand mean of 2.63 for the academic and a grand mean of 2.68 for the non-academic staff. Therefore, both the items academic and non-academic staff are of the opinion that ethical issues influence recruitment process in public universities in Benue State.

Hypotheses

Table 3: t-test on the mean ratings of the academic and non-academic staff on the extent to which ethical interference in the appointment of administrative heads influence the management of public universities in Benue State

Gender	N	Mean	Std Deviation	df	t-cal	Sig Level	Decision
Academic	240	2.67	0.87	498	0.18	0.05	Not Significant
Non-Academic	260	2.65	0.90				

$P > 0.05$; Not Significant; H_0 not rejected.

Table 3 showed that $t\text{-cal} = 0.81$ at df 498. Since $t\text{-cal}$ is greater than sig. value 0.05 ($P > 0.05$), the stated hypothesis is therefore not rejected. This means that, there is no significant difference between the mean rating of academic staff and non-academic staff on the extent to which ethical interference in the appointment of administrative heads influence the management of public universities in Benue State.

Table 4: t-test on the mean ratings of the academic and non-academic staff on the extent to which ethical interference in the recruitment process influence the management of public universities in Benue State

Gender	N	Mean	Std Deviation	df	t-cal	t-crit	Sig. level	Decision
Academic	240	2.68	0.83	498	0.50	1.96	0.05	Not Significant
Non-Academic	260	2.63	0.84					

$P > 0.05$; Not Significant; H_0 not rejected.

Table 4 s that $t\text{-cal} = 0.50$ at df 498. Since $t\text{-cal}$ is greater than sig. value 0.05 ($P > 0.05$), the stated hypothesis is therefore not rejected. Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical value, the null hypothesis is therefore not rejected. This means that, there is no significant difference between the mean rating of academic staff and non-academic staff on the extent to which ethical interference in the recruitment process influence the management of public universities in Benue State.

Discussion of findings

It is evident in research question 1, table 1 showed that the influence of ethical interference in the management of public universities in Benue State in terms of appointment was to a great extent based on the responses of the respondents. The respondents were of the view that, ethnicity, favouritism, nepotism, lack of merit-based employment and not given credence to seniority in the appointment of administrative heads could largely influence the management of public universities in Benue State. The findings is in accordance with Johns (2017) who noted that it could lead to increase turnover among staff and leading to decrease productivity. The results showed that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of academic and non-academic staff on the extent to which ethical issues interference in the appointments of administrative heads influence management of public universities in Benue State.

The findings of research question 2 showed that the influence of ethical interference in the management of public universities in Benue State relating to recruitment process is to a great extent based on the responses of the respondents. It shows that binging ethnicity, lack of merit-based, nepotism, unclear criteria and tribalism could lead to contempt among staff thereby affecting the management of public universities in Benue State. This is supported by Ogundipe, (2020) and Okolie, (2020), they both opined that institutions are facing numerous ethical issues such as nepotism, favouritism, corruption, financial misappropriation and academic integrity however, Olatunde (2023) noted that recruited staff must be of quality. It means qualified candidates should be engage. In the same vein, Ekundayo and Ajayi, (2019) observed that universities these days were not totally free from the ethical interferences because many factors comes to plays in recruitment process. The hypothesis 2 showed that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of academic and non-academic staff on the extent to which ethical issues interference in recruitment process influence management of public universities in Benue State

Conclusion

This study on ethical issues interference in the management of public universities in Benue State revealed that ethical issues significantly influence the appointment of administrative heads and recruitment process. These unethical practices could lead to ineffective leadership, decrease morale, contempt among staff, and lack of trust in the institution. It is essential for public universities in Benue state to crave for good management by following due process in all activities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following were recommended:

1. Public universities in Benue State should be transparent and follow due process in the appointment of administrative heads. Merit-based appointment should be upheld.
2. University management should have a clearly well spelt out guideline for engaging new staff, Heads of Units should be involved in the recruitment process, this would help promote good system where everyone works towards a common goal.

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