

EDUCATION ETHICS

HIGHER EDUCATION IN CRISIS

SUSTAINING QUALITY ASSURANCE AND
INNOVATION IN RESEARCH THROUGH
APPLIED ETHICS

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INSTITUTIONALIZING ETHICS IN NIGERIAN
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS:

*Beyond Compliance to Regulatory Norms and
Quality Assurance Mechanisms*

Introduction

There is today a growing awareness of the need to systematically address the issue of Ethics in higher education institutions in Nigeria. The alarming level of decadence in the institutions makes this urgently necessary. We dare to contend that formal education in Nigeria is in a state of emergency.

It was a concerned Nigerian who once observed that "Nigerian universities have degenerated into institutions where lots of evil are generated and nurtured". Although we may not fully agree with this more or less negative assessment, yet it is indeed regrettable that in the Nigerian Education Sector fundamental values and virtues are constantly violated; there are several shades of cheating, plagiarism, unethical research, nepotism in staff recruitment often devoid of competency considerations, self-centred neglect of staff and student welfare, multidimensional corrupt practices, sexual harassment, abysmal neglect of duties for which one regularly receives salaries, etc. Universities in Nigeria are evidently characterized by lack of ethical behaviors and operational practices which give the young people the wrong signal that this is how the world functions and that only with

unethical behaviours could one achieve professional success. (Cf. Singh, D., Stilckelberger, C. (Eds) 2017, p. 13).

Referring specifically to the situation in the United States of America, T.B. Galant (20 II) noted that those who believed in the promise of higher education to shape a better future would be experiencing a time of unprecedented despair because of the real decadence in the education sector. The stories look alike in different parts of the globe: students are regularly cheating in their classes, admissions officers are bending the rules for VIPs, faculties are fudging research data to produce false results that polish some selfish interests, copy-and-paste plagiarism has become the smart method of publishing in order not to perish. Even succession to leadership positions in higher education institutions has been deformed into a tug-of-war of the survival of the fittest. Galant has raised that perturbing question: "If those associated with our institutions of higher learning cannot resist ethical corruption, what hope do we have for an ethical society?" (ibid, p. ii).

We shall briefly examine the milestone achievement recorded by Globethics.net Geneva which provides useful resource materials for institutionalizing ethics in Nigeria and beyond. This will explain the background for the close collaboration between Globethics, Geneva and Godfrey Okoye University (Go University), Enugu. Incidentally, GO University has become a paradigmatic sample of how the institutionalization of ethics could be practised in Nigerian higher education institutions. The paper will further discuss the gains of retrieving professional pride and reactivating the virtue of shame for the higher education industry in Nigeria, highlight what ethics is not thereby showing that it may not be equated to compliance to regulatory norms and quality assurance mechanism.

Worthy of mention is the task of Globethics Nigeria towards overcoming ethical decadence in Nigerian institutions of higher education. We will finally make some concrete recommendations towards achieving the noble objectives of ethics in higher education and then conclude with a note on the importance of creating virtuous institutions of higher learning in Nigeria.

2. The Milestone of Globethics Geneva

Established some 15 years ago, and legally domiciled in Geneva, Switzerland, this *Global Ethics Network* has built up resources and partnerships and repositioned itself to focus on Ethics in Higher Education. It understands ethics as:

E	EMPOWERMENT	<i>Developing Talents</i>
T	TRANSFORMATION	<i>Placing Common Good before Self-interest</i>
H	HOLISTIC APPROACH	<i>Understanding of in-depth Correlations</i>
I	INTEGRITY	<i>Making Values-based Decisions and Behaviour</i>
C	COMPETENCE	<i>Focusing on Innovative and collective Proficiency</i>
S	SUSTAINABILITY	<i>Standing up for One World</i>

This has been properly crystalized into the four programmes, which the network pursues with passion at its global, regional and national levels as follows:

- (i) **Ethics for Institutions Programme**, which *"offers institutions the opportunity to set their*

* Cf. www.globethics.net

b)

ethical standards and structures to strengthen ethics not only by focusing on individual behaviour, but also on institutional mechanisms used to incorporate ethics within the organization, such as ethics quality management, codes of ethics, research ethics committees, complaint mechanisms, etc. "

- (ii) **Ethics for Students** is a programme which *"prepares and enables students to adopt ethical thinking and behaviour in learning and research at all levels across the institution."* It offers not only a theoretical knowledge of ethics, but mostly deals with applied ethics, *"including changing behaviours through character formation, dealing with ethical dilemmas, coaching in institutional norms, procedures, awards and sanctions "*, etc.
- (iii) **Ethics for Teachers** is a programme designed to train teachers and researchers as well as assistants at all levels, to place high premium on integrity and personal commitment, and to implement ethical standards in their respective fields of responsibility. They are expected to include ethics in their teaching course and research work in order to strengthen ethics in higher education.
- (iv) **Ethics for Professionals** provides a programme for professionals *"with tailored educational programmes, services, tools, materials and resources on applied ethics, and practical ethical dilemmas to assist them in their professional working environment and to encourage them to make ethical decisions in their daily activities."*

Globethics.net has, in close collaboration with their regional and national members developed an

enriching package for the advancement of ethical standards in human associations. It was therefore easy for Godfrey Okoye University to start and nurture a symbiotic relationship with this global network because of its antecedents as a catholic university. The University is an institutional member of Globethics' *Consortium for Ethics in Higher Education*.

3. Institutionalization of Ethical Decisions, Attitudes and Behaviour in Godfrey Okoye University Model

An independent Directorate of Ethics was institutionally established in Godfrey Okoye University in the academic year 2017/2018. If there is anywhere ethical standards have to be the normal way of daily institutional activities, it has to be in a Catholic University. Although ethical standards have been maintained in the university, the institutionalization of an independent Directorate of Ethics gave a boost to our passion for ethics in higher education.

We lay great emphasis on the institutionalization of ethics. By 'institutionalization of ethical decisions, attitudes and behavior we mean, among others:

- a) Establishing ethical dimension' and behavior as a norm, as the normal practice, (not as a rare heroic excellence), in the organization and overall culture of the University.
- d) Enthroning *"Service before self"* as an attractive approach to decision making by individuals, management bodies and institutions in the University.

- c) Getting the endorsement and appreciation of all stakeholders for Ethics in Godfrey Okoye University.

Institutionalization is rightly in tandem with the Igbo adage that "a tree does not (rightly) make a forest".

The main functions of the Directorate of Ethics in our University include:

- Making the GO University *Oath of Honour* mandatory for all members of staff, as well as for the governing bodies of GO University.
- Ensuring that every student of the university attends and participates actively in the lectures on "Moral Reasoning and Ethics", as already articulated in the General Studies Curriculum of the University.
- Updating the course content for lectures in Moral Reasoning and Ethics.
- Setting-up an Ethics Committee in the University.
- Working out strategies for promoting ethical behaviour at all levels and units of the University.
- Giving particular attention to each unit of the University to ensure that ethical standards are consistently maintained.
- Developing templates for motoring and measuring ethical performance in all units of the University.
- Establishing financial awards and other incentives to honour ethical behaviours.
- Producing visible insignia to awaken awareness for ethical behaviour and practices.

- Integrating ethical behaviour in the criteria for promotion and awards in the University.
- collaborating closely with Globethics.net to pursue consistent action plans towards achieving the noble aim of empowering young people for values-driven leadership.
- Developing a Code of Ethics for all students and staff of the University
- Organizing regular training sessions on ethical performance in higher education for academic and administrative staff of GO Uni .
- Developing systematic benchmark for Ethical-Performance-Accreditation in higher education institutions.
- Offering a complaint mechanism (with privacy protection) on non-ethical practices in GO University.
- Collaborating with the National Universities Commission (NUC) Abuja.
- Collaborating with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), particularly with the "Division of Ethics of Science and Technology, Social and Human Science Sector".
- Ensuring that the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights is taught and implemented in Godfrey Okoye University.
- Articulating and pursuing many more strategies to achieve the goals of the Directorate.

The management and administration of every private university in Nigeria have to contend with several ancillary institutions and quasi-institutions that get actively involved in setting and monitoring the standards and mode of operation of the university. We mean, for instances, the National Universities Commission (NUC), the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), the Board of Trustees (BOT), the Governing Council, the Senate, etc. For this reason, it is necessary to build ethics into the heart of these relevant decision making bodies, so that ethics may not be regarded as a complaining child that cries only when wrong steps are taken in the institutional practice. In the words of C. Sampford, ethics *"must be built into the operations and decision making of the institution ... rather than a side constraint to be considered afterwards."* (Cf. Balthazar, C., 2015).

If the named ancillary establishments for quality assurance in higher education in Nigeria could be committed to a fundamental option for ethical prerogatives, our universities would chum out citizens and leaders of excellence in character and learning; otherwise the universities would quickly degenerate into institutional disaster, to the detriment of the human society.

As soon as the Directorate of Ethics was established in Godfrey Okoye University, we immediately communicated this to the NUC, and immediately received the formal acknowledgement and approval stamp of this regulatory body, issued with a large dose of congratulatory message-

Every student of GO University must participate in the lectures and do assignments and pass the examination on Moral Reasoning and Ethics before graduation. Life in the University is based on well-articulated code of conduct for students and staff. Defaulters are sanctioned in accordance with the ethical standards of due process.

Furthermore, every staff of GO University took and has to take the Oath of Honour to be considered a bona fide member of the university. The Oath of Honour articulates our core values as dialogue, punctuality and commitment to duty, modest in relationship and behaviour (against any form of sexual abuse and bribery), honesty in research and behaviour (against any form of plagiarism) . etc. The character component plays a central role in the assessment and promotion of staff and students of the University.

We are pleased today that the awareness has grown among staff and students that there is an official directorate where you could discuss your personal worries and receive the corresponding attention for ethical rectitude. The students and staff of our University are making effective use of this opportunity.

Professional Pride strengthens Ethical Attitude

Lack of professional pride is one of the missing links in maintaining ethical standards as a modus operandi in different professional practices. A brief consideration of the original meaning of the word "professional" will expose us to the sustainable values in professional practice. C. Balthazard (2015) gives us important clues about the original meaning of "professional":

From its Late Latin derivation, *professus*, which is the past participle of *profiteri*, being professional means *"to profess, confess"* competence or proficiency in a skill: The implication is that professionals were those who 'professed' their skill to others, and 'vowed' to perform their profession to the highest standard. In essence therefore, being a professional was *"to have made a public commitment to a high standard of performance, to*

integrity, and to public service". Consequently, being a professional meant putting "*doing good work*" and the "*quality*" of the work ahead of economic gain and the economic efficiency of work.

Professional service was not about the money, it was about the quality and integrity of work. Nevertheless, it did not imply that professionals could not be well paid for the work they did, it was just that being paid for doing the work was not "*a defining characteristic of being a professional*" .. Indeed, professional services receiver higher premium than casual practitioners. No wonder then there is a reasonable percentage of people who prefer to receive and pay for the services of professionals rather than amateur practitioners. The satisfaction, that is the pride, which propelled the services of the professional, was based on *technical competence, personal integrity* and *human sensitivity*, and not on monetary gain.

We can be sure that a professional in educational matters who possesses a healthy dose of professional pride, may never toy with teaching, learning and examination matters in a higher education institution. That is to say, a professional in education may never compromise standards in place of money or any 'other misconstrued values.

The Virtue of Shame enhances Ethical Behaviour

Aristotle in his Nicomachean Ethics, Book IV, Chapter 9, articulates some pertinent thoughts on *Shame, bashfulness, shamelessness.*

Although Aristotle would prefer to regard "shame" as quasi-virtue, for the simple reason that it is more of a feeling than a state of character, nevertheless he acknowledges shame as a kind of *fear of dishonor*. He

taught that young people should be prone to the feeling of shame because they live by feeling and therefore commit many errors, *but are restrained by shame*. Shame restrains the human person from persisting in unethical behaviours which invariable dishonor the intrinsic status of the being human Therefore people who are prone to the feeling of shame should be acclaimed for it because it sustains persistence in ethical behaviour. A shameless person could be equated with a crazy (mad) person. Shamelessness sustains a person in doing wrong with impunity.

Aristotle understands shame not as mere fear of external disapproval, nor as mere tendency to find pleasure in the noble, but as an emotion responsive to praise and blame and consequently to considerations about the nobility and shamefulfulness of one's own actions and one's character. Understood this way, shame provides learners with the sort of motivation that allows them to perform genuinely virtuous actions before they have acquired practical wisdom and the stable dispositions characteristic of virtuous agents. (<http://www.sacred-texts.co.uk/a/ari/11ico11ico043.1it111>).

According to Aristotle, being shameless or incapable of shame when shame is called for is a vice, and being constantly ashamed - bashful, I guess, or of low self-esteem - is no virtue either. Ideally, you'll be ashamed at the right things, to the right extent.

The narrative about the God's interaction with Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis, after the disobedience of eating from the forbidden tree, describes an example of what it means to be ashamed at the right things and to the right extent. When God enquired where Adam was, the response was: "*I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid*" (Genesis 3: 10). "I was afraid" could as well be appropriately replaced with "I was ashamed". The shameful discovery

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of naked disobedience was an acknowledgement of the dishonour that had taken place in Adam's relationship with God. Indeed, the disobedience otherwise described as the "Fall" was a debasing or degrading of original status of the human person in relationship to God. The decision to hide from God was Adam's expression of the avoidance of impunity. In other words, Adam's relationship to God could not be continued with impunity, in the sense that the disobedience did not matter, meeting with God could be continued "as usual" nor needing to hide from God.

From the hiding position, Adam paid attention to the repositioning directives in the new mode of relationship. This narrative brings to us the simple reality that every bad behaviour debases the worth of the human person. This is clearly expressed in the chasing of Adam and his wife out of the beautiful Garden of Eden - the paradise of divinity. Shame is the antidote that propels the human to abandon wrong doing and return to the nobility worthwhile behaviour.

A fundamental option for ethics in higher education institutions should propel us to achieve that educated people who work in institutional industry should become ashamed of getting involved in any form of bad behaviour which in reality destroys the professional pride of being educated and invariably debases the very dignity of their human person.

Ethics for Professionals

It is worthy of mention that some professional bodies like the Nigeria Institute of Estate Managers and Valuers have expressed great interest in addressing ethical issues relating to their profession. Recently, the Enugu branch of this professional body invited the GO University's

Director of Ethics to address them elaborately on the theme of "Personal Integrity and Professional Ethics". This interaction has awakened further interest mother professional bodies to renew and face the challenges of ethics in their professional practice. This has also inspired and strengthened the plans to develop training programmes for ethics in different professions, including the military and paramilitary establishments in our country.

What Ethics Is Not

In their attempt to define ethics, Verlasquez et al. (1987) drew attention to four things that should not be considered as ethics:

- a. *Ethics is not necessarily about acting in accordance with one's feelings as sometimes a person's feelings about a particular issue may lead them to act in a way that is unethical.*

It is easily plausible the mere feelings could deceive the human person into wrong actions. Indeed it is not exactly what we feel that we do most times. Perhaps I often feel like slapping someone who has annoyed me or like cutting off the head of somebody who has hurt me terribly, but still desist from doing so. If we would do all we feel, it is probable that our life would be miserably unethical.

- d. *Ethics cannot be equated with religion because although most religions advocate and provide incentives for people to act in an ethical manner, ethics applies to everyone whereas religion is limited to certain groups of people who believe in the teaching of the religion.*

People who migrate from one religious faith to another in an attempt to escape from the ethical discipline of the former may discover that ethics is much beyond the demand of a particular religious faith. We understand religion in this context as the human articulation and practice of relationship with the Divine. People belonging to different religious faiths can conveniently agree on and practice ethics in higher education. It is indeed difficult to imagine an articulation and practice of relationship with the Divine that would abhor ethics that basically insist on personal integrity in all we do.

The issue of religion and morals has led in the early 1980s to greater emphasis on character education instead of moral education. Emphasis is on the "engraving process of habituation to consideration of others, self-control and responsibility" (Ryan, K. *A Brief History of Moral Education*). Consideration of others, self-control and responsibility are perennial values of a good character.

- c. *Behaving in an ethical manner should not be confused with respecting laws, and we quickly add, or with compliance to regulatory norms and/or internal quality assurance mechanisms.*

Ethics in higher education has sometimes been equated to compliance to regulatory norms and quality assurance mechanisms. This would destroy the very substance of ethics.

It is a known fact that throughout history examples can be found of laws and regulations which were clearly unethical. Some examples of these are: laws linked to slavery, apartheid and compulsory sterilization of certain groups of people. Today, many countries uphold the illegality of laws which authorize capital punishment, euthanasia, abortion and compulsory electroconvulsive shock treatment, even though large sections of the same

population and other countries are against such practices. There have also been organizational regulations that clearly marginalize and even exploit some workers. It is also commonplace that sometimes people go to polling stations to have existing laws changed for ethical reasons. One could nevertheless interject that the opposite is sometimes the case, that people also go to the polls to support the enactment of unethical laws.

Perhaps more curious and revealing is the fact that what led to the decadence we witness today in HEIs in Nigeria is not necessarily the absence of well-articulated norms and operational regulations. The tragedy of educational decadence is rather being smartly piloted today in Nigeria by leaders who have succeeded in jettisoning ethical prerogatives and circumvented established norms and regulations with arguments that promote only the private interests of the leader and his accomplices.

The Ethics in Higher Education being discussed here is the type that produces people and leaders of integrity who tenaciously respect and implement what the laws and established regulatory norms prescribe as modus operandi of higher education institutions. Such leaders and persons of integrity have the courage to question existing laws and regulation and would also insist on following due process to get unethical regulations and laws reviewed to correspond to ethical standards of operation.

- f. *Ethical behaviour cannot be based on "what society accepts" because people's behaviour may deviate from what is ethical and societies may condone unethical behaviour (such as withholding vital medical treatment from certain groups of people or even trying to eliminate certain groups of people altogether).*

Some Nigerians use the expression "Nigerian factor" to excuse unethical behaviours. The ethics we mean here does not accommodate any form of "Nigerian factor" as excuse for wrong doing. It is the ethics that clearly maintains that there is no right way of doing wrong. This ethics pre-empts what the Igbos describe in the adage: "*Alu gbaa-afo oburu omenala*". A possible explanation of this adage is that when wrong" doing or evil actions and behaviour receive tacit agreed (tolerated) in a wide range of space and time, they translate into seemingly accepted tradition. In such a circumstance, everybody knows that the action is wrong, everyone complains and decries such an action, at the same time many dep1.oy the same unethical action to achieve certain personally beneficial goals, and indeed only an infinitesimal percentage of the people really take serious steps to insist on a change of behaviour. The situation is such that ethical decisions, attitudes and behaviour are sacrificed at the altar of "who will bell the cart" (cf Ani, I: 2009, vii). This is why ethics is not a matter of what the society accepts.

Globethics Nigeria

Since Godfrey Okoye University's Director of Ethics has been nominated the National Contact for Globethics Nigeria, efforts are geared towards taking all higher education institutions along the way of best practices towards achieving the noble goals for establishing such institutions, namely, producing citiz~ns and leaders of excellence in character, knowledge and skills. Other institutions of higher learning - University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN), Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), the Veritas University Abuja, the

Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) Enugu, Enugu State College of Education, Technical (ESCET), to mention but these - have joined in collaboration with GO University Enugu to form Globethics Nigeria.

We invite all stakeholders in higher education business to honestly join in the timely campaign for ethics in higher education, being faithful to their personal and professional integrity. Globethics Nigeria will be reaching out to people of goodwill to become constituted sponsors of their programmes which will include enlightenment meetings, seminars, workshops, and advocacy against inhuman and subhuman practices in higher education institutions. It is our hope that the passion with which Globethics Nigeria has been established will be sustained to achieve the benefits of higher education proficiency for our country and beyond.



Recommendations for Institutionalization of Ethics in Higher Education Institutions

To sustain the noble goals of institutionalizing ethics in higher education institutions, we earnestly and strongly propose:

- i) that all regulatory bodies of higher education in Nigeria, NUC, etc. should establish, equip and empower "Directorates of Ethics" in their national offices to ensure the implementation and monitor the institutionalization of ethical behaviours and attitudes in our higher education institutions;
- ii) that all higher education institutions properly establish, equip and empower Directorates of Ethics to perform internal assurance and I

monitoring of ethical standards in all activities of the institution;

- iii) that the regulatory bodies develop templates for measuring ethical standards in the institutions and make ethical accreditation compulsory for all institutions of higher learning;
- iv) that a functional advocacy mechanism for students and staff who fall victim of ethical misconduct in the management of higher education institutions be established and be better positioned than what we today call "disciplinary committee".

This is our chance to contribute to the establishment of virtuous institutions and in making Nigeria become a successful state made up ethical citizenry with leaders of integrity. We all know that the issue of Ethics in higher education is a very urgent matter in favour of our national development. Let us decide now and join in making a fundamental option for ethics in higher education.

8. Conclusion

According to C. Sampford (2015):

"Saints are in short supply - and we have better uses for them elsewhere. It is better to design institutions that do not require saints to run them. It is better to develop virtuous institutions where conformists can be virtuous than evil institutions where only saints will be virtuous"

Virtuous institutions are characterized by thorough persistence in maintaining ethical standards at all levels of their operation. We dare to conclude that the future of our dear country Nigeria depends largely on the percentage of committed people who have developed a passion for ethics in higher education institutions where professionals, leaders and honest citizens acquire character, learning and skills for peace, development and progress. If you think that education is costly, the Nigerian situation has proved that even "smart-ignorance" is not affordable in human association.

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