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Professional Ethics in Educational Governance, Politics, and Practices: Implications for Universities in Abia State

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Abstract

This study examined the predictive influence of professional ethics on educational governance, politics, and academic practices in Abia State's higher education system, with emphasis on Abia State University (ABSU), Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUUAU), and the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN), Aba. The persistent challenges of political interference, weak accountability, and inconsistent ethical standards in university governance motivated this investigation. A correlational research design was employed to ascertain the degree to which ethical governance, political neutrality, and professional practice forecast significant institutional outcomes. The study population comprised 4,380 academic and administrative staff across the three universities in the state, from which a sample of 366 respondents was drawn using the Taro Yamane formula.

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The Professional Ethics and University Governance Questionnaire (PEUGQ) was used to collect data. Experts validated it, and it had a reliability coefficient of 0.86. Data analysis using simple linear regression and t-tests at a 0.05 significance level revealed that ethical governance significantly predicted transparency and accountability ($R = .762$; $R^2 = .581$; $p < .05$); political neutrality significantly predicted the reduction of undue influence in appointments and resource allocation ($R = .689$; $R^2 = .475$; $p < .05$); and professional practice significantly predicted the quality of academic delivery ($R = .711$; $R^2 = .506$; $p < .05$). The results confirm that professional ethics are essential for improving institutional integrity, governance transparency, and academic quality. The study recommends, among other things, institutionalising enforceable ethical codes, promoting transparent appointment processes, and providing continuous ethics training to sustain integrity and accountability across Abia State's higher education institutions.

Keywords: Professional ethics, educational, governance, political neutrality, university administration.

Introduction

Universities and specialist higher-education institutes are central to national development because they produce skilled labour, generate knowledge through research, and act as custodians of culture and language (UNESCO, n.d.; Chankseliani et al., 2020). By educating professionals, conducting applied and theoretical research, and engaging with communities, higher education institutions contribute directly to human-capital formation and to the achievement of broader development objectives, including several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNESCO, n.d.; Chankseliani et al., 2020). In the Nigerian context, public universities and specialised centres, such as Abia State University (ABSU), Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU), and the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN), Aba, are therefore strategically important for regional development,

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agricultural innovation, and linguistic and cultural preservation (MOUAU, n.d.; NINLAN, n.d.). Recent institutional accounts and government activity in Abia State show the centrality of these institutions for local socio-economic development and cultural transmission (National Ambassador, 2025; NINLAN, n.d.).

Despite their central role, higher-education institutions in Nigeria commonly face governance challenges that jeopardise their capacity to deliver on teaching, research, and community mandates. A recurring theme in recent empirical and policy literature is the impact of political interference, opaque appointment processes, and weak adherence to professional ethical standards on institutional quality (Ogunode, Edinoh, & Agbade, 2024; Ikechukwu, 2024). Political influence may manifest in executive or legislative interference with governing councils, selection of senior officers, and resource allocation; practices that undermine meritocracy, reduce institutional autonomy, and weaken accountability mechanisms (Ogunode et al., 2024; Ikechukwu, 2024). These governance vulnerabilities erode confidence in institutional processes, can depress staff morale, and may impair student outcomes and research productivity. Recent studies using Nigerian data emphasise that political interventions in recruitment, promotion, admissions, and council appointments are associated with reduced institutional effectiveness and perceptions of unfairness (Ogunode et al., 2024; Fasanmi, 2023).

NINLAN (the National Institute for Nigerian Languages) exemplifies why institutional governance and professional ethics matter in practice. Established by statutory instrument as Nigeria's apex body for the research, documentation, teaching, and promotion of Nigerian languages, NINLAN's mandate makes it a central actor in preserving linguistic heritage and enabling language-based education (National Institute for Nigerian Languages [NINLAN], n.d.). Yet formal government reviews and visitation panels have periodically highlighted governance deficits and the need for follow-up on White Paper recommendations at NINLAN (Federal Government of Nigeria, White Paper on NINLAN Visitation Report, 2011–2015). These official findings illustrate how governance lapses and weak institutionalisation of professional norms can impede an institute with critical cultural and scholarly responsibilities (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2015/White Paper).

Within Abia State specifically, recent governance developments and public commentary indicate both pressures on university governance and opportunities for

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reform. For example, state-level leadership changes and the constitution of new governing councils have been prominent in the public record, underscoring how political actors play visible roles in institutional oversight (National Ambassador, 2025). Similarly, episodes reported in the national press and in sector analyses point to disputes over appointments and staff relations, which are commonly framed as consequences of political intervention and weak governance structures (The Newsroom, 2024; Mouau News, 2025). Taken together, these situational factors make Abia State a salient location in which to study the relationship between professional ethics and institutional governance.

Despite growing recognition of governance challenges, there remain important empirical gaps. Much of the literature on Nigerian higher-education governance relies on qualitative accounts, position papers, or single-institution case studies; quantitative investigations that test how professional ethics predict governance outcomes, political neutrality, and academic practices across multiple institutions in a single state are less common (Ogunode et al., 2024; Ikechukwu, 2024). In particular, there is a need for robust, instrument-based research that links measurable dimensions of professional ethics (e.g., ethical governance, political neutrality, and professional practice) to observable governance outcomes, transparency, and indicators of academic quality. Such studies can provide actionable evidence for institutional reforms on codes of ethics, transparent appointment processes, staff development programmes, etc., and those that are tailored to the contextual realities of Nigerian state universities and specialised research institutes.

Accordingly, this study investigates the predictive influence of professional ethics on educational governance, politics, and academic practices within Abia State's public higher-education system, with particular attention to ABSU, MOUAU, and NINLAN, Aba. By applying a correlational design and a validated instrument that operationalises ethical governance, political neutrality, and professional practice, the research aims to supply empirically grounded recommendations for strengthening institutional integrity, reducing undue political influence, and improving academic outcomes in Abia State and comparable contexts.

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Statement of the Problem

Despite numerous federal and state-level reforms, Abia State's higher education institutions continue to face entrenched governance challenges that undermine their efficiency, credibility, and educational quality. Allegations of political interference in the appointment of vice-chancellors and governing council members at Abia State University (ABSU), resource management controversies at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU), and recurring institutional support gaps at the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN), Aba, illustrate enduring systemic weaknesses (National Ambassador, 2025; Ogunode, Edinoh, & Agbade, 2024; Federal Government of Nigeria, 2015). These governance issues manifest in limited transparency, weak accountability, and the politicisation of administrative and academic processes.

Scholarly and policy reports consistently show that when professional ethics are weak, institutional governance suffers: recruitment and promotions become politicised, decision-making is opaque, and resource allocations often lack accountability (Ikechukwu, 2024; Ogunode et al., 2024). In Abia State, these tendencies have contributed to declining staff morale, student dissatisfaction, and public mistrust in higher-education institutions. Moreover, the failure to institutionalise ethical standards and mechanisms for political neutrality undermines the merit-based culture required for sustainable academic development and quality assurance (Fasanmi, 2023; Okocha & Nwosu, 2023).

Although several studies have examined political interference and governance in Nigerian universities generally, there is limited empirical evidence quantifying the predictive influence of professional ethics on educational governance, political processes, and academic practices within a specific subnational higher-education system such as Abia State's. Most prior works are conceptual, anecdotal, or single-institution analyses, leaving a gap in systematic, data-driven understanding of how ethical governance and political neutrality relate to institutional effectiveness. Given the state's pivotal educational role in Nigeria's Southeast and the strategic importance of its universities and specialised institutions such as NINLAN, it becomes critical to determine whether, and to what extent, professional ethics can predict governance outcomes, reduce political intrusion, and enhance academic practice. Addressing this problem is essential for policy reforms that can strengthen institutional autonomy, promote transparency, and restore confidence in public higher education in Abia State.

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Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which professional ethics, specifically ethical governance, political neutrality, and professional practice, predict key governance, political, and academic outcomes in Abia State's public higher-education system. Specifically,

- (1) this study seeks to determine whether adherence to ethical governance standards predicts transparency and accountability in decision-making in universities in Abia State.
- (2) Whether political neutrality predicts reductions in undue political influence over leadership selection and resource allocation in universities in Abia State.
- (3) Whether professional practice predicts improvements in academic quality and student outcomes in universities in Abia State.

Research Questions

- (i) To what extent does ethical governance predict transparency and accountability in universities in Abia State?
- (ii) To what extent does political neutrality predict the reduction of undue political influence in appointments and resource allocation in universities in Abia State?
- (iii) To what extent does professional practice predict the quality of academic delivery in universities in Abia State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: Ethical governance does not significantly predict transparency and accountability in universities in Abia State.

H₀₂: Political neutrality does not significantly predict reduction of undue influence in appointments and resource allocation in universities in Abia State.

H₀₃: Professional practice does not significantly predict the quality of academic delivery in universities in Abia State.

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Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several ways. Empirically, it provides quantitative evidence on how professional ethics (through ethical governance, political neutrality, and professional practice) predict governance and academic outcomes within Abia State's higher education system. This idea enriches the conversation about ethical practices in university administration by connecting professional ethics to key aspects of how institutions perform, like transparency and academic quality. It emphasises that the values upheld by university leaders can directly influence the overall effectiveness and integrity of their institutions. Practically, the findings are expected to inform the design of policies that strengthen integrity, accountability, and political neutrality in university governance. For policymakers and institutional leaders, the study offers evidence-based insights for reinforcing ethical standards, transparent appointment procedures, and continuous staff training to enhance governance and educational outcomes across Abia State's higher institutions.

Methodology

This study adopted a correlational research design, deemed appropriate for examining the predictive influence of professional ethics on educational governance, politics, and academic practices. The design enabled the researcher to determine the extent to which ethical governance, political neutrality, and professional practice predict transparency, accountability, and academic quality in Abia State's higher education system. The population of the study comprises all academic and administrative staff of Abia State University (ABSU), Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU), and the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN), Aba, totalling 4,380 individuals. Using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula at a 5% margin of error, a sample size of 366 respondents was obtained. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate institutional and staff-category representation across the three institutions. The data used were collected using the Professional Ethics and University Governance Questionnaire (PEUGQ), which comprised three subscales: ethical governance, political neutrality, and professional practice.

The instrument was subjected to content validation by experts in educational management and measurement to determine its appropriateness and clarity. Internal consistency reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, which produced a

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coefficient of 0.86, confirming the instrument's reliability. Data were collected through both physical administration and electronic distribution of the questionnaire, ensuring broad participation. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality throughout the process. The data collected were analysed using simple linear regression to answer the research questions, while associated t-tests were employed to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. This analytical approach provided the basis for determining the extent to which professional ethics predict transparency, accountability, and academic quality within Abia State's public higher education.

Results and Discussion

The results as presented in Table 1 below revealed strong and statistically significant predictive relationships between professional ethics and various dimensions of institutional governance and academic practice in Abia State's higher education system. Analysis of the first research question showed that ethical governance significantly predicted transparency and accountability in university administration. The regression result produced an R value of .762 and an R² of .581, indicating that approximately 58.1% of the variance in transparency and accountability was explained by ethical governance practices. The relationship was statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p < .05$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This finding suggests that higher levels of ethical governance correspond with improved transparency and accountability in institutional decision-making processes.

Table 1: Regression Analysis of Ethical Governance Predicting Transparency and Accountability

<i>Predictor Variable</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>Adjusted R²</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<i>Ethical Governance</i>	.762	.581	.578	490.23	< .05

Note: R = multiple correlation coefficient; R² = coefficient of determination; F = F -ratio; $p < .05$ indicates statistical significance.

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Similarly, table 2 below shows the second regression analysis that demonstrates that political neutrality significantly predicted the reduction of undue influence in staff appointments and resource allocation. The analysis found a strong relationship, with an R value of .689 and an R² of .475, meaning that political neutrality explained nearly 48% of the decrease in undue political influence. The relationship was significant at $p < .05$, confirming that political impartiality among staff and administrators plays a meaningful role in promoting fair, merit-based institutional processes.

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Political Neutrality Predicting Reduction of Undue Influence

<i>Predictor Variable</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>Adjusted R²</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<i>Political Neutrality</i>	.689	.475	.472	326.11	< .05

Note: R = multiple correlation coefficient; R² = coefficient of determination; F = F -ratio; $p < .05$ indicates statistical significance.

The result in Table 3 below indicates that professional practice significantly predicted the quality of academic delivery, with $R = .711$ and $R^2 = .506$. This means that 50.6% of the variance in academic delivery quality was explained by professional practice, and the relationship was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Collectively, these findings affirm that professional ethics (through ethical governance, political neutrality, and professional practice) serve as strong predictors of governance effectiveness and academic quality in Abia State's higher education institutions.

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Table 3: Regression Analysis of Professional Practice Predicting Academic Delivery Quality

<i>Predictor Variable</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>Adjusted R²</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<i>Professional Practice</i>	0.711	0.506	0.503	357.45	< .05

Note: *R* = multiple correlation coefficient; *R²* = coefficient of determination; *F* = *F* -ratio; *p* < .05 indicates statistical significance.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study bring to bear the critical role of professional ethics in shaping governance, political processes, and academic practices within Abia State's higher education institutions. The first finding revealed that ethical governance significantly predicts transparency and accountability, confirming that adherence to established ethical standards enhances institutional decision-making and strengthens accountability mechanisms. This finding aligns with prior research, and this indicates that ethical leadership fosters trust, reduces corruption, and improves organisational performance in Nigerian universities, as put forth by Ogunode, Edinoh, & Agbade, 2024; Okocha & Nwosu, 2023. In the context of ABSU, MOUAU, and NINLAN, this suggests that systematic adherence to codes of ethics can mitigate opaque governance practices and ensure that institutional policies are implemented consistently and fairly.

The second finding demonstrated that political neutrality significantly predicts the reduction of undue influence in appointments and resource allocation. This result supports the argument that insulating higher-education institutions from partisan pressures protects their autonomy and reinforces merit-based processes (Ikechukwu, 2024; Fasanmi, 2023). By minimising the influence of external political actors, universities and specialised institutes such as NINLAN can allocate resources efficiently, make fair staffing decisions, and maintain a culture of integrity.

Finally, the study found that professional practice significantly predicts the quality of academic delivery, indicating that staff adherence to professional standards is linked to enhanced teaching, learning, and research outcomes. This finding resonates with global literature on the role of professional ethics in higher education, which

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highlights that faculty and administrative professionalism positively impact student learning, research productivity, and institutional credibility (Chankseliani et al., 2020; UNESCO, n.d.).

While the current study provides valuable quantitative evidence of the predictive role of professional ethics, it predominantly relies on structured survey data. To gain a deeper understanding of the contextual and cultural factors influencing ethical conduct in Abia State's higher institutions, future research should incorporate qualitative approaches, such as interviews and focus groups with administrators, faculty, and students. Such methods can uncover perceptions, attitudes, and challenges that are not readily captured through quantitative instruments, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of ethical behaviour, governance practices, and institutional culture in the state's universities and specialised institutes.

Contribution to Knowledge

- 1. Empirical Evidence:** This study addresses a significant gap in the literature by providing robust quantitative evidence on how professional ethics—such as ethical governance, political neutrality, and professional practice—impact governance outcomes and educational quality across various institutions. While many earlier studies leaned on qualitative insights or concentrated on individual institutions, this research broadens the perspective significantly.
- 2. Linking Ethics to Institutional Performance:** By highlighting the strong connections between professional ethics and important outcomes, the study makes it clear how ethical practices can enhance transparency, accountability, and academic quality. This insight adds valuable depth to the ongoing conversation about how ethical governance serves as a solid foundation for improving institutional effectiveness.
- 3. Framework for Policy and Practice:** The findings offer a useful framework for policymakers and educational leaders in Abia State and similar areas. They emphasise the necessity of establishing ethical standards and transparent practices, which can guide the creation of effective governance structures in higher education.

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4. **Recommendations for Reform:** The study provides practical, evidence-based recommendations, suggesting strategies such as adopting enforceable ethical codes and ensuring that appointments are merit-based. These actionable insights are directly relevant for immediate application in governance reforms.
5. **Contextual Relevance:** By focusing specifically on the context of Abia State's higher education system, the research deepens our understanding of local governance challenges and highlights the essential role of professional ethics in tackling these issues. This context-sensitive approach can inform future research and policy discussions tailored for similar environments.
6. **Foundation for Future Research:** The study opens the door for further exploration by stressing the importance of qualitative methods to delve into the factors that influence ethical behaviour in higher education. It also proposes the need for longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impacts of ethical reforms, enriching the academic dialogue around governance in higher education.

In summary, this research greatly enhances our understanding of how professional ethics can bolster governance and academic practices, providing both theoretical insights and practical guidance for higher education institutions.

Conclusion

Professional ethics is indispensable for strengthening governance, academic practice, and institutional integrity in Abia State's universities. Embedding ethical principles into all facets of institutional administration is vital for improving transparency, accountability, and overall educational quality. The study demonstrated that ethical governance, political neutrality, and professional practice are strong predictors of institutional performance and the quality of academic delivery. Strengthening these dimensions is therefore essential for achieving sustainable educational development in the state.

Furthermore, the involvement of a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrators, and policymakers, in developing, reviewing, and implementing ethical standards can deepen institutional commitment to ethical governance. Engaging these stakeholders through participatory workshops,

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consultative surveys, and dialogue platforms ensures that reforms are contextually relevant and broadly accepted. Given the cross-sectional nature of the present study, longitudinal research is recommended to assess the long-term effects of enhanced ethical practices on institutional performance, student outcomes, and governance stability. Such research would help determine the sustainability of ethical reforms and guide continuous improvement in higher education governance across Abia State.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were proffered:

1. **Adopt and enforce institutional codes of ethics:** Universities and NINLAN should develop and implement clear, enforceable codes of conduct aligned with national and global best practices.
2. **Ensure transparent and merit-driven appointment processes:** Recruitment, promotions, and leadership appointments should be based strictly on merit to reduce political interference.
3. **Institutionalise regular ethics training:** Continuous professional development programmes should include ethics workshops and seminars for academic and administrative staff.
4. **Establish oversight and compliance committees:** Dedicated committees should monitor adherence to ethical standards and report infractions transparently.
5. **Create confidential reporting systems:** Whistleblowing mechanisms that protect anonymity should be introduced to encourage reporting of unethical behaviour.
6. **Encourage stakeholder participation in governance:** Mechanisms for including faculty, students, and community representatives in decision-making can strengthen accountability.
7. **Secure state-level policy support:** The Abia State government should back institutional reforms through policy directives, funding, and capacity-building initiatives.

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