

# WORK ETHICS AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: THE STUDENTS PERCEPTION

*Dr. (Mrs.) Ruth O, Anyaogu*

## **Abstract**

The study was focused on work ethics among academic staff in tertiary institutions in Imo State. Attempt was made to fathom some of the ethical conduct of lecturers to work; their level of commitment to work; factors affecting their ethical conduct; and the consequences of poor attitude to work. Three research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The sample consisted of 560 students drawn through proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The descriptive survey design was adopted. Questionnaire was employed to collect data for the study, mean, standard deviation, rank order were employed in answering the research questions. ANOVA and Scheffe's Test were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance. It was found out that academic staff exhibited low level of commitment to work; some factors that adversely affected their work ethics included: high student/lecturer ratio; inadequate facilities; the consequences of poor ethical conduct ranged from lowering of standard of education, poor academic performance of students, high incidents of omitted results/scripts among others. It was recommended that tertiary institutions should operate advancement procedures that reward both conduct, teaching, research, and to nip on bud any looming problem that will lead to down tools of lecturers as time lost can never be gained.

## **Background to the Study**

Ethics is as old as school and religion. It is a code of conduct, based on universal moral duties and obligations which indicate how professionals should behave. It deals with the ability to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong, and propriety from impropriety. Okeke (2004:28). Anyaogu (2007:3), aptly saw work ethics as the practice of applying a code of conduct based on moral principles of day-to-day actions to balance what is fair to individuals or organizations and what is right for society.

Tertiary institutions are formal organizations that hire various groups of workers who help to accomplish their various objectives. Among these institutions work force, the academic staff appear to play the leading role in the sense that they are the engine that drives the institutions. As a live wire, any time they turn their back from work, the institution becomes desolate. The major input and output (students) cannot exist without academic staff at work. The urgent need for academic staff positive attitude and commitment to work stem from the upsurge of educational standard and societal changes which set new expectations and standards for tertiary institution workers. These call for growth, job commitment and dedication in performance and discharge of their duties and to keep abreast with current ideals, knowledge, ethics as well as productivity.

However, compliance with the ethical demands of the code of conduct for academic profession depends on the quality, adequacy and efficiency of the management as well as the level of motivation of the staff. As Ali (1992:61), remarked "the quality of education depends on the quality of personnel and their effectiveness with which they carry out their responsibility; Any institution that underplays her lecturers may discover on the long run that it has undermined her future".

Academic staff differs in their background, sex, qualifications, and experience. As individuals they exhibit different attitude or approach to work. Anosike (2002:43) observed that "lecturers were replete with truancy, lateness to duty, absenteeism, indiscipline and negative attitude to work". Succinctly, Nzerem, (2004:15), noted that "the magnitude of indiscipline and corruption are issues of great concern". She asserted that cultism has taken over tertiary institutions and academic staff are accused of being members or sponsoring cultism; examination malpractice in the campuses takes the form of cheating, paying money for scores, sexual gratification from female students, altering scores, smuggling in of answer scripts, closing eyes to mercenaries to mention a few. The indispensable and crucial roles academic staff play in the educational system have attracted the attention of scholars, researchers, planners and administrators. There is need to establish order and control in respect of staff conduct and behaviours as well as evolve ways and means of sustaining high ethical standards in the execution of duties.

## **Statement of the Problem**

There have been hues and cries..about the deteriorating, declining and poor quality of tertiary education in Nigeria. The standards of education have fallen. The current population explosion in the education industry has put a lot of strain on institutions and thus tends to render the system ineffective in various dimensions. Lecture halls, laboratories, students' hostel, library space, books and journals, office space, poor orientation, antiquated workshops and stinking toilets are all seriously inadequate and unpleasant. These inadequacies, coupled with

the promotion criteria slogan "Publish or Perish" gave high concentration to publishing and selling of books and handouts to the neglect of teaching, and supervision of students. The situation has aroused the researcher's interest to pose these questions:

To what extent are academic staff committed to their work?

Which are the major factors that adversely affect work ethics among academic staff?

What are the consequences of lecturers' poor attitude to work as perceived by students?

The following hypotheses were tested: H<sub>01</sub> - There is no significant difference among the five institutions in terms of students' mean ratings of the extent to which academic staff are committed to work; H<sub>02</sub> - There is no significant difference in the perception of students from various faculties in their mean ratings of the consequences of poor ethical conduct among academic staff.

### **Significance of the Study**

Introspectively, data generated will enable teachers in institutions to assess themselves in their general attitude to work and their level of ethical conduct and thus work towards improvement or excellence. The society will benefit when it receives the output (graduates) that are morally, socially, academically, and ethically moulded in knowledge and character. The stakeholders, NUC (National University Council) could use information generated from this study to formulate better policies to guide and shape the management of tertiary institutions. Improvement on staff works ethics will enable students achieve school goals.

### **Method**

The study utilized a descriptive and inferential survey design. The population comprised 5,600 final year students in the faculties of Education, Business, Sciences, and Agriculture from Universities, Polytechnic, College of Education and Imo Poly in Imo State. A sample size of 560 (10%) was drawn through proportional stratified random sampling technique. The instrument used was a self developed questionnaire based on the available literature entitled "Perception of students on work ethics questionnaire (PSWEQ) and-Structured on a four point rating scale of likert type, Strongly Agree (SA) 4 points, Agree (A) 3 points, Disagree (D) 2 points, Strongly Disagree (SD) 1 point with a total of 34 items. Since a four-point likert scale was used in the data collection, the weighted mean of 2.50 was deemed as the criterion for accepting or rejecting items of the research questions.

The instrument was face validated by experts in Education. A test-retest method was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire items. The reliability coefficient of the instrument using Pearson Product moment correlation was 0.81. The researcher personally administered questionnaire and all copies were retrieved with the aid of research assistants. The mean scores, standard deviation, (SD) and rank order were determined and statistical table constructed with the aid of computer. The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha-level of significance with analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Scheffe's test statistically to determine differences as required.

## Presentation of Results

Below is the data collected and analyzed on commitment of lecturers to work.

S/No	Items	Mean	Std Dev.	Decision	Rank Order
1.	Do use lecture periods effectively in terms of teaching the topics of the lectures	2.820	0.929	Accept	2 <sup>nd</sup>
2	Do allow students to grade scripts for them.	2.332	0.953	Reject	7 <sup>th</sup>
3.	Do teach their courses except when they are unavoidably absent	2.088	0.900	Reject	10 <sup>th</sup>
4.	Do adhere to the institutions stipulated code of conduct	2.611	0.969	Accept	3 <sup>rd</sup>
5.	Do give extra lectures to students especially when there is still a lot to cover in the course outline	2.566	0.957	Accept	4 <sup>th</sup>
6,	Do attend meetings and institution functions like matriculation, convocation, etc.	2.271	0.914	Reject	8 <sup>th</sup>
7.	Do submit students <sup>1</sup> results in time	2.502	0.925	Accept	5 <sup>th</sup>
8.	Do show concern to students whenever they fail in issues regarding academic activities	2.977	0.966	Accept	1 <sup>st</sup>
9.	Do answer all relevant questions asked by students during lectures	2.470	0.940	Reject	9 <sup>th</sup>
10.	Do spend extra hours to attend to students problem	2.202	0.275	Reject	9 <sup>th</sup>
	Cumulative average on commitment	2.484	0.275	Reject	

Table 1, - shows the mean scores and standard deviations of 10 items describing the extent to which academic staff are committed to work. The table revealed that 5 items were accepted as greater than average 2.50 (i.e. expected frequency score = 4+3+2+1 = 2.50) while 5 items were below.

4

Table 2: Students Perception on Factors that Affect Work ethics Adversely

S/No	Item	Mean	Std Dev.	Decision	Rank Order
11.	Unusually large number of students to teach	3.108	0.901	Accept	2 <sup>nd</sup>
12.	Poor quality of intakes, that is Students	2.727	0.971	Accept	6 <sup>th</sup>
13.	Lack/inadequate instructional facilities (machine, chemicals, equipment	3.152	0.913	Accept	6 <sup>th</sup>
14.	Too many programme for available resources (over-stretching of resources)	2.923	0.903	Accept	4 <sup>th</sup>
15.	Secret cult activities on campus	2.280	1.021	Reject	12 <sup>th</sup>
16.	Students riots and	2.368	1.022	Reject	11 <sup>th</sup>

	Demonstrations				
17.	Poor conditions of service (housing, water, electricity)	2.943	0.972	Accept	3 <sup>rd</sup>
18.	Too much emphasis on research and publications	2.398	0.946	Reject	10 <sup>th</sup>
19.	Top management apathy to institutional problems	2.707	0.970	Accept	7 <sup>th</sup>
20.	Late payment of salaries and Allowances	2.648	1.004	Accept	8 <sup>th</sup>
21.	Poor communication system on Campus	2.268	0.999	Accept	5 <sup>th</sup>
22.	Over-loading of teaching credit Hours	2.620	1.001	Accept	9 <sup>th</sup>
	Cumulative average on factors	2.713	0.532	Accept	

The table revealed that 9 items were accepted as major factors that adversely affect work ethics of lecturers (those with mean score greater than 2.50).

Table 3: Consequences of Poor Attitude to Work

S/No	Items	Mean	Std Dev.	Decision	Rank Order
23.	Lowering of standard of Education	3.294	0.899	Accept	1 <sup>st</sup>
24.	Poor academic performance of Students	3.100	0.980	Accept	3 <sup>rd</sup>
25.	Students' dislike for the institution	2.791	0.982	Accept	10 <sup>th</sup>
26.	Students' absenteeism from' Classes	2.827	1.048	Accept	7 <sup>th</sup>
27.	Students' lateness to classes	2.800	0.976	Accept	5 <sup>th</sup>
28.	Frustration and withdrawal of students from school	2.795	0.956	Accept	9 <sup>th</sup>
29.	Incessant industrial actions, resulting in disruption of school academic calendar	2.743	0.989	Accept	11 <sup>th</sup>
30.	Students' cry for omitted results/ Scripts	3.214	0.933	Accept	2 <sup>nd</sup>
31.	Lack of interest in schooling by Students.	2.700	0.949	Accept	12 <sup>th</sup>
32.	Students' disdain for their Teachers.	2.804	0.904	Accept	8 <sup>th</sup>
33.	Students' involvement in Examination malpractice	2.848	1.022	Accept	6 <sup>th</sup>
34.	Students' indiscipline behaviours	2.911	1.002	Accept	4 <sup>th</sup>
	Cumulative average on Consequences	2.908	0.689	Accept	

Table 3, revealed that all the 12 items on the list were accepted as major consequences of poor attitude to work, among academic staff of tertiary institutions in Imo State.

### Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one had stated that (HO1).

There is no significant difference among the institutions as regards the extent to which academic staff are committed to their work.

Table 4: ANOVA summary on commitment.

Source	Mean Square	Sum of DF	Squares	F Value	P > F
Institution	555	4	1,304	37.024	0.0668
Error	559	42			
Corrected total					
R-Square	0.12				
	Coeff Var	Root MSB	Commitment		
	Mean				
	10.399	0.258		2.484	

From the table, the null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level of significance ( $P < 0.05$ ). That is, there is significant difference among the institutions.

Table 5: Scheffe's Test for Commitment Means with the same letter is not different. Scheffe significantly

Scheffe Grouping	Mean	N	Institution
A	2.645	130	FUTO
B	2.472	110	IMSU
B	2.470	120	AICE
B	2.395	100	FPNO
B	2.389	100	Imo Poly

In the table, the institution with the highest mean score is FLJTO ( $x = 2.648$ ) while Imo Poly ( $x = 2.389$ ) is least.

H02 - There will be no significant difference in the perception of students from various faculties in their mean ratings of the consequence of poor attitude to work exhibited by academic staff.

Table 6: ANOVA summary on consequences

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	P > F
Faculty	3	6.459	2.153	4.62	0.003
Error	556	259.096	0.466		
Corrected Total	559	265.555			
R-Square	0.024323				
	Coeff Var	Root MSE	Consequences Mean		
	23.474	0.683	2.908		

In the table 6, the F-calculated value is 4.62 with significance probability of 0.003, which is less than 0.05, Thus, rejecting the null hypothesis: that is, there is significant difference. The post hoc test, using the Scheffe's test is shown below.

**Table 7: Scheffe's Test for Consequences**

Scheffe Grouping	Mean	N	Faculty
A	3.063	67	Business
A B	2.957	209	Education
	2.877	242	Science
	2.595	42	Agriculture

From the table, the highest ( $x = 3.063$ ) and (X2.595). The means showed that there is significant difference in the ratings of students from different faculties hence the scheffe's grouping letters A & B. faculty of Business Administration has the least is Faculty of Agriculture

## **Discussion**

It can be observed from table 1 that the overall mean score was 2.484 which is less than the expected mean score of 2.50. This means that the level or extent to which academic staff of tertiary institutions in Imo State are committed to their work is generally below average. The finding was in line with Tanji (2001), when he observed that some lecturers lacked a life job commitment as well as strong union that can address issues of the profession. Succinctly, Okeke (2003), opined that most lecturers lack commitment to duty because university system rewards research and publication at the expense of hard work, dedication and commitment to duties. Since research is emphasized most at the expense of teaching, supervision and other duties in the guidelines for promotions, lecturers probably sacrifice other duties at the alter of research.

The high level of commitment to duty at FUTO table (10) could be attributed to high level of encouragements, better conditions of service and congenial working environment placed on ground for academic staff.

In this study, table 2 has shown that the factors, lack/inadequate instructional facilities  $X = 3.152$ , unusually large number of students to teach  $X = 3.018$  among others that adversely affect work ethics among lecturers have a severe and sore effect on work ethics ( $x = 2.713$ ) that is above average.

This falls in line with Nwaoku (2005), that there is a high correlation between good working conditions and a high level performance. To her, personnel policies, workload, class size, personal consideration, extra load and physical conditions stimulate and encourage the teaching-learning process. Professionals are usually prepared for their tasks in satisfactory and stimulating working conditions and academic staff are no exception.

Table 3, drew conclusion that the consequences or resultant effect of poor attitude to work among academic staff ( $X=2.908$ ) is very high. This agreed with Anosike (2002), when she maintained that all Nigerians know that the standard of Education has fallen and ethical conduct expected of the teachers has equally fallen. In the same vein; Okeke (2004), observed that the talk about the falling standard of education had become a topic for frequent reporting and commentaries in our mass media. Our educational institutions and their products appeared incapable of assisting to country to soar to great technological, height despite our high level of technological awareness.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made.

1. Tertiary institution authorities should start operating advancement procedures that reward both conduct, teaching and research so that lecturer's would be committed to duties/work.
2. Institutions code of conduct should be made available to staff and students.
3. The administrators, the council and the government should/ought to nip on bud any looming problem that will make lecturers put down their tools (strike) on time as the consequences are grave on students and the educational system in general as time lost can never be gained.
4. Institutions should constitute Ethics Committee to intensify drive for improved work ethics by staff; so that they-develop-high level of ethical conduct and commitment to work.
5. Academic staff should be motivated through better conditions of service, adequate provision of physical facilities, grants, fringe benefits and payment of attractive salary; that will make them happy, healthy, prosperous, satisfied, dedicated and committed.

## **Conclusion**

In view of this study, it can be concluded that the ethical dispositions of academic staff to work were diverse, and some uncomplimentary. Also the consequences were detrimental to work ethics, good governance and maintenance of standards in education. There are strong relationships between lecturer's conditions of service (electricity, water supply, accommodation) inadequate facilities (machines equipment) and level of ethical conduct to work in the institutions.

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