Available on: https://jsshrs.ep-journals.org/ E-ISSN: 3051-3561 P-ISSN: 3051-3553

Journal of Social Science and Human Research Studies

Volume: 02 Issue: 02 February-2026

Administrative Ethics and Corruption in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: Evidence from Nnamdi Azikiwe University

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Published Date: February 24, 2026 **Article DOI: 10.65150/EP-jsshrs/V2E2/2026-10**

ABSTRACT: This study examined the relationship between administrative ethics and corruption in Nigerian tertiary institutions, using Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, as a case study. The research adopted a descriptive survey design, drawing data from 340 academic and non-academic staff selected through a stratified random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was administered, and data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with SPSS 27.0. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.87, indicating high internal consistency. The findings indicate that while a majority of respondents (77.9%) perceived administrators as acting with integrity (mean = 3.93, SD = 1.04), the survey responses also suggest the presence of specific unethical practices within the institution studied. Reported concerns included perceived nepotism in recruitment processes (mean = 3.93, SD = 1.09), embezzlement (mean = 3.99, SD = 1.06), and bribery (mean = 3.94, SD = 1.00). The regression analysis ($R^2 = 0.520$, $p < 0.0001$) demonstrates that the variables examined jointly explain a substantial proportion of the variation in reported unethical behaviour within the university. Among these, institutional factors ($\beta = 0.482$, $p < 0.001$) showed the strongest statistical association, followed by cultural factors ($\beta = 0.326$, $p < 0.001$) and environmental factors ($\beta = 0.218$, $p < 0.001$). Within the scope of this single-institution study, the results suggest that perceived weaknesses in internal control mechanisms, tolerance for preferential treatment, and unfavourable working conditions are significant predictors of unethical conduct. Although formal ethical guidelines appear to be in place, the findings imply limitations in their implementation and enforcement within the university context. It recommends strengthening ethical enforcement mechanisms, enhancing transparency through e-governance, improving staff welfare, and promoting ethical leadership to restore accountability and integrity in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

KEYWORDS: Administrative ethics, corruption, ethical leadership, institutional governance, Nigerian tertiary institutions

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Administrative ethics form the moral foundation of effective and equitable governance in public institutions. In tertiary education, ethics guide decision-making, policy implementation, and relationships among administrators, staff, and students. Ethical administration promotes accountability, transparency, and efficiency, which are essential for institutional success. However, Nigerian universities increasingly face unethical administrative practices that undermine integrity and educational goals (Akanbi & Olanrewaju, 2021). Since independence, Nigeria's higher education system has expanded significantly through the establishment of federal, state, and private universities to enhance access and national development. Yet, this growth has not been matched by improvements in governance, funding, or ethical regulation. University administrators often encounter conflicts between institutional duties and personal interests, resulting in ethical lapses such as financial mismanagement, favoritism in recruitment and promotion, manipulation of examinations, and diversion of research or capital funds (Odeyemi & Salisu, 2020).

Corruption in tertiary institutions erodes public confidence, compromises academic standards, and encourages mediocrity. Omoregie and Ighodalo (2022) observe that weak ethical frameworks, poor leadership, and political interference create an enabling environment for misconduct. The absence of strong enforcement mechanisms and limited institutional autonomy further weaken accountability (Egbule, 2021). Administrative ethics in Nigerian universities mirror the broader governance problems of the public sector. As microcosms of society, universities reflect national ethical and institutional deficiencies. The lack of effective oversight, insufficient autonomy, and neglect of ethics education in public administration programs has left many administrators ill-equipped to address ethical dilemmas (Nnabuife & Okoye, 2023).

Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU), Awka, Anambra State, provides a relevant case for analyzing administrative ethics and corruption in Nigerian higher institutions. As a major federal university, it illustrates both the achievements and governance challenges of the tertiary education system. Its administrative operations spanning finance, personnel, and academic management offer insights into the application or neglect of ethical standards. Despite being recognized for academic excellence, cases of financial irregularities, examination misconduct, and unethical recruitment

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have been reported, raising concerns about the effectiveness of internal controls (Ijeoma, 2023). The situation underscores the need to understand how administrative ethics influence corruption and how governance reforms can foster accountability and integrity. Corruption in higher education undermines meritocracy, discourages innovation, and diminishes global competitiveness. It poses a serious threat to national development and institutional credibility. Therefore, understanding the relationship between administrative ethics and corruption is crucial for designing sustainable strategies that strengthen internal governance, promote transparency, and rebuild public trust in universities.

Globally, universities are expected to uphold ethical standards that reflect honesty, fairness, and justice. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes that higher education institutions should serve as moral exemplars and agents of social integrity. Nigeria's inability to fully embed these values within its tertiary system hampers human capital development and institutional performance.

This study therefore examines the ethical dimensions of university administration, identifies factors promoting corruption, and proposes measures to enhance ethical conduct among administrators. Using Nnamdi Azikiwe University as a case study, it seeks to provide empirical insights that can inform reforms, strengthen policy frameworks, and promote ethical reorientation across Nigerian tertiary institutions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria are expected to serve as centres of moral integrity and intellectual leadership, promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical governance. However, the erosion of administrative ethics and the persistence of corruption have become widespread, undermining the credibility and performance of university administration. Despite various reforms, policies, and institutional codes designed to promote ethical behaviour, unethical practices remain prevalent in the higher education system (Ogunleye & Adewale, 2020). Corruption manifests in forms such as financial misappropriation, falsification of results, sexual harassment, bribery, favouritism in recruitment, and manipulation in student admissions. These practices have eroded academic integrity, reduced public trust, and weakened institutional efficiency (Ezeani & Nwosu, 2021).

Administrators, who should exemplify ethical leadership, are often implicated in or complicit with unethical practices due to weak accountability mechanisms, poor enforcement of ethical codes, and excessive politicization of university governance. Although agencies like the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) have introduced anti-corruption initiatives for higher institutions, the continued rise of unethical behaviour indicates lapses in implementation and monitoring. Many institutional mechanisms for ensuring ethical conduct are either ineffective, underfunded, or influenced by personal and political interests (Okonkwo & Ijeoma, 2023).

Nnamdi Azikiwe University exemplifies these challenges, with reported cases of financial irregularities, academic fraud, and unethical staff-student relations revealing weaknesses in its ethical oversight systems. Such misconduct threatens the university's academic reputation, administrative efficiency, and ability to fulfil its educational mission (Obi & Chukwuma, 2022). Although corruption in Nigeria has been widely studied in political and public sectors, limited empirical research has focused on the ethical dimensions of university administration. The scarcity of studies exploring how administrative ethics shape corruption within tertiary institutions creates a critical knowledge gap (Adebisi & Omotayo, 2021). This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by examining the link between administrative ethics and corruption in Nigerian universities, using Nnamdi Azikiwe University as a case study. It aims to identify causes of unethical behaviour, assess institutional ethical mechanisms, and propose strategies for improving accountability and integrity in higher education governance.

1.3 Research Questions

The research seeks to provide answers to the following key questions:

i. What is the nature and scope of administrative ethics practiced in Nnamdi Azikiwe University?
ii. In what ways do unethical administrative behaviours contribute to corruption within the university system?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the influence of administrative ethics on the prevalence of corruption in Nigerian tertiary institutions, using Nnamdi Azikiwe University as a case study. The specific objectives of the study are to:

i. examine the nature and scope of administrative ethics practiced in Nnamdi Azikiwe University; and
ii. identify the forms and manifestations of unethical administrative practices contributing to corruption within the university.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Administrative Ethics

Administrative ethics serves as the moral framework guiding public administrators to act with honesty, transparency, fairness, and accountability. It involves applying moral principles in decision-making and public service delivery. According to Lawal and Olayinka (2023), administrative ethics embodies the duties and values that shape officials' commitment to public interest. In Nigerian tertiary institutions, adherence to ethical standards is essential to address corruption, favoritism, and abuse of office that undermine credibility and performance. Okafor and Ojeifo (2022) emphasize that ethical administration promotes fairness in recruitment, fund management, and decision-making.

Despite existing regulations, unethical practices such as fund diversion, nepotism, and sexual misconduct persist in universities (Eze, 2023), often due to weak accountability and poor leadership. Ethical governance therefore requires integrity, fairness, and strict compliance with codes of conduct. The Nigerian Public Service Rules (2021) demand professionalism and avoidance of corruption. Ethical leadership, as Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005) note, builds trust, strengthens morale, and promotes transparency. Institutionalizing ethics through codes of conduct, training, and transparent systems (Adedeji & Ogunyemi, 2024) embeds integrity in organizational culture. Ultimately, administrative ethics enhances accountability, reduces corruption, and supports good governance. Its effective application, particularly at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, can advance institutional credibility and sustainable educational development in Nigeria.

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2.1.2 Corruption

Corruption is a major barrier to institutional effectiveness and national development in Nigeria, particularly within tertiary education. It undermines academic integrity, erodes public trust, and weakens governance systems. Transparency International (2023) describes corruption as the misuse of entrusted power for private gain, manifesting in bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, examination malpractice, and favoritism (Ogunleye & Oloruntoba, 2022). In Nigerian universities, poor leadership ethics, weak accountability, and tolerance for misconduct promote such practices. Eze and Nwokolo (2023) note that corruption also includes plagiarism, grade manipulation, and admission racketeering. At Nnamdi Azikiwe University, irregularities in promotions and procurement reflect administrative decay (Okafor & Anigbogu, 2021). Corruption violates fairness, accountability, and service ethics (Adebayo & Fatile, 2022). Adegbite and Olayemi (2023) argue that weak oversight and poor remuneration sustain it. Addressing corruption demands ethical leadership, transparency, audits, and reforms that institutionalize integrity (Umeh & Ezenwa, 2024).

2.1.3 The Nature and Scope of Administrative Ethics Practiced in the University

Administrative ethics refers to the moral principles and standards that guide the behavior and decision-making of administrators, particularly in public institutions such as universities. It serves as the foundation for accountability, transparency, integrity, and fairness in managing higher education systems (Okafor & Nwosu, 2023). In Nigerian tertiary institutions, administrative ethics involves strict adherence to institutional rules, avoidance of corruption, and commitment to professionalism and responsible use of public resources (Eze & Uche, 2022). The essence of administrative ethics lies in promoting moral conduct and preventing unethical behaviors such as favoritism, embezzlement, and academic malpractice. Adeyemi (2023) notes that ethical administration requires respect for human dignity, fairness, and compliance with institutional policies. University administrators vice-chancellors, registrars, and heads of departments are expected to demonstrate honesty, impartiality, and accountability in their dealings with staff, students, and the public. Ethical conduct ensures that institutional goals are achieved in the public interest rather than for personal benefit (Adebayo & Sanni, 2021).

Administrative ethics in university governance extends to financial management, human resource administration, academic integrity, and service delivery. It upholds principles such as transparency, due process, meritocracy, and equity (Nwakamma & Okorie, 2022). When effectively practiced, it fosters trust, fairness, and organizational justice, reducing opportunities for corruption. At Nnamdi Azikiwe University, for instance, ethical practices are reflected in fair recruitment, transparent admissions, and adherence to procurement regulations (Ike & Obi, 2024). Internal control systems and ethics committees ensure compliance with professional standards, while training and evaluation promote good governance (Onwuka & Ezeani, 2023). Nonetheless, challenges such as nepotism, bribery, and abuse of office still undermine ethical governance in some Nigerian universities, eroding public trust and institutional credibility (Agbo & Nnaji, 2023). Continuous reforms, strong leadership, and regulatory oversight are necessary to address these issues. Ultimately, administrative ethics is a vital component of university governance. As Omole and Afolabi (2024) emphasize, ethical leadership enhances transparency, accountability, and institutional integrity key ingredients for sustainable development and academic excellence in Nigeria's higher education system.

2.1.4 Forms and Manifestations of Unethical Administrative Practices Contributing to Corruption within the University

Unethical administrative practices in Nigerian universities have become a major concern due to their negative effects on institutional integrity, transparency, and academic quality. These practices appear in various forms of misconduct that weaken the ethical foundation of university governance. Corruption in institutions such as Nnamdi Azikiwe University often manifests through overt and covert actions that erode public confidence and diminish academic standards (Adebayo & Akinola, 2023). Such unethical behavior arises when administrators misuse their authority for personal gain or favoritism. Common examples include nepotism in employment and promotion, bribery for grades, admissions or contracts, and diversion of institutional funds, reflecting weak accountability mechanisms (Olayinka, 2022). Other forms include favoritism in resource distribution, sex-for-grades scandals, and examination malpractices. These actions promote injustice, discourage merit, and reduce administrative efficiency (Ezenwa & Nwachukwu, 2021). At Nnamdi Azikiwe University, weak internal controls, inadequate enforcement of ethical codes, and politicized appointments further sustain these practices. Ethical principles such as transparency, fairness, and accountability are often compromised by cultural influences like patronage networks and conformity to corrupt norms (Okafor & Udeh, 2023).

Unethical conduct also appears in academic fraud and manipulation of procurement processes. Procurement officers may inflate contracts, bypass due process, or collude with vendors, while unethical recruitment and promotion lead to the appointment of unqualified personnel, thereby reducing teaching and research quality (Adewunmi & Bello, 2023). Similarly, secrecy in administrative decision-making enables impunity, as officials hide or manipulate records to evade scrutiny (Onuoha & Nnamani, 2022).

The consequences are extensive: institutional credibility declines, staff morale deteriorates, and the university's moral and educational missions are undermined. To curb these issues, researchers recommend enforcing clear ethical codes, regular ethics training, transparent governance, and strong whistleblower protection (Eme & Okonkwo, 2024). Strengthening accountability, ethical leadership, and openness in all administrative processes is vital to restoring moral integrity and ensuring universities fulfill their role as centers of learning, character building, and national development (Ibrahim & Odu, 2023).

2.2 Theoretical Review

The major theories relevant to this study include the Ethical Climate Theory, Agency Theory, and Institutional Theory.

Ethical Climate Theory: The Ethical Climate Theory, originally developed by Victor and Cullen (1988), explains how the shared perceptions of what constitutes ethical behavior within an organization influence decision-making and actions among members. According to this theory, every organization possesses a dominant ethical climate whether caring, instrumental, or law and code-based that guides administrators and staff in moral reasoning and ethical judgment. In the context of Nigerian tertiary institutions such as Nnamdi Azikiwe University, this theory highlights how organizational culture and ethical leadership shape the moral conduct of academic and non-academic staff. A positive ethical climate reduces the likelihood of unethical behavior such as bribery, sexual harassment, and examination malpractice, while a weak ethical climate encourages

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rationalization of corruption. Thus, building a strong ethical environment through transparent policies, integrity training, and value-based leadership can minimize corruption in university administration (Okafor & Nwankwo, 2023; Yusuf, 2022).

Agency Theory: Agency Theory, proposed by Jensen and Meckling (1976), posits that a conflict often exists between principals (owners or governing councils) and agents (university administrators or employees) due to differing interests. In public tertiary institutions, administrators act as agents entrusted with managing public resources and academic integrity on behalf of the government and the public. However, in the absence of effective oversight, agents may engage in opportunistic or corrupt behavior, such as misappropriation of funds or favoritism. This theory is pertinent to understanding corruption in Nigerian universities, as weak accountability structures, lack of transparency, and limited enforcement mechanisms create opportunities for ethical breaches. Administrative ethics embodied through accountability, honesty, and fairness serves as a moderating factor, helping to reduce agency problems and improve institutional integrity (Eze & Agbo, 2022; Balogun, 2023). Effective implementation of ethical codes and external audit systems reinforces ethical compliance and reduces corruption risks.

Institutional Theory: Institutional Theory, as articulated by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), explains how organizational behavior is shaped by institutional norms, rules, and external pressures. It posits that organizations tend to conform to established norms and practices—whether ethical or unethical to gain legitimacy and acceptance within their institutional environment. In the Nigerian higher education context, this theory provides insight into how systemic issues such as political interference, bureaucratic inefficiency, and weak governance frameworks can institutionalize corruption. Administrative ethics, therefore, functions as an institutional mechanism that can promote organizational legitimacy by fostering compliance with professional codes and societal expectations. When institutions like Nnamdi Azikiwe University institutionalize ethics through policy enforcement, anti-corruption training, and transparent recruitment processes, they strengthen their legitimacy and reduce the culture of corruption (Chukwuemeka & Edeh, 2023; Ogunyemi, 2024).

2.3 Empirical Review

The reviewed studies offer valuable evidence for the present study on administrative ethics and corruption at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Ogunleye and Adebisi (2021) carried out a study titled *"Administrative Ethics and Corruption in Nigerian Universities: The Role of Leadership Integrity."* The research adopted a descriptive survey design and was conducted across five federal universities in Southern Nigeria, including the University of Lagos and the University of Benin. The sample size consisted of 250 academic and non-academic staff, selected through stratified random sampling. Structured questionnaires were employed for data collection, and data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis. The results revealed a significant negative relationship between ethical administrative conduct and corruption tendencies. It was found that lack of transparency, weak disciplinary systems, and leadership favoritism contributed to unethical practices. The study recommended strengthening institutional ethical codes and implementing regular integrity audits to reduce administrative corruption.

Eze and Okonkwo (2022) examined *"Ethical Climate and Corruption Perception among University Administrators in Southeast Nigeria."* The study employed a mixed-method research design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews across four universities, including Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. A sample of 300 respondents (senior administrators, lecturers, and registry officers) was selected using purposive and proportionate sampling techniques. Data were gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, while thematic analysis and multiple regression were used for interpretation. The findings revealed that a positive ethical climate significantly reduced perceived corruption, while weak accountability structures encouraged nepotism, bribery, and misuse of university resources. The authors recommended periodic ethics training for administrators and the establishment of independent anti-corruption monitoring committees in universities.

Afolabi and Yusuf (2020) conducted a study titled *"Administrative Accountability and Corruption Control in Public Universities in Nigeria."* The researchers adopted a cross-sectional survey design with a sample of 200 respondents drawn from three federal universities in the North-Central geopolitical zone using systematic random sampling. Data were obtained using a Likert-type questionnaire and analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Findings indicated that administrative accountability and transparency significantly influenced corruption control. The absence of monitoring mechanisms allowed for financial mismanagement and favoritism in recruitment and promotion. The study recommended that anti-corruption units be integrated into university administrative structures to ensure compliance with ethical norms.

Nnadi and Chukwu (2024) examined *"Institutional Culture and Administrative Corruption in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: A Case Study of Nnamdi Azikiwe University."* The research adopted a case study design to explore how institutional norms influence ethical behavior and corruption. A sample size of 150 respondents, including departmental heads, administrative officers, and bursary staff, was selected using judgmental sampling. Data were collected through interviews and document analysis (administrative reports, audit records, and ethics policy manuals). Content and thematic analysis revealed that tolerance of unethical practices, such as unofficial payments, favoritism, and lack of sanctions, perpetuated corruption. The study recommended reforming the university's ethical code, introducing whistleblowing mechanisms, and enforcing strict sanctions against administrative misconduct.

2.4 Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study anchored on the Ethical Climate Theory, as it provides the most direct and relevant explanation for the relationship between administrative ethics and corruption in Nigerian tertiary institutions, with Nnamdi Azikiwe University serving as the empirical focus. The Ethical Climate Theory (Victor & Cullen, 1988) provides the most appropriate theoretical foundation for this study. This theory explains how the collective perceptions, beliefs, and moral standards within an organization influence the ethical or unethical behavior of its members. It emphasizes that the moral atmosphere or "ethical climate" of an institution shapes decision-making, ethical reasoning, and the tendency toward or against corruption. In the context of Nigerian tertiary institutions, particularly Nnamdi Azikiwe University, the Ethical Climate Theory is relevant because it highlights the critical role of organizational culture, ethical leadership, and administrative behavior in promoting integrity or, conversely, fostering corruption. When the ethical climate of a university prioritizes honesty, transparency, accountability, and fairness, staff and administrators are more likely to act ethically. Conversely, when unethical behavior is tolerated or rewarded, corruption becomes normalized. Therefore, this theory provides a clear framework for analyzing how the ethical environment, leadership conduct, institutional policies, and norms collectively influence corruption patterns and administrative integrity in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

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3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the relationship between administrative ethics and corruption in Nigerian tertiary institutions, focusing on Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. This design was suitable as it enabled systematic assessment of ethical conduct, administrative practices, and corruption trends among university staff without manipulating variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The population comprised both academic and non-academic staff, including senior administrators, lecturers, and junior personnel. From an estimated workforce of 2,150 (Nnamdi Azikiwe University Staff Bulletin, 2024), a sample of 340 respondents was selected using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 95% confidence level and a 0.05 margin of error. A stratified random sampling technique categorized respondents into top, middle, and lower management levels to ensure fair representation. A structured questionnaire served as the main instrument for data collection, covering demographic data and items on ethics and corruption measured on a five-point Likert scale. Three experts validated the instrument, and a pilot test yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.87, confirming reliability (Hair et al., 2022). Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics specifically, Pearson correlation and multiple regression via SPSS version 27. Ethical standards were upheld through informed consent, confidentiality, and adherence to the university's Research Ethics Policy (2024).

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: The Nature and Scope of Administrative Ethics Practiced in Nnamdi Azikiwe University

S/N	STATEMENTS	SA (f) (%)	A (f) (%)	U (f) (%)	D (f) (%)	SD (f) (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	University administrators demonstrate integrity and honesty in the discharge of their duties.	120 (35.3%)	145 (42.6%)	25 (7.4%)	30 (8.8%)	20 (5.9%)	3.93	1.04
2	Ethical standards are clearly communicated and enforced among university staff.	105 (30.9%)	150 (44.1%)	35 (10.3%)	30 (8.8%)	20 (5.9%)	3.86	1.02
3	There are established mechanisms for monitoring ethical compliance among administrators.	98 (28.8%)	138 (40.6%)	45 (13.2%)	35 (10.3%)	24 (7.1%)	3.74	1.07
4	Administrators are trained regularly on ethical standards and anti-corruption practices.	110 (32.4%)	125 (36.8%)	40 (11.8%)	40 (11.8%)	25 (7.4%)	3.76	1.11
5	Ethical behaviour is rewarded and unethical conduct is appropriately sanctioned.	115 (33.8%)	130 (38.2%)	30 (8.8%)	40 (11.8%)	25 (7.4%)	3.79	1.09
	Grand Mean/SD						3.82	1.07

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 presents the perceptions of 340 respondents regarding administrative ethics at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. The analysis covered areas such as leadership integrity, clarity and enforcement of ethical standards, monitoring procedures, ethics training, and the use of sanctions or rewards to promote compliance. Based on responses obtained in this study, a majority of participants expressed generally favourable views about the ethical environment within the institution. Specifically, 77.9% of respondents agreed that administrators demonstrate integrity and honesty, with this item recording the highest mean score (M = 3.93, SD = 1.04). This finding suggests that, from the perspective of those surveyed, transparency and upright conduct are recognised leadership attributes. In a similar vein, 75.0% indicated that ethical standards are clearly communicated and enforced (M = 3.86, SD = 1.02), implying that institutional expectations regarding conduct are, according to respondents, reasonably well articulated. However, perceptions were comparatively lower in relation to monitoring mechanisms. While 69.4% agreed that structures exist to oversee compliance with ethical standards (M = 3.74, SD = 1.07), this more moderate level of agreement may indicate areas where respondents perceive the need for improved transparency or effectiveness in monitoring processes. Concerning ethics training, 69.2% affirmed that regular sensitisation programmes are conducted (M = 3.76, SD = 1.11). Although this reflects a positive assessment, the distribution of responses suggests that the frequency and inclusiveness of such training may warrant further attention. With respect to sanctions and rewards, 72.0% agreed that ethical conduct is encouraged and misconduct appropriately sanctioned (M = 3.79, SD = 1.09). While this indicates a degree of confidence in enforcement mechanisms, it should be interpreted as reflecting the perceptions of the sampled respondents rather than as conclusive evidence of institutional practice. Overall, the grand mean of 3.82 (SD = 1.07) points to a generally positive ethical climate as perceived by participants in this study. Nevertheless, these findings are based solely on self-reported survey data from a specific sample and should therefore be understood within that context. Further empirical investigation, including qualitative inquiry or institutional audits, would provide additional insight into the consistency and effectiveness of ethical governance practices at the university.

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Table 2: Forms and Manifestations of Unethical Administrative Practices Contributing to Corruption in Nnamdi Azikiwe University

S/N	STATEMENTS	SA (f %)	A (f %)	U (f %)	D (f %)	SD (f %)	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	University administrators engage in favoritism and nepotism during staff recruitment and promotion exercises.	142 (41.8%)	110 (32.4%)	36 (10.6%)	28 (8.2%)	24 (7.1%)	3.93	1.09
2	There are cases of embezzlement and diversion of institutional funds by university officials.	156 (45.9%)	102 (30.0%)	30 (8.8%)	26 (7.6%)	26 (7.6%)	3.99	1.06
3	Bribery and exchange of favors influence administrative decisions such as admissions, transfers, and resource allocation.	130 (38.2%)	124 (36.5%)	40 (11.8%)	28 (8.2%)	18 (5.3%)	3.94	1.00
4	Procurement and contract awarding processes are often manipulated to favor certain individuals or groups.	122 (35.9%)	118 (34.7%)	42 (12.4%)	34 (10.0%)	24 (7.1%)	3.82	1.08
5	Some administrators misuse their positions to solicit gifts, money, or other benefits from subordinates or students.	148 (43.5%)	116 (34.1%)	30 (8.8%)	26 (7.6%)	20 (5.9%)	3.98	1.05
	Grand Mean/SD						3.93	1.06

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 presents the views of 222 respondents on administrative practices they perceive as contributing to corruption at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. It should be noted that the findings reflect the opinions of participants in this study and do not represent verified institutional records. The survey responses addressed five specific areas identified in the research instrument: favoritism and nepotism in recruitment processes, embezzlement of funds, bribery, manipulation of procurement procedures, and the abuse of official authority for personal gain. These results are therefore interpreted within the limits of the study's sample and methodology. The findings, as reported by respondents in this study, suggest that many participants perceive unethical conduct to be common within the institution's governance structure. For instance, 74.2% of respondents agreed that favoritism and nepotism influence staff recruitment and promotion (mean = 3.93; SD = 1.09), indicating a widespread perception that merit may at times be overshadowed by personal or political considerations. In a similar vein, 75.9% affirmed the existence of embezzlement and diversion of funds (mean = 3.99; SD = 1.06), reflecting strong concern among participants regarding financial accountability. Additionally, 74.7% of respondents agreed that bribery and the exchange of favors affect certain administrative decisions, including admissions and resource allocation (mean = 3.94; SD = 1.00). About 70.6% also indicated that procurement processes are sometimes manipulated to favor particular individuals (mean = 3.82; SD = 1.08). Furthermore, 77.6% reported that some administrators exploit their positions to solicit gifts or personal benefits (mean = 3.98; SD = 1.05). The overall mean score of 3.93 (SD = 1.06) points to a general pattern of agreement among respondents that such practices are perceived to be prevalent. While these results highlight significant concerns expressed by participants, it is important to note that the conclusions are based on self-reported perceptions rather than independently verified cases. As such, the findings should be interpreted within the context and limitations of the study. Nonetheless, the data indicate the need for strengthened oversight mechanisms, clearer ethical guidelines, and more consistent enforcement of anti-corruption measures to enhance transparency, accountability, and fairness in the university's administration.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examined the link between administrative ethics and corrupt practices within Nigerian tertiary institutions, focusing on a federal university located in Southeast Nigeria as the empirical setting. The findings indicate that although the institution has established formal ethical mechanisms including codes of conduct, disciplinary procedures, and oversight committees their practical application is uneven. While staff members generally demonstrate awareness of ethical guidelines, adherence appears to vary, particularly in administrative units that attract limited scrutiny. The conduct of institutional leadership emerged as a critical factor in shaping ethical standards. Where leaders model transparency and accountability, staff behaviour tends to reflect similar values. Conversely, inconsistent enforcement of rules diminishes institutional credibility and weakens public confidence. These observations correspond with earlier studies that identify a gap between formal ethical provisions and their substantive implementation in Nigerian universities, and they reinforce the argument that leadership commitment is pivotal to sustaining ethical culture. Thus, although ethical structures are formally in place within the institution studied, their effectiveness is constrained by insufficient monitoring mechanisms and administrative politicization.

The investigation further revealed patterns of unethical administrative conduct within the university. Reported practices include irregularities in admissions processes, non-transparent procurement procedures, preferential treatment in recruitment and promotion, examination misconduct, and mismanagement of institutional funds. Allegations relating to admission processes and contract awards were particularly prominent, suggesting vulnerabilities in areas where discretion and financial interests intersect. Instances of examination malpractice and manipulation of academic records were also identified, often linked to personal gain. These findings align with broader scholarship on governance challenges in Nigerian higher education, which highlights systemic weaknesses that enable such practices. Preferential treatment in staffing decisions undermines merit-based systems and can erode staff morale. Taken together, these patterns of conduct compromise academic integrity, institutional reputation, and

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stakeholder trust. They illustrate that corruption within higher education encompasses not only financial impropriety but also procedural and ethical lapses that ultimately weaken the university's core mandate and moral authority.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between administrative ethics and corruption within Nigerian tertiary institutions, using Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK) as a case example. The findings show that, while formal ethical guidelines and regulatory frameworks are in place, their application is not always consistent in everyday administrative practice. In several instances, established procedures appear to function more as formal requirements than as actively enforced standards guiding institutional conduct. The analysis further suggests that challenges such as irregularities in admissions processes, preferential treatment in appointments, lapses in procurement procedures, and concerns regarding the management of academic records have implications for institutional credibility and public confidence. These issues are influenced by a combination of structural and contextual factors, including limitations in internal control mechanisms, financial constraints, entrenched patronage networks, and external pressures. Overall, the study indicates that administrative corruption in tertiary institutions is complex and multifaceted. Addressing it effectively requires more than the existence of written ethical codes; it calls for strengthened oversight systems, transparent administrative procedures, committed ethical leadership, and sustained institutional reforms aimed at promoting accountability, integrity, and efficiency in university governance.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are advanced to promote higher standards of administrative ethics and reduce corrupt practices within the institution under review, as well as in comparable public universities. These suggestions are presented in a constructive manner to support institutional improvement while maintaining scholarly objectivity.

First, there is a need to reinforce existing ethical compliance structures. Institutional codes of conduct should not only be clearly articulated but also consistently implemented through fair, transparent, and well-documented disciplinary procedures. Bodies responsible for oversight such as ethics committees and internal audit units should operate with adequate autonomy and institutional support to carry out their responsibilities effectively and without undue influence.

Second, administrative processes should be made more transparent and accountable. The integration of digital platforms in areas such as admissions, procurement, and records management can help minimize discretionary manipulation and reduce opportunities for unethical practices. Technology-driven systems also strengthen monitoring mechanisms and facilitate broader access to institutional information, thereby enhancing accountability.

Third, attention should be given to staff welfare and motivation. Competitive remuneration, prompt payment of entitlements, and improved working conditions can reduce financial strain that may contribute to unethical behaviour. In addition, recognizing and rewarding ethical conduct through formal commendation and merit-based promotion may foster a culture of integrity within the institution.

Collectively, these measures are intended to support sustainable administrative reforms while preserving the credibility and reputation of the institution and the wider university system.

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