

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Economic Rationalization and Re-engineering of Ethics and Values Education in Public Universities in Anambra State

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ABSTRACT

Growing concerns about the erosion of ethics and values among students in Nigerian public universities have renewed scholarly interest in how universities can strengthen moral formation under limited financial conditions. This study examined academic staff perceptions of the economic rationalization and re-engineering of ethics and values education in public universities in Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study, and two null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The population comprised 106 lecturers in relevant education departments in the two public universities in Anambra State. A census approach was attempted; however, 89 valid questionnaire copies were retrieved and used for analysis, representing an 83.96% response rate. Data were collected with a structured questionnaire validated by three experts and subjected to reliability testing using Cronbach Alpha. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while one-sample t-test was used to determine whether respondents' mean ratings were significantly above the criterion mean of 2.50. Results showed that academic staff agreed that economic rationalization strategies can support ethics and values education re-engineering ($M = 3.29$, $t(88) = 15.42$, $p < .001$). They also agreed that re-engineered ethics and values education is positively associated with students' ethical behaviour outcomes for sustainable national development ($M = 3.37$, $t(88) = 17.08$, $p < .001$). The study concludes that, based on lecturers' perceptions, cost-conscious curriculum integration, faculty development, accountable governance, stakeholder partnership and monitoring systems are useful approaches for strengthening ethics and values education. The findings should, however, be interpreted as perception-based evidence rather than direct proof of changes in students' behaviour.

KEYWORDS

Economic Rationalization; Ethics Education; Values Education; Public Universities; Sustainable National Development.

1. Introduction

Value Public universities occupy an important position in Nigeria's educational and developmental system because they produce skilled manpower, generate research knowledge and shape the civic orientation of young adults. Beyond the transmission of disciplinary knowledge, universities are expected to cultivate graduates who can participate responsibly in social, economic and political life. This expectation is especially important in a period when national development is increasingly linked not only to technical competence, but also to integrity, accountability, civic responsibility and respect for human dignity.

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Sustainable national development requires a balance between economic growth, social inclusion and responsible governance. The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) described sustainable development as development that satisfies present needs without weakening the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In the Nigerian context, scholars have connected sustainable development with ethical leadership, equitable resource use and social responsibility (Emas, 2015; Okafor & Egenti, 2021; Okebukola, 2015). This means that universities cannot contribute meaningfully to sustainable national development if they produce graduates with strong technical knowledge but weak moral judgement.

The concern for ethics and values education in Nigerian universities is connected to reported cases of examination malpractice, cultism, academic dishonesty, cybercrime, disregard for institutional rules and declining civic responsibility among some students. These behaviours weaken public confidence in universities and undermine the formation of responsible graduates. Ofor-Douglas (2021) argued that university education has a role in values re-orientation for socio-economic development in Nigeria, while Ekeh (2019) emphasized that education should deliberately inculcate values that support responsible citizenship. Within Anambra State, public universities are also expected to respond to these concerns by strengthening moral and civic learning within their academic programmes.

Ethics and values education refers to the deliberate educational process through which learners develop moral reasoning, integrity, respect, fairness, responsibility and commitment to the common good. Obijekwu and Obiesili (2022) presented ethics and values education as an important pathway to sustainable development because it strengthens the moral capacity of learners to act responsibly in society. Similarly, Ike and Onyia (2018) maintained that ethics in higher education should be integrated into institutional culture, curriculum, leadership and teaching practice. These positions show that ethics and values education should not be treated as an optional add-on, but as a central part of university formation.

However, public universities operate under serious financial pressures. Limited funding, competing academic priorities, inadequate facilities and staff development needs make it difficult to introduce new programmes without considering cost, sustainability and measurable outcomes. This is where economic rationalization becomes important. In this study, economic rationalization refers to the efficient allocation and use of available resources to achieve educational objectives without unnecessary duplication or waste. Applied to ethics and values education, it means integrating moral and civic education into existing curricula, using low-cost participatory teaching strategies, developing staff capacity, engaging stakeholders and monitoring outcomes in ways that are financially realistic for public universities.

Re-engineering ethics and values education, therefore, does not necessarily require the creation of entirely new departments or expensive stand-alone programmes. Rather, it can involve redesigning existing courses, embedding ethical case studies into professional subjects, linking entrepreneurship education with integrity, encouraging student-led ethical leadership initiatives and strengthening institutional accountability. Amah and Okafor (2023) observed that re-engineering education for sustainable development requires curriculum review, programme monitoring and practical learning experiences. Pandey (2024) also stressed that value education can be integrated into curriculum development through a comprehensive approach that connects knowledge, behaviour and social responsibility.

The main gap addressed in this study is that the economic dimension of ethics and values education has not received sufficient empirical attention in public universities in Anambra State. Existing discussions often emphasize moral decline or curriculum reform without clearly examining how limited institutional resources can be rationally organized to support ethics and values education. The present study, therefore, investigated academic staff perceptions of the economic rationalization and re-engineering of ethics and values education in public universities in Anambra State, with careful attention to the limits of perception-based evidence.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Transformative Learning Theory, Social Learning Theory and Human Capital Theory. Transformative Learning Theory, associated with Mezirow (1991), explains how education can change learners' frames of reference through critical reflection, dialogue and exposure to new perspectives. In the context of this study, re-engineered ethics and values education is expected to move students beyond passive knowledge of rules to reflective judgement about right conduct, social responsibility and professional integrity.

Social Learning Theory, developed by Bandura (1977), also supports the study because students learn ethical behaviour not only from formal teaching but also from observation, modelling and reinforcement within their institutions. This implies that university governance, lecturer conduct, peer leadership and institutional accountability are part of ethics education. When students observe fairness, transparency and responsibility in the university environment, such behaviour can become part of their own moral learning.

Human Capital Theory, advanced by Becker (1993), provides the economic justification for investing in ethics and values education. Education is not only a private benefit to the individual; it also produces social and economic returns through more productive, trustworthy and responsible citizens. Therefore, economically rationalized investment in ethics and values education can be justified when it is designed to reduce wasteful behaviour, improve institutional climate and support sustainable national development. Together, these theories show why ethics and values education should be both morally necessary and economically defensible.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The increasing erosion of ethical standards and values among university students in Nigeria has become a serious concern to educators, policymakers, parents and employers. Public universities are expected to develop graduates who possess knowledge, skills and moral responsibility. However, reports of examination malpractice, cultism, violence, dishonesty, cybercrime and disregard for university rules suggest that the ethical formation of students requires renewed attention.

In public universities in Anambra State, the problem is intensified by financial constraints and competing institutional priorities. Many universities focus heavily on programmes perceived to have immediate labour-market value, while ethics and values education is sometimes treated as secondary. This creates a gap between the university's developmental mission and its actual capacity to cultivate responsible graduates. The challenge is not merely whether ethics and values education is desirable, but how it can be strengthened in a financially realistic and institutionally sustainable manner.

Although several studies have discussed values education, sustainable development and university reform, fewer studies have examined how economic rationalization strategies can support the re-engineering of ethics and values education in public universities in Anambra State. There is also a need to avoid assuming that agreement with ethics education automatically proves actual behavioural change among students. Consequently, this study investigated academic staff perceptions of strategies for economically rationalizing ethics and values education and the perceived student ethical behaviour outcomes associated with such re-engineering.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine academic staff perceptions of the economic rationalization and re-engineering of ethics and values education in public universities in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the extent to which economic rationalization strategies can be utilized to re-engineer ethics and values education in public universities in Anambra State; and

- ascertain the perceived student ethical behaviour outcomes associated with re-engineered ethics and values education for sustainable national development in public universities in Anambra State.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- To what extent can economic rationalization strategies be utilized to re-engineer ethics and values education in public universities in Anambra State?
- What are the perceived student ethical behaviour outcomes associated with re-engineered ethics and values education for sustainable national development in public universities in Anambra State?

1.5 Hypotheses

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

- H_{01} : The mean rating of academic staff on economic rationalization strategies for re-engineering ethics and values education in public universities in Anambra State does not significantly differ from the criterion mean of 2.50.
- H_{02} : The mean rating of academic staff on perceived student ethical behaviour outcomes associated with re-engineered ethics and values education for sustainable national development does not significantly differ from the criterion mean of 2.50.

2. Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. This design was considered appropriate because the study sought to collect the opinions of academic staff on economic rationalization strategies and perceived student ethical behaviour outcomes associated with re-engineered ethics and values education.

The study was conducted in public universities in Anambra State. The state has two public universities: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, with campuses at Uli and Igbariam. The population of the study comprised 106 lecturers from the Department of Educational Management and Policy, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, and the Educational Planning Unit of the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam campus.

A census approach was adopted because the population was manageable. Therefore, no sampling technique was used. However, out of the 106 copies of the questionnaire administered, 89 were properly completed and found usable for analysis. This gave a response rate of 83.96%. The analysis was consequently based on the 89 valid responses rather than the full population of 106 lecturers.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. The questionnaire contained sections measuring economic rationalization strategies, re-engineering of ethics and values education, and perceived student ethical behaviour outcomes. The economic rationalization section contained 10 items covering budgetary support, curriculum integration, stakeholder partnership, incentive systems, governance accountability and student-led initiatives. The ethics and values re-engineering section contained 10 items covering curriculum restructuring, teaching approaches, faculty capacity, institutional support and monitoring. The student ethical behaviour section contained items on examination malpractice, respect for rules, civic responsibility, volunteerism, ethical decision-making, peace promotion and appreciation of sustainable development goals.

Sample items included: "Including ethics and values education as a graduation requirement," "Ensuring accountability in university governance to model ethical behaviour," and "Students' decision-making is more often based on ethical considerations." The response scale was Strongly Agree (SA = 4), Agree (A = 3), Disagree (D = 2) and Strongly Disagree (SD

= 1). The criterion mean was 2.50, obtained from the average of the four response weights. Mean scores of 2.50 and above were interpreted as agreement, while mean scores below 2.50 were interpreted as disagreement.

The instrument was face validated by three lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and Policy, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The validators examined the items for clarity, relevance to the research questions and appropriateness for academic staff respondents. Their observations were used to revise ambiguous expressions and improve the wording of the items. A pilot study was conducted in Enugu State using 20 university lecturers who were not part of the main study. Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument sections. Reliability coefficients of 0.89, 0.85 and 0.88 were obtained for the economic rationalization, ethics and values re-engineering, and student ethical behaviour sections respectively.

Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. Standard deviation was used to show the spread of respondents' ratings around the mean. One-sample t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance by comparing respondents' mean ratings with the criterion mean of 2.50. This statistical procedure was used only to determine whether the mean ratings were significantly above the criterion mean; it was not used to establish causal influence. Therefore, the findings are interpreted as academic staff perceptions rather than direct behavioural measurement of students.

3. Results

3.1 Research Question One

To what extent can economic rationalization strategies be utilized to re-engineer ethics and values education in public universities in Anambra State?

Table 1: Respondents' Mean Ratings on Economic Rationalization Strategies for Re-engineering Ethics and Values Education in Public Universities in Anambra State (N = 89)

SN	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Allocating budgetary support specifically for ethics and values education programmes	3.42	0.65	Agree
2	Integrating ethics and values education into economically viable academic programmes	3.30	0.72	Agree
3	Partnering with industries and NGOs to fund ethics and values re-engineering initiatives	3.18	0.78	Agree
4	Introducing entrepreneurship courses with strong ethics and values orientation	3.26	0.70	Agree
5	Offering financial incentives for departments promoting ethics and values integration	3.12	0.81	Agree
6	Embedding ethics and values training in employability and professional development programmes	3.36	0.68	Agree
7	Ensuring accountability in university governance to model ethical behaviour	3.45	0.62	Agree
8	Including ethics and values education as a graduation requirement	3.55	0.60	Agree
9	Sponsoring research on the economic benefits of ethics and values education	3.21	0.76	Agree
10	Encouraging student-led ethical leadership initiatives with economic support	3.14	0.79	Agree
Cluster Mean		3.29		Agree

Data in Table 1 show that respondents agreed with all 10 items as economic rationalization strategies that can be used to support the re-engineering of ethics and values education in public universities in Anambra State. The mean ratings ranged from 3.12 to 3.55,

all above the criterion mean of 2.50. The standard deviations ranged from 0.60 to 0.81, indicating that respondents' ratings were relatively close to the mean values. The cluster mean of 3.29 shows that, on average, academic staff agreed that economic rationalization strategies are useful for strengthening ethics and values education within the financial realities of public universities.

3.2 Research Question Two

What are the perceived student ethical behaviour outcomes associated with re-engineered ethics and values education for sustainable national development in public universities in Anambra State?

Table 2: Respondents' Mean Ratings on Perceived Student Ethical Behaviour Outcomes Associated with Re-engineered Ethics and Values Education in Public Universities in Anambra State (N = 89)

SN	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Re-engineered ethics and values education is perceived to reduce examination malpractice among students	3.48	0.63	Agree
2	Students are perceived to demonstrate greater respect for university rules and regulations	3.39	0.67	Agree
3	There is perceived increase in students' commitment to societal development projects	3.26	0.71	Agree
4	Students are perceived to be more aware of the importance of ethical behaviour in professional life	3.51	0.59	Agree
5	Instances of cultism and violence are perceived to decrease among students	3.22	0.74	Agree
6	Students are perceived to show greater civic responsibility and volunteerism	3.30	0.69	Agree
7	Sustainable Development Goals are perceived to be better appreciated by students	3.41	0.65	Agree
8	Ethical leadership qualities are perceived to be more evident among student leaders	3.35	0.66	Agree
9	Students' decision-making is perceived to be more often based on ethical considerations	3.28	0.73	Agree
10	Students are perceived to contribute actively to the promotion of peace and social justice	3.46	0.64	Agree
Cluster Mean		3.37		Agree

Table 2 shows that respondents agreed with all 10 items on perceived student ethical behaviour outcomes associated with re-engineered ethics and values education. The mean scores ranged from 3.22 to 3.51, each exceeding the criterion mean of 2.50. The standard deviations ranged from 0.59 to 0.74, showing limited variation in respondents' opinions. The cluster mean of 3.37 indicates that respondents generally perceived re-engineered ethics and values education as positively associated with students' ethical behaviour outcomes for sustainable national development. This interpretation is limited to respondents' perceptions and does not represent direct observation of students' behaviour.

3.3 Test of Hypotheses

H₀₁: The mean rating of academic staff on economic rationalization strategies for re-engineering ethics and values education in public universities in Anambra State does not significantly differ from the criterion mean of 2.50.

Table 3: One-Sample t-Test of Mean Rating on Economic Rationalization Strategies for Re-engineering Ethics and Values Education

Variable	N	Mean	Criterion Mean	t	df	p-value	Decision
Economic rationalization strategies for ethics and values education re-engineering	89	3.29	2.50	15.42	88	p < .001	Reject H ₀₁

Table 3 shows that the respondents' mean rating of 3.29 was significantly higher than the criterion mean of 2.50, $t(88) = 15.42$, $p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that academic staff ratings significantly supported the use of economic rationalization strategies for re-engineering ethics and values education in public universities in Anambra State.

H₀₂: The mean rating of academic staff on perceived student ethical behaviour outcomes associated with re-engineered ethics and values education for sustainable national development does not significantly differ from the criterion mean of 2.50.

Table 4: One-Sample t-Test of Mean Rating on Perceived Student Ethical Behaviour Outcomes Associated with Re-engineered Ethics and Values Education

Variable	N	Mean	Criterion Mean	t	df	p-value	Decision
Perceived student ethical behaviour outcomes associated with re-engineered ethics and values education	89	3.37	2.50	17.08	88	p < .001	Reject H ₀₂

Table 4 indicates that the respondents' mean rating of 3.37 was significantly higher than the criterion mean of 2.50, $t(88) = 17.08$, $p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This suggests that academic staff significantly agreed that re-engineered ethics and values education is associated with positive student ethical behaviour outcomes for sustainable national development. The result should not be interpreted as causal evidence because the study did not directly measure students' behaviour over time.

3.4 Discussion of Findings

The first finding showed that academic staff agreed that economic rationalization strategies can be utilized to re-engineer ethics and values education in public universities in Anambra State. This finding is important because it shifts the discussion from a general call for moral reform to the practical question of how public universities can strengthen ethics education under financial constraints. The respondents rated strategies such as curriculum integration, accountability in university governance, industry and NGO partnership, employability-linked ethics training, student-led ethical leadership and graduation requirements positively. These strategies are cost-conscious because they can be embedded into existing institutional structures rather than requiring entirely new programmes.

The finding supports Amah and Okafor (2023), who stressed the need to re-engineer education through curriculum review, monitoring and learning experiences that support sustainable development. It also agrees with Pandey (2024), who argued that value education can be integrated into curriculum development through teaching methods that connect knowledge with responsible behaviour. However, the present finding should be understood as evidence of lecturers' agreement, not as evidence that these strategies have already produced

measurable institutional transformation. This distinction is necessary because agreement with a reform strategy does not automatically establish its effectiveness in practice.

The result of the first hypothesis further showed that the mean rating for economic rationalization strategies was significantly above the criterion mean. This suggests that academic staff considered such strategies relevant and desirable. Theoretically, this aligns with Human Capital Theory because investment in ethics and values education may yield social and economic benefits by producing graduates who are more responsible, accountable and employable. It also aligns with Social Learning Theory because institutional accountability and ethical leadership provide models that students can observe and internalize. Nevertheless, future studies using regression, longitudinal design or mixed methods would be needed to determine the actual predictive or causal effect of these strategies.

The second finding showed that respondents agreed that re-engineered ethics and values education is associated with positive student ethical behaviour outcomes for sustainable national development. The highest-rated areas included students' awareness of ethical behaviour in professional life, reduction in examination malpractice, contribution to peace and social justice, and appreciation of Sustainable Development Goals. This finding is consistent with Ofor-Douglas (2021), who connected university values re-orientation with socio-economic development, and with Obijekwu and Obiesili (2022), who emphasized ethics and values education as a pathway for sustainable development.

The finding also reflects the assumptions of Transformative Learning Theory. When students are exposed to reflective ethical issues, case analysis, civic engagement and dialogue, they may begin to reassess their personal assumptions and social responsibilities. However, the result should be interpreted cautiously. The study measured lecturers' perceptions of student ethical behaviour outcomes, not direct student behaviour, disciplinary records or longitudinal changes. Therefore, the finding indicates perceived positive association rather than verified behavioural improvement.

The second hypothesis showed that respondents' ratings on perceived student ethical behaviour outcomes were significantly above the criterion mean. This confirms that the academic staff surveyed considered re-engineered ethics and values education important for strengthening students' moral and civic orientation. This agrees with Ike and Onyia (2018), who argued that ethics in higher education should be mainstreamed into teaching, leadership and institutional culture. The finding also supports John-Nelson, Ihunwo and Ohanyiri (2025), who identified value re-orientation education as relevant to a productive Nigerian society. Even so, the present study adds that such re-orientation must be discussed together with economic feasibility, institutional monitoring and realistic resource allocation.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that academic staff in public universities in Anambra State perceive economic rationalization strategies as useful for re-engineering ethics and values education. Strategies such as curriculum integration, targeted faculty development, stakeholder partnership, accountable governance, student-led ethical leadership initiatives and monitoring systems were considered relevant because they can strengthen ethics education without imposing excessive financial burdens on universities.

The study also concludes that re-engineered ethics and values education is perceived to be positively associated with student ethical behaviour outcomes that support sustainable national development. However, the conclusion is limited to lecturers' perceptions. It should not be read as direct proof that students' behaviour has changed. For stronger evidence, future studies should include students, use behavioural indicators and apply analytical methods capable of testing relationships among variables. Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Administrators of public universities in Anambra State should integrate ethics and values education into existing curricula through cost-effective approaches such as case

studies, interdisciplinary teaching, role-playing, reflective assignments and community-based learning.

2. University management should provide targeted staff development programmes on ethics pedagogy, curriculum integration and assessment of moral and civic learning outcomes.
3. University leadership should strengthen transparency and accountability in governance because institutional conduct provides an important model for students' ethical learning.
4. Public universities should build partnerships with alumni, professional bodies, civil society organizations, industries and community groups to support ethics and values education without depending solely on limited government funding.
5. Ethics and values education should be linked with entrepreneurship, employability and professional development programmes so that students understand the economic and social importance of integrity in the workplace.
6. Universities should develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks for ethics and values education. Such frameworks should include student feedback, lecturer reports, civic engagement outcomes and, where appropriate, institutional records of misconduct.
7. Future researchers should expand the study to include students and non-teaching staff, use larger samples and apply correlation, regression or mixed-method designs to examine actual relationships between ethics education interventions and student behaviour.

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