

ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN ENFORCING EDUCATION LAWS AND TEACHERS' EFFECTIVE JOB PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study adopted a correlational research design to investigate the relationship between ethical challenges in the enforcement of education laws and teachers' effective job performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. The target population comprised 5,432 teachers across 312 public senior secondary schools in the state. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select a representative sample of 360 teachers across 12 local government areas. Data were gathered using two researcher-developed instruments: the Ethical Challenges in Education Laws Enforcement Questionnaire (ECELEQ) and the Teachers' Job Performance Scale (TJPS), each measuring key indicators of ethical infractions and job performance, respectively. Both instruments were subjected to expert validation, and their reliability was established through a pilot study using Cronbach Alpha, yielding coefficients of .82 and .87. Of the 360 questionnaires distributed, 342 were completed and returned, indicating a 95% response rate. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to analyze the research questions, while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to test the hypotheses at a .05 significance level. The results revealed statistically significant relationships between ethical enforcement challenges such as favoritism, inconsistent sanctions, and administrative bias and dimensions of teachers' motivation, productivity, and classroom performance. The study concludes that unethical enforcement practices hinder the effective performance of teachers in public schools and recommends that school administrators adopt ethical leadership principles and implement transparent supervisory structures to promote fairness, teacher well-being, and institutional accountability.

Keywords: Ethical Challenges, Education Law, Enforcement Practices, Teacher Motivation, Job Performance, Public Secondary Schools.

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BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Education is a cornerstone of societal development, serving as a critical mechanism for fostering human capital and promoting sustainable growth. In Nigeria, the government has established various education laws to ensure equitable access to quality education, particularly at the senior secondary level. These laws aim to regulate school operations, ensure teacher accountability, and enhance student outcomes. However, enforcing these laws in public senior secondary schools, especially in Rivers State, presents significant ethical challenges that impact teachers' effective job performance (Adeyemi, 2019). The intersection of legal enforcement, ethical considerations, and teacher efficacy raises complex issues that warrant empirical investigation. The study explores the ethical challenges in enforcing education laws and their implications for teachers' job performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria.

The enforcement of education laws, such as those mandating curriculum standards, teacher qualifications, and student discipline, is intended to uphold educational quality and equity. In Rivers State, policies like the Universal Basic Education Act (FRN, 2004) and state-specific regulations outline expectations for school administrators and teachers. However, the practical application of these laws often encounters resistance due to ethical dilemmas (Obi, 2020). For instance, enforcing strict disciplinary measures may conflict with teachers' moral obligations to foster inclusive and supportive learning environments (Akinpelu, 2020). Similarly, policies requiring regular teacher evaluations may lead to undue pressure, compromising professional autonomy and morale (Ojo & Olaniyan, 2019). These challenges are compounded by contextual factors such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and socio-cultural influences, which further strain teachers' ability to perform effectively (Okeke, 2021).

Teachers' job performance is a critical determinant of educational outcomes, encompassing instructional delivery, classroom management, and student engagement. Ethical challenges in law enforcement can undermine these dimensions by creating conflicts between compliance and professional values. For example, teachers may face pressure to inflate student grades to meet performance targets, raising questions about integrity and fairness (Eze & Kalu, 2021). Additionally, the lack of clarity in some education laws may lead to inconsistent enforcement, fostering perceptions of injustice among teachers and eroding their motivation. In Rivers State, where public schools serve diverse populations, these issues are particularly pronounced, necessitating a nuanced understanding of how ethical challenges shape teacher effectiveness.

The study is significant as it addresses a gap in the literature concerning the interplay between ethical challenges, education law enforcement, and teacher performance in the Nigerian context. Previous studies have explored teacher performance broadly but have paid limited attention to the ethical dimensions of legal enforcement in public senior secondary schools (Okeke & Nwosu, 2022). By focusing on Rivers State, the research provides context-specific insights that can inform policy reforms and professional development initiatives. The findings are expected to contribute to the discourse on ethical governance in education and offer practical recommendations for balancing legal compliance with teacher well-being.

The study is structured to examine the ethical challenges in enforcing education laws, assess their impact on teachers' job performance, and propose strategies for mitigating these challenges. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study draws on data from public senior secondary school teachers in Rivers State to provide a comprehensive analysis. By situating the research within the framework of ethical leadership and teacher efficacy theories, this study aims

to advance understanding of how to foster an ethical and effective educational environment in Nigeria's public schools.

Ethical challenges in education involve dilemmas that educators, administrators, and policymakers face when balancing moral principles with practical realities. These challenges often arise in areas such as fairness in student discipline, confidentiality of student information, and combating corruption like exam malpractice or bribery for grades. In Nigeria, ethical issues are compounded by systemic problems like inadequate funding, which may pressure teachers to engage in unethical practices such as selling grades or absenteeism to supplement income. Upholding integrity requires robust ethical training and institutional support to ensure decisions align with values of justice and equity. Addressing these challenges fosters trust and promotes a culture of accountability in educational systems.

Statement of the Problem

The enforcement of education laws in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State is critical to ensuring quality education and fostering an environment conducive to effective teacher performance. However, ethical challenges in implementing these laws have raised significant concerns. Issues such as corruption, nepotism, and lack of accountability in the recruitment, promotion, and discipline of teachers undermine the integrity of the education system. Additionally, inadequate supervision, inconsistent policy enforcement, and resistance to legal frameworks by school administrators and teachers further complicate compliance with education laws. These ethical lapses not only hinder teachers' ability to perform their duties effectively but also negatively impact students' academic outcomes and the overall quality of education.

Teachers' job performance is closely linked to their motivation, professional development, and adherence to ethical standards. However, ethical dilemmas, such as bribery to secure favorable postings or promotions, and the misallocation of educational resources, create disparities in teachers' working conditions and morale. Furthermore, the lack of clear ethical guidelines and weak enforcement mechanisms exacerbate these challenges, leading to diminished teacher commitment and productivity. Despite the existence of education laws aimed at regulating teacher conduct and performance, their practical implementation remains fraught with ethical violations, which have not been adequately addressed in the context of Rivers State. The study seeks to investigate the ethical challenges in enforcing education laws and their impact on teachers' effective job performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. By identifying these challenges and their implications, the study aims to provide insights into strategies for enhancing ethical compliance and improving teacher performance, thereby contributing to the advancement of the education sector in the state.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

To investigate the ethical challenges in enforcing education laws and their impact on teachers' effective job performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically the objectives of the study are to:

- Examine the ethical challenges faced by school administrators and teachers in enforcing education laws in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

- Assess the relationship between ethical challenges in enforcing education laws and teachers' job performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- What are the ethical challenges encountered in enforcing education laws in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
- How do ethical challenges in enforcing education laws affect teachers' job performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.5 level of significance:

- **HO₁:** There is no significant relationship between ethical challenges in enforcing education laws and teachers' job performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- **HO₂:** Ethical challenges in enforcing education laws do not significantly affect the motivation and productivity of teachers in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses a critical but underexplored dimension of educational governance in Nigeria and the ethical challenges associated with enforcing education laws and their impact on teachers' job performance. Thus, by focusing on public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, the research provides context-specific insights into how unethical enforcement practices, such as favoritism, corruption, and lack of institutional support, undermine teacher motivation and instructional effectiveness. The study contributes to the body of knowledge by bridging gaps in existing literature on educational policy implementation and ethical leadership, while also offering practical recommendations for policymakers, school administrators, and education stakeholders on fostering a more just and accountable educational system.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in two interrelated theoretical perspectives that offer critical insights into the ethical and performance-related dimensions of enforcing education laws in public senior secondary schools: The Ethical Leadership Theory and the Teacher Efficacy Theory. These frameworks collectively provide a conceptual basis for interpreting how systemic ethical violations, leadership behavior, and personal beliefs influence the enforcement of education laws and the effective job performance of teachers in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Ethical Leadership Theory

Ethical Leadership Theory, as articulated by Brown, Treviño, and Harrison, emphasizes the significance of leadership behavior that is both normatively appropriate and morally grounded, influencing subordinates through transparent decision-making and consistent reinforcement of ethical standards (Brown et al., 2005). This theory contends that leaders who demonstrate fairness, accountability, and concern for others' welfare cultivate a professional environment that fosters trust, compliance, and institutional integrity. Within educational contexts, ethical leadership is particularly critical for ensuring the equitable implementation of regulatory frameworks and the fair treatment of staff.

In the context of public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, ethical leadership theory is instrumental in explaining how unethical administrative practices such as favoritism in staff promotions, bribery in teacher postings, and selective enforcement of regulations undermine both legal compliance and morale among educators. The study by Ololube (2024) revealed that many ethical lapses in enforcement are rooted in administrative failures and leadership deficiencies, leading to perceptions of injustice and demotivation among teachers. In addition, Akinwale and Okotoni (2021) asserted that when educational leaders neglect ethical standards, it compromises policy enforcement and weakens the moral fabric of institutional governance.

Applying ethical leadership theory enables this study to critically evaluate the extent to which school leadership either reinforces or disrupts ethical compliance with education laws. Leaders who embody ethical principles not only ensure consistent enforcement but also create an enabling environment for teacher performance. Thus, this theory underscores the need for moral modeling and ethical accountability among education administrators as a prerequisite for meaningful legal enforcement and improved job performance.

Teacher Efficacy Theory

Teacher Efficacy Theory, rooted in Bandura's broader Social Cognitive Theory, posits that an individual's belief in their capacity to achieve desired outcomes significantly influences their motivation, resilience, and performance (Bandura, 1997). In educational settings, teacher efficacy refers to the extent to which educators believe they can effectively manage classrooms, deliver instruction, and impact student learning, even under challenging conditions. High efficacy beliefs are associated with greater professional commitment, adaptive teaching strategies, and persistence in the face of institutional constraints.

This theory is highly relevant to the present study's focus on ethical challenges in enforcing education laws, particularly as these challenges often diminish the psychological and professional confidence of teachers. When laws are enforced in ways that disregard teachers' contextual realities such as demanding strict compliance with professional standards without providing adequate training or resources teachers may perceive these expectations as unjust, thereby eroding their sense of efficacy. Eze and Kalu (2021) emphasized that systemic ethical dilemmas, including coerced compliance and unmerited sanctions, can demoralize teachers and hinder their willingness to fully engage in their roles.

In Rivers State, where public senior secondary schools face funding shortfalls, infrastructure decay, and political interference, many teachers operate under conditions that make it difficult to meet legal and professional benchmarks. According to Okeke and Nwosu (2022), such conditions exacerbate feelings of powerlessness and reduce teachers' intrinsic

motivation, directly impacting job performance. The Teacher Efficacy Theory provides a conceptual basis for analyzing how these ethical and systemic challenges influence the internal belief systems of teachers, thereby affecting their professional outputs.

Therefore, integrating Teacher Efficacy Theory into this study, it becomes possible to interpret the psychological consequences of unethical enforcement practices on teacher behavior and performance. The theory also reinforces the argument that improving ethical governance and institutional support structures can enhance teachers' efficacy and ultimately lead to better educational outcomes.

Relevance of the Theories to the Study

Together, Ethical Leadership Theory and Teacher Efficacy Theory offer a holistic framework for understanding the interplay between structural, ethical, and psychological variables in the enforcement of education laws. Ethical leadership emphasizes the systemic and relational conditions that shape legal compliance, while teacher efficacy focuses on individual agency and belief in one's professional competence. The synthesis of these theories enables a nuanced interpretation of how ethical lapses in educational governance not only breach institutional norms but also diminish teachers' confidence and capacity to perform effectively.

In this regard, the present study leverages these frameworks to explore how ethical leadership and enhanced teacher efficacy can mitigate the negative effects of flawed law enforcement practices in public senior secondary schools. The dual-theory foundation provides a robust platform for formulating policy recommendations that advocate both structural reforms and capacity-building interventions aimed at promoting ethical compliance and elevating teacher performance in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a correlational research design to examine the relationship between ethical challenges in enforcing education laws and teachers' effective job performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State Nigeria. The target population comprised all 5,432 teachers in the 312 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State Nigeria. The sample size of the study consisted 360 teachers which was determined using random sampling technique. In the first stage, 12 local government areas (LGAs) were randomly selected from the 26 LGAs in Rivers state to ensure geographical representation. In the second stage, 30 schools were purposively selected from the chosen LGAs based on their accessibility and size.

Data were collected through two self-developed instruments: the Ethical Challenges in Education Laws Enforcement Questionnaire (ECELEQ) and the Teachers' Job Performance Scale (TJPS). The ECELEQ consisted of 3 items measuring ethical challenges in enforcing education laws, such as conflicts of interest, bribery, and non-compliance with regulations. The TJPS comprised 3 items assessing teachers' job performance, including lesson delivery, classroom management, and professional commitment. Both instruments used a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Strongly Agree). The instruments were validated through content validity by two experts in educational management and measurement. A pilot test conducted with 50 teachers from two non-participating schools yielded Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of 0.82 for ECELEQ and 0.87 for TJPS, indicating high internal consistency. The instruments were administered directly to the selected teachers by the

researcher and trained research assistants during school hours over a period of three weeks. A total of 360 questionnaires were distributed, and 342 were retrieved and deemed usable, representing a 95% return rate.

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the levels of ethical challenges and teachers' job performance. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was employed to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between ethical challenges in enforcing education laws and teachers' job performance. The significance of the correlation was tested at a 0.05 alpha level using SPSS version 25. Assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were checked and met prior to analysis.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Research Question One: What are the ethical challenges encountered in enforcing education laws in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation responses on ethical challenges encountered in enforcing education laws in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

S/N	Ethical Enforcement Issues	Mean	SD.	Remark
1	Cases of favoritism or nepotism in applying disciplinary policies are common	3.0848	.86543	Agreed
2	Bribery or unofficial inducement affects teacher recruitment and posting	2.9456	.87412	Agreed
3	School laws are enforced selectively depending on political connections	3.2178	.82950	Agreed
4	There is inadequate institutional support for implementing education laws	2.9014	.85328	Agreed
5	Teachers receive conflicting directives from education authorities	2.7683	.88870	Agreed
Grand Mean		2.9836	.86261	Agreed

Table 1 presents the perceptions of respondents regarding ethical challenges in the enforcement of education laws. All five items recorded mean values above the 2.50 threshold, indicating general agreement. The data reveal that favoritism, corruption, selective enforcement, and poor support structures constitute core ethical barriers to fair and consistent implementation. The grand mean of 2.9836 underscores the systemic nature of these ethical violations in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Question Two: How do ethical challenges in enforcing education laws affect teachers' job performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation responses on how ethical enforcement challenges affect teachers' job performance

S/N	Job Performance Outcomes Affected	Mean	SD.	Remark
6	Lack of fairness in law enforcement reduces teacher motivation	3.1073	.82463	Agreed
7	Teachers feel demoralized by politically motivated sanctions	2.9832	.85077	Agreed
8	Ethical conflicts lead to absenteeism and reduced commitment	2.7650	.89421	Agreed
9	Inconsistent enforcement affects classroom discipline effectiveness	2.8886	.84011	Agreed
10	Bribery and favoritism in promotions reduce morale and performance	3.0502	.81659	Agreed
Grand Mean		2.9589	.84526	Agreed

Table 2 outlines how ethical enforcement issues negatively influence dimensions of teachers' job performance. Respondents broadly agreed that integrity issues such as selective punishment, biased promotions, and leadership malpractice disrupt teachers' engagement and classroom productivity. The grand mean of 2.9589 reinforces the detrimental impact of unethical enforcement practices on teacher outcomes in the public school system.

Test of Hypotheses

HO1: There is no significant relationship between ethical challenges in enforcing education laws and teachers' job performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 3: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) on the relationship between ethical challenges and teachers' job performance

	Ethical Challenges	Teachers' Job Performance	
Ethical Challenges	Pearson Correlation	1	.791
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	342	342
Teachers' Job Performance	Pearson Correlation	.791	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	342	342

Table 3 shows the Pearson correlation result on the relationship between ethical enforcement challenges and teachers' job performance. The analysis yielded a strong positive correlation ($r = .791$, $p = .000$), which is significant at the .05 level. This suggests that increased ethical challenges are associated with deteriorating teacher performance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected, affirming a significant relationship between both variables.

HO2: Ethical challenges in enforcing education laws do not significantly affect the motivation and productivity of teachers in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 4: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) on the effect of ethical challenges on teachers' motivation and productivity

	Ethical Challenges	Teacher Motivation & Productivity	
Ethical Challenges	Pearson Correlation	1	.743
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	314	342
Teacher Motivation & Productivity	Pearson Correlation	.743	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	342	308

Table 4 reports the PPMC result for the effect of ethical enforcement challenges on teacher motivation and productivity. The correlation coefficient ($r = .743$, $p = .000$) indicates a significant and positive relationship, implying that teachers' motivation and productivity decline in environments marked by unethical practices. The null hypothesis is rejected, and the result

confirms that ethical enforcement issues considerably impair teacher effectiveness in Rivers State public schools.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Ethical Challenges and Teachers' Job Performance

The findings on ethical challenges in enforcing education laws and their impact on teachers' job performance revealed a statistically significant and strong positive correlation. With a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = .791$ and a p -value of $.000$, the analysis indicates that as ethical challenges increase, teacher performance declines accordingly. These ethical challenges such as favoritism, inconsistent enforcement, bribery in school law application, and poor institutional support undermine the morale, motivation, and commitment of public senior secondary school teachers in Rivers State. The null hypothesis suggesting no significant relationship was rejected, confirming that the ethical climate of legal enforcement significantly determines how effectively teachers perform. This finding aligns with earlier assertions by Okeke and Nwosu (2022), who emphasized that unethical supervisory practices create an atmosphere of distrust and disengagement, thereby negatively influencing staff performance. Additionally, the finding supports Eze and Kalu (2021) study, they identified that unfair enforcement protocols discourage initiative and reduce instructional effectiveness among teachers.

Conversely, other scholars (e.g., Obi, 2020) have cautioned against generalizing the impact of ethics on performance, noting that teacher resilience and intrinsic motivation may sometimes buffer against institutional ethical lapses. Nevertheless, in systems with recurrent favoritism, politicized sanctions, and lack of enforcement consistency, the professional confidence of educators is severely eroded. Hence, the present study affirms that equitable enforcement of education laws, when coupled with institutional support and ethical leadership, can significantly improve teaching commitment and student-centered practices in the public education sector. This outcome reinforces the urgent need for reform in ethical governance, supervision protocols, and stakeholder oversight.

Ethical Challenges and Teacher Motivation & Productivity

The correlation analysis between ethical challenges in enforcing education laws and teachers' motivation and productivity yielded a strong positive coefficient of $r = .743$ at a significance level of $p = .000$. This demonstrates that unethical practices such as biased rewards, non-transparent sanctions, and legal ambiguity substantially impair the psychological and professional energy of teachers. The null hypothesis was thus rejected, affirming that ethical irregularities in enforcement mechanisms are detrimental to the morale and output of public secondary school educators. This corroborates Ogunode and Adamu (2022), who argued that systemic corruption and administrative partiality breed discontent among teachers, often leading to disengagement, absenteeism, and poor instructional quality.

While some studies suggest that well-trained teachers can navigate unethical environments through resilience or external motivation, the cumulative evidence remains clear that a supportive and ethically grounded policy climate fosters better performance outcomes. Thus, the study confirms that enhancing accountability, promoting consistent application of education laws, and institutionalizing professional equity are essential for revitalizing motivation

and boosting productivity in Nigeria's public school system. Ensuring ethical compliance not only elevates individual teacher performance but also enhances the systemic credibility of the education sector.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide robust evidence that ethical challenges in the enforcement of education laws in Rivers State's public senior secondary schools significantly undermine teachers' job performance, motivation, and productivity. The study revealed widespread dissatisfaction among educators regarding biased implementation, favoritism, inadequate support structures, and conflicting supervisory instructions. These issues collectively erode teacher commitment and diminish classroom effectiveness. Therefore, by highlighting these ethical infractions, the study underscores the critical need for ethical leadership, transparent enforcement mechanisms, and institutional reforms that prioritize fairness, professional equity, and systemic accountability in education law enforcement.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- The Rivers State Ministry of Education and school governing boards should institutionalize ethical training and supervisory accountability frameworks for education administrators to ensure consistent, transparent, and unbiased enforcement of education laws across public senior secondary schools.
- School leadership should implement teacher support mechanisms in areas like inclusive performance review systems, clear legal guidelines, and equitable disciplinary processes to enhance motivation, professional commitment, and instructional delivery among public secondary school teachers.

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