



Making Ethics Effective in Higher Education in Africa and Beyond

A Programme Led by a Visionary
Leader, Prof. Obiora Ike

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Ethics in higher education, ethics conference, training of teachers, ethics excellence, academic excellence, ethics assessment, ethics assessors

Abstract

This article tracks the development of the Globethics.net Foundation's work on ethics in higher education, mainly as a focus on the University administration and good practices. Ethics in university management and organisation is a center of focus since the new strategic focus in 2016, paying tribute to the leadership of Globethics.net Executive Director Obiora F. Ike. Prof. Dr Ike pioneered the work and laid firm foundations for its continuation and global implementation. In addition to the Globethics.net resources of library, publications and online education through its academy, Globethics.net launched processes and tools to inspire and equip higher education institutions to reach true ethics excellence in their organisation as institutions.

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1. Introduction

If addressing ethics in higher education may sound odd to some of us, to others unethical behaviours is a daily concern! Time is for action should we wish to avoid the collapse of education and by same the collapse of a nation as articulated by Prof. Obiora Ike in a conference on *ethics and academic excellence* in Rwanda in September 2022.

If Globethics.net has made its focus to bring “ethics to higher education” as from 2016, it is a signal that unethical behaviours across universities at global level requires since long time our attention. Prof. Obiora Ike proposes a very practical approach to embedding ethics in higher education institution, by focusing on the organisation of the university sector.

As senior associate, we have been concretely active implementing ethics in higher education since 2016 as part of the Globethics.net team. As the director of this programme, Prof. Ike had the idea to go back home to Nigeria and reached out to his network and organise a first conference on ethics in higher education which led to the first publication on the topic entitled *Ethics in Higher Education Foundation for Sustainable Development* (with C. Onyia, 2016, published 2018) and *Ethics in Higher Education Religion and Traditions in Nigeria* (with C. Onyia, 2016, published 2018)¹. Thanks to the trust in Prof. Obiora Ike, high level commitment from academic VC and Deans at University of Nigeria (UNN) were secured and led to the first conference in Nigeria, a premiere in Africa, which gathered hundreds of professors from the University of Nigeria and other universities in Enugu State.

This unique event enabled to outline the importance, needs and the interest around Ethics in Higher Education to the main stakeholders in higher education institutions and their teachers and management. From this first event

¹ Obiora Ike and Chidiebere Onyia (Eds.), *Ethics in Higher Education, Foundation for Sustainable Development*, 2018, 645pp. ISBN: 978-2-88931-217-7 Obiora Ike and Chidiebere Onyia (Eds.), *Ethics in Higher Education, Religions and Traditions in Nigeria*, 2018, 198pp. ISBN: 978-2-88931-219-1

and till 2022, several conferences and workshops have been organised around the world to the academic institutions either in person or online to reach out to a great number of universities globally. Today, we can say that the programme on ethics in higher education has also reached a maturity level and has gained the confidence of a large number of universities worldwide including many HEIs in Africa. Thanks to the long-term commitment of the team at Globethics.net and its network, this institution is recognised as a key player and for its expertise in the field of ethics in higher education with over 200'000 members globally.

While Globethics.net was starting to experience some successful results, launching ethics in higher education is the logical continuation to the existing work done for more than ten years on ethics understood more widely. Globethics.net has built on the success of the online free library of resources on ethics and the in-house publications department on ethics, geared towards the needs of professors, teachers and students². Extending this foundational work and to articulate a new brand around ethics was undertaken in team with the support of the Board. In 2017, Globethics.net started to lay down its mission and the objective was to provide a catchword for ethic and E.T.H.I.C.S was proposed and agreed which stands for **E**mpowerment, **T**ransformation, **H**olistic Approach, **I**ntegrity, **C**ompetence and **S**ustainability.

With its new mission, Globethics.net was targeting not only academic staff, higher education institutions and the professions but ultimately the end goals was to equip lecturers to prepare future young leaders around the world with strong ethical values and to build a cadre of new ethical leaders that would be able to stand by their own ethics in their respective function and role in society; this is the mission of Globethics.net and is a clear call for higher education/learning institutions to reflect on their own values and ethics.

² Note by the Editors: The Globethics.net online Library platform on ethics can be found at: <https://www.globethics.net/library> ; the Publications house landing page is: <https://www.globethics.net/publications>

Reaching out to a great network of ethics experts has not only included Catholic and Reformed institutions and faith-based universities and professors across Africa, Asia, South America and in Europe, but faith-spirituality related organisations facilitated it greatly, including non-Christian communities as well.

No doubt, the journey to transforming higher education through ethics has started and is meant to be carried out in a practical approach so that ethics becomes a reality in higher education and is fully endorsed by all VCs worldwide. Globethics.net is developing a great range of resources targeted equally for professors and teachers as well as the management of the institutions. Some of them include publications of various conferences organised by Globethics.net and as well as curriculum for professors and teachers accessible through online courses and run by Globethics.net Academy. Others, are more precisely targeting administrators of HEI to deliver and achieve academic excellence. The online Academy is among the first key resources to have been developed in the first two years under Prof. Obiora Ike and has now been firmly established.

2. Reaching out to higher education institutions

The strategy of Globethics.net is based on the key idea of having a direct interaction with the academic staff so that effective transformation of higher education into ethical institutions could really happen. Our programme is aimed at ensuring education leaders play their role in preparing the youth to become responsible ethical young leaders in the future. Let's come back to the first steps of realization of this bold idea.

It all kicked-off with on-site programmes in 2017 through a series of 3 pilot workshops in Africa starting with Nigeria, followed by Kenya and South Africa as part of a two-year programme which was completed as a first

phase in 2018³. Those three workshops were very revealing and had to evolve. Thus, the pilot was undertaken in three different formats and in 3 countries. The programme initially started as a two-day programme and was designed to address a number of issues and challenges in 8 practical workshops with the following themes:

- Changing of mindsets, transforming and embedding an ethical culture in HEI
- Reasserting the institutional values and establishing a statement of commitment for academic staff
- Being an ethical education leader: values and virtues
- Analysing the role of ethics in education & research in today’s world
- Building teacher’s capacity & skills to apply ethics in teaching, research & supervision
- Overcoming challenges of staff-students relationship & behaviours
- Managing and making ethics effective & secure in HEIs
- Sustaining ethics in the academic environment

Given the high level of interest, enthusiasm and the need for more in-depth workshop, the programme evolved from a two-day training of teachers to a four-day programme of *Training of Trainers*. The outcomes of what was called the *EHE Programme* was undertaken by an international team with key highlights of how to embed ethics in higher education with more details in the below sections. Again, this was made possible thanks to the capacity of a large team with various key competencies, but mainly by Prof. Obiora Ike to reach out to the three regions in Africa as outlined hereunder.

³ Note by the Editors: The different workshops provided the material for 10 volumes as of Oct. 2022, in the Education Ethics Series to be found: <https://www.globethics.net/education-ethics-series>

Pilot workshop in Nigeria – A unique two-day awareness & mobilisation of academic staff

The first experience of Globethics.net into practical academic workshop on ethics in higher education took place in April 2017 in Nigeria, with a two-day programme on two different sites of University of Nigeria (UNN) located respectively in Nsukka and in Enugu with over 55'000 students. The programme was designed and developed based on an analysis undertaken during the 2016 conference where key ethical challenges were highlighted by UNN. The key objective for a physical on-site training workshop for teachers was deemed necessary in order to raise awareness of lecturers and to build their capacity and skills around ethics. The programme was tailored to address the challenges they faced with the end goals of making ethics a transformational approach to the long-terms sustainability of their institution.

This first workshop in Nigeria is one of the key achievements by Prof. Obiora Ike. He was able to secure the commitment of the top management at UNN and to have been able to mobilize 700 hundreds of lecturers and administrative staff to attend the ethics two-day workshop in two different locations. This conference workshop provided a learning experience that guided the ongoing work on distilling ethics in higher education administration: to make progressive, lasting and systemic change with the support and buy-in of the top leadership as a key requirement. A first session was organised for 400 teachers in Nsukka and a few professors were invited to contribute the first day and then to share their learnings on the second day with the participants. A similar exercise with 300 teachers was organised in Enugu over two days right after the first one. The evaluation showed the relevance of such practical workshop with over 99.2% out of 354 respondents who would recommend this programme to their fellow mates.

Pilot workshop in Kenya – A four-day workshop dedicated to the teaching of teachers

The same experience was undertaken in Kenya with the same level of interest expressed with a conference that gathered over 450 participants from 15

institutions followed by a three-day and half workshop programme of training of teachers for some 120 academic staff. The conference brought along key stakeholders such as the Association of Universities, UNESCO, etc. This workshop differs from Nigeria as it was extended by two more days and allows for more interaction with the participants and to engage more in practical workshop in smaller group discussions and to lead to some concrete solutions. The Kenya opening conference was extremely fruitful as it has given an opportunity to the academic staff to make great input and to express their expectations towards their academic institution. The VC felt that the programme was comprehensive enough and addresses all his concerns. The key outcomes of this event were the adoption of a Values Statement of Commitment to be signed by all academic staff and a detailed action plan to guide the (CUEA) to implement a strong ethics programme within their institution.

Pilot workshop in South Africa – A four-day training of trainers (T-o-T) workshop for Ethics Champions

The third pilot experience was conducted with the University of South Africa where 30 academic staff was given a four-day training of trainers on ethics to be rolled out within their institution. UNISA is also the place where Globethics.net Office is located. This time, it was an opportunity to test a full training of trainers (T-o-T) approach which was very extremely positive. UNISA has a long experience in implementing ethics and holds an Ethics Office compared to the two previous pilots. Similar to CUEA, at the end of the four-day workshop, a detailed action plan was also proposed to UNISA to reinforce their existing ethics programme and to implement more concrete actions.

Outcomes of the pilot workshops in Africa

In general, we can say that the key outcomes of those three training workshop programmes were very constructive and positive as confirmed in the evaluation. The level of interest kept growing in Nigeria where an ethics conference was organised in Abuja in October 2018 and hosted by University of Abuja which gathered a number of stakeholders from the education

sector such as the National University Commission, Association of Universities, Swiss Embassy, etc. More than 300 participants attended the event including a great number of students. The intention to have a national conference for all universities in Nigeria was under discussion throughout 2019 for 2020 but unluckily was cancelled due to the health crisis that emerged.

As we can see, thanks to Prof. Obiora Ike's commitment, this first conference on Ethics in Higher Education in Nigeria in 2016 paved the way to a series of conferences in Africa and beyond the continent. This successful event created an emulation to propose similar gatherings of ethics experts and to come up with practical ethics workshop that would address the ethical challenges faced by academic institution.

Two other universities requested to have their academic staff to benefit from a similar programme as for UNISA in 2018. A similar T-o-T was organised for Godfrey Okoye University (GOU), Enugu State University of Science and Technology and Coal City University. For this programme, we had a conference led by GOU and followed by the training of teachers for two days and a half for some 90 academic staff followed by a one-day T-o-T for some 30 trainers.

This two-year of experience in 2017 and 2018 around establishing ethics in higher education has proven to be extremely successful, encouraging and well received by HEIs. The programme was attended overall by over 1'000 teachers and nearly 20 institutions in Africa. The contribution of a great number of ethics expert to the various conferences during that period confirmed the great potential of this programme to embed effectively ethics and to bring transformation within the academic institution.

The above experience with the 3 countries have proven to be greatly appreciated by the higher education institutions and enabled to establish a programme that can make great impact at country level in particular if we can secure the support of the national education bodies at the ministry of education and the buy-in of associations of universities and leading tertiary education institution to join Globethics.net in its effort to embed ethics in academic institutions.

3. Monitoring ethics performance in institutions

Drawn from the above positive experience, it was felt that HEI needed further assistance to sustain their ethics programme and to move to another level to ensure that effective ethics measures are implemented and that they are improving on their ethics performance. It came clear to Globethics.net, that after two years on promoting and training on Ethics in Higher Education, the time has come to equip HEI with an additional instrument that could help them to monitor their ethics policy and strategy as well as its implementation. From this conclusion, the *Ethics Model of Excellence Tool* (EMET) was proposed to serve as an ethics performance management system for higher education based on a self-assessment approach. This tool received the full support and endorsement by Prof. Obiora Ike and an external funder. EMET was inspired by a similar initiative, which was successful implemented in Ghana with the Public Procurement Authority where a model of excellence has been developed and applied with over 1000 ministries, municipalities, districts and assemblies.

Nevertheless, to confirm the relevance for an ethics self-assessment approach for higher education, an international survey was conducted with some 20 universities worldwide to assess the need for proposing an ethics self-assessment approach for academic institution. Overall, the results of the survey show that over 90% approve such an initiative by Globethics.net and see in it a great potential to reinforce ethical behaviours and practices in higher education while enhancing university ranking. This proves to be even more relevant after two years of hardship by higher education during the health crisis where teachers and students as well as institutions suffered for their inability to respond to students' needs either to attend physical courses or even to access online courses.

4. Higher Education - Ethics Model of Excellence Tool (HE-EMET)

The *Ethics Model of Excellence Tool* is an online management system to support ethical transformation within the academic institution. It is drawn

from the Model of Excellence of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) with a special focus on issues related to *leadership, ethics, governance and sustainability* coined as the *L.E.G.S Principles*©. They are the drivers for ethical change and transformation while relying on ethical academic processes so that results can be achieved by students, staff, the institution and the profession. The spirit and philosophy are meant to encourage learning and sharing experience for continuous improvement on ethical behaviours and practices.

Understanding the assessment philosophy is important and requires specific training of the assessors. As of now and thanks to the support of Prof. Obiora Ike and his leadership, EMET has undergone two phases of development. The first phase I) was designed with the contribution of a group of representatives of academic staff in Ghana from 13 institutions and who were trained as ethics assessors. Following this first phase of design and trial, a second phase II) of EMET was developed based on the outcomes of Phase I to make a practical tool to be adopted by Higher Education. This phase II received the endorsement of Prof. Obiora Ike and was tested in Rwanda in September 2022. Two other countries will participate in the phase II and shall contribute to the pilot test planned in Ghana for November 2022 and Bulgaria in December 2022.

We are expecting at the end of the Phase II, some 40 to 50+ institutions would have tried the EMET and would be in a position to confirm its usefulness for Higher Education.

From the Ghana workshop in 2021 and the Rwanda workshop in 2022, assessors demonstrate their enthusiasm to embark on an academic model of Excellence. The methodology offers the opportunity to them not only to be trained as ethics assessors and to gain a new competence and skills in their institution. This programme on EMET has enabled the new trained assessors to reflect on their personal and institution ethics and to identify the ethical challenges with objectivity. It also helps them as assessors to make some recommendations to their institution on how to address potential ethical weaknesses and how to remedy to them.

EMET has also the potential to encourage the academic staff to undertake more ethics training and to include ethics in their curricula irrespective of their field of teaching and research in various sectors to support the learning of professors and teachers.

Finally, EMET provides great opportunity to HEI to improve on their ethics structures and procedures and beyond. By adopting such a management system, HEI are preparing their institution to adopt a continuous improvement around ethics and their academic environment, which shall contribute to improving their ranking and to rethink their institution for the betterment of the society and their country.

5. Meditating Prof. Obiora Ike’s messages

Such experience and delightful collaboration for the past five years would not have been possible without the support and commitment of Prof. Obiora Ike from whom I learnt a lot. I would like to share with the reader some of the key messages and sayings that would reflect the spirit, view and approach of Prof. Obiora Ike that were expressed in the various conferences and workshops on ethics in higher education. In all, I have retained 12 wise messages that could be addressed to stakeholders in higher education and key players in this world should we want to see a more ethical society and world.

1. A message to the youth: *“Become a character, act ethically and stand up for your own country”*
2. A Message to teachers: *“Students must be able to trust their teachers”*
3. A message to higher education: *“The collapse of education is the collapse of a nation”*
4. A message to administrators : *“Failing to plan is planning to fail”*
5. A message to top management and leaders: *“Acknowledge each one’s uniqueness and recognize one’s capacity”*

6. A message to personnel: *“Always smile, keep a good spirit and hold a joyful heart at work”*
7. A message to people: *“Before expressing yourself, allow others to speak and listen to them first”*
8. A message to the media: *“Citizens must be told the truth and you must report independently”*
9. A message to Church leaders: *“Know your assets and invest ethically to be financially sustainable in the long-term”*
10. A message to the world leaders: *“Know the local context and adapt to the reality of the ground”*
11. A message to development partners: *“Be respectful of others’ own culture and learn from the heritage of the community”*
12. A Message to the United Nations: *“No sustainable development can be achieved without ethics”*

We shall kept those messages throughout our programme as wisdom sayings from Prof. Obiora Ike.

6. Conclusion

In view of the above, the programme on ethics in higher education can be considered to be a great success for Globethics.net. There is no doubt that these past 6 years, academia around the world have gained and benefitted a lot from the work of Globethics.net. More and more, higher education institutions are joining this global platform and showing strong interest for ethics and are looking at ways to embedding ethics in their institution and to rethink the role of education leaders. This is due in large part to the vision and leadership of Prof. Obiora Ike, and the team he has gathered, around ethics in higher education. In this respect, we can consider his work at Globethics.net to be a major landmark contribution in the lifetime of Globethics.net since its establishment in 2004.

Throughout those past years working in close collaboration with Prof. Obiora Ike for supporting the development of the *Training of Teachers and Trainers on Ethics in Higher Education* and the *Ethics Model of Excellence Tool*, I am personally grateful to him for the enriching experience and for the trust he put in various projects and the approaches proposed above as well as for his continuous commitment and support to making ethics effective and a reality in higher education.

Thank you, Obiora and enjoy your retirement under the African sky again!

7. Short biography

Nadia Balgobin has been a senior advisor to Globethics.net since 2010 and organised the first Global Ethics Forum in 2011. She has developed a values-based training programme for SME for Globethics.net in 2014 and has produced a *Guide on Ethical Investment and Sustainable Resource Management for the African Church Assets Programme (ACAP) III* in 2019. She is also an international expert in the field of business ethics, institutional excellence and sustainable procurement. She holds more than 30 years experience working with international organisations, multinationals including public institutions, faith-based organisations, NGOs, MSMEs, academic institutions, development partners such as the UN environment. Nadia has worked in different areas such as education, health, construction, infrastructure, IT, etc. Nadia is a Master trainer and have designed numerous training programmes and e-learning as well as blended online content. As a global ethics lead assessor, she is currently driving the *Ethics Model of Excellence Tool (EMET)* on behalf of Globethics.net for academic institution. Nadia is based in Geneva and holds a degree in political science, a postgraduate in business excellence, a certificate in organisation and project management. Nadia is an alumni of Lausanne polytechnic school (EPFL).

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