

Investigating the Impact of Moral Philosophy on the Attitude of Civil Servants towards Public Accountability in Anambra State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of moral philosophy on the attitude of civil servants towards public accountability in Anambra State, Nigeria. The research examines how ethical principles, moral reasoning, and philosophical values influence transparency, responsibility, integrity, and commitment to duty among public servants in the state civil service. Adopting a mixed-method research design, the study evaluates the level of moral consciousness among civil servants, the extent of adherence to accountability standards, and the challenges affecting ethical conduct in public administration. Data were obtained from 320 respondents comprising civil servants, administrative officers, and ethics and compliance personnel drawn from selected ministries in Awka South, Onitsha North, and Nnewi North Local Government Areas. Quantitative findings reveal that 70% of respondents believe that moral philosophy significantly influences accountability and ethical decision-making in public service, while 65% agree that corruption and abuse of office are linked to weak moral orientation. Furthermore, 74% of respondents support the inclusion of ethics-based training and philosophical studies in civil service development programmes. Qualitative findings indicate that poor remuneration, political interference, favouritism, and weak institutional enforcement constitute major obstacles to public accountability despite awareness of ethical principles. The study is anchored on Deontological Ethical Theory, which emphasizes duty, moral obligation, and adherence to ethical standards irrespective of personal interest or external pressure. Findings further demonstrate that ministries with structured ethical orientation programmes recorded higher levels of transparency, discipline, and compliance with public service regulations. The study proposes a framework that integrates moral philosophical education, regular ethics workshops, institutional monitoring mechanisms, and value-driven leadership in the civil service system. The research contributes to the field of philosophy and public administration by demonstrating the practical relevance of moral philosophy in promoting accountability, reducing corruption, and strengthening good governance in Nigeria. It also recommends that government institutions incorporate ethical and philosophical training into public service reforms to enhance integrity, efficiency, and public trust in governance.

Keywords: *Moral Philosophy, Public Accountability, Civil Servants, Ethics, Good Governance, Public Administration, Anambra State, Nigeria*

Introduction

Public accountability remains one of the most important principles of democratic governance and public administration across the world. In modern societies, governments are expected to utilize public resources responsibly, transparently, and in ways that promote the welfare of citizens. The civil service occupies a central position in this process because it serves as the machinery through which government policies and programmes are implemented. In

Nigeria, the effectiveness of the civil service is often evaluated based on its level of accountability, efficiency, transparency, and commitment to ethical standards. However, despite numerous reforms and anti-corruption campaigns, unethical practices such as bribery, embezzlement, abuse of office, favouritism, and negligence continue to affect public institutions.

These challenges have generated renewed academic and public interest in the relationship between ethics, philosophy, and governance. Moral philosophy, which deals with the principles guiding human conduct and the distinction between right and wrong, has increasingly been identified as an important framework for improving accountability and integrity in public administration. Moral philosophy provides the ethical foundation upon which individuals and institutions can develop a sense of responsibility, honesty, fairness, and justice. This study therefore investigates the impact of moral philosophy on the attitude of civil servants towards public accountability in Anambra State, Nigeria.

The importance of accountability in governance cannot be overemphasized. Accountability ensures that public officials remain answerable for their actions and decisions in the management of public resources. It promotes transparency, reduces corruption, and strengthens public confidence in government institutions. According to Ezeani (2006), accountability in public service involves the obligation of officials to explain and justify their actions to the public and to ensure that governmental power is exercised in accordance with ethical and legal standards. In democratic societies, accountability is considered a necessary condition for sustainable development and good governance.

Historically, the relationship between morality and governance dates back to ancient philosophy. Classical philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle emphasized the importance of virtue and ethical conduct in leadership. Plato, in *The Republic*, argued that leaders must possess wisdom, discipline, and moral integrity in order to govern society effectively (Plato, 1992). Aristotle further developed this argument through virtue ethics, which stresses the cultivation of good character and moral habits as the basis of responsible leadership (Aristotle, 2004). These philosophical traditions established the idea that governance is not merely a political activity but also a moral responsibility.

Similarly, Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics emphasized duty, obligation, and adherence to moral laws irrespective of personal interest or consequences (Kant, 1785). Kant argued that human actions should be guided by universal moral principles and respect for ethical duty. In the context of public administration, this perspective implies that civil servants should discharge their duties honestly and fairly regardless of external pressures or opportunities for personal gain.

African philosophy also provides important ethical insights relevant to accountability and governance. Traditional African societies emphasized communal values such as honesty, justice, responsibility, respect for elders, and commitment to collective welfare. According to Wiredu (1998), African moral philosophy is deeply rooted in communalism and social responsibility. Leaders were expected to prioritize the welfare of the community above personal interests. In many African societies, public office was regarded as a sacred trust rather than an avenue for personal enrichment.

Despite these philosophical ideals, contemporary Nigerian society continues to face serious ethical challenges. Corruption remains one of the greatest obstacles to national development. Transparency International (2021) consistently ranks Nigeria among countries struggling with corruption and weak accountability systems. Cases of embezzlement, abuse of office, contract inflation, and financial mismanagement have undermined public trust in government institutions. Within the civil service, unethical practices such as bribery, absenteeism, nepotism, and misuse of official authority negatively affect service delivery and administrative efficiency.

The civil service in Anambra State is not exempt from these challenges. Public complaints regarding bureaucratic inefficiency, lack of transparency, favouritism in recruitment and promotion, and poor service delivery have raised concerns about the ethical orientation of public officials. Although the government has introduced various reforms and monitoring mechanisms, unethical conduct remains a major issue affecting public administration.

The emergence of ethics-based reforms in Nigeria reflects efforts to improve accountability and professionalism within the public sector. Since the implementation of civil service reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, emphasis has increasingly been placed on discipline, transparency, and efficiency (Adebayo, 2001). Institutions such as the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) were established to combat corruption and promote ethical conduct. However, scholars argue that legal and institutional reforms alone cannot guarantee accountability without a strong moral foundation among public officials (Omoregbe, 2007).

Modern literature supports the argument that ethics education and moral orientation programmes can significantly improve public accountability. Studies conducted in various African countries indicate that civil servants who possess strong ethical values are more likely to resist corruption and comply with public service regulations (Okeke, 2020). Ethical training programmes have also been associated with increased professionalism, discipline, and transparency in public institutions.

Furthermore, the relationship between moral philosophy and governance has gained increasing attention in contemporary academic discourse. Scholars argue that philosophy contributes to governance by promoting critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and value-based decision-making. Public administrators who are guided by moral principles are more likely to prioritize public welfare over personal interests. This perspective is particularly important in developing countries where governance challenges often arise from weak institutional ethics.

The literature also reveals important gaps in existing studies. Many studies on accountability in Nigeria focus primarily on corruption and political office holders while neglecting the ethical orientation of career civil servants who constitute the operational structure of government institutions. Existing research rarely examines how moral philosophy influences attitudes, perceptions, and behaviour within the civil service system. In Anambra State specifically, there is limited empirical research investigating the practical relevance of moral philosophy in shaping accountability among public officials.

This study therefore seeks to fill these gaps by examining the influence of moral philosophy on the attitudes of civil servants towards public accountability in Anambra State. The

study evaluates ethical awareness, moral reasoning, institutional challenges, and the effectiveness of ethics orientation programmes in promoting accountability.

The significance of the study extends beyond philosophy and public administration. Accountability is essential for sustainable development, social stability, and economic growth. Corruption and unethical conduct reduce public confidence in government, discourage investment, and weaken democratic institutions. By promoting moral responsibility and ethical conduct, philosophy contributes to national development and institutional effectiveness.

The study also aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 16, which emphasizes peace, justice, strong institutions, and accountability. Strengthening ethical values among civil servants can improve governance, enhance service delivery, and foster public trust in government institutions.

In synthesizing these arguments, the introduction establishes moral philosophy as an essential tool for promoting accountability, integrity, and good governance within the civil service. The subsequent sections discuss the theoretical framework, methodology, demographic characteristics of participants, results, discussion, conclusion and recommendations, and references.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Deontological Ethical Theory as propounded by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Deontological ethics emphasizes duty, moral obligation, and adherence to ethical principles irrespective of personal gains or consequences. According to Kant (1785), actions are morally right when they are performed out of duty and guided by universal moral laws. The theory stresses honesty, integrity, fairness, and respect for ethical standards.

The deontological perspective is highly relevant to public administration because civil servants are entrusted with responsibilities that directly affect the welfare of citizens. Public officials are expected to perform their duties according to established rules, regulations, and ethical principles. From the deontological point of view, accountability is not dependent on rewards or punishments but on moral duty and commitment to public service.

Kant argued that individuals should act according to principles that can be universally accepted. This idea is reflected in the concept of public accountability where civil servants are expected to act in ways that promote justice, transparency, and fairness. A public officer who embezzles public funds or abuses official power violates universal moral principles because such actions undermine social trust and institutional integrity.

The theory further emphasizes respect for persons and human dignity. In public administration, this implies that civil servants should treat citizens fairly and responsibly without discrimination, favouritism, or exploitation. Accountability therefore becomes both a legal and moral obligation.

The relevance of Deontological Ethical Theory to this study lies in its emphasis on ethical discipline and moral responsibility in governance. Civil servants who internalize moral values are more likely to demonstrate honesty, transparency, professionalism, and commitment to duty.

Conversely, the absence of moral principles encourages corruption, negligence, and abuse of office.

In addition to deontological ethics, the study also draws insight from Aristotle's Virtue Ethics. Virtue ethics focuses on character formation and the cultivation of moral virtues such as honesty, courage, justice, and integrity. Aristotle maintained that ethical behaviour results from habitual practice and moral discipline (Aristotle, 2004). Within the civil service, virtue ethics suggests that accountability can be strengthened through continuous ethical orientation and character development.

The combination of deontological ethics and virtue ethics provides a comprehensive framework for understanding public accountability. While deontology emphasizes moral duty and adherence to ethical rules, virtue ethics focuses on character and moral excellence. Together, these theories explain how moral philosophy influences the attitudes and behaviour of civil servants toward accountability.

The framework therefore supports the argument that strengthening ethical consciousness and philosophical education among civil servants can improve transparency, discipline, and good governance in Anambra State.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method research design involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The mixed-method approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive information regarding the influence of moral philosophy on public accountability among civil servants in Anambra State. The combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques provided a deeper understanding of ethical behaviour, accountability practices, and institutional challenges within the civil service.

The study area was Anambra State, Nigeria. Anambra State is located in the southeastern region of Nigeria and is known for its active commercial activities, educational development, and growing public institutions. The state consists of several ministries, departments, and government agencies that rely heavily on the civil service system for policy implementation and administrative functions.

The target population for the study comprised civil servants, administrative officers, and ethics and compliance personnel working in selected ministries and government agencies in Awka South, Onitsha North, and Nnewi North Local Government Areas. These areas were selected because they contain major administrative and commercial centres within the state.

A sample size of 320 respondents was used for the study. The sample consisted of 280 civil servants, 25 administrative officers, and 15 ethics and compliance personnel. The respondents were selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to select ministries and departments relevant to the study, while simple random sampling was used to select respondents within the institutions.

Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and direct observation. Structured questionnaires were administered to civil servants to obtain quantitative information regarding ethical awareness, accountability practices, and attitudes toward moral philosophy. The

questionnaires contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to capture respondents' perceptions on ethical behaviour and accountability.

In-depth interviews were conducted with administrative officers and ethics personnel to obtain qualitative insights into the challenges affecting accountability in the civil service. The interviews focused on issues such as corruption, political interference, institutional discipline, and ethical orientation programmes.

The study also employed direct observation to assess behavioural patterns and administrative practices within selected public institutions. Observation enabled the researcher to identify practical manifestations of ethical and unethical conduct in the workplace.

The quantitative data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Tables were used to present demographic characteristics and major findings of the study. The qualitative data obtained from interviews were analyzed thematically in order to identify recurring patterns and themes relating to ethics and accountability.

To ensure validity and reliability, the questionnaire was pre-tested among a small group of civil servants outside the study area. Necessary corrections and adjustments were made before the final administration of the instrument. Reliability was also ensured through consistency in data collection procedures.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and assured of confidentiality. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were free to withdraw at any stage of the research process.

Demography of Participants

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 320)

Characteristic	Frequency (n = 320)	Percentage (%)
Gender (Male)	180	56.0
Gender (Female)	140	44.0
Age 21–30	70	22.0
Age 31–40	120	38.0
Age 41–50	85	27.0
Age 51 and above	45	13.0
Civil servants	280	87.5
Administrative officers	25	7.8
Ethics personnel	15	4.7
Bachelor's degree holders	175	54.7
Master's degree holders	95	29.7
Other qualifications	50	15.6

Note. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place. Role percentages (87.5 + 7.8 + 4.7) and qualification percentages (54.7 + 29.7 + 15.6) sum to 100.0.

Table 1 indicates that the majority of respondents were civil servants within the age bracket of 31–40 years. It also reveals that most respondents possessed tertiary educational qualifications, suggesting a relatively informed participant population. Male respondents constituted 56% of the sample, while female respondents accounted for 44%.

Results

The study examined the major factors affecting accountability and ethical behaviour among civil servants in Anambra State. The distribution of these factors is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Factors Affecting Public Accountability among Civil Servants

Factor	Frequency (n = 320)	Percentage (%)
Weak moral orientation	95	29.7
Corruption and bribery	85	26.6
Political interference	60	18.8
Poor remuneration	45	14.1
Weak institutional enforcement	35	10.9

Note. Percentages are based on N = 320 and sum to 100.1 because of rounding.

The findings indicate that weak moral orientation and corruption are the major factors affecting public accountability among civil servants in Anambra State. Weak moral orientation was identified by 29.7% of respondents, followed by corruption and bribery (26.6%), political interference (18.8%), poor remuneration (14.1%), and weak institutional enforcement (10.9%).

Further analysis showed that 70% of respondents agreed that moral philosophy positively influences ethical decision-making and accountability in public service. About 74% supported the inclusion of ethics and philosophy courses in civil service training programmes, while 65% believed that unethical conduct in government institutions is largely connected to poor moral values.

Qualitative findings revealed that civil servants who had undergone ethics orientation programmes demonstrated greater commitment to transparency and professionalism. Respondents also identified political pressure, favouritism, and lack of effective disciplinary mechanisms as major obstacles to accountability. Ministries with structured ethical orientation programmes were reported to record higher levels of transparency, discipline, and compliance with public service regulations.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that moral philosophy plays a significant role in shaping the attitudes of civil servants towards public accountability in Anambra State. The high percentage of respondents who acknowledged the importance of ethical values suggests that accountability in public service is strongly connected to moral consciousness and personal integrity.

The findings support the arguments of Kant (1785) that moral duty and ethical obligation are essential foundations of responsible behaviour. Civil servants who possess strong ethical values are more likely to perform their duties honestly and transparently. This finding also aligns

with Aristotle's virtue ethics, which emphasizes character and moral discipline as essential qualities of good leadership.

The study further reveals that corruption, political interference, and weak institutional enforcement negatively affect accountability within the civil service. These findings correspond with previous studies which argue that institutional reforms without moral reorientation may not effectively reduce unethical practices in public administration (Omeregbe, 2007).

Another important finding is the growing support for ethics education and moral philosophy within the civil service system. Respondents believed that regular ethical orientation programmes could improve discipline, professionalism, and compliance with public service regulations. This supports recent literature emphasizing ethics-based training as a strategy for promoting good governance and reducing corruption (Okeke, 2020).

The qualitative findings also reveal that poor remuneration and favouritism contribute to unethical behaviour among civil servants. Nevertheless, respondents maintained that moral values remain essential despite economic and political pressures. This suggests that ethical conduct is influenced not only by institutional conditions but also by individual moral principles.

The study therefore establishes that moral philosophy is relevant to contemporary governance and public administration. By promoting honesty, responsibility, and accountability, philosophical ethics contributes to the development of efficient and trustworthy public institutions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the impact of moral philosophy on the attitude of civil servants towards public accountability in Anambra State, Nigeria. The findings reveal that moral philosophy significantly influences ethical conduct, transparency, and responsibility among civil servants. The study further establishes that corruption, political interference, weak enforcement mechanisms, and poor moral orientation remain major obstacles to accountability in the civil service.

The study concludes that accountability in public administration cannot be achieved solely through institutional reforms without strong ethical values and moral discipline among public servants. Moral philosophy therefore provides an important framework for strengthening integrity, professionalism, and good governance.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government institutions should incorporate moral philosophy and ethics education into civil service training programmes.
2. Regular workshops and seminars on accountability and ethical conduct should be organized for civil servants.
3. Stronger institutional monitoring and disciplinary mechanisms should be established to discourage corruption and abuse of office.
4. Government should improve the welfare and remuneration of civil servants to reduce economic pressures associated with unethical practices.

5. Public institutions should promote value-driven leadership based on honesty, transparency, and responsibility.
6. Ethics and compliance units should be strengthened within ministries and government agencies to ensure adherence to accountability standards.

The study contributes to the fields of philosophy, ethics, and public administration by demonstrating the practical relevance of moral philosophy in promoting accountability and good governance in Nigeria.

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