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Case study of the University of Nigeria's use of ethical considerations in research

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Abstract
Particularly when they are required to make particular moral choices in life, humans encounter various difficulties. It might be challenging to distinguish between ethics and morality in some situations. This essay looked at the definition of ethics, specifically research ethics, as well as the traits of research ethics and the necessity of incorporating research ethics into academic writing. The study was primarily library-focused and focused on the stressful or imperfect notion as well as the rotten apple idea. The importance of upholding research ethics in public educational institutions was emphasized, with particular reference to the University of Nigeria, where all master's and doctoral candidates' reports are checked for plagiarism using Turnitin. They must adhere to the 15% and less plagiarized material criteria in order to be permitted to graduate and be added to the research repository. Additionally, it should be highlighted that all postgraduate students and academic staff are required to create Google Scholar accounts and have their works properly cited in the research repository.

Keywords: ethics, research ethics, plagiarism, self-plagiarism, falsification, fabrication, informed consent

Introduction

The importance of conducting research and publishing findings is stressed in every facet of academic endeavor. Because of this, research's primary goal is to further our knowledge by adding to what is already known. But only when it is shared with other people or academics will such knowledge make sense.

Journal articles, theses, dissertations, and books are used to spread this knowledge. Researchers must follow ethical standards in all facets of academic writing when conducting and publishing their research findings (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2016) [4]. This necessitates that the exercise be carried out in a sound and moral manner based on established ethical norms.

The meaning of ethics

Norms or rules of behavior for people and their interactions with one another are governed by the philosophy subfield of ethics (Kovacs, 2017; Blumberg *et al*, 2016) [10, 4]. According to Akaranga & Ongong'a (2013), it refers to "social rules for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior" and a "ethos" or "style of life" (Shah, 2011, p.205) [15]. Although many countries have laws that govern behavior, ethical standards are more expansive than legal requirements. However, cultures use laws to uphold moral principles.

Social norms are developed as a result of the study of ethics and center on the conduct that a person should exhibit in a certain circumstance. These behavioral standards that direct moral decisions can support a variety of ethical viewpoints (Saunders, Lewis. & Thornhill, 2011) [14].

Moral principles are gradually instilled in people throughout their lives, and social interactions have an impact as well. Because of this, different people have different interpretations of ethical standards (Resnik, 2011) [13]. In the early years, children might acquire norms in their families, schools, and even when attending Sunday schools or the madrassa.

Science Ethics

Since researchers are professionals, research ethics includes well-established standards and guidelines that regulate their behaviour. Research ethics is a branch of applied ethics. In order to conduct ethical research in our daily lives, researchers must respect the rights of their subjects and provide quality publications of their findings (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011) [7]. Teleology and deontology are the two main philosophical schools that influence research ethics (Blumberg *et al*, 2016) [4]. According to the teleological viewpoint, research's goals outweigh its efforts. This suggests that the advantages of the research's conclusions could be balanced against the expenses of engaging in immoral behavior. However, this depends on how much good is produced compared to how much bad (Frankena, 2015) [8]. The deontological theories, which are the antithesis of teleological theories, contend that the aims of study can never be used as a justification for conducting immoral research. They contend that there are other factors than the goodness or badness of a rule's effects that determine whether it is ethical to act in a certain way (Frankena, 2015) [8]. Even if it does not encourage the greatest balance of good over evil, a course of action can nonetheless be ethically correct. Therefore, one cannot secure the legitimacy and reliability of data by deception. After discussing what ethics is and the two main perspectives that can be used to conceptualize research ethics, it is critical to look at the history of research ethics and the ideas that underpin it in current research.

Research ethics' origins

The requirement to use humans in study led to the development of the discipline of biomedical research, which is the foundation for adopting research ethics. Even though this development dates back to the eighteenth century, it wasn't until December 9, 1946, when an American tribunal began criminal proceedings against 23 prominent German administrators and physicians who knowingly committed

war crimes and crimes against humanity, that the need to evolve great interest in human beings was given serious consideration (Kour, 2014) [9]. They were accused of performing medical tests on thousands of World War II detainees held hostage in concentration camps without their permission. Unfortunately, many of these people died as a result of the studies, while others suffered chronic paralysis. Due to the prevalence of human exploitation in numerous situations, the Nuremberg code was established in 1948 as a result of the trial's findings. In order to prevent the mistreatment of human subjects and safeguard their rights during study, it was then necessary to develop professional norms and rules (Oddi & Cassidy, 2020; Fouka and Mantzorou, 2011) [12, 7]. The Nuremberg code placed particular focus on the risk-benefit ratio, informed consent, the right to withdraw from research, and protection from physical and mental harm or suffering and death (Burns, 2016) [5]. There were several declarations on research ethics, but the Helsinki declaration of 1964 is the most significant one since it acknowledges the need for nontherapeutic research and emphasizes subject protection by stating that the well-being of individuals is greater than societal or scientific requirements (Oddi & Cassidy, 2020) [12]. The idea of research ethics has sparked the creation of a number of ideas that describe how humans are able to overcome a variety of obstacles in their day-to-day experiences.

Research Ethics Theories

In this article, we briefly address the "bad apple idea" and the "stressful or flawed environment theory" in order to better understand why researchers engage in research misconduct. One rotten apple hurts its neighbors, according to a Latin saying that was translated into English in the 14th century (Shah, 2011, p.206-207) [15]. The "bad apple theory," which highlights the possibility that
mold from one apple could spread and infect the others, is derived from this saying. This is the reason why a bad individual is compared to a bad apple in a bunch. According to the "bad apple idea," the majority of researchers uphold the highest standards of ethics, with only a few exceptions.

On the other hand, the "stressful or imperfect environment theory" emphasizes the idea that an institution has several pressures, incentives, and career goals that push people or researchers to violate their standards and engage in misbehavior. This is obvious even at the University of Nigeria, where the well-known adage "publish or perish" serves as a crucial barometer for academic staff members' upward professional mobility (Shah, 2011, p.206) [15]. As a result, many professors will work hard to complete their doctoral theses and publish in scholarly journals in order to meet the requirements for advancement to higher levels. To achieve this duty, lecturers will collaborate with their coworkers or students to write academic articles. On the other side, postgraduate students will also collaborate with senior academic staff members to publish the necessary articles so they may meet the requirements for publishing articles in order to acquire their master's or doctoral degrees, as appropriate. Without a doubt, this might lead to scientific malpractice of some kind.

Difficulties with Ethics in Research

Norms support the goals of research, which include information sharing, telling the truth, and lastly the necessity to correct errors. Writing a research proposal and getting it approved are the first crucial stages before starting the real research investigation. A researcher must choose the best methodology to use, the most pertinent methods of data collection, present the research findings, interpret them appropriately, and display the material in a logical order. The information is then carefully examined and documented in the form of a book, project report, thesis, or article. While conducting research, it is crucial that a researcher always adhere to the proper values. Research misconduct may arise if this is not followed. We also talk about research ethics within this framework, focusing on concerns with the research itself, research participants, and the research method.

Research-Related Moral Dilemmas

If a researcher's research findings could harm the productive working relationships with their sponsor, they should be withheld from the public. This is obvious if the information concentrates on the organization's policies and potentially discloses sensitive information about the people or organization. This necessitates good communication with other researchers while also preserving their intellectual property rights. If this is not strictly followed, it could spark resistance or even protests.

Academic Autonomy

Academicians are expected to be free thinkers who openly share their thoughts and knowledge without fear of reprisal while still being aware of the need to preserve intellectual property (Mugenda, 2013).

Fraud, Falsification, and Fabrication

Falsification or fraud is the manipulation of materials, equipment, processes, by changing results or omitting some data or findings so that the research does not seem to have been well represented or recorded. Fabrication involves creating, inventing, or fabricating data or results which are then recorded or reported (Mugenda, 2013; Kour, 2014) [9]. Any researcher who engages in such behavior is in violation of the main goal of research ethics, which makes them unreliable and increases the risk that they will deceive other academics while also damaging their own academic authority. This frequently occurs when a researcher or researchers abuse their position of authority and privilege to their own profit at the expense of the vulnerable subjects (Mugenda, 2013).

Concerns with money and sponsorship

Research is a delicate but demanding endeavor that requires in-depth information presentation and analysis. Therefore, as a research study should be completely carried out, researchers should be held responsible to the public and must seek out financial backing and sponsorship. However, in other instances, the sponsoring organization may not provide full financial support for the research and may instead be trying to save money, which will have an impact on the study's quality. This unquestionably results in hasty research and skewed findings (Mugenda, 2013). These studies might be a waste of money, have no value, or have no bearing on customers.

Some research investigations are also carried out with the assistance of a sponsor or sponsors who outline their requirements. This might result in non-compliance or non-conformity in one aspect.

Plagiarism

Higher education academic institutions often discuss the problem of plagiarism. This is the practice where an author or researcher has to make sure that any work that is written should be original and be free of some texts, results, or even expressions that are borrowed, manipulated, or used such as ideas, processes, results, or even words of the author or publication without citing the source (Mugenda, 2013; Kour, 2014) [9].

The development of information and communication technology (ICT) in modern society has made this misconduct necessary (Saunders *et al*. 2011) [14].

The initial paragraphs, such as the introduction and literature review, are where plagiarism is most frequently found. This could be a result of the researcher's integrity being compromised by laziness, ignorance, or cultural diversity. It is the writer's responsibility to properly cite or quote the source work. Self-plagiarism and multiple duplication, commonly referred to as "salamis," are two examples of plagiarism. This occurs when the same information is mentioned in two or more publications. The third type of plagiarism is "redundant publication," which happens when a researcher reuses his prior work in a new study without properly citing the earlier work or when previously published information is republished together with some brand-new data. It's possible that the researcher wants to oversell the conclusions that have already been reached. However, this unquestionably obstructs study analysis and infringes copyright laws.

The "ithenticate" tool from iParadigms is one of the instruments used to check for plagiarism. And the University of Nigeria uses Turnitin, which can be found at http://lturnitin.com. To confirm the authenticity of materials submitted for publication, crossref-http://www.crossref.org has teamed up with the two software suppliers. All postgraduate students at the University of Nigeria are required to submit their projects and theses for review using the turnitin program. The written works of Masters and PhD students must pass this software's inspection and contain no more than 15% original content. Before a graduate's name is added to the list of graduates, a report must first be acknowledged and submitted along with the written projects to the Board of Postgraduate Studies for approval. Additionally, it is urged and encouraged for all academic staff members and postgraduate students to sign up for Google Scholar, get accounts, and upload their published works using those accounts.

Ethics in writing and publishing

Academic and professional advancement in higher education institutions requires the publication of articles in peer-reviewed journals or a book. At the University of Nigeria, "publish or perish" is the guiding principle. To compete with other universities in Africa and around the world in Webometrics, each institution of higher learning must encourage its students to participate in the craft of publishing.

This will increase visibility and rating. Any written work must be unique and should contribute significantly to knowledge by presenting findings that other academics will find fascinating to read. Additionally, it can only be submitted for publication if it has been well researched, written, and complies with all applicable study ethical standards.

One author or multiple authors may contribute to a given article. In some cases, a graduate student or up-and-coming scholar may write the name of a senior scholar on the article without the senior scholar's knowledge in order to share shared ownership of the work. But in order to receive credit for the finished product and to increase accountability when the work is eventually released, each of them must have a specific role to play. Only if all of the authors concur with the information can the paper be considered original. Because the researcher or author of a paper or article must make some sort of contribution to the final work, they should identify their affiliation with a higher education institution. The Chief Editor or editor of the journal receives the paper after it has been written, and they then send it to a minimum of two academic researchers for peer review. The reviewers' comments are aimed to evaluate the paper's quality by providing scholarly commentary and insight. Before the work is accepted for publication in the upcoming journal issue, these opinions are then sent to the author or authors who follow the criteria. However, it is unethical to submit the same manuscript to two distinct journals or to publish the same research findings twice without letting the editors know.

Ethical concerns involving research participants

Human subjects are involved in the study process in the majority of research investigations. Due attention must be given to how to interact and relate to them in this admirable endeavor, as detailed below.

Safety and advocacy

It is the researcher's duty to create a project that won't violate the safety and rights of the interviews or respondents. This is crucial for defending, promoting, and campaigning for their rights (Blumberg *et al*, 2016) [4]. While conducting the research, the respondents must be thoroughly informed of the hazards involved.

Privacy, secrecy, and anonymity

Anonymity is the practice of keeping information about respondents' racial or cultural backgrounds hidden, avoiding using their names or revealing any other private details about a participant (Mugenda, 2013). For this reason, a researcher must pledge during the research to keep confidential information provided by the respondent private. But if any information must be made public, the respondent's permission must first be obtained. By preventing physical and psychological harm to the research subject, this improves objectivity toward them and prevents the researcher from asking the respondent awkward questions that can mislead or even startle them.

Beneficence

The word "benevolence" translates as "doing good" (Churchill, 2015). It is the responsibility of the researcher who interacts with a volunteer directly to describe the goals of the study and the advantages that will result from them. The benefits should not, however, be overstated or even understated by the researcher. According to Beauchamp and Childress (2015) [3] and Mugenda (2013), the concept of beneficence in research is related with the Hippocratic dictum "be of benefit, do not hurt." This leads us to assess the benefits of the study. The basic goal of upholding

research ethics is to promote and further the wellbeing of people while avoiding bias and dishonesty.

Deception

Participants in study should always be told the truth. However, if they are only given a partial account or the truth is outright withheld or corrupted, this can result in deception. This circumstance arises when a researcher performs a survey with prejudice or conducts a study just to benefit the research project's sponsor (Blumberg, *et al* 2016) [4].

Non-maleficence

While non-maleficence highlights the potential risks of involvement, beneficence underlines the study's usefulness. It places emphasis on what defines injury, which might be of a physical, psychological, social, or even financial nature (Burns & Grove, 2016) [5]. The goal of non-maleficence is to prevent harm. It focuses on the necessity of refraining from physically or psychologically harming the respondent in order to prevent any intentional injury or to reduce any component of prospective harm. This could be the outcome of asking awkward questions, feeling let down, or pressuring them into disclosing facts that might cause discomfort or even dread in the respondents. A researcher's responsibility is to describe the research's implications, which should be weighed against the hazards involved. The researcher should then undertake a debriefing with the respondent(s) at the conclusion of the study, outlining the precise purpose of the investigation and the reasons why full disclosure was not made (Treece & Treece, 2021) [16].

Informed and Willing Consent

It is implied that "a person consciously, voluntarily, intelligently, and in a clear and manifest fashion, grants his or her consent" when it comes to one of the main ethical concerns with doing research (Arminger, 1997, p.330). An focus is placed on gathering information honestly in every research study. However, this is only possible if the researcher fully discloses to the respondents the aim of the study, the potential hazards, and ensures the confidentiality of the research participants by maintaining anonymity. Only if the researcher is able to clearly identify themselves to the subjects by outlining the advantages of the study can they gain such confidence. For instance, when a survey is administered or focus groups are used, participants are free to respond to questions as they see fit. In this regard, the respondent must be told by the researcher that the principle of voluntary consent, or willingness to engage in a study, must be followed. Additionally, in order for a responder to give their informed permission, a researcher must be honest about the study's objectives and elucidate on any potential dangers. The researcher should next promise the respondent's privacy and secrecy and refrain from disclosing their identify (Mugenda, 2013).

The respondent's right to autonomy, defined by Beauchamp & Childress (2015) [3] as the capacity for self-determination in action in accordance with a personal plan, is further highlighted by informed consent. A respondent can choose to take part in a study at this point if they are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of learning new information as a result of it. This component also deals with how to compensate for any bodily suffering or harm, as well as how to respect people's privacy and dignity.

Groups at Risk or Particular Populations

It is feasible to include underserved or vulnerable populations in research, such as children, the poor, or those who are ill. If this is done, the researcher needs have their guardians' or parents' permission in order to include them in the studies (Mugenda, 2013).

Ethical concerns in the conduct of research

To encourage collaborative efforts, research requires collaboration and coordination across many individuals, distinct disciplines, organizations, and ethical norms. This comprises fairness, mutual respect, trust, and accountability. Researchers should follow the norms regarding authorship, copyright and patenting policies, data sharing policies, and peer review confidentiality requirements. This is the reason, for instance, the University of Nigeria established a research code of conduct that is governed by a research note book. All university researchers are expected to become familiar with and abide by the organization's code of ethics (Bell & Bryman, 2017 [2], Saunders *et al*, 2011) [14]. When writing research proposals, projects, theses, and dissertations, this must be kept in mind.

Research agendas

The following ethical standards for research are addressed by the University of Nigeria's code of conduct. First and foremost, instructors and students should uphold honesty in all communications by providing accurate data reporting, effectively presenting their findings using the proper methods and procedures, and using methods and procedures that result in the completion of the final written report. At the University of Nigeria, a postgraduate student's creation of a research proposal, produced with the assistance of a potential supervisor or supervisors, serves as the first step in the academic writing process. At this stage, the student presents the research at a departmental seminar where it is evaluated by faculty and other postgraduate students, who offer constructive criticism to raise the caliber of the work. The proposal is then revised and improved by the candidate before being further debated at the faculty or school. At this level, the supervisor is the one who submits the document in place of the applicant. The proposal is authorized for research after the required changes and amendments are successfully made, at which point the candidate is completely registered to conduct the study. This is typically a demanding process that takes a lot of time, and some potential candidates even leave the program and decide not to pursue research.

Recommendations

There are numerous justifications for upholding ethical standards while performing research. They first advance the key goals of the study, which include, among other things, knowledge acquisition and the promotion of accuracy in research by preventing mistakes that can result from supplying inaccurate information, falsifying information, or misrepresenting information. Second, research demands a lot of work, which necessitates collaboration and coordination between numerous individuals and researchers. Therefore, it is crucial that researchers and consumers have a strong sense of mutual trust, respect for the opinions of other academics, treat them fairly, and accountability for their research endeavors. To maintain the copyright and patenting policies of their products, guidelines have been

produced in this regard. However, this is only possible if the right regulations are followed to improve confidentiality. Third, the general people, who value the researcher's efforts, must read any work in which researchers are involved or any work that is published. Fourth, if public money are being used to support the research, those funds must be properly accounted for in order to improve the research's quality and integrity. Finally, research ethics is concerned with societal values. Therefore, in accordance with international law and safety requirements, researchers should promote social responsibility, uphold the integrity of human values, and safeguard the welfare of study participants and animals.

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