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ENSURING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This paper examines the issue of academic integrity in Nigerian universities with particular emphasis on research and publications. Considering the important roles that research findings could play in policy formulations towards national development, some guidelines are suggested in research and publication procedures in the universities. Of particular emphasis is the need for university researchers to be honest in research methodology to ensure genuine and reliable findings. Higher financial allocations in the area of research by the governments and reliable findings. Higher financial allocations in the area of research by the government and greater involvement of research institutes are also considered necessary for the conduct of meaningful researches in the universities. The need for objective peer review of research reports towards quality publications is also stressed. Honesty, as a value of academic integrity, which serves as the foundation for trust, fairness, respect and responsibility is considered important and called for in this paper.

Introduction

Improvements in educational practices and policies at all levels of the educational system are predicated on discoveries of new ideas and facts from researches. The resultant educational development manifests in improved policies, clear-cut educational management strategies and instructional methods, and adequate infrastructural facilities. These manifestations are intended to bring about improved teaching and learning situations, geared towards national development.

In tertiary institutions of learning, all members of the academic community should be committed to

the creation and discovery of knowledge. The knowledge so created or discovered needs to be documented (published) and made easily available to end-users such as educational planners, policy makers and administrators. Hence, for such knowledge to be useful, it must be original and genuine. However, the present research focus in our tertiary institution is on "publish or perish" syndrome, where the quantity of research alone appears to determine the individual's academic career progression. In this type of situation, the quality of the research carried out could be low, resulting into unwholesome proliferation of less than respectable published stuff due to manipulation in the methodology employed. Table 1 shows the typical relative grading of parameters for promotion of academic staff in Nigeria universities.

S/n	Parameter	Maximum	%
1.	Academic qualifications	10	9.5
2.	Professional quality	5	4.8
3.	Teaching experience	10	9.5
4.	Teaching research load	5	4.8
5.	Quality of teaching	5	4.8
6.	Interview performance (where applicable)	10	9.5
7.	Recognized publication	40	38.5
8.	Administrative experience service to community	10	9.5
9.	Academics professional	5	4.8

	distinction		
10.	Currency of publications	5	4.8
	Total	105	100

Source: Universities of Ilorin (2003) conditions of service for Senior Staff Ilorin: University Press. It is clear from Table 1 that the quality and currency of publication alone account for 42.9% of the parameters considered for promotion of academic staff. Other parameters such as academic and professional qualifications, teaching and administrative experience and interview performance for readers and professors, all account for less than 60%. The lopsidedness in the grading of these parameters, coupled with time, finances and other resources required for genuine researches might lead to "cooking up" of data resulting in spurious and invalid results (Jimoh 2000). Likewise, in the 2004 Nigerian university ranking, research indicator was one of the key variables used in the ranking exercise. In the exercise carried out by the National Universities Commission (NUC), only scholarly articles published in high-class international journals were considered: all publications in local journals were exempted (NUC. 2005). It then becomes obvious that the quality of researches conducted in the universities determines to a large extent, the individual lecturers' career progression as well as the overall ratings of the universities. There is thus the need to enshrine academic integrity in the procedures employed in research work.

Academic integrity entails a firm adherence to a set of values and principles that together reinforce educational mission and academic processes. The five fundamental values of academic integrity are honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility (The Centre for Academic Integrity. 1999). From these values of emanated principles of behavior that enable academic communities to translate ideals into action. It is therefore the responsibility of every university to apply the values of academic integrity in protecting the quality of education and research on the campus(es).

In the opinion of Jimoh (2000), there is an increasing downward trend in the quality of research emanating from our and end up with spurious results that are merely tailored to fit into the theoretical or empirical results literature. It then becomes imperative to maintain some integrity in the area of research outcomes/findings. Such research findings could then be effectively and efficiently utilized in educational policies and practices in Nigeria.

The possibility that some researchers conducted in Nigerian universities might lack fundamental values of academic integrity, either on purpose or through carelessness, is the basic prompting for this paper. It is hoped that this paper would come up with some measures towards higher integrity in the researches, and publications there from, emanating from the Nigerian universities Universities and research centers. This trend manifests in traces of academic dishonesty in every stage of the researcher's activity, the literature review, the sampling procedure and the increasing tendency of today's researcher to pretend that he is not aware of earlier studies that have attempted to examine the same or similar variables. Some researchers simply 'cook' up their data

Academic integrity is a behavioural approach to academic life. It deals with identifying values and behaviours that must be promoted in academic communities as a foundation for promoting a vibrant academic life, promoting scientific progress and preparing students for responsible citizenship.

The Center for Academic Integrity (1999, p4) defined academic integrity as "a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility". Honesty is crucial to the quest for knowledge and to free exchange of ideas in teaching, learning and research. It abhors cheating, lying, misinterpretation, deception and all forms of fraudulent practices in the education process.

The Concepts of Academic Integrity and Research

Trust is equally important for continuity of knowledge. On with trust can colleagues take for granted the work of others and begin from where the left off. Trust is thus necessary for advancement of knowledge either through individual or collaborative efforts. Fairness as a value of academic integrity is necessary as the foundation of the critical dimension of educational inquiry. Fairness is imperative in institutional Standards, practices, procedures, and interactions among, and treatment of, all categories of members of an academic

community. In an academic integrity climate, respect should be promoted among all members of the academic community for each others. For scholarship and research, and for the education process as a whole. In addition to self-respect, respect for the work of others is required in terms of proper acknowledgement.

Responsibility implies that each member of the academic community supports and enforces high standards of conduct in learning, teaching and research. Individuals are to take responsibility for their own honesty and seek to discourage and prevent misconduct by others. The university has the responsibility to establish and maintain an environment that supports academic integrity so as to project the quality of education being given and research being given and research being carried out. This paper focuses on ensuring academic integrity in researches and publications in the Nigerian universities.

Simply put research is the process of finding out the solutions to identified problems in a particular discipline, Research, if properly conducted, is a very useful tool in acquiring valid and reliable knowledge. Research is described as a scientific process that is both a mystery and a discipline (Jimoh, 200). As a misery it excludes the uninitiated from exercising undue influence over its work. As a discipline, it provides a body of knowledge, which sustains the work of fellow professionals, providing problems for study, procedures for research and the forms for reporting results. Osuala(2001) also defined research as *a* most important tool for advancing knowledge, for promoting progress and for enabling man to relate more effectively to his environment, to accomplish his purposes and to resolve his conflicts. Thus, the primary aim of undertaking research is to move the society forward. Carrying out meaningful research towards acquiring valid knowledge requires planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Specifically the basic procedures to be followed in any research effort include:

- (i) Proper identification of a problem
- (ii) A review of relevant literature
- (iii) Formulation of hypotheses or research questions (depending on the research design)
- (iv) Construction of instrument(s) for data collection
- (v) Sample selection
- (vi) Analysis of data

(vii) Presentation of findings and publishing of reports

These steps require some measure of integrity to ensure that the final report is genuine with cogent findings that are replicable and applicable to problem-solving policies.

Maintaining integrity in Research and Publishing

There are ethical practices in conducting researches and publishing the outcomes. These practices are viewed in line with the integrity expected in research and publications. Integrity in research connotes honesty in the procedures employed in earning out research work. This honesty, at its simplest, means never falsifying the result of any research and always giving full credits for any other people's contributions to our achievement (UK Centre for Legal Education (UK Centre for legal education(UKCLE, 2003)). The systematic procedures in conducting researches and publishing their findings are discussed below, highlighting the necessary measures of integrity in each stage.

I. Identification of a Research Problem

Proper identification and articulation of a research problem leads to the choice of a research topic. To ensure integrity in the study, the researcher should identify an area of interest in this discipline and formulate a relevant topic that is capable of having useful outcomes. The study should not be a replica of an existing one so as to contribute to existing knowledge and move the society forward.

2. Review of Relevant Literature

The essence of literature review provides the current researcher with an insight into existing and up-to-date information on the new area of research (Lasisi, 2005). It highlights how previous researchers conceptualized the problem, the theoretical approaches employed, the research methodology used and the paucity of their findings. In instilling integrity in the literature review, the researcher should avoid accumulation of too many materials, which may be unrelated to the study. There is thus the need to evaluate the credibility of the literature sources and quality of the ideas in relation to the current study.

The citation should be honestly done, giving proper credit and acknowledgement for borrowed words and ideas. Improper citations, misquotations and unacknowledged use of ideas of others are forms of plagiarism. According to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, to "plagiarize" means:

1. To steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own.
2. To use (another's production) without crediting the sources.
3. To commit literary theft.
4. To present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

Plagiarism is an act of fraud involving both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterwards. Hence, plagiarism can be avoided by citing sources correctly for the readers to identify those sources. The most common citation method is to identify sources (s) in the text, with the author's surname and the publication year in parentheses (and the page numbers(s) of quoted verbatim)

3. Research Design

A research design specifies the procedure to be used in gathering, analysing and interpreting data. It determines the sample and sampling techniques and the formulation of appropriate hypotheses and or statement of the research questions. The research design adopted should be appropriate to choose representative samples from which generalizations could be drawn. The instrument(s) for data collection should be valid and reliable, and appropriate statistical tools should be used to analyse the genuinely (not "cooked-up") collected data. To avoid 'cooked-up' data, adequate time should be allowed for gathering research materials. The rule of thumb for gathering research materials is "estimate the amount of time you think it will take to conduct your research, and then double it!"(werrel.2001 p.1).

Furthermore, to give credibility and usefulness to the research findings, researcher should overcome the temptation to use 'complex' statistics on data, which simple descriptive statistics would have adequately explained. Also, as suggested by American Statistical Association (1999), researchers should clearly and openly describe their statistical methods for readers to understand.

4. Presentation of Research Report

research is not complete until it has been reported. A research report conveys information to the readers on the methodology employed in carrying out the study and the outcomes of the research. If the research methodology has been honestly carried out by the researcher, then the finding would be credible, dependable, confirmable and applicable to policy formulation. Another important aspect of the report is proper documentation of the information

aspect of the report is proper documentation of the information sources used in the report is proper documentation of the information sources used in the report, to avoid plagiarism. The vehicles for providing this documentation are the in-text citations at the point in the report where the information is presented, and a reference list at the end of the report, listing all the sources, arranged alphabetically.

5. Publishing of Research Report publishing of research reports is important as a means of communication to the scholarly world so that readers may be informed of research findings. Other researchers may also build on these findings. Usually before publication, research reports are assessed by peers to judge the quality of the research and subsequently, improve the quality of the manuscript. This is done through constructive criticism of the report, coupled with clear identification of weakness in the work and suggestions for improvements needed. To ensure academic integrity in peer review of research reports, the review must be conducted by competent, unbiased reviewer and completed on time and in confidence (Hochstetler, 2005). Assessed research reports with positive ratings are usually published in scholarly journals and electronic media such as the Internet. Academic integrity behooves on a researcher the obligation to make research findings accessible to allow for confirmation, replication and application to societal development.

As a measure of integrity in published works, copyright law protects authors from unauthorized copying, display distribution or sale of their work by others. However, there are conditions for "fair use" of copyright materials, if the material is being used for educational purpose and is available to a limited number of people for limited amount of time (Werrel, 2001). But as a rule, to avoid copyright infringement, permission must be obtained before posting any material. Reproducing previously published work requires permission from both the authors and the publisher.

The systematic procedures in conducting meaningful researches and publishing their findings involves enormous cost .so much valuable time, efforts, money and others resources are expand in collecting data, analysing them and publishing the reports for the advancement of knowledge and improvement of educational practices to move the society

forward. Expectedly therefore, university research is experiencing a crisis of neglect due to poor funding by the Nigerian governments and research institutes Table 2 presents the research grant releases by the Federal government to the federal universities, as a percentage of the recurrent grants, between 1993 and 2002

Table 2: Research Grants Releases as a Percentage of Recurrent Grants Release to the Nigerian Federal Universities (1993-2002)

1 Year	2 Recurrent Grant	3 Research Grant Allocations	4 Research Grant Releases	5 4 as % Of 2	6 4 as % of 3
1993	3,226,229,278	199,683,506	119,683,506	3.71	100.00
1994	3,405,345,420	129,516,497	97,578,145	2.87	75.3
1995	4,576,364,236	150,034,293	127,642,402	2.79	85.1
1996	5,924,050,010	141,247,855	108,681,753	1.83	73.3
1997	3,697,819,940	186,910,647	102,700,986	2.77	54.9
1998	7,295,447,524	211,024,467	100,871,427	1.46	50.6
1999	10,362,430,272	295,167,155	196,910,840	1.90	66.7
2000	28,206,218,866	441,744,392	733,503,635	2.60	166.0
2001	28,419,719,503	610,449,148	744,139,702	2.62	121.9
2002	30,351,483,190	675,921,050	825,840,677	2.72	122.1

It is clear from the figures in Table 2 that the research grant ranged from 1.46-3.71%. These percentages are rather low for adequate distribution to the varied areas of research interests in the university system. The fluctuations in the research grant releases might not be unconnected with the NUC policy of non release of grants to universities who failed to account for the outstanding balances against them. As a form of checks and balances by the NUC, the Federal universities are to individually account for at least 50% of all releases in order to qualify for the release of their subsequent research grant allocation. The submission of each university on grant utilization for the earlier releases must be found satisfactory. This submission involves at least 50% returns of the current amount allocated including the outstanding balance carried forward by the university from the previous grants(s). The same policy accounts for the fluctuations in the research grant allocations for the period under review. The current trend of higher releases than an allocation is indictments on the universities that the research grants were either not fully distributed to the beneficiaries or prompt returns were not made by the beneficiaries.

Another important aspect of academic integrity in research publishing is in the constitution of the editorial board of a journal. The approval of all members should be sought and got. A situation where a renowned Professor is included without his/her knowledge or permission is a fraudulent act. Towards ensuring academic integrity in publications of Nigerian academics, the NUC carried out the assessment of Nigerian universities local journals with regards to international standards. Among the assessment criteria used were evidence of peer review, of Editorial Board membership acceptance, and of active participation of such experts (NUC, 2005).

Recommendations

In addition to the suggestions made under each stage of the research and publication process, the following general recommendations are made towards instituting and maintaining integrity in academic life in general and in research and publications in particular, in Nigerian universities. Each Nigerian university should have clear academic integrity statements, policies and procedures that are known to the entire community and are

consistently implemented. These policies and programmes should be enshrined in the strategic plan of each university and practiced from the top down.

The Nigerian governments at all levels and the research institutes should make more funds available for research institutes universities. This step would encourage genuine collaborative and individual research, with relevant and applicable findings towards improved scientific and educational practices.

Availability of adequate funds would also empower academic staff of Nigerian universities to meet up with the publication standards required for promotion. Each university administration should ensure prompt and equitable distribution of such funds to all disciplines within the institution. Strategies should also be put in place to ensure prompt completion of research work and submission of reports by the beneficiaries.

The primary goal of many university based researches is to publish books and papers in scholarly journals, for the purpose of career advancement. There is the need for university researchers to be honest in their research activities. This would form the basis for the respect and trust that policy makers would have in their findings as a way of encouraging action research relevant to policy formulation to move education, and in fact the whole society, forward.

To avoid plagiarism, university researchers should endeavour to use their own words and ideas in writing the research report. For copied, adapted and paraphrased materials, full credit and acknowledgement should be given to the information sources.

The references cited in a research work form the link between the work and previous studies. Thus, the references should be accurately cited so that others can locate the reference work. The practice of submitting diskette in addition to hard copies of research report for review is a good measure of ensuring correct citation of Internet sources (correct Internet addresses are underlined in blue colour). In the review of articles for publication (usually by peers), efforts should be made to ensure competence of the reviewers, confidentiality of the reviewed materials and timely response from the reviewers. In addition, the reviewers should acknowledge the positive aspects of the materials being reviewed; assess the negative aspect constructively and indicate clearly the improvements needed. With these measures, quality and timely publications would be made.

Researchers should avoid duplicate publication of the same article in two different media, unless an appropriate citation is made in the later publication to the earlier one. Re-use of same paper for more than one publication is referred to as self-plagiarism. Even in a situation where a work warrants publication in two languages, it is important that the later publication makes clear reference to the earlier work, otherwise the second publication constitutes a falsification of the research record. To forestall this fraud, most journals require that the submitted work has not been simultaneously submitted elsewhere, it is important to ensure that only when an article has been rejected by or withdrawn from consideration in one journal may it be submitted elsewhere.

In the constitution of the editorial board of a journal, the approval of all members must be sought and got. A situation where names of renowned Professors are included in editorial board without their knowledge or permission is an academic fraud, and should be avoided.

The fear of plagiarism should not rob a researcher of the opportunity to benefit from the available resources in other people's writings. Rather, every researcher should learn how to make proper and responsible use of plagiarism and copyright infringement.

Conclusion

Academic integrity in a university concerns to all the categories of people within the system- students, lecturers and administrators- and all their activities such as teaching, learning, and research and community service. To institute academic integrity in the university system, five values must be enshrined in the strategic policies of each university. These values are honest, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. Honest) is the foundation of all academic activities.

Cultivating honest) in individualized activities such as research begins with one and extends to others. There is thus the need for university academic to honestly carry out every procedure for research work to ensure genuine outcomes that could be applied to formulate policies for development of individuals and the society at large.

Reference

American Statistical Association (1999). Ethical guidelines for statistical practice. Available on <http://www.amstat.org/profession/ethicalstatistics.html>. Retrieved on May 17.