

Providing Leadership in Nigerian University Education Research Enterprise: The Imperative of Research Ethics

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Abstract : It is universally acknowledged that the primary function of universities is the generation and dissemination of knowledge. This mission is pursued through the research component of the university programme especially at the post-graduate level. The senior academic staff teach, supervise and provide general academic leadership to post-graduate students who are expected to carry out research leading to the presentation of dissertation as requirement for the award of doctoral degree in their various disciplines. Carrying out the research enterprises involves a lot of corroboration among individuals and communities. The need to safeguard the interest of everyone involved in the enterprise makes the development of ethical standard in research imperative. Ensuring the development and effective application of such ethical standard falls within the leadership role of the vice -chancellors, Deans of post-graduate schools/ faculties, Heads of Departments and supervisors. It is the relevance and application of such ethical standard in Nigerian university research efforts that this study discussed. The study adopted the descriptive research design. A researcher-made 4 point rating scale was used to elicit information from the post-graduate dissertation supervisors sampled from one university each from the six geo-political zones in Nigeria using the purposive sampling technique. The data collected was analysed using the mean score and standard deviation. The findings of the study include among others that there are several cases of unethical practices by Ph.D dissertation students in Nigerian universities. Prominent among these include duplicating research topics, making unauthorized copies of data paper or computer programme, failing to acknowledge contributions of relevant people and authors, rigging an experiment to preempt the result among others. Some of the causes of the unethical practices according to the respondents include inadequate funding of universities resulting in inadequate remuneration for university teachers, inadequacy of equipment and infrastructures, poor supervision of Ph.D students, 'poverty on the side of the student researchers and non-application of sanctions on violators. Improved funding of the Nigerian universities system with emphasis on both staff and student research efforts, admitting academic oriented students into the Ph.D programme and ensuring the application of appropriate sanctions in cases of unethical conduct in research featured prominently in the needed leadership imperatives. Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend the development of university research policies that is closely tied to each university's strategic plan. Such plan should explain the research focus that will attract more funding and direct students interest towards it without violating the principle of academic freedom. The plan should also incorporate the establishment of a research administration office to provide the necessary link between the students and funding agencies and also organise training for supervisors on leadership activities expected of them while educating students on the processes involved in carrying out a qualitative and acceptable research study. Such exercise should include the ethical principles and guidelines that comprise all parts of research from research topic through the literature review to the design and the truthful reporting of results.

Keywords : academic leadership, ethical standards, research stakeholders, research enterprise

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