



ADHERENCE TO ETHICAL PRINCIPLES IN RESEARCH AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF IN UNIVERSITIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The study was aimed at assessing academic staff adherence to fundamental ethical principles in research in universities in cross River State, Nigeria. Three research questions were raised and hypothesis. Relevant literature were reviewed according to the variables of the study. The study adopted an ex post facto research design with a stratified and purposive sampling technique to select a total of 500 academic staff from the two major universities in the state (Universty of Calabar and Cross River University of Technology, CRUTECH). A questionnaire developed by the researcher and was well validated and pilot tested using Cronbach alpha reliability estimate whose coefficients for the four sub scales ranged from .78-.81 was used for data collection. Data were collected by the researchers and shall be analysed using simple percentage and the result showed that academic staff adherence to ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality and beneficence has been very poor. It was recommended that staff should be trained on how to apply ethical considerations in their research practices. That papers that are published must show how ethical considerations are followed before accepted for publications. That this aspect of research must be properly emphasized in the research lessons.*

KEYWORDS: Ethical principles, informed consent, confidentiality, beneficence



INTRODUCTION

Research is an activity that is carried out with an objective mind of discovering the truth. It is an activity that is systematically embarked upon so as to ensure that new discoveries are made, existing knowledge improved, old idea which cannot withstand the current ideas of time refuted or improved upon. No developed nation of the world has achieved all her recorded successes in science and technology, education, health, transport, security etc without the instrument of research (Ofem, Evans & Nkananag, 2016). In education, issues and problems that have plagued the educational system have received considerable improvement via research activities that were conducted over the years. For instance, the new innovations in teaching, assessment and learning methodologies have improved geometrically that students can learn in the absence of the teacher, feedbacks can be obtained by students right at the comfort of their homes and academic information can easily be disseminated through classrooms online forums among others. These are all outcomes of research efforts.

One common characteristics of research in education is that it is mostly quantitative oriented. By this, it implies that it involves the utilization of data in most of her research work in order to obtain a valid and reliable result that can be confidently generalized to the entire population. Research in behavioral science is different from research in physical sciences. In physical sciences, although human subjects are involved, in the laboratories which are dominant for their studies, most of the instruments that are used are inanimate objects which consent is irrelevant. They are standardized and variation in result may not be due to the objects used in research but the researcher's factor. However, in behavioral or social sciences, most of the information that is utilized in research activities are obtained from either primary sources or secondary sources.

Primary sources of information according to Kothari and Garg (2014) are data which are collected afresh and for the first time, and thus happen to be original in character. These data are mostly obtained from individuals either through questionnaire, interviews or observations. O'Leary (2004) pointed out that since most research involves collecting data from people about people, research inevitably carries ethical issues and researchers are unconditionally responsible for the integrity of all aspects of research processes. This is because research activities involve the utilization of human elements who provides the required information needed to solve or understand a particular phenomenon. It therefore implies that these human subjects that are utilized in various research activities must be protected and allowed to take decision such that will either enable them participate in the study or not. It is on this basis that ethical consideration in research are inevitable.

The word "ethics" is derived from the Greek word "ethos" which interpreted means customs, mores or character. It refers to the system of moral principles or values, principles of right or good behavior in relating with others. Ethics refers to the word values regulating the suitable behavior of individuals (Fishe, 2013). Ethical consideration to research therefore refers to the general regulations concerning the duties or procedures followed by researcher. Ethical consideration serves to identify good, desirable or acceptable conduct in the research process. It involves the fundamental values and beliefs that are meant to guide the behavior of researchers in relation to what they do with research participants, instrument, data analysis, results among others.



Ethical principles are expressions of how individuals ought to behave as individuals and as a society. They constitute moral judgments that can be applied to particular situations to help us make decisions and guide our behavior. According to Kelly (n.d), aside from direct treatment of humans, how research is conducted is an important aspect of whether or not, it is ethical. Ethical consideration may help us decide whether the research should even be done, and if so how it should be pursued.

The first modern code governing ethics of research was developed during the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war crimes in response to abuses during medical experimentation on humans. Subsequently, there was concern with protection of human subjects of research in the U.S in the 1950's and 1960s. The code states explicitly requirement for voluntary consent of research subjects and spells out the element of that consent. The code stipulates that the use of human participation is permissible so long as "human subjects are necessary, the result hold promise of benefit to the society's scientific basis and designs are sound, harms of human are minimized or avoided, risks are minimized, experimenters are qualified, voluntary withdrawal of subjects is allowed and that research will be terminated if research subjects are likely to be injured or harmed.

However, over the years, other codes governing the conducts of research involving human subjects have been outlined. For instance, the declaration of Helsinki, Ethical Principles for medical research was developed by the world medical association in 1964 and revised in 2008 which declares the necessity of research with human, physicians duty to safeguard health and privacy, put humans wellbeing before scientific advances and requires free of coercion. Moreover, the Belmont report, published in 1974 in United States identified three ethical principles which are respect for persons, beneficence and distributive justice. However, according to Touka and Mantzorou (2011), the following are the major ethical issues in conducting research; informed consent, beneficence (do not harm), respect for anonymity and confidentiality, respect for privacy, distributive justice are skills of the researcher.

Armiger (1997) noted that informed consent refers to the act of allowing the participant whether to take part in the research or not. It means that a person knowingly, voluntarily and intelligently and in clear terms and manifest way, decides what to do. It is the act of self-determination according to personal plans. This therefore ensures that the liberty, integrity of the individual is sought for. This comes through provision of enough information which includes the purpose of the study, the procedures, the possible harm and benefits, risk involved among others. According to Ana (2010), the researcher must provide a non-coercive disclaimer which states that participation is voluntary and no penalties are involved in refusal to participate, the subject must be told that some information has been deliberately withheld in order to avoid altered behaviors. The researcher must also take into account that persons with physical, cultural and emotional barriers may require a very simple language in order to understand him and the freedom to withdraw must be explained. Therefore, cardinal to informed consent is disclosure, comprehension, competency and voluntariness (Burns & Grooe, 2005).

The ethical principles of beneficence refers to the Hippocratic "do no harm" principle. According to Beau champ and Childress in Fouka and Mantzorou (2011), beneficence suggests that the professional mandate to do effective and significant research so as to better secure and promote the welfare of our constituent while beneficence relates to benefits of the research, malfeasance requires a high level of sensitivity from the researcher



about what constitute “harm”. The type, degree and number of potential risk must be addressed as well as the participants, value system. If the risk outweighs the benefits, the study should be revised. The researcher must be honest and unbiased in the reporting of the findings.

Anonymity and confidentiality as an ethical principle in research is closely related to beneficiaries. Anonymity as used here refers to the complete separation of the participants identity from the responses provided. While confidentiality is concern with the management of private information in order to protect the subjects’ identify (Nies Wiadomy, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an ex post facto research design with a stratified and purposive sampling technique to select a total of 513 academic staff from the two major universities in the state (University of Calabar, Calabar and Cross River University of Technology, (CRUTECH). A questionnaire developed by the researcher and was well validated and pilot tested using Cronbach alpha reliability estimate whose coefficients for the four sub scales was 0.78 was used for data collection. Data were collected by the researchers and were analysed using simple percentages and the results obtained were presented below.

PRESENTATION OF RESULT

Research question one

To what extent does academic staff adhere to the selected ethical principles of research? To answer these research questions simple percentages were used and the result is shown in the table below

Table 1: Simple percentages of adherence to ethical principles in research

S/N	Items	Yes	No
Informed consent			
1	Do you allow participants to decide whether they participate in a study or not?	341 (66.4%)	172 (33.52%)
2	Do you collect data from participants without explaining the purpose of the research to them?	163 (31.77%)	350 (68.22%)
3	Do you consider the participants fit to decide whether to be involved in the study or not?	481 (93.76%)	19 (6.24%)
4	Do heads of schools sometimes give you consents un- behalf of the participants of the study?	350 (68.22%)	163 (31.77%)
5	Where studies involve children, do you seek the permission of parents/guardians before using them in the study?	170 (33.76%)	343 (66.24%)
6	Do you provide participants of the study enough information about the risk involve in the study before been involved in the study?	132 (18.33%)	381 (81.67%)
7	Participants of the study are sometimes allowed to withdraw without any threat of punishment	341 (66.4%)	172 (33.52%)
Aggregate score		1973(54.94)	1600(44.56)



Confidentiality			
1	I ensure that I hold information provided by respondents only for the purpose of the study	402 (78.36%)	111 (21.63%)
2	I protect the identity of sensitive information provided by my respondents in my studies	318 (61.93%)	195 (38.01%)
3	I do not allow any second party to get access to the information that is provided for my studies	178 (34.69%)	335 (65.37%)
4	I sometimes discuss certain information obtained from participants of the study with friends for social reasons	122 (23.73%)	391 (76.21%)
5	I don't bother know who provides information on a certain phenomenon of interest.	318 (61.93%)	195 (38.01%)
	aggregate score	1333(52.01)	1245(48.58)
Beneficence			
1	The participants I used in my studies are fully aware of the risk involved in my studies	216 (42.10%)	297 (57.83%)
2	I rarely bother on what it will cost the participant in the process of carrying out the study	197 (38.47%)	316 (61.5%)
3	I ensure that the study I carry out is scientifically sound to provide valuable knowledge to the society	401 (78.15%)	112 (21.83%)
4	I ensure that the integrity of my participants is not affected by the work I carry out	299 (58.2%)	214 (41.71%)
5	I ensure that my findings are not biased as to affect the reputation of the subjects of the study.	361 (70.37%)	299 (58.23%)
		1473(57.47)	1233(48.10)

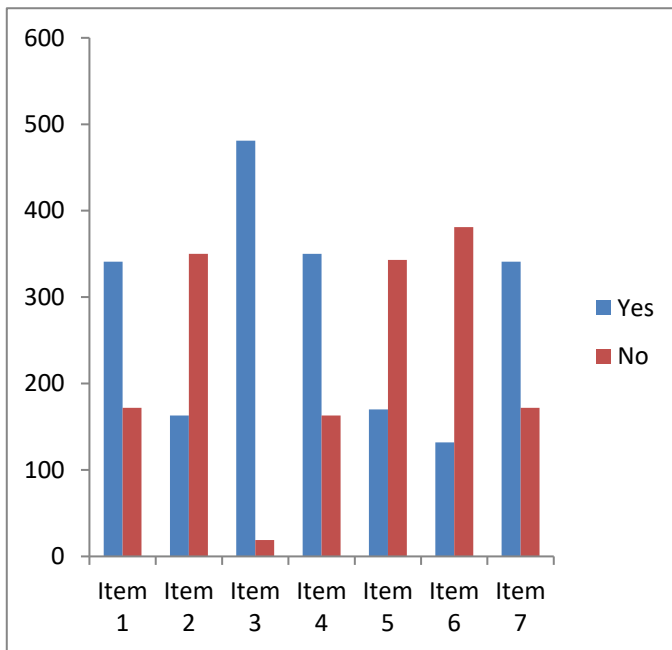


Fig 1. Response on informed consent

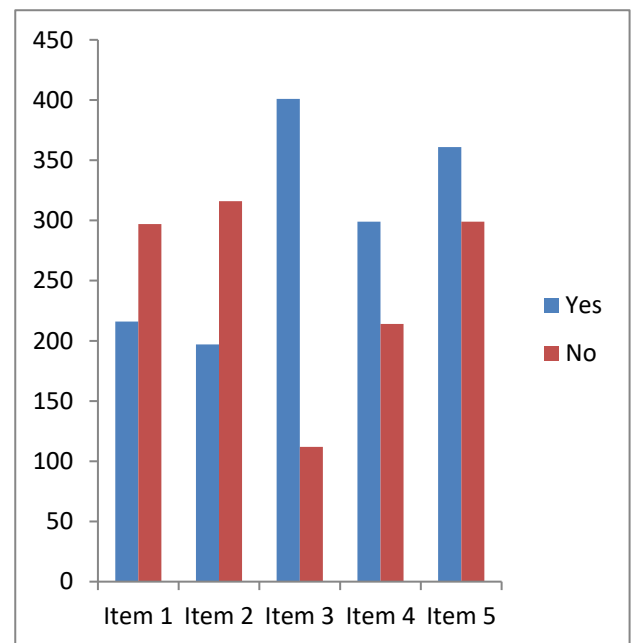


Fig 2. Response on confidentiality

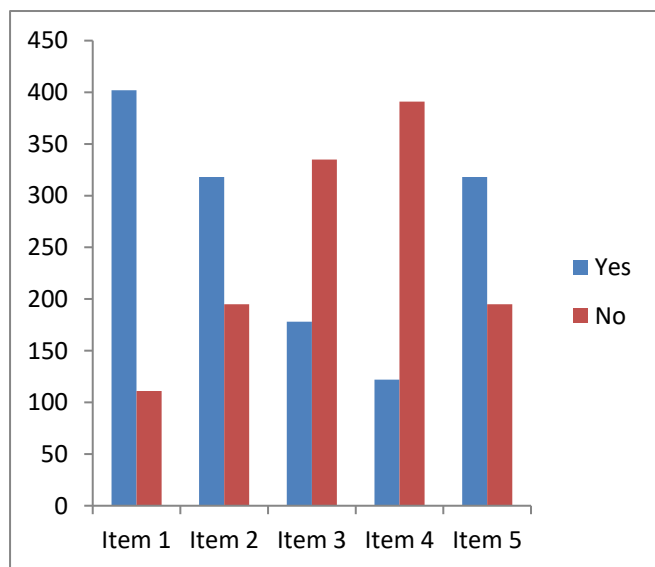


Fig 3. Response on beneficence



The result in the table above shows the responses of academic staff to selected three ethical principles in research. The result showed that for item 1, 3 and 4, researchers follow certain principles of allowing participants, researchers agreed that they allow participants to decide to participate in the study or not (66.4%), consider the ability of the participants in taking decision to be involved in the study (93.76%) as well as obtain permission from school heads before administering questionnaires (68.22%). However, item 7 which involves collecting data from children without permission of their parents, the result showed that most researchers do not stick to this principle.

The result also showed that for adherence to confidential ethical principle, respondents agreed that they ensure that they hold information provided by respondents only for the purpose of the study which represents 78.36% while protection of identity on sensitive information provided by my respondents in my studies, the respondents agreed that they the protect the identity of the respondents which represent 61.93%. however, on the utilization of information obtained with friends, the result showed that there has been negligence as information provided is not completely secured from others as represented by 65.37% of those who said no to the item. On aggregate, the respondents' responses showed that for informed consents as stipulated in the items, 1973 responses representing 54.94% agreed to the items while 1600 responses representing 44.56% said no to it. On confidentiality 1333 responses representing 52.01% said yes while 48.58% said no to the items. While on beneficence, 1173 responses representing 57.17% said yes to the items while 1233 responses representing 48.10% said no.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of analysis showed that staff disposition towards adherence to this selected principles in research is very poor. This could possibly be as result of the fact that in Nigeria precisely, legislations that should have backed these principles are not properly documented as obtained in other countries. Rules and regulations guiding the utilization of research subjects have not been streamlined and this has caused a lot of unethical activities in the process of carrying out research. In collaboration with the research findings Research Ethics in Africa (2014) noted that most researchers in the third world countries do not follow ethical principles of research of outdated legislation, untrained committee members, low awareness of ethics sublines and lack of training bioethics and research ethics. The findings also were in line with that of Ukozor (2011) who opines that researchers in the third world countries are confronted with several problems ranging from noncompliance to research rules, poor perception of respondents to research activities, as well conduction of research for satisfaction of academic requirement for graduation and other reasons. These problems have heightened the possibility of researchers resorting to unethical means to satisfy their interest. The result was also in collaboration with that of Ugande (2011) who noted that some researchers may distort facts , forcefully drop questionnaires for individuals to fill without explaining the rationale of the study to them, as well as even utilize those who are not part of the study for data collection as long as they get what they want.



CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that academic staff adherence to ethical principles in research is not encouraging.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it was recommended that staff should be trained on how to apply ethical considerations in their research practices. That papers that are published must show how ethical considerations are followed before accepted for publications. That this aspect of research must be properly emphasized in the research lessons.

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