

PROMOTING ETHICAL COMPLIANCE FOR IMPROVED VISIBILITY OF LECTURERS' RESEARCH OUTPUTS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The study focused on the promotion of ethical compliance for improved visibility of lecturers' research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State. Three research questions were answered and three hypotheses tested in the study. The design engaged in the study was descriptive survey. The population of the study was a total of 2,784 academic staff of the three public Universities in Rivers State while 351 staff consisting of 214 males and 137 females were sampled using stratified random sampling technique. The instrument used for data gathering was a 15-item questionnaire named "Promoting Ethical Compliance for Improved Visibility of Lecturers Research Outputs Questionnaire" (PECIVLROQ) and the instrument was face and content validated by three experts in Educational Management at University of Port Harcourt while the reliability was estimated as 0.89 using Cronbach Alpha statistics. Out of the 351 copies of questionnaire administered, 342 copies from 209 males and 133 females which represented 97.4% were retrieved and used for analysis. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance. The findings from the study showed that the lecturers were mostly aware that they must cite all the sources they used in their research and this followed by the fact that they possessed a good understanding of the concept of plagiarism. The most strongly agreed-upon implications or direct consequences of unethical practices were rejection of research publication and the risk that a lecturer's publication will be withdrawn. The most prominent factors hindering ethical compliance were the pressure to publish as a requisite for career advancement and insufficient training of lecturers on ethical issues. The study recommended that the publish or perish phenomenon in universities should be replaced with a performance-based promotion system which will limit unethical practices among lecturers.

Keywords: Ethical Compliance, Visibility, Research Output, Lecturers, Universities

Introduction

Research plays an important role in the process of development and the quality and quantity of output from any research process must meet extant regulations and standards, in order for it to be universally accepted. Research is universally recognized as a critical driver of development and societal progress. However, its acceptance and utility are tied to the adherence of the research process and output to established standard guidelines. The process of the research must not only be rigorous and scientific, but must pass the required integrity test. This is where the adherence to research ethics becomes important in order to enhance the visibility and acceptance of any research output.

Research ethics provides the fundamental guidelines for the responsible conduct of research (Abanobi and Abanobi, 2021). It is essentially a global set of principles intended to govern any research whether it involves an interaction between the researcher and participants, or the use of data related to those participants or any other object in the research process. These ethical considerations act as a necessary moral and procedural compass for all research designs and practices (Ederio et al., 2023). Every researcher is expected to adhere to these guidelines irrespective of their locations in order to generate globally accepted research outputs.

Some scholars such as Bhandari (2022) and David (2015), have itemized some of the ethical considerations that are required in any research and these includes; ensuring participants freely choose to take part after fully understanding the nature, risks, and benefits of the study, protecting the identity and private information of the participants of the research, taking proactive steps to minimize any physical, psychological, social, or professional risks to participants and being truthful and transparent in reporting findings, among other criteria. David (2015) further broadened the scope of ethical principles in science and education research to encompass honesty, objectivity, integrity, carefulness, openness, and respect for intellectual property, all of which are essential for maintaining the trustworthiness of the research process.

Globally, educational institutions whether in the Universities or other levels or types of education are frequently confronted with ethical issues that challenge the integrity of research (Mejorada, et al., 2023; Ederio et al., 2023) and this makes the study of ethical awareness and compliance a vital area of inquiry, especially among lecturers in Universities. It is a known practice that ethical research guidelines are formally embedded in institutional policies, national regulatory frameworks, and international scholarly standards. These guidelines dictate everything from the proper handling of human subjects, such as patient data, student information to the proper attribution of sources and originality such as preventing plagiarism. This means that every researcher must be familiar with the ethical requirements of the scope of his or her research in order to avoid failing the integrity test of research. The university, as a knowledge-producing entity, has a professional duty to ensure its academic staff, who are the primary producers of its research output, are fully conversant with these rules.

Abbas et al. (2021) suggested that while factors like internet access might negatively correlate with plagiarism instances which may be due to easier cross-checking tools, ethical control and

instructional elements appear to have a favorable correlation with reducing it. This finding indirectly underscores the importance of a formalized, instructional approach to ethics, implying that simple access to information is not enough; there must be conscious ethical instruction and control provided by the institution to its staff. Low awareness of specific, nuanced guidelines such as data management protocols, or how to handle conflicts of interest can lead to unintentional ethical breaches, which can be as damaging as intentional misconduct and this will reduce the acceptance, sharing and visibility of the research output.

Furthermore, a culture of ethics, which is supported by clear guidelines, significantly contributes to the ethical conduct of individuals within the university (Arnaud, 2010). If awareness is low, it suggests a potential gap in the organizational communication or training structures meant to disseminate these clear guidelines, making the exploration of current awareness levels among lecturers a critical first step.

While research visibility refers to the ease with which research output such as journals, books and other hardware can be found, accessed, and cited by the wider academic and professional community, visibility is also a key measure of a lecturer's productivity and a university's reputation and as such, must be jealously protected. The failure to protect the quality of research outputs at individual and institutional levels can have far-reaching implications.

Ethical non-compliance, ranging from minor procedural errors to major research misconduct, can severely damage or entirely negate research visibility in several ways. It is a known fact that reputable scholarly journals and publishers adhere to stringent ethical standards. This means that submissions lacking proper informed consent, ethical clearance, data integrity, or originality are most times rejected, regardless of the study's scientific merit. Non-compliance essentially creates a gatekeeping mechanism that blocks research from being published in the most visible and influential venues.

Similarly, if an ethical breach is discovered after a publication as in the case of fabrication of data, undisclosed conflict of interest etc., the paper is subject to retraction. A retracted paper is not only invisible but carries a negative marker that reflects poorly on the author and the institution, potentially undermining the credibility of all other work by that lecturer. Similarly, research conducted unethically is often inherently flawed or untrustworthy. The academic community is less likely to trust or cite findings from authors or institutions known for ethical laxity. As citation count is a primary metric of visibility and impact, non-compliance directly reduces the utility and influence of the research output.

Boutchich and Kadiri (2021) provided empirical support for this link, finding that while publications are most impacted by ethics, ethics-supporting documents and transparency have the biggest effects on research output. This suggests that the documentation and transparent adherence to ethical principles are key determinants of whether the research is ultimately deemed acceptable and impactful, thereby ensuring its visibility. Ethical compliance, therefore, is not a bureaucratic hurdle but a fundamental quality assurance measure that ensures the

published work can be trusted, thus maximizing its potential for visibility and contribution to knowledge.

There are several factors that hinders adherence to some of these ethical guidelines even where they exist. For example, lecturers often face immense pressure to publish or perish, which lead some lecturers to cut corners on time-consuming ethical procedures, such as proper documentation or seeking formal ethical review in their research. Similarly, if ethical training is not mandatory, comprehensive, and regularly updated, lecturers may simply not know how to comply with complex or changing guidelines even within their field. Also, ethical guidelines that are poorly written, inaccessible, or inconsistent across the institution can confuse lecturers, leading to unintentional non-compliance. Some lecturers might even unknowingly believe that non-human subject research such as desk research and policy analysis requires no ethical review, leading to overlooked obligations, such as proper data anonymization or intellectual property acknowledgments.

There is no doubt that the University environment plays a decisive role in fostering or inhibiting ethical behavior. Organizational culture is a major determinant of adherence or resistance to ethical guidelines in research. Arnaud (2010) suggested that an organizational culture that actively supports ethical behavior and provides clear guidelines is necessary for ethical conduct and without this support, compliance becomes an individual burden rather than an institutional standard. Furthermore, leadership ethics profoundly impacts the overall system. Brigue and Orlu (2023) highlighted the influence of ethical leadership on an institutions reputation, which in turn affects its ability to attract quality staff, students, and community support. It is therefore important for the institution to relate properly with its staff in the adherence to ethics in order to generate quality research outputs that are acceptable to all.

Empirically, Abanobi and Abanobi (2021) conducted a study on lecturers' awareness of research ethics in Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba, Delta State. The study utilized a descriptive survey design with a sample of 193 lecturers selected using the Taro Yamane formula. The instrument used was the Researchers' Awareness of Research Ethics Questionnaire (RAREQ), which achieved a reliability coefficient of $\alpha=0.72$ (Cronbach's alpha). Data were analyzed using mean statistics and t-test. The key findings revealed that lecturers possess a high extent of awareness of research ethics and are similarly aware of unethical research activities. The study also concluded that there was no significant difference between male and female lecturers' mean ratings regarding the awareness of both research ethics and unethical activities.

Similarly, Turyasingura *et al.*, (2025) investigated research ethics and research publications in institutions of higher learning in Uganda focusing on a case of Southwestern Uganda. The study employed a cross-sectional research design combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, selecting a sample of 285 respondents using purposive and simple random selection techniques. Data were analyzed using theme analysis for the qualitative data and descriptive statistics, correlations, and regressions (SPSS Version 23.0) for the quantitative data. The core finding established that research ethics positively impacts research publications

($r=0.862, P<0.01$), contributing empirical data to the discussion on the effect of ethical limits on the success of research output in higher learning institutions in the region.

On the other hand, Mbagwu *et al.*, (2024) explored a topic on enhancing global research visibility of faculty staffs by the academic libraries in public Universities in South East, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, targeting the population of 162 librarians in public universities in South-East, Nigeria, from which 120 librarians responded (a 74% response rate) via an Online Questionnaire disseminated through WhatsApp platforms. Data analysis primarily utilized tables, percentages, and charts. The findings were presented mainly in the form of recommendations, urging librarians to acquire training on Research Visibility Components (RVCs) and university management to address copyright issues, provide infrastructural facilities (like steady power and high-power internet), and mandate faculty staff to deposit their productive work in Institutional Repositories for submission to RVC platforms.

The study by Asadi *et al.*, (2020) focused on identifying the components and factors affecting the professional ethics of teachers. The study adopted a mixed (qualitative-quantitative) research method and was classified as applicable research. The qualitative phase involved interviews with 20 faculty members/teachers until theoretical saturation was reached, with reliability confirmed by an inter-coder agreement coefficient of 0.81. The quantitative phase used a multi-stage cluster sampling method to survey 367 primary school teachers in Tehran using a researcher-made questionnaire ($\alpha=0.85$). The results identified the components of professional ethics as "psychological," "communication-social," "technical-specialized," and "belief characteristics," with economic, social, organizational, and individual factors affecting these components. The final quantitative analysis showed that the professional ethics model could be predicted up to 0.70 by the identified factors, and the overall fit of the model was confirmed (GOF=0.44). These studies highlight the importance of ethics and relevant guidelines in promoting quality research that will contribute to national growth and development.

The aim of the study was the promotion of ethical compliance for improved visibility of lecturers' research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the level of lecturers' awareness of ethical research guidelines in public Universities in Rivers State
2. find out the implications of non-compliance to ethics on visibility of lecturers' research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State
3. find out the factors hindering ethical compliance among lecturers for improved visibility of research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State

The following research questions were answered in the study:

1. What is the level of lecturers' awareness of ethical research guidelines in public Universities in Rivers State?
 2. What are the implications of non-compliance to ethics on visibility of lecturers' research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State?
 3. What are the factors hindering ethical compliance among lecturers for improved visibility of research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State?
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1. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the level of lecturers' awareness of ethical research guidelines in public Universities in Rivers State
 2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the implications of non-compliance to ethics on visibility of lecturers' research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State
 3. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the factors hindering ethical compliance among lecturers for improved visibility of research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State

Methodology

The design adopted for the study was descriptive survey. The population of the study was a total of 2,784 academic staff of the three public Universities in Rivers State. The sample size of the study was 351 staff consisting of 214 males and 137 females and this number was estimated using the Taro Yamane minimum size determination formula. The selection of respondents was done using stratified random sampling technique. The instrument used for data gathering was a 15 item questionnaire named "Promoting Ethical Compliance for Improved Visibility of Lecturers Research Outputs Questionnaire" (PECIVLROQ). The questionnaire had two sections which were A and B for the collection of demographic data of the respondents and the second section contained the questionnaire items. The questionnaire was responded to using the four point modified Likert scale format of Strongly Agree/ Very High Level (SA/VHL) having a score of 4, Agree /High Level (A/HL) having a score of 3, Disagree/ Low Level (D/LL), having a score of 2 and Strongly Disagree/ Very Low Level (SD/VLL) having a score of 1. These scores were summed up and the average was 2.50 which was the criterion mean score used for decision making. The questionnaire was face and content validated by three experts in Educational Management at University of Port Harcourt while the reliability was estimated as 0.89 using Cronbach Alpha statistics. Out of the 351 copies of questionnaire administered, 342 copies from 209 males and 133 females which represented 97.4% were retrieved and used for analysis. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Answer to Research Questions

RQ₁: What is the level of lecturers' awareness of ethical research guidelines in public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation scores on the level of lecturers' awareness of ethical research guidelines in public Universities in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Male n=209		Female n=133		Mean Set	
		Mean \bar{X}_1	SD	Mean \bar{X}_2	SD	X \bar{X}	Decision
1	Lecturers are aware of the need to secure the consents of their research participants	2.80	0.62	2.71	0.56	2.76	High Level
2	There is a good understanding of the concept of plagiarism	2.85	0.60	2.81	0.57	2.83	High Level
3	Lecturers understand that they must declare any conflict of interest in their research	2.77	0.64	2.73	0.62	2.75	High Level
4	All lecturers know that they must cite all the sources they used in their research	2.87	0.63	2.83	0.55	2.85	High Level
5	Lecturers know that they must seek for permission to use copyrighted contents	2.44	0.70	2.42	0.63	2.43	Low Level
	Average	2.75	0.64	2.70	0.59	2.72	High Level

Table 1 indicated that the overall level of lecturers' awareness of ethical research guidelines is at a high level, with an average mean score of 2.72 which was above the criterion mean score

of 2.50 used for decision making. Lecturers are most aware that they must cite all the sources they used with a mean value of 2.85 and they also indicated that they possessed a good understanding of the concept of plagiarism with a mean value of 2.83. Conversely, awareness is significantly lower and categorized as low level, regarding the requirement to seek for permission to use copyrighted contents with a mean score of 2.43 which was below the criterion mean score of 2.50 used for decision making.

RQ2: What are the implications of non-compliance to ethics on visibility of lecturers' research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation scores on the implications of non-compliance to ethics on visibility of lecturers' research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Male n=209		Female n=133		Mean Set	
		Mean \bar{X}_1	SD	Mean \bar{X}_2	SD	X \bar{X}	Decision
6	Lecturer's publication can be withdrawn	2.91	0.61	2.86	0.63	2.89	Agree
7	Rejection of research publication	2.89	0.66	2.92	0.67	2.91	Agree
8	Low marketability of research outputs	2.74	0.69	2.82	0.59	2.78	Agree
9	Damage to researcher's reputation	2.83	0.61	2.64	0.60	2.74	Agree
10	Hinders collaboration opportunities	2.70	0.66	2.68	0.58	2.69	Agree
	Average	2.81	0.65	2.78	0.61	2.80	Agree

Table 2 showed that the lecturers universally agree on the implications of non-compliance to ethics on the visibility of their research outputs, resulting in an overall average mean of 2.80 which was above the criterion mean score. The most strongly agreed-upon implications are the direct consequences of rejection of research publication with a mean value of 2.91 and the risk that a lecturer's publication being withdrawn came next with a mean value of 2.89. Other acknowledged implications included low marketability of research outputs with a mean score of 2.78 and damage to researcher's reputation with a mean score of 2.74 which were all above the criterion mean score of 2.50 used for decision making.

RQ3: What are the factors hindering ethical compliance among lecturers for improved visibility of research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation scores on the factors hindering ethical compliance among lecturers for improved visibility of research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Male n=209		Female n=133		Mean Set	
		Mean \bar{X}_1	SD	Mean \bar{X}_2	SD	\bar{X}	Decision
11	The pressure to publish as a requisite for career advancement	2.97	0.64	2.99	0.68	2.98	Agree
12	Insufficient training of lecturers on ethical issues	2.94	0.65	2.97	0.67	2.96	Agree
13	Insufficient incentive for quality research products	2.85	0.63	2.92	0.64	2.89	Agree
14	Inadequate research guidance from the University	2.76	0.61	2.88	0.56	2.82	Agree
15	Personal interest of academics to boycott principles for personal gain	2.83	0.64	2.94	0.61	2.89	Agree
Average		2.87	0.63	2.94	0.63	2.91	Agree

Table 3 showed the factors hindering ethical compliance are strongly perceived, with lecturers generally agreeing across all items, yielding an overall average mean of 2.91. The most prominent hindering factor is the pressure to publish as a requisite for career advancement with a mean score of 2.98, followed closely by insufficient training of lecturers on ethical issues with a score of 2.96. Other key hindrances that received strong agreement include the personal interest of academics to boycott principles for personal gain and insufficient incentive for quality research products both having a mean score of 2.89.

Test of Hypotheses

HO₁: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the level of lecturers' awareness of ethical research guidelines in public Universities in Rivers State

Table 4: z-test analysis of no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the level of lecturers' awareness of ethical research guidelines in public Universities in Rivers State

Variable	n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Male	209	2.75	0.64	340	0.74	1.96	0.05	Not Rejected
Female	133	2.70	0.59					

Table 4 indicated that z-crit. value of 1.96 was above the estimated value of z-cal. of 0.74 and as such, the null hypothesis was accepted and this means that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the level of lecturers' awareness of ethical research guidelines in public Universities in Rivers State.

HO₂: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the implications of non-compliance to ethics on visibility of lecturers' research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State

Table 5: z-test analysis of no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the implications of non-compliance to ethics on visibility of lecturers' research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State

Variable	n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Male	209	2.81	0.65	340	0.43	1.96	0.05	Not Rejected
Female	133	2.78	0.61					

Table 5 showed that z-crit. value of 1.96 was above the estimated value of z-cal. of 0.43 and as such, the null hypothesis was accepted and this means that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the implications of non-compliance to ethics on visibility of lecturers' research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State.

H₃: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the factors hindering ethical compliance among lecturers for improved visibility of research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State

Table 6: z-test analysis of no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the factors hindering ethical compliance among lecturers for improved visibility of research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State

Variable	n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Male	209	2.87	0.63	340	1.00	1.96	0.05	Not Rejected
Female	133	2.94	0.63					

Table 6 established that z-crit. value of 1.96 was above the estimated value of z-cal. of 1.00 and as such, the null hypothesis was accepted and this means that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the factors hindering ethical compliance among lecturers for improved visibility of research outputs in public Universities in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the study establishes that the overall level of lecturers' awareness of ethical research guidelines is at a high level. Specifically, the finding showed that lecturers are most aware that they must cite all the sources they used and similarly indicated that they possessed a good understanding of the concept of plagiarism. Conversely, the empirical information revealed that awareness is significantly lower, and categorized as low level, regarding the requirement to seek for permission to use copyrighted contents.

This high level of awareness is strongly supported by the empirical information from Abanobi and Abanobi (2021), whose key findings revealed that lecturers possess a high extent of awareness of research ethics and are similarly aware of unethical research activities, and found no significant difference between male and female lecturers' mean ratings. Furthermore, the empirical information from Mbagwu et al., (2024) implicitly supports this by recommending that university management address copyright issues, suggesting that this specific area which this current study finds is a low awareness area that requires attention.

The findings from the study shows that lecturers generally agree on the serious implications of non-compliance to ethics on the visibility of their research outputs. The finding revealed that the most strongly agreed-upon implications are the direct consequences of rejection of research publication and the risk that a lecturer's publication being withdrawn came next. Other acknowledged implications included low marketability of research outputs and damage to researcher's reputation.

This strong consensus on negative consequences is supported by the empirical information from Turyasingura et al., (2025), whose core finding established that research ethics positively impacts research publications, contributing to the discussion on the effect of ethical limits on

the success of research output. Conversely, the empirical information from Mbagwu et al., (2024) somewhat negates this, implicitly suggesting that a lack of ethical compliance is addressed through institutional efforts to mandate faculty staff to deposit their productive work in Institutional Repositories for submission to Research Visibility Components (RVC) platforms.

The study demonstrated that the factors hindering ethical compliance are strongly perceived, with lecturers generally agreeing across all items. The finding revealed that the most prominent hindering factor is the pressure to publish as a requisite for career advancement, followed closely by insufficient training of lecturers on ethical issues. Other key hindrances that received strong agreement included the personal interest of academics to boycott principles for personal gain and insufficient incentive for quality research products.

The prominence of these factors is supported by related empirical evidence. The finding that insufficient training is a key hindrance is indirectly supported by Mbagwu et al., (2024), who recommended that librarians acquire training on Research Visibility Components (RVCs). Furthermore, the strong emphasis on personal, social, and organizational factors is supported by the empirical information from Asadi et al., (2020), who identified components of professional ethics as "psychological," "communication-social," "technical-specialized," and "belief characteristics," with economic, social, organizational, and individual factors affecting these components. The study further highlighted that the insufficient incentive for quality research products aligns with the economic factors identified by Asadi et al., (2020) and this needs to be given adequate attention for lecturers' research output to be more appealing in the global space.

Conclusion

The study concluded that there was a high level of lecturers' awareness of ethical research guidelines and these lecturers understand the implications of non-compliance. However, there are several personal and organizational factors which makes it difficult for them to comply with these guidelines and addressing these factors is important to promote the lecturers' visibility and acceptability of their research outputs.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study;

1. University disciplinary committees should ensure that staff who violate existing ethical guidelines should be punished without fear or favour.
2. The publish or perish phenomenon in Universities should be replaced with a performance based promotion system which will limit unethical practices among lecturers.

3. There is need for adequate sensitization for both old and new staff on the ethical guidelines guiding research activities within the University for improved visibility and enhanced research outputs.

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