

CONTEMPORARY ROLES OF LIBRARIANS IN NAVIGATING AND ADDRESSING ACADEMIC RESEARCH ETHICAL DILEMMAS: THE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES IN PERSPECTIVE.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary developments and free academic environments such as:

✓ Open access ✓ repositories, ✓ collaborative research ✓ big data ✓ innovations ✓ social networks platforms have subjected knowledge, teaching, speaking and publishing to the norms and standards of scholarly inquiry.

Further, concerns on:

✓ Funding, ✓ ranking, ✓ reputation building ✓ integrity of research on such institutions.

Honesty, objectivity, trust, legality, integrity, accountability and responsibility in conducting academic research according to the European University Institute, (2013:7) have become the cornerstone of many academic enterprises which includes the Polytechnics now Technical Universities. With regards to the conversion of the polytechnics in Ghana to Technical Universities, it is envisaged to trigger research gaps. Inversely, limited attention has been given in addressing ethical issues, intellectual property and awareness.

Bothma, Cosijn, Fourie and Penzhorn (2014, 137) define ethics as a branch of philosophy that deals with human conduct and character in distinguishing right from wrong. Academic writing is guided

by laid down rules, standards and codes of conducts in order to uphold intellectual integrity and honesty. As behavioral attitudes which involve issues on conscience, the "duty-based theory" which complements the need for compliance to academic research policies, rules and code of conducts was espoused for the study. The duty based approach hypothesises that human behaviour ought to be regulated by laid down rules. This framework considers ethical action as one perpetuated from duty, that is, "it is done precisely because it is obligation to perform the action" (Fallies, 2007:28). Researchers before conducting any study, ought to know and consider the ethical implications of their activities be it on humans, animals and or objects.



Source: Bradford (2017)

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The study explored the role of librarians in support of the Polytechnic's new road map, identified the various ethical dilemmas, assessed the impact of ethical compliance on research, identified the various tools and applications use to control the menace of ethical violations.

ROAD MAP OF TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES' EDUCATION IN GHANA

Polytechnics are mandated to produce publications that meet both local and international standards; hence, there is the need for librarians to create the needed awareness to faculty and students on academic ethics. Developments such as inventions and innovation, which fall within their domain are subject to some level of ethical compliance called intellectual property and patent rights. The Technical Universities, according to the Ministry of Education (2014:1), have the terms

- Contribute to raising the quality and competitiveness of the Ghanaian workforce by providing opportunities for working employees to upgrade their skills and acquire new skills.
- The Technical Universities are envisaged to reduce the admission pressures on the traditional universities,
- Provide progression avenues for technical and vocational students.
- Advance in research to inform policies

STUDY METHOD

This is an exploratory study that adopted the quantitative method. Questionnaire was the instrument used for the data collection. Twenty-six (26) Senior Polytechnic librarians whose institutions have undergone the transition became the resultant respondents. That is Seven (7) out of the Ten (10) Polytechnics have been accredited Technical University status (National Council for Tertiary Education 2016) and Ghana News Agency (2016). These were: Accra Polytechnic, Kumasi Polytechnic, Tamale Polytechnic, Sunyani Polytechnic, Takoradi Polytechnic, Ho Polytechnic and Koforidua Polytechnic

RESULTS

The role of Librarians

The librarians as part of their traditional roles increase access to information, this recorded (89%), supported marketing and publicity of scholarly materials scored (81.4%) Seventy four (74%) were involved in managing institutional repository (IR), Seventy (70.3%) indulge in networking and collaboration, (67%) focus on information literacy, (59.2%) were concerned with digital curation and preservation, Fifty five percent (55.5%) were involved in Author Aid services amongst others. However the dynamics and demands in academic research has triggered emergent, blended roles and developments by librarians according to Cherinet, (2018:93).

On the contrary, (51.8%) were concerned with Research Data Management (RDM). Fewer Librarians (44.4%) were involve with academic identity management activities. Thirty seven (37%) rarely review literature and identified gaps in the collection, far fewer number (33.3%) supported Virtual Research Environment (VRE), while (33.3%) were involved in Alert /tagging Services. Data Visualisation and Personal Information Management (PIM) services recorded minimal endorsement from respondents thus (22.2%). The later roles were discovered to curb ethical dilemmas by ensuring that researchers access and utilize authentic information. Findings revealed that these evolving and variegated roles have not gained the needed recognition and attention in Africa as indicated by Hart and Kleinveldt (2011:37) and corroborated by Mchombu and Maggy (2015:115).

Components of Ethical Misconducts/Dilemmas

Plagiarism was strongly agreed by majority of the Librarians (88.8%), Academic Dishonesty recorded (66.6%), Data manipulation attained (59.2%), Conflict of interest and duplication recorded (40.7%) respectively, Poor record keeping (33.3%), Author Inflation / honorary authorship (33.3%) Salami Publication (29.6%) and Ghost Authorship (29.6%). Other delinquencies which were discovered include: social network abuse, data insecurity and cybercrime (Dadzie, 2011:63)



Importance of Academic Research Ethics

The findings of the study revealed the following as some of the impact of ethics on scholarship: Elimination of plagiarism was strongly endorsed by (81.4%), accountability recorded (70.3%), ensures integrity (66.6%), promotes transparency (62.9%), promotes standardization (62.9%), openness in research (55.5%), rights to anonymity (51.8%), as source of funding support (48.1%), enhances institution's reputation (44.4%), promotes continuity in research (40.7%). The study revealed minimal awareness about the importance of ethical compliance with respect to funding, reputation building, ranking and continuity of research which explicitly point out about the methodology involved in carrying out research.



Control of Ethical Dilemmas by Librarians

This section represents the response on measures to control and curb ethical menace. Majority of the respondents (84.2%) indicated the use of plagiarism detectors such as TurnItIn, Plagscan, Viper, Copy leaks. Information literacy was proposed by (81.4%), compliance to fair use and copy right recorded (77.7%), Establishment of Academic ethics committees recorded (62.9%). In addition to these were the use of referencing managers which assist in compiling references used: example Mendeley, Zotero, Endnote and Refworks. These recorded (59.2%). Establishment of Academic Writing Centres was minimally endorsed by (48.1%). Promotion on Personal Information Management (PIM) recorded (33.3%).

The study discovered and recommended remedies which could curb and manage the menace of misconduct. These were categorized under: "use of innovative applications, interactive and collaborative approach, policy and compliance, intensified advocacy and education on academic research ethics, behavioral change"

- The use of innovative applications** - These are tools and applications that enables one to carry out integrated research. These include: plagiarism detectors, referencing tools, learning and content management applications such as integrated library system, learning management system among others.
- Interactive and collaborative approach** - Encompass research support, best practices and additional roles assumed by librarians to curb the menace of violation. Studies have revealed that one of the ways for librarians to accelerate this transformation is through collaborative action (Shun, 2016:688). These include creation of "Virtual Research Environments (VRE), learning commons, Web 2.0, email, instant messaging, forums, wikis, blogs, meeting tools, project management tools, video conferencing, data-based conferencing, Access, Grid, project calendars and task assignments computers for effective and collaborative research.
- Policy and compliance** - On the issue of policies and compliance, Academic Research and Ethics Committees should be established to advocate, enforce, sanction and penalize offender. Establishment of ethical standards and policies that will promote conformity and compliance. Compliance to in accreditation checklist and standards.
- Intensified advocacy and education on academic research ethics** - Teaching of Information Ethics as part of the curriculum in Library and Information Science (LIS) schools is recommended. Also the establishment of Academic Writing Centres where research papers and works are proof read and edited to ensure that academic writing meet certain standards and pedestal are recommended. An example is the Carnegie Writing Centre at the University of Ghana. Again the Practicing Personal Information Management (PIM).

DISCUSSION

The traditional roles were being performed by majority of the librarians to support research but those roles do not fully track and address diverse dilemmas which have emerged resulting from changes in technology and the academic landscape (Bell, 2016). Majority of the librarians endorsed information literacy, but this was debunked by Cordell (2013:178) pointing that digital literacy instead of information literacy served as preventive strategy by impacting on behavioral change in this technological era. This notwithstanding Literature Gap Analysis, establishing Research Data Management (RDM) where librarians play critical roles in the research life cycle. Again Virtual Research Environment (VRE), Alerts and tagging Services, data visualization, promoting Personal Information Management (PIM), Academic identity management.

Majority of the librarians seventy four (74%) strongly agreed to the establishment of repositories. However before information in the repository is disseminated, it needs to be scrutinized ethically. Librarians as part of their roles are to acquire and operationalize the use of plagiarism detectors and referencing tools such as TurnItIn, Mendeley, Plagiarism Checker, Plagscan and Refworks which could be available openly and for free. Again Establishment of Academic Ethics Committees, Academic Writing Centres, review of accreditation checklist on ethics, policies and compliance and teaching of ethics as part of the Library and Information Science (LIS) school's curriculum were endorsed.

CONCLUSION

The study ascertained the degree of awareness of these dilemmas among the librarians. It postulated vigorous ethical scrutiny and research enquiry to ensure that research findings improve human conditions both present and future. As information professionals their traditional roles are currently embedded with the new and challenging tasks

Keywords: Research ethics, librarians' role, ethical dilemmas, Technical Universities

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