Ethics Training and Research Writing Quality in Postgraduate Education at Public Universities in Rivers State: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract
The quality of postgraduate research writing is shaped not only by academic knowledge but also by the ethical choices the students make during their research. While ethics training is intended to guide students in responsible conduct, many academic environments still face challenges in consistently applying these principles. Some postgraduate students lack the support and understanding needed to navigate ethical concerns such as plagiarism, confidentiality, and honest data reporting. This study aims to investigate the impact of ethical considerations training on the quality of postgraduate research writing in public universities in Rivers State. Using a qualitative design, the study employed purposive sampling to select three public universities in Rivers State, 20 postgraduate students, and 10 lecturers who had supervised research writing and participated in ethics training at their institutions. A researcher-developed interview guide was used, with 15 questions for students and nine (9) for lecturers. The interviews explored areas including plagiarism awareness, data confidentiality, and the integrity of data reporting. The study maintained ethical standards through informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews, then transcribed and analysed thematically. The findings revealed that students who had a clear understanding of plagiarism tended to reference correctly and submit original work. Upholding data confidentiality not only protects research participants but also enhances the trustworthiness of the findings. Students who were honest in reporting results, even when outcomes differed from expectations, were seen as more academically responsible. Lecturers noted that students with ethics training showed more care in their research design and reporting. However, the study also found that some departments lacked clear guidelines, and there were gaps in how ethics training was delivered and supported. Based on the findings, it was recommended that universities provide structured and regular ethical training focused on practical areas like plagiarism prevention, safeguarding participant data, and promoting transparency in research reporting.

Keywords: Research Ethics, Research Writing Quality, Thematic Analysis, Postgraduate, Education

Introduction
In an era where academic integrity is gaining global attention, universities around the world have begun prioritising ethical education as a core aspect of postgraduate training. International academic bodies such as the Council of Graduate Schools and UNESCO advocate for structured research ethics instruction to uphold scholarly standards. Improving the quality of postgraduate research writing through adherence to ethical conduct means ensuring that students acquire the skills necessary to produce research that is valid, transparent, and dependable. Research ethics refers to the principles and practices that safeguard honesty, accountability, and respect in the scholarly process. These ethics are essential to maintaining the reliability of academic work and preventing misconduct such as plagiarism, fabrication, or falsification (Adeleye & Adebamowo, 2012). Ethical competence in postgraduate students encompasses the ability to recognise and avoid plagiarism by citing appropriately, paraphrasing correctly, and maintaining originality. Awareness alone, however, does not ensure ethical behaviour. Studies among students in some Nigerian universities reveal that although many are aware of anti-plagiarism tools, actual use remains modest due to issues such as subscription costs, power supply problems, and limited mastery of the software (Opesanwo & Anwana, 2023). Further, average awareness of what plagiarism entails is

often linked to pressure to meet deadlines and limited writing skills, which adversely affect ethical conduct (Jerome Idiegbeyan-ose et al., 2013). Effective ethical considerations training equips students with knowledge about responsible authorship, data handling, and the expectations for originality. Code documents at national postgraduate bodies emphasise training, mentoring, and clear definitions of research misconduct, alongside sanctions like reprimands, suspension, or withdrawal of degrees, to reinforce ethical norms (NPMCN, 2020). Institutional policy frameworks often specify graduated penalties depending on the severity of misconduct, ranging from the opportunity to revise work to outright cancellation of registration (NPMCN editorial, 2020). Use of plagiarism detection software like Turnitin or iThenticate during research writing submission ensures that similarity scores remain within acceptable limits.

This strategy is widely advocated because it aids early detection and deterrence of copying (Olukanni, 2022). Policies that mandate submission of draft work for originality checking before final submission help maintain academic credibility (NPMCN policy, 2020). Ethical scholarship also requires transparent supervision and mentoring. Early-career researchers benefit from guidance that reinforces correct citation practices and promotes honestly reported findings (Adesanya editorial, 2020). Without such mentorship, scholars may resort to unethical shortcuts under institutional pressure to publish (Adeleye & Adebamowo, 2012). Research ethics form the foundation for high-quality postgraduate work by defining clear norms of integrity, providing training in ethical scholarship, enforcing the use of originality software, and ensuring meaningful mentorship. When these elements are present, dissertations are more likely to exhibit depth, clarity, and trustworthiness, thereby strengthening the standing of academic credentials. In today's academic environment, ethical training is expected to guide students through responsible research practices that foster integrity, transparency, and accountability. Ethical considerations training refers to organised instruction on the principles and guidelines that regulate how scholarly investigations are conducted. These principles include honesty, confidentiality, fairness, and respect for intellectual property, which are essential for producing credible and valuable research outputs (Adebayo & Igwe, 2023). In postgraduate education, where academic rigour and originality are highly valued, understanding and applying ethical principles is necessary for ensuring that students produce quality research writing that contributes to knowledge and meets institutional expectations. Ethical research practices are foundational to the production of credible, verifiable, and impactful academic knowledge. A thesis or dissertation serves not only as a graduation requirement but also as a scholarly contribution that reflects the researcher's competence and integrity. When students internalise ethical principles, their research is more likely to be replicable, peer-reviewed, and publishable. This is particularly important in postgraduate education, where scholarly outputs are often used to inform policy decisions, improve teaching methods, or contribute to industry practices. Ethical considerations training enhances plagiarism awareness by educating individuals on proper citation practices, originality in writing, and respect for intellectual property.

One of the central areas of research ethics is plagiarism awareness. Plagiarism, which involves using someone else's work without proper acknowledgement, undermines the integrity of academic research and compromises its originality. Plagiarism awareness is the understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, the various forms it may take, and the consequences attached to it. With adequate training, postgraduate students are more likely to avoid unintentional plagiarism, use proper citation styles, and uphold academic honesty in their research writing (Chinweuba & Obasi, 2024). Beyond academic penalties, plagiarism can have lasting effects on students' confidence and academic identity. Being accused of plagiarism, even unintentionally, may damage a student's reputation and delay graduation. Moreover, habitual reliance on unacknowledged sources can hinder the development of independent thinking and scholarly writing skills. Institutions that address plagiarism as a learning issue, rather than merely a disciplinary one, can support students in building ethical writing habits from the outset. Training on plagiarism often includes the use of digital tools, such as plagiarism checkers, which help students identify and correct citation mistakes before submitting their work. These tools compare student writing to a vast range of online and offline sources, highlighting areas that may lack proper attribution (Uzuegbu & Tsenongu, 2024). This process allows students to revise their work, ensuring that paraphrasing is accurate and that sources are correctly cited (Adedayo & Musa, 2024). Plagiarism training that includes practical use of detection software enables students to safeguard their academic integrity. It encourages a proactive mindset, where learners take responsibility for ensuring their work is original and properly credited, rather than relying solely on instructors to catch errors. Plagiarism awareness supports data confidentiality by promoting ethical handling of information, proper attribution of sources, and respect for the privacy of research subjects.

Another key aspect of ethical research practice is data confidentiality. Data confidentiality in academic research refers to protecting personal and sensitive information gathered during a study from unauthorised access, use, or disclosure. It involves taking steps to ensure that the privacy and identity of research participants are preserved,

especially when dealing with interviews, surveys, or secondary datasets (Nwachukwu & Umeh, 2022). Respecting confidentiality not only fulfils ethical obligations but also enhances trust between researchers and participants. When students are taught to implement confidentiality measures such as anonymisation and secure data storage, it strengthens the credibility of their findings and contributes to the overall quality of their research writing. Confidentiality is also a cornerstone of ethical clearance processes in academic research. Many universities require postgraduate students to submit their research proposals to an ethics committee before data collection begins. These committees assess whether participant rights, including the right to privacy, have been adequately safeguarded. Failure to meet these standards can result in project rejection or retraction of findings. Thus, understanding data confidentiality is not only about protecting information but also about fulfilling broader obligations to research participants and institutions. Data confidentiality encourages honesty in data reporting by fostering a secure research environment where information is protected and accurately presented without manipulation.

Honesty in data reporting is another major component of research ethics. It means presenting research findings truthfully, without altering or fabricating data to meet expected outcomes. Ethical research training emphasises the need for students to report both positive and negative results, avoid data manipulation, and provide accurate interpretations of findings (Ogunleye & Akinwale, 2023). Honest data reporting supports academic integrity by ensuring that research findings are accurate, transparent, and dependable. This level of integrity builds trust between researchers, educators, and the public, creating a foundation on which decisions can be confidently made. When data are shared honestly, readers can verify results, reproduce studies, and rely on the outcomes for further research or policy formulation (Whyte, 2021). Conversely, data that are misleading or incomplete can lead to poor decision-making and undermine confidence in research findings (Tijani et al., 2021). Honest data reporting refers to the practice of presenting research findings with integrity, ensuring that all information is accurate, transparent, ethically sourced, and capable of being verified. This definition can be unpacked in terms of precision, clarity, traceability, and oversight as follows. Accurate reporting means researchers carefully collect and record data without misrepresenting results through falsification or fabrication. For instance, studies conducted in sub-Saharan contexts reported that over 40 percent of researchers admitted to altering or fabricating data (Okonta & Rossouw, 2014), thereby compromising trust in the research record. Honest reporting rejects such practices, favouring faithful adherence to observed findings. Transparency involves providing full disclosure of methods, analytical decisions, and limitations. Nigerian research institutions advocate for formal misconduct policies and training in ethical scientific writing, emphasising the need for students to adopt reference management and plagiarism awareness strategies in research writing work (Ubuane et al., 2021). This approach enables supervisors and peer reviewers to follow the trail of reasoning and verify findings independently.

Verifiability entails that raw data are maintained and accessible for review. In academic practice discussions, it was noted that the absence of original data undermines the credibility of research writing and may lead to retraction or sanctions (Ubuane et al., 2021). Supervisors play a vital role in requiring retention of data, confirming ethical approval, and ensuring that conclusions are supported by evidence rather than speculation. Supervisors guide postgraduate students to internalise standards of integrity in reporting. In Nigerian higher education, awareness of plagiarism is widespread, yet actual use of detection tools such as Turnitin remains low due to infrastructural challenges, lack of training, and cost barriers (Opesanwo & Anwana, 2023). By mentoring students through the proper use of anti-plagiarism software and ethical writing practices, supervisors strengthen the reliability of research writing outputs. Overall, scholarly integrity depends on institutions embedding ethics into training and policy. A combination of preventive strategies, such as workshops, institutional policies, and surveillance tools, helped reduce misconduct perceptions among postgraduate students (Eze & Adeola, 2021; Okon & Esu, 2020). When these measures are supported by supervisor attitudes that model truthful reporting, postgraduate authorship aligns more closely with principles of reliability and accountability.

When supervisors exemplify honesty in their conduct and offer regular, clear feedback on ethical concerns, they create an environment in which students begin to internalise and mirror those values. This modelling of moral behaviour helps students recognise that truthful presentation of data is expected, reliable, and non-negotiable in all stages of research. Ethical awareness among students is thereby strengthened by consistent supervisory guidance and reinforcement. Institutions have a role in providing workshops, seminars, and access to plagiarism detection tools; these channels give students structured exposure to academic integrity principles. When institutions offer sessions on proper citation, referencing, and ethical writing, students gain an understanding of why honesty matters and how it is practised. The availability of similarity-checking software such as Turnitin has been found to increase integrity in student submissions by raising awareness of improper paraphrasing or unattributed copying (Opesanwo & Anwana, 2023). Research in public universities reported that Turnitin software

contributed to upholding standards among postgraduate students of Economics Education, though challenges remained in access and training (Jolaosho & Adisa, 2025). These tools reinforce ethical awareness when combined with institutional guidance and rules that emphasise originality as a non-optional standard of academic practice (Olukanni, 2022). Ethics training thus involves both individual and institutional responsibility. Individually, students learn to value accurate and faithful presentation of evidence when supervisors explain the rationale for honesty and review drafts critically.

Supervisors who point out questionable practices, guide corrections, and praise truthfully reported results help students recognise that reporting errors, limitations, and unexpected findings is part of rigorous research practice. Institutionally, policies and procedures that mandate originality checks, support frequent workshops, and provide resources for academic writing form a backdrop against which students operate. Honesty in data reporting enhances the quality of postgraduate research writing. By requiring proper methodology and documentation, it ensures that research findings reflect genuine evidence, thereby increasing their trustworthiness. When students are aware that their work could be scrutinised via similarity-detection software, and that supervisors and institutional policies will verify the integrity of their work, they are more likely to produce accurate data and conduct honest analysis. Consequently, the overall research writing output stands on firmer ground, with findings that stakeholders can rely on. When supervisors act ethically and institutions embed integrity-focused training and tools into postgraduate education, students' ethical awareness becomes a shared responsibility. The combined effect of individual mentoring and structural support ensures that research findings are accurate, authentic, and reliable, improving research writing standards and preparing students for future academic or professional commitments.

In Nigerian universities, the quality of postgraduate research writing has become a concern among scholars, administrators, and employers. Issues such as plagiarism, poor referencing, unethical data handling, and biased reporting have contributed to questions about the relevance and rigour of some academic works (Onyemachi & Ali, 2021). Historically, ethical training in Nigerian universities was often informal and embedded within research methods courses. However, with increasing scrutiny from accrediting bodies and employers, there has been a shift toward more formalised ethics education. The requirement for students to complete a research ethics course or seminar before receiving approval to begin their research writing is now becoming a formal policy in some universities. This requirement is defined as a compulsory educational step, which ensures that all students engage with foundational principles of ethical research before undertaking substantial investigations in their postgraduate programmes. Students who attend these courses are introduced to the rationale for ethical oversight, the rules governing human and animal research ethics, the processes for seeking approval, and the importance of informed consent and data protection. However, several challenges are identified in the literature that limit the effectiveness of these requirements. One major challenge involves inconsistent enforcement. In some institutions, the course is formally listed, yet enforcement varies across departments or supervisors, resulting in unequal implementation. As observed by Bieniek et al. (2024), some students never received structured ethics training and were left to discover ethical principles on their own, while others had access to workshops, yet compliance depended heavily on supervisory practice. Another challenge concerns a lack of awareness. Many postgraduate students and occasionally their supervisors lack understanding of institutional policy or even the existence of mandatory modules on research ethics. Limited access to technological tools designed to support ethical research practices constitutes a further barrier.

Although institutions may establish formal procedures for ethical approval, administrative systems can be under-resourced, slow, or paper-based, making it difficult for students to apply for approvals promptly. Evaluation studies of institutional ethics review processes revealed that ethics committees face bottlenecks due to heavy workloads, inadequate administrative staffing, and a lack of digital infrastructure, which delays approval timelines and may discourage full compliance (Jolaosho & Adisa, 2025). The situation is compounded by the absence of widely implemented digital integrity systems. Olukanni (2022) notes that even where anti-plagiarism tools exist, they are often underutilised due to cost, limited digital infrastructure, or lack of formal training. Similarly, Opesanwo and Anwana (2023) found that access to software like Turnitin remains uneven, reducing students' ability to check their work before submission. The requirement to pass a research ethics course before thesis approval is an educational policy aimed at embedding ethical awareness and competence in students before they conduct research. Effective implementation requires consistent enforcement across all academic departments, sufficient awareness among students and supervisors, and an administrative infrastructure that includes digital or well-staffed ethical review systems. Without these supporting conditions, some students may still begin research without fully understanding ethical obligations or encounter delays and uncertainty when seeking formal approval. These gaps demonstrate that while the formal requirement represents institutional intent to build integrity into

research training, actual outcomes depend on equitable enforcement, broad familiarity with policy, and efficient administrative and technological support. Addressing these challenges through ethical considerations training can help foster a research culture rooted in ethical awareness and responsibility. Institutions that incorporate research ethics as part of postgraduate training equip students with the skills and values needed to navigate academic challenges and contribute to national development.

In Rivers State, where universities are working to improve research outputs and academic credibility, it becomes important to examine how ethics training influences research writing quality. The quality of research writing is often measured by its originality, methodological soundness, proper referencing, and the extent to which it meets academic standards. Therefore, exploring the influence of ethics-related factors such as plagiarism awareness, data confidentiality, and honesty in data reporting can offer valuable insights for improving postgraduate education. This study adopted the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), developed by Albert Bandura (1986). SCT explains how individuals acquire and maintain behaviours through the interaction of personal factors, environmental influences, and behaviour. It is well-suited for studying how ethical considerations training influences postgraduate students' ethical practices and research writing quality, as it accounts for learning processes, self-efficacy, and the role of the academic environment.

Statement of the Problem
Producing high-quality research writing is one of the key goals of postgraduate education, as it reflects a student's understanding of research processes and academic standards. Focusing on Rivers State provides an opportunity to explore how the academic institutions in the State respond to global calls for ethical accountability. As a region with a growing number of postgraduate programmes and research-intensive institutions, understanding the dynamics of ethics training can provide a microcosm of broader trends in Nigerian higher education. It also offers a basis for targeted recommendations that may enhance research writing quality and ethical compliance in similar academic settings. However, concerns have continued to rise about the quality of research writing by the students in public universities in Rivers State. Cases, issues such as plagiarism, mishandling of research data, and dishonest reporting have been observed, raising questions about the level of ethical considerations training provided to students. Many postgraduate students may not have adequate awareness of what constitutes plagiarism or how to avoid it. Some may also lack a proper understanding of how to protect confidential data gathered from research participants. In addition, the practice of altering or fabricating research findings, whether due to pressure to meet expectations or poor training, can affect the overall reliability and value of academic work. While research ethics are often taught in theory, the actual influence of such training on the quality of students' research writing is not always clear. It is important to understand how knowledge of plagiarism, respect for data confidentiality, and honesty in reporting affect research writing. This study, therefore, seeks to determine the influence of ethical training on the quality of research writing among postgraduate students in public universities in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study
The study aimed to examine the influence of ethics training on research writing quality in postgraduate education at public universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the influence of plagiarism awareness on research writing quality in postgraduate education at public universities in Rivers State.
2. examine the influence of data confidentiality on research writing quality in postgraduate education at public universities in Rivers State.
3. determine the influence of honesty in data reporting on research writing quality in postgraduate education at public universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions
The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the influence of plagiarism awareness on research writing quality in postgraduate education at public universities in Rivers State?
2. What is the influence of data confidentiality on research writing quality in postgraduate education at public universities in Rivers State?
3. What is the influence of honesty in data reporting on research writing quality in postgraduate education at public universities in Rivers State?

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to examine the influence of ethics training on research writing quality in postgraduate education at public universities in Rivers State. This approach was chosen to gain deeper insight into the perceptions, experiences, and ethical practices that influence the quality of postgraduate research writing. It allowed the researchers to gather rich, qualitative data directly from those who have undergone ethical training and engaged in postgraduate research. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select 20 postgraduate students and 10 lecturers from public universities in Rivers State. These participants were chosen because they had completed or were in the final stages of writing their postgraduate research and had participated in research ethics training. Their experiences were considered valuable for understanding the influence of specific components of ethics training on research writing quality. The study maintained ethical standards through informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. The data collection instrument was a researcher-designed semi-structured interview guide containing 15 open-ended questions for students and 9 open-ended questions for the lecturers, which were thematically linked to the research objectives. For the students, questions 1–5 addressed plagiarism awareness, questions 6–10 focused on data confidentiality, and questions 11–15 explored honesty in data reporting and their overall influence on research writing quality. Similarly, for the lecturers, questions 1–3 addressed plagiarism awareness, questions 4–6 focused on data confidentiality, and questions 7–9 explored honesty in data reporting and their overall influence on research writing quality. The questions were open-ended to allow participants to freely share their views and elaborate on their experiences. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in a quiet and neutral location within the university premises. Each session lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. The recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. The researchers ensured participants felt at ease and encouraged honest and reflective responses throughout the discussions. Each participant gave informed consent before participating, and their identities were kept confidential. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Data collected was stored securely and used strictly for academic purposes. The data were analysed thematically. This process began with familiarisation through multiple readings of the transcripts, followed by the generation of initial codes. These codes were then grouped into potential themes corresponding to the research objectives. The themes were reviewed, refined, and named to ensure they reflected the essence of participants' responses. The themes captured patterns and key insights related to how awareness of plagiarism, data confidentiality, and honesty in reporting contribute to the perceived quality of postgraduate research writing. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study.

Results

Theme 1: Awareness of Plagiarism in Enhancing Research Writing Quality

Students' response: All 20 interviewees acknowledged that plagiarism awareness significantly shapes the academic integrity of their research writing. Many described plagiarism as academic theft or misappropriation of others' intellectual property. Several participants defined it as using another person's work without appropriate credit, while a few emphasised that plagiarism includes both direct copying and paraphrasing without acknowledgement. Participants indicated that using plagiarism detection tools like Turnitin and Grammarly helped them become more conscious of their writing. These tools reinforced proper citation and referencing, reduced over-dependence on secondary sources, and enhanced originality. For example, one student mentioned that after using plagiarism software, they gained confidence in their work and ownership of ideas. Some interviewees highlighted that their awareness of plagiarism encouraged deeper engagement with sources and critical thinking. This awareness, they believed, made their research writing stand out during examinations and defences. The majority of the respondents confirmed they had used plagiarism detection tools at least once during their research journey. These tools influenced their writing styles, pushing them toward original expression and strict adherence to referencing formats such as APA. Those who did not initially use detection tools said they became more conscious of their writing after being introduced to plagiarism policies later in their academic programme. A few students expressed that they only started using these tools during their Master's project phase, where the requirement became mandatory.

Across responses, the influence of plagiarism awareness translated into better writing habits, avoidance of unethical practices, and a deeper understanding of intellectual property rights. All interviewees agreed that being aware of plagiarism significantly enhanced the quality of their research. One student reported that their research writing was "exceptional and applauded by external examiners" due to its originality. Others noted that their understanding of plagiarism reduced their dependence on unverified sources and strengthened their arguments. The awareness fostered greater accountability, prompting students to develop their ideas, improve paraphrasing skills, and cite sources appropriately. Some mentioned they deliberately avoided working on topics already over-

researched, ensuring a unique contribution. A recurring challenge mentioned was time constraint, which pressured students into copying and pasting materials from existing works. Another major difficulty was navigating the literature review, where distinguishing original thoughts from summarised materials proved tough. To overcome these, students reported adopting time management strategies, attending workshops, and developing paraphrasing skills. A few made use of AI grammar and citation tools to reduce unintentional similarity indices. Most respondents agreed that university guidelines on plagiarism were inadequate or inconsistently enforced. While some mentioned attending online seminars or orientations, others said their departments lacked structured guidance or training. A few interviewees proposed regular, department-led sensitisation programmes and stricter penalties for plagiarism.

Lecturers' response: The interview responses revealed that plagiarism awareness plays a crucial role in shaping the academic quality and originality of postgraduate students' research work. All 10 lecturers agreed that students who understand the concept and consequences of plagiarism tend to produce more credible and independent research. This awareness encourages proper citation, critical thinking, and originality, especially in the literature review, findings, and conclusion chapters. Most lecturers stated that they begin emphasising plagiarism from the proposal stage and continue the conversation throughout the research writing process. Techniques such as departmental seminars and individualised research training sessions are employed to sensitise students. Turnitin software is widely used across departments as a mandatory pre-submission check, reinforcing academic integrity. Institutionally, universities and postgraduate schools provide periodic workshops, seminars, and written guidelines. A departmental or postgraduate handbook detailing ethical expectations and sanctions for plagiarism was also mentioned as an important tool for deterrence.

Theme 2: Data Confidentiality in Enhancing Research Writing Quality
Students' response: When it came to data confidentiality, students reported various approaches. Several students ensured anonymity by using pseudonyms or excluding personal identifiers. Others stated they kept raw data in encrypted folders or password-protected drives. One participant emphasised they obtained verbal or written consent before data collection, especially for interviews and surveys. A few used online tools like Google Forms with restricted access to maintain confidentiality. Students noted that data confidentiality concerns influenced how they constructed research instruments. For instance, some included neutral, non-invasive questions and ensured all responses remained anonymous. Others mentioned that their awareness of confidentiality guided them to avoid sensitive questions that could harm participants. This, they believed, improved the ethical quality of their studies and reduced participants' reluctance to respond. When asked about ethical concerns, the majority reported no major issues. However, a few described situations where participants were sceptical about disclosing personal opinions, especially in politically or religiously sensitive topics.

To address this, students explained they reassured participants of their anonymity, explained the purpose of the study clearly, and offered the option to withdraw at any point. Nearly all students agreed that ensuring data confidentiality improved their research writing quality. It not only strengthened ethical compliance but also encouraged honest and open responses from participants, making their data more authentic. One student mentioned that using real-life case studies while protecting identities made their research both impactful and compliant with ethical standards. Respondents gave varied responses regarding training. While some cited attending online research ethics seminars, others mentioned receiving brief guidelines from their supervisors. A few, however, reported receiving no formal training, suggesting a need for structured workshops or courses on ethical research practices, particularly in handling participant data.

Lecturers' response: Lecturers reported that data confidentiality is a fundamental ethical component of research writing, and great effort is made to instil its importance in postgraduate students. From the onset, typically at the proposal or seminar stage, students are taught to anonymise respondent identities, secure consent forms, and avoid disclosing raw data without clearance. Several lecturers emphasised that students' commitment to confidentiality is reflected in the ethical tone of their data collection and reporting processes. This dedication often enhances the trustworthiness of their findings and boosts research writing approval rates during external examinations. One lecturer pointed out that breaches in confidentiality, such as including identifiable participant information, had delayed research writing approval and necessitated revisions. To avoid such pitfalls, departments are strict about ethical clearance and student training, with supervisors carefully reviewing research tools to ensure compliance. Some noted that because of these strict measures, confidentiality breaches are rare.

Theme 3: Honesty in Data Reporting in Enhancing Research Writing Quality

Students' response: All participants agreed on the importance of honest data reporting. Strategies used included cross-checking results, using statistical tools like SPSS, and having supervisors validate their findings. One student explained they resisted the temptation to manipulate results even when findings contradicted expectations. Another mentioned being guided by institutional values and personal integrity. Most students reported no pressure to alter their data. A few acknowledged subtle expectations from peers to produce certain outcomes, especially in action research, but insisted they remained truthful. They handled such pressures by defending the objectivity of their data and sticking to established ethical practices. All interviewees emphasised that honest reporting significantly boosted their research writing credibility. Several students said that presenting accurate data made their findings more persuasive and respected by examiners. Some added that being transparent about limitations and unexpected results improved the academic value of their work and gained them commendations. Some students mentioned it was difficult to report findings that did not align with their hypothesis or literature review. They feared the results would appear weak. To overcome this, they engaged in critical discussions with their supervisors and included honest explanations in their discussion sections. Others noted they had "no challenge" because they were confident in their methodology. Responses were mixed. While some students said their institutions offered clear ethical reporting guidelines and training, others claimed there was little or no support. Those who received support described it as "guidance that ensured quality and accountability." Others advocated for stronger institutional frameworks, including mandatory workshops, ethical clearance procedures, and detailed handbooks.

Lecturers' response: All 10 lecturers emphasised the critical role of honest data reporting in maintaining the integrity and academic credibility of a postgraduate research project. They highlighted the necessity for students to report findings based on actual results rather than expected outcomes, as fabricating or manipulating data undermines both reliability and scholarly value. Guidance strategies include hands-on seminars on data analysis using tools like SPSS, step-by-step supervision during data entry, and real-time monitoring of statistical interpretations. Supervisors also review multiple research drafts, paying close attention to consistency between raw data and reported findings. While most lecturers stated they had not personally encountered cases of dishonesty due to close supervision, they did mention that common dishonest practices in the system include fabricating sample sizes, exaggerating results, or omitting unfavourable data. To address these issues, departments enforce raw data submission, supervisor validation, and panel vetting of research work.

All lecturers interviewed confirmed that their departments and postgraduate schools have systems in place to promote academic integrity. These include compulsory training seminars, plagiarism checks using Turnitin, ethical clearance procedures, and departmental guidelines. Some lecturers initiate private research workshops for their supervisees before research writing begins. These sessions introduce key topics such as plagiarism, data confidentiality, and ethical reporting. Continuous engagement throughout the supervision process ensures that academic honesty is upheld at each stage of the research journey. Lecturers unanimously agreed that ethical practices, particularly in plagiarism avoidance, confidentiality, and data honesty, have a direct positive effect on the academic quality and acceptance of research writing. Adherence to these practices increases credibility, reduces examiner criticism, and minimises delays in research defence and approval. Where ethical lapses have occurred, the consequences were significant, including research rejection or demands for major revisions. Students who upheld ethical standards produced research writing that was more respected by both internal supervisors and external assessors. Lecturers pointed out several challenges postgraduate students face in adhering to ethical standards. These include limited understanding of plagiarism policies, inadequate skills in paraphrasing and citation, difficulty maintaining objectivity in reporting, and poor handling of sensitive data.

Discussion

The first theme, Plagiarism Awareness in Enhancing Research Writing Quality, suggests that heightened awareness of plagiarism has profoundly improved students' academic writing integrity. As the interviewees reported, understanding plagiarism, not merely as copying but also as improper paraphrasing, heightened their critical engagement with sources and led them to adopt stronger citation habits. This aligns with the work of Makinde et al. (2023), who found that undergraduates at a Nigerian university became more meticulous in citing and paraphrasing once they received structured training and access to plagiarism-detection tools such as Grammarly and EagleScan. Their findings revealed that tool use fostered a deeper understanding of academic honesty and improved writing clarity. Lecturers emphasised that dedicating effort to address plagiarism from the proposal stage onward, and reinforcing awareness through departmental seminars, had a lasting impact on

students' research quality. This is corroborated by Oyegunle et al. (2021), whose study of postgraduate science education students in Nigeria demonstrated that routine use of detection software significantly raised research quality and student confidence. They concluded that awareness campaigns, combined with software-based checks, cultivate better writing practices and self-assurance in research work. Students reported that software like Turnitin and Grammarly helped them feel ownership and confidence in their ideas. Makinde et al. (2023) similarly found that training and access to plagiarism-checkers led to more accurate paraphrasing and improved academic integrity, confirming the link between tool use and conscientious writing. Interviewees stressed that lecturers' sustained guidance, seminars, workshops, and policy reinforcement helped inculcate integrity. These strategies mirror the recommendations of Oyegunle et al. (2021), who found that mandatory pre-submission checks and regular sensitisation improved research quality and writing authenticity. Awareness of plagiarism, particularly through the use of detection tools and ongoing educator support, promotes better writing habits, originality and accountability. As shown in Nigerian contexts, structured interventions via software and training effectively raise awareness and enhance research standards among postgraduate students.

The second theme, Data Confidentiality in Enhancing Research Writing Quality, indicates that students and lecturers strongly align in their belief that safeguarding data confidentiality enhances both the ethical integrity and overall quality of postgraduate research. Students employed practical measures such as pseudonymisation, encrypted storage, password-protected drives, and controlled online forms to ensure anonymity and limit access to raw data. Many emphasised obtaining consents, verbal or written, before collecting data, especially in interviews and surveys. These steps appeared to shape their research instruments, leading them to deliberately avoid intrusive or sensitive questions and include neutral wording, thus fostering honest participant engagement and richer data. Likewise, lecturers reported that institutions embed confidentiality expectations early in the research process, often at the proposal or seminar stage. They supervise students closely to ensure anonymisation of respondent identities, appropriate storage or destruction of raw data, and proper use of consent procedures. When confidentiality procedures are overlooked, such as including identifiable information, the consequence has been delayed research approval and required revisions. This oversight reinforces how ethical compliance contributes to smoother progression and higher credibility of student work. Both students and supervisors recognise that proactive confidentiality practices, such as encryption, anonymisation, and clear consent, are integral to ethical compliance and to eliciting honest responses. Students linked ethical adherence to data quality and authenticity, while lecturers noted that such practices boost trustworthiness and prevent institutional issues. Training and guidance are unevenly distributed. While some students attend online ethics seminars or receive guidance from supervisors, others acknowledged having no formal training. This gap mirrors broader findings in Nigerian graduate education contexts, where less than half of students can define ethical considerations properly and only a minority emphasise voluntary participation and anonymity in their instruments (Ubi et al., 2020). That study reported that just 47.31% understood what ethical consideration meant, and only 26.17% emphasised anonymity in their research instruments. These convergences underscore the value of structured ethics training. Formally organised workshops or courses would standardise knowledge about confidentiality, consent, instrument design, and data protection, reducing reliance on supervisors alone. This would help all students, even those who currently receive minimal guidance, to conduct ethically sound research. The data from both students and lecturers emphasises that confidential data handling, through anonymisation, consent, and secure storage, supports ethical compliance, enriches participant engagement, and enhances the authenticity of research findings. However, the identified variability in formal training highlights a need for more systematic ethics instruction. Integrating structured research ethics education early in postgraduate programmes would further embed best practices and improve the quality of research writing outputs.

The third theme, Honesty in Data Reporting in Enhancing Research Writing Quality, shows that both students and lecturers consistently affirm that honest data reporting is essential for the credibility and academic strength of postgraduate research writing. Students described methods such as cross-checking results, using SPSS, and relying on supervisor validation. They emphasised resisting any temptation to manipulate outcomes, even when results conflicted with expectations. This commitment to objectivity, complemented by defending their data against subtle pressures, was said to significantly enhance the persuasiveness and respect accorded to their work. Lecturers confirmed that robust supervision practices, including repeated draft reviews, programme seminars on data analysis, and enforced submission of raw data, play a central role in ensuring integrity and discouraging fabrication or omission of unfavourable findings. The convergence reinforces that adherence to ethical reporting, through objective analysis, supervisor oversight, and transparent handling of limitations, strengthens research writing credibility. Similar observations arise in Nigerian higher education literature, where weak oversight and lack of formal training contribute to data fabrication and diminished research integrity (Abdulkarim et al., 2025). Both groups note inconsistencies in the availability of official guidance and ethics training. While some students

reported clear institutional support, others said training was minimal or absent. Lecturers described compulsory seminars and Turnitin checks in some departments, but also acknowledged gaps in paraphrasing, citation, and objectivity skills among students. This pattern aligns with national findings in Nigeria, where insufficient ethics education leaves many researchers unaware of proper practice and vulnerable to misconduct (Adebayo, 2023; Nwosu, 2020). In light of these observations, the evidence suggests that strengthening the ethics infrastructure at the institutional level would be beneficial. Mandatory workshops, detailed reporting guidelines, and supervisor-led training on data honesty and integrity would support consistent ethical behaviour across all students. Both students and lecturers emphasise that honest reporting enhances the academic credibility and acceptability of postgraduate research writing. They agree that ethical supervision, transparency in limitations and unexpected findings, and use of legitimate statistical tools build trust in research outcomes. However, the uneven provision of formal ethics training indicates a need for more structured institutional support. Establishing comprehensive ethics training and clear integrity frameworks would support honest data reporting and enhance the overall quality of postgraduate research.

Conclusion

This study has shown that awareness and adherence to ethical research practices play a meaningful role in shaping the quality and acceptance of postgraduate research writing. Students who understood plagiarism, data confidentiality, and honest reporting were more likely to produce work that was not only academically sound but also respected by examiners. Plagiarism awareness improved citation habits, encouraged original thinking, and helped students take ownership of their writing. Data confidentiality, on the other hand, guided students to respect participants' privacy, which led to more open and reliable responses during data collection. In the same way, honesty in data reporting supported credibility and reduced examiner doubts, especially when students were transparent about unexpected or contradictory findings. Both students and lecturers recognised that these practices enhanced the trustworthiness of academic work. However, the study also highlighted gaps in institutional support. While some departments provided seminars, tools, and guidance, others lacked structured systems for ethical training. Challenges such as time pressure, limited training, and unclear guidelines were mentioned by students and acknowledged by lecturers. The findings suggest that a stronger institutional commitment to ethical training, consistent enforcement of existing policies, and early engagement with students on research standards would help promote academic integrity. In doing so, postgraduate students can be better equipped to produce research writing that meets ethical expectations and upholds scholarly standards.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Tertiary institutions should integrate structured ethics training into postgraduate orientation and research methodology courses. These sessions should focus on plagiarism awareness, proper citation techniques, and responsible authorship to help students develop habits that promote originality and academic honesty.
2. Departments should provide clear, accessible guidelines and consistent support on data confidentiality. This can include offering seminars, practical demonstrations, and supervised research design clinics to guide students in ethical data collection, storage, and transparent result presentation.
3. Academic departments should organise regular workshops that emphasise the importance of honesty in data reporting. These sessions should teach students how to manage, analyse, and present data truthfully, even when outcomes do not align with their expectations.

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