



Original Article

Situating the Place of Literature in Research Ethics

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Abstract: It is an indisputable fact that literature reserves a significant place in research ethics. However, its place in research ethics is neglected by most of the scholars concerned with the scholastic subject matter of research ethics. This study aims at exploring the place of literature in research ethics. Primary data were obtained from observation, and library and internet data sources. Content analysis and qualitative approach are employed in the analysis of data. The work is grounded by the functionalist theory, which explains the functional connectivity between literature and research ethics, as societal systems that are interdependent. The analysis reveals that literature plays crucial roles in instruction, information, education, exerting influence, construction of realities and ethics, execution, preservation and transmission of research ethics, instilling creative and critical skills in researchers, research authorities and participants, and causing readership, and new world orders in research sphere. The study concludes that literature is deeply involved in all that concerns research ethics. It recommends sustained right use of literature for constructing, disseminating, executing, sustaining and reforming research ethics across ages and societies.

Keywords: Situating, place, literature, research ethics, functional connectivity

Introduction: Literature situates in various endeavours, including research with its ethics. Regrettably, its place in research ethics is undermined by many^{1, 2, 3}. To that end, this study rises to explore the significant place of literature in research ethics. The study seeks to demonstrate that literature takes centre stage in research ethics, because it is deeply involved in all that concerns research with its

ethics. This study further posits yjay in constructing, documenting, disseminating, institutionalising, spreading or circulating, transmitting and sustaining the dos and don'ts of research, both oral and written forms of literature are used un/consciously and in/formally. This implies that research activities in general and research ethics in particular cannot be possible without literature. This

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study seeks to show that literature reserves a significant place in research ethics. As a concept, 'literature' is derived from the Latin word 'litera', meaning 'printed material'^{1, 2}. For this writer, it is given this etymological meaning of literature that the layman defines it as any written sources of information and knowledge about nature, humans, things, phenomena, society, realities, etc.^{2, 3}. Literature is not just any written material for reading, as many people myopically think of it to be. It is not the news photo that presents to or tells one about what the presented photo is or can be. Literature is much more than all of that. It does not stop at telling what certain things are or ought to be, but goes on to show and give them life through the medium of language. It does not only refer to a body of writing, but also to a complex and vast non-material aspect of a people's culture, which exists in both oral and written forms^{1, 2, 3}. It is in view of the foregoing realities that Uwatt says, 'Literature... is a representation of the struggle in society at human, spiritual, economic, social, cultural, religious and environmental levels and within the self'¹.

As Anigbogu and Uwakwe rightly note, the term literature is used in a wide sense to refer to written works and printed materials that give information². Examples of these written works are books on different subjects, articles, pamphlets, etc. When used in a narrow sense, literature means fictional and non-fictional works of artistic value and quality². It may also be defined as the study of imaginative works that relate certain aspects of human experience². Literature is peculiar, as a discipline, because it is the art of life that involves the recreation of human experience. This reality is somewhat captured by Moody³, who says 'literature brings us back to the realities of human situation, problems, feelings and relationships.' So, as a discipline, literature exposes students, teachers and other concerned categories of persons to different aspects of real life situations, with which they understand certain conditions that they would not have understood in real life. Studying literature, as a discipline, gives insight into real life possibilities. Thus, Probst remarks:

Even in scientific and technological era, literature remains a vital subject of the

curriculum. It is indeed our reservoir of insight into the human condition, the pool of perceptions and conceptions from which we draw our visions of what it is to be human⁴.

Research ethics is imperative in order to guide researchers and other parties involved in research to act rightly in the course of research. That is, right actions in research undoubtedly contribute to the well-being of society. The foregoing views call to mind the definition of ethics by Omoregbe's⁶ as 'what concerns with the question of right and wrong in human behaviour; studies the reasons why certain actions are morally wrong and certain others are morally right and commendable. It follows that research ethics concerns questions of right and wrong human behaviours in the research endeavour. It also concerns interrogating and spelling out actions that are morally right and wrong in research activities. It is with research norms, values, principles and conventions that some actions in research activities are adjudged right, while others are adjudged wrong.

However, these dos and don'ts are sustained and disseminated across ages through various symbolic means, with language and literature being the top means. This reality highlights the unreserved place of literature in research ethics. It is to avoid unethical practices and indecorum in the research arena that research ethics are evolved and continuously revised and enlarged. As ethics of this endeavour are made, they are institutionalised, executed, transmitted and passed across to generations of researchers using literature and other mechanisms.

Methodology: This article involves a review of past and recent literatures on the subject matter of discourse. Descriptive survey method, qualitative approach and content analysis were employed. Observation is the primary data source involved in the study. Secondary data were sourced internet materials, using Google search engine. The keywords were situating, place, literature, research ethics, and functional connectivity.

Theoretical Framework: This study is grounded by the functionalist theory^{7, 9, 10, 11}. This study adopts the functionalist theory because of its apt theoretical depiction of the functional

connectivity between literature and research ethics. These two systems correlate or connect functionally. The functionalist theory is simply regarded as functionalism¹¹. Functionalism has been described as a situation in which all parts of the social system of the society work together in a sufficient degree of harmony, devoid of persistent intractable conflicts⁷. For Cancian⁸, functionalism is a system that can be analysed into a set of interdependent parts, the value of some of which determine whether or not a certain property occurs in the system, and the variations of the values of the variables determine the disappearance or not of the system. It is imperative to note that the implication of the foregoing is that literature, research and ethics are interrelated as existential systems of the society. There is functional connectivity between and among them respectively. Be it so, literature has a significant place in research ethics because of the role it plays in making it what it is and known to researchers and various research bodies/agents.

The great sociologists Emile Durkheim, Robert Merton and Talcott Parsons are the pioneer theorists of functionalism^{9, 10}. These pioneers maintained that society is a collection of integral parts of a whole, which must co-exist, co-relate, be interdependent and be functional in their dealings in order to pursue and realise substantial set goals/objectives that are of the good of all⁹. For the functionalists, elements of society are function. The functionalists use the terms functional and dysfunctional to describe the effects of social elements on society. According to them, elements of society are functional if they contribute to social stability and dysfunctional if they disrupt social stability¹⁰. Some aspects of society can be both functional and dysfunctional. They have identified two types of functions: manifest and latent¹⁰. Manifest functions are consequences that are intended and commonly recognised. Latent functions are consequences that are unintended and often hidden¹⁰. For the functionalists, society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. This paper argues that literature and research ethics are interconnected systems that work

together in the research field to better various spheres of life in society.

Functionalism interprets each part of society in terms of how it contributes to the stability of the whole society^{11, 10}. Society is more than the sum of its parts. Each part of society is functional for the stability of the whole. The functionalist theory see society as an organism in that within an organism, each component plays a necessary part, but none can function alone, and when one experiences a crisis or fails, other parts must adapt to fill the void in some way¹¹. Thus, literature and ethics correlate and interact to produce research ethics. They complement each other and this extends to research ethics. Essentially, the thesis of the functionalist theory rests on the postulation that all societal systems are interconnected and function in interconnected manner, whereby the functionality of one connects to that of another. This is to say that a tree cannot make a forest and so societal systems are interdependent and complementary to another, as one system cannot function in absolutism and solitude^{10, 11}. Here, the theory applies suitably in that it lends credence to the central postulation of this paper that literature correlates with research ethics and thereby reserves a pride of place in research in general and research ethics in particular. The paper avers that the functionality as well as the sustenance of research ethics is dependent on literature.

Situating Primary and Secondary Functions of Literature in Research Ethics: The primary functions of literature are known to be information, education, entertainment, instruction, depiction of realities, mirroring life and society, preservation and transmission of culture^{18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24}. It is the mirror with which reality and ideology are seen and moulded. It is important to note that information about research activities, e.g. informed consent, risk benefit, vulnerability, confidentiality, human rights and integrity^{12, 13}, in entirety is given using language, literature and both old and new media, among other means. Literature takes centre stage in information production and dissemination. Thus, by playing this primary role, literature features prominently in research and research ethics. It offers instructions about the dos and don'ts of research. These instructions

and enacted ethical principles of research are preserved by literature. Research realities are mirrored and depicted by literature. Various research ideas (ideologies) are formed, moulded, protected, disseminated, revealed, transmitted and sustained using literature along with other means like language and media^{19, 21}.

Beyond the aforementioned primary functions of literature, it plays other vital functions that lie behind its significant place in research ethics. Literature serves as the means through which knowledge, ways of life, societal systems, ideologies, worldviews, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, discoveries, experience, innovations, and so on are recorded and kept for posterities¹⁸. It also preserves culture; projects and sustains identity; aids the mastering of the language with which it operates and reveals itself; helps in social control and order; resolves emotional tension and issues; and serves as historical and social document^{1, 19, 21}. These aforementioned secondary roles of literature make it find a significant place in research ethics.

In view of the foregoing, this writer makes some observation in this paragraph. Accordingly, the writer observes that in addition, research demands that the researcher should take the culture of their research area into consideration. S/he is to respect the culture of the host community. The researcher is expected to preserve rather than tamper with the culture of a host community. In particular, the identity of vulnerable groups is to be protected by the researcher. This requisition places literature on the same level with research ethics. Literature helps people to master the language used in research and for research ethics. This study further observes that just like research ethics, literature helps in ensuring social control and order. It resolves tension issues. And, historical, social and otherwise documents on research and research ethics involve and are made using literature. Besides giving pleasure to readers, literature broadens and deepens human knowledge^{2, 19, 21}. Literature does these to those who read about research and research ethics. It expands their knowledge of research and research ethics². Literature has been a mechanism for carrying out scientific, technological and philosophical activities, with

huge prospects^{18, 20, 21}. For example, questions about realities, the validation of truth, scepticism, etc. are debated and showcased through literature in both written and oral forms.

Literature concerns itself with, and promotes truth²⁵. It is an indisputable fact that truth lies behind every ethics. Thus, research ethics involves truth and it is rooted in truth. The place of literature in research ethics could be seen on the basis of its concern with and requisition for truth. This is evidenced in the demand on researchers to be truthful. Also, literature historicises research ethics, as it does to other human endeavours^{21, 26, 27}. Generations of researchers and research bodies learn from embodied research ethics through both written and oral forms of literature¹⁸. Literature, especially the written sources, prevails on researchers to avoid unacceptable research practices, norms, values and traditions that guide and ground research activities and works. Innovations in research as well as research ethics are brought to place by literature.

Again, literature plays a crucial role in enacting laws and making policies, some of which apply to research ethics. It is one of the mechanisms for evolving, executing, disseminating and sustaining research ideals and standards^{18, 20, 21}. It allows for self-assessment, and a critical evaluation or judgement of others, making a critical assessment, creative and critical thinking. This author observes that given the foregoing, objectivity rather than subjectivity characterises research works as a result of the influence literature exerts on researchers and research bodies.

Anigbogu and Uwakwe note that 'apart from giving pleasure to readers, literature broadens and deepens human knowledge'². By broadening and deepening human knowledge, literature rouses and broadens critical thinking about research and research ethics in the individual. Critical thinking and reflection, and creative writing are induced by literature or literary instinct^{29, 22}. Zala²² agrees that creative and imaginative skills as well as creativity and imagination are products of literature. There is no gainsaying the fact that these skills are required in research and do characterise research ethics.

Having discussed the functions of literature as the base of its significant place in research ethics, it is imperative for a mention to be made of its forms and genres at this juncture. There are two forms of literature, which are oral and written. Oral literature is the first form of literature that evolved with the beginning of the world (i.e. since the beginning of human existence). Written literature rose in 3rd BC, when writing evolved in Sumer in 300BC^{30, 31, 32}. It should be noted that forms of literature are different from genres of literature. There are three genres of literature. These are prose, drama and poetry. The genres of literature are also called its branches. The term 'genre' means kinds or categories². Each genre of literature is characterised by a particular style or form of expression. The differentiation of each of these genres from others lies in the presentation, which involves the relationship between author, work and audience, and the structure or the artistic constituents of each of the literary genres.

Conclusion: So far, this study has shown that literature reserves a significant place in research ethics. It thereby calls attention to the neglected significance of literature in research activities in general and research ethics in particular. The primary and secondary functions of literature are what afford for it the unreserved place literature has in research ethics. The study argues that with its primary and secondary roles, literature takes centre stage in research ethics in particular and research activities in general. Its lead functions, which gain its unreserved place in research ethics, are instruction, information, education, exerting influence, construction of realities and ethics, execution, preservation and transmission of research ethics, instilling creative and critical skills in researchers, research authorities and participants, and causing readership, and new world orders in research sphere. In conclusion, the study holds that literature is deeply involved in all that concerns research ethics as well as research activities in general. It recommends sustained right use of literature for constructing, disseminating, executing, sustaining and reforming research ethics across ages and the globe.

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