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Editorial

2020 Open Call for Special Issues: Editor-in-Chief's Note

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Articles and Statements

Comment Moderation and Freedom of Speech at PubPeer: Challenges and Issues

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Abstract

PubPeer (<https://www.pubpeer.com/>) is currently very likely the most visible and coordinated post-publication peer review site for academics and scientists, even more than PubMed Commons, which has now become obsolete because it allows for anonymous comments and critiques. In order for this site to continue to gain the trust and respect of scientists, it needs to display complete transparency and open communication with the public. Little is known about the founders and the management of this organization, California-based The PubPeer Foundation, although two of its founders, Boris Barbour and Brandon Stell, work at French research institutes. It is believed that in November of 2016, The PubPeer Foundation received US\$ 412,800 in funding from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation. However, the public would not have been able to glean this information from looking at the “About us” page, even after PubPeer upgraded to version 2.0 on June 15, 2017. This large financial donation is linked to John Arnold’s “war on bad science”. Opacity regarding these facts, compounded by comment removal querying this funding and why it had not been publicized at that time, and how this funding is currently being used, underscores trust in PubPeer, its founders, and its funders. It is unclear who precisely is the comment moderator at PubPeer, and comments come and go, are edited and erased, at the will of the anonymous moderator. If PubPeer hid basic information from the public for almost 7 months, continues to show signs of content (i.e., comment) manipulation and infringement of commentator freedom of speech by impeding the publication of comments, then what moral voice does PubPeer have to request the transparent participation of scientists, editors, and publishers on its site?

Keywords: Boris Barbour, Brandon Stell, cancer, crisis in science, Laura and John Arnold Foundation, opacity vs transparency, post-publication peer review, psychology, PubMed Commons.

Highlights

- PubPeer is a post-publication peer review site.
- The PubPeer Foundation received US\$ 412,800 from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation.
- Comments (i.e., public records) continue to be manipulated and deleted at PubPeer.
- The precise comment moderator(s) at PubPeer is/are unknown.
- Commentator freedom of speech is limited at PubPeer.

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“Crisis” in science publishing, increasing scrutiny, and post-publication peer review

One definition for science’s apparent current crisis is “the inability to detect errors/fraud, lack of transparency, lack of reliability, potential for bias, potential for unethical practices, lack of objectivity, inconsistencies amongst reviewers, lack of recognition and motivation of reviewers” (Das, 2016). Post-publication peer review (PPPR) may be a realistic solution to resolving some of science publishing’s ills (Wichert, 2017; Brembs, 2018), but its use and implementation requires the coordinated use by all of publishing’s stakeholders (e.g., authors, editors, publishers, funders) (Teixeira da Silva et al., 2017). Peer reviewers and editors are the key gate-keepers who are expected to maintaining quality control of the published literature (Teixeira da Silva, 2017a), but perverted incentives, including increasing reliance on metrics to quantify “quality” (Teixeira da Silva, Bernès, 2018), has led to the considerable corrosion and abuse of the biomedical literature, although the extent to which this has taken place is currently difficult to quantify. PPPR has presented itself as one of the most powerful means to correct errors in the literature, although the level of correction that is required is still unclear, and still relies heavily on editorial independence (Teixeira da Silva, 2016a). If publishing were to function perfectly, then all errors would be corrected, but this is not always possible, for multiple reasons. Extreme errors that invalidate results, duplications, or misconduct are often subject to retractions, and these most often cast a poor light on authors, editors, journals and the publishers involved (Teixeira da Silva, 2016b). Given this negative stigma attached to retractions (Teixeira da Silva, Al-Khatib, 2019), there is still a wide range of responsiveness to PPPR, even by those journals and publishers that claim to follow the strictest forms of publishing ethics, namely the publishing industry’s Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

In recent times, some journals have experienced their very first retraction, which may represent a highly improbable or unexpected event, i.e., a “black swan” publishing event (Teixeira da Silva, 2015a). Such low levels of corrections or retractions in such journals may also indicate that their published literature might not yet have been subjected to rigorous PPPR, or that the editors and publisher might be resisting its review or correction, to avoid reputational damage. In such cases, editors may be violating their basic responsibilities towards the integrity of the published record (Teixeira da Silva, Dobránszki, 2018). Many journals and publishers are coming under increased scrutiny by its authorship, readership, concerned editors, or members of the public. In one such case, *Molecular and Cellular Biology*^{*}, the journal and publisher (American Society for Microbiology) decided to complete a thorough PPPR of the figures in published papers in a certain window of time to ascertain the extent of problematic papers[†] after a spate of papers had been highlighted on the PPPR whistle-blowing site, PubPeer[‡].

PubPeer used to have a journal-by-journal classification[§] which was scrapped when it upgraded to the beta version 2.0^{**} on June 15, 2017. That classification system was useful to identify “black swan” journals and to identify journals that potentially had a too-good-to-be-true publication record as well as those that had a history of problematic papers. Although no public explanation was provided by PubPeer, the elusive Peer O, which is/are presumably the PubPeer moderator(s), did offer some insight into why the “Topics”^{††} page was scrapped, stating “In the near future we will make them easier to find but we do not plan to provide a mechanism that would allow users to create new ones. Although we agree that some were very useful, the topics that you discovered on the old site were a small fraction of the total number that were created; the overall majority were a violation of PubPeer rules or comments about a specific publication and were a moderation nightmare. However, if in the future you have an idea for a thread on PubPeer that you think would be useful for everyone please send us an email.” The topics page allowed for peers to opine on specific issues, but the anonymous platform failed to prevent abuses, i.e., comment

* <http://mcb.asm.org/content/37/11/e00199-17.full>

† <http://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/49642/title/Journal-Cleans-Up-Image-Archives/>

‡ <https://www.pubpeer.com/>

§ <https://web.archive.org/web/20170210135854/https://www.pubpeer.com/journals/>

** <https://www.pubpeer.com/publications/pubpeer2>

†† <https://web.archive.org/web/20150319025106/https://pubpeer.com/topics>

moderation failed to some extent at PubPeer. As a consequence, important topics that allow academics to be aware of challenges in biomedical publishing ethics, such as the continued inability to hold some COPE member journals, editors and publishers accountable for what appears to be a vastly corroded (i.e., poorly academically vetted) literature*, compounded by opaque, unaccountable and unresponsive PubPeer management, made such topics fade from public view.

PubPeer has always been surrounded by controversy because it allows both registered and anonymous commentators to critique the literature or academics. Unlike PubMed Commons, which only used to allow registered commentators to add comments that were subjected to strict moderation overseen by Hilda Bastian, prior to the sudden closure of PubMed Commons in mid-February 2018 (Teixeira da Silva, 2018a), one of the concerns about PubPeer is that its moderators may be biased, inconsistent and cannot be held accountable, as indicated above for Peer o, whose identity remains unknown. The argument here is that a PPPR site must display the highest possible levels of honesty, trust, respect, transparency, and accountability to be considered a true journal club (Teixeira da Silva et al., 2017). From early in 2017, a number of journal clubs had begun to emerge and register formally at PubMed Commons[†]. As equally as PubPeer was hiding the identity of its moderators, so too was PubMed Commons hiding the identity of its team[‡]. This opacity displayed by PubPeer and PubMed Commons may, in fact, be a way to conceal possible conflicts of interest (COIs), given the amount of interaction that takes place between PubPeer and Retraction Watch, a popular blog, as exemplified by its call to coercion (Teixeira da Silva, 2017b) or its potentially bad advice to scientists (Teixeira da Silva, 2017c), and between Hilda Bastian and these organizations. Hidden relationships between PubPeer and Retraction Watch have already been documented (Teixeira da Silva, 2017d) while the inter-mingling between these science watchdogs and COPE raises concerns about the neutral or bias-free nature of any of these parties (Teixeira da Silva, 2019a). This paper presents additional evidence that shows hidden facts regarding the financial support of PubPeer and suppression of comments. These issues underscore the overall trust that the academic community may have on this site and its possible objectives.

PubPeer funding, possible hidden conflicts of interest, and suppressed freedom of speech

In September of 2015, PubPeer revealed its founders (Couzin-Frankel, 2015): Brandon Stell, an American brain physiologist at Paris Descartes University in Paris[§], Boris Barbour^{**}, Director of the Cerebellum Group at IBENS-ENS (CNRS) at PSL Research University, also in Paris, and Gabor Brasnjo, a patent attorney. In a bid to obtain financing, Stell created The PubPeer Foundation in California as a “nonprofit public benefit corporation with 501(c)(3) nonprofit status”^{††}, thus having to reveal his identity that he had kept secret for several years while he ran PubPeer as an “underground” organization. Stell is the President of this organization while Barbour is the treasurer, thus overseeing finances. On or near November 8, 2016, The PubPeer Foundation received US\$ 412,800 in funding from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation (LJAF) for general operations from 2016-2019 (Fig. 1B)^{**}, as part of a wider “war on bad science”^{§§}. Almost seven months later, this information had still not appeared on the PubPeer “About” page (Fig. 1A), reflecting serious concerns about the transparency of this organization and/or its leadership (Teixeira da Silva, 2018b). With the launch of the beta version, PubPeer 2.0, in mid-June of 2017, a tiny acknowledgement was made to this fact (Fig. 1C), but even so, the link to the correct funding page on the LJAF site was not linked, and the precise date when that funding was received was not indicated.

This aspect alone should have raised alarm bells and red flags among academics. When a whistle-blowing website that claims to be an online journal club and that specializes in criticism of

* <https://www.pubpeer.com/publications/2E91E8916236A6EE03F372E64FBBAF>

† <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedcommons/journal-clubs/about/>

‡ <https://pubmedcommonsblog.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/author/pubmedcommonsblog/>

§ http://www.biomedicale.parisdescartes.fr/physiocer/?page_id=2983

** <http://www.ibens.ens.fr/spip.php?rubrique32&lang=en>

†† <https://www.pubpeer.com/about>

** <https://www.arnoldfoundation.org/grants/> (listed under Research Integrity)

§§ <https://www.wired.com/2017/01/john-arnold-waging-war-on-bad-science>

the biomedical literature by profiling scientists, editors, journals and publishers, often by masked individuals with an unknown, undisclosed or possibly biased agenda that may or may not be academic, but then fails to disclose this information to the public (i.e., lack of openness, full disclosure, transparency), and then expects such values from its commentators, then this may be a cause for concern. Concerned with this opacity regarding funding, I added a comment as an anonymous commentator to a PubPeer page in December of 2016 where my posted comment could be recorded, requesting why this important information had not been released to the public*. My comment was not approved, nor published (Fig. 1D). This indicates that PubPeer was not, at that time, operating in a fully honest, open, transparent, or accountable manner, at least not to the public. By hiding this aspect of financing from the public for over 7 months, and by employing unfair and excessive comment moderation that undermines basic principles of freedom of speech, even if – or especially if – they are queries or opinions that are critical of PubPeer, trust in PubPeer may become eroded.

A PubPeer > About

The PubPeer Foundation is a California-registered nonprofit public benefit corporation with 501(c)(3) nonprofit status in the United States. The overarching goal of the Foundation is to help improve the quality of scientific research by enabling innovative approaches for community interaction. Our initial focus will be on maintaining and developing the PubPeer online platform for post-publication peer review.

The bylaws of the newly created Foundation aim to establish PubPeer.com as a service run for the benefit of its readers and commenters, who create all of its content. We feel that a nonprofit organization constitutes the ideal framework through which to pursue these goals. We are also taking this opportunity to formalize the responsibilities of directors, officers, agents, and subcontractors of the Foundation. First and foremost, they should always act to preserve and defend the anonymity of users of Foundation sites. In addition, they must not comment on Foundation sites except through official channels (such as the blog, the twitter account or as moderators), and they must avoid real and apparent conflicts of interest.

The inaugural Board of the Foundation consists of the three founders of PubPeer.com and two associates, respectively: Brandon Stiel (President), George Smith, Richard Smith, Boris Barbour (Treasurer) and Gabor Brasnjo (Secretary).

We wish to thank all of the expert commenters of PubPeer.com, who are responsible for the success of the site. We also thank and are extremely grateful to our pro bono legal representatives (Nicholas Jollymore of Jollymore Law and Alex Abdo, Daniel Korobkin and Samia Hossain of the ACLU) for defending our site and the community's right to comment freely under the law.

For anything related to the Foundation or PubPeer.com, please continue to contact us through the site (contact@pubpeer.com) and not via any professional or personal channels you may discover.

B

The PubPeer Foundation	2016 - 2019	\$412,800
To provide general operating support.		

C PubPeer 2.0
PubPeer Blog - 44 Comments

#1 Peer 0 commented 6 days ago

We are proud to announce the new version of PubPeer, developed with the generous financial support of the Laura and John Arnold Foundation.

D

Anonymous on December 15, 2016 at 8:16 PM said:
Your comment is awaiting moderation.

Why has PubPeer not indicated that it received US\$ 412,800 from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation for 2016-2019?
<http://www.arnoldfoundation.org/grants/>

E Boris Barbour
January 17, 2017 at 22:45

This ridiculous court ruling must be swiftly overturned. Let the truth be free.

Boris Barbour
Director of Research
CNRS, Ecole Normale Supérieure
Paris, France

F ### Melanoplus Littoralis commented a few seconds ago [Awaiting Moderation]

I have noticed, since the launch of version 2.0, many comments being removed (presumably "moderated"). Can PubPeer indicate exactly who is Peer 0, and if Peer 0 is the single moderator. If not, who precisely serves as the moderator for all incoming PubPeer comments, or are there multiple moderators? What standards or policies exist for comment moderators and where can these policies be found on the PubPeer page? One could argue that the PubPeer moderators serve a function not unlike editors of an editor board, yet while specific editors may be held accountable for journal content, at PubPeer, there is simply an elusive "contact@pubpeer.com" and no specific individual can be held accountable for content that one day exists on a thread, but the next may be gone. Transparency and accountability are two core issues as PubPeer moves forward, even more so now that it has received sizable funding, and users and the public deserve to know the answers to these issues. Otherwise PubPeer will invoke its own crisis of trust in the post-publication peer review movement.

G Sorbus Subcuneata commented a few seconds ago [Awaiting Moderation]

"one would hope that a website that is supposed to promote transparency and open discussion would at a minimum be transparent about its moderation policies"

"What is certain is that non-transparent, apparently biased moderation is unacceptable"

In the spirit of this openness and transparency challenged by Lydia Maniatis, two questions:

1. Who precisely is/are the PubPeer moderator(s)?
2. What qualifications do the PubPeer moderator(s) have to moderate such a diversity of topics and fields of study?

H Sorbus Subcuneata commented a few seconds ago [Awaiting Moderation]

Who is the de facto author of this document?

Exploring publication ethics in the arts, humanities, and social sciences: A COPE study 2019
COPE Council with support from Routledge (part of the Taylor & Francis Group) and Shift Learning (2019) - 0 Comments
doi: 10.24018/cope.2019.4.1

Write Preview

Leave a comment

Attach files by dragging & dropping, selecting them, or pasting from the clipboard.

Comment must be at least 15 characters.

Styling with Markdown is supported

Fig. 1. Evidence of hidden financial conflict of interest by PubPeer (A), confirmation that US\$ 412,800 in funding was received from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation (B). Only on June 15, 2017, an estimated 7 months after receiving this funding, did PubPeer make a short acknowledgement, but failing to indicate any specific details such as how funding was being used and when funding had been received (C). A query related to this funding was deliberately suppressed (D). Boris Barbour is a passionate defender of freedom of speech, transparency and

* <http://blog.pubpeer.com/?p=190#comment-427> (comment not visible because not approved)

sharing information, as was displayed on January 17, 2017, in his defense of Leonid Schneider, a science watchdog, accused of libel in two German courts (E). A comment made on June 20, 2017, on PubPeer beta version 2.0 regarding the identity of the PubPeer moderator and moderation rules was not approved for publication (F), nor was a similar comment made anonymously on September 12, 2019, approved (G). A simple query regarding the precise identity of the authors of a COPE statement was also not approved. In essence, the lack of comment approval reflects the suppression of freedom of speech and displays communication opacity. All screenshots used from publicly visible sites under the fair-use agreement for PPPR (Teixeira da Silva, 2015b).

The issue of freedom of speech and first amendment rights in the US was clearly exemplified in a court case brought against PubPeer and its anonymous commentators by Fazlul Sarkar (Teixeira da Silva, 2018c). PubPeer's Barbour clearly valued open speech, having been given ample opportunity to openly express his discontent at PubMed Commons in response to criticisms of PubPeer by a plant physiologist, Prof. Michael Blatt*. Barbour appears to be an avid defender of freedom of speech, coming to the defense of another science watchdog, Leonid Schneider (Fig. 1E)[†], who describes himself on Twitter as a "certified Troll with slanderous website"[‡], and who had the freedom to accuse a high-ranking ethics journal of being "predatory" (Teixeira da Silva, 2019b), making this suppression of freedom of speech at PubPeer worrisome, and somewhat hypocritical. This apparent double standard employed by PubPeer and/or its management was confirmed on June 20, 2017, when I posed a question at PubPeer regarding the identity of the moderator (Peer O), a question that was not approved for publication (Fig. 1F). In response to public criticisms made by Lydia M. Maniatis regarding PubPeer's moderation and commenting policies[§], I added an anonymous comment on September 12, 2019, that requested that the identity of the PubPeer moderator(s), and also to explain their qualifications to be able to moderate such a wide range of topics that are critiqued on their blog. That comment was also never published (Fig. 1G). Furthermore, a short query requesting the precise identity of the authors of a COPE Council statement was not published (Fig. 1H)**. These suppressed comments cement the notion that freedom of speech is being suppressed to some extent by PubPeer and that this site and its moderator(s) are employing censorship of comments that may be perceived to be critical of PubPeer, or their possible allies.

Implications of PubPeer opacity, inadequate comment moderation, and suppression of freedom of speech

In June of 2018, a reporter in France's Le Monde characterized PubPeer's mode of moderation as imperfect^{††}. The apparent double-standard being practiced by PubPeer with respect to freedom of speech and fair and moderated commenting coupled with public shaming and humiliation (Teixeira da Silva, 2018d) should be of great concern to academics, especially those who are profiled on this website. Exposure of this topic reveals that many unanswered questions remain: How many comments are being approved, or not, by commentators? When, and under what circumstances, are comments deleted? Why are comments deleted if they are initially approved? When are comments manipulated? Who precisely moderates comments, anonymous and registered? What criteria are being applied during comment moderation? Is there a formal process to challenge comments, or to request their removal? Comment-related concerns, including the ease with which PubPeer is able to manipulate and erase them, equivalent to erasing public records, calls into question who precisely owns comments on that whistle-blowing website, i.e., if comments can be copyrighted (Teixeira da Silva, 2018e). Is there a board of moderators, similar to an academic journal's editorial board, to self-regulate PubPeer? Can the public hold PubPeer

* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/myncbi/boris.barbour.1/comments/>

† <https://forbetterscience.com/2017/01/17/open-letter-in-support-of-my-investigation-of-trachea-transplants-in-germany-by-rafael-cantera/comment-3529>

‡ <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid>

§ <https://pubpeer.com/publications/pubpeer2#139>; <https://pubpeer.com/publications/pubpeer2#140>

** <https://pubpeer.com/publications/BE3D071504F6F7F2D797B2009F5CB9>

†† <https://twitter.com/Gjpvnant/status/1004017602031767553>

accountable? PubPeer, like other science watchdogs (Teixeira da Silva, 2016c), is purportedly claiming to be working for the good of science to resolve some of its replication and trust problems through PPPR. Yet, as evidenced to some extent in this paper, important information regarding the financing of PubPeer had been temporarily hidden from the public, and queries regarding this failure to disclose detailed information were suppressed. Valid queries related to comment moderation were also suppressed. The scientific community needs to reflect on whether it can trust the critique of published academia's integrity in the hands of PubPeer, where it is currently not possible to hold the "moderator" fully responsible, where apparent contrasting standards are practiced, and where there is evidence of a lack of openness and transparency, and suppressed freedom of speech. PubPeer's Barbour espouses such principles in public, as evidenced by claims, from May 28-31, 2017, where he was a keynote speaker of the "Transparency and Accountability" section of the 5th World Conference on Research Integrity, noting that transparency lies at the heart of PubPeer*. The current focus of PPPR by the LJAF at PubPeer appears to be on cancer research†, coordinated with or organized by the Open Science Framework‡, and psychology.

Conflicts of interest

The author's work has been profiled by PubPeer and by its "partner" organization, also funded by the LJAF, Retraction Watch. The author has used PubPeer, both as a signed, registered commentator, and anonymously. The author has written several papers and commentaries related to PubPeer, Retraction Watch, Leonid Schneider, and COPE, in a bid to better understand the role of these watchdogs in science ethics and integrity. The author declares no other apparent conflicts of interest related to this topic.

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* <http://wcri2017.org/program/keynote-speakers>; <http://wcri2017.org/program/plenary-sessions>

† <https://www.pubpeer.com/search?q=cancer>

‡ <https://osf.io/e81xl/wiki/home/>

[Teixeira da Silva, 2017b](#) – *Teixeira da Silva, J.A.* (2017). The profoundly unethical nature of Retraction Watch's call for coercion. *American Journal of Information Management*, 2(3): 43-46. DOI: 10.11648/j.infomgmt.20170203.11

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The Impact of Teacher Educators' Professional Ethics Practices on Student-Teachers in Teacher Training Colleges in Tanzania: The Case of Mbeya Region

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Abstract

Professional conduct among school teachers in Tanzania has a very vital impact on teaching and learning. The purpose of the study was to find how professional code of ethics among teacher educators in teacher training colleges (TTCs) as among teacher training institutions (TTIs) is being practiced with effect to their student-teachers who are prepared to teach in schools as their outputs. The study used a mixed research approaches using the qualitative approach as the dominant approach with explanatory design. About 155 informants were used and data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussion. Findings revealed that professional misconduct among school teachers, to a large extent, involve fresh university graduates who have never professionally trained in TTCs than the TTCs graduates. Moreover, findings confirmed that TTCs teacher educators to a large extent maintain the Professional Code of Ethics and Conduct (PCEC) and positively affect their student-teachers. It is then recommended that, in order to help in maintaining PCEC in schools, all responsible employment authorities for professional teachers should introduce the conditions that all fresh university graduate teachers with no professional teaching experiences in lower levels must first undergo ethical professional internship before employment. Moreover, the government should strategically improve TTCs to make them professional training centres for professional teachers who wish to teach at lower levels of education.

Keywords: Conduct, Code of Ethics and Conduct, Misconduct, Tanzania, Teacher education.

Highlights

- Professional Code of Ethics and Conduct is important for teacher training in Tanzania.
- Teacher educators have a positive impact on future teachers' professional development.
- TTCs teacher educators considerably maintain Professional Code of Ethics and Conduct

Introduction

The teaching profession, like other professions, is said to consider the application of a code of ethics as key to the maintaining of acceptable standards of the teaching profession (Hinds, 2005). This is because a code of ethics guides and protects teacher educators, protect service users and safeguard the reputation of the profession (Banks, 2003). The distinctiveness of the code of ethics in the teaching profession is that it allows one to exercise the highest and acceptable moral standards of

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the society (Beck et al., 1997). This being the case, the teacher needs to act and behave as a role model before the students and other people in society (Strike, Ternasky, 1993; Wynne, 1995).

United Republic of Tanzania [URT] (2007) explains some aspects of behaviour which teachers in schools and in TTCs in the context of Tanzania should observe. These aspects include; use of proper language that is emphasized be it a medium of communication between him/her and the students. A teacher is not expected to use abusive language, harsh words or unnecessarily complicate the language. A teacher is also expected to dress up in a way that other people will acknowledge good behaviour with simple and neat clothing that covers most parts of the body thus avoiding unnecessarily tight clothes. In addition, a teacher is required to demonstrate cleanliness in all aspects of his/her life to inspire learners and other people around him/her. Moreover, a teacher needs to demonstrate a warm personal relationship between him/her and the learners and colleagues in line with acceptable manners following rules and regulations set of the profession. This means that a teacher needs to demonstrate a relationship that will not allow a chance for indulgence or unnecessary friendship, especially when relating to learners. Teachers have been forbidden against these offences: absenteeism, negligence, alcoholism, bad behaviours (rape, sodomy, adultery and keeping student as a wife/husband), examination scandals, criminal offences (treason, poaching, corruption, forgery, theft and to be detained) and insubordination (URT, 2007).

For decades, TTCs in Tanzania have been seen as important institutions for developing a profession that is a mother to all other professions as teacher educators are considered as a point of reference when one is talking about ethics and moral values, even in other professions (Anangisyee, 2006). Hence, PCEC for teacher educators remains as a law they are supposed to adhere to and transform them into their student-teachers so that they may also live accordingly in their professional practices. Nevertheless, contrary to the findings of some authors (Hinds, 2005; URT, 2007; Wynne, 1995), various studies have been done in Tanzania reporting on the breach of PCEC among teachers in primary and secondary schools who are the product of teacher educators in TTIs. For instance, Oziambo (2013) shows that absenteeism was prevalent among teachers in both urban and rural schools. Also, Mabagala (2016) reports on the financial mismanagement as common professional misconduct prevalence among public secondary school teachers. Similarly, Mfaume and Bilinga (2016) in their study found that unethical dressing among teachers was noticeable both in rural and urban schools while Kuleana (1999) reports that male teachers were accused of having sexual relationships with their female students. Basing on the results as suggested from these studies, there is a need to explore how professional code of ethics among teacher educators in TTCs and TTIs are inculcated in their student-teachers.

Method

This study adopted pragmatism philosophical worldview assumption. Being a philosophical worldview supporting mixed-methods studies, it concentrates on the use of pluralistic approaches to derive knowledge about the problem (Morgan, 2007; Tashakkori, Teddlie, 2010). According to Lopez-Fernandez and Molina-Azorin (2011), the use of mixed methods (quantitative or qualitative) may play an important role in research since the results obtained via the different methods can enrich and improve the understanding of the matters under study.

The qualitative approach was however mainly dominated the study. Qualitative was chosen as the leading research approach for this study mainly because of its concern of subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions, and behaviour (Avison, Myers, 2002; Kothari, 2004). This study considered explanatory research design as an appropriate design. The researcher interprets how the qualitative results help to explain the initial quantitative results (Creswell, Plano Clark, 2011). Almalki (2016) further explains that, in this design quantitative data being used as the basis on which to build and explain qualitative data. Moreover, Creswell (2014) insisted that it is considered explanatory because the initial quantitative data results are explained further with the qualitative data.

Teacher educators and student-teachers from TTCs in the Mbeya region were involved in the study to represent the whole population in other regions. These TTCs were; St. Aggrey TTC, Mbeya Moravian TTC, Teofilo Kisanji TTC, Tukuyu TTC, and Mpuguso TTC. The informants from these TTCs were student-teachers, normal teacher educators, college dean of students and the principals of TTCs. This population was purposely considered in this study because it represents TTCs in Tanzania. The study involved 24 student-teachers in each TTC coded as ST, five teacher educators

coded as TE, dean of students coded as DS and the Principal from each college coded as CP making a total of 155 of respondents. The study used both probability and non-probability sampling procedures/techniques in obtaining samples that were used in the study. This was due to the nature of the respondents that were recommended to be used in this study that some of them had an equal chance of representation while others had not that opportunity.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: The Presence of In-service Professional Trainings in Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs)

This part intends to look at the presence of in-service professional training and the level of attendance among teacher educators in TTCs. During the questionnaire administration, the responses regarding the presence of in-service professional training were as follows:

Table 1. In-service professional training for teacher educators in TTCs

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	26	86.7
No	4	13.3
Total	30	100.0

Table 1 shows that the majority of teacher educators agreed on the presence of in-service professional training in TTCs. Alongside this, the researcher was interested to know if these professional trainings were practically present by looking at the level of attendance among teacher educators. The level of attendance of these in-service professional training is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Attendance of in-service professional training among teacher educators in TTCs

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	19	63.3
No	11	36.7
Total	30	100.0

The presentation in Table 2 shows that the level of attendance of in-service professional training among teacher educators in TTCs was high. The results in table 1 on the presence of in-service professional training and the high level of attendance of these training as shown in Table 2 evidently show the implementation of TTCs' curricular. According to the Tanzania Institute of Education [TIE] (2007; 2013), there should be in-service professional training and attendance of these training for teacher educators in TTCs. The two curricula, certificate, and diploma, in teacher education programmes, insist on the presence and attendance of short courses, long courses, seminars, workshops, conferences, symposia, as well as conducting educational research for teacher educators. Both curricula insist on the presence and attending of these professional training for the sake of attaining the optimum and effective pedagogical and professional development and improvement of teacher educators. With reference to Jahangir et al. (2012), in-service professional training programs for the teachers of the postgraduate level tend to increase the qualities possessed by a good teacher which positively affects the transfer of knowledge and behaviour to their students.

Basing on the results as demonstrated on the high presence and attendance to various in-service professional training for teacher educators, I deduce that TTCs successfully up-to-date their teacher educators and hence deserve to produce their good fellow professionals. It is evident that these in-service professional training kept on professionally updating teacher educators in TTCs for

a long period and hence managed to produce good products. This is because there is no way out one can separate the quality professional practices and the regular in-service professional training in any profession (Walters, 2013).

Theme 2: The Extent of the Practice of Professional Code of Ethics and Conduct (PCEC) among Teacher Educators in TTCs

This subsection shows the examination of the level of the practice of PCEC among teacher educators in TTCs. The analysis of the shown levels of practice was thereafter defended with various reasons from informants which were presented and discussed thematically. Table 3 below has shown the analysis of the levels of practice PCEC as follows.

Table 3. Practice of professional code of ethics and conduct

Levels of the practice of PCEC	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High Level	21	70.0
Minimum Level	9	30.0
Low level	0	00.0
Total	30	100.0

The findings presented in Table 3 show the responses given by teacher educators. On their side, they show that there is a high level of practicing PCEC for teacher educators in TTCs. In the same thinking other informants who participated in the interview and focus group discussion highly recommended the presence of a high level of PCEC practice in TTCs. The justification behind the informants' high recommendation on the presence of high level of PCEC practice in TTCs was reasoned out and thematically discussed as follows:

Subtheme: Appearing in professional attire

The professional attire helps in recognizing the behaviour of such a profession. For example, for a long period of time the professional attire of teachers has been defining them as decent and role models not only to the student but to the society at large. Most informants voiced that teacher educators in TTCs highly practice their PCEC. One of the bases of their voice was that of maintaining professional attire and appearance. During the focus group discussion, one of informant conversed that:

“Our teachers follow the professional code of ethics and conduct, especially on the issue of appearance and dressing in general they endeavour. For instance, our college is nearby a university, as we usually see university teachers' appearance and dressing, with no doubt our teachers maintain their professional code of ethics and conduct especially on dressing and appearance in general than them. We sometimes see female university teachers enter the classroom to teach dressed on even jeans trousers contrary to teacher professional code of ethics and conduct; don't you see that they transfer misconduct to their student-teachers?” (ST).

The above informant's view gives the point of professionally appearing and dressing in a comparative way between TTCs teacher educators and university teachers. The informant's view reveals the presence of the contrast between university teachers and TTCs teacher educators in professionally appearing and dressing. Basing on the informant's attention, it shows the high ability to make an appraisal based on moral obligations relating issues in the teacher education profession.

Teacher education scholars had different views about professional appearance and dressing. For instance, Sampson (2016) comments that the appearance and attire of professional teachers should be in accordance with the standards that are appropriate to the duties with which they are associated. On his side, Dixon (2007) insists on the issue of professional attire and appearance for teachers regardless of the level of education as they influence their students. He contends that dress and appearance are forms of non-verbal communication that consist of an individual's outward assemblage of apparel on the body as well as all alterations and additions to the body.

Dress and appearance can provide information about the wearer's values, attitudes, interests, lifestyle, and social and personal relationships.

In the same outlook, Kenner et al. (2001) in their survey, they found that high school principals perceived teachers who were dressed professionally as awesomely professional, responsible, and confident. Consequently, they encouraged an endeavour for both teachers and students to learn about professional dressing. Hence, even if the teacher has put on the dress with no communication purpose, its interpretation as a function of individual choice gives it communicative relevance which determines the level of respect in the eyes of the viewers (Hickson, Stacks, 1993). Thus, Dixon's (2007) recommendation together with informants' reasons emphasise the need to put on professionally approved attires as educators and trainees in TTCs.

Subtheme: Good feedback from different educational stakeholders

Informants had different views as their justification for the practice of PCEC among teacher educators in TTCs which related to good feedback from different educational stakeholders. The base of this good feedback is on the appearance and performance of their student-teachers during the teaching practice (TP) and even on their former students who are already in service. The fact behind the said base of this good feedback is built on the known proverb that "*a son of the serpent is a serpent*" which means an individual's character inheriting. This is because the relationship between teacher educators and student-teachers in terms of appearance and performance with reference to this proverb is that of mirror image. One of the informants during the focus group discussion narrated saying:

"When we are recognized that we are good ethically, our teacher educators get acknowledgment that they have good ethics. For instance, during our BTP in school X, we were much appreciated especially on our good dressing and job performance because we used to be available at school all the working hours. Even after being assessed by our teacher educators, we continued going to school until the day of our departure. Our fellow student-teachers from universities used to leave the school before the end of working hours, even after they had been assessed by their teachers they did not continue coming to school. So, our conduct was gratified by the head of school and other associates, hence beyond doubt, they were of the opinion that even our teacher educators are ethically good" (ST).

In the same vein, another informant during the interview narrated saying these words:

"First of all, let me start by saying that we teacher educators from TTCs maintain our PCEC. If you want to know that we follow our PCEC, make follow up and see the extent of ethical appreciation in schools for our student-teachers. For instance, in two consecutive different educational stakeholders meetings, I attended on behalf of the principal as organized by the Regional Commissioner of Mbeya, school teachers who are products of us in TTCs, were much appreciated by heads of schools and their association leaders that, in their duty stations they demonstrate good PCEC than universities' fresh graduates. Those stakeholders openly expressed that to a large extent moral decay in schools is influenced by fresh graduates from universities who never passed and being ethically moulded in TTCs. This gives a good picture that we teacher educators from TTCs are good role models hence it is enough evidence that we maintain our PCEC at a high level" (DS).

With reference to the above narratives, it has been noted from the first narrative that TTCs student-teachers maintained good dressing and demonstrated a spirit of hard work with respect to working hours. The second narrative reveals the high ethical credibility of TTCs graduates and student-teachers in the eyes of educational stakeholders. Basing on the interpretation of the said proverb above, the issues arose in the two narratives above as the point of mirror image; confirm that the professional behaviours of student-teachers interpret the professional behaviours of their teacher educators. The underpinning points of view from the above narratives show that teacher educators' professional practices affect their student-teachers.

In the light to the narratives as provided by the informants above, a researcher through his teaching experiences in lower levels particularly in secondary schools, evidently, confirm to what have reported by the informants through providing the following incidence:

"As a guidance and counselling master in one secondary school, I witnessed the following case which through my position I was directly involved to solve it. There were student-teachers from both University and TTC who were there for TP. Two friend male student-teachers amongst

those from university based on their specializations one was assigned to teach chemistry and the other to teach biology subject both in form three. That one who was teaching biology subject he introduced to the students the topic of reproduction and he invited his friend as a guest speaker to talk and demonstrate what he called 'sexual organs and their functions'. In their demonstration through their laptop, they showed real naked males and females through video as a way of showing sexual organs; and they lastly showed real sexual intercourse video as a way of showing the function of such organs. This demonstration annoyed most students in the class and then they decided to report such incidence to the school headmaster. After hearing them, he directed such a case to me asking me to counsel those student-teachers regarding the PCEC. In their claims, school students said that they don't want again student-teachers from universities with a reason that, apart from such incidence, some of the university student-teachers even seduce them unlike to student-teachers from TTCs. They said that such behaviour is not immoral socially and religiously regarding that such school was a religious-based institution. Hence, they asked the headmaster to only accept the student-teachers from TTCs with the argument that, they maintain teaching professional ethics. When I met with these male university student-teachers, they agreed with what has been reported by the students with a reason that they wanted their students to clearly understand the lesson".

Indeed, such true incidence I witnessed, confirms what has been noted in the above informants' narratives. This being the case, I am of the opinion that in one way another the behaviour demonstrated by student-teachers from universities draws the negative perceptions towards their professional behavioural practices as expected moral role modelling school teachers in the eyes of educational stakeholders. This is because the role of a teacher is not to direct their students against any immoral influencing practices. According to Mergler (2008) as graduates from both TTCs and University Colleges of Educations are expected to demonstrate the ways in which they meet the standards before they are registered to teach as full professional teachers, it is essential that teacher education programmes require pre-service teachers to be aware of, understand and demonstrate their ability to uphold the standards.

In the same line Maxwell and Schwimmer (2016) surmise that, in teacher preparation, the professional ethics perspective entails that the focus of ethics education is to initiate future professionals into a community of practice defined by a shared conception of what it means to act ethically and responsibly in the provision of educational services. That is to say, professionals have a basic obligation to judge and act in reference to collective standards, rather than their own individual and subjective ideas about what is right, necessary and effective in a work situation. Thus, the teaching profession's fundamental ethical principles in initial teacher education as a means of promoting teacher professionalism are vehemently significant.

Subtheme: Good teaching experience in lower levels of education

Good teaching experience in lower levels of education was another reason spoken by most informants that it contributed to the high level of practicing PCEC for teacher educators in TTCs. The results as presented in table 4.8 in section 4.2 above justify that the majority of teacher educators in TTCs have good teaching experience in lower levels of education. This shows that TTCs implement their curricular whereby for one to qualify as a teacher educator in TTCs, he/she should have good teaching experience in lower levels (primary/secondary school) (TIE, 2007; 2013). The Good teaching experience in either primary or secondary school for teacher educators in TTCs helps them to teach their student-teachers with a clear picture of the culture and environment in which they are going to work. During the interview session, one of the informants said:

"Through my long teaching experience in different levels of education, a good professional teacher is the one who started teaching from lower levels". (DS).

From the above informant's point of view, it shows that good teaching experience in lower levels of education is a foundation of teacher education professional practices in higher levels of education. Considering the moral development premise, the higher stage of moral cognition is built on the lower stage of moral cognition. This means, having teaching professional experience in a lower level of education becomes a good foundation of moral reasoning ability at a higher level of education for teacher educators. Through learning from the above informant's experience in the

teacher education profession, I concur that good teaching experience in lower levels of education contributes to maintaining PCEC for those who produce teachers. This is because, in normal circumstances, the experience of the bottom builds the experience of the top. This means a teacher educator with teaching experience he/she is possibly familiar with much information relating to teacher education PCEC in different levels of education since teacher education PCEC alike. According to Ladd (2013), researchers have long documented that teachers improve dramatically during their first few years on the job. More experienced teachers are on average of being more effective in practicing their professionalism than teachers with fewer years of classroom experience.

In the same thinking, Akiri (2013) contents that studies on the effect of teacher experience on student learning have found a positive relationship between teachers' effectiveness and their years of experience. The evidence currently available suggests that inexperienced teachers are less effective than more senior teachers in various professional aspects. Moreover, the research findings of Hussain et al. (2013) suggest that "a teacher with a greater year of experience due to his/her maximum time spent with the students can better understand the needs" (p.2). Thus, professional teachers do better with a reflection of their PCEC as they gain more and more experience.

Subtheme: Teaching own practices

Teaching own practices means an individual teaches what he/she practices. This habit is fundamental in the teacher education profession. As part of their PCEC, teacher educators are required to transfer their professional beliefs to their student-teachers who professionally copy from them as their role models. Informants told me that in TTCs there was such habit among teacher educators. One of them during the interview expressed:

"In TTCs there are good ethics for teacher educators. This is because what we do is what we teach. Let me give you an example, we insist that every one of our students should have a scheme of work and lesson plans. This is one of the conditions for teachers that they are not required to enter in class without these two things. We teach based on them and get inspected" (DS).

Referring to the above outlook from the informant, I notice that professionally, teaching is all about transmitting knowledge by actions. The informants' descriptions above were supported by Smith (2001) who insists that good teacher educators are reflective in their own work, working at a meta-cognitive level in their own teaching by explaining their actions in words in relation to why and how they teach as they do to their student-teachers. Informants' views about TTCs graduates and student-teachers professional practices evidently justified the presence of a high level of practicing PCEC among teacher educators in TTCs while comparing with their fellows in Universities. The comparative reasons and evidence provided by informants reflected the voices of educational stakeholders on the ethical credibility of TTCs and universities' teacher products.

Theme 3: Influence of Teacher Educators' Ethical Behaviours on Student-teachers in TTCs

From this theme, various circumstances have been outlined by the informants to show that teacher educators' have a positive effect on their student-teachers professional development. This positive effect was expressed in the following subthemes.

Subtheme: Teaching preparation

Good preparation of teaching for professional teachers at any level of education is inspiring. Good preparation is more commendable for those who prepare professional teachers because it helps them to keep in mind that if their teacher educators do so to them, it is professionally obligatory. It is for this reason that, for teacher educators to hold this habit can positively be transferred to their student-teachers abreast. One informant during the interview session had this to comment:

"When we teach our student-teachers about preparing their scheme of work and lesson plans as important tools for a professional teacher, we use our scheme work and lesson plans as teaching tools. So, each one of us teaches based on his or her scheme of work and lesson plan. Consequently, I believe we highly affect them positively because whatever we do in the teaching and learning process is what we teach them to do" (DS).

The main point of insistence in the quotation above is about good preparation of the lesson planned to be taught. Good preparation of the planned lesson determines good end results of the

lesson taught to students and vice versa. This means that good preparation is for good results/effects and that contrary to that, the results/effects become awful. With reference to the above informants' view, pedagogical or methodological knowledge-knowing how to teach is of primary importance to be qualified as a professional teacher at any level. In this view, in-depth knowledge of a subject is less important than in-depth teaching skills. At its extreme, this view holds that a good teacher can teach anything in his area of specialization (Ingersoll et al., 2014). This being the case, I concur that a teacher educator who appears before his/her student-teacher in good preparation affects his/her student-teacher in the same way and is admirable in the teacher education profession. This is because teaching preparation of a lesson to teacher educators and other professional teachers at any level implies professional enthusiasm, competence, and compliance.

Subtheme: Good occasional attendance

Attending at the right place, at the right time, for the right task in the teacher education profession is imperative; and hence, it is estimable for student-teachers to adopt this habit. One informant during the focus group discussion expressed:

"We are affected in good ways by our teachers especially on the issue of attendance, being in time. For instance, while we are in college we endeavour to work up early morning and prepare ourselves to arrive early at the assembly area and in classrooms. In addition to that, even during BTP, we endeavour to be present at vocation early and leave based on the working schedule hours. I believe that doing all these actions is part of the good effects we receive from our teacher educators" (ST).

Since good occasional attendance corresponds to good time management, teacher educators have to inspire this sense among their student-teachers. Holding the spirit of good time management for student-teachers will allow them to see their teacher educators as their moral role models (Ntawigaya, 2016).

Subtheme: Good appearance and professional attire

Good dressing and appearing in an acceptable manner professionally for teacher educators are one of the areas that have great effects on student-teachers. Informants especially student-teachers voiced out that they were affected greatly by the dressing of their educators. One of them during the focus group discussion provided a narration saying:

"Truly, the way our teacher educators maintain teacher education PCEC highly helps us to continue appearing as expected professional teachers. During BTP, we continue to maintain our good professional behaviour of putting on professional dresses even when we put on no uniforms as we are being taught and learn from our teachers. Indeed, we are positively affected by our teacher educators' ethical behaviours than our fellow student-teachers from universities" (ST).

In concurring with this theme, Rosenfeld and Plax (2006) reported that "clothing, an important aspect of nonverbal behavior, serves a wide variety of communicative functions" (p. 24). The 'dressing-argument' was also discussed by Saiki (2006) in her research. According to her findings, it shows that teacher educators who dress in a professional manner are admirable and believable to their student-teachers in the way that copying and pasting of their dressing manner are imaginable. Indeed, the above narration convinces that there is a great effect of teacher educators' dressing to their student-teachers in TTCs.

Subtheme: Life skills

Teacher educators in TTCs endeavour to provide life skills education to student-teachers. In the study area, it was found that most TTCs have practical exercises of different activities that promote life skills for student-teachers. During the focus group discussion, one of the informants expressed thus in regard to the issue of life skills:

"I was born in a city and had all my studies there. I even did not know how to hold a hoe and am not alone; we are many here at the college. But when I came here to college, our teacher educators have been teaching us different types of life skills. Today, I know how to prepare a garden for different types of fruits and vegetables. Alongside this, we are also taught about environmental cleanliness. Indeed, we are very much thankful to our teacher educators who teach us life skills apart from classroom subjects" (ST).

Evidently, TTCs with enough land provided different activities like livestock rearing, roots, and shoots, field classes (kitchen gardening) for different types of agricultural products like fruits, vegetables, etc. Also, there were also life skills relating to household cleaning, stoic activities

(physical education), etc. In all these life skills relating activities, teacher educators found to be front liners.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no financial conflicts of interest

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