



RESEARCH ETHICS: INQUIRY TO CURRENT EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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Abstract

The term 'Research Ethics' indicates the kind of guidelines, procedures, code of conduct that is followed by researchers while conducting academic research in educational institutions. The present article constitutes a critical review of various articles pertaining to ethics in academic research. An extensive literature search was conducted for identifying the articles using J-STOR and Pro-Quest databases. This paper identifies and presented the general ethical concerns faced by a researcher in current educational research. The results of this literature review revealed that beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, integrity are the some fundamental ethics that a researcher has to pay attention to. Partisanship pertaining to research methodologies and practices, values, belief systems will influence the ethical behavior of the researchers. In order to control these ethical violations, researchers need to take utmost care in designing their research methodologies that involve action research, ethnographic studies, market surveys and covert research.

Keywords: *Research Ethics, ethnographic studies, action and covert research, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, integrity.*

Introduction

The word Ethics itself leaves a lot of people puzzled and startled because it is highly subjective in nature. It constantly varies from individual, community and social values. It traces its roots which are dated back to the Ancient Greek philosophy which deals with the moral life of a person. Ethics per se point out at a setup of well described and established principles that regulates a person's behavior or helps in the conduct of an activity. Ethics is the offspring or an offshoot of philosophy which concentrates on the subject of making decision dealing with its authenticity. Ethics in research is a set of commandments which list out the dos and don'ts of carrying out a research.

In the 21st century Ethics has become a pre-requisite for conducting effective, qualitative and meaningful research. With the advent of science and technology it has become very easy for a researcher to get carried away by the information to which he is exposed through the medium of internet and other forms, but the same blessing can turn into a curse when the latest software tracks down the originality of the research article. So, it's a blessing in disguise for the knowledge forum which gets updated with information from time to time. The ethical behavior of individual researchers' is continuously under unprecedented scrutiny (Best & Kahn, 2006; Field & Behrman, 2004; Trimble & Fisher, 2006). In the present scenario, any concerns related to ethical practices will negatively influence approaches on science, and the mishandlings by a few are often the ones that receive widespread publicity (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2003).

It is a well-established fact that the research in educational setup should strictly follow ethical standards. The conclusions drawn from the research has to undergo the scrutiny of these principles which will in turn certify the outcome as genuine. Apparently the important question which arises is that, what are these principles exactly, from where did they evolve from, who would be the correct person to defend them, and how can they be watched?

The regulatory body APA which lays down the general principles for ethical research has Integrity, Fidelity and Responsibility, Beneficence and Non maleficence, Justice, Dignity and Respect for People's Rights as its important parameter. These general principles should be given utmost care so that there is no breach in the ethical standard in the research carried out by the researcher. A researcher has to look at his research as a delivery of his new baby which exemplifies innovativeness and creativity, which makes him proud of being the intellectual owner of it.

There can be umpteen reasons why a researcher should bind to the ethics in research. Firstly, principles denote and explain the purpose of research, such as facts and minimizing the lacunas. For instance, stopping false, wrong usage of collected data or fabricating avoid error and promote the truth. Secondly, since research involves coordination and cooperation equating various people from different disciplines and educational bodies, principles in ethics in research opens a new window which nurtures the quality needed for collaborative work which includes fairness, mutual respect, trust and accountability. No



researcher in this world would want his work to be stolen from somebody or won't entertain his research ideas getting leaked. Finally, Researchers are held ethically responsible to the public.

A researcher should

1. Promote aims of the research such as knowledge and avoid errors in the existing knowledge.
2. Promote values which are essential to collaborative research.
3. He must be held accountable to the public.
4. Respect the moral and social values of the society at large.
5. Academic Honesty, objectivity (by disclosing personal or financial interest that might affect or influence the research).
6. Maintain Integrity, promises and the agreements with individuals or organizations must be respected.
7. Be open to Sharing data, results, ideas, tools, techniques, resources, with general public or people with common interest.
8. Be prepared for criticism and give scope for novel ideas.
9. Honor the idea of intellectual property.
10. Maintain confidentiality throughout the research.
11. Be open to publication and sharing the findings.
12. Be open to responsible Mentoring.
13. Never compromise on the respect of the colleagues.
14. At no point of time indulge in non-discrimination.
15. Subject competence should never be forgotten.
16. Legality of certain subjects should be checked.
17. Be vigilant about animal care.

Look closely at human subject's protection.

Review of Literature

Debora Diniz (2008) in his documentary "Research Ethics In Social Sciences: The Severina's Story" discussed, about biomedical research ethics which can also be a part of social science research which certain relation to the concept of ethnographic research, the so called participant observation and open ended interviews. The author concluded by saying that methodological and epistemological particularities must be scrutinized by the review boards for subject's relating to human research.

Deborah Harcourt & Jonathon Sargeant (2001) in their work "The Challenges of Conducting Ethical Research with Children" has focused on research on children. The author in this paper has tried to conceptualize that a researcher while working on human participants be it a child or young people must be diligent and include practices which develops a relationship through different aspects of research.

Stephen L. Payne (2000) made a critical analysis of the social sciences and conventional research practices in business in an article titled "Challenges for Research Ethics and Moral Knowledge Construction in the Applied Social Sciences", where he talks about any alternative social paradigms and any assumptions underlying in social inquiry. He refers to these paradigms as debates on different potentials of communications as well as the reflexivity in social science research. The author has concluded that moral knowledge must be the pathway for enhanced interpersonal and intrapersonal communication skills in research conducted in social sciences.

V. Brand (2009) in his study "Empirical Business Ethics Research and Paradigm Analysis", examined the philosophy behind research in any business ethics. According to him, empirical business ethical research that are published in any academic journals have an occasional reference to relevant issues and suggested that there must lie a synthesis between the models of paradigms and formulated a comparison between the assumptions of various methodological, ontological and epistemological ways that are there in the field of empirical business ethics research and researches related to it.

David Calvey (2008) in a paper titled "The Art and Politics of Covert Research: Doing 'Situated Ethics' in the Field" discussed and explained the covert research and its relationship between professional ethics and doctrine of informed consent as a last resort to research methodology. The much debated risk and danger in the field work has been highlighted in the case for covert research. Thus, coming to the conclusion the author, has primarily enunciated on situated ethics being a part of covert research in general.



Beverley J. Antle & Cheryl Regehr (2003) in their article “Beyond Individual Rights and Freedoms: Meta-ethics in Social Work Research” argued that social workers who are often called to demonstrate the efficiency of their research and to contribute their works for emancipation of knowledge building in the social sciences are not given the recognition they deserve. The authors hold that although the social researchers have a long practice ethics tradition, they are not recognized for their unique dimensions in research ethics. Research ethics in social sciences consider how to maintain a balance between non-malefactions which means that the obligation should do no harm and beneficence which is an obligation to bring some good to the society. The authors laid greater emphasis on the social norms and justice in research and that these aspects do not meddle with the individual rights and freedom

Anthony D. Miyazaki & Kimberly A. Taylor (2008) had carried out a research on the business ethics research. To resolve the need of researcher’s biases in particular empirical substantiation in the field, the literature has been reviewed on researcher interaction biases which influence the results of the research in the insurance fraud and discuss the implications for the business ethics research

Kenneth & Michele (1999) reported the findings of traditional and contemporary approaches on the research ethics based on pre and post interpretation approach. The distinction is based on the heuristic one.

Paul Greenbank (2003) in his study entitled “The Role of Values in Educational Research: the case for reflexivity” discussed how the values had an influence on the choice of the research method. The ontological and epistemological position which has been adopted by the researcher is mainly influenced by the competency and personal values. The acceptance of the value-neutral approach and the partisan nature of research have been advocated with concern of the social values in educational research.

Wilfred Carr (2000) in his study on “Partisanship in Educational Research” reviewed James Tooley’s claim to have uncovered ‘partisanship’ in the ‘focus content and argument of educational research’. Wilfred Carr suggested that Tooley’s claim is simply one more manifestation of the failure of many educational researchers to take account of the extensive theoretical and methodological developments that have occurred over the last four decades in the political and social sciences.

Amanda L. Nolen & Jim Vander Putten (2007) depicted on several professional associations' principles for research practice, in their study on “Action Research in Education: Addressing Gaps in Ethical Principles and Practices”. They identified a series of potential ethical issues which are intrinsic in action research in K-12 schools and the difficulties which encounters the action researchers with the policies and the procedures of particular institutional review boards. The recommendation for the future practices were addressed to the three groups: institutional review boards, K-12 school professionals and teacher educators, and national professional and representative organizations.

In an article entitled “The Politics and Ethics of Educational Research in England: Contemporary issues” carried out by Helen Simons (1995) suggest that the government sponsored educational research is increasingly subject to contractual control of the research design, distribution, publication and even the research process itself and there are arguments that current policy which poses a serious threat on the quality of educational research and the limitations on the contribution which can create a generation of public knowledge and the utilization of research in the educational policy making and debate in the public.

Elizabeth Adams & St. Pierre (2006) in the article entitled “Scientifically Based Research in Education: Epistemology and Ethics” discussed on how this concept has produced some certain scientism which has been deployed to attempt the control in the field of educational research. Further the article figures out that scientifically based research treats methodology as if it can be differentiated from the epistemology and thus forgets that different bodies of knowledge and thought make different sciences possible.

Conclusion

After doing this thorough review on research ethics, it is understood that research ethics is being manipulated in many ways; the most vital of them are by stealing data or by inappropriate citation. It is also understood that some researchers have carried out their experiment on the animals without the permission of the government which has given rise to the new set of problems faced by the researchers. The Three contemporary approaches to current educational research are Action Research, Ethnographic Studies and Covert Research in their research. These approaches should be dealt carefully if he/she expects accolade from the research community.



Norms for conducting the research should be established by the researcher beforehand to avoid unfair and unaffected research. The following are the various possible ways in which a researcher can avoid violating ethical code in research. American Psychological Association (APA) Ethical Principles check list for researchers concerning research and publication:

- Institutional Approval
- Informed Consent to Research
- Informed Consent for Recording Voices and Images in Research
- Client/Patient, Student, and Subordinate(When conduct research on these people take steps to protect the prospective participants from adverse consequences of declining)
- Research Participants
- Dispensing With Informed Consent for Research
- Offering Inducements for Research Participation
- Deception in Research
- Debriefing
- Humane Care and Use of Animals in Research
- Reporting Research Results
- Plagiarism
- Publication Credit
- Duplicate Publication of Data
- Sharing Research Data for Verification
- Reviewers should protect the confidentiality of and property rights

Like APA there are additional sources for ethics code such as National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors), Chemist's Code of Conduct (American Chemical Society), Code of Ethics (American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science), Statements on Ethics and Professional Responsibility (American Anthropological Association), UNESCO Code of Ethics for Social Science Research . There are some Indian Sources for Ethics Code such as Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), National Bioethics Committee, Drug Controller General of India (DCGI), Ethics Review Committees of Asia Pacific (FERCAP), and Forum for Ethics Committee Review in India (FERCI).

All these agencies can only insist on the guidelines but adhering to it or not is the sole responsibility of the researcher. Nevertheless, a researcher should strive hard to adhere to all the guidelines given and should be ready at any stage to encounter ethical barriers.

An important factor which can bring out the good and the bad in a researcher is the cut throat competition which prevails in the field, but some great researchers are also caught in this web of violating ethical standards. Even C.N.R Rao, the noted chemist and the Bharat Ratna awardee was caught in this controversy when one of his research articles had used the idea of another person without citing the author (Jayaram, 2012). No researcher voluntarily wants to copy or violate the ethical standards but at times even without the knowledge of the researcher he commits this mistake which is professionally unforgivable. Overnight production of research articles thus can be dangerous and would lead to so many complications. A researcher should first of all have flair for research, only then he will be enjoying the work and would understand the inner urge to create something transforming. As a researcher one has to be ready to put in extra time to come out with the original research rather than feeling happy in producing a shabby work.

It is the responsibility of the researcher to also become a whistleblower so that he can help the community discover misconduct in research and send a strong message to their research fraternity that violation of ethics is not commendable at any stage. As a researcher one should be constantly exposed to other developments in the field so that he can have a check on other happenings which are ethically violated.

If a researcher is sensible enough and follows the above mentioned guidelines on research ethics he would strike a balance between the two aspects; research and its ethical values.



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