ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF STUDENTS' RESEARCH: AN OVERVIEW.

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Abstract: An important consideration in conducting a helpful and meaningful research is a thorough reflection on ethical issues. There are certain settled academic norms regarding the ethics of research which students are expected to adhere to in writing their dissertations as budding researchers. This opinion paper offers an overview of the ethical guidelines for both qualitative and quantitative research. It suggests relevant considerations in respect to basic ethical guidelines. Further, it highlights the challenges and consequences of violation of research ethics, as well as the importance of ethical practices. Research ethical conundrums are complex and subjective in nature; researchers must put integrity, transparency, standard procedure and proper acknowledgement of other researchers' work into consideration. The principles stated in this article are not by any means exhaustive to ensure ethical research outcome, but rather, it is to contribute to an understanding of the ethical responsibility required from the student research processes. Moreover, this provides a framework within which the conscientious research student should be guided against any departure from the norms based on sheer ignorance. Finally, the study recommends creating adequate awareness of the responsibility of both the students and faculty members, especially among the students. This could be done through regular training and re-training in an on-going process until the culture of sound research ethics is imbibed.
Keywords: Student research, Research Ethics, Ethical guidelines, Integrity

INTRODUCTION

The Greek word ethos which means 'character' is the root word of the term ethics. The purpose of ethics in research is to regulate the behavior of researchers and serve as a tool for the approval of research works. Ethics in research relates to the set of complex values and standard to regulate scientific research activity (Soazig 2006). It follows that student and researchers should be acquainted with ethical and moral behavior in research as part of the requisite criteria for the award of institutional degrees and consideration or acceptance of research output. Consideration of ethics should be critical part of the substructure of the students' research process, beginning from the conceptualization of problem statement to the interpretation and reporting of the project or dissertation findings. To avoid ethical research uncertainty, students should be aware of their ethical obligations (Smith, 2003).

Ethical standards are important for a number of reasons; it supports or reinforces the objectives and outcome of research; it creates the platform for accountability and fairness in the conduct and reporting of the outcome of research. It is important to note that in literature, a body of knowledge already exists on various research areas, therefore research ethics would guide against unethical practices like plagiarism and usage of falsified data. Furthermore, ethical standard could provide strong bases from which future research can authentically be based and survey could be conducted without any fear from respondents that confidentiality will be compromised by researchers. Research outcomes are expected to base on facts rather than falsified data. This entrusted trust should not be betrayed by researchers because ethical lapses in research would be misleading. There could be considerable reasonable rational for disagreement

about general research ethics, however, the baseline information is important in shaping the students' research to form an appropriate standard (Hammersley and Traianou, 2007).

European Union code of research ethics for Socio-economic research programme funded 'RESPECT' project by Dench, Iphofen and Huws (2004) focuses on professional and Ethical codes for technology-related socio-economic research, among other things, helped in developing a voluntary code of standards and benchmark practices for the conduct of socio-economic research. This provides broader ethical and professional debates within the socio-economic research community. The study highlights a number of specific guidelines and codes relating to data protection, research ethics, intellectual prosperity rights and professional related issues.

In addition, National Research Ethics Service (NRES) document for instance, provides basic guidance for students, their supervisors and research ethical committees on applications for ethical review, and describes how students' research should be undertaken safely under the various rules which gives due consideration for participants. The objective is to ensure that basic research ethics are not violated. The synthesis of research and ethics literatures and experiences in examining the tensions between the purposes of research and the individual rights of participants indicate that ethical framework is important in establishing a standard principle in qualitative research in order to resolve the issues on research goals and ensuring the rights of the research participants (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 2000).Moreover, Jones (2000) examined ethical considerations in quantitative research in education. According to the author, the clarity and rigor of set standard procedures is the strength of quantitative approaches to research in education. There should be a clear definition of the main and control variables and the possibility of making comparison across different empirical studies. In contract, one of the identified drawbacks is the fact that it may not give a real meaning to the complexity of teaching and learning in education.

There is the possibility of information misuse whether the information is systematically collected or otherwise. In general, ethical issues in quantitative research in education could seem to be characterized by some level of oversight or less concern for explicit consideration for ethical issues as we may have in some other fields. With an established procedures and set techniques to manipulate large sample of data, ethical issues may not be given serious consideration.

Ethical issues in quantitative research by Soazig (2012) posited that in large-scale surveys which researcher may later use for analysis, the researchers do not have contact with the participants who were involved in such survey, as such, may not be largely aware of ethical issues that are part of the fieldwork. The interest here will be more of disseminating the outcome of their findings for actions and further discourse without any further consideration for ethical issues. Ringheim (1995) observed that agencies that fund research are becoming more concerned about ethical considerations in such research, specifically, discussed the central ethical issues which are germane in the design and conduct of social science research with a special caution for adolescents' sexual behavior research. The paper emphasizes the need for ensuring an informed consent research procedure, and proper functioning of an ethical review committee.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to identify voluntary code for students' dissertations in relation to acceptable ethical consideration and contributes to broader ethical and professional debates by providing succinct information on good or moral practice in student's research. No doubt, this will to a large extent, reduce the issues of plagiarism, presentation of words, data, or ideas of others as if it were one's own ideas without attribution of the ideas or words to the original author(s) in a form that is appropriate. It is a kind of theft of intellectual property and a form of research misconduct. In addition, other questionable writing practices among students and researchers

which include: misuse of privileged information; misuse of data; duplication of publications; fabrication and falsification of research data and results are some of the serious forms of misconduct identified in the literature which should be reduced to the barest minimum. It is therefore, the primary responsibility of a student or researcher to avoid either a false statement or any form of omission that distorts the outcome of a research.

Basic Guidelines for Student Ethical Research

Ethics are norms for conduct that clearly shows the differences between what is acceptable and what is not. It is a code of conduct similar to any religious creed or professional code of conduct like the Hippocratic Oath[1] in medicine. Research ethics are morals required in academic professional research. Just like other ethical norms that are learn at home, places of religious gathering or schools and social settings. Therefore, research ethics are also to be taught or learnt in higher institutions (David, 2011). A number of colleges and research institutions have collated ethics that must be adhered to as a procedure for carrying out research (Ethical Guidelines 2003; Guidelines for Responsible Conduct of Research, 2011).

In no particular order, the followings are selected and summary of some ethical guides culled[2] from existing literatures for students' research:

1. Protection of privacy: personal information collected *must* be kept undisclosed. There should not be any reason why personal information should be use other than what they are meant to achieve. Disclosure to another confident is totally unethical. Research data must be kept confidential.
2. Integrity and honesty: As much as it is practicable, one of the hallmarks of research is integrity in executing the research and honesty in communicating the process and the outcome of

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[1]First of all, do no harm
[2]Ethical Guidelines 2003; Guidelines for Responsible Conduct of Research, 2011

such research without undue influence from other personal gains or considerations. Any form of data falsification or misrepresentations which will misinform the public or other researchers either in the field or in other disciplines who may be interested in the outcome of your research efforts should be avoided. Careful should be taken to avoid unnecessary errors.

3. Where there are doubts on ethical issues, ask questions. This could be directly from the supervisor(s), ethical committee (where there is one), or even from the internet as related to the institutions or geographical location.

4. Objectivity: Biases and outcome already preconceived should be avoided. When all procedural processes are meticulously and methodologically followed, data analysis, interpretation and reporting should be done even when they are contrary to the expected or a priori expectation. It is often seen that recommendation(s) of students are more often than not, not stepping or coming from the outcome of their research, but from someone else research. Plausible reasons could be adduced for the contrary result outcome when necessary.

5. Thorough review of the literature: This is necessary with appropriateness in acknowledging the work of other researchers without undermining their efforts. Correct citation is also of essence.

6. Plagiarism is a criminal act: It should be learn. It is more than what many people think it is. Respect should be given to peoples work and intellectual property rights.

7. Criticism: which could be constructive or unconstructive is part of the research learning curve? It should be expect, be open to it and use it to advance competence.

8. Purposeful: Researches are to be used to expand and advance discovery and scholarship, rather than getting just a degree. Learning nothing or making no addition to knowledge through duplicating someone else dissertation from another campus or previously submitted projects is intellectually unethical.

9. Falsehood: Information should not be elicited from persons under a false pretense. There should be voluntary and informed consent.

10. 'Double-dipping' ought to be avoided: This is an act of submitting the same paper or a large reflection or substantial part of a paper submitted for a particular course to satisfy another course requirement either by the research student or by another student. This is similar to publishing a paper in different journals with different titles or what is referred to as redundant publication or self-plagiarism.

11. Guiding against carelessness in citing sources of data, information or citing of authors intentional or unintentionally in a wrong manner for ease of accessing the document for further academic exploration of information is important.

12. Try to always access the primary sources of the literature being referred to in the work. It is poor academic standard to frequently rely on secondary information or summarized work.

13. Admittance: Check against deliberately acknowledging the work of others in little ways than what have been used from their study. If ideas have been borrowed extensively from other persons work, then it is important to also admit it.

14. Verbatim statements: These are not to be left without being enclosed in quotation marks to show that they are the exact words or ideas of others.

15. Student research should not be undertaken by professional or an academic ghost authorship. It is unethical.

16. Internet search: As easy as it is to access information on the internet, students should be aware of the evolving ethical issues on the internet.

17. Research quality: This should not be sacrifice for self-interest or partiality.

18. Reduced risk: Risk involvement needs to be reduced to the barest minimized with the student researcher and participants.

19. Primary data collection: This could be prone to ethical issues when compared with secondary data collection. Based on this foregoing fact, extra effort should be taken to keep with ethical issues with primary data collections in relation to confidentiality, consent, and anonymity as well as privacy of respondents should be respected among others.

20. Research materials are to be disposed accordingly and appropriately without infringing on the privacy of individuals or filled questionnaire finding it ways back to any particular respondents through a third party.

21. Personal data collected for a particular research should not be transferred to a third party or use for commercial purposes other than the original goal.

General Unethical Research Activities

There are several other activities that may not be directly refers to as "misconduct" in the philosophical meaning of ethical research, which however, may still be seen as unethical by many researchers. These are deviations from standard rules or acceptable norms in research practices, few of such research unethical practices are listed as follows:

a) Data mining or filling of questionnaires privately and secretly as if it were actually administered.

b) Cutting off outliers from data and data manipulation without any reference to such development in the body of the paper.

c) Informing others or the author of a paper of confidential information from a paper as a peer reviewer.

d) Failing to credit or appropriately acknowledge the work or materials and ideas of others use in your work.

e) Exploitation of graduate students in paper writing without acknowledging their efforts and contribution as appropriate.

f) Stealing or outright duplication of someone else's research work and 'cleverly' not even citing it in the reference section in order to present the work as original.

g) Submitting the same paper or similar paper with only tinkling with the title to different publishers in an effort to increase the number of publications.

h) Criticizing a manuscript or draft by the student without any effort to read the content or determine the strength or weakness of its contents.

i) Contracting a whole dissertation out for someone to do it for a reward for monetary gain.

j) When a colleague name(s) is included in a paper as first, second or whatever author without any contribution, because of a reward for direct or indirect benefit(s) and sometimes getting paid for writing a paper without any minimum contribution from the original author(s).

(Source: Ethical Guidelines 2003; Guidelines for Responsible Conduct of Research, 2011)

A brief consideration is now given to look at just a case or scenario in which ethical practices could be violated.

Scenario

A research student was to administer 1,500 questionnaires in a local community in which she is not too familiar with the terrain. She was on the field with another colleague of hers who had agreed to assist her, when a supervisor gave her an urgent call. Dr. Pat informed her of a special released circular and new directive requesting that all projects should be turned in by a week's time. At that point in time, she had just administered 500 questionnaires. She will need at least 7 days to complete the field work if she will not be incurring additional cost because of the geographical terrain, average time to complete a questionnaire with the majority of the illiterate members of the community and the language barrier. Thus, she decided to horridly leave the field to enter the administered questionnaires and extrapolate or increase the data three times.

This action could violate the research ethical policies in relation to fabrication or falsification of data, especially when no particular reference was made to the actual sample size. The data may not be the true representation of the total population. However, when actions are taken by researchers without the intention to misinformed, bias, or to be dishonest, it should not be seen as misconducts when the procedures are stated and limitation to the student expressed.

Implications of Unethical Practices in Students' Research

The deviation from the normal procedural processes in students' research could have some implications on different fronts. First, aside the fact that the community or the public could be misinformed, future research could be built on false outcome or references. The student in question could as well have either ignorantly or tactically learned how to be dishonest in carrying out research. As such, an aspect of the student training is to imbibe professional ethics and principles of moral.

A common cause of ethical challenge is conflict of interest between the researcher and the researched (Blaxter *et al.* 2001). The rule must be set, settled and stick to in research. Research ethics framework need include mechanisms to ensure compliance, a system of governance for research ethics which is mandatory for social scientists seeking funding (Stanley and Wise, 2010). The effects of violating ethical procedures may not be apparent or immediately; but it could have a dear impact on the society in the long run. Unethical practices in student research has long run and multiplier effects on student carrying such behavior into adulthood, which may be difficult to unlearn without some cost or penalty in the future. The multiplier or increasing rate effects could be devastating to research and development of private institutions and government establishments. It is better curb than controlled. Ringheim (1995) observed that even donors funding research are increasingly focusing on being assured that ethical considerations are addressed.

Moreover, where such research is funded, the outcome of such research is not only unreliable or unusable, the efforts and fund committed to such research could have been defeated and uneconomical. Policy recommendations and implementation will largely be based on guess work or the game of chance rather than on substance and facts.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

To avoid the negative resultant implication(s) and cost to the society and the economy, it is imperative that students researchers, supervisors and regulators who are saddled with research outcome responsibilities ensures that ethical guidelines are followed. They should follow the rules so that integrity in research are not sacrificed or traded off. In practice, ethics in research should be part of the learning and character that student must imbibe in higher institutions to make the output of research meaningful and our ivory tower an authentic citadels of intellectuals where students pursue scholarship, morally law abiding and sound in character. It is also recommended that awareness of the responsibility of both the students and faculty members or group should be created, especially among the students. This could be done through regular training and re-training in an on-going process until the culture of sound ethics in research is imbibed.

In conclusion, research ethical conundrums are complex and subjective in nature. This study examined an overview of ethical concerns in student research, and ethical principles that can guide students' research and researchers. The principles state in this paper are not by any means exhaustive and cannot ensure ethical research outcome, but rather, it is to contribute to an understanding of the ethical responsibility required from the students' research processes.

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