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Legal and Ethical Considerations in Conducting Educational Research: A Qualitative Perspective of PhD Scholars

/Dr. Gulnaz Akbar

Lecturer Education

Government College Women University Sialkot

gulnaz.akbar@gcwus.edu.pk

Dr. Tahira Mumtaz

Lecturer, Political Science

Government College Women University, Sialkot

tahira.mumtaz@gcwus.edu.pk

Ms. Saba Akbar

Lecturer, Pakistan School of Economics Law College, Lahore

sabaakbar491@gmail.com

Dr. Umar Farooq

Assistant Professor

Department of Education, University of Education, Attock Campus

umer.farooq@ue.edu.pk

Riaz Ahmad Khan

Research Assistant Legal, Department of Law, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan

riazahmadkhan533@gmail.com

Abstract

When doing educational research, researchers must adhere to important moral and legal guidelines as well as safeguard study participants' rights. Research is undoubtedly an honest endeavor. The legal and ethical aspects of data protection, in particular, have a significant

impact on how research data is gathered, used, shared, and preserved. PhD candidates must adhere to the ethical standards established by the intellectual community; in this situation, the American Psychological Association (APA) is the pertinent entity. To ensure that everyone involved takes part in their research, researchers must understand and abide by these legal and ethical constraints. The purpose of this study is to assess PhD researchers' comprehension of the legal and ethical and guidance on how these should be applied to their particular research projects.

Key words: Legal & ethical considerations, Research

Introduction

Educational research need to be pertinent to working teachers because it ought to be seen as a professional, critical, and reflective endeavor. Recognized as an essential component of a teacher's work, fostering self-awareness and personal growth so that instruction can be enhanced (Hitchcock & Hughes, 2004). Another way that educational research solves problems is by looking for solutions to well-known "problems" or "issues" in education, posing fresh questions about them by taking a different angle, or creating entirely new problems for the teaching profession by "making the familiar strange." (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002).

Numerous studies show that a legal and ethical consideration is a sensitive part in conducting educational research. Denscombe (2003) identifies three fundamental ideas that ought to direct scholars' work: Denscombe, 2003: 138; see also Cohen et al, 2007: 52; Gregory, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004: 104; Mason, 2002: 80–82; McNamee, 2002).1. The best interests of those taking part should be secured, which means to ensure that participants do not suffer physical or psychological harm as a result of the conduct of the research and that the confidentiality of the individuals being studied is respected (see also Gregory, 2003. Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).2. Researchers should refrain from deceit and deception; and 3. Participants should give informed consent. Legal and moral issues must be taken into account when gathering, storing, and processing different types of personal data; as a result, the Data

Protection Act of 1998 must be closely followed. The eight core Principles within the Act are that data must be:

1. Processed fairly and legally, 2. For restricted purposes, 3. Suitably, pertinently, and not excessively, 4. Accurate and current, 5. Not retained for longer than is necessary, 6. Handled in accordance with your rights, 7. Safe; 8. Not sent to other nations without sufficient security.

The notion of "informed permission," which has two primary components in terms of an individual's right to be asked for or to supply information about themselves, is highly valued under the 1998 Data Protection Act:

Openness ensuring that the public is properly informed about the purposes and methods of data collection;

The APA offers the following guidance: It says that "faculty advisors discuss publication credit with students as early as feasible and throughout the research and publication process as appropriate." When researchers and students put such understandings in paper, it becomes a helpful tool for them to regularly discuss and evaluate contributions as the research proceeds. Even the best-laid plans, though, can lead to disagreements since different people will frequently see the same scenario in different ways. "We know from social science research that people often overvalue their contributions to a project," says Stephen Behnke, JD, PhD, director of the APA Ethics Office. "Authorship should reflect the contribution." Many times, both sides sincerely think they are correct." According to the APA's Ethics Code, psychologists can only claim credit for work they have really completed.

Students must abide by the same regulations. They ought to be recognized as authors if they made a significant contribution to the conception, planning, carrying out, analysis, or interpretation of the research that was reported. Technically focused contributions don't deserve authorship. Similarly, advisors shouldn't demand ex-officio authorship for the projects completed by their pupils.

The value of practitioner research has increased recently in graduate programs and scholarly publications. As a result, there is now more focus on the complicated ethical issues surrounding research that has applications to professional practice. Planning research that meets the ethical requirements of their professional practice, their institutional research ethics committees, and their intellectual curiosity is a challenge for many practitioner-researchers. Research ethics include guidelines for day-to-day operations, safeguarding individuals' dignity, and disclosing the data from the study. To ensure the safety of everyone associated with their research, researchers must be aware of and follow certain protocols. This study looked at PhD researchers' perceptions of the moral and legal issues surrounding conducting education research. "The collection and analysis of information on the world of education to understand and explain it better" is the goal of the social science study field known as education research (Opie, 2004). In the sphere of educational research, the idea of legal and ethical concerns is not new. This study examined how PhD researchers perceived the need to take legal and ethical issues into account when carrying out their education research.

1.1 Research Objectives

The study's primary goals are:

- 1.1.1 To understand how PhD researchers feel about the moral and legal aspects of doing research in education
- 1.1.2 To investigate the value of legal and ethical issues for PhD researchers undertaking educational research
- 1.1.3 To determine the issue that researchers have concerning moral and legal issues when carrying out their educational study

1.2 Research Questions

There were some research questions in the light of research objectives:

- 1.2.1 How much do PhD candidates know about the moral and legal ramifications of doing research in education?

1.2.2 How much do PhD candidates learn about the many aspects of legal and ethical issues when doing research in education?

1.2.3 How much can academics do to make sure they are cited when doing research?

1.2.4 How can PhD candidates make sure that ethical issues are taken into account during the entire research process?

Methodology

The nature of the investigation was qualitative. It is employed to comprehend fundamental motives, beliefs, and justifications. The case study research design was used. The purpose of this small-scale research project was to directly inquire of persons engaged in education research about their awareness of and adherence to ethical and legal requirements in their work. As they collected information for their M.Phil. Research, there was a strong emphasis on how they had applied the knowledge to guide their research methodology.

The PhD scholars of Institute of Education and Research (IER) University of the Punjab Lahore were the population of that research. The number of PhD scholars is 32. There were 14 PhD scholars in regular program and 18 scholars in weekend program. Voluntarily participation of each participant was ensured for interview purposes.

To obtain data, the approach of purposeful sampling was employed. The researcher uses his or her discretion when selecting study participants from the population while using the purposive sampling technique. The majority of PhD candidates were chosen freely to gather data. Once appointments were made in a private setting, a limited number of participants were interviewed.

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structured interview was the first part of instrumentation for obtaining the answers of research questions in the light of research objectives. Interview questions were related to the understanding of interviewer towards legal and ethical consideration in conducting educational research. Some interview questions were related to the importance of legal and ethical consideration in conducting educational research.

Document review was the second part of instrumentation. The document review was process of collecting data by reviewing existing documents. The M.Phil research documents of selected PhD scholars were reviewed by the researcher to explore the level of understanding towards legal and ethical considerations in conducting their M.Phil research work. Validity of the instrument was ensured through expert opinion. Interviews were conducted in a safe and confidential environment. Individuals were informed of the purpose of the study before conducting interview through Informed consent.

Findings

For analytical purposes, a thematic analysis was carried out. One of the most popular types of analysis in qualitative research is thematic analysis. It places a strong emphasis on identifying, analyzing, and documenting patterns (themes) in data. Themes are recurring patterns in data sets that are connected to a particular research issue and are crucial for describing a phenomenon. It provides the researcher with a theoretical framework that is flexible. Initially, the interview responses were converted into text and the paper was formatted so that each person's unique data could be identified by their margin. Rather of looking for pre-defined themes, an inductive method to thematic analysis lets topics come from the data itself. Some significant difficulties that immediately sprang to mind after reading the material for the first time were listed in order to get a sense of the various topics. By classifying data pertaining to related subjects, themes emerged. Categories could be changed because of the flexible procedure. The next stage of the analysis was coding each topic for interpretation. Each theme's name served as an illustration of its meaning, accompanied by a few quotes from the source book.

What do you know about research ethics in conducting educational research?

According to first participant research ethics are very important. It is unethical to take material of others without their permission. Research ethics are very important in every kind of research not only educational research. Education is training and development of morals and ethics. When you don't take information from others it is obviously unethical. One of participant considers research ethics as basic part of any kind of research. One of the interviewee was much rigid about legal and ethical considerations. Participant number eleven said that research ethics are the beauty of research. So research is incomplete without legal and ethical considerations. One PhD scholar having two research publications and she was much sensitive. She said we cannot material or a single word without his/her permission. There were 26 % people said that research ethics are important in conducting educational research. There 20 % people said that research ethics are beauty of research in conducting educational research. There were 6 % people said that education is training of morals and development of ethics so research ethics must keep in mind in all kind of research.

What is the importance of informed consent to participants in conducting educational research?

Participant first said that it must be in written form. But for interviews it should be in oral form. Participant 2 said that the research purpose must be written in informed consent so that the participant can participate knowing the objectives of research. Participant 3 said that participant must know about your research objectives so that he/she can decide about participation. Participant 4 considers that research is incomplete without inform consent. Participant 5 said our religion never allows us to take others things without their so how we can take their thoughts without their permission. Participant 6 said that we cannot conduct research without inform consent because without the permission of participant we cannot take data.

There were 53% PhD scholars said that inform consent should be in written form in conducting educational research. There were 20 % PhD scholars said that purpose of the research should be elaborated in the inform consent so that participants may decide for participation in research. There were 13 % people said that our religion never allow us to take others material without their permission so how we can disobey the orders of Allah (SWT).

Confidentiality is the main feature of legal and ethical consideration what do you think?

Participant 1 said that environment is necessary. Environment is necessary. The information of the participant may be published. Participant 2 said must feel secure and comfortable. So research is not important participant is important. Participant 3 in some researches confidentiality cannot be maintained. Participant 4 said feel much important confidentiality because participant is much important then research. Participant 5 said the focus on the self-respect of research participants must be ensured. Participant 6 said confidentiality is very in all kinds of research. Participant 7 said that not only environment is important but data of the participant is also important to keep confidential. Participant 8 said that respect of the respondent give him security. So he can share his views freely. Participant 9 said in some researches confidentiality is important but in all researches we cannot ensure. Participant 10 said confidentiality is directly related with participants and data gathered from the participant. Participant 11 said we should focus on research objectives if their nature is related to privacy there should be confidential environment otherwise no need of confidentiality. Other participants having almost same view that research participant are important not the research is important. There was 46 % PhDscholars said that environment is important for ensuring the confidentiality. There were 13 % PhD scholars said that security of the participant is important in conducting educational research. There were 13 % PhD scholars said that self-respect of the participant is more important than anything in conducting educational research.

To what extent do you consider yourself active in applying legal and ethical considerations in conducting educational research? Can you describe how you first realize the importance of legal and ethical considerations in conducting educational research?

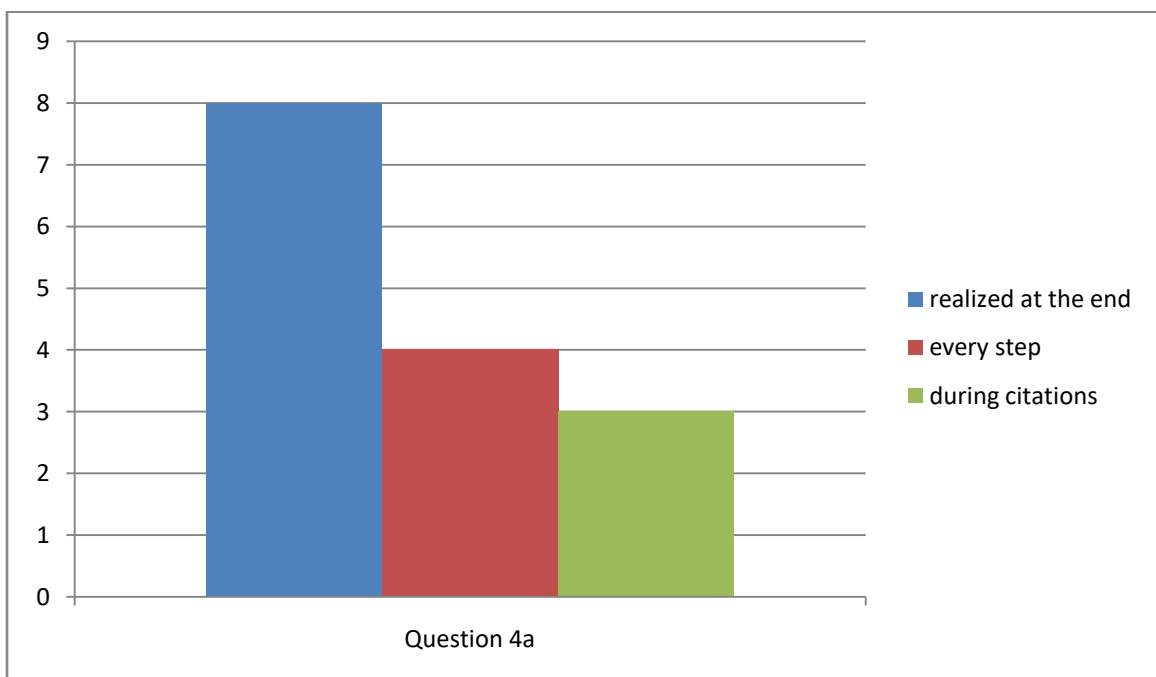
First participant was conscious about research ethics under the light of his experience. At every step I realize the importance of research ethics. Some participants were conscious about research ethics. At the end I realize the importance of research ethics. Participant 3 said I avoided plagiarism. I gave proper references. I took permission from the author. I use the data as data. Participant 4 I have no direct experience with participants. But I acknowledge the people in a right way. At every step of my research project I realize the importance of research ethics.

Participant 5 one of participant viewed that she had no experience at masters level but she learned many things from M.Phil research. Participant 6 said that most of the people viewed that they are active but they are unaware about many research ethics. Participant 7 was followed all research ethics throughout the study. She knows the importance of research ethics. Participant 8 was not aware about research ethics but she follow according to her knowledge that research ethics are important. Majority of the participants said that research ethics are important at every step so at the end learn a lot.

There were 33 % PhD scholars said they follow all steps of research ethics but there were 13 % people avoid plagiarism in conducting their educational research. Some research scholars 20 % were active being unaware. Some PhD scholars 13 % viewed that they learned from their mistakes during the whole process of their educational research.

Figure 4a

Can you describe how you first realize the importance of legal and ethical considerations in conducting educational research?



Most of the PhD scholars 53 % realize the importance of research ethics at the end. But most of the PhD scholars said that

How you think that your research supervisor attitude was serious towards ensuring legal and ethical considerations in conducting research?

Research supervisor role is very sensitive. He always check whole write up. May research supervisor was serious about legal and ethical considerations. I learned many things from my research supervisor. My research supervisor was much active. He is role model for me. One of the interviewee viewed that my research supervisor was not serious for my research.

Among sixteen PhD scholars 73 % were of the view that there supervisor was quite sensitive about the ethical considerations. Participants who said their behavior was careless. There supervisor was role model according to 6 % participants. Similarly, their supervisor was active according to 13 % of participants.

Any course was offered related to legal and ethical considerations in your course work if yes then how it was helpful to implement the knowledge in conducting educational research?

Participant 1 said that I learned in masters about research ethics but in M.Phil there was no course only research course consist on one section that was related. Participant 2 said no course was offered at M.Phil level related to legal and ethical considerations. Only short chapter was consists but a course should be offered so that students can learn more and more. One of the participant viewed that one course should be introduced. Two participants said that they were offered courses about research ethics but majority of the people said they were not learnt about research ethics. Only two participants said no course should be offered only research ethics chapter is enough but majority of the PhD scholars favored that a course should be offered.

According to 13 % of participants course should be offered about ethical considerations. While, 80% said no such course was offered in their previous classes. Six percent responded that one chapter is enough on this topic.

How you describe any particularly difficult experience in conducting your educational research related to the application of legal and ethical considerations?

Participant 1 said that people were reluctant in data collection process. Participant 2 said that my research experience is not vast but I face little problem in supervisor selection. I did a mistake that I didn't consult with the person and I selected his as my supervisor. That's why I face problem. Participant 3 said that I don't site things properly that's why I face problem till the viva day. Participant 4 said that I feel difficulty because I was beginner but I learned a lot. Majority of the PhD scholars feel difficulty in data collection process. People are not serious for research. Seventy three percent of participants responded they faced the problems during data collection. While, 6 % said they faced problem in supervisor selection. Twenty percent were of the view that they faced problem in citations.

Are you aware of the institutional policy of research ethics? If yes what are its key features? If not what key features do you suggest as a researcher?

Answer: There should be a system to inform students about legal and ethical considerations. There should be a system to inform students about legal and ethical considerations. Most of the participants have no knowledge about institutional policy. Twelve participants said there should be a national body to evaluate the research ethics in conducting educational research. Participants who said they are unaware about the institutional policy were 80 %. There should be some national body for such thing said by 13 %. Thirteen percent said there should be some system of awareness. Eighty percent responded that there should be some evaluation team. Thirteen percent said there should be a regulatory body. Six percent suggested that there should be an information system.

What kind of mechanism you would like to share for legal and ethical considerations in conducting educational research?

Participant 1 said that I don't have much experience but APA is enough if we follow it. Majority of the PhD scholars viewed that we should APA manual honestly and a body should work to ensure legal and ethical considerations. An awareness campaign should launch so that

people can know the importance of research because people are not serious about research ethics. Thirteen participants viewed that APA is enough if we follow it properly. Eighty percent of participants said that APA manual is enough. While, 13 % participants described that there should be awareness campaign about ethics.

What do you suggest to ensure the legal and ethical issues by the students and teacher?

Participant 1 said that teacher should brief about legal and ethical considerations before conducting their educational research. Research supervisor should elaborate salient features of legal and ethical considerations with students so that students can ensure legal and ethical considerations while conducting their research. Teacher and student should change their behavior so that they can contribute for conducting educational research.

Seventy percent participants said teacher should play there in briefing about the ethical considerations. Thirteen percent said student should show serious behavior towards it. Thirteen percent said both teacher and student should play their role.

Discussion

Legal and ethical considerations are more important in any kind of research not only educational research. PhD researchers disagree on several points about the moral and legal implications of doing research in education. Some scholars were much sensitive and having enough knowledge about legal and ethical considerations but some were facing trouble because of legal and ethical consideration in conducting educational research. For example some PhD scholars were viewed that inform consent should be in written form and must elaborate research objectives so that participants can decide about their participation.

We should promote the research culture in our institutes. Most of the scholars face trouble during data collection process because people are not well aware about the worth of research. The majority of PhD researchers believe that their difficulties stem from improper guidance on the legal and ethical aspects of doing research in education. Research supervisor should elaborate salient features of legal and ethical considerations with students so that students can ensure legal

and ethical considerations while conducting their educational research. Teacher and student should change their behavior so that they can contribute for conducting educational research.

Conclusion

The concluding points are given on the basis of findings of the study.

Most of the PhD scholars consider research ethics as basic part of any kind of research. There are different views about informed consent some PhD scholars favor the written form. But for interviews it should be in oral form. One of the interviewee viewed that the research purpose must be written in informed consent so that the participant can participate knowing the objectives of research. Our religion never allows us to take others things without their permission so how we can take their thoughts without their permission.

Confidentiality is also another feature of legal and ethical consideration in conducting educational research. One of the participant feel much important confidentiality because participant is much important then research. So the focus on the self-respect of research participants is necessary in conducting educational research. One of the PhD scholars feels that it is up to the nature of research because in all designs of research we cannot ensure protective environment. Regarding the role of PhD scholars concerning ethical and legal considerations when pursuing education research, there were differing responses.

Majority of the PhD scholars took permission from the author in conducting their educational research. Most of the PhD scholars have no direct experience with participants. But she acknowledges the people in a right way. She realizes the importance of research ethics at every step in conducting educational research. Research supervisor role is very important for any kind of research. There are different views of PhD scholars about the role of supervisor. Some PhD scholars show positive reaction about their supervisor attitude in conducting their educational research about legal and ethical considerations. Some PhD scholars viewed that their supervisor always check whole write up. Some PhD scholars consider their supervisor as role model for conducting their educational research. She said her supervisor never check her write up throughout the research project. Only short chapter was consists but a course should be offered so that students can learn more and more. There should be a system to inform students

about legal and ethical considerations. Most of the participants have no knowledge about institutional policy. Majority of the PhD scholars viewed that we should APA manual honestly and a body should work to ensure legal and ethical considerations.

Recommendations

A few suggestions are made in light of the conclusions and type of study that is being suggested.

Initially, it is recommended that the Higher Education Commission create a teacher and student awareness campaign regarding the legal and ethical aspects of conducting research in education.

When it comes to raising awareness of the ethical and legal issues surrounding educational research, the media can be quite influential.

The government has to call a conference of interested parties to hear their opinions on undertaking research in education.

The government ought to provide professors and students with rewards (such as promotions and positions) for their involvement in research. Future research should receive a lot of attention so that it can comprehend the importance of ethical and legal considerations when doing educational research.

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