Chapter 1

Role and Importance of Ethics in Research

Sibongile Simelane-Mnisi
Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Ethics relate to the manner in which a researcher treats participants in the research study. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and explain the role and the importance of ethics in educational research. Firstly, an explanation of ethics is presented. This is followed by the discussion on the importance of ethics in research. Thereafter, a framework for ethical analysis is presented. Furthermore, the important role that needs to be considered when conducting a research is provided. Reference is made to the target university’s ethics processes and procedures for the qualification purposes. It may be concluded that for every research study to be conducted, it is important to follow the ethics in order for the researcher to know how to treat and conduct the participants in the research. It is recommended that researchers protect the interests of vulnerable groups throughout the research process.

INTRODUCTION

In research, it is important that ethical approval be given before the commencement of a research project. In fact, it is now standard practice that research including human participants and animals should be approved prior to commencement by the institutional ethical review committee (Banks et al., 2013). In this regard, it is crucial for Higher Education Institutions to have an independent committee that will look after ethical issue in research. The committee should ensure that all research conducted on human subjects, animals as well as the environment are reviewed.
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and approved. This should be done in order to ensure that research ethics codes, guidelines, quality, standards and norms are adhered to. It is therefore, important that the committee works according to written standard operating guidelines and procedures. Hammersley (2015) argues that research ethics codes should be formulated in terms of principles, rather than specific instructions and prescriptions. For this reason, Hammersley (2015) adds that principles should be treated as the reminders of what needs to be taken in consideration, rather than as assumptions from which specific ethical judgments can be derived. In this regard this author posited that principles are useful in ethical research and should be adhered to.

Currently, there has been a growth to regulate the conduct of research (Banks et al., 2013; Hammersley, 2015) to types of research design, research governance frameworks for particular disciplines as well as codes of ethics and statements of ethical practice. In this case, interest in the nature and practice of research–teaching integration in most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has been reported (Alpay & Verschoor, 2014). This is observed by the increase in the research outputs of various HEIs and the increasing competitiveness amongst universities for both high student satisfaction as well as ratings research funding. Most academics are participating in the research activities of the institutions. As a result, a healthy synergy between teaching and research is strongly encouraged within institutions. Such improvements give academics the opportunity to properly participate in research and follow the correct standards, codes and guidelines for ethics clearance and adherence in research when initiating the research journey. It may be argued that there are difficult decision-making and ethical dilemmas faced by researchers in the teaching. Research show little or limited evidence in ethical research on intelligent environments that uses a range of embedded devices, sensors, biometrics and wearable technology (Jones, Hara, & Augusto, 2015). The results in the study on literature review by Jones et al. (2015) revealed that research on intelligent environments are making little impact on real systems being built and are disconnected from each other.

Banks et al. (2013) view ethics in two approaches that include ethics as regulation as well as ethics as decision-making. These authors state that the regulatory approach requires awareness of and conformity to, as well as categorized ethical rules on the part of researchers. On the other hand, they indicated that the decision-making approach focuses on the idea of researchers as active moral agents attempting disputes between ethical principles such as do no harm versus respect and confidentiality (Banks et al., 2013; Resnik, 2011).

Ethics relate to the manner in which a researcher treats participants in the research study. In fact, ethics cover questions relating to what counts as what responsibilities humans have for each other and the ecosystem, right and wrong conduct, good and bad qualities of character. On one hand, ethics strengthens the quality of research while on the other hand, the qualities of a researcher which include ethical sensitivity. The
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