

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ETHICS: A PURSUIT

*Vipinder Nagra*

**Assistant Professor, D.A.V. College of Education, Hoshiarpur, Punjab, India.**

### **ABSTRACT**

The virulent competition all over the globe has brought about number of challenges to the forefront in all spheres of life including education. Prolific steps have to be undertaken in the field of research to face these challenges and enjoy the triumphs of success in this fast tract global society. Quality research as a tool helps in transformation, development and empowerment of the nation and thus, has to be carried out ethically. Research ethics have to be followed sincerely and honestly otherwise unethical approaches can severely affect the credibility of research, the autonomy of researchers, the quality of research and the rights of participants. There is dire need to sensitise the researchers about the various ethical norms to be practised while carrying out research and also to make them aware about the social commitments and self-regulation they have to practise while performing research activities. An attitudinal change in researcher to carry out ethical research is the need of the hour which can be brought about through effective awareness programmes and guidance of the research teacher. The article thus, tries to identify the various unethical research activities being practised by the researchers, their probable reasons, suggestions to practise ethical research and the role of a teacher.

**Key Words:** Research, Unethical, Quality control,

### **About the Author:**



The Author Ms Vipinder Nagra is Assistant Professor at D.A.V. College of Education, Hoshiarpur, Punjab, India.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The unprecedented developments in the field of science and technology, media and internationalisation have posed challenges in all spheres of life. These challenges have created a competitive environment at the global level in the education sector also and particularly in higher education. Quality research is fundamental for generating intellectual resources necessary to survive and sustain economic growth, prosperity, to compete and enjoy the triumphs of success in this fast tract global society. It is a tool for transformation, development and empowerment and is essential for overall progress of society as a whole. Research is an integral part of education and quality of research cannot be improved unless the quality of education is raised and vice versa.

## **RESEARCH ETHICS:**

Ethics is the basis of human development and the quality of research depends upon these ethics. It includes honesty, objectivity, integrity, carefulness, openness, respect for intellectual property, confidentiality, responsible publication, mentoring, respect for colleagues, social responsibility, non discrimination, competence, legality, etc. Generally, ethics means the norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and our relationship with others. In the field of research ethics are determined as:

- It must not cause harm to the participants and people,
- It should make positive contribution towards the welfare of the people,
- It must respect and protect the rights and dignity of participants,
- It must do justice to all by highlighting the benefits and risks of research

Thus, Research ethics involves the ethics of planning, conducting and reporting of research. Quality research, which is the basis of growth and development of a country, can be best carried out if it furnishes the ethics of research.

In this regard, almost all the Commissions and Committees (UGC, NCERT, ICSSR) on education have recommended for the enhancement, enrichment and encouragement of research. NCERT (1961) adopted an effective strategy adopted by the Ministry of Education to create a research climate and develop research expertise by organising national seminars on promotion of research in education. The Review Committee on Education (1960) examined the standards of teaching and research in the Departments of Education in Indian Universities and recommended to produce competent teachers and train personnel for undertaking the research problems of education. The UGC is especially concerned with promoting interdisciplinary research. In 1963, the UGC introduced a scheme for developing a limited number of university departments for the advanced research and training in certain selected fields. National Commissions on Teachers (1983-1985) with regard to research stated that, at least "one hundred selected training colleges and university departments of education should be specially cultivated by the UGC for promoting research." The ICSSR has set up twenty research institutions in partnership with State Governments to strengthen research competence, capacity building and is further providing funding and training for national and international fellowships also.

These efforts have somehow introduced research activities in the education system but it has lead to research which is no doubt increasing in quantity but lagging far behind in quality. Researchers are blending data and information from several sources and resources to achieve quality research work. In this mad race, they have started practicing unethical ways of conducting research further leading to deterioration of the standard of education. The research concepts of originality, intellectual honesty, objectivity, etc. remain utopian words or pious wishes which are far from practical reality. To this access to technology like internet has increased the chances of dishonest research or practice of unethical research. To summarise, the quality of research is lowered due to lack of moral commitments, lack of self-regulation, shortage of funds, lack of infrastructure facilities, lack of interest and motivation, absence of congenial environment, lack of recognition of good research work, over intrusion of internet facilities, etc. As a result the credibility of research, the autonomy of researchers, the quality of research and the rights of participants have been strongly affected.

Unethical Practices in Research refers to the intentional, knowing or reckless disregard for ethical practices in the conduct of research. It includes infringing nondisclosure agreements, breaching respondents' confidentiality, deceiving people, invoicing irregularities etc. Following are some of the other unethical practices being practised by researchers to conduct research:

1. *Plagiarism*: Plagiarism is the use or close imitation of pre-existing material of another author in such a manner that it appears as one's own original work. It can be use of entire work, or paraphrasing, failure to cite original work, copy the reference list, idea or argument of a prior work. It can be intentional or unintentional but is considered a serious offence.
2. *Fabrication and falsification*: Misinterpreting or misleading from the original or what is true. Like overstating the number of participants, changing results, etc.
3. *Non publication of data*: Sometimes researchers try to hide significant or insignificant data due to one reason or the other.
4. *Inappropriate data-gathering procedures*: Wrong or faulty or erroneous methods of data collection used by the researcher is another type of unethical practice. Even using faulty statistical techniques to enhance the significance of the research work is an unethical practice.
5. *Poor data storage and retention*: Research data has to be available even after the research is complete so that it can be verified at any time by others. But researchers try to avoid storage and retention because of falsification and fabrication of data. In other words, failing to keep good research records or not maintaining research data for a reasonable period of time are also unethical.
6. *Misleading authorship*: Including a colleague as an author on a paper in return for a favour even though the colleague did not make a serious contribution to the paper.
7. *Sneaky publication practices*: Submitting or publishing the same paper in two different journals without telling the editors.

**Other unethical ways** can be:

- Select a research-topic because it is attractive to a sponsor or its publication may be favourable to their interests.
- Irrelevant review of literature just to oblige others on one pretext or the other for citations.
- Exaggerating the relevance of research work to seek positive reinforcement from seniors.
- Invent a citation or page-number of a reference.
- Consider only the positive implications of the research and not the negative implications.
- Promising a student for higher grades for certain personal favours.
- Making significant deviations from the research protocol approved by institutions or boards concerned.
- Rejecting a manuscript for publication without sound evidence or reading.
- Duplication of data i.e., using same information more than once.
- Replication of study which means repeating the study using same methods but different subjects.

#### **POSSIBLE REASONS:**

These unethical practices are carried out to a great extent with the motive of attaining degrees (Ph.D). Another reason that is most common is to fulfil the slogan of **Publish or Perish** being followed by various universities and colleges. Although the slogan was given for a positive cause to motivate the scholars and researchers to explore new ideas and publish them but the real practice has taken somewhat iniquitous turn. The introduction of Career Advancement Scheme and Direct Recruitment by UGC has prompted the scholars to write anything and get it published from publishers by paying meagre amount called as publishing or processing fees. In a hurry to grab and gain credits for the API score they have forgotten the concept of ethics. It is not that all are following the easiest mode but majority are in this mad race of publishing and scoring in shortest span of time. As a result, there is swelling of poor quality research work.

## **ATTITUDINAL CHANGE:**

This tradition can be solved to a great extent through an attitudinal change. The researcher has to be conscious of what is right and what is wrong. Attitude is the mind set. The ethics of honesty, truthfulness, objectivity will develop with positive and ethical research attitude. To develop this attitude their needs and aspirations have to be addressed suitably. Along with this following steps have to be followed:

1. Train and sensitise the young researchers effectively.
2. Provide information about ethics of research and to make ethics an integral part of the planning and methodology of research.
3. Increase the resources to carry out quality research.
4. Appropriate utilisation of research capacity.
5. Providing creative environment leading to constructive approach.
6. Make funds available for publishing quality research work.
7. Guidance to increase research innovations, consciousness and alertness.
8. Disseminating information about recent research policies and approaches.
9. Creating suitable rewards for good research work.
10. Priority to be given to research development initiatives.

To develop research attitude the foremost challenge that arises is about developing professional learning communities. Their preservation and orientation is the real issue that has to be solved on priority basis to develop social commitment and self regulation among them. Teaching and research being an inseparable and supportive part has to be taken up simultaneously. Every professional has to act as a researcher to search for new knowledge. They have to construct a research team to enhance their innovative ideas for the development of nation and society.

## **ROLE OF TEACHER:**

A well established system of education and research fails without a competent and specialised teacher. He is the driving force of an educational system and also a panacea for all sorts of educational problems. A teacher can inculcate the essential values of honesty, sincerity and commitment along with moral values in his students and particularly in research students. Preaching and practice should be followed equally without any gaps so that ethics are not eliminated. A competent teacher involved in teaching and research activities can guide his students effectively. He can sensitise the students pursuing research about the ethics of research. Orientation about research ethics is necessary to develop rational thinking. He can make them aware about the malpractices of plagiarism, copyright, duplication, etc. so that they are not practised by them while conducting research. Importance of quality research and its various attributes have to be taught along with the introduction of congenial environment to conduct research activities. An organised team of professionals, scholars and researchers can take the initiative to generate awareness about ethical research standards.

“As is the teacher so are the students”. Therefore, taking note of this saying the teacher himself has to follow the research ethics to inculcate the same in his students. Effective use of latest technology (ICT) for ethical research can be discussed and appropriate skills can be developed by the teacher. The overall protocol depends upon sound motivation and inspiration that can be easily generated by competent and committed research teacher.

## **CONCLUSION:**

As Mahatma Gandhi has well said, “You must be the change you wish to see in the world”. Thus, adequate infrastructure, skilled and trained manpower, latest technology, institutional capacity and standards, financial

support, are some of the essential requisites which cannot be ignored for conducting ethical research. Transparency and accountability have to be strictly followed to avoid any sort of corruption that leads to unethical research practices. Institutions undertaking research, researchers, funders or sponsors and those who publish material generated from research have to come forward to eliminate the evil of unethical research. Students and research associates must be informed about the ethical responsibilities of carrying out research and to ensure also that they do not violate the ethical guidelines. Enunciation of ethical principles and formulation of necessary guidelines for research are, therefore, a part of such a process, and also a necessary and desirable step.

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