



Ethical Considerations in an Educational Research: A Critical Analysis

Intakhab Alam Khan^{1*}

¹King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, educational researchers in particular have started showing more interest and awareness towards ethical guidelines and codes while conducting educational researches. This trend stems from the popularity of the online researches and sophisticated software to crosscheck if the written text is ethically correct or not exactly plagiarized. This has culminated into the authenticity and validity of some of the contemporary styles of research being employed to new research methodologies. This paper is a theoretical analysis of the concept and importance of ethical guidelines and the cases of plagiarism. In addition, certain reasons of plagiarizing tendencies have also been dealt with. Conclusions have been drawn from personal experience, related works and university norms to incorporate an ethical code of conduct in the domain of educational research.

Keywords: Ethical guidelines; software; plagiarism; educational researches; research methodologies.

*Corresponding author: E-mail: dr.intakhab@yahoo.com;

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethical considerations in educational research may be found as a dream unless the researcher is aware of ethics and academic honesty. A lot of people learn ethical norms informally: At home, at school, at a religious place, or in a good social environment. Although most people acquire their sense of right and wrong during childhood, moral development occurs throughout the life span; consequently, human beings pass through different stages of growth as they mature. Similar tendencies may enter into one's professional career, and an academician may not find it wrong if he does something unethical. More precisely, a researcher may copy something from other sources, but he may not simply realize that he has done something wrong or unethical.

Education is not an occupation rather a noble profession. One of the characteristics of profession is commitment. Education is not only a subject of study for earning bread and butter, but a means and betterment of human life. If ethics is not considered important in this field, the whole social system will be adversely affected; eventually perhaps the value system will collapse. Morality and ethics are quite closely related to each other, and these are integral parts of Education. Teachers are the agents that brings about desired changes in the society [1]. Teachers are the role models, and teaching is the foundation of human development. Therefore, teachers need to be ethical in a real sense while teaching or conducting researches [2].

2. GENERAL BACKGROUND

Most societies have legal rules and civil codes that check the behavior of the people of those societies and even others. But, ethical norms appear to be more important. One may define 'ethics' that broadly studies code of conduct, and value systems. It has a deep connection with other disciplines like anthropology, philosophy, theology, law, psychology, sociology and humanities. Professional ethics of education may differ from professional ethics in health sciences or business. However, the root is the same. Teaching and medical professions are considered as the noblest professions simply because of the fact that these fields are related to social service in which 'dedication' is a must. Similarly, ethical norms are very important in the area of educational research that sometimes modifies the principles and practices of education, and elevates the standards.

3. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

There is always a need to ensure that the process of educational research is genuinely based on ethical standards, principles and guidelines. Some ethical principles are inevitable to conclude that the research process and findings are authentic. With the constant increase in the quantity of educational research the concern grows among the critics and educationists that the current research approaches are not free from unethical elements. This paper aims to explore, analyze and criticize the importance of ethics in educational research. In addition, it also takes into account what, why and how the researchers plagiarize. It will enable the educationists, pedagogues, researchers and research guides to take the facts into account while engaging themselves in the process of research of any type in the field of education.

The main objective of this paper is to shed light on some crucial ethical issues as perceived by the researcher on the basis of his experience and secondary data. The discussion is expected to evolve some compatible strategies in the future to check the elements of plagiarism.

3.1 Research Ethics in an Educational Setting

Plenty of reasons can be enlisted as to why ethics can be taught in educational institutions in general and educational research in particular. The most important reason is that ethics guides and controls people and activities associated with the educational institutions: Teaching, learning, doing research or even guiding. In other words, ethical principles enrich the expected codes and value systems that are essential in a human group that ensures accountability, shows mutual respect, and practices fairness which discharging various responsibilities. Ethics and ethical considerations in the area of education are ultimately concerned with the concept and practice of plagiarism. It is an act of using the existing literature or works of previous authors or scholars without proper citation and reference.

The importance of ethical considerations was emphasized by [3], 'that the main criterion for educational research is that it should be ethical. In other words, educational researchers should give 'ethics' the top priority'. Lewis [4] categorically suggested to develop a detailed framework for research ethics in the domain of social sciences in which education is included in.

3.2 Ethical Guidelines

Ethical guidelines are applied to all professions and fields of study. British Educational Research Association (BERA) listed a few modified guidelines. The guidelines enable the educational researchers to evaluate all aspects of the process of conducting educational research at all the levels of research, and to reach an ethically acceptable stage which can justify researcher's actions [5]. Based on the guidelines proposed by [6], the following is a rough and general summary:

The old famous cliché 'honesty is the best policy' is still significant in all the spheres of life. Therefore, each one of us should try to maintain the noblest concept 'honesty' in one's life as well as profession. A researcher is supposed to honestly present and analyze research data. There are many who don't abide by the guidelines for many reasons.

Objectivity is a preferred approach in educational researches in order to avoid personal bias. Subjective opinion is not often appreciated in the area of any research. A researcher should always try to be as objective as possible in order to refrain from subjectivity that is likely to adversely affect the approach and methodology of research. In addition, a good and quality researcher has the academic responsibility to be highly careful in any kind of writing because many future researchers and scholars would quote and rely on his presented data and findings. The findings and recommendations of a particular study may cause a curriculum modification that is supposed to exert an academic effect on the target learners.

A researcher must not hide anything rather he should share his reports to maximum number of researchers and scholars or even students. He should be positive to welcome criticism to improve himself and his approach towards researches. Besides, while conducting a research, the investigator has the academic and ethical responsibility to inform the subjects about the purpose of the study, seek written consent and manage copyright issues. Since a piece of research is nothing personal rather public and institutional, therefore the researcher should not try to possess his work.

An intellectual should respect another intellectual and his property: His publication and works. One must acknowledge properly, and avoid unpublished works without technical formalities

of using the data or writing. In addition, Mutual respect for fellow workers or colleagues must be shown by the researchers. It creates a healthy environment for mutual respect, understanding and growth.

No one can perhaps deny that Education is a social activity, and it changes the social system if needed. The educational researcher is supposed to try to enrich goodness among the fellow beings, and control corruption and crime through educational activities and process. In almost all kinds of organizations, it is found that the decision maker is not able to arrive at a right conclusion because of insufficient or inappropriate information. Therefore, in an educational institution as well, the concerned people are sometimes in a dilemma: what to do and what not. The researcher is perhaps more accountable as his works are going to lay a basis for future research, teaching or learning process.

3.3 Ethical Issues and Plagiarism

There are many ethical issues to be looked in, but the most obvious academic issue is plagiarism. Plagiarism can be roughly conceived as a process of using the writing of other publishers/writers/researcher without proper referencing or citations. While the requirement is different: Honesty. Academic integrity or honesty can be assured only if the written text is not plagiarized either deliberately or unintentionally. Academic integrity includes a number of values and moral codes such as fairness, trust, mutual respect, accountability etc. In addition, it ensures trust and dependence in the context of academic scholarship in general and research in particular. [7,8]; [9-12]. Another author especially talked about the problems and issues of plagiarism in writings/researches [13]. Yet another study [14] was experimented on the first-year university science and engineering students' understanding of plagiarism which lead to the point that the target learners group need orientation and training in the area of plagiarism, concepts, types and dimensions so that they can avoid unethical behavior.

Plagiarism is considered as a kind of breach of academic integrity as it is rightly believed to lessen or sometimes eliminates the real value of a scholarly work. Despite the fact that plagiarism occurs at all levels of scholarship, the main focus in the recent explosion of research in this area is on student plagiarism [15-19]. Student plagiarism should be checked more strictly because the

tendency may drastically continue throughout the academic or even professional life.

The practice of plagiarism needs genuine attention as there are incidences of plagiarism in almost all groups of students at almost all the levels of education. The psychology of students remains the same, however the level varies.

3.4 Plagiarism: A Misunderstood Concept

There are different views regarding the definitions therefore, it leads to complexities in defining plagiarism [20] and identifying it, particularly for those scholars who have just stepped into the field. The focused areas of plagiarism belong to the 'Nature' of plagiarism and 'the extent'. It is felt that sometimes scholars plagiarize; however, they intelligently paraphrase and alter the language using different expression for the same content. There are some who copy from the old writings of print journals or unpublished dissertations/theses, and it becomes extremely difficult to trace the plagiarism out. On the other hand, some writers cite some existing online literature, try to summarize/paraphrase, and the software suspects the element or the content and submit reports. In my opinion, a panel should hold the meeting with the concerned author to explain his position rather than taking action against him.

The crucial issue of 'self-plagiarism' has also been raised by the critics even if the author has the copyright, he can't reproduce or duplicate publication, though. Cheema et al. [21] found that while some plagiarism in higher education research is deliberate, some is unintentional. It was well noticed though most researchers know about the concept of plagiarism, many were unaware of its types (ibid). They also express the concern over many researchers who do not even sense the punishments for the act of plagiarizing.

It was pointed out the demographic and institutional predictors of plagiarism. The authors concluded that plagiarism is higher where there is more incentive for publishing: economic or promotional incentives [22]. The authors also noted that senior scholars from high-ranking institutions even can't be considered exceptional as they also practice plagiarism for different reasons. On the other hand, the need of the time is that the academic community should set an example as a role model for their students and other researchers (ibid). It was felt that some people are found to seek to outfox as a result

they turn to be the plagiarists. In other words, they want to prove them better than their opponents in the domain of research. As a result, they want to contribute more even if they don't produce the quality [23].

We need to be careful in giving statements that plagiarism isn't always deliberate. However, it also remains a fact as researches have indicated that inadvertent plagiarism, as psychologists believe is a rather common memory glitch that connects to the everyday cognitive functioning. Academicians need to pay attention on the study that explored the problems of plagiarism in which he referred to the status, causes and a few suggestions [24].

3.5 Popular Reasons of Plagiarism

The case of plagiarism is not restricted to one region or a few institutions rather the problem is global in nature. An individual's mind set is the actual reason because if one copies other's work, then one is surely aware of the problem. But, even after having followed the guidelines and the standard, the problem may be related to the tool one uses to check the plagiarism. Therefore, plagiarism checker tools should be modern and sophisticated.

Many people do not actually understand the nature of plagiarism. Some researchers are not known to the style of referencing and citations. Another important reason of plagiarism is lack of time for proofreading and realizing that some text have direct connection with the material already available online. Internet may be proved to be a boon as well as a bane for a neo-researcher/writer. We can access many studies and papers online, on the other hand, we can unintentionally leave some text unedited or rewritten in author's own words. In this connection, a researcher [25] pointed out that internet as a source of plagiarism is highly significant, however, it can be diagnosed easily with the help of a plagiarism tool. The students should be trained in the areas of plagiarism to avoid the online text or to assure proper citation and referencing. As mentioned earlier, plagiarism is common to both the students and scholars, the following is a comparison of the trend of plagiarism between the students-writers and researchers (see Table 1)

It has also been noted that some of the issues of plagiarism and the reasons associated to the practice of cheating [26]. With reference to the students' plagiarism, [27] work shed some light

Table 1. Why do writers plagiarize?

Reasons of plagiarism in academic writings	
Students writings	Writings of the academic staff
Academic factors	
Lack of writing/research skills	Lack of research potential
summarizing Paraphrasing Criticizing Arguing	Not know what and how to cite/write
Problems evaluating Internet sources	Most paraphrase to avoid plagiarism
Confusion between plagiarism and paraphrasing	Lack of summarizing ability
Careless notetaking	Carelessness in citations
Confusion about how to properly cite sources	Lack of knowledge on plagiarism
Misconception of plagiarism	Respect for intellectual property
Misconception intellectual property	
External factors	
Pressure from family	Academic and institutional pressure
Social competition	Academic rivalry
Student ethics and the College	Research ethics and institutions
No sense of quality: knowledge and education	Writing: a formality
Lack of moral responsibility	No commitment
Cultural factors	
Culture based attitudes towards plagiarism	Behavioral issues
Personal factors	
Cynicism About Grades	Craze for scholarship
Fear of Failure	Sense of inferiority
Lack of Planning	Careless planning
Lack of interest	Lack of academic motivation
Laziness	Attitude: Less work more publication

on the occasion when they try to copy from some sources especially the internet. [28] worked on the topic, 'who cheats in the university?' Taking up an interesting issue on the perceptions of the students on integrity, [29] and [30] carried out studies and revealed interesting features. [31] demonstrates that cheating is prevalent and that some forms of cheating have increased dramatically in the last three decades.

3.6 Addressing the Issues of Unethical Behavior and Plagiarism

These days, most of the institutions and publishers try to check the cases of plagiarism by the modern use of sophisticated tools for plagiarism checking. In this case, it can be concluded that modern technology can help the institution to put a check on the incidences of plagiarism. However, human intervention is also needed because a machine can't be logical enough to blame a researcher for the nature and amount of plagiarism in different kinds of researches.

3.7 How to Minimize Plagiarism in Students' Writings

Devlin M [32] suggested a few significant ways of minimizing plagiarism. Based on the references

and personal observation, the following techniques can be found useful in controlling the events of plagiarism in the students' writing by:

- Clarifying the tasks and guiding the way to accomplish,
- Making objectives clear to students,
- Chalking out assessment criteria, and briefing them to the target group,
- Supervising the work in an appropriate manner using detection tool,
- Creating an environment to work honestly which leads to rewards and scholarship,
- Teaching the skills of writing: Summarizing, paraphrasing, analyzing and concluding,
- Acquainting the students with the analyzing process and initiating argument in logical manner,
- Focusing on those tasks which has no scope for plagiarism,
- assigning creative and innovative topics,
- By monitoring the students' progress in the class itself,
- By discussing the written task with the students alone and in the class to check the writer's potential,
- Collecting and checking the reference list before the submission is due,

- Showing the students the electronic resources available to them to read but not to copy,
- Asking the assignees to submit the task via mail (which will be cross check by a plagiarism software),
- Essays and assignments electronically, while making students,
- Informing them to know that plagiarism may lead to penalties.

Regarding the students' ability to cross check if the text has been plagiarized or to what extent plagiarized, [33] and [34] conducted two studies on the following areas: can undergraduate students determine whether text has been plagiarized and paraphrasing criteria of college and university professors.

3.8 How to Control Plagiarism among Academic Staff

Though most of the teachers/writers/researchers are becoming aware of plagiarism as an unethical behavior, there is a need to enhance their knowledge further by:

- Holding seminars, presentations etc. to be familiar with the elements and types of plagiarism,
- Providing free access of plagiarism software to cross check their works/writings,
- Encouraging the staff to earn a few necessary sub-skills of writing,
- Clarifying them that their works have to pass through the plagiarism check,
- Developing the staff as true professionals,
- Creating an environment to work honestly which leads to rewards and scholarship.
- Informing them to know that plagiarism may lead to penalties.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Academic plagiarism avoidance is perhaps a must which each one should try to practice. The students should basically be taught and trained as to how to write, cite and refer other's works/studies/researches. The modern age is characterized as the age of technology in which

one can employ various tools to find out if the writings contains some portions of plagiarized text. Latest researches have shown that plagiarism is not an easy concept. Educational institutions therefore, need to realize that there is a need to address 'plagiarism' as it goes against the standard and guidelines of ethics.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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