

Ethics Of Research And Reporting Scholarly Writing

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Abstract

This paper is focused on the ethics of research and reporting scholarly writing for post-graduate students and other researchers. Meaning of research and educational research, ethics of research and reporting empirical and theoretical research articles were highlighted. Finally, conclusion and recommendations were made.

Introduction

Carrying out a research requires an organized set of plan to solve a defined problem in different fields of human endeavor including education. Research involves a probe into the unknown using scientific approach. According to Nworgu (2006) a research is an enquiry into the unknown which must be carried out using scientific method of investigation. Nworgu further stressed that every field of human endeavour involves research but not in all field is the scientific method employed. Research involves the description of man – made phenomena in respect to cause and effect relationships. For Shankar-Rao (2012: 54) “research is an attempt to know new things, facts, information among others in scientific manner”. In fact, research should be carried out only when it is geared towards advancing knowledge for better living in the society. This means that more substantial studies are very important because it yields scholarly results (Sharag, 2010). Scientific method requires precise preparation in developing meaningful research in education. Educational research therefore involves all scientific investigation that assist the researcher in finding solution to the identified problems in education. In fact, educational research follows a set of sequential steps to arrive to a logical conclusion. The scientific method according to Schaefer (2006: 29) “is a systematic organized series of steps that ensures maximum objectivity and consistency in researching a problem irrespective of discipline”. This scientific method cut across all discipline in their quest to obtain new knowledge for effective social living in the society.

Scientific research requires precise preparation or plan in developing useful research following the five basic steps namely: defining the problem, reviewing the literature, formulating the hypothesis, selecting the research design, collecting and analyzing data and finally, developing the conclusion which could lead to ideas for further research. Sociologists of education like researchers in other disciplines carry out their investigations following the ethics of research in reporting scholarly writing. Any practice that seriously deviates from ethics of research is not acceptable because the information gathered in carrying out research in any discipline might have been fabricated, falsified or plagiarized (Jacobson, 2011).

Meaning of Educational Research

Educational research develops new knowledge about teaching, assimilation and learning processes for the purpose of knowledge and establishing theories on the basis of the

believable facts within the environment. According to Agwasim (1997) educational research is a process of arriving at dependable solutions to identified problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Educational research in this context refers to finding solution to identified problem through carefully planned and systematic method of data collection, analysis and honest interpretation of data for advancing new knowledge or fact. The information gathered from carrying out educational research helps in improving the educational practices hence, enable man to relate effectively in the society.

Educational research is conducted, for four primary purposes namely: description, prediction, improvement, and explanation of many different kinds of phenomena. For instance the descriptive studies have greatly increased peoples knowledge about what happens in the school as a social system. Some descriptive researches are intended to produce statistical information about aspects of education of interests to policy makers and educators (Gall, Ball and Borg, 2007).

Prediction is another type of research knowledge. This is the ability to predict a phenomenon like the cause of students success in academic work using aptitude test like the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or similar tests for placing students according to their academic achievement, career success or criminal conduct. If the purpose of the research is prediction a correlational research design is used (Ali, 2006).

Another important aspect of educational research is its improvement tendency. The outcome of educational research helps to improve practice because of various synthesis of intervention – oriented research derived from empirical research and theories of teaching and learning processes (Brophy, 2001). This means that using accurate data collected and critical analysis of data in the conduct of research is very important for honest interpretation of data for advancing new facts. The results will definitely present additional set of issues that has value for further studies. Consequently, in conducting educational research, what comes to mind is the value of such research in view. The value attached to the problem(s) under study will indicate whether the problems are worth investigating following ethical practice (Brym and Lie, 2003).

Ethics of Research

Ethics is very crucial in moulding human life. According to Robinson (2005) ethics is the science of morals. In other words, ethics is the principals of behaviour in the society that leads someone to abide by the ethical practices within a group or organization. The ethical practice in conducting research is very crucial in solving societal problems. Ethical principles vary over time in respect to academic discipline (Jacobson, 2011). Jacobson further stressed that researchers must follow rightly accepted ethical research protocols, hence, seek to uphold the highest ethical standard. One cannot imagine any social situation and immediately draw a conclusion without conducting an investigation using scientific method. Anything contrary to following sequential rules of carrying out an enquiry into the unknown should be regarded as unethical and illegal (Haggerty, 2004 and Schaefer, 2006). According to American Sociological Association (ASA) (1997) certain specific standards in conducting research is known as code of ethics.

Code of ethics includes not invading their subjects' privacy. In sociological research, people are always used as source of information and so they are assured of anonymity by guaranteeing the confidentiality of their personal information on the problem under study. The code of ethics therefore can provide guidance to the researcher in every discipline (Parascandola, 2002 and Jacobson, 2011).

Ethics of research revolves around three main themes namely: ethical treatment of research participants, competence of the researcher and finally, honest reporting of the findings in the research conducted by a researcher or researchers. The researcher must protect the participant's or subject's privacy or identity. This will assist in collecting accurate and reliable information from them. If a subject's identity is required unreliable data may be collected. The researcher must be competent enough to analyze data in carrying out a study. This is very important because if a researcher is not competent he/she will find it difficult to discuss the research findings with confidence (Uwazie, 2008).

After analyzing the data collected, honest reporting of the results is very crucial. Any study that is devoid of honest report generates a lot of bias. Findings are reported accurately either in favour or against earlier findings by different researchers in different socio-cultural environment. It is therefore essential that in analyzing and interpreting the data collected it must aim at solving identified problem (Okeke, 2004). Empirical research is designed to generate new knowledge using objective measurable conditions (Nworgu, 2006).

Researchers communicate the findings of their research through conference papers, reports, seminars, on-line journals and printed journals to assist in accumulating new knowledge or complementing knowledge earlier acquired. All scientific research hinges on observation, description and analysis, because facts without theory and value are meaningless (Shankar Rao 2012). Shankar Rao further stressed that values attached to a problem leads to the formulation of theory that motivates a researcher to conduct a research and logically interpret and explain the problem(s) under study. The findings can be verified or disproved bearing in mind the previous work of other researchers that relate to present study. "A theory is a set of statements that seeks to explain problems, actions or behavior" (Schaefer, 2006: 8). Similarly, the findings of research are used to either confirm, reject or modify a theory or provide the basis for new valuable theories through the establishment of the systematic relationship between facts.

How to Report Scholarly Writing

One thing is to carry out a research, then, the other is to report the observation or findings in a scholarly manner. Reporting empirical research articles are quite different from reporting theoretical paper articles. In reporting empirical research findings, it is essential that the abstract of the study is well articulated. The background of the study will also exhibit the conditions, circumstances and factors that have given rise to the problem under investigation (Nworgu, 2006). Nworgu further stressed that a good background to the problem should encapsulate essential historical antecedents to the problem that invariably provided the readers an insight into the circumstance that gave rise to the identified problem. Any work cited must be referred to appropriately either to support or justify your position. This stage gives rise to introductory paragraphs that are packaged through review of relevant or related literature.

The aim of review of related literature is to link the previous work or study with the researcher's personal observation, then logically indicate the need for the present study. The purpose of the study is to establish why the study represents a contribution to the existing knowledge in a particular area of the study (Benatar, 2002). In reporting empirical investigation appropriate methods used should be properly discussed. Discussion of the design used is very important because the design used must be appropriate to the study. The target population must be clearly indicated. This will enable

the researcher to know whether to use the entire population or use a representative sample that represents a particular population for the study. Clear description of the sampling technique adopted for the sample selected is crucial for replicability and understanding of the study (American Psychological Association (APA), 1994). The types of instrument used for data collection are indicated such as tests, questionnaire, interview or any other tools used to provide data. Evidence of validity and reliability of the instrument used should be clearly presented indicating the statistical tools or tool used in analyzing the data collected and results found.

Results of the findings should be clearly shown. Discussions of the findings are presented through which one can meet the underlying assumption (hypothesis). The researcher must understand the techniques and the statistic that are being reported. In the discussion of the findings other findings at both local and international researches may support or not support the findings of the current result of the study conducted by a researcher or researchers. Furthermore, the results of the findings will give clue for additional set of issues for further research. In other words, the result will offer opportunity to advance knowledge and more essentially provide appropriate safeguard against subjective bias (Parascandola, 2002).

Reporting theoretical (opinion) article is more tedious to write. Reviewing literature for the purpose of embarking an opinion paper covers a lot of documented views to provide framework for the purpose of the study as a basis for acceptable research study (Ali, 2005). According to Przybyla (2009) opinion essays require a combination of personal and argumentative approach while writing. This means that when a topic is being handled, the writer is required to proceed with arguments that justify the writer's position. In other words, personal views are supported with opinions of secondary sources on related topic (Nwankwo, 1999).

In writing theoretical (opinion) paper the writer should package the background in a logical sequence. Major variables should be defined as they appear and provide an operational definition for each of the major variables for clearer understanding by the readers as they move into the main body of the write-up (Nworgu, 2005). The conviction expressed in the introductory part of the paper creates an interesting guide for the readers to reason along with the writers' ideas and attitude toward the topic from the very beginning of the write-up (Przybyla, 2009). Nevertheless, one remark or issue raised can be supported or challenged based on cultural environment which is diversified as well as the discipline the researcher is focusing.

What to avoid in reporting scholarly articles

1. Do not be too vocal about your personality.
2. Do not move out from the topic you are writing to avert irrelevant information not related to the topic.
3. Do not use aggressive tone in communicating.
4. Do not present emotional and moral judgment to prevent referring to a particular group.
5. Do not be excessively vocal about personal opinion no matter how strong it may be.
6. Do not focus on points that have no back-up with authoritative literature.
7. Do not commit plagiarism and over-citing one or two authors.

Conclusion

Reporting scholarly writing is guided by ethical standards required in conducting research, empirical or theoretical article notwithstanding. Both require ethics

in the logical presentation of facts and findings during the conduct of the research. Using appropriate tools such as technique and language of expression assist to carry the interest of the readers along. The outcome of the research therefore should be packaged to add new knowledge to the already existing one and gives opportunity for further research.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion above the following recommendations are made.

1. Research in general should be goal-oriented. This promotes generation of new knowledge.
2. Respondent's privacy should be highly respected. This will assist the researcher in gathering authentic information as the result of animosity.
3. Researchers should follow the code of ethics as competent and honest researchers in reporting the findings of the research conducted.
4. The findings of the research conducted should be open to the public through seminars, conferences, symposium, on-line prints/journals and communiqué.
5. Researchers should not be extensively vocal about personal opinion no matter how strong the case may be.
6. Researchers should not commit plagiarism because it is a criminal offence and also against the ethics of research.

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