

Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research Among Postgraduate Students in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The issue in research ethics has been a long-standing problem in the academic world. In qualitative research, most of the studies carried out involve human subjects and require awareness of ethical issues that may arise, such as misconduct in research, plagiarism and authorship disputes. However, the emphasis on this issue has been given little exposure mostly among postgraduate students in Malaysia. This paper will highlight the most common ethical issues that arise in qualitative research studies, why this has happened, and how to overcome these important issues across institutions. In order to discover these issues, the databases Scopus, Google Scholar and Google Search were queried in the searching. The databases were assessed through the criteria of research ethics, research misconduct, and ethical issue in qualitative research from the year 1995 to 2019. The results revealed that there are studies on ethics in qualitative research especially in health and business area but insufficiently addressed in education. Besides, there are also several types of ethical problems in qualitative researches being identified which are commonly engaged by students despite research classes or courses that have been provided. Finally, it is concluded that not only does the research ethics component needs to be clearly addressed in the teaching among postgraduate students when conducting qualitative research, but there is also an urgent need to improve the institution curriculum in the research subject.

Keywords: Ethical Issue, Qualitative Research Ethics, Malaysia

Introduction

Research is no longer a novelty in education, it has been expanded for many specific purposes. The research comes from the medieval French word that means *to seek closely*. According to Masri (2005), research is a process of generating and enhancing knowledge about humans, phenomena or events and any other aspects. As humans, the curiosity of seeing and experiencing leads to the need for scientific explanation for every phenomenon or symptom that occurs. Research defined by Creswell (2008) is a process of steps used in collecting and analysing the information to increase the understanding of a topic or issue focused. He suggested that the research consists of three steps of posing a question, collecting data to answer the questions, and presenting an answer to the question. Besides, it is agreeable that research is when the information gathered to answer a question that solves a problem (Wayne, Gregory & Joseph, 2009, pp.10). By contrast, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined research as a systematic process in which we know more about something than previously, when we were engaged in the process (pp.5). They also suggested that knowledge was contributed through a process based on several types of research such as pure research, applied research, evaluation research, and action research. Therefore, the definition divulges that research is an information gathering or rearranging process systematically by asking real questions to find the solutions.

In the academic world, there are two common types of research design used, namely qualitative research and quantitative research. Both types are simplified by the most basic definition where qualitative research uses words as the data and being analysed in numerous ways, while quantitative research uses numbers as the data and is analysed using statistical techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, there are now numerous definitions used in addressing the qualitative research as well as in quantitative research according to a particular discipline or method. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative research aims at understanding of how people delineate the process of their lives and interpret their experiences. On the other hand, quantitative research is based on the method of positivist inquiry where the research is conducted through experiments and involves numerical data collection which will be analysed by the statistical test (Chua, 2006). However, qualitative research is rarely employed in the education programs as it is often criticised for a lack of rigour (Watts *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, students usually prefer to use time and cost-saving approaches in conducting their research and quantitative

research are often the main choice in most of them. Nevertheless, the qualitative approach is still the only option when it comes to the necessity of understanding human experiences.

In Malaysian institutions, research writing is compulsory in most of the courses taken by postgraduate students. Students are expected to acquire research skills after they graduated. Furthermore, students today must also be skilled in research even though are not involved in academics as it can enable them to recognize the rigorous research and better understanding when participating in it (Maldonado-Maldonado & Lee, 2019). Unfortunately, many students who graduated lack good research skills especially those who are involved in research field in their occupation (Nwangwa, Yonlonfoun & Omotere, 2014).

Although the research subject is taught at the university in 'research methodology' classes, it is not the core subject in most of the courses. The syllabus of the subject covered all areas and topics in research but the most important topic of ethics is not fully delivered especially in a qualitative approach. Ethics is the most critical part that reflects judgment and decision-making in any kind of research. Many of the deviations in research happened when the researchers simply do not know or never thought of the ethical norms of the research (Olesen, Amin & Mahadi, 2018). The ethical norms are any thinking rules of distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour where it has become broader and informal than laws. It was developed throughout human life but it cannot be regarded as just a simple common sense (Resnik, 2011). Therefore, this paper will highlight the ethical issues in qualitative research studies and explore how to raise awareness of these important issues among students.

Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research

Ethics is related to 'doing well' and avoiding harm. It can be reduced and prevented by applying appropriate ethical principles in the research. A study by Kim and Park (2013) found that research ethics is distinguished by different types of disciplines such as science, history, art, and humanities. This was indicated when researchers from different disciplines might face different types of ethical issues according to the nature of their research background (Olesen, Amin & Mahadi, 2017). Usually, qualitative research is conducted in the setting of participation of people in their daily experiences. The researchers focus on exploring, examining and describing people in their natural environments and it needs their willingness to participate in it. In qualitative research, ethics has imperatively emphasized the protection of participants or human subjects because the violations of human rights have become among the darkest events in human history (Orb, Eisenhower & Wynaden, 2001). Hence, any research that involves people would require ethical awareness where it may arise from such interactions or connections.

Initially, scientific fraud was the term that was thought of as a problem confined to a small number of unscrupulous individuals. Yet, in the last 30 years, there has been an increase in awareness in ethical problems of research. Thus, a foundation of a committee of journal editors called the Committee of Publication Ethics (COPE) was founded in 1997 to address this problem. There are guidelines designed by the committee to raise awareness on the protection of intellectual integrity for advocating good practices in the research cycle (Smith, 1997; Gilbert & Denison, 2003). There was also at a time, where institutions were in the process of setting up an ethics committee just for approving projects submitted by the researchers (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002, pp.14). Consequently, it has become common for a researcher to gain ethics approval from the committee before they commence their research in the past ten years but, it was not universally accepted and welcomed (Birch, Miller, Mauthner & Jessop, 2012). Nevertheless, the existence of research ethics committees with the purposes of ensuring that the research is conducted ethically was still under debate as to whether the increased in ethics regulation would lead to or should ensure that research is being practised ethically (Dingwall, 2006; Richardson & McMullan, 2007; Hammerley, 2009).

Ethical issues have come to the fore as they have raised concerns over the regulation in the efforts of knowledge production and tremendous pressure in academics publication. According to Maldonado-Maldonado and Lee (2019), problems originating from ethical issues do not prevent the saturation of worldwide publications. Furthermore, there has been too many books and articles with low quality on the rise (Altbach & De Wit, 2019). Thus, this will cause an increase in ethics violations as researchers strive to produce more research articles to be published to fulfil the requirement set by a particular institution or academic system. Earlier, there are three types of problems that seem to affect a qualitative study. These are the researcher-participant relationship, data interpretation and data designing (Ramos, 1989). Then, Shaw (2008) addressed that the important topics of ethics in qualitative research are focused on the research design, fieldwork, and analysis. While, Nespor and Groenke (2009) have indicated different issues of ethics in qualitative research that focuses on the question asked, the time

and space of the study, and the ways of participants being defined. Hence, it has become crucial for a researcher to consider the potential of misconduct that might be anticipated when preparing the research's protocol.

Research Misconduct

A qualitative study mostly involves human beings, thus this might lead to ethical issues of misconduct during the interaction. Misconduct in research can not only jeopardize the reputations of research groups and institutions, but it also will reduce public confidence and halt the progress of knowledge (Gilbert & Denison, 2003). Research misconduct has a long argument in defining a tight definition since many of the researchers seeking a clear understanding of what was and was not considered as misconduct in research (Rennie & Gunsalus, 2001; Smith, 2006). In the year 2000, the federal government of United States has defined research misconduct as the fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing or reviewing research, or in reporting research results (Smith, 2006). The USA has been the longest and most extensive country in dealing with research misconduct in a systematic way when this issue was at the early stage (Nylenna *et al.*, 1999). Before that, there are several definitions proposed by the National Committees of several countries as presented in **Table 1**. Nevertheless, it was always questionable how common research misconduct occurs and the answer depends on how it was defined by a particular country.

Table 1: Proposed definition by the national committees of several countries
(Nylenna *et al.*, 1999; Smith, 2006)

Committee Member	Year Proposed	Definition Proposed
Denmark	1992	Intention or gross negligence leading to falsification or distortion of the scientific message or a false credit or emphasis given to a scientist.
Norway	1994	All serious deviation from accepted ethical research practice in proposing, performing and reporting research.
Sweden	1997	Intention distortion of the research process by fabrication of data; theft or plagiarism of data, text, hypothesis, or methods from another researcher's manuscripts or application form or publication; or distortion of the research process in other ways.
Finland	1998	Presentation to the scientific community of fabricated, falsified, or misappropriated observations or results and violation against the good scientific practice.
Britain	2000	Behaviour by a researcher, intentional or not, that falls short of good ethical and scientific standards.

Qualitative research often relates to human subjects during the process of data collection. The probability of engaging in research misconduct is high as compared to quantitative research. This has been proven by limited literature of qualitative research related to misconduct (Watts *et al.*, 2016; Olesen, Amin & Mahadi, 2018). Researchers might be unaware of the unique benefits of qualitative study as well as lacking in the necessary training to apply qualitative approaches. This could lead to a lack of study found on misconduct in qualitative research. The nature of problems related to misconduct in qualitative research is subtle and different compared to quantitative research. Its occurrence depends on how the researcher gains access to a group of community and in the effects of how the researcher may have on the participants (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001).

According to Batchelor and Briggs (1994), any researcher engaged with misconduct has resulted in those researchers being ill-prepared to cope with the unpredictable nature of qualitative research. Other than that, the researcher might as well experience the unexpected ethical dilemmas along the process of the research plan (Field & Morse, 1992). In qualitative research, the procedures involving human subjects following the same guidelines as dominated in the codes of ethics such as informed consent, privacy protection, and non-deception. In the early 1980s, the emphasis of ethical issues was more on the invention, fudging, and distortion of data. However, research misconduct has started being reported in the 1990s together with other new issues such as unauthorized use of confidential information, the omission of important data, and data interference (Christians, 2005). The issue of misconduct was found to be a specific topic covered in the research teaching classes but generally on how to recognize and avoid the potential misconduct in research (Plemmons, Brody & Kalichman, 2006).

Research misconduct among students arises whenever requirements are misunderstood, lacking skills to comply with the requirements, and the existence of conflict between students and the assessor (Mitchell & Carroll, 2008).

Students often confront with time constraints, funding worries, and requirement to attain high levels of personal and professional success in producing original research (Harman, 2003; Bennett, 2005). In addition, research misconduct is also found to be one of the trends of paper retraction among Malaysian researchers (Aspura, Noorhidawati & Abrizah, 2018). Thus, it is crucial to address this problem among students to ensure that it is likely to occur more frequently in the future.

According to Bannister (1996), there are several major principles associated with research misconduct especially involving ethical behaviour. The standard principles as listed in **Table 2** are used as the guidelines in qualitative research for protecting humans from being exploited and invasion of their privacy. There are other studies addressing their concern on ethics of care for the participants, but they are refused on the standard ethical principles as it does not always be appropriate in a qualitative study (Litchman, 2014). Other than the standard principles listed, there are other types of ethics in qualitative research which are situational (the unpredictable moments) and relational (feminist research perspective) (Swartz, 2011).

Table 2: Principles in Qualitative Research (Lichtman, 2014)

No.	Principle	Description
1.	Do no harm	It is often used in medical or health studies such as research with drug involvement and treatment experiments where it concerned with the violation or any situation that might be harmful to the participants.
2.	Privacy and anonymity	It was a crucial element that relates to interpretation and strength of inquiry where the information either rich or lack of integrity. Participants would expect their privacy and identity is guaranteed and will not be revealed.
3.	Confidentiality	Any participants usually expect their given information is treated as confidential and not to be given away to others.
4.	Informed consent	This is where the participants are provided with information in advance on the research study before they agreed to participate. The participants also have the right in deciding to withdraw from the study at any time they want.
5.	Truthfulness and accuracy in reporting data	It is imperative in reporting the data where researchers have to ensure that their reports are reasonably and accurate.
6.	Rapport and friendship	Develop rapport and make friends are two different things in research. Developing rapport works to get the participants to disclose information and researchers need to avoid a situation that makes the participants think they are friends.
7.	Intrusiveness	Participants always expect that the researcher will not be excessively intrusive in terms of their time, space and personal lives. The researcher will find it difficult but it is needed to make sure that the study is not with the purpose of intrusion.
8.	Inappropriate behaviour	The researchers must ensure not to engage in conduct of a personal or sexual nature, not getting too close to the participant who can be blurring the boundaries in between and try to back off because a researcher is bound by the code of conduct to treat the study with respect.
9.	Data interpretation	The data collected have to be analysed in a manner that avoids misstatements, misinterpretation or fraudulent analysis because the data represent what you see and hear.
10.	Data ownership and rewards	In qualitative research, the researcher owns the work generated but it is also a unique issue that relates to confidentiality, anonymity, and consent.
11.	Inclusion and social justice	This is where recognition is given to the participants in whom researchers take an active role by addressing social problems and social justice but, a newly trained researcher needs to be careful not making promises that are difficult to keep.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is also another ethical issue found to be mostly engaged by students intentionally or unintentionally. Plagiarizing behaviour is considered as a concept of copyright, ownership and intellectual property that cannot be shared with others (Pennycook, 1996; Sapp, 2002). It has also been defined in the Oxford Dictionary as the practice of taking someone's works or ideas and passes it as their work. According to Olesen, Amin, and Mahadi (2017), plagiarism is part of misconduct in research where it is the appropriation of another person's idea, processes, results or words by not giving any appropriate credit to the originating author. Plagiarism has been rather pervasive over the past decades and increasing on an international scale since the availability of resources from the internet that could easily be plagiarized (Pickard, 2006; Zhang, Yin & Zheng, 2018; Liu *et al.*, 2018; Wu, 2018). Issues of plagiarism and duplicate publications were found mostly in social science (Kang *et al.*, 2007 & Shin, 2008). Although, higher learning institutions that act as the key stakeholders in promoting academic ethics have delivered their concern on plagiarism through its policies and practices (Sun & Hu, 2019), yet, it still becomes a worrisome trend for higher learning institutions where it can pose a threat to the institution's reputation (Flint, Clegg & Macdonald, 2006).

Sun and Hu (2019) revealed that there are different issues reported concerning the current understanding of plagiarism by both students and their lecturers despite a clear definition explained. Most of them make it corrective in plagiarizing, but it appeared that they are rather lenient in practice. There are studies highlighted on issues of plagiarism in higher learning institutions and hence, it has been categorized as rather weak even though students do have basic understanding on it (Smith, Ghazali, & Minhad, 2007; Karim, Zamzuri & Nor, 2009; Chun, Stewart & Wai, 2012; Yusof & Masrom, 2012; Looi, Wong & Koh, 2015). There are also other factors contributing to plagiarism such as lack of awareness, competence as well as personal attitudes (Smith, Ghazali, & Minhad, 2007). Thus, whoever who has academic experience or other forms of exposure on writing need to continuously influence the perception of plagiarism in the right manner that is prevalent in academics.

Authorship Disputes

In social science, research misconduct is hardly mentioned in terms of data fabrication and falsification. Instead, the authorship dispute is the topic that is frequently discussed concerning research misconduct. Unlike in natural sciences, misconduct in research is mostly discussed from the aspects of data manipulation (Olesen, Amin & Mahadi, 2017). Ison (2018) indicates that there are differences in requiring authorship acknowledgements according to the country especially for those with English-as-the-second-language settings. Authorship disputes have become part of the culture in a scientific publication (Barrett, Funk & Macrina, 2005). This occurs when the researcher questions a person's rights to author or co-author a paper or an article, the ignorant attitude of authors, and lack of awareness on the existing standard guidelines of authorship (Olesen, Amin & Mahadi, 2018).

Within the researcher - supervisor link, authorship dispute can be related to the term irresponsible authorship or intellectual dishonesty where either the ethic is implemented or it is due to academic credit award. In some cases, the term co-authorship is applied when there are equal effort and contribution from each author. However, someone who signed as an author but made little contribution to the work is considered as deception in reporting the research (Smith, 2000). Besides, stealing of students' work is serious even with the student consents to co-authorship but the power of relationship can't be given through coercion at any level (Mitchell & Carroll, 2008).

Authorship dispute was also found as the most common reason for journals publication retractions (Huh, Kim & Cho, 2016). According to Aspura, Noorhidawati and Abrizah (2018), most of the papers retracted are papers on collaborative works with co-authors from national and international affiliations. On the other side, the practice of corresponding author for a particular paper or article is used to indicate the seniority and leadership of the study as well as an indicator in a research assessment (Noorhidawati, Aspura & Abrizah, 2017). Consequently, disagreement on the authorship will negatively affect the goodwill and reputation of the individual author especially the students.

Method

The findings of this paper were carried out from the electronic databases listed in **Table 3**. These databases are considered robust and covered 19 areas of studies such as business, sciences, medical, social sciences, and others between 1995 until 2019. Specifically, Scopus indexes a total of 107 documents related to social sciences and Google Scholar listed a total of 50,800 results related to this study, both in quantitative and qualitative research articles. Nevertheless, it is to note that no databases are comprehensive or perfect including Scopus, Google Scholar, and Google Search. Yet, it was suggested that the searching process uses more databases to increase the likelihood of obtaining relevant articles (Younger, 2010). Thus, this paper is conducted in an effort of manual

searching on several established sources such as Google Scholar and Google Search in which considering that these databases are reliable containing journals and articles related to the study.

Table 3: Databases in Performing Literature Search

Database	Access From	Site	Open/ Close Access
Scopus	Emphasis: Ethics Issues; Research Misconduct; Qualitative Research; Higher Education; Higher Learning; Undergraduate Student; Postgraduate Student; Malaysia.	www.scopus.com	Open and Close
Google Scholar	Emphasis: Ethical Issue; Ethical; Research Misconduct; Qualitative Research; Qualitative Approach; Higher Learning; Higher Education.	www.scholar.google.com/ scholar	Open
Google Search	Emphasis: Ethical Issue; Ethical; Research Misconduct; Qualitative Research; Qualitative Approach; Higher Learning; Higher Education.	www.google.com	Open

The analysis was done through manual selection from the database listed using keywords such as ethics issues, ethical issue, research misconduct, ethical, qualitative research, higher education, higher learning, undergraduate student, postgraduate student, and Malaysia. The selection criteria of the articles, journals, and books are specifically focused on ethics in qualitative research. Throughout the selection process, there is a total of 50 databases retrieved and 9 out of it are from books publication.

Results and Discussions

The literature on research misconduct in Malaysian students of social sciences is limited. This is because the problem was seldom reported as there are too many processes involved when reporting. Furthermore, some might be afraid of repercussions after it was reported (Olesen, Amin & Mahadi, 2017). In most studies, ethical issues refer to research misconduct, plagiarism and authorship disputes (Smith, 2006; Orb *et al.*, 2011; Resnik, 2011; Olesen *et al.*, 2017 & 2018; Su & Hu, 2019).

Although there are other issues that were debated such as papers retraction, gaps between students and supervisors, and research collaboration, the most common issues raised related to ethics in qualitative research are discussed in this paper. Besides, the ethical issues expressed are different according to the nature of the study and most of them had witnessed or experienced at least once in violation of ethics along their working years as a researcher despite being provided with policies and regulations in their institution (Olesen, Amin & Mahadi, 2017). Therefore, the findings will highlight the prevalence of ethical issues, the reason for engaging in ethical issues, and prevention of ethical issues in qualitative research as presented below.

Prevalence of Ethical Issues

In the Malaysian higher learning institutions, research misconduct is one of the ethical issues that have become a common scenario among researchers or students, especially plagiarism and authorship disputes, although these were rarely reported. A study by Olesen, Amin and Mahadi (2018) also indicated that most of the students in Malaysian higher learning institutions have a lack of understanding and awareness of the issue of plagiarism since the university has failed to include it in the subject course or university's policy in research. This has happened among the students in Malaysia due to the limited delivery of knowledge in plagiarism and its consequences through the research ethics education (Wan *et al.*, 2011; Yusof & Masrom, 2012; Looi *et al.*, 2015).

Usually, ethical issues are related to misconduct or misbehaviour in research. In their study, Olesen, Amin and Mahadi (2018) found that their participants have highlighted six types of misbehaviour in research that need to be considered. The six forms of misbehaviour are categorized into the data, misrepresentation of products, plagiarism, authorship, protocol, and unethical research management. The consequences of these misbehaviours are found to be dangerous to the research community and will be detrimental to the progress of research in that particular country. Nevertheless, the most common misbehaviour involved among researchers in qualitative is the violation of the codes of ethics because it concerns more on the privacy of the human subject.

Generally, qualitative research is concerned mostly with human subject and because of that, consent from the participants involved is important to avoid individual intrusion. Sanjari *et al.* (2014) indicated that a researcher

must endeavour to minimize the possibility of intrusion on the study participants by all means. Intrusiveness during data collection process is a concern for participants. The researcher, especially those who are health care practitioners, need to exercise extra caution especially when it is related to highly sensitive issues. Despite the various nature of studies, it is probable that one might have experienced once in violating the research ethics throughout their involvement in the research world. Hence, prevention is a must to ensure the trustworthiness of reporting in qualitative research be taken care of.

Reason Engaging in Ethical Issues

Several factors are being identified which will affect the decision for engaging in research misconduct including individual, structural, organizational and cultural factors (Olesen, Amin & Mahadi, 2018). While other studies conducted were investigated more towards those factors, this paper only highlights the most crucial one that have influenced the researcher's writing style which is the culture factor. According to Park (2003) and Song-Turner (2008), different cultures can influence one's referencing and citing styles which could result in plagiarising behaviour. Besides that, the non-existence of the writing culture within the institution also becomes one of the reasons for plagiarism (Olesen *et al.*, 2017).

Most studies have highlighted that the most common problem among students is their lack of knowledge and understanding of ethics in a research. As a result, engaging in misconduct in their research will lead to plagiarism and falsification behaviour when the students were unable to reference correctly in their research writing (Olesen *et al.*, 2017). However, Resnik (2011) in his research indicated that nearly all actions by the researchers are classified as unethical or misconduct. The action of misconduct in research may occur only when researchers intended to deceive or conduct honest errors such as sloppiness, poor record-keeping, miscalculations, bias, self-deception, and negligence.

On the other hand, teaching is one of the approaches used to provide essential knowledge to the researchers on how to conduct qualitative research ethically. The need for teaching in ethics education among postgraduate students has become imperative because it is particularly important to educate future generations on research (Olesen, Amin & Mahadi, 2018). However, teaching in research should start earlier before students get involved in the research study (Miller, 2010). Olesen, Amin and Mahadi (2018) also indicated that students not only lack of early exposure to research ethics but they should continue to be exposed to research ethics so that they will not forget as well as making it a reminder for themselves. Furthermore, the teaching also seldom involves an explanation of the consequences when engaging in ethical problems.

Besides that, the increasing number of postgraduate students may cause research misconduct to frequently occur and difficult to resolve due to the lack of understanding in its definitions, supervisor inexperience, and limitations in acknowledging students' decision making (Mitchell & Carroll, 2008). This is when an early intervention by the institution or faculty is required to highlight the importance of knowledge on research ethics. Without it, more students will be engaged in research misconduct. Moreover, cases on research misconduct usually involve young researchers or students that draw greater attention from the research community and it will be questionable in terms of their training and responsibility within the institutions (Olesen *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to address the ethical issues seriously and deeply to reveal the effect on the individual involved.

Prevention of Ethical Issues

In the education world, studies on ethics frequently emphasized the importance of preventing from engaging in ethical issues. It is not only threatening the academic profession and compromises in its integrity but also in the political, financial as well as social support for research. Given that social sciences are the most scientific publication, then misconduct in research will give its impact not only to the study but also to society (Fang *et al.*, 2012). Either way, research ethics education is also important to academicians and support staff. There is no doubt to educate them on ethics in research to prevent them from engaging in misconduct. For students, the subject of research ethics should be taught solely as one subject to provide a clear understanding of research ethics and to avoid unethical research practices (Olesen *et al.*, 2018). Thus, the institutions have to revisit the needs in implementing the ethics education in the postgraduate curriculum and add in as a specialized or core subject of the curriculum according to the particular field.

Other than that, training and courses on ethics also help in providing better understanding among students. Yet, it was seldom provided by the institution and most of the researchers will attend courses organized by an external organization. Resnik (2011) expressed that the research environment also plays an important role in research

misconduct. Hence, courses on research ethics are therefore likely to help most people gain a better understanding of the ethical judgment as well as decision making. Besides, it can also reduce the rate of serious deviations in research by improving the understanding of ethics and sensitizing into the issues. Resnick also added that although those courses and training does not prevent research misconduct, it is also useful in helping to prevent deviations from the research norms.

In addition, the researcher individually should also consider the emotional distance in adopting the research topic or engaging with the participants in which it will be a potential challenge of emotion. In practice, appropriate planning must be placed before the process of data collection and mastered how the study will be conducted as well as what level of relationship development is required (Sanjari *et al.*, 2014). In return for the privacy of the participants, the researcher must not rely solely on the informant to avoid the intrusiveness of the participants. It is necessary for the researcher to refrain from soliciting the privacy of the participants or prevent the disclosure of personal issues. Thus, strategic planning must always consider all types of challenges to explicit the ethical protocols, guidelines, and codes with respect to qualitative research.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the common ethical issues in qualitative research that engaged by researchers, especially among Malaysian students. We also highlighted why and how to prevent from engaging in ethic problems when planning and implementing the qualitative study. This paper cannot ensure a reduction in ethical problems but it can contribute to an understanding of the importance of ethics education among students through the institution's curriculum and courses, especially to those who have conducted or are involved in a qualitative study. The institutions as the key stakeholders also play an important role in ensuring that the incidents and ethical issues among the students are discussed and managed before future mistakes arise. For a qualitative researcher, it is a must to always respect the given mandate of maintaining ethics protocol specifically for the protection of participants' rights, the importance of the research area, and the originality in research reporting.

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