Ethical Issues in Social Science Research

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Abstract

Scientific integrity is a key aspect of research ethics. The responsibility of every researcher is to seek the truth from the quest of new and better knowledge. Based on this, the social science research must ensure the moral integrity. Hence this paper decided to x-ray some ethnical issues that may interfere or hinder the effective result of the finding. This paper is purely qualitative and secondary source of data was utilized. It was recommended the principles of ethical conduct of social science should be strictly adhere to by the researchers.

Introduction

Science is defined as the study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world and society. It can also be taken as the pursuit and application of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world following a systematic methodology based on evidence (Grayling, 2015). The process of the approach include identification of the subject matter to be studied, formulation of testable hypotheses, observation or experimentation, testing the hypotheses and then generalization. Social science research method is a modest attempt to grapple with the problem of research around man. It is an attempt to identify and explain the procedure and processes of conducting research on individual, organisations and communities (Carl & Cofnas, 2016).

The main difference between the natural and social science researches is the degree of control application in the natural science scientist uses procedures that eliminate, as far as possible, source of bias and errors that may distort the results in the social science certain biases are inevitable. It study the cultural man, which unlike objects cannot be put into the laboratory to be experimented upon. Most importantly, a reasonable allowance for different types of error and biases is made by the social scientist. The enables him to come up with a result that is consistent with reality within some degree of confidence (Ezeah, 2004).

According to Aibieyi and Ibrahim (2008) science is a method and a system of deriving truth. Social science research follows a set of sequential steps. These sequential stage constitute what is called the research process. This process is a product of the scientific method which is usually the underlining method in research. Research process in social science is the overall scheme of scientific activities in which scientist engage. All the activities involved in the research process are assumed to achieve the goals of science. Basically seven major types of activities could be identified as stages in the research process- the problem, hypotheses, research design, measurement, data collection, data analysis and empirical generalization. Different scholars have defined research in various ways according to Nwankwuo (1994), Research as a systematic and objective analysis and recording of controlled observation that lead to the development of generation, principle or theories resulting in prediction and possible ultimate control of events.

Belmont (2018), opined that Research involves the manipulation of things, concepts or symbols for the purpose of generalizing or verify knowledge, whether that knowledge aid in construction of theory or in the practices of an art. It is seen as more enlightening because research is an activity of solving problem, which leads to new knowledge using methods of inquiry which are currently accepted as adequate by scholars in the field. Research implies diligent and systematic attempt to provide plausible answers to questions by the process of logically designed operations.

Social Science Research

Social science research is a process of gathering information of data about a specified object/concept or phenomenon events or matter. It also includes the process of processing or interpreting information so as to produce knowledge about the phenomenon in question and also for the purpose of solving problems, that are associated with the phenomenon. Social science deals with events around man. There are two areas of social research; Qualitative and quantitative social research. Quantitative research specifies numerical assignment to the phenomena under study, while qualitative research produces narrative or textual description of the phenomena under study (Scot and Johnson, 2009). The advantage of quantitative research is that the findings from the sample under study will more accurately reflect the overall population for which the samples was drawn.

From the definition of research, the following are the characteristics of research: research is directed towards the solution of a problem; emphasized the development of principles, theories and generalization that will be helpful in predicting future occurrences; Is based upon observable experience or empirical evidence; requires accurate observations and description; involves gathering new data from primary or first-hand sources for a new purpose; requires expertise; patient and an unhurried activity; require courage; carefully recorded and reported; research needs to be objective and logical; applying every possible test to validate the procedures employed, the data collected and the conclusion reached. According Aibeiyi and Ibrahim (2008), in writing of thesis or dissertation, it is generally agreed that the research format should cover five major aspects of the study as follows:

- Introduction or background to the definition of problem
- Review of literature
- Methodology
- Data analysis
- Summary, recommendation and conclusion

The Significance of Social Science Research

According to Osemwota, Okhakhu & Tonwe (1996), social science research is of practical benefits and theoretical value to mankind. Some of the importance are as followed.

1. Social science research helps in creating new knowledge, mew method and new invention which illuminate the path of human progress. The research develops scientific tempers, creativity and innovation are developed. Basic and applied new knowledge is developed. This definitely add to the up-grading of the society.
2. Social science research helps in promoting social wlfare by providing a deeper understanding of causal nexus underlying various social evils and providing effective remedial measures to neutralize those social evils. Social research is generally normative emphasing what is good for the society by stating, what is and what is not good for the economy. It helps to contribute to social welfare.
3. Social research helps in the development of methodology to deal with social issues such as executive stress, worker ethics, leadership style, child labour, illiteracy, drug addictions, labour absenteeism etc to deal with these, appropriate methodology in needed.
4. Social research helps to highlight the relationship between social facts and their causes. The knowledge of causative factors and their magnitude makes it possible for the social researcher to make predictions. Although, due to the complexity of social phenomena, accurate predictions in must cases in not possible. But, with some high degree of accuracy, better control and planning become possible
5. Social science research is useful in guiding social policies and planning. Social planning requires a store of reliable and factual knowledge on the basis of which the blue-print can be designed and social science help in securing such knowledge through voluminous social data that is generated on the basis of which social policies and planning strategies are formulated.

Qualities of a Good Social Science Researcher

There are no hard and fast rules regarding the requisite virtues and qualifications a researcher should possess but to a very great extent, the success of a research work depends upon some qualities of the research possesses. This can be seen from two points: general and specific qualities.

General Qualities

These are qualities that a Researcher required for the success of any research work. It includes

a. Scientific attitude

For any research to be successful, the researcher must possess a scientific frame of mine. That is, the researcher must possess the determination and ability to get at the naked facts and not be influenced by mere appearance or by his subjective wishes.

b. **Imaginative Powers**

The researcher must possess a high degree of Imaginative power. The quality will enhance his position to grasp the abstract and tangible aspects of society which form a major part of social phenomena.

c. Perseverance

Research is not for the impatient. A research requires inexhaustible perseverance. Perseverance is an indispensable requirement of any serious research work. The researcher should be able to work patiently and continuously over a long period of time, even when success in not in sight.

d. Quick Grasping power

The researcher should possesses a quick grasping power, otherwise it will be difficult for him to grasp the significance of things or symbols and take appropriate action. Sometime, circumstances present themselves before the researcher with great suddenness

Specific Qualities

These are some specific qualities that enhance a proper footing for a successful research work, it possessed by the researcher. Amongst are:

1. Respect for ethics of research

Ethical considerations are very important in any research work. A good researcher, therefore should respect the ethics of research.

2. Personal interest in the study

The researcher should be highly interest in the study he is undertaking. This will help inspire him and keep his moral high even in the face of difficulties

3. Knowledge of the subjects

Researcher should have a good knowledge of the subject under study. A good knowledge of the subject area or topic being studied will immensely help the research worker in preparing the forms of questionnaire and schedule of get the information needed.

4. Knowledge of the appropriate methodology of research

The researcher should be aware of the appropriate methodology to be applied to the subject under study. In the absence of such knowledge, the researcher is most likely to commit methodological errors and the deduction drawn by him may not be sound.

Ethical issues

Research ethics deals with how we treat those who participate in our studies and how we handled the data after we collect them. The increasing emphasis on the need to protect research subject against dangers have been deeply rooted in the social science (Sen & Nagwanshee, 2016). According to Vanclery, Banes and Taylor (2013), some ethical issues in social science research may arise from any of the following.

a) The research topic and the problem being investigated;
b) the context of the study is the nature of the setting within which the investigation is being conducted;
c) the kind of persons, including their personality traits participating in the research;
d) the procedure and data collection method required by the research design; and
e) the type of data needed and nature of research report to be written

Various ethical problems occur in Social Science Research, these include:

- Involvement without consent

People who participate in a research study usually have the right to know that they are part of that study. The researcher ought to describe the detail of the

research to the participants or their legal representatives, in case of children or other who are not able to give informed consent. But by their nature, some researches are conducted without the knowledge or consent of the research subject. This is mostly the case in the studies base in observational methods of data collection in which research subjects that may sometimes be individual, group or communities may not be aware that they are being studied (Yip, Han & Sing, 2016). The participant observational method has been used quite often to carry out studies in which people were involved in research without their knowledge and consent. Scientists hold very strong views that prior knowledge and consent of research subjects would lead to changes in the behavior being studied thereby rendering the investigation meaningless. (Resnik, 2015).

Deception in Research

This type of ethical problem in social science research, occurs when researcher engage in questionable practice of deceiving research participants by given them incorrect information about the nature and purpose of the research. For some areas of social science, particularly certain areas of experimental social psychology, deception is a crucial issue on which reasonable people will likely disagree. Deception is the practice of giving false information to research participants about some aspect of the study. The purpose of deception is to get participants to reveal their true thoughts, feelings, or behavior, which they would not otherwise provide if the true nature of the experiment were made known to them. As soon as possible after the study, the researchers need to inform participant that the information they received during the experiment was in fact a rose. According to (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2018) there are several reasons why deception may be employed in social research. They include the following:

- Deception to conceal the true purpose of the research
- Deception to conceal the true function of the research participant's actions and role in the research
- Deception to conceal the experiences that research participants will have especially that may be harmful or entail some discomfort

Participants Involvement in Research

Ethical codes of research require that it is crucial to obtain the consent of research subjects before involving them as participant in an investigation. There are

however cases in which consent of research participants is obtained not freely but through coercion. It is a very common, though questionable practice in social science research for investigators to involve people in research on the basis of coerced consent rather than consent voluntarily given. Involving people in research on the basis of coerced consent is more generally associated with situation within formal institutional setting in which researchers may be persons in subordinate position to participate in a research without voluntarily giving their consent to do so (Vanclay, Baines and Taylor, 2013).

Acts that Conflict with Human Ideas

The study of honesty as form of human ideal may entail inducing participants to lie by creating opportunity for participants to be involved in such behavior which conflicts with human ideals. A scientist studying resistance attitude under condition of authoritative and dictatorial influence may need to create a situation with induces research participants to obey order they may otherwise regard as wrong and harmful (Adelle and Weiland, 2012).

According to (Makau, 2016), it is unethical for a researcher to misrepresent his identity to gain entrance into an otherwise inaccessible social situation. He also particularly condemns disguised observation on grounds that it diminishes the general climate of trust towards research. For him, disguised observation constitutes an ugly invasion of privacy which is quite an objectionable practice in the social science scientist ought to be ready to honour in his dealings with others.

Treatment of Research Participants

Failure to treat research subjects with fairness consideration and respect is a very unethical research practice (Ezeah, 2004). A research participant is one of several individual who thoughts, actions, experience , attitudes and orientations are studied in a single research project which contribute greatly to the development of a generalized principle of social subject by treating them as objects of research has been consider as an unethical and objectionable practice in educational research.

The True Nature of Research

Amongst the ethical problems, is involving potential participants in scientific investigations without their knowledge or informed consent. While information about the true nature and purpose of the research is withheld from them. Withholding such vital information from research subject amounted to abridged freedom of choice of the participants right (Townsend & Wallace 2014). It is therefore suggested that in conducting research, Researchers should carefully consider the possibility of avoiding such ethical problems.

Conclusion

A decision to conduct research in spite of the ethical problems that may be entailed in its procedures may be guided, therefore, by the potential benefits and contributions which Social Science Research is expected to make to society, social researchers should respect the right, dignity and the worth of all people and try to eliminate bias in their activities. And social science researcher should acknowledge the rights of others to hold values, attitudes and opinions that are quite different from their own.

Social research is beneficial to society, groups and individual, therefore the researchers must do their work in a responsible moral and legal manner in accordance to the society in which they live.

Recommendations

In view of the backdrop from this paper, the followings are hereby recommended.

1. Researcher should note that one of the responsibility is to protect the welfare of their research subjects and so on.
2. Researcher should apply a diligent and systematic approach in the research work embarking on.
3. The social researcher should be well informed about the legal act, the law that may affect the conduct of the research in the country their investigation are conducted.
4. The social scientist must be careful to avoid the mistakes of operational negligence
5. Participants consent to participate in the social research must be voluntary and free from coercion

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