

1. INTRODUCTION

Educational research is a methodical exploration of educational systems, practices, and policies that strive to upgrade student learning outcomes and educational experiences [1]. The primary objective of educational research is to recognise efficacious teaching and learning approaches, assess educational programmes, and influence educational policy determinations. Research has endeavoured to establish knowledge-based evidence that can contribute to refining educational practices and ultimately ameliorate student achievement [2]. Educators facilitate informed decisions after conducting educational research to fulfil the heterogeneous needs of learners by scrutinising sundry facets of education such as curriculum design, instructional techniques, and assessment methods [3].

Ethics are the guiding principles that assist in safeguarding the things that people value [2]. It is widely accepted and has well-defined parameters and guidelines based on morality that direct researchers, academicians, and practitioners to comply with fairness while involved in research [4]. The word 'ethics' originates from the French word 'ethique'. It was first used in the 14th century as a discipline concerned with moral obligations. Moreover, ethics has been termed moral philosophy, and ethics takes into account the system of moral values or principles on any subject matter [5]. Ethics exhibit the way for right or wrong in human conduct, covering beliefs about what is ethically acceptable [6]. It is an area of expertise that comprises the notion of right and wrong behaviour based on rules and regulations [7]. Perkins [8] views ethics as understanding the foundation and structure of morality, guiding individuals and groups on how to believe in society. A structure of moral doctrines affects our ways of living related to whatever is upright for individuals and society. McNamee [9] views ethics as a division of philosophy that speaks inquiries about actions fostering a claim on morality and studying the values and customs of individuals. It has been applied to numerous arenas of life, such as economics, business, politics, and the environment [10].

However, it is essential to note that ethical considerations in research are crucial to guard the rights and welfare of participants participating in research, ensuring their privacy, dignity, and autonomy [11]. By prioritising ethical

considerations, researchers can establish trust and maintain the integrity of their studies. Additionally, ethical practices can lead to more accurate and unbiased data, as participants are more likely to provide honest and reliable responses [12]. While ethical considerations in research are essential, focusing on these considerations may hinder the progress of educational research and limit its potential to improve student achievement [13]. For example, strict ethical guidelines may restrict researchers from conducting specific experiments or gathering data from vulnerable populations, which could lead to limited findings and a lack of understanding of the diverse needs of learners. However, balancing preserving ethical standards and advancing educational research is essential. By adhering to ethical considerations, researchers can confirm that their results are consistent, valid, and relevant to real-world educational settings, ultimately leading to more informed decisions that benefit all learners.

2. MAJOR ETHICAL ISSUES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

There are numerous ethical issues which are threats to the quality, originality, novelty, and integrity of educational research. These issues should be kept in view before conducting the research. If any researcher violates the ethical standards and regulations, this activity causes ethical issues in research. These are some major ethical issues:

Informed consent: The first critical ethical issue in conducting educational research is informed consent. For example, researchers must ensure that participants know about the study, the possible threats involved, and their choice to take out at any time. Additionally, researchers should obtain informed consent from participants regarding how to share their data with other researchers or organisations. Archard [14] emphasises informed consent as a fundamental principle of research ethics, which requires researchers to obtain voluntary and informed consent from individuals before participating in research. This means that participants must be fully aware of the objective and aim of the study, the procedures, the possible risks and benefits, as well as their rights and ability to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Informed consent is crucial for upholding autonomy and protecting the well-being and rights of participants.

The participants provided consent to guarantee that they had the autonomy to make an informed verdict about partaking in a study, and they respected their autonomy and right to self-determination. Without informed consent, researchers risk violating ethical principles and potentially causing harm to participants [15]. By obtaining consent, researchers can establish trust and maintain the integrity of their research, ultimately leading to more reliable and valid results. For example, in a clinical trial testing a new medication, obtaining informed consent involves explaining to participants the purpose of the study, the possible side effects of the medicine, and their choice to take out of the study at any time if they are affected by adverse reactions. This confirms that participants are aware of what they agree to and allows them to make autonomous decisions regarding their participation. Without informed consent, participants may be unknowingly subjected to risks or forced into research against their will. The nocebo effect occurs when individuals experience adverse side effects or worsening symptoms after exposure to a placebo. Depression can occur when participants in a study are informed about potential side effects and develop symptoms despite receiving an inactive substance [15]. To mitigate the nocebo effect, researchers must provide clear explanations about the purpose of the study and potential side effects and emphasise participants' right to withdraw if they experience any adverse effects [16]. This ensures that participants are fully informed and can make autonomous decisions about their participation, avoiding any unintended harm from the nocebo effect.

Oluchi [17] opined that participants' understanding of the purpose and procedures of the study can help alleviate concerns and build trust, leading to greater participant engagement and cooperation. Informed consent also promotes ethical responsibility and respect for individual autonomy, as it acknowledges the rights of participants. By obtaining consent, researchers demonstrate their commitment to upholding ethical standards and prioritising their participants' well-being and rights. It allows them to make an informed decision about whether to take part based on their circumstances and beliefs. Ultimately, informed consent is a crucial step in conducting ethical research and maintaining the integrity of the scientific community.

Confidentiality and anonymity: The second ethical issue is confidentiality and anonymity.

This approach includes taking measures such as using secure storage systems and anonymising data during analysis. By addressing these ethical concerns, researchers can build a rapport with participants and uphold the doctrines of kindness, ensuring the well-being and rights of individuals involved in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity concerns are also crucial to consider when conducting ethical research. Participants were guaranteed that their data would be kept confidential and that their individualities would remain unidentified in any circulated findings or reports. It protects their privacy and encourages honesty and openness in their responses, as they can share their views and experiences without fear of retribution or judgment [18]. Respecting participants' confidentiality builds a strong foundation for ethical research and helps maintain the scientific community's integrity. Furthermore, participants can be confident that their information will be picked up with extreme caution and security. All information collected during the research process will be kept safe and only accessible by authorised personnel [19]. Strict protocols, including encryption and limited access controls, should be followed to protect participants' personal information. This commitment to data security is essential for establishing trust between researchers and participants, fostering a collaborative environment where individuals feel comfortable sharing their experiences and opinions.

By prioritising confidentiality, researchers can create a safe space for participants to freely express themselves, ultimately leading to more accurate and insightful findings [20]. For example, in a study on mental health stigma, researchers could protect participants' personal information by using encrypted online surveys and restricting access to only authorised personnel. Individuals can openly share their experiences with mental health without fear of their information being compromised or disclosed. The confidential nature of the study encouraged participants to provide honest and detailed responses, providing researchers with valuable insights into the impact of stigma on individuals' lives. Rodgers and Nolte [21] found that encrypted online surveys and restricted access may reduce the risk of unauthorised access. However, there is still a possibility of data breaches or hacking [22], which may discourage participants from sharing their experiences due to concerns about compromised personal information.

Researcher bias and objectivity: The tendency of researchers to be influenced by their individual opinions, principles and choices in the planning, application, investigation and elucidation of a study is referred to as researcher bias [23]. This bias can lead to distorted or inaccurate findings and conclusions. To minimise researcher bias, researchers need to strive for objectivity by conducting studies in a neutral and unbiased manner, using rigorous methodologies, and being aware of their biases. Ross [24] defines objectivity as being impartial, unbiased, and free from personal opinions or preferences. In research, objectivity is essential for producing reliable and valid results [25].

By practising objectivity, researchers can ensure the credibility and integrity of their findings and conclusions. Objectivity is crucial to the effectiveness of a survey [26]. The researchers needed to remain objective throughout the analysis process, ensuring that their personal beliefs or biases did not influence the interpretation of the data. By maintaining a neutral stance, researchers can ensure that findings correctly reflect participants' experiences and provide valuable insights into the sensitive topic of mental health [27]. This objectivity helps build trust with participants, encouraging them to openly share their experiences without fearing biased interpretations. For example, in a study on the effectiveness of therapy for individuals with anxiety disorders, researchers may use objective measures such as self-report questionnaires and clinical assessments to gather data. By remaining neutral, researchers can accurately analyse the data and determine whether the therapy significantly improved participants' symptoms. Esarey and Valdes [28] state that an unbiased approach ensures that results are valid and reliable, ultimately contributing to the development of evidence-based treatments for mental health conditions. Moreover, researchers' biases toward specific treatment approaches or preconceived notions about anxiety disorders may influence their interpretation of the data, potentially leading to biased conclusions and ineffective treatment strategies.

Identifying and managing potential biases in research is crucial for accurately understanding and addressing social anxiety [29]. Implementing rigorous research methodologies, such as double-blind studies and peer review, can help minimise bias and ensure the validity of findings [27]. Additionally, involving individuals with lived

experiences can help reduce the stigma surrounding social anxiety by highlighting the experiences of real people and fostering empathy and understanding in society [26]. This collaborative approach between researchers and individuals with lived experiences can also lead to the development of more accurate and comprehensive diagnostic tools for assessing social anxiety. By gaining insights from those who have first-hand knowledge of the disorder, researchers can refine existing assessment measures and create new ones that capture the nuances and complexities of social anxiety. In turn, this approach can enhance the accuracy of diagnosis and ensure that individuals receive appropriate treatment based on their specific symptoms and needs [29].

Ensuring objectivity in data collection and analysis is another vital aspect of research ethics. By implementing standardised protocols and minimising bias, researchers can obtain reliable and valid data that can be employed to develop effective interventions and strategies [30]. Additionally, conducting longitudinal research can facilitate valuable insights into the durable effects and trajectories of social anxiety, enabling clinicians to tailor individualised treatment plans better [31]. It is essential to ensure objectivity in data collection following a set of steps. To ensure objectivity in data analysis, researchers should follow a systematic and transparent approach. Before collecting data, they should clearly define their research question and hypotheses. It is crucial to use random sampling techniques to minimise bias and ensure sample representativeness. During data collection, researchers should adhere to standardised protocols and avoid any personal biases or preconceived notions [32].

Additionally, appropriate statistical methods should be used to analyse the collected data, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the results. Cleaning and organising the data, checking for outliers or errors and selecting suitable statistical tests are crucial steps in this process [33]. By following these steps, researchers can enhance the validity and credibility of their findings and make their research more robust and trustworthy. Furthermore, researchers should also consider the limitations of their study and acknowledge any potential confounding variables that may affect their results. Explaining the statistical methods is essential, allowing for transparency and replicability in future studies. Additionally,

peer review and collaboration with other experts in the field can further strengthen the reliability of the research findings Alam & Patel, [34]. This approach includes identifying any biases that may influence the data collection process or introduce errors in the analysis. By addressing these limitations, researchers can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research outcomes and promote accurate interpretation of the results.

Transparency and honesty: Transparency refers to providing transparent and open information about a study's methods, procedures, and results, allowing others to assess the validity and reliability of the research. Honesty involves truthful and accurate reporting of findings and acknowledging limitations or biases [35]. By practising transparency and honesty, researchers promote trustworthiness in their work and contribute to the integrity of the scientific community. It is also crucial to ensure the integrity of scientific research throughout the research process.

The survey included disclosing conflicts of interest, reporting methods and results accurately, and sharing any potential biases or limitations of the study [36]. By doing so, researchers can build trust within the scientific community and allow for critical evaluation and replication of their work. In addition, open and transparent research practices promote collaboration and facilitate the exchange of ideas, leading to more robust and reliable scientific advancements [37]. For example, a researcher who studies the effects of a new drug on a particular disease should thoroughly disclose any financial ties they have with the pharmaceutical company that produces the drug [38]. All the steps taken during the study were accurately reported, such as participant selection, data analysis methods, and reproducibility. Furthermore, discussing potential limitations or biases in the research, such as sample size or confounding variables, allows other scientists to evaluate the findings in a better way.

3. ETHICAL CODES AND STANDARDS

Ethical codes and standards provide clear guidelines for researchers to conduct their studies ethically and responsibly. By adhering to these codes and standards, researchers can guard the rights and well-being of participants and maintain the integrity and credibility of their

research findings [39]. Additionally, ethical codes and standards help establish trust between researchers and the public, as they demonstrate a commitment to conducting unbiased and objective research [40]. Without the oversight of an Institutional Review Board (IRB), there may be a higher risk of unethical practices occurring in research, which can undermine the credibility of the scientific community as a whole. APA 7th edition should be followed during in-text citation and referencing. Ethical standards have been developed to guide the conduct of research that is ethical. The Code of Ethics, updated in 2011 as the Code of Ethics [41], requires values and moral ideals to be maintained in educational research. The following are considered in terms of several essential ethics and principles. Ethical standards are the enforceable rules for researchers in arriving at an ethical progression of the act.

Permission: The participants involved in the study must be informed about the research objectives, the risks involved, and the potential consequences. Oral or written permission was obtained from the participants before inviting them to participate in the research study. In addition, they must be kept informed about the significant changes in the course, nature, purpose, procedure, risks, benefits, and limits of confidentiality of research activity, which might influence their willingness to participate in the study. Agreeing to participate in the research activity was termed informed consent.

Truthfulness: No hidden objective, methodology or data reporting compromises the researcher's or the participants' trust. Deception is used when participants' reluctance to provide truthful data is considered to indicate a compromised state. The data can then be obtained from the participants based on partial truth. This was accomplished by a debriefing session carried out after the completion of the study, where all aspects of the study and its causes for deceptions were discussed with participants [42]. The research process aims to restore trust among participants, students and customers.

Freedom to withdraw: At all times during the study, participants had complete freedom of withdrawal. Participants or clients were assured at the beginning of the research study that they could easily withdraw from the study at any time if they did not feel relaxed during the research process or if the study targeted their emotional or psychological state.

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