The Importance of Adopting Ethical Codes in the Libyan Educational Institutions - with Special Reference to the Postgraduate Students in English Departments

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Abstract

Educational institutions, like any other organization, should adopt ethical codes that govern their members' behaviors and performances. The problem lies in the absence of these ethical codes in many Libyan Educational Institutions. In fact, researchers, teachers and students have responsibilities towards each other and towards other people in the society. This research follows a descriptive method. It aims to shed light

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on the importance of adopting and being aware of these ethical codes for EFL postgraduate Libyan students. It also aims at drawing the attention of the decision-makers, researchers, teachers, and students to the importance of adopting ethical codes that should be respected and followed by all the members of the Educational Institutions.Highlighting, emphasizing, and respecting ethical issues undoubtedly will enhance the teaching, learning and researching processes. Regrettably, this issue is neglected by many Libyan educational institutions and has not received the attention it needs.

Key words: Ethics- Ethical codes–Ethical principles - transparency – accountability – Honesty –Equity - Anonymity - confidentiality

1. Introduction

In the sixties, there was enormous growth in social and educational sciences. University enrolments expanded and the number of these disciplines' practitioners grew correspondingly. At that time, there were few rules governing research work. In that era, "several studies conducted (and) raised key ethical issues for social scientists. By the nineties, many professional associations, all universities, colleges, hospitals, and most government agencies had in place codes of ethics to guide social researchers" Jackson, (1995, p. 285). May (2005:52) indicates that BERA (The British Educational Research Association) has now published an agreed set of ethical guidelines in respect of the research work of its members. She adds that these guidelines will undoubtedly "go some way to support the efforts of researchers in securing fairer terms of research."

In recent decades, there has been increased awareness of ethical issues in all disciplines. As Sullivan, (2009:1), asserts, "Codes of ethics for professionals in numerous disciplines have taken on significance in recent years".

According to Nather, (2016, p.:24), "One must always bear in mind ethical considerations when designing a research project. This is true for all types of research". One of the major concerns that a researcher needs to address before designing a study is ethics. "Social research has an ethical-moral dimension, although, different approaches to science address the values issue differently. All approaches recognize the ethical dimension to research." Neuman, (2014:145)

In the Libyan context, most of these rules governing research work are usually considered by some researchers. Some other researchers, however, are unaware of some of these ethical codes; consequently, these codes are usually neglected unintentionally. Recently, the Quality Insurance Center has issued the Directory of Ensuring the Quality and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Libya, which includes a number of items regarding the quality insurance. One of these items is assigned to (The Ethical Charter of Educational Institutions) which must be adhered to in order to obtain accreditation for any higher educational institution in Libya. The Directory of Ensuring the Quality and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Libya (2018: 21). Adopting this charter, undoubtedly will enhance the quality of research work, and the teaching and learning process in our educational institutions.

The significance of the research

This paper examines ethical issues such as integrity, honesty, transparency, respect for others, accountability, fairness, equity, justice, anonymity, and confidentiality. It hypothesizes that these ethical codes are not adopted by many Libyan Educational Institutions. The paper argues that adopting and respecting these ethical issues, in our Educational Institutions, ensures that all our activities such as teaching, researching and translating will meet ethical requirements. Underscoring and emphasizing ethical issues undoubtedly will enhance the teaching, learning and researching processes. This research may benefit decision makers, researchers, teachers and students and draw their attention to the importance of adopting these ethical codes in the educational institutions. By applying these ethical codes, students will avoid pitfalls such as plagiarism bias, and dishonesty. Moreover, following these ethical codes will ensure teachers fairness, equity, and justice.

Directory of Ensuring the Quality and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions

In this regard, it is worth referring to the Directory of Ensuring the Quality and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Libya p. 21 (translated by the researcher from Arabic) regarding (The Ethical Charter of Educational Institutions) which shouldmust be adhered to in order to obtain accreditation for any higher educational institution in Libya. See Appendix 1

Note: "Employee" in this research refers to any official, employed by the College, irrespective of grade, full-time or part-time, Council or Departmental appointed, or paid on a salaried or an hourly/daily individual basis. The following Item is adopted from the above-

mentioned Directory because of its relevance to the topic under discussing.

Item 10: Transparency and Integrity

This item has one section:

• Transparency and integrity

The Educational Institution should provide ethical charters to all its employees, such as members of the teaching staff, supporting cadre, and employees, which provide for their duties, rights and ethical practices in the implementation of their duties.

The institution should also be transparent and impartial in disseminating the correct information about all its activities.

The most important good practices in this item:

- The existence of a general ethical charter and ethical charters for all professions and specialties conducted by the institution.
- The institution must be impartial in disseminating information and data regarding its vision, mission and objectives.
- The institution must apply a firm and clear system of reward and punishment.
- The institution must ensure transparency and full fairness in the administrative and financial transactions of all its members.
- The institution must take into account the ethics of scientific research, the prescribed controls and the relevant local and international standards.
- The institution must guarantee the academic freedom of teaching staff, and enable them to express their opinions in accordance with the job description and customs applicable in educational institutions.

▪ The institution should explore students' views on the performance of the teaching staff and their relationship with students.

Definitions of Ethics

Ethics, as Biggam, (2011:249) indicates "is essentially a code of conduct on how we ought to lead our lives: sometimes it can appear in written form – as reflected in the laws of the land – but it can also be present in our unwritten philosophical and social beliefs that manifest themselves in everyday behaviour" Biggam, adds that ethics is not a science, i.e. it is not absolute – people can, and often do, disagree on what is acceptable and unacceptable conduct. Whereas, Blyth*,* (2015:166) perceives, ethics as "rather potent academic concept, because of the powerful human rights connotations attached to it".

The ethical issues, according to Neuman., (2014:145) are:

the concerns, dilemmas, and conflicts that arise over the proper way to conduct research. Ethics defines what is or is not legitimate to do or what "moral" research procedure involves. There are few ethical absolutes but there are many agreed-on principles. These principles may conflict in practice. Many ethical issues require you to balance two values: the pursuit of scientific knowledge and the rights of those being studied or of others in society.

Criteria for assessing ethical acceptability

To establish criteria for assessing ethical acceptability (Jackson, 1995, pp. 296-306) refers to two approaches: *consequentialist* and *deontological*, the first view is that ethical judgments about a research project should be made in the light of its consequences for the subject (participant), for the academic discipline, and for the society. A cost-benefit analysis might reveal that the advantages gained by the

advancement of our knowledge justify the violation of some rules: in this view, deception is tolerable if it does not do any long-term damage to the subject (participant).

The *deontological* view for research ethics, on the other hand, proposes absolute moral strictures that must never be violated. According to this view, maintaining the *comfort and self-esteem* of the subject (participant) should be the central concern of the researcher. Moreover, *respondents should feel free to refuse participation,* withdraw at any time, or to refuse to answer any particular question. This view also implies that the respondent has a right to know how he or she was selected for the participation in a study. Furthermore, researchers should not use hidden codes to assist in the identification of those who have or have not returned questionnaires. In dealing with competent adults, participation should be based on *informed consent-* i.e. the potential respondents must be informed about the nature of the study, what kind of issues will be explored, how the respondents were selected, and who is sponsoring the research. Where studies are done involving children, the infirm or incompetent adults, the organization or individual responsible for the prospective respondents should provide consent in writing. According to Seidman (2005), new interviewers tend to be hesitant about informed consent. These two views, in particular, are strictly relevant to post-graduate students. They should be aware of these two approaches and take them in consideration when conducting a research, particularly, during collecting data via questionnaires or interviews and during writing and distributing (Informed consent forms)

Ethical and moral

     Ethical (ultimately from Greek) and moral (ultimately from Latin) are similar in meaning in that they both have to do with the differences between right and wrong. As Kahn, (1994:21) indicates, "*ethical* now tends to refer to system or theory of judging rightness or wrongness, whereas moral tends to refer to more concrete choices and to issues that arouse feelings: you might say that *ethical* refers to right and wrong, and *moral* refers to good and evil".

Bias

     Bias is defined as "a preference or predisposition to favour a particular conclusion" Jackson, 1995:259). In fact, one of the main ethical values is to be aware of bias and to avoid it. As Ang and Nather, (2016:253) indicate, one of the questions that should be asked when critically evaluating a research article is, "Does the writer possess any bias?" Tomal, (2003:2-3), refers to two types of hypotheses, a directional hypothesis and the null hypothesis and clarifies that the former is "when the researcher makes a guess that there will be a difference in two variables" whereas, the latter might state that, there will be no difference between the two variables, therefore, he states that "the null hypothesis is probably more popular because it tends to prevent the researcher from having a bias"

     It is noticeable that some EFL Libyan post-graduate students while writing the literature review chapter that they select arguments that defend their point of view and neglect other arguments that refute their hypothesis. As Ang and Nather, (2016: 247), warn "A sound review article is characterized by a thorough and disciplined literature search. It is vital to take into account all relevant studies, to provide a holistic view

and weed out bias. It is essential that the interviewer avoid asking leading questions (i.e., questions that bias the interviewee's responses) so that the interviewee can give his or her candid responses without influence from the interviewer. (Tomal, 2003, p.37.)

In terms of reducing bias, Ang and Nather, (2016:244). indicate that unlike the unstated methodology of narrative reviews, "systematic reviews aim to minimize bias by using explicit and pre-selected criteria to obtain objective information." Likewise, Carspecken cited in Haralambos, et al (2000:985), believes that critical research need not be biased "because the researchers engaging in it have value commitments. Critical researchers should not just look for the facts which fit their theories. … they should be open to finding evidence which contradicts their theories and challenges their values. They should always be open to changing their standpoints in the light of what they find during the course of the research".

Ethical principles

Codes of ethics provide guidance, but ethical conduct ultimately depends on an individual researcher. Researchers have a moral and professional obligation to be ethical even when research participants are unaware of or unconcerned about ethics. Indeed, many participants are little concerned about protecting their privacy and other rights. (Neuman., 2014. P.145)

Hamilton and Smith, (2016), present the following list of ethical principles:

1. *integrity;*
2. *honesty;*
3. *truth;*

4. *transparency;*
5. *respect for others;*
6. *trust;*
7. *accountability;*
8. *fairness;*
9. *equity, justice and social justice;*
10. *democratic and ethical governance and management of the education*
11. *quality education;*
12. *personal and systems improvement;*
13. *institutional autonomy/institutional independence;*
14. *international co-operation.*

They also identify the following eight groups of actors in education:

1. *teachers in schools;*
2. *academic staff in higher education (HE);*
3. *school pupils;*
4. *HE students;*
5. *parents/guardians/care givers/carers of school pupils;*
6. *parents/guardians/care givers/carers of HE students;*
7. *employers and managers within the education system;*
8. *relevant public officials, and the political leaders and representatives of broader civil society more generally.*

It is of great value if instructors of research methodology at EFL Libyan higher institutions to assign part of their course content to the ethical principles. Integrating these principles into the curricula of English post-graduate students will we raise their awareness of these

principles and help them to take these principles in considerations when conducting their research.

According to Duska, (1998: xi) "Knowing the proper ethical principles and applying them to specific situations is not all that is required to be ethical. One must have the character strength or virtue to be able to operate at an ethical level on a day-to-day basis." Brey, (2006, p.92) refers to values that are essential for the development of the individual and include "honesty, objectivity, fairness, trust, collegiality, respect, accuracy, thoroughness, independence, openness, curiosity and responsibility".

Integrity

Hamilton and Smith, (2016) recommend that all actors in education should ensure the "integrity" of their behaviour, as they illustrate, "their behaviour is consistent with a set of positive moral and ethical principles and standards, based on core values." They add that "Integrity will provide the connection between positive ethical principles and quality in education, and create a barrier to corruption". (P.38)

Transparency

According to Transparency International organization (2019), Transparency**:**

 is about shedding light on rules, plans, processes and actions. It is knowing why, how, what, and how much. Transparency ensures that public officials, civil servants, managers, board members and businesspeople act visibly and understandably, and report on their activities. And it means that the general public can hold them to account. It is the surest way of guarding against corruption, and helps increase trust in the people and institutions on which our futures depend.

Justice or fairness

According to Duska, (1998:.xiv), justice, or fairness "is the virtue that demands people treat others fairly even if it is at a cost to themselves. Justice requires that equals be treated the same, and that people get their due. … Justice demands a person go beyond self-interest … Justice is vital to being ethical".

Anonymity and confidentiality

One general rule in conducting organizational surveys is that "a department should have at least five members in order to ensure a minimum degree of anonymity, otherwise, if the group is too small, the group might need to be combined with another group" Tomal, (2003:64). In more recent research, Mendes, et al (2015) found that privacy and confidentiality issues were the most frequently reported ethical issues faced in daily practice by educational psychologists in Portugal. In fact, one of the main requirements for writing a research is to "gain agreement of participants before recording their input and give guarantees about confidentiality and destruction of recorded audio/video material after transcription" McMillan and Weyers, (2010, p. 128).

The researcher needs to be concerned with how the data is collected and:

whether consent forms or other confidentiality agreements should be used. Likewise, the researcher should be concerned with the method of collecting data so that it does not harm the students in any way psychologically or emotionally. Also, care should be taken to secure the data so that the information does not have a negative effect upon the learning environment. Tomal, (2003 p. 27).

Aveyard, (2014:172), suggests using the passive voice because "it can be useful in cases where you need to maintain anonymity, for

example, 'I was informed that . . .". Moreover, Tomal, (2003, p. 83), warns that respondents are "less likely to give critical opinions than if given complete anonymity through the use of a questionnaire". EFL postgraduate students are recommended to use passive structure in their academic writing. Using this type of structure will help these students to preserve anonymity and encourage them to express their opinions freely.

According to McMillan and Weyers, (2010:.212), three fundamental tenets should be observed when conducting any research in order to protect human rights, dignity, health and safety of participants and researchers:

1. the research should do no harm;
2. consent should be voluntary; and
3. confidentiality should be respected throughout.

Maintaining confidentiality

Some benefits of maintaining confidentiality, according to Nather, and Wong (2016:1**55**) are:

• Establishes trust between the researcher and subjects
• Reduces unwanted anxiety on the part of the individual
• Preserves the individual's dignity
• Ensures that the participant feels respected
• Gives the participant control and autonomy

Participation in research is voluntary, thus a researcher's obligation to protect (the participant's) confidentiality is of paramount importance. People will not volunteer for research unless they are certain that the information they disclose will not be revealed to the public without their consent.

Lincoln and Guba, (1985) argue that the terms 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability' and 'confirmability' are more

appropriate for assessing the quality of a qualitative study than terms such as 'validity' and 'reliability'. They argue that all qualitative research should have a 'truth value' and that this could be determined by strategies that represent the hallmark of good qualitative research, such as keeping an accurate trail of the research process and transparency in the data analysis process.

Honesty

Hamilton and Smith, (2016) recommend that all actors in education should ensure their behaviour is "honest and trustworthy". As they illustrate "it avoids systematically any form of cheating, lying, fraud, theft, extortion or other dishonest behaviours. This includes not engaging in behaviour of an actual criminal nature. (p. 39)

Institutional autonomy/institutional independence

Hamilton and Smith, (2016, p. 67), emphasize the importance of the principle of "institutional autonomy/institutional independence. They indicate that it, "involves recognizing the need to give appropriate autonomy and independence to individual institutions within a national education"

Conclusion

Codes of ethics for professionals in numerous organizations have taken on significance in recent years. As many professional associations, hospitals, and most government agencies, educational institutions should have codes of ethics to guide their activities and help them to be aware of their responsibilities. The absence of these codes of ethics may lead to human rights violation.

Adopting, respecting and applying these codes by all members of educational institution will undoubtedly enhance the quality of services

provided by these institutions such as teaching, researching, consulting and translating. Moreover, it will reinforce the trust among all members of these institutions and build a trustful rapport with clients.

The present research shed light on the most important principles such as integrity, honesty, transparency, respect for others, accountability, fairness, equity, justice, anonymity, and confidentiality. Moreover, the present research referred to the Directory of Ensuring the Quality and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Libya regarding (The Ethical Charter of Educational Institutions) which must be adhered to in order to obtain accreditation for any higher educational institution in Libya. In addition, it defined clearly important terms such as ethics, moral and bias. Furthermore, it highlighted criteria for assessing ethical acceptability.

More importantly, it provides the following recommendations:

✓ Each educational institution should have Ethical Charter and it must be made public.

✓ It is a recommended that all members of the educational institution to act ethically and in accordance with this Ethics Charter of the institution.

✓ All members of the educational institution (teaching staff, researchers, students, and employees) should comply with the ethical codes.

✓ They should act ethically when they conduct themselves in the workplace in executing their duties and making decisions.

✓ A high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained.

✓ Services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias.

✓ Research work must be written and conducted impartially, fairly, unbiased, free of plagiarism and respect participants identities.

✓ Transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information.

✓ Researchers should gain agreement of participants before recording their input and give guarantees about confidentiality

✓ Any research work should take into account all the ethical principles and be open to public.

✓ All members should refuse to participate in or conceal unethical practices.

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Appendix 1

The Directory of Ensuring the Quality and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Libya

Item 10: Transparency and Integrity p. 21

(Translated from Arabic by the researcher)

المحور العاشر: الشفافية والنزاهة

يتضمن هذا المحور بعداً واحداً هو:

◄ الشفافية والنزاهة.

يجب على المؤسسة توفير مواثيق أخلاقية للعاملين بالمؤسسة كافة، من أعضاء هيئة تدريس وكوادر مساندة، وموظفين، تنص على واجباتهم وحقوقهم والممارسات الأخلاقية حين تنفيذ مهامهم.

كما يجب أن تتمتع المؤسسة بالنزاهة والشفافية في نشر المعلومات الصحيحة المتعلقة بجميع أنشطتها.

أهم الممارسات الجيدة في هذا المحور:

■ وجود ميثاق أخلاقي عام ومواثيق أخلاقية لجميع المهن والتخصصات التي تزاولها المؤسسة.

■ يجب أن تتمتع المؤسسة بالنزاهة في نشر المعلومات والبيانات فيما يخص رؤيتها ورسالتها وأهدافها.

■ يجب أن تطبق المؤسسة نظاماً ثابتاً وواضحاً للثواب والعقاب.

■ يجب أن تضمن المؤسسة الشفافية والعدالة التامة في المعاملات الإدارية والمالية لجميع فئاتها.

■ يجب أن تراعي المؤسسة أخلاقيات البحث العلمي والضوابط المنصوص عليها والمعايير المحلية والدولية ذات العلاقة.

■ يجب أن تضمن المؤسسة الحرية الأكاديمية لأعضاء هيئة التدريس، والتعبير عن آرائهم وفق التوصيف الوظيفي والأعراف المعمول بها في المؤسسات التعليمية.

■ يجب أن تستطلع المؤسسة آراء الطلاب في أداء أعضاء هيئة التدريس وعلاقتهم بالطلاب.