

The Use of Ethical Guidelines in Educational Research in Japan: Teacher and Student Views

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Teachers in tertiary educational institutions in Japan often take the role of being educational researchers. Data gathered from students is used for course administration and evaluation, but is also sometimes used in conference presentations or publications. Ethical guidelines for the protection of research participants are well established in medical and psychological fields. There are also similar (though not as strict) guidelines set out by educational research organizations. Educational research in Japan however, does not seem to follow such guidelines. Much research here seems to omit ethical consideration in the planning and conduct stages. Research is often guided by the pervasive belief that 'the Japanese students don't care'. This paper presents the results of two studies conducted recently in Japan. The first shows the results of a study on the awareness and use of ethical guidelines by 45 teachers in Japanese universities and colleges. The second presents the opinions of 99 students on the use of ethical guidelines in research. Finally, points arising from the conference workshop will be included as part of the ongoing discussion of this issue.

高等教育に従事する教師が、研究者の役割を担うことは日本でもよくあることだ。学生から集められたデータを授業評価のためだけでなく、学会発表や論文のために使用することもある。医学や心理学の分野では、研究に参加する者を保護するための倫理的ガイドラインは確立している。また、教育学学会組織による同様の倫理的ガイドラインも存在する。しかし、日本にはまだそのような規程は存在しない。多くの研究者が「日本人学生はデータを使用されても気にしない」という風潮に甘んじて、研究準備および実施段階で倫理的な配慮がなされていないようである。本論文は、倫理的ガイドラインに関する二種類の調査結果をまとめたものである。まず、45人の大学教師を対象におこなった倫理的ガイドラインにたいする意識調査の結果を述べる。次に、この問題に関する99人の大学生を対象にした意識調査結果を紹介する。最後に、JALT2004でおこなわれたワークショップの参加者の意見がまとめてある。

Educators in tertiary institutions in Japan often perform roles both as teachers and researchers. The research role can be divided into two broad phases of conducting and reporting the research. Academic integrity related to the reporting of research includes the standards of not plagiarizing, cheating or presenting false data. This issue is gaining attention in Japan. For example, International Christian University in Tokyo has implemented a policy on academic integrity that addresses these standards. The other aspect of good research is the respectful treatment of research participants. In educational research, these participants are often students. Educational research associations outside of Japan, such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the British Education Research Association (BERA), have implemented ethical standards relating to the conduct of research. These are based on standards used within the field of psychology that were set out by the American Psychological Association (APA). The following section of this paper outlines the key issues contained within these standards.

Key Issues

The standards of ethics in educational research as described by AERA and BERA focus on central issues such as informed consent, confidentiality and behavior of researchers. In terms of informed consent, the key concepts are as follows:

- Use language that potential participants can understand
- Document consent properly using a written permission form that participants can understand
- Inform participants of their right to decline to participate or to withdraw at any time without negative consequences
- Inform participants of anything that might affect their decision to participate – risks, discomfort, level of confidentiality
- Answer any questions participants have about the research (unless deception is justified in the research procedure – e.g. when informing participants of the true nature of the study would influence their behavior and invalidate the study)
- Protect individuals from negative consequences of declining or withdrawing
- Give suitable alternative activities to students who decline to participate in a study that offers course credit
- If the participants are legally unable to give consent (e.g. children), then they should still

have the research explained and their agreement obtained before obtaining permission from someone who is legally authorized

- Informed consent should be obtained before research participants are filmed or recorded

Issues relating to confidentiality include the following:

- Participants have a right to confidentiality of themselves and the data they provide
- Researchers should tell participants if there are limits of confidentiality
- Anonymity should not be promised when only confidentiality is being offered

The behavior of researchers is covered by the following points:

- Researchers should consider local guidelines when doing research
- Researchers should be sensitive to other cultures during research
- Researchers should not use their power over others to influence participation
- Students should not be deprived of standard parts of the curriculum as a result of participating in research (e.g. missing out on some central course content due to the time spent on data collection within class time)
- Results should be shared with the participants at the conclusion of the study

These standards are a common feature in many academic environments outside of Japan. To this author's knowledge there is no similar set of common guidelines in existence in Japan. Furthermore, it appears that despite the standards required in overseas research settings, non-Japanese teachers do not commonly incorporate these guidelines into the research in Japan. Recent research in Japan suggests a low awareness and use of ethical guidelines in educational research in Japan. A survey of 43 non-Japanese university and college teachers in Japan was conducted during the national conference of the Japan Association of Language Teachers in 2003. The results revealed a low awareness of the APA guidelines in terms of not being aware that they existed or being unable to mention any of the central concepts. The results also showed that many teachers had little experience in the use of ethics committees (Hammond, 2004). There was some use of ethical standards such as gaining informed consent in written or verbal forms; however, there was a wide range of ideas on what constituted appropriate consent. Some teachers obtained signatures from students agreeing to have their work used, while others offered more detailed information about the research. Sometimes only verbal consent was obtained and there was also a range of ideas about this, for example, lack of objection being taken as consent. It was suggested from this that discussion on a set of standards for the Japanese context should include a focus on an appropriate definition of what Japanese people would like to consider as informed consent. This would include discussion on the nature of information given to potential participants and how they would indicate their consent to participate.

The teachers who participated in the survey often mentioned that they wanted to hold further discussions to gain awareness about the use of ethical guidelines. One of the issues raised was the concept of whose property the students' work was. Another issue was the recognition of another teacher of using her power over students to encourage participation in research. It was also noted, however, that not all participants were in favor of developing guidelines. There was a concern that overly rigid guidelines would be set. Therefore, it was concluded that part of the discussion in this area needs to ensure that a balance is attained between protecting research participants and allowing researchers to research without unnecessary hindrance (Hammond, 2004).

The abovementioned guidelines have been developed within a Western culture and reflect Western cultural values. Ethical principles become meaningful within the social context in which they are constructed (Fox and Rendall, 2002) and therefore they should be evaluated within that context. This is not to say that researchers in Japan should abandon overseas standards based on the argument that Japan is different, rather, it calls for an examination of what aspects of the guidelines could be considered universal, such as the concept of obtaining informed consent, and which aspects need to be modified, for example, the manner in which informed consent is obtained locally. In the survey of teachers it was noted that although obtaining written informed consent was considered a good idea, the act of signing a paper seemed to be somewhat threatening to the Japanese (Hammond, 2004). It has been argued that during this process of examination, it is important to include how

the research participants feel about these issues (Fox and Rendall, 2002). Therefore, there needs to be an inclusion of the views of Japanese people, both researchers and participants in the examination and discussion of ethical standards.

The issue of how Japanese students feel about the ethical guidelines was investigated recently. Japanese students reported agreement with the APA ethical guidelines pertaining to informed consent, confidentiality and the behavior of researchers. In written comments some students pointed out that if they were forced to participate in research or did not clearly understand the aims, then they sometimes did not give their honest responses. This showed that the use of ethical guidelines is important for not only the respectful treatment of research participants, but also for the quality of the responses they give. An additional aspect that was asked about was the removal of student names from work to be used in research. Students also strongly agreed with this principle (Hammond & Watanabe, 2004).

It was concluded from the recent studies in Japan that the educational research community here should move towards developing at least a minimal set of ethical guidelines (Hammond, 2004; Hammond & Watanabe, 2004). This set of guidelines could be made available to researchers through educational associations such as JALT and the Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET). It was argued that by establishing a set of ethical guidelines for the Japanese context it would lessen the current gap between research communities overseas and in Japan (Hammond, 2004; Hammond & Watanabe, 2004).

Issues in Question

The issues raised in the workshop usually focused on teachers wanting to know how ethical guidelines apply to their research contexts. The following is a brief presentation and discussion of the issues raised during the session. This is offered not as a definitive answer to these issues, but rather as an opening of ongoing discussion in this area.

One issue raised was what to do when using an experimental procedure for investigating the usefulness of a teaching idea. In an experimental design, one group of students receives the new teaching method, while a control group does not. It could be argued that such research is unethical due to the control group missing out on any benefits gained from the new teaching idea. This issue did arise in a previous study by the author in which a Japanese teacher objected to trying out a new method of teaching because she perceived there to be an unfair advantage given to the experimental group. To solve this dilemma by considering the established guidelines, the ethical standard of not depriving students of standard parts of the curriculum could be applied. That is, whatever the new teaching idea is, both groups should still receive the standard elements of the course. In addition to this, any inequalities such as an improvement in grades in the experimental group could be removed by scaling the scores of the control group up or of the experimental group down for the study task.

Another issue raised in the workshop was the application of ethical standards for the use of research that would be used to improve a program. That is, taking examples of student work to show to other members of staff for the purposes of evaluating and improving the program. In this situation it could be argued that this kind of research is still

internal research within the institution and therefore does not require participant permission. However, as a courtesy to students, removing their names from their work would probably be appreciated.

A further issue raised in the workshop was what to do with data that had been collected with no firm research purpose in mind at the time. In such situations, the teacher no longer has contact with students to gain permission to use it. In educational research when teachers are also the researchers, this situation may arise when a teacher has an interest in an area, a class from which data can be collected and yet insufficient time to really plan the research at that time. Considering the established guidelines, teachers should still give participants information about the possible uses of such data prior to collection. That is, to inform participants of the general area and aims, and that their answers could be used for a study that may be presented or published outside of their institution. The usual guarantees of anonymity or confidentiality, informed consent (based on as much information as possible at the time) and the right to decline or withdraw should also be offered.

Regarding the idea of informing students about the research purposes, many teachers were unsure of how to construct an appropriate participant information sheet. Workshop participants were offered information on how to structure such a sheet (see Appendix 1). This sheet was developed from the APA guidelines and includes the main standards such as information about the research to be given, outline of participants' rights, and contact details of the researcher. This is based on the principles listed in subsection 8.02 titled "Informed Consent to Research" in the

general section of "Research and Publication" (American Psychological Association, 2004). The principles contained in this sheet have not been modified specifically for the Japanese context. Assuming that many of these principles will be considered to be appropriate for Japan, it is hoped that information sheets such as this one can be introduced more widely within the research community in Japan so that teachers without previous knowledge of ethical guidelines can begin to incorporate them into future research. In addition, wider use of such a sheet can facilitate discussion on the appropriateness of it to various research situations within Japan and be modified if necessary to fit the Japanese research context.

The discussion of the key issues focused more on the issues for teachers rather than the views of students. The study by Hammond and Watanabe (2004) only indicated an overall agreement by students with the general ethical guidelines. Further research could ask more detailed questions regarding specific situations such as in which circumstances it is acceptable to use student work for purposes outside of the course for which it was required. Teachers unfamiliar with this area may naturally be more concerned with what they can do in their own context regarding their own behavior, especially if they already agree with the Western ethical principles and want to start applying them in some form immediately, for example, giving more information and choice to participants in their current research. Once teachers gain more familiarity with the Western values, they might then be able to focus on how these can be applied more specifically to their Japanese contexts. As more information is gathered regarding

students' views, then this can help guide further discussion and development in the area of ethical guidelines for educational research in Japan.

Conclusion

The results of previous research on the existence and use of ethical standards in Japan, suggest that there needs to be further investigation into the awareness and use of ethical standards in educational research in Japan. This need is also reflected in how the participants in this workshop showed a keen interest in understanding how to apply the ethical principles to their current contexts. Action toward incorporating ethical guidelines can be done by individual teachers prior to more organized discussions nationwide. In doing so, teachers can bring their experiences of what seems to be appropriate to their teaching context to the discussion. To develop a culturally appropriate set of ethical guidelines for educational research in Japan, it is important to hear all voices in this debate such as the teachers, students, and institutional stakeholders so that overseas guidelines are neither blindly implemented nor dismissed.

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Appendix 1

Structure of a Participation Information Sheet

(Where possible, this sheet should be given to participants in their native language.)

1. General Introduction

General introduction of researcher(s) – name(s) and affiliation(s).

General description of the study area.

2. Research Aims:

Outline of general research questions. It may be necessary to withhold specific research questions at this time.

3. Requirements of participation

Describe what the participants have to do in terms of:

- The type of data to be collected (e.g. questionnaire, interview, video etc.)
- What activities the participants have to do
- How long it will take to collect the data

4. Handling of the Data

Describe to participants how their data will be handled in terms of:

- Whether the data is confidential or anonymous
- How the data will be analyzed (e.g. group or individual)
- How the data will be kept if it is not anonymous (e.g. for how long, where, who will have access to it, and any limitations on confidentiality)
- How the data will be used (e.g. for teaching purposes, to publish a paper, present at a conference etc.)

5. Risks & Benefits

Describe any possible negative effects that could result from participating in the study. If there are no risks, state that.

Describe any possible benefits that could result from participating in the study. If there are no benefits, state that.

6. Right to Decline or Withdraw

Mention that potential participants can refuse to participate or withdraw at any stage during the study.

Make it clear that there are no negative consequences of refusing to participate or withdraw.

7. Contact Details

Offer participants further opportunity to ask questions, obtain a copy of the results, or raise any issues resulting from the study. Contact details can include:

- Contact details of at least one of the researchers
- Contact details of someone outside of the study, but within the same institution, who could be contacted in the event of any complaints
- If there is a significant risk of emotional upset as a result of participation, provide contact details of a support person who is not one of the researchers
- Instructions to keep a copy of the information sheet for themselves