

Research Ethics Challenges & Road Ahead | Updated 2020



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UGC NET Study material on Research Topics for NET Exam has been covered entirely based on topics provided in the syllabus.

In the 7 Parts series which can be referred using below, the first six parts contain important short study notes useful for your paper 1 preparation while the 7th part contains solved question papers of last almost 12 years MCQ Question which is asked in the previous examination.

Please go through them in a sequential fashion to understand them in better ways.

Unit-II Research Aptitude

Introduction

Maintenance of standards in teaching and research field is the core responsibility of UGC. In this connection, UGC consults with various experts and panels to ensure **Quality Research**. A number of research articles published in the reputed journals

are one of the globally accepted criteria to judge quality, not only this published journals are considered for various academic purposes such as Institute Ranking, Appointment, promotion of Faculty members, Award of Research Degree.

However, the credibility of research publication is in 'Question for years' as it presents Institution Image & Nation Reputation. In recent few years' problems of dubious/sub-standard journals has become serious concern all over the world and the percentage of the research article published in such poor quality journals are much higher than others by Indian university and students.

The government of India has been uninterruptedly increased funding for conducting quality research but unfortunately, none of our university/institutions come under the list of top 100 university/institutions at the world level. Government of India had started several fellowship Net fellowship, Junior Research Fellowship (JRF-SRF), Mulana Azad National Fellowship, Rajeev Gandhi National Fellowship, Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) fellowship, Grant Commission (UGC) Research Award, Indian Council of Historical Research Doctoral Fellowship (PDF) for Women, and minor and major research project grant etc. to attract the younger generation to make their carrier in the research field and to promote the quality research in the higher education system.

So far the guidelines provided by the various Universities in term of advisable for all academic members while performing research has not resulted in a good outcome and better practice of research ethics.

There are various reasons behind the low standard of research in various study fields, but the most important reason is related to the ethics of research. These ethical issues are not a new thing it was raised by 'Plato' twenty-four hundred years ago.

Recently UGC-approved list of journals was created to ensure published papers are of high standard along with an intention to perform research in an ethical way. The guidelines apply in many possible contexts including teaching, conducting research, paper publication or misconduct along with disciplinary procedures.

If the research in not conducted in an ethical manner the 'Outcome' will be irrelevant.

What Is Research Ethics

- Research Ethics is a set of guidelines that help researchers to conduct research successfully. The major principals revolve around the research process, data collection, interpretation of data, report publication, thesis, confidentiality, obfuscation and plagiarism.
- The ethics are closely related to the moral and value, it explains norms for conduct that distinguish between 'what is wrong' & 'what is right'.

- It fosters a research culture that adheres to ‘relevant legislation governing the protection of the dignity, rights, safety and privacy of those involved in research;’ ‘provide clear and easily accessible guidance on best ethical practice and regulatory requirements’; ‘offer support and training to staff and students and any others
- The Policy document contains not just the items that constitute ethical research but also lays out the ‘Ethical Review Process’ and the role of the University Research Ethics Committee.
- In fields of medical science, while conducting biomedical and health research, the four basic ethical principles namely; respect for persons (autonomy), beneficence, non-maleficence and justice have been enunciated for protecting the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of research participants.
- The researcher and the team are responsible for protecting the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of the participants enrolled in the study. They should have the appropriate qualifications and competence in research methodology and should be aware of and comply with the scientific, medical, ethical, legal and social requirements of the research proposal.
- The ECs are responsible for ensuring that the research is conducted in accordance with the aforementioned principles.

General Ethical Issues

Ethical issues can surface any time during research activity, it may be due to participants, researcher or the organization supporting the research process. The role of ‘EC(Ethical Committee)’ plays an important role to ensure proper policy in place to answer below issues –

These are broadly divided into three areas due to –

- **Ethical issues related to the research process**
- **Ethical issues related to participant or researcher**
- **Ethical issues related to sponsoring institution**

Benefit-risk assessment-

- Benefits to the individual, community or society refer to any sort of favourable outcome of the research, whether direct or indirect. The social and scientific value of research should justify the risk, which is the probability of causing discomfort or harm anticipated as physical, psychological, social, economic or legal.
- The researcher, sponsor and EC should attempt to maximize benefits and minimize risks to participants so that risks are balanced to lead to potential benefits at the individual, societal and/or community levels.
- The EC should assess the inherent benefits and risks, ensure a favourable balance of benefits and risks, evaluate plans for minimizing the risk and discomfort and decide on the merit of the research before approving it.

Informed consent process-

- Informed consent protects the individual's autonomy to freely choose whether or not to participate in the research. The process involves three components – providing relevant information to potential participants, ensuring the information is comprehended by them and assuring voluntariness of participation.
- This is more related in the fields of medical science and health research involving human participants, it is the primary responsibility of the researcher to obtain the written, informed consent of the prospective participant

Privacy and confidentiality-

- Privacy is the right of an individual to control or influence the information that can be collected and stored and by whom and to whom that information may be disclosed or shared.
- The researcher should safeguard the confidentiality of research related data of participants and the community.

Conflict of interest-

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- Conflict of interest (COI) is a set of conditions where professional judgement concerning a primary interest such as participant's welfare or the validity of research tends to be unduly influenced by a secondary interest, financial or non-financial (personal, academic or political).
- Research institutions must develop and implement policies and procedures to identify, mitigate conflicts of interest and educate their staff about such conflicts & Researchers must ensure that the documents submitted to the EC include disclosure of interests that may affect the research.

Data acquisition, management, sharing and ownership-

- There is no single best way to collect data. Different collection techniques are needed for different types of research. Researchers should be sensitive to participants and use best practices for data collection
- Ownership issues and responsibilities need to be carefully worked out well before data are collected and researchers should ensure clarity about data ownership, publication rights and obligations following data collection.
- MoUs vetted by the institution and/or EC should be in place.
- Researchers are responsible for knowing when permission is needed to collect or use specific data in their research.
- Data protection and storage is important and once collected, data must be properly protected, as it may be needed at a later stage to confirm research findings, establish priority, or be re-analyzed by other researchers.

- Responsible data handling begins with proper storage and protection from accidental damage, loss or theft. Care should be taken to reduce the risk of fire, flood and other catastrophic events. Computer files should be backed-up and the back-up data saved in a secure place at a site that is different from the original data storage site.
- Data should be shared or placed in a public domain in a de-identified/anonymized form unless required otherwise, for which applicable permissions/re-consent should be sought unless obtained beforehand.

Payment for participation-

Research participants who suffer direct physical, psychological, social, legal or economic harm as a result of their participation are entitled, after due assessment, to financial or other assistance to compensate them

Research Report & Reviewing –

- The value and benefits of research are dependent on the integrity of the researchers.
- The responsible conduct of research (RCR) involves the following major components: values; policies; planning and conducting research; reviewing and reporting research; and responsible authorship and publication.
- Research that is completed, irrespective of results, must be published since it would be unethical to expose another set of participant/patients/volunteers to the same risks to obtain the same results.
- Avoid bias in the research process as it is considered as unethical to deliberate attempt to either hide facts or to under-represent or over-represent the truth.

Responsible authorship and publication-

- Authorship should never be gifted and ‘ghost’ authors are not. The authorship of research should be considered at the time of its initiation.
- The authorship of scientific publications is a very important issue since it is the way in which scientists receive credit for their contributions. All listed authors of a publication should have contributed significantly to it. It is inappropriate to offer “guest authorship” to anyone who has not made any significant contribution. Likewise, it is wrong to exclude from authorship anyone who deserves to be an author.

Responsible use of Funds-

The management of research funds requires adherence to EC policies and regulations as well as policies of other funding agencies. This is applicable to both funds received from the institute and from external granting agencies. Efforts should be made to ensure reasonable and efficient use of resources following transparent and fair processes.

Research misconduct and policies for handling misconduct-

- Research misconduct means fabrication, falsification or plagiarism (FFP) in proposing, performing or reviewing research or in reporting research.
- The fabrication is making up data or results and recording or reporting them without visiting the field area.
- The falsification is manipulation research materials equipment or processes or changing or omitting data or result such that the research is not accurately represented in
- The plagiarism is the appropriation of another person's idea, processes result or words without giving due credit. Another type of plagiarism is self-plagiarism when copying or reuse of one's own research but both type of plagiarism is considered to be an unacceptable practice
- The Obfuscation is the obscuring research finding by the reporting style by the researchers if the researcher is not highlighting the results that are important or those that he does not fitting with his ideology.

Research Review, SOP & Ethics committee-

Ethics committee should operate and define a well-structured SOP for the review process and other task research-oriented tasks.

The Key Term plagiarism

The Oxford Dictionary defines plagiarism as “the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own”. In the context of scientific research, it can involve unattributed lifting of textual material or scientific ideas or actual research results. The most extreme example would be a deliberate attempt to pass off someone else's entire research project as one's own. However, it can also involve (deliberate or unintentional) incorporation of some ideas or results of other researchers, without proper attribution, within one's own research publication. Though the degree of severity can vary, plagiarism always amounts to ethical misconduct and requires redressal.

The use of someone else's work in one's own is not by itself unethical. A limited amount of textual material in someone else's paper can be copied if it is clearly marked as a quote (typically by enclosing it within quotation marks) and the source is explicitly cited where the quote starts or ends. Alternatively, text may be paraphrased with a general indication of where the concepts originated. Occasional re-ordering or substituting of words is not sufficient to count as paraphrasing: the recommended procedure is to read and understand the source material, then put it away and express the idea in one's own words. Besides textual material, the incorporation of ideas, figures, graphs etc from other sources in a manner that conveys a false impression that they are original amounts to plagiarism.

Taking one's own published results and reproducing them in another work as if they were new is “self-plagiarism”. “Duplicate publication” –submitting the same research results to two or more journals and treating them as separate publications –is also a form of self-plagiarism and must be avoided.

Plagiarism is an issue not only for scientific publications but also internal reports, textbooks, monographs and grant proposals

Recent Development & Changes by UGC

- The UGC has prepared the Approved List of Journals that would be considered for the purpose of Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) and Direct Recruitment of Teachers and other academic staff as required under the UGC (Minimum Qualifications for Appointment of Teachers and other Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges) Regulation, 2016.
- In the face of the mounting problem of quality vs quantity and the numerical evaluation becoming predominant, the UGC started its firefighting measures: it asked universities and other research institutions under it to compile lists of acceptable journals for every discipline which it then collated and put up on its website
- Insisted on a plagiarism check being done on all dissertations using the Urkund software (made available to all research supervisors) before they were to be certified as ready for submission, and made it mandatory for all PhD dissertations to be institutionally uploaded onto the Inflibnet site.
- Credibility of Research Publications is extremely important because it has a direct impact upon the individual, institutional and National image. With an aim to refine and strengthen the University Grants Commission (UGC) approved a list of journals, the UGC has issued a Public Notice dated 28th November 2018, and decided to establish a Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics (CARE).
- The good quality Research Journals in disciplines under Social Sciences, Humanities, Languages, Arts, Culture, Indian Knowledge Systems etc., will be maintained by CARE and referred to as 'CARE Reference List of Quality Journals'.
- A Consortium For Academic Research Ethics (CARE) has been established to refine and strengthen the UGC-approved list of journals by creating and maintaining 'Reference List of Quality Journals' for disciplines like Humanities, Social Sciences, Language, Arts, Culture, Indian Knowledge System etc.
- The first CARE list is expected to be published before March 31, 2019 which will replace the existing UGC-approved list of journals.
- This will be used for all academic purposes. The 'CARE Reference List of Quality Journals' will be regularly updated and published by the UGC and the Members of the Consortium at their respective
- UGC's vice-chairman would be chairman of CARE and its members would include representatives of government and government-recognized institutions working in the fields of social sciences, humanities, arts, science, medicine, agriculture, and engineering. In addition, the Association of Indian Universities would also get representation in CARE, besides INFLIBNET (Information and Library Network).

[Source – [MHRD Website](#)]