

# Developing Research Ethics in Intercultural Communication Studies

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**Abstract.** Intercultural communication research does in interaction process between researcher and society (ethnic, community, and nation) has exclusivity or uniqueness of culture. The researcher carries cultural background and research mission in one hand, meanwhile in the other hand, community or society have a different culture and information that needed by the researcher. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey have concluded that meeting among people with different culture require complete understanding, especially in intercultural perception that facilitated interaction between researcher and community. In this case, the researcher should attempt to hold norms, rule and trust principles during field research. These main principles called ethics of research. The paper tries to explain, firstly, attention to ethics in intercultural communication research. Secondly, developing responsible cultural communication research to agreed the research ethics. The formulations that can be submitted through this paper are as follows: firstly, research ethics in communication studies and intercultural communication need to be understood by the researchers. It is even has to comply with formula of research ethics in qualitative and quantitative research. Each paradigm has a different perspective on scientific truths and differences in the interests of the paradigm in conducting research. Secondly, principles such as respect for human dignity, privacy and confidentiality, justice and inclusiveness, and the benefits and disadvantages of human research, should be used as a benchmark for developing intercultural communication research ethics.

*Keywords:* research ethics, culture, intercultural communication, quantitative research, and qualitative research.

## Introduction

Culture is a model explanation of uniqueness, originality, and inherited of human behavior. An environments, ethnics, communities or nations have differences with one another that cannot be explained by variables outside the cultural aspect. When they are different, then the variable that causes the difference would be more profound when it comes to cultural aspects. Porter and Samovar in Mulyana (1990: 19) says communication is the matrix of complex and interacting social actions, and occurs in a complex social environment. Just

take a look at how Indonesia is more easily explaining its diversity because the culture of one ethnic is different from the other ones.

Similarly, communication behavior is different from one another because of cultural roots. The ethnic communication style that lives in eastern Indonesia will be different from the one in the western region. All of these differences are represented in language, pronunciation, style, diction to different patterns and settings of interaction in which it will become an important cultural character. Cultures shape the way we process and create messages. Even if we hear a message from another culture,

we have the tendency to "shape" it into our own culture to understand it.

According to Mulyana (2004), there are two types of perspectives in human communication actions, which are perspective of multiple cultures and single culture. A multiple cultures perspective is looking at human behavior as a different, unique, and unity/uniformity. Whereas, single culture perspective argues that human behavior is essentially the same or general values, such as equality of human values, feelings, and love. They are also called universal values.

In organizational culture, there are three perspectives that influence the research of behavior and human culture. The recent development of a meta-theoretical perspective has helped the classification of the assumptions and frameworks from which scholars approach the study of organizations (Smrek, 2010, Martin, 1992, 2002; Martin & Frost, 1996; Martin & Meyerson, 1988). The three perspectives developed by Martin and colleagues are integration, differentiation, and fragmentation.

Different perspectives on humans causing differences in methodological use, selection of scientific assumptions and research practices developed in the academic world. In this case, the perspective on human as research object or research subject cannot be explained only from one angle of the perspective only.

The problem of looking at human beings causes the research to have differences in treating humans as the subject research. In this case, this research takes humans as part of the research object or researcher. When a researcher describes the communication experience of HIV sufferers, do they actually not suffer because they are being researched? Aren't they distracted by their thinking and emotional systems? Would it be felt heavier when they are not researched?

The social world is a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and interacting world of interests. Thus, when a research takes place in the social world, the research does not move in empty space. A Research involves the inherent dimensions of the researcher, the object of the research, the objectives, the methodology, and the value of society. If those are not being considered, it will affect the accuracy of the research results. Research will have cultural biases on the methodology, processes and inferences (theoretical/conceptualization) of the study.

When it comes to such problem, it is time for social research and research based on the

culture of society to understand the values that both parties have, and finally understand the form of ethics while doing the research. Although, of course, a researcher still adheres to the principle of scientific attitudes as one of the efforts to build scientific truths that are believed.

## **Purpose**

Intercultural communication research or transcultural research attempts to explain the different of communication behaviors resulting from culture and communication which created new cultures for the actors. However, the research is not a value-free. This paper tries to explain the importance of ethics in intercultural communication research or transcultural communication research. These aspects are concerned with: (1) attention to ethics in communication research (intercultural). (2) developing responsible cultural communication research to agree with the research ethics.

## **Result and Discussion**

### Research Ethics in Cultural Communication

An example of a research seeks to "photograph" the behavior of socially deviant children. Communication actions on how they interact and their meaning to the environment should be explored by lingering with children. When researcher interviewed street children and they offered alcoholic beverage, should the researcher drink it or not? Then, activities during drinking and chatting are documented visually; can the results of that research be published?

Another story says, when health workers (paramedics) are doing a review of disease on ethnic Baduy people, they are being offered a charred food. They asked what food to eat to Baduy children who happened to eat together with them, and it turned out that the food is a bat burned to black. Should the officer spew food or refuse to eat? (Idi Dimiyati, 2017).

Horton and Hunt (1984) explain that culture in the communication process is closely related to the meaning compiled by the actor of communication. For example, a vanilla farmer in the east coast of Mexico has a hard time understanding American tourists wearing flashy sport shirts, bearing large camera bags, buying lots of cheap jewelry and talking loudly. "Why are they so weird?"

All the stories are presented because they relate to the ethics of research that must be known by both parties. Research about the community, for example, requires the signs of research ethics because the results of research

and field data acquisition related to humans with their all activities will be used as new knowledge.

No matter how small the risks that arise from a research, all must be clear to the informant. Jacob in Yurisa (2008) mentions that, although interventions conducted in the study do not have risks that could be harmful to the subject of research or informants, the researcher should consider the socio-ethical aspect and uphold the dignity of human beings.

Boas and James Lull cited Sembiring (2002), which explain that "If we really aim to understand human thinking, then all experience analysis must be based on their concept rather than our concept." That is, the viewpoint of subject research of the observed person becomes a main factor of research explanation. Furthermore, James Lull also asserted that one of the responsibilities of ethnographic researchers is to conduct all their subject research in a natural setting, where the place of behavior takes place. It means researchers understand the rules, cultures and norms that apply and observed during the research took place. From these considerations, most anthropologists strongly advise researchers to use the 'emic' approach rather than 'ethics'.

On the other hand, Jacob in Muslim (2007) said that a researcher in carrying out all research activities must hold up scientific attitude and also use ethics research principles.

#### Formulating the Ethics of Communication and Culture Research

Conducting communication and cultural research requires clear signs. This is to keep the interaction between researcher and object of researcher (people/society) going well. The basic principle is that researchers understand the culture of the community/community being studied. Through a deep understanding of the culture of the people being studied, researcher will understand their ethics and values so as not to get caught up in the conflict during the research.

In this case, beside understands the culture of the person being studied, research ethics helps the researcher to know the good and the bad in their research culture. There are four main principles that need to be considered in building research ethics:

1. Respect for human dignity. Respect for person means recognizes the rights of research's subjects. They know their research ways and have freedom to choose their attitude

(not to be forced) whether to participate or not.

2. Respect the privacy and confidentiality of research subjects. According to Rose Wiles, Graham Crow, Sue Heath & Vikki Charles (2006), Oliver (2003), Gregory, (2003) which stated that spoken or written in confidentiality is charged with secrets, while anonymity is defined as 'unknown name of unknown authorship'. In the ethics literature, confidentiality is commonly viewed as the principle of privacy. Research seeks to extract information, that is the ins and outs of events or build opinions on a situation or event. Thus, the data cannot be separated from the source and provide identity of confidentiality in the data source.
3. Respect for justice and inclusiveness. SRDC and SRDA (2017), an association that makes up the ethical code of health research, states that research setting concerns with the distribution of benefits and burdens among participants. On one hand, distributive justice means that there is no segment of the population should be unfairly burdened with the harms of research. The study seeks to distinguish social, ethnic and other inequality biases. For example, the position of ethnic equality in a media content of research should be balanced if it concerns the issue of socio-demographic characteristics of something.
4. Taking into account the benefits and losses (balancing harms and benefits). Richard Barke (2007) mentions that the research attention to the usefulness of the community as the nature of scientific research etiologically. The researcher minimized the impact of psychological injury or grip on the research subject (no maleficence).

#### How is the Ethics in the Tradition of Quantitative and Qualitative Research?

The problem of research ethics becomes an important part of understanding the research process or during interacting with the person or community under study. For example, one of the

principles that must be explained is that the researcher explains the objectives, benefits, and the results that will be given after the measurement is done. In the tradition of laboratory research, the explanation of research ethics has always been discussed before the study. Researchers explain that if during the treatment (experimental treatment), the observed objects (people) feel uncomfortable, disturbed, or emotionally threatened, they are allowed to withdraw from research activities.

For some of other researchers' views, such openness of research interferes with scholarship, concerning the principle of "natural state argument". (Drew, 2007, p. 70). It raises the debate about the need or undetailed explanation. For example, researchers who tested the effect of a SARA-related medium with different designs on the two treatment groups would have a halo effect. The halo effect is known in organizational and management experiments as the experimental effect caused by knowing the purpose of the study by the person being tested.

Likewise with non-laboratory research or community surveys, ethics needs to be explained to the respondents. Drew site opinion from Bacon and Oleson (2005) which stated that, "the survey researchers have the ethical responsibility of not wasting a respondent's time and to only collect data that has the utility (real use)." Furthermore, the opinion of Schenk and Williamson (2005) explain that "In discussing the ethical responsibilities involved in conducting on non-experimental research on children, it suggests that if the information gathering activity will not directly benefit the children involved or their community, do not proceed."

Ethical positions in qualitative research, such as in most intercultural communications and cultural studies, tend to be more complex than the quantitative research. This relates to the principle of natural setting that takes precedence over the course of the study. Bajari (2012) mentioned that qualitative research demands high level of natural setting. A researcher intensifies into a community in order to get a complete picture of a situation or experience. The pretending of researchers becomes the "ultimate weapon" in order to "hide" the identity as a researcher. This is certainly done in order to get the typical data with intervention of feeling being excluded".

Nevertheless, given that the researcher's relationship with the observed is unavoidable and will last for a long time, the identity of the researcher will be known slowly. The identity of

the researcher can not be hidden. Therefore, qualitative research should be based on trust to provide data about the "experience" of the key informant that is honest, and the researchers are responsible for the data provided.

On the other hand, qualitative research also holds the principle of self-preservation, not excessive, and takes place in an atmosphere of reasonableness. "We do not need to be indigenous to understand the natives", said (Clifford Geertz, 1985: 248). "If the prostitute is prostitute, I think he has violated the code of ethics and has done slavery to his respondents". A phrase conveyed by a qualitative research master who is indirectly related to research ethics in a qualitative shutter. Once again, ethics is held on the basis of the trust and responsibility of both parties. For example, do not offend the informant, do not force them, and be open.

## **Conclusion**

The objective of upholding the ethics of research is to build the comfort and security of informants in a scientific work project. The researcher should be able to ensure the confidentiality of the data source and the resulting data. Further research results are used for the welfare and human safety.

The formulations that can be submitted through this paper are as follows: firstly, research ethics in communication studies and intercultural communication need to be understood by the researchers. It even needs to comply with the formula of research ethics in qualitative and quantitative research. Each paradigm has a different perspective on scientific truths and differences in the interests of the paradigm in conducting research.

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Besides that, colleges have an important role in establishing a research supervisory agency acting as an ethics commission.

The tasks of ethical commissions have already conducted in the field of health sciences as follows:

1. Conducting a review of the research protocols to be discussed.
2. Discussing the review results

3. Researching the contents of informed consent (submission to the subject) along with an explanatory text for approval of the research subject.
4. Provide ethical clearance for all research requires.
5. Evaluate the implementation of ethical-related research.

Communication Science can imitate the development of institutions or the Commission of Ethics in health. Communication research, especially those concerning institutions or persons in need of confidentiality should be guaranteed by first reviewing research proposals by the ethics commission on communication research. With this effort, communication and cultural research will stimulate both the quality of the results and the research process.

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