The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available on Emerald Insight at:
https://www.emerald.com/insight/2633-7436.htm

Ethical consideration dilemma: systematic review of ethics in qualitative data collection through interviews

Michael Nii Laryeafio and Omoruyi Courage Ogbewe
Arden University, Manchester Campus, Birmingham, UK

Received 28 September 2022
Revised 19 December 2022
29 April 2023
12 June 2023
Accepted 15 June 2023

Abstract

Purpose – Qualitative research that involves the use of human participants calls for the need to protect those participants to give their honest view during data collection. This is an important part of every primary data collection in qualitative studies using interviews. This paper aims to investigate all available ethical considerations that need to be observed by the researcher when conducting primary data collection through interview and to explore the theories that underpin the ethics in qualitative studies.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper systemically reviewed existing qualitative data on ethics and gathered information that were analysed and presented on the topic area.

Findings – The findings show that ethical considerations deal with the various approaches adopted by the researcher to make the participants feel safe to participate in any given researcher. During an interview process in qualitative research, the findings show that anonymity, voluntary participation, privacy, confidentiality, option to opt out and avoiding misuse of findings are ethical considerations that must be observed by the researcher. The outcome of the investigation also shows that deontology and utilitarianism, rights and virtue are the main theories that underpin ethical considerations in research.

Originality/value – The rights of the research participants need to be respected in qualitative research to assist in gathering accurate information to achieve the objectives of study. This and other ethical principles such as anonymity, privacy, confidentiality, voluntary participation and option to opt out guide the researcher to systematically adhere to data collection approaches that yield valid results in qualitative data collection using interviews.

Keywords Primary data, Ethics, Qualitative research, Ethical theory, Anonymity, Informed consent, Interviews, Data collection, Ethical approval

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

Qualitative research that involves human subjects should focus on using the best form of interaction to gather accurate information. The researcher is vested with the main ideas and the approach to interact with the participants during data collection. However, these human subjects have the choice of what kinds of information they provide to researchers based on the treatment that are shown to them by the researchers. Researchers such as Collis and Hussey (2014) and

---

Journal of Ethics in Entrepreneurship and Technology
Vol. 3 No. 2, 2023
pp. 94-110
Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 2633-7444
p-ISSN: 2633-7436
DOI 10.1108/JEET-09-2022-0014

Smith *et al.* (2009) proposed that researchers must have a policy of respecting the rights and privileges given to human participants in any given qualitative studies to allow the freedom of expression and the option to opt out at any point during the data collection.

These and other privileges given to the human participants in a research aid in gathering information without fear or pressure from the participants. Saunders *et al.* (2016) also affirmed by saying that the accuracy of information gathered using interviews largely depends on the honesty of the participants, and this is caused by outlining the ethical considerations that needs to be observed by the researcher. Ethical considerations are fundamental in any kind of research, this provides the opportunity for the researcher to gather the most important information without causing any harm to the participants in the research (Orb *et al.*, 2000). The aim of this paper is to present a systematic and comprehensive literature review on ethical considerations in qualitative data collection using interviews and highlighting the various theories that underpin the ethical issues in qualitative research.

2. Literature review

Research ethics considers the act of doing good and protecting the rights of participants in research, as well as avoiding any possible harm to any participants (Kara and Pickering, 2017; UK Statistics Authority, 2022). Kara and Pickering (2017) further noted in their research study that research ethics often considers the elements which concerns primary data collection than secondary data. For example, in their research that analysed 29 published articles between 2000 and 2015, majority of the article (22) addressed ethical consideration such as anonymity, privacy, confidentiality, informed consent and formal ethical regulations that concerns primary data collection, and the rest consisted of other topics such as ethics and secondary data, ethics and data analysis, theory and life-writing. This became evident that though ethical considerations are associated with other kinds of data, it particularly concerns primary data collection than secondary data. This was also confirmed by Colnerud (2015) who also expressed that ethical considerations help in preventing or reducing any harm that could happen to the human participants during primary data collection. Thus, it becomes very important for the protection of human rights in any kind of research (Cilliers and Viljieon, 2021). In the current trend of research investigation, it is illegal to violate human right under the pretence of research studies. The nature of ethical issues in qualitative research is so delicate as compared to quantitative research (Drolet *et al.*, 2022). Researchers have the highest accountability to ensure that they notice or identify and foreseeable harm and safeguard the wellbeing of the participants (Williams-Jones *et al.*, 2013). As such, the actions of researchers, especially those that engage in qualitative studies, have been under high scrutiny due to the likelihood of mistreating the human participants, to gain deeper findings and clarity of information generated.

As noted by Van Burg *et al.* (2022), qualitative research has been vital in the development of theories on emerging techniques that helped the existence of men in recent times, such as crowdfunding (Short *et al.*, 2017), digital technologies (Nambisan *et al.*, 2019) and lean start-up approach (Shepherd and Gruber, 2020). The relevance of qualitative research has called for the need to ensure internal coherence as noted by Howard-Grenville *et al.* (2021) where they pointed out that a perfect fit must exist in qualitative studies which helps to link the research question to data collection, data analysis, as well as findings and development of theory.

However, researchers that engage in qualitative studies are faced with three major challenges that raises the issue of ethics in data collection: the researcher–participants relationship, the subjective interpretation of data and findings by the researcher and the research design adopted (Beauchemin *et al.*, 2021). There is the possibility of disclosing some damaging information under deception. The literature provides an example of researcher's deception through Humphrey's study of homosexuals (Punch, 1994). Humphrey used participants' observation as his data collection technique through the act of deception, and this raised major concerns and shocked American scholars who wanted to have his doctorate degree revoked. Humphrey engaged in controversial research where he observed homosexuals in a public bathroom, and under the disguise of working under a different investigation follows same homosexuals to their various homes. Though this contradicts the ethical principle, Clark (1996) expressed that deception allows the researcher to gather "uncontaminated" data. This approach of "deception" was adopted by Clark (1996) in her forensic unit research. While conducting research over a period of six weeks, Clarke pretended to be working as a nursing auxiliary to observe participants and later take notes. In other words, Clarke did not disclose her identify as a researcher, rather pretended to be a worker at the facility. Clark (1996, p. 38) justified her approach by expressing that when "dealing with sensitive aspect of subject's behaviour", some degree of deception should be permitted. However, Kang and Hwang (2021) pointed out that the act of deception violates human right and exposes the participants to harm and danger.

Misconduct in research studies deeply affects the results of any investigation. While Bruhn *et al.* (2002) believed that the authenticity of research findings depends on data collection techniques, Davison (2004) also expressed that human participants can give their honest opinion on an investigation when they are given "convenient" environment to operate. Participants should not be manipulated under no circumstance to give any to be involved in a research data collection. Throughout the research life cycle, it is very important for researchers to consider any possible ethical challenges that could occur (Giorgini *et al.*, 2016). Due to the difficulties associated with identifying any possible ethical issues, ethical committee acts as experts who access the research documents prior to the investigation to make sure all ethical "checklists" are met by the researcher (Lynöe *et al.*, 1999).

3. Historical background to research ethics

There has been different school of thoughts when a historical account of the birth of ethics in research is being narrated. This approach to rightfully engage human participants in research started when people started to reflect on the best way to interact and live. To recall, history has it that the birth of research ethics in modern studies started when investigators had to protect the human participants in any kind of investigation. To this school of thought, the Doctors Trial of 1946–1947 gave way for a starting point to document regulations that should have been followed by investigators for the Nuremberg Trials for war criminals by the Nazis (Annas and Grodin, 1992). To further expand on the scenario, there were a total of 23 physicians from Germany who wanted to conduct research with human subjects as the main participants in view of uncovering a scientific knowledge regarding limits of the human body as a result exposed those human participants involved in the research to high temperatures and altitudes (Grodin, 1992).

The accused 23 German physicians ended up brutalising and torturing the human subjects involved, as well crippling most of them which led to the death of thousands of the research victims. During the Nazi racial purification policies, these physicians were also exploring ways to racially kill innocent people in a relatively painless manner for reasons of mercy. This was to relieve the foreigners of the racial discrimination met out to them by the Nazis, without their consent. These acts were the most destructive and gruesome experiments that led to the murder of thousands of victims in Germany by the Nazi party in 1942 (Nuremberg Code, 1947).

After the Second World War, there were several trials conducted by the USA, Great Britain and the then Soviet Union to legally hold the Nazi party accountable and responsible for murder of thousands of victims which was labelled as crime against humanity. These trials started in Nuremberg, Germany on 20 November 1945 and became known as the "Nuremberg Trials". For fair trials of the 23 physicians, the court developed lists of ethical guidelines that the physicians did not follow to conduct such research investigations, and these became known as the "Nuremberg Code". The Nuremberg code of conduct consisted of 10 main ethical principles that were violated by the Nazi physicians, and these are as follows:

1. Research participants must voluntarily consent to research participation.
2. Research aims should contribute to the good of society.
3. Research must be based on sound theory and prior animal testing.
4. Research must avoid unnecessary physical and mental suffering.
5. No research projects can go forward where serious injury and/or death are potential outcomes.
6. The degree of risk taken with research participants cannot exceed anticipated benefits of results.
7. Proper environment and protection for participants is necessary.
8. Experiments can be conducted only by scientifically qualified persons.
9. Human subjects must be allowed to discontinue their participation at any time.
10. Scientists must be prepared to terminate the experiment if there is cause to believe that continuation will be harmful or result in injury or death.

The Nuremberg code paved the way for the development of "Declaration of Helsinki" (DoH) in 1964 by the World Medical Association in their efforts to lay down basic ethical principles that should be followed in conducting biomedical research. The DoH has all the key ethical guidelines as detailed by the Nuremberg code and further advanced on specific guidelines to solve unique vulnerabilities of human participants involved in clinical research investigations. As published by the World Medical Assembly in 1964, the initial ethical principles are as follows:

- Clinical research must conform to the moral and scientific principles that justify medical research and should be based on laboratory and animal experiments or other scientifically established facts.
- Clinical research should be conducted only by scientifically qualified persons and under the supervision of a qualified medical man.
- Clinical research cannot legitimately be carried out unless the importance of the objective is in proportion to the inherent risk to the subject.
- Every clinical research project should be preceded by careful assessment of inherent risks in comparison to foreseeable benefits to the subject or to others.
- Special caution should be exercised by the doctor in performing clinical research in which the personality of the subject is liable to be altered by drugs or experimental procedure.

Following the DoH in 1964, the development of the "Belmont Report" in 1979 became the next set of ethical guidelines that was proposed by the National Commission for the maximum protection of human participants on Biomedical and Behavioural Research. The Belmont Report reviewed and reaffirmed three key ethical guidelines that researchers must follow when dealing with human participants in research, and these are respect for persons, beneficence and justice. The Nuremberg code, DoH and Belmont Report paved way for modern approaches to research ethics in research.

4. Ethical theories

There have been several attempts by scholars in the field of ethics to provide justifications for the need to oblige to some form of principles when engaging human participants in research (Koski, 2009). In essence, it is common and appropriate to consider different ethical theories that underpin the principles of a researcher to clarify what is wrong or right during data collection that involves human participants. The following are four key ethical theories that form the philosophical position of researchers during data collection.

4.1 Deontology

This ethical theory is often associated with the works of Immanuel Kant who expressed that the rightness or wrongness of an action should not be dependent on the consequences of that action, rather on whether that action is right under a series of rules (Beauchamp, 1991). This is mostly regarded as obligation or duty and thus referred to as the rule-based ethics. Under this theory, people must follow their rules and do their duty. Salzman (1995) also pointed out that deontology ethical theory exists within the domain of morality which helps to guide our choice of what is right and wrong. For example, when a computer scientist who has much knowledge in hacking systems learn that there is going to be a nuclear weapon launch that could kill lots of people. Under this circumstance, the computer scientist can hack and cancel the launch of the nuclear weapon, to avoid killing of people (Olson, 1967). However, the deontic view is that it is unprofessional to break into the system of the nuclear weapon without consent or permission. Deontologist advises not to breach the professional code of conduct as a computer scientist (Waller, 2005).

4.2 Utilitarianism

Unlike deontology, this theory mainly focusses on the rightness or wrongness of an action based on the outcome of that action. This is born out of consequentialism which holds that utilitarianism deals with taking actions that produces the greatest benefits to the greatest number of related people (Shaw, 1998). This is a moral principle that holds that the best ethical choice is the actions that produces the best benefits to the greatest number. For example, a healthy person has a good liver, kidney, heart and lungs. Imagine there are four people at the hospital who needs organ transplant each. In this instance, a healthy person can save four people with his/her organs. Utilitarianism theory suggests that the life of one healthy person can save four people at the hospital (greatest number) and that is arguably the best choice to make (McCloskey, 1957). The consequence of taking the life of just one person is saving the lives of four people, though other scholars suggest that taking the life of any person is unethical.

4.3 Rights

This is a duty-based ethical theory which explains the rights of every person, and it is the duty of another person to respect those rights, thus owing up the duty to respect the rights of another. As Traer (2009 p. 103) explains:

> [...] the most widely accepted justification for moral rights relies on Kant's deontological argument that we have a duty to treat every person as an end, and not to our ends, because every person is autonomous and rational, and thus has intrinsic worth.

4.4 Virtue

This theory highly judges a person based on his or her character, rather than the action or outcome of event. This deals with the moral reputation of a person that determines any ethical behaviour (Annas, 1993). As the name suggest, virtue can be expressed as a morally good tendency to act well in some aspects of life (Hursthouse and Pettigrove, 2018). This mainly portrays the character traits and become central to the personality of a person.

When researchers are faced with decision-making situation or data collection when there is the need to adhere to ethical considerations, there are several ethical theories that gives the guidelines to reach a decision that is ethically correct. To reach the right decision when dealing with human participants, each ethical theory helps to adhere to the best practices that lead to taking the best decision.

5. Qualitative research

The choice of this type of research largely depends on the philosophical position of the researcher. This type of research relies on the information supplied by the human subjects in the research. They hold the idea that human subjects under any given piece of research should be given the chance to bring out their views about the topic area in the research. This should be devoid of any predetermined set of questions that gives participants less chance to express themselves. As expressed by Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. This was affirmed by Parkinson and Drislane (2011) who also expressed that qualitative research use research techniques such as case studies and participants which helps in narrative and descriptive nature of practice. The most common idea from both authors concludes that qualitative research investigates events in their natural settings and successfully attempts to make meaning to the research based on the meanings the human subjects attach to them. Simply put, qualitative research deals with the gathering and analysing of non-numerical data to explore views, experiences or opinions of others.

6. Current and emerging trends in qualitative research

The community of research in qualitative studies has gone through several changes from where the human participants are harmed to the stage where the rights of participants are highly respected and protected (Roth and von Unger, 2018). Qualitative researchers tend to treat ethics as the main characteristics between the researcher and what is researched. To move further, the advancement in technology has led to the transformation of many fields of research and qualitative research is no exception. As a result, qualitative research is going through tremendous and rapid changes and any researcher interested in such investigation should know the state of development in qualitative research (Costa and Moreira, 2019). These changes and other emerging trends could be seen in three main areas (ESOMAR, 2010): sources of data, data collection and analysis of data.

The traditional data sources under qualitative research were mainly through interviews, observation, focus groups and recordings (Gill *et al.*, 2008). Currently, these methods have been heavily complemented by virtual, textual, visual and other data that is gathered from social media. The introduction of Web 2.0 technologies (interactive contents) has led to the development of social media platforms that enables people all over the world to share their lives and other private information online which is accessed by people all over the world (Sykora, 2017). With creativity and innovation, qualitative researchers have found ways to leverage on this trend to conduct high quality research. As such, as many people around the world creates accounts on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms, there are vast amount of qualitative data streams that could be accessed by the qualitative researcher. In a nutshell, social media platforms have become an additional source of data for researchers.

The consequence of data available on social media platforms has brought about other emerging data collection tools such as data mining and web crawling techniques used in recent times. For example, software programmes such as Ncapture have been integrated into NVivo which helps to capture social media contents for fast qualitative data analysis. Ncapture is a free web-browser extension created for internet explorer and Google chrome which helps the researcher to collect contents from the web to effectively import into NVivo for qualitative data analysis (Tom and Richards, 2003; Zamawe, 2015). This has led to the introduction of "netnography" (the combination of network and ethnography) as a new form of qualitative social media research. Netnography is a specific type of qualitative social media research that relates to data collection, analysis, representation and research ethics that is deeply rooted in research participant's observation (Kozinets, 2017). Kozinets (2002) further explained that netnography uses an interpretative research philosophy which helps to adapt participants' observation approach of anthropology to the detail investigation of involvement and experiences which manifest through digital communications.

The traditional qualitative data analysis consists of using humans to code texts manually (Saunders *et al.*, 2016); however, the introduction of social media research has turned efforts to using automated content analysis (ACA). This consists of techniques that are used to automatically analyse social media contents. Scholars such as Stockwell *et al.* (2009) and Sievert and Shirley (2014) added that ACA helps qualitative researchers to engage in large-scale data analysis and helps to produce efficient results.

7. Qualitative data collection methods and procedure

7.1 Methods

Data collection is one of the most important parts of every research investigation. It is the systematic process of gathering and collecting information on the interested variables in research to answer the research question and evaluate the outcome of a research (Collis and Hussey, 2016; Saunders *et al.*, 2016). In a qualitative research where human participants are involved, data collection translates into the various processes of gathering and collection data from the targeted participants about the topic area, through, for example, interviews. There are several methods of qualitative data collection, and it is up to the researcher to justify the methods used. The choice of data collection methods for qualitative research is highly influenced by the research philosophical positioning of the researcher (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). The most common method of collecting qualitative data is through, interviews, group discussions or focus group, observations, surveys and note taking. It is worth mentioning that the interview could take place via telephone, online (through Skype, Zoom and Teams) or face-to-face, and be recorded for analysis. The focus of the research investigation is interviews as the main qualitative data collection methods.

7.2 Interviews

This is the most common form of data collection for qualitative research investigation (Collis and Hussey, 2016). This presents the great opportunity for researchers to fully interact with the participants to solicit for data about a topic area. There are several forms of interviews that are available to the researcher such as unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews (Oats, 2016). Researchers can choose any form of interviews for the data collection based on the depth of data to be collected to answer the research questions.

7.3 Procedures

A long-standing process of conducting interviews to solicit for information from participants suggests that the researcher must have four main documents ready and to be sent to the participants (interviewee) before conducting the interview (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). These documents are as follows: consent form, information sheet, interview guide and introduction letter (when the researcher is seeking to involve organisations or institutions).

7.4 Information sheet

It is mostly called participant's information sheet (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). This is a written document that gives the summary of the research project and detailed out how the participants will be affected by their involvement in the data collection for the study (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Areas that are clearly detailed out in the information sheet are: (1) What is the study about? (2) How do I join? (3) What happens to the information? (4) Do I have to take part in the research? (5) Will I benefit from the research? and (6) What if I change my mind. These and many other information are provided on the information sheet to give the interviewee an awareness of the research investigation and how he or she will be protected.

7.5 Consent form

Having read the information sheet and become aware of the project, interviewees are given the consent form to sign to show their willingness to take part in the research. This is therefore a signed document that outlines the informed consent of an individual to partake in a research study (Collis and Hussey, 2016). In most cases, the consent form has some information with a tick box against it, asking individual to tick to agree to some key information that will take place in the research before finally signing the document. Some key information that requires a "tick" by the individual (interviewee) are (1) I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated for the above study, (2) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and (3) I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentations.

7.6 Interview guide

Usually limited to a one-page document (Menzies *et al.*, 2016), the interview guide simply lists the high-level topics that the researcher plans to cover in the interview with the high-level questions that the researcher wants the interviewee to answer under each topic. The topics and questions written on this document is guided by the research questions (Lazar *et al.*, 2017) that is necessary and sufficient to achieve the aim of the research.

7.7 Introduction letter

This is a letter that is written to an organisation to allow members of its staff members to be involved in data collection (Saunders *et al.*, 2016) or to seek permission to retrieve data from archives of the organisation, thus often called organisational letter.

All these documents mentioned above must be made ready to commence an interview by the researcher. The researcher through a sampling technique, selects and sends an invitation to the participants and records the number who has agreed to be interviewed. The interview is then recorded and transcribed for analysis.

8. Ethical considerations in conducting interviews

When the information sheet, consent form and interview guide has been designed by the researcher, it now time for the researcher to commence the interview process. This is the time where ethical considerations become very relevant. The following are some of the ethical considerations that must be observed by the researcher during the interview process.

8.1 Anonymity

Providing anonymity to the interviewees means that all the information collected is devoid of personal details of the interviewee such as address, email, name and other key information that could lead to the identification of the interviewee (Crow and Wiles, 2008). Ensuring anonymity of information collected gives protection to the interviewees and allows them to give out key information which ensures reliability of findings (Saunders *et al.*, 2015). This helps to protect the privacy of voluntary participants in the research investigation.

8.2 Privacy and confidentiality

The interviewer must ensure that any information collected from the interviewee must remain private and confidential; thus, ensuring that no third party has access to the raw data unless otherwise stated by the interviewee for exposure.

8.3 Voluntary participation

To gain reliable information from the interviewee, none must be forced or induced to participate in the research investigation. Forcing participant will mean that they are not willing to give out any information but for material compensation, they will take part which could lead to the collection of false information. Allowing for voluntary participation will ensure that participants understand the research area and accept to engage in the data collection (Mumford *et al.*, 2021).

8.4 Option to opt out

The researcher must respect the rights of interviews at any point during the data collection to opt out. When this happens any already collected data about the participants must be discarded. This ensures that no interviewee is forced to engage in the research if some questions go against their virtues (Mumford *et al.*, 2021). The researcher owes it a responsibility to respect the rights of the interviewees.

8.5 Non-maleficence/Beneficence

The ethical principle of non-maleficence and beneficence describes the researcher's obligation to fully avoid causing any harm to the participant intentionally or be able to identify and eliminate any source of harm to the participant (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). The researcher in this instance should not over-burden the participant with more questions or create a situation where the participant feels uncomfortable. Any deliberate attempt by the researcher to cause an unwelcome environment will impact negatively to the responses that will be gathered (Wilson *et al.*, 2008). This was initially a concern in the nursing research where a patient places full trust in the hands of a nurse or health officer, and therefore suffers a deliberate harm by the health officer which could be avoided (Alderson, 2000). For example, where patients handle sensitive and private information to the health officer due to trust. Table 1 below gives a typology of ethical concerns faced by interviewers.

9. Key ethical concerns in entrepreneurship and technology

Technology and entrepreneurship are constantly developing fields that provide numerous benefits to society. However, they also bring up a few ethical concerns. The following are some of the most important ethical issues in technology and entrepreneurship:

Privacy: Personal data collection, storage and use are now easier than ever thanks to technology (Reynolds, 2019). This raises concerns regarding who has access to that data and how it is being used. Technologists and entrepreneurs must respect the privacy of individuals and be open about their data practices.

Security: Cyberattacks and data breaches are becoming increasingly common as technology usage rises (Reynolds, 2019). Business owners and technologists should do whatever it takes to safeguard client information.

Table 1.
A typology of ethical issues in an interview

Type of ethical issues	Specific examples
Informed consent	• Not explaining the purpose of the research to interviewee • Not confirming interviewee to agree to participate
Anonymity	• Failure to delete details such as names, staff ID number, race, date of birth, religion, and office position
Confidentiality and Privacy	• Forgetting to agree with interviewee to keep the responses they give from third party • Failure to store the information in folder encrypted • Allowing supervisor to see the raw data (response)
Cultural sensitivity	• Failure to allow interviewee to skip some questions that are very sensitive to their beliefs • Wearing forbidden dress to meet an interviewee based on their background
Deception	• Pretending to be someone else when dealing with interviewee No letting identity be known during data collection
Coercion/inducement	• Giving money to interviewee to be interviewed • Forcing interviewee to be interviewed • Not allowing interviewee to cancel participation at any time
Power dynamics	• Not respect interviewees during the interview • Not allowing for clarifications from the interviewee • Not treating the interviewee as yourself • Declining the interviewee's wish to listening to the recorded response
Preventing harm	

Source: Authors' own work

Intellectual property: New concepts and inventions are frequently developed through technology. Intellectual property rights must be respected by technologists and entrepreneurs alike, and they must avoid violating the rights of others (Reynolds, 2019).

Bias and discrimination: If technology is not designed and implemented in a way that is fair and inclusive, bias and discrimination can continue (Van Burg *et al.*, 2022). Technologists and entrepreneurs need to be aware of the possibility of bias and discrimination and take steps to reduce it.

Social obligation: Technologists and entrepreneurs have a responsibility to think about how their products and services will affect society (Van Burg *et al.*, 2022). They should guarantee that their developments are not unsafe to society and that they are adding to everyone's benefit.

Labour issues: Entrepreneurs and technologists must consider the effects on workers as technology alters the nature of work. They should guarantee that their advancements do not prompt work dislodging or double-dealing (Van Burg *et al.*, 2022).

Business and innovation present numerous moral difficulties that should be tended to. It is essential for technologists and entrepreneurs to be aware of these issues and to take steps to guarantee that their innovations are socially responsible and beneficial.

10. Gaining ethical approval

Research that involves the use of human participants needs to seek for ethical approval from an ethics committee. Saunders *et al.* (2016) further expressed that all research that involves human tissues requires that ethical approval must be sought by the university's research ethics committee. Obtaining ethical approval means that the researcher has adhered to the acceptable ethical standards of a reliable and genuine research study (Bickman and Rog, 2009).

For the application process, the researcher must make available the research proposal, together with the data collection instrument, participants' information sheet, consent form and then apply for ethics from the university's ethics committee by filling the ethics form online and attaching the proposal for submission. The ethics committee has been named differently by many universities based on the country or university of application, for example, it is called the "Institutional Review Board" (IRB) in the USA. Section 9 below gives a detail overview of IRB and its composition. The ethics committee (or IRS) reviews the application and examines the proposal to meet all requirements per the ethics standards. Once all requirements are met by the applicant (researcher), ethical approval is granted for the research to commence.

11. Institutional review board

The IRB is also referred to as an independent ethics committee (Mohamadi *et al.*, 2014) with the sole mandate of reviewing the proposed research methods by researchers to ensure that the methodological pathway is ethical. This is an officially constituted group under the FDA in the USA. This committee is called "Research Ethics Committees" in Spain. This committee assumes the central role in research by approving (or rejecting), monitoring, reviewing social science research involving human participants. The primary aim of the IRB is to conduct a high-level risk-benefit analysis to determine whether research involving humans should be allowed and thus brings no harm and other related risk to the human participants involved (McNeil, 2014).

The purpose of the IRB is to ensure that various steps are taken by the committee to assist in protecting the rights and welfare of the human elements in the research. This means that by the review of the research protocols and other related materials by the IRB, any psychological or physical harm are eliminated (Alicia, 2009). The review process takes the form of assessing the research methods and fully promoting informed consent and voluntary participation by all participants who can make such decisions. The composition of IRB varies among countries; however, it consists of academic scholars and other non-academic scholars which helps to bring a greater scope of understanding and helps to ensure sense of ethics in human-related research. It important to note that the IRB is often applied in health and other social science research which includes sociology, psychology and anthropology. This research often relates to social behaviour, attitude or opinions, as well as research on the quality of health care provided and means of improving the health-care practices.

The growth of research in ethical considerations and debates among qualitative researchers to adapt the IRB reviews to social science research necessitated the formation of specialised ethics committees (as called in the UK) to exclusively oversee social science research investigations. For a better review by the IRB, the specialised ethics committee tries to adequately understand research conducted by social scientists.

It is a usual practice that universities around the world publish all ethical concerns that must be addressed in respective research on their official websites. Students are expected to carefully review such principles and apply to their research. Due to differences or constant changes in culture, all ethical committee members must be subjected to constant training programme to be able to incorporate new and updated cultural changes into the ethical principles for students to be aware. This will help to improve the ethical committee processes. In addition, these ethicists must train teachers or supervisors who oversee the work of research students so that they can acquire the updated and most relevant ethical issues in qualitative research. These supervisors will also teach and explain to students how to apply all needed concerns in ethics. Because ethical concerns are mostly general in most qualitative research, through training programme organised for the students, they become aware to a more narrowed and focused ethical concerns regarding the specific human participants in research. In a cycle of approach, well knowledgeable students on specific ethical issues in qualitative research are more likely to address all ethical concerns before applying for ethical approval. This situation improves the process of the ethics committee and makes their role more effective by responding to students' applications promptly, because of rightfully responding to all specific ethical concerns. This is illustrated in the framework below (Figure 1).

12. Conclusion

Human beings are at the centre of qualitative research, and the rights of these human participants need to be respected to give out valid information. Researchers conducting a qualitative research investigation must adhere to ethical considerations such as anonymity, voluntary participation, privacy and confidentiality and freedom to walk out in a researcher. Researchers must also make sure consent forms and information sheet are given to the participants to read and agree to take part in a research investigation before conducting interviews. Adhering to ethical considerations in research demonstrate that the research investigation meets the standard of ensuring reliability and validity of findings.

13. Limitations and suggestions for future research

One limitation of this research is it focused on ensuring that the research participants are safe and can give out the right information through tape-recorded interviews.

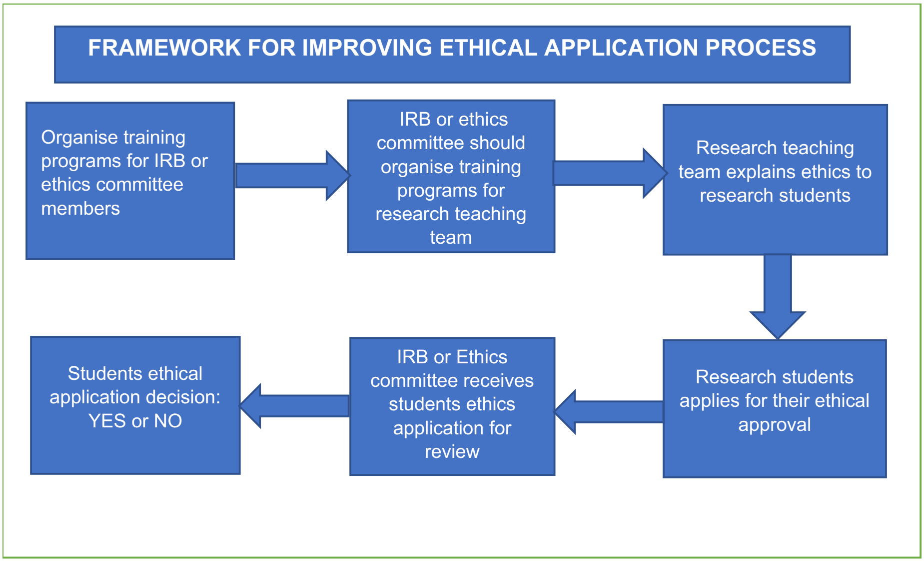

Figure 1.

Source: Author

The security nature of the recording device (technology used) can however, exposed the interviewee through device hacking and other cyber-attacks. Further research is therefore recommended to examine the kinds of recording device to use during interview recording to provide data protection from the public and other cyber criminals. The study was also limited to giving a general consent form to the interviewee to sign before the researcher commences the interview. Further research is therefore suggested to explore the content of the consent form to clearly state the most relevant parts that seeks to protect the interviewee. There should also be further research to fully examine the retention and use of recording by the researcher for future studies. This will help to give a measure on how long any interview data recorded should be kept by the researcher before been discarded. In addition, the researcher relied heavily on secondary data that has been collated by other past researchers, and due to the current trends in qualitative research, it is highly suggested that future researcher should adopt the interpretative philosophy using semi-structured interview to fully interact with scholars in qualitative research to uncover any new knowledge about ethics in qualitative research. Research in qualitative studies often overlooks the cultural diversity among participants that helps to understand the worldview of participants. Future research studies should be directed towards exploring how research design in qualitative research should focus on addressing cultural issues in data recoding. This is because there are some tribes or cultures that frowns on recordings and the taking and retention of information after the person’s death. In addition, future research should focus on the effect of training programmes that are organised for the ethics committee and its effects on ethical approval process. In the words, are there any given forums or developmental programmes that are made available to the ethics committee in view of improving knowledge on current ethical concerns and how it has made their role more effective.

References

Alderson, P. (2000), *Qualitative Research: A Vital Resource for Ethical Healthcare*, The Welcome Trust, London.

Alicia, M. (2009), "Coast IRB, caught in sting, to close", *The Wall Street Journal*.

Annas, G.J. and Grodin, M.A. (1992), *The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY.

Beauchamp, T.L. (1991), *Philosophical Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, 2nd ed., McGraw Hill, New York, NY.

Beauchemin, É., Côté, L.P., Drolet, M.J. and Williams-Jones, B. (2021), "Conceptualizing ethical issues in the conduct of research: results from a critical and systematic literature review", *Journal of Academic Ethics*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 335-358, doi: 10.1007/s10805-021-09411-7.

Bickman, L. and Rog, D. (2009), "Applied research design: a practical approach", in Bickman, L. and Rog, D. (Eds), *Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods*, 2nd ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 3-43.

Bruhn, J.G., Zajac, G., Al-Kazemi, A.A. and Prescott, L.D. (2002), "Moral positions and academic conduct: parameters of tolerance for ethics failure", *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 73 No. 4, pp. 461-493, doi: 10.1353/jhe.2002.0033.

Cilliers, L. and Viljieon, K. (2021), "A framework of ethical issues to consider when conducting internet-based research", *South African Journal of Information Management*, ISSN: 1560-63x, 2078-1865.

Clark, H.H. (1996), *Using Language*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Collis, J. and Hussey, R. (2014), *Business Research: A Practical Guide for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students*, 4th ed., Macmillan education; Palgrave.

Colnerud, G. (2015), "Ethical dilemmas in research in relation to ethical review: an empirical study", *Research Ethics*, Vol. 10 No. 4, pp. 238-253, doi: 10.1177/1747016114552339.

Costa, A.P. and Moreira, A. (2019), "Technology ethics in qualitative research: how to be", *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 24 No. 13, pp. 1-4.

Creswell, J. and Plano Clark, V. (2007), *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Crow, G. and Wiles, R. (2008), "Managing anonymity and confidentiality in social research: the case of visual data in community research", ESRC National centre for research methods.

Davison, J. (2004), "Dilemmas in research: issues of vulnerability and disempowerment for the social workers/researcher", *Journal of Social Work Practice*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 379-393, doi: 10.1080/0265053042000314447.

Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (2011), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4th ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Drolet, M., Rose-Derouin, E., Leblanc, J., Ruest, M. and Williams-Jones, B. (2022), "Ethical issues in research: perceptions of researchers, research ethics board members and research ethics experts", *Journal of Academic Ethics*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 269-292, doi: 10.1007/s10805-022-09455-3.

ESOMAR (2010), "Current and emerging trends in qualitative research", *Athens, Greece in combination with congress-Odyssey*, Retrieved from: Current And Emerging Trends In Qualitative Research – WebSM (accessed 18 December 2022).

Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E. and Chadwick, B. (2008), "Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups", *British Dental Journal*, Vol. 204 No. 6, pp. 291-295.

Giorgini, V., Mecca, J.T., Gibson, C., Medeiros, K., Mumford, M.D., Connelly, S. and Devenport, L.D. (2016), "Researcher perceptions of ethical guidelines and codes of conduct", *Accountability in Research*, Vol. 22 No. 3, pp. 123-138, doi: 10.1080/08989621.2014.955607.

Grodin, M.A. (1992), "Historical origins of the Nuremberg code", in Annas, G.J. and Grodin, M.A. (Eds), *The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code: Human Rights in Human Experimentation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Guillemin, M. and Gillam, L. (2004), “Ethics, reflexivity and ‘ethically important moments’ in research”, *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 261-280.

Howard-Grenville, J., Nelson, A., Vough, H. and Zilber, T. (2021), “From the editors – achieving fit and avoiding misfit in qualitative research”, *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 64 No. 5, pp. 1313-1323.

Hursthouse, R. and Pettigrove, G. (2018), “Virtue ethics”, in Zalta, E.N. (Ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2018 ed.)*, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, Retrieved 2021-02-19.

Kang, E. and Hwang, H. (2021), “Ethical conducts in qualitative research methodology; participants observation and interview process”, *Journal of Research and Publication Ethics*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 5-10.

Kara, H. and Pickering, L. (2017), “New directions in qualitative research ethics”, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 239-241.

Koski, G. (2009), “Ethical issues in translational research and clinical investigation”, *Clinical and Translational Science*, Academic Press.

Kozinets, R.V. (2002), “The field behind the screen: using netnography for marketing research in online communities”, *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 39 No. 1, pp. 61-72.

Kozinets, R.V. (2017), “Management netnography: axiological and methodological developments in online cultural business research”, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods*, Sage, London.

Lazar, J., Feng, J. and Hochheiser, H. (2017), *Research Methods in Human-Computer Interaction*, 2nd ed., Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, Cambridge, MA.

Lynöe, N., Sandlund, M. and Jacobsson, L. (1999), “Research ethics committees: a comparative study of assessment of ethical dilemmas”, *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 152-159.

McCloskey, H.J. (1957), “An examination of restricted utilitarianism”, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 66 No. 4, pp. 466-485, doi: 10.2307/2182745.

McNeil, C. (2014), “Debate over institutional review boards continues as alternative options emerge”, *JNCI Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, Vol. 99 No. 7, pp. 502-503.

Menzies, T., Williams, L. and Zimmerman, T. (2016), *Perspectives on Data Science for Software Engineering*, Elsevier.

Merriam, S. (2009), *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Mohamadi, A., Asghari, F. and Rashidian, A. (2014), “Continuing review of ethics in clinical trials: a surveillance study in Iran”, *Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine*, PMC 4648212. PMID 26587202, Vol. 7, p. 22

Mumford, M.D., Higgs, C. and Gujar, Y. (2021), “Ethics in coercive environments: ensuring voluntary participation in research”, in Panicker, S. and Stanley, B. (Eds), *Handbook of Research Ethics in Psychological Science*, American Psychological Association, pp. 113-123.

Nambisan, S., Wright, M. and Feldman, M. (2019), “The digital transformation of innovation and entrepreneurship: progress, challenges and key themes”, *Research Policy*, Vol. 48 No. 8, p. 103773, doi: 10.1016/j.respol.2019.03.018.

Nuremberg Code (1947), “The doctor’s trial: the medical case of the subsequent Nuremberg proceedings”, *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Online Exhibitions*, Retrieved from: Nuremberg Code – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (ushmm.org) (accessed 2 April 2022).

Olson, R.G. (1967), “Deontological ethics”, in Edwards, P. (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Collier Macmillan, London.

Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L. and Wynaden, D. (2000), "Ethics in qualitative research", *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 93-96.

Parkinson, G. and Drislane, R. (2011), "Qualitative research. In online dictionary of the social sciences", available at: http://bitbucket.icaap.org/dict.pl

Punch, M. (1994), *Politics and Ethics in Qualitative Research. Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage, Newbery Park, CA.

Reynolds, G.W. (2019), *Ethics in Information Technology*, 6th ed., Cengage Learning.

Roth, W. and von Unger, H. (2018), "Current perspectives on research ethics in qualitative research", *Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 19 No. 3, pp. 798-809.

Salzman, T.A. (1995), *Deontology and Teleology: An Investigation of the Normative Debate in Roman Catholic Moral Theology*, University Press.

Saunders, B., Kitzinger, J. and Kitzinger, C. (2015), "Anonymising interview data: challenges and compromise in practice", *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 15 No. 5, pp. 616-632.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2016), *Research Methods for Business Students*, 6th ed., Pearson.

Shaw, W. (1998), *Contemporary Ethics: Taking Account of Utilitarianism*, Wiley-Blackwell, ISBN 978-0-631-20294-3.

Shepherd, D.A. and Gruber, M. (2020), "The lean startup framework: closing the academic–practitioner divide", *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, Vol. 45 No. 5, p. 104225871989941, doi: 10.1177/1042258719899415.

Short, J.C., Ketchen, D.J., McKenny, A.F., Allison, T.H. and Ireland, R.D. (2017), "Research on crowdfunding: reviewing the (very recent) past and celebrating the present", *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, Vol. 41 No. 2, pp. 149-160, doi: 10.1111/etap.12270.

Sievert, C. and Shirley, K.E. (2014), "A method for visualizing and interpreting topics", *Proceedings of the Workshop on Interactive Language Learning, Visualization, and Interfaces*, Association for Computational Linguistics, Baltimore, MD, pp. 63-70.

Smith, J., Flowers, P. and Larkin, M. (2009), *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Stockwell, P., Colomb, R.M., Smith, A.E. and Wiles, J. (2009), "Use of an automatic content analysis tool: a technique for seeing both local and global scope", *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, Vol. 67 No. 5, pp. 424-436.

Sykora, M. (2017), "Web 1.0 to web 2.0: an observational study and empirical evidence for the historical r(evolution) of the social web", *International Journal of Web Engineering and Technology*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 70-94.

Tom, R. and Richards, L. (2003), "The way ahead in qualitative research", *Journal of Modern Applied Statistical Methods*, Vol. 2 No. 1.

Traer, R. (2009), *Doing Environmental Ethics*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

UK Statistics Authority (2022), "Ethical considerations associated with qualitative research methods", available at: https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/ethical-considerations-associated-with-qualitative-research-methods/pages/2/ (accessed 24 April 2023).

Van Burg, E., Cornelissen, J., Stam, W. and Jack, S. (2022), "Advancing qualitative entrepreneurship research: leveraging methodological plurality for achieving scholarly impact", *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, Vol. 46 No. 1, pp. 3-20.

Waller, B.N. (2005), *Consider Ethics: Theory, Readings, and Contemporary Issues*, Pearson Longman, New York, NY.

Williams-Jones, B., Potvin, M.J., Mathieu, G. and Smith, E. (2013), "Barriers to research on research ethics review and conflicts of interest", *IRB: Ethics and Human Research*, Vol. 35 No. 5, pp. 14-20.

Wilson, S., Draper, H. and Ives, J. (2008), "Ethical issues regarding recruitment to research studies within the primary care consultation", *Family Practice*, Vol. 25 No. 6, pp. 456-461.

Zamawe, F.C. (2015), "The implication of using NVivo software in qualitative data analysis: evidence-based reflections", *Malawi Medical Journal*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 13-15.

Further reading

Annas, J. (2022), "Virtue and duty: negotiating between different ethical traditions", *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, S2CID 143268990 – via SpringerLink, Vol. 49 No. 4, p. 609, doi: 10.1007/s10790-015-9520-y.

Enfield, K.B. and Truwit, J.D. (2008), "The purpose, composition, and function of an institutional review board: balancing priorities", *Respiratory Care*, Vol. 53 No. 10, pp. 1330-1336.

Perrault, E.K. and Keating, D.M. (2017), "Seeking ways to inform the uninformed: improving the informed consent process in online social science research", *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 50-60.

Perrault, E.K. and Nazione, S.A. (2016), "Informed consent – uninformed participants: shortcomings of online social science consent forms and recommendations for improvement", *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 274-280.

Pope, T.M. (2009), "Multi-Institutional healthcare ethics committees: the procedurally fair internal dispute resolution mechanism", *Campbell Law Review*, Vol. 31, pp. 257-331.

Corresponding author

Michael Nii Laryeafio can be contacted at: m.niilaryeafio@yahoo.com