

การหย่อนทางจริยธรรมในกระบวนการเก็บข้อมูลวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ

The Compromising of Ethical Ideals in Gathering

Qualitative Research Data

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิชาการชิ้นนี้ทำการศึกษาเฉพาะวิธีการรวบรวมข้อมูล และบริบทแวดล้อม ในงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพว่า แนวคิดทางจริยธรรมที่ใช้ในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูล เพื่อทำวิจัย อาจได้รับการล่อลวงได้ง่ายในมุมมองของงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ การรวบรวมข้อมูลเพื่อเขียน บทความวิชาการชิ้นนี้ใช้การทบทวนจากวรรณกรรมภาษาอังกฤษที่หลากหลายในช่วงปี ค.ศ. 1960 ถึงปัจจุบันเพื่อให้เห็นถึงการเปลี่ยนแปลงของแนวคิดทางจริยธรรม และมุมมอง จริยธรรมในกระบวนการเก็บข้อมูลวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพในระดับสากล โดยเสริมกรณีศึกษา ด้านแนวทางจริยธรรมในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพที่เกิดขึ้น ในบริบทประเทศไทย โดยสามารถสรุปได้ว่าแนวคิดทางจริยธรรมในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลเพื่อทำการวิจัย เชิงคุณภาพมีแนวโน้มที่จะถูกล่อลวงได้ง่ายในบางกรณี เช่น การเข้าใจผิด (Deception) โดยนักวิจัยต้องสามารถอธิบายเหตุผลในการใช้วิธีการนั้นๆ ได้อย่างเหมาะสมโดยไม่ขัดกับ หลักจริยธรรมการวิจัยที่ได้รับการยอมรับโดยสากล และสำหรับบริบทแวดล้อม พบว่า นักวิจัย ใช้วาทกรรมว่างานวิจัยนั้นเป็นประโยชน์ต่อชุมชนในการเข้าไปทำการวิจัย นอกจากนี้ พบว่า ความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรมของผู้วิจัยและผู้ให้ข้อมูล ส่งผลต่อแนวคิดสิทธิส่วนบุคคลซึ่งเป็น หนึ่งในปัญหาของแนวคิดทางจริยธรรมในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลเพื่อทำการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ

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Abstract

The article intended to study only the data gathering and environmental contexts of the qualitative research to know whether the degree of ethical ideals can be compromised with the methods of collecting qualitative data and environmental contexts. Reviewing various literature written in English during the 1960s to date occurred in order to understand the concept of ethical ideals in gathering data and the universal perspective on ethical ideals for doing qualitative research. Then the Thai cases were added to elaborate the understanding in the Thai context. It can be concluded that the ethical ideals in collecting research data could be harmed by deception during collecting data. Researchers must be able to explain the reasons for their use in order to gain ethical approval. For environmental contexts, the discourse that this research is beneficial for the community was used. Also, the cultural differences between the researcher and the key informants affected the privacy concept which was considered to be the ethical ideal for gathering data for qualitative research.

Keywords : Ethical Ideals, Qualitative Research, Research gathering data

Introduction

The ethical code of conduct for doing research has long been discussed since World War II (Belmont Report, 1978). Recently, the code of conduct for doing research was issued based on the international principles entitled: the Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for Protection of Human Subjects or Research (Belmont Report, 1978) which became a code

of conduct for doing the research internationally and well-accepted in Thailand. In Thailand, the Guideline for Research on Human 2550 B.C. derived from Forum for Ethical Review Committee in Thailand (FERCIT) employed the Belmont Report as a guideline, which comprised of 3 ethical codes of conduct as follows; Respect for person, Beneficial and Justice (www.krisdika.go.th, 2007).

Even the code of conduct for doing research concerned humans as a fundamental principle, though, the qualitative and quantitative research arenas had their own code of conduct. These differences came from the diverse techniques used for gathering research data. At the bottom of the continuum are commonly used labels ranging from ethical code for gathering quantitative to qualitative research data. The data gathering of quantitative research concerned the process of using system and control as a basis. The scientific research on human and psychology were grouped here, whereas the process of gathering qualitative research data concerned the depth and completed data. The ethics for gathering qualitative research concerned how to gain trust from participants so that they would feel secure to give away information without the exercise of power of researcher over the participant and deception (Sapsford & Jupp, 1996).

The paper was interested in the ethical ideals for gathering research data of qualitative research to know whether apart from following the research ethic guideline on humans, is there any tendency that the ethical ideals for gathering qualitative research data can be compromised. Ethical ideals to be used in this paper are concerned with setting up moral behaviours, which are then defined as the codes and principles (May, 1997). For example, the code of conduct for doing research on Humans was issued as Belmont Report : Ethical Principles and Guidelines for Protection of Human Subjects or

Research (1978) which become a code of conduct for doing the research internationally. However, this paper did not advocate to study issue of the research on humans or behavioral research where the ethical principles for doing the research with humans directly were clear. This paper intended to study the qualitative data gathering methods; i.e.; interview and observation. The ‘people’ in the social research arena were the key informants. The level of physical and emotional attachment between researchers and the participants were shallower than the psychological experiment or the health issues (Aswin Sangpikul, 2013)

The term “ethical ideals” in this essay can be indicated as basic concepts and etiquette for researchers to follow and to avoid the power-relations problem. The power between the researchers and the participants is imbalanced. It is perceived that the researchers have a greater power over the participants. The exercise of power by researchers can be seen in terms of the exploitation of participants (Burton, 2000). It is the case of the ethical ideals dilemma that this paper intended to discuss. Ethical ideals dilemma can happen whenever more than one desirable value is presented. For example, the conflict between ethical principles concerned with the harm and privacy of the participants and the methods used for gathering data, and do individuals have an absolute right to privacy, or is this right overridden by the needs of the search for knowledge?

It is the case that some ethical ideals are compromised in the practice of gathering research data, but some might not be. It is hard to measure the number of cases as a frequency: always, often or even sometimes. The practice of gathering research data involves research techniques, groups of participants and the environmental context where the research takes place. Therefore, ethical ideals may be compromised in the practice of research

depending on the following questions:

1. Which are the viable strategies for undertaking research; for instance, ethnography and case studies?
2. Which methods are used for gathering research data; participant observation, interview?
3. What are the other surrounding contexts i.e. the cultural context of the country where the field study will be undertaken and the political problems that may occur when gathering research data (for example, the control exercised by the fund's owner or gatekeeper) that affect the compromise between ethical ideals and the practice of gathering research data?

Substance

The Belmont Report (1978); the ethical principles and guidelines for research involving human subjects, was issued based on the unethical research that had been done before in the fields of health and psychology i.e; the Tuskegee Syphilis study and the Laud Humphrey's "Tearoom" study and the Stanley Milgram experiment. These studies led to the creation of the Belmont Report and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) which were formed to protect human subjects involved in research. The Belmont Report comprised of 3 principles; 1. Respect for persons, 2. Beneficence or "Do no harm", and 3. Justice or non-exploitative by using 3 primary areas of application; informed consent, assessment of risks & benefits, and selection of subjects. Recently, the Belmont Report provides the moral framework for regulating Government Policy on conducting research on humans in The U.S. and other countries including Thailand. Apart from the Belmont Report, ethical principles in social

research were categorised by Diener and Crandall (1978) into four main areas; 1. Harm to participants, 2. Informed Consent, 3. Invasion of Privacy and 4. Deception. These 4 areas gained some perspectives from the fundamental Belmont report. Only the collecting of data in qualitative research served as a main focus. In addition, the unethical researches that had been done before as mentioned earlier would be reviewed as examples;

1. Harm to participants

Research that has potential to harm participants is unacceptable. The potential for harm can be presented in many ways. It may affect the subjects physically or emotionally by reducing confidentiality, causing embarrassment and losing self-esteem (Bryman, 2004). In which ways does “Harm” compromise the practice of gathering research data? Physical harm is more apparent and easier to detect compared to emotional harm (Williams, 2003). Therefore, the practice of data gathering that causes emotional harm has a tendency to occur, for example, research conducted with vulnerable groups; for example, female abuse (Chatzifotiou, 2000), children (Grover, 2004; Kahn et al, 1998) and people with learning disabilities (Swain et al, 1998).

2. Informed consent

It is a guideline that nothing should be done to the research subjects without their agreement. Agreement is based on the two concepts entitled “Informed” and “Consent” “Informed” is based on adequate knowledge and comprehension of information of the research project such as purpose, benefits and the risks of dissemination of information (Barnes, 1979). “Consent” is based on the canon that the participants are competent to make rational and mature judgement. In addition, participation in the research project must be on a voluntary basis (Homan 1991). In which way does “Informed consent” compromise the practice of gathering research data?

The concept of informed consent is not clear cut (Sapsford & Jupp, 1996). Therefore, it has a tendency to compromise the practice of gathering research data. The concept of informed consent can be divided into “The informed” and “Consent” issues. For the informed participants issue, it is hard to present prospective participants with all the information required to make an informed decision about their involvement. Even though the researchers may provide clear information regarding consent to the participants, participants may not fully understand and may determine the objectives in different ways. Swain et. al. (1998) discuss in their research when participants are drawn from vulnerable and powerless groups in society; for example, people with learning difficulties. Swain et. al. (1998) state about a participant, “May”, that “May believed that her story, as told to the researcher, would be widely disseminated” (P. 28) In reality, this research is limited to only some particular groups that are interested in this field. For the consent issue, there are some arguments about consent as follows: How is informed consent obtained in research that involves many participants such as research on people’s behaviour in public areas? (Raynolds, 1982)

In addition, who should sign consent forms if research is conducted with children or elderly people (Sapsford & Jupp, 1996) should a relative or other key informants sign?

3. Invasion of privacy

Researchers have to respect the privacy of participants. Therefore, it must be clearly seen that the invasion of privacy is not compromised with the practice of gathering data for the following reasons: First, transgressions of that right in the name of research are not regarded as acceptable (Bryman, 2004). The classic Humphrey’s research is an example. He tracked down the target group’s names and addresses and followed them up to interview them

(Williams, 2003). This caused exposure of secrets about their sexual behaviour to some of their families (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). This is an infamous and classic case that social researchers should not copy. Second, invasion of privacy goes along with informed consent. The participants in a sense acknowledge that the right to privacy has been surrendered for that limited domain. (Burton, 2000) Therefore, some researchers try to protect the right of privacy of the subjects without some researcher being harmed by their own research. Chatizifotou (2000) allows participants to nominate the interview location. In addition, the interview questions should be reviewed so as not to invade people's rights. Especially questions about sensitive and private topics such as income or sexual behaviour are reviewed. (Bulmer & Warwick, 1983)

These limitations on methods of gathering research data might affect the information gained. Moreover, there may be issues of safety when entering the place nominated by the participants. In addition, stress can occur because of trying to help participants feel less threatened. Finally, the researchers should not divulge information derived from others without their permission. This is related to the rights of the participants to their information. The researchers might gather the data by using their own perception rather than the participants' views. This case may happen in research with vulnerable groups. The researchers should let them share in how researchers will gather and interpret their information.

4. Deception

Altering information as a way of gathering data is the definition of deception. Deception has a lesser degree of harm compared to other ethical principles (Bryman, 2004). Therefore, in only some cases with some degrees deception compromises the practice of gathering data. An example

of deception is the infamous case “The lost mailbox” by Milgram (1963). This research caused deception because people who send letters believe their letters are accidentally lost rather than deposited for a research experiment (Bryman, 2004). Recently, sometimes, the misleading that happened without the researcher’s intention helped them to gain some more information. Even the researchers themselves are not expecting. For example, the research on the process to become the intimated massage parlour by Sulimarn (Narumol) Wongsuparp (1996). She used the ethnographic methodology to attend the training process of the massage parlour. Only the cheering up staff knew who she was in order to protect her from being recruited to “serve” the guest. However, she was endangered once and used some tricks to get out of the situation. Anyhow, from being in the same room with the guest for a while, she gained richer information than just waiting to gain some acquaintances with the other massagers in order to gain their trust for uncovering herself and interviewing them. Anyhow, the deception by altering information or the researchers created research results by themselves is not advocated to be compromised for this case.

Conclusion for ethical ideals’ part

Each ethical principle has a different degree of flexibility. Invasion of Privacy is quite restricted, while, harm to participant and informed consent are not clear-cut. Finally, deception is the easiest principle to invade because it is considered as not nice to perform without the appropriate reasons provided.

The Practice of Gathering Research Data

This part of the essay attempts to answer the question “What kind of research practice can be used to gather data and is compromised in ethical ideals?”

Social science research can be divided into qualitative and quantitative research which provide different levels of possibility to compromise ethical principles. Cases where ethical ideals are compromised in the practice of gathering research are much in evidence in the qualitative approach. The viable strategies for undertaking qualitative research are : ethnographic and case studies (Punch, 2005), which are capable of invading ethical principles (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). These strategies involve a small number of participants with in depth information gathered. These strategies have a higher tendency to be involved with human beings than the quantitative method. Ethnography and case studies use participant observation and interview techniques for gathering data These techniques invade ethical principles at different levels.

As distinct from the above-mentioned qualitative research, quantitative research has fewer problems with ethical principles. However, there are some cases where ethical ideals are compromised with the practice of gathering research data in the quantitative approach; for example, the measuring technique as a tool for gathering research data: sometimes the measurable entity and classification of qualitative approach are the cause of ethical problems. An example is the IQ test that measures mental ability and classifies people as a group. This might make people who have a lower IQ feel inferior (Sapsford & Jupp, 1996), and it might produce emotional harm or cause embarrassment.

Techniques for gathering data in qualitative research

The techniques used to gather data invade ethical principles at different levels. The techniques of gathering research data in qualitative

research cover a number of techniques; for example, participant observation and interview.

1. Participant observation.

It is assumed that qualitative fieldwork employs participant observation as a central technique. This technique undertakes a long - term involvement in the life of a group in order to learn about people's thoughts. It has a higher degree of invading ethical ideals in comparison to other techniques (Jones, 2006), while other methods that have less direct involvement with participants and short-term involvement are immune from the ethical problems

The level of direct participation is one of the data gathering areas that should be reviewed because people in direct participation must be informed. Whereas in indirect participation, for example the people waiting in the queue, the question might be "Are they being affected by being observed?", if not it is not as important as indirect participation.

There are two sub techniques for undertaking participant observation.

1.1 Covert Participant Observation

Ethical ideals are compromised with this technique because covert research is a pragmatic method, ideally non-reactive and giving access to secret transactions. In addition, covert observation avoids the long process of obtaining permission. The idea of employing covert research as a method for gathering data is supported by Douglas (1976 in Sapsford & Jupp, 1996). He points out how, in some tactics of investigative research, researchers slip into the setting like spies. Therefore, the covert method is supported if undertaken in view of the right of the subjects to be free from disturbance and inhabitation.

However, disadvantages of covert participant observation are also presented. It transgresses the principle of informed consent and privacy. In the infamous case of Humphrey (1970), he studied homosexual encounters in public toilets, which is an example of an invasion of the rights of the participants. In addition, it is viewed that left field work will be detrimental for the researchers (Murray, 2003). One example of being detrimental is feeling guilty because the covert method is being like a spy. In Homan's research, he carried out covert participant research, but he reflected from his work that he felt guilty in doing this: "The field observer conformed his outward behaviour in all possible respects with the norm existing in the assembly. He adopted the appropriate postures of prayer... he carried a black leather bible with him thereby presenting himself as "saint" rather than "sinner" (Homan, 1980, p. 49). Moreover, in the research done by Murray (2003) she discusses her two roles; back stage and front stage when doing participant observation. She states that "I also felt a twinge...while talking to Sarah but dismissed it and took notes anyway" (P. 1). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the covert participant observation can compromise ethical ideals whenever there are no other means or methods of accessing or gathering research data available, and whenever it can be proved that this method is in certain cases favourable to, and in the interests of, subjects.

1.2 Overt Participant Observation

This is the style of participant observation where researchers disclose themselves to the public. Overt participant observation is the data gathering method that is immune from the ethical principles. The researchers enter into the field by building rapport for gathering data. However, ethical ideals are compromised with this method because the relationship between the researchers and participants is based on an imbalance of power.

For example, research undertaken in developing countries where researchers come from the governmental agencies (Bulmer & Warwick, 1983).

2. The interview method

The interview method is more immune to ethical principles compared to the above data gathering techniques. Many researchers who employ the interview technique pay respect to the ethical principles. This is supported by interviews with powerless groups in a community: the research of Grover (2004) and Swain et. al. (1998) who conducted research with children and people with learning disabilities respectively. They both perceived that the research should present the voice of the participants and emphasize ethical principles.

In addition, holding onto ethical principles might help researchers to gather reliable data. For example, the use of the consent form helps researchers to get exact information from the participant (Raynolds 1982). However there is another view from Bourdieu (1996) that the participant is not in the powerless group. They also gain benefit from the research. In addition, Bourdieu (1996) discusses about interpretations of interviews that participants are more conscious. Sometimes they use the interview as a tool to access for their benefit or protect their information by resistance to the interview question objective.

However, the interview technique has a tendency to invade ethical principles, and ethical ideals are compromised in this technique. Firstly, the participants might trust the researchers because they look like consultants who can help them (Swain et al, 1998). Because of this, the researchers might take advantage in gathering information that may harm or invade the privacy of participants, and present information that is slanted towards the researchers view.

Secondly, the research questions might disturb subjects who have been abused (Pryke, 2004). This represents an invasion of ethical ideals. To solve this, the researchers try to use interview techniques that help the participants feel free to deliver information (Bourdieu, 1996). For example, the in-depth interview balances power between researchers and participants.

For the methods of gathering research data, it can be concluded that techniques for gathering research data interfere with the four ethical principles to different degrees. Therefore, ethical decision-making depends largely on the individual researcher's awareness and interpretation of these mechanisms and guidelines (Kimmel, 1988; P 9). Researchers should try to minimize disturbance both to subjects themselves and to the objects (Kent et al 2002). In addition, researchers should try to adjust themselves to the framework of the ethical issues. For example, finding a lower risk method, or expanding the sample group to reduce the instances of problems.

The environmental contexts

Apart from the method of gathering research data, ethical ideals are compromised in the environmental contexts: the environment in which the research is undertaken. This essay categorises the environmental contexts as follows.

1. The cultural context

Ethical ideals and values are different in each country. The level of ethical principles that compromise the practice of gathering research data might be different in each culture. This is based on cultural differences. Hofstede (1980) undertook research on differences of national culture, which resulted in four dimensions: power distance; collectivism vs. individualism;

femininity vs. masculinity; and uncertainty avoidance.

In some countries, people have a higher level of masculinity (level of autonomy and concern on the rights). Where ethical principles are concerned, for example, the research associations in The US. are more apprehensive about the consent form. In Britain and most European countries social scientists are rarely required to obtain ethical reviews of their research unless it is to be conducted in conjunction with a health practitioner (Kent et. al., 2002).

A cultural difference in terms of power distance is the example of the use of power between researcher and participants. The power of the researcher is seen less in western countries, while in Asian countries there is a greater power distance. Because of this, the exercise of power by researchers to gain more information has a tendency to occur. For example, the article's writer had direct experience with the research on One Village One Product scheme (OTOP) in Thailand which found that the research is often conducted by the local governmental universities rather than other agencies as they relied on the lecturer's status.

The title and the finding of research may affect the marketing strategy of the case study. For example, the research entitled "The Production of Cultural Space for Tourism: a Case Study of PLERNWAN, Hua-Hin District, Prachuabkikhun Province" by Tanawat Nitipaparnan (2015) which discussed the production process of cultural space of Plernwarn's market from the marketing viewpoint, the title of the research in Thai employing the words "*Wattanathum Pradit*" or "*Inventing Culture*". In addition, the finding stated that "*Plernwarn's market as a culturally invented by cut and paste the well-known period of the past to audiences.*" This may affect the marketing strategy of the firm without notice.

2. Politics in research

2.1 The community's well being

It is suggested that research projects should bring benefit to people and their environment (Styrdom, 1999). Moreover, it is also suggested that research projects should take into consideration the concerns of the society. Then, the welcoming of ethical principles to compromise with the practice of gathering research data will be considered. The Humphrey's research as mentioned earlier on homosexuality is a recent example of harmful research. However, at the period that this research was conducted, the problem of HIV was topical. This research might help to understand the risk group more clearly.

2.2 Funding

The majority of social research projects are sponsored by governments, other organisations or agencies with a vested interest in the result. It is an ethical ideal that research should not be undertaken if it is funded by bodies that are looking for preconceived conclusions and are liable to bias the investigation. However, sometimes the compromise of gathering research data and ethical ideals are negotiated because some researchers who intend to advance their profession might try to find methods to manipulate the data gathered to favour the funding.

2.3 Gatekeeper

The gatekeeper is one who allows the researcher access to undertake research in their firm (Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991). Firms might be concerned about "how they are going to be represented". If the research has potential to present a good reputation of the organisation, the gatekeeper might accept that. Some gatekeepers, for example the manager of the firm, have a tendency to force the employees to give information on the research

even when the employees are not willing. For the direct experience of the article's writer with, the local gatekeeper in Thailand, for example; the head of village, I found that the authority often influenced their villagers to give away positive information to impress the researcher and to maintain the "face" of its village. It is possible to conclude for this part that the research in different environmental contexts invades ethical ideals. It is noticed that ethical ideals are found in research that is related to culture, religion and gender. These areas of research are important and cannot perform ethical and research's methodological compromise unless it can be proved that there will be benefit to wellbeing. However, in some countries, research is still undertaken with compromise on the data collection and on the researchers perspectives.

Conclusion

Ethical ideals can be compromised in the practice of the gathering of research data whenever the following cases had happened; First, the beneficial, there were some conditions that the researchers can break through in the name of research that benefits the community's well - being and the advancement of knowledge finding. As supported by Punch (2005) "get it out and do it" (p.85). In addition, he also warns against leaning too far toward a highly restrictive model for research that prevents academics from exploring complex social reality Secondly, the permission of informed consent is hard to access. Therefore, some researchers turn to use the covert method, which is easier for accessing data. However, recently, this method has been claimed to be violating informed consent and destroying the future of social research. Finally, the culture differences, affect the methods used for

gathering data. From the example of local Thai culture that the article's writer had come across found that "maintaining the face of the host" as mentioned in the environmental context is a traditional Thai culture to be concerned. So the data received would not reflect the real problem of the villagers. As such, no perfect case is immune from ethical problems because the level of harm in each individual's perception is different. It is not the work of the researcher to preventing ethical problems alone. Participants, key informants, fund's owner or gatekeeper have to be a part of that research. Hence, the idea of collective responsibility might be the answer for undertaking research. The researchers and participants should gather together and find the appropriate research data gathering techniques which protect the participants and also the researchers themselves from being harmed by their own research.

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