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**ETHICAL NUANCES FOR PROFESSIONAL REFINEMENT IN
THE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION
ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE**

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INTRODUCTION

A fertile imagination is a quality of mind which can guarantee an understanding of the realities of a discipline in relation to the macro-societal values. It is not merely a quality of mind among the contemporary range of cultural sensibilities – it is the quality whose wider and adroit use offers the promise that such sensibilities – really the gamut of human reason, will play a better role in human affairs. Conventional wisdom holds that a system operated within the context of observance of laws and regulations is a sound vision and philosophy.

The knowledge base needed for Physical Education as an academic discipline is here with us. The matrices were erected through the undaunted industry of the leaders in the field of Physical Education Academic Discipline, (PEAD). Nevertheless, there is a wide gap between the achievements and the possibilities that could push farther its frontiers. The professionals face the challenge of high intellectual adventure to explore the contours of PEAD. It is required of the “adventurers” the ethical tenacity to profess in the fertile branch of knowledge.

The primary objective of this article is to provide the ethics of conduct for research in PEAD. Why ethical considerations in the conduct of research in the discipline? Humanity even with the established professions as its instruments of civilization, has not straightened itself ethically and PEAD, a “latter day profession”, is yet an imperfect tool – hence the need for ethical norms. Again, if PEAD research findings should be the “final word”, in an ordered series of evidence, it should be necessary meet both the structural and ethical principles. Meanwhile, the former is usually emphasized. This article provides a theoretical model to add ethical verve to PEAD research efforts.

ETHICS AND RESEARCH IN PEAD

Ethics is defined by Omeregbe (1989) as the normative science of human conduct. This definition shifts emphasis from morality of human actions which falls in the realm of religion. Ethics therefore ought to provide "practical advice" in human affairs. It is in that context that ethics is construed in this article. Physical Education deserves a set of acceptable and equitable operational norms for the guidance of the professionals in their research endeavours.

It is relevant to note that ethical rules may not be enforceable by judicial process being within the ambit of natural law, belief or conviction. Natural laws are guided by reason (Johnson, 1991). The assumption is that all human beings ought to be rational people. With rationality, humans are able to accept good actions and avoid bad actions. Ethics, as does natural law, obliges people to refrain from evil and to do good. Omeregbe (1989) puts it lucidly by saying that all men who have not lost the use of their reason feel obliged by natural law, and that such obligations come through the ethical conscience.

The point is that any human behaviour which is unnatural is contrary to nature and is unreasonable. Natural law is based on reason and human beings ought to be guided by reason in their activities. It therefore takes rationality and obedience to the natural law or ethical doctrine to be a "human being". The ethical issues in the conduct of Physical Education in this article will be based on the conceptual frame work presented above.

THE ETHICAL PLAN

The following are some considerations the ethically motivated researcher in Physical Education should adhere to.

1. **Responsibility of the Professionals**

It is the professional responsibility of the Physical Educator to improve the knowledge based on the profession. This should be done through research contributions of an original nature. As professionals physical educators should:

- be accountable for their actions
- not ignore ethical issues in the conduct of research
- act for the benefit of the profession, society, and humanity.

2. **Research Topic**

An important ethical consideration is settling on a "good" and "original" research topic. A good research topic should attempt to recede the frontiers of ignorance through an original contribution to knowledge. Example, "The ethical behaviour of professional physical educators and its influence on secondary school administration in Akwa Ibom State – Nigeria", (Uduk, 1995).

3. **Research Funding**

How the research would be funded should agitate the researcher's mind. The cost of execution should neither be overestimated nor underestimated. An overestimated proposal may not attract sponsorship. That would deny the public the good effects of the study thereby delaying the advancement of knowledge. If sponsorship is granted inflated proposal may deprive sponsorship of more research. If the research is to be self sponsored it is ethical to undertake a thorough feasibility study to determine the projected financial estimate of the work. If done properly, the researcher would be able to find out if his financial resources would meet the research demands. The point here is that the researcher should always make a fair financial estimate of the study he is about to embark on.

4. **Research Population**

The choice of population of study is at the liberty of the researcher. That is exactly the limit of the freedom. It is unethical for the researcher to do the following or similar things on the population:

- invade their privacy
- obtain information by subterfuge
- give away information on promise of confidentiality
- isolate obtained data to disparage individuals in the population
- manipulate the population to obtain information
- obtain information from a second source as a proxy of the population
- draw conclusions on the population with a "deliberate/fake" sample
- not giving every member of the population equal chance of selection on sampling.
- relocate the actual characteristics of a population, e.g. substituting urban for rural population.
- generalize about the population from unproportionately unrepresentative sample.
- withhold information from the population on the consequences of participation in the research.

5. **Research Data**

Data are the raw materials of research. To falsify data for fixed goals is dreadfully unethical (Warwick, 1980). Reporting spurious findings from fake data is a disservice to the profession and humanity.

The following norms for ethically acceptable studies in P.E.A.D. are presented:

- avoid violating the norms and culture of the group being studied
- avoid research that would polarise the population or set off internal conflicts
- seek the consent of the population
- do not cause physical, mental, social or political harm to the participants.

At the data collecting stage, researchers should not collect data from the population in deviance of ethical considerations. Besides, findings from data tampered with

are not the defacto picture of the population. Selltiz, Wrightsman and Cook (1978), opine that it is unethical to obtain data by bribing, coercing, offering irresistible incentives and deceiving the research participants.

6. **Data Analysis**

Data, the raw materials of research, need careful analysis and interpretation for the true conclusions from research findings. It is unethical if the researcher fails to separate his personal opinion from inference from the data. The researcher is expected to divorce himself from the obtained data.

Researchers in P.E.A.D. should not commit the following unethical acts against their data.

- draw conclusions not germane to the data
- allow personal prejudices to guide their conclusions
- fail to analyse data pertinent to the researcher's hypotheses/or questions
- over-interpret the data by making ridiculous conclusions
- fail to separate facts established through the research from normative values
- trivialise significant issues in the findings
- fail to disguise the source of data to protect the participants on dissemination of research findings.
- making recommendations without empirical bases from the data.

7. **Post Research Protocol**

Ethical responsibilities of the researcher go beyond the completion of the study. The following are some of the "sins" researchers should not commit at the post research stage. They should not fail to:

- tell the participants in advance particularly on private, religious or political issues, that their individual views, would be made public;
- honour promises to the participants;
- return materials/documents collected during the course of the research
- acknowledge any assistance provided by sponsors
- publish research findings or make the report accessible to professional colleagues.

CONCLUSION

Research is the fountain-head where new ideas flow, flood the course of knowledge, to change, improve and develop the world. It is an indispensable tool in the march of civilization. A good research should satisfy two conditions: commitment to truth in practice and principle. While adherence to the former depends on appropriate research methodology, the latter depends on acceptable ethical attitudes.

Despite the fundamental role of research in human progress, unethical practices are sometime adopted by over-zealous researchers. Where such misconduct are suspected, the researcher is guilty of ethics of trust. To negate that responsibility in any guise is to smear the license of professionalism.

A good researcher should satisfy two cardinal truths of operation, namely; worthiness in method and ethical principle. None is inferior to the other. Like the opposite sides of the same coin each is legally inseparable. Researchers, who wish to contribute to the knowledge base of Physical Academic Discipline are called upon to be committed to a demonstrable ethical integrity in their research endeavours.

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