

Designing a Workshop on Advocating Research Ethics Teaching Skills to Trainers in Academic Institutions of Developing Countries

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Research ethics is a part of bioethics alongside medical ethics. It is an important discipline to study by researchers, academia, Institutional Review Boards, Research Ethics Committees (IRBs/RECs) and health care professionals apart from under graduate and post graduate students at the academic institutions of both western and non-western societies [1-2]. Research ethics and integrity are fundamental for other competencies and requirements in conducting research. In light of bioethics, the approach to problematization is envisioned as lifelong learning [3]. The notions of morality, moral learning, moral sensibility, narrative imagination, cultural values and human rights are central to ethics teaching. These are critical for reaching a moral agreement or consensus by clarifying morally acceptable solutions in different scenarios [4].

Four cardinal principles of ethical framework: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice govern research ethics practice in a given social, cultural, and economic context. The applicability of theoretical models for research ethics practices in medical and health related fields changes over time in response to unethical research practices, such as misconduct-plagiarism, falsification and fabrication (FFP)- and questionable research practices, globally and in the local context of resource limited developing countries [5-6]. An evolution of the research ethics curriculum in academic institutions for undergraduate and postgraduate courses calls for the inclusion of an effective and sustainable approach to facilitate the moral learning process [7]. The UNESCO is responsible for implementing bioethics education in academic institutions. In addition, the United Nations Agency has supported Ethics Teacher Training Courses globally since 2004 and has highlighted relevant teaching/learning skills and methodology.

Situation Analysis: Problem Identification and Determinants

In developing countries of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America, current programmers address research ethics teaching by adopting a variety of approaches (training courses conferring degrees/diplomas, workshops, seminars, and lectures) [8-9]. A conventional Socratic method used by facilitators during the group work might enforce the participants' behavior as desired in teaching ethics. Nevertheless, there are some limitations which is reflected by increasing research misconduct such as plagiarism, falsification and fabrication in these contexts [7]. New and innovative educational tools such as case-based teaching and flipped classroom are applicable to teach bioethics inclusive of research ethics to cultivate research integrity among academia. In this regard, the role of casuistry and artistic representations mobilizes emotions and facilitates learning process and critical thinking ability requires meticulous attention in ethics teaching [8-9]. However,

anecdotal evidences indicate weaknesses and incompetence in teaching skills in research ethics. Likely determinants include lack of proper training courses (and curriculum), incompetent facilitators/instructors, lack of infrastructure, administrators' commitment to train teachers in research ethics, not given priority to research ethics compared to other disciplines, and inadequate technical and financial resources to conduct regular training workshops in developing countries.

Justification and Feasibility

It is mandatory to strengthen the capacity of research ethics teaching skills in developing countries [10] where there is an emerging and re-emerging public health problems and increase in fund flow by giant pharmaceutical firms, vaccine and diagnostics companies by means of regular workshops for trainers. In a real life situation, it will happen only by technical and financial support and sharing of material resources in terms of north-south and south-south collaboration between academic institutions of Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America. A case-based learning model incorporated in this workshop approach could mobilize small group discussions, arguments, dialogues, reflections and deliberations to elucidate the array of opinions, perceptions and their practical experiences [11-12]. Those outputs could influence and stimulate further ethical reflections sometimes in more insightful and deeper thoughts. This will enhance a reciprocal learning process when teaching moral and ethics concepts and issues. It is expected that improved teaching skills of qualified and competent teachers will help improved adult learners/students in profound understanding of the research ethics principles, standards, challenges and dilemmas to protect vulnerable populations and building trust on science/research (free from misconduct and questionable research questions) when conducting research. Cognizant of this, our team of four participants proposed this workshop intervention to champion research ethics in global south by means of competency that we have learned through the SACCADE project (Strategic And Collaborative Capacity Development in Ethiopia and Africa). Moreover, this project intervention will serve as a template at the regional level for strengthening the capacity of a core group of trainers in ethics teaching skills.

Objectives of the project intervention

General Learning Objective

To acquire the relevant knowledge and skills related to pedagogic tools and procedures in teaching research ethics and to gain insight on underlying theoretical framework at the academic institutions of developing countries of the respective region (Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Latin America)

Specific Learning Objectives

At the end of the 5-day workshop, the learners/attendees will be able to:

- Aware of the role of morality, narrative imagination, moral sensibility, culture, values, human rights principles and critical thinking quality in teaching research ethics;
- Gain knowledge and competency required for how to incorporate artistic representations (audio, visual, audiovisual) in teaching research ethics through Socratic Method and Case-based model;
- Understand the pros and cons of each pedagogic tool in teaching research ethics;
- Strengthen their capacity/skills in teaching research ethics in different scenarios by appropriate use of multiple pedagogical techniques

Proposed Activities

The virtual workshop of 5 days is aimed for senior researchers, senior academic staff, doctoral students, IRB/REC members, senior healthcare professionals of the respective region with prior training and or attained a degree in bioethics/research ethics. The workshop will cover three major topics, one forum for deliberation, two group works that reflect case-based models and two plenary sessions.

Human resources responsible for the activities will include the assigned well experienced two Lecturers/Facilitators of the Academic Institutes and accredited REC/IRBs within the specified Region and two invited International Lecturers/Facilitators with expertise in bioethics/research ethics. There will be a group of web masters, technical assistants to handle audio-visual (AV) aids, video clips and a secretariat to manage required e-learning materials, facilities for breakout sessions and plenary sessions. For each didactic lecture, there will be 60 minutes of presentation and 60 minutes of discussion.

A forum for deliberation will last for three days. The duration of time given for each group work will be one hour and each plenary session will last for two hours. There will be one event every year and will be able to train 30 participants per training course. The faculty of the Academic Institute in developing countries which already has the capacity to host the training courses or the Academic Institute will act as the host for this training course.

Topic 1: Theoretical Foundation: morality, moral sensibility, narrative imagination, culture, values, vulnerability, human rights principles, and critical thinking ability in teaching research ethics;

Topic 2: Pathways to gain moral and ethical knowledge: Socratic Method, Case-based model, dialogue, deliberations, debate, artistic representations

Topic 3: Selecting multiple pedagogic tools: pros and cons of each pedagogic tool, developing country specific artistic representations prepared for teaching research ethics.

The relevant material resources for the training course are expected to be shared by north-south collaborative partnership between the host Institute and the Centre for Medical Ethics, University of Oslo, Norway.

Evaluation Plan for Course Attendees

For achievement of the course objectives and the expected outcome, the following indicators are to be measured:

- Frequency of participation of each attendee in a forum for deliberation
- Improved awareness, knowledge and understanding towards research ethics teaching skills to be measured by a structured questionnaire (before and after the workshop)
- In the course evaluation questionnaire in a 5- point Likert scale, the following will be included:
- To what extent do you think yourself about understanding research ethics; morality, cultural values, moral sensibility, narrative imagination, vulnerability and research ethics;
- To what extent are you confident in your understanding of pathways to gain moral and ethical knowledge (include Socratic Method, Case-based model, dialogue, deliberations, debate, artistic representations);
- To what extent are you confident in how to use multiple pedagogic tools in teaching research ethics?

Conclusion

Research ethics and research integrity education for those who are engaged in research are critical components in preventing research misconduct. Improving research ethics teaching skills by myriad of approaches is desirable and requires sustainability. The implications of this proposed intervention incorporating multiple pedagogical techniques appropriate for the given context require close monitoring and evaluation when implemented.

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