

Ethical Considerations in Academic Research

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ABSTRACT

Ethics is a set of moral principles or moral values often an important consideration in academic research. We need to rule out any potential misconduct either with the scientific method or the way results are presented to the people (M.I.T.D., Correia, 2023). In the past, work ethics can involve setting up in-person coffee meetings instead of virtual catch-ups; using snail mail for important documents, rather than emails/WhatsApp/Telegram, etc, and taking real breaks for a breather or stretching, and not just screen switches; these are among the many ways in which work habits used to be carried out, yet produce results. In social science, the objectives of human research typically involve gaining insights into real-world phenomena, examining effective treatments, and exploring behaviours to improve lives; what you research and how it is conducted involve ethical considerations (Pritha Bhandari, 2021). According to Benny Ang (from Elsevier, 2025), authorship, competing interest, plagiarism, simultaneous submission, research fraud, salami slicing, and the use of Generative AI are the most common unethical acts; plagiarism being the most common. The need to understand and uphold ethics in scientific research is pertinent in today's scientific community. The rapid advancement of technology and science raises ethical questions about privacy, consent, and the potential long-term impacts on society and its environment (Miteu, G.D, 2024).

This paper discusses the importance of being ethical when conducting research, including some data on the use of AI; unethical practices in research can be defaming not just for the author(s) of the research but also the affiliated institutions.

Keywords: ethics, ethical considerations, ethical practices, ethical principles

INTRODUCTION

When conducting research, one of the main factors many researchers fail to consider is ethics in research. In recent times, the issue of ethics when conducting research has caught the attention of those involved in the field. Ethics according to the dictionary, and popular belief, is the rules governing relationships and behaviours among individuals in a society, as well as the behaviour order among people, society, and even nations. Any group or professional behaviour that affects society as a whole carries essential ethical requirements or conduct. Professionals like teachers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, and business leaders are entrusted with responsibilities that affect individuals and society. They play a crucial role in acting responsibly, maintaining integrity, and putting their service above self-interest; this is no different in the world of research. Simply put, ethics is a set of moral principles or moral values; we need to rule out any potential misconduct either with the scientific method or the way results are presented to the people (M.I.T.D., Correia, 2023). An example is present-day materialistic ethic, termed *materialistic ethics*, once considered out-of-date; the desire for physical matter often correlates with a decline in ethical behaviour, as individuals may prioritize profit and personal gain over the well-being of others. More recently, this has changed to "*new materialist ethics*" which emphasizes human mutual dependence, shared wisdom, and the intricate relationships between people and their surroundings, moving beyond focussing on personal gain and wealth (Braidotti, 2023; Park, 2025).

In research, ethics are moral principles and rules for its conduct, ensuring the safety and rights of participants, maintaining the integrity of the research process, and upholding the credibility of scientific findings.

Who is responsible for maintaining ethics in research?

The answer is basically everyone involved in the publishing process is responsible: authors, affiliated institutions, publishers, journal editors, reviewers, and many others. According to Ang (June, 2025), in a webinar on “Research Ethics and Integrity in Academic Publishing”, there are essential knowledge on ethical conduct that we need to know in our research publications. There are standards of expected ethical behaviour by all parties involved in the act of publishing including the author(s), the journal editor, the peer reviewer, the publisher, and other sponsored journals.

Ethical conducts

In general, we need to be aware or have knowledge on ethical conducts, otherwise we could jeopardise the reputation of a published research work. Misconducts in research include *plagiarism*, *simultaneous submission*, *research fraud*, *salami slicing* and *use of generative AI*, among others, Ang (June, 2025). These concepts are explained below:

- Plagiarism is when you use other people’s work, sometimes copying word for word, and not acknowledge or make reference to the original source, including copying word-for-word, improper paraphrasing, incorrect citation, using AI-generated text, and self-plagiarism
- Simultaneous submission is when an author submits a single piece of work to multiple publications at the same time; in fields such as the arts and creative writing this is acceptable.
- Research fraud is a serious misconduct and includes fabricating data, falsifying results, and plagiarism. Fabrication is inventing data or results, falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes including changing or omitting data.
- Salami slicing is the practice of splitting a single study's data into multiple, smaller publications, often to increase the number of papers an author can publish.
- Use of generative AI to create new content, such as text, images, audio, and code.

One of the most common types of publication misconduct is *plagiarism*; this happens when one author deliberately uses another's work without permission, credit, or acknowledgment. Plagiarism takes different forms, from literal copying to paraphrasing some else's work and can include plagiarising data, words and phrases, ideas and concepts. Among the more common text plagiarisms are *paraphrasing*, *text recycling*, *literal copying*, and *substantial copying*, as explained in the tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. Types of Plagiarism (Ang, 2025)

Action	What is it?	Is it unethical?	What should you do?
Paraphrasing	Reproducing someone else's ideas while not copying word for word, without permission and acknowledgment of the original source.	Yes. Paraphrasing is only acceptable if you properly reference the source and make sure that you do not change the meaning intended by the source.	• Make sure that you understand what the original author means. • Never copy and paste words that you do not fully understand. • Think about how the essential ideas of the source relate to your own work, until you can deliver the information to others without referring to the source. • Compare your paraphrasing with the source, to make sure you retain the

			intended meaning, even if you change the words.
Text-recycling	Reproducing portions of an author's own work in a paper, and resubmitting it for publication.	Yes. See our separate factsheet on duplicate submission.	• Put anything in quotes that is taken directly from a previously published paper, even if you are reusing something in your own words. • Make sure to reference the source accordingly.
Literal Copying	Reproducing a work word for word, in whole or in part, without permission and acknowledgment of the original source.	Yes. Literal copying is only acceptable if you reference the source and put quotation marks around the copied text.	• Keep track of sources you used while researching and where you used it in your paper. • Make sure you fully acknowledge and properly cite the original source in your paper. • Use quotation marks around word-for-word text and reference properly.
Substantial copying	This can include research materials, processes, tables, or equipment.	Yes. "Substantial" can be defined as both quantity and quality of what was copied. If your work captures the essence of another's work, it should be cited.	• Ask yourself if your work has benefited from the skill and judgment of the original author? • The degree to which you answer "yes" will indicate whether substantial copying has taken place. If so, be sure to cite the original source.

What are they?

- *Paraphrasing* refers to reproducing someone else's ideas, while not copying word for word, without permission and acknowledgement of the original source.
- *Text recycling* is literal copying the reuse of one's own previously published text in a new document, often referred to as "self-plagiarism"; it is essential to cite the original source and requires obtaining permission, especially when there are other authors on the original work.
- *Literal copying* refers to reproducing a work word for word, in whole or in part, without permission and acknowledgement of the original source.
- *Substantial copying* can include research materials, processes, tables, or equipment.

All the above types of plagiarism are considered unethical; the table above provides suggestions on what one could do if he or she had committed unethical practices when writing research reports or papers.

Ethical conducts in Malaysia

It has been found that students tend to carry out plagiarism when writing research proposals and reports or papers. According Ramathan (2017), research conducted in higher education would often have to go through ethical clearance applications, managed and processed through dedicated departments within the institution. In study on research misconduct, it was found that misbehaviours ranged from manipulating research data and misrepresentation of research outcomes, to plagiarism and authorship disputes, among others (Olesen et al.,

2018). Despite steps taken by the institutions to monitor research misconduct, it still arises in the research community. Conversely, a study on unethical acts and practices in the construction industry was conducted by lecturers from an Engineering faculty (Hanapi et al., 2023). Conflicts of interest, exorbitant costs, professional incompetence, subpar work delivery, fraud, corruption and failing to dispose of waste in an appropriate, safe, and environmentally acceptable manner are few of many common misconducts. All of this despite organisations having their own standards of conduct and professional bodies that encourage good ethics.

Therefore, ethics should be the concern of everyone concerned, researchers and students in academia, and certainly those in the professional sectors; we should have a critical awareness of potential ethical risks that can impact not just the research community, but society as a whole.

The following table presents a group of students' performance based on a research methodology course when checking for plagiarism. The numbers in the column with similarity index were papers submitted into Turnitin, and when the same papers were checked for AI usage, the numbers escalated which indicated that students used AI to write, sometimes a big portion of their papers. Turnitin indicates the portions of a paper which were sourced from other works, and often acknowledged; however, when using generative AI tools (ChatGPT, Claude, Grammarly, etc) writers might seek help from AI to assist in their writing, and in some of our candidates' the percentages were very high.

Table 2. Results on Similarity Index & AI Index

Name	Similarity Index	AI Index		
		1st Proposal Submission	2nd Proposal Submission	3rd Proposal Submission
Student 1	9%	41%	28%	
Student 2	12%	47%	<20%	
Student 3	16%	42%	0%	
Student 4	22%	58%	60%	40%
Student 5	10%	69%	<20%	
Student 6	19%	77%	42%	<20%
Student 7	9%	34%	<20%	
Student 8	4%	45%	<20%	
Student 9	13%	50%	39%	24%

At this juncture, it is interesting to note that researchers have discovered that research and publishing misconduct is widespread in many parts of the world; the most common ones have been highlighted in the European and East Asia regions.

Ethical conducts in East Asia

Bak (2018) highlights three high profile cases of scientific misconduct in East Asia: Hwang scandal in South Korea, Obokata scandal in Japan, and an increasing number of retracted papers among Chinese writers. The perspective taken in this research is of the social and cultural institutional surrounding each case, not the scientific misconduct of the researchers. In Japan, the Obokata pluripotency (STAP) cell research had high expectations from not just the scientific community but also the Japanese government and the public. The research was deemed with much anticipation as the successor to the previous successful stem cell research by

Nobel Prize winner, Shinya Yamanaka in 2007. In 2014, the pluripotency (STAP) cell research published two papers in the magazine *Nature*, however, the papers were soon retracted.

In South Korea, the Hwang scandal caused a stir in the country despite the fact that the country was not a driving force for scientific discovery. The fear for how the scientific community might view the country in research that might surface after the scandal. However, this fear was proven unfounded; although stem cell research stalled, it was temporary and the research continued (Kim, M. et al, 2018).

It is clear from the studies cited above the role of the state is prominent. In East Asia, sociocultural environments in which scientific practices are embedded and an active role of the state and a strong nationalistic culture have been often emphasized (Bak (2018). The state is not just considered a promoter of scientific research in the country, it also plays the role of a regulator in science, pushing for scientific research with commercial potential and reforms of research ethics.

In China, the BioMed Central (BMC) case saw forty-one papers authored by Chinese scholars retracted in 2015 due to falsified peer reviews. As a result of this and other institutional changes such as institutional assessment and reward systems, have put an added burden to researchers and scientists. The idea of “publish or perish” has indeed weighed on research writers as the state emphasises publications in journals indexed by Thomson Reuters’ Science Citation Index (SCI), due to a global influence of university rankings.

The important role of the state, coupled with the sociocultural and institutional environmental changes surrounding East Asia’s scientific endeavours has forced many researchers/scientists to move with the times, sometimes with much apprehension. Han & Li (2018) reporting on a case study, found that the assessment and reward systems, as mandated by the Chinese government, has resulted in a unique type of research misconduct; these systems have become the trigger of the “publish or perish” culture which has then led to research misconduct.

In the Philippines, Bergonia et al. (2022) reported that one of the major roles of a researcher is to ensure that the anonymity of their participants is protected at all phases of the study process, from recruitment, to the initial collection of information/data, until the end of the process of disposal of records or devices on which information is stored. Hence, with consent, participants are protected and with confidentiality, any personal or non-personal information of participants are kept private. This paper was a scoping review where literature in ethics in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research is scarce. However, the ASHA Code of Ethics (ASHA, 2005), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for ethical standards of its funding projects, and the Framework for Research Ethics (FRE) were established to provide ethical validation. Moreover, the RCR (responsible conduct of research) education has overseen and taught research ethics to many, and has since 1989 when it began for the Institute of Medicine, expanded into components of research ethics for all fields, especially research that involves human subjects; now it works closely with the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Ethical conducts in the Western region

In the Western region, examples of research misconduct include fabricating or falsifying data, plagiarism, questionable authorship, and misrepresenting credentials, all of which undermine research integrity and can lead to paper retractions. Other issues involve mismanaging data, manipulating publications, engaging in unethical conduct such as harassment, or misusing research funds. These behaviours are often caused by external pressures, such as the tough competition for research grants and publications in high indexed journals; these are addressed through institutional policies and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, Revised Edition 2023 (ALLEA 2023).

Alfaro-Núñez (2022) reported on a shared publication when the pressure to publish innovative and ground-breaking research in prestigious journals were timely; yet, she claims what may be called “shortcuts”, may consequently lead to misconduct actions. The collaboration in question began well despite linguistic and cultural barriers, but ended unpleasantly for all parties with all three of the manuscripts retracted due to data falsification, text recycling and submissions without peer reviews.

Cronqvist (2025) claimed that in Sweden, there is still uncertainty in educational science about how research ethics should be placed and conducted. While adjustments were made in the law and research ethics had received increased attention, the study looked at the complexity of defining research ethics by doctoral students in their dissertations. Using phenomenological analysis, it was found that themes were used to describe the meaning of research ethics; the main theme is the responsibility for participants followed by responsibility for the research process, about ethics, and the researcher as a person.

Meier et al., (2024) were driven to find out how language decisions at different stages of the research process may have ethical implications and, if these decisions cause harm and how they can be mitigated. The study found predominant themes which include: conception of research projects, working with participants, data analysis and interpretation, as well as dissemination and project management. There were sub themes in each of them, potential harms were identified and proposed mitigations were proposed for each and every one of them.

Mueller & Baniya (2024) took on a feminist approach to research in translation, “tends to focus on standardizing translation to achieve an objective level of quality and rigor”. (Mueller & Baniya, 2024 p 2). They however, focus on the dimensions of translation which go beyond objectivity and into the grey areas of emotionality, feeling and human connection that shape meaning in translation. Through many hours of interview between researchers and translators, the outcomes were positive such that strategies for caring about, taking care of, caregiving and care receiving through translation were realised.

Zimmer (2010) reported that researchers publicly released profile data collected from the Facebook accounts of an entire cohort of college students from a US university. After an elaborate process to assist in resolving the data breach, it was revealed that there are conceptual gaps in the understanding of the privacy implications of research in social networking spaces at the time. With the use of AI tools for conducting research, and writing it in this day and age, the need to minimize the potential outbreak of misconducts in research is paramount.

CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, one of the most important considerations when conducting research is ethics; ethical considerations that have often been taken lightly or a back seat at times, is now brought to forth in many research publications. Research ethics is undeniably an obligation; everyone involved or has a hand in any form of research is obliged with this responsibility, especially when research is open market in the internet and possibly all other social networks and media.

In the words of the famous late *Richard P. Feynman*: "I'm talking about a specific, extra type of integrity that is not lying, but bending over backwards to show how you're maybe wrong... In summary, the idea is to try to give all of the information to help others to judge the value of your contribution; not just the information that leads to judgment in one particular direction or another".

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