



Research Ethics in Social Studies: Indonesian Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The necessary standards for conducting and disseminating research rely on research ethics. Research ethics determine whether research is integrity-based and adequately completed. Given the significant role of ethics in research, much of the research in Indonesia does not fall under the remit of research ethics committees (REC), especially research in studies, such as in education. This condition might happen because of the lack of knowledge about ethics in research and their significance. Thus, this case study aims to observe whether or not Indonesian researchers have enough knowledge about research ethics and their perception of the essential roles of ethics in research. We collected the data through a written interview with 20 participants selected purposely. The results of this study provided an extended discussion of knowledge and understanding of research ethics among Indonesian researchers in the educational field. We concluded that social researchers' knowledge, support, and access to gain ethical clearance for the research should receive particular attention so that research in social studies could be ethically conducted and presented with qualified and validated results.

Keywords: Ethical clearance, research integrity, research knowledge, social studies.

ABSTRAK

Standar yang diperlukan untuk melakukan dan menyebarkan penelitian bergantung pada etika penelitian. Etika penelitian menentukan apakah penelitian didasarkan pada integritas dan diselesaikan secara memadai. Mengingat pentingnya peran etika dalam penelitian, sebagian besar penelitian di Indonesia tidak berada di bawah kewenangan komite etik penelitian (REC), khususnya penelitian di bidang studi seperti di bidang pendidikan. Kondisi ini mungkin terjadi



karena kurangnya pengetahuan tentang etika dalam penelitian. Oleh karena itu, studi kasus ini bertujuan untuk melihat apakah peneliti Indonesia mempunyai cukup pengetahuan tentang etika penelitian dan persepsi mereka mengenai peran penting etika dalam penelitian. Kami mengumpulkan data melalui wawancara tertulis dengan 20 peserta yang dipilih secara sengaja. Hasil penelitian ini memberikan diskusi yang luas mengenai pengetahuan dan pemahaman etika penelitian di kalangan peneliti Indonesia di bidang pendidikan. Kami menyimpulkan bahwa pengetahuan, dukungan, dan akses peneliti sosial untuk mendapatkan izin etis atas penelitiannya harus mendapat perhatian khusus sehingga penelitian dalam bidang ilmu sosial dapat dilakukan secara etis dan disajikan dengan hasil yang berkualitas dan tervalidasi.

Kata Kunci: Izin etis, integritas penelitian, pengetahuan penelitian, IPS.

INTRODUCTION

Through formal standards, regulatory requirements, and the regulatory-like assessments conducted by research ethics committees, researchers are often exposed to research ethics (Schneider, 2015; van den Hoonaard & Hamilton, 2016). With the help of practical tools like informed consent forms and privacy-protection procedures, the limited understanding and appreciation of research ethics quickly turn into an operational framework, a paradigmatic reduction of research ethics to the domains of informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality (Brosnan et al., 2013; Friesen et al., 2017). Based on a conventional conception of research ethics, this regulatory paradigm provides little opportunity for interaction with the fundamental values and principles upheld by official research ethics guidelines (National Research and Innovation Agency (NRIA), 2023).

Additionally, it suffers from the regrettable flaw of seeing the interpersonal interactions between the study participant and the researcher through the prism of legal obligations (van den Hoonaard & Hamilton, 2016). However, regulation and reviews for research ethics are not the end-all and be-all of research ethics (Anderson et al., 2011). In addition to or instead of the regulatory paradigm, some academics have advocated ethical methods (van den Hoonaard & Hamilton 2016). For instance, Emanuel and Grady (2007) described how the research participants should be under regulatory protectionism participant access through the distribution of informed consent. Therefore, there is a need for a greater emphasis on how participants' engagement occurs most efficiently and effectively to promote good research in social studies, in particular.



In the Indonesian context, researchers on social humanities research need to gain more knowledge of research ethical guidelines (Resosudarmo, 2022). Whereas, Law Number 11 of 2019 on the National System of Science and Technology Article 39 has established the requirements for all research undertakings in Indonesia to adhere to the ethical guidelines pertinent to their respective fields. In light of this regulation, our research seeks to investigate the knowledge and perception of ethical clearance among researchers engaged in Indonesian social studies. Two research questions were identified in this study:

1. To what extent did Indonesian researchers of social studies understand ethics in research?
2. How did Indonesian researchers of social studies perceive information-related access to gaining ethical clearance in Indonesia?

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION IN SOCIAL STUDIES

Ethics pertains to the distinctions between what is morally right and wrong, which can find expression in principles like beneficence, justice, and fairness, as well as laws, policies, or codes (DuBois, 2008). The need to pay heed to ethical considerations is evident across all research endeavors, as scholars must contemplate the effects on the subjects involved, the appropriateness of employed methodologies, the roles researchers undertake, and the rationale behind these decisions (Jonsen, 1998). However, the emphasis on ethics is particularly prominent within social studies due to the expectations set by the profession and the specific demographics and issues that social work researchers investigate.

Even with explicit guidelines, the connection between ethics and research remains intricate and complex. While research approaches like participatory, action, or critical social research more closely align with the social justice ideals of social work (Humphries, 2008), Examinations indicate that the actions of social researchers sometimes contradict ethical principles (Humphries, 2008; Jordan, 2004). Moreover, even when social researchers are



dedicated to ethical behavior, relying solely on codes of ethics proves inadequate, given that no code can encompass every potential situation or dictate every aspect of conduct.

Moreover, ethical considerations are present throughout every stage of the research process. Initial ethical concerns encompass some aspects, such as research sponsorship, funding, and orientation, where potential conflicts of interest and influences might arise between sponsors and the primary investigator (McLaughlin, 2011). In the context of social studies ethical standards, the results of a study should present the potential to provide valuable information that aligns with social studies' ethical responsibility to aid those in need. This decision impacts the study's design and participant selection, requiring social workers to ensure that their sample inclusively represents diverse groups and clients, consistent with the ethical obligation to address diversity and social justice (Reamer, 2001). Similarly, selecting research methods can be framed ethically by opting for approaches that empower service users and promote research that empowers marginalized groups (Butler, 2002).

Conflicts of interest can also stem from the researcher's pursuit of reputation, financial gain, emotional involvement, or professional advancement. Such conflicts can arise when conflicting values coexist regarding the same matter (Hugman, 2010). Certain subjects, populations, or settings might have limited avenues for dissemination, be less appealing, inadequately funded, or present more significant challenges for study access. Academics striving for career progression could choose between an area with significant knowledge gaps and one with more resources. Researchers of social studies can face the tension between their roles as researchers and practitioners. It escalates when harm is discovered, and the research participants anticipate receiving services due to their involvement (Shaw & Gould, 2001). These tensions relate to issues concerning confidentiality and the limitations of sharing information collected during research. While social studies could prompt intervention based on concerning information, the research role would typically prohibit and jeopardize such actions.

To clarify the roles and expectations that might emerge during research, obtaining informed consent becomes a pivotal matter during the design, participant selection, and data collection phases. Among all ethical considerations in research, informed consent is perhaps the most recognizable, as researchers usually need regulatory approval to safeguard subjects



against breaches of confidentiality or other harm. While the precise standards may differ by country, studied population, funding source, or research type, a common expectation is that 'research participants must be informed about the purposes, methods, and risks associated with the research, and they must voluntarily consent to participate' (Reamer, 2001). However, securing informed consent can be ethically and methodologically complex due to cultural, linguistic, and social disparities (Faden & Beauchamp, 1986; Israel & Hay, 2006). Ethical researchers must uphold justice, respect, and fairness principles while ensuring participants comprehend the significance of consent, affirming their right to refuse or withdraw consent without adverse consequences.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ETHICAL SOCIAL RESEARCH IN INDONESIA

Research ethics is a fundamental aspect of responsible and accountable scientific inquiry (Kolstoe and Pugh, 2023). In Indonesia, a diverse and culturally rich nation, implementing research ethics is paramount to protect the rights and well-being of research participants, uphold the integrity of research outcomes, and contribute to advancing knowledge (Resosudarmo, 2022). According to Emanuel et al. (2000), research ethics involves "the analysis of ethical issues that arise when people are involved as participants in research." This definition highlights the examination of ethical concerns related to the participation of individuals in research studies.

In Indonesia, research ethics encompass principles and guidelines for conducting research involving human subjects, animal subjects, and the use of biological materials (Oey-Gardiner and Rahardi, 2021). These principles align with international standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, privacy protection, and minimizing participant harm. The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (Kementerian Riset, Teknologi, dan Pendidikan Tinggi or Kemenristekdikti) has established guidelines for research ethics, which include the principles of good research practice, the responsibilities of researchers, and the procedures for obtaining ethical clearance for research involving human (Oey-Gardiner and Rahardi, 2021). Some universities and research institutions may have specific codes of conduct and review processes for research ethics.



In the Indonesian context, research ethics for social studies share many characteristics with research ethics in general. Adapting the framework of Principlism for the purposes of research ethics review is relatively straightforward. Research protocols can be assessed in light of autonomy (relating to the process of recruiting participants and gaining their consent), beneficence (the benefit of the project to participants and wider society), non-maleficence (the presence of risks), and justice (ensuring fairness in the distribution of the benefits and burdens of research)(Kolstoe and Pugh, 2023). Obtaining informed consent is a central ethical requirement in Indonesian research, particularly social studies (Oey-Gardiner and Rahardi, 2021). Researchers must ensure that participants clearly understand the research purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and their rights as participants (Morton, 2018). Researchers must ensure that participants' identities and personal information are safeguarded throughout the research process, including data collection, storage, analysis, and dissemination.

METHOD

Research Design

The study employed a case study to comprehensively explore Indonesian researchers' perspectives and practices of research ethics in their works. The written interview was designed to gather data about researchers' awareness of research ethics, adherence to ethical guidelines, and understanding of ethical considerations in their work. It was developed based on established ethical principles and guidelines recognized in the field. The interviews were conducted to delve deeper into the participants' experiences, opinions, and challenges related to research ethics. Through open-ended questions, researchers aimed to gain insights into the participants' decision-making processes, ethical dilemmas they encountered, and their perceptions of ethical norms within their research communities. Data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved identifying recurring themes, patterns, and narratives within the interview transcripts. The interview question are

1. What do you know about research ethics for social studies?
2. How do you perceive the implementation of research ethics for social studies?

3. How do you perceive information-related access to gaining ethical clearance in Indonesia?
4. Do you think implementing research ethics for social studies is important?

Participants

The research was conducted with a sample of 20 participants consisting of 17 females and 3 males drawn from various academic disciplines and research backgrounds. They volunteered to participate in the PD program to implement research ethics in their research projects. The consent form obtained from the participants informed of the aims of the study, and they had the right to withdraw from the study without any risk. They were aged from 23 to 51 years old. The participants were selected based on the purposive sampling. They were available during the PD schedule and were committed to actively participating and sharing their insights. Below is the participants' demography.

Table 1. Participants' demography

Category	Type/Group	No. of Participants
Gender	Male	3
	Female	17
Age (Years)	20 – 30	6
	30 - 40	9
	> 40	5
Occupation	Lecturer	13
	Teacher	2
	University student	5
Research method applied	Qualitative	9
	Quantitative	6
	Mix Method	5

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

FINDING

Indonesian Researchers' Knowledge of Research Ethics in Social Studies

Gaining insights into individuals' awareness is a crucial starting point for evaluating ethical practices at both personal and institutional levels of research. The results showed that 40.6% of participants exhibited theoretical awareness and comprehension of ethical concerns within their respective research fields (See Figure 1). Conversely, 59.4% of participants demonstrated minimal familiarity with ethical matters, requiring additional prompting and education for understanding. The Indonesian social studies researchers infrequently included ethical considerations in their research as they lacked knowledge of what ethics should be included. Their knowledge of research ethics in social studies was limited to avoiding plagiarism and protecting participants' person

y participants mentioned in the interview session:

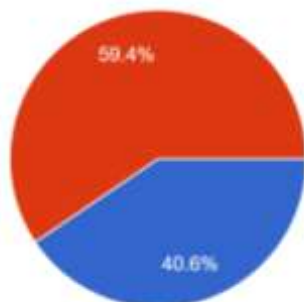


Figure 1. Indonesian researchers' knowledge of research ethics

...I personally never use formal ethical clearance during my research. I just ensure that I protect the participants' data, for example, by ensuring their names are pseudonyms. (Participant 1)

I think research ethics should only be implemented by scientific researchers, such as health research requiring experiments. I did not know that research on social studies should apply it, too. So far, I have avoided plagiarism when doing research. I think it can also be categorized as one of the ethical considerations. (Participant 7)



The excerpts indicated that Indonesian researchers of social studies rarely applied research ethics because they had limited knowledge of ethical considerations within social studies. They tended only to apply ethical considerations while reporting their study or writing their research articles using pseudonyms referring to their study's participants. We further identified several factors influencing Indonesian researchers' knowledge of research ethics in social studies, such as limited access to information-related ethics in social research, complicated procedures for gaining ethical clearance, and less prioritized research ethics implementation in social studies. As the participants of this study said:

In my opinion, the access for submitting research ethics for social studies is not well-socialized among researchers in Indonesia, resulting in very few researchers understanding this submission. (Participant 4)

...not well-publicized, causing researchers, especially novice researchers, to have limited understanding. (Participant 12)

...still very limited. Some institutions do not have research ethics committees. Therefore, researchers are not aware of using research ethics. (Participant 2)

The excerpts indicated that Indonesian researchers of social studies had limited access to information related to ethical considerations in social research. It resulted in their low awareness of research ethics in their research.

Indonesian researchers of social studies perceive information-related access to gaining ethical clearance in Indonesia

This study found a significant need for implementing ethical research practices in social studies. All of the participants agreed that research ethics implementation is crucial. Derived from the in-depth interviews conducted with five participants, this significance stems from the impact of the research on the individuals engaged, as highlighted by Jonsen (2008). The participants mention that:

... engaging in ethical research is essential to prevent legal complications...
(Participant 1)

...it ensured that no party perceived disadvantages... (Participant 5)

...it aids in minimizing potential risks for both participants and researchers... (Participant 3)

Research ethics is crucial for me since it brings accuracy to the collected information, as participants can openly express their genuine feelings without apprehension. The consent form highlighted that the gathered data is solely for research purposes. (Participant 2)

... maintain confidentiality so that participants do not need to be afraid of their data being spread. (Participant 4)

The statements from the five participants in the in-depth interview underscore that the ongoing research will influence the subjects under study. This highlights the necessity for ethical research practices to prevent any adverse effects on the research subjects due to the conducted study in the social studies field, which involved humans as the research subject.

Regarding ethical clearance access, the findings indicate that the accessibility of information regarding ethical licenses in Indonesia is not optimal. Some of the participants mentioned that:

...my colleagues and I usually independently carry out ethical research practices, such as personally administering consent forms to seek approval from our participants since there are no ethical research committees in our institution...

...Ethical research implementation in Indonesia remains insufficient due to the limited promotion of the significance of ethical research practices in the research process. This has resulted in a lack of awareness among novice researchers, myself included....

...At my university, no committee is dedicated to ethical research, which has left me uncertain about the required documentation for incorporating ethical research principles into my study...

These remarks from participants suggest that most researchers within social sciences and humanities autonomously undertake ethical research. This self-reliance is due to the limited presence of ethical research committees tailored for these fields, with several academic institutions even lacking their establishment. Further, the non-existence of ethical research committees in the domains of social studies within education contributes to the lack of familiarity with integrating research ethics among researchers, particularly young ones.



DISCUSSION

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the knowledge and application of research ethics among Indonesian researchers in the social studies field. The results highlighted the crucial role of awareness in shaping ethical practices and the need for further education and awareness initiatives within the research community. Furthermore, the study also revealed a dichotomy in the participants' knowledge of research ethics. While 40.6% of participants demonstrated theoretical awareness and comprehension of ethical concerns within their research fields, 59.4% exhibited minimal familiarity with ethical considerations in social studies. The results further indicated the presence of a significant knowledge gap that requires attention. The lack of comprehensive understanding of research ethics among Indonesian social studies researchers implied that ethical considerations were not fully integrated into their research practices.

Interestingly, participants' interview responses shed light on their limited conception of research ethics in social studies. Many considered ethics confined to avoiding plagiarism and safeguarding participants' personal information, such as using pseudonyms. This perception signifies a narrow view of ethical considerations, often overlooking broader principles such as informed consent, potential harm to participants, and data handling. This finding indicated a critical need to enhance researchers' understanding of the comprehensive ethical dimensions inherent in social research. The findings of this study might violate the previous studies that ethics involves differentiating between actions that align with moral correctness and those that do not, such as beneficence, justice, and fairness, as well as through established laws, policies, or codes (DuBois, 2008). Besides, taking ethical aspects into account is apparent in all research pursuits. Researchers should consider the impact on participants, methodological appropriateness, researchers' roles, and the rationale of their decisions (Jonsen, 1998).

Several factors influencing the participants' limited knowledge of research ethics were also identified. Limited access to information on ethical considerations and complicated procedures for obtaining ethical clearance emerged as a prominent barrier. The participants noted that the submission procedures for research ethics needed to be better socialized among researchers in Indonesia. This lack of awareness and accessibility hindered researchers from



fully comprehending and implementing research ethics in social studies. In addition, the complexity of ethical clearance procedures posed a challenge, deterring researchers from engaging in ethical practices. Additionally, research ethics in social studies are underrated. This notion supported Resosudarmo's (2022) claim that Indonesian researchers have not been provided with explicit directions on conducting their social studies research, mainly based on clear and correct ethical guidelines.

This study also found a significant need for implementing ethical research practices in social studies. Many participants in this study continue to prioritize engaging in research ethics due to their responsibility to consider ethical factors regarding the impacts on the individuals being studied. Their focus on adopting research ethics is primarily driven by concerns about potential consequences for the subjects involved rather than considering factors such as the suitability of research methods employed, the roles assumed by researchers, or the reasoning underlying these choices (Jonsen, 1998). Their primary motivation for adhering to research ethics concerns the potential effects on participants.

Regarding social studies, which encompasses a wide range of disciplines that explore human behavior, societies, cultures, and interactions, ethical considerations are crucial due to the potential impact on individuals, groups, and communities. Many social studies delve into personal and sensitive topics. They can uncover sensitive information that has the potential to harm individuals, communities, or cultural groups. Ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of participants is crucial to maintaining trust and encouraging open participation. Researchers must implement measures to protect participants' identities and sensitive information. This finding is in line with Jonsen (2008), who highlighted the impacts of the research on the individuals involved. The impacts are related to preventing legal complications, ensuring that no party perceived disadvantages, minimizing potential risks for both participants and researchers, bringing accuracy to the collected information as participants can openly express their genuine feelings without apprehension, and maintaining confidentiality. This notion is also supported by Kolstoe and Pugh's (2023) and Morton's (2018) arguments that researchers must ensure that participants clearly understand the research purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and their rights as participants.



Considering these findings, it is evident that there is an urgent need for comprehensive and targeted interventions to enhance Indonesian researchers' knowledge of research ethics in social studies. Workshops, seminars, and easily accessible resources could play a pivotal role in promoting awareness and understanding. Furthermore, streamlining ethical clearance procedures and emphasizing the importance of research ethics in academic training could contribute to a more ethical research culture. Ultimately, bridging the knowledge gap and fostering a comprehensive understanding of research ethics is crucial for maintaining the integrity and validity of research in social studies.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the knowledge and perceptions of Indonesian social studies researchers regarding research ethics. The findings illuminated a multifaceted landscape where ethical considerations intertwine with the intricacies of conducting research within a culturally diverse and socially dynamic context. Indonesian researchers exhibited varying levels of familiarity with research ethics principles, often influenced by their educational backgrounds, institutional support, and exposure to ethical guidelines. While some researchers demonstrated a robust understanding of the ethical dimensions inherent in social studies research, others may need more awareness, potentially stemming from inadequate knowledge or insufficient emphasis on ethical education within their academic journey. Cultural norms, institutional expectations, and personal values influenced Indonesian researchers' perception of research ethics in social studies. The tension between the pursuit of academic excellence and the ethical treatment of research participants was evident as researchers navigated the delicate balance between obtaining valuable insights and ensuring the well-being and dignity of those involved in their studies.

The study underscores the imperative for targeted initiatives aimed at enhancing researchers' understanding of research ethics in the realm of Indonesian social studies. The provision of accessible and culturally sensitive ethical guidelines, coupled with comprehensive training programs, holds the potential to empower researchers in making well-informed decisions aligned with their academic ambitions and dedication to ethical research practices. Collaborative platforms for discussions and knowledge exchange further bolster a shared comprehension of ethical challenges and solutions specific to Indonesian social studies



research. Ultimately, elevating awareness and understanding of research ethics among Indonesian social studies researchers stands to enhance the quality of research outcomes, amplify societal impact, and foster a research environment grounded in integrity and respect for all stakeholders.

To support these objectives, the government can play a pivotal role by spearheading the development of clear, accessible, and culturally attuned ethical guidelines tailored to the Indonesian social studies context. These guidelines should address the unique ethical challenges faced by social studies researchers in Indonesia. Additionally, the government can allocate resources to implement comprehensive training programs, covering both theoretical and practical aspects of ethical research in the Indonesian social studies context. Collaborating with academic institutions, research organizations, and ethics experts, the government can ensure the widespread dissemination of guidelines and the effectiveness of training initiatives.

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