

Davsur research ethics task force: addressing the research ethical issues in the conduct of research activities in Deped Division of Davao del sur

Força-tarefa de ética em pesquisa Davsur: abordando as questões éticas de pesquisa na condução das atividades de pesquisa na Divisão Deped de Davao del sur

Grupo de trabajo de ética de la investigación de Davsur: abordar los problemas éticos de la investigación en la realización de actividades de investigación en la División Deped de Davao del sur

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ABSTRACT

This action research aimed to explore how the division research ethics mechanism as an intervention addressed the research ethical issues in the conduct of researches in the division. The conduct of this research involved the district research coordinators, selected participants of researches, and selected researchers. Also, survey questionnaires, interviews, rubrics and research manuscripts were used in analyzing effectiveness of the intervention. Results revealed that the level of practice on the research ethics mechanism in districts became higher, research manuscripts became more observant to the research ethics principles, researchers became more observant of the research ethics principles, and participants of various research participants felt safer and comfortable in responding to researches. With this, it is recommended that this mechanism shall be established and mobilized to all levels of governance, and orientation and workshop on the implementation of the research ethics mechanism will be conducted.

Keywords: Department of Education, Division Research Ethics Mechanism, Ethics Principles, Action Research, Philippines

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa-ação teve como objetivo explorar como o mecanismo de ética em pesquisa da divisão como uma intervenção abordava as questões éticas da pesquisa na condução das pesquisas na divisão. A condução desta pesquisa envolveu os coordenadores distritais de pesquisa, participantes selecionados das pesquisas e pesquisadores selecionados. Além disso, questionários de pesquisa, entrevistas, rubricas e manuscritos de pesquisa foram usados para analisar a eficácia da intervenção. Os resultados revelaram que o nível de prática sobre o mecanismo de ética em pesquisa nos distritos tornou-se mais alto, os manuscritos de pesquisa tornaram-se mais observadores dos princípios de ética em pesquisa, os pesquisadores tornaram-se mais observadores dos princípios de ética em pesquisa e os participantes de vários participantes da pesquisa se sentiram mais seguros e confortáveis em responder às pesquisas. Com isso, recomenda-se que este mecanismo seja estabelecido e mobilizado para todos os níveis de governança, e que sejam realizadas orientações e oficinas sobre a implementação do mecanismo de ética em pesquisa.

Palavras-chave: Departamento de Educação, Mecanismo de Ética em Pesquisa da Divisão, Princípios de Ética, Pesquisa-Ação, Filipinas

RESUMEN

Esta investigación acción tuvo como objetivo explorar cómo el mecanismo de ética de la investigación de la división como una intervención abordó las cuestiones éticas de la investigación en la realización de investigaciones en la división. La realización de esta investigación involucró a los coordinadores de investigación distritales, participantes seleccionados de investigaciones e investigadores seleccionados. Además, se utilizaron cuestionarios de encuestas, entrevistas, rúbricas y manuscritos de investigación para analizar la efectividad de la intervención. Los resultados revelaron que el nivel de práctica en el mecanismo de ética de la investigación en los distritos aumentó, los manuscritos de investigación se volvieron más observantes de los principios de ética de la investigación, los investigadores se volvieron más observantes de los principios de ética de la investigación y los participantes de varios participantes de la investigación se sintieron más seguros y cómodos al responder a las investigaciones. Con esto, se recomienda que este mecanismo sea establecido y movilizado a todos los niveles de gobierno, y se llevará a cabo una orientación y un taller sobre la implementación del mecanismo de ética de la investigación.

Palabras clave: Departamento de Educación, Mecanismo de Ética de Investigación de la División, Principios de Ética, Investigación Acción, Filipinas

1 INTRODUCTION

Managers and educational leaders play a vital role in safeguarding teachers and learners from any potential harm or threat posed by whatsoever activity. Such activity is the conduct of research especially in light of the grim situation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. In schools, especially in the department of education, adherence to research ethics principles has always been the concern. Research ethics is....

Globally, bleak scenarios on the conduct of research particularly the ethical issues and concerns have been reported. In fact, major ethical issues like the informed consent, beneficence, respect for privacy and anonymity have been reported in Greece (Fouka and Mantzourou, 2021). Moreover, there have been challenges in the conduct of research in ASEAN region related to the safety and protection of rights of participants (Reyes, 2012). Similar scenarios have been felt and dealt in Schools Division of Davao del Sur.

In connection, as the Division Research Focal Person, basic education research proposals in the department and request letters from private and public higher education institutions asking to conduct their study are some of the loads I manage in the division. It has been my observation that most of these undertakings put less emphasis on the adherence to the research ethics guidelines or principles. In fact, approximately 90 percent of the received proposals in the division failed to consider the essential elements which are vital in our commitment to the protection of the rights, welfare, and well-being of our teacher and student research participants, and to research integrity.

In addition to this, there were researches conducted in the division that involved vulnerable participants like children and children with special needs where researchers failed to consider having a detailed plan in safeguarding the welfare and protection of the participants from the potential harm that could have been brought by these researches. In similar note, the research unit has also been receiving request letters from undergraduate students of different tertiary schools asking permit to explore very critical research topics. Furthermore, these researches conducted in the outbreak of pandemic did not include details on their adherence to COVID-19 health and safety protocol in their data gathering procedures and informed consent form.

While it is true that there have been various activities conducted to improve the quality and integrity of the researches in the department; however, there were no policies on hand that deliberately ensure the commitment to protection of the rights, integrity and welfare of the research participants. This now poses threats to our students and teachers who have always been asked to participate in researches.

With these observations and scenarios, I feel the dire desire to carry out an intervention that would best address the gap in our research engagement. This initiative will provide a regulatory framework of policies that will consist of principles, guidelines, values, and key procedures in research ethics that will be utilized by the schools, districts, and the division office in providing extra layer of protection to their teachers, school heads, and students from possible harm caused by the conduct of a research study.

INNOVATION/STRATEGY/INTERVENTION

DAVSUR RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW MECHANISM

Rationale: The Department of Education's role in undertaking educational studies that will serve as one of the pillars for necessary reforms and policy improvement was emphasized in the Basic Education Act of 2001 (RA 9155, Chapter 1, Section 7) at all levels of government. Various projects and activities have been introduced in this regard to foster a positive research community within the organization. Few examples of which are the Basic Education System Reform Agenda (BESRA), the Research, Innovation, and Policy Evaluation Secretariat (RIPES), and the creation of the Policy Research and Development (PRD) Division to support and oversee the vertical and horizontal conduct of education research.

While there are various provisions of support mechanisms provided for the DepEd researchers and an influx of interest in conducting action and basic research, the process of deliberately ensuring the quality in the conduct of research and commitment to the protection of the rights, welfare, and well-being of human participants in research, and to research integrity are yet to be established. As a response to this aim, the DepEd- Division of Davao del Sur Research Ethics Protocol and Research Ethics Committee (DepEd DavSur REC) are established.

This Division of Davao del Sur Research Ethics Protocol aims to provide DepEd researchers guidelines stipulated in the National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research 2017 (Philippine Health Research Ethics Board, 2018). Such guidelines require adherence to the elements of the framework that consist the principles, values, and key procedures in addressing research ethics.

Objectives

1. Establish division-based guidelines in reviewing research proposals in accordance to the national research ethics principles.
2. Ensure the safeguard of the welfare and rights of the prospective research participants in the division.

Statement of the Problem

The focus of this research is to address the research ethical concerns in the conduct of researches of private and public agencies or institutions using the DavSur Research Ethics Protocol. To carry on with the study, this action research seeks to answer the question: **How does the DavSur Research Ethics Protocol address the research ethical issues in DepEd Davao del Sur.?**

2 Theoretical Foundation

This study used the Department of Education various provisions as foundation of this action research. Particularly it used the Basic Education Act of 2001 (RA 9155, Chapter 1, Section 7) which is mandated to all levels of government. Various projects and activities have been introduced in this regard to foster a positive research community within the organization. Few examples of which are the Basic Education System Reform Agenda (BESRA), the Research, Innovation, and Policy Evaluation Secretariat (RIPES), and the creation of the Policy Research and Development (PRD) Division to support and oversee the vertical and horizontal conduct of education research.

3 METHODS

This section presents the participants of the study, data gathering methods, data analysis plan, and the ethical considerations.

3.1 PARTICIPANTS AND/OR OTHER SOURCES OF DATA AND INFORMATION.

The participants of this research will be coming from various groups to maximize claims of the validity of the intervention to be adopted. In particular, fifteen (15) district research coordinators, ten (10) research participants of various studies to be conducted in the division, and five (5) researchers from internal and external schools will be selected in this research study. Moreover, to support these data, artifacts like the research manuscripts will be collected for assessment.

Fifteen (15) District Research Coordinators. The Division of Davao del Sur had delegated a research coordinator for every district. A research district coordinator functions as the head of the district in assessing, evaluating, and providing technical assistance to the researchers under the scope of their district. Research proposals from the field will be subjected first in their scrutiny in terms of the content, format and other concerns before recommending it to the division office for approval. Since they have the direct hold to the different schools in terms of researches, they are therefore considered to be frontliners in ensuring that district-based research proposals adhere to the quality and ethical guidelines for research. These participants will be responding to the survey questionnaire to determine the extent of implementation of the research ethics protocol/guidelines before and after the proposed innovation.

Ten (10) Research Participants of the Selected Research Studies. The Division office particularly the Planning and Research Unit receives and approves various request to conduct study in schools in the division. These requests are coming from private and government institutions. One or two research participants from these selected research studies will be selected for an in-depth interview regarding their experiences with regard to the adherence of the researchers to the research ethics protocol.

Sample Research Manuscript as Artifact. One of the various ways to check the commitment of the researcher on addressing the research ethics concerns and issues is seen through their manuscript especially on the details of their data gathering procedures. There will be at least 5 manuscripts of studies conducted from internal and external action researches and basic researches to be checked. The checking will encompass validation of the phases of the research manuscript that indicate adherence to the research ethics protocol.

Five (5) researchers from Private or Government Institutions. The obligation of ensuring that research engagement adheres to the research ethical principles is also given to the researchers themselves. It is their responsibility to make sure that the benefits from the research is greater than the threats or danger posed to the participants. There will be five (5) selected researchers from internal or external institutions to be observed all throughout their data gathering phase.

3.2 DATA GATHERING/COLLECTION METHODS

To gather the data needed and to determine the effectiveness of the proposed intervention, the following methods will be used: 1.) Survey questionnaire; 2.) In-depth Interview; 3.) Research Manuscript Assessment; and 4.) Observation Assessment.

Survey Questionnaire. This questionnaire will encompass items that will determine the extent of the implementation and observance of the research ethics guidelines, principles, values, and key procedures in 15 districts. Particularly, the items will encompass questions about the observance of the district research coordinators on the researchers' adherence to the elements of social value,

informed consent, vulnerability of research participants, risk, benefits and safety, privacy and confidentiality, justice, transparency, qualification of the researcher/s, and on the research ethics review process.

Furthermore, to determine the perceived extent of observance of the research ethics principles before the implementation of the DavSur Research Ethics Review Process, a set of pre-survey questionnaire will be administered. On the different note, the integration of the intervention will take place after the pre-survey. Meanwhile, post-survey questionnaire will be administered after the implementation and integration of the mentioned intervention. This is to determine the extent of observance of the research ethics protocol after it is being implemented.

Individual Interview. This method will be employed to qualitatively explore the perception of the 10 research participants of the different research studies. These participants will be invited for an individual interview to share their experiences regarding the adherence of the researchers on the ethical considerations of their study. The research participants will be individually interviewed in their most convenient time, place, and medium.

Research Manuscript Assessment. Researchers who conducted their studies in the division will be asked to submit a copy of their manuscript. This copy will be assessed using a validated analytic rubric on research ethical principles. The rubric will encompass criteria encompassing the essential elements to be considered in writing an ethically sound research study. There will be a pre-research manuscript assessment to be done during the initial review procedure. After the protocol review, researchers will be given time to integrate the essential protocols to merit the permit to conduct their study. Moreover, post-research manuscript assessment will take place after the revisions and conduct of their studies.

Observation Assessment. One of the various authentic assessments is the observation (Reganit, 2018). This method will be employed through accompanying the researchers in gathering their needed data. To appropriately assess the observance of these researchers to the protocol, a rubric will be employed. With the permission of the participants and the researcher, I will enter into different mediums (google meet, zoom meet, video calls, group chat) to be used by the researcher in gathering the needed data and observed how the protocol is observed.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

This study will utilize the simplest form of data triangulation. This method uses a variety of information or data sources in order to increase the validity of results. The basic purpose of this approach in this research is to help in giving more detailed and balanced picture of the situation.

Furthermore, descriptive statistics will be used to analyze the pre and post survey responses; pre and post research manuscript assessment; and observation assessment. In particular, mean, percentage and standard deviation will be used to reveal the effectiveness of the intervention being used. Meanwhile, Collaizi method will be used to analyzed the transcripts generated from the interviews that aims to determine qualitatively the extent of the effectiveness of the intervention being employed.

The pre and post research surveys were divided into 7 subscales: social value, informed consent, vulnerability of research participants, risk, benefit, and safety, privacy and confidentiality of information, justice, and transparency.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

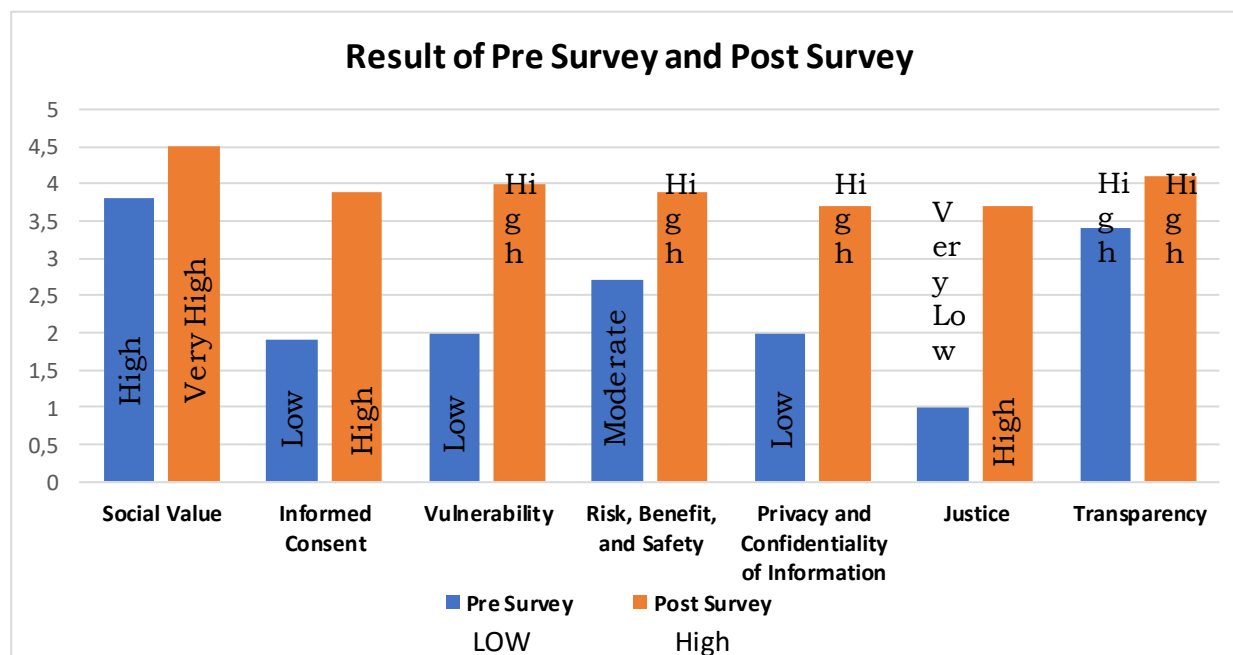
Before conducting the survey, interview, and observation, the researcher will assure to the participants and respondents the confidentiality of the data and records that will be gathered through them. Also, the participants will be assured that their identity will remain anonymous throughout this study. Furthermore, the researcher will also inform the participants how the records of information will be kept private and confidential during and after the conduct of the study, and how these data will be used and presented in different venues.

After a brief orientation about the ethical concerns of this data collection, the researcher will ask each participant to sign the informed consent form. In the consent form, statements of participants' understanding regarding the procedure will be provided. Some of these statements include asking them to allow the researcher to record the conversation through a tape recorder, and to withdraw from being interviewed in case they feel uncomfortable with the interview procedures. After the interviews, the researcher will consolidate the interview responses and present them to the participants. Verification letters will then be provided and signed by the participants as a proof of accuracy of the recorded responses.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of Pre-survey and Post-survey on Research Ethics Practice

In this section, the results of the pre-survey and post-survey on the research ethics implementation and observance of the 15 districts, as answered by the research coordinators, are discussed.



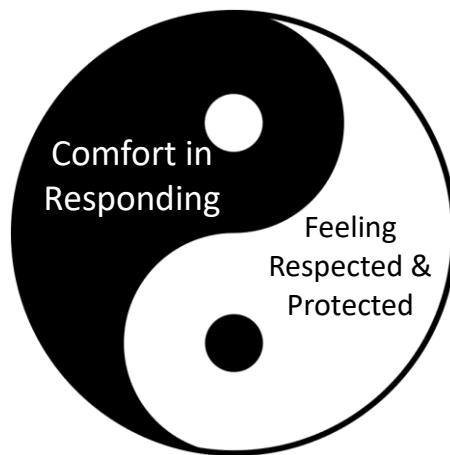
It can be gleaned in figure 1 that before the implementation of the research ethics mechanism the overall level of practice of research ethics principles is low. In particular, the social value and transparency were high; the risk, benefit and safety was moderate; the informed consent, vulnerability, privacy and confidentiality of information were all low; and the justice was very low.

On the other hand, after the implementation of the research ethics mechanism the level of practice of the research ethics principles became high. Furthermore, it can be gleaned that the social value became very high; and the informed consent, vulnerability of participants, risk benefit, and safety, privacy and confidentiality of information, justice, and transparency became high.

The data from presurvey and postsurvey showed an interesting discrepancy. Hence, It can be implied that the intervention being employed was effective.

Results of the Interview

For the results of the analyzed individual interviews, the following themes have emerged when asked about their views and experienced as participants in researches that are now compliant to the research ethics mechanism: *Comfort in responding to the questions*, and *Feeling respected and protected*.



When asked about how they feel on the implemented ethics protocol ,various participants expressed that they now feel more comfortable in responding to the research surveys (P1,P2, P4, P5).

In fact, P1 explained how he became comfortable in participating in the research.

... kumportable na mi mutubag sa mga surveys nila kay well-explained na ang tumong sa ilahang research. (P1)

... we are now comfortable to respond to their surveys since the objectives of their research are already well-explained.

P2 also expressed the same feeling.

... *ganahan na mi muanswer kay nagfollow jud siya sa ethical considerations sa pagconduct of research.*

... we now like to answer because the researcher has already complied with the research ethical considerations.

Meanwhile, the interviewed participants also expressed that they felt respected and protected the way researches now are conducted. (P2, P5)

P2 elaborated how he felt being respected.

... actually, nindot sya.. kay nafeel nako na girespect jud ko sa researcher kay tungod wala ko giforce na mutubag jud.

... actually, it was nice because I really felt the respect given to me by the researcher since she did not force me to respond.

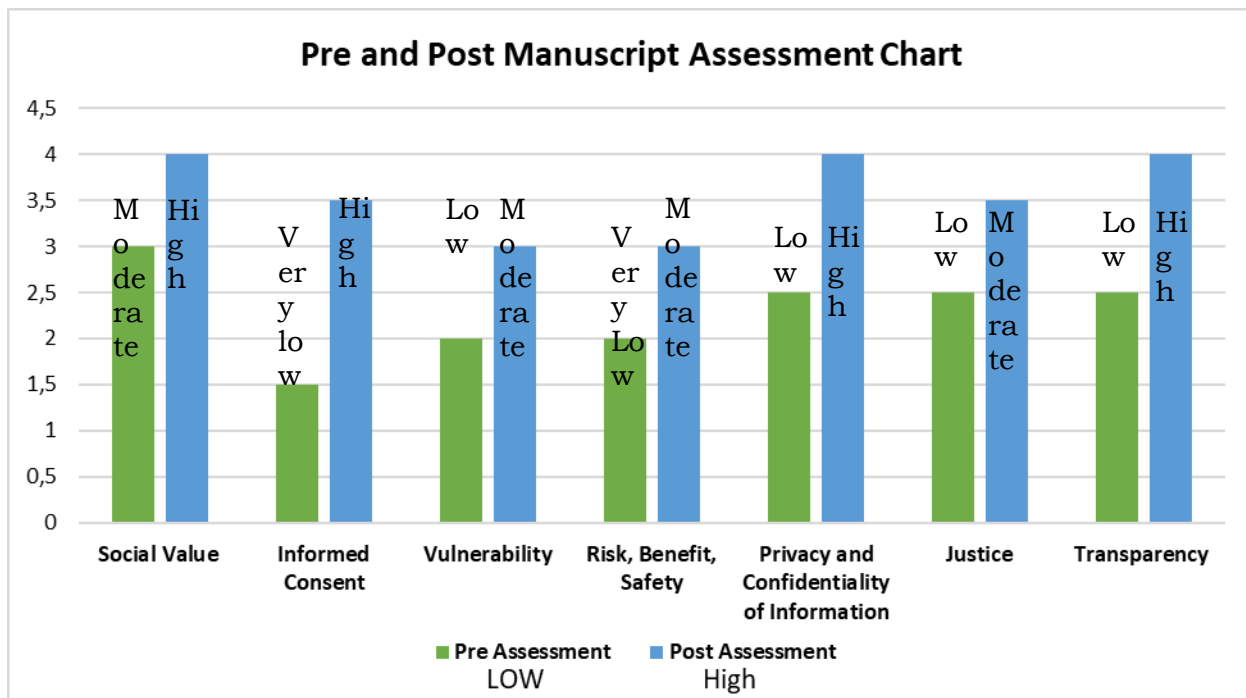
P5 also revealed the feeling of being protected in the conduct of a study.

... mitubag jud ko sa mga pangutana kay kabalo ko protected akoang identity kay nakabalo pud ko na gioblige ang researcher to keep everything confidential and dapat jud niya iprotect akoang privacy.

... I really responded to the questions because I know that my identity is protected since I learned that the researcher is obliged to keep the data confidential and to protect my privacy.

Results of Research Manuscript Assessment.

The figure below shows the results of the pre-assessment and post-assessment of the research manuscripts submitted for management and approval of the division office. It can be gleaned that before the implementation of the research ethics mechanism the research manuscripts have low level of observance of the research ethics principles. In particular, all of the research ethics dimensions garnered low level of observance in all the assessed manuscripts, except for the social value with moderate level of observance.

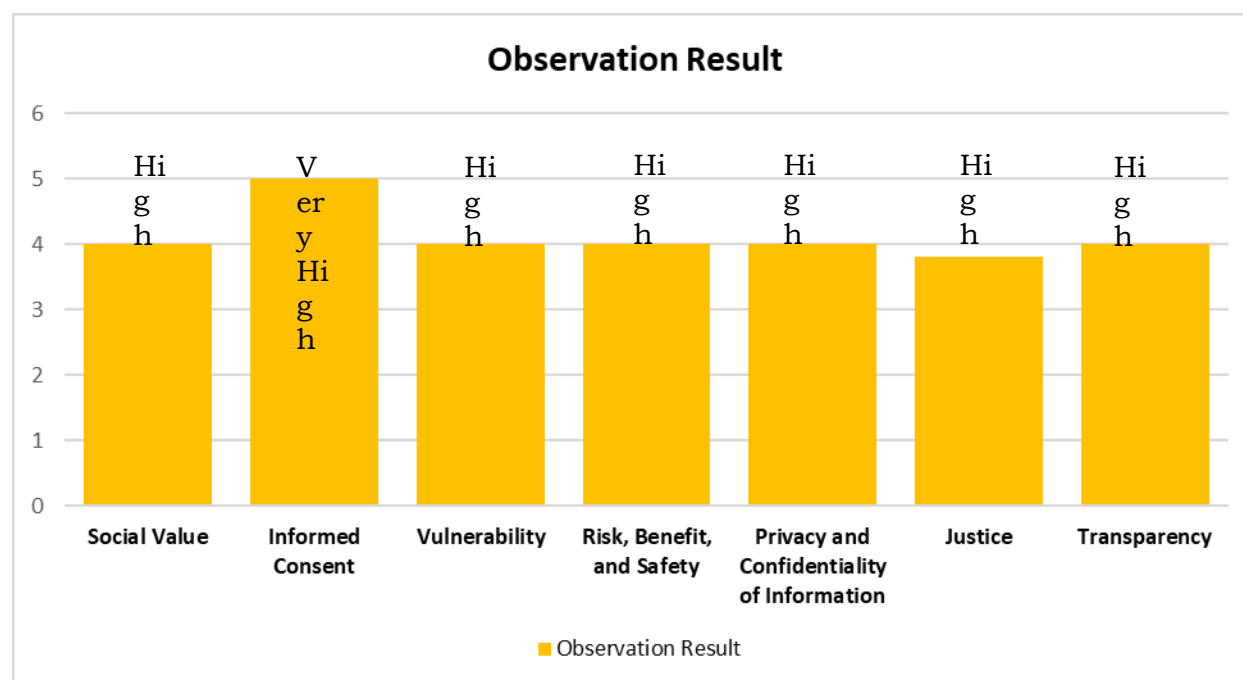


On a different note, it can also be gleaned that the presence of the research ethics principles in the manuscripts after the implementation of the research ethics mechanism was high. Furthermore, the social value, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality of information, and the transparency became high. Meanwhile, the vulnerability of participants, risk, benefit and safety, and justice became moderate.

It can be implied through the data being presented that the research ethics mechanism being employed was effective and contributory to the better observance of the research ethics principles.

Results of the Observation Assessment

In this section, the figure will only show one set of data which were acquired after the implementation of the research ethics mechanism. This is done since all researches can only merit the permit to conduct their researches if protocols are found ethical and sufficient.



It can be gleaned through the figure that the level of observation of the researchers in the research ethical principles were high. In particular, the informed consent garnered a very high level of observance while the rest of the research ethics principles garnered a high level of observance. It can be implied through these data that the employed research ethics mechanism is effective.

4 CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Division research ethics mechanism paved way to an ethically sound research undertakings in the division. Since scientific research is an ethically sound research, this intervention helped the researchers in enhancing their scientific studies through the observance of the research ethics mechanism. With the introduced mechanism, the teaching and non-teaching personnel, and the learners who are always selected by the researchers to participate in researches are now given extra layer of protection from potential harms that these research activities may inflict. On the different

note, the research ethics mechanism has also helped researchers in strengthening the integrity of their researches especially those managed and approved by the division office.

Although this study revealed favorable results, however, the researcher still deemed it necessary to explore another research that will involve more research advocates on the field since the tools in this research were only available for selected respondents and relied on their perception only. Moreover, the intervention used in this study is limited since it did not involve capacitating researchers in the field of the necessary competencies to develop a scientific and ethical research. Furthermore, the intervention used in this study can still be improved through an integration of high technologies that is timely and appropriate to the emerging situations brought by the pandemic.

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