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WITHIN ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN RESEARCH: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF INFORMED CONSENT

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ABSTRACT
In the conduct of highly credible educational researches, compliance to ethical standards and protocols were paramount concerns of the researchers. One of the critical compliances in sound ethical conduct of an educational research was to ensure that respondents were fully aware of the nature of the research. As such, informed consent was a fundamental ethical requirement. This study examined teachers' perceptions on the use of informed consent in educational researches. It employed a descriptive correlational research design which was participated by 200 randomly selected public elementary school teachers in the Philippines. Results revealed that teachers highly perceived the use of informed consent in the conduct of educational researches in terms of comprehension, autonomy and voluntariness. On hand, teachers frequently struggled in the use of informed consent as they encountered that informed consent contained complexity of information, cultural difference and dynamics in the nature of research. Thus, the study found out that there was a positive correlation between teachers' perception in the use of informed consent in terms of comprehension and the challenges they encountered in terms of complexity of information which suggested that as teachers' understanding on the use of informed consent improved, they also recognized the complexities involved in communicating this information.

Keywords:
Ethical, consideration, informed, consent, analysis, comprehension, use, complexities, information, challenges

INTRODUCTION

Writing research is an objective scholarly endeavor where researchers follow complex scientific processes and intricate procedures. Research does not only contain comprehensive procedures and meticulous processes but also it entails highly-established ethical standards which researchers opted to follow. Ethical standards in the conduct of research may vary from institutions to institutions but in a nutshell, ethical standards as in writing research encompass a set of principles that guide research designs and practices. Such principles commonly involve the voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, potential harm and results communication. In this line, one of the prevalent researches in the academic community is the administration of educational researches where common subjects or respondents are learners, parents and teachers who may pose different characteristics and demographics that may be subjected for potential implications to the identities as persons. So, researchers take sensitive steps and processes that guide them to prevent any unethical conduct as they administer their researches. With this, one of the common forms that have been widely by researchers specially by teachers who are conducting educational researches, is the use of informed consent as one of the ethical compliance in the administration of research. Informed consent in this regard, is crucial in research as it ensures individuals to have an informed choice about whether to participate in a research study. Based on the collective observations of the researchers, common misunderstanding and misinterpretation of teachers who are administering their research works, they value informed consent as only a formality in the data collection procedure. In addition, the researchers also observed that most teachers whom they have worked with, put less emphasis on the credence of informed consent as core requirement in complying with set of ethical standards

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provided for in the conduct of their research work. Additionally, the researchers observed that most often, than not, teachers as researchers, fail to strictly provide informed consent before their respondents specially when the subject-respondents are their learners. So, these underlying conditions, the researchers sought to examine teachers' perceptions on the use of informed consent in administering educational researches. This study comprehensively laid significant findings how teachers perceive the use of informed consent. Following the conditions that the researchers observed, it is a necessity to undertake this study in order to provide a comprehensive insights and discussions on teachers' perceptions with regard to the use of informed consent.

Consequently, as teachers are exposed in the culture of research, informed consent has been dramatically treated as a demonstration of respect for personal autonomy of the respondents and is an important ethical requirement in research. The consent process establishes the participants' distinct role in the conduct of a research work. It is further embraced that although informed consent is not legally required in various circumstances in the conduct of research work, it is strongly emphasized that the information to be conveyed by the respondents under a certain study, have to be respected and protected arising from the respondents' autonomy. Informed consent makes an ensuring value and that instrumentally valuable as it promote respect and compliance to the ethical standards in a research work (Roache, 2014). In addition, providing understandable information to respondents, it is necessary for the researcher to undertake a careful and delicate consent process by which enabling the respondents to have a clear autonomy to decide whether they would participate or not (Gesualdo et al., 2021). Further, researchers are encouraged to undertake higher level of engagement and understanding in the construction and provision of consent process among the research's respondent so as to establish well-informed decision-making of the respondents as they may or may not participate in the study (Luhnen et al., 2018). Apparently, informed consent is an ethical concept that is codified in the research community. Its fundamental criterion is that the respondents should be competent and adequately informed and not coerced to participate (Cocanour, 2017). Thus, voluntary expression of the consent by a competent subject and the adequate information disclosure about the research are critical and essential elements of the informed consent process (Manti & Licari, 2018).

Apparently, the researchers identified that the strong gaps existed in the previous studies published concerning the use of informed consent. They found out that most of these researches only focused on the content of informed consent and how it was being used primarily in the medical field. Thus, the researchers found less published studies on the use of informed consent in administering educational researches. With these knowledge gaps, this study aimed to fill such. On one hand, significance of this study lies on the provision of empirical evidences based on the teachers' perceptions relative to the use of informed consent.

OBJECTIVES

This study examined teachers' perceptions on the use of informed consent in educational researches. It specifically answered the following questions:

1. How may teachers' perceptions on the use of informed consent in the administration of educational researches in terms of comprehension, autonomy and voluntariness?
2. What are the challenges encountered by teachers in using informed consent as they conduct educational researches in terms of complexity of information, cultural difference and dynamics in the nature of research?
3. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' perceptions on the use of informed consent and the challenges they encountered in using informed consent in conducting educational researches?

Hypothesis:

The study hypothesized that there is no significant relationship between teachers' perceptions on the use of informed consent and the challenges they encountered in using informed consent in conducting educational researches

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive correlational research design in order to examine teachers' perceptions on the use of informed consent in educational researches. Apparently, the researchers used a simple random sampling to select the participation of 200 public elementary school teachers among the selected schools in the Philippines. Hence, the researchers used a researcher-made survey-questionnaire which was subjected to validation and reliability testing through pilot test. As to the content of the developed survey-questionnaire, part 1 of the instrument contained items relating to the teachers' perceptions on the use of informed consent in terms of comprehension, autonomy and voluntariness while part 2 of the same instrument contained items relating to

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the challenges encountered by teachers in the use of informed consent in terms of complexity of information, cultural difference and dynamics in the nature of research. On one hand, validation was made through the expertise of three (3) professionals holding a doctorate degree in educational management and supervision. Once the researchers complied with the recommendations to enhance or modify the developed instrument, the researchers proceeded to pilot testing where they conducted it among non-included respondents. Results of the reliability test showed that items under part 1, obtained a Cronbach Alpha result of .812 while items under part 2, gained a Cronbach Alpha result of .819, both described as "acceptable." Further, the researchers used google forms in administering their survey-questionnaire. They have sent the link to the respondents' personal email addresses. Once all the data have been collected, the researchers organized the gathered raw data using MS Excel. As to the data analysis, the researchers used mean, standard deviation and general weighted mean in order to examine teachers' perceptions on the use of informed consent and the challenges they encountered as they use informed consent in conducting educational researches. Also, the researchers used Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) in order to examine if there would be significant relationship between teachers' perceptions on the use of informed consent and the challenges they encountered in using informed consent in conducting educational researches. On the other hand, in compliance with the ethical requirements in conducting a research study, the researchers provided informed consent and short orientations among the respondents where they discussed the intent, nature and context of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Informed consent is an ethical requirement commonly used to assure that respondents voluntarily participate and deliberately engaged in the data collection process of a certain research work. In educational researchers, informed consent is one of the mandated ethical requirement which may be templated or provided by the institutions where the researchers are engaged. In addition, informed consent contained critical information about the current study which the researchers undertake. In educational settings, teachers commonly secured informed consent to abide with the ethical standards and procedures in their respective field and institutions. Under informed consent, it explicitly provided a complete but precise narration of a certain research work details.

1. **Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Informed Consent in Administering Educational Researches.** The result showed that comprehension obtained the highest mean score of 3.67, described as highly perceived while autonomy gained a mean score of 3.62, described as highly perceived. Also, voluntariness gained a mean score of 3.56, described as highly perceived. The results implied that teachers have a strong perception in recognizing the importance of clear and precise research's intent, procedures and processes that are contained on informed consent. Also, it implied that teachers highly perceived that informed consent provided founded understanding with all the vital details of the work including the protection and promotion of their respondents' rights during the conduct of data collection process. Close mean scores were obtained whereas on the results relative to autonomy, it implied that teachers highly perceived the importance of allowing their respondents to make informed choices relating to their active involvement in research study. Thus, with their high perception, it also showed that their respondents as being provided with clear and precise informed consent, rights and data privacy were protected significantly influencing their respondents' choice to participate. Lastly, the result on voluntariness indicated that teachers highly perceived the use of informed consent as it enabled them to underscore respect and deeper acknowledgement on their respondents' deliberate involvement throughout the data collection process. In addition, the result also signified that teachers were not only aware on the vitality of ethical dimensions of informed consent but also its implications to their respondents' deliberate choice in participating with their research works. Results of the study supported the study of Laurijssen et al. (2022) which concluded that informed consent was one of the cornerstone in academic researches as it established the moral responsibility of the researchers as they engage the participation of their respondents in the research study emphasizing their welfare, privacy and confidentiality of their personal information.
2. **Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Using Informed Consent.** The results showed that teachers frequently struggled in using informed consent as they experienced that prevalence of complexity of information which gained the highest mean score of 3.45, described as always encountered. On the other hand, teachers also always struggled in considering cultural difference in using informed consent which obtained a mean score of 3.32, described as always encountered. Similarly, teachers always

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encountered challenges in using informed consent in line with the dynamics of the research they have administered which gained a mean score of 3.30, described as always encountered. The results suggested that teachers frequently struggled in using informed consent as it contained complex information in which they found it difficult to convey the necessary details of their researches' procedures and processes. As such, this complexity imposed misunderstanding among their respondents that eventually compromised their willingness to participate. In addition, the results implied that teachers always encountered cultural differences as they used informed consent. This suggested that they were always hampered by the cultural sensitivity principle as different cultural norms and values significantly influenced their respondents' decision to participate. Apparently, with these differences, the researchers always encountered rejection by their targeted respondents to participate in the data collection process. Lastly, teachers also frequently struggled in research dynamics, this implied that research variability created layers of complexity and changing decisions posed by their respondents to participate. Also, the result further revealed that teachers were challenged in adapting informed consent process to the limited contexts and forms of their research works. Results of the study supported the study of Moeini et al. (2019) which concluded that poor awareness of respondents about their rights and choices contained on informed consent strongly influenced their rejection to participate in the study. Also, unclear explanation and broad contexts of research work as explained on informed consent made the document more complicated to be understood by the respondents.

3. **Relationship Between Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Informed Consent and the Challenges they Encountered in Using Informed Consent in Conducting Educational Researches.** There was positive correlation between teachers' perception in the use of informed consent in terms of comprehension and the challenges they encountered in terms of complexity of information (r=.516). This suggested that as teachers' understanding on the use of informed consent improved, they also recognized the complexities involved in communicating this information. In other words, as teachers gain deeper understanding on the use of informed consent, they were too became aware of the complexities involved to effectively communicate the information to their targeted respondents. Apparently, the study implicated that teachers' awareness on the complexity of informed consent, it may foster a more proactive approach and intelligent processes which they could initiate. Additionally, the study implicated that teachers as researchers should formulate strategies to enhance clarity including simple and precise language and concise discussions with their respondents in order to build founded comprehension about their research and so, understand the vital content of their constructed informed consent. Results of the study supported the study of Koyfman et al. (2015) which concluded that researchers should use understandable language that correspond to their research intent. This should be primarily reflected on the content of their used informed consent.

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CONCLUSION

Informed consent is an ethical requirement commonly used to assure that respondents voluntarily participate and deliberately engaged in the data collection process of a certain research work. The study found out that teachers highly perceived the use of informed consent in the conduct of educational researches in terms of comprehension, autonomy and voluntariness. On hand, teachers frequently struggled in the use of informed consent as they encountered that informed consent contained complexity of information, cultural difference and dynamics in the nature of research. Thus, the study found out that there was a positive correlation between teachers' perception in the use of informed consent in terms of comprehension and the challenges they encountered in terms of complexity of information which suggested that as teachers' understanding on the use of informed consent improved, they also recognized the complexities involved in communicating this information.

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