



## **A Comparative Study on Iranian EFL Teachers' Awareness of Code of Ethics in Research: the Role of Gender and Years of Teaching Experience**

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### **Abstract**

This study is aimed at examining the role of gender, and years of teaching experience in Iranian EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research. 272 Iranian EFL teachers were chosen based on convenience sampling and were assessed through the Iranian EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research scale inventory. After gathering the questionnaires, data was analysed by SPSS. An independent-samples t-test was performed to examine whether the teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research differs significantly between genders. In addition, Pearson correlation was performed to find the connection between years of teaching experience and the aforementioned factor. The findings showed substantial positive relationships between all five sub-constructs of the code of ethics and experience. Besides, the findings revealed that there were considerable differences in the degree of knowledge among EFL teachers of research codes of ethics and its sub-constructs between male and female teachers. The mean score of the female teachers in all sub-constructs was higher than the male teachers. This study may be the only piece of research that has investigated the EFL teachers' knowledge regarding factors affecting their awareness of the code of ethics in research in Iran.

**Keywords:** teachers' awareness, code of ethics, gender, years of teaching experience

## Introduction

Research into English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) acquisition and education has expanded exponentially during recent years. Research plays an important role in education. Research is a search for new knowledge, with critical and systematic investigation and peer review. It also “aims to generate (new) information, knowledge, understanding, or some other relevant cognitive good, and does so by means of a systematic investigation” (Baer, 2010, p. 14)

Generally speaking, in doing research regarding human subjects such as educational research, it is crucial to consider the ethical standards proposed to protect your subjects’ ethical concerns which may arise from the sort of problems investigators have examined and the methodology they apply to obtain valid and reliable data. Thus, teachers, as researchers, need to adhere to ethical rules and norms to obtain valid and reliable data (Best & Kahn, 2006).

Traditionally, professional ethics were used as profession and work ethics. Different definitions have been given for this notion:

1) Work ethic which is the commitment of a person or group’s mental, psychological, and physical energy, the belief of community in order to acquire power and ability within the group and individual for the reason of improvement.

2) Professional ethics is one of the divisions of the new morality that tries to answer different professions and ethical matters and regards certain principles for that.

3) Professional ethics precedes the matters and questions of ethics and principles and moral values in a system of professional ethics in the professional context.

4) The aim of professional ethics is a set of norms which should be followed willingly and based on moral sense.

5) Individual ethics is an individual responsibility for his/her actions.

6) Professional ethics consists of a series of value judgments, orders to do one’s duties and actions (Gharamaleki, 2001, p. 39).

There are two features common in most professional ethics definitions:

a) The existence and significance of individual approach in doing their responsibilities; and

b) the individual's profession responsibilities and moral commitments.

These characteristics are both very critical and each individual should follow it in order to carry out his/ her job and duty.

Shamoo and Resnik (2015) in their study, proposed some ethical principals in conducting research: 1. Honesty, 2. Objectivity, 3. Integrity, 3. Carefulness, 4. Openness, 5. Respect for Intellectual Property, 6. Confidentiality, 7. Responsible Publication, 8. Responsible Mentoring, 9. Respect for colleagues, 10. Social Responsibility, 11. Non-Discrimination, 12. Competence, 13. Legality, 14. Animal Care, and 15. Human Subjects Protection.

Regarding ethical issues in research, Baer (2010) in his textbook which is the result of one of the research projects funded under the Science in Society theme of the Seventh Framework Program from the Centre for Professional Ethics at Keele University tried to contribute to the framework for ethics consideration and ethics examination in Europe –and beyond – by promoting access to information and education about ethics in research.

In their study, O'Neill and Bourke (2018) examined the challenges of developing a workshop that both informs and teaches instructors about ethics. They argued that worldwide, there is a growing expectation that instructors will act in a 'professional' way. Professionalism, in this respect, involves identification of a particular body of occupational knowledge, adherence to desirable norms of behavior, processes to hold members to account and commitment to what the profession considers as ethically right or good, that is, as ethical conduct.

Reemann et al. (2013) examined the act of interviewers during the oral proficiency interview. Their findings revealed “an overall attempt to follow the scripted interview format envisaged for this examination, but alterations to the script prevail with both gender groups” (p. 209).

The understanding of ethical issues in research is reflected in the development of related literature and the emergence of regulatory codes of research projects set by different agencies and professional organs. A main ethical dilemma is that which needs researchers to find a balance between the demands put on them as professional experts in pursuit of reality, and

their subjects' justices and values likely threatened by the research. Ethical problems for researchers can increase remarkably when they go from the general to the specific, and from the abstract to the concrete (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2007).

Also, teachers continually require examining their performances in their classrooms. In order to do this, they need to compare their practices with various methods applied by other teachers in similar circumstances. They may implement action research to discover if a procedure is working for them or whether they require to try something else with a given pupil or classroom.

Ethics, beside culture, custom, habits, and regulation- and even beyond these traditions, is quite an important issue which constructs social life. It does not appear possible for a society to exist long without ethic codes. Ethic has various meanings depending on the context in question. "Sometimes, ethics means moral values; other times, it means legal limitations on behavior and understood community standards" (Öztürk, 2010, p.394). Ethics are standards of right and wrong, which specify what people ought to do or ought not to do in social situations. It is a set of social practices (Davies, 2004).

Brill (2001) commented that "the Code of Ethics is a window into a profession" (p. 223). That is to say, they raise awareness of what is necessary for the members of that profession. In addition, ethical codification may be viewed as a way of defining social self-identity, and then projecting the image unrestrictedly to the public (Jia, 2009).

Similarly, ethical issues in research are so important and vital. They avoid the fabrication or faking of data and, as a result, develop the search of knowledge and truth, which is the primary aim of the research. Also, honesty, openness, systematisms, and record are essential requirements for conducting research. In addition, investigators have a duty to 'secure life, safety, dignity, honesty, the right to self-determination, privacy and confidentiality of research topic of personal information' (World Medical Association, 2013, pp.2191-2194). Ethical conduct is indeed crucial to collaborative efforts, as it calls for an atmosphere of mutual respect, responsibility, and shared values among researchers. This is particularly

critical since it comes to data sharing, co-authorship, guidelines on copyright, confidentiality and so on. In addition, investigators should comply with ethical norms to support the research and trust the community's people. Community people need to be ensured that investigators follow the proper standards for issues such as human rights, informed consent, law enforcement, accountability, security, confidentiality, etc. Consideration of these moral considerations significantly influences research project integrity (Mazur, 2007).

The other significance of these standards on research is to raise teachers' awareness, individually and collectively, to keep a high level of professional and ethical conduct on research issues. So, it is crucial to know these norms and to adhere to them. Also, ethical standards create directions and guidelines for the responsible conduct of research (Shamoo & Resnik, 2015).

Many professional organizations and agencies have presented codes and standards that describe ethical conduct and direct researchers with regard to the importance of ethical issues in the research. As Mazur (2007) put it, those codes and standards address notions like informed consent, confidentiality, respect, accountability, confidentiality, objectivity, etc. Such codes and standards provide primary guidelines, but researchers will also face external concerns that are not specifically addressed, and that will allow researchers to take decisions to prevent abuse (Mazur, 2007).

Furthermore, as professionals, teachers as researchers are required to follow a set of rules for ethical conduct in research. Some authors explored the components of EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research and developed and validated a model and a scale of EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research in Iran. Their model is considered as the theoretical framework of this study. However, there has been no focus on the examination of some factors which may influence EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research in Iran. The factors considered in this study are gender and years of teaching experience. These factors may affect the level of EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research. For instance, according to Ansarin, Farrokhiand, and Rahmani (2015), females performed better than males in terms of critical reflection. Thus, considering this factor is noteworthy. Also, it is supposed that the

more experienced and knowledgeable teachers are, the higher their level of overall awareness of ethical issues in research will be. Ansarin, Farrokhi, and Rahmani's (2015) argued that teachers' years of experience affect their level of pedagogical and critical reflection. Therefore, one variable of the present study is years of teaching experience. Regarding the importance of awareness of the code of ethics in research for EFL teachers and learners, the study reported here is an initial step in ascertaining the factors which influence the level of their awareness of ethical issues in research. EFL teachers are required to raise their awareness about various factors that affect their awareness of the code of ethics in research. There have been no studies to examine the role of gender, and years of teaching experience in Iranian EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research. It is the goal of the study reported here to fill this gap in the literature to examine the role of mentioned factors in Iranian EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research. By answering the following research questions.

**RQ1:** Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research and their years of teaching experience?

**RQ2:** Are there any significant differences between male and female EFL teachers concerning their awareness of the code of ethics in research?

## Method

### Participants

The subjects in this research were 272 teachers of EFL teaching at various private language institutes (N=139) and state high schools (N=133) in Iran. The participants were chosen based on convenience sampling, and the participation was completely voluntary. They were female (N=102), and male (N=170) in different age ranges (20-29 = 98, 30-39 = 140, 40-49= 25, over 50=9) and years of teaching experience (below 15=121, over 15=151). The teachers had all studied in different English branches, such as teaching, literature, translation, and other fields of study at B.A, M.A or Ph.D.

### Instruments

The EFL Teachers' Awareness of the code of ethics in Research Scale was used in this study. This code of ethics in research scale is a questionnaire



which was designed and validated by the researchers. This scale includes 59 items and assesses EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research in five sub-constructs: (F1) Before beginning the research, (F2) Beginning the research, (F3) Gathering the data, (F4), Analyzing the data, and (F5) Writing, Reporting, sharing, and storing the data. The responses were based on the Likert Scale. The Reliability of this scale was obtained through Cronbach's alpha, which was .94., and its validity was measured by running CFA through the Structural Equation Modeling approach. The scale enjoyed acceptable validity. This scale was provided in the appendix. Table 1 summarizes the result of Cronbach's alpha for this scale.

Table 1  
*Number of Items and Cronbach Alpha Indexes After Item and Reliability Analysis for the Code of Ethics in Research Scale*

Scale	Subscales	Number of items	Cronbach alpha
	F1	6	.810
	F2	9	.817
	F3	20	.940
Code of Ethics in Research	F4	6	.794
	F5	17	.850
	Overall	58	.94

*Note: F1= Before beginning the research, F2= Beginning the research, F3= Gathering the data, F4= Analyzing the data, and F5= Writing, Reporting, sharing, and storing the data.*

Additionally, confirmatory Factor Analysis was used to examine the validity of the designed Teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research scale. The association between each sub-constructs of the proposed model was analyzed based on the CFA analysis, the results of which can be seen in Figure1. The goodness of fit indices was used to check the model fit. The CFA model, with all factor loadings is presented in Figure1.

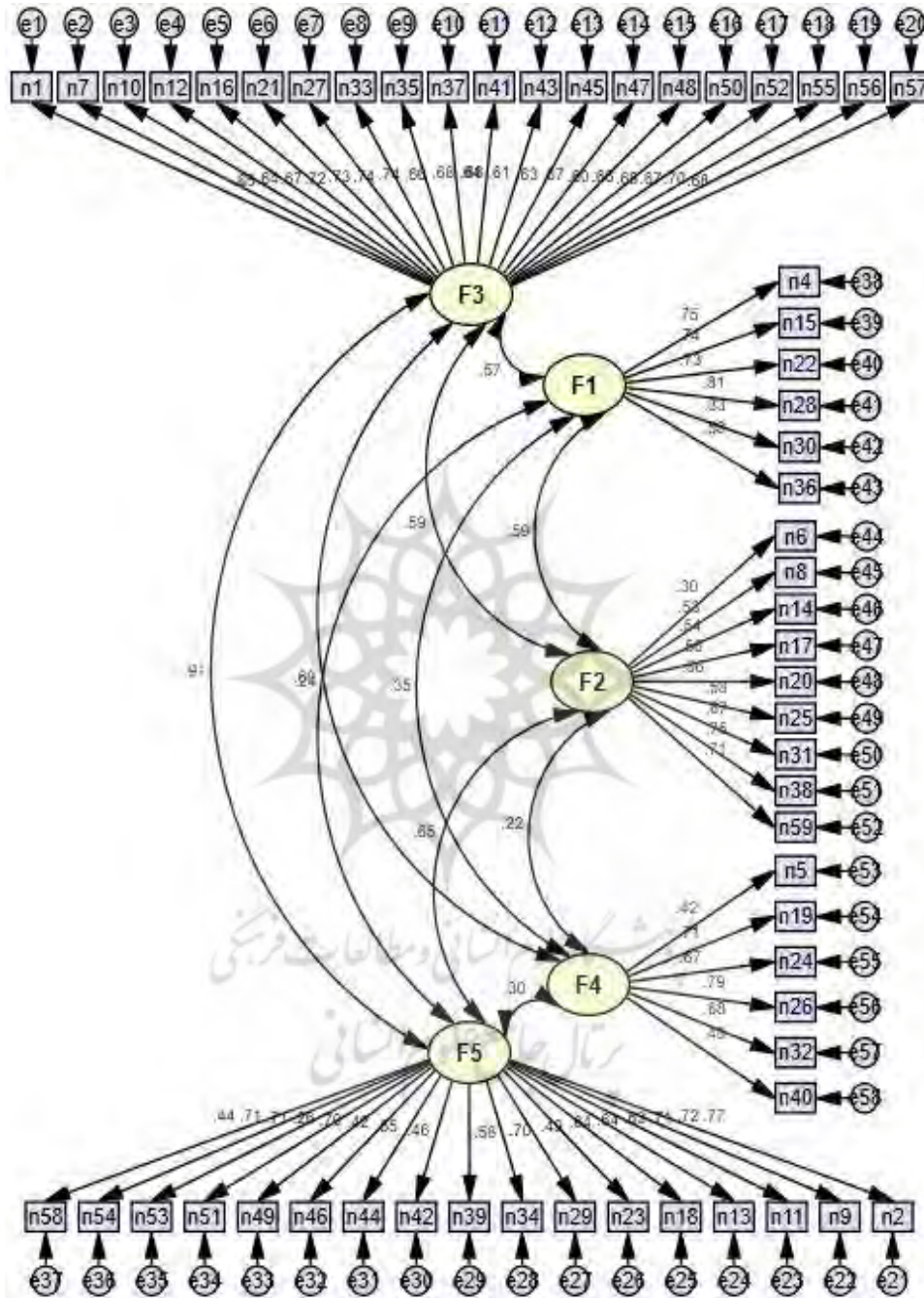


Figure 1. CFA Model of the EFL Teachers' Awareness of the Code of Ethics in Research Scale



As Figure 1 illustrates, Code of Ethics in Research scale has five sub-constructs. The loadings of the first factor, *Before beginning the research*, with six items range from .33 to .81. The loadings of the second factor, *Beginning the research*, with nine items ranges from .30 to .75. Moreover, the loadings of the third factor, *Gathering the data*, with 20 items range from .60 to .74. In addition, the loadings of the fourth factor, *Analyzing the data*, with six items range from .41 to .79. Finally, the loadings of the last factor, *Writing, Reporting, sharing, and storing the data*, with 17 items, range from .44 to .77.

There are significant positive correlations between all five sub-constructs. The highest relationship is between F3 and F5 (.91), and the lowest relationship is between F2 and F4 (.22).

Table 2 shows the Goodness of fit indices. Used in this study were  $\chi^2 / df$ , GFI, CFI, and RMSEA.  $\chi^2/df$  should be less than 3, GFI and TLI should be above .90, and RMSEA should be less than .08 in order to have a suitable model.

Table 2  
*The Goodness of Fit Indices*

	$\chi^2$	df	X2/df	GFI	CFI	RMSEA
Acceptable fit			<3	>.90	>.90	<.08
Model	4107.335	1558	2.59	.95	.93	.07

As shown in Table 2 all the goodness of fit indices are within the appropriate range. The scale thus did enjoy acceptable validity.

### **Procedure**

The present study was implemented to test the role of gender, and years of teaching experience in Iranian EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research. The data collection achieved through the EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research inventory, started in December 2019, and ended in February 2020. The researchers explained the purpose of their research and instruction for the EFL teachers to fill in the scale. The questionnaire distribution process was done by hand-to-hand method, telegram, and email. They were computed in SPSS software after collecting

the data. Next, an independent-samples t-test was performed to examine whether the teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research differs significantly between male and female participants. In addition, Pearson correlation was performed to find the connection between years of teaching experience and the awareness of teachers about the code of ethics in the study.

### Results

In order to find the association between Years of Teaching Experience and teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research, Pearson correlation was conducted. Table 3 shows the results of the correlation between Years of Teaching Experience and different sub-constructs of teachers' code of ethics.

Table 3

*Results of Pearson Correlation between Years of Teaching Experience and code of ethics*

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	code of ethics
Experience	.374**	.343**	.441**	.190**	.414**	.478**

\*\*Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01

As it can be seen in Table 3, there are significant positive relationships between all five sub-constructs of code of ethic and experience. Among the five sub-constructs of teachers' code of ethic, F3 ( $r=.44$ ,  $p<.05$ ) has the highest relationship, and F4 ( $r=.19$ ,  $p<.05$ ) has the lowest correlation with experience. In addition, there is a moderate significant positive relationship between the overall code of ethics and years of teaching experience ( $r=.47$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

To address the second research question, which aims to investigate whether teachers' knowledge of the code of ethics in research and its sub-constructs varies significantly between male and female teachers, an independent samples t-test was carried out. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of male and female teachers in the code of ethics in research.

Table 4

*The Descriptive Statistics of male and female teachers in the code of ethics in research*

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
F1	Male	118	22.50	3.44712	.31733
	Female	154	26.60	4.43296	.35722
F2	Male	118	35.32	4.36268	.40162
	Female	154	40.16	6.03332	.48618
F3	Male	118	82.56	10.76213	.99073
	Female	154	85.90	14.70708	1.18513
F4	Male	118	17.94	4.56772	.42049
	Female	154	20.88	5.12978	.41337
F5	Male	118	66.47	10.69278	.98435
	Female	154	70.25	11.20430	.90287
code of ethic	Male	118	224.80	24.66270	2.27039
	Female	154	243.81	34.89545	2.81196

As Table 4 shows, the mean score of female teachers in all sub-constructs is higher than male teachers. Moreover, the mean score of female teachers in the overall teachers' codes of ethics (243.81) is higher than male teachers (224.80). To find that these differences are significant, an independent samples t-test was run. Table 5 shows the results of the independent-samples t-test for gender.

Table 5  
 Results of the Independent-Samples *t*-test for Gender  
*t*-test for Equality of Means

	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
<b>F1</b>	2.11	270	.021	.39005	.49371
<b>F2</b>	2.68	270	.000	.52950	.65742
<b>F3</b>	2.09	270	.031	2.46676	1.60806
<b>F4</b>	2.53	270	.001	1.26348	.59877
<b>F5</b>	2.50	270	.002	2.62018	1.34402
<b>Overall</b>	2.59	270	.001	7.27834	3.77804

Levene's test indicated the homogeneity of variance on the overall scaleRAs indicated in Table 5, there are significant differences in the level of the EFL teachers' awareness of codes of ethics in research and its sub-constructs between the male and female teachers: F1 ( $t=2.11$ ,  $P<.05$ ), F2 ( $t=2.68$ ,  $P<.05$ ), F3 ( $t=2.09$ ,  $P<.05$ ), F4 ( $t=2.53$ ,  $P<.05$ ), and F5 ( $t=2.50$ ,  $P<.05$ ).

### Discussion

Research plays an important role in education. In implementing educational researches, teachers as researchers need to adhere to ethical rules and norms. Also, a basic aspect of research is uncertainty, in relation to the result of the research, its potential benefits and the risks included, which can cause important ethical challenges (Baer, 2010). Therefore, a well-

defined and well-established collection of ethical norms and standards to inform researchers of these issues is required.

The primary purpose of the present study was to discover the role of gender, and years of teaching experience in Iranian EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research. The findings of the first research question suggest that there were significant positive relationships between all five sub-constructs of the code of ethics and experience. Among five sub-constructs of the teachers' code of ethics, "Gathering the data" factor had the highest relationship and "Analyzing the data" factor had the lowest relationship with experience.

Moreover, the study demonstrates a correlation between Iranian EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research and their years of teaching experience. The data suggest that the more experienced teachers are, the higher their level of overall awareness of the code of ethics in research will be. The results revealed that as teachers experience working with more students with diversity of interests, abilities, cultures, emotions, backgrounds, social and financial status, and many other distinctions, they will be more ethical while conducting research. Thus, they tend to act more ethically as they gain more expertise in working with all these differences in different environments and departments.

The findings of this study can have some pedagogical implications. This study may be the only piece of research that has increased EFL teachers' knowledge regarding factors affecting their awareness of the code of ethics in research. The findings of this study inform EFL teachers to care about ethical issues in research and to try to keep themselves up to date in this respect. They need to raise their awareness in research ethics in the ELT domain. The findings of this study can also be beneficial in the improvement of professionalism in ELT. They can also be considered as complementary features alongside professional development programs regarding language teaching and testing. Likewise, the study may have implications for EFL teachers and educational administrators to improve performance in ELT. Thus, the findings of this study can guide Iranian ELT professionals to work towards setting standards in the assessment field for Iranian EFL teacher professional development. Accordingly, teacher educators play a crucial role in leading EFL teachers toward an awareness of



the code of ethics in research. They need to arrange workshops and courses such as in-service training courses for teachers with a specific end goal to develop their awareness, knowledge, and expertise to conduct research ethically.

As for the study's limitations, the participants were collected using convenience sampling from one country (Iran). Ethics and ethical principles are culture-bound. They may differ in diverse cultural settings and contexts. Thus, this study can be repeated with more participants from different parts of the world, with various educational systems, employing different methods that ensure a higher randomization level and ultimately greater generalizability that can also set the ground for finding cross-comparison. The significant limitation of this study is that only a questionnaire was used to assess the awareness of the code of ethics in research among teachers. Further studies can use questionnaires and interviews to create a mixed method approach and test the teachers' understanding of the code of ethics in research. Finally, further research can also be carried out to explore the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research with other variables, such as professional development of teachers and variables related to teachers.

**Declaration of interest:** none

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### Appendix

#### EFL Teachers' Awareness of the code of ethics in Research Scale

Dear respondent. This survey is designed to explore EFL teachers' awareness of the code of ethics in research while engaging in the process of researching. The information you reveal to us through this questionnaire is kept confidential and would be used for research purposes.

The items of this questionnaire cover the areas related to the following headings: (1) Before beginning the research, (2) Beginning the research, (3) Gathering the data, (4), Analyzing the data, and (5) Writing, Reporting, sharing, and storing the data.

#### A. Teachers' information: Please mark the part that best matches your status.

1. Years of teaching experience: Below 5  5-10  11-15  16-20   
21-25  Above 25
2. Level/s you teach right now: pre-intermediate  Intermediate   
Upper-intermediate  Advanced
3. Gender: Male  Female
4. Age: 20-29  30-39  40-49  50-59
5. Degree: MA.  Ph.D.  Others
6. Your Major of study: Teaching English  English Literature   
English Translation  Others
7. Have you ever had research training courses? Yes  No
8. How many articles have you published so far? None  1-3  4-6   
6-8  More than 8

**B. Please mark the part that best matches your status. There is no wrong or right answer.**

No	Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	As an EFL teacher, in research, ....					
1	I do not deceive participants about important aspects that would influence their willingness to participate.					
2	I finalize proof of compliance with ethical considerations and a lack of conflict of interest.					
3	I am careful with the reliability and validity of the instruments.					
4	I know how to do research.					
5	I ignore the data that proves or disproves my personal hypotheses.					
6	I feel responsible to the research community.					
7	I conduct the research competently and with due concern for the honor and welfare of the participants.					
8	I select an influential research problem.					
9	I feel responsible to provide safe storage for that information and to control access to it.					
10	I ensure that all participants, not only an experimental group, receive the advantages from the effective treatments.					
11	I avoid duplicating or gradual publications.					
12	respect research place so that they are not left disorganized after a research study.					
13	I maintain raw data and other materials including procedures, instruments.					
14	I am sensitive to any locally established institutional policies or standards for implementing research.					
15	I plan my study so as to reduce the possibility that findings will be misleading.					
16	I keep careful records of data collection.					
17	I develop the integrity of research.					
18	I communicate my study results and share my findings with others.					

19	I do not fabricate, falsify, or misrepresent data.					
20	I respect my colleagues and treat them fairly.					
21	I do not force the subjects to participate or into signing consent forms and getting them freedom to take part.					
22	I discuss authorship for publication with my colleagues.					
23	I communicate in clear simple, suitable language.					
24	I choose the most suitable statistical analysis.					
25	I seek to promote social goods and prevent or alleviate social harms.					
26	I respect the privacy of participants and consider issues of anonymity and confidentiality.					
27	I inform the participants the likely risks included in the study and of potential outcomes for them.					
28	I have received suitable approval from host institutions or organizations.					
29	I do not disclose information that would hurt participants.					
30	I try to improve my professional research competency.					
31	I respect standards and charters of domestic cultures.					
32	I refrain disclosing only positive findings.					
33	I get informed consent from study participants prior to participating in the study.					
34	I do not plagiarize or self-plagiarize.					
35	I have legal obligations to human subjects.					
36	I know relevant rules and institutional and governmental policies.					
37	I have a responsibility to be cautious of cultural, gender, religious, and other important differences within the study population.					
38	I disclose the aim of the research.					
39	I avoid misrepresenting authorship, evidence, data, results, or conclusions.					
40	I avoid "taking sides" and only negotiate the results that put the participants in a favorable light.					



41	I promote a trust with participants.					
42	I do not recruit ghost writer to do my research or to write my research text as the author.					
43	I prevent discrimination of participants on the grounds of sex , race , ethnicity or other factors not related to scientific competence and integrity.					
44	I consider corresponding issues and ordering of the names.					
45	I prevent or minimize prejudice or self-deception,					
46	I cite funding resources.					
47	I am honest with participants about communicating the purposes of the study.					
48	I compensate for the participants' time, attempt, cooperation.					
49	I am exact in reporting the data.					
50	I keep a good relationship with participants.					
51	I avoid overlapping publication or do not submit the article to two or several journals simultaneously.					
52	I try to minimize invasiveness by intervening with the participants or setting from which data are gathered.					
53	I am exact in citation.					
54	I am open to criticism and new ideas.					
55	I avoid gathering detrimental information.					
56	I refrain exploitation of participants.					
57	I respect probable power imbalances.					
58	I conceive who is the owner of the data while writing, reporting, sharing, and storing them.					
59	I avoid careless errors and irresponsibility, and examine my own work and the work of my peers with care and criticism.					

Thanks

### Biodata

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