ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF SILENCE BEHAVIOR AMONG MALAY WORKERS IN SELECTED GERMAN ORGANIZATIONS

Robe'ah Yusuf [1*], Azhar Hj Wahid [2], Siti Asma' Mohd Rosdi [3], Pooveneswaran Nadarajan [4]

[1] Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia
Email: robe_ah@pbmpu.upsi.edu.my

[2] Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia
Email: azhar@fbk.upsi.edu.my

[3] Faculty of Management and Economics, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia
Email: sitiasma@fpe.upsi.edu.my

[4] Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia
Email: pooveneswaran@pbmpu.upsi.edu.my

[*] Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Abstract:

This concept paper discusses the current process of data collection to obtain information on silence behavior among Malay workers in German organizations. This discussion explains about the concepts of ethics and ethical considerations in conducting research on a group of people. Ethical issues are vital to be discussed as researchers should be responsible for ensuring that issues related to ethics and research procedures are addressed and reported transparently. Several considerations need to be adhered to by researchers to reduce the risk to respondents. For this study, the researchers had applied for ethical approval in advance from the Center for Research and Innovation (RMIC) and gone through several processes that need to be considered. To facilitate the understanding of the ethical review panel, the researchers have outlined several important aspects that need to be taken into account. Among the main consideration highlightedwas the need for the Malay employees in these German organizations should remain anonymous or the real identity of the respondents should not be disclosed during the study reporting. The data collected must be managed securely and confidentially. Study respondents were given a clear description of the study conducted and why they were involved in the study. Several consent forms were given to ensure that the involvement of respondents are willing and ethical. Apart from that, the appointment of an enumerator and the need for one was justified as the process of collecting data for this study was restricted due to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Introduction

Research ethics is a good practice in research that holds the firmness of core ethical principles in protecting the rights and safety of humans, animals and ecosystems for the sake of universal well-being while complying with all rules and legislation (Fleming, 2018). This is because researchers need to understand that ethics act as a guideline in conducting any studies and researchers who do not adhere to ethics will damage the reputation of research. After all, adhering to ethics is the responsibility of the researcher (Zegwaard, Campbell & Pretti, 2017). Researchers should take full responsibility for practicing ethics with self-awareness when conducting research. In short, ethics is the responsibility of the researcher. Most importantly, the researcher must be responsible for safeguarding the safety, dignity, rights and well-being of the respondents. According to Chun (2017), researchers need to take care of various other ethical issues at different stages of the research process. Both the researcher and the respondent or the study participant have an important role to play. Researchers need to safeguard the rights of respondents or study participants. As respondents or study participants, they have the right and can consider wanting to participate or refuse to become respondents or study participants based on their own perspective.

Based on the great responsibility as a researcher, one should be concerned about the type of research conducted and consider ethical issues in his study, especially studies involving living things such as humans or animals. This discussion revolves around studies involving humans. Human studies, in any study context, are any studies conducted on people, their data or biological specimens including studying humans involves various procedures as follows:

1. Review or interview
2. Psychological, physiological or medical testing or treatment
3. Observations by researchers
4. Personal documents or other materials
5. Collection and use of their organs, tissues or body fluids (e.g., skin, blood, urine, saliva, hair, bones, tumours and other biopsy specimens)
6. Access to their information (in an identifiable, re-identifiable or non-identifiable form) as part of a published source or database

Ethical issues are very important in research as a guide to complement each study conducted. Research that does not adhere to research ethics will damage the reputation and results of research, especially research involving human beings as subjects. This is because it has a direct bearing on the life of the subjects involved in the study.

Literature Review

Ethics is "the science of moral values and duties; the study of human ideals of character, action, and purpose." (Sales & Folkman, 2000). Ethics is the norm for behavior that distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Usually expressed in the list of rules, professional codes of conduct, religious beliefs, or any good, sensible words that show distinction between right and wrong (American Psychological Association, 2002). Among the

basic principles of research ethics involving humans is not to harm respondents (Stephenson, Giles & Bissaker, 2018).

According to Bartkus and Higgs (2011), most people recognize some common ethical norms but different individuals interpret, apply, and balance these norms in different ways in their values and life experiences. However, ethics is different from law. Ethical norms tend to be broader and informal than the concept of law. The two concepts are different and distinguishable, such as legal but unethical to do or illegal but ethically acceptable.

According to Berg and Lune (2017), human experiments were conducted even before the 18th century. However, the ethical attitudes of researchers attracted public interest only after the 1940s because of human exploitation in some cases (Bilous, Hammersley & Lloyd, 2018). Professional codes and laws have since been introduced to prevent scientific distortion of human life (Brink, 2018).

The impact of the "Nazi Experiment" led to the introduction of the Nuremberg Code (1947) which was the main code enacted to protect human rights in research. According to Chopra, Golab, Pretti and Toulis (2018), the code focuses on voluntary informed consent, freedom to withdraw from research, protection from physical and mental harm, or suffering and death.

From the highlighted previous studies, it was found that there is still fewer research from Asia, especially Malaysia which discusses or studies the ethics of humanities research. Relatively, there is still a lack of empirical studies to fill the gaps in research on ethics in research involving human beings.

Ethical Factors

Every research must ensure that the methods, content and purpose do not violate the researcher's code of ethics, norms and universal values such as religion, culture and customs. If a study meets all the characteristics and principles of science but is not ethical, then the research is considered imperfect, such as manipulating humans, such as making human clones. Therefore, ethical considerations need to be taken into account in future research. This is worth considering and termed as an ethical consideration. Ethical considerations are a set of principles and values that must be adhered to when conducting human affairs. Ethical considerations ensure that no one acts in such a way that endangers society or individuals who may violate societal and religious norms (Filabi & Bulgarella, 2018).

Having this awareness will reduce the risk and be able to prevent people and organizations from engaging in activities that are not good and detrimental to certain parties. Ethical issues are based on the honesty of the researcher. Researchers must demonstrate all efforts to ensure that every research step is carried out honestly and all data obtained are accurate. According to Casson (2013), there are many organizations, such as the Publishing Ethics Committee dedicated to promoting ethics in scientific research. Organizations mostly agree that ethics is not something to think after or a side note to research studies. Ethics is an important aspect of research that needs to remain at the forefront in the beginning of research work.

Important Elements of Ethics

When conducting research involving humans, several important elements need to be considered by the researcher. The following is a summary of the essential elements of ethics as outlined by several past researchers (MacFarlane, 2009; O'Mathúna, 2012).

i.   Language - researchers provide complete information in easy-to-understand language. The description is also necessary so that the respondents understand what the researcher wants.

ii. Respondent's feelings-given enough time for the respondent to answer the questions and it should not include embarrassing questions, cause emotional turmoil or about unpleasant experiences. In general, researchers should not expose respondents or subjects to emotional, mental or physical stress.

iii. Ethics in all levels of research - researchers should emphasize the ethics of selecting research problems, determining research methods, data collection, data analysis, interpretation and reporting of research.

iv. Know the level of education of the respondents - take into account the level of education of the sample to be studied. Must not assign inappropriate or complicated tasks to respondents. This situation, if it occurs, will complicate the research process and will cause a negative response from the sample being studied.

v.   Be honest with the respondent - explain to the respondent the goals and objectives of the study. Thus, respondents will voluntarily participate in the study.

vi. Report on accurate data - providing incomplete data, out of context, falsifying findings or presenting misleading facts is considered a violation of research ethics.

vii. Maintain the confidentiality of the respondents - the researcher must not disclose information about the study sample as it may jeopardize the safety or dignity of the respondents. Personal rights must be tightly controlled, preserved and must not fall into the hands of third parties.

viii. Adhering to research ethics is the responsibility of the researcher. Failure to adhere to such ethics will jeopardize the validity, reliability or accuracy of the study conducted.

ix. Comply with the rules set by the organization or company where the location of the data is being collected.

Code of Ethics

Knowledge of codes of ethics is essential for individuals conducting research. In research, ethical issues are very important as a guide to complete each research conducted. Researchers should take into account the impact of their actions on the subject in their research. In this regard, several professional bodies of academic organizations have produced codes of ethics to guide researchers. According to MacFarlane (2009), the code of ethics enacted in the American Psychological Association (APA) is as follows:

i.   Researchers must maintain objectivity in their research.

ii. Researchers should be aware of the limitations of their abilities and skills and not conduct research beyond the limits of their abilities.

iii. Each individual or respondent surveyed has the right to himself/herself and his/her dignity to be protected.

iv. All researchers should avoid causing and bringing danger to the respondents/subjects used in the study.

v.   Confidential information provided by study respondents must be kept confidential.

vi. The findings of the study are presented honestly without any manipulation.

vii. Researchers must not abuse their opportunity as a researcher to obtain information aside from the professional and research purposes.

viii. Researchers should appreciate all assistance, cooperation, or sources of information obtained from others.

ix.   Researchers must not accept any assistance, sponsorship or other forms of assistance of personal interest that may violate ethical principles in conducting their research.

Focus of the Study

Research in various institutions is increasingly being implemented today, so more and more ethical issues have arisen in the field of Social Science research. This is especially true during the process of collecting data from organizations involving large respondents (Hirsch, 2019). Today's technological advances also make it easier for data to be exposed and easily disseminated without control. By in the study of mute behavior in German organizations, researchers made the existing research ethics in the organizations studied and, in the researcher's, own study centre as the main guideline.

This is because the study is a study that involves humans as respondents. Respondents in this discussion refer to a group of Malay workers in a German organization in Malaysia. The employees involved in this study were Malay employees who reported directly to their immediate German-ethnic boss. The selected organizations involve four main sectors, namely industrial, education, banking, services and others. For this study, researchers are instructed by the university's research department, RMIC to apply and fill in the application form to conduct human subjects-based studies and must obtain a certificate after attending an ethics workshop called Human Research Ethics Workshop (HREW Certificate) from Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI).

A Study of Silence Behavior in German Organizations

Silence behavior refers to a collective level phenomenon in an organization. According to (Breevaart, Bohle, Pletzer & Medina, 2020), employees keep important information and do not voice opinions for various reasons due to concern about risk, career security and many more. On the part of superiors, speaking out in response to important problems facing the organization helps in solving problems from the bottom up. However, this information sharing sometimes does not happen as expected. It is as if there is a strong force in most organizations that causes the withholding of information even though the information has the potential to bring down the organization. This issue is named as silence behavior in organizations based on the model from Morrison and Milliken (2000). This silence behaviour is a collective phenomenon. This may be due to top management characteristics, organizational and environmental characteristics, characteristics that influence employee interaction, management beliefs, organizational structure and policies, concerns over negative feedback from management and demographic inequality.

Benevene argues (2020), the mute behavior experienced by most organizations is influenced by certain powers that are difficult to disclose. Although most members in the organization knew what was going on, they did not dare to speak out for fear of receiving consequences especially the career aspect (Breevaart et. Al, 2020). There is also evidence to suggest that subordinate members prefer to be silence rather than channel negative news to superiors. Although many are aware that taking a silence attitude will only destroy the organization due to the shortcomings that occur, but not many dares to come forward to make a disclosure because they are more concerned about the safety of their careers in the organization. If members in an organization withhold and censor every important piece of information that should be channelled upwards, 98.4% of the information will not be received by top management for the decision-making process (Conrad, 2005).

Such a situation will pose a problem to the top management to make the right decision as there is still a lot of important information that cannot be conveyed as a result of the mute behavior among the subordinate members. The study of Milliken, Morrison and Hewlin (2003) has successfully identified several issues that cause employees to choose to be silence. However, the study of Milliken et.al (2003), used only one independent variable which is the expectation of negative effects. These researchers admitted that there are weaknesses in their study because the study sample is small which consists of forty employees from the industrial sector who are still young and have no experience in using the interview method. Nevertheless, most recent studies on silence behavior involve quantitative methodologies.

This situation suggests research on silence behavior involves humans as a major subject. Every researcher should be aware that no matter what type of methodology is applied in research and has a variety of techniques yet there are a variety of different ethical issues to be addressed. Therefore, researchers are advised to pay attention to the existing guidelines of organizational ethics and professional ethics in the research to be conducted.

Methodology

This paper is a concept paper that discusses the basic concepts of ethical procedures in data collection based on the considerations that need to be taken into account when starting the data collection process. This is a reference to the researcher's field of study. This is because as part of the process in data collection for research, each researcher is responsible for ensuring that issues related to research ethics and procedures are conducted and reported transparently as stated by Lucas, Fleming and Bhosale (2018). The researchers discussed the ethical considerations for the study of silence behavior among Malay employees in selected German organizations, for the reporting of the research methodology.

According to Chien and Chen (2008), part of the ethical procedure in research is that the researcher must provide a consent form that must be filled in and signed by the study respondents (consent letter). The form (consent letter) informs the researcher's identity such as name, institution, level of study, name of supervisor and telephone number or email to be contacted. Respondents were also given several forms (consent letters) which stated that their information were protected and will remain anonymous. Respondents were also given explanation on why they were selected as study participants, why data from them was necessary while emphasizing that their involvement does not involve risk and meant for study purposes only.

For this study, the researchers filled in the RMIC, UPSI research ethics approval application form to obtain the required amount of data from Malay employees in German organizations. Researchers explain that a group of people with certain characteristics are needed and targeted in this data collection affair. For this study, the researchers took data from 350 Malay respondents who reported to the nearest German leader. The purpose of this survey is to obtain data on the behavior of Malay workers when confronted with the nearest German boss. Because this study began to be implemented in 2019, researchers need to explain the need for enumerator appointment due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Researchers explained that the steps in obtaining data were through telephone, email and questionnaires, which were collected through enumerators. Researchers set the condition to be eligible to be the respondents of the study are employees who have worked for five years or more under the German-based organizations or companies. All the respondents selected for the

purpose of the study were Malay and they report to their immediate German-ethnic bosses. Meanwhile, for the application for ethical approval, the researcher explained and attached a questionnaire that was verified by five panels of evaluators to obtain the permission of the research institution and the focused organization.

The researcher also explained the implication of the study, which is to reduce negative perceptions and explain the culture and behavior that exists in multinational organizations. Apart from explaining the contribution of the study to the respondents, the researcher also wrote the contribution of the study in the ethical approval application form from RMIC, UPSI. Next, the researchers stated the contribution of the study such as outlining new policies and models in the study of silence behaviour among Malaysian employees.

Considerations in Data Collection Procedures

For the study of the behavior of Malay workers in German organizations, the involvement of respondents in a study should be based on their consent. Respondents have the right not to participate if they are not interested. For this study as well, it was found that respondents from Code 1 (industrial sector workers) were less interested in participating in the study due to time constraints and working in shifts. Consent from every Malay employee in this study was essential to avoid high degree of bias.

Throughout this study, 200 forms were distributed for the first time, but only 102 were returned with a response rate of 50%. For the second distribution, it reached 181 as required. Given the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the appointment of an enumerator was very important because the opportunity to meet the respondents face-to-face were not possible. For this study, the appointment of enumerators, usually among the superiors or their immediate chief, turned out to be very helpful. Although it involves the help of an enumerator, researchers always try to adhere to the rules set by the organization or company where the location of the data is collected.

Figure 1 explains the selection of respondents based on sectors as required for this study. The selection of the respondents was carried out using a random sampling method, based on their respective sectors.
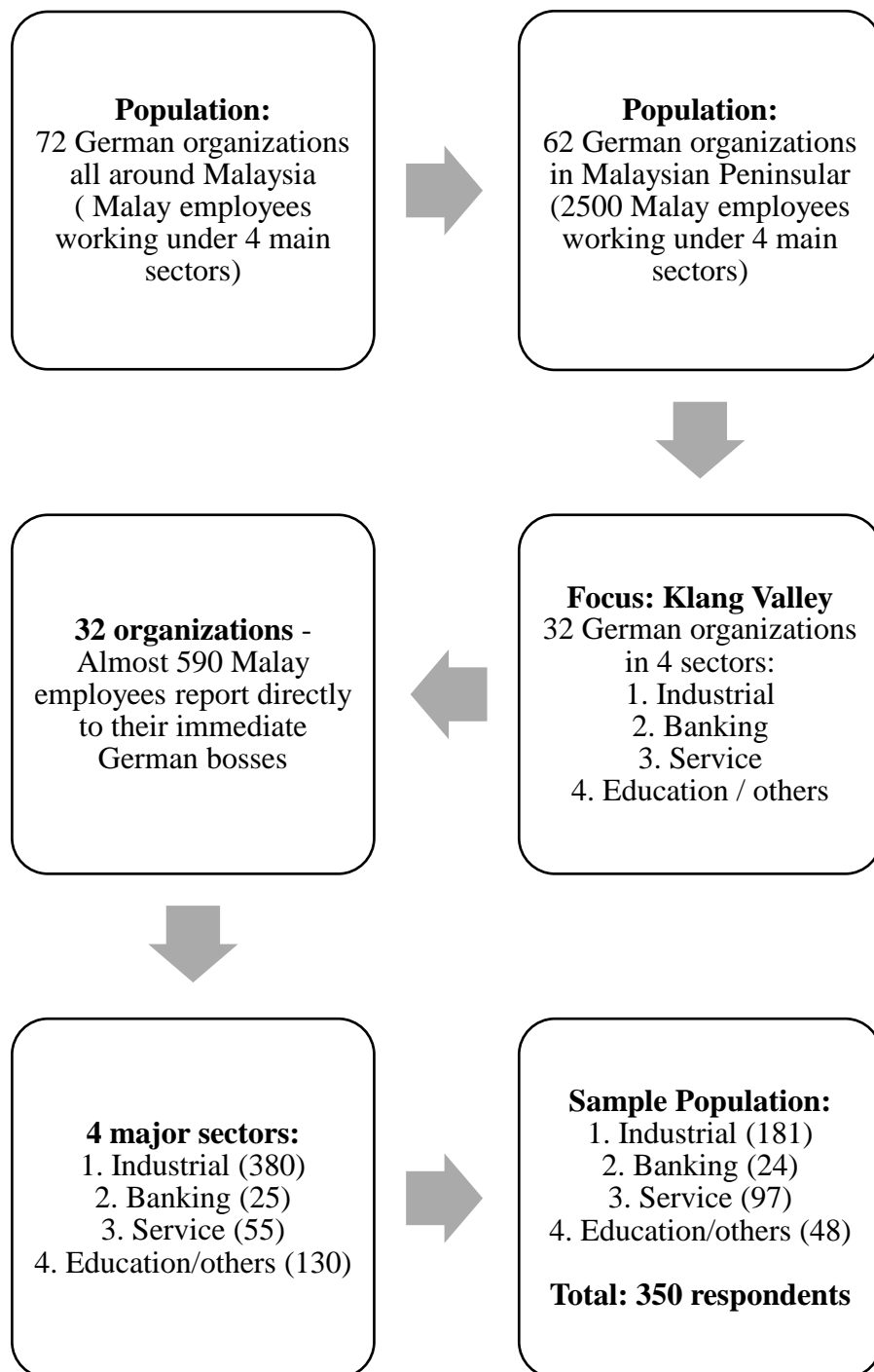
Population:
72 German organizations all around Malaysia (Malay employees working under 4 main sectors)

Population:
62 German organizations in Malaysian Peninsular (2500 Malay employees working under 4 main sectors)

Focus: Klang Valley
32 German organizations in 4 sectors:
1. Industrial
2. Banking
3. Service
4. Education / others

32 organizations - Almost 590 Malay employees report directly to their immediate German bosses

4 major sectors:
1. Industrial (380)
2. Banking (25)
3. Service (55)
4. Education/others (130)

Sample Population:
1. Industrial (181)
2. Banking (24)
3. Service (97)
4. Education/others (48)

Total: 350 respondents

Figure 1: Selection of Respondents Based on The Organization Sectors

Discussions

The significance and importance of this discussion are to provide ethical guidance to future researchers to increase the sensitivity of researchers to follow ethical guidelines, especially in the following matters:

1. Notice of confidential data.
2. Notice that respondents can withdraw from the study at any time.
3. These permission forms must be placed in the "appendix" as proof.
4. Respondent's consent to participate in the study.
5. The length of time taken

The emotional impact of the from start till the end of the study must be considered as the issues related to privacy and confidentiality are taken into account during the data collection process (Bytheway, 2018). This is important because ethics in research is an aspect that ensures the guarantee of the rights and dignity of study respondents and their involvement in research does not harm them and their daily life (Cameron, 2018).

Conclusion

In order to obtain data for the study of silence behavior of Malay employees in German organizations, several considerations have been taken into account. Respondents that are Malay employees in German organizations should remain anonymous whereby their real identity cannot be revealed by researchers during reporting. The data collected must be managed securely and confidentially. Study respondents should be given a clear description of the study conducted and why they were involved in the study. Several consent forms were prepared to ensure that the respondents' involvement in this study felt secure and anonymous. Their participation was also ensured with proper consent and without any coercion.

In conclusion, failure to adhere to ethics will threaten the validity and reliability of the study conducted because of bias issues such as respondents will be tired, unfocused, missing data or respondents giving the similar answer for the entire questionnaire. Therefore, adhering to ethics is the responsibility of the researcher because many aspects need to be considered in conducting the research. All of these issues involve the following keywords such as voluntary participation, self-determination, physical injury, mental and emotional disorders, researcher identity, respondent identity, confidentiality, anonymity, confidential information, blurring of eyes and mind as well as dishonesty issues.

References

American Psychological Association. (2002). Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct. *American Psychologist, 57*(12).

Bartkus, K. R., & Higgs, J. (2011). Research in cooperative and work-integrated education. In R. K. Coll & K. E. Zegwaard (Eds.), *International handbook for cooperative and work-integrated education: International perspectives of theory, research and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 73-84). Lowell, MA: World Association for Cooperative Education.

Benevene, P. (2020). Managing silence in workplaces. *J. Workplace Learn.* 32, 94–95. doi: 10.1108/JWL-02-2020-157.

Berg, B. L., & Lune, H. (2017). *Qualtitative research methods for social sciences* (9th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearsons Education Ltd.

Bickman, L., & Rog, D. (2009). Applied research design: A practical approach. In L. Bickman& D. Rog (Eds.), Handbook of applied social research methods (2nd ed., pp. 3–43). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bilous, R., Hammersley, L., & Lloyd, J. (2018). Reflective practice as a research method for co-creating curriculum with international partner organisations [special issue]. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, *19*(3), 287-296.

Breevaart, K., Bohle, S. L., Pletzer, J. L., and Medina, F. M. (2020). Voice and silence as immediate consequences of job insecurity. *Career Dev. Int.* 25, 204–220. doi: 10.1108/CDI-09-2018-0226.

Brink, R. (2018). The investigation of information management of the work-integrated learning process by using a multiple-case design as a qualitative research paradigm [special issue]. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, *19*(3), 223- 235.

Bytheway, J. (2018). Using grounded theory to explore learners' perspectives of workplace learning [special issue]. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, *19*(3), 249-259.

Cameron, C. (2018). The evolution of a mixed methods study in work-integrated learning [special issue]. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, *19*(3), 237-247.

Casson, J. (2013). A review of the ethical aspects of corporate governance regulation and guidance in the EU. *Occasional Paper*, 8, pp.1-44.4.

Chien, C. F., & Chen, L. F. (2008). Data mining to improve personnel selection and enhance human capital: A case study in high-technology industry. *Expert Systems with Applications*, *34*(1), 280-290.

Chopra, S., Golab, L., Pretti, T. J., & Toulis, A. (2018). Using data mining methods for research in co-operative education [special issue]. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, *18*(3), 297-310.

Chun, R. (2017) How virtuous global firms say they are: A content analysis of ethical values. *Journal of Business Ethics*,*155* (1), pp.57-73. DOI: 10.1007/s10551-017-3525-39.

Coll, R. K., & Chapman, R. (2000). Evaluating service quality for cooperative education programs. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, *1*(2), 1-12.

Coll, R. K., & Kalnins, T. (2009). A critical analysis of interpretive research studies in cooperative education and internships. *Journal of Cooperative Education and Internships*, *43*(1), 1-14.

Coll, R. K., & Zegwaard, K. E. (2011). The state of the art and future issues for cooperative and work-integrated education. In R. K. Coll & K. E. Zegwaard (Eds.), *International handbook for cooperative and work-integrated education: International perspectives of theory, research and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 387-390).

Conrad, C. (2005). Strategic Organisational Communication in a Global economy, Thompson Wadworth.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Filabi, A. & Bulgarella, C. (2018). Organisational culture drives ethical behaviour: Evidence from pilot studies. In OECD Global Anti-Corruption & Integrity Forum. Paris: OECD.

Fleming, J. (2018). Recognizing and resolving the challenges of being an insider researcher in work-integrated learning [special issue]. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, *19*(3), 311-320.

Haggerty, K. D. (2004). Ethics creep: Governing social science research in the name of ethics. *Qualitative Sociology*, *27*(4), 391- 414.

Held, V. (2006). The ethics of care: Personal, political, and global. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Hirsch, P. (2019). Keeping the fish fresh: Corporate compliance and ethical values, *Journal of Business Strategy,40*(2), pp.68-72.DOI: 10.1108/JBS-01-2019-0003.

Jiang, Y. H., Lee, S. W. Y., & Golab, L. (2015). Analyzing student and employer satisfaction with cooperative education through multiple data sources. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, *16*(4), 225-240.

Lucas, P., Fleming, J., & Bhosale, J. (2018). The utility of case study as a methodology for WIL research [special issue]. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, *19*(3), 215-222.

MacFarlane, B. (2009). *Researching with intergrity: the ethics of academic enquiry*. London: Routledge.

Milliken, F. J., Morrison, E.W., & Hewlin, P. F., (2003). An exploratory study of employee silence: Issues that employees don't communicate upward and why? *Journal of management studies, 40*, 6 September, 2003, 1353-76.

Morrison, E.W. & Milliken, F. J. (2003). Speaking Up Remain Silence: The Dynamics of voice and silence in the organizations. Journal of Management Studies, 40, 6 September, 2003. 1352-1354.

O'Mathúna, D.P. (2012) *Ethical considerations in designing intervention studies,* in B. Mazurek Melnyk and D. Morrison-Beedy(eds) *Intervention Research: Designing, Conducting, Analyzing, and Funding: A Practical Guide for Success*. New York: Springer Publishing.

Nuremberg Code. (1947). Available from: http://www.bmj.com/ content/313/7070/1448.1

Rangka Kerja Kecemerlangan Penyelidikan (The Research Excellence Framework) (2014). Retrieved from https://www.ied.edu.hk/ele/2016/REF/161031-The_REF.pdf.

Resnik, D.B. (2015). What is Ethics in Research & Why is it Important? National Institue of Environmental Health Sciences. Retrieved from https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/resources/bioethics/whatis.

Sales, B.D., & Folkman, S. (Eds.). (2000). *Ethics in research with human participants*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Zegwaard, K. E., & Coll, R. K. (2011). Exploring some current issues for cooperative education. *Journal of Cooperative Education and Internships*, *45*(2), 8-15.

Zegwaard, K. E., & Hoskyn, K. (2015). A review of trends in research methods in cooperative education. In K. E. Zegwaard (Ed.), *New Zealand Association for Cooperative Education 2015 Conference Proceedings* (pp. 59-62). Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Association for Cooperative Education.