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III/DDSR/Ntn-Rech/29/2017

December 2, 2022

Notification No: 24/Research/MLCU

Culture in Research: Policy and Ethics

In terms of Section 22, sub section (2) of the Martin Luther Christian University Act 2005, read with Statute 6.3.1 of the Martin Luther Christian University Statutes and Rules 2016, and as recommended and approved by the Academic Council meetings held on July 18, 2022 and Board of Governors meeting held on November 24, 2022, the Culture in Research: Policy and Ethics is, hereby, notified:

Culture is integral to all social sciences research and by extension to any discipline that looks at the well-being of the human community. By another extension, it applies to all disciplines that participate in inter-disciplinary academics.

In positivism independence between the researcher and the researched person is emphasized. Post-positivists argue that theories, hypotheses, background knowledge and values of the researcher can influence what is observed. Post-positivism pursues objectivity by recognizing the possible effects of biases. While positivists emphasize quantitative methods, post-positivists consider both quantitative and qualitative methods to be valid approaches.

In post-positivism, epistemology is based not only on objective assessments, but also on human insights and conjectures. The ontology is based on the belief that reality can be known only imperfectly and probabilistically, and that reality can also be drawn from social constructions. The axiology considers that research can be value-free or value-neutral, but is inevitable. Therefore, the researcher must work to detect and try to correct it. Post-positivists try to understand how their axiology (values) may have influenced their research, including the research questions, definitions, methods and analysis (Panhwar et al 2017; Ryan, 2006; Patry, 2013, Fischer, 1998).

There are two theoretical constructs that highlight the importance of culture.

Post-positivism

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possible effects of biases. While positivists emphasize quantitative methods, post-positivists consider both quantitative and qualitative methods to be valid approaches.

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Research as social justice

Michel Foucault observed that Western society is concerned with social problems, but he challenges many fundamental assumptions about the supposedly humanitarian features of Western civilization. He shows how relying on Western science and reason to solve problems of humanity, instead evolves into different forms of mute, subtle and masked dominations pervasive in daily life. He also pointed out how the professed drive to gain the truth about human beings and their beliefs and ways of living, has actually made other peoples subordinate to systems of authoritative knowledge production, that justify “exercises of power, public policies, laws, regulations, domination and social exclusion, all too frequently to the advantage of those well-placed in a societal hierarchy” (Datta 2012). According to Foucault, what counts as knowledge in a given era is always influenced, in complex and subtle ways, by considerations of power (Duignan, nd, Datta 2012).

Linda Smith in the Introduction to *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education* says:

...what is valid in research is that which resonates with people’s lives and informs their power to make change...the drive to create theory and research that matters to people’s lives is relevant to decolonizing and Indigenous studies. The contributions of social justice in education have broad implications for pedagogy, curriculum, schooling, educational policy, and social movements. (She pleads for) Scholarship on social transformation (for) reducing harm and expanding good.

More recently Bagele Chilisa, has written in the preface of her book *Indigenous Research Methodologies* (2012), “The community of social science researchers is experiencing a struggle as it comes to terms with social justice issues that arise from the research process itself, as well as the

findings that are produced by their efforts. While more and more non-Western researchers from the third world and from indigenous societies are expressing criticism about what is viewed as colonising epistemologies and methodologies, we are also cognizant of the need to bring indigenous methodologies into the research arena as a means of addressing the goals of enhanced human rights and social justice. Research has great power: to label, name, condemn, describe, prescribe solutions, by researchers who are outsiders or by insiders who have been schooled in dominant ideologies, theories and methods”. From the Preface.

She goes on to say that there is a need for diverse research approaches suitable for various groups: tribals, women, LGBT socially and economically oppressed communities, disabilities, who have been excluded from dominant research frameworks.

So the achievement of social justice must proceed beyond decolonization to the replacement, or at least a complementary or pluralistic approach to social knowledge systems and their application. In any academic pursuit, the search must only be intellectually justifiable, but also must have social value. These concepts have been elaborated by Paolo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Research Policy

1. The cultural foundations of research will be included in the PhD course work
2. A social justice approach to research will be emphasized that includes culture and gender
3. There will be an appropriate emphasis on qualitative methods and participative strategies
4. PhD and other researchers will write a positionality and reflexivity statement as part of the text

Ethics approval

1. All research projects will include cultural aspects as an integral part of their research proposals. This will be reflected in the ethics application form.
2. All research proposals will include a positionality statement.



**Dr Larilin Kharपुरi,
Dean, Research**