

# Ethical Issues in Research Involving Children in TESOL and Applied Linguistics

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**How to cite this paper:** Samanhudi, U. (2018). Ethical Issues in Research Involving Children in TESOL and Applied Linguistics. *International Journal of Language Teaching and Education*, 1(2), 1-12

**Accepted:** 28 March, 2018  
**Published:** 31 March, 2018

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## Abstract

This study sets out to address the ethical issues involved in studies concerning English language learning and acquisition which involve children (those under 18 years of age as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) as participants. This small-scale study focused on the analysis of ethical issues in three preliminary of samples of studies which involve children in the field of TESOL and Applied Linguistics. These three articles involved children as participants and are published in reviewed journals in the area of TESOL and Applied Linguistics. The results indicate that although implicitly presented, the informed consent and protection issues have generally been fulfilled by the researchers of the three articles. However, a more explicit explanation needs to be given more spaces in the research report in order to make it more transparent to the public (Peter, 2015; Thomas, 2009) and to ensure that the research is rigorous and significant (Dikema, 2009).

## Subject Areas

Language Teaching

## Keywords

Ethical Issues, Children, TESOL and Applied Linguistics

## INTRODUCTION

The current literature documents the past practice of research involving children in which the majority of issues concerning children's opinions, perspectives and lives, in general, were explored from the perspectives of adult researchers (Huang et al., 2014; Kirk, 2006).

At that time, according to Huang et al., (2014), children were seen differently from normal adults (referring to adults without any mental retardation and developmental disabilities) in that they were seen as immature human beings in understanding the world.

Children were considered incapable of explaining their viewpoint even about their own lives (see also Pinter, 2014; Kirk, 2007; Curtis & Cicchetti, 2003; Punch, 2002b). Their world then explored through the perspectives and understandings of adult caretakers who are close to them such as their parents or teachers (Christensen & James, 2000). Thus, research concerning children in social sciences such as in the field of TESOL and Applied Linguistics tended to be more about them rather than directly involved the children in the research (Pinter, 2004; Christensen & James, 2000; Hill, 1997). However, this traditional recognition has gradually

changed in the past few decades since the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989 (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Alderson, 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000, among others). One of the main principles applied in the last 20 years of this document was ensuring the right of children to participate in decision-making processes (Christensen & James, 2000a). Specifically, Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) addresses the importance of children and young people's opinions and voices to be heard by those who are making decisions that affect their lives (Galagher et al., 2010).

This writing sets out to address the ethical issues involved in studies concerning English language learning and acquisition which involve children (those under 18 years of age as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) as participants. The first part of this essay discusses the perspectives of research on children that affect ways of research involving them (Punch, 2002b). The second section focuses on ethical issues in research which involves children. The last part will critically evaluate published research involving children in the TESOL and Applied Linguistics contexts focusing especially on ethical issues (e.g., informed consent and protection issues) as reflected in those research articles.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Perspectives on Children in Research

For a few decades, there have been changes of seeing children in terms of their participation in research due to a developing conceptualisation of children and childhood by experts (Kirk, 2007) leading to a heated debate on whether research involving children should be made different from research with adult participants (e.g., Kirk, 2007; Christensen, 2004; Christensen & Prout, 2002; Punch, 2002b; Harden et al., 2000b). Traditional perspectives on children were influenced by theories of socialisation and developmental psychology in which they were conceptualised as incompetent and immature (James, 2001; Waksler, 1991) which were sharply

contrasted from normal adults as competent and mature human beings (Diekema, 2009). A new way of thinking emerged in the late 1980s in which perspectives on children were much influenced by interactionism and social constructionism theories and the development in children's rights which provided a new frame of the social status and position of children (Kirk, 2007; James & Prout, 1997) in which they are now constructed, like normal adults, as active agents rather than passive objects of research (Beresford, 1997). There have been, specifically, four perspectives identified in the current literature in relation to children's involvement in research such as the children as objects and subjects of the research (see O'Connor et al., 2016; Cheah & Parker, 2015; Christensen & Prout, 2002), the children as social actors (e.g., Christensen, 1998; Christensen & James, 2000a) and the children as co-researchers within the research (e.g., Lundy & McEvoy, 2012; Christensen & Prout, 2002; Alderson, 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000; James et al., 1999).

In the first place, children were traditionally seen as different from normal adults. They were considered as immature human beings who are not able to understand the world and to explain their opinions about their experiences in lives so that issues related to them were commonly explored from adults' perspectives (O'Connor et al., 2016; Huang et al., 2014; Curtis & Cicchetti, 2003) especially through those adult care-takers close to the children's lives (Christensen & James, 2000; Kirk, 2007). Different from normal adults who are considered mature and are able to actively participate (to give consent) in research which involves them (Christensen, 2008), children, in contrast, were seen as incompetent to participate in any decision-making activities including in research which involves them (Cheah & Parker, 2015; Christensen & Prout, 2002). Children, in this case, are thought too immature and incapable of conceptualising their own experiences and worlds (Christensen & Prout, 2002) so that data obtained directly from them are considered unreliable and invalid (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999). This perspective exists, Waksler

argued, because 'adults routinely set themselves up as the understanders, interpreters, and translators of children's behaviours' (Waksler, 1991., p. 53) and because most adult researchers tend not to be respectful of the children's rights in research such as in expressing their opinions and viewpoints (Diekema, 2009; Morrow & Richards, 1996). Therefore, early research involving children tended to be about the children rather than involving them as active participants in the research (Hill, 1997). This perspective to research clearly shows that children are still treated as objects, that is 'as a person acted upon by others, rather than as a subject acting in the world' (Christensen & Prout, 2002., 2002., p. 480). Adult researchers, Christensen (1998) asserted, serve children as a source of information with little attention given to their subjective experiences and the personal meanings they may possibly construct about their own lives (see also Wellesley & Jenkins, 2009).

For years, children involved in the field of TESOL and Applied Linguistics research, for example, are treated as passive participants especially those where experimental research approaches are used (e.g., Macaro & Erler, 2008; Vandergrift, 2005; Gu et al., 2005). For instance, Macaro and Erler (2008) reported a study focusing on a classroom intervention study with 11-12-year-old learners of French in the UK. In this research, they compared two groups of young learners, one of which received a strategy training intervention while another group of learners was left without any intervention. It is reported that the treatments were effective in helping the learners learned at their best. However, it is also found that the group with intervention encountered difficulties in completing the tasks due to unclear instructions outlined in those tasks given. This occurred, Pinter said, because the researcher thought that the children would understand the word choices used in the instructions as adult participants would (Pinter, 2005). This clearly shows that adult researchers still predominantly construct knowledge about children from their own perspectives (Woodhead & Faulkner 2008).

The second perspective on children in research

allows researchers to give children a more active role as research participants by treating them as subjects of the research (Pinter, 2005) apart from their limited communication capabilities when compared with adults as research participants (Alderson & Goodey, 1996). This perspective emphasises the importance of recognising children's capacity to actively participate in research they involve and puts attention to children's development and maturity to ensure their ability to actively participate in the research (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Therefore, this way of seeing children in research tends to use age-based criteria in order to decide whether a certain group of children can be included in the research (e.g., Pinter, 2005; Alderson, 2000; Waksler, 1991). However, it is common that children located as subjects of the research are not given a wider room for a full participation such as during data interpretations (Pinter, 2005). For example, Cekaite and Aronson (2005) conducted research in an immersion classroom of immigrant children in Sweden. Focusing on the roles of spontaneous language plays and jokes in the development of the children language, they gained abundant data regarding the children's spontaneous language use and their interactions patterns. However, there found no clear relationship between the researchers and the children so that the children were not aware of what was going on and why. In other words, the children are not aware of their participation in the research making the interpretations, again, were purely done by the researchers from their own perspectives (Pinter, 2005).

The third perspective on children in research pays more attention to their autonomy (Prout & James, 1990). Under the influence of interactionism and social constructionism theories, in this perspective, children are seen as social actors who have valuable experiences and understandings of the world (Mathews, 1994; Fielding & Conroy, 1992) and are seen as those who are able to become valid information resources due to their ability to provide reasonable testimonies (Kendrick et al., 2008; Fraser & Robinson, 2004) and to recall events (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999) as adults can do (Alderson, 2000).

Children, according to this perspective, are not seen solely as part of a certain group of community (e.g., family, school, social institutions) but are seen as active participants in the society they belong (Pinter, 2005). Consequently, children are no longer seen as different from adults as research participants (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Both are treated equally in, for example, the choice of particular methods used in the research (O'Connor et al., 2016). In this sense, the methods employed by the researchers need to be suitable for the children involved in the study including the questions used to investigate that must be clear and easy to understand by the children (Christensen & James, 2000a). In his study about a new literacy approach in a primary school, Coppock (2010), for instance, invited children to be actively involved in the research through peer interview activities, data analysis, and wrote a short report of their findings. These short reports by the children were then put together in the final project report as written by the adult researchers.

Finally, the current perspective on children in research is to do with their role as co-researchers. Alderson (2000) argued that placing children as co-researchers like those common to adult participants is very important in research as it may allow them to act actively in the research process (see also O'Connor et al., 2016; Christensen & Prout, 2002). Like adults, children have sufficient agency and abilities to engage in the interpretations of the process of their own lives (Fraser & Robinson, 2004) apart from the complexity of these interpretations process that need some understanding of concepts and theories (Punch, 2002b; Harden et al., 2000b). This idea is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) particularly with sections concentrating on children's rights to actively participate in any activity involving them. It is clearly outlined in The CRC that all activities that bring implications to children's lives must involve their active participations through allowing them acting as a fellow within the research project that is conducted (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). This way, according to Thomas and O'Kane, children are given

more opportunities to be involved, informed, consulted and heard in the accomplishment of the research.

Moreover, involving children as co-researchers in research indicates very clearly that their competence and decision-making abilities are no longer underestimated (Curtis, 2003). They are involved, for example, in the process of data analysis and interpretations of the findings and identifications of potential issues in the site for further research (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). This way of looking at children in research is also paralleled in new social science methodologies that see research as a co-production activity which means that the contributions toward the research are shared by both the researchers and the informants (Christensen & Prout, 2002). To follow is Section 3 which presents a discussion about ethical issues in research involving children.

### **The Ethical Issues in Research with Children**

Ethics is an essential element in any research either involving children or adults (Didcock, 2007; Crow et al., 2006; Homan, 1991). It is a general term which refers to 'set of moral principles and rules of conduct' (Morrow & Richards, 1996., p. 90). In a research context, ethics has to do with the implementation of those moral principles and rules of conduct in order to ensure participants' willingness to be involved in the research, to prevent harm to research participants and to promote the good for them (Sieber, 1993). This implies that, generally, ethics in studies involving either children or adults such as those found in the field of TESOL and Applied Linguistics (e.g., Coppock, 2010; Cekaite and Aronson, 2005; Cahyono, 2003) deal with at least two key issues such as informed consent and protection issues ( e.g., Flick, 2014; Bryman, 2012; Berg & Howard, 2012; Kirk, 2007; Darlington & Scott, 2002) in which the informed consent, it is argued, is mostly complicated with research involving children than adults due to their different ways of communicating their experiences and understanding of the world (Kirk, 2007; Locher et al., 2006).

Kirk (2007) noted that ethical issues are different

between research involving children and adults especially in how those ethical issues are approached with children. In line with Kirk's statement, Christensen, (2008) said that different from normal adults, children's way of communication, understanding of the world and experiences are limited due to, for example, their vocabularies constraints and understanding of the world so that adult researchers involving children tend to use 'special' methods of data collections and interpretations to enable meaningful participations from the children (see also Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). Other scholars especially social science researchers (e.g., those working in the field of TESOL/Applied Linguistics), however, contended that there must not be such a sharp distinction between research involving either children or adults (e.g., Vandergrift, 2005; Gu et al., 2005; Pinter 2005; Christensen, 2004; Christensen & Prout, 2002; Harden et al., 2000b) in both methods and ethical standards (James et al., 1998). In response to this issue, Punch said that research should not be made simplistic on whether it should be made different between adults and children participants. It should be made, Punch strongly emphasised, dependent on three important things in a research process (i.e., research context, research questions and the individual's characteristics) and reflexivity in which the researchers critically reflect not only on their roles and assumptions but also on the choice of methods and their application (Punch, 2002b). The first ethical issue, informed consent, is further explained in Section 3.1 below.

## **Informed Consent**

Cresswell, (2012) in response to the ethical issue in research, said that a central point of ethical practice particularly in social research is that participants voluntarily give informed consent to be involved in the research (see also Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Crow et al., 2006; Homan, 1991). In this sense, it is very important for the researchers to ensure that all participants in the research fully understand the degree of their engagement in the research (Bailey, 2007). The consent must also

include reasons for why their participation is necessary, how the results of the research would be used and to whom these results of the research would be reported or published (British Educational Research Association, 2004). Moreover, for consent to be considered truly informed, Crow et al., (2006) further noted that it is also important for the participants to understand the potential consequences of a research project in which they are engaged. Thus, given this understanding, the research participants (either adults or children) agree to participate without coercion, to withdraw at any time (Baskin et al., 1998) and to be given the right to determine, based on their own interest, to collaborate in the research (Harcourt & Conroy, 2005).

Morrow & Richards (1996) said that the issue of informed consent dominates the discussion of research involving children because 'children are mostly considered incapable of giving any consent for any research in which they are involved' (Christensen & Prout, 2002) which makes it more complicated to gain consent from children than adults (Kirk, 2007). This is different from normal adults who are usually able to provide consent for their own involvement in research (Harcourt & Conroy, 2005). For example, in UK context as frequently found in many other places (Christensen, 2008), consent in research with children is taken to mean consent from parents or those 'in loco parentis' because the children, in this respect, are seen as the property of their parents (Gallagher et al., 2010). In a wider context like at a school level, Gallagher et al added, consent for children participating in research is also taken from a wide range of adult gate keepers within the school area such as school teachers, head masters, and school governors.

Further, it is generally recognised that conducting research which involves children presents distinct ethical and practical challenges that require special consideration as compared with research that involves normal adults (Diekema, 2009; Locher, 2006). While adults, for example, are described as having the capacity to provide informed consent (Scally, 2014), children are

considered, as mentioned above, being vulnerable and are having no capacity to provide the informed consent (Prout & James, 1990). However, with the shift perspectives toward children's involvement in research, Christensen & Prout, (2002) asserted that differentiating ethics guidelines or standards between adults and children is no longer necessary. In this sense, the researchers, for example, do not have to use particular methods or indeed, work with different set of ethical standards when working with children (Harden et al., 2000b). Last but not least is that informed consent is also important to be made transparent to the public by clearly explain it in the research report (Scally, 2014) in order to show that the data in the research were valid and that the research is rigorous and significant (Corti et al., 2000). To follow (Section 3.2) is a discussion of Protection issue in research involving children.

## Protection

In addition to the informed consent, Gallagher et al., (2010) said that in research ethics there is an obligation to protect research participants from risks such as distress associated with research-related procedures, and any present or future psychological, social, economic, or legal harms generated by the study (see also Diekema, 2009; Kirk, 2007; Darlington & Scott, 2002). Children, according to Diekema, (2009) are vulnerable (i.e., incapable of considering the risks and benefits of their participation in research) group of research participants that need extra protections from the researchers as compared to adults who are mostly able to protect themselves from any kind of abuse potentially occur in the research. The researchers, Locher said, must be able to maximise the benefits to participants involved in the study and to ensure the least possibility for any harms to occur for them as the research informants (Locher, 2006). It is considered good practice, therefore, to highlight the limits to confidentiality in information sheets as well as providing information on how the researcher will manage disclosures (Alderson, 1995; Davis, 1998). The children must also be ensured that they

are being protected from harm that might result from taking part in research conducted by researchers who use quality, scientific methods and analysis (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). Finally, it is necessary that children gain such a fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of research, especially with regard to the selection of them as participants which must be suitable for the purpose of the research (Doglas & Diekema, 2009). Given these facts, it is therefore understood and is emphasised recently that care must be taken very seriously by the researchers. In this sense, the focus, for example, must not be on self-promotion within one's profession but in the best interest of the child (Harcourt D & Conroy, 2005).

To sum up, any ethical issues related to research which involves children must be in line with both the ethical and legal requirements used by the researcher to govern the research engaging with children as suggested by Diekema (2009). According to Diekema, the adult researchers must be aware of the importance of ethical and legal research practice. In this case, the research that they do must be rigorous and significant scientifically. It is also important for the children to be fairly selected and accessed without any pressure toward their family or schools. Finally, it should be noted that the researchers must be able to minimise the risks, gain valid and voluntary informed consent, respect the participating children and ensure that the protocol has been approved by an independent ethical review board (Locher, 2006).

## METHOD

This small-scale study is an exploratory study that is focused examining the ethical issues as reflected in three preliminary samples research articles in the area of TESOL and Applied Linguistics. This study employed a qualitative approach based on a small number of texts (Arsyad, 2013) and analyzed specifically the fulfillment of some ethical aspects important in any research involving children e.g., consent form and protection issues (Gallagher et al., 2010; Kirk, 2007). As this study used only few texts, this study does not aim to make any

claims as to the size, frequency and representativeness of the data or the generalisability of the findings beyond the scope of the examined articles. Rather, the detailed analysis of ethical issues as reflected in the three articles may serve as a preliminary indication of some trends of ethical issues fulfillment as displayed in the research articles in the area of TESOL and Applied Linguistics as observed in the examined texts (Bruce, 2014). Therefore, future research is needed to validate these findings across purposefully designed corpora containing more sizable and diverse compilations of TESOL and Applied Linguistics texts (Lim, 2012).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Descriptions of Research Articles in TESOL and Applied Linguistic Areas

In order to examine the ethical issues in research involving children in the field of TESOL and Applied Linguistics, three articles were selected. These three articles involved children as participants and are published in reviewed journals in the area of TESOL and Applied Linguistics.

**Article One:** Gozali, I., & Harjanto, I. (2014) 'Improving the Grammatical Accuracy of the Spoken English of Indonesian International Kindergarten Students'. *TEFLIN Journal*, 25(2), 168.

Article one is an action research report focused on describing some interventions by the teacher used to improve pupil's particular aspects of linguistics. There were eleven children (students in the classroom) aged 5-6 years old at K2 level involved in this study. The researcher involved one Grammar teacher of the K2 classes as a collaborator in this study and was provided with the materials, techniques, and methods of teaching Grammar as required for this research. Observations both in and outside the classroom were used in this study to collect data in the form of students' grammatical accuracy from their speech.

**Article Two:** Cahyono, B. Y. (2003) 'Aida and her mainstream classroom: A case study of a young English language learner's literacy development'. *TEFLIN Journal*, 14(2), 219-238.

Article two is a study focused on a child's literacy development. This kid is a young English language learner from Indonesia who was in a Grade 2 (aged 7-8 years old) classroom in a primary school in the south-eastern part of Australia. The researcher examined the English learning activities in the participant's classroom. He noted the kid's literacy development with examples of her work through series of observation in the classroom. The researcher also conducted interviews with the teacher regarding the kid's academic and her English language learning.

**Article Three:** Lázaro, A., & Azpilicueta, R. (2015). Investigating negotiation of meaning in EFL children with very low levels of proficiency. *International Journal of English Studies*, 15(1), 1-21.

Article three is a study that is focused on documenting conversation strategies of young learners (ages 7-8 years) of English as a foreign language while playing a game in the classroom. Data were collected through observations which were videotaped. The researchers came into the classroom for two weeks before data collection process to make sure that the children are familiar with them and did observations in the classroom to further collect the data.

### Results of Analysis of the Three Articles

In Section 2 above, it is clearly stated that informed consent and protection are two important issues which need special attentions in research involving children (Gallagher et al., 2010; Kirk, 2007). Firstly, although implicitly presented, the informed consent has generally been fulfilled by the researchers of the three articles in the area of TESOL above. This is evidenced by, for example, the involvement of adults (teachers) close to the children in the school context where the studies were conducted. These consents that were likely be given by teachers close to the children's lives at school may be encouraged by the fact that the children participating in this research (aged between 5 to 8 years old for each) were still considered incapable of giving any consent

(Christensen & Prout, 2002; Harcourt & Conroy, 2005) so that it is the teachers who have control over the children at the schools who were asked for the consents by the researchers (Megone et al., 2016; Reeves, 2010). Given this situation, it is safe to say that the children involved in the three studies above were still treated as passive participants because no opportunities for them to provide even consent for the research as found in other studies in TESOL and Applied Linguistics area as reported by Pinter (2005) above. In Article 1, for example, in researching children aged 5-6 years old at K2, the researcher involved the grammar teacher to participate during the research. The teacher was one of the information resources about the children through interviews conducted. Meanwhile, data from the children were gained through series of observations- the method which is considered as the most suitable for children – a 'child-friendly' data collection (Megone et al., 2016). Similar evidence is found in both articles two and three in which teachers were involved in the research and it is likely that the informed consents for those children were gained through them. However, none of the three articles mentioned the involvement of parents in providing consents in the research. Diekeme (2009) said that children represent vulnerable group of research participants because they are not able to provide consent of their participation in the research. Bearing this in mind, it becomes very important, Diekema further asserted, that parents are included because it is assumed that they are able to act in the best interest of their children when they decide to or not to allow their children to participate in any research. In other words, involving parents in those three research processes was supposed to have been done by the researchers given those children are the property of their parents (Gallagher et al., 2005).

Furthermore, the implicit presentation of ethical issues especially in dealing with informed consent as practiced by the researchers in the three articles analysed has been challenged by Corti et al., (2000). According to them, researchers have responsibilities to

clearly explain the ethics before and during the research. It is also vital that understandable language in their research report on how the informed consent was gained prior to the conduct of the research is provided (Corti et al., 2000). Additionally, the researchers need to explain the approach they used to the children, e.g., as social actors who were considered knowledgeable about their own lives and the topic of the research like normal adults (Christensen & Prout, 2002) and to explain things included in the consent form (Sparman, 2013). This suggests that explicit explanations regarding the access to the participants are worth presenting in the research report in order to make it more transparent to the public (Peter, 2015; Thomas, 2009) and to ensure that the research is rigorous and significant (Dikema, 2009). It is also important that the informed consent is clearly explained because the researchers must ensure that the children engaged in their study fully understand the degree of their involvement in the research (Crow et al., 2006). It is also the researchers' responsibility to explain fully and meaningfully what the research is about and how it would be disseminated and what potential consequences might occur (Harcourt & Conroy, 2005; Morris, 1998). However, in response to such a situation as reflected in the three articles analysed above, some scholars admitted that this practice of presenting implicit ethical issues in research in social sciences like in TESOL and Applied Linguistics area is common because ethical choice in this field typically carries lighter burdens than in some other professional and academic fields like medical research (Gallagher et al., 2010; Thomas, 2009; Pinter, 2005) and the fact that the informed consent issue in social sciences like TESOL and Applied Linguistics is relatively new (Akpabio & Eksikot, 2014).

Secondly, the protection issue which indicates the researcher's obligation to protect the participating children from any harm such as conflict and a threat to self-esteem (Kirk, 2007) has clearly been fulfilled by the researchers. In this case, the procedure of ethics in dealing with protection particularly has been shown by the use of anonymity of the participating children in in



the research. For example, it is obvious that the names of each participant involved remained pseudonym in the three articles. This may indicate, to some extent, the researchers' awareness in terms of protection issues in research (Christensen & Prout, 2002). However, like informed consent issue in general, the issue of protection is not well explained by the researchers. The researchers did not obviously mention that the research process had guaranteed the participants from certain harms that may occur as the implications of their involvement in the research. This might be caused by the limited space given to explain the informed consent in general so that no clear explanations are also found for the protection issue. All these may indicate that the researchers are not fully aware that the consent process is vital. As Gallagher et al said, 'the consent process is the time to clarify any differences of opinions and understandings between the researchers and participants regarding information presented in the consent form' (Gallagher, et al., 2010., p. 474).

All in all, although, to some degree, ethical issues (i.e., informed consent and protection issues) have been reflected in the three articles, it would have been better that these ethical issues are clearly explained in the research to provide, as mentioned above, a more transparent information to the public regarding the research process (Sally, 2014). Following Dikema (2009), the researchers, in their research report, need to show that their research is rigorous and significant (Corti et al., 2000) one of which is through a valid and voluntarily informed consent as evidenced and explained in the research report (Crow et al., 2006).

## CONCLUSION

This study has reported results of analysis of three samples of articles from TESOL and Applied Linguistics area. It is found that consent and protection issues have been well fulfilled by the researchers involving children in this discipline. However, a more obvious explanation regarding how the consent was gained and what was in the consent needs further attention in order to ensure

the validity of data gained from the children involved in the study (Crow et al., 2006). All these suggest that future research, particularly in TESOL and Applied Linguistics area needs to pay attention to ethical issues prior to the research, during the research process and in the research report in which detailed explanations of, for example, informed consent are worth providing to ensure the research validity and rigour (Corti et al., 2000).

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:** I would like to thank Dr. Lesley Emerson (Senior Lecturer, School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Works, Queens University Belfast, UK) for her expert advice and comments on this paper and the Indonesian Endowment Fund for Education Scholarship (LPDP) for its funding support.

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