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*Original Paper*

Caesar's wife must be above suspicion: using Stutchbury and Fox's methodological tool to assess ethical qualities of Masters of Education dissertations at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique (2004-2019)

Octávio José Zimbico<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Educational Administration, Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, Mozambique

Correspondence: Octávio José Zimbico, Department of Educational Administration, Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, Mozambique. Tel: +258828609400, E-mail address: o.zimbico@gmail.com

**Abstract**

This study assesses the ethical qualities of the master of education dissertations defended at Eduardo Mondlane University (EMU), in Mozambique, from 2004 to 2019. Under this general objective, this question sought to be answered: Which ethical qualities can be found in Masters of Education dissertations at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique (2014 – 2019), based on the methodological tool of Stutchbury and Fox for effective ethical analysis? This is a qualitative study with characteristics of systematic review and evaluation research. Data were collected from a purposive sample of 76 dissertations, available on the EMU Open Institutional Repository. Coding and anonymous analysis of the dissertations' ethical procedures, under the methodological tool for the effective ethical assessment of Stutchbury and Fox then took place. The findings reveal that these dissertations can be considered slightly acceptable in the deontological dimension, while in the remaining three dimensions, i.e., external, relational, and ecological are weak and, therefore, cannot be considered reliable. These findings, also, reveal how challenging is to improve educational research integrity at EMU.

**Keywords:** EMU, master's dissertations, educational research, ethics, methodological tool

**1. Introduction**

The ethical dimension of educational research represents a logical and structured way of mobilizing moral principles of guiding conduct, which is held by a group or even by a professional. Ethical issues are often complex and they are likely to emerge and may change as the research proceeds. Dowling and Whiteman (2020), for instance, argue that “rather than ‘applying’ certain rules or ‘adhering’ to codified principles, researchers are presented as negotiating a much looser assemblage of potential interests and occurrences”(p. 771). Despite that ethical clearance applications may vary across institutions, there are, however, some core issues and processes that need to be followed. At one level, researchers need to be mindful of rules, laws, and codes of conduct that determine how to behave whilst they are conducting their research; at another, it can be argued that maintaining the integrity of the research is itself an ethical issue (Dowling & Whiteman, 2020; Klykken, 2021).

According to Stutchbury and Fox (2009), all research in situations that involve people interacting with each other will have an ethical dimension to be strictly considered. This can vary from, for instance, ‘thinking with care’ about the integrity of both the research and its participants, a continuous and reflexive engagement with the principle of informed consent (Klykken, 2021); emergency settings, and fragility as arising through the unequal distribution of resources and social goods, and through the denial of voice in key decisions impacting upon one's life (Fox et al., 2020), to the need of complying with ethical considerations in educational research involving children (Pillay, 2014; Abrar & Sidik, 2019).

Ethical principles are intended to guide the behavior of researchers and offer security and protection to participants. Thus, “we suggest that a helpful way in which to use this framework is to generate a set of

questions that could be used to interrogate a particular situation” (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009, p. 494).

Given the primacy of ethics in research, it would be argued that ethics needs to take center stage in any research being planned and executed (Laher et al., 2019). However, “ethical principles are not necessarily universal” (Hand, 2018, p. 188). This should be the reason that “no listing of principles of ethics can cover all eventualities” (Anderson & Arsenault, 2005, p. 26). For instance, ethics in methodology, when researching in an African context, do not always follow what is proposed in the western literature, since some ethics in research are context-specific (Ngozwana, 2018). Thus, “for gaining valid data and reliable findings, it is also vitally important for a researcher to be well-known with ethical, cultural, and practical aspects of the research context” (Hassan, 2019, p. 76).

The traditional and often dominant issues that emerge when considering research ethics involve obtaining informed consent from participants, protecting them from harm, and ensuring confidentiality (Hand, 2018). A conscientious ethical reflection on a research project can only be done with sufficient knowledge of potential participants' perspectives, i.e. an understanding of what they think about participation and of the social constraints they experience concerning participation. Such knowledge “can help researchers to avoid unintentionally creating situations where (...) participation is limited” (Richard & Bélanger, 2018, p. 71).

According to Nikkanen (2019), while researchers work in the field, interacting with people in their daily life, the work can neither be planned and controlled beforehand nor regulated in every detail. Thus, “often unforeseen situations require quick decisions on how to react and quick evaluation on whether the planned activity is still relevant” (p. 380).

A multiple case study (Birks et al., 2020) showed that academic misconduct is a systemic problem that manifests in various ways and requires similarly diverse approaches to management in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. This study recommended a greater consistency in policies and procedures, as a key to managing the mutations of academic misconduct that continue to plague the higher education (HE).

While in Central Asia researchers may want to obtain necessary approvals, to protect their own and their participants' safety, with people being generally reluctant to participate in research due to underdeveloped research culture and not seeing the value of research given that in most cases 'it stays only on paper and benefits only the researcher' (Jonbekova, 2018); in global South “community contexts ethical principles should pay special attention to issues related to resources, power relations between researchers and participants, and participants' abilities to consent given language barriers and literacy” (Laher et al., 2019, p. 397).

Due to contextual peculiarities, researchers encounter several methodological dilemmas, suggesting that more caution should be taken when using certain research methods. It is unavoidable to reflect on the role that educational institutions can adopt in the development of programs to promote a culture of academic integrity which: design experiences to foster learning, better prepare students to meet academic obligations, prevent dishonest actions and establish efficient processes to sanction who are responsible for academic breaches (Guerrero-Did et al., 2020).

In Mozambique, according to Mário et al. (2003), “research carried out by public HE institutions is perceived as critical to the production of fundamental and applied knowledge” (p. 94). However, there is a lack of knowledge about the need to follow specific ethical standards in the research, being an opportunity for EMU to educate faculty and students about the research ethics review process and the responsible conduct of research (Scarlar et al., 2008). This might be one of the reasons why Beverwijk et al. (2008) considered Mozambique as “a turbulent country” where “dynamics of policy processes and change can be different in countries in which fundamental structural elements (basic laws and regulations on decision making power, new institutions to implement and control the law) have yet to be developed and established” (p. 375).

The research-led vision, it's the main opportunity at EMU, whereas the competitive Mozambican HE landscapes are the main threat. Thus, defining the measurable, objective, and acceptable quality standards, to enable unbiased and uncontested performance classification, is surely one of the major challenges of internal quality assurance (Zavale et al., 2016).

Following available data, little is known about the ethical qualities of dissertations defended at EMU, from 2004 to 2019. For this reason, our interest was to assess the compliance with this methodological requirement for academic integrity. Our thesis is that educational research, at EMU, must be such as to ensure that is taking place following the rules, standards and codes, and has the appearance of integrity.

Whilst the experience of ethical review varies through countries and continents (Jonbekova, 2018); there is a common concern that the processes can be difficult, sometimes unclear, and obstructive (Ramrathan et al., 2017; McMahon & Milligan, 2021). Nevertheless, there is recognition that the ethical conduct of research is a moral and professional imperative and that ethical review boards have some role to play in its development. According to Ramrathan et al. (2017), “society has become sensitive to the idea that the rights of people should be protected, particularly those who are vulnerable” (p. 432). As such, the task for the research community is “to consider how a system based on compliance and the safeguarding of institutional positions can be engaged within such a way as to emphasize the moral and ethical conduct of research” (Butterwick et al., 2020, p. 7).

Given that social research faces a dilemma related to human choices, values, actions and norms, beliefs, culture, language, among others that are subjective and highly unpredictable; this area is molded by researchers’ views on society and that might put a question on its credibility. According to McMahon and Milligan (2021), this implies two problems: *subjective problems* – those related to the researchers themselves and *objective problems* – related to the research problems. Further, ethical issues include universality and variability, freedom and constraint, certainty, and uncertainty. Thus, only when viewed together, can the accumulative influence of such paradoxical ethical issues be understood (McMahon & Milligan, 2021). To overcome this, say Debnath and Chatterjee (2021), research ethics provides guidelines about the topics, data sources, and the balance between possible interpretations. So, to “improve the quality of research in social science research ethics must include critical and relevant social issues, verifiable documentation and impartial reporting” (p. 4).

In the examination of 150 theses from five large Mozambican universities, Coughlin (2015) found that 75% contained significant plagiarism. To counter this, the suggestion is that universities should apply the most efficacious measures for prevention and define and implement remedial and disciplinary actions appropriate for diverse cases.

Although in the institutional repository of the EMU there are thousands of research reports<sup>1</sup>, between theses and dissertations, little is known about the ethical qualities of educational research since we did not identify any specific study, dedicated to ethical issues of educational research. Given this reality, it is difficult to assess the integrity of dissertations defended from 2004 to 2019. Hence, this problem raised the following question: which ethical qualities can be found in Masters of Education dissertations at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique (2014 – 2019), in the light of the methodological tool for effective ethical analysis proposed by Stutchbury and Fox (2009)?

The objective of this study is to assess the ethical qualities of Masters of Education dissertations at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique (2014 – 2019), based on the methodological tool for effective ethical analysis proposed by Stutchbury and Fox (2009). Under this objective the study proposes the following questions: (i) Are there any ethical issues specifically stated in the dissertations? (ii) How ethical are the methodological procedures employed in the dissertations? and (iii) How can these dissertations be assessed under the methodological tool for effective ethical analysis proposed by Stutchbury and Fox (2009)?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research design

According to Stutchbury and Fox (2009), the educational research literature is not short of guidance concerning ethical issues. So, this literature “is extensive, but there is surprisingly little overlap or cross-referencing, making it difficult for students of educational research to be confident that they have considered all the ethical implications of their research project” (p. 502).

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.dsd.uem.mz/>.

To assess the ethical qualities of Masters of Education dissertations at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique (2014 – 2019), a three-stage process was employed: (1) creating a data collection frame (based on the combination between the literature review and dissertations), (2) collecting the data (from the EMU institutional repository), and (3) analyzing the data. This assessment was based on the methodological tool for effective ethical analysis proposed by Stutchbury and Fox (2009). It comprises four dimensions, namely: (i) consequential/utilitarian; (ii) external/ecological; (iii) relational; and (iv) deontological (see details in Table 2).

According to Stutchbury and Fox (2009), educational researchers are often guided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines (2004) or the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) research ethics framework (2005). The BERA guidelines cover the responsibilities of the researcher, the participants, the public, and funding agencies, as well as issues around publication and intellectual ownership, say Stutchbury and Fox (2009). They consist of 48 ‘should’ all based on the principle of ‘respect for people, respect for knowledge, respect for democratic values, and respect for the quality of educational research. The ethical grid as presented incorporates all of these principles at different levels, and the ESRC framework identifies six principles, all of which are covered in the grid. (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009).

This is qualitative research, with two major characteristics of systematic review and evaluation research (Lub, 2015; Newman & Gough, 2020; Farrington, 2003).

In the qualitative research, it can be expected that practitioners and policymakers will continue to make use of different types of qualitative evaluations-emphasizing different purposes and starting from different paradigms to evaluate their specific programs and policies using scientifically based evidence (Lub, 2015). Thus, all the more reason is “to let qualitative evaluation criteria correspond with the paradigms and lenses through which it can be assessed and the different functions that qualitative information can have” (p. 6).

Regarding the systematic review, it usually has some kinds of ‘review’ of existing knowledge presented distinctly from the methods of the proposed new primary research (Newman & Gough, 2020). We adopted systematic review not to find out what is already known from pre-existing research about phenomena, instead, we sought to ascertain how ethical this research is being done. Therefore, “the term research in an academic sense it is widely accepted that we mean a process of asking questions and generating knowledge to answer these questions using rigorous accountable methods” (p. 3).

Concerning evaluation research, we judged it important “to develop methodological quality standards for evaluation research that can be used by systematic reviewers, scholars, policymakers in assessing the validity of conclusions about the effectiveness of assessments” (Farrington, 2003, p. 67). We attempted to make progress toward the development of such standards by reviewing types of validity, methodological quality scales, and the challenge of realistic evaluation; since what Stutchbury and Fox (2009) propose is a way of thinking they would like to demonstrate that this approach incorporates much that has been written whilst responding to some conventional limitations highlighted in the literature.

### 2.1.1 Sampling strategy

For ethical reasons, related to our integrity, in the context of the preventative measures in the context of the covid-19, the health and safety protocols in the University did not allow us to handle dissertations in the printed version. For this reason, we used all the 76 dissertations available online, in the institutional repository, distributed as it follows: 2004 (four), 2005 (10), 2007 (three), 2009 (three), 2011 (three), 2012 (five), 2013 (six), 2014 (two), 2015 (11), 2016 (10), 2017 (three), 2018 (seven) and 2019 (nine) (see table one).

### 2.1.2 Data gathering and analysis

The first stage comprised the search of the literature on ethics in Educational Research: highlighting different experiences from North, Central and South America, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Africa. This task allowed us to understand the recent theoretical and empirical findings of ethics in Educational research. The subsequent stage consisted of the search of literature about ethical analysis. The goal of this was to find the theoretical and empirical basis under which a tool for effective ethical analysis would

take place. The third stage comprised the download of all dissertations available online on the institutional repository.

For data analysis, we used Stutchbury and Fox's ethical grid, considered by these authors as a "tool for effective ethical analysis". This framework encourages us "to view each situation from different philosophical perspectives and in doing so addresses issues about how to behave ethically, alongside methodological considerations, thus ensuring the integrity of the research" (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009, p. 489). During the data analysis a two-stage procedure was employed: in the first stage, we sought to check if the dissertations under study have a specific topic regarding ethical considerations, whereas in the second we sought to check if (whether there is or there isn't any specific topic regarding ethical issues in the dissertations) did the procedures comply with the methodology proposed by Stutchbury and Fox (2009).

Given the qualitative nature of this study, the ethical character of the dissertations is assessed comparing the ethical trustworthiness proposed by Stutchbury and Fox (2009). There are other ways this social reality could have been considered, but in this study we adopted a two-stage comparison: firstly, to verify the suitability of the ethical grid; and secondly, to ascertain if the requirements proposed in the ethical grid match the methodological procedures adopted by the Master of Education students, at EMU, when writing their dissertations.

Regarding ethical issues, dissertations had to be coded and, therefore, anonymity was guaranteed during all the steps of the study. Permission for the use of dissertations was previously and formally requested.

### 3. Result

To assess ethical qualities of Masters of Education dissertations at Eduardo Mondlane University, from 2014 to 2019, based on the methodological tool for effective ethical analysis, proposed by Stutchbury and Fox (2009) (Table two), we first checked if there is a section dedicated to ethical issues in each dissertation (see Table one).

**Table 1. Dissertations by specific area, gender and ethical specifications**

Year	Code	Area	Gender		Section for ethical issues?	
					Yes	No
2004	01	CS		Female		
	02	NSM		Female		
	03	NSM	Male			
	04	CS	Male			
2005	05	AE	Male			
	06	NSM	Male			
	07	AE	Male			
	08	NSM	Male			
	09	AE	Male			
	10	CS	Male			
	11	AE	Male			
	12	CS		Female		
	13	AE	Male			

	14	CS	Male			
<b>2007</b>	15	CS		Female		
	16	AE		Female		
	17	CS	Male			
<b>2009</b>	18	NSM		Female		
	19	NSM	Male			
	20	NSM	Male			
<b>2011</b>	21	AE	Male			
	22	EAM		Female		
	23	EAM		Female		
<b>2012</b>	24	NSM	Male			
	25	CS		Female		
	26	AE	Male			
	27	NSM		Female		
	28	AE	Male			
<b>2013</b>	29	CS	Male			
	30	NSM	Male			
	31	AE	Male			
	32	EAM	Male			
	33	AE		Female		
	34	EAM	Male			
<b>2014</b>	35	NSM	Male			
	36	EAM	Male			
<b>2015</b>	37	EAM	Male			
	38	FCT		Female		
	39	AE		Female		
	40	FCT		Female		
	41	FCT		Female		
	42	CS	Male			
	43	AE	Male			
	44	CS		Female		
	45	EAM		Female		
	46	NSM	Male			
47	EAM		Female			
<b>2016</b>	48	CS		Female		

	49	AE		Female		
	50	AE	Male			
	51	CS	Male			
	52	HESD		Female		
	53	EAM	Male			
	54	FCT	Male			
	55	CS	Male			
	56	AE	Male			
	57	CS	Male			
<b>2017</b>	58	HESD	Male			
	59	AE	Male			
	60	CS		Female		
<b>2018</b>	61	NSM	Male			
	62	EAM		Female		
	63	EAM		Female		
	64	EAM		Female		
	65	EAM		Female		
	66	EAM	Male			
	67	EAM	Male			
<b>2019</b>	68	EAM		Female		
	69	HESD	Male			
	70	EAM	Male			
	71	FCT		Female		
	72	CS	Male			
	73	EAM	Male			
	74	FCT		Female		
	75	EAM		Female		
	76	EAM	Male			
		<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>30</b>

AE: Adult Education

FCT: Familiar and Communitarian Therapy

CS: Curricular Studies

HESD: Higher Education Studies and Development

EAM: Educational Administration and Management NSM: Natural Sciences and Mathematics

Source: Institutional Repository, Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, Mozambique.

According to Table one, of the total 76 dissertations available in the repository, 20 are in the area of EAM, 17 are in the area of AE, 17 are in the area of CS, 13 are in the area of NSM, six from the FCT area, and

three of HESD.

Of the 20 dissertations in the area of EAM, 10 were written by male students and 10 by female students. Of the 17 dissertations in the area of AE, 14 were written by male students while the remaining three were by female students. Of the 17 dissertations in the area of CS, 10 were written by male students, and seven by female students. Of the 13 dissertations in the area of NSM, 10 were written by male students, and three by female students. Of the six dissertations in the area of FCT, five were written by female students and one by a male student. Finally, the three dissertations in the area of HESD were all written by male students.

According to Table one, 46 dissertations were written by male students, and 30 by female students. Additionally, 46 dissertations have, in the Methodology chapter, a section specifically reserved for ethical considerations, while the remaining 30 dissertations do not.

Of the 46 dissertations with a section specifically reserved for ethical issues, 26 were written by male students, and the remaining 20 by female students. While of the 30 dissertations that do not have a section specifically reserved for ethical issues, 20 were written by male students, and the remaining 10 by female students.

Regarding ethical issues by scientific areas, EAM has the highest number of dissertations, i.e., 15, followed by AE, with 10 dissertations, whereas HESD has the lowest number of dissertations, i.e., three.

The figures in Table two show that male students tend to surpass females, whether their dissertations have a specific section dedicated to ethical issues or not. This trend also prevails in the distribution of dissertations by scientific areas they belong to, except FCT.

Stutchbury and Fox (2009) interpreted each of Seedhouse's boxes as an aspect of the situation that should be considered within that level of thinking. They suggested that a helpful way in which to use this framework is to generate a set of questions that could be used to interrogate a particular situation. In thinking through the ethics of any piece of research, judgments will need to be made, say Stutchbury and Fox (2009). Following this proposal, Table two displays the ethical qualities of the dissertations, assessed under Stutchbury and Fox's methodological tool for effective analysis.

**Table 2. Ethical qualities of the dissertations according to the methodological tool for effective analysis proposed by Stutchbury and Fox (2009)**

Dimension	N	%
<b>Consequential/Utilitarian</b>		
Benefitting individuals		
Benefitting particular groups/organization		
Maximizing benefits for society		
Benefitting myself as the researcher		
Risk assessment	07	09.2
<b>External/Ecological</b>		
Cultural sensitivity	18	23.7
Showing awareness of all parts of an institution/research setting	10	13.2
Planning responsive communication - awareness of multiple perspectives	05	06.6
Meeting responsibilities to sponsors	02	02.6
Following codes of practice	33	43.4

Researching within the law	15	19.7
<b>Relational</b>		
Establishing trust	24	31.6
Avoiding imposition	36	47.4
Respecting autonomy	31	40.8
Collaborating and offering reciprocity	26	34.2
Confirmation of findings	14	18.4
Respecting people equally	16	21.0
<b>Deontological</b>		
Avoidance of wrong	38	50.0
Avoidance of harm	45	59.2
Showing fairness	36	47.4
Telling the truth	24	31.6
Keeping promises	02	02.6

According to Table two, seven dissertations comply with the requirements of the risk assessment, which belong to the first dimension (i.e., consequential/utilitarian).

In the ecological/external dimension, there is a record of 33 dissertations “following codes of practice”, 18 highlighting cultural sensitivity, 15 “researching within the law”, 10 “showings awareness of all parts of an institution/research setting”, two “planning responsive communication – awareness of multiple perspectives”, and two “meeting responsibilities to sponsors”.

In the relational dimension, there is a record of 36 dissertations “avoiding imposition”, 31 “respecting autonomy”, 26 “collaborating and offering reciprocity”, 24 “establishing trust”, 16 “respecting people equally”, and 14 confirming findings.

In the deontological dimension, there is a record of 45 dissertations “approaching issues of avoidance of harm”, 38 “approaching avoidance of wrong”, 36 “showing fairness”, 24 “telling the truth”, and two “keeping promises”.

In general, this data show that all the dissertations tend to comply below 50% with the requirements of the four dimensions proposed in Table two. In the deontological dimension, the dissertations have the highest compliance, followed by the relational, and the ecological/external dimensions. In the consequential/utilitarian dimension, there is a record of the lowest compliance.

#### 4. Discussion

The fact that dissertations defended before 2009 do not have any section dedicated to ethical issues (see Table one) demands special attention, to ascertain the possible causes of this phenomenon. Further, it is also important to identify the underlying causes of this change, from 2009 upwards. According to Creswell (2012), since, “ethics has become a more pervasive idea stretching from the origins of a research study to its completion and distribution” (p. 23), ethical issues characterize the procedures followed throughout the research process. Thus, it is unavoidable to follow the required steps if the major goal is to achieve the objectives the research is intended to, within the logic of integrity.

Attempting to the data displayed in table one, there are two possible reasons why dissertations defended before 2009 do not have any special section dedicated to ethical issues: (i) students might be under-prepared to state in a detailed way how they undertook their research, or (ii) simply they are not conscious enough about the need to comply with the ethical procedures. Therefore, there is also a subsequent need

to understand the emergency of a specific section dedicated to ethical issues in the dissertations defended from 2009 upwards. As argued by Bassegy and Owan (2019), scholars have made mistakes, due to ignorance or lack of awareness, although numerous ethics must be followed for effective educational research management and practice. Thus, “the onus is now on students, researchers, and scholars to abide by such ethics for improved problem solving and effective decision making in researches in education and beyond” (p. 1300). However, there are 12 dissertations defended from 2009 upwards, without any specific section dedicated to ethical procedures (see table one).

Despite that, a purely administrative process of review is inadequate to ensure the ethical conduct of research, especially qualitative research (Hand, 2018), the accomplishment of this requirement is important because by considering the explanation of ethical procedures the researcher has to state inevitably all the steps of the research. Rather, say Hand (2018), it is argued that ethical research entails the resolution of a potential series of ethical dilemmas as they arise when researching. As such, “the ethical conduct of research is a matter of researcher formation and development” (p. 72). Within this context, “it is vital that researchers feel free or act autonomously at all stages of the research, from planning to implementation, interpretation of the data collected and its publication” (Sahin & Kesik, 2020, p. 79). Due to the need to ascertain how ethical was the process of conducting research aimed at fulfilment of the requirements of Masters of Education at EMU, we used the ethical grid drawn up from Stutchbury and Fox's methodological tool (see table two).

According to table two the “consequential/utilitarian” dimension is represented by seven dissertations, at the level of “risk assessment”, corresponding to 9.2% of the dissertations. As Marseille and Kahn (2019) explain, efficiency concerns as expressed in utilitarianism and cost-effectiveness analysis will often be the best guide to rapidly securing those rights for as many people as possible. These data reveal that below tenth part of the dissertations consider the utilitarian dimension, but only at the level of risk assessment. Therefore, students tend to pay attention to risk assessment when doing their research, rather than exploring the remaining levels of this dimension. Despite that this is the only level being considered, at the utilitarian dimension, it can be argued that there are some achievements in this regard, since these data suggest that students are conscious about the need for assessing the risk.

In the “external/ecological” dimension, the highest level is “following codes of practice” with 33 dissertations, corresponding to 43.4%, whereas the lowest level is “meeting responsibilities to sponsors” with two dissertations, corresponding to 2.6%. The remaining levels, i.e., “cultural sensitivity” with 18 dissertations, “showing awareness of all parts of an institution/research setting” with 10 dissertations, “planning responsive communication – awareness of multiple perspectives” with five dissertations, and “researching within the law”, with 15 dissertations, correspond, respectively, to 23.7%; 13.2%; 6.6%; and 19.7%. As suggested by Pataki et al (2020), “to institutionally support students, the codes of ethics of salient professional organizations should be updated to reflect the socio-ecological implications of knowledge production and practice” (p. 744). Special attention should be paid to the fact that students are considering more “following codes of practice” than any other level in this dimension (see table two). Therefore, this level corresponds to more than 40% of the dissertations. But, on the opposite hand, there are only two dissertations (i.e., 2.6%) considering the need for “meeting responsibilities to sponsors”. A possible explanation for this seems to be the scarcity of sponsoring opportunities for students in Mozambique.

In the “relational” dimension, the highest level is “avoiding imposition” with 36 dissertations, corresponding to 47.4%, whereas the lowest level is “respecting persons equally”, with 16 dissertations, corresponding to 18.4%. The remaining levels, i.e., “establishing trust” with 24 dissertations, “respecting autonomy” with 31 dissertations, “collaborating and offering reciprocity” with 26 dissertations, and “confirmation of findings” with 14 dissertations, correspond, respectively, to 31.6%; 40.8%; 34.2%; and 18.4%. “The commitment of theorizing research ethics and ethical decision making is dependent on the concrete every day circumstances of the researcher and the researched, and on how these play into the situated context of their relational encounter and connectedness” (Hilppö et al., 2019, p. 412). This dimension, with 36 dissertations, corresponding to 47.4%, reveals the highest consideration to “avoidance of imposition” during the research on behalf of other levels. Indeed, it is easily noted that avoiding imposition during the research is one of the most disseminated practices amongst students when it comes to complying with ethical procedures.

In the “deontological dimension”, the highest level is “avoidance of harm” with 45 dissertations, corresponding to 59.2%, whereas the lowest is “keeping promises” with two dissertations, corresponding to 2.6%. The remaining levels, i.e., “avoidance of wrong” with 38 dissertations, “showing fairness” with 36 dissertations, and “telling the truth” with 24 dissertations, correspond, respectively, to 50%; 47.4%; and 31.6%. From a deontological perspective, an act is simply right or wrong, despite its consequences. Deontologists argue that if a moral rule can be violated in one situation, it can be violated in any situation, and therefore stop being a moral rule (Laakasuo & Sundvall, 2016). In this dimension, “avoidance of harm” and “avoidance of wrong” are the highest dimensions being considered. It means that in the “deontological” dimension students do pay more attention to both levels than any other, being, this, an important dimension in the ethical procedures.

It is argued that the research ethics committees not only safeguard ethical standards but also encourage researchers to ensure that the scientific validity and methodology of the studies was appropriate (Davies, 2020). Thus, assessing the degree to which structural and functional variations in research ethics committees influence the protection of participants should be an aim of future in-depth functional quality evaluations (Yakubu et al., 2017).

In their study, Selemani et al (2018) found that students plagiarised intentionally because of laziness and poor time management in Mozambique. They also found that failure by academics to detect and punish plagiarism, due to workload, may have encouraged students to commit plagiarism. Therefore, “students were more willing to be punished through warning and rewriting their plagiarised assignment because these forms of sanctions did not jeopardize their academic career” (p. 13). These findings represent a significant challenge to educational researchers at EMU, since researchers' misconduct is formally recognized as a serious offense to academic integrity. Thus, measures are expected when it comes to strengthening the efforts toward a strong HE subsystem in Mozambique. Low academic conscientiousness indicates a low tendency towards hard work in achieving high quality learning outcomes.

Although ethical procedures may vary throughout the countries, as explains Jonbekova (2018), it is important to determine what systems exist for research oversight in these institutions and what steps might be taken to move additional institutions toward compliance with norms (Yakubu et al., 2017). An example comes from Nigeria, where concerns are raised by the fact that many research studies are being conducted in social and behavioral science faculties in more than 45 universities, even without research ethics committees, say Yakubu et al. (2017).

To address these situations, policymakers and research ethics committees are expected to ensure that “training in research ethics typically focuses on professionals and on the interpretation of research ethical guidelines” (Kasule et al., 2016, p. 18). However, “it is not possible to anticipate all questions of research ethics, as there are problems that lie outside the law” (Colnerud, 2015, p. 250). The results of this study imply, therefore, the need for a research ethics committee at EMU, to rule and regulate academic research integrity.

While uncertainty warrants ethical consideration, increased ethical scrutiny and restricting the conduct of such research raises its ethical challenges (Facca et al., 2020). Thus, this issue highlights that greater efforts should be made by researchers and other decision makers to influence the application of research into policies and practices; otherwise the culture of weak academic integrity will persist.

Whilst there is much literature related to the ethics committee and its impact on the educational researcher, there is still little conceptualization of how the educational researcher and research committees might work together to take account of certain methodologies – such as action research – and arrive at shared interpretations of the acceptable range of ethical good practice (Brown et al., 2020).

## 5. Conclusion

All societies, groups, communities or professions assign and create their own set of rules or ethical code of conduct, becoming a common practice for all to follow such norms. The data analysis revealed that about 60% of the dissertations have ethical issues specifically stated in the methodology chapter. Further, the methodological procedures employed in the dissertations can be considered ethically acceptable, in the external/ecological, relational, and deontological dimensions; while the consequential/utilitarian

dimension has the lowest consideration. Thus, these dissertations can be considered reasonably ethical, except in the consequential/utilitarian dimension.

These dissertations, when assessed under the methodological tool for effective ethical analysis proposed by Stutchbury and Fox (2009), can be considered slightly acceptable in the deontological dimension, where the highest level is above 50%, while in the remaining three dimensions, i.e., external, relational and ecological, levels are below 50%.

To achieve high levels of academic integrity, it is necessary to identify the most effective strategies which promote the correct academic practices; in order to prevent fraud and promote ethical culture, given that EMU aims to change the paradigm, from a teaching-led university to become a research-led university.

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