



*Research Paper*

## **Semantics of Power in the Academic Research Process: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Experiences of Students and Graduates of Tehran University**

Ramin Najafi<sup>1</sup>, Abasalat Khorasani<sup>2</sup>, Mahmoud Haghani<sup>3\*</sup>, and Mahmoud Abolghasemi<sup>4</sup>

1. PhD student in Higher Education Development Planning, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran. [ra\\_najafi@sbu.ac.ir](mailto:ra_najafi@sbu.ac.ir)
2. Associate Professor, Department of Higher Education, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran. [A-Khorasani@sbu.ac.ir](mailto:A-Khorasani@sbu.ac.ir)
3. Corresponding Author: Assistant Professor, Department of Higher Education, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran. [M\\_haghani@sbu.ac.ir](mailto:M_haghani@sbu.ac.ir)
4. Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Development, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran. [m-abolghasemi@sbu.ac.ir](mailto:m-abolghasemi@sbu.ac.ir)

**Received: 2019-12-13**

**Accepted: 2021-02-24**

### **Abstract**

Since power relations in academic research, especially group and team research, are undeniable, identifying the semantics of power in the research process using the experiences of students and graduates has been the purpose of this study. The research design was qualitative using the descriptive phenomenological method. In order to collect qualitative data, in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 students and graduates of Tehran University using Criterion-based sampling strategy. In order to analyze the data, the Stokes- Colaizzi-Kane analysis method was used. Based on research findings, ethics, freedom of action, explicit control, latent control, irresponsibility, influence, cooperation and support and guidance

have been identified as meanings of power in the research process. According to the findings, due to the lack of positive experience of research supervisors' influence on students, the weakness of research leadership in the academic research process is evident.

**Keywords:** *Power, Research, Immoral authorship, University, Phenomenology.*

## **Introduction**

Power does not have a fixed form or substance; rather, it is a number of dynamic and heterogeneous relationships (Flohr, 2016). Because of this dynamic as well as its obviousness, there is no consistent and comprehensive definition of power (Bundy-Fazioli, et al, 2013; Pfeffer, 2003). Thus, according to Dahl, some students think that the whole study of power is a "bottomless swamp" (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007). This makes power inherently important and sensitive, especially in complex and relation-based organizations such as universities. Academic research, especially group research, is one of the areas of the university where power is clearly seen; because in these researches, actors are different in terms of identity, position, abilities, personality types, desires and aspirations. Thus, power relations and inequalities in this process are its inherent features (Louw & Fouche, 1999; Barretta-Herman & Garrett, 2000; Hemer, 2012).

Various research findings show that power in the research process can be considered as a fundamental problem. Research Findings by Louw and Fouche (1999), Barretta-Herman and Garrett (2000), Bennett and Taylor (2003), Sandler and Russell (2005), Street et al. (2010), Izadinia (2014), Bozeman and Youtie (2016) , As well as Macfarlane (2017) show that the power and position of individuals can influence decisions related to the authorship credit, the order of authors, the exclusion of authors and the inclusion of guest authors in a study and lead them to immoral paths. Thus, on the one hand, there is no consensus on the definition of power, and on the other hand, the research process as one of the manifestations of social relations in higher education is an action-based situation that is influenced by the power of individuals and their tendency to abuse it. Therefore, in this research, we have decided to identify the meaning of power in the research process based on the views and experiences of students and graduates.

## **Methodology**

The present study is of practical type due to the applicability of its data in policy making and planning of higher education in Iran. Since the exploration and description of the experiences of students and graduates from the exercise of power in the research process has been the purpose of

the research, the research plan is qualitative. In this research, the researcher seeks to describe the common features of the experiences of students and graduates and tries to extract these features from the research experiences that they express based on communication and interaction with them. Therefore, it seems that the most appropriate research method for the present study is phenomenology; because phenomenology is a study of human experience and the ways in which things reveal themselves to us through that experience (Sokolowski, 2005). Given that the researcher conceives of power relations as a somewhat unknown phenomenon or entity that needs to describe its features, therefore, the phenomenological approach of Moustakas (1994), which is a descriptive approach, is more appropriate, which includes four main processes: Preparation for data collection; Collecting data; Organize, analyze and combine data; And summary, implications and findings. In this study, students and graduate students and graduates have formed the study population; because they are mainly the power target of actors in the process of academic research. Research sampling method is non-purposive and criterion-based. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 students and graduates of the University of Tehran. In order to realize the validity of the research, measures such as long-term and continuous participation of the researcher in the research, avoiding early conclusions and reviewing the research colleagues have been done. To make the findings more reliable, the data collection and analysis process is accurately described, the data is presented in written and visual form, and the researcher again refers to the relevant research literature. Also, in order to analyze the data, Stokes-Colaizzi-Kane analysis method was used.

## **Results**

Using direct and indirect questions, researchers sought the meaning and perception of students and graduates of the University of Tehran from the power of their research experiences. In answer to this question, students and graduates have identified power in the research process as a concept that can be positive, negative and even neutral, as well as guiding or deterrent. Based on the content analysis of the data, power in research experiences means ethics, freedom of action, explicit control, latent control, irresponsibility, influence, cooperation, and support and guidance. Table 1 shows these themes with the themes describing them.

**Table 1:** Main and subsidiary themes of power in research.

<b>Main theme</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Main theme</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
Ethics	Mutual respect of the professor to the student in the order of the authors professor's ethical behavior in publishing research results The professor opposes the inclusion of her/his name in student research	Irresponsibility	Irresponsibility of students and professors  Feeling lonely in the dissertation  Being alone in a sea of thesis
Explicit control	Power as a force  Power as the imposition of dissertation results  Looking down on the student by the professor  Directing research topics to cover journal issues  Students at service professor in the field of research collaboration	Latent control	students need to professor's name to publish their article Inability of the student to make a simple request to the professor Fear of the professor, the cause of not determining the order of the authors Fear of consequences, the cause of the student's lack of resistance to department power Unwritten rules that prevent the supervisor from being chosen from outside the department
Influence	Power as influence		Unwritten rules for choosing the advisor by the department
Freedom of action	Power as freedom of action Freedom of action in choosing a supervisor and advisor Freedom of action in choosing the research topic Determining the order of the authors by the student	Cooperation	Power as cooperation  Equal power and participation in the research process Professor's participation and professional ethics  Consulting department professors in the dissertation process
Support and guidance	Power as support  The guiding role of the professor		The participation of the professor than what you expect Using all department professors for advice and

Main theme	Sub-themes	Main theme	Sub-themes
	Guiding the researcher by the senior researcher through her/his scientific power Respect, trust and participation of the professor, the reason for students' participation Friendship, interaction and mutual understanding, a factor for balanced participation		referee Specifying the job description at the beginning of the research

## Conclusion

Since power or ability to emerge and reveal needs to influence the target of power, the closest and most important meaning to power is the concept of influence. Therefore, it is very difficult to distinguish between the two concepts. Traces of this concept can be seen in many definitions (including Fiske & Berdahl, 2007). But the important point is that since the concept of leadership is deeply related to the influence of others, due to the lack of positive experience about the influence of student research Supervisors, the weakness of research leadership in the academic research process is evident. According to the research findings, the following practical suggestions are presented:

- Holding faculty development workshops focusing on student supervision and guidance styles;
- Establish institutional mechanisms to monitor the performance of supervisors, advisors and referees;
- Feasibility study and implementation of an institution to support victims of bullying in the research process.

## References

- Barretta-Herman, A. L., & Garrett, K. J. (2000). Faculty-student collaboration: Issues and recommendations. *Advances in Social Work*, 1(2), 148-159.
- Bennett, D. M., & Taylor, D. M. (2003). Unethical practices in authorship of scientific papers. *Emergency Medicine*, 15(3), 263-270.
- Bozeman, B., & Youtie, J. (2016). Trouble in paradise: Problems in academic research co-authoring. *Science and engineering ethics*, 22(6), 1717-1743.

- Bundy-Fazioli, K., Quijano, L. M., & Bubar, R. (2013). Graduate students' perceptions of professional power in social work practice. *Journal of Social Work Education, 49*(1), 108-121.
- Fiske, S. T., & Berdahl, J. (2007). Social power. *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles, 2*, 678-692.
- Flohr, M. (2016). Regicide and resistance: Foucault's reconceptualization of power. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory, 17*(1), 38-56.
- Hemer, S. R. (2012). Informality, power and relationships in postgraduate supervision: Supervising PhD candidates over coffee. *Higher Education Research & Development, 31*(6), 827-839.
- Izadinia, M. (2014). Authorship: The hidden voices of postgraduate TEFL students in Iran. *Journal of Academic Ethics, 12*(4), 317-331.
- Louw, D. A., & Fouche, J. B. (1999). Authorship credit in supervisor-student collaboration: Assessing the dilemma in psychology. *South African Journal of Psychology, 29*(3), 145-148.
- Macfarlane, B. (2017). The ethics of multiple authorship: power, performativity and the gift economy. *Studies in higher education, 42*(7), 1194-1210.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage.
- Pfeffer, J. (2003). Developing and exercising power and influence. *Organizational influence processes, 15-32*.
- Sandler, J. C., & Russell, B. L. (2005). Faculty-student collaborations: Ethics and satisfaction in authorship credit. *Ethics & behavior, 15*(1), 65-80.
- Sokolowski, R. (2005). *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Translated by Mohammad Reza Ghorbani. Tehran: New Step Publications (In Persian).
- Street, J. M., Rogers, W. A., Israel, M., & Braunack-Mayer, A. J. (2010). Credit where credit is due? Regulation, research integrity and the attribution of authorship in the health sciences. *Social Science & Medicine, 70*(9), 1458-1465.



This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

---