Content Analysis of Research Data Policies in Australian Universities: Postprint

Authors: Xing Wenming, Hua Xiaoqin

Date: 2023-10-08T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

[Purpose / Significance] By analyzing the current status and characteristics of research data policies in Australian universities, this study provides references for the formulation and implementation of research data policies in Chinese universities. [Method / Process] Based on 27 collected research data policies, this paper analyzes the basic information of these policies (including policy makers, formulation time, and revision cycle), the main content (encompassing preface, scope of application, relevant concepts and definitions, data management subjects and responsibilities, data management plan, data ownership, data storage and preservation, data access and sharing utilization, data transfer, policy implementation responsible persons, etc.), as well as related policies. On this basis, the characteristics of research data policies in Australian universities are summarized. [Results / Conclusion] Research data policies in Australian universities are characterized by policy standardization, clear content, well-defined rights and responsibilities, emphasis on support and services for researchers, and attention to correlation and coordination with other policies.

Full Text

Preamble

Content Analysis of Research Data Policies in Australian Universities
Xing Wenming[1], Hua Xiaoqin[2]

Abstract

[**Purpose/Significance**] This study analyzes the current state and characteristics of research data policies in Australian universities to provide reference for the formulation and implementation of such policies in Chinese universities. [**Method/Process**] Using 27 collected research data policies as the sample,

this paper examines their basic characteristics (including policy makers, effective dates, and revision cycles), main content (encompassing preambles, scope, definitions, data management roles and responsibilities, data management plans, data ownership, storage and preservation, access and sharing, data transfer, and responsible officers), and related policies. Based on this analysis, the distinctive features of Australian university research data policies are summarized. [**Result/Conclusion**] Australian university research data policies exhibit characteristics of standardized formulation, clear content, well-defined rights and responsibilities, emphasis on researcher support and services, and attention to policy coordination and synergy.

Keywords: research data policy; research data management; research data sharing

1 Introduction

Research data constitutes a crucial scientific output. With the proliferation of data-intensive research paradigms, research data has become increasingly recognized as a fundamental resource that drives new scientific discoveries, reduces research costs, standardizes research processes, and promotes research integrity. Consequently, research data management and sharing have emerged as strategic priorities, garnering significant attention from international organizations, government agencies, and research institutions.

However, research data management and sharing face numerous obstacles, including low willingness to share, difficulties in controlling data quality, and lack of funding for data management [1]. Formulating relevant policies to address these challenges has become a common international practice. Research and educational institutions serve as both primary producers of research data and major recipients of research funding, making them key actors in research data management [2]. Their research data policies have thus attracted considerable attention. In March 2018, China's "Administrative Measures for Scientific Data" stipulated that "relevant research institutes, universities, and enterprises as legal entities are the responsible bodies for scientific data management" and that "establishing and improving internal scientific data management systems" constitutes one of their essential duties [3]. Against this backdrop, formulating institutional research data policies to promote and regulate data sharing has become an important responsibility and urgent task for Chinese research institutions. Currently, most Chinese research institutions, particularly universities, have yet to develop their own research data policies. In contrast, countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States have established relatively systematic and comprehensive research data policies that can provide valuable lessons for China in developing and improving its scientific data policies and advancing data sharing practices [4]. This paper conducts a comprehensive investigation of Australian university research data policies and performs content analysis to provide reference for Chinese universities in formulating and implementing their own policies.

Funding: This work is supported by the National Social Science Fund of China under the project "Policy Guarantee Research on Scientific Research Data Management and Sharing from the Perspective of Information Life Cycle" (Grant No.: 15CTQ021).

Authors: Xing Wenming (ORCID: 0000-0001-8605-9107), Ph.D., Associate Professor, E-mail: xwm789@126.com; Hua Xiaoqin (ORCID: 0000-0002-8991-2190), M.S., Librarian.

Received: June 26, 2018; **Accepted:** October 26, 2018

2 Literature Review

The development of Australian research data policies originated with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (2007) [5], which explicitly required every university to formulate its own research data policy. Subsequently, the Australian National Data Service (ANDS) released the *Outline of a Research Data Management Policy for Australian Universities/Institutions* in 2010 [6], providing guidance for universities and effectively promoting policy development. In international scholarship, N. S. Mauthner and O. Parry analyzed policy and practice factors affecting research data sharing, noting that institutional policies often overlooked practical challenges, such as researchers' reluctance to deposit data in repositories despite willingness to share with colleagues based on relationships or common interests. They recommended that institutions consider these factors and provide researchers with more options to better promote data sharing [7]. R. Higman and S. Pinfield examined the relationship between research data management and sharing in UK universities, finding that while data sharing should be the starting point for policy formulation, the primary driver was actually requirements from research funders [8].

Domestic researchers have shown considerable interest in Australian university research data policies to inform policy development in China. Existing research can be categorized into three areas: (1) macro-level examinations of research data policy systems in developed countries, with studies by Si Li and Xing Wenming [9], Tang Yi [10], Zhang Yao and Lü Junsheng [11], Dong Kun and Gu Liping [12], He Qingfang [4], and Wen Fangfang [13] demonstrating that the UK, Australia, and US have established comprehensive multi-level policy frameworks covering national/government, funding agencies, research institutions, data repositories, and publishers; (2) comparative studies of university policies across countries, with research by Si Li and Li Yueting [14], Ding Pei [15], and Zhuang Xiaozhe [16] investigating policy characteristics across nations; and (3) specific analyses of Australian university policies, with studies by Wanyan Dengdeng [17] and Zhou Xiaoyan and Zai Bingxin [18-19] examining management and sharing policies, preservation policies, and policy formulation processes.

These studies provide valuable insights into Australian practices, but suffer from two limitations: first, some adopt a macro perspective on international

policy systems, limiting in-depth analysis of Australian policies; second, given the rapid development of Australian policies, earlier studies or those based on partial samples may not reflect current practices. Building on previous research, this paper comprehensively investigates recent developments in Australian university research data policies and conducts in-depth content analysis to provide reference for Chinese universities.

3 Research Design and Approach

To comprehensively understand Australian university research data policies, this study surveyed the *Australian University Research Data Registry* published by ANDS [20], which details policies, resources, and services (including repositories, tools, and guidelines) for all 39 Australian universities. Most universities have developed both a Code of Conduct for Research/Responsible Conduct of Research Policy (containing research data management provisions) and a dedicated research data policy, while a few have only one type. For analytical consistency, this study selected only dedicated research data policies (27 total) as the sample, listed in .

The analysis proceeds by first examining basic policy information (approving authorities, effective dates, revision cycles), then employing content analysis to systematically review main policy components. Based on the ANDS *Outline of a Research Data Management Policy for Australian Universities/Institutions* [6], policies were categorized into: preamble (policy statements, objectives), scope, definitions, data management roles and responsibilities, data ownership, storage and preservation, access and sharing, researcher departure procedures, responsible officers, and related policies. Key points were summarized to inform Chinese policy development.

4 Basic Information on the Policies

4.1 Policy Approving Authorities

Many Australian university research data policies document their approving authority. Analysis reveals two primary types: (1) academic boards or senates (10 and 3 policies respectively), and (2) university vice-chancellors or presidents (9 policies). RMIT University's policy was approved by the Executive Director of the Research Office.

4.2 Policy Effective Dates

Among the 27 policies, 26 indicated their effective date. Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper] shows the number of policies by year. Australian universities began formulating research data policies in 2008, with a fluctuating upward trend peaking after 2012. This reflects the influence of the 2007 *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* [23], which mandated institutional guidelines, prompting universities to develop their own policies.

4.3 Policy Revision Cycles

Twenty-three policies indicated revision dates. Analysis of revision intervals (in years) shows that 3-year cycles were most common (12 policies), followed by 1-year and 5-year cycles (3 each). Most Australian university policies are revised within 5 years, demonstrating commitment to regular updates. Nine policies also specified next revision dates. However, some policies have not been revised as scheduled. For instance, the University of Newcastle's guideline indicated a September 2013 revision, and the University of Melbourne's policy a November 2013 revision, but updated versions could not be located.

5 Content of Australian University Research Data Policies

While most policies include sections, the headings vary. Drawing on the ANDS outline [6], this analysis organizes policy content into: preamble (policy statements, objectives), scope, definitions, data management roles and responsibilities, data ownership, storage and preservation, access and sharing, researcher departure procedures, responsible officers, and related policies.

5.1 Preamble

5.1.1 Policy Statements Fourteen policies include policy statements, most commonly labeled "Statement" or "Introduction" (e.g., Charles Darwin University, RMIT University). Other terms include "Overview," "Preamble," and "Principle." These statements typically cover: (1) legal basis/background, with many citing the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (e.g., Charles Darwin University's policy states it is "based on the fundamental principles of the Code"); (2) significance and value of research data, with Australian Catholic University's policy noting that "research data is a valuable product of research activities that helps researchers, staff, universities, and research institutions better understand research profiles, increase returns on public investment, enhance research transparency, and serve as evidence of research outcomes"; and (3) basic policy positions, such as Federation University Australia's statement that "the university is committed to establishing research data management standards to ensure adequate preservation of data and materials as evidence of research outcomes and for when results are questioned."

5.1.2 Policy Objectives Twenty-four policies include purpose statements, focusing on: (1) standardizing research data management and preservation to promote sharing and improve research efficiency; and (2) enhancing research transparency, quality, and integrity through proper preservation of data, materials, and records as evidence of outcomes. Central Queensland University's policy states its purpose is "to provide guidance for researchers and students in responsibly documenting, managing, and preserving research data, ensuring appropriate preservation as evidence of research outcomes and for when results are questioned."

5.2 Policy Scope

Twenty-two policies define scope, typically labeled "Scope," "Application," or "Audience." These define applicability in terms of both research activities (all research conducted at the university) and personnel (all individuals involved in research, including students, visitors, collaborators, and volunteers, regardless of location or status). Australian Catholic University's policy, for example, applies to: (1) all staff, affiliates, visitors, and students involved in university-related research, regardless of location; and (2) all research data and materials, regardless of format.

5.3 Definitions

Twenty-six policies provide definitions for key terms. Those appearing more than three times include: research data (24 times), researcher (15), primary material (12), metadata (11), research (9), research data management planning (8), research data management (7), data management (6), intellectual property (4), research student (4), research records (3), and staff (3). These definitions clarify terminology and facilitate policy implementation.

5.4 Data Management Roles and Responsibilities

Twenty-one policies specify data management responsibilities, covering responsible parties and data management plans.

5.4.1 Data Management Responsible Parties Nine policies identify responsibility holders, with seven universities (Australian Catholic University, Charles Darwin University, Edith Cowan University, La Trobe University, Monash University, Queensland University of Technology, University of Southern Queensland) stating that data management is a shared responsibility among researchers, staff, students, and the institution. RMIT University's policy assigns responsibility solely to researchers, while the University of Adelaide's policy states that "individual researchers bear management responsibility for data related to their research."

Fourteen policies delineate institutional and researcher responsibilities in dedicated sections. Institutional responsibilities include: (1) ensuring policy implementation and researcher oversight; (2) providing guidance, support, and training on research methods, data management, and research ethics; (3) offering facilities and services for data storage and preservation; and (4) ensuring secure, reliable storage, access, sharing, and handling of research data. Researcher responsibilities include: (1) complying with relevant policies, standards, and guidelines; (2) negotiating data management plans; (3) ensuring proper collection, processing, documentation, storage, preservation, and sharing of data; and (4) ensuring data security and confidentiality.

5.4.2 Research Data Management Plans Research Data Management Plans (RDMPs) describe how research data will be collected, organized, managed, stored, backed up, maintained, and shared. Sixteen policies mention RDMPs, with ten specifying required content: (1) data collection; (2) data ownership and attribution; (3) storage location, methods, and retention periods; (4) access and sharing agreements; (5) data reuse/sharing; and (6) disposal of data beyond retention periods. Queensland University of Technology's policy notes that "the university provides an online research data management planning tool to help researchers create effective plans."

5.5 Research Data Ownership

Twenty-two policies address data ownership, generally stating that data from research conducted at or using university facilities belongs to the university (or as determined by intellectual property policies), except where laws, funding agreements, or collaboration agreements specify otherwise. La Trobe University's policy states that "according to the university's intellectual property policy, ownership of research data created by university staff belongs to the university, subject to third-party agreements."

Some policies address ownership when researchers leave. Deakin University's procedure states that "data ownership and storage should be documented before project commencement, clarifying whether ownership and storage are affected by researcher departure or collaboration termination." Federation University Australia and the University of New England require that data and materials remain with the university unless a written agreement with the legal office is signed.

5.6 Research Data Storage and Preservation

Nearly all policies address data storage and preservation, covering: (1) storage location; (2) retention periods; (3) data security; and (4) disposal of data beyond retention periods.

5.6.1 Storage Location Sixteen policies specify storage locations, emphasizing that data should be stored in secure, university-provided or approved facilities. Curtin University's policy states that "the university will provide secure and reliable storage facilities… research data and primary materials should be stored in university-provided facilities unless otherwise contractually agreed." The University of Adelaide requires that "all research data and primary materials must be stored in secure, accessible, and clearly identified locations approved by the university." Some institutions offer multiple options, such as Queensland University of Technology's *Data Storage Options* [37].

5.6.2 Retention Periods Twenty policies specify retention periods, which vary by discipline and research type. The University of Tasmania's policy states

that "minimum retention periods should be determined according to the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, university records management procedures, and legal, contractual, and funder requirements. Generally, all research data and primary materials should be retained for at least 5 years." Several universities (Flinders, Adelaide, Canberra, New England, South Australia, Tasmania, Newcastle) specify different retention periods for various data types. excerpts the University of Tasmania's provisions.

Retention periods must also consider special circumstances. The University of Canberra's policy states that "when research results are questioned or research misconduct is alleged, all data and materials must be retained until the matter is resolved."

5.6.3 Data Security Sixteen policies address data security from both institutional and procedural perspectives. Institutionally, policies require secure storage with regular backup, maintenance, and updates. Australian Catholic University's policy states that "research data must be stored securely to prevent theft, misuse, damage, or loss." Central Queensland University's policy specifies that "data, materials, and related records should be securely stored in at least three different locations. Researchers may keep an active copy on personal computers or portable drives, but original and master copies should not be stored on removable drives, USB devices, or laptops. All master copies should be stored on university-approved devices." Many policies emphasize that the university will provide facilities and guidance for secure storage, such as Charles Sturt University's commitment to "providing facilities for secure and reliable storage of research data."

5.6.4 Disposal of Data Beyond Retention Periods Twenty policies address data disposal principles and procedures. RMIT University's policy specifies: (1) consider whether minimum retention periods have been met and whether data retains value; (2) comply with legal, funder, and contractual requirements using appropriate, safe, and environmentally sound methods; (3) obtain approval from researchers or faculty heads; (4) retain data related to questioned results, legal allegations, or misconduct complaints until resolution; and (5) use irreversible destruction methods (especially for sensitive/confidential information). Several universities (Central Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania) require written approval for disposal.

5.7 Research Data Access and Sharing

Twenty-two policies address data sharing, access, and use. Policies establish obligations for both data producers and users. Data producers should share data post-project, subject to regulations, principles, and agreements. Curtin University's policy states that "research data should be made as widely and freely available as possible, subject to protecting participant privacy, confidential data, intellectual property, sensitive data, and contractual arrangements (including

funder and publisher requirements)." Flinders University's policy notes that "post-project or at appropriate stages, research data should be shared through open access agreements (e.g., Creative Commons licenses), subject to relevant regulations."

Data users must also comply with requirements. Central Queensland University's policy states that "publicly funded research must comply with funder access requirements: ARC-funded research must follow the *ARC Open Access Policy*; NHMRC-funded research must follow the *NHMRC Open Access Policy*." Charles Sturt University's policy requires that "researchers using data should consult producers or current managers and acknowledge them in publications according to academic conventions and citation principles; confidentiality must be maintained when accessing confidential information."

5.8 Data Handling When Researchers Leave

Twenty policies address data handling upon researcher departure. Most require that original data and materials remain with the university (unless otherwise agreed), though researchers may take copies. The University of South Australia's policy states that "when leaving, researchers may negotiate with faculty heads or research supervisors to take a copy for personal use, while original data remains with the university."

Some policies allow data transfer to new institutions. Central Queensland University's policy specifies that "if a researcher leaves for another institution, an agreement for transferring data and materials must be formed, complying with Central Queensland University's intellectual property policies." Other policies require departing researchers to arrange for data management and preservation, such as Edith Cowan University's requirement that "data custodians must identify appropriate successor custodians and update management plans before leaving."

5.9 Responsible Officers

Eleven policies identify officers responsible for policy implementation and interpretation. Most common are: (1) Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) (Australian Catholic University, Central Queensland University, Curtin University, University of Queensland); and (2) Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (University of Wollongong, Federation University Australia, University of Canberra). Other designations include Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Training and Performance Enhancement) at Deakin University and Executive Director (Research) at the University of Melbourne.

5.10 Related Policies and Regulations

Eighteen policies list related policies, frequently citing: codes of research conduct, copyright and intellectual property policies, privacy policies, records management policies, human research ethics policies, information and IT policies,

and open access policies. These fall into three categories: (1) funder requirements (e.g., *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, *ARC Open Access Policy*, *NHMRC Open Access Policy*, *NHMRC Data Sharing Statement*) that provide policy context; (2) relevant laws and institutional regulations (e.g., national IP, freedom of information, privacy and data protection laws, institutional codes, privacy policies, IP policies, records management policies) that serve as implementation references; and (3) supplementary procedures and guidelines (e.g., Australian Catholic University's *Research Data Retention Policy and Guidelines*, Charles Darwin University's *Research Data Management Procedure*, Flinders University's *Research Data Management Guidelines*, Griffith University's *Best Practice Guidelines for Researchers Managing Research Data and Primary Materials*) that support policy implementation.

6 Characteristics of Australian University Research Data Policies

6.1 Rapid Policy Development and Timely Updates

A 2014 survey identified 18 Australian universities with dedicated research data policies [43], while this study found 27—a 50% increase. As Section 4.3 shows, over 85% of policies indicate revision dates, with most revision cycles under 5 years, demonstrating commitment to regular updates.

6.2 Policy Drivers: Data Value and Regulatory Requirements

As Section 5.1 indicates, policy backgrounds and purposes include: (1) requirements from the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*; (2) recognition of research data value; and (3) promoting research standardization and sustainability. However, research shows that while data sharing should be the starting point, the primary driver is actually requirements from research managers/funders [8]. This suggests Chinese research management departments, particularly funders, should promptly issue research data policies to better drive institutional management and sharing practices.

6.3 Clear Rights and Responsibilities Centered on Data Management Plans

As Section 5.4 demonstrates, Australian universities have established a management mechanism centered on research data management plans with clear division of labor between institutions and researchers. Most policies require RDMPs and specify their contents, with some institutions providing planning tools. Policies clearly define responsibilities among university research offices, faculties, researchers, and data repositories, ensuring feasibility through coordinated efforts.

6.4 Emphasis on Researcher Support and Services

Research data management and sharing depend not only on researchers but also on institutional support. Australian policies explicitly state that universities and relevant departments bear responsibilities beyond oversight to provide support and services: offering guidelines and tools for RDMP development, providing storage facilities and services, delivering consultation and training, and ensuring secure, accessible data storage.

6.5 Attention to Policy Coordination and Synergy

Effective policy implementation requires coordination with related policies and regulations. As Section 5.10 shows, 18 policies list related policies, with many citing relevant regulations within the policy text. For example, Monash University's policy states that "Monash University recognizes that research data management must comply with relevant regulations, codes, and guidelines. This policy follows the provisions of the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*." This ensures policy consistency and facilitates implementation.

7 Conclusion

Australian universities have developed relatively comprehensive and standardized research data policies. This paper provides a thorough analysis of their basic information and main content to inform the development, improvement, and implementation of research data management and sharing policies in Chinese universities. Chinese universities should draw on these experiences to formulate relevant policies promptly, thereby promoting and safeguarding the development of research data management and sharing practices in China.

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Author Contributions: Xing Wenming: paper writing and revision; Hua Xiaoqin: data collection and analysis.

Content Analysis on Research Data Policies of Australian University

Xing Wenming[1], Hua Xiaoqin[2]

[1]School of Public Administration, Xiangtan University, Xiangtan 411105
[2]China Jiliang University Library, Hangzhou 310018

Abstract: [Purpose/significance] In order to understand the situation of research data policies formulated by Australian universities, so as to offer reference to the establishment and implementation of research data policies in Chinese universities. [Method/process] This paper took the collected 27 research data policies as sample, analyzed these policies' general information (including policy maker, effective date and the revision cycle), the policies' main content (including policy preamble, policy scope, definitions, roles and responsibilities, data management plan, data ownership, data storage and retention, data sharing and reuse, data transfer, the responsible officer, etc.), and the related policies, and on base of the analysis, it summarized the characteristic of Australian universities' research data policies. [Result/conclusion] The Australian universities' research data policies have the following characteristics: policies are normative,

content is clear, rights and responsibilities are clear, emphasis on support and service for researchers, and emphasis on correlation and collaboration with other policies.

Keywords: research data policy; research data management; research data sharing

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.