



EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Ethics Reviews of Educational Research Studies in Europe and Beyond: Challenges and Ways Forward

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Session Information

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EERA Session

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Room: OB-George Moore Auditorium

Chair/Discussant: George Head/ Pavel Zgaga

Contribution

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The main objectives of the European Educational Research Association (EERA) are to promote high-quality educational research for the benefit of education and society and to promote free and open dialogue concerning theory, methods and research ethics in education. Recent debates concerning research ethics practice demonstrate a need to re-examine this practice within the domain of educational research (Science Europe, 2015).

This mandatory component of educational research affects a large number of researchers and significantly influences the entire research process. In addition, the ethics reviews of educational studies involve a large number of reviewers who devote a considerable amount of time and energy to this component of empirical studies in education. However, this practice is often the subject of vigorous debates (Nicholls, Brehaut & Saginur, 2012; Schrag, 2011; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012).

Debates regarding ethics often lack the evidence required for informed decision-making and, following the 2015 conference in Budapest, the EERA Council initiated a study to examine educational researchers' experiences with, and attitudes toward, the research ethics review scope and practice. Results from this study are expected to contribute to a better understanding

of the issues related to the ethics in educational research and to the development of measures that can contribute to the improvement of this important component of educational research.

This study used a mixed method approach consisting of a combination of exploratory and explanatory sequential research methods (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). The study employed an online survey of 2015 ECER participants and EERA council members to assess the ethics review process in education. The online survey was developed after an extensive literature review (Lidz et al., 2012; Malouff, & Schutte, 2005; Kehagia, Tairyan, Federico, Glover & Illes, 2012; Plemmons, Brody & Kalichman, 2006) with input received from the EERA working group members. The online survey consists of open-ended questions related to the research ethics process, the participant experience with this type of academic work as well as the basic work-related characteristics and experience of the participants.

The survey sample consisted of 516 participants. In total, approximately 2,500 participants were invited to take part in this study during February 2016 and nearly 21% of the invitees responded to the survey. In addition, approximately 100 survey participants are expected to participate in an individual or focus group interview to discuss the results of this study and provide additional information to improve our understanding of ethical issues in educational research.

The quantitative data analysis entailed exploratory techniques and data visualization to describe the practice of the ethics review process in education. It also featured bivariate statistics to determine associations between the participants' attitudes and their experiences with this important component of the research process. Additionally, the study used multivariate analysis to reduce the number of observed variables. The qualitative data analysis will apply thematic analysis (Saldana, 2009) using software for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis.

Preliminary survey results demonstrate that the participants understand the meaning of the ethics review process in education and that most of them recognize the need for this type of evaluation. However, a significant number of participants are facing considerable difficulties when attempting to meet sometimes unclear requirements that delay their studies and diminish the efficiency and/or quality of their work.

Results demonstrate strong negative associations between the reported difficulties with the ethics review process and attitudes toward this practice. In addition, results from this study demonstrate an uneven development of institutional capacities and deficient application of available resources in the ethics review process. Preliminary results of qualitative data indicate some promising solutions that may increase the value of this important aspect of empirical studies in education.

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