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Applied Linguistics Journal Editor Perspectives: Research Ethics And Academic Publishing

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Abstract

Concern for research integrity and ethics has been a part of scholarly publishing since the earliest scientific journals were published. At the same time, scholarly publishing is a big business. Thus, journal editors must manage publication interests and ethics as well as research integrity and ethical issues. As ethics and integrity are deeply embedded in the research process, not only in terms of treatment of human subjects or methods for collecting, analyzing, and presenting, but also in all aspects of publishing, we investigate the role of journal editors in scholarly publishing for applied linguistics. Specifically, we examine the issues/challenges applied linguistics journal editors face in relation to research integrity and ethics, their knowledge, beliefs and practices, through an anonymous online survey. Results show that the most serious issue identified by the editors was finding sufficient, expert reviewers. Other serious issues included plagiarism and false/fabricated data. However, in general, editors did feel most of the listed issues were serious problems or they did not know if the issues were a problem (e.g. disputed authorship). We conclude by offering recommendations for ways forward (e.g. training specific to editors rather than relying on prior training as researchers) and by suggesting further research (e.g. studies with a more dialogic approach which would allow editors to voice their perspectives and investigations of local communities of practice which might supersede universality assumptions of research integrity and ethics).

Key words: research integrity; research ethics, applied linguistics; journal editors; survey

Introduction

Concern for research integrity and ethics has been a part of scholarly publishing since the earliest scientific journals were published. The first two scientific journals were initiated in 1665, based on the premises of promoting scholarship and disseminating papers of scientific interest. *Journal des Savants* specifically included book reviews and news of the death of scholars as part of their efforts to support a scholarly community through up-to-date news (Spinak & Packer, 5 Mar 2015). *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* though initially edited by the organisation's secretary, later established procedures for peer review and collective editorship in order to avoid charges of bias (The Royal Society, 2022). These ideas – the responsibility to share research findings, to stay up-to-date, to avoid bias, and to establish good stewardship through editorial policies – continue to be foundations of scholarly publishing, linking dissemination of research findings with research integrity and ethics.

While the impetus of such journals was scholarly, current scientific publishing is a remarkably big business. *The Guardian* reported that scientific publishing had global revenues of more than 19 billion pounds and in 2010 reported profits of just one publisher (Elsevier) were 724 million pounds (Buryani, 27 Jun 2017). Greco (2020) highlights the multiple changes in academia which have led to publishing as big business including the increase in the tertiary student population and number of universities in the United States, the development of a publish-or-perish culture intended to distinguish higher education institutions in a competitive market, the consolidation of independent publishing houses under commercial publishers and, more recently, the proliferation of online publishing.

While business ethics and practices now pervade scholarly publishing, research integrity and ethics continue to be fundamental. Referring to a “research-industrial complex” in scholarly research, Lee (2023) notes the reliance on regulations imposed at the individual level. She suggests that we need to do more to enable ethical research rather than relying on regulations to prevent or punish inappropriate actions. This requires engaging the entire research ecosystem: researchers, institutions, funders, professional organisations and publishers (p. 7). As Soehartono, Yu and Khor remind us, “Alongside the escalating research landscape, ethics and integrity continues to serve as a basis for good and wholesome research practices” (2022, p. 2488).

Journal editors /editorial staff (e.g. Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor, Associate Editor, Review Editor) play a central role in the academic publishing process, acting as gate keepers and arbiters of manuscript selection while balancing needs of publishers, authors and the broader academic community.

Editors/editorial staff are responsible for ensuring consistent dissemination of quality research, fairness to stakeholders, and ethical oversight for research and publication. They act both as inspectors as well as being under inspection: they must be aware of policies related to research integrity and ethics as well as being subject to research and publication integrity/ethics themselves.

The role of editors is expansive and goes beyond selection of articles for publication. Based on guidelines from the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE, 2019), ethical editing includes

- ensuring smooth submission processes and timely decisions;
- maintaining relationships with past editor(s) (for continuity), reviewers (to ensure lack of competing interests, appropriate critique, confidentiality, etc.), and authors (to support transparency, clarify expectations, avoid research misconduct as well as review for meeting aims and scope, originality, clarity, and research significance);
- journal management and communications, including, e.g. specifying authorship criteria; checking for competing interests, funding information, relevant acknowledgements, and research ethics statements; documenting the submission record and decisions made;
- managing editorial independence and commercial issues/interests;
- ensuring peer review processes and policies are followed including stated practices on anonymity/confidentiality or open peer review, timeliness of peer review, selection of appropriate reviewers
- responding to possible misconduct, inappropriate behavior (by authors, editors, reviewers) and complaints.

Poff and Ginley (2020) list several strengths and weaknesses that editors bring to ensuring ethical research publishing. Among the strengths are independence, credibility, expertise, the ability to implement policies, and responsibility for overall integrity; among the weaknesses are limited options for

legal action and lack of authority to discipline misconduct, lack of knowledge, and possible reputational damage. Along with this, the authors believe editors have a number of opportunities such as being well-positioned to detect misconduct, to collaborate with institutions/organisations, to use technology to detect misconduct, to work with publishers for their own development and to make educational resources available (p. 120). However, this work is based on considerations of what editors can/might/should do. The question of what editors themselves see as responsibilities and challenges remains open.

As ethics and integrity are deeply embedded in the research process, not only in terms of treatment of human subjects or methods for collecting, analyzing, and presenting, but also in all aspects of publishing, we investigate the role of journal editors in scholarly publishing for applied linguistics. Specifically, we examine the issues/challenges applied linguistics journal editors face in relation to research integrity and ethics, their knowledge, beliefs and practices.

Background

Guidelines

The background of research integrity and ethics is usually considered to be grounded in the Nuremberg Code (1947) and the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association 1964, 2013), both related primarily to medical research. In 1979, the Belmont Report was issued, again grounded in medical research but intended to be relevant for all human subjects research¹ (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, NCPHSBRR, 1979). The report outlined three fundamental principles for research subjects:

1. respect for persons (e.g. research participants as autonomous agents but also in regards to potential vulnerabilities and need for protection),
2. beneficence (e.g. that research participants should feel secure in their well-being),
3. justice (e.g. fairness, equality toward research participants and other stakeholders, with due consideration of balancing different needs of different stakeholders).

These principles continue to be reference points for ethics review boards (ERB) (at the macro ethics level) and researchers (at the micro ethics level). The principles are intended to be universalist, without consideration of local context or cultural specifics (see Israel, 2015, for discussion). In addition, there are continuing controversies about whether ethics review based in medical sciences is appropriate for social sciences (Carniel et al, 2022; Schrag, 2011). Some agencies, recognising differences in medicine and other fields, have initiated guidelines specifically for social sciences (e.g. Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH), 2022). The NESH guidelines note that while researchers are primarily responsible for ethical conduct of research, other research actors (including institutions, funders, collaborators, editors and publishers) also have obligations to ensure research integrity and ethics.

¹ In this article we tend to refer human subjects based (behavioural) research. However, we recognise applied linguistics research is not limited to human subjects. There are separate guidelines for animal research as well as for human biomedical research.

Guidelines typically deal with *research ethics* as treatment of human subjects. However, other declarations/statements address *research integrity* as having a broader scope. Research integrity encompasses areas of research trustworthiness such as appropriate research methods, adequate research records, authorship, acknowledgements, peer review, conflict of interest and broader societal considerations which must be weighed against research risks. The Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (Steneck, Mayer, Anderson, 2010) is considered a foundational document in this area. It promotes four principles for research integrity: honesty, accountability, professionalism, and stewardship (Resnick & Shamoo, 2011). Other statements building on the Singapore Statement include, for example, The Montreal Statement on Research Integrity which focusses on cross-boundary collaborations and includes information on intellectual property, authorship, and publication (World Conference on Research Integrity, 2013)². These statements and other guidelines suggest that research integrity and ethics is a perennial concern of journal editors.

Well-known guidelines linked specifically to scholarly publication include the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) guidelines (2022) and the COPE guidelines (2019). However, Teixeira da Silva highlights potential problems with overreliance on guidelines and established tools (e.g. ORCID, Publons) warning that all of these have “flaws, porous aspects, and other fallibilities that weaken their ability to serve as failsafe effective protective measures in academia (2021, p. 2113). In a discussion of needs for research ethics in social sciences, Brown (2022) highlights the importance of developing a sound research ethics culture rather than relying on ERBs which might prioritise protecting institutional reputation. Ravn and Sørensen (2021), in a study of questionable research practices (QRPs), found disciplinary differences (comparing humanities, medical sciences, technical sciences, and natural sciences) in QRPs and in perceptions of QRPs based in different epistemic cultures. In a related study, Sørensen et al (2021, p 5) determined that establishing a culture of integrity was particularly important for social sciences, especially those based in humanities and qualitative methods.

Publication ethics

Some prior research has considered research integrity and ethics in applied linguistics especially in relation to research methods and research reporting. For example, Isbell, et al (2022) surveyed (un)ethical research practices for quantitative research based on self-reports from applied linguists. Plonsky, et al (2017) surveyed applied linguistics researchers on questionable research practices and found that most studies reported appropriate checking of statistical assumptions. However, in an analysis of publications in two prominent applied linguistics journals, Hu and Plonsky (2021) found the checks on these assumptions were not often stated, leading to potential issues in research transparency. Similarly, Al-Hoorie and Vitta (2019), considered the ‘sins’ of quantitative research which could negatively impact trustworthiness (i.e. reliability and validity) of research findings, though not directly mentioning research ethics. Based on some of these concerns for ethical reporting of research data, journals have responded with clearer guidelines on expectations, e.g. *TESOL Quarterly Research Guidelines* (Chapelle & Duff, 2003; Mahboob et al, 2016); *Language Learning Submission Requirements* (Language Learning Resource Club, n.d.).

² The ‘Singapore Statement’ and ‘Montreal statement’ are international in scope and not country/city specific. Based on discussions initiated at the World Conference in Research Integrity (WRIC), a series of statements have been issued, each named for the city in which the conference was held at the time of the discussion. See <https://www.wcrif.org/>

These studies and the guidelines primarily considered the role of researchers; they tended to focus on ethics as accountability through methodological rigor (especially in data analyses and handling). Other studies have taken a broader view. Larsson, et al (this issue) surveyed researchers in humanities (including applied linguistics) to examine researcher self-reports of a broad spectrum of questionable research practices (e.g. not reporting conflict of interest, not acknowledging research assistant contributions, using default research design/instruments). Nejadghanbar and Hu (2022) examined features of potentially predatory journals in 'language and literature/English language' to help researchers/authors better determine which open access journals might be considered as predatory and therefore not supportive of research integrity. A synthetic review of ethics in applied linguistics publishing over four decades was conducted by Yaw, et al (2023). They found a growing awareness not only of research ethics but also an expanded view of what constituted ethics. Following Kubanyiova (2008), the researchers reported on both macro (procedures issues, often linked to the types of topics raised by Ethics Review Boards) and micro ethical issues (the day-to-day issues researchers face). (See also de Costa, 2015.) Liu and De Cat (2021) reported on views of applied linguists to Open Science – a suite of efforts including open access publication, open data, which are linked to research integrity through efforts to support transparency, reproducibility and quality in research. They found that applied linguistics researchers espoused positive views toward reproducibility in research but views were mixed in data sharing, with more recent PhD graduates expressing more agreement on requirements to share data along with publication. In terms of actual practice, PhD students and recent graduates were more likely say that they planned to share data alongside publications, although they had not yet done so, while more experienced researchers were more likely to say they had 'sometimes' shared data. Lack of ERB approval to share data was cited as the most common reason for not making data available (though it should be noted that is usually the researcher's decision to request permission to share or not) along with time needed to prepare data for sharing. In a review of applied linguistics journals, Silver and Lin (in press) examined open science practices, including practices related to research ethics and integrity, based on website information. They found that most journals included information on the basics of research ethics (e.g. participant consent) through links to publisher policies. They also found that though policies were quite consistent across publishers, reporting in journal articles varied. Thus editorial practices are a critical part of implementing publisher policies for research integrity and ethics.

Another set of studies specifically considered journal editors, though not necessarily in applied linguistics. Fisher (2004) reflected on his experience as an editor of a journal in business management and his attempts to foster a culture of fairness to authors. This included concern for correspondence with authors and reviewers, procedures to support timely review, and how these practices ultimately supported a high-quality publication. We see these efforts as related to research integrity as they support transparency in the publication process. Similarly, Batten (2002) offers a narrative of his experience as a book review editor for a Japanese Studies journal. Though not referring directly to ethics or integrity, his outline of the decision-making process for selecting books to review, soliciting reviewers, and editing reviews for publication clearly shows the relevance of microethics. Ali and Ali (2017), writing as editors of a post graduate medical journal, highlighted growing concerns for research publications including plagiarism and dual submissions (submitting the same article to more than one journal at the same time). They recommended three remedies: clear instructions to authors, clear guidelines for editors, and research ethics training for editors. Though unstated, the implication of their recommendations is that relying on research ethics training for researchers (e.g. through the CITI

Programme, Responsible Conduct of Research, 2007) is insufficient for the knowledge needed by journal editors.

Investigating uncertain or questionable ethics practices, Angelski, Fernandez, Weijer, and Gao (2012) looked specifically at journal editors in medical science. Noting that the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 1964) gave responsibility for ethical research to both authors and publishers, and that editors and journals have policies and practices intended to support the principles of the Declaration, they wondered why unethical research practices persist. Based on a survey of 103 medical journals published in English, they examined whether editors would publish 'ethically uncertain' research and, if yes, in what circumstances. They also attempted to ascertain journal editor views of what constitutes 'ethically uncertain' research in the field of medicine. The vast majority of respondents (85%) said they would not publish ethically uncertain research; a small percentage said they might under certain circumstances but they would ask authors to resubmit and rectify uncertainties or they would provide an editorial comment. The journal editors acknowledged that they saw themselves as rule-makers and gate keepers in relation to ethical research. Issues identified included fraudulent data, duplicate submissions, lack of ERB approval or lack of participant consent, "other" breaches of the Declaration of Helsinki, and excessive risk to participants. The medical journal editors also stated that they informed reviewers to check that ethical issues were appropriately addressed although they did not specify that reviewer should reject articles based on ethical uncertainties.

A survey of social science journal editors focused on reviews and decisions for publication in relation to research integrity and ethics (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2016). Survey results showed that 30.7% of articles were rejected outright, 46.4% were reviewed by 3 reviewers and 33.6% were reviewed by 2 reviewers (p. 238). Finding expert reviewers was the primary challenge faced by editors. In terms of review quality and confidentiality, 49.1% of the reviews included confidential information to the editor, 49.1% of the reviews included comments that editors did not feel comfortable forwarding to authors and 58.3% of the editors stated that they had edited reviews before forwarding to authors. These practices speak to fairness to authors: to what extent do authors receive a copy of the full comments which might sway editor decisions but also in what ways might editors try to make the processes fairer by weeding out unhelpful comments? In this, editors are not only gatekeepers of potential questionable/unethical conduct by researchers but also by reviewers (cf Fisher, 2004). Considering the role of journal editors for management journal, Greenwood (2016) was specifically interested in how research publications address the interests of participants as well as examining the utility of required reporting consent procedures. Noting that research participants hold multiple subjectivities, vulnerabilities, and potential responsibilities in relation to the research (especially institutional research), Greenwood questioned whether the formalised ERB consent process was sufficient to address participant interests. Journal editors and COPE officers (10 total) were interviewed along with a survey of journal editors (90 respondents). Declarations of participant consent procedures were required by only 17% of the journals; of those that did not require a declaration, only 11% were considering formalising this as part of their review processes. A number of reasons were given for not requiring declarations. These included: potential cultural differences; publication bias if authors were not part of institutions with formal ERB processes; interference with planned research methodologies; a sense that management research in general was not high risk or harmful; the suggestion that other ethical issues (e.g. self plagiarism) would be more important as a focus of editor efforts; the possibility of disincentivizing submissions; the

potential to put the journal editor in the role of policing ethics (p. 515). Research independence coupled with a culture of responsibility were preferred over formal declarations.

As journals try to grapple with how to handle research integrity and ethics issues, some have posted guidelines related to reporting standards (as above). Most reputable applied linguistics journals include some information on research integrity and ethics on the publisher website (Silver & Lin, in press). In at least one case, an international publisher prepared guidelines on publication ethics and commissioned a study of journal editors³ to investigate perceptions of ethical issues. Wager et al. (2009) undertook a survey of journal editors for Wiley-Blackwell. Though they included editors from different specialisations (medical healthcare, non-medical sciences, social sciences), areas of concern tended to be consistent (i.e. little disciplinary distinction within the three broad science areas as defined in the study). Their questionnaire was based on 16 potential issues, drawn from the COPE Code of Conduct (COPE, 2011), the Council of Science Editors (2022), the World Association of Medical Editors (2023) and the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (2022). Editors were asked to evaluate the severity of the issue, their confidence in addressing it, the frequency of occurrence, and whether it was happening more/less frequently. Overall the level of concern was low. However, some issues were identified (p. 349) including those related to redundant publication and duplicate submissions. Authorship and research design/reporting issues were also considered to be serious including undisclosed conflicts of interest, gift authorship and disputed authorship, unethical research design, and false or fabricated data. Another area of concern related to reviewers including undisclosed reviewer conflicts of interest and reviewer misconduct. For the most part editors were fairly confident in dealing with these issues, though less so for gift authorship. Awareness and use of resources related to publication ethics was low, including lack of awareness of guidelines (e.g. COPE guidelines) except for some awareness of their own journal's instructions to authors (44% were aware of these instructions). In addition, editors felt that unethical practices were relatively low although Wager, et al noted, "While it is difficult to estimate the true frequency of publication misconduct, most studies ... have revealed that it is disturbingly frequent" (p. 353).

Recent discussion in academic journals and on social media linked to scholarly publishing continue to raise these issues including: authorship (Hossein & Lewis 2020); citations (Gasparayan et al, 2015); plagiarism (COPE, n.d.); image manipulation (Jordan, 2014; Parrish & Noonan, 2009); papermills (COPE, 2023a); review processes (Donovan 2009, Lanier 2021, ReviewerCredits [@reviewercredits], Scholarly Peer Review [@Scholarly_Peers]); retractions (Retraction Watch [@RetractionWatch]; and, training (Fanelli et al 2015, the Embassy of Good Science [@EmbassySci]).

Given the continuing discussion of research integrity and ethics in relation to scholarly publishing, the important roles that editors play, and the possibility that there are disciplinary differences in perceptions and practices, we investigated the awareness, confidence and knowledge of applied linguistics journal editors based on the following questions:

- What are editor responsibilities vis-à-vis ethics and/or integrity?
- What are editor challenges vis-à-vis ethics and/or integrity?

³ As issues of AI-assisted publication (e.g. use of ChatGPT) was just being raised at the time our survey was conducted, this is not addressed in our study.

- How do editors resolve issues and challenges they confront?
- How can journal editors ensure ethical research conduct (or more simply, can they)?

Given the lack of prior study on this topic and this specific population, we consider our study to be an ‘exploration’, following Stebbins (2001, p. 4): “*Social science exploration* is a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life.”

Methodology

We designed an online survey for journal editors in applied linguistics, broadly defined. Our survey was informed by guidelines and sources such as COPE (2023b), the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) (n.d.), Greenwood (2016), Mustaine & Tewksbury (2016) and especially Wager, et al (2009) as the latter was about discipline specific journal editors (albeit broadly defined as ‘science’) and drew from the COPE guidelines at that time. Our survey was distributed online to editors and editorial staff, for voluntary response [(information deleted to maintain anonymity) IRB 2022-1013], as described below. Due to the exploratory nature of the investigation, descriptive statistics are presented

Survey development

We designed the survey by adapting from Wager et al.’s (2009) and cross-checking for current issues raised in prior research or through organisational statement related to research integrity and ethics (Table 1).

Table 1. Sources for Survey Development

	Sources	Year
1	Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth. (1999). Ethical guidelines for good research practice. https://www.theasa.org/downloads/ethics/Ethical_guidelines.pdf Accessed 25 Jan 2023	1999
2	Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth (ASA). (2011). Ethical guidelines for good research practice. https://www.theasa.org/downloads/ASA%20ethics%20guidelines%202011.pdf Accessed 25 Jan 2023	2011
3	Barroga, E., & Matanguihan, G.J. (2020). Fundamental shifts in research, ethics and peer review in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. <i>Journal of Korean Medical Science</i> , 35(45): e395 https://doi.org/10.3346/jkms.2020.35.e395 .	2020
4	CITI Program. Social & Behavioral Research Course. https://about.citiprogram.org/ Accessed 25 Jan 2023	2023
5	Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). (2022). Ethics toolkit for a successful editorial office: A COPE guide. https://publicationethics.org/sites/default/files/cope-ethics-toolkit-journal-editors-publishers.pdf Accessed 25 Jan 2023	2022
6	Conselo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas (CSIC). (2022). Good practice guide for scientific-academic publishing. The publication of magazines and book in CSIC press, v3.2. https://revistas.csic.es/public/publication_guidelines_CSIC.pdf Accessed 25 Jan 2023	2022

7	Embassy of Good Science. n.d. Guidelines. https://embassy.science/wiki-wiki/index.php/Special:BrowseData/Resource?_search_Resource_Type%5B0%5D=Guidelines . Accessed 25 Jan 2023	2023
8	Fenneke, B., & Lex, B. INSPIRE Checklist for the development and implementation of initiative to foster responsible research practices. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3670739	2020
9	Greenwood, M. (2016). Approving or improving research ethics in management journals. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 137, 507-520. Doi: 10.1007/s10551-015-2564-x	2016
10	International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE). (2022). Recommendations for the conduct, reporting, editing, and publication of scholarly works in medical journals. https://www.icmje.org/recommendations/ Accessed 25 Jan 2023	2022
11	Mustaine, E. E., & Tewksbury, R. (2016). A survey of social science journal editors for behind-the-scenes data on the publication process. <i>Journal of Scholarly Publishing</i> , 47(3), 231-249. https://doi.org/10.3138/jsp.47.3.231	2016
12	National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH). (2018). A guide to internet research ethics. https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/social-sciences-humanities-law-and-theology/a-guide-to-internet-research-ethics/ Accessed 25 Jan 2023	2018
13	Social Research Ethics Committee in UCC (SREC). (2020). SREC guidance for social researchers engaging in ethnography/autoethnograph (AE) or utilising ethnographic methods. https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/research/researchatucc/ethicswebpage/EthicsGuidanceforAutoethnographicandEthnographicResearch8June2020.pdf Accessed 25 Jan 2023	2020
14	McIntosh, T., DuBois, J.M., & Perlmutter, J.S. (2022). Ethical challenges in the commercialization of neurotechnology: Contending with competing priorities. <i>AJOB Neuroscience</i> , 13(1), 60-62, https://doi.org/10.1080/21507740.2021.2001083	2022
15	Wager, E., Fiack, S., Graf, C., Robinson, A., & Rowlands, I. (2009). Science journal editors' views on publication ethics: Results of an international survey. <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i> , 35, 348-353. https://10.1136/jme.2008.028324	2009

The survey was comprised of five sections:

1. Background information (e.g. editorial experience, geographical information for the editorial office, type of articles included);
2. Publishing ethics issues and handling (e.g. a list of potential issues such as plagiarism, duplicate publication, undisclosed reviewer conflicts with likert scales to gauge seriousness of the issues, frequency of the issue, editor confidence in handling the issue, and usual procedures for handling the issue);
3. Knowledge and awareness of research ethics policies (e.g. authorship, correction requests, requirement of evidence of ERB, editorial code of conduct and availability of these policies on the website);
4. Journal policies with reference to open science initiative (e.g. policies on open data, use of open science badges, collaboration with OASIS [Open Accessible Summaries in Language Studies]);
5. Other issues - an open ended question "Are there any other issues you wish to raise?".

The survey draft was cross checked with topics addressed in the CITI Programme such as informed consent and conflict of interest. A number of CITI topics were not included as being specific to particular studies but not relevant to our exploratory concerns (e.g. research with prisoners, international research). The draft questions were also cross-checked with topics found in the COPE Ethics Toolkit for A Successful Editorial Office (COPE, 2022a) including handling of allegations of misconduct, authorship disputes, data availability, consent to publish, peer review processes.⁴ We piloted an initial form of the survey with the editors and editorial staff of three education research journals (Pedagogies, Asia-Pacific Journal of Education, and Teaching & Learning), primarily to check for clarity and the time needed to complete the survey, and revised the survey based on the comments received.

The final survey was comprised of 23 questions, some with additional sub-questions or branching questions (total of 99 if all branching questions are included), mostly multiple-choice. A copy of the full survey is available at ([_copy attached for peer review; a copy will be made accessible in an institutional repository with persistent URL for publication_](#)).

Respondents

Our target population was editors and editorial staff of applied linguistics journals. Editorial staff were defined as general editors, editor-in-chief, managing editors, co-editors, associate editors, assistant editors, section editors (e.g. book review editors, social media editors) as listed on the journal website. Editorial Board members and publisher representatives were not included.

We first obtained a list of 'linguistics' journals as in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) and Scientific Journal Rankings (SJR) databases. We then determined whether each journal was an 'applied linguistics' journal based on our reading of the journal's title, scope, or types of articles published. We further shortlisted only journals published in English, although we did include multilingual journals (i.e. those published in English and one or more other languages.. The final number of journals was 210 including well-known journals published by international publishers, regional journals, and journals associated professional organisations. The full list can be found at [_ \(copy attached for peer review; a copy will be made accessible in an institutional repository with persistent URL for publication_](#)).

Survey invitations were sent out using email information on the website or by searching email addresses for editorial staff named on journal websites. As the vast majority of journals did not include email contact information, we emailed invitations to all editorial staff named on the website for the 50 highest ranked international journals based on JCR and SJR. For other journals, we identified only the main editors (e.g. editor-in-chief, co-editor, managing editor) and requested they forward to other editorial staff. Response rate could not be calculated due to the lack of clarity on recipients of the invitations (i.e. forwarding by recipients to other editorial staff as well as faulty addresses and institutional security measures which prevented receipt).⁵

⁴ We also checked against the COPE Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (COPE, 2022b) but found these were not relevant to our survey as they were more related to production issues, usually handled by the publisher e.g. regular publishing schedule, licensing information)

⁵ More than 10% of the invitation emails generated 'cannot deliver' messages. We cannot provide an exact number due to the 1st author's institutional email security protocols which sometimes generated error messages but did not specify which addresses were problematic.

Data collection

Invitations were sent out in 3 batches, using bcc, with a link to the online survey (using Verint [2023]). All responses were anonymous. Two email reminders were sent to each wave of recipients. Data were collected from 18 February to 29 March 2023. A total of 42 complete responses was collected. Six incomplete responses were submitted; these were not included in the analysis.

Data Analysis

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, descriptive statistics were undertaken using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 28); effect sizes were not calculated. (See Isbell et al, 2022 for discussion of reporting effect sizes for exploratory research.)

Results

Most of the journal editors worked for 10 years or less as editors and as editors of the specific journal. Respondents worked in editorial offices primarily in Australia/New Zealand or Europe (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of years as editors and office location

Total number of years as a journal editor		Total number of years as an editor of this journal	Editorial office location
Less than 5	33.3	47.6	Africa: 0
5 – 10	33.3	38.1	Asia: 16.7
11-15	14.3	4.8	Australia/New Zealand: 42.9
16-20+	19.0	9.5	Europe: 33.3
			North America: 2.4
			South America: 0
			Midde East: 4.8

The majority of journals published empirical studies (97.6%), conceptual/theoretical studies (78.6%), systematic reviews (76.2%), book reviews (61.9%) and replication studies (59.5%). Only 31% published traditional (narrative) literature reviews.

COPE provides a variety of services to members including discussion forums, eLearning and the option to submit anonymous case studies for discussion and advice. In addition, members can engage in a journal audit “designed to support and encourage editors to identify areas of their journal's policies and processes that may need to be revised so that they adhere to best practices in scholarly publishing” (2018). While 40.5% of the editors reported their journal was a member of COPE, 52.4% did not know and 7.1% reported the journal was not. Of those who were COPE members, only 11.8% had undertaken a COPE Journal audit, 64.7% did not know and 23.5% had not.

The most serious issue identified by the editors was finding sufficient, expert reviewers (33.3% identified this as a ‘very serious problem facing my journal’). Other serious issues included plagiarism and false/fabricated data (both 9.5%). However, most issues were identified as ‘not a problem for my journal’ or ‘I do not know if it is a problem’. This included some issues raised in prior research such as disputed authorship, undeserving authorship, undisclosed author/reviewer conflicts of interest, unethical research design, inappropriate image manipulation, excessive or inappropriate citations, duplicate

submissions, inappropriate anonymisation. Interference in editorial decisions by the journal owner or editorial board was hardly seen as a problem with 77.2% saying 'not a problem' and 2.4% replying it was 'a very serious problem facing my journal'. As one respondent commented, the many 'I do not know if it is a problem' might be due to the difficulty of editors knowing whether the problem occurred (e.g. unacknowledged professional writers, lack of acknowledgements, undisclosed conflicts of interest, false/fabricated data). See Table 2 for detailed responses.

Table 2. Severity of issues faced (%)

	Not a problem for my journal	A minor problem facing my journal	A significant problem facing my journal	A very serious problem facing my journal	I do not know if it is a problem
Authorship					
Disputed authorship (e.g., requests to add or remove authors post-submission)	42.9	33.3	2.4	4.8	16.7
Undeserving (i.e. guest/gift) authorship	45.2	21.4	4.8	4.8	23.8
Unacknowledged professional writers (ghost writers)	38.1	2.4	14.3	2.4	42.9
Incorrect or inappropriate statements of affiliation by authors	45.2	16.7	2.4	4.8	31.0
Inappropriate or incomplete acknowledgements (e.g. lack of acknowledgement of funding)	28.6	33.3	2.4	0.0	35.7
Recommendation of false reviewers for submission	38.1	28.6	7.1	7.1	19.0
Undisclosed author conflicts of interest (including undisclosed involvement of commercial company)	40.5	14.3	9.5	4.8	31.0
Unethical research design / conduct	40.5	33.3	11.9	4.8	9.5
Data, Images and Plagiarism					
Falsified / fabricated data	35.7	11.9	9.5	9.5	33.3
Inappropriate photographic image manipulation	57.1	7.1	4.8	7.1	23.8
Plagiarism (including text recycling and/or self-plagiarism)	21.4	40.5	26.2	9.5	2.4
Publication Practices					
Redundant publication (i.e. overlapping / 'salami slicing')	21.4	40.5	28.6	0.0	9.5
Duplicate submission (one paper sent to several journals at the same time)	28.6	35.7	11.9	7.1	16.7
Interference in editorial decisions by journal owner or editorial board member	76.2	4.8	4.8	2.4	11.9
Inappropriate anonymisation	31.0	45.2	7.1	0.0	16.7

Citations: excessive or inappropriate self-citations, citations by prearrangement, or other inappropriate citations	28.6	40.5	19.0	4.8	7.1
Reviewers					
Undisclosed reviewer conflicts of interest	31.0	26.2	9.5	2.4	31.0
Reviewer misconduct	38.1	31.0	14.3	2.4	14.3
Finding sufficient, expert reviewers to review the manuscript and ensure ethical treatment of authors and submissions	7.1	19.0	38.1	33.3	2.4

A few editors listed other ethical issues including financial motivations for submitting book reviews, pressure to publish quickly due to institutional demands, publications as ‘propaganda’ or produced by papermills. Other remarks included inconsistent reporting on ethical review/participant consent procedures and inappropriate reporting of data (e.g. overuse of statistical tests, omission of important methodological details, not making code or data available).

Confidence in handling these issues tended to be high with almost all issues rated as confident, quite confident or highly confident. The highest issues listed as ‘not all confident’ were identifying unacknowledged professional writers (28.6%), inappropriate or incomplete acknowledgement (21.4%), and plagiarism (28.6%). None of these were ranked as serious issues by the editors.

Table 3. Confidence in handling the issue if it occurs (%)

	Not at all confident	Confident	Quite confident	Highly confident	I do not know
Authorship					
Disputed authorship (e.g., requests to add or remove authors post-submission)	9.5	26.2	45.2	19.0	0.0
Undeserving (i.e. guest/gift) authorship	14.3	35.7	31.0	19.0	0.0
Unacknowledged professional writers (ghost writers)	28.6	40.5	16.7	14.3	0.0
Incorrect or inappropriate statements of affiliation by authors	9.5	31.0	33.3	26.2	0.0
Inappropriate or incomplete acknowledgements (e.g. lack of acknowledgement of funding)	21.4	23.8	35.7	19.0	0.0
Recommendation of false reviewers for submission	7.1	31.0	28.6	33.3	0.0
Undisclosed author conflicts of interest (including undisclosed involvement of commercial company)	9.5	26.2	45.2	19.0	0.0
Data, Images and Plagiarism					
Falsified / fabricated data	19.0	40.5	23.8	16.7	0.0
Inappropriate photographic image manipulation	19.0	28.6	33.3	19.0	0.0

Plagiarism (including text recycling and/or self-plagiarism)	28.6	14.3	40.5	16.7	0.0
Publication Practices					
Redundant publication (i.e. overlapping / 'salami slicing')	4.8	40.5	33.3	21.4	0.0
Duplicate submission (one paper sent to several journals at the same time)	16.7	19.0	28.6	35.7	0.0
Interference in editorial decisions by journal owner or editorial board member	4.8	26.2	35.7	33.3	0.0
Inappropriate anonymisation	4.8	14.3	42.9	38.1	0.0
Citations: excessive or inappropriate self-citations, citations by prearrangement, or other inappropriate citations	7.1	28.6	33.3	31.0	0.0
Reviewers					
Undisclosed reviewer conflicts of interest	9.5	45.2	21.4	23.8	0.0
Reviewer misconduct	7.1	35.7	28.6	28.6	0.0
Finding sufficient, expert reviewers to review the manuscript and ensure ethical treatment of authors and submissions	0.0	45.2	40.5	14.3	0.0
Unethical research design / conduct	4.8	31.0	45.2	19.0	0.0

When asked how they generally handled the issues raised, very few participants reported they would consult other organisations/sites related to research ethics (e.g. CITI Program, Embassy of Good Science) to solve the issue. Instead the most opted approach to handle issues was to consult with other editors and/or editorial board members, followed by 'on my own based on my own judgement and experience' or based on information from my publisher'. The least chosen option across all issues was 'in consultation with other journal editors/professional contacts' (Table 4). One respondent commented "For most of these items I would discuss with the publisher AND check COPE and likely would discuss with other journal editors (maintaining author anonymity). So it's not really an 'either/or' choice."

Table 4. How do you generally handle this type of issue (%)

	On my own based on my own judgement and experience	In consultation with other editors and/or editorial board of my journal	Based on information from my publisher (e.g. the published website information for my journal, in consultation with publisher/society representative such as the Managing Editor or Ethics Editor)	In consultation with other journal editors/professional contacts	By consulting the information provided by Committee on Publishing Ethics (COPE)	By consulting other organisations/ sites related to research ethics (e.g. CITI Program, Embassy of Good Science)
Authorship						
Disputed authorship (e.g., requests to add or remove authors post-submission)	2.4	54.8	23.8	11.9	7.1	0.0
Undeserving (i.e. guest/gift) authorship	9.5	47.6	19.0	14.3	7.1	2.4
Unacknowledged professional writers (ghost writers)	7.1	47.6	23.8	14.3	4.8	2.4
Incorrect or inappropriate statements of affiliation by authors	21.4	47.6	19.0	7.1	4.8	0.0
Inappropriate or incomplete acknowledgements (e.g. lack of acknowledgement of funding)	19.0	54.8	16.7	7.1	2.4	0.0
Recommendation of false reviewers for submission	19.0	50.0	14.3	16.7	0.0	0.0
Undisclosed author conflicts of interest (including undisclosed involvement of commercial company)	16.7	45.2	21.4	11.9	2.4	2.4
Data, Images and Plagiarism						
Falsified / fabricated data	2.4	50.0	21.4	11.9	9.5	4.8

Inappropriate photographic image manipulation	7.1	52.4	23.8	9.5	4.8	2.4
Plagiarism (including text recycling and/or self-plagiarism)	14.3	50.0	16.7	11.9	4.8	2.4
Publication Practices						
Redundant publication (i.e. overlapping / 'salami slicing')	14.3	54.8	16.7	9.5	2.4	2.4
Duplicate submission (one paper sent to several journals at the same time)	19.0	45.2	14.3	16.7	2.4	2.4
Interference in editorial decisions by journal owner or editorial board member	23.8	47.6	7.1	14.3	4.8	2.4
Inappropriate anonymisation	42.9	42.9	2.4	11.9	0.0	0.0
Citations: excessive or inappropriate self-citations, citations by prearrangement, or other inappropriate citations	42.9	40.5	2.4	11.9	2.4	0.0
Reviewers						
Undisclosed reviewer conflicts of interest	14.3	57.1	16.7	7.1	2.4	2.4
Reviewer misconduct	16.7	57.1	14.3	7.1	4.8	0.0
Finding sufficient, expert reviewers to review the manuscript and ensure ethical treatment of authors and submissions	28.6	0.0	2.4	16.7	2.4	0.0
Unethical research design / conduct	14.3	54.8	9.5	9.5	9.5	2.4

As many issues related to research integrity and ethics are determined by journal policies, a series of questions asked specifically about policies and if the policies were available on the journal website. Most of the journals have policies on correct requests and expressions of concern/recommendation to retract (64.3%) and, if yes, these are stated on the journal website (55.6%). Slight less than half (45.2%) have policies on author appeals and complaints but if there are policies, these are likely to be stated on the journal website (63.2%). Half have policies on authorship/authorship complaints and these are stated on the journal websites (71.4%). Few have policies on harassment of editors, reviewers, authors (4.8%) or complaints against editors, reviewers, editorial board members and/or publishers (14.3%) (Table 5.)

Table 5. Awareness and availability of policies on research integrity and ethics (%)⁶

	Does your journal have policies on corrections requests, submissions of expressions of concern or recommendation or need to retract?	Does your journal have a policy on appeals and author complaints and policies for management of these appeals and complaints?	Does your journal have a policy on handling corrections and retractions?	Does your journal have a process for post publication debate (e.g. letters to the editor, published rebuttals)	Does your journal have a policy on authorship and handling of any complaints related to authorship?	Does your journal have a policy on harassment of editors, reviewers, authors) (%)	Does your journal have a policy on evidence of Institutional Review/Ethics Review (or similar)?
Yes	64.3	45.2	57.1	31.0	50.0	4.8	38.1
No	16.7	14.3	11.9	31.0	14.3	33.3	28.6
Don't know	19.0	40.5	31.0	38.1	35.7	61.9	33.3
Are these policies published on the journal website? (%)*							
	(N = 27)	(N = 19)	(N = 24)	(N=13)	(N=21)	(N=2)	(N = 16)
Yes	55.6 (N = 15)	63.2 (N=12)	45.8 (N=11)	53.8 (N=7)	71.4 (N=15)	100.0	75.0 (N=12)
No	18.5 (N = 5)	15.8 (N=3)	29.2 (N=7)	23.1 (N=3)	9.5 (N=2)	0	18.8 (N=3)
Don't know	25.9 (N = 7)	21.1 (N=4)	25.0 (N=6)	23.1 (n=3)	19.0 (N=4)	0	6.3 (N=1)

*Note: The percentage for this question is based on the participants who reported "yes" in the previous question.

⁶ The order of some items in Tables 5-8 are different to the sequence in the original survey for more logical presentation of the results.

While most journals offered training for new editors (69%), few offered editorial board members (21.4%) and reviewers (23.8%) (Table 6).

Table 6. Does your journal have any training for ... (%)

	New editorial staff?	Editorial board members	Reviewers
Yes	69.0	21.4	23.8
No	23.8	64.3	66.7
Don't know	7.1	14.3	9.5

When asked about awareness of any Editor Code of Conduct for your journal or from your publisher (covering, e.g., consent to publish, ethical treatment of animals, human subjects, vulnerable populations, handling confidential data), 47.6% were aware of such policies, 28.6% were not and 23.8% replied this did not know.

When asked about policies to share data or customised software, code, tools used for data analysis with reviewers, most responded that this was not required - although more journals required data sharing (33.3%) than sharing of software, etc. (28.8%) (Table 7)

Table 7. Sharing of data or data analysis tools with reviewers (%)

	Does your journal have a policy that requires data sharing with reviewers upon request?	Does your journal require authors to share any customised software, code, tools, etc. used in the analysis with reviewers upon request?
Yes	33.3	23.8
No	40.5	57.1
Don't know	26.2	19.0

Finally, with reference to open science initiatives (i.e. open data, open access, open materials, pre-registration, open science badges) most journals offered some form of support (Table 8). However, only 23.8% collaborated with OASIS. (38.1% did not or did not know, respectively. As collaboration with OASIS requires editor assistance, it is likely that those who 'don't know' do not have a collaboration agreement.)

Table 8. Support for Open Science Initiatives (%)

	What are your journals policies on open data?	What are your journals policies on open access publication?	What are your journals policies on open materials?
Required	7.1	11.9	7.1
Recommended	45.2	47.6	42.9
No Policy	31.0	26.2	31.0
Don't know	16.7	14.3	19.0
	Does your journal support pre-registration?	Do you offer Open Science Badges?	Are you considering offering Open Science Badges? (N = 35)
Yes	19.0	16.7	14.3 (N=5)

No	33.3	45.2	25.7 (N=9)
Don't know	47.6	38.1	60.0 (N=21)

When asked about the ways in which journals supported pre-registration, out of eight respondents three said their journal actively solicited pre-registered reports, two said they offered open science badges for pre-registration and three said 'by other means (unspecified)'.

Discussion

Overall the level of concern for issues related to research integrity and ethics was low among our respondents. In addition, most of the applied linguistics journal editors we surveyed felt confident in handling issues that did occur. This aligns with prior research such as Wager et al (2009). In addition, the respondents felt they had resources to support handling of issues that arose, especially through consultation with other editors and editorial board members for their journal. However, recent meta-analyses and self-reports suggest that research misconduct and questionable research practices occur regularly, if not frequently. In a meta-analysis on the prevalence of research misconduct/questionable research practices, Xie, Wang and Kong (2022) found 2.9% of researchers had engaged in research misconduct, 12.5% self-reported questionable research practices while 15.5% had witnessed others who engaged in misconduct and 39.7% who had observed questionable research practices by others (p. 41). While the reports for research misconduct are not high (and the self-reports in particular are low), all issues of research misconduct and questionable research practices can erode trust in research findings. Sorenson et al warn: The authority and societal relevance of research depend on the trustworthiness of research results. However, science is fallible, contextually situated, and "never pure" (Shapin, 2010), progressing by learning from mistakes and refutations of own hypotheses, being itself a source of uncertainties and dilemmas (Beck, 1992). Therefore, it is crucial that the scientific community and the public can have trust in researchers and their organisations, knowing that they have research integrity" (2021, p2).

A particular difficulty, as raised by the respondents, is that editors may not be in a position to know of issues related to research integrity and ethics. As one editor highlighted "I am *not aware* of such problems, but that doesn't mean such problems don't exist."

In some cases respondents are aware of issues but there are no easy fixes. For example, a few respondents raised issues including how to handle author affiliation if the author changes institution (especially if the new institution insists on being listed as the affiliation even though the research was carried out elsewhere) or how to handle evidence of ethical review for countries/institutions that have no IRB. These issues raise questions about assumptions of universality in principles and practices for research integrity and ethics, leading to dilemmas for editors.

Finally, one editor cogently remarked "We are a small journal and I find the question on 'policies' a little problematic. No, we don't have a stated policy on many of these issues, but we are perfectly capable of managing them when they need addressing. While it may seem appropriate to have a long list of policies, it is somewhat like the small print on software agreements. No one reads them."

Some prior research has shown that research misconduct and questionable research progress are negatively influenced by pressure to publish (e.g. Anderson et al 2007). However, Fannelli, Costas and Larivière (2015) found that other factors including national policies, research environment, and career

stage were more likely to have an impact. While more training is often offered as a panacea, others question whether training can make a difference to practices (Sørensen, et al, 2021; Satalker & Shaw, 2022). Even those who support more training (e.g. Fang, Steen & Casadevall, 2012) note that training is insufficient if institutional culture is not addressed. These studies are primarily concerned with training for researchers or ERB members (Carniel, et al., 2023). However, training for editors on specific issues such as identifying image manipulation, addressing potential plagiarism or redundant publication might be useful. Based on the 1st author's experience, some publishers are taking this up by offering more training opportunities to editors, usually through online materials and webinars. However, as noted in our results, there are resources available (e.g. through COPE, Embassy of Good Science) which editors do not tap. This may be due to lack of awareness on the part of editors. (Note not only the very small percentage of respondents that consult other organisations' guidelines and resources but also the 52.4% of respondents who do not know if they are members of COPE.) Thus there may be issues related more to 'take up' than availability. Another option might be to create more opportunities for dialogue on this issues – with researchers, editors, reviewers, and publishers – through conference symposia and workshops. This could help to generate a more informed and supportive culture for research integrity and ethics.

One group which could have an impact through policies and regulations is funders (Brown, 2023; Lee, 2023; Sørensen, et al, 2021). This is linked to the comments by others that research culture is likely more impactful for good research (integrity and ethics) practices than regulation (De Peuter & Conix, 2023; Labib, et al., 2021; Ravn and Sørensen, 2021; Ščepanović, et al, 2021). We know of no research which investigates funder requirements and perspectives on research integrity and ethics.

We conclude by noting a number of areas for further research as suggested by our results. First, we suggest follow up on our survey. We consider our sample to be small in terms of the number of responses from possible journals and editorial staff. A question is how to incentivize a higher response rate so we can have a better understanding of editor perspectives. An additional exploratory study which engages editors in focus groups or interviews might provide more in-depth understanding as some respondents commented that the multiple choice format was somewhat restrictive. Second, while anonymity is often valued by respondents, it would be useful to waive anonymity in order to better understand how some issues affect journals differently, e.g. 'larger' v 'smaller' journals, journals managed by professional organisations v commercial publishers, journals in different regions or regional journals v international ones. This would also allow for better understanding of local communities of practice in publishing and editing ethics (Miao, Ai & Liao, 2022). Third, our study did not tap on areas in which editors might like to have more training and/or ways in which they believe their own knowledge and awareness could be enhanced. Though training is not sufficient, it is clearly necessary and we suspect that training designed to fit editor needs is mostly likely to be taken up.

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