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## **Stewardship, Standards, and Scholarly Responsibility at the Turn of a New Year**

### **Abstract:**

*This editorial reflects on the past year of the Journal of Educational Computing Research, highlighting record impact factor and submission growth alongside initiatives to strengthen transparency, ethical reporting, and methodological rigour. Key developments include the introduction of a mandatory ethical statement, expansion of the editorial board, the introduction of the RAISE framework for AI-focused research, and evolving attention to future research needs. Submission patterns, editorial priorities, and future objectives are discussed, highlighting the journal's commitment to stewardship, scholarly standards, and responsible, innovative research.*

### **Keywords:**

Educational computing, research ethics, transparency, AI in education, RAISE framework, editorial leadership

The beginning of a new calendar year offers an appropriate moment for scholarly journals to pause and reflect on their role within an evolving research ecosystem. Journals are not passive repositories of research outputs. They function as sites of intellectual governance, shaping what kinds of questions are asked, how evidence is produced and evaluated, and which norms of practice come to be regarded as legitimate. This governance role has become increasingly pronounced in technology-rich and AI-mediated research domains (Tlili et al., 2025). An annual editorial, when approached as a reflective and forward-looking scholarly exercise rather than a ceremonial update, can therefore play a meaningful role in articulating standards, signalling priorities, and reinforcing collective responsibility within a field.

This editorial is written in that spirit. It reflects on the journal's recent trajectory, interprets key performance indicators in relation to broader disciplinary developments, and situates recent editorial initiatives within ongoing debates about research quality, transparency, and ethics. It also sets out priorities for the coming year that respond to both the opportunities and the pressures associated with sustained growth.

### **Interpreting growth and visibility**

The journal's current impact factor represents a significant moment in its development. Rising from 4.0 in 2023 to 4.9 in 2024, the Journal of Educational Computing Research

has reached a new record. Although impact factor remains a contested metric, its continued prominence in academic evaluation systems means that it shapes perceptions of journal quality and influence. An impact factor of 4.9 indicates that work published in the journal is being widely cited and engaged with, suggesting that it occupies a central position within scholarly conversations in the field.

From an editorial perspective, however, the importance of this figure lies less in its symbolic value than in what it demands. Increased citation visibility brings increased scrutiny. It heightens expectations regarding methodological rigour, conceptual clarity, and ethical accountability. It also amplifies the consequences of editorial decisions, as published work is more likely to shape subsequent research agendas, policy discussions, and practice. The journal's responsibility, therefore, is not to pursue metric optimisation, but to ensure that its editorial standards remain robust, consistent, and aligned with the long-term interests of the field.

Submission volume provides a complementary perspective. The receipt of 1,668 submissions within 2025 represents a substantial increase compared to earlier periods. When I assumed the role of Editor in Chief, the former Executive Editor, Robert Seidman, remarked that the journal was now experiencing something akin to a flood of submissions, which at that time numbered approximately 1,100 manuscripts for 2024. For reference, there were 901 manuscript submissions in 2023, representing a 64.7% increase from 2022. The continued growth since then reflects both the journal's reputation and the rapid expansion of research activity across the educational computing field and related domains, with other educational technology journals also receiving many more submissions in 2025 (Lewin et al., 2025).

Such growth is not without cost. While a larger submission pool allows for greater selectivity, it also places significant pressure on editorial infrastructure, peer reviewers, and decision timelines. Although this growth has been managed effectively to date, this trajectory reinforces the need for clear editorial criteria, transparent processes, and sufficient editorial capacity. Editorial workload, reviewer fatigue, and the rise of AI generated review reports (Karnalim, 2025) are not merely operational concerns, but risks to epistemic quality. Growth that is not matched by structural adaptation risks undermining the very quality and fairness that journals such as JECR are expected to uphold.

### **Evolving submission profiles**

Beyond volume, the nature of submitted work provides valuable insight into how the field is developing. Generative AI as an educational tool has certainly dominated manuscript submissions over the past year, and submissions have reflected increasing diversity in methodological approaches, theoretical frameworks, and technological focus. Accordingly, the journal has called for a greater emphasis on ethics within the

use of educational technologies (Allison, 2025a), but JECR is not alone in these calls. The wider field of education technology journals have published similar calls to action for more consideration of ethical issues and equity within education technology research and practice (Chiu, 2025; Lewin et al., 2025). Encouragingly, in the second half of 2025, submissions are more frequently engaging with generative artificial intelligence and extended reality not simply as novel technologies, but as socio-technical systems embedded within educational, institutional, and cultural contexts. A greater number of authors are becoming attentive to issues of learner agency, accessibility, well-being, and pedagogical intent. This shift reflects a welcome move away from technology-driven novelty toward analytically grounded and socially responsible inquiry. However, such work still represents a relative minority of submissions.

At the same time, rapid technological change continues to generate pressures toward premature generalisation and under-theorised claims. The journal's role, therefore, is to remain open to innovation while maintaining a firm commitment to conceptual depth, methodological transparency, and critical engagement. Novelty alone is not a sufficient criterion for publication. What matters is whether research advances understanding in ways that are interpretable, defensible, and consequential.

The editorial *From Generative AI to Extended Reality: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Challenges, Opportunities, and Future of Educational Computing* (Allison et al., 2025) represented a deliberate effort to synthesise emerging debates and to articulate a shared research agenda. Drawing on contributions from fourteen members of the editorial board (including ten new editorial board members who joined in 2025), the editorial identified four interrelated thematic areas requiring sustained scholarly attention: equity and inclusion, ethics and social sustainability, instructional design, and human-computer interaction. These themes cut across technologies, methodologies, and educational contexts, and are increasingly reflected in manuscript submissions.

### **Formalising ethical reporting in educational research**

One of the most consequential developments over the past year was the introduction of a mandatory ethical statement field within the journal's submission process. Authors are required to provide a statement outlining the ethical aspects of their research, including confirmation of ethics review board approval where applicable, details of informed consent procedures, and explicit reference to compliance with standards relating to confidentiality, anonymity, and participant protection. Authors are also directed to SAGE's policy guidelines on publication ethics (SAGE Publications, 2025), reinforcing alignment between journal-level expectations and wider publishing standards.

The introduction of this field reflected a deliberate move to more explicit ethical reporting, and was a key priority for me when I joined JECR as Editor in Chief. Educational research, particularly when it involves human participants, is ethically situated by default. Decisions about consent, data use, intervention design, and participant welfare are integral to research quality, not ancillary considerations. Making ethical reasoning visible within the submission process supports editors and reviewers in evaluating ethical adequacy and signals to readers that ethical considerations have been treated as a core component of the research design.

The implementation of this field has also revealed areas of concern that warrant explicit reflection. In a small but significant number of submissions, authors have written text in this field such as “Not Appropriate”, “NA”, or “None” despite the manuscript clearly involving human participants, including, in many cases, children. This is precisely the context in which heightened ethical care and transparency are most critical. In some cases, this appears to reflect misunderstandings about ethical oversight, particularly in classroom-based or practice-oriented research. In others, it raises more substantive questions about awareness of, or engagement with, ethical norms.

From an editorial perspective, such responses are problematic not merely because they represent incomplete reporting, but because they risk normalising the absence of ethical accountability in contexts where it is clearly required. As educational research increasingly involves digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and immersive technologies, ethical issues become more complex rather than less so. Data may be collected passively, consent may be assumed rather than negotiated, and interventions may have effects that extend beyond the immediate study context.

The journal’s position is therefore clear. Where research involves human participants, authors are expected to provide a transparent and reasoned account of ethical approval and consent processes, or a defensible explanation for why formal approval was not required under specific institutional or national frameworks. Simply indicating that ethical considerations are “not applicable” is insufficient in such cases. Both misunderstanding and disengagement require editorial intervention, albeit of different kinds. This stance is not intended to be punitive, but corrective and educative. It reflects the journal’s responsibility to uphold ethical standards and to support authors in meeting them.

### **RAISE and the normalisation of transparency**

The introduction of the RAISE (Reporting AI Studies in Education) framework (Allison, 2025b), published in September 2025, represents a central element of the journal’s broader commitment to transparency and research quality. RAISE was developed in response to the rapid integration of artificial intelligence into educational research and practice. As outlined in the original editorial (Allison, 2025b), the framework provides a

structured checklist of thirty items across ten thematic domains, guiding authors in reporting AI interventions, study design, learner context, data collection, outcomes, and findings. Without clear reporting standards, it becomes difficult to assess validity, compare findings, or support cumulative knowledge building. RAISE addresses these challenges by making design decisions, assumptions, and contextual factors explicit.

Already, the ethics and risk matrix, as part of RAISE, has proven beneficial in identifying the different risks of AI related interventions, and since its publication, the framework has now begun to shape submissions. For instance, Khodabandeh (2025) provided the ethics and risk matrix as supplementary material for their study which examined AI-assisted feedback for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in an online learning environment. Meanwhile, Gong et al, (2025) incorporated selected aspects of the matrix in their appendix where they reflected on the ethics and risks of LLMs scaffolding within game-based learning.

Given its relatively recent publication, RAISE has largely functioned as an editorial suggestion during revision following reviewer feedback. Increasingly, however, manuscripts are being submitted that engage with RAISE and its principles from the point of initial submission. Importantly, RAISE does not prescribe methodological uniformity, nor is it compulsory. Its purpose is not to constrain inquiry, but to enhance interpretability and trust in educational research involving artificial intelligence.

There is a clear conceptual alignment between RAISE and the journal's strengthened approach to ethical reporting. Both initiatives are grounded in the principle that transparency is a precondition for scholarly credibility. Just as methodological opacity undermines interpretability, ethical opacity undermines trust. Together, these measures reflect a coherent editorial stance on responsible research practice.

### **Priorities for the year ahead**

Looking forward, the journal's priorities for the new calendar year are shaped by the need to balance growth with sustainability. A central objective is the recruitment of an associate editor. Sustained increases in submission volume make this essential for maintaining timely and high-quality editorial processes. Associate editors play a critical role in managing peer review, synthesising feedback, and ensuring consistency across decisions. Introducing associate editors is therefore a structural necessity rather than a discretionary enhancement required to maintain epistemic quality and decision timelines as submission volumes increase.

A second priority is the continued refinement of submission guidelines, particularly with respect to ethical approval statements for educational interventions. While recent changes have improved ethical transparency, clearer guidance is needed to support consistency across diverse institutional and national contexts. The aim is not to impose uniformity, but to promote reflexivity and accountability in ethical reporting.

More broadly, the journal will continue to position itself as a forum for research that is both innovative and responsible. This includes encouraging work that critically examines the pedagogical, social, and ethical implications of emerging technologies, as well as scholarship that advances theory and methodology in enduring ways. Editorial leadership in this context involves not only selecting what is published, but shaping the conditions under which high-quality, ethical scholarship can flourish.

### **Concluding reflections**

This editorial has sought to frame recent developments as interconnected elements of scholarly stewardship rather than isolated achievements. Metrics such as impact factor and submission volume matter insofar as they reflect engagement and responsibility. Editorial initiatives such as RAISE and agenda-setting thematic editorials matter because they articulate standards and priorities. Procedural changes matter because they shape how knowledge is produced, evaluated, and trusted.

As the journal enters a new calendar year, it does so from a position of increased visibility and influence. With that influence comes an obligation to sustain intellectual rigour, ethical accountability, and inclusive scholarly dialogue. This editorial is offered as both a reflection on that responsibility and an invitation to continued collective engagement in shaping the future of the field.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the work of a journal is always collective, sustained through the often-invisible labour of authors, reviewers, readers, editorial board members, and publishing colleagues at SAGE. It is through this shared commitment to scholarly care and responsibility that JECR continues to evolve. So, for all those involved, thank you.

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