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Enhancing Ethical Research Participation and Inclusion of Marginalized Adult Migrant Learners: An Early Career Researcher's Perspective

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Key words: adult
migrant learner;
informed consent;
LESLLA;
reciprocity;
reflexivity;
research ethics

Abstract: With this article I aim to raise awareness of the underrepresentation of adult migrant learners with limited educational experience, so-called LESLLA (*literacy education and second language learning for adults*) learners, in education, language, and literacy studies. As most researchers have so far concentrated on educated adult second language learners, LESLLA learners have not been the focus of ethical research discussions. Based on my own experience as an early career researcher, I reflect on selected ethical dilemmas I encountered, focusing on informed consent procedures and reciprocity to discuss how prevailing issues can affect participation and thus sustain underrepresentation of LESLLA learners. By providing contextualized reflections on procedural ethics and ethics-in-practice, I hope to generate discussions on solutions to enhance research participation and inclusion of marginalized adult migrant second language learners with limited educational experience, in turn strengthening reflexivity and integrity of qualitative research(ers).

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1. Introduction: Less WEIRD, More LESLLA and Contextualized Research Ethics

The fixation of behavior scientists on so-called WEIRD, i.e., western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic participants (HENRICH, HEINE & NORENZAYAN, 2010) has resulted in biased sampling, persistent research gaps, and limited generalizability of existing findings in educational and applied linguistics, impacting the viability of linguistic theories (ANDRINGA & GODFROID, 2020; DEYGERS, BIGELOW, LO BIANCO, NADARAJAN & TANI, 2021; SHEPPERD, 2022). This disproportionate preoccupation with highly educated learner populations in second language research, steadily ignoring "the principle of justice" (KUBANIYOVA, 2008, p.505), has reinforced understudied "invisible" learner populations (ORTEGA, 2005, p.432). Among these neglected learner populations are adult migrant second language learners with limited formal educational experience (YOUNG-SCHOLTEN, 2015). [1]

Adult migrant second language learners with limited or interrupted formal education are, in this article, referred to by employing the LESLLA acronym, coined by the international [LESLLA research organization](#). Since its launch in 2005, this research community has significantly contributed to a growing knowledge base for adult second language and literacy researchers, practitioners, and policy makers focusing on LESLLA learner populations (YOUNG-SCHOLTEN, 2021a). Moreover, the LESLLA community has continuously been advocating for the inclusion of second language learners with emerging literacy in research samples in the fields of educational and applied linguistics (BIGELOW & TARONE, 2004; KREEFT PEYTON & YOUNG-SCHOLTEN, 2020; TARONE & BIGELOW, 2005). With its formalization into an international organization, the LESLLA research network consolidated its central position and thriving potential in the field of adult second language and literacy education (D'AGOSTINO & MOCCIARO, 2021, p.9). [2]

The LESLLA acronym stood initially for *low educated second language and literacy acquisition for adults*, but was revised in 2017. Aiming for a bias-free name, this resulted in an advocative renaming of LESLLA into *literacy education and second language learning for adults*. Particularly in the North American context, LESLLA learners have also been referred to as limited formal schooling learners, students with interrupted formal education or *students with limited or interrupted formal education* (SLIFE). The SLIFE acronym was coined by DeCAPUA, SMATHERS and TANG (2009) and is mostly used to refer to English second language learners (see DECAPUA & MARSHALL, 2010; PENTÓN HERRERA, 2022). KING and BIGELOW (2018), BROWDER (2019) and BROWDER, PENTÓN HERRERA and FRANCO (2022) cautioned about the (inconsistent) use of the SLIFE term, its definition and potential risk of stigmatizing learners. Regarding sampling, BROWDER (2019, p.50) offered his concerns about data production requiring "inaccurate or potentially harmful" labeling of students. Sharing these concerns, I use the LESLLA acronym interchangeably with the terms *marginalized learners* and *adult migrants with limited formal educational experience*, to refer to this specific learner population. [3]

LESLLA learners constitute a very heterogeneous group of adult second language learners with diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds (YOUNG-SCHOLTEN, 2021b). However, many share forced migration and limited and/or interrupted formal education experience (see SHAPIRO, FARRELLY & CURRY, 2018). Due to various ongoing humanitarian and environmental crises, the number of refugees has been on the rise¹. In 2020, at least 763 million adults and adolescents had only minimal or no literacy skills in their first language². These adults and adolescents become LESLLA learners when they migrate to highly literate societies. They are confronted with the immense challenge to learn a new language and, for the first time in their life, literacy skills in this new language. Whilst this adult learner population has traditionally been at the margins of education, second language, and literacy research, seminal LESLLA research with, on, and for this marginalized learner population has been evolving during the last two decades (KREEFT PEYTON & YOUNG-SCHOLTEN, 2020; TARONE, BIGELOW & HANSEN, 2009). In the research context of Finland (see PÖYHÖNEN & TARNANEN, 2015; PÖYHÖNEN, TARNANEN & SIMPSON, 2018), LESLLA research has started to gain momentum only during the last decade (MALESSA, 2018). Most recently, researchers have also included the digital literacy dimension in their studies (EILOLA, 2023; EILOLA & LILJA, 2021; LILJA, EILOLA, JOKIPOHJA & TAPANINEN, 2022; MALESSA, 2021; TAMMELIN-LAINE, VAARALA, SAVOLAINEN & BOGDANOFF, 2020). In my qualitative doctoral research, I explored technology-equipped adult migrant literacy training practices and problems (MALESSA, 2023a). Additionally, a literacy support game app was tested and evaluated by LESLLA teachers. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a planned mixed-methods field study with LESLLA learners could not be realized (MALESSA, 2023b). [4]

Surprisingly, LESLLA learners have not only been marginalized in applied linguistics research, but in research ethics as well. Despite its long research tradition, applied linguists have only lately started to discuss and disseminate ethical dilemmas (KUBANYIOVA, 2008; STERLING, WINKE & GASS, 2016). While a lively discussion of ethical aspects relevant for LESLLA research has started to evolve (DE COSTA, 2016; PERRY, 2011; PERRY & MALLOZZI, 2015; THOMAS & PETTITT, 2017; WARRINER & BIGELOW, 2019), there is still a need to expand debates on both *procedural ethics*, "which usually involves seeking approval from a relevant ethics committee to undertake research involving humans" (GUILLEMIN & GILLAM, 2004, p.263) as well as *ethics in practice*, referring to "the everyday ethical issues that arise in the doing of research" (ibid.) relevant to LESLLA scholars and scholarship. [5]

The discussion of relevant ethical issues in research contexts with populations considered *vulnerable*³, including minoritized groups of forced migrants and

1 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/07/1139047> [Accessed: August 29, 2023].

2 <https://www.unesco.org/en/days/literacy> [Accessed: August 29, 2023].

3 The concept of vulnerability has been criticized due to its deficit perspective and connotations of helplessness (VON UNGER, 2018). LUNA (2009) noted its problematic use as a label for certain populations and its stereotyping effect, but instead of rejecting the concept, she proposed a revised concept of a layered vulnerability, as *vulnerability* is, particularly from a

refugees, is particularly welcome due to its applicability to LESLLA research contexts (CLARK-KAZAK, 2017, 2021; DEPS, REZENDE, ANDRADE & COLLIN, 2022; FOX, BAKER, CHARITONOS, JACK & MOSER-MERCER, 2020; HUGMAN, BARTOLOMEI & PITTAWAY, 2011, 2014; MACKENZIE, McDOWELL & PITTAWAY, 2007). Relevant scholarly contributions are often researchers' own contextual reflections on their research and its ethical implications (BERNSTEIN, 2019; BIGELOW et al., 2019; BLOCK; WARR; GIBBS & RIGGS, 2012; LEE, 2011; MICHAUD, FORTIER & AMIREAULT, 2022; PERRY, 2019; PETTITT, 2019; PÖYHÖNEN & SIMPSON, 2021; TOMKINSON, 2014; VON UNGER, 2018). [6]

Despite a growing interest in procedural ethics, NGO, BIGELOW and LEE suggested that researchers have paid less attention to "the deeper ethics and politics of research with immigrant communities, particularly related to researcher positionality (2014, p.1)." Especially for early career researchers, detailed discussions between individual researchers and research community-supported dissemination of "ethically important moments" (GUILLEMIN & GILLAM, 2004) are beneficial to raise awareness of ethical responsibility, strengthening the two vital aspects of research integrity: positionality and reflexivity (SHEPHERD, NOBLE & PARKIN, 2022). "Acknowledging that our insights are always both illuminated and limited by our specific contexts" (ORTEGA, 2005, p.428), I use my own ethical lens to reflect on selected aspects of procedural ethics and ethics in practice that I encountered as a junior researcher. By discussing my own experience in combination with disseminated experiences of other applied linguists, I aim to share personal observations of procedural and practical ethics and provide key ideas for further discussion on practical and ethical ways to enhance research participation. These observations relate to the inclusion of LESLLA learners in my local Finnish, Nordic, and European research context, as well as beyond my own discipline and geographical context. [7]

In Section 2, I examine selected aspects impacting LESLLA learners' research participation and representation in academic knowledge. Reflecting on selected ethical dilemmas which I experienced as an early career researcher in Finland, I focus on informed consent procedures (Section 2.2) and reciprocity (Section 2.3) to discuss how these issues can potentially affect participation and thus sustain LESLLA learners' underrepresentation. Drawing observations from these scenarios, I further reflect on potential means to increase participation and inclusion of marginalized adult second language learners with limited educational experience in ethical and engaging academic research. In Section 3, I conclude with an outlook on contextualized research ethics to enhance research participation and inclusion of marginalized populations. [8]

practical research perspective, highly relevant and remains a key concept for research ethics (LUNA, 2019). Regarding the LESLLA learner population, it is essential to acknowledge that their refugee experience can make them vulnerable in many ways (BLOCK et al., 2012; MACKENZIE et al., 2007).

2. Potential Difficulties for LESLLA Learners' Research Participation

The concept of participation, simultaneously familiar and elusive, can be difficult to define. In the Cambridge online dictionary, participation is described as "the act of taking part in an event or activity,"⁴ not commenting on the nature of this act, its degrees of (in)active contribution or (independent) volition. However, to ensure that potential research participants can provide informed consent, participants' volition, ability, and autonomy need to be considered in ethical research participation. Challenging and questioning whether participants can make informed decisions on their participation is of particular importance in LESLLA research, with displaced persons, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. In this specific research context, there are several barriers to informed, independent decision making. [9]

As potential research participants, adult second language learners with limited literacy and educational experience are faced with a language and literacy barrier in an unfamiliar academic context, where participation often depends on engagement with (complex) written texts and documents. This underscores why language-related issues need to be at the center of attention when planning consent procedures and data production, particularly when researchers' and participants' language backgrounds and proficiency vary (KOULOURIOTIS, 2011; PERRY & MALLOZZI, 2015; SIVUNEN, 2019). PERRY and MALLOZZI (2015, p.406) underlined that the language used in the data production process is one crucial aspect that could impact participants' level of vulnerability. [10]

In cross-cultural research, there are often not only significant language and communication issues (HENNINK, 2019), but also fundamental differences in educational and cultural backgrounds of researchers and participants, which can create challenges (LIAMPUTTONG, 2019). It is thus likely that these discrepancies contribute to divergent views and expectations of research process and participation. KOULOURIOTIS (2011, p.3) highlighted that "it is arrogant to assume that the culture of the researcher or the culture in which research takes place must take precedence." On a similar note, MACKENZIE et al. (2007, p.301) underlined researchers' responsibility to strive for understanding and engaging with research participants' views and experiences to build research relationships that respond to participants' needs and values. Consequently, the difficulty conceptualizing "meaningful" informed consent may be a product of the disparity between the participants' culture(s) and that of the researcher (KOULOURIOTIS, 2011, pp.6-7). MICHAUD et al. (2022, p.4) emphasized that in the research context of forced migration or refugee populations, "it is important for Western researchers to be sensitive to cultural issues that may be unknown to them." Differences in "lifeworlds" and power positions necessitate a high degree of ethical reflexivity of researchers (BLOCK et al., 2012, p.71). Accordingly, HYNES (2003, p.13) called for a thorough inspection of "inequalities of political rights, economic positions, psychosocial positions, gender and other social and cultural factors between the researcher and the researched." [11]

⁴<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/participation> [Accessed: June 18, 2023].

I present further aspects impacting LESLLA learners' research participation, procedural ethics and compensation in the following subsections. I start by sharing my experience of pre-study ethical review (Section 2.1) and consent procedures (Section 2.2). Lastly, I reflect on institutional barriers I was faced with when, after data production, I considered reimbursement of participants (Section 2.3). Based on a personal, ethically important moment during my research, I discuss payment and incentivization, portrayed often as potential risks for coercion. [12]

2.1 Pre-participation: Ethical review and approval

Regarding procedural ethics practices applicable in social science contexts, Finland differs considerably compared to research settings necessitating ethical reviews of social studies with human participants. Particularly in the US, Canada, and Australia (GUILLEMIN, GILLAM, ROSENTHAL & BOLITHO, 2012; HEMMINGS, 2006), institutional review board approval can be very time- and labor-intensive, which has led to open criticism of overzealous ethics reviews (SCHRAG, 2011). Compared to Finland, other countries in Europe, e.g., Norway, have a stricter regulation of research ethics (DEWILDE & RODRICK BEILER, 2021; GRIFFIN & LEIBETSEDER, 2019; SMETTE, 2019). Contrary to these complex ethical procedural requirements, ethical review procedure of non-medical studies involving human participation in Finland is usually much less complicated. Research with human participants does not stipulate generic, universal ethical review prior to data production, unless there are certain factors impacting research, e.g., informed consent deviation, participants' physical integrity intervention, child participants, strong stimuli exposure, potential mental harm, or safety risk for participants (FINNISH NATIONAL BOARD ON RESEARCH INTEGRITY [FNBRI], 2019, p.19). [13]

As such, in the Finnish research context, decisions about exemption from ethical approval are not externally made by institutional review boards or ethics committees, but by researchers themselves. This in turn allows for a high degree of autonomy but, on the other hand, demands a high degree of ethical responsibility from researchers working with participants from marginalized backgrounds, including LESLLA learners. From an international perspective, research not requiring institutional review board approval is unusual. While no ethical review was necessary for my research, when disseminating one of my sub-studies (MALESSA, 2023a), I found myself in the position of needing to obtain documented institutional review board approval. To satisfy the guidelines of an international publisher, I turned towards my home university's ethics committee which provided me with a description of the ethical review system for research in Finland (see the [Appendix](#)). VON UNGER, DILGER and SCHÖNHUTH (2016, §16) reported that publication in international journals also constitutes a reason to seek ethics review for researchers in Germany. To date, ethics reviews in the social and cultural sciences has by and large been voluntary in Germany, except when required by journals or funders (VON UNGER et al., 2016). Given different, conflicting requirements for institutional review board approval, researchers in transnational settings have described similar difficulties

and dilemmas around obtaining ethical approval (GRIFFIN & LEIBETSEDER, 2019). [14]

2.2 Documenting and safeguarding participants' informed consent

In human research ethics, informed consent is considered fundamental and has been particularly prominent in procedural ethics, including formal approval processes and guidelines. Informed consent requires that "participants are fully and adequately informed about the purposes, methods, risks and benefits of the research and that agreement to participate is fully voluntary" (MACKENZIE et al., 2007, p.301). As refugee-background participants often find themselves in unequal power relations "with sponsors, service providers and/or the government for survival and/or legal status" (CLARK-KAZAK, 2017, p.11), this intense dependency has an impact on the extent of genuine voluntariness of participation in research "conducted by, or in partnership with, such organizations" (ibid.). Researchers working with LESLLA learner populations need to be aware of these external factors. Further, the power imbalance between researchers and participants needs to be considered. Creating an ethical consent process with refugee-background participants is therefore not an easy undertaking (see BLOCK et al., 2012; MACKENZIE et al., 2007). [15]

During my own preparations for a planned field-testing with LESLLA learners (MALESSA, 2023b), I spent considerable time pondering how to overcome language and literacy barriers to ensure informed consent from potential participants, who likely have very limited second language proficiency and only emerging literacy skills in any language. It felt like a mammoth task to materialize research information and participant consent documents into LESLLA-friendly formats that adhered to local guidelines of my home university's ethics committee, as well as national and international legal and ethical regulations⁵. Standard research notifications, privacy notices, and consent forms provided by my local ethics committee are devised for certain types of research designs (e.g., surveys) and thus challenges of ethnographic studies are not necessarily recognized (S.PÖYHÖNEN, private conversation, June 11, 2023). The existing documents, including many pages of written, context-specific, and legal language, are clearly targeted at a WEIRD population and pose a high risk of incomprehensibility for Finnish/English as a second language speakers, let alone LESLLA learners. MACKENZIE et al. (2007, pp.301-302) emphasized that standard interpretations of informed consent are based on assumptions that "participants are autonomous, understand the implications of giving consent and are in relatively equal positions of power with researchers." Standard practice applied to research contexts with vulnerable participants, including LESLLA participants, is therefore inadequate. [16]

Simplified templates (combining research notification, privacy notice, and consent) designed for minors and "people with reduced capacity for self-

5 Participant information and consent needs to comply with national ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland (FNBRI, 2019) and with the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

determination as participants"⁶ contained less text compared to standard templates, yet were still exclusively based on written language. Evidently, these existing Finnish/English-language based *easy-to-read* documents are not suitable for LESLLA research purposes, as they cannot truly inform potential participants "in a way that they are able to understand" (FNBRI, 2019, pp.11-12). Furthermore, PERRY and MALLOZZI (2015, p.408) underlined the inappropriateness of "equating adult language learners with children or developmentally delayed adults." Language is a crucial factor in the informed consent process, serving as a facilitator to generate understanding and thus enabling informed decision making, particularly in cross-cultural research. The following questions, based on PERRY and MALLOZZI (p.399), functioned as starting points for my own considerations:

1. Which language(s) should be used for informed consent procedures, data production?
2. Should interpreters/translators be included and if so, in which way?
3. How will differences in meaning be recognized and accounted for? [17]

In my research context, turning down existing templates requires the researcher not only to innovate alternative templates, methods, and procedures to inform participants but also to produce an additional standard data privacy notice "so that the lawfulness of the processing is adequately documented."⁷ Extended templates for project information and participant consent have further been attested by DEWILDE and RODRICK BEILER (2021). SMETTE (2019, p.52) confirmed that the implementation of the GDPR reinforced the formalization of consent procedures in Norway. [18]

According to my university's guidelines on project information and consent, a participant must be "adequately informed about the research and his/her rights as a subject,"⁸ and "consent can only be informed if the person has *received* all the information concerning the processing of personal data and the research (information sheet and privacy notice)" [emphasis added].⁹ However, suggestions *how* to properly inform participants, by offering e.g., alternative methods or practices, are not provided in these guidelines. This in turn places a high responsibility on individual researchers to create suitable methods and procedures that ensure participants' informed decision making, while at the same

6 <https://www.jyu.fi/en/research/research-and-innovation/research-services/research-ethics/the-human-sciences-ethics-committee/tee-lausuntopyynto/lausuntopyynto-liitteet/letter-of-information-for-research-subjects/what-to-do-when-you-have-children-or-young-people-as-participants> [Accessed: June 18, 2023].

7 https://www.jyu.fi/en/university/data-privacy/clear_en_07102022-2.docx [Accessed: June 18, 2023].

8 <https://www.jyu.fi/en/research/research-and-innovation/research-services/research-ethics/the-human-sciences-ethics-committee/tee-lausuntopyynto/lausuntopyynto-liitteet/participation-consent-form-for-research-subjects> [Accessed: June 18, 2023].

9 <https://www.jyu.fi/en/research/research-and-innovation/research-services/research-ethics/the-human-sciences-ethics-committee/tee-lausuntopyynto/lausuntopyynto-liitteet/participation-consent-form-for-research-subjects/how-to-ask-for-consent-do-you-need-a-signature/view> [Accessed: June 18, 2023].

time trying to satisfy procedural practices. DEWILDE and RODRICK BEILER (2021, n.p.) exemplified that

"we knew we were doing something wrong when our potential participants reacted to our consent forms as if we were a summons from secret police. We eventually realized that we were dealing not only with differences of language and educational background but of biography and memory. [...] Several learners have lived in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq or Syria, where they have had negative experiences, including bad memories of encounters with the government." [19]

DEWILDE and RODRICK BEILER illustrated, in their account of their research experience with adult migrants who had little formal schooling, why a thorough reflection of existing procedural practices is crucial in research with forcedly displaced migrants, who become LESLLA learners, and how existing procedural practices can discourage participation due to past experiences. Similarly, drawing on WALKUP and BOCK (2009), THOMAS and PETTITT (2017, p.279), stressed that "elaborate assurances of confidentiality and harmlessness (especially couched in the legalistic language of informed consent forms) can actually backfire, decreasing participants' confidence and comfort." Consent procedures, intended to protect participants, can thus inadvertently prevent participation as they are overprotective and remain inaccessible to potential participants. [20]

A disproportionate focus on the documentation of consent procedure and proof of given consent calls into question the significance of adequately providing pre-consent participant information. There are clear tensions between procedural, practical, and personal ethics in research with marginalized participants, including LESLLA learners, raising questions whether the documentation of consent has received too much attention compared to considerations regarding the safeguarding of the truly informed nature of consent. Is providing information sufficient to ensure informed consent? Regarding LESLLA learners, BIGELOW and PETTITT (2016, p.67) even questioned whether it is "ethical to carry out research with participants who may not reach the point of being fully informed participants?." Bearing in mind that most LESLLA learners have a refugee-background, it is essential that researchers acknowledge that their potential future research participants' "capacities for autonomy" may be affected by feelings of prolonged displacement and trauma, potentially impacting genuinely informed consent (MACKENZIE et al., 2007, p.309). To develop a successful research partnership, MACKENZIE et al. (2007) proposed iterative models of consent and relational approaches to autonomy. Ideally, meaningful and genuinely informed consent is therefore attained in a process of an ongoing, mutual negotiation by researchers and participants. [21]

Satisfying legal requirements set by official institutions does not automatically guarantee ethical research conduct (GUILLEMIN & GILLAM, 2004, p.269), especially when (early career) researchers are faced with the high burden of bureaucratic and institutional barriers affecting their resources (including time, finances, human constraints). My attempt to create LESLLA-friendly information and consent practices was a daunting task with what I perceived as minimal

institutional support. To ensure that research is sound in ethical terms, individuals need institutional support. There is evidently a need for training beyond procedural ethics (STERLING et al., 2016, p.35), particularly for inexperienced researchers. Institutional support fostering collective and personal responsibility is crucial, as NIEMI (2016, p.1023) reminded us that

"ethical researchers grow in ethical scientific communities. The collective responsibility partly complements and partly overlaps the personal responsibility. [...] One ethical responsibility of a scientific community is to create space and nourish the autonomy and ethical judgements of its member scientists." [22]

According to NIEMI (p.1021), case study analysis is essential in research ethics training. I argue that procedural and practical ethics teaching could further benefit from detailed analysis of discipline-specific case studies, based on experienced researchers' practice, to benefit junior researchers' development as ethical researchers (see MICHAUD et al., 2022; VON UNGER, 2018). Furthermore, as an early career researcher involved in LESLLA research, I call for more guidelines focusing on specific disciplines (see BRITISH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION [BERA], 2018), research fields and/or research participants to complement generic institutional, national, and international guidelines (including ALL EUROPEAN ACADEMIES, 2017; FNBRI, 2019). While I agree with NIEMI (2016, p.1023) that ethical researchers do not hide behind laws, codes, formal procedures, nor checklists, I recommend practical guidelines, developed by institutions, professional organizations, and/or research communities, as a basis for discussion and recognition of blind spots and tricky dilemmas in specific research areas (see CLARK-KAZAK, 2017). [23]

Personally, looking back at my effort to generate LESLLA-specific information and documentation, early-stage advice how to produce adequate target-group specific, written/verbal, non-Finnish/non-English (academic, legal) language material, information on translation/interpretation issues and resources would have been advantageous. Information on methods enhancing informed consent, e.g., video-mediated solutions, such as the animation software *Vyond* (proposed by GRINDEN, 2021) could have been helpful. My personal experience motivates my request for more collective ethical support, including institutional flexibility, support, and trust during the decision-making process, to enhance compliance with procedural ethics procedures. Similarly, COOMBER (2022) demanded more institutional trust, stressing that ethics committees should not automatically require written consent from participants including "groups who wish (and/or indeed it is vital for their safety) to remain anonymous," but should acknowledge researchers' declarations of ethical conduct. As the GDPR does not necessitate written consent, ethics committees' requests for written consent documentation are highly problematic (S.PÖYHÖNEN, private conversation, June 11, 2023). In the context of forced migration, previous negative experience with authorities may have created mistrust of written consent forms. Accordingly, there are calls for verbal consent as an alternative (LIAMPUTTONG, 2019), "with clear procedures on how to obtain and record such oral consent" (CLARK-KAZAK, 2017, p.12). [24]

In establishing positive relationships between researchers and participants, trust is crucial. Procedural practices might, however, prevent participants to trust researchers (see DEWILDE & RODRICK BEILER, 2021) or put a strain on established trust between researchers and participants. DAVISON, BROWN and MOFFITT (2006) reported on issues that novice researchers were confronted with while conducting qualitative research in Canada. Gaining participants' trust was a particularly contentious issue:

" I knew that without the signed forms I wouldn't really be able to use the data (whatever that means) but it felt so difficult ...so un-natural. We have been working together for this long and now because of the interviews they have to sign something? I am sure many agreed to sign just as a *favor* to me. I hope this doesn't affect the relationship I have built with them already" (pp.28-29, emphasis added). [25]

Establishing relationships based on mutual trust is crucial for ethical research conduct and collaboration, yet at the same time, trust placed in the researcher can result in participants doing the researcher a *favor* (see also BLOCK et al.'s reflections, 2012, pp.79-80). Perceiving the researcher in a position of authority might lead to consent being given by participants who "may for cultural reasons feel that they cannot refuse" participation (KOULOURIOTIS, 2011, p.3). Regarding educational research contexts, VON UNGER (2018) highlighted their problematic nature as they are hierarchically structured social spaces with clear role assignments allowing for only limited voluntariness. Students may thus become "captive research participants" (BLOCK et al., 2012, p.78), which, in turn, makes the voluntary nature of consent in educational settings questionable. BIGELOW and PETTITT (2016, p.67) warned that researchers "must be careful not to exploit the implicit trust many refugees and immigrants have in their teachers and those their teachers signal to them as trustworthy." Inadequate procedural practices may therefore foster the risk of potential coercion. [26]

2.3 Reciprocity and incentivization: Fostering or festering participation?

While a lot of attention in procedural ethics is directed towards informed consent, based on ethical principles of protecting participants and doing no harm, the principle of *beneficence* "particularly in the sense of communities that participate in our research and to which its results are supposed to serve" has received much less attention (KUBANYIOVA, 2008, p.505). The notion of *reciprocity* can indeed pose several ethical dilemmas (see BIGELOW & PETTITT, 2016). CURRY (2012, p.92, emphasis added) defined reciprocity as "a cooperative exchange of help in which two parties strive for an arrangement where *everyone* benefits." PETTITT (2019, p.155) rightfully questioned "what counts as 'cooperative exchange'? What criteria can we use to determine that 'everyone benefits' from research? Who is 'everyone'? And most importantly, who gets to answer these questions?." Warning of potential paternalism, ECKERT (2013, pp.22-23) stressed that "what actually constitutes a contribution to the community is a complicated issue, and certainly not one that the researcher can resolve on his or her own." Although PITTAWAY, BARTOLOMEI and HUGMAN (2010, p.234) affirmed that "there is little guidance for researchers on how to negotiate

benefits with participants, and current funding arrangements usually provide neither time nor resources to effectively do so," they underlined the importance of giving "the community something of real value, in forms determined by participants themselves" (ibid.). [27]

Conventionally, reciprocity in research has been seen to constitute a "quid pro quo agreement" in which research participants' contributions are acknowledged by reimbursement in the form of payment to compensate them for their involvement in data production, their time, and effort (CURRY, 2012, p.92). In medical sciences, where clinical trials necessitate human participation, payment as an incentive is particularly common. Interestingly, while educational sciences also rely on human participation, "payment for participation in educational research is generally discouraged, not least because of the extra burden of cost that the extension of this practice would place on the practice of research" (BERA, 2018, p.19). In fact, according to BERA, incentives can even be considered "bad practice" (ibid.). Although undue incentives might pose a risk for vulnerable populations, DE CASTRO and TEOH (2012) highlighted that banning all payments without thorough justification may be unreasonable. Even though finding a balance between preventing coercion and promoting participation is not an easy task, a categorical ban is clearly a very paternalistic and, in many cases, also unethical solution. [28]

Acting on institutional ethical guidance that emphasized an increased risk of coercion and recommended "the avoidance of financial incentives with vulnerable populations that may be facing financial insecurity," SHEPPERD (2022, p.10) decided not to offer financial incentives in her internet-based doctoral research with Arabic-speaking learners of English, which was conducted remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, in hindsight, she regarded her decision as not being adequately critical and stated that for future studies, she would "consider options like mobile top-up cards to at least cover the data usage of participation" (p.8). Similarly, after completing my study with LESLLA teachers (MALESSA, 2023a), I had an ethically important moment when I realized that I had not taken into account the option to reimburse my participants before starting data production. I had conveniently relied on the altruism of participating teachers, even during the turbulent times of the COVID-19 pandemic which had a tremendous effect on personal (work)load. Consequently, I experienced a strong sense of injustice, as I recognized that the participating teachers had sacrificed their valuable time and thoughts, while I had not even considered compensation options. [29]

As a token of my appreciation for producing my doctoral study's data, I wanted to present participating teachers with a voucher, a movie ticket etc., and asked my home university for official advice. While my home university would have been willing to sponsor proposed rewards, I was informed that due to a recent change in taxation, even small monetary rewards, including movie tickets and vouchers, would be liable to taxation. Unless I provided the university with my participants' personal data (name, social security number, address), which the university would forward to the tax office (FINNISH TAX ADMINISTRATION [FTA], 2023a),

no compensation would officially be possible (M. KANERVO, personal communication, March 16, 2022). I tried to disentangle this ethical dilemma by contacting various university members and the university's Human Sciences Ethics Committee. The ethics committee shared my concerns, communicating them to members of the university's higher management, hoping for a broader discussion between universities. However, either the committee has not been informed about further steps taken or there has been no advancement of the repeatedly initiated discussions between the committee members and the university management (M. HONKO, personal conversation, June 7, 2023). Therefore, my calls and e-mails for justice were unfortunately in vain and I finally sent an e-mail to my participants explaining my intentions and apologizing about the impossibility to officially materialize my gratitude. [30]

Based on my own experience, it seems impossible for researchers in Finland to offer official monetary reimbursement, without being forced to collect sensitive personal data from participants and hand the data over to institutional bodies of their university and the central tax office. This practice might entail potential misuse of personal data and, while it is deemed to be legal, it is in my opinion unethical, contradicting the fundamental ethical principle of providing anonymity and confidentiality to research participants. A potential transfer of personal data erodes researcher-participant trust, especially in LESLLA research with refugee-background participants with potentially compromised ability to trust in officials, service providers, individuals, and communities in a new (language-) environment (HYNES, 2003). KURKI (2018, p.35), an early career researcher from Finland, conducted ethnographic research in pre-vocational training for immigrants (MAVA) and contributed a relevant vignette describing the fragility of researcher-participant trust:

"The atmosphere in the interviews with some of the MAVA students started somewhat coldly as I was asked if I would be reporting my findings to the immigration authorities. I did my best to explain research ethics and encouraged them to think and talk critically about integration." [31]

KURKI demonstrated the importance of explaining to participants the separation and independence from "officialdom," as suggested by HYNES (2003, p.15). Indeed, anonymity and confidentiality are likely prerequisites for many LESLLA learners to consent to research involvement (compare PERRY's reflections on unwanted "default" anonymity, 2019, p.159). CLARK-KAZAK (2017, p.13) reminded researchers of their "duty" to protect participants' information as "in some cases, the identification of research subjects can have serious consequences for their safety, well-being, migration status, and/or eligibility for services." [32]

If anonymity can only be guaranteed for unpaid research participation, I agree with SHEPPERD (2022, p.10) who highlighted that "the idea that people should contribute to research out of personal interest or an altruistic support for the advancement of science is a privileged concept that assumes an affluence of time, stability, and capacity that likely further biases samples towards WEIRD

populations." In terms of reciprocity, this poses a significant ethical problem for me as an early career researcher. In my professional role, I can officially reward participants only with small presents, including a bag of sweets or coffee, which are exempt from taxation and thus sensitive data collection (M. KANERVO, personal communication, March 16, 2022). However, in my private capacity I am allowed to give participants substantial tax-free "gifts." In Finland, donations to private persons, not exceeding €4,999 in three years are exempt from taxation (FTA, 2023b). Yet, these individual considerations need to be elaborated on in an institution-wide discussion, as I am benefiting from my participants' involvement in my professional capacity as a junior researcher affiliated with an official research institution. [33]

In contrast to my WEIRD teacher participants, who assumedly had not expected actual reciprocal benefits from participation, MACKENZIE et al. (2007) reported of participants in Thailand and Kenya feeling disappointed and exploited when they did not receive tangible tokens of gratitude in the form of a report or photograph: "'They come and get their PhDs and write their books at our expense—we should get something back'; 'They get their PhDs and funding from our stories and they cannot even be bothered to send us a report and a thank you letter'" (p.305). The aspect of power is of paramount importance not only in ethically sound research, but also academic knowledge production (see TIETJE, 2023). I am thus proposing a contextualized discussion on tax-free reimbursement of research participants in academia and other probable alternatives, as private compensation by an early career researcher in the name of science is clearly not a feasible nor an ethical option. [34]

3. Advancing Research Participation and Inclusion of Marginalized Populations: Towards (Utopian) Contextualized Research Ethics

Calling for more attention to research participant exclusion due to "barriers relevant to access or exacerbated vulnerabilities," SHEPPERD (2022, p.10) declared that institutional review boards' undue emphasis on potential coercion and thus a categorical avoidance of financial incentives is likely to sustain sampling biases toward WEIRD populations. A lack of incentives or the existence of legal burdens to incentivization likely impacts self-selection of participants. It seems that in Finland, access to participation is not complicated by institutional review boards but by the Finnish Tax Administration. [35]

Regarding the over-representation of WEIRD learners in research, I continue to ponder the following questions for their academic and societal impact:

- Is it ethical/realistic to expect participants to act on purely altruistic motives?
- Can we afford not to acknowledge participants' efforts and engagement financially, if we as researchers and our home institutions in turn are in fact the ones benefiting financially the most?
- How can I ethically justify participatory research with co-workers who are not reimbursed for their time and engagement? [36]

BLOCK et al. (2012, p.74) emphasized that ethical research must not only be methodologically rigorous, but also meaningful for participants. Meaningful participation necessitates further that participants have the means to participate. According to CLARK-KAZAK (2017, p.12), "financial compensation can be offered for people's time and/or child care and/or transportation costs in order to remove barriers to participation, it should be proportionate and reasonable." Not reimbursing participants for their time and other participation-related expenses is neither proportionate nor reasonable. Reciprocity, reimbursement, and compensation might take many forms, depending on the participants' resources, needs, and wishes. MACKENZIE et al. (2007) insisted on a negotiated "research relationship with participants that not only respects, but also promotes their autonomous agency and helps re-build capacity" (p.301), and further urged researchers to "recognize an *obligation* to design and conduct research projects that aim to bring about reciprocal benefits for refugee participants and/or communities" (ibid., emphasis added). Taking an advocative stance, I ask for access and equity for refugees and immigrants in research participation and process, sharing ORTEGA's (2005, p.439) view that

"for SLA [second language acquisition] researchers concerned with serving the pressing social and educational language learning needs of majority and minority L2 [second language] populations, the formidable but uncompromising challenge is to explore what it would take for the field to contribute knowledge that is useful for the groups we seek to serve across educational contexts. This exploration can only be possible if it is guided by moral and political values that we, as individuals and as a research community, can embrace. By examining the relationship between our current research practices and our value commitments in instructed SLA research, we make ourselves vulnerable, but much is to be gained. A genuine engagement with notions of ethical values and professional responsibilities would enlarge the space available for productive dialogue among differing understandings of the field. It has the potential to enhance the rigor and relevance of the research we generate. It might even be the catalyst for transforming our theories and our research practices. I am hopeful that collectively and individually we can work towards a socially responsible, politically self-reflective, and epistemologically diverse field of instructed SLA that generates research inspired by societal needs." [37]

By communicating my own experience and ethical concerns, I aim to contribute to the process of demystification "of doing ethically grounded research, and in the process, mentor others" (BIGELOW & PETTITT, 2016, p.66). As an early career researcher, developing one's individual guidelines of "virtue ethics" (HAVERKAMP, 2005), taking a reflective position during one's researcher training is not only beneficial regarding the development of one's skill set as an aspiring researcher but should also be encouraged by research communities and institutions. Perspectives on procedural ethics, as well as ethics in practice, need to be considered and acted upon to holistically advance ethically sustainable research. As ethical dilemmas are contextualized, a generic focus on research ethics needs to be shifted towards a contextualized approach (ibid., see also PERRY & MALLOZZI, 2015, p.407). KUBANYIOVA (2008, p.515) reminded us that

"when research becomes highly situated, it is as if suddenly a can of ethical worms is opened, and what seems straightforward and logical at the macro-level suddenly becomes ambiguous and problematic in the actual research practice, rendering existing ethical guidelines inadequate." [38]

To examine this "can of ethical worms" relevant to LESLLA research, NGO et al. offered some questions: "What ethical issues are unique to conducting research with refugee and immigrant communities? What are our responsibilities to participants? What is the role of advocacy in our work? How might we foster more mutual relationships of collaboration and scholarship?" (2014, p.2) [39]

In conclusion, against the background of the domination of highly educated participants in second language research, it seems clear that academic research participation and the inclusion of marginalized adult second language learners with limited educational experiences needs to be enhanced. Relevant stakeholders in academia and education should strive to improve recruitment of adolescent and adult second language learners with limited educational experience in research activities and thus promote LESLLA learners' inclusion in academic practice and discourse on both institutional and individual levels. However, to increase research participation and inclusiveness, researchers need to acknowledge potential participants' lived realities and resources. [40]

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Appendix

Description of the ethical review system for research in Finland. Click [here](#) to download the PDF file.

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