

What We Still Don't Know About Peer Review

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Abstract

Despite criticisms, the peer review process (PRP) is undoubtedly well established as an official and legitimated mechanism for evaluating and controlling scientific production. Although PRP has been a prominent object of study, we argue in this article that empirical research on PRP has not been addressed in a comprehensive way. Nine categories were applied to 150 empirical research articles on the topic with results revealing various gaps in empirical PRP research: (1) the research has been dedicated to the evaluation of the system rather than to the actual description of PRP as a concrete socio-discursive practice; (2) the most productive group of studies considers the multiple relationships between the sociological attributes (socio-demographic or scientometrical) of the actors (authors, reviewers, and editors) and the results of the process but does not take into account the texts exchanged by those actors; and (3) the few studies that do analyze the texts interchanged in the process do not take into account any of the variables included (such as scientometrical data, agreement, and rejection rates) in the more productive areas of the field. This lack of integration among the methodological approaches to PRP results in a partial comprehension of this important process, which determines the production and dissemination of an important part of scientific knowledge..

Keywords

Peer review, Research articles, Production and evaluation of scientific knowledge.