



Article Title

ASIANEFL RESEARCH PROTOCOLS

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Abstract:

The search for 'truth' is pervading educational research. In particular, and limiting research to the EFL/ESL sphere, theories and research results abound proving and disproving and altering that truth. The field of research has been likened to the judicial adversarial system where results are argued over. Not only are results disputed, but also initiating research designs are faulted. Then the direction of research, be it quantitative, or qualitative, or a combination, is faulted by subsequent researchers. Thus the research results grow in varying directions, and the teacher becomes confused and bewildered as to what approach or theory is going to benefit his/her students. What the teacher is left with is a lack of consolidating research that gives clear direction and guidance. Since Chomsky's (1968) theory of universal grammar, and Krashen's (1981) language acquisition device and monitor theories, research has exponentially blossomed, with the majority going unreported. English, as a foreign or second language field of study, now covers the globe in education curriculums and private schools.

Greater awareness is being brought to bear on the theories and the rationale that result in teaching methodologies, and every teacher in ESL/EFL is searching for meaningful and practical research data to put into practice. Yet issues of critical importance still need settling; the ethics of gathering data have been grossly ignored hitherto, though emphasis of ethno-methodologists is beginning to highlight this, (Saville -Troike, 1989). As well, debate into the paradigms used, when used, how used and why used, is not settled. As argued by learned authors, now is the time to present research as building blocks upon

previous research, not to demolish it, and to wisely use appropriate paradigms within a culturally acceptable way, such that the data leads to results that teachers can apply.

Introduction

Whilst one may ask the question, 'what is the purpose of research?' it is suggested that the answer is found in what research isn't. It is suggested that research in education is not about settling a debate or answering definitively a question, but merely a tool that provides answers that lead to further inquiry. This is surely seen by the numerous methodologies in second language acquisition over the last three decades and the attempt to build a constructive basis from which second language acquisition L2 teaching can proceed. Yet the research and data has not provided incremental steps, more so horizontal counter arguments. Poggenpoel, Myburgh, and van der Linde (2001:1) also suggest that in fact what research is, is an entity "...that depends on decisions made during the research process." Other researchers pose the same initiating question, namely, what is research, yet immediately enter a debate about qualitative versus quantitative paradigms without explaining what they believe research to be.

Education is a social science in constant flux. In particular, if we narrow the focus to English as a second or foreign language, education theories become critical in approaches we take to teaching that L2. Ellis (1994:676) notes that in period of the 80's "...theories appeared at a startling rate." Based on research, Krashen (1981) introduced his monitor and language acquisition device theories that seemed to be the catalyst for wide ranging research and debate into how and why a student learns a foreign language. Arguments proposed, ((Bickerton (1967), and Lennenberg (1981)) based on research, that a critical period existed for second language acquisition, whilst counter research showed from magnetic resonance scans, (Hot, 2002) that second language acquisition has more to do with neurological properties of the brain than being confined to a person of young years whose anatomy is still adapting to his L1, and thus, via a universal grammar, which many researchers, spearheaded by Chomsky, (1968), et al, argue transfers to the L2. Yet universal grammar in L2 acquisition relies in part on an acceptance of the critical age hypothesis, and research in this field, being inconclusive, clouds the universal grammar

hypothesis, thus highlighting (Herschensohn, 1998) the importance of research techniques and interpretations of data from the critical period research. Thus research and design methods have become a critical tool in forwarding or nullifying the debate.

One purpose of research is to raise skepticism. This posture, according to Dooley (2001: 3), "... requires us to distinguish poor research, unworthy of our belief, from good research, which deserves at least provisional acceptance." A more general statement is provided by Christensen, (1997:27) who suggests that research at the heart of a science is to "understand the world we live in." This view is shared by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001:3) who say that research is "...concerned with understanding the world." However, as opposed to saying specifically what research is, they prefer to couch the answer in terms of what research does, "...the discovery of truth," (2001:5). Thus we may argue that research is a tool which develops during the process of inquiry that provides us with information, based on one or more paradigms, corroborating or conflicting, upon which one may make an assessment that is open to analysis by a third party inquiry.

Paradigms and Definitions

The two paradigms spur energetic dispute as to their value as research tools. One is based on facts whilst the other is based on the researcher's foibles. A basic definition of the qualitative paradigm is "...social research based on field observations that is analyzed without any statistics," (Dooley, 2001:248). Christensen (1997:192), defines the two as a way to 'examine variables'. Hara (1995:1) notes the quantitative paradigm as something that "...endlessly pursues facts..." whilst the qualitative paradigm is an approach "... used if the researcher wants to observe in detail by his/her own research viewpoint."

Clearly quantitative research in education provides data that is emotion free and is disassociated from the researcher's viewpoint or feelings. The goal of this research is the "...discovery of a universal value," (Hara, 1995:2). Conversely is the view that in education the above paradigm is too rigid and that the researcher's viewpoint provides a critical part of the data.

Liebscher (1998:4), notes that "...qualitative studies lack the same clear cut and objective standards for design as quantitative studies..." for, as also noted by Poggenpoel, Myburgh, and van der Linde (2001:1), the design unfolds as the research develops. The counter argument proposed (Creswell, 1994) is that there is no definitive procedure for data collection that researchers can apply or refer to. However, if we consider the language of Liebscher (1998), we may equally argue that "...objective standards..." may be too narrowly focused for they obscure subjective peripheral data that may be relevant. Hara (1995), makes a general statement supporting the value of quantitative data in educational research and that the data can be applied to various other educational research situations because of its objectivity and being value free. It is submitted this is too broad a statement when applied to second language acquisition.

Research data obtained, for example, on second language acquisition processes from a survey of students in Australia, should not be applied or compared to a survey of second language acquisition students in Korea. The differences are beyond the scope of this work, but data gained from the exact same survey in a Confucianist based EFL society (Oh, 2002), with ingrained principles of filial piety, (D.J. Kim, 1999), should not be compared to the data from the same survey carried out in another non Confucianist ESL country. Any comparison would, whilst probably being based on sound criteria and research design, provide misleading results, unless specifically limited to that country of origin.

With respect to reality and knowledge of the two paradigms, clearly the goal of quantitative research is to find out "... the facts that exist in reality... the research results are derived by discovering exact facts and, therefore, the same research methods and the results are generalized", (Poggenpoel, Myburgh, and van der Linde, 2001:10). Thus they can be applied in other research situations or follow up research. Conversely, qualitative research allows the researcher "...to provide a form of therapeutic self-knowledge which will liberate individuals from the irrational compulsions" (Carr and Kemmis, 1985:138).

Culture and the Paradigms

Yet may it be argued that by advancing definitions, and saying what a paradigm does, fails to address the rapidly changing nature of education, particularly in so far as first and second language acquisition goes and thus any definition of research needs to be broad enough to encompass change. It will be submitted below that the research paradigms do not make significant allowance for such changes as are being found in education. Crozet and Liddicoat (1997) note that culture pervades education, and none more than in inter cultural teaching, and arguably this aspect is present in other social sciences under study. If this argument is accepted, then by confining the education research debate within two paradigms, then the search for the truth (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001:3) may fail to identify and report valuable data and observations that future teaching methodologies may usefully employ. Research within any Asian country involves complex issues of culture, and it is argued that as 'culture and culturalism' is not a clearly identifiable term, then quantitative research would fail to provide a valid analysis, unless based on prior qualitative research, for varying definitions exist as to what culture may be. As communication is the link between Asian learners and English-speaking persons then cross-cultural communication is the medium for cultural confusion. Jayasuriya (1990) says culture is not a fixed entity but a mixture of past present and future concoctions. Hellsten (1999) notes more restrictively that culture is a static phenomenon yet whilst agreeing with the self-other argument propounded by Hoffman, D. (1999) she contradicts this static phenomenon scenario by stating culture is visible in "...practice and every day actions..." which clearly must include the concept of Globalism that is not in a static state. How then does a quantitative research design assess this?

In Hellsten's (1999) view, education research planning implementation and production rely on theories of culture. Bourdieu and Passeron (1994:8) quoted in Hellsten, (1999) impliedly argue that language is a sub unit of culture but that it is "the most active and elusive part of cultural knowledge which each individual owes to his background." What is left is a fierce debate as to what the notion of culture means and any research design must commence with these caveats. Thus Hellsten (1999) impliedly argues that no education research can occur in the absence of qualitative inquiry.

Thus the theories of Popkewitz (1994) pertaining to educational research being value free

cannot apply within an EFL educational second language acquisition research setting, unless settled theories of culture are built into the survey, which is very difficult. Therefore it is hypothesized by Liebscher (1998: 673) that a combination of paradigms is necessary to legitimize research, for the solution to problems "... are seldom found in one study and by using one methodology." Thus ESL/EFL research arguably needs this caveat at the forefront of any research design.

Kinds of Research Questions Generated

The question places the paradigm before the research. Yet accepting the argument of Poggenpoel, Myburgh, and van der Linde, (2001) it is the question, or changing nature of the research question at various stages of the research process that determines the paradigm. As well, before one embarks upon any research, the research design needs assessing, for, as noted by Caporaso, (1995:450), the "...art of good research design is to identify those cases which can tell us the most in terms of distinct theoretical content", and such that the design "...minimize, as much as possible, present and future competing explanations," (Dooley, 2001:9). However, in reality research is an adversarial process because it becomes a weapon in the hand of subsequent researchers, (Dooley, 2001:3). Christensen (1997:14) says that whilst the preliminary enquiry is to nominate a research question, in his opinion an easy task, the difficulty arises in making that question researchable.

The kinds of research that have been undertaken within an educational field, employing both paradigms, are what the infants of multi lingual parents can distinguish between two languages, which said research generated data that, according to Genesee (1989), provided inadequate evidence to come to a satisfactory conclusion. Recent developing research studies suggests that task based synchronous CMC (computer mediated chatting) can be an effective method for facilitating the development of interactive competence (in both EFL and ESL situations), because it provides students with the opportunity to generate several interactional speech acts. Whilst Chun (1998) predicted that this interactive competence would gradually transfer to the student's speaking competence, the learned author left open the possibility that research (yet to be designed) will support his prediction. Interestingly, Cheon (2001), in her research, determined that CMC in the Korean classroom produces a

grammatical competence in the absence of formal teacher instruction, and that the written discourse generated by CMC tended to center at the upper end of the communicative competence spectrum.

Although the research was limited to Korean female students and comparison with the control class, whilst suggesting a theoretical advantage of CMC over traditional teacher-student classrooms, it did not include a qualitative analysis to identify factors ranging from the effects of Confucianism on female students to the CMC class which was less than half the size of an ordinary class. Y. Kim (1998), using qualitative and quantitative research, confirms the conduciveness of this written interactive competence to spoken communicative competence. But his research was in an ESL country and can be distinguished from Cheon, (2001) where an EFL country was researched. Sotillo (2000) went further and suggested that not only the written discourse improved, but also so did the oral discourse. "As with face-to-face communication, the synchronous discussion data show the functional uses of language as students engaged in interaction, such as requesting personal information, flirting, making assertions, challenging classmates, and joking among themselves."

Cho and Krashen (2001) researching Korean teachers, report "...that reading, especially free voluntary reading, helps improve vocabulary, reading comprehension, grammar and writing...among second language acquirers." Yet it is submitted this research and published findings are not relevant to a non-Confucianist based society, for the qualitative process failed to consider factors that would have influenced the result. It is further submitted that the data is not applicable within Korea itself, for it failed to identify the fundamental notion of filial piety (Kim, 1999), which so controls daily life and is omnipresent in the education sphere, (J. Lee, 2002). Thus one can see important pedagogical findings are being made and applied in the absence of research, explicitly showing that future research and designs will carry greater weight and importance. And thus be subject to greater scrutiny.

Data and Data Collection

Again, referring back to the hypothetical Asian SLA example, the facts that exist in reality exist because of a myriad of competing Confucian principles that are inextricably intermeshed. Kuhn (1970) cited in Poggenpoel, Myburgh, and van der Linde, (2001:10) suggests the research approach taken is a matter of the researcher's belief, aims, and the topic at hand. It is submitted that in any research in, for example, Korea, the latter point, namely the researcher's beliefs sets the paradigm's application more than the researcher's beliefs or aims. Any research into EFL or SLA in Korea (Asia) needs not only a clear ethno-methodological examination, "...with an extensive background study of the community..." (Saville-Troike, M. 1989:110) but clear insights into cross cultural communications, for the caveat of Beal (1992:51) "...that in every language...there is a gap between what is literally being said and what is meant" suggests that no quantitative research can record this. By confining the paradigms to a communicative event (as is second language acquisition, or the analysis of a communicative event) then the choice of research paradigm, according to Saville Troike (1989:118) is that quantitative research must first be validated by qualitative research, which in turn determines the reliability of the qualitative observation, "...which is apt to be casual and uncontrolled...".

W. Lee (1996) provides a guide as to the unseen factors that dominate education in any Asian nation. Quantative research cannot value these factors, and clearly not endlessly pursue facts, and arguably, by supplying a universal value, (Hara, 1995) it may be a value that has ignored a fundamental issue.

Ellis (1994:670) lists the main areas of data collection peculiar to L2 acquisition, but notes the "...doubts that exist regarding the validity and reliability of such data," for in this field of research, there is no agreement about what constitutes an ideal research design.

Data collection and analysis has its starting point with "...an appropriate organizing structure..." but there is little to be learned, according to Caporaso (1995:457), if its design is weak or indeterminate. Wolcott (1990) similarly supports this line noting an inadequate database does not transform into a good research paper.

Whilst Ellis (1994) notes the difficulty of data collection in the L2 sphere, Cross, David,

Graham and Thralls, (1996:107) say that an ethnographic research "...tends to become so overwhelmingly data rich it is hard to see the forest for the trees", yet it is a means of establishing order from chaos. Their view conforms to the definition of Christensen (1997:192) as to what research is. Lather, (1986) concludes, "Haphazard considerations of the need for trustworthy data are not enough if openly ideological research is to be accepted as data rather than as metaphor by those who do not share its value premises."

Validity and Reliability

Without providing a clear definition of just what validity is, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001:105-106) note apart from the fact it is an "...important key to effective research", it is the "...touchstone of all types of educational research." Dooley (2001:76) defines validity as "...appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of social science measures." Christensen (1997:217) defines validity as "measuring what you want to measure." Reliability, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001:105) "...is a necessary precondition for validity" yet Dooley (2001:76) expands the definition to the degree a result is "free from errors of measurement". Christensen (1997:217) simply says reliability is a term equating to "...consistency or stability." Do both terms apply to quantitative and qualitative research? Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001:105) note reliability as the former domain of qualitative research, but that view is under challenge. Validity has been traditionally attached to quantitative research, and some researchers, (Smith, 1984), argue that reliability and validity attach only to quantitative research. Burke-Johnson (1997) notes the modern view that reliability and validity attach to qualitative research "...that is plausible, credible, trustworthy, and, therefore, defensible." But in the field of L2 research, what is plausible, for example, universal grammar transference from L1 to L2 is a contentious issue itself.

Thus Ellis (1994:673) notes that validity means one can infer, from the research, an underlying phenomenon, but that any two same surveys will be subject to "...linguistic, situational, and psycholinguistic factors...data collected from one source will not match those collected from another." Thus the question, what constitutes valid L2 data cannot be tested by reference to a second test for in second language research, for "...not all tasks,

linguistic or meta linguistic, tap the same source of linguistic knowledge" (1994:673). Ellis (1994) leaves us to ponder what can be done if data cannot be validated in the field of linguistics and meta linguistics. Thus, in view of Ellis's (1994) caveats, reliability and validity in the field of L2 acquisition will be the source of continual argument and disagreement, and not, as Caporaso (1995:457) notes, an opportunity to build upon previous research, but merely an opportunity to attempt to discredit previous research.

Cause and Effect

Cause and effect is "...a method of teasing out possible antecedents of events that have happened and cannot, therefore, be engineered or manipulated..." (Cohen, Manion and Morrison. 2001:205). The independent variables have already occurred, (Kerlinger, 1970, cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001:204). But as noted, the absence of a control factor makes the result unreliable. Their value is if they are tested later with a valid research design complementing the paradigm. As ex post facto research is, according to Manion, Cohen and Morrison, (2001:208), specifically applicable to educational research, then by applying and combining the theory of Hellsten, (1999) who says educational research can only proceed by way of qualitative research, it is arguable that cause and effects needs to be assessed by reference to a qualitative research design that includes all appropriate theories of culture. The weakness of this research, (if we consider the list of affective factors that can effects a student, ((Ellis, 1994)), in, for example, an examination of the critical age hypothesis in the Korean classroom, is the lack of control the researcher has over those effective factors. Though control can be artificially introduced by testing alternative hypothesis (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2001:210), the cost and time factors can almost negate this suggestion.

Conclusion

According to Caporaso (1995:458), "Science proceeds not only by hypothesis and conjecture but also by relentless attempts to reject our own theories." In the field of educational research, and in particular second language acquisition, the rejection of theories abound and as scientific advances with improved MRI scans, (Clever, 2002), for example, theories pertaining to critical age hypothesis, universal grammar, etc, will change

or be redefined. The major criticism of the paradigms, according to Caporaso (1995) is that they encourage researchers to report findings not as an incremental to hitherto research, but as separate findings. This retards research advances, and a quick look at the ESL/EFL dichotomy shows this to be the case.

As noted above, language involves culture. What exactly culture is and does in language will be fiercely debated for the foreseeable future, but any L2 research, or cross cultural ethnographic research, must in the research design consider the impact of this culture, whether it be the Confucianist patriarchal structure in Korea, to the implied casualness of the Australian and his language, (Beal, 1992). Quantitative research cannot consider this alone, yet qualitative analysis will, according to Wolcott (1990), suffer from what's not been discarded as opposed to what's been included, confirming the similar dilemma of Cross, G., David, C., Graham, M. & Thralls, C. (1996), as well as from inadequate research designs. Finally, to minimize future competing explanations, as Dooley (2001) suggests, grossly overlooks the reality that research should be about change based on an accumulative knowledge, and competing explanations may be a sign of important differences emanating from the research design that gives guidance and suggestions to teachers for specific teaching situations.

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