Course description

Module: Research Methodology   **Level:** L1

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Lecture 1: An introduction to research methodology

Lecture's outline

> An introduction to research methodology
> - What is research?
> - Objectives of research
> - Characteristics of research
> - Motivation in research

1- What is research?

Generally speaking, research refers to gaining new knowledge concerning a particular topic. It is an indispensable aspect of our daily life and it is deeply rooted in our practices that we are often unconscious about it. For example, upon your registration in the department of English, you have conducted research several times. At times, you have conducted it to gain familiarity with new and unknown aspects of your studies such as the nature of the modules, the aspects of assessments and so on. At different times, you have conducted research because you have been faced with a problem and you needed to solve it in order for you to move forward with your registration process. The difference between our casual day- to-day generalization and the conclusions usually recognized as scientific method lies in the degree of formality, rigorousness, verifiability and general validity of latter.

Similarly, within an academic framework, research is defined by different scholars as:

- A careful investigation or inquiry especially through search for new facts in any branch of knowledge. (The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English)
- Systematized effort to gain new knowledge. (Redman and Mory)
- Research comprises defining and redefining problems, formulating hypothesis or suggested solutions; collecting, organizing and evaluating data; making deductions and reaching conclusions; and at last carefully testing the conclusions to determine whether they fit the formulating hypothesis. (Clifford Woody)
- The manipulation of things, concepts or symbols for the purpose of generalizing to extend, correct or verify knowledge, whether that knowledge aids in construction of theory or I the practice of an art. (D. Slesinger and M. Stephenson)

2- Objectives of research

Though every research has its own specific objective, most research can be categorized in terms of a set of broad objectives. Walliman and Kuthari distinguish the following research objectives:

- ***Explore.*** *It is about gaining familiarity with a phenomenon or to achieve new insights into it (studies with this object in view are termed as exploratory or formulative research studies)*

- ***Categorize.*** *This involves forming a typology of objects, events or concepts.*

- ***Describe.*** *Descriptive research relies on observation as a means of collecting data. It attempts to examine situations in order to establish what is the norm, i.e. what can be predicted to happen again under the same circumstances.*

- ***Explain.*** *This is a descriptive type of research specifically designed to deal with complex issues. It aims to move beyond 'just getting the facts' in order to make sense of the myriad other elements involved, such as human, political, social, cultural and contextual.*

- ***Evaluate***. *This involves making judgments about the quality of objects or events. Quality can be measured either in an absolute sense or on a comparative basis. To be useful, the methods of evaluation must be relevant to the context and intentions of the research.*

- ***Compare***. *Two or more contrasting cases can be examined to highlight differences and similarities between them, leading to a better understanding of phenomena.*

- ***Correlate***. *The relationships between two phenomena are investigated to see whether and how they influence each other. The relationship might be just a loose link at one extreme or a direct link when one phenomenon causes another. These are measured as levels of association.*

- ***Predict.*** *This can sometimes be done in research areas where correlations are already known. Predictions of possible future behavior or events are made on the basis that if there has been a strong relationship between two or more characteristics or events in the past, then these should exist in similar circumstances in the future, leading to predictable outcomes.*

- ***Control.*** *Once you understand an event or situation, you may be able to find ways to control it. For this you need to know what the cause and effect relationships are and that you are capable of exerting control over the vital ingredients. All of technology relies on this ability to control.*

3- Characteristics of research

A research's value and impact are determined by certain characteristics. A good research should be:

- ***Controlled*** *in real life there are many factors that affect an outcome. The concept of control implies that, in exploring causality in relation to two variables (factors), you set up your study in a way that minimizes the effects of other factors affecting the relationship.*

- ***Rigorous*** *you must be scrupulous in ensuring that the procedures followed to find answers to questions are relevant, appropriate and justified. Again, the degree of rigor varies markedly between the physical and social sciences and within the social sciences.*

- ***Systematic*** *this implies that the procedure adopted to undertake an investigation follow a certain logical sequence. The different steps cannot be taken in a haphazard way. Some procedures must follow others.*

- *Valid and verifiable* this concept implies that whatever you conclude on the basis of your findings is correct and can be verified by you and others.
- *Empirical* this means that any conclusions drawn are based upon hard evidence gathered from information collected from real life experiences or observations.
- *Critical*: critical scrutiny of the procedures used and the methods employed is crucial to a research enquiry. The process of investigation must be foolproof and free from drawbacks. The process adopted and the procedures used must be able to withstand critical scrutiny.

4- Motivation in research

While the research objective is related to the research outcome within the academic sphere, the motivation behind doing it is related to the researcher's gain. A researcher may conduct a research in order to:

- Get a research degree
- Face the challenge in solving the unsolved problems
- Get intellectual satisfaction
- Be of service to society
- Get respectability and recognition

Practice

Read the following abstracts and try to identify the objective(s) of the research they report.

An exploratory study on English teachers' opinions in multicultural preschools

Abstract

Developing plurilingualism is one of the objectives of the European Union and therefore the teaching of foreign languages (FLs) has acquired particular relevance in the last decade. Spain has made a great effort to promote an early start of the foreign language teaching in all its regions; however, there is an enormous gap between the legislative and methodological level, mainly due to the lack of uniformity regarding the decentralization of the education system (Calero, 2006). This target may be more challenging in places such as Ceuta or Melilla, two Spanish cities on the north coast of Africa, due to their particular multicultural context, where preschool classrooms are already multilingual, despite the FL. Based on the interpretative paradigm, this paper presents an exploratory study on English Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' opinions at preschools in Ceuta and Melilla. We carried out eight interviews to EFL teachers analyzing their own practice in these multicultural preschool classrooms, where monolingual and bilingual children share their learning experience with the common objective of developing their communicative competence in English

A Correlational Study between Language Attitudes and English Language Orientation of Indonesian EFL Learners

Abstract

This study investigated the correlation between bilingual language attitudes and English language orientation of Indonesian EFL learners in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. 256 students from five universities (two public and three private) participated in the research. The participants answered a questionnaire, which was divided into two parts, namely a bilingual language attitude questionnaire and an English language orientation questionnaire. The results showed that language orientation had a positive and significant correlation with language attitudes toward English and a positive but insignificant correlation with language attitudes towards the Indonesian language. It indicates that English language orientation strongly influenced Indonesian EFL students' language attitudes towards English but not necessarily towards Indonesian language. This research offers implications for English language teaching and learning in a foreign language context.

Students' Attitudes and Motivation regarding English Second Language Learning: A study of the effect of sociolinguistic factors

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate how students think that sociolinguistic factors such as age, gender, social class, and ethnic identity affect their attitudes and motivation regarding English second language learning in the Swedish upper secondary school. A questionnaire consisting of both qualitative and quantitative questions has been distributed in order to examine students' attitudes and motivation regarding English second language learning. The results show that the influential factors were age, gender and ethnic identity, whereas most of the participants disagreed concerning the influence of one's social class on language learning. In examining the students' motivation for English language learning it was found that the majority of the students have a positive attitude due to the status of English as a global language and the possibilities for future employment that a command of English entails. In conclusion, according to the students' perspectives, sociolinguistic factors do impact on their attitudes and motivation regarding English second language learning at upper secondary school level.