Research: Starting Point and Development

Farida ABDERRAHIM [1]
[1] Université d'Alger 2, Algérie

Introduction

In this paper, I would like to focus on some key aspects any research has to conform to. Preparation of a good research project demands considerable thought. The two most difficult stages of research are the beginning − the choice of a topic, and the end − the final writing of the dissertation/thesis. Being interested in a topic is not enough to do research; we need intellectual maturity which will enable us to understand what research is and what it is based on.

1. Definition and Characteristics of Research

Definition

"Research is the manner in which we solve knotty problems in our attempt to push back the frontiers of ignorance". (Leedy, 1980). We note that the two key words here are "knotty problems" − problems which require an answer, and "ignorance" − we are always in search of reducing ignorance and acquiring knowledge. This leads us to another definition: "Research may be described as a combination of a quest for knowledge and understanding". (Greenfield, 1996).

Characteristics of Research

- Starting Point:

Research starts with a question in the mind of the researcher. Everywhere around us, there are phenomena which stimulate our curiosity, which cause us to wonder, to speculate and to ask questions. By asking questions, we in fact, start the process of research: Why is it like that? What is the cause of that? What does it mean? These questions are transformed into the "Statement of the Problem" and the aim(s) to be achieved.

- **Development:**

The development of research goes through four major steps:

- Reviewing the field: Literature Review related to the "knotty problem";
- Theory Building: accumulating facts, knowledge in order to solve the "knotty problem";
- Theory Testing: answering hypotheses about the "knotty problem". Hypotheses are part of our everyday life. Something happens; we immediately attempt to account for the event by a series of guesses (hypotheses). Each hypothesis provides a direction for solving the "knotty problem".

- Reflecting and Integrating data: we search the accumulated data for answers to the set hypotheses in order to solve the "knotty problem". The significance of data depends upon the way in which the facts are looked at.

A good piece of research respects specific characteristics (Preece, 1994):
- Justification: why the research question is important to be investigated;
- Background: what is known about the topic so far;
- Design: method of measurement;
- Results: description, tabulation, analysis and Inference and
- Discussion: conclusions about the topic.

2. Tools of Research

Collecting Data:

The three most common tools of research are the Questionnaire, the Interview and the Test. When deciding on the means of research appropriate to a research, we should keep in mind the research problem and the nature of the work because the significance of data depends upon the way the facts are looked at.

Methods of Analysing Data:

The four methods of analysing data are:
- The Historical: for documentary or historical data,
- The Descriptive: for observation collected data,
- The Analytical: for quantitative data and
- The Experimental: which usually involves a Pre/Post test design.

In most research, there is an interrelationship between these four methods. It is very rare that a research uses one method exclusively.

3. Interdisciplinary

Interdisciplinary refers to the direction of a research, what is combined in order to solve a problem. Just as we very rarely use exclusively one method to gather and analyse data, similarly, we hardly ever analyse a research problem from only one point of view, literary or linguistic, to mention two very broad disciplines. The "artificial" division we make in subjects curricula is only pedagogical in order to teach thoroughly an aspect of a subject, for example, Literature or Linguistics; hence the different modules in a curriculum such as Written Expression, Oral Expression, Grammar, Phonetics … .

A research problem can and indeed should be approached from different perspectives in order to adequately analyse it. For example, the link between culture, history and literature is highlighted in the context of African, British or American literature.

In Applied Linguistics, language pedagogy draws from Cognitive Psychology to explain and teach most language components and skills. Anxiety − this affective variable − is one direction of thinking and analysis. Autonomy − another up- to- date direction (focused on in the new system of LMD) draws debates on how teachers should make learners aware of the strategies they use in order to become autonomous.

The third direction I will refer to illustrate interdisciplinarity is the official recommendations made by the Ministry of Education to relate different areas of knowledge when presenting the content of the Algerian textbooks of English in use in the Middle and Secondary School.

References

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