

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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INTRODUCTION :

Research takes place to try to find solutions for certain problems which exist in a certain domain or to get more information about a certain phenomenon. According to WIDDOWSON (1990 : 56)

“ Research enables people to be aware of different ways of conceiving of the familiar world , and if they act on the new conception , to alter or extend their customary ideas and practices”

Therefore , research helps people to be informed about the real state of certain matters so that to know about the positive and negative points related to them and to try to have solutions or remedies to the deficiencies which exist . Research in the field of language study has witnessed several changes since there were different approaches used in this kind of practice . Since this domain is very wild the following article will try to focus on research methodology concerning foreign language teaching .

The investigation into the field of foreign language teaching involves several elements since it deals with the different methods and approaches related to this field , the materials used and the attitude of the teachers and learners concerning this process .

TYPES OF RESEARCH :

Research can be divided into two categories .The first one is called secondary research . It is related to the use of the library to search for information .The second type is primary research . It focuses on getting information from those who are concerned with the study such as the learners either by questioning them or observing them .

Primary research is divided into two categories : case studies and statistical studies .Case studies deal with the study of the behaviour or the

attitude of an individual or a group of individuals concerning some aspects of language or even language teaching during a long period of time. Statistical studies are related to the study of the behaviour of an individual or a group of individuals at a particular point in time or at several distinct points in time .

Statistical studies are also into two categories : surveys and experimental studies .Survey studies deal with the attitudes , opinions and characteristics of a group through the use of questionnaires .Experimental studies investigate the behaviour of groups under certain conditions by the means of tests or the examination of the scores obtained in the academic tests designed for the classes .

There is a third type of research which is considered as being less formal than the previous ones . It is called action research . This type of research is done by the teacher .

“Action research puts ideas into practice for the purpose of self improvement and increasing knowledge about curriculum , teaching and learning . The ultimate result is improvement in what happens in the classroom and school” (Kemmis and McTaggart , 1982).

This type of research involves the teacher who will try to get information about the teaching and learning situation in order to use it so that to improve the level of his learners and try to get remedies for those problematic issues that exist in his/her environment .

THE DIFFERENT STEPS OF RESEARCH :

The research methodology related to the field of language teaching involves several steps which are : Reflection and planning , library research , data collection and data analysis .

1)- Reflection and planning : In this step the researcher thinks about the problematic questions concerning the domain of foreign language teaching. He/She has to limit the field of study by choosing the subject which he/she wants to investigate on .For example , he/she can make a research about the difficulties found when teaching a foreign language or the way of teaching one of the four skills or the relationship between learners' motivation and language teaching or the impact of using teaching materials on the teaching process . After having made a decision concerning the problem which is going to be studied , one has to make a sort of planning about the different steps involved in this study so that to be able to organize one's self in order to start searching for

information related to that topic as it is necessary to know the elements which should be studied within that subject .

2)- Library research : Reading is the first source used for getting information when making research because it provides with the necessary knowledge concerning the field studied .

Library reading is fundamental in research as it establishes the theoretical basis for such a task and enables the researcher to get different ideas about the problem put into question . This sort of reading must be intensive and critical . The list of books read should involve some recent books so that to be able to have exact and actual information concerning the domain of investigation .

When reading books , one should know how to take notes and also to write down the reference concerning each book which has to include the author's name and surname , the title of the book , the place of publication , the date of publication and the number of pages .

Having a large number of references will enable the researcher to establish an objective view concerning the studied subject . It also helps to get the required arguments related to the problem raised . The reader has to organize the information he got in an order that suits the title he intends to tackle .

Also , he has to analyse and explain what he has read . "Responses of trained readers will continue to be useful both to teaching and research" (Jacobs, 1981 :237) . This means that critical reading helps the researcher to make a sort of comparison between the different ideas and try to put them into practice .

3)- Data collection : Data collection involves questionnaires , interviews and classroom observation .

a)- Questionnaires :Using a questionnaire is a necessary process in research methodology as it enables to have answers to those questions related to the problematic issue . " Questionnaires are effective way of gathering information about affective aspects, such as beliefs , attitudes , motivation and preferences." (Zeyneb Onel, 1997,57) .

Thus , questionnaires helps the researcher to get clearer ideas about the learners the teachers and the teaching situation . There can be two types of questionnaires : one type is designed for learners . For example , it may include questions about the difficulties they find in learning a foreign language , the extend of their mastery of a certain skill , their ability to understand without the

use of the mother tongue , their attitude towards learning a foreign language and their level of performance .

The second type is designed for teachers. They can involve questions concerning the timing allotted to teaching a foreign language , the timing designed for teaching each skill , the methods and techniques used for teaching

The difficulties they find when teaching and the different materials they use .

b)- Interviews : Another way to collect information is the use of interviews . They involve questions concerning the field studied . The researcher asks learners and teachers about the different points he is investigating on. Then , he takes notes so that to use that sort of information later on . Interviews helps to get information about the teaching situation as far as the learner and the teacher are concerned.

c)- Classroom observation : Classroom observation is the most practical means of getting information because it enables the researcher to notice all what is going on in the classroom . It aims at obtaining details concerning the behaviour of both the teacher and the learner in addition to the kind of relationship existing between them .

The observer can take notes about the content of the lessons , the teaching materials used , the different steps involved in the lesson including the presentation , the explanation of the lesson and the drills and exercises used . He can also guess if the learners are motivated or not and try to come out with the different problems and difficulties the teachers and learners encounter .

Classroom observation enables the researcher to establish fixed ideas about the teaching situation through the direct content with the class .

4)- Data analysis :This step involves the analysis of the information gathered . At this level the researcher tries to classify the data and analyse it for the sake of getting results and drawing conclusions . The analysis of the answers got from the collected data will lead to examine the existing problems and difficulties .

The gathered information can be summarized in tables, charts and diagrams . This analysis should give the researcher the possibility to come out with evident truth about the studied subject . For example , this analysis may provide the researcher with the number of learners , the kind of teaching materials and the level or degree of motivation .

THE ORGANIZATION AND PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH :

The research work should be presented in an organized and ordered way

According to Perry (2005 :2) , the main components of a research article or project are “ namely title , abstract , introduction , methodology , results and discussion / conclusion” .

First , there should be an abstract which summarizes the work in no more than 300 words . Then an introduction should follow to introduce the work and state the different steps involved in it . After that , there is the presentation of a literature review which deals with the theoretical background related to the studied field (one chapter or two according to the subject) .

Then the chapter which follows should speak about data collection . After that there is the presentation of data analysis and the last chapter deals with a discussion which involves recommendations and suggestions . Finally , a conclusion is provided to summarize the whole work . At the end of the research work , there is a section devoted to references . It includes the list of books and articles cited in the work . They are written in an alphabetical order (starting by the author’s last name) . Then there is a section of appendixes which is used to present information that could not be presented within the work such as questionnaires , texts and copies of learners’ performances .

CONCLUSION :

Research methodology in language teaching involves approximately the same steps used in applied linguistics . The use of the proper instruments designed for making research will lead the results to be logical and tangible . The effectiveness of the research methodology is related to the researcher’s way of criticising and analysing the data gathered .

Finally , one can say that even if research methodology has achieved a great improvement there are still some areas which remain problematic especially that of data collection since this process is linked to individuals’ opinions . This means that there should be more investigation into the field of research methodology .

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