



PNU University

Research methods in Applied linguistics 1&2

(English Department)

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To My Family

Parvin
Parastoo
Saynaz

IN THE NAME OF GOD

Preface

Conducting research has been one of the most significant activities in the last few decades in our field. Formerly, students of applied linguistics were limited to library research. They would read what others claimed, then paraphrase or quote words of others, and eventually draw some conclusions there upon. Of course, there is nothing against library research. It has been, it is, and it will be a frequently used technique of inquiry. It is not, however, powerful enough to cope with the developments in the field and the formulation of new findings.

Our field is growing fast. It is becoming more and more scientifically-oriented. It is expanding rapidly in scope and getting intermingled with other fields. Psychology, sociology, neurology, biology, anthropology, and language acquisition are just a few areas which are related to the field of language education. Some of these fields use rigorous methods of research to approximate the techniques of physical sciences.

For scholars in the field of applied linguistics, it has become an essential requirement to equip themselves with the knowledge to cope with the techniques and principles of scientific research. Applied linguists should understand what other researchers are doing in their fields. Furthermore, applied linguists should be able to express themselves in the language of research such that others understand their findings.

This would not be possible unless researchers in the field of applied linguistics prepare themselves to conduct research scientifically and move beyond traditional review of literature type investigations.

This book is designed to fulfill the above-mentioned need of the students of language and language related fields. It is the product of over a decade of teaching research methods course at different universities and at different levels of education.

Most of the materials have been tried in research methods classes and revised for betterment. Thus, the book has certain unique characteristics.

First of all, it does not assume any prior knowledge of conducting research on the part of the students. Therefore, the concepts, the procedures, and the practical problems are presented in as simple a language as possible. No linguistic complexity is included in the text either, because I believe that complex concepts can be explained in simple linguistic contexts. Sometimes, the reader may feel that some of the concepts are overdone. However, the repetition of some of the concepts has been deliberate. In some educational institutions, such as Payam-Noor University, students do not have the chance

of attending regular classes. So, the materials should be developed in such a way that they have the least need for teachers to explain the concepts.

Second, the context of the materials is geared to the fields of applied linguistics. That is, the examples and the activities are taken from the EFL environments in Iran. Therefore, students are expected to face no conceptual problem in understanding the contexts. This would alleviate one of the major disadvantages of the available books in which most of the examples and explanations are within the context of an alien society. It is believed that the major problem regarding foreign books is not understanding the scientific concepts themselves but getting the points within the context in which they are explained.

Third, the materials in each chapter are built on the previous chapters. Therefore, it is not advised to start from a chapter in the middle of the book. Nor is it recommended to eliminate any chapter. The chapters are sequenced such that each chapter is a prerequisite for the subsequent one.

Of course, for those who are already familiar with concepts in research, it may not be necessary to read the book from cover to cover. However, as mentioned before, this book is designed for those who do not have any prior knowledge on the issue. Therefore, they should study the chapters in the presented sequence.

Fourth, the materials are sequenced on the basis of the steps involved in a real research project. That is, the chapters are not on the basis of the sequence of statistics or research concepts. Rather, they are arranged on the basis of steps that should be taken in conducting a research project. Thus, teachers should lead the students through the process of research on the basis of the steps presented in the book.

Fifth, the activities in the book are designed in such a way that the students would be able to check their comprehension of both the concepts and application of the concepts. That is, the activities are of two types. The first type of activities includes true-false, multiple-choice, and comprehension items which are designed to check the students' comprehension of the concepts. The second type of activities usually include certain problems to be solved or certain tasks to be performed. This part is designed for the students to check whether they are capable of applying theoretical information to practical real life situations or not. Although, the key to the activities is provided at the end of the book, students are strongly recommended not to consult the key before trying their best to solve the problems.

Sixth, the book is designed for a two-semester course of research methods 1 and 2. It includes 16 chapters. My own preference is to teach the first 8 chapters for research methods 1. The first eight chapters deal with the foundations of research. It is also recommended that students prepare a review of literature type paper for the term. That is, the students are required to set a question, make a hypothesis, do the necessary readings, and document the materials they read following one of the style formats discussed in the book (preferably APA).

In research methods 2, the rest of the book will be taught and the students would work on the topics they had selected in research methods 1,

but would complete the rest of their research projects. At the end of the research methods 2, students are required to prepare a complete term paper which approximates the qualities of a publishable article.

Last, but not least, the book reflects my own experiences in teaching research methods courses. Furthermore, it has been tried for a few years at different universities with different student populations. However, NO PERFECTION IS CLAIMED by any means. I am looking forward to receiving constructive comments from colleagues, students, and readers. And I am positive that these comments and suggestions will definitely help improve the quality of the book in later editions.

H. Farhady
Tehran, 1995

SECTION ONE

The Concept of Research

One of the most logical ways of doing something is to clearly understand what that thing is. To do research is not an exception. Particularly, for the students of language, including linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, language teaching, literature, and many other language related fields, an understanding of the concept of research is an undeniable necessity. Unfortunately, the foundation of research is not well-established in these fields. Most students have a vague and sometimes a false notion of the word research.

Some students think of research as reading some books, often the first few pages of each book, and trying to narrate already documented facts. In such cases, the student, or the so-called researcher, acts as a simple reporter without any significant contribution to the already known information. Some others, on the other hand, may seem boastful of their superficial knowledge of elementary concepts in research. In order to impress others, this latter group sometimes makes unreasonable comments on research related issues. These naive students are not less dangerous than those ignorant ones. What seems essential to the students and scholars in the field of applied linguistics is the achievement of a fairly thorough knowledge of at least the basic concepts and principles of research. Only then would the culture of research be cultivated in language-related disciplines.

Therefore, this section is designed to provide as clear an explanation of the concept of research as possible. In the first chapter, a brief historical perspective of research will be presented. And in the second chapter, the concept of research will be defined and its characteristics will be explained.

It should be mentioned that the discussion here is not as technical as it

would be if the book was intended for students majoring in research methods. Most of the topics are presented under the assumption that readers in language-related disciplines do not seem to have a prior knowledge on the issues related to research in its real sense. It is hoped that simple explanations will help researchers to conduct their research projects conveniently. That's why complicated theoretical treatment of the concepts is deliberately avoided.

CHAPTER 1

Background

Objectives of the Chapter

After reading this chapter, the students should be able to:
identify the sources of acquiring knowledge,
explain the advantages and shortcomings of every source of information,
differentiate the impressionistic sources of information and their shortcomings,
make logical statements using deduction and induction,
understand the difference between scientific and nonscientific approaches to
research.
define the scientific method of research, and
perform on the self-assessment activities with 75% accuracy.

KEY TERMS

Sensory experience
Expert opinion
Inductive reasoning
Scientific method

Logic
Deductive reasoning
Authority

1.1 Introduction

Man, the most intellectual creature of all, is born curious. His curiosity, fulfilled by his intellect, is probably the origin of all human knowledge. Broadly speaking, knowledge refers to the body of facts and hypotheses that enables one to understand phenomena and to solve problems. Knowledge can range from the simplest perception of an object to the deepest understanding of a complex theory. Knowledge can be obtained through different channels both systematically and unsystematically. Furthermore, the unique possession of man, i. e., communication through some sort of symbol, has enabled him to transfer the outcome of his curiosity and intelligence, i. e., knowledge, to his offsprings.

Of course, in early days, man's curiosity and intelligence were under the strict control of mystic beliefs and attitudes he inherited from his predecessors. All events and happenings had some kind of metaphysical explanation. These explanations were thought to be beyond man's mental and physical capacity to understand. Almost everything was taken for granted with no permission to further questioning. Even on some occasions, those who ventured any kind of counter-explanation were doomed to immoral or satanic inclinations. In other words, a large body of human understanding about the world was based on mostly unsystematic, unreliable, and unverified sources. On no occasion did they try to investigate the validity of the information they received from different sources. Nor were they allowed to do so. That's probably why the early man progressed slowly. However, man continued to utilize certain available sources to obtain new information and to improve the quality of the old information.

1.2 Sources of Obtaining Information

Despite all the problems man has had with the nature of the information he inherited, certain channels of obtaining knowledge have assisted him through his life. Sensory experience, expert opinion, and logic have usually helped him in obtaining information. However, the inadequacies of accumulating knowledge through these sources forced scholars to develop what is presently known as the scientific method in research. In order to provide the reader with the trend in the acquisition of knowledge, each source of information will be briefly discussed.

1.2.1 Sensory Experience

Man, very naturally, sees, hears, smells, tastes, and touches. He sees objects and forms concepts of the objects. He hears sounds and records the variety of waves in his brain. He smells scents and associates different objects with their smells. He tastes many flavors and corresponds them with their referents. And finally, he touches numerous objects and textures and learns to identify them. The information man takes in through his senses is the most immediate way of obtaining knowledge for him.

The accumulation of information through senses forms one's personal experience. Experience helps man to find solutions to the problems. For