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BOOK REVIEW

Exploring second language classroom research: a comprehensive guide

(Nunan, D. & Bailey, K. M., Heinle CENGAGE Learning, Boston / USA, 2009, 496 p. ISBN -10: 1424027055 ISBN-13: 978-1424027057)

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Exploring Second Language Classroom Research is a comprehensive book written by two significant figures in the field, David Nunan and Kathleen M. Bailey in 2009. Providing a wide range of perspectives on language classroom research in general terms, the authors give place for a wide range of issues from research methods to data analysis procedures along with sample research studies in the field including some sample tasks for reflection and application. The information it provides makes the book a significant resource as it presents a broad perspective from main research traditions to current issues with an aim to help researchers develop practical research skills. These issues are employed under four main parts including fifteen chapters which are organized around a number of significant thematic issues. The book is especially intended for researchers and language teachers and educators interested in classroom research, besides many scholars from sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, applied linguistics, etc. find the book very comprehensive and highly regarded for their research studies. This book is helpful for the novice researchers as an

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introduction to conducting language classroom research as it provides an overview of the research steps comprehensively along with data analyses procedures.

In Part 1, *Second language classroom research: an overview*, the authors provide an introduction part offering a general overview of each following chapters included in this part. Chapter one, *Introducing second language classroom research* focuses on the major research traditions, to name psychometric tradition, naturalistic inquiry and action research discussing the similarities and differences among them. The authors aim to make readers reach a clear understanding of empirical research questioning the differences among product, process and product-process studies with a fresh look.

Chapter 2, *Getting started on classroom research*, demonstrating a wide range of information about research questions and literature review discusses variables and experimental study in general terms. The authors also give a wide place for defining the relevant terminology including nominal, ordinal and interval data, control and experimental groups along with annotated bibliography and literature review. The second issue treated here is the basic research designs in experimental and non-experimental research studies which helps readers reach a general idea of the basic steps in a research.

One of the aims of the final chapter of Part 1, Chapter 3, *Key concepts in planning classroom research* is to demonstrate the main features in a classroom research emphasizing hypothesis, internal and external reliability, internal and external validity, types of variables. Moreover, the chapter is devoted to discussing the issues of correlation and criterion groups design. For a better understanding, the authors highlight that the research questions and hypotheses are core concepts determining the variables and the design in a research study. The chapter ends with quality control issues in research followed by a discussion of payoffs and pitfalls.

Part 2, *Research design issues: approaches to planning and implementing classroom research*, consists of five chapters concerning the major research designs covering action research, survey, case study, etc. Starting in Chapter 4, entitled "*The experimental method*" the authors begin a comprehensive discussion of the basic characteristic features of this research paradigm which is accepted also as the scientific method. In this regard, quantitative data, experimental designs and statistical analyses are noted down as the main principles for the experimental method (Grothjan, 1987). The authors also place special focus on the quality control issues in this research paradigm discussing the threats to internal and external validity. They also discuss the main research designs in the experimental method in detail including the true experimental designs, the intact group design and correlation and criterion group designs. Concluding the chapter, a comparison of main research designs in the experimental method is presented in a table demonstrating strong and weak points.

The focus of Chapter 5, *Surveys*, as the name suggests is on the survey research in general terms, emphasizing the basic uses and definition of it and questionnaires in particular. Next, designing and piloting the questionnaires are discussed along with the ethical and quality control issues in a questionnaire design. Having defined the survey research, the distinction between an experiment and a survey is made in that intervening and manipulating

the variables in an experiment is typical on the contrary to a survey in which the researcher “does not do anything to the objects or subjects of research” (Jaeger, 1988, p.307).

Chapter 6, *Case study research*, deals with the case study in second language research starting with a broad definition of it as “detailed, often longitudinal, investigation of a single individual or entity” (Nunan & Bailey, 2009, p.158). Emphasizing the remarkable value of case study, the potential problems relating to the external validity are also discussed in this chapter. While closing the chapter, the authors give special attention to Nassaji and Cumming’s studies as a sample study based on socio cultural theory in order to highlight the contribution of it to the field (2000). Claimed to be theoretical and mostly data-oriented, case study research is criticized (Duff, 2008).

In chapter 7, *Ethnography*, the authors note down the significant points of ethnographic studies mentioning its being qualitative in nature and analyzed through interpretive analysis in a broad sense. The main characteristics of this design are stated by Watson-Gegeo (1988) in that people’s behavior which naturally occurs is culturally interpreted for providing a brief overview of what people do in a setting and the interactions going there. In order to highlight the key principles of ethnography in a broad sense, the authors acknowledge that cultural patterns and theoretical frameworks are worthy of consideration in an ethnographic study which is comparative and holistic in nature as well. Last sentences are devoted to the stages of the research process which includes observation, interviewing members of the culture, followed by determining the topic and answering the research questions. Duff (2008)’s study was chosen as a sample ethnographic study of which the context, focus of investigation, data collection tools and the main findings were reported.

Chapter 8, *Action research*, the final chapter of part two, is concerned primarily with the definition of action research and the main cycles for conducting it. Becoming increasingly important nowadays, action research is defined as “an approach to research which aims at both taking action and creating knowledge or theory about that action as the action unfolds” by Coghlan and Brannick (2014). The cycles in an action research are key concerns which are made up of the identification of a problem, preliminary investigation, and hypothesis formation, planning of intervention, taking action and reflection on the outcomes (Nunan, 1992). The authors end this chapter with the challenges and benefits in doing action research along with possible solutions.

Three chapters make up Part 3, “*Data collection issues: getting the information you need*” which discusses the ways for obtaining language classroom data. Chapter 9, *Classroom observation* puts a great emphasis on different options for documenting the obtained data during classroom observations. The options are stated by Bailey (2006) as field notes, observation schedules, video-recordings, audio recordings, synchronous and asynchronous chat records for gathering classroom data which can be both manual and electronic in nature. The authors note that there are various ways and tools for “documenting classroom life” which vary according to the researcher’s intent to see and the way she/ he interprets the data. Transcribing the classroom interaction is also dealt with in this chapter. As a conclusion, the authors deal with the quality issues, sample study, payoff, and pitfalls in terms of classroom observation.

The central argument of Chapter 10, *Introspective methods of data collection* is to define and exemplify the introspective methods. In this sense, introspection is defined as “the process of observing and reporting one’s own thoughts, feelings, reasoning processes, and mental states” (Nunan & Bailey, 2009, p. 285). While doing so, it is aimed to understand the ways these processes shape the behavior. Moreover, two basic procedures are given place in the chapter, to name think-aloud protocols and stimulated recall which are explained in detail along with their limitations and advantages as well. Reaching into the mind of the participant is mentioned as the only advantage of introspective methods by the authors.

Chapter 11, *Elicitation procedures* is presented to discuss interviews, production tasks, role plays, questionnaire tests as elicitation procedures. As a term, elicitation can be defined as any kind of way for gathering data directly from the informants. These procedures provide valuable data as they are obtained through the informants’ own statements and self-reports. Different types of interviews are also dealt with in this chapter as structured, semi-structured, unstructured, ethnographic and focus group interviews. The greatest advantages of elicitation methods are regarded as time-saving and providing a wide range of data while some points are criticized. The chapter ends with the usual quality control issues and a sample study.

The focus of interest of Part 4, *Data analysis and interpretation issues: figuring out what the information means* is the analysis of classroom interaction both qualitatively and quantitatively. Chapter 12, *Analyzing classroom interaction* aims to shed light on a range of approaches to analyzing classroom interaction through the transcripts analyzed. To make it clear, the authors start with the nature of classroom discourse followed by transcribing and coding classroom interaction. Not only learner language but also teacher talk, student- student interaction are handled as classroom interaction. A specific method is briefly considered by the authors as conversational analysis which is closely related to classroom interaction studies.

Chapter 13, *Quantitative Data analysis* is of worth consideration in that it puts forward the ways for analyzing the quantitative data which is obtained through processes of counting or measuring. Accordingly, the statistics and some other ways for reporting the numerical data are discussed here. Some specific statistical issues are discussed among which are significant correlations, descriptive including standard deviation, mean, mode and median in addition to inferential statistics. The two-way chi-square test, t- tests, ANOVA (one way analysis of variance), Pearson’s correlation coefficient are briefly considered by the authors in order to contribute to the familiarity with statistical analyses which are mostly found convincing by researchers. The chapter ends with suggestions for further reading including statistical books.

Chapter 14, *Qualitative data analysis* addresses the techniques for qualitative data analysis which is mainly based on meaning not measuring. The authors discuss meaning condensation and grounded analysis as specific techniques for exploring patterns in qualitative data. Discourse analysis, conversational analysis and interaction analysis are also covered and compared as qualitative data in addition to the use of technology in qualitative data analysis. The authors provide necessary information about the ways for developing recurrent themes in a qualitative data set including five prominent steps. Having discussed the

basic quality control issues, the chapter is concluded with a brief discussion of the pitfalls and payoffs accompanied by a sample study.

Chapter 15, *Putting it all together*, puts it all together including a wide range of topics from ethical concerns to the steps in a research process along with qualitative and quantitative data collection and analyses. The main contribution of the chapter to the readers is to provide the basic skills needed for creating an original research plan based on the steps described throughout the book. A brief overview of language classroom research is presented in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 while the steps in planning and implementing research is dealt with in Chapters 4 through 8. Then the authors shift to data collection in Chapters 9, 10, and 11 while data analysis is explained in Chapters 12, 13, and 14. To this end, in the final chapter as a concluding part the authors attempt to combine all these information together. Developing and carrying out a research plan is given a paramount importance here within which the steps in a research process is detailed. Some important questions are placed in terms of research questions, subjects, data collection ways, and data analysis procedures before designing and carrying out one own's language classroom research study as well as during and after the study. As a sample study in this chapter, a mixed methods study is chosen by Katz (1996) as it uses both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analyses procedures with an aim to investigate teaching styles of four teachers. The authors conclude the chapter with the payoffs and pitfalls of mixed methods.

All in all, with its clear explanations, *Exploring Second language Classroom Research* is of great interest and useful resource for both novice and experienced researchers who want a quick and comprehensive overview on the steps in a research process starting from posing a research question to interpreting and reporting the data. The central argument of the book is to emphasize the guiding principle in conducting a research is appropriateness for answering research questions posed by the researcher. Therefore, no research method is criticized or claimed to be superior over another through the book by discussing the payoffs and pitfalls in each chapter. To put it short, the layout of the book including reflection, action boxes, outstanding suggestions for further readings, payoffs and pitfalls are presented in a well-organized manner which provides the book with its undoubted strengths. As a whole, having served its subject well the book provides rich and significant information to the readers in terms of both theoretical and methodological aspects in a language classroom research.

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