

# Triangulation

I'm always amazed when reading research in which, for example, the researchers take great pains to write down every part of a conversation between teacher and student(s), and then proceed to deduce generalizations from this conversation. My response is "Your deductions might be true for those students in that class, with that teacher, in that country, in that institute, on that date, at that time of day. However, that is all. You have presented isolated speech samples from a highly specific source. There are too many variables and not enough data." To take another example, there is a great deal of research describing the most frequently used words and phrases in the UK. However, I do not intend to use the results of this research to teach my students to say "Sort of ..." "Well, I mean ..." "You know ..." "Like ..." What is good for the everyday (ungrammatical) native speaker is not necessarily good for the EFL student learning Academic English, or other ESP subjects.

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The point is that when we do research (qualitative or quantitative), we must be as rigorous as the situation allows, giving attention to all the variables, and collecting as much data as possible. Action research (AR) has been blamed for not being rigorous, because of its subjective nature. However, this need not be the case. Of course, if we give an isolated class of students an isolated questionnaire on an isolated day, without preparation, we cannot be surprised when these results are questioned (even if we have performed an ANOVA analysis of the results). However, if we triangulate a number of data-collection instruments (i.e., questionnaires, interviews, lesson observations, learner journals, teacher journals, and videos) over a significant amount of time, then trends can be seen to emerge, whatever the idiosyncrasies of any one of the instruments.

Imagine that we have identified a motivation problem in our lessons. Put simply, we want to find out why students are not motivated and how we can help them to become motivated. Having identified the problem, we must think of ways to investigate it. There is no need for a null hypothesis approach since we want to be open to all the information that comes our way.

In order to get the ball rolling, we can start with a

questionnaire about motivation, though we have to remember that this is only one source of data and will inevitably have various problems. In addition, we must give this to as many students as possible. Next, it will be good to interview students about their motivation: "How do you perceive your motivation problems? "What causes do you attribute the problems to?" "What suggestions do you have for improving the situation?" These interviews will be subjective, and will be dependent on the interview situation, but they will at least give a picture of how selected students perceive the problem. Since student beliefs control learning, it is important to find out what these beliefs are.

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Next, we can ask students to complete learner journals during the semester. These can be compared with the teacher's perceptions, as recorded in a teacher journal. We can also take videos of lessons during the semester and observe these with colleagues.

When we look at all this triangulated data, it might be possible to discern some patterns in student responses. Based on these, it will be possible to make changes in the lessons (formative research) and then to give the instruments (questionnaires, interviews, videos) again, to see if student responses are significantly different. In this way, we are using a wealth of data to investigate a problem in the classroom. We have used a number of research instruments with a large number of students, over a significant period of time. Because of this, possible answers have emerged, and we have further investigated those answers. Just as in the first paragraph, there are still many variables in our research, and we cannot claim that the results are general for every EFL teacher. However, we can say that the research was based on a number of data sources and that these sources pointed in the same direction.

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# The Questionnaire

In the previous Action Research column, I mentioned that “Qualitative research should be longitudinal (carried out over a period of time) and triangulated (using various research instruments).” Bearing this in mind, however, the questionnaire can be a useful AR tool when constructed correctly and when used in combination with other research methods.

Questionnaires have the advantage of being simple to administer and easy to analyze. They can use 1-5 Lickert scales (e.g., “1 - Always,” “2 - Usually,” “3 - Sometimes,” “4 - Rarely,” “5 - Never”), or they can have simpler “Yes/Maybe/No” options or “True/False” options. They can even use a “continuum” approach, in which students mark their response on a line between two extremes, though these responses are more difficult to deal with. When the questionnaire has been successfully administered and completed, the teacher/researcher has a nice collection of data, in easily quantifiable form. Such “hard facts” can be deceiving, however, since it is easy to imagine that these numbers and “Yes/No” responses represent reality, whereas this is far from the case. This brings us to the disadvantages of questionnaires.

Firstly, there are the “student unknowns”: (a) Did the students understand the questions; (b) Were the students sincere when filling in the questionnaire (Did they fill in options at random?); (c) Did the students respond according to their own ideas, or did they give the responses which they thought the teacher wanted; (d) Did the students see this as a valuable activity, designed to improve their learning environment, or did they see it as a waste of time?

Secondly, there are the “questionnaire unknowns”: (a) Did the questions ask what they were meant to ask (Did they represent the best way of finding out the required information?); (b) Did the questions match the linguistic and cognitive capabilities of the students (e.g., Were the questions in the L1 or the L2?); (c) Were the questions unbiased? (Were they neutral, or did they ask students to confirm the teacher’s opinions?); (d) Did the questionnaire ask sensitive (inappropriate) questions (e.g., Did students have to put their name on the form?)?

As we can see, the way in which students answer can depend on the learning environment (classroom, atmosphere, stress, etc.), the way in which the questionnaire is administered (“Just fill this in and give it back to me. Then we’ll get back to work.”), the linguistic level of the questions (if too difficult for the students, the questionnaire becomes a language test rather than a research tool), and their expectations of what will be done with the questionnaire (“Will my

answers affect my grade in any way?”).


Another problem is that even the most perfectly designed questionnaire can only tell us what we want to know! This might sound strange, but what about those factors that we haven’t asked about? Perhaps there are things going on that we haven’t observed, but which are important to the students. How can we find out about these if we don’t ask about them? One possibility is to include an open question at the end of the questionnaire: “Do you have any comments?” However, this option tends to be ignored by students, since it draws attention to their opinions. A preferable solution is to triangulate our research instruments, and to use learning journals, speaking journals, and open interviews. In this manner, students become comfortable with expressing their views, and “hidden” issues come to the fore of their own accord.



To conclude, let’s take a look at a questionnaire that has been used extensively in ELT research, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning of R. Oxford (1989). The first link is a Korean version, and the second link is an adapted version of the original English one: (a) [www.finchpark.com/books/twas/comm/134.htm](http://www.finchpark.com/books/twas/comm/134.htm), (b) [www.finchpark.com/books/twa/comm/sille.doc](http://www.finchpark.com/books/twa/comm/sille.doc). As we can see from this questionnaire, there are a number of sections, and there is a lot for the students to do, apart from just filling in the information. They also have to collect the data and analyze it for themselves at the end of the instrument. Note in particular the way Oxford keeps posting the instructions up for the students. The whole of the second page of the questionnaire is taken up with directions and examples, and the meaning of the five options is repeated before each section.

In other words, “There’s many a slip twixt cup and lip” in terms of using questionnaires for AR. Oxford has asked the students to take care of the results themselves, and therefore to modify their perceptions without teacher intervention. As with learning journals, etc., making the questionnaire part of the learning content is an effective way of addressing many related problems.

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Oxford, R.L. (1989). Use of language learning strategies: A synthesis of studies with implications for strategy training. *System*, 17(2), 235-247. 

## Quantitative vs. Qualitative

One reason I am drawn to Action Research is that it accepts and uses qualitative research methods for what they are - subjective perceptions of reality. This might sound strange, since research is, according to the modernist model, supposed to define and measure; i.e., if something can't be measured, then it is not worth considering.

However, the hard sciences - Physics, Biology, Chemistry, etc. - have left the experimental, isolationist model of research far behind. Systems Theory, Complexity Theory, and Model Theory tell us that phenomena cannot be examined in isolation, since the interaction with other parts of the same, or neighboring, systems is their main characteristic, out of which new forms emerge. If we isolate a factor, then it ceases to have contextual meaning, and behaves in a non-natural fashion. At this point, the research is meaningless.

Even if we examine a complete system, e.g., a class of language learners, and try to compare them with a control group, e.g., another class of language learners, we have problems. The control group is a different system, consisting of different sub-systems (the students), who are influenced by further different sub-systems (teachers, parents, friends, relatives, etc.). Even if the experiences within the classroom are controlled, the control group students will have different emotional, social, and cognitive experiences outside the classroom from those of the experimental

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### *Language learners are not Skinner's rats.*

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students, and any conclusions drawn by the research team must acknowledge this.

There is a further factor to be considered - the subjective nature of reality. Language learners are not Skinner's rats. They are subjective humans, who react emotionally to various stimuli and situations. Their learning is affected by their beliefs and self-perceptions, however misplaced these might seem to be. In terms of educational psychology, we can say that "subjective perception = personal truth." In other words, if I believe that I am a poor learner, then this is my "truth," and I will manage my learning in order to confirm this "truth." Thus, each student has their own reality in which they believe implicitly, and which controls the effectiveness of their learning. Rather than searching for a philosopher's stone which would turn everything to gold, the teacher has to come to terms with individual versions of truth.

In this situation, the task of research is to examine all the personal truths in the classroom. We must find out *what* they are, *where* they come from, and *how* they can be changed. It is not enough to say that "This student has misplaced perceptions regarding his/her ability" or "This student's view of the language learning process is wrong." If we are to change such perceptions for the better, we have to accept them, respect them, and find out how to positively affect them.

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This is where we can turn to qualitative Action Research. When examining the individual perceptions which drive learning, the teacher is in a privileged position, since students are familiar with him/her and can share confidences. They can explain their feelings, doubts, and fears; they can describe their personal realities in human terms, rather than through impersonal numbers. The teacher can then look at a wealth of rich, deep data and find out how to help his/her students become confident, motivated, successful language learners.

We can see that the factors we really want to measure (confidence, meaning, autonomy, motivation, diligence, sincerity, and attitudes to learning) cannot be itemized in a multiple-choice, "objective" fashion. Yet the professional texts tell us that language learning cannot occur without these. Instead, qualitative research respects and documents such personal variables. It allows us to say: "My students believe these things to be true. I will attempt to positively influence these perceptions, in order to improve the effectiveness of their learning." A pleasing, self-reflexive feature of Action Research is that one of the methods of positively influencing our students is to perform Action Research upon them!

### **The Author**



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## Publishing Results

**Y**ou recently identified a problem in your classroom and decided to use Action Research methods to investigate it. You explored the problem using checklists, questionnaires, interviews, observation, counseling, journals, emails, etc., and you collected lots of useful data from these. Perhaps you even noticed that the act of using all these AR instruments somehow seemed to ease the problem. Finally, you took appropriate action, and the problem was (or was not) resolved. Whatever the outcome, it is important now that you tell people. The time has come for your experiences to hit the printed page.

It's easy to imagine that your research wasn't significant: "Who wants to know my findings? They're not that important." However, let's step back and think for a moment. Imagine all those professors in the ESL (English as a Second Language) world who are writing books and articles about ELT (English Language Teaching). Every EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teacher has had to deal with textbooks which were written for TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) students, but which do little to satisfy the needs and characteristics of Asian, heterogeneous, culture-specific classrooms. Even when we attend EFL conferences, we see ESL speakers giving plenary speeches, seemingly oblivious of the fact that language performance in the EFL learning environment happens *inside* the (test-driven) classroom or not at all. These big names really don't know what is going on in your classes in Korea. They cannot imagine the testing frenzy that high school teachers go through, the 15-hour study-days that most high school students experience, the totally test-driven classroom, or the language-as-code instruction that happens in language institutes. They have never been faced with a school principal who says "teach page 52 today," students who say "If it's not on the test, I don't want to learn it," or administrators who say "Only 20% of your students can get an A."

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### *The time has come... to hit the printed page.*

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In fact, these are some of the problems that you might have been researching. Questions such as, "How do I motivate students when they know that 50% of the class must get C or D?" or "How do I introduce communicative competence into a test-driven classroom?" is very relevant to many of your colleagues who are in the same boat. If you have looked at the problem deeply, and have found some answers, then you need to tell us.

The word "deeply" is important here. You didn't just

give a questionnaire to a class of 15 students (5 of whom didn't complete it correctly) on a Tuesday in November. You spent time on the problem, and you designed various research instruments to triangulate your findings.

You are ready to publish, even if your subjective case-study does not match up to the statistical requirements of quantitative

research models. Take heart, and remember that the cognitive, affective, and social phenomena that you observed over a period of time have inherent validity for many people in similar situations.

But how to proceed? Well, the publication you are reading now is one option. Have a look at the articles in this issue, and see what people are talking about. Where are the submission contact details? This is a very good way to start. When you feel ready to branch out, how about submitting to the *Korea TESOL Journal*? You probably have some of these around the apartment if you are a KOTESOL member. Have a look at the Call for Papers and the Information for Authors at the front of the journal. Still in Korea, there are lots of other journals that you might want to try. These are variously run by universities, education departments, or teachers' associations. If you can't find them in the local library, ask around in your KOTESOL Chapter.

Most journals have style sheets in the back, which show you how to format your submission. Some even have these on the Internet. In general, EFL journals (though often varying to some degree) tend to use a form of APA (American Psychological Society) style. Useful guidelines for this (e.g., "How do I cite an Internet address?") can be found at <http://www.apastyle.org/>.

So please take your courage in both hands, and put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard). Tell us about the things that worked, and the things that didn't work. Help to improve the educational climate of which you have become a part.

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## Observation

Jack Richards (1996, p. 12) notes that “Action research typically involves small-scale investigative projects in the teacher’s own classroom, and consists of a number of phases which often occur in cycles: planning; action; observation; and reflection.” Observation is thus at the heart of action research. It could be said that all language-learning research is based on observation, since even the quantitative paradigm relies on data collection before carrying out its intricate niceties.

It is easy to think that research doesn’t exist until it hits the pages of a professional journal (“I am published; therefore, I am”). However, when we read the reports and case studies contained in various books and articles (e.g., Bailey & Nunan, 2000), we can see that qualitative research is largely a matter of reporting and commenting on observations carried out by practicing teachers. These observations (about themselves and about their students) are collated, categorized, analyzed, and presented for the interested reader, who is often left to make up his/her mind about the implications for his/her particular teaching situation.

Wajnryb’s (1993) excellent book about classroom observation tasks is not explicitly a research methodology book. However, it is highly recommended for teachers (and teacher-trainers) wishing to investigate and enhance their practices in an action-

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### *Physician, heal thyself.*

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research manner. If they have time to write up the results and submit a paper to the *Korea TESOL Journal*, this is most welcome and benefits a wide range of colleagues, but even without this final step, the activity of exploration through observation is a valid and valuable research activity.

At the non-threatening “micro” level of personal-practice investigation, observation can be carried out simply by using checklists (Finch, 2005), by setting up a video in the classroom, or by asking a colleague to sit in and take notes. It can be structured observation, or it can be unstructured. In the former case, various observation instruments can be made, focusing on different areas of self-research (e.g., the teacher’s approach to the learners, the teacher’s language, the learning environment, the lesson, teaching skills and strategies, classroom management, and materials and resources). On the other (unstructured) hand, it can be interesting to make a video without planning what to observe and simply make notes and comments as situations arise.

As we can see, there is a lot to observe from various

perspectives, and various ways of doing this. Starting with ourselves (“Physician, heal thyself”) is a good way to begin. As Sauvignon (1976) points out, a great deal of research focuses on learners, ignoring the fact that teachers (that’s us) also have attitudes and beliefs about language learning and that these affect our teaching and the learners’ consequent learning.

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Such examination can begin with self-directed observation and can lead to positive improvement and enhancement of our teaching practices. In its institutional, teacher-training guise, however, the “hard, critical look” is not often seen as a method of research and can be stressful for teachers who see themselves being judged, not always by competent educators, and sometimes with potential negative repercussions. It is important, therefore, that administrators, as well as teachers, understand the important formative role of observation, and the necessity for discussion and understanding at every stage of the process. When this occurs, observation can become a non-stressful, well-documented group activity and can involve (and influence) all the teachers in the educational institution.

Finally, let’s not forget that teachers (even more so in student-centered, autonomous learning environments) are vital to the learning process, and can facilitate and promote a love of learning.

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# Questionnaires

Once we have identified a problem in the classroom, questionnaires offer a basic means of investigating that problem from the students' point of view. Teachers can make their own questionnaires or adapt published research instruments (FLCAS, BALLI, SILL, etc.). Some of the areas we might look at include motivation, attitudes to assessment, group work, homework, peer-pressure, participation, etc.:

- Anxiety ([www.finchpark.com/books/lj/0074.html](http://www.finchpark.com/books/lj/0074.html))
- Confidence (.../lj/0042.html)
- Learning styles (.../lj/0056.html; .../lj/0057.html)
- Classroom environment (CEQ) (.../lj/0053.html; .../lj/0066.html)
- Student perceptions about the course (.../lj/Pre.doc)

Questionnaires do not give us the full story, of course, since they represent no more (and no less) than the students' perceptions of what is happening in class. However, when we remember that these perceptions control the learning that takes place, we can see that it is extremely important to know what the students are thinking. The "Classroom Environment Questionnaire" (CEQ) offers an example of a particularly useful approach to this situation. Students are asked first to respond according to the learning environment that they would like to see. They are then asked to fill in the same questionnaire, identifying what actually happens in class. Results of the two questionnaires can be compared, giving an idea of what needs attention. If the teacher also fills it in, further valuable information can be identified regarding differences between teacher/student perceptions.

It is important to be careful about how questionnaires are introduced. If they suddenly appear in the lesson without warning, students can easily see them as intrusions and consequently might not be serious when completing them. It has also been shown that students often give the answers that they think their teacher wants them to give in such "artificial" situations. It is a good idea, therefore, to incorporate questionnaires into the learning content of the lesson. If this can be done, then the research instrument becomes a part of learning and English is used in an authentic setting. Questions can be made very simple and can be set at the proficiency level of the students. Having worked through the questionnaire as a learning activity, students will be able (and motivated) to answer sincerely.

This does not exclude the use of Korean questions if the teacher would like students to answer freely and in depth. A common problem with questionnaires is that they are usually composed of Yes/No, True/False, or Likert-scale ("Answer on a scale from 1 to 5") "closed" questions. Because of their restricted nature, responses can only confirm (or not) the teacher's suppositions.

They cannot draw attention to issues that are not mentioned. For this reason, it is important to add an "open" question or two and to further supplement questionnaires with other research methods such as interviews and learner journals.

When making the questions, we need to look closely for hidden assumptions ("What-am-I-thinking?" questions) and double negatives ("Don't you like working in groups?"). The first type encourages students to give an "acceptable" answer, while the second type raises first-



language interference problems ("Yes, I don't like it" vs. "No, I don't like it," and "Yes, I like it" vs. "No, I like it."). As a means of combating such problems, and as with many aspects of EFL teaching, it can be interesting and rewarding to ask groups of students to make the questionnaire. Not only does this help them to think deeply about the issue and to compose relevant questions, but it also encourages them to do this in English.

Finally, when using a Likert scale, there can be a problem of association, with "5" implying "very good" and "1" implying "not good." Research instruments, therefore, often allocate "complete agreement" with "1" and "complete disagreement" with "5." An alternative to this problem can be to use a number of unusual symbols and to state the responses that they represent at the beginning of the questionnaire:

- $\Theta$  = I agree completely
- $\Omega$  = I agree on the whole
- $\Delta$  = I disagree on the whole
- $\Phi$  = I disagree completely
- $\mu$  = No comment (I have no opinion)

Good luck with your questionnaires!



## A Quote to Ponder

***Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.***

William Butler Yeats (1865 - 1939)  
*Irish poet and dramatist*

# Checklists

When we think of ELT research, it's easy to picture people in "ivory towers" writing papers on theoretical aspects of a profession they have very little contact with. This is not altogether unfair in EFL, since most of the books we read during our professional development are written by people in ESL environments. However well-meaning they might be, they cannot be expected to know what happens in Korea, and we can justifiably ask "How do your findings help me?"

Luckily, AR is concerned with what happens in our classrooms, and its goal is to make the learning that occurs there as effective as possible, through our own investigations. One very useful AR instrument is the checklist. The checklist offers an excellent way of finding out what is going on in our classes, so that we can make positive adjustments. We don't have to worry about validity, reliability, quantitative vs. qualitative methods, or any of ye olde researche war-horses when we use a

checklist to (for example) look at classroom management and teacher-talking time (Table 1).



Because the teacher is usually alone in the classroom, and because there are rarely opportunities for self-initiated observation, it is not unusual for teachers to be unaware of certain aspects of their own language performance. Checklists provide simple and effective solutions, and can be combined with classroom-observation methods. Thus, when you ask a colleague to visit your class, or when you are watching a video of one of your lessons, it can be helpful to have a checklist of items for attention. Here are some you might like to try. (Make you own as well, and ask a colleague to observe you, using the checklists).

**Table 1.** Checklist of TTT vs. STT

Talking Time	5	10	8	20	25	30	35	40	45	50
Teacher										
Students										

**Table 2.** Checklist of Teacher Classroom-Language (Frequency of Phrases)

Phrases	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
OK.																		
Great.																		
Good job.																		
Well done.																		
Listen to me.																		
Look at me.																		
Stop what you're doing.																		

**Table 3.** Observation Checklist (based on Brown, 1975, p. 70)

TL = Teacher describes, narrates, explains, directs	TQ = Teacher questions
TR = Teacher responds to pupil's response	S = Silence
PR = Pupil's response to teacher's questions	X = Unclassifiable
PV = Pupil volunteers information, comments on questions	

	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50
TL										
TQ										
TR										
PR										
PV										
S										
X										

**Table 4.** Humanistic Criteria for Teacher Reflection

*My English lessons today promoted:*

education	_____	learning
meaning	_____	form
self-direction	_____	teacher autocracy
self-respect	_____	low self-esteem
interaction	_____	teacher-talk
self-assessment	_____	fear of assessment
cooperation	_____	competition
creativity	_____	plagiarism
motivation	_____	indifference
mediation	_____	instruction
process	_____	product

**Reference**

Brown, G. (1975). *Microteaching*. New York: Methuen.

## Action Research: What? Why? How?

Welcome to the first article of what is to be a regular column on the topic of Action Research. To celebrate this new arrival in *The English Connection* (TEC), this initial article is presented in the form of a dialog between two EFL teachers (A & B).

*Scene: A is sitting on the sofa, avidly reading the latest copy of TEC. B is in the kitchen, heating up some Shin Ramyon, instant noodles.*

### Action Research

By Andrew Finch

A: Hey, B, look at this: "Action Research: What? Why? How?" This could be interesting.

B: Come on, A. We've heard it all before. Don't you mean "Action Research: Who needs it?"

A: Do I detect a hint of sarcasm in your voice?

B: You could say that, but I'd prefer to call it realism. We're both EFL teachers. We don't have time to mess around with research.

A: Mmm (*continues reading silently*)

B: And even if we did, we couldn't be sure that we'd be in the same job at the end of the research period.

A: Mmm (*continues reading silently*)

B: And then who's going to publish it after we've been to all the trouble of data collection and data analysis, let alone report writing?

A: Mmm (*continues reading silently*)

B: Put that down and eat some *ramyon*. You're making me nervous.

A: It's strange, but all the things you've just mentioned are in this article. Did you write it?

B: You must be joking. I don't have time to write for TEC. I don't even know what "TEC" means.

A: According to this article, the next thing you will say is that published research rarely gets into the classroom.

B: You beat me to it. It was on the tip of my tongue.

A: In fact, it cites an article by Patsy Lightbown\*, which lists the achievements of Applied Linguistics in terms of making our methodology more informed. It's a very short list.

B: What did I tell you? Come on, the baseball game will be on TV soon.

A: Hear me out. This could be useful. Do you know what Action Research is?

B: Search me.

A: It's research carried out by teachers in their own classrooms. When they identify a problem (research question), they look for ways of solving it (hypothesis), try them out in class (research method), and see whether they work (data analysis, conclusions). If the problem is solved, everyone's happy. If the problem continues, then they look for other approaches.

B: Is that all? You mean Action Research is teaching?

A: Or teaching is Action Research. All teachers have problems to solve. Action Research simply documents the process and makes the results available to other teachers.

B: You're talking about publishing the results now. That sounds like hard work.

A: OK, but think about it. Imagine that you identify problems in your classes. Maybe there's a motivation problem, a confidence problem, or peer pressure.

B: Or students turning up late without a book.

A: A problem - structural, acquisitional, affective, social, etc.

B: One of the many.

A: So you decide to look into it. Maybe there are factors involved that you hadn't thought about before.

B: You're not kidding.

A: You give the students questionnaires, you interview them, you video the class, or you ask a colleague to come in and watch.

B: Really?

A: And then you take a look at all the data. Perhaps there's something there. Maybe the students tell you something about your classes that you didn't realize.

B: I'm not sure I want to know.

A: Even on the most basic level, just asking someone to observe you and to count all the times you say "OK," "Good job," "Well done," "Listen to me," etc. can make a big change in your lessons and in your students' perceptions of you.

B: I see what you mean. And then there's the body language and mannerisms.

A: Exactly. We never see our habitual actions until someone points them out.

B: And that's all there is to Action Research?

A: Certainly not, but let's move on to your next point.

B: But I haven't made it yet.

A: I know, but you will. It's all in the article. It says here that you are worried about generalizability of results and the validity of qualitative research methods.

B: Well, I wouldn't have put it in quite those words...

A: Let's take the first one. Every teacher is different, every learning institution is different and every class of students is different. So how can we expect to share our results with other teachers?

B: Or why should we concern ourselves with their results?

A: When we do Action Research, we simply document case studies. We say "This is how I approached this problem in this situation, and this is what happened."

B: What's all the fuss? That's no big deal.

A: Yes, it is a big deal. This sort of information is extremely valuable to other teachers faced with similar problems. Even if you say "I tried this and it didn't work," your colleagues need to know, so that they don't waste time following the same route. And how about all those people

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## Treasure Hunt



Most of us who've signed up for a MA-level course experience similar problems in accessing reference material. While the problem can be reduced to a nuisance, I fear it will never be completely or satisfactorily solved. Following are some resources and methods that have helped others locate books and journal articles. The most important step is planning, as reference materials will take some time to get. Determine what you'll need and then figure out where to get it at the cheapest cost.

There are many resources available to us for acquiring texts. Two of the best sources of information may be the most difficult and the most overlooked. Most distance programs supply students with access to their campus library and some way of communicating with other students. While all schools differ, most offer online material to their distance students. Figure out what they offer and how to access it. This can prove to be a headache, but potentially worthwhile. If you're properly established with your library, inter-library loans may be available; and if you need journals, it is likely that your library has a service to dispatch journal copies rather cheaply. Ask your administrator for an Athens password to access online databases such as Ingenta. TESOL Quarterly and ELT Journal on CD make for good investments, too. Another option is to buy or borrow books from people enrolled in your course or other MA courses. You will need to work on developing contacts and resources early on because neither can be done overnight.

Don't overlook libraries at Korean universities. In fact, your Korean university ID is like a passport in that you should be granted access to

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By Jon Marshall

other university libraries. Most have English language resources. You may need to bring a Korean friend with you to help you navigate the library itself and any of its online resources. At times you may find yourself in a "gray area" when emailing yourself URLs to material that is only accessible through library subscription - but that's an individual decision.

One trick I've found is to do a Google search for a "unique ten word string." Frequently an accessible reference will be returned. This is a good way of locating online journal articles as well. Also, you can try out Google's new service Google Scholar at <http://scholar.google.com/>.

Purchasing books can be the easiest, but most expensive route. Aside from Amazon.com or Abe.com, visit publishers' websites (CUP, OUP, Pearson), go to conferences and seminars for discounted books, and visit bookstores such as Kyobo or your local English language specialty shop.



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writing books and papers in ESL countries? These are the professional books we are expected to read, but which are based on the ESL situation. Few of these authors have been in an EFL classroom and faced the sort of situations we face every day. If we write them up, this will be giving much-needed data to those authors.

B: It sounds like you're sold on the idea.

A: Well, I like the fact that this approach respects **me** as a teacher, along with the things that **I** find out about **my** teaching situation. Instead of having a stranger coming in and observing out of the blue, I can work with my students and watch things develop.

B: Just a minute. What happened to those questions about validity and reliability?

A: No problem. It says here that qualitative research methods have been fully justified for some time, and even that they are sounder than the old propositional, isolationist ones. But apparently there will be more about that in the next article. Let's watch the game. Your

ramyon's getting cold.

### The Author

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\* Lightbown, P. (2000). Anniversary article: Classroom SLA research and second language teaching. *Applied Linguistics*, 21(4), 431-462.

