

Enhancing students to become adept research proposal writers:

The case of Master Two-University of Msila

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Abstract

The study reflects the teacher's observations to students in a variety of classroom research methodology activities to uncover the constraints and pinpoint difficulties experienced by students all through the study terms and to suggest ways in which these difficulties could be overcome and resolved. The result findings of this study have shown that teachers through class modeling have a significant role to play in helping students overcome barriers to understanding reading material, in researching for appropriate data, and in interpreting literature review and finally in developing their skills and in drafting a research proposal.

Key words : observation, research proposal activities, constraints, teacher's modeling

ملخص

هذه الدراسة تعكس ملاحظة الأستاذ للطلبة أثناء القيام بعدة تمارين في البحث التربوي ومنهجيته قصد التعرف على العراقيل والمشاكل التي يواجهها الطلبة قصد متابعتها والفصل فيها. وقد أبدت الدراسة وجوب الأساتذة بقيام بتجارب نموذجية تكون حافزا لتجاوز العقبات أثناء كتابة البحث الخاص بأطروحة التخرج.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ملاحظة - مراحل البحث - العراقيل - نموذج الأستاذ

Introduction

Three years of research methodology study seems not suffice the envious students researching the way how to research. Students in Master Two LMD system envisaging to prepare their thesis of limited scope are not really satisfied with the contents of courses acquired and seem to be at a loss on how to

prepare a research proposal. For this intent, we see it of paramount importance to focus ,in this article, on key points related to research implicature to clarify certain research methodology design and process to help the students see at least how to begin with a certain clear purpose in mind. “The purpose statement should provide a specific and accurate synopsis of the overall purpose of the study” (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987, p. 5). If the purpose is not clear to the writer information provider; hence , it cannot be clear to the reader researcher.

Research methods training must equip students with an understanding of a multiplicity of methods, i.e., the process and the product of research. The research process is broken down into two phases: formulating the question, and seeking the answer. In formulating the question training is given to students in how to: identify a research problem which might be defined as the issue that exists in the literature, theory, or practice that leads to a need for the study” (Creswell, 1994, p. 50), the problem statement which describes the context for the study and it also identifies the general analysis approach” (Wiersma, 1995, p. 404)., narrow the topic to focus on the relevant issues, review previous research literature, formulate an answerable question, and state hypotheses of expected outcome.

Theoretical Framework: Basic Assumptions

Postgraduate students in their thinking about study and research, are faced with the problem of topic finding, which primary sources are crucially important for evidence, what empirical approaches they should adopt for their research questions, how to write hypotheses and how to prove or refute their validity, what type of literature review they should read and consult “The review of the literature provides the background and context for the research problem. It should establish the need for the research and indicate that the writer is knowledgeable about the area” (Wiersma, 1995, p. 406). It shares with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the study being reported (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990).It also relates a study to the larger, ongoing dialogue in the literature about a topic, filling in gaps and extending prior studies (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

In addition, most of the students are prompted by the idea that a research work is just an accumulation of facts , well constructed and structurally well referenced, nicely put together like a jig-saw puzzle somehow reflecting the mismatch of a Persian carpet. But in all this , students also suffer from the way they present the whole work ; they lack the written hand and the way they should structure their writing to make it look more reflective and personal ; for a good research work should be reflective of its own person, even for an amateur researcher , there must be a kind of personal touch, a self-motivation insight and a kind of curiosity arousal .

Besides the motivational intent for a research conduct, there are general research skills which are essential equipment for academic pursuits learners must obey to. Self-Training into inquisitive research demands a kind of tenacious aptitude, a wide reading, critical thinking selecting, analyzing, synthesizing, adapting and applying those meta -cognitive skills altogether to fuse them into a well construed readable piece of discourse.

Learners' Intended perspectives

Throughout the observation phases, the researcher noticed that master two LMD students need to be encouraged and oriented to focus their attention on these aspects of research insight to fully develop the acquisition of the critical skills, conceptual and analytical data collection tools as well as shifting from an end product vision into a more down to earth perspective reflected in the practicality of the knowledge acquired implemented through a process like oriented trend. In this case, learners will better know how to shift from students knowledge receivers into amateur researchers ; thus detaching themselves bit by bit from the ties of the teacher supervisor towards building their own self constructive development approach.

Aims and Objectives

We may assert that the crucial aspect of the initial training course in research methods and observation phase is to critically enhance the students researchers

- To develop the ability to read , select what to read and how to read it ,understand and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the written word that can best serve in any systematic process of inquiry
- To choose or select a topic/theme/subject(of topical interest)
- To think about a preliminary title as this could set the purpose of the investigation

- To try to formulate a problem and become aware of it.
- To conduct a preliminary literature study to demarcate the problem and reflect on the significance and feasibility of the investigation.

Raising Learners' Awareness

However, It is important at this stage to make students aware of what is researched and *why*? For not all the topics can be researched.

- Some topics cannot be researched because the question is not of interest, not in vogue, irrelevant or difficult to treat and / or lacks documentation
- Some topics cannot be researched because of ethical considerations- Dignity and welfare, consent, anonymity, risk, time and money consuming.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND RECOMMENDATION

As part of regular teaching sessions, the primary researcher assigned classroomn researching tasks and observed how learners approached these assignments. Participant observation is integral to understanding the breadth and complexities of research participants' experiences. Factors that are significant for a thorough understanding of the research problem can be uncovered through observation.

Participant observation also helps one understand and interpret data obtained through other methods, because it provides a context for understanding that data. Students' responses to the learning activities were noted down and written up as descriptive narratives in the researcher's journal for analysis and interpretation. And on the basis of the students' observed learning experiments that the researcher's idea for this article sprang up. As a research methodology credit lecturer, I consider the whole process from a three angle vision.

Table 1: Research proposal different stages

Initial phase: training Awareness raising – exploiting the possibility of the scheme -Research Process 1	Medial phase: Self-identification and personal involvement Incubation /reflection Research Process 2	Final phase: Self-reflection and personal refinement- the research product process 3
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I- Initial Phase: training awareness- exploiting the possibility of the scheme -
Research Process 1 (Familiarizing Students to research start)

Research Process One: recommendation one

Initially students need to learn how and what to read in their literature review. Goodman (1967; 1988) commented that reading is really a mystery, that nobody knows how reading works and that reading is in effect a psycholinguistic guessing game; for knowing how to read demands certain strategies and to be able to develop into strategic readers is not a gift endowed to anybody. Harmer (2001:200) states that a reader uses a variety of clues to understand what the writer is implying thereby moving beyond the literal meaning of the words to the contextually and conceptually implied meaning. Chastain (1988:228) suggests that the reading process entails active, cognitive interaction between mind and text in order to interpret and comprehend the text.

This process is critical to studying and understanding literature review. Students should be initially trained in this skill; they should know how to read selectively, to read behind the lines, to read to discover, pause and question the signposts, to develop a sense of inferring, predicting and prior knowledge implication and application.

Consequently, the reading process comprises (1) learning to interpret symbols and pronounce words (Goodman 1998:11); (2) identifying words and understanding their meaning (; Grabe & Stoller 2002:9; Grabe 1991:392) and (3) learning to bring meaning to a text in order to derive meaning from it (Foertsch 1998; Harmer 2001; Rumelhart 1977; Smith 1985; Wallace 2003; Weaver 2002).

Grabe (1991:396) distinguishes six skills and knowledge areas, namely automatic recognition skills; vocabulary and structural knowledge; formal discourse structure knowledge; content/world background knowledge; synthesis and evaluation skills/ strategies; and meta-cognitive knowledge and skills monitoring.

To develop into strategic readers students need to equip themselves with a strong sense of using the prior knowledge in understanding the text, in locating the information they need, in underlining the key elements, in understanding the text structure of the research literature, cultivate an ability of epitomizing, synthesizing and in critically evaluating a previous research. Wallace (1986:70) suggests that the basic process of learning to read is acquired only once.

Teachers in charge of supervision must assign Master students methodology classroom activities and observe their different outcomes with the purpose of finding

faults and pinpointing remedies. Consequently, teachers set recommendations and advisory working ethics for everybody to respect. This may make part of the training program set for this purpose, at least at an initial phase. Once learners could discern between relevant and irrelevant material and be aware of selecting data and making the most of it, then they need to learn to develop their own research proposal, select a self appropriate research method or design, for researching students' learning strategies relies extensively on collecting data through various self-report procedures (Chamot 2005), and opt for the suitable methods used for the interpretation of result findings.

Note: In the first phase Master students need to tackle the following research components

- Contextualisation of the study
- Motivation for the research
- Demarcation of the research
- Contribution of the research
- Research problem statement
- Preliminary Literature study
- Stating a hypothesis(hypotheses)

Checklist related to the first phase

- Do students have the necessary experience, available sources, data collection research tools, time and finances to undertake the research adequately?
- Are students really interested in the subject and willing to achieve it successfully?
- What relevant literature to consult?
- How to make the choice of documents or sources (primary/secondary and tertiary)?
- How should the title look like? Why a preliminary title?
- How could students write a good introduction of the whole work?

II -Medial phase: : Self-identification and personal involvement/Incubation /reflection Research

Process 2 (Getting students involved in the research)

Research Process Two: recommendation two

It is in this phase that the researcher starts to get out of the shell by identifying his personal research design and defend his argument or thesis by stating the type of approach, what suitable methodology could best suit his topic clearly and the reasons why he has chosen a particular method or procedure and which approach to choose- quantitative, qualitative or a combination of the two (triangulation).The researcher then begins to show to his reader which type of tools surveys he has opted for in the collection of his data and in case of a questionnaire ,he has to show the types of questions the respondents have to answer with a degree of easiness or difficulty after piloting it.

Then, he has to give some explanatory notes on the selected population, the sample and the different sampling methods selected with providing reasons for the appropriate sampling. The researcher must demonstrate that his research methods must be appropriate to the objectives of the study. His methodology should also discuss the problems that were anticipated and explain the steps taken to prevent them from occurring, and the problems that did occur and the ways their impact are to be minimized. Ethical considerations should also be considered so as to ensure harmony.

Conclusion: In the second phase Master students will tackle the following research components

- Research design
- Research design decisions
- Research approach
- Research method
- Identification of research population and sample
- Sampling methods and procedure
- Data collection processes and tools
- Field observations
- Surveys
- Research schedule
- Protocol and ethical consideration

Checklist related to the second phase

Final phase: Self-reflection and personal refinement- the research product process 3; recommendation three

In the final stage, the researcher has to ensure that the data were carefully collected, processed and then analyzed to enable the readers to evaluate the validity and the reliability of the reached results and how the conclusions were

eventually drawn. He has also to make sure that the questionnaires were anonymously coded and treated, field notes attentively recorded and observations objectively noted.

The researcher, in this phase, acts as a truthful reporter with too much objectivity-he has to report his findings as truly as possible, reporting both the negative and positive assets of the investigation with all the limitations, stating in fact the prospective traits of his results giving a true depiction to his research to enable the future researchers to have another go with what he has already prospected.

Note: In the third phase Master students will tackle the following research components

- Summary of field work findings
- Literature review Finding
- Survey findings Interpretation of results
- Questionnaire results
- Interview analysis
- Observation results
- Case study Result

Checklist related to the third phase

RESEARCH DESIGN

Since the methods or procedures section is really the heart of the research proposal, the activities should be described with as much detail as possible, and the continuity between them should be apparent (Wiersma, 1995, p. 409). In this respect, a qualitative research approach was selected to determine, examine and analyse L2 Master study research credit experiences to identify the barriers and challenges experienced in research and thesis completion.

A qualitative approach was chosen since it is by nature exploratory, interpretative and descriptive and is an attempt to understand multiple realities. (Babbie & Mouton 2001:270-271; Leedy & Ormrod 2001:102). Qualitative studies furthermore have the potential to provide rich, detailed data (Carr 2008:716). The research findings would be used to establish appropriate strategies to support Master students in their data research , interpretation and comprehension of the research proposal for thesis termination.

RESEARCH CONTEXT, POPULATION AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

The research focused on examining the perceptions, thoughts and experiences of LMD Master TEFL students in their studies. The time allocated for the study of the module is 1h30mns per week for a whole semester. In the second semester, students are expected to devote the same amount of time in practical research and the writing of their thesis. Hence, all the 14 students who have registered for this module and who constitute a complete sample have passed Master one and have been subjected to undertake a research work to their own choice in the following domain (Applied linguistic/didactics/TEFL).

Since sampling should be well selected, the key reason for being concerned with is that of *validity*—the extent to which the interpretations of the results of the study follow from the study itself and the extent to which results may be generalized to other situations with other people (Shavelson, 1988).

In his research of relevant data, the researcher has resorted to variant observations to the students at work, his interactions with them, the completed and the analysed questionnaires handed back and the focus group study. The observation and interaction component of the research involved that whole group of students).

DATA ANALYSIS

After the data had been collected, it was studied according to the research proposal elements related questions. The encoded responses were collated and grouped according to the elements stated.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings in relation to the conditions and the educational atmosphere under which students study, practice and learn, how students were committed to the featured material and the way they interacted with their teacher and classmates, are discussed below.

OBSERVATIONS

When first confronted with how to distinguish between the researched and the non researched topics, most students appeared rather skeptic about treating the task. And although the teacher gave some models of topics that could be researched and others about the non researched ones, students' apprehension remained a bit suspicious. But when the teacher set assignments and asked students to work them out in groups, students tended to appreciate better the task and showed a kind of confidence the more they went deeply in breaking the task into manageable chunks. What was noticed was the common contribution they

brought to the task and even the slow achievers did contribute with the meanest they had.

INFORMAL INTERACTION and DISCUSSIONS

There is no better place than the classroom atmosphere. The classroom atmosphere was generally cozy and relaxed; promoting learning in collaboration and conducive to fruitful interactions between students and the lecturer, and between students themselves. The researcher and participant observer encouraged the students – as a class, in groups and individually – to share their opinions about the different researched topics, their kind of reading, their literature review, their bibliography and their reading experiences and the strategies they use when treating X and Y topics. Hence, thanks to this kind of interactions that the researcher made it possible an evidence that reflected the proof of reliable data.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To promote research understanding and applicability, it is recommended that students should get rid of any psychological inhibiting factors and constraints need to be resolved. Teachers should adopt a holistic approach that covers students' needs analysis to discern any lapses in dealing with research methodology and designing process.

ENGAGEMENT WITH RESEARCH AS RESEARCH

1. Promote the cozy collaborative learning circle.

- A condition for successful collaborative learning is to structure groups in such a way that the group members contribute complementary skills and knowledge. Reciprocal learning and teaching (an interactive, co-constructive or cooperative learning environment) is conducive to building comprehension .
- peer learning can be facilitated through talking amongst themselves – a process that deepens and refines understanding .

2. Make of the reading material a common sense for students researching purposes

- To appreciate and understand the literature being studied, students need to be able to discover information and ideas within the text and make inferences – something that can only be achieved through active, reflective and analytical reading .
- Adopt strategies that help learners read, react critically to what they read, prompt research questions and solve problems. Wilson (1988) advocates using strategies and techniques such as the following:

- formulate questions to which students must respond prior to, during, and after reading
- require students to respond to the text in terms of their own values and to contrast this with responding to the text from its cultural specific schemata
- anticipate events or outcomes and recognize when and how reader expectations were roused and fulfilled
 - respond to texts through a variety of writing activities that ask readers to go beyond what they have read and to experience the text personally

3. Recommendation three: Tips on how to write

a. The Abstract

b. the introduction

1. Writing the abstract

- Write your abstract after the rest of the paper is completed.
- use complete sentences and do not sacrifice readability for brevity.
- Summarize the study, including the following elements in any abstract. Try to keep the first two items to no more than one sentence each.
- Purpose of the study - hypothesis, overall question, objective
- A brief description of the experiment
- Results, including specific data - if the results are quantitative in nature, report quantitative data; results of any statistical analysis should be reported
- Important conclusions or questions that follow from the experiment(s)
- Single paragraph, and concise
- Use the past tense
- An abstract should stand on its own
- Focus on summarizing results
- What you report in an abstract must be consistent with what you reported in the paper
- Correct spelling, clarity of sentences and phrases, and proper reporting of quantities (proper units, significant figures) are just as important in an abstract as they are anywhere else

Writing the Introduction: “The introduction is the part of the paper that provides readers with the background information for the research reported in the paper. Its purpose is to establish a framework for the research, so that readers can understand how it is related to other research” (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 96).

The first chapter of a dissertation is normally given the title **Introduction**, and it serves many purposes. It is the place where you should

- Reach out to a specific audience. (Creswell, 1994, p. 42)
- discuss the motivation for the work that is being reported
- state and define the problem that the dissertation is trying to address or solve
- state the aims and objectives of the work
- give an indication of how the work will be progressed
- provide a brief overview of each of the main chapters that the reader will encounter

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