

Book Review

Understanding, Evaluating, and Conducting Second Language Writing Research

Charlene Polio and Debra A. Friedman, Routledge, 2017, ISBN: 978-1-138-81467-7

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Understanding, Evaluating, and Conducting Second Language Writing Research, authored by Charlene Polio and Debra A. Friedman, deals with the domain of research in second language writing. Learners, teachers, teacher-educators, and researchers interested in exploring what research in second language writing entails can benefit from the book. The book sheds light on what to know about and how to undertake research particularly when second language writing is increasingly becoming a crucial area of pedagogic explorations.

While numerous second language (L2) writers have some proficiency in L2 writing, many of them, despite being interested, lack the necessary knowledge and skills when it comes to carrying out research in L2 writing (Hyland, 2013). *Understanding, Evaluating, and Conducting Second Language Writing Research* is designed to assist those interested in conceptualizing and carrying out L2 writing research. In this book, Polio and Friedman also take into account teachers of L2 writers as another target audience of the book. The book provides a comprehensive account of research in relation to L2 writing for the above-mentioned target audiences. Consisting of two major parts (Approaches and Methods), it deals with the *what* and *how* of L2 writing research.

In Chapter 1, Polio and Friedman introduce readers with L2 writing as both a cognitive process involving a plethora of internalized skills and knowledge, and a situated activity tied to a specific context, goal and audience. The chapter deals with pedagogical approaches (writing-to-learn and learning-to-write) to L2 writing. In addition, philosophical paradigms (postpositivist and postmodern) and methodological approaches (qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods) in L2 writing research are also explored. It also informs and rationalizes that the book is organized into two major parts: Approaches and Methods.

The Approaches part (Chapters 2-5) of the book introduces and illustrates various types of research in relation to L2 writing. Chapter 2 provides a general concept of experimental research and an explanation of issues pertinent to such research. It offers readers useful insights into how to maintain practicality, reliability and validity to control independent and dependent variables. Chapter 3 builds on the concept of experimental research to elucidate causal-comparative and correlational research both of which resemble experimental research to a certain extent. The discussion of a sample correlational study at the end of the chapter demonstrates readers how a correlational study is conducted. Chapter 4 upholds the primacy of contexts in elucidating case study and ethnographic research approaches to the study of L2 writing as a situated social practice. It discusses ethical issues and observer's paradox to warn novice L2 writing researchers of some potential lacunae in conducting the two types of research. In Chapter 5, the classification of mixed-methods research (MMR) and its several related dimensions help readers to understand the broad scope of MMR. The discussion of MMR in relation to L2 writing research significantly caters to the understanding of how MMR can be specifically applied to L2 writing research. Furthermore, the elucidation of different types of sampling offers a broad insight into what sampling options to choose and how to conduct sampling in MMR.

The Methods part (Chapters 6-11) of the book sheds light, from a methodological perspective, on how to conduct L2 writing research by employing a range of tools and techniques. Chapter 6 enumerates the various goals for analyzing learner texts. The presentation of a taxonomy of ways to analyze learner texts provides a useful guide to L2 writing researchers on how to choose and use techniques in analyzing learner texts. Moving from learner texts to target texts, Chapter 7 specifies a common goal of target text analysis: acquainting novice researchers of L2 writing and teachers of L2 writers with the features of specific non-learner genres. Importantly enough, it taps into significant teaching implications associated with target text analysis. Chapter 8 presents readers important issues concerned with collecting and analyzing retrospective and introspective data which researchers of L2 writing need to consider. In Chapter 9, Polio and Friedman deal with a popular and widely used method of data collection: the interview. Apart from pinpointing the strengths of conducting interviews, the chapter guides readers to

identify the methodological and epistemological risks associated with conducting interviews. Chapter 10 clearly distinguishes qualitative coding from quantitative coding. While doing so, it acquaints readers with the perks and perils of carrying out qualitative coding. Chapter 11 stresses the importance of social contexts that distinguish Discourse Analysis (DA) from textual analysis. Its summary of the major approaches in DA helps readers to conceptualize how DA can be effectively employed in L2 writing research.

By discussing the use of research syntheses in L2 writing research, Chapter 12 – the concluding chapter – puts forward the application of MMR to L2 writing. The cautionary note against the proliferation of unreliable or weak findings is geared toward providing future directions to L2 writing researchers in ensuring quality in their research.

The organization of the entire book is highly structured. Each chapter in both the two major parts of the book conspicuously provides a comprehensive table showcasing representative sample studies (pertinent to the chapter) conducted by writing scholars, in order to delve into the nature of the sample studies. The presentation of a focal study in a box exemplifying and delineating a sample study adds another distinctive mark to each chapter. However, a section on pedagogical implications, depicting how research findings presented in the chapter could be explicitly linked to teaching practices of teachers (one of the target audiences of the book), could be included in each chapter. Such a section would add a valuable dimension to each chapter and could contribute more visibly to improve the current practices in L2 writing. Despite this limitation, the book puts forward a comprehensive and systematic approach to researching L2 writing. While it judiciously addresses the currently available literature on L2 writing research, it significantly contributes to the field by offering thought-provoking insights which can inform and improve ESL pedagogical and research activities. It is, therefore, highly worth recommending for both novice and experienced researchers and teachers of L2 writing. In the Bangladeshi context of learning and teaching English where L2 writing is often seen very importantly, particularly because of its significance in the public examinations, the book can play a supportive role to improve current practices. In addition, since the quality of writing of the Bangladeshi students is often considered to remain low despite years of efforts, the book can encourage teachers to undertake small-scale research on their students' writing which can facilitate better learning and teaching.

References

Hyland, K. (2013). *Teaching and researching writing*. London: Routledge.



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