

Applied Linguistics Research Methods for Applied Linguistics Introduction 'The Scope of Applied Linguistics Research' Over the past two decades, books on applied linguistics research have often failed to define the term research, perhaps because the focus of such books was so narrow that a definition of research seemed self-evident. The diversity of answers was staggering, ranging from short, idealistic answers about what research is (e.g., "Careful, thorough study" and "The search for the truth") to very cynical answers (e.g., "Something that profs at universities that grant advanced degrees do because they don't teach and need to publish" and "Ignoring the obvious"). The approaches to defining research differed in fairly systematic ways, falling generally into four categories as follows: 1. Definitions that listed the types of research (e.g., "An investigation of a particular topic, or problem, through a document search and/or empirical study (the conducting of experiments) and analysis" and "Investigation through the reading of literature, experimentation and/or any other type of data gathering . and "Systematic study of language issues and use in order to improve delivery of services to our students.") 4. Definitions that enumerated the steps in the process of research (e.g., "Working toward truth, proving theories, trying out new approaches – and then compiling results, analyzing results and sharing with colleagues" and "Stating a hypothesis; gathering data; testing the hypothesis; relating the conclusions to issues at hand.") Given the scope of applied linguistics research indicated in these responses, finding a single definition general enough to include all possibilities, yet clear enough to be meaningful seemed to me to be a major challenge. In a conversation with Donald Freeman many years ago, he suggested that research might be defined simply as "any principled inquiry." Still more recently, McDonough and McDonough (1998) dealt with observation, introspection, diary studies, experiments, interviews, questionnaires, numerical techniques, and case study research, and Brown and Rodgers (2002) included chapters on case study research, introspection research, classroom observation and interaction research, descriptive statistics research, correlational research, quasi-experimental research, and course or program evaluation. A few years later, Johnson (1992) covered correlational approaches, case-study approaches, survey research, ethnographic research, experimental research, and what she called multisite/multimethod research, and Nunan (1992) explained experimental method, ethnography, case study, classroom-observation research, introspection methods, elicitation techniques, interaction analysis, and program evaluation. Characteristics of Applied Linguistics Research Applied linguistics research can be described from many different perspectives including at least (1) the contextual factors involved in applied linguistics research, (2) van Lier's parameters of educational research design, (3) Grotjahn's data collection methods, data types, and data analysis procedures, (4) other sets of research characteristics, and (5) the qual-quant continuum. Other books focused on the research methodology involved in language teacher research (Freeman, 1998), language classroom research (van Lier, 1988; Allwright & Bailey, 1991), action research (Wallace, 1998; Burns, 1999), survey research (Brown, 2001), research methods in text and discourse analysis (Jenner, 2000), or research methods in pragmatics (Kasper & Dahl, 1991). Johnson (1992, p. 217) examined a wider variety of the contextual factors involved in research: (1) the sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts, (2) purposes and goals, (3) initiators/impetus, (4) support and funding, and (5) institutional setting..") 2. Definitions that listed the topics of research (e.g., "In its widest sense, to seek new ways to improve language education and

intercultural communication training" and "Searching for information on how students process information, internalize data and retain it for communicative purposes.") 3. Definitions that covered the purpose of research (e.g., "The search for information that will help practitioners (in this case, teachers) better carry out their jobs .Within these institutional contexts a number of factors can influence the type and quality of research: the size of the institution, availability of resources to support research, institutional policies and priorities, the institution's past experiences with researchers, and even the personalities of the various administrators and teachers involved.social context (e.g., language backgrounds, ethnic mix of the students, etc.), (d) pedagogical context (e.g., teaching methods used, preferred learning styles of the students and teachers, etc.), (e) psychological context (e.g., comfort level of participants with regard to research studies, etc.). Some books (Anshen, 1978; Hatch & Farhady, 1982; Butler, 1985; Woods, Fletcher, & Hughes, 1986; Brown, 1988; Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991; Rietveld & van Hout, 1993; Scholfield, 1995) focused almost exclusively on statistical research. In this case, secondary research included library research (research heavily dependent on secondary sources, often associated term papers in school) and literature reviews (more sophisticated reviews of some aspect of the Very broad categories of research literature of the field, which contributed new knowledge to the field). Qualitative research involved many different traditions (see Table 19.3 below) and data gathering techniques (including at least case studies, introspection, discourse analysis, interactional analysis, and classroom observations).Contextual factors in AL Research Brown and Rodgers (2002, pp. 14–16) summarized a number of contextual factors that influence applied linguistics research at international, national, professional, institutional, local, and personal levels: Broad categories of research (adapted from Brown, 2001). 1.2 Options in applied linguistics research In Brown (1988), I naively categorized the different types of research as shown in Figure 19.1 into two categories that my librarian mother taught me years ago: secondary research (derived from the research and writings of others) and primary research (derived from original data of some sort).Such preconceptions and preferences arise from individual differences in abilities, personalities, motivations, priorities, training, etc.Other research-oriented books in applied linguistics have been more inclined to grapple with the notion of what research is, perhaps because they were somewhat more general in nature, usually surveying a variety of different types of research. After a decade or so of experiences like the TESOL survey (discussed above and reported in Brown, 1992), I expanded my view of the types of research in applied linguistics to include more categories.Institutional contexts in applied linguistics research can refer to everything from entire school districts, to individual language programs, or even to very specific individual tutoring situations.Recently, collections of articles have also begun to appear that are focused on a specific type of research, like teacher research (Griffiee & Nunan, 1997; Hornberger & Corson, 1997), or qualitative research (Bailey & Nunan, 1997).Defining applied linguistics research In Brown (1992), I reported on a survey of hundreds of members of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) organization around the world.The earliest of these explored the differences between qualitative and quantitative research (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989).Institutional contexts. 1. 1... 1.3. 1.3. 1.3.4.5.