

Finding a Research Topic in TESOL: Insights and Reflections

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Abstract:

This article explores the process of selecting a research topic in TESOL. It examines challenges and considerations, emphasizing the balance between personal interests and practical factors. Drawing from literature review, personal experiences, and mentorship, researchers identify emerging trends and areas of interest. Inspiration often stems from teaching practice and serendipitous encounters. The article highlights the role of collaboration and flexibility in shaping research trajectories, ultimately contributing to the advancement of TESOL and language education globally.



Selecting a research topic is a pivotal step in the research process, particularly within the field of TESOL. This article endeavors to provide insights and reflections on navigating the path to identifying a research topic in TESOL, drawing upon scholarly literature and personal experiences.

The initial phase of finding a research topic involves thorough exploration of the TESOL literature (Lynch, 2017). Researchers immerse themselves in scholarly journals, participate in conferences, and engage in discussions with peers and mentors. During this phase, researchers identify emerging trends, detect gaps in the literature, and discern areas of personal interest. This process serves as a foundation for subsequent stages of inquiry.

One notable challenge in finding a research topic is the process of narrowing down from the broad areas of interest to manageable research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This process necessitates balancing personal interests with practical considerations such as feasibility, relevance, and potential impact. Researchers must critically evaluate the scope and significance of potential research topics, ensuring alignment with their expertise and scholarly objectives.

Personal experiences play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of research inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As a PhD student, I encountered the uncertainty and excitement of exploring potential research topics firsthand. Initially drawn to the broad area of language assessment, I struggled to define a specific research focus. Through iterative reflection and dialogue with my supervisor, I gradually honed in on the intersection of technology and language assessment, leading to my current research trajectory. This reflective process underscores the importance of self-awareness and mentorship in navigating the research journey.

Inspiration for research topics often emerges from everyday teaching practice (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Educators encounter daily teaching challenges, innovations, and questions that spark curiosity and inquiry. By critically reflecting on classroom experiences and engaging with teaching quality improvement, researchers can uncover fertile ground for research inquiry. This bottom-up approach to topic selection ensures relevance and applicability to real-world educational contexts.

Serendipity plays a crucial role in shaping TESOL research trajectories. During a routine classroom observation, I noticed students' heightened engagement with mobile apps for vocabulary practice.

This unexpected observation led me to explore mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), resulting in several studies on the efficacy of language learning applications in EFL contexts. This experience underscores Kumar's (2018) assertion that researchers must remain open to new ideas and flexible in their approach. It demonstrates how seemingly mundane observations can evolve into significant research contributions, highlighting the importance of receptivity to unexpected insights in daily practice. By embracing such serendipitous moments, researchers can uncover novel directions that meaningfully advance the field of language education.



Collaboration and mentorship are integral to the research process, providing invaluable support and perspective (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). My doctoral journey exemplifies this. A chance encounter at a departmental seminar connected me with an experienced researcher who became my mentor, guiding me towards exploring mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in EFL contexts. This mentorship helped refine my methodology and theoretical framework. Concurrently, joining a research group on educational technology facilitated collaborations that sparked new ideas, such as investigating gamification in language learning apps. These experiences provided not only academic guidance but also emotional support, helping me navigate the complexities of finding and refining my research topic. They transformed initial uncertainties into focused, impactful research contributions in TESOL, underscoring the crucial role of both structured mentorship and informal collaboration in shaping a researcher's trajectory.

In conclusion, finding a research topic in TESOL is a dynamic and iterative journey, characterized by exploration, reflection, and collaboration. By navigating through the literature, reflecting on personal experiences, and embracing serendipity, researchers can identify meaningful research questions that contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field.

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