



Book Review

Polio, C., & Friedman, D. A. (2017). *Understanding, Evaluating, and Conducting Second Language Writing Research*. New York: Routledge.

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This recent book discusses traditional and emerging approaches and methods in second language (L2) writing research. Perhaps the book's most unique characteristic is that it gives equal importance to both quantitative and qualitative research, emphasizing how the strengths of each can be combined to shed light on the complexity of L2 writing, which is not only a cognitive process but also an activity carried out in a social context. Readers will benefit from the up-to-date content of the book, which differs from other L2 research method books because of its specific focus on L2 writing.

The book consists of 12 chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction, providing useful background information regarding the scope of L2 writing research. Drawing on two empirical studies, the chapter also clearly illustrates how quantitative and qualitative research approaches can help answer different yet related research questions. Following this chapter, the book is divided into two main parts: "Approaches" (Chapters 2-5) and "Methods," or techniques for data collection and analyses (Chapters 6-11). The authors make a convincing argument that distinguishing between the former and the latter is essential because, to answer research questions, an approach (e.g., experimental research, case study research) is chosen before a method (e.g., learner text analysis). Moreover, while some methods tend to be used often in certain approaches, a method is not always tied to an approach, and vice versa. For example, a learner text analysis can be used in experimental research to measure outcomes of teaching or in case study research to measure L2 learners' writing development over time. Another great feature of this book is that, in each chapter, the authors include a list of representative empirical studies and use these studies to illustrate the concepts discussed in the chapter, thus helping readers understand the concepts better. Each chapter ends with a detailed discussion of a focal study and a list of recommended further readings.

In the first part of the book, the four chapters (Chapters 2-5) have a similar structure. The beginning of each chapter describes characteristics of a research approach, followed by a discussion of key research design issues, including criteria used to evaluate studies based on the approach, how to meet those criteria, and challenges that may arise. For example, in Chapter 2, which is on experimental research, such issues include how to ensure internal and external validity. Overall, readers, especially novice researchers, should find this first part concise and informative. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, the latter focusing on causal-comparative and correlational research, should be of particular interest to readers who plan to use quantitative approaches to answer their research questions. By contrast, Chapter 4 provides a nice overview of ethnography and case study research. While readers who are not familiar with these approaches may find a few concepts presented rather unclear (e.g., *culture* and the difference between *discourse community* and *community of practice*), the recommended readings at the end of the chapter should be helpful. The next chapter deals with mixed methods research, which, according to the authors, has recently gained increasing attention in social science. Perhaps the most interesting point raised in this chapter is that mixed method research entails not only the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, but also an integration of data from these methods at some point in a research study (i.e., use of findings from one method to confirm, offers additional details for, or expand

findings from the other method). As the authors have observed, to date, L2 writing researchers incorporating both data types do not seem to sufficiently integrate their data and do not seem to be aware that mixed methods research should be evaluated based on a distinct set of criteria, which is also discussed in this chapter.

The second part of the book (Chapters 6-11) presents six different research methods. Each chapter provides an overview of a method, discusses the purposes and types of studies using the method, points out key research design issues, and provides step-by-step guidelines on how to design a study based on the method. Focusing on learner text analyses, Chapter 6 should be interesting to readers who plan to investigate quantitative variables such as those related to complexity, accuracy, and fluency in L2 writing. In Chapter 7, the authors discuss analyses of target texts (i.e., texts L2 learners learn to produce). A common goal of such analyses is to identify conventions and variations of specific written genres to obtain results that can inform L2 writing pedagogy. Thus, this chapter is especially relevant to readers interested in genre analyses and corpus-based target text analyses. On the other hand, Chapter 8 discusses the use of retrospective methods (e.g., stimulated recall) and introspective methods (e.g., think-aloud protocols) to investigate L2 writing processes. The chapter presents many issues that need to be considered when such methods are used, such as reactivity (i.e., how the methods may change participants' writing processes) and veridicality (i.e., the completeness of the data).

The next three chapters deal with methods in qualitative data collection and analyses. Chapter 9 focuses on interviews, which have been used extensively to understand perspectives of various stakeholders involved in L2 writing (e.g., L2 writers, essay graders, teachers). The chapter provides a clear summary of the characteristics and purposes of different types of interviews and interview questions, and readers should benefit from the additional discussion about ethical issues in interview-based research. In contrast, Chapters 10 and 11 deal with methods in qualitative data analyses. The former focuses on thematic analyses, which are used to systematically code data to identify patterns or themes that serve as the basis for data interpretation. This chapter presents a useful table summarizing different thematic analysis methods, but readers may need to consult additional readings at the end of the chapter for greater detail because the differences between some of these methods may not seem obvious. Finally, Chapter 11 discusses qualitative discourse analyses. The emphasis is on methods used to analyze oral interactions, which have been employed to investigate issues such as learner interactions during pair writing tasks and the nature of talk in university writing centers. Also included in this chapter are useful recommendations as to how to record, transcribe, and analyze oral data.

The text ends with a chapter on emerging methods and current issues in L2 writing research (Chapter 12). The chapter addresses both quantitative (i.e., eye-tracking, key stroke logging) and qualitative methods (e.g., reflective narratives, critical discourse analyses) and proceeds to discuss issues pertaining to research quality, such as transparency and completeness of research reports and research replication. One part of the chapter also highlights one important limitation in the existing qualitative L2 writing research. That is, in many cases researchers seem unfamiliar with the method they have adopted and have not adhered to the philosophical principles underlying the method. Readers who wish to gain some ideas for their future L2 writing research should definitely not skip this final chapter.

This book does not aim to provide a synthesis of findings from the existing empirical L2 writing studies. Its focus is on how to conduct research and what types of questions can be answered with the approaches and methods presented. Charlene Polio and Debra Friedman, whose respective expertise lies in quantitative L2 writing research and qualitative research, offer comprehensive and up-to-date content which will be invaluable to novice researchers. Through insightful discussions and meticulously selected examples, these researchers will learn about what they should and should not do when conducting an empirical study. In addition, the book can be useful for experienced researchers who want to learn more about certain L2 writing research approaches and methods. Therefore, the authors seem to be successful in achieving their goals in writing a text that can serve as a course book in a graduate L2 writing course, a supplementary book in a graduate research method course, or a reference book.