

Conducting research and scholarship: A review of four books from the EAP practitioner perspective

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Robert Coe, Michael Waring, Laura V. Hedges, and Laura Day Ashley (eds.). *Research methods & methodologies in education*. 3rd ed. Sage, 2021. 428 pp. ISBN 9781529729634, 9781529758603. Paperback: £36.99, Ebook: £30.99.

Jim McKinley and Heath Rose (eds.). *The Routledge handbook of research methods in applied linguistics*. Routledge, 2020. 529 pp. ISBN 9781138501140, 9781032474922, 9780367824471. Hardback: £196, Paperback: £38.39, Ebook: £35.99.

Lindy Woodrow. *Introducing researching English for Specific Purposes*. Routledge, 2022. 241 pp. ISBN 9780367503680, 9780367503703, 9781003049678. Hardback: £116, Paperback: £30.39, Ebook: £28.49.

Joy Egbert and Sherry Sanden. *Foundations of education research: Understanding theoretical components*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2020. 170 pp. ISBN 9781138321014, 9781138321038, 9780429452963. Hardback: £116, Paperback: £31.99, Ebook: £29.99.

One of the barriers that English for academic purposes (EAP) practitioners face when conducting scholarship and writing for publication is limited knowledge of research methods (Banegas & Romano, 2024; Davis, 2019; Webster, 2022). Therefore, as a teacher educator on scholarship and dissertation modules on a master's programme in teaching EAP at my university (University of Leeds, 2025), I am interested in literature which could develop EAP practitioners' ability to conduct research and scholarship. In this piece, I review four such potential candidates. These were selected on the basis of

convenience rather than by a systematic procedure, and I acknowledge that there are many other relevant volumes available that I do not review here.

To start with, *Research methods and methodologies in education*, edited by Coe et al. (2021), is a textbook for postgraduate students and early career researchers in education. Its aim is to offer 'a broad introduction to core principles that underpin rigorous research and a pragmatic overview of the varied approaches to research design, data collection and data analysis that are used within educational research' (p. 1). The book's forty chapters are organized into five parts. Part 1 serves as a general introduction to research and Part 2 focuses on basic principles and steps of conducting research. Part 3 discusses various research designs, for example action research, ethnography, case study, and longitudinal research. Part 4 on data collection includes, for example, chapters on classroom observation, questionnaires, and interviews. Finally, Part 5 has chapters on data analysis, including discourse analysis and various statistical analyses. The chapters on statistics go beyond the five most frequent inferential statistical methods, namely t-test, chi-square test, ANOVA, correlation, and regression analysis (Wei, 2023) by emphasizing effect size.

The chapters are not always ordered logically (such as statistical chapters not grouped together) but the reader is most likely to read the chapters in the order of interest or to read selected chapters only. A book of 428 pages might feel daunting but the two-column layout and division of each chapter into short sections makes the book easily digestible. Moreover, each method/ology chapter has a research essentials section that briefly summarizes key aspects of the given method/ology that a researcher should bear in mind. With thirty-two contributors of various backgrounds, there is a necessary variation in the extent to which the chapters are accessible to postgraduate students, with some chapters more reader-friendly and hands-on than others. However, even if the reader might not feel ready to use a particular method/ology after reading the relevant chapter, getting to understand the basics of methods used by others in published literature is useful in itself. Among the values of the book is that it shows the reader the breadth of possibilities in education research. For those interested to learn about a particular topic in greater depth, the chapters offer a short list of suggested further reading to explore. Overall, it is no surprise that the book is in its third edition.

I would like to highlight several chapters that I believe will be particularly useful to EAP practitioners. Chapter 2 by Robert Coe and Chapter 3 by Michael Waring are very clear explanations of such concepts as ontology, epistemology, paradigms, methodology, and methods. Chapter 5 by Laura Day Ashley usefully highlights what needs to be considered before starting a research project and Chapter 7 by Martyn Hammersley critically examines research ethics. Chapter 20 by Gert Biesta focuses on mixed methods, yet it

is insightful for conceptualization of any kind of research. Chapters 24 and 25 by Carolyn L. Mears and Anita Gibbs, respectively, on interviews and focus groups, and Chapter 29 on questionnaires by Peter Tymms, provide practical considerations for using these methods. Chapter 30 by Graham R. Gibbs is a very reader-friendly introduction to NVivo for qualitative data analysis. Finally, Chapter 35 by Michael Borenstein ‘explain[s] why researchers in the field of education (as well as many other fields) should focus primarily on effect size estimation rather than tests of significance’ (p. 348) and Chapter 39 by Robert Coe introduces effect size in an accessible way. However, the chapters do not point out that effect size can be used for the analysis of qualitative data as well (Onwuegbuzie, 2003).

A similar volume is *The Routledge handbook of research methods in applied linguistics* edited by Jim McKinley and Heath Rose (2020). The book aims to ‘theorize ... available approaches, designs, methods, and data analysis techniques’ (p. 2) in applied linguistic research. It is divided into four parts. Part 1 introduces key concepts and issues, such as research ethics and transparency. Part 2 focuses on research designs such as experiments, grounded theory, and critical discourse research. Part 3 has chapters on data collection methods including think-aloud protocols and oral elicitation tasks and Part 4 has chapters on data analysis including text analysis, corpus analysis, and statistics. Although the importance of effect size and even its reporting in published research becoming a mandatory practice is mentioned (p. 99), there is no chapter dedicated to effect size.

With over forty chapters and 529 pages, this is an information-rich source. Comprehensive in its scope, the book goes beyond traditional method/ologies and explores more recent trends such as eye-tracking, language policy, multilingualism, multimodality, and interdisciplinarity. Although more consistent in the level of accessibility, the layout and structure of the chapters are not as reader-friendly as those in the Coe et al. volume. As such, this is not a cover-to-cover reading for most EAP practitioners, but the following chapters will definitely be beneficial. Chapter 4 on sampling by Masuko Miyahara points out considerations around sample size across various research designs. Chapter 12 by Patricia A. Duff, Chapter 14 by Sue Starfield, and Chapter 15 by Darío Luis Banegas and Sal Consoli explain the basics of case study, autoethnography, and action research, respectively, paying particular attention to research ethics and quality. Some chapters provide new insights on frequently used research methods: Chapter 23 on interviews by Louise Rolland, Jean-Marc Dewaele, and Beverley Costa highlights aspects of power imbalance and of interviewing vulnerable participants; Chapter 27 by Janina Iwaniec is a must read for designing questionnaires; and Chapter 28 by Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen provides useful guidance on conducting observations. Some other chapters could help EAP practitioners broaden the scope of their research and scholarship:

Chapter 29 by Heath Rose introduces diary methods; Chapter 36 by Ali Fuad Selvi is a step-by-step guide on qualitative content analysis; and Chapter 18 by Ron Martinez provides innovative suggestions for mixed-methods research combining qualitative research with corpus research.

While the first two books explore research from the perspectives of education and applied linguistics, respectively, *Introducing researching English for specific purposes* by Lindy Woodrow (2022) focuses on English for specific purposes (ESP), which includes EAP. This narrower scope is juxtaposed to related (sub)disciplines, as the 'book addresses some common areas in applied linguistic research but also focuses on ways ESP research is different from research in applied linguistics and TESOL [Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages]' (p. 1). Aimed at postgraduate students, practitioners, and novice researchers, this book is pitched at a level lower than the previous two books, which makes Woodrow's guide more accessible but also less informative than the other two volumes.

The book's 241 pages are divided into ten chapters, five appendices, and a glossary. The opening chapter introduces ESP and the book. Chapter 2 focuses on starting a research project, from choosing a topic, through reviewing literature to writing a research proposal (the last one supported with two appendices). Chapter 3 reviews several theoretical frameworks, namely genre theories, intercultural rhetoric, English as a lingua franca, academic literacies, multimodality, and critical EAP. Chapter 4 suggests a number of research topics, including academic writing, disciplinarity, language analysis, needs analysis, and assessment. Chapter 5 briefly mentions research paradigms before discussing quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods designs.

Quantitative (e.g., questionnaires, corpora, and statistics) and qualitative (e.g., interviews, observations, discourse analysis) data collection and analysis methods are the focus of Chapters 6 and 7, respectively. Chapter 8 discusses research ethics (supported with three appendices), validity, and reliability, and Chapter 9 provides guidance on writing up and publishing research. The last chapter lists useful resources, including journals, handbooks, guidelines, corpora, and software.

The book's main strength lies in ample exemplification with extracts from master's dissertations as well as published journal articles. Bearing in mind its target audience, the book is made accessible also by multiple tables and boxed-text extracts (the latter mislabelled as figures); a useful glossary of fifty terms; lists of further examples, resources, and reading (with rationales for the inclusion of the recommended sources); and questions for the reader to reflect on.

The book's main limitation, in turn, is that it is overambitious in its scope, and that its breadth comes at the expense of the depth. This unfortunately also results in some superficial advice. For example, Chapter 6 applauds

using electronic questionnaires to ‘forc[e] respondents to answer every question before moving on to the next’ (Woodrow, 2022, p. 98), without considering the ethicality of not giving respondents a choice not to answer some questions, or the possibility of deterring respondents from completing the questionnaire. Similarly, Figure 2.5 (p. 14) presents critical reading as evaluating the text’s reliability, sources cited and evidence presented, and comparing the claims to other studies. This rather simplistic presentation reduces the complexity of critical reading by overlooking such aspects as hidden assumptions, marginalizations and omissions, transferability to other contexts, and relating the text to the reader’s existing knowledge and prior experience. Finally, Chapter 2 argues that for small research projects, ‘simply changing the research site or participants [of a previous published study] is often sufficient ... to make a study original’ (p. 12). Although such a replication in a different context can be seen as addressing a gap, this gap is not necessarily meaningful if ‘there is no new angle [or] no meaning outside of the researcher’s life’, as Egbert and Sanden (2020, p. 88) point out. For this reason, I believe that replication studies’ context should be based on a sound, theory-informed rationale. Overall, Woodrow’s (2022) book reads more like an overview of options rather than a comprehensive guide, but it can be useful if used alongside other books reviewed here.

Unlike the previous books, *Foundations of education research: Understanding theoretical components* by Joy Egbert and Sherry Sanden (2020) does not focus on conducting research but on basic principles and concepts that inform research design. These include positionality (Chapter 1), conceptual framework (Chapter 2), epistemology exemplified with objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism (Chapter 3), research paradigms exemplified with structuralist/positivist, interpretivist, critical, constructivist and other paradigms (Chapter 4), theory and theoretical framework (Chapters 5 & 6, respectively), methods and methodologies, with the latter exemplified with experiment, case study, ethnography, and action research (Chapter 7). While these concepts are introduced in separate chapters, connections between them are drawn throughout the book and continuously developed via two visual metaphors – a tree and concentric circles. The last chapter tackles a number of myths about research. In addition to these eight chapters, the book has three appendices and a total of 170 pages.

The authors have to be commended for presenting complex concepts not only critically, acknowledging discrepancies in the literature, but also very accessibly. The features that contribute to the book’s accessibility include vignettes juxtaposing the perspectives of novice and experienced researchers, examples from published research (extracts in the main text and full texts in the appendices), tables and figures, reflection tasks, guided practice tasks, and lists of suggested further reading. Now in its second edition, my suggestion for the next edition is including an answer key

for the closed tasks aimed at analysing sample texts in the appendices. I recommend that EAP practitioners read this book in its entirety, along with selected chapters from the other volumes reviewed here.

Taken together, these four books constitute a very useful assemblage which presents aspects of conducting research in breadth and depth and which represents several related (sub)disciplines.

One area that I feel is missing in all these books is a focus on developing and formulating research questions, but see for example Coombe (2021) and White (2017). Overall, I would recommend to EAP practitioners feeling hindered in scholarship due to a lack of knowledge of research methods, to start reading books like these and to continue learning about particular methods from literature that applies their use, before trying new methods themselves. This can be self-directed or done under supervision by undertaking formal postgraduate study or research. It is my hope that these publications will enhance EAP practitioners' research and scholarship.

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Biography

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