Chapter 7
Education Research and Scholarship in an Intercultural Context:
An Instance of Interpretation, Induction, and Deduction

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the research framework for a study that focused on the development of a second language vocabulary acquisition model in a tertiary setting is presented. This study is an investigation of lexical inferencing strategies specifically employed by second language (L2) learners, and focuses on whether the explicit teaching of effective vocabulary strategies benefited learners in developing vocabulary. The framework presented here draws on theories of learning from the fields of education, applied linguistics, vocabulary development, and cognitive psychology. Several theoretical standpoints on vocabulary development, and factors such as lexical representation, theoretical constructs in reading comprehension, and vocabulary processing in tertiary L2 learners, and socio-linguistics were considered in the design and inquiry process of the study, which was set in an intercultural context. The nature of scholarship involved in this exercise is referenced and its relationship to research paradigms is discussed.

INTRODUCTION AND THE QUESTIONS INVESTIGATED

In this Chapter, a research undertaking relating to a subject inherently intercultural – second language learning – is used to illustrate some critical considerations in the design, implementation and outcomes of research in education and of scholarship more broadly. The approach adopted in the chapter is the identification of critical elements in research design and implementation, discussion of the underlying principles, and identification of the forms of scholarship and the paradigm or paradigms that might apply.

Improving intercultural education and intercultural communication is seen as an important goal for the 21st Century (Batelaan & Coomans, 1999; Davis, Brown, & Ferdig, 2005). Nevertheless, realizing intercultural education is perceived as challenging for a number of reasons. Firstly, a cohesive body of research in the area is seen to be lacking, partly due to the fact that researchers in intercultural communication and education come from multiple fields. Secondly, different educational systems can add to the complexity of intercultural education perspectives.

Bennett (2009) refers to intercultural learning as the acquisition of enhanced understanding of cultural settings or outlooks, which includes one's own views, and applying that knowledge to improve the capacity to interact across cultural contexts. With regard to intercultural learning, Deardoff espoused an intercultural competence model (2006) in which the degree of intercultural competence is dependent on the acquired degree of attitudes, knowledge/comprehension, and skills. Deardoff suggests that one should begin with attitudes, moving from an individual level to the interaction level focusing on outcomes. More recently, Garson (2017), in a study conducted on students' intercultural development and their perceptions of intercultural learning in academic settings in Canada, points to the increasing number of Canadian higher education institutions that include internationalization as a strategic priority. Garson states that while 84% of the Canadian higher institutions profess that students graduate with sufficient international knowledge and are inter-culturally competent, there do not appear to be standard assessments or evidence to support these claims. The study further emphasizes that in the absence of standard assessments and evidence for knowledge of internationalization and intercultural competencies, it is difficult to ascertain whether students gain sufficient competencies in intercultural learning. Against this background, it is pertinent to re-examine how diverse cultural dynamics affect intercultural learning and specifically how it affects language proficiency development in the context of vocabulary acquisition.

Formulating the research questions in an educational research study is a task calling for careful thought as the research questions indicate what the researcher hopes to learn from the research project. Research questions may concentrate on the relationship of theories and concepts or aim to understand new concepts and generate new theories in an exploratory research paradigm. The latter fits with what is described in this book as the neo-positivist paradigm in the inductive mode. The research questions will reflect the purpose for the study Beyond that Maxwell (2005) asserts that research questions help shape research designs which are also shaped by a number of other facets of the research such as the researcher's perspective, existing literature review and emergent data from the project itself. A single study may have multiple research questions, though Creswell (2007) encourages researchers to try to define one overarching question, which can then have a number of sub-questions. In research based on qualitative data, such as the research reported in this chapter, the research questions will relate to what the researcher wants to understand about the intentions and perspectives of the individuals at the center of the interactions and processes of the phenomenon being studied (Agee, 2009).

In the study undertaken by the author, the research objectives were guided by research questions and sub-questions. Maxwell (2005) advocates three categories of questions for qualitative research: questions about meaning, or how people make sense of the world; questions that illuminate context; and questions that investigate processes. All categories were applicable in the author's study, which had three major objectives. Each objective was supported by corresponding research questions:

Objective 1: To investigate patterns of inferencing strategies occurring between pre-receptive stages of vocabulary and productive-vocabulary stages in L2 vocabulary acquisition.

Research questions:

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