

Research in ELT

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Great research anywhere:

1. asks **new questions**
2. uses **new tools**
3. brings **new data, and**
4. offers **new answers.**

Works of Plato, Galileo, Newton, Adam Smith, Coleridge, Einstein and Chomsky belong to this class. In Asia, Upanishads, and works of Wyasa, Wishwamitra, Patanjali, Panini, Valluvar, Confucius, Al Beruni, Shri Shankara, Kabir and Gandhi belong to this class. They influence generations.

Another class of research is conventional in one of the features mentioned above. Works of Buddha, Freud, Darwin and Marx belong to this category. Their impact may be relatively limited. Buddha's followers could not answer Shri Shankara when the latter asked them to explain variety in form and substance without assuming the presence of God or hand of

nature. Piaget and Descartes have a similar problem, as do Foucault and many modern philosophers.

Other works have no new questions and new tools. Using old tools, they find new answers to old questions, or new questions for old answers. Many PhD theses belong to this class. They collect data to confirm what we already know.

The fourth kind has nothing new, they are wrongly called research.

Let us now look at a research problem in ELT. It is believed that given exposure and motivation, language learning is inevitable. But many learn English in spite of limited exposure, while many others fail to do so in spite of it. The same family, and the same residential schools may have learners with unequal achievements. Aptitude in language learning is under investigated.

So is the alleged "influence" of mother tongue (MT). MT has been blamed for various ills in second language learning. But no language obstructs the learning of others. Besides, speakers of the same MT learn other languages with different degrees of success. Learners make mistakes even where MT is not an obstruction. Aptitude seems an important factor in language learning. But what is it? How does it work? Who has how much of it? How can it be measured? We need to investigate these questions with new tools and find valid answers.