Demystifying Research[2]

Prof. Geetha Durairajan

Thought seed[1]:

For a few minutes think of the various ingredients you need to make halwa (or any dish that you are familiar with) with rava. Put all of them on the kitchen counter. You will have rava, sugar, ghee, a bit of saffron, elaichi, (maybe a bit of milk) water, etc, along with the utensils needed. Would you describe the 'collected together/ selected carefully' ingredients as 'halwa? Why? Why not? Supposing in this process you discovered that you had too little sugar but had loads of great vegetables sitting in your home, then what would be your plan? Would you drop the idea of the halwa and try making rava upma instead or would you prefer taking a trip to the store and buying more sugar? What do the ingredients make you do in every cooking episode? Do the ingredients aid in making the dish or become the dish themselves when just combined? Alternatively think of how salads are made, when some vegetables are cut and combined in a specific manner. Think of the relationship that the ingredients and the final dish have and how they behave.

Using tasks/activities in class: All of us as English teachers, regularly try out various tasks/ activities in our classes. We often break our heads to create something that is interesting or thought provoking for our students. Sometimes we innovate just to be creative, to hold our students' interest. All human beings, children and adults alike, love playing games; as teachers therefore we often take language games into our classrooms. It is like adding a spoon of honey to mask some medicine that has to be taken. Regardless of the reason, whenever these activities or games or tasks work, we want to share the excitement with our colleagues and in some cases, if they are interested, with our family members. This we do by talking about what we did either in the staff room, or with our family members at home. We tell them what we did, describe the activity or game or task in some detail, and then tell them how successful it was, how the students enjoyed it etc. Our listeners are very happy for us, they may congratulate us and tell us that we did well.

Sharing our learnings: Such sharing is perfectly fine for this purpose, but it will not go very far if we want our work to be known to a wider community, or even if we want to state with confidence that what we did worked and that our students benefited. The sharing with staff room colleagues or with family members will usually be limited to the one activity or task we tried out that day. When we wish to write it up for a wider audience, we expand and extend our 'narrative' to include the complete set of tasks

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[1] This notion of thought seeds for the first time has been used in the field of language education by Dr. Shree Deepa, who was inspired by the idea of dropping seed balls in a forest for them to germinate at will. (Deepa, S. 2022. Thought seeds in Anthrogogic Learning Contexts. *Journal of Indian Education.* Vol.48, Issue No.2. (forthcoming)). A thought seed is just that: a seed that is planted in the mind of the reader, left to grow, and fruit when it will. Thought seeds are anthrogogic(meant for adults) in nature, unlike tasks, which are often pedagogic. Thought seeds are open ended; they may present a problem, but there need not be a clear solution that has to be found.

[2] Please note that all these terms/constructs which are in bold will be discussed in forthcoming columns.

we used, but this is still not sufficient. For 'sharing' to become research, we need to provide evidence (in the form of data, data analysis and interpretation of findings) to back up our claims (that something worked). This providing of evidence is what differentiates the description of a game, an activity or a task from research. It requires documentation.

Today, in the 21st century, we have moved from exercises to tasks and also activities. A frequent question I get asked is precisely this: why is it that a description of a series of tasks cannot become a research article. The answer is very simple. A research article must re- search something done, with a purpose and provide evidence for either a hypothesis or a claim. To teach speaking, for example, we may get our students to do a series of tasks, ranging from the very basic one of being able to greet/introduce another person, both formally and informally, then move to being able to invite the other person for a function, and then go on the much more complicated one of asking someone to refuse a request without hurting that person. It is very easy for us to put together a collation of such tasks, covering a wider range of language functions, try them out, describe them and then state: "believe me, it worked; you too should try it out." Many researchers get rejected and therefore very dejected when they just write a paper or even a thesis! as a *I-did-this-and-this-and-that-and-this–that-happened* and so *it-was-a-great-study-and-this-is-my-paper*. The big question therefore is: do we need data or not? Yes, we need data, but this data needs to be presented, analysed (often with a rationale, also called a framework!), interpreted and the findings discussed to be presented as evidence for the claims made. Data without such treatment functions as mere ingredients in the making of a dish such as the one in the 'thought seed'; they don't make a research paper, but are very crucial and function as the ingredients in the making of a research paper. The data needs to be subjected to certain processes before they get converted into a credible research paper. We have all read or heard about the **quantitative** and **qualitative** treatment of data (it is as simple as a namkeen upma versus a sweet halwa! We will talk about this in forthcoming columns).

With intelligent use of the internet, we are also able to find and either cite or quote various definitions of 'tasks' as available in the literature and call it our literature review. That is not sufficient. We need to show that our research is different from what people already know. This 'what people already know' in technical terms is called the literature review. It is not just a collection of random referential citations (either in the APA or MLA format) but a carefully chosen set of statements/constructs/terms/findings etc from **relevant studies** that help us place our study in the available research shelves. Literature reviews are often critically examined existing studies where we argue for our **research area** and **establish a research gap**[2]. But this too is not sufficient: such a write up by itself also does not a research article make! Research is not just a bunch of data and a bunch of random (untreated quotes/paraphrases/citations/references) with *some* references or a bibliography. A research paper will display a good treatment of data and have a relevant literature review. However, if you have been able to put together a relevant literature review, and also have data to back up your claims, although it is not a research paper yet, you have begun the process of writing up your research and will arrive there soon.

The Research paper is your own finding that

needs to be presented in a proper format that shows your seriousness with the study and displays your thorough critical understanding of the whole process with explicit details for the reader to vividly imagine sitting in your shoes while you went about conducting your study. In other words, the research paper that you write must offer the reader your eyes, your brain as it reacts to existing arguments found in similar studies around the world. At the same time, this does not mean that you need to present a minute by minute, excruciating detailed description of all that you have done. All relevant detail in the data needs to be adequately captured, analysed and interpreted.

Happy data collection and treatment with relevant literature hunt, see you soon with more information!

Prof. Geetha Durairajan, retired Professor, English and Foreign Language University, Hyderabad

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ELTAI READING MOVEMENT

ELTAI has launched Reading Clubs in educational institutions with the primary objective of creating a 'culture of reading' among school and college students. This initiative is based on a research-based framework that takes into account differences in age, gender, interests, and location.

Objectives of the Reading Club:

❏ To create a love for reading in students and enable them to become better, lifelong readers;

❏ To enable them to reflect on what they read in order to lead them to become effective writers and speakers;

❏ To familiarize them with different text types (genres) and enable them to engage in appropriate reading strategies; and

❏ To employ synchronous (both virtual and physical meetings) as well as asynchronous modes – Web tools, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Blogs, Reading Logs, MOOCs (audios, videos, quotes, blurbs, reviews, etc.) to sustain their interest.

ELTAI would like to have MoUs with institutions that are willing to implement this initiative and help to achieve these objectives collaboratively. Institutions interested in this project may please write, expressing their interest, to: indiaeltai@gmail.com with a copy (Cc) to Dr.Maithry Shinde, the Coordinator of the project at: **maithry@stmaryscollege.in.**

For a brief description of this initiative, visit our website at: http://eltai.in/reading-clubs/.

For an outline of the respective roles and responsibilities of the host institution and ELTAI, visit the website at: http://eltai.in/roles-and-responsibilities-of-the-host-institution-and-eltai/.