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Humanistic Pedagogies and EFL Experiments

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that all research should be based on humanistic pedagogies with educational functions. While conducting research associated with issues of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), researchers should pay attention to whether the samples have also been well educated. This study emphasizes that when focusing on significances of doing research and collecting data, educators and researchers in an experiment project should not ignore the study's functions of real education and language learning. Based on ethic and humanistic views, teachers or researchers of a research project should maintain their educational responsibilities, instead of just collecting data for journal publishing. Researchers should focus on helping students learn appropriately in a realistic environment, not merely on reporting the experiment results.

This study has compared 2 EFL experiments conducted in France's and Israel's language learning programs. The Israeli study, with both functions of doing research and educating students, has been described to be a more humanistic study. The student samples of the study learned something and the method of data collection was appropriate. In contrast, the study conducted in France showed a possible bias model of EFL experimentation, disregarding significant functions of education. This study argues that while conducting research plans, researchers should ask themselves a critical question: Have we educated our children, or, have we just paid attention to doing research, collecting data and publishing papers?

Key words: Quantitative Study, Qualitative Study, Positivism, Humanity, Research Methodology

I. Introduction

Conducting research plans for the purpose of discovering better methodologies of teaching and learning is unavoidable. The reasons can be explained by the following philosophers. According to Auguste Comte (1798-1857), significant sociological scholar, all good intellects have repeated, since Bacon's time, that there can be no real knowledge but that which is based on observed facts. It is almost impossible for our generation to discover and create a theory, such as the ultimate fact like Newton's three laws of motion or Einstein's principle of relativity. Hence, many scholars focus on the "repeated good intellects" and do their research using scientific methods. This study addresses the significance of conducting experiments; however, it also argues that all experiments related to education cannot ignore their functions of education.

Peca (2000) mentions that basic concepts of the positivistic paradigm can be traced historically from Aristotle through Comte. It is currently valued as one of the most scientific and contemporary methods of doing experiments. For raising accuracy and level of persuasion and authenticity for research findings, Comte's positivism is an indispensable and significant component to be applied when doing research. Through following this logical train of thought, the spirit of positivism avoids making theological and fictitious statements that have been broadly accepted in scientific scholar communities. Almost all the reports completed through methodologies concerning the spirit of positivism can be valued. Theories developed based on data collecting and samples' perceptions should be more persuasive and powerful than scholars' imaginations or assumptions. Hence through evidence obtained from the real populations, statements concluded from the collected data in the empirical papers should be more reliable than hypothesis and deduction in conceptual papers.

1.1. Correlation between English Learning and Doing Research in Class

However, from the perspective of an English teacher, sometimes the scientific research ignores the effect and real function of education, resulting in a waste of educational resources. Educators should anticipate themselves as mentors who would not treat students as mice, but consider their each and every learning opportunity. What we would like to suggest is that, through quantitative empirical and qualitative interpretative methods, not only do we have to achieve the functions of education when doing observation or testing teaching methods, but also it is necessary to raise the level of accuracy and persuasion by logical research methodologies.

That is, with the positivist spirit, social scholars and educators should dig into a deeper level of understanding in their fields, through considering components of humanity and education, in order to create upgraded forms, epistemologies, or pedagogies by experiments done in both scientific and charitable methods. That is,

when applying the qualitative methods with the spirit of positivism and logic, such as interview, observation, or survey questionnaires, teachers must not ignore their responsibility of teaching and the need to give students a proper learning experience without being bothered by the research projects.

1.2. Ethics and Humanity Issues

It should be argued that a moral researcher shall not only possess his/her spirit of positivism and scientific methods, but also his/her understanding of the samples' real need, which is always learning. For instance, a modern educational scholar's project of research should be done through sufficient observations and attaining a more valuable purpose of real education. In order to achieve authenticity in qualitative methods, and at the same time to demonstrate what Comte regards the real knowledge is (through conveying practicality of a repeated intellect), a researcher as well as an educator must take into consideration Comte's positivism, and also humanitarianism and democratism when doing a research project. Then, he/she can be respected as a modern scientist and a moral educator.

In terms of how to treat our subjects in a humanitarian and scientific fashion, we believe it depends on the budget for sufficient compensation of the subjects' loss. More significantly, it also depends on if the researcher is sympathetic and honorable enough. A conscientious researcher should not anticipate seeing his/her finding fit into any of his/her assumption, but he/she has to let the students freely lead the result into a certain conclusion. Indeed, it is necessary to perform research in a neutral way, which is the only approach that makes our area or professional community improve a little bit and produces honest findings.

1.3. Significance of Positivism

When entering the scientific research stages, Comte divided the progress of mankind differently from Kuhn's paradigm shift, arguing human progress is enhanced by the scientific community's effort and improves little by little. Comte applied the view of history and discussed improvement in three stages.

Firstly, in ancient times, scholars focused on theology and relied on our questions and doubted supernatural agencies to explain what man could not explain at that time. Secondly, they intended to use metaphysical ideas which were not formed with experiments. Sometimes, scholars would allude to abstract and poorly understood causes. What Comte believed real scholars should do was to practice positivism. The reason is that human beings after all realize that it is scientific laws controlling the world.

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II. Literature Review via Methodologies Comparing

This article would like to compare and contrast two researches conducted with a quantitative method and a combination of quantitative and interpretative qualitative methods. The first one is about two classes of thirty-four students in the eleventh grade who participated in English learning project designed and carried out in Israel. The study's title is "The Skilled Use of Interaction Strategies: Creating a Framework for Improved Small-Group Communicative Interaction in The Language Classroom" (Yael, Levine, Olshtain & Stiner, 1997).

On the other hand, the second project was conducted by English teachers in France. This study's title is "Interaction and Second Language Learning: Two Adolescent French Immersion Students Working Together" (Swain & Lapkin, 1998) with only two eighth grade learners. Both of these two studies focus on the significance of positivism in order to emphasize the effect and efficiency of interaction and cooperation in language classrooms.

Actually, the interactive approach is often repeated by ESL scholars, which argues that language learning is for real communication and application, and therefore the teaching and learning can be better achieved through interaction, collaboration and negotiation. Professor of Harvard University, Wilga Rivers (1987) also believes that,

> "Through interaction, students can increase their language store as they listen to or read authentic linguistic material, or even the output of their fellow students in discussions, skits, joint problem-solving tasks, or dialogue journals. In interaction, students can use all they possess if the language-all they have learned or casually absorbed- in real-life exchanges…even at an elementary stage, they in this way to exploit the elasticity of the language." (p. 4-5)

Both of these two studies dwell upon the importance of real interaction and cooperation in daily conversation, and practical communication when applying English in real life. When comparing and contrasting the Israeli and French scholars' experiment models from both the positivist and moral issue's perspectives, it could be doubted that sufficient collected data and functional education might not be easily attained at the same time.

Table 1.

Comparing and Contrasting Diverse Research Methodologies

Empirical Studies	Yael et al. (1997) The Skilled Use of Interaction Strategies	Swain and Lapkin (1998) Communicative Interaction in Second Language Learning
Methodology	Quantitative method	A combination of quantitative and interpretative qualitative methods
Population	Two classes of thirty four students	Only two
Sample's age	Eleventh grade	Eighth grade
Setting	Israel ESL classrooms	France ESL classroom
Target issue researched	Interactive approach	Immersion, interaction, and collaboration
Positivism	Being taken into consideration	Being taken into consideration
Strategies learned by students	More strategies (eight strategies)	Fewer strategies, and just one experimental game played
How much students had learned from experiments	More	Doubting: If sacrifice students' right of learning?
Interaction and cooperation concepts conveyed	Yes	Yes
Detailed through qualitative data	None (statistical)	Data is more persuasive and powerful because they tape-recorded the dialogues of a pair, then analyzed and reported (qualitative)
Sampling method	Whole class used	2 subjects for reflecting 35 students
Data collection	Two tests gave before and after training for five weeks (Frequencies of applying strategies were counted)	Recording, transcribing and analyzing the dialogues
Form of data	Numerical	Words
Further strategies researched and tested	Can not find	Can not find
Detailed & Complex Result (persuasive as a report)	Numerical and dull	More complex and persuasive because of details concluded
Function of Education	More	Less (simpler target content of teaching and learning)

2.1. Comments from Perspectives of Positivism

As you can see from Table 1, these two models both developed with the spirit of positivism because their data were well collected in a technological way. In addition, through their processes of experiments, the teachers followed an interactive approach and students benefited from their learnt interaction methodologies. Differently, the Israeli scholars designed more strategies and collected data with only a quantitative method, while the French scholars simply completed data collecting through the Jigsaw activity and illustrated cooperative strategies.

In fact, the French scholars' strength in conducting research is that there were more sufficient data and more powerful evidence. Besides recording students' interactive ability before and after the treatment and data-analysis with a quantitative method, they also used qualitative methods such as tape-recording and dialogue analysis. Thereupon, it is evident that the process followed was quite scientific.

From the scientific viewpoints, we believe that these two research projects both had sufficient positivist spirit, focusing on collecting accurate data and intending to use them as observational evidence in order to promote the significance of the interactive approach. Just like many other papers in the ESL fields with repeated intellect of interactive approach, the teachers in France and Israel both focused on the topics of Interactive approach in their research.

Although the French teacher's data is more persuasive and powerful because they tape-recorded the dialogues of a pair, then analyzed and reported on how their students improved through collaborative and interactive strategies, the researchers' methodology might not be really ideal because of the number of its samples (2 from 35) were not as many as the Israeli research. Anyhow, the French study still qualifies as a positivist study due to its scientific methodologies and complete processes of data analysis.

French scholars Swain and Lapkin's (1998) research titled "Interaction and Second Language Learning: Two Adolescent French Immersion Students Working Together" involved a whole class of grade eight students who were learning English as their second language. However, only two students participated at a deeper depth, by being observed and recorded more by the researchers. This study suggested that students may help their partners to improve by giving to and obtaining from partners their clarification, repetition and reassurance. Besides collecting data with interpretative qualitative method by tape recording and pair dialogue detail analysis, they gave two tests before and after their classroom interactive teaching and activities for five weeks, which were systematical, showed more educability and achievement, and therefore displayed a high spirit of positivism. Students gained opportunities to practice in the tests; in addition, the researchers obtained opportunities to collect sufficient data.

2.2. Comments from Perspectives of Humanity (Moral Concern) and Education

In critical review, the French study is somehow lacking in the function of education. The students in France, being samples of empirical study, might not have learned as freely and naturally as the students in Israel. Although the applied pedagogies and class activities were not described sufficiently in the French experiment, observing two students continuously during the whole processes of learning is not appropriate for a teacher in a classroom. Additionally, two students learned a single strategy (one strategy) and played a game during the time when the research was conducted. Although the idea of interaction and cooperation was conveyed, the students were not taught with some other well-designed strategies.

More clearly, only testing one strategy and collecting data for reporting results sacrifices the students' right of learning. As researchers, we should teach from the students' perspective instead of our own research perspective. Students' purpose of learning is not related to the success of their teachers' experiment, but related to their improvement of learning. On the other hand, the Israeli students were better taught with more (eight) strategies. Their dialogue practices were not taped and analyzed, but their "times of interaction" were counted before and after six weeks of learning with provided "Modified-Interaction" and "Social- Interaction Strategies". Their data showed only score differences before and after training, and therefore comparison of the result of experimental and control groups are not as persuasive and authentic as the detailed analysis in the French study. However, from the perspective of real education and students' human rights, this study did offer more knowledge input for students and created a more positive learning situation.

2.3. Advantages of Doing Research through View of Positivism

A justification can be made that the both of these two models fit positivism. Both of them have strengths and weaknesses. The teachers in Israel did not forget to fully extend the function of education by designing more interactive strategies, but their data provided numerical evidence which proved their eight strategies to be effective. The researcher did not analyze their data with respect to further strategies in a good manner and did not discover new findings from the data of dialogue analysis. From conservative and scientific views of doing research, we believe that further strategies should be tested and reported as follow-up to this research since English educators all know that there are more than twenty strategies in the similar field. However, the researcher could not find the continued study related to this.

III. Conclusions: Significance of Education Function

In summary, although the French teachers' study offered more complete and sufficient data for application of future strategy design, the students did not learn with

a series better structured strategies like the students of Israel. Their human rights of learning may have been ignored due to their teacher's research behaviors, as only a single strategy was introduced and a series of more complex research processes were contrastingly conducted during their learning process in the classroom. The value and role of a language classroom should be doubted in this case.

As Hansen (1973) had mentioned in his study, teachers definitely have their responsibility to fulfill students' needs of learning and make commitment to their education goals. Therefore, this study argues that researchers and teachers have to focus more on students' purposes of learning when doing experiment, implementing their plans or collecting data from their students as well as their samples. Similarly, Brown (2007) motions Rogers' (1951) 19 principles of humanistic psychology associated with teaching and comments: "…the whole person as a physical and cognitive, but primarily emotional, being. His formal principles focused on the development of an individual's self-concept and of his or her personal sense of reality, those internal forces that cause a person to act." (p. 97). In other words, the learning environment needs to be real, nonthreatening, feeling-free and learning-purpose oriented, instead of being confused by reacting to teachers' observation and recording.

In conclusion, it is argued when we do any research, execute scientific plan or follow the procedures of teaching experiment, we have to weigh our effort evenly between sufficient, powerful, and persuasive data and the functions of genuine benefit and educating our students. That is, educators should search for a balance between the issue of moral, as well as the real function of education, and the scientific methodologies that would lead the research to be completely efficient.

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注重研究計劃中的教育功能

摘 要

　　社會學之重要學者孔德曾指出，自培根的時代以來，所有較接近真理的知識會不斷地被學術界再度重申，而所謂知識，是哲學家及科學家基於觀察實驗後，所驗證產生出比較接近永恆事實的部分。對於現代人而言，欲發現如牛頓重力定律，並且能夠建立一個理論與公式，為幾乎不太可能達到的成就 。因此，現代多數學者，把研究重點放在被重申的知識與學理，並且用科學方法，來做他們的學術研究。這一種研究通常對學術界會有一些貢獻，然而，只有顧及科學精神與實驗觀察，卻忽略了道德考量的教育類研究，往往會危害到教學成效的品質。於是本文強調，教育界的學術研究，應首先基於倫理道德基礎、兼顧及實質教育功能，以形成合理的教學實驗模式，然後，再基於科學的實證主義，以收集研究所需的資料而提出書面報告；此外，本文也呼籲，教學界學者在享有實證研究的權威之餘，應該仍不忘道德與教育功能議題的重要性。學校的老師們在獲得主管與學生同意、實驗與研究之餘，應該不忘自身仍富有教育的重大責任，學生必需受到尊重且得到合理之學習效果。

關鍵字: 量化研究，質化研究，實證主義，研究方法