

The Analysis of “Exploring Teacher Beliefs and Classroom Practices through Reflective Practice: A Case Study”

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Abstract: This paper analyses a case study which employs qualitative research methods, utilizing a case study strategy, to delve into the relationship between the beliefs and classroom practices of a second language teacher, Dantes. The study integrates semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to explore the teacher's beliefs and gather data on classroom practices. The interviews not only reveal the teacher's initial beliefs but also uncover deeper convictions through final interviews, such as the unconscious belief in using a step-by-step teaching method. Six one-hour classroom observations enhance the validity of the observational data and provide an assessment that goes beyond the teacher's self-interpretations of behavior. However, the observation design may be influenced by the researcher's subjectivity, and the use of a single observer may increase the personal subjectivity affecting the outcomes. The study also employs data triangulation, combining data from interviews, journal writing, and final interview reflections, to strengthen the validity of the research findings. Additionally, member checks further validate the results through Dantes' feedback and reflections on the research outcomes.

Keywords: Qualitative research; Teacher beliefs; Classroom practices; Reflective practices

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1. Introduction

The journal article named “Exploring teacher beliefs and classroom practices through reflective practices: A case study” adopts qualitative research through case study as a research strategy to analyze the relationship between a second language teacher's (Dantes') beliefs and classroom practices^[1]. According to Stake, case study as a way to find the specific person's relationship between the beliefs and practices is suitable and effective^[2]. This is because a case study focuses on the uniqueness of an individual case and in-depth understanding of the particular case and is “strong in reality”^[3]. Moreover, a case study also entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case^[4], which is coherent with the research aim of this journal article. While Yin criticizes the validity of case study is especially problematic because “the frequent failure of case study is that researchers fail to develop a

sufficiently operational set of measures and because ‘subjective’ judgments are used to collect data”^[5]. The essay is going to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of research methods used to collect statistics, the data analysis strategies, and then discuss the literature review used to develop arguments.

2. The analysis of data collection methods

The overall data collection design is comprehensive because the researchers use several semi-structured interviews to explore teachers’ beliefs and six classroom observations to collect data of classroom practices. These intensive and repetitive data collection methods could help the researchers to improve the validity of the final data resources to answer the first two research questions ^[6].

2.1. Interview as a method to explore beliefs

The journal article uses several well-structured semi-structured interviews as a way to explore the beliefs of teachers, which is suitable and effective for collecting the teachers’ beliefs. First, it is because Rubin ^[7] and Thomas ^[8] suggest that interviews could help researchers to explore the experiences, motives, and opinions of others in detail and in-depth. For example, in the journal article, the researchers use “initial interview to gain insights on Dantes’ beliefs used as the starting point for making later comparison” . Then, the final interview that adds new questions to dig out further beliefs, such as the unconscious beliefs of using step-by-step teaching method because “semi-structured interview allows for probing of views and opinions where respondents should expand on their answers and find the new unexpected data, helping to meet the research objectives” ^[9]. For example, Dantes admits “he did not realize that he had the step-by-step belief until the researchers asked Dantes directly” . Last, we can also see from the journal article that all the interviews are recorded and transcribed, which could also provide a more accurate rendition of the interview .

2.2. Observation as a method to collect classroom practices data

2.2.1. The strength of observation

The overall design of using “six one-hour classroom observations” as a way to explore the teacher practices could provide first-hand statistics on practice. Since the research aim is to analyze the overt behavior and particular kinds of behavior, the structured interview is certainly an accurate and effective way . Besides, the six one-hour classroom observations also increase the validity of the observational data resources. As Thomas ^[10] has suggested that a repeated observation can be considered a validity check. Additionally, “observation provides an opportunity to get beyond people’s opinions and self-interpretations of their attitudes and behaviors, towards an evaluation of their actions in practice” . So, the researcher could check the consistency of self-interpretation of his beliefs and his practices through observation. For example, researchers have observed that some of Dantes professed beliefs from the interviews couldn’t be found in consistent classroom practices from the observations. Additionally, the classroom observations are recorded and transcribed , which enables researchers to check the observation evidence instead of rushing to a possibly snap decision about what is being observed to increase the data validity.

2.2.2. The weakness of observation

Some of the observation designs may affect the validity of the final results of the classroom practices. First, observation results may be influenced by the researcher’s subjective constructs (including their values,

motivations, prejudices, and emotions) that affect the validity of classroom practices data collection . For example, the researchers find that in the language teaching part, the teacher holds the belief of helping students develop skills necessary for their learning purpose, while there is no consistent classroom practice during the observation . However, does that mean all of Dantes' teaching practices do not provide students necessary skills for learning purpose or is it because the observer subjectively thinks Dante does not provide? The skill necessary for their learning purpose is a quite ambiguous concept, and different people may hold different opinions towards what is necessary. Who is eligible to decide what the necessary skills for students' learning are is not clearly stated in the journal article. So, the findings of the divergence between the beliefs and practices may be caused by the observer's values. Besides, in the journal article, there is only one observer in the whole observation process, which might also increase the personal subjective influence on the validity of the observational results, and if there were more observers, the effects may be reduced. Because Yin has suggested that if observation could have more than one observer, it would enable the research to generate more reliable observational evidence. Last, it should also be noticed that there is a concern about the observer's influence on the participant's behavior as "the researcher's presence is always an intervention in some way" ^[11], although the observer used non-participant observation, sitting at the back of the classroom and trying to minimize the influence of the class. In addition, there is also a concern that the participants adjust their behaviors because they know they are being observed . Consequently, it would be hard to say the observational results reflect what has happened in reality .

In general, the observations have explored most of Dantes' classroom practices to answer the second research question, even though it could be better if the problems discussed above could be solved properly during the observation process.

2.3. The analysis of data analysis strategies

2.3.1. Data triangulation

(1) The strength of data triangulation

The data triangulation could help researchers to evaluate the data resources collected from different research methods by reducing the risk of conclusions that show the biases of using only a specific method to increase the validity of findings ^[12]. The data triangulation allows the researchers to gain a more secure understanding of the research questions . For example, the researchers use post-observation interviews to check "what has happened in that class" to confirm the classroom practices using the data collected from the observation . This may be because additional data resources missed in observation could be provided through interviews, and also could be used to check the accuracy of the observations. Moreover, these data of Dantes' beliefs collected through the interview, journal writing, and final interview reflection offer comprehensive data, which could allow a better assessment of the teacher's classroom practices.

(2) The weakness of data triangulation

However, the data triangulation cannot minimize the misconception and misunderstanding to increase the data validity because several data sources may have the same biases . One of Fielding's key points is that it is not true that triangulation automatically increases validity because "the methods that are triangulated may have the same biases and sources of invalidity, and thus provide only a false sense of security . For example, in terms of the beliefs of choosing the topic that the students find interesting, Dantes admits he does not know what practices are interesting for students, and the researcher does not find the interesting part in Dantes' teaching practices. Both Dantes' interview description and the

researchers' observation do not notice any interesting behavior. Therefore, the researchers have made a conclusion that there is no interesting classroom practice in Dante's teaching behavior. However, they may find the interesting classroom practices if they add the students' interviews to explore some students' attitudes towards the classroom activities, because the students are the direct audience of the classroom practices. However, the students' feedbacks about the classroom practices are not included in the whole research project.

3. Member checks

Various member checks are also included in the data analysis, which could also increase the respondent validation through the feedback from Dantes and his reflections and comments on the findings . As Maxwell suggests that member checks could increase the validity through "the systematic soliciting of feedback about the final findings." Besides, the researchers add the comments and reflections on the findings from the member checks, which could further validate the results, for instance, in the journal article, through follow-up interview, the fact that Dantes has reflected upon the reasons why he has adopted step-by-step method in his teaching practice is because of his previous learning experience that formed this belief . However, even though Dantes' feedback is no more inherently valid than his interview responses, both should be taken as evidence in terms of the validity of final results .

4. Analysis of the arguments in the findings

The first two findings as answers to the first two research questions have been analyzed in the previous section. In this section, the author of the present essay will mainly focus on the research aim of finding the relationship between Dantes' beliefs and practices.

In the whole essay, to some extent, it fails to state clearly why the relationship between the teacher's beliefs and classroom practices is interactive, which affects "the internal validity" of the conclusion . First, there is an assumption that if these beliefs are aligned with the classroom practices, it is because the beliefs influence the classroom behaviors. However, the convergence between the beliefs and practices could not fully prove that it is beliefs that influence the classroom practices. That Dantes has these practices may be because the curriculum or the course syllabus requires Dantes to do so, or it may be because his peers, such as other experienced teachers' classroom practices, influence him. Therefore, it is hard to say which affects which according to researchers' analysis of data, even though the researchers have cited Breen *et al.* ^[13] at the beginning to prove that beliefs influence the classroom organization and Senior in the third research question to say that "beliefs as insights from teaching situation" ^[14]. The researchers, again, made another assumption that beliefs and practices may interact because it is hard to define whether it is beliefs that influence the practice or it is classroom practices that reshape the beliefs. However, in the journal article, the researchers fail again to give us the statistical proof that those two concepts are interactive, but just cite a report of Breen *et al.* ^[15] to prove the argument.

5. Conclusion

This essay describes the general research methodology used to resolve the research question and then analyze different research methods used to collect the data. Besides, the essay also focuses on the data analysis strategies

used to analyze the statistics so as to increase the validity of the final data results. In the end, the internal validity of the findings is evaluated through analyzing the arguments and the literature review. It is recommended that the research may analyze more language teachers' cases in other countries to enrich the database so as to be more feasible to generalize the conclusion in to all language teachers.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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