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## **“The Secret Weapons to be a successful teacher researcher”: A Book Review of Inquiry and Research Skills for Language Teachers by Kenan Dikilitas and Ali Bostancioglu**

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## **“The Secret Weapons to be a successful teacher researcher”: A Book Review of Inquiry and Research Skills for Language Teachers by Kenan Dikilitas and Ali Bostancioglu**

### **Abstract**

The authors of the book, *Inquiry and Research Skills for Language Teachers*, Kenan Dikilitas and Ali Bostancioglu, present a comprehensive account of how to integrate exploratory practice (EP) concepts into the research process, including step-by-step processes and general criteria to follow. This book guides pre-service teachers' research comprehension and utilization in a pleasant, engaging, and non-overwhelming manner. It includes introspective inquiries, research projects, and the experiences of pre-service teachers. In different parts of the book, the authors explain how this book can help future teachers learn how to do research and ask questions that they can use in the classroom. Research is shown to be a tool that teachers can use to satisfy their own curiosity, encourage an investigative perspective, and strengthen the connections between theory and practice, rather than a burden they have to add to their already busy lives. This excellent, user-friendly monograph is a valuable resource for teachers all over the world who are frustrated by the complexities of publications on educational research methodologies written by academics for academics. This book will help teachers improve their classrooms through inquiry-based pedagogical reflection, exploratory practice, and research skills and methods.

### **Keywords**

exploratory practice (EP), inquiry, pre-service teachers, reflection, research skills

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## **“The Secret Weapons to be a successful teacher researcher”: A Book Review of *Inquiry and Research Skills for Language Teachers* by Kenan Dikilitas and Ali Bostancioglu**

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The authors of the book, *Inquiry and Research Skills for Language Teachers*, Kenan Dikilitas and Ali Bostancioglu, present a comprehensive account of how to integrate exploratory practice (EP) concepts into the research process, including step-by-step processes and general criteria to follow. This book guides pre-service teachers' research comprehension and utilization in a pleasant, engaging, and non-overwhelming manner. It includes introspective inquiries, research projects, and the experiences of pre-service teachers. In different parts of the book, the authors explain how this book can help future teachers learn how to do research and ask questions that they can use in the classroom. Research is shown to be a tool that teachers can use to satisfy their own curiosity, encourage an investigative perspective, and strengthen the connections between theory and practice, rather than a burden they have to add to their already busy lives. This excellent, user-friendly monograph is a valuable resource for teachers all over the world who are frustrated by the complexities of publications on educational research methodologies written by academics for academics. This book will help teachers improve their classrooms through inquiry-based pedagogical reflection, exploratory practice, and research skills and methods.

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As a teacher educator of research courses for more than 20 years, I have always been interested in my students' questions, such as why they were given a research course, how it would help them become professional teachers, and why they were afraid of the course being hard for them to understand and implement. As a result, my students were unaware of the connection between research and teaching. Actually, I intended to help them overcome their challenges by giving them a research course, but I had not been able to find an appropriate strategy. I was lucky to find this book by Kenan Dikilitas and Ali Bostancioglu. It gives a complete overview of how to use EP concepts in research, including step-by-step instructions and general guidelines to follow.

This book facilitates the research comprehension and application of pre-service teachers in a pleasant, engaging, and non-overwhelming manner. It involves reflective inquiries, research projects, and pre-service teachers' experiences. In several sections of the book, the authors discuss how this book might help pre-service teachers learn how to do research and formulate classroom-appropriate questions.

An increasing number of reports on action research in ELT are now being published (Banegas et al., 2020; Bullock & Smith, 2015; Mackay et al., 2020). The majority of these were created by in-service teachers. There are not many handbooks that address training pre-service teachers in research skills or provide activities to help them develop these skills. This

book is a response to the fact that people who want to teach languages need to learn how to do basic research and inductive reflection.

The authors show that teachers can use research to satisfy their own curiosity and build an investigative perspective, rather than as an extra task that adds stress to their already busy lives. They also try to assist other researchers, as well as pre-service and in-service teachers, in recognizing the significance of the connection between research and classroom teaching. Dikilitaş and Bostancolu also stress how important it is for pre-service teachers to learn how to do research and how to ask questions.

In the book, *Inquiry and Research Skills for Language Teachers*, Kenan Dikilitaş and Ali Bostancıoğlu present the book's central point. This is what they assert:

...research should be an integral part of learning to become a teacher in pre-service teacher education programs and to prepare pre-service teachers for the actual profession in the future. Although we recognize that developing research knowledge and skills can be intimidating at first for those who take a research course for the first time, we also believe that the benefits pre-service teachers can reap from a research course could be invaluable and relevant. We assume that teachers can also develop reflective skills including learning to think and investigate potential and personalized pedagogical issues through habituated and acquired perspectives. (p. vi)

This book helps teachers understand and improve their reflective skills. With this in mind, reflective inquiry is a must-have skill for teachers, lecturers, and pre-service teachers. Educators observe classroom events and critical incidents, identify issues, propose solutions, and reflect on lessons. Research training must become a part of the academic lives of pre-service teachers, both in a theoretical and reflective way.

This book also helps them plan how to use these skills in their classrooms when they start working. From this point of view, the goal is to help teachers shape and build their practices or practical knowledge instead of completely changing them. Then, the book could be a useful addition to the knowledge of teaching that pre-service teachers are always getting better at, and it could help them develop a growth mindset that puts thinking and understanding first before acting or making a practical or pedagogical change. This is in line with Mann and Walsh (2017, p. 28), who point out that "learning to reflect needs to be developed early in a career, particularly for pre-service teachers."

To meet this need, this book uses and explains Allwright's (2005) EP principles to help pre-service teachers develop pedagogical reflection:

Principle 1: Prioritize "quality of life"

Principle 2: Work mostly to grasp language classroom activities.

Principle 3: Include everyone.

Principle 4: Make an effort to bring people together.

Principle 5: Work on mutual advantage as well.

Principle 6: Incorporate understanding work into classroom practice.

Principle 7: Make the work an ongoing endeavor.

For Dikilitaş and Ali, research has always been an interesting thing to do for people who like to learn new things, find out the causes and effects or effects of actions or decisions, and satisfy their curiosity regarding things they might not be able to see without looking at some collectively generated and classroom-oriented data that they collect from the relevant people and settings around them.

In this book, Dikilitas and Ali also depict pre-service teachers working together to solve puzzles. The book shows how EP, which puts discovery ahead of action, can be used to encourage and guide pre-service teachers to conduct research in the classroom.

The book's objectives are both professional and educational. Professional goals include making sure that pre-service teachers have a positive view of research without tiring them out; introducing research from an EP perspective that puts quality of life in the language classroom first; promoting pre-service teachers' research views and knowledge of research's professional benefits; and incorporating exploratory research into teachers' teaching and thinking. Pedagogical goals relate to learning through critical reflection on puzzles, which: imply that research is linked with reflective teaching, integrate Exploratory Practice principles into research processes (with the ultimate goal of using teaching materials as research tools; minimizing the burden research creates on teachers); and promote and empower teaching through detailed exploration and critical reflection.

The book also shows teachers how to design and deliver a research course for pre-service teachers and guides students who want to make a plan, do research, and write a reflective report by giving them a step-by-step guide and general rules to follow, as well as practical examples of research reports written by pre-service teachers.

This book is intended for pre-service teachers and their research lecturers, as well as teacher educators and teacher trainers who work with in-service teachers. Pre-service teachers who want to do research to improve their understanding of teaching can use this book. It can also be used by teacher educators to help their students through the exploratory practice research process as part of a course.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part is structured into six chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to research for pre-service teachers. Chapter 2 is about puzzles as starting points for pre-service teachers' inquiries. Chapter 3 is about pedagogically exploitable pedagogic-research activities (PEPRAs) that serve teaching and learning and research at the same time. Chapter 4 is about how to get data to solve puzzles. Chapter 5 is about how to analyze the pieces to solve puzzles. Chapter 6 is a summary. Chapter 7 is about reflection, which is an important skill for research and teaching. Chapter 8 is about international examples of research methods courses.

Pre-service language teachers and teacher educators/trainers can use the book's research guidelines. Chapter 1 provides a research overview, distinguishing academic and pre-service teacher research. Second, researchers can use personal and contextual issues to understand their own teaching and learning. The authors discuss research paradigms and practicum. This chapter discusses the research process for pre-service language teachers and the importance of inquiry and reflection. There could have been more infographics or graphic organizers to help people understand this theoretical introduction to research in language education.

In the following chapter, Dikilitaş and Bostancolu assert that a "research problem" is a "puzzle" and that the act of conducting research is "puzzling." The word "problem" is a negative word that emphasizes problem-solving because it denotes "difficulty." The objective is to learn more about the teaching practicum and reflect on it by solving a puzzle. The authors divide puzzles into two categories: those about the individual solving the problem and those about other people. This final group encourages students to look around the classroom and its surroundings. This chapter focuses on assisting pre-service teachers in identifying difficulties through group activities that result in higher-order thinking queries. The authors outline how to locate and construct the "puzzle," and they also cover costs and ethics. The complexities of classroom life are also described.

In Exploratory Practice (EP), the "research problem" is referred to as a "puzzle" (Allwright, 2003). Both puzzles and research problems are about finding out what the

question being asked is and what factors are involved (Allwright, 2003; Bryman, 2007). This process helps researchers and practitioners decide how to keep moving forward with their investigations. For example, defining and/or refining puzzles, research problems, or research questions can help researchers find out who the study is for and what research methodology and tools to use (Bryman, 2007). For this reason, puzzles, research problems, and questions are important parts of the inquiry.

The authors proposed and examined the Pedagogically Exploitable Pedagogic-Research Activities (PEPRAs) in Chapter 3. It refers to the planning and preparation of activities to assist pre-service teachers in their classrooms in getting started with their research. Many classroom research tools, such as surveys, observations, questionnaires, and checklists, are provided by the authors and can be used in the teaching-learning process to solve puzzles. The authors also give pre-service teachers advice on how to make these instruments, as well as self-reflection activities that help them think critically.

In chapter 4, the authors explain how to generate data in a systematic way that can help solve puzzles from an epistemological, ethical, and methodological point of view. The chapter focused on the use of pedagogically exploitable pedagogic-research activities (PEPRAs) and gave examples of how they could be used to solve puzzles. As a result, examples of how to generate data for puzzles related to learning and teaching were given. For this reason, the authors link PEPRAs to data collection. They provide a step-by-step guide to connect puzzles to PEPRAs for class data generation activities. The authors argue that PEPRAs can make teachers and students more interested in EP and bring about benefits such as curiosity, better understanding of issues, self-discovery, and reflection. Finally, the advantages of getting data from different sources were discussed. The goal was to get teachers-to-be to use three different kinds of evidence to back up their conclusions and make their research more reliable, valid, and trustworthy.

Chapter 5 includes qualitative and quantitative data analysis. In qualitative data, the authors explain the Thematic Analysis (TA) and its phases. Quantitative data analysis explains the steps of univariate analysis, such as setting up a data set, coding quantitative data, and figuring out univariate statistics (such as the mean, mode, and median). The goal of this chapter is to give readers a basic understanding of two approaches as well as some hands-on activities for practicing those approaches. This chapter provides pre-service teachers with best practice on how to process relevant data. The most frequently asked questions following data collection by pre-service teachers are "How do we deliver the findings?" and "What will be my next step?" This step can be frustrating for them, as it is often difficult for researchers to make sense of the collected data. As teacher researchers in the fields of English as a foreign language and English as a second language, we have experienced this kind of mental block when writing research papers. Hence, we are well aware of the challenges that come with academic writing in those fields for pre-service teachers.

In chapter 6, the authors discuss the importance of analyzing emergent puzzle findings in light of the context in which they emerged. The authors highlight the points as follows:

Each puzzle exploration is unique which means they are not readily generalizable to all other contexts. Nevertheless, dissemination is offered to communicate teacher candidates' understandings among classmates and offer them a chance to evaluate those findings in the light of their own experiences. Strategies to prepare written and oral presentations have been included in subsequent sections. Finally, the potential positive benefits of undertaking research in such fashion have been presented with hopes to motivate other to conduct research methods in a similar way. Those potential benefits included:

development of language skills (i.e., familiarization with academic genre, academic writing, presentation skills), development of inquiry and higher order thinking skills (i.e., analyzing, evaluating, creating, critical thinking), and development of pedagogic skills (i.e., understandings that teacher candidates can transfer to their future careers, self-efficacy). (p. 121)

Chapter 7 focuses on using reflective writing to improve pre-service language teachers' critical reflection practices. The authors contend that reflective writing assists teachers, particularly pre-service teachers, in comprehending classroom challenges and developing critical writing skills. They also emphasize the value of reflective writing as a tool for practitioners to share their feelings and perceptions during the learning process. These brief reflection comments may assist teacher candidates in specifying their experiences through writing. Teachers can use Exploratory Practice (EP) to investigate needs and interests as puzzles. By putting all the experience into writing, reflective writing can support the procedural method of completing EP. By commenting on the research processes, analysis, and experiences, teachers and pre-service teachers gain new insights into their puzzles. The importance of incorporating reflective logs and collaborative writing tasks as part of the writing process for pre-service teachers is discussed in this chapter. These exercises are simple to implement in a pre-service teacher practicum. They are intended to assist them in reflecting on exploratory studies.

In the final chapter, the authors introduce various course formats for educational research that are available to pre-service teachers in various countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, Japan, Pakistan, and Turkey. The instructors who teach the course keep a record of the contributions and reflect on them. The goal of compiling such a piece is to offer various viewpoints and bring together the various models used in these courses. In this chapter, the authors discuss a step-by-step course book for a research course that aims to help pre-service teachers develop an investigative and research-based perspective. It accomplishes this by combining different parts of academic research, such as coming up with a topic and questions to ask, collecting data, and discussing and interpreting findings in a way that helps teachers who are just starting out. Dario Banegas's Research Language Teaching course in Argentina stands out as a particularly interesting case study. Banegas made and taught a web-based course that got students interested in their own ways of teaching and taught them how to do a research project at the same time.

As evidenced by my review/essay, I highly recommend this book as a supplement to a research course for pre-service language teachers, with the goal of getting them used to conducting classroom research as a regular practice that involves constant reflection and questioning. In conclusion, Dikilitaş and Bostancolu's contributions to research education can engage readers to learn about various challenges and engage in reflective activities. Because it contains clear explanations, practice assignments (in chapters 2-6), and self-assessment checklists, this book is useful for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at universities.

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### Author Note

Elih Sutisna Yanto is a reviewer for the *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, published by EMERALD and *Cogent Arts & Humanities* published by Taylor & Francis. Elih is a board member of the Exploratory Practice Indonesian Community (EPiC) and faculty member of teacher training and education at Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang, Indonesia. He can be contacted through e-mail at [elih.sutisna@fkip.unsika.ac.id](mailto:elih.sutisna@fkip.unsika.ac.id).

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