

Current Research Trends of English Education in Domestic and International Journals

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Articles in one domestic journal, *English Teaching (ET)*, and one international journal, *TESOL Quarterly (TQ)* from 2011 to 2013 were surveyed in order to analyze current research trends and to suggest better orientation toward future research focusing on participants, research methods, target language skills, and research topics. The results show that university students have participated most in both of the journal articles, indicating that they are practically available to the researchers in higher educational settings. The proportion of quantitative and qualitative research methods was well balanced in *TQ*, while, in *ET*, more than 50 percent of the articles relied on quantitative research methodology along with a relatively larger proportion of mixed method research in *ET*. In terms of target language skills, writing has been studied most in *ET* and speaking in *TQ*, showing growing interest in productive language skills nowadays. As for research topics, articles based on socio-cultural factors have been published most in *TQ* and articles based on classrooms pedagogy in *ET*, which reflects that English learning is performed mostly in classroom settings in Korea. Pedagogical implications and suggestions are made based on the findings.

Key Words: research trends, research methods, target language skills, research topics

I . Introduction

In recent years, studies in the field of second language (L2) seem to have included “a wider variety of methodologies” (Chapelle & Duff, 2003, p. 157), which implies today’s research methods are becoming more diverse and complicated. In 1986, Henning (1986) analyzed the transition of research methods using the articles in *Language Learning* from 1970 to 1985 by intervals of five years. This is considered to be the first study to survey research methods in English education. Since then, a similar line of research

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synthesis has systematically been conducted over the world (e.g., Ellis, 2013; Gao, Li, & Lu, 2001; Lazaraton, 2000; Richard, 2009).

English education in Korea has been established as a science in terms of theory and practical application to educational fields, but systematic analyses of research methods and topics have been rather neglected (Kim, 2004, 2006; Yoo, 2006). Seong and Nam (2010) mentioned in their study that it has been relatively rare to analyze English education articles and check its realities in Korea (e.g., Choe & Ma, 2013; Kim, 2004, 2006; Lee, 2005; Yoo, 2006).

Ellis (2013) emphasized the necessity of surveying the past progress in research topics and methodologies in the L2 field, saying “not just where we are now but where we have come from” in language teaching research really counts (p. 141), which had barely drawn attention in Korea. Thus, in this study, we would like to systematically analyze the recent research trends of English education through the analysis of articles in the two Journals – one domestic journal (*English Teaching*) and one international journal (*TESOL Quarterly*) – for the last three years (2011–2013). More specifically, much attention has been paid to analyze and compare research methods, target language skills, research topics, and participants. We expect that L2 researchers could gain the opportunity to overview recently emerged issues and to figure out future needs from a local–international comparative perspective through this study.

II . Literature Review

1. Studies on research trends in Korea

Kim (2006) classified developmental stages in TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) research of Korea into four stages. In the beginning stage (1965–1974), there were few articles which strictly observed academic frameworks. Articles which were considered as observing academic rules have started to appear since the experimental stage (1975–1984). The first developmental stage (1985–1994) is the one when English education started to be established as an independent discipline. Since developmental stage two (1996–2005), quarterly journals with ample (semi-)experimental research have been published.

Although analyzing research methods and topics of English education has gained increasing attention in Korea since the mid-1990s (Choi et al., 1995; Seong & Nam, 2010), the studies in this area are still quite scarce (Rhoo, 2011). Kim (2000) examined methodological changes in TEFL research of Korea through the analysis of *English Teaching* and *TESOL Quarterly*, and presented new directions for the future research. He

focused on two research paradigms: qualitative and quantitative. The results revealed that interest in quantitative studies was growing but qualitative studies was lacking in *English Teaching*, whereas qualitative studies were gradually being emphasized in *TESOL Quarterly*. Four years later, Kim (2004) investigated the trend of research methodology and orientation in TEFL by comparing and analyzing the same two journals, *English Teaching* and *TESOL Quarterly*, once more. The findings were similar to his previous study, displaying that *English Teaching*, unlike *TESOL Quarterly*, used more quantitative methods and less qualitative. In addition, it was revealed that *TESOL Quarterly* employed descriptive orientations considerably more and gradually stressed interpretive orientations. Yoo (2006) studied research trends in English education in Korea from 1996 to 2005 using three domestic journals – *English Teaching*, *Foreign Languages Education*, and *Applied Linguistics*. She discovered that topics on language skills were investigated most frequently both in *English Teaching* and *Foreign Languages Education*, while topics on second language acquisition (SLA) were examined most in *Applied Linguistics*. It was also revealed that quantitative research was more prevalent than qualitative research in all three of the journals as shown in Kim (2000, 2004).

Seong and Nam (2010) investigated research trends published in one domestic journal, *Modern English Education*, from 2000 to 2009. They overviewed the research trends based on four categories – research areas, research topics, participants, and research methods. Among three research areas, English education had been studied most, followed by English language skills and English literature. For research topics, language acquisition/learning and teaching methodologies were the most preferred topics, and in terms of methodologies, quantitative approaches were chosen more than qualitative ones. As for participants, college students have participated most in studies. Rhoo (2011) also investigated research method trends in English education from 2006 to 2010 using one domestic journal (*English Teaching*) and two international journals (*TESOL Quarterly* and *Language Learning*). Her study showed that quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in most of the studies in both Korea and other countries. In terms of types of research, (quasi-)experimental, analysis, and investigation research were used most in Korea, whereas (quasi-)experimental, analysis, and case studies were employed most in the two international journals. Concerning research contents, language acquisition and learning theory were on the top of the list in all three of the journals. More recently, Choe and Ma (2013) compared and analyzed current methodological trends and topics in four 2007–2012 journals, where two journals were domestic, *English Teaching* and *Modern English Education* and two were international, *Language Learning* and *The Modern Language Journal*. The findings displayed that topics and

methods were diversified in the domestic journals, which could match the international ones.

2. Studies on research trends overseas

Gao, Li, and Lu (2001) investigated methodological trends of applied linguistics comparing China and the west covering the years 1978–1997. They discovered that empirical research methods were being directed from non-empirical methods; particularly qualitative methods were rising steadily. They stated that, especially in the west, quantitative methods have been being challenged by qualitative methods since the mid-1990s, showing quantitative methods are not the only dominant form of L2 research any longer. In his series of studies surveying research trends in the L2 field, Lazaraton (2000, 2002, 2005) also noted that qualitative methods were rising continuously with the proportion of qualitative studies reaching approximately 40 percent in *TESOL Quarterly*.

Reflecting the qualitative research trends, Richards (2009) analyzed leading journals in the L2 field in terms of qualitative research approach. His study demonstrated that studies solely relying on qualitative methods were shifting toward ones using mixed methods starting in 2000. Richards (2009) also mentioned that qualitative approaches have been contributing considerably to or developing diverse areas in the L2 field such as communicative language teaching, conversation analysis, linguistic ethnography, and longitudinal studies.

In the editorial section of *Language Teaching Research*, Ellis (2013) briefly examined topics of study, countries where the studies were conducted, and languages investigated, based on two volumes of *Language Teaching Research* published in 1987 and in 2011. He stated that articles dealing with different types of teaching and cultural aspects appeared in the later volume. Regarding the countries where the studies originated, the United Kingdom was the country where most journals were written and published in 1987, while articles originated from many different countries in 2011 such as the UK, America, China, Japan, Kenya, Israel, and Taiwan. As for the languages investigated, English was the predominant one both in 1987 and in 2011.

Previous studies on research trends in Korea and overseas displayed “epistemological diversity” (Ortega, 2012, p. 206) in terms of research methodologies and topics. In line with the research, this study surveyed one domestic journal, *English Teaching (ET)*, and one international journal, *TESOL Quarterly (TQ)* from 2011 to 2013 to analyze current trends and to inform better understanding and orientation toward future research focusing on participants, research methods, target language skills, and research topics.

III. Methods

1. Data collection

Articles in one domestic journal, *English Teaching (ET)*, and one international journal, *TESOL Quarterly (TQ)* from 2011 to 2013 were collected and analyzed in the current study. The two journals mainly cover English teaching and learning and publish quarterlies. A total of 207 research articles in the two journals of *ET* and *TQ* from the first issue of 2011 volume to the last issue of 2013 volume were downloaded and examined, focusing on participants, research methods, target language skills, and research topics. The total number of articles in the two journals each year can be seen in Table 1. In the case of *TQ*, only research articles were analyzed, excluding “In the issue”, “Symposium”, “The forum”, “Research issues”, “Reviews”, and “Teaching issues” sections. In the case of *ET*, all the articles were counted since *ET* does not have the special sections that *TESOL Quarterly* has.

TABLE 1
The Number of Articles in *ET* and *TQ*

Journals	2011	2012	2013	Total
<i>English Teaching</i>	48	54	35	137
<i>TESOL Quarterly</i>	21	25	24	70
Total	69	79	59	207

2. Data classification

For data classification, we mainly focused on participants, research methods, target language skills, and research topics, trying to set up an optimal number of subcategories satisfactorily to cover the articles in the two journals. The classification was mostly based on Choe and Ma (2013) except for the category of participants. Choe and Ma (2013) have not considered participants a coding category. However, we decided to include the category of participants in the current study since Korean learners mostly learn English in institutional settings.

First, we classified participants into elementary school students, middle school students, high school students, college students, adults, and others (e.g., teachers, professors, and administrators). For research methods, we classified the journal articles into six subcategories, which were quantitative (statistical), qualitative, mixed, theoretical, synthesis, and others. Next, we examined target language skills based on

vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, general proficiency, interaction/pragmatics, and others. Lastly, research topics were investigated and classified into classroom pedagogy, sociolinguistic analyses, testing/assessment, curriculum/policy, socio-cultural factors, cognitive factors, affective factors, CALL/multimedia, materials, and learner traits (see Table 2). More specifically, sociolinguistic analysis included conversation analysis, discourse analysis, and ethnographic descriptions, and socio-cultural factors covered issues of identity, socialization, and learning contexts. Topics such as first language, age, gender, and proficiency were classified in the category of learner traits.

TABLE 2
Data Classification

Partici- pants	Research methods	Target language skills	Research topics
ES	Quantitative	Vocabulary	Classroom pedagogy
MS	Qualitative	Listening	Sociolinguistic analysis
HS	Mixed	Speaking	Testing/Assessment
Univ.	Theoretical	Reading	Curriculum/Policy
Adults	Synthesis	Writing	Socio-cultural factors
Others	Others	Grammar	Cognitive factors
		General proficiency	Affective factors
		Interaction/pragmatics	CALL/Multimedia
		Others	Materials
			Learner traits

Note. ES: elementary school students, MS: middle school students, HS: high school students, Univ: university students.

While categorizing all the articles produced in the two journals, we found that some articles had no participants, or, had two or more subcategories such as middle and high school students in one article. In the latter case, double-marking was allowed and classified into both middle and high school students. This rule applied to target language skills and research topics as well. After determining the data classification criteria, all the data were analyzed following the coding scheme by the two researchers. The researchers discussed the categories in advance and any disagreements in the process of data analysis were resolved through reexamination, discussion, and with the help of a third party's independent ratings.

IV. Results and Discussion

First of all, all the participants were examined in each article and Table 3 summarizes the results. A variety of participants ranging from elementary school students to adults were involved in both of the journals, which is encouraging. It is noticeable that approximately 47 percent of the participants in *ET* and 39 percent of the participants in *TQ* were university students. That is, college students as participants were favored mostly in Korea as well as over the world, displaying similar results of Seong and Nam's study (2010). This may reflect that most researchers in the L2 field work in higher educational settings such as colleges or universities and university students are practically available to the researchers without much difficulty. However, Korean learners learn English in their elementary and secondary schools as one of their mandatory major subjects. These results imply that L2 researchers and educators need to put more effort to conduct research focusing on elementary and secondary English education so that the results of studies could be pedagogically beneficial and helpful to be applied to the fields of English education in elementary and secondary school settings.

TABLE 3
Participants

Participants	<i>English Teaching</i>				<i>TESOL Quarterly</i>			
	2011	2012	2013	Total (%)	2011	2012	2013	Total (%)
ES students	5	10	3	18 (15.1)	1	0	5	5 (9.3)
MS students	4	10	0	14 (11.8)	0	3	5	7 (13.0)
HS students	7	10	1	18 (15.1)	1	2	4	5 (9.3)
Univ. students	19	18	19	56 (47.1)	8	6	7	21 (38.9)
Adults	2	4	2	8 (6.7)	4	2	4	10 (18.4)
Others	1	1	3	5 (4.2)	3	10	3	6 (11.1)
Total	38	53	28	119 (100.0)	17	23	28	54 (100.0)

Note. ES: elementary school, MS: middle school, HS: high school, Univ.: university.

Secondly, research methods were examined using six subcategories: quantitative, qualitative, mixed, theoretical, synthesis, and others (see Table 4). Articles in both of the journals employed a wide range of research methods even though quantitative and qualitative research methods were still two leading approaches in the field of L2 (Gao et al., 2001). The proportion of quantitative and qualitative research methods was well balanced in *TQ*, capturing around 30 percent of research methods. On the other hand, in *ET*, more than 50 percent of the articles relied on quantitative research method, which is

in line with the findings of several previous studies (e.g., Choe & Ma, 2013; Lazaraton, 2000, Seong & Nam, 2010), while qualitative method were applied around 14 percent. It seems that English learning environment may influence these results. Korean students learn English as a foreign language, and they mainly learn it in institutional settings. Therefore, the generalizability of research findings is seriously counted in Korea so that learners in similar educational environments could get benefits from L2 research findings. The percentage of mixed research in *ET* was steadily increasing and equivalent to the one in *TQ*, accounting for about 20 percent each. This reflects the current beliefs that language learning and teaching are multifaceted, and a triangular perspective in research methodologies would be desirable to deal with the complex process of L2 learning and teaching. Articles using research synthesis had not been published in *TQ* over the last three years, whereas around three percent of articles had utilized research synthesis methodology in *ET*.

TABLE 4

Research Methods

Methods	<i>English Teaching</i>				<i>TESOL Quarterly</i>			
	2011	2012	2013	Total (%)	2011	2012	2013	Total (%)
Quantitative	30	26	13	69 (50.4)	7	6	9	22 (31.4)
Qualitative	6	7	6	19 (13.9)	5	10	9	24 (34.3)
Mixed	5	15	7	27 (19.7)	5	5	3	13 (18.6)
Theoretical	2	2	4	8 (5.8)	2	3	2	7 (10.0)
Synthesis	2	1	1	4 (2.9)	0	0	0	0 (0.0)
Others	3	3	4	10 (7.3)	2	1	1	4 (5.7)
Total	48	54	35	137 (100.0)	21	25	24	70 (100.0)

Next, we investigated target language skills of the two journal articles, which were classified into nine subcategories: vocabulary, four language skills, grammar, general proficiency, interaction/pragmatics, and others (see Table 5). For the last three years, studies on speaking had been produced most in *TQ* and writing in *ET*, showing increasing interest in productive language skills nowadays. It is encouraging that both of the journals have included diverse language skills, not just heavily relying on one specific language skill. Along with four language skills except for listening, research on vocabulary had been performed actively domestically as well as internationally, evidencing growing interest in English vocabulary learning. It is also noticeable that the proportion of studies on listening was the lowest both in *ET* and in *TQ*, indicating that research on listening has been neglected in the field of L2. It might be partly because

learners begin to listen to English at a relatively earlier age and have higher level of perceived competence compared to other language skills, or partly because listening has been considered an additional language function rather than major ones to acquire. However, L2 learners need to develop balanced language skills for enhancing communicative competence and general proficiency level, and L2 researchers need to pay more attention to listening as well. As expected, *ET*, unlike *TQ*, introduced many articles about grammar, reflecting that Korean learners study English for improving (standardized) English test scores in many cases and building knowledge of English grammar is crucial for the purpose.

TABLE 5
Target Language Skills

TL Skills	<i>English Teaching</i>				<i>TESOL Quarterly</i>			
	2011	2012	2013	Total (%)	2011	2012	2013	Total (%)
Vocabulary	3	8	7	18 (11.2)	4	3	2	9 (11.5)
Listening	2	1	0	3 (1.9)	0	2	0	2 (2.6)
Speaking	7	1	8	16 (10.0)	2	5	7	14 (17.9)
Reading	6	6	4	16 (10.0)	5	1	4	10 (12.9)
Writing	11	14	14	39 (24.4)	4	3	2	9 (11.5)
Grammar	7	7	5	19 (11.9)	2	1	1	4 (5.1)
General proficiency	3	6	2	11 (6.9)	0	2	0	2 (2.6)
Interaction/pragmatics	3	2	2	8 (5.0)	2	3	0	5 (6.4)
Others	14	12	4	30 (18.7)	4	10	9	23 (29.5)
Total	53	49	40	42 (100.0)	23	30	25	78 (100.0)

Lastly, research topics were analyzed under ten subcategories: classroom pedagogy, sociolinguistic analysis, assessment, policy, socio-cultural factors, cognitive factors, affective factors, multimedia, materials, and learner traits. The results are summarized in Table 6. Among the topics, it seems to be natural that the proportion of classroom pedagogy relevant research was the highest in *ET* and second highest in *TQ*, which make up nearly 25 percent of domestic articles and around 20 percent of international articles. This reflects that English learning is performed in classroom settings over the world and researchers have made efforts to provide pedagogical implications based on their research findings. The highest percentage of research topic in *TQ* was socio-cultural studies accounting for 30.2 percent, and the third highest was about sociolinguistic studies taking up 12.5 percent. On the other hand, the two topics did not gain much attention in *ET*. The reason might be that the participants of *ET* studies were rather

homogenous in terms of socio-cultural backgrounds compared to those of *TQ* studies. Similar to the results reported in Choe and Ma (2013), a relatively large proportion of research on affective factors (e.g., motivation, attitude, perception, anxiety, and preference) and learner traits (e.g., L1, age, gender, ethnicity, aptitude, and proficiency) had been carried out in Korea, indicating the necessity of adequately equipping research environment for cognitive research. Interestingly, both of the journals published small number of articles about multimedia and materials. The use of multimedia and well-designed materials has gained growing interest in every education field with the advance of technology, suggesting that L2 researchers need to pay more attention to those areas.

TABLE 6
Research Topics

Research Topics	<i>English Teaching</i>				<i>TESOL Quarterly</i>			
	2011	2012	2013	Total (%)	2011	2012	2013	Total (%)
CP	1	13	15	43 (24.7)	7	7	6	20 (20.8)
SA	4	5	4	13 (7.5)	3	5	4	12 (12.5)
T/A	9	5	2	16 (9.2)	2	0	1	3 (3.1)
C/P	4	8	3	15 (8.6)	0	5	3	8 (8.3)
SF	2	2	5	9 (5.2)	10	11	8	29 (30.2)
CF	2	2	2	6 (3.4)	1	1	1	3 (3.1)
AF	12	10	7	29 (16.7)	3	3	3	9 (9.4)
C/M	3	5	1	9 (5.2)	1	0	0	1 (1.1)
Materials	1	3	3	7 (4.0)	2	2	1	5 (5.2)
LT	14	8	5	27 (15.5)	1	1	4	6 (6.3)
Total	66	61	47	174 (100.0)	30	35	31	70 (100.0)

Note. CP: classroom pedagogy, SA: sociolinguistic analysis, T/A: testing/assessment, C/P: curriculum/policy, SF: socio-cultural factors, CF: cognitive factors, AF: affective factors, C/M: CALL/multimedia, LT: learner traits

V. Conclusion

We investigated all the articles produced in two journals from 2011 to 2013 – *TESOL Quarterly (TQ)* and *English Teaching (ET)* – in order to examine current research trends in English education by analyzing participants, research methods, target language skills, and research topics. The results are as follows:

First, university students have participated most in the studies in *TQ* journal, followed by adults, middle school students, and high school students and elementary

school students. As in *TQ*, university students have joined most in the studies as participants in *ET*, followed by elementary school students and high school students, middle school students, and adults. The reason may be that a lot of researchers in the L2 field work in universities and students are easily available to them. Second, in relation to research methods, *TQ* has used qualitative and quantitative methods most, followed by mixed, and theoretical methods, but no synthesis. On the other hand, *ET* has used quantitative methods most, followed by mixed, qualitative, theoretical, and synthesis methods. *TQ* showed relatively balanced qualitative and quantitative methods, whereas *EQ* displayed overwhelming quantitative methods and gradually increasing mixed methods. It may seem that research methodology is influenced by learning environment. In other words, Korean students learn English as a foreign language in school settings, and generalizability of research findings is considered important. Third, as for target language skills, speaking has been studied most by *TQ*, with reading, vocabulary and writing following it. On the other hand, writing has been studied most by *ET*, with grammar, vocabulary, reading, and speaking following it. It may be partly because that Korean students study English in preparation for many standardized tests such as TOEFL, TOEIC and College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) and students overseas do not learn English only for that purpose. Lastly, when it comes to research topics, articles based on socio-cultural factors have been produced most in *TQ*, and articles based on classroom, sociolinguistic, affective, and so on followed it, especially with only one article on multimedia published. Slightly different from *TQ*, articles based on classroom have been published most by *ET*. Additionally, ones based on affective, learner traits, testing, and so forth followed it. These results seem to be influenced by the fact that Korean students are rather homogeneous in terms of socio-cultural backgrounds but many participants in *TQ* live in multicultural environments.

Based on the findings, it seems to be necessary that researchers should perform more studies with participants from elementary and secondary school students, not only because English education in Korea is mainly focused on elementary and secondary school students but also because the studies would be pedagogically helpful to the field of English education in Korea. In addition, as English education has been established considerably, research methods should be carried out considering the situations and trends of English education in Korea. Richard (2009) found that qualitative method has prevailed for a long time internationally (e.g., *Applied Linguistics*, *TESOL Quarterly*, and *Language Teaching Research*) while quantitative methods have been dominant in some other journals (e.g., *Language Learning*, *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, and *ELT Journal*). It seems to reflect that language learning and teaching are many-sided and various methods would be helpful to study language learning and teaching. As for target language skills, researchers need to also be interested in listening

and pragmatics/interaction for a balanced development of English education since one of the ultimate purposes of language learning would be for communication, not for a test. We investigated only two among quite a few journals in the current study and each journal would not be an absolute representative of domestic and international journal respectively. Notwithstanding all this, we hope that researchers share interest and information about the current methodological trends and stakeholders in the L2 field could be provided with pedagogical implications through this study.

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