

## Publishing your article in the New Zealand Language Teacher Some Notes for Guidance

Carrying out research is an important way for us to advance knowledge and understanding about language teaching and learning. Teachers are engaged in research at a variety of levels, all the time. When, for example, we evaluate a given activity, a unit of work or programme of study, and make changes and improvements in the light of this evaluation, we are engaging in a kind of research. This type of 'classroom based research' is invaluable to the teaching profession and adds to our knowledge and understanding of effective learning.

The type of research that is generally published in journals builds on this type of evaluation in particular ways. Firstly, research according to what we call the 'scientific method' tries to address a particular question, problem or hypothesis which might arise from the classroom. It does this by following a sequence of steps:

1. What do I want to find out, and why do I want to find it out?
2. What type of theoretical background underpins what I want to find out?
3. Have other people in the past tried to find this out, too? If so, how did they go about it? If not, why not?
4. How am I going to go about finding an answer to my question in a way that will give me the best (that is, valid and reliable) answers?

After these questions have been addressed, a study can be designed and carried out. Once it has been carried out, the steps continue:

5. What did I find out?
6. What do my findings mean? how o they relate to the theoretical background and to what other people before me have found out?
7. What conclusions can I draw from the findings?
8. What might I need to do if I wanted to make my study even better?

Once the study has been carried out, if we want to let others read about what we did and what we found out, we need to write up the study following the steps indicated in the table below.

Step	Part of the write-up / article
1. What do I want to find out, and why do I want to find it out?	Introduction
2. What type of theoretical background underpins what I want to find out?	Literature Review
3. Have other people in the past tried to find this out too? If so, how did they go about it? If not, why not?	Design of the study / methodology
4. How am I going to go about finding an answer to my question in a way that will give me the best (that is, valid and reliable) answers?	
5. What did I find out?	Findings / results
6. What do my findings mean? How do they relate to the theoretical background and to what other people before me have found out?	Discussion
7. What conclusions can I draw from the findings?	Limitations and conclusions
8. What might I do if I wanted to make my study even better?	

## Notes

1. Authors do not need to stick rigidly to the headings as suggested, but articles written within the 'scientific' tradition will follow the sequence quite closely – all of the articles in the 2007 edition of the New Zealand Language Teacher (volume 33) provide good examples of the model in practice.
2. You will come across some articles that only address questions 1-3 and 6 and 7. These are literature review type articles which aim to summarise what others have done to investigate a particular problem, and then speculate on further research that might be carried out in the light of the literature and any perceived gaps.
3. It is generally expected that, when carrying out research among human participants, prior consent in writing is obtained from the participants indicating :
  - a. that they understand the project you are carrying out;
  - b. that they have been given an opportunity to say 'yes, I want to take part' or 'no, I do not wish to take part';
  - c. that they are perfectly free not to take part or to withdraw from the study later on;
  - d. that the work based on the study might be published later.

Research which is carried out as part of tertiary study already has an 'ethics approval process' built in. 'Classroom based studies' / 'action research' might not have the process. So it is important for teachers to set up some kind of approval / consent process in consultation with their principals.