

LANGUAGE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND EMPIRICAL SURVEY ON STUDENTS' INTRODUCTORY UNDERSTANDING OF RESEARCH METHODS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines major methodological approaches in language research and simultaneously investigates the foundational research-related awareness of junior secondary school students as an educational reference point. A systematic literature review was carried out by synthesizing academic books, peer-reviewed journals, and scholarly sources covering seven methodological traditions: descriptive qualitative, descriptive quantitative, experimental, historical, comparative, etymological, and grounded theory. To situate these academic frameworks within an educational context, a small-scale descriptive survey involving 31 students from SMP Negeri 3 Tebing Tinggi, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia, was administered on May 7, 2026. The survey instrument was explicitly calibrated to the junior secondary school curriculum level; it probed students' general familiarity with introductory research concepts rather than their command of advanced paradigms. Findings from the literature review confirm that methodological selection must be driven by the nature of the research question and the characteristics of the data. Survey findings indicate that students hold a basic awareness of research-related activities drawn from their schoolwork experience, yet report limited confidence in formal research design and analytical terminology. The study concludes that progressive, age-appropriate methodological instruction is essential for cultivating long-term research literacy.

Keywords: language research methodology, systematic review, junior secondary education, students' introductory awareness, SMP Negeri 3 Tebing Tinggi

A. Pendahuluan

Language stands as one of the most intricate and far-reaching systems through which human beings organize and share experience. The breadth of scholarly interest it attracts spanning philosophy of mind, cognitive neuroscience, sociology, and education testifies to its centrality in human life. Investigating language rigorously, however, demands more than intuitive observation; it requires principled, transparent procedures for gathering evidence, constructing categories, and warranting interpretive claims.

Over the past century, the repertoire of available research approaches has grown considerably. The structuralist tradition associated with Ferdinand de Saussure established a foundational vocabulary by distinguishing the abstract system of language (*langue*) from its concrete use in context (*parole*). Successive theoretical movements including functionalism, generativism, sociolinguistics, and cognitive linguistics each reoriented this vocabulary around new questions. The result is a methodologically plural field in which no single procedure holds a monopoly on valid inquiry.

This pluralism mirrors the multi-dimensional character of language itself: a phenomenon simultaneously rule-governed and socially negotiated, cognitively represented yet culturally inflected, historically continuous yet perpetually in flux. Meeting the demands of such a phenomenon requires researchers to exercise methodological reflexivity an awareness not only of how to execute a given procedure but also of why that procedure is epistemologically appropriate for the question at hand.

The urgency of methodological clarity has intensified in the contemporary research environment. Digital technologies have made vast quantities of naturally occurring language data available at scale. Cross-border communication and migration have produced complex multilingual ecologies. The present paper pursues two complementary aims: a structured synthesis of seven major methodological traditions in language research, and an educational perspective reporting findings from a small-scale survey conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Tebing Tinggi, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia.

B. Metode Penelitian

The present study combines a systematic literature review (SLR) with a small-scale descriptive survey. The SLR was designed to synthesize existing scholarly knowledge on language research methodologies in a transparent and replicable manner. Source identification was carried out across Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, and Scopus. After title and abstract screening, 20 sources were retained for full-text extraction and thematic synthesis.

The descriptive survey was designed independently of the SLR. Participants were 31 students at SMP Negeri 3 Tebing Tinggi, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia, surveyed on May 7, 2026. The questionnaire comprised ten items probing students' familiarity with introductory research-related concepts recognition of common data-collection activities (interviews, observation, questionnaires, documentation), general understanding of the term 'research,' and self-reported confidence in research-adjacent tasks. Responses were analyzed descriptively using frequency counts and percentages.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Descriptive Qualitative Research

Among the methodological traditions examined, the descriptive qualitative approach occupies a particularly prominent position in linguistics owing to its capacity for contextually sensitive, meaning-centred inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Instruments such as in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis are favoured for their capacity to surface the lived texture of language use (Syaifullah & Izzah, 2019). Jannah (2020) notes this tradition has been especially productive for capturing the heterogeneity of classroom language practices in Indonesian applied linguistics scholarship.

2. Descriptive Quantitative Research

The descriptive quantitative tradition privileges breadth, precision, and replicability. Its central concern is the systematic measurement of language-related phenomena so that patterns may be identified across larger populations (Larson-Hall, 2010). Ritonga, Suib, and Zaky (2023) note that the rapid growth of digital language archives in the Indonesian research context has substantially expanded the practical scope of descriptive quantitative work.

3. Experimental Methods

Experimental research occupies a distinctive position in the methodological landscape by virtue of

its explicit causal logic. Experimental designs manipulate one or more independent variables under controlled conditions in order to isolate their effect on a target outcome (Field & Hole, 2003). The tension between internal and ecological validity remains a productive source of methodological debate in the field.

4. Historical Research Methods

Historical linguistics addresses systematic change across time. By examining phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic transformations documented in archival texts, historical researchers reconstruct the developmental trajectories of languages (Trask, 1996). Labov's (1994) influential work demonstrates that historically oriented research can achieve explanatory precision that rivals synchronic experimental approaches.

5. Comparative Research Methods

Comparative linguistics proceeds from the recognition that the full structural and functional range of human language can only be appreciated through systematic cross-linguistic investigation. By examining correspondences and contrasts across languages, dialects, or speech communities, comparative

researchers draw inferences about linguistic universals and typological tendencies (Croft, 2003).

6. Etymological Methods

Etymological research addresses the origins of lexical items and the pathways through which their form and meaning have changed across time. By tracing the phonological and semantic history of words, etymologists reconstruct patterns of borrowing and semantic change that illuminate broader cultural and social histories (Rabiah, 2018). Yusvida (2020) highlights that contemporary globalization has multiplied the empirical material available to etymologists.

7. Grounded Theory

Grounded theory departs from the deductive logic characteristic of much quantitative and experimental research by making theory generation its central methodological objective. Concepts, categories, and theoretical propositions emerge inductively from sustained engagement with empirical data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). Sudjani and Gunadi (2020) note that this reflexive orientation is especially valuable in non-Western research contexts.

8. Baseline Awareness Among Junior Secondary School Students

The survey component established a baseline educational profile. General familiarity with research showed that 17 students (54%) reported a working understanding, 11 (35%) indicated partial familiarity, and 3 (10%) reported none. Interviews were identified as a research activity by 10 respondents (32%), followed by

observation (26%), documentary tasks (23%), and questionnaires (19%). Twenty-four respondents (77%) agreed that understanding research methods matters for language study, and none expressed disagreement.

Berikut adalah perbandingan lintas-metodologi dari ketujuh tradisi penelitian yang dikaji dalam studi

Tabel 1. Cross-Methodological Comparison of Language Research Approaches

Method	Primary Goal	Data Type	Strengths	Limitations
Desc. Qualitative	Deep contextual understanding	Interviews, observation, documents	Rich, nuanced insight	Limited generalizability
Desc. Quantitative	Measurement & pattern description	Surveys, corpora, statistics	Replicable, generalizable	Reduced contextual depth
Experimental	Causal inference	Controlled behavioral data	Strong internal validity	Low ecological validity
Historical	Language change over time	Archival texts, manuscripts	Captures diachronic change	Incomplete data records
Comparative	Cross-linguistic variation	Parallel texts, surveys	Reveals universals & diversity	Comparability challenges
Etymological	Word origin & semantic change	Dictionaries, historical texts	Cultural-linguistic depth	Data availability limits
Grounded Theory	Theory generation from data	Interviews, observation	Emergent, participant-centered	Time-intensive, subjective

D. Kesimpulan

This study set out to accomplish two interrelated objectives: to map the principal methodological traditions of academic language research, and to situate that map within an educational developmental perspective by documenting the baseline research awareness of junior secondary school students.

The systematic review confirms that methodological diversity is not a weakness of the field but a structural necessity. Because language operates simultaneously as a cognitive system, a social practice, a historical artefact, and a cultural resource, no single investigative procedure can do full justice to its complexity. Methodological literacy means knowing which of these tools best fits a given research question (Nasution & Zulheddi, 2018).

The survey findings from SMP Negeri 3 Tebing Tinggi illuminate the educational baseline from which this kind of literacy must be built. Students arrive at junior secondary school with practical, experience-based familiarity with a small number of data-collection activities and a broadly positive attitude toward learning about research. Investing in age-appropriate methodological instruction at the junior

secondary level is a foundational concern.

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