

Editorial for EJEL Volume 14 Issue 5

Welcome to this special issue of EJEL focusing on research methodologies in e-learning. The call for the special issue was inspired by the large range of research methods and approaches within e-learning research. These vary in respect to the approach taken in studies reported on, for example action research or design based research, correlation research focusing on evaluation and effectiveness. Studies can further vary in respect to their point of departure; for instance, being based on single case studies while other studies may cover several cases and be more longitudinally oriented. Further variation can be observed in respect to the research methodologies used where some studies are quantitative, some qualitative and some use mixed methods. Adding to this is the broad variety of pedagogical approaches, domains and contexts approached.

Given this rich variation and that the research reported contributes to produce knowledge about e-learning, the call aimed to further explore the research methodologies used in producing this knowledge by formulating the following questions;

- How and why do we chose and motivate our methodological approaches, and are there specific arguments that are vital to deal with when choosing a research design in e-Learning contexts?
- How do we identify and qualify criteria for suitable construction of research designs according to a current study on e-Learning?
- What do we need to consider in our field of e-Learning, when we align a research design with the current research questions?
- How do we manage reliability and validity in e-Learning research - and how do we become aware of blind spots and links between research objectives and relevant findings?
- What are the options for generalisation of findings in various approaches and are there special concerns to take into account in e-Learning research?
- How are the criteria for research design and research findings negotiated between other research communities (paradigms) and our field of e-Learning?
- Are there new instances and new uses of e-Learning that lead to a need for new research designs and new research methods, tools and techniques?

The articles in this special issue relate to one or several of these questions and therefore contribute to reflect upon and further our knowledge on these issues. The three first contributions report on the use of mixed methods and motivations for the choice of mixed methods in research designs, albeit in different ways. The contribution by Gelareh Roushan, Debbie Holley and David Biggins describe a two-spiral action research approach to the analysis of experiences of informing institutional e-learning policy. Approaching a complex and burning issue, the approach that is proposed moves away from traditional top-down management approaches and argues for greater coordination of several key stakeholders in processes of change and development. The second contribution by Timos Almpanis makes an argument for mixed-methods approaches in e-learning contexts, and more specifically as a result of having analysed the heads of e-learning and their perspectives of technology enhanced learning (TEL) at several universities. The third contribution by Caroline Stockman presents to us a study where the use of mixed-methods design aided in becoming aware of blind spots - in this case revealing the importance of power and knowledge in technology acceptance research. Although a research design may be well suited to a research question, the author argues we need to remain open to emerging insights.

While the first three contributions report on experiences and benefits from mixed methods design, contribution four by Lyz Howard presents a theory-practice gap and more specifically makes the argument that there is currently no theory upon which to practice autonetnography (ANG). From a qualitative perspective with the use of meta-ethnography, methodology relating to autonetnography is examined as a step towards developing a framework using ANG as an eResearch methodology.

Contribution five by Javier Sarsa and Tomás Escudero acknowledge many of the problems and difficulties involved in e-learning research, and particularly quantitatively oriented research striving to measure the effects of e-learning. The multitude of features and factors involved in e-learning research complicate coming

to conclusions regarding expected benefits. The authors present and discuss a roadmap meant to highlight crucial aspects to consider and reflect on to increase the validity and reproducibility of results.

The contributions in this special issue thus ranges from articles building on qualitative methodology to quantitative methodology, and a mix of both. The scope varies from reflecting on use of methodology and results to anchoring and proposing new approaches to e-learning research. As such, the contributions vary in the very way that was originally phrased in the call for the special issue. However, as intended, the reflections and arguments presented by the authors make a valuable contribution to an ongoing critical discussion and challenging of established approaches and paradigms.

Robert Ramberg
Guest Editor