BOOK REVIEW

Archaeology of Research
Adilur Rahaman

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Harunur Rashid Khan
President
Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association (BELTA)
&
Associate Professor (Adjunct), BRAC Institute of Languages
BRAC University
Corresponding Email: harunrj@gmail.com

Archaeology of Research is primarily an anthology of English Language Teaching (ELT) research which chronicles 326 articles published in Bangladeshi peer-reviewed journals in the last two decades. However, designating this book as merely an ‘anthology’ would be misleading, because as an ELT research historian (Collingwood, 1946), Adilur Rahaman systematically examines the past scholarly initiatives and sketches a way of paradigm shift for developing a scientifically, pragmatically, and intellectually vigorous research culture in Bangladesh.
The book contains nine chapters which are logically connected to serve a single purpose: illustrating the trends and gaps in ELT research in Bangladesh. For instance, Chapter Three (English Language Education Research in Asia) tells us about the typical research issues in 23 Asian countries. Chapter Four (Method) demonstrates the epistemological strength of the book. The readers, while studying Chapter Four, take a multidisciplinary tour, ranging from philosophy to psychoanalysis. I would like to quote from the back cover of the book where a prominent economist of Bangladesh remarks:

This novel endeavor uses the Althusserian method of “symptomatic reading” to critically examine the ELE research articles of Bangladesh. His application of oppositional and/or dialectical reading of the text is relevant not only for English Language Education but also for other disciplines of human sciences.

In Chapter Five (Documentation), the author provides a comprehensive summary of 326 research articles divided into 24 categories. The classification of the articles is reader-friendly, since most of the categories such as Methods and Techniques, Curriculum/Syllabus and Material Design, or Language Education Policy are taught as courses in BA in English/ELT and MA in English/ELT programs. While dealing with such courses, one may easily explore the types of research that have been carried out in Bangladeshi context.

Chapter Six (Critique) is a revelation of the pitfalls of ELT research in Bangladesh. Applying the psychoanalytic principles (i.e. symptomatic reading), this chapter shows the prejudices, false consciousness, and ideological predilection of the researchers. For instance, a large number of researchers still believe in ‘native speakerism’ and ‘early start’ which are defined as professional fallacies by Phillipson (1992). Besides, ‘Positivism’ and ‘Orientalism’ (see Saha, 2014 for a detailed discussion on the Orientalist approach of the Asian scholars) dominate the minds of the researchers. This book will help rethink about the false consciousness and dogmatic outlook of ELT researchers.

There is also a concern about ‘alienation’ (Mészáros, 2006) in the ELT research practices. Adilur Rahaman (pp. 525-526) maintains:
Researchers are alienated from self, i.e. human qualities; therefore, they dehumanize others. Researchers are alienated from society; therefore, they oversight the significant problems (i.e. research questions of ELT in Bangladesh). Researchers are alienated from the researched (i.e. teachers, students, and pedagogic reality); therefore, the research articles fail to demonstrate any dialogical relationship between researcher and the researched. Researchers are alienated from their own history; therefore, the ELT research articles do not appear to be anthropologically informed. Researchers are alienated from their own creativity; therefore, they produce and reproduce clichés.

In Bangladesh, ELT researchers seem to be alienated from each other. In other words, they appear to be reluctant to explore what others are doing. Instead of thinking about the entire ELT research landscape in the country, they tend to take a myopic view to serve individual interests. This book will definitely contribute to curing the myopia, if researchers read the anthologized articles.

Nowadays, ELT scholars are exploring ways of humanizing language testing (Hamid & Hoang, 2018). Adilur Rahaman discusses this issue by coining two terms: ‘testing ideology’ and ‘telos of testing’. He writes:

By testing ideology, I mean belief systems regarding the telos of testing. The testing ideology of the documented articles appears to be coercive, dehumanizing, and, mechanical. The testing ideology is mechanical, because it celebrates the notion of “backwash effect”, and invokes the mechanical-behaviorist model....This testing ideology is dehumanizing because it oversights creative energy, dignity, and craving for fulfillment in humans (p. 518, italics in original).

At this point, I would address a pertinent question: Who would be benefitted by reading this book? The answer is: novice researchers, experienced researchers, and MA in ELT/English students. Novice researchers will find Chapter Five (Documentation) useful, because they grope around topics and do not have any idea about the intellectual history of ELT in Bangladesh. The anthology in Chapter Five will tell them the intellectual history of ELT research. Experienced researchers will find Chapter Six (Critique) thought-provoking and stimulating. They will understand the ‘epistemological unconscious’ (p. 47) of ELT researchers by reading this chapter. MA in ELT/English students may use the book in the classroom to gain knowledge and insights about ELT research activities in
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Bangladesh. Besides, the book (anthology chapter) will ease the struggle of MPhil and PhD students of English Education while writing literature review.

Archaeology of Research deserves special attention in seminars, symposiums, and conferences. The book leads us to set the priorities and agenda of ELT research in Bangladesh. If we remain ignorant of the intellectual history of ELT research and holistic picture of ELT landscape in the country, we will keep producing cliché articles. The book, by recording the intellectual history and by depicting the holistic picture of ELT landscape in Bangladesh, has rescued us; it has already become an apparatus to curb ‘mechanical reproduction’ (p. 520) and to cure ‘creative impotency’ (p. 525) in ELT research in Bangladesh.

References