



Research in English Studies: An Interview with Gabriele Griffin

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ABSTRACT

This interview aimed to explore the latest trends and transformations in the field of researching and publishing in English Studies based on the interview conducted with Gabriel Griffin. In addition, it attempted to investigate how knowledge is controlled by establishing various imperatives and limitations in the field of research and publication. This study is based on qualitative interpretative research design and I employed interviewing as a research method to explore the ideas related to research in English Studies with Gabriel Griffin. The structured interview via email with Griffin identified the reasons for the slow development of research methods in English Studies and its relationships with other disciplines, particularly social sciences. In addition, this interview attempted to explore the latest transformation and innovation in researching, and publishing in the domain of English Studies. This study has wider implications as it supports for exploration of the research in English Studies and provides a clear direction for further exploration.

INTRODUCTION

Research in English Studies, in the present context, has transformed and modified with the latest developed innovative research methods and the application of digital tools in collecting information, analyzing, systematizing, and publishing them. In addition, the research has become tougher in the present context, as the reliability of the data, arguments in the research, and more precisely the findings of the whole research project have been questioned by the postmodern philosophical worldview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Moreover, the production of knowledge has been controlled by establishing various limitations and imperatives in research and publication. Furthermore, Griffin (2013) claimed in her edited volume *Research Methods for English Studies* that research methods in English Studies were not discussed and systematized almost up to the end of the 20th century and in many respects, the situation remained the same up to 2013. All of the reasons depicted above triggered me to explore the development and latest trends of research in English Studies. Thus, the main objective of this interview is to investigate the historical and existing situation of research particularly focusing on English Studies. In addition, this interview has great significance by providing a fresh idea to the readers regarding the role of theory in the research, production, and dissemination of knowledge in the present context.

For exploring the information related to research in English Studies via email, I have selected Gabriele Griffin who edited the volume *Research Methods for English Studies*, which was published by Edinburgh University Press. In addition, Griffin is a professor of Gender Research and Director of Graduate Studies at Uppsala University, Sweden. Griffin focused on her research on various issues of women incorporating the areas of gender and technology, women's cultural production, and non-normative identities just to name a few. Griffin was the co-coordinator at the Nordic Centre of Excellence on 'Beyond the Gender Paradox - Women's Careers in Technology-Driven Research and Innovation In and Outside of Academe' (2017-2022). Griffin published many [books and research articles](#) related to research and contemporary issues of gender and women.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Interviewing has been reported as the method of collecting qualitative information which assisted to explore in-depth information in the related field (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Jamshed, 2014). In addition, interviewing method can be applicable for collecting qualitative information which can collaborate with other various research methods such as observation, ethnography, and autobiography, and it can be used in the field of social sciences and research in English Studies (Ghimire, 2022). Furthermore, interviewing as a research

method assisted to explore the in-depth information in English Studies in many contexts, such as exploring the author's views and readers' perceptions and in-depth understanding of certain issues just to name a few. Moreover, Fritz and Vandermause (2018) admitted that in a situation where a face-to-face interview is not possible, an email interview can be assisted in gathering in-depth qualitative information.

Moreover, research in English Studies has become a prominent field for exploring as it has its broad area of study, however, Waugh (2016) argued that English Studies has lost its uniqueness, creativity, transformation, and innovation because of the latest developed market policy, and media. Furthermore, Carter (2016) argued that English Studies is a distinctive subject however, after having partnerships with various departments such as media studies, creative writing, and performance studies just to name a few, has lost its particular object of study and its uniqueness. In addition, Pope (2016) claimed that English by nature is interdisciplinary and has a good relationship with all the subjects by crossing disciplinary boundaries and limitations. However, this interview attempted to explore the development and existing realities of research in the field of English Studies based on the interview conducted via email with Gabriel Griffin.

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on a qualitative interpretative research design and employed interviewing as a research method for exploring the ideas of the author as suggested by Griffin (2013). For exploring the ideas related to research in English Studies, I have voluntarily selected Gabriel Griffin as she explored various ideas related to research in English Studies and she was the editor of the volume, *Research Methods for English Studies*, published by Edinburgh University Press. As I requested an interview via email, she agreed to it. I prepared some fixed questions for the structured interview as suggested by Kothari (2004) incorporating the issues related to development, publication, and the latest trends of research particularly focusing on English Studies. I emailed her the questions for an email interview as suggested by Fritz and Vandermause (2018). Finally, I received her response with answers to those questions which provided information such as the latest trends in research in English Studies, various imperatives and limitations in knowledge production and publication, and so forth which were reported in the following section.

RESULTS

Ghimire: How are you? How is your daily routine going on, particularly regarding the research?

Griffin: I write and do research every day unless I have meetings etc booked that prevent me from doing so. My best writing time is the morning so I try to write then. But research (i.e. reading, looking up things etc. I also do in the afternoon.

Ghimire: I would like to begin with your edited volume *Research Methods for English Studies*. You have written in its introduction section that research methods in English Studies were not discussed and systematized almost up to the end of the 20th century and in many respects, the situation remained the same up to 2013. What might be the possible reasons behind this?

Griffin: Historically the study of literature was seen as a 'gentleman's pursuit' in England, not as something that was a serious scientific discipline. Therefore there seemed to be no need for methods as such. Further, for a long time understanding literature was also regarded as something that required a sensitive soul rather than scientific methods. The notion of the sensitive soul was understood as meaning that the process of reading and interpreting literature could not be explained readily through means such as methods. But talking about methods is also an issue of developing the relevant vocabulary and this has been rather slow, even though literary theory and interpretation have become and have been through much of the 20th century, very sophisticated.

Ghimire: What sort of transformation have you observed in the trend of research in English Studies, particularly after 2013? Are you satisfied with this?

Griffin: There have been many changes in research in English Studies in the last ten years or so. For one thing the topics that are considered interesting have changed. But there have also been significant changes in methods, particularly regarding the development and use of digital tools.

Ghimire: You have incorporated various research methods in your edited volume entitled *Research Methods for English Studies*. However, I feel a lack of discussion about the role of theories in the research of English Studies. Are there any reasons behind that?

Griffin: In many instances students of English think that theory is method. But this is not the case. Theory of whatever kind is the perspective you bring to literature but it is not a method as such. Doing a postcolonial reading of a text, for example, does not imply any method at all but simply the perspective you bring to bear. The method might involve narrative analysis, reader response criticism, critical discourse analysis, or any other method. So I make a distinction between theory and method. Theory may inform method but it is not method.

Ghimire: Some researchers and scholars have not enjoyed the use of theory in research of English Studies. They believed that they could tell the findings of

the research in advance if they knew the theory which had been used in the research. What do you think is the role of theory in the research of English Studies?

Griffin: Everybody brings a perspective or theory to bear on how they read a text, whether they acknowledge it or not. Your theory informs what you pay attention to in a text, for example. It is important to acknowledge the theoretical frame that informs your reading so that readers can understand where you are coming from. I think theory is crucial to reading texts.

Ghimire: It is said that research in English Studies is still heavily dominated by textual analysis instead of exploring the latest social issues related to English Studies based on the real context of society. There has been confusion regarding its domain. Do you agree? What should be done for making the research transformative and innovative in addressing various unexplored areas in English Studies?

Griffin: English Studies has many uses and ways of making sense of texts and of the world. Textual analysis is one dimension, the relation between text and context (or text and social issues) another. Both are important as far as I'm concerned.

Ghimire: In the present context, the earlier rigid notion of boundaries of genres has been blurred. In such a situation, are there any fundamental differences between research in English Studies and research in other social sciences? If yes, what might be the basic differences between them?

Griffin: There are many differences between Social Sciences research and English Studies. For one thing, the object of enquiry is different, broadly speaking. Further, the evidence drawn on to make claims in regards to the object of study is different. And especially the quantitative methods used in Social Sciences are quite different from the qualitative methods used in English Studies, for instance. This is not to deny that there are overlaps. For example, both in Social Sciences and in English Studies you might make use of auto/biographies to investigate a particular issue. I would think of the two fields in terms of overlapping circles where there is some shared middle ground but also parts that are quite distinct and separate.

Ghimire: Some scholars and researchers argued that research should address local issues which matter in the life of common people instead of global ones. What is your view on this?

Griffin: Local and global issues are intertwined, not distinct. Poverty in one part of the world, for example, is related to global market forces. To see them as separate is therefore a false distinction. That does not mean that you need to address both at all times, but addressing one inevitably has implications for the other.

Ghimire: What are the latest challenges that you have observed in the process of researching and supervising in English Studies?

Griffin: It has become hard to keep up with the development of digital methods but it is very important in English Studies that we do so. That's one thing. The other thing is that we live in a world where competition in academe means that more and more gets published and it can be difficult to keep up with that. But it is important to do so.

Ghimire: Do you realize the production of knowledge has been controlled because of institutionalization of certain trends and domains of research in English Studies, particularly in certain universities and research institutions? How can we solve such problems of creating limitations in research?

Griffin: I am not quite sure what you mean by this question. The production of knowledge is always the object of control because of publication imperatives, because in some countries academics do not enjoy academic freedom and cannot express their actual views and opinions, and because disciplines have canons which dictate what is acceptable to study in one discipline rather than another. So there are always constraints for researchers. The question is how you respond to these constraints and to what extent you allow them to dictate to you what you research.

Ghimire: I would like to show my concern about the publication of research work which has been controlled and checked by making certain criteria for writing and publishing. In addition, it is said that the latest indexing system of journals creates the center-seeking tendency in the production of knowledge. Do you agree? To what extent publication of articles in high-impact journals and their numbers of citations measured the social values of research?

Griffin: The so-called neoliberalization of universities, the rise of the 'audit culture' and of 'new public management' has led to the setting up of instruments such as ranking lists to determine the academic value of the research conducted. In some ways this acts as a measure of quality control. But it also is a form of neo-colonialism because the highest-ranking journals usually publish in English which means that national or local languages do not get a look-in. One argument put forward here often is that publishing in 'minority' languages means that there are not many readers, so there is little dissemination of knowledge. It certainly is the case that countries with advanced economies and large populations (eg Germany) have their own publishing industries and do not 'need' to publish in English in so-called 'international' (= often English-speaking) journals. But even these countries have their own ranking structures and systems so one does not escape that imperative. But it is also the case that, certainly in the past, much highly significant research was published in little known journals.

Ghimire: As an experienced researcher, author, and professor, finally, what messages/suggestions would you like to give to the researchers of English Studies?

Griffin: I think it is important not to be too subservient to the fashions and dictates of English Studies at any one time. These change and if one follows them too much; one's research is not of lasting value. I also think it is really important to read very widely, not just in one's narrow area of research. It's a way of keeping up with developments and insights more generally, and of getting ideas. Working with people from other disciplines is a really excellent way of seeing one's own discipline in a different light.

CONCLUSIONS

The above interview with Griffin identified how research in English Studies developed and transformed in the present context, however, there have been challenges in the production of knowledge and publishing due to various imperatives and limitations in the research. This interview was based on an email interview therefore; it has its own limitations and constraints for exploring further information by cross-questioning the interviewee, thus, it lacked some issues which needed to be raised at the time of the interview. Nevertheless, this interview revealed some insightful ideas related to researching, publishing, and knowledge production and control in the research. In addition, this interview depicted how focusing on the English language in the research and publication ignored the importance of local language and discrimination of local knowledge in the global context. This study has wider implications as it supports to the exploration of the research in English Studies and provides a clear direction for further exploration.

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