



Using the OASIS Research Database for ELT Professional Development

by [Inge Alferink](#)

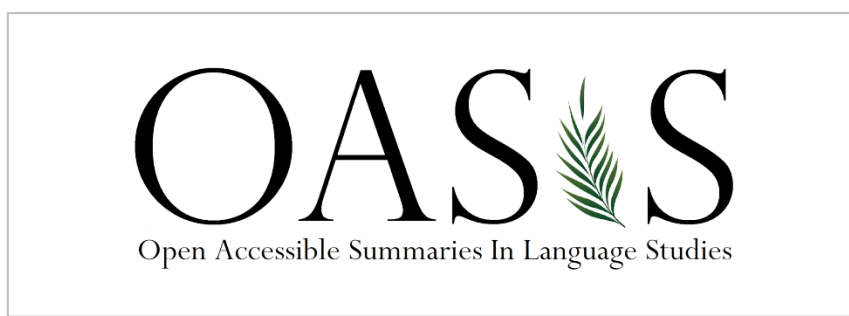
Research on language learning is prolific. A search of the language and education sections on [Web of Science](#) returns over 3.5 thousand articles for 2022 alone. Anyone would have a job keeping up! Not only are there an abundance of articles, but many of them are also lengthy, detailed, and filled with technical terms, meaning they often take a lot of time to read. And that is if they are available at all, as plenty of research findings disappear behind paywalls. It is no surprise, then, that many teachers don't engage directly with research and research findings, even if they report that they are generally positive toward research and think it can be useful (Marsden & Kasprovicz, 2017)—teachers are busy people!

OASIS: Accessible Research Summaries

During my PhD and as a postdoctoral researcher, I have read through a mountain of research articles on multilingualism and language learning. It could be a real slog and I had paid time to do it—a luxury practitioners do not tend to have! In this article, I discuss one initiative that tries to improve access to research findings for language practitioners: [Open Accessible Summaries in Language Studies](#) (OASIS). OASIS summaries are one-page summaries written in nontechnical language. They are intended to provide a 10-minute read that includes the information and detail needed to put a study and its finding into some context. Each summary always includes the following sections:

- *What the research was about and why it is important:* Here, the study is briefly explained and put into context.
- *What the researcher(s) did:* In this section, the setup of the study is explained. Authors are encouraged to include examples and to be specific about the participants and languages involved.
- *What the researcher(s) found:* Here, the findings are reported in a format comprehensible to nonspecialist readers, which includes avoiding detailed statistical information.
- *Things to consider:* This section can be used to add nuance, relay concerns or particular takeaways, or flag possible follow-up studies.

OASIS also includes a link to the original article in case you want to know more and to any materials that are available online. For example, [this summary](#) about measuring oral proficiency contains links to the [tests they used](#).



OASIS was established in 2018 after a roundtable with journal editors, with the support of professional organisations such as [ACTFL](#) (in the United States) and the Association for Language Learning ([ALL](#); in the United Kingdom). The database is set up as a long-term, sustainable resource. To achieve that, the organization works closely with academic journals in the broad field of language studies. Some major international journals now ask every author to write an accessible summary of their newly published articles, which means OASIS constantly has new, up-to-date content on the database. One of the journals they work with is *TESOL Quarterly* (TQ). Every new article published in TQ has a corresponding OASIS summary for you to read. Currently, there are more than 1,300 summaries in the database, and all are freely available to download—with new ones being added every week. See [the Appendix](#) for an example summary of an article about how to select vocabulary to teach published in TQ. (Download the original summary on OASIS [here](#).)

Using OASIS for English Language Teacher Professional Development

It is important to mention that OASIS does not give direct recommendations of, for example, pedagogical choices. In other words, they don't tell you what to do. The main purpose of OASIS is to provide access to research findings for people who might not otherwise have access or have time to access. Research is complex, and individual research papers rarely provide clear-cut answers and solutions. OASIS is therefore mainly meant as a starting point for individual or group reflection and/or discussion.

Here is a practical guide to how an English language teacher could use OASIS summaries in their practice (adapted from Andringa & Van Beuningen, 2020):

Using OASIS to Reflect on Your Beliefs and Intuitions

1. Think about a strong belief or intuition you have about language learning or teaching (for example, *Frequency-based word lists are the most effective way of choosing what vocabulary to teach*). In a team, you could identify which beliefs and intuitions exist and choose either the most common one or, alternatively, choose a general theme for the different opinions that exist within the team.

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2. Identify key words (e.g., *vocabulary*, *frequency*, *list*) and use these to search the database for relevant summaries. Currently, this search would return 94 summaries listed in order of relevance.
3. Select the most relevant summaries based on the details on the overview page. Details include the title and information such as the type of learner, age range, language being learned, and others. How many you select depends on the time you have available and, if working in a team, how many people are involved.
4. Read the selected summaries. If working in a team, divide the work between team members. Take notes during reading, if needed.
5. Reflect on what you've read. You can use these questions to get you started:
 - a. Are the findings surprising? Why or why not?
 - b. Do the findings change your thinking? Why or why not? And in what way?
 - c. If the findings don't change your thinking entirely, do they add any side notes or caveats to your beliefs? If so, what are they?
 - d. In what way do the insights gained from your OASIS search have consequences for your teaching practice?
6. If working in a team, exchange the insights each of you have gained from searching for and reading OASIS summaries. If you have chosen to work around a specific theme for which there were different perspectives, then first discuss for which perspective there was most supporting evidence. Subsequently, reflect on what the insights mean for your beliefs and practice (using, e.g., the questions in Step 5).

Variations

Here are some alternative starting points:

- Think of something in your practice that you or your team find difficult to teach or would like to try a new approach for. Together with your team, formulate a statement, such as "I would like to know more about effective ways of giving feedback on oral presentations." Run through Steps 2–4 in the list, then note what inspiration you have found from the materials, including possible caveats, like "has only been tried with a different target audience." Use the information you have read to create a classroom activity to use and evaluate. You can use the following questions to guide your reflection:
 - As a teacher, did you like the approach? Why or why not?
 - Did the students like the approach? Why or why not?
 - Did creating or trying the new approach raise any new questions?
 - If working in a team, were your and your colleagues' experiences with the new approach the same or not?
- Think of something in your practice that you or your team thinks works, but you're not sure this is really the case or you're unsure why. Run through Steps 2–4 in the list and then reflect on your findings using the following questions as a starting point:
 - To what extent does research show your approach should work?
 - Did you find any studies that suggest your approach is not the most effective one?

- Can you explain any differences between your experiences and research findings by looking at differences in, for example, the target audience, the target language, etc.?
- What did you find out regarding the (in-)effectiveness of the approach?
- Do the insights you've gained have consequences for your teaching?

OASIS aims to give language practitioners agency by providing access to research findings and letting you make up your mind about what to take into your classroom. These are just some suggestions of how you could use OASIS summaries to reflect on your practice and incorporate research engagement in your routine.

NOTE: This article was written by an OASIS employee.

**For more information, visit the [OASIS website](#). To stay up-to-date with any new content, you can follow them on Twitter [@OASIS_Database](#) or sign up for their automated [weekly digest](#) of new summaries.*

References

Andringa, S., & Van Beuningen, C. (2020). Onderwijs ontmoet onderzoek. *Vakwerk*.

Marsden, E., & Kasprowicz, R. (2017). Foreign language educators' exposure to research: Reported experiences, exposure via citations, and a proposal for action. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101(4), 613–642. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12426> [OASIS Summary](#)

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