Research Trends In English Language Teaching: A Twenty-Year Review Of Master Theses And Doctoral Dissertations

İngiliz Dili Eğitimi (İDE) Alanındaki Araştırma Eğilimleri: Yüksek Lisans Ve Doktora Tezlerinin 20 Yıllık İncelemesi

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ABSTRACT

This research article reviews the master theses and doctoral dissertations on English Language Teaching published between 2001 and 2020 in Turkey. The theses and dissertations were analyzed in terms of emerging themes, research design, participants, and data collection tools. At the end of the summative content analysis conducted on 96 doctoral dissertations and 295 master theses, it was found that the theses and dissertations showed some similarities and differences. To illustrate, teaching methodology was the most studied theme, while language testing and assessment was the least studied theme in both groups. In addition, the quantitative research design was the most preferred one in the MA theses, whereas it was mixed-methods research design for the PhD dissertations. Moreover, most of the participants in both groups included tertiary-level students and instructors. Finally, documents were the most employed data collection tools, but the observation was the least preferred tool in both groups. Further professional implications are discussed in terms of master theses and doctoral dissertations in the English Language Teaching field to guide future researchers and offer a new research agenda.

Keywords: Doctoral dissertation, English language teaching, higher education, master thesis, research trends

ÖZ

Bu araştırma makalesi, Türkiye'de 2001–2020 yılları arasında İngiliz Dili Eğitimi (İDE) üzerine yapılmış olan yüksek lisans ve doktora tezlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Tezler, ortaya çıkan temalar, araştırma tasarımı, katılımcılar ve veri toplama araçları açısından analiz edilmiştir. 96 doktora tezi ve 295 yüksek lisans tezi üzerinde yapılan özetleyici içerik analizleri sonucunda yüksek lisans ve doktora tezlerinin bazı benzerlik ve farklılıklar gösterdiği tespit edilmiştir. Örneğin, her iki grupta da öğretim yöntemi en çok çalışılan tema iken ölçme ve değerlendirme en az çalışılan tema olmuştur. Ayrıca yüksek lisans tezlerinde nicel araştırma deseni en çok tercih edilen desen iken doktora tezlerinde karma yöntem araştırma deseni en çok tercih edilen desen olmuştur. Buna ilaveten her iki grupta da yükseköğretim düzeyindeki öğrenciler ve eğitimciler, katılımcıların çoğunluğunu oluşturmuştur. Son olarak, her iki grupta da dokümanlar en çok kullanılan veri toplama araçları iken en az tercih edilen araç ise gözlem olmuştur. Gelecekteki araştırmacılara rehberlik etmek ve yeni araştırma gündemi sunmak için İDE alanındaki yüksek lisans ve doktora tezleri bağlamında ilgili mesleki çıkarımlar bu çalışma kapsamında tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yüksek lisans tezi, doktora tezi, İngilizce öğretimi, yükseköğretim, araştırma eğilimleri

Introduction

Research trends in applied linguistics have attracted considerable attention among scholars since there has been a growing body of research in the past decades (Acıroğlu, 2020; Kirmizi, 2012; Lei & Liu, 2019a, 2019b; Ma & Kim, 2014; Özmen et al., 2016; Yihong et al., 2001).

In the relevant literature, it is seen that research trend studies or bibliometric studies focused mainly on research articles. Then, there has been a shift toward other academic genres, including conference papers, book chapters, student research papers, and theses and dissertations. While some of these studies take a holistic view of academic genres in applied linguistics, others are concerned with more specific fields or subfields of applied linguistics, such as English for academic purposes (EAP) or computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Besides, some of these studies had a comparative component at an international level, whereas some were concerned with research trends at the domestic level.

When research trend studies are examined, it is seen that research articles are the most commonly studied academic genre. For example, Lei and Liu (2019a) investigated the research trends in System's publications between 1973 and 2017 and concluded that second language acquisition (SLA), teaching practices, learning strategies and technology, and sociocultural and sociopsychological issues were the most focused themes. While some topics like CALL, communicative competence, and learner strategy were found to be popular across three periods and remained unchanged, especially the number of studies regarding identity, English as Foreign Language (EFL) learner, English as Lingua Franca (ELF), and self-efficacy topics showed a significant increase. Similarly, Lei and Liu (2019b) conducted bibliometric research on the articles published in 42 Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) indexed journals in applied linguistics between 2005 and 2016. The authors revealed that research on social class, language policy, eye tracking, EFL learner, ELF, multilingualism, and language ideology showed a significant increase. In contrast, research on communicative competence, academic discourse, vocabulary acquisition, discourse analysis, heritage language, self-efficacy, and corpus-based studies remained constant.

In some studies, research trends at the national and international levels are compared in research articles. To exemplify, Yihong et al. (2001) compared research methods in applied linguistics published in journals in China and the West. After analyzing 2486 articles, the authors found out that the research studies were moving from a nonempirical direction toward an empirical one, especially with the increase in quantitative studies in China while the quantitative paradigm was being replaced by qualitative studies in the West (Yihong et al., 2001). In addition, Choe and Ma (2013) compared SLA related studies ($N = 867$) in two domestic and two international journals published between 2007 and 2012. In both groups, statistical analyses were in the first place, and grammar, as the target language skill, was prominent. However, classroom pedagogy had the highest occurrence in domestic journals regarding research themes, whereas learner traits were the first in international journals. Finally, to offer a more cross-cultural perspective, Ma and Kim (2014) examined the articles published in a domestic journal (English Teaching (ET)) in Korea and an international journal (TESOL Quarterly (TQ)) between 2011 and 2013. According to the results, university students were the dominant participants in both journals. As for research methodology, more than half of the studies referred to quantitative methods in ET, whereas there was nearly an equal share between quantitative and qualitative methods in TQ In addition, writing was the most researched skill in ET articles while speaking was the most researched skill in TQ articles. Finally, socio-cultural factors were the most studied research topics in TQ articles, whereas classroom pedagogy came to fore in ET articles.

Latif (2018) investigated English Language Teaching (ELT) research papers published between 2006 and 2015 and found out that teacher education was the most studied research topic, and experimental methods and quantitative data were more preferred in these papers. Accordingly, the author drew attention to the causes of dominant ELT research trends in Egypt and claimed that the local educational research culture, inappropriate interdisciplinary approach, reading sources, institutional regulations, and researchers' over-reliance on convenience sampling were the possible causes.

On the other hand, some studies focused on the subfields of applied linguistics such as CALL, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), and EAP. To begin with, Sallam et al. (2020) investigated various genres such as conference papers, book sections, journal articles, and reviews of Language Massive Open Online Courses (LMOOCs) and concluded that there is still a lack of LMOOC-related articles in CALL journals. Similarly, Duman et al. (2015) examined research studies ($N = 69$) published on MALL in SSCI-indexed international journals between 2000 and 2012. The authors showed that research on MALL increased at a fast pace from 2008 and reached a peak in 2012. Also, approximately half of the studies adopted quantitative methods and again in approximately half of the studies learning approaches were included as theoretical frameworks. As for EAP, Tazik and Khany (2019) reviewed the literature on EAP by analyzing 15 books, 6 book chapters, and 347 research articles and revealed that academic writing, curriculum development, and critical EAP were the most important challenging issues.

As academic genres, theses and dissertations appear to have occupied a prominent place in research trend literature in the Turkish context rather than research articles. First, Kirmizi (2012) examined MA theses in ELT published between 2005 and 2010 in Turkey. The author revealed that the theses were conducted on language skills ($N = 59$), psychology ($N = 33$), teaching methods ($N = 32$), evaluation of materials or curriculum design and evaluation ($N = 24$), linguistics ($N = 23$), learner factors ($N = 20$), teacher factors ($N = 19$), CALL ($N = 17$), culture and literature ($N = 12$). Second, PhD dissertations published in Turkey between 2010 and 2014 were analyzed in terms of subject areas, research paradigms/techniques, research contexts, scopes, validity/reliability concerns, and piloting. It was demonstrated that those subject areas were teaching English as a foreign language ($N = 76$) with learner and teacher variables as the most studied subarea, foreign language teacher education ($N = 58$) with preservice teacher education as the most studied subarea and SLA ($N = 10$) with the acquisition of morphosyntax as the most studied subarea. In addition, mixed methods ($N = 97$) was the most preferred method and tertiary education ($N = 90$) was the most studied research context (Özmen et al., 2016). Finally, Acıroğlu (2020) examined research trends in MA theses and PhD dissertations published on ELT between 2015 and 2018. It was found out that quantitative and mixed methods were the most preferred study designs while Likert type of survey and semi-structured interview were the most commonly used data collection tools. As for participants, undergraduate students, in-service teachers, and teacher educators formed the majority. Besides, communicative skills, ELT and learning, and vocabulary teaching were the most common subjects of study. Accordingly, it was suggested that for further research, there should be more qualitative studies for deeper analyses, more Ministry of National Education (MoNE) students

as participants and there should be facilitative opportunities for conducting research with MoNE students.

To provide a more comprehensive perspective about the content and scope of theses and dissertations at the national level and pave the way for comparative and international studies in the future in a specific domain, the researchers in this study aimed to review the MA theses and PhD dissertations published in Turkey between 2001 and 2020 and narrowed the scope of the study to ELT research specifically. Although there has been research on theses and dissertations in ELT, these studies are limited to some extent in that while one of these studies is concerned with only doctoral dissertations (Özmen et al., 2016), another one is concerned with only MA theses (Kirmizi, 2012) and finally, another study examined MA theses and PhD dissertations published only between four years (Acıroğlu, 2020). In this vein, there is still a gap in the relevant literature to shed light upon the nature of ELT-related theses and dissertations and a need to offer a detailed review of the past two decades. Therefore, this study aims to fill in this niche in the literature by comparing ELT-related MA theses and PhD dissertations indexed in the National Theses Database and conducted in Turkey between 2001 and 2020. To this end, the current study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Are there any differences between the MA theses and PhD dissertations on ELT in terms of emerging themes?
2. Are there any differences between the MA theses and PhD dissertations on ELT in terms of research design?
3. Are there any differences between the MA theses and PhD dissertations on ELT in terms of participants?
4. Are there any differences between the MA theses and PhD dissertations on ELT in terms of data collection tools?

Methods

Research Design and Sampling
This study aimed to review ELT-related MA theses and PhD dissertations published between 2001 and 2020 in Turkey in terms of themes, research design, participants, and data collection tools. After the materials for the study were gathered, they were coded on an Excel file, and the researchers coded each study by its publication year, type, emerging theme, research design, participants, and data collection tools. Therefore, the current study has a descriptive research design because the aim is to explain the phenomenon in question and include the frequency of occurrences as well. This study employed document analysis which is a form of qualitative research to analyze documentary evidence via systematic procedures. Inclusion criteria for the documents were their publication year, genre, and field of study because, specifically, the MA theses and PhD dissertations in ELT published between 2001 and 2020 were chosen for this study.

Data Analysis
The researchers referred to summative content analysis as a qualitative research method to analyze the relevant documents (Cohen et al., 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2012) via systematically examining the content to reveal patterns (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001), and categorize the emerging themes (Dörnyei, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

While analyzing the data, the researchers built a taxonomy of emerging themes by moving back and forth due to the iterative nature of the qualitative data analysis. They identified some keywords representing the underlying idea in the thesis/dissertation content and counted these emerging themes to determine their frequency. In this vein, summative content analysis, which includes counting and comparing keywords or content based on the interpretation of the underlying context, was employed in this study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Two researchers were involved in the analyses in order to decrease the subjectivity of the qualitative data analysis. The researchers interpreted and categorized the documents separately by comparing the theses/dissertations against each other in line with the coming data flow. The coders constantly compared the theses/dissertations with the old ones and new ones in order to be consistent while forming the emerging categories (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Both coders were informed about the relevant literature and research results to avoid missing any important points or ending up with irrelevant results.

Since one of the aims was to reveal the themes, the coders checked their own categories for intra-rater reliability and compared their findings together via online meetings for inter-rater reliability and trustworthiness. Due to the bottom-up nature of the qualitative analysis, the coders went through some stages in order to reach and offer a general framework. In other words, they went through open coding, focused coding, and axial coding in order to reach the emerging themes (Kolb, 2012).

The coders separately analyzed the theses/dissertations and came up with their own draft forms. Three weeks later, they made some revisions and gave the final shape to their own work to ensure intra-rater reliability. Furthermore, after a quarter of the total documents (25%) were analyzed, they had a meeting and compared their emerging themes to find out the agreement levels according to the inter-rater formula (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the first round, the inter-rater reliability formula was found to be 70% and the coders detected the disagreed categories. Then, they discussed some expressions that may cause differences or ambiguity. After the first meeting, the coders continued to analyze the rest of the materials. When all of the documents (100%) were analyzed separately, they held the second meeting, where the inter-rater reliability was calculated again. In the second round, the inter-rater reliability was 90%. Both rounds indicated a high level of agreement between the coders as 70% agreement is regarded to be the minimal ideal level for inter-rater reliability. However, both coders held a detailed discussion about the disagreed points until there was a complete agreement.

Procedures
The researchers first got official permission from the University's Ethical Committee, where the study was conducted. Then, they referred to the official website of the Council of Higher Education, the National Theses Database, in order to reach the MA theses and PhD dissertations published between 2001 and 2020 in the field of ELT.

As is seen in Figure 1, the researchers searched the keyword "English language teaching" in the aforementioned website and analyzed the emerging theses and dissertations in terms of their publication year, title, theme, and research methodology with regard to research design, participants/materials/subjects and data collection tools. For this purpose, the researchers downloaded each thesis and dissertation, carefully examined their abstract and methodology sections, and where necessary, examined results sections to get an overview of the nature of the study.
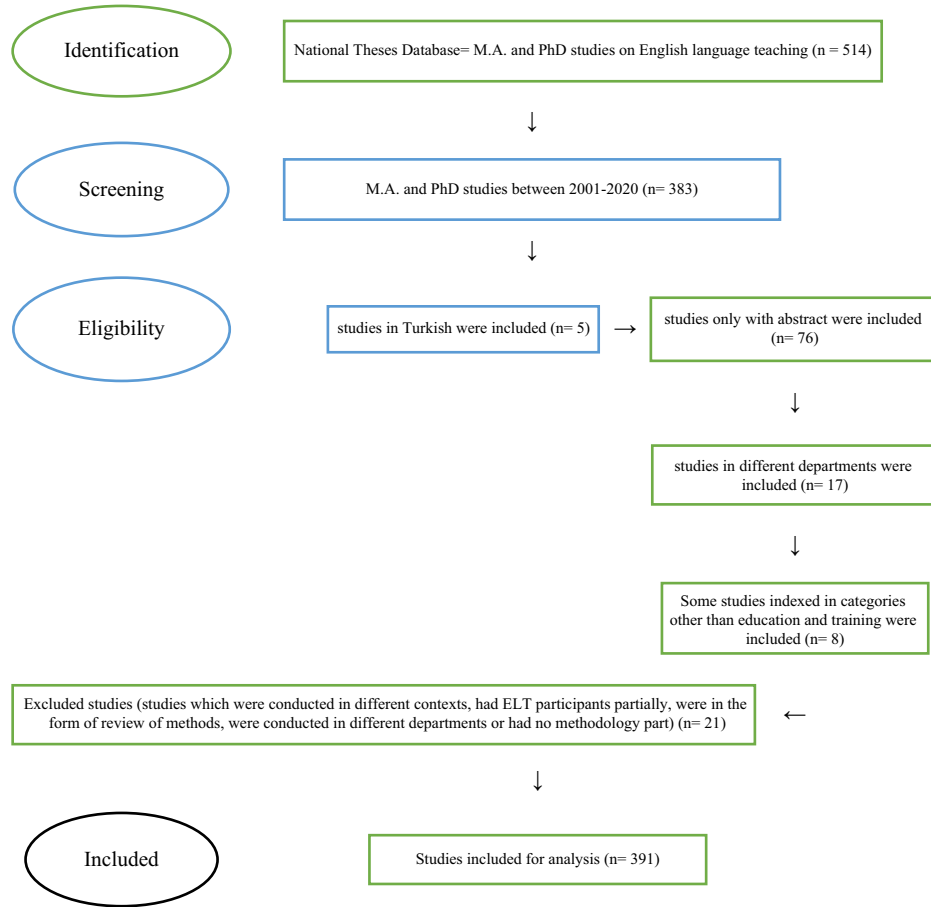
Figure 1.
The Prisma Flow Diagram for Paper Selection Process.

Since the abstract sections were insufficient for giving detailed information about the research methodology, the researchers moved on to the methodology and sometimes results/findings sections to avoid missing any important detail about the research trends and methodological issues.

At the end of the analyses, according to Table 1, it was found out that there were 101 PhD dissertations related to ELT in Turkey between 2001 and 2020. The year with the most PhD dissertations is 2016 ($f = 12$) and 2020 ($f = 11$), respectively, while the least numbers belong to 2007 and 2001 with only one dissertation. According to the table, there were 35 PhD dissertations published between 2001 and 2010, while there were 66 PhD dissertations published between 2011 and 2020.

A high majority of the dissertations were conducted within the ELT departments, but three were conducted at the Departments of Curriculum and Instruction. Since these were still related to ELT, they were included in the study. The dissertations which

were conducted in a different country were excluded from the study. That is, two dissertations were conducted in Iran, and they were thus excluded. Also, one of the dissertations included ELT Department students as one part of the study and offered limited insights on ELT, so it was also excluded. Additionally, one of the dissertations analyzed the validity of the claims of a model and another one reviewed language teaching methods. Thus, both were excluded from the study. On the other hand, it should be noted that 10 dissertations only had an abstract but were not in the form of full texts on the website. Since the researchers were not able to reach the full texts of these dissertations, only the abstracts were analyzed. All in all, five dissertations were excluded, and 96 were included in the analyses.

As for MA. theses, it was found out that there were 311 MA theses related to ELT in Turkey between 2001 and 2020. The year with the most number of MA theses is 2019 ($f = 36$), whereas the year with the least number is 2008 ($f = 6$). According to the table, there were 143 MA theses published between 2001 and 2010 while there were 168 MA theses published between 2011 and 2020. A majority of the theses were conducted within ELT Department; however, five were conducted at the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (two were written in Turkish), two were conducted at the Department of English Linguistics and Literature, two were at the Department of Western Languages and Literature Applied Linguistics, one was at Department of Translation and Interpretation, one was at the Department of Educational Administration and Supervision, one was at the Department of Computer

Table 1.
Distribution of PhD Dissertations and MA Theses by Year

Year	PhD Dissertations	MA Theses
2001–2010	35	143
2011–2020	66	168
Total	101	311

Education and Instructional Technology (written in Turkish). These theses were still related to ELT, so they were included. Among these theses, four were included since they focused on ELT. Finally, 67 MA theses were available in abstracts but not as full texts. However, these theses were still considered for the analyses based on the limited information provided in the abstract.

As for the excluded theses, one of the theses written in Turkish was conducted at the Department of Psychological Services in Education including ELT Department students as one part of the study and offered limited insights on ELT, so it was excluded. Another one was conducted at the Department of Education Management and Supervision and again included ELT Department students as one part of the study, offering limited insights on ELT, so it was excluded. Also, the theses which were conducted in a different country were excluded from the study in that four were conducted in Iraq, one in Libya, and one in Kosovo, so they were all excluded due to contextual differences. The other excluded theses were conducted on different groups that were not related to ELT. For example, the ones conducted with participants from different departments and faculties, and the ones in the form of a review of literature were also excluded from the study. All in all, 16 MA theses were excluded, and 295 theses were included in the analyses.

Findings

Emerging Themes and Categories

At the end of the analyses, seven themes emerged in the MA theses and these are presented in Table 2. These themes were teaching methodology, SLA, program and material evaluation, teacher education, discourse analysis, intercultural communication, and language testing and assessment. While teaching methodology was the most studied theme with 104 occurrences, language testing and assessment was the least studied theme with 15 occurrences.

Categories of these themes are as in the following. The teaching methodology theme covered the categories of teaching language skills and domains, approaches and methods, technology-assisted language learning (TALL), and academic writing. Teacher education included professional development, teacher beliefs, and teacher competencies. Program and material evaluation consisted of program, course, and coursebook evaluation, Common European Framework (CEF)/English Language Portfolio (ELP), and syllabus suggestions. The SLA theme contained acquisition theories, learning styles and strategies, individual differences, and ELF. On the other hand, the intercultural communication theme was made up of studies on pragmatics, nonverbal communication, sociocultural principles, and nonlinguistic elements. Discourse analysis studies covered the categories of discourse markers, genre analysis, corpus studies, and conversation analysis.

As for the PhD dissertations, again, seven themes emerged, and these are presented in Table 3. These themes were teaching methodology, teacher education, program and material evaluation, SLA, intercultural communication, discourse analysis, and language testing and assessment. While teaching methodology was the most studied theme with 28 occurrences, language testing and assessment was the least studied theme with three occurrences.

As it is seen, teaching methodology was the most studied theme while language testing and assessment was the least studied

Table 2.
Emerging Themes and Categories in the MA Theses

Theme	Category	Frequency
Teaching methodology	Language skills/domains	49
	Approaches and methods	27
	Technology-assisted language learning	23
	Academic writing	5
	Total	104
Second language acquisition	Individual differences	32
	Learning styles and strategies	21
	Acquisition theories	11
	English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)	3
	Total	67
Program and material evaluation	Material evaluation	20
	Program and curriculum evaluation	19
	CEF/ELP	4
	Total	43
Teacher education	Professional development	17
	Teacher beliefs	13
	Teacher competency	2
	Pedagogical content knowledge	1
	Metalinguistic knowledge	1
	Needs assessment	1
	Total	35
Discourse analysis	Discourse markers, theories, genres	8
	Corpus study	7
	Conversation analysis	6
	Total	21
Intercultural communication	Pragmatics	5
	ICC	2
	Nonverbal communication	1
	Sociocultural principles	1
	Twitter	1
	Body language awareness	1
	Implicatures	1
	Willingness to communicate	1
	Self-efficacy	1
	Repetitions	1
	Visibility	1
	Task effect	1
	Total	17
Language testing and assessment	Testing speaking	2
	Literacy measure	2
	Testing writing	2
	Testing vocabulary	2
	Testing reading	1
	LYS-5	1
	Language assessment	1
	Web 2.0 tools	1
	Alternative assessment	1
	Proficiency test	1
	Portfolio development	1
	Total	15

Note: CEF = Common European Framework; ELP = English Language Portfolio; ICC: Intercultural Communicative Competence. LYS-5 = EAT; (EAT: English Admission Test).

theme in both MA theses and PhD dissertations. Another similarity was the program and material evaluation theme which was in third place in both groups.

Research Design

Out of 311 MA theses, 16 were excluded due to the scope or context of the study and 104 did not explicitly indicate the research design of the study so they were also excluded. In total, 191 MA theses explicitly indicated the research design. The distribution of the research design of the MA theses is shown below.

The theses and dissertations that adopted quantitative research design relied on experimental, descriptive, survey, quasi-experimental, explanatory, exploratory, and correlational studies. However, the studies with qualitative research design referred to the case study, action research, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, corpus study, phenomenological study, and document analysis.

According to Table 4, three different research design types were used in the relevant MA theses. Among these, the quantitative research design ($f = 89$) was the most preferred research design, this was followed by the mixed-methods research design ($f = 54$), and finally, the qualitative research design was in the third place ($f = 48$).

Out of 101 PhD dissertations, five were excluded due to the scope or context of the study and 17 did not explicitly indicate the study's research design so they were excluded. In total, 79 PhD dissertations explicitly indicated the research design. The distribution of the research design of the PhD dissertations is presented in Table 5.

According to the table, three different research designs were employed again in the relevant PhD dissertations. Among these, mixed-methods research design ($f = 39$) was the most preferred research design, whereas qualitative research design ($f = 22$) was in the second place. Finally, quantitative research design ($f = 18$) was in the third place. It seems that the MA theses and PhD dissertations followed research designs in different frequencies. Specifically, while quantitative research design was the dominant design in the MA theses, mixed-methods research design was the dominant one in the PhD dissertations.

Participants

Out of 311 MA theses, 23 were excluded due to the scope of the study or limited/no information provided in the abstract. Thus, the participants/materials/subjects in 288 MA theses are displayed in Table 6. Tertiary-level students included undergraduate and graduate students in different departments and preparatory class students. Instructors included three categories, namely university lecturers at different departments, in-service English teachers, and administrators. K-12 students were MoNE students. Documents covered coursebook, corpus, and curriculum. Finally, the "others" group included parents, preschool children, specialists, counselors, and native speakers of English and Turkish.

When the participants in the MA theses were analyzed, it was seen that five different groups/materials were included as participants/materials. Among them, tertiary-level students ($f = 225$) were the most studied group, whereas others ($f = 10$) were the least focused groups as participants.

Out of 101 PhD dissertations, five were excluded and the participants/materials/subjects in 96 PhD dissertations are displayed in Table 7.

Table 3.
Emerging Themes and Categories in the PhD Dissertations

Theme	Category	Frequency
Teaching methodology	Language skills/domains	11
	Approaches and methods	6
	Technology-assisted language learning	6
	Academic writing	5
	Total	28
Teacher education	Professional development	6
	Teacher beliefs	5
	Teaching identity	2
	Teacher competencies	2
	Professional vision	1
	Teaching image	1
	Engagement with research	1
	Post-observation feedback	1
	Peer mentoring	1
	Preparing a new syllabus	1
	Reflective teaching	1
	Total	22
Program and material evaluation	Program and curriculum evaluation	9
	Material evaluation	6
	CEF/ELP	3
	Total	18
Second language acquisition	Acquisition theories	4
	Learning styles and strategies	5
	Individual differences	4
	English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)	2
	Total	15
Intercultural communication	Curriculum analysis	1
	Academic self-concept	1
	Critical intercultural awareness	1
	Lecturer attitudes	1
	Pragmatic competence	1
	Willingness to communicate	1
	Total	6
Discourse analysis	Genre analysis	2
	Conversation analysis	3
	Total	5
Language testing and assessment	Foreign language assessment literacy	1
	Cognitive diagnostic assessment	1
	Portfolio assessment	1
	Total	3

Note: CEF = Common European Framework; ELP = English Language Portfolio.

When the participants in the PhD dissertations were analyzed, it was seen that five different groups/materials were included as participants/materials. Among them, tertiary-level students ($f = 84$) were the most studied group whereas MoNE students ($f = 2$) were the least focused group. According to the tables,

Table 4.
Research Design of the MA Theses

Research Design	Categories	Frequency
Quantitative research design	Quantitative	30
	Descriptive study	24
	Experimental	16
	Survey	8
	Quasi-experimental	7
	Explanatory	2
	Exploratory	1
	Correlational	1
	Total	89
Mixed-methods research design	Mixed	53
	Empirical	1
	Total	54
Qualitative research design	Qualitative	19
	Case study	13
	Action research	6
	Conversation analysis	5
	Corpus study	4
	Document analysis	1
	Total	48

tertiary-level students appeared to be favored in both MA theses and PhD dissertations as the dominant participant group, and this was followed by instructors.

Data Collection Tools
Out of 311 MA theses, 23 were excluded due to the scope of the study or limited/no information provided in the abstract. Personal information forms and demographic information forms were excluded from the analysis. Overall, the data

Table 5.
Research Design of the PhD Dissertations

Research Design	Categories	Frequency
Mixed-methods research design	Mixed method	39
	Total	39
Qualitative research design	Qualitative	6
	Case study	5
	Action research	5
	Discourse analysis	2
	Corpus study	2
	Phenomenological study	1
	Document analysis	1
	Total	22
Quantitative research design	Quantitative	4
	Experimental	7
	Quasi-experimental	2
	Descriptive	4
	Survey	1
	Total	18

Table 6.
Participants/Materials/Subjects in the MA Theses

Participants	Categories	Frequency
Tertiary-level students	Preservice English teachers	149
	Preparatory class students	54
	University students in other departments	16
	Graduate students	6
	Total	225
Instructors	University lecturers	62
	In-service English teachers	37
	Administrators	7
	Total	106
K-12 students	MoNE students	25
Documents	Coursebook	5
	Corpus	5
	Curriculum and materials	4
	Total	14
Others	Native speakers of English	4
	Native speakers of Turkish	3
	Children	2
	Parents	1
	Specialist	1
	List	1
	Counselor	1
	Total	13

Note: MoNE = Ministry of National Education.

Table 7.
Participants/Materials/Subjects in the PhD Dissertations

Participants		Frequency
Tertiary-level students	Preservice English teachers	60
	Preparatory class students	18
	University students in other departments	3
	Graduate students	3
	Total	84
Instructors	University lecturers	35
	In-service English teachers	11
	Total	46
Documents	Corpus	4
	Coursebook	1
	Total	5
Others	Native speakers of English	2
	Native speakers of Turkish	1
	Referees	1
	Editors	1
	Total	5
K-12 students	MoNE students	2
	Total	2

Note: MoNE = Ministry of National Education.

Table 8.
Data Collection Tools in the MA Theses

Data Collection Tools	Frequency
Documents	193
Questionnaire	179
Interview	103
Test	58
Scale	37
Observation	16

Table 9.
Data Collection Tools in the PhD Dissertations

Data Collection Tools	Frequency
Documents	118
Interview	67
Questionnaire	56
Scale	19
Test	19
Observation	17

collection tools used in 288 MA theses are displayed in Table 8.

To illustrate, documents included various categories such as diaries, essays, journals, reports, tasks, sheets, field notes, compositions, and recordings. Interviews, on the other hand, covered stimulated recalls, conferences, sessions, discussions, and reflections. As for tests, a number of tools were used in the form of a vocabulary test, achievement test, discourse completion test, multiple-choice test, comprehension test, reading test, retention test, and grammaticality judgment test.

According to the table, various data collection tools were employed in the MA theses. While documents ($f = 193$) were in the first place, observation ($f = 16$) was in the last place.

As for 101 PhD dissertations, six were excluded due to the scope or context of the study or limited/no information provided in the abstract. Background questionnaires and demographic information sheets were also excluded. Thus, the data collection tools used in 95 PhD dissertations are displayed in Table 9.

As can be seen from the table, various data collection tools were employed in the PhD dissertations. While documents ($f = 118$) were the most preferred tools, observation ($f = 17$) was the least preferred tool. The similarities between the MA theses and PhD dissertations were the use of documents in the first place and the use of observation in the last place.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study reviewed the MA theses and PhD dissertations in ELT published between 2001 and 2020 in Turkey in terms of the theme of the study subject, research design, participants, and data collection tools. At the end of the analyses, it was revealed that there were seven themes in both MA theses and PhD dissertations.

The teaching methodology was the most studied theme in both groups while language testing and assessment were the least studied themes. To begin with the MA theses, Ekizoğlu (2019) examined the syntactical development of ELT students through one-to-one feedback and found out that one-to-one feedback fostered students' syntactic ability in the writing process. Ekiz (2013) aimed to reveal whether reading about the native culture in the target language could affect reading self-efficacy and reading marks. The author concluded that the topics about the native culture appealed to the majority of the participants, facilitated their vocabulary guessing, and increased their knowledge about their own culture. Göksel (2017) focused on prospective teachers' concepts of the features of an effective foreign language teacher and questioned the role of the EFL teacher education program in their views. It was shown that professional development, the knowledge of EFL teachers, and having good relationships with

students came to the fore in the emerging categories. Boldan (2019) drew attention to the effect of anxiety coping strategies used by instructors and learners on learners' foreign language speaking anxiety among ELT students. The author demonstrated that the participating students had a moderate level of foreign language speaking anxiety and female students had a higher level of anxiety. Also, linguistic deficiencies and speaking in front of others were the most common sources of speaking anxiety. Finally, Kamaz-Gümüşel (2019) revealed in-service English language teachers' attitudes toward ELF and concluded that the participants favored native-like attainment for speaking skills both for themselves and for their students. However, they highlighted the importance of the integration of non-native varieties in their English lessons. As for PhD dissertations, Eryılmaz (2020) investigated the professional identity development of seven participants who held dual identities as English language teachers and teacher trainers. It was found out that the participants constructed trainer identities by being assigned as trainers in their institutions or by personally claiming for such an identity, and they mostly relied on their teacher knowledge and experience. Tosun (2011) analyzed the process and interactive models for improving reading skills in ELT and revealed that there was a significant difference in terms of age and gender among ELT students. Mede (2012), on the other hand, aimed to design and evaluate a language preparatory program at an English-medium university. Finally, Geçkinli (2020) examined the perceptions of Turkish EFL teachers and students about ELF and concluded that teachers tended to hold a positive attitude toward ELF whereas students held a neutral attitude.

In terms of research design, the quantitative research design was the most preferred design in the MA theses while it was mixed-methods research design which came to the fore in the PhD dissertations. To exemplify the MA theses, Mermer (2020) referred to mixed-method research design including both quantitative and qualitative methods to detect ELT majors' perceptions of the difficulties of listening comprehension problems via a 5-point Likert-scale and open-ended questions. Tan (2020) employed a quantitative method to examine the impacts of extensive writing on university students' writing scores and learners' writing attitudes through a Likert-scale questionnaire. Finally, Koca (2019) conducted a corpus-driven genre analysis study to analyze the genre-specific rhetorical structure of discussion sections of unpublished research articles written by Turkish MA and PhD students enrolled in an ELT graduate program. As for the PhD dissertations, Şaban (2020) examined the implementation of differentiated instruction in EFL classrooms in higher education in an English preparatory program and employed a mixed-method research design by a collection of data via qualitative and quantitative questionnaires, instructor and student interviews, lesson

plans, observations as well as instructor and student reflections. Köse (2010), on the other hand, conducted a study on the contributions of form and meaning-focused translation instruction on the progress of translations, reading, and language skills of ELT students through a reading comprehension test, translation test, language skills self-assessment scale, and a questionnaire. İlin (2003) referred to qualitative research design to describe how supervisors at ELT Department perceive their supervisory feedback and how their perceptions affected their supervision practices by using recordings of feedback sessions, holding interviews, and making observations. Finally, Eveyik-Aydın (2015) conducted a corpus-based genre analysis in the discussion and conclusion sections of research articles within the applied linguistics and ELT fields.

Similarly, tertiary-level students were the most studied participants in both MA theses and PhD dissertations and instructors followed this order. However, MoNE stakeholders were studied less compared to tertiary-level students. This finding attracts attention and possible reasons could be investigated in future studies (Acıroğlu, 2020). To illustrate the MA theses, Kulak (2019) investigated the beliefs of preservice English teachers about their most and least preferred vocabulary learning strategies. Erol (2019) analyzed EFL preparatory school students' willingness to communicate. Koşar (2019) conducted a research study on primary school English language teachers' perceptions and practices regarding learner autonomy. Finally, Ertekin (2003) referred to the parental diaries of two bilingual children exposed to English and Turkish from birth, and two monolingual children exposed to Turkish from birth. The aim was to reveal the effects of bilingualism on early language acquisition in terms of morphosyntactic features and code-switching. As for the PhD dissertations, Balbay (2020) examined the effect of critical pedagogical content integration through critical awareness-raising content integration among preservice English teachers. Dağtan (2020) focused on the perceptions of students and lecturers on learning and teaching of speaking skills in ELT departments. Cincioğlu (2011) worked with mentors at various schools to get a deeper understanding of their perceptions of the effectiveness of practicum. Finally, Andarab (2014) analyzed a series of ELF-based coursebooks to reveal whether they fulfilled ELF requirements.

As for data collection tools, documents were the most favored data collection tools, whereas observation was the least preferred one in both MA theses and PhD dissertations. To begin with the MA theses, Güven (2019) applied questionnaires to reveal the attitudes of ELT students and teachers toward using MALL. Uztosun (2008), on the other hand, referred to stimulated interviews to demonstrate the use of communication strategies employed by preservice English teachers. As for tests, Abal (2016) employed reading and writing tests to examine preservice English teachers' knowledge and use of discourse markers, while Göknil (2015) used a lexical achievement test to see the impact of personalization on the lexical competence. Also, Asmalı (2012) administered a written discourse completion test to compare the apology and refusal strategies used by Turkish, Polish, and Latvian students at ELT Department. On the other hand, among the PhD dissertations, Akdemir (2013) held semi-structured interviews with ELT freshmen students to examine their characteristics as listeners. Kazancı (2018) administered a questionnaire to investigate reading medium preferences and pertaining reasons of university students from the Electrical-Electronics Engineering and ELT departments. Kanatlar (2005) referred to observations,

questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews to reveal the role of using the native language in beginner-level speaking classes. Finally, Uzun (2014) referred to MOODLE software to apply tests to find out the place of the software in academic vocabulary acquisition.

This study's results bear some similarities and differences with the relevant literature regarding research trends in applied linguistics. Parallel to Kirmizi (2012), language skills and domains were the most studied category under the theme of teaching methodology, but culture attracted less attention in the MA theses. Also, Kirmizi (2012) found out that psychology was in the second place, and in this study, individual differences (anxiety, motivation, attitude, and personality traits) were under the theme of SLA, which was in the second place as well. As for PhD dissertations, similar to Özmen et al. (2016), mixed-methods research design was the most used research design, and tertiary-level students were the most studied participant groups. Echoing Acıroğlu (2020), the quantitative research design was the most preferred study design in the MA theses, and mixed-methods research design was the dominant design in the PhD dissertations. However, in this study, documents were the most preferred data collection tools in both groups, which contrasts with the findings of Acıroğlu (2020).

In terms of research trend studies in research articles, there are also some similarities and differences. To begin with, SLA was in the second place in the MA theses, while it was in the fourth place in the PhD dissertations, which is in contrast to Lei and Liu's findings (2019a). In addition, TALL studies were not studied as commonly as the language skills and domains category, which again contrasts with Lei and Liu (2019a), who found that CALL-related studies were popular in the research articles. Also, while ELF showed a significant increase in the research articles in the study of Lei and Liu (2019b), in the current study, ELF had few occurrences in the relevant theses and dissertations. These differences may have resulted from different academic genres examined in this study and those of Lei and Liu (2019a). Finally, similar to Ma and Kim (2014), university students were the dominant participants in the MA theses and PhD dissertations.

There are a number of caveats that need to be mentioned within the context of research trends in ELT-related theses and dissertations. First of all, it has been found out that there is a convergence between the ELT-related MA theses and PhD dissertations to a great extent in terms of themes of study subjects, even though the order of occurrence of some subjects is different. In this regard, the thesis/dissertation writers and supervisors can refer to current research trends at the international level rather than relying on domestic studies to keep up with research trends in applied linguistics. Based on the relevant literature, some discrepancies between this study and international studies have been detected in that a subject study which is said to be on the rise in the last decades is not ranked in the first, second, or third place in this study. To touch upon a more recent subarea at the international level and reveal some context-bound differences, international studies, and domestic studies should be considered. In addition, mixed-methods research design was favored in both groups. MA and PhD students could refer to this design to benefit from complementary purposes of words and numbers or triangulate the gathered data. However, some rarely employed research designs such as action research, conversation analysis, corpus study, and discourse analysis can be used in future studies as well.

As for participants, preservice English teachers were the most studied participant group in both MA theses and PhD dissertations, which may stem from the nature of the study or convenience sampling facilities. However, the other participant groups such as in-service English teachers, students, and administrators at state schools should be included more in theses and dissertations in order to enhance university–school cooperation, bridge a theory–practice gap, and gain a wider perspective about different stakeholders.

As for data collection tools, documents were the most employed tools in the theses and dissertations. Also, questionnaires and interviews were densely employed in both groups. This may stem from the need to reach more participants, increase the chances of generalization, or offer in-depth analysis. Since relying on more than one data collection tool may facilitate triangulating data and crosschecking study findings, ELT practitioners and professionals are suggested to administer different tools to offer a more complete picture of the phenomenon in question rather than adhering to the mainstream research culture in specific contexts.

In a nutshell, a thesis or dissertation in ELT should be carried out according to the latest research trends in different countries and ENL/ESL/EFL contexts to catch up with the current topics and changes in the field. There should be increased opportunities to include MoNE students, teachers, and administrators in these studies to provide a wider perspective and come up with concrete results. Additionally, varied data collection tools should be employed instead of conforming to the dominant, traditional sense of conducting research studies at the domestic level. For all these issues to be addressed, the rapport between supervisors and thesis/dissertation writers could be established, and these writers could receive more facilities like a grant or other type of financial support to carry out their studies. Also, research awareness and motivation of in-service teachers can be enhanced, and these teachers can be supported in their institutions. Finally, the communication channels between universities and state schools should be open to provide useful solutions for existing problems in terms of teaching, testing, professional development, and conducting scientific research.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study has some limitations. First of all, the researchers reached the theses and dissertations which included the term "English Language Teaching" in their titles, abstracts, and keywords, or presented ELT as their subject at the Thesis Centre. Thus, the ones with different labeling or subjects at the Thesis Centre or the ones which did not narrow down the focus of the thesis/dissertation in the subject section were excluded from the study. Also, it should be noted that some theses/dissertations only had an abstract and were not available in the form of full texts on the website. Since the researchers were not able to reach their full texts, only the abstracts were analyzed, and the relevant analysis was conducted based on the limited information found in the abstracts. Although the full texts were not available, these theses/dissertations were still included in the study. Besides, some PhD dissertations and MA theses do not explicitly indicate the name of their research design. Finally, some of these theses/dissertations do not use a specific term to define their research design or qualitative analyses although the writers give detailed information about the steps they followed while interpreting/coding/categorizing the data. In this case, the researchers did not intervene or add extra comments, but they preferred to analyze

the thesis/dissertation based on the given information. Last but not least, the validity and reliability procedures were not considered in the analyses.

As a suggestion for further research, theses and dissertations published at the national and international levels can be compared to detect the similarities and differences in different countries as cross-cultural research. Furthermore, based on these similarities and differences, a possible distinction might be detected in various ENL/ESL/EFL contexts with regard to the changing nature of research trends in academic genres. In this way, future researchers can detect the niche in the relevant literature more easily and focus on the missing aspects to add originality to their study and contribute to the field accordingly.

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Extended Abstract

Aim: This study aims to review the master theses and doctoral dissertations on English Language Teaching (ELT) published between 2001-2020 in Turkey in terms of themes, research design, participants and data collection tools. The researchers aimed to review a less studied academic type, namely, the master theses and doctoral dissertations in the field of ELT published on the official website of the National Thesis Database of the Council of Higher Education in Turkey in the last two decades

Method: The researchers first obtained the official permission from the Ethics Committee of the university where the study was conducted. Then, they visited the official website of the National Thesis Database of the Council of Higher Education (https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/giris.jsp) to reach the master theses and doctoral dissertations published between 2001-2020. While analyzing the data, the researchers created a classification of the emerging themes and constantly compared the theses and dissertations due to the iterative nature of qualitative data analysis. In other words, they made constant comparisons in line with the incoming data flow. Some keywords representing the basic idea in the content of the theses and dissertations were determined and the emerging themes were examined to find their frequencies. Therefore, summative content analysis which involves counting and comparing keywords or content based on the interpretation of the underlying context was used.

Findings: At the end of the analysis, seven themes emerged in both master theses and doctoral dissertations. While teaching methodology was the most studied subject, language testing and assessment was the least studied subject in both groups. As to differences, second language acquisition ranked second in the master theses while teacher education ranked second in doctoral dissertations. In terms of research design, there were three research designs both groups. While quantitative research was in the first place in the master theses, it was mixed methods research design for the doctoral dissertations. As for participants/materials, five main themes emerged. In both groups, while tertiary level students were in the first place, instructors were in the second place. In data collection tools, it was found that documents were the most preferred data collection tools in both groups. These documents consisted of various categories such as diary, essay, journal, report, task, sheets, field notes, compositions and recordings. However, observation was the least preferred data collection tool in both groups. Finally, questionnaires were in the second place as a data collection tool in the master theses while interviews were in the second place in the doctoral dissertations.

Discussion and Conclusion: In order to address recent topics in master theses and doctoral dissertations, cover the increasing interest in a particular field or reveal some contextual differences in a current topic, international studies as well as national studies should be taken into account. In addition, mixed methods research design was heavily preferred in both groups to benefit from the complementary purposes of words and numbers or triangulate data. However, some rarely used research designs such as action research, conversation analysis, corpus study and discourse analysis can also be used in theses and dissertations.

In terms of participants, the most studied group in both master theses and doctoral dissertations included tertiary level students and especially pre-service English teachers, which may be due to convenience sampling or research purposes. However, in order to improve university-school cooperation, bridge theory-practice gap and gain more comprehensive perspectives on different stakeholders, other groups such as in-service English teachers, students and administrators at state schools should be included more in these studies. In this vein, researchers may aim to reach more students/teachers/administrators at state schools. In addition, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) may encourage teachers to participate in workshops, projects, seminars, and cooperate with academicians by filling out questionnaires, or participate in activities such as holding interviews, making observations and writing diaries. In this sense, stakeholders at state schools should be informed about participation in thesis/dissertation studies by local and academic authorities.

In data collection tools, while documents were the most preferred data collection tools in both groups, questionnaires and interviews were also frequently preferred. This may be partly due to the need for reaching more participants, increasing the chances of generalization, or providing in-depth analysis. Since relying on more than one data collection tool may facilitate triangulating data and cross-checking study findings, ELT practitioners and professionals are suggested to administer different tools to offer a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon in question rather than adhering to the mainstream research culture in specific contexts.