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Finding and minding the gaps for language education in Turkey: A content analysis on doctoral dissertations in ELT programs from 2010-2020¹

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Abstract

The number of ELT doctoral dissertations is growing every year, and these are great sources to spot the leading research trends and the research gaps in the field. Previous studies have been conducted to explore research trends in Turkey, accordingly journal articles and conference proceedings were examined. However, little research has aimed to investigate doctoral dissertations. As the number of graduates increases every year, a current study exploring the research trends of ELT in Turkey is needed. Therefore, the present research aims to fill this gap by examining 252 doctoral dissertations published between 2010 and 2020. Content analysis was conducted on the titles and abstract parts of the dissertations and then, coding was applied with the help of a priori codes suggested by the relevant literature. Findings have suggested that Teacher Professional Development is the leading research topic while Culture, Social, and Gender Issues are found to be under-researched. The results imply that these areas need improvements on both local and global scales. In light of the findings, further research in certain areas is suggested for local researchers.

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Keywords: Doctoral dissertations; content analysis; ELT research trends; TESOL

1. Introduction

As in many countries all over the world, the final requirement of a graduate program is writing a thesis, which is a great responsibility for candidates of the programs. However, deciding on a thesis topic might be a challenge since a developed literature review and appropriate methodology are necessary. Especially, the TESOL (Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages) students have great difficulty in finding research gaps in literature since TESOL is one of the most researched fields of social sciences. Only certain aspects of TESOL remain under-researched today and these aspects require longitudinal design and very immerse qualitative techniques in terms of methodology. İnal et al. (2016) state that TESOL research in Turkey is dominated by the studies adopting quantitative research designs and they are mostly positivist in nature. Therefore, some concerns arise in that some areas might have

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been under immerse investigation due to the practicality of methodology. Another reason why TESOL is an active research area stems from the status of the English language in the world. English as a lingua franca (ELF) means all countries except for those whose native languages are English in the world have something to do with English language education and accordingly, a lot has been made to improve the quality of language education in EFL countries. Turkey is one of the EFL countries trying to improve the quality of its language education. However, Türker (2006) claims that Turkey does not meet the needs of ELF, so the research paradigms cluster around standard target language and target culture. Yet still, efforts have recently been made to comply with changes that emerged with EFL, and the latest studies promise more room for the international role of English in teaching (see Bayyurt & Sifakis, 2017; Ceyhan-Bingöl & Özkan, 2019; Deniz & Özkan & Bayyurt, 2016; Inal & Özdemir, 2015; Kaçar & Bayyurt, 2018; Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2015).

Based on the current position of English as an international language and the well-researched nature of TESOL, the purpose of the present paper is to examine doctoral dissertations published by the Council of Higher Education in Turkey. A qualitative approach has been adopted to discover local trends and identify under-researched areas of the field. The significance of the study lies beneath the purpose of the study, which is to track down local research topics and analyze the research paradigms of ELT in Turkey. The results have been aimed to be guiding for researchers as they will describe the present situation and shed light on future research.

1.1. Literature review

TESOL has a dynamic nature both as a discipline and profession. Therefore, our focus is shifting from one to the other following the changing needs of the world. Accordingly, it is inevitable to witness changing trends in the field. Brown (1991) embraced the notion of time as an important issue while demonstrating the changes in TESOL and he examined the studies of the quarter-century, published in TESOL Quarterly. After the examination of studies of the last 25 years, he unearthed four main issues in TESOL, dominating the period. Brown (1991) named these issues as focus on learner, socio-political and geographical issues, methods, and subject matter.

Under the category of focus on the learner, he stated two sub-categories as motivation and empowerment. For many years, researchers had investigated motivation through a dichotomy, however, it was later understood that motivation was a challenging issue. Integrative and instrumental motivations were not enough to come up with clear explanations. The notion of integrative motivation was shaken because it was seen that English had been widely used to communicate with non-native speakers. Besides, extrinsic motivation was found not to be at the heart of language learning even though its power cannot be ignored. Intrinsic motivation had been regarded to be effective and motivating. The other issue concerning learners is empowerment, which means equipping learners with skills that facilitate them in real life. Making learners powerful to survive had become one of the goals.

Socio-political and geographical issues had been emphasized a lot since the use of English around the world prevailed. Kachru's circle (1985) started to change; the lines of outer and expanding circles began to be blurred. Thus, the purpose of English teaching changed in time, programs needed to be consistent with the change. Also, under the same category, the change regarding "English Plus" programs and "English Only" programs was mentioned. Because they are home to many immigrants, Canada and the USA have discussed these programs for many years. "English Only" programs aim at developing the language by heavily exposing the learners to the English language and these programs ignore the effects of other languages and cultures in teaching English while "English Plus" programs value the co-occurrence of home or native languages and home cultures in the learning process. In 25 years, it was stated that "English Plus" programs became more prevalent as the cross-cultural role of English teaching

became prominent. This shift gave rise to bilingual education programs and immersion programs, which is an indicator of the fact that an open-minded policy started to be followed. Besides socio-political issues, the subject matter was focused. Providing learners the best way to learn and putting new ideas into practice were discussed. Content-based education started to gain the interest of practitioners since it is in a form in which skills are presented in an integrative way, also believed to be motivating as it could reflect learners' interests. Whole language education and task-based education had similar objectives and outcomes. One of the merits of subject matter was stated to be purposeful, too. Human issues were also seen as content and the purpose of this content was to empower students.

As the last issue, Brown (1991) came up with changing practices in methods. The shift from the mechanical nature of language to the social nature of language affected the practices within the classroom. Communicative, cooperative, and student-centered teachings were pedagogical reflections of this belief. Now that the social part of learning was involved in teaching, teaching language learning strategies became necessary in this regard. When we looked at the summary of the last 25 years of TESOL (1966-1991), what we can deduce is that trends seemed to move towards learner-centered methodology and intrinsic motivation seemed to lie behind each category. The changing nature of methodology embarked on new responsibilities on teachers and learners. In terms of teacher's role, communicative activities, out-of-class assignments, developing strategies for language skills, group activities, encouraging peer feedback gained importance while risk-taking, setting personal goals, socio-affective and cooperative learning, and making mistakes were rewarded in terms of learners.

A similar paper was published in 2006. Canagarajah (2006) examined the last 40 years of TESOL (1966-2006) and discussed his findings by considering Brown's (1991) findings. For the issue of learners, he proposed that 40 years showed that arguments over motivation reached a point in which adopting the right motivation became the key. Identity formation in language learning was found to be motivating and taking learners' backgrounds and needs into consideration were regarded as the starting point. Empowerment yielded its place to critical thinking and critical practice. As for the subject matter, human issues were found to be the foundation of what was being implemented within the lesson and whole language education blending communicative tasks gained a seat. Methods reached a different period in 2006. They raised the importance of learning strategies, thereby aiming to enhance learning opportunities. This period in which learners were taken into the middle of everything was named as post-method era. Socio-political issues somewhat changed direction but still very similar to the issues mentioned earlier. The importance of L1 dominated the research area as the "English Plus" movement had been mentioned earlier. In parallel with this, classroom code-switching became the area of interest. Revisiting Kachru's circles was seen as a must since being native and non-native came as vague terms. Within 15 years, many add-ons affected the trajectory of main issues, as well as new issues; globalization, the digital revolution, changing skills, and multidialectal English speakers and listeners gained remarkable attention from the scholars (see Benesch, 1999; Cook, 1999; Gebhard, 2005; Menard-Warwick, 2005; Murray, 2000; Raimes, 1991). His paper showed us that the changing needs of the world urged practitioners to find solutions rather than searching for the new. At the same time, what we witnessed is that TESOL is not stable but rather moving in that it has to do with changes in other disciplines.

Table 1. The issues in TESOL from 1966 to 2006

TESOL at Twenty-Five: What are the Issues? (Brown, 1991)	TESOL at Forty? What are the Issues? (Canagarajah, 2006)
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Focus on the learner	Intrinsic motivation to learn English is seen as a way of empowerment.	Learner's identity is paid great attention to as learners come from diverse backgrounds. Autonomy, critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and process orientation are seen as a means of empowerment.
Focus on sociopolitical and geographical issues	Sociopolitical issues position English as an international language and language policies are arranged accordingly.	Varieties of English come out as important determinants. Accordingly, World Englishes affect the design of curricula and classroom activities.
Focus on the subject matter	Content-based and Task-based curricula gain popularity.	Contents and genres are valued as to social and psychological aspects.
Focus on the method	Learner-centered and cooperative teaching plays an important role and training language strategies gain importance.	The post method era guides teachers to see the classrooms and learners as to how they are by not consulting preplanned techniques and approaches.

Canagarajah (2016) published a paper on the history of TESOL and in the 50th anniversary of TESOL Quarterly, he published another paper examining the trends and he proposed that even 10 years made the trajectory change. The period having been reached after 50 years in TESOL is highly complex as stated by Kramsch (2014); practitioners have a big confusion in mind over what they teach in the classrooms and what their learners will use in real life. Yet still, it has been seen that TESOL follows circular patterns with growing branches. Language acquisition, target language, literacy, teacher development are the issues newly mentioned in this paper when compared with his paper published in 2006. With the effects of globalization, SLA forms a generative construct in which every speaker can bring something from their existent background and communication remains as the primary component. The target language as the second new issue is the result of globalization, too. The fact that languages mingled with one another has changed the specified paths to follow. The pedagogical reflection of the issue makes practitioners ask: What kind of language should be taught in the classrooms? For the change in literacy, it can be stated that the change stems from the digital revolution. Due to the digital revolution, we have started to come across multimodality. The use of new genres is existent in the field. Finally, all the changes occurring in TESOL naturally have brought about the need for teacher development because teachers' beliefs have great effects on their practice. The overview of Canagarajah (2016) shows us that TESOL is shifting from predetermined models to more personalized and local models.

“from product to process and practice

from cognitive to social and ecological

from prepackaged methods to situated pedagogies and language socialization

from studying controlled classrooms and experimental settings to everyday contexts and ecologies

from the homogeneous to variation and the inclusive plurality

from knowledge or skills to identities, beliefs, and ideologies

from objective to personal and reflexive

from the generalized and global to specific and local.” (p.30)

As well as the global trends that emerged in TESOL, local trends have significant implications in that they lead researchers to decide on the areas that need improvement, and accordingly, come up with solutions to their research problems. Özmen et al. (2016) examined 137 doctoral dissertations published between 2010 and 2014 by adopting a meta-synthesis design. Subject areas, research paradigms, research contexts, and sampling methods of the dissertations were investigated to complete a clear picture of the local research trends. The subject areas were categorized under three major codes as Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Foreign Language Teacher Education, and Second Language Education. Their results showed that the majority of the doctoral thesis was categorized under the theme of Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Learner and teacher variables, language skills, curricular studies, and document analysis and language used were frequently investigated while multiple intelligences, intercultural communication, testing, young learners, World Englishes, Language competence, and technology received little attention. The doctoral research emerged as the second frequently studied theme, and pre-service teacher education received considerably more attention than in-service training. The last theme, second language acquisition, included the acquisition of morphosyntax, acquisition of lexemes, error analysis, and focus on form. Amongst these sub-areas, morphosyntax and error analysis were studied more when compared to the studies on lexemes and focus on form. The study concluded that rising interest in investigating pre-service teachers' language proficiency requires attention as it is not one of the priorities of the ELT curriculum.

Another study presenting the local trends were conducted by Alptekin and Tatar (2011). They investigated local professional journals, conference proceedings and papers, and Ph.D. dissertations for the period 2005-2009. Their investigation yielded seven categories; foreign language teaching and teachers, foreign language learning and learners, foreign language teacher education, listening and speaking, reading and writing, measure and evaluation, and language and culture. In terms of foreign language teaching, the majority of studies investigated a variety of teaching methods and approaches such as content-based instruction, content, and language integrated learning, task-based instruction, etc. Even though these methods have a communicative background, it was stated that pronunciation was received little attention. Materials were also evaluated within the framework of teaching and stated to be a concern amongst the researchers. Stereotypical representations in the coursebooks were investigated. Their findings regarding foreign language learning suggested that cognitive, affective, and social factors received a significant amount of attention by the researchers; learning strategies, attitudes, and motivation, and autonomy were closely investigated. A considerable amount of research was investigated on teacher education, specifically on in-service and pre-service teachers' attitudes, beliefs, values, and perceptions. It was also stated that major concern of research on pre-service teachers dealt with the English proficiency of teachers, which was not evaluated as a curricular priority. In terms of skills, local research trends seemed to focus on reading and writing for a variety of reasons while listening and speaking received little attention with surface-level analyses. For measurement and evaluation, validity and reliability issues of tests were founded to be a concern as well as test anxiety.

Within the scope of language and culture, English as a lingua franca received attention by examining native and non-native English speaker teachers, intercultural communication, the international position of English concerning critical pedagogy, and intercultural awareness of students.

Aydınlı and Ortaçtepe (2019) reviewed 140 research articles in locally published journals between 2010-2016 by building upon Alptekin and Tatar's (2011) study. One of the aims of the research was to spot the newest scholarly interests and improvements in Turkey. The review suggested that language learners had been investigated from various aspects; English as a lingua franca, CEFR, high-stake exams, technology-integration, teaching practices, etc., yet still factors affecting language learners such as learning difficulties and behavioral issues were suggested for further research. Studies on conversation analysis and interdisciplinary studies had been stated to be scant, therefore need more attention.

A review article on doctoral research between 2009 and 2013 was published by İnal et al. (2016). In this review, 25 doctoral dissertations were investigated, and the following categories were proposed; instructional variables and designs, learners, textbooks, and development and evaluation. Most of the dissertations were stated to focus on learning and classroom teaching, and this finding was followed by the effects of instructional variables, and issues regarding learning. The researchers suggested that more investigation was needed for speaking skills, classroom management, English as a lingua franca issue, and content and language integrated learning as there was an immense focus on the role of activities and instruction in the classroom.

In this present study, local trends of TESOL in Turkey are aimed to be discovered. This effort is not only restricted to find out the trends but also analyze frequently researched and under-researched areas to describe the current situation and to guide future research for the areas that need improvement. Therefore, 252 doctoral dissertations published between 2010 and 2020 have been taken under examination. For this aim, dissertations have been retrieved from the online database of the Council of Higher Education Thesis Center in Turkey. To discover the trends, abstracts and titles have been analyzed by the use of content analysis and the findings have been presented as a meta-analysis of the last ten years. The following research questions have been aimed to be answered:

1. What are the trends in ELT research in Turkey?
2. How are these trends similar or different from those that emerged globally?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The present study adopts a qualitative design by using two types of qualitative data analysis techniques. Content analysis was implemented to decide the themes of the thesis. The deductive approach of content analysis was utilized to place the emerging themes under a priori codes suggested by Lin & Cheng (2010). An inductive approach was also used to decide on the names of the themes that cannot be categorized based on a priori codes. When deciding on codes and categories, the data led researchers to conduct in-text meta-analysis "to provide a more comprehensive description of phenomenon researched by a group of studies" (Timulak, 2009, p. 592). The phenomenon of the present research refers to TESOL studies published nationwide as the requirement of ELT Ph.D. programs.

2.1. Data Source

The data were collected online from the Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education. The official website enables visitors to filter the theses as to time, the field of interest, and degree level. The Ph.D. theses published between the years of 2010 and 2020 in the field of English language education were typed into the search section. 257 Ph.D. theses were found on the database. However, 5 of them were excluded from the dataset since they were given within other Ph.D. programs such as translation studies, linguistics, and English literature. Therefore, the dataset of the present study includes 252 Ph.D. theses from the field of ELT.

2.3. Data Analysis

For data analysis of the research, two approaches have been adopted. Content analysis was utilized as it helps researchers gain new insights of data by referring to a certain context (Krippendorff, 1980), and also, it enables researchers to refer to pre-established data, codes, by making inductive and deductive judgments (Dörnyei, 2007). After scanning the titles and abstracts of the theses, the coding process was applied to the data. Coding was conducted by using a priori codes as suggested by the relevant literature. Lin and Cheng (2010) examined 493 M.A thesis abstracts retrieved from the national thesis database of Taiwan and aimed at discovering an overview of local research trends of TESOL concerning global trends. Therefore, these codes were preferred in the present study since Lin and Cheng's (2010) study employs a large sampling size and aims to compare local trends with global trends as this present paper does. Fourteen codes were obtained as the result of their study, and these codes and their scope can be found in Table 2 below.

Table 2. TESOL research trends codes suggested by Lin & Cheng (2010 p. 134)

Code	Scope of the code
Affective Factors (AF)	“Learner’s motivation; anxiety; belief; need; self-perception.”
Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)	“Computers, multimedia, the use of technology in teaching or learning.”
Culture, Social, or Gender Issues (CSG)	“Cross-cultural studies; cultural learning; multicultural or ethnic issues; gender differences; bilingualism; socioeconomic status; family factors.”
English for Specific Purposes (ESP)	“ESP program; English for academic purpose; English for occupational purposes.”
Integrated Skills (IS)	“Studies on the combination of two or more language skills.”
Learner Factors (LF)	“Individual difference; prior learning; cognitive development; conception.”

Linguistics (LIN)	“Studies related to phonetics; morphology; syntax; discourse analysis; pragmatics; sociolinguistics; psycholinguistics; neurolinguistics.”
Language Skills (LS)	“Listening; speaking and communication (including pronunciation); reading (including phonological awareness, metalinguistic awareness, or phonics); writing (including spelling); vocabulary; grammar.”
Materials or Curriculum Design and Evaluation (MC)	“Teaching or learning materials (including supplementary materials, projects, or tasks); curriculum design and/or evaluation.”
Second Language Acquisition (SLA)	“SLA studies; interlanguage studies.”
Testing and Evaluation (TEVAL)	“Language tests; achievement tests; portfolio assessment; peer evaluation; GEPT test; college entrance exam.”
Teacher Factors (TF)	“Teachers’ beliefs; personality; attitude; aptitude; pedagogical or content knowledge; teacher behaviors and strategies.”
Teaching Method (TM)	“Teaching methods, such as communicative language teaching, audio-lingual or direct method, task-based approach; the application of specific teaching activities, such as drama, jazz chants, storytelling, or debates.”
Teacher Professional Development (TPD)	“Pre- or in-service English teacher training or programs; team teaching; tour study program for teachers.”

To provide inter-coder reliability, the data were revisited and recoded with the help of a colleague. Final codes emerged after multiple coding processes. Qualitative data analysis revealed categories and then, the data was quantified to present it with frequencies and percentages. Some research titles and abstracts seemed to focus on more than one category. In such cases, researchers went into detail in dissertations and searched for what was intended in the thesis study. Some of the codes suggested by Lin & Cheng (2010) were not used such as; Affective Factors (AF) and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) since Affective Factors can be categorized under Learner Factors (LF). If Affective Factors (AF) had been taken as a code in the data analysis, many other aspects regarding learner factors should have been used as a code, which would be confusing and might have been misleading. Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) was not a code for the present research even though many theses seem to include elements regarding CALL. However, it is known that CALL is a medium for improving language learning, it is not an area intended to be improved in language learning. Other codes stated by the previous research did not emerge in data analysis, which is the reason why they are not mentioned in this paper. Final codes of the present research emerged as follows:

1. Culture, Social, or Gender Issues (CSG)

2. Materials or Curriculum Design and Program Evaluation (MCDPE)
3. Language Skills (LS)
4. Learner Factors (LF)
5. Linguistics (LI)
6. Second Language Acquisition (SLA)
7. Teacher Factors (TF)
8. Teacher Professional Development (TPD)
9. Teaching Methods (TM)
10. Testing and Evaluation (TEV)

3. Findings

3.1. Qualitative Findings

The content analysis conducted on the abstracts and titles of the doctoral dissertations yielded 10 categories as stated below. Culture, Social, or Gender Issues, Materials or Curriculum Design and Program Evaluation, Language Skills, Learner Factors, Linguistics, Second Language Acquisition, Teacher Factors, Teacher Professional Development, Teaching Methods, Testing and Evaluation were the codes suggested by Lin & Cheng (2010). Table 3 given below exemplifies findings taken from the actual data analysis process with example units.

Table 3. Examples of qualitative findings of the themes

Categories	Example units from the themes of the theses
Culture, Social, or Gender Issues (CSG)	Classroom power relations in an English as a foreign language setting from a critical pedagogical perspective
Materials or Curriculum Design and Program Evaluation (MCDPE)	An evaluation of second grade English language curriculum: Teachers' perceptions and issues in implementation
Language Skills (LS)	The impact of the explicit instruction of lexical bundles on academic writing skills of Turkish EFL learners
Learner Factors (LF)	Willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language among Turkish students in Turkey
Linguistics (LIN)	A corpus-based approach to pragmatic markers: Comparison of Turkish learners of English and native speakers of English
Second Language Acquisition (SLA)	Investigation of grammatical and lexical errors in three different levels Turkish EFL learners' spoken corpus
Teacher Factors (LF)	A case study of Turkish and Polish English teachers' effectiveness

Teacher Professional Development (TPD)	Teaching as a performing art: Promoting nonverbal immediacy of English Teacher Trainees
Teaching Methods (TM)	The effect of project-based learning in teaching the English language to children in preschool education
Testing and Evaluation (TEV)	Washback and instructional sensitivity of a theme-based high-stakes English language proficiency test

Table 4 below shows the frequency of the themes that emerged from the data analysis. It is seen that teacher professional development, language skills and learner factors dominate local doctoral research whereas culture, social, and gender issues and testing and evaluation have been founded as under-researched topics.

Table 4. Frequency of the emerging themes

Categories	<i>f</i>	%
Teacher Professional Development (TPD)	50	19.8
Language Skills (LS)	44	17.4
Learner Factors (LF)	36	14.2
Second Language Acquisition (SLA)	26	10.3
Materials or Curriculum Design and Program Evaluation (MCDPE)	23	9.1
Teaching Methods (TM)	18	7.1
Teacher Factors (TF)	16	6.3
Linguistics (LIN)	15	5.9
Testing and Evaluation or Research (TEV)	13	5.1
Culture, Social, or Gender Issues (CSG)	11	4.3
Total	252	99.5

3.1.1. Culture, Social or Gender Issues (CSG)

Under the code of Culture, Social, or Gender Issues, eleven dissertations have been found and specific topics have been mentioned. These are critical literacy, classroom power relations, multicultural environment, intercultural, cross-cultural awareness and communication, and international students. Gender issues and critical literacy studies seem to be an under-researched area in doctoral dissertations when compared to cultural and social studies. The interest in cultural studies seems to be dominant in the database as seven of them aim at studying multicultural and intercultural environment, communication, and awareness.

3.1.2. *Materials or Curriculum Design and Program Evaluation (MCDPE)*

Doctoral research taken under investigation has pointed out that the majority of the studies focused on evaluating and designing programs at preparatory departments of private and state universities in Turkey, the number of program evaluation studies is seventeen. Eight of them were conducted at the preparatory departments of universities while five of them were conducted at educational institutes under the Ministry of Turkish National Education. The rest of the settings include the program evaluation studies conducted at M.A, Ph.D., and Erasmus programs. Some other research studies, six dissertations, evaluated the English language curriculum used at the primary, middle, and high school levels. CEFR has been mentioned as the framework for evaluation in two doctoral dissertations focusing on the curriculum of the Ministry of Turkish National Education and foreign language coursebooks. Coursebooks have been investigated and most of the topics regarding the materials are related to the representation of social and cultural issues in coursebooks such as; identity representations, postmodernism, ideological and hegemonic practices, and cultural representations.

3.1.3. *Language Skills (LS)*

Data analysis has shown that productive skills have been studied more than receptive skills. Reading skill has been studied more than listening skills in receptive skills. However, the important finding is that skills have not been studied alone. In many studies, integration of a technique to the skill is worthy of attention, and technology integration or multimodality can be seen in much research aiming to improve language skills. Designing instruction or blending language skills with other cognitive skills seems to be a popular language skills research design.

3.1.4. *Learner Factors (LF)*

Learner factors have taken relatively more attention when compared to other research areas in ELT. Studies on individual differences are dominant in the analyzed data. Autonomy, motivation, willingness to communicate, self-efficacy, attitudes and beliefs, self-determination, and self-perceptions of language learners have been investigated. Besides, learner identity and learning strategies are amongst the frequently studied areas which concern learner factors. Learner strategies were found to be immensely focused on six dissertations. Autonomy was specifically studied on four different dissertations and when studied, the concept of motivation was found to be accompanying them. Beliefs and self-efficacy together were found to be the focus of two dissertations under this theme. Anxiety, adjustment, perceptions, personality, and locus of control of learners are the rest of the topics.

3.1.5. *Linguistics (LIN)*

The majority of the studies categorized under the theme of Linguistics have focused on discourse studies. Written discourse has been examined more than oral discourse. When investigated, oral discourses have been often analyzed with pragmatics. The other popular research area is corpus-based research. It is seen that corpus-based research has been frequently preferred when lexicology is being studied.

3.1.6. *Second Language Acquisition (SLA)*

Feedback studies, error studies, and memory-related studies take the lead in second language acquisition research. Interlanguage is the topic of 15 studies and the acquisition process of certain elements of language has been analyzed in detail, such as; the processing of compounds, demonstrative adjectives, relative clauses, and causatives. Error in second language acquisition was mentioned in three different theses. Feedback backing up language acquisition was the topic of four theses like memory studies including cognitive façade of acquisition like retention and recall.

3.1.7 Teacher Factors (TF)

The topics included under the theme of teacher factors are similar to the topics under learner factors. Pedagogical beliefs, perceptions, cognition, and strategies have been heavily studied. Other areas of studies regarding teacher factors can be stated as teacher competencies, native and nonnative teacher issues, teacher identity, and teacher burnout.

3.1.8. Teacher Professional Development (TPD)

The examination of the teacher professional development category has shown that many studies have been conducted on students of ELT departments in Turkey. Therefore, teacher professional development research predominantly targets pre-service teachers of the English language. Technology use, language competencies, intercultural competence, sense of self-efficacy, motivation, assessment literacy, instructional decisions, and beliefs are popular research areas for in-service teacher development. As well as pre-service teacher development, studies on in-service teacher development have emerged, but not as much as the former area. Material use, classroom management, digital and assessment literacies of in-service teachers have been researched. However, instructors working at the preparatory departments of universities have been researched as in-service teacher development. Few studies have been conducted on teacher trainers and mentoring while some others evaluated the quality of teacher professional development of ELT programs in Turkey.

3.1.9. Teaching Methods (TM)

Student-centered teaching methods have been dominantly studied for improving teaching methods. Task-based instruction, content, and language integrated learning, collaborative learning, project-based learning, strategy-based instruction, and implicit instruction are seen in many studies under the theme. As well as such teaching methods, integration of various modalities is common. The role of authentic games, technology integration, using drama, using plays, metaphors has been seen to be investigated for classroom teaching.

3.1.10. Testing and Evaluation (TEV)

Testing and evaluation studies have a mixed-orientation in the topic selection of theses. Assessment and evaluation of writing skills have been frequently studied when compared to the assessment of other skills. The research on assessment tools shows themselves as alternative assessment tools and European Language Portfolio (ELP). Some other studies have been conducted to validate language tests and high-stake tests. For validation of the assessment, rater-training has been examined in one of the dissertations. The last code that emerged under this theme is research-oriented studies. Several studies have been conducted to develop a scale for language research.

3. Discussion

The main finding suggests that changing global trends in TESOL has affected the local trends in TESOL. Canagarajah (2016) published a study that summarizes changing trajectories of half a century in TESOL research and claims that the last 50 years bring us an age when process and practice, social and ecological issues, situated pedagogies and language socialization, everyday context and ecologies, variation and inclusive plurality, identities, beliefs and ideologies, personal and reflexive characteristics and specific and local issues are valued more. Accordingly, teaching methods have been aimed to enrich with the integration of new genres and literacies. Aydınli and Ortaçtepe (2019) state that the integration of both technology-based and non-technology-based materials to language teaching has been locally

investigated and their effects on learners' skills have been evaluated. Using drama, authentic games, metaphors propose the emerges of new genres and literacies in language classrooms. Besides, the role of communication and learners seems to be a leading aspect in language classrooms as the investigated methods in doctoral dissertations have communicative and learner-centered backgrounds. However, this is not a new trend in the current context as Alptekin and Tatar (2011) stated that local researchers heavily focus on various teaching methods and approaches such as task-based instruction, content-based instruction, content and language integrated learning, and cooperative learning. Yet still, decades of efforts in teaching methods now seem to include new genres and literacies, which is consistent with global trends. The issue of identity is another global trend concerning TESOL. Social identities have begun to take attention from local researchers such as the issues of nativeness and non-nativeness of English teachers, which is a promising finding when compared to previous research suggesting that English teaching is still inner circle bound (Türker, 2006). According to Alptekin (2009), the need for questioning rooted beliefs about the target language and culture has started with the dominance of ELF. The new period of inquiry shows that the steps have been taken, and local researchers aim to keep up with the global needs of the century. When the studies regarding learner factors and teacher factors are taken into account, it has been seen that personal characteristics of learners and teachers have been minded. Identities, personalities, beliefs, and perceptions have been dominantly studied as doctoral research in Turkey. Characteristics of learners have been examined concerning the foreign language learning process (İnal, et al., 2016). Learning strategies, autonomy, attitudinal issues, motivation, learning styles, and anxiety has been highly researched topics (Aydınlı & Ortaçtepe, 2018). Yet still, when compared to global trends, understanding the identities of learners from a holistic perspective requires more attention in Turkey since the studies mainly focused on understanding the characteristics of learners concerning the second language acquisition process. Cognitive and affective factors dominate the local research whereas the research on sociocultural factors affecting the learners is scant. The same issue is consistent with language teacher identities, as well. The doctoral research on language teachers predominantly aims to investigate teacher education in Turkey (Özmen, et al, 2016), therefore drawing a clear picture of the identities of teachers is difficult from where we stand today. While cognitive and affective factors have been researched, the studies investigating language teachers from sociocultural factors are scarce. Regarding the language skills, the investigation of productive skills is still dominant in local research, this might have resulted from the practicality of methodological issues. According to Özmen et al. (2016), doctoral research seems to adopt in-campus data collection. As for receptive skills, reading has been heavily studied. At this point, the findings show consistency with global trends in that the integration of various modes to skill studies has been desired. Even though the ultimate goal is to improve the language skills, blending the skills with cognitive grounds such as the inclusion of multimodal input has come forth. Another growing global interest emerges in local ELT materials. Although it is still under-researched, critical analysis of materials has been started to be studied locally. Stereotypical representations and the quality of materials in terms of including all skills adequately and genres have received local attention (Alptekin & Tatar, 2011). As for the issue of curriculum and program evaluation, evaluating of graduate programs and preparatory programs are common in doctoral research, and this finding can be attributed to the convenience of data collection, and accordingly results in the scarcity of research in curriculum and program evaluation of K-12 education, which can be suggested as a local need. In terms of testing and evaluation, local concerns have been seen amongst researchers. Laying the research on local grounds has emerged in the high-stake examination as so the issue of assessment is based on high- stake tests in Turkey (Aydınlı & Ortaçtepe, 2018). Therefore, the validation of these tests has become a concern to meet context-specific needs. Studies on portfolios have been seen as a part of educational policy and attempt to increase the quality of language learning since adopting European standards has emerged from Turkey's aspiration to join the European Union (Alptekin & Tatar, 2011). Another area of research that deserves discussion

is second language acquisition. A moderate level of attention has been given to this area and the findings seem consistent with the findings suggested by Özmen et al., (2016). It seems that SLA research does not go beyond investigating the acquisition of morphological and syntactic features of the language, and the analysis of errors. This finding can be attributed to the nature of SLA research as it can be highly demanding and deserves longitudinal research. Yet still, Turkish researchers have low interest in qualitative research paradigms (İnal et al., 2016; Özmen et al., 2016). When compared to SLA research, linguistics has received little attention as it is expected since it is not the pure focus of TESOL rather, it is a complementary area. The studies on linguistics revolve around the analysis of written discourses and corpus-based studies. These attempts seem to be made to improve the quality of language teaching, and materials.

Teacher professional development and culture, social, or gender issues have been found the critical areas of discussion as the former received the attention of Turkish researchers most while the latter did not get enough attention. Pre-service teacher education has been immensely investigated under this category. Previous research on local journals and doctoral dissertations yielded the same results (Aydınlı & Ortaçtepe, 2018; Özmen et al., 2016). This considerable interest suggests improvements in language education in Turkey. However, surprising finding came out as pre-service teachers' language use and proficiency, which was evaluated as being ironic by Alptekin & Tatar (2011) as language proficiency of teachers is not seen as a curricular priority of ELT departments. Other areas of research in teacher education such as technology use, intercultural competence, characteristics, motivation, assessment literacy seem to consistent with the global trends, and the same global orientation can be stated as in-service teacher education as well. Investigating beliefs, technology use, and teaching methodology are of interest in local research. In-service teacher education research seems to be mainly limited to the studies on language instructors at university. Therefore, methodological issues as convenience sampling can be one of the reasons explaining the limitation of doctoral research (Özmen, et al., 2016). As for culture, social, or gender issues, the least amount of attention has been spotted in this area, however, it is not because local research stays beyond the global research, but culture, social, or gender issues have recently started to dominate the world. The studies on culture are dominant since the globalization of the world requires it, and critical approaches to language education such as investigating power relations have emerged. Therefore, local research keeps up with global research at this point. Discussing the reasons why under-researched areas need more research, why some trends in ELT have been recently rising, and why it bears importance is significant. Culture, Social and Gender issues, as the least researched area, is of great importance for TESOL both locally and globally. This results from the fact that teachers of today do not only need to be flexible in terms of methodology but also need to be critically aware. The last century brings out the term “Socially Responsible Teaching”, which requires teachers to be socially responsible teachers. Salı and Gürsoy (2014) concluded from research conducted on pre-service ELT teachers within the scope of socially responsible teaching that ELT teachers seem to be partly aware of global issues, yet still, they approach positively toward the issue. This implies that teacher training is needed for pre- as well as in-service teachers. The training on global issues should not only be provided at a theoretical and awareness level but also at a practical dimension that would lead the learners to be active participants in finding and implementing solutions. Socially Responsible Teaching encourages teachers and learners to act upon social problems and be a part of the solution. Thus, further research studies on the issue might focus on the practical aspects of the integration of global issues in language teaching. Moreover, English language teaching has not been taught to speak solely with the target community anymore. In contrast, the main objectives have changed. Learning English has started to be seen as a way of being a powerful individual in the 21st century. Rather than the ability to speak English, having critical awareness and sophisticated thinking skills while using the language is important. Therefore, more research on culture, social and gender issues is needed for

cognitive reasons as well. As for the most researched areas as teacher professional development, especially for language competency of teachers, a suggestion might be offering more pre-service training and in-service training on language use for decision-makers as it seems a problematic area.

4. Conclusions

This present study was carried out on 252 Ph.D. theses published in the Council of Higher Education Thesis Center from 2010-2020 to find out what the most researched topics of ELT are and to see where we are from a global standpoint. Content analysis was conducted by using a priori codes suggested by the relevant literature and the findings have revealed that Teacher Professional Development is the leading research topic in doctoral research whereas Culture, Social, or Gender Issues are found to be the least researched ELT topics in Turkey. The findings reflect methodological issues, newly emerging global trends, and problematic issues at a local level. Additionally, findings mainly imply that language teacher education needs improvement from many perspectives. The least researched topic has appeared as Culture, Social, or Gender Issues. This is not because this topic does not need improvement, but because it is a newly emerging topic both on local and global scales. However, further research regarding Culture, Social, and Gender Issues are desperately needed as the 21st century's teachers and learners have been facing different problems today. Changing dynamics of the classrooms and characteristics of students calls for an urgent attempt. The current situation that emerged with the analysis of doctoral dissertations also implies that testing and evaluation should take more attention in terms of both theory and practice. As the research mostly reflects what has been practiced, it seems that these areas have needed improvement over time. In terms of the international role of English, teaching culture is important, but the content of the language lessons should not be limited to culture. Other social issues, especially the current social issues, should take their places in the curriculum. Filling this gap will help the learners of the 21st century be prepared to deal with the problems and make them critically thinking learners. From the eyes of the 21st-century teachers, implementing cultural and social issues into the language lessons should be seen as a way of empowerment. Besides, that the evaluation of the writing skill has been studied a lot reveals unintentionally neglected sides of evaluation in language classrooms. Evaluating writing skill can be relatively easy since teachers can access tangible sources at ease, but more attention can be directed to the evaluation of other skills. Improving the evaluation of speaking skills seems to be a local need in Turkey since the research is scarce. Apart from the implications of the study, the suggestions for further doctoral research come out as a result of the present study. Further research should focus on culture, social and gender issues. These issues should be selected from the issues that concern the community where language teaching occurs. Cultural studies predominantly focus on improving intercultural communication and awareness, very few of them aims at discovering the cultural identities of learners or speakers. In the last decade, Turkey has become home to many immigrants, and accordingly, the social and cultural structure of the classrooms has shaped. This change suggests further research.

Content analysis was conducted on the titles and abstracts of doctoral dissertations, which might be a limitation of this present research. Therefore, an investigation on full papers might reveal new details about the most researched ELT issues. With a detailed investigation, further studies might aim to examine the most researched settings and participants of the thesis, which might make contributions to ELT researchers for finding out more specific gaps in the field.

4. Ethics Committee Approval

The authors confirm that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrality rules in their country. (Data of Confirmation: January 14, 2020).

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Türkiye’de dil eğitimi alanındaki boşlukları aramak: 2010-2020 yılları arasında ELT programlarında verilmiş doktora tezlerinin içerik analizi

Öz

Her geçtiğimiz yıl ELT doktora tezlerinin sayısı artmaktadır ve bu tezler, önde gelen araştırma eğilimleri ve alanda araştırma konularındaki boşlukları saptayabilmek adına en iyi kaynaklardır. Geçmiş çalışmalar Türkiye’deki araştırma eğilimlerini keşfedebilmek adına yapılmıştır ve bu amaçla dergi makaleleri ve konferans bildirileri incelenmiştir ancak çok az çalışma doktora tezlerini analiz etmektedir. Mezun sayısı her sene yükseldiğinden, Türkiye’deki araştırma eğilimlerini bulmayı amaçlayan güncel bir çalışma ihtiyacı ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu yüzden, 2010 ve 2020 yılları arasında basılmış 252 doktora tezi bu araştırmanın içeriğini oluşturmaktadır. Tezlerin öncelikle başlıklarında ve öz bölümlerinde içerik analizi uygulanmıştır ve daha sonra, alan çalışmalarında bulunan daha önceki benzer araştırmaların sağladığı kodlarla toplanan veriler üzerinden kodlama yapılmıştır. Bulgular, öğretmen mesleki gelişiminin en çok araştırılan konu olurken, kültür, sosyal ve cinsiyeti konu olan araştırmaların sayısının oldukça az olduğu saptanmıştır. Sonuçlar, bu araştırma alanlarının hem yerel hem de küresel ölçüde geliştirilmeye ihtiyacı olduğunu belirtmektedir. Bulgular ışığında, belirli alanlarda daha fazla çalışma yerel araştırmacılar için önerilmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: doktora tezleri; içerik analizi; İngilizce dili ve eğitimi; araştırma eğilimleri; TESOL

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