

A Review of Theses Conducted by Graduate Students in Jordanian Universities in the Field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language from 1980 to 2008

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ABSTRACT

This study tackles the status of theses written by graduate students in the field of teaching English as a foreign language in Jordan. It investigates some attributes and characteristics of the thesis like the numbers and gender of graduates, type and focus of research, availability of the statement of the problem, assumptions of the study, implications, conclusions ... etc. A corpus of 163 master's theses from two public universities was analyzed. The results of the study revealed that 78% of the theses used even the survey/descriptive or the quasi-experimental type of research; 92% of the theses had clear purpose of the study and 72% with clear significance of the study and 45% of the theses had flaws in the statement of the problem. The results also showed that while 90% of the theses contained definition of terms, 80% did not include the assumptions section, 78% did not comprise implications of the study and that 60% lacked the conclusions. Finally, the results showed that 67% of the theses used one type of population (students) and that 73% used one instrument only for conducting the research.

Keywords: Master's theses, graduate students, teaching English Foreign language.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education at the tertiary level in Jordan started in the early 1960s. The first public university, The University of Jordan, was established in 1962. Fourteen years later, another public university, Yarmouk University, was established to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of students in the country. Nowadays, twenty seven public and private universities are open for Jordanians as well as students from Arab and other countries in the world. Although these universities offer hundreds of programs for undergraduate students, few of them offer graduate programs for the master's and Ph.D. degrees. Yarmouk University (Henceforth YU) and The University of Jordan (Henceforth UJ) were the first two universities to offer a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a major in Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The first master's degree in Education/TEFL at YU was offered in 1980, and in 1982 at the UJ. By the end of the year 2008, more than

250 theses were granted by all universities in Jordan. However, this amount of graduate research is still not reviewed, analyzed or evaluated by any empirical research study.

During the past three decades, the departments of Curriculum and Instruction in both universities have reviewed, modified and changed these TEFL programs several times. However, these changes were not based on an empirical comprehensive study that justifies the need for such changes and improvements. Therefore, even after the changes were made, there was no guarantee that such programs were implemented as planned or whether more development was required. That is to say, that until now, decision makers in these universities do not know for sure where these programs are heading. Therefore, when the decision of the Ministry of Higher Education in Jordan in 2006 was made to suspend some programs and to reduce the number of admission for students in some other programs, many educators indicated that one of the reasons behind such a decision was the low quality of theses conducted by graduate students in Faculties of Education. As a result, the University of Jordan issued new regulations and requirements for admission and completion requirements of the master's thesis to solve

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this problem. One of these decisions was that students have to obtain a TOEFL score of 500 or above as a graduation requirement but not as an admission requirement. If students fail to pass the test they take two TOEFL preparation courses at the university and then apply for the local unified test developed by the Ministry of Higher Education in Jordan.

Statement of the Problem

Decisions of the Ministry of Higher Education in Jordan and the UJ were issued to control the entrance and exit requirements of the students to the graduate programs in order to improve the quality of theses written by those students. On the other hand, no empirical study was conducted to investigate the characteristics and elements of the theses written by graduate students in all programs in general, and TEFL in particular. Most staff members in this particular program felt that such decisions were merely opinions and wishes made by decision makers in both the Ministry of Higher Education and these two Universities. That is to say, the decisions were not directed to improve the quality of the graduate students' work. Thus, the reality of this huge amount of research conducted by graduate students is still unrevealed and not investigated yet. Therefore, many questions concerning the aspects and quality of this kind of research are still without answers. Some of these questions are: Do these theses have or lack the characteristics of a good thesis? Do these theses suffer from serious problems and flaws that characterize them as theses of low-level qualities or just minor flaws? Are the students so keen and careful to produce very good or excellent quality of research? Therefore, this study comes as an urgent need to verify and investigate some of the aspects and attributes of a big number of ignored theses conducted by graduate students in TEFL programs in both universities (YU and UJ) from 1980 through 2008.

Purpose of the Study

Literature on theses and dissertations shows that there are many research studies that focus on the problems of doctoral dissertations in respect to many issues concerning the problems that the students encounter, the relationship between the students and their advisors, as well as the attributes and characteristics of these dissertations (Coorough, 1993; Novak, 1975). However, few studies have been conducted to deal with master's theses in the same regard (Chang, 2006). The main

purpose of this study was to investigate the major characteristics of master's theses written by graduate students in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in both UJ and YU from 1980 through 2008. By doing so, the study will provide a better picture of the status of master's theses in the field of TEFL in Jordan by highlighting the main attributes of these master's theses; so that it could be considered as a reasonable base for making suggestions for the future of master's theses in the country.

Questions of the Study

Particularly, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the major characteristics of master's theses written by graduated students in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at YU and UJ from 1980 through 2008?
2. Are there any trends in master's theses characteristics regarding the topics of these theses, type of population, type of data collected, type of instruments used?

Significance of the Study

This study is considered significant because it is believed to be the first one in the country, according to the researcher's knowledge, that provides a research-based background about master's theses research conducted by TEFL graduate students. It is also believed that this study is going to be helpful for the departments of curriculum and instruction as well as the professors who teach in these departments because it is going to provide them with a general review of their students' work and to check if there are certain drawbacks and flows in the students' master's theses. Therefore, the study could be seen as a starter and a cornerstone for future evaluation of TEFL programs at the Jordanian universities for the sake of global development and improvement of such programs. Another significant aspect of this study is that it is hoped to be viewed as a guide for professors who teach in the TEFL programs and their graduate students as well, in which they become more knowledgeable about the status and nature of theses research in the field. Finally, this study is expected to be valuable because it draws the attention of researchers and graduate students to some aspects of the field that are not investigated yet and some other aspects that should be avoided because they are overly researched.

Limitations of the study

This study is limited to master's theses conducted at both the UJ and YU in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Other theses from other universities in the country are not included. Also, all master's theses investigated in this study were actually conducted from 1980 through 2008; theses conducted after this time are not a part of this study. Finally, the study is also limited to certain characteristics and attributes of the theses that are used in the analysis; other characteristics or elements of the theses are not a part of the study (i.e., abstracts, literature review, and references).

Literature Review

Doctoral dissertations and master's theses constitute a wealth of serious and rigorous studies that contribute to the field of research but usually go unpublished and unnoticed in most cases. Researchers who investigated this wealth of research found different results and made several conclusions according to the purposes of their research and according to the field they studied.

Novak (1975) analyzed 642 doctoral dissertation abstracts in the Department of Education at North Texas State University written during the period 1953 through 1974. The researcher analyzed several attributes of the dissertations as: date of publishing, major, sex, name of the professor, type of the study, focus of the dissertation, instrument, analysis techniques, length of the dissertation, quantity of tables, number of titles in the bibliography, relation to candidate's educational major, type of research statement, and percentage of dissertations showed a statistically significant difference. The results of the study showed that analytic studies ranged from a maximum of 64% to a minimum of 10.5%, while experimental studies ranged from 4% to 53% and descriptive studies ranged from 32% to 52%. Furthermore, males authored 516 (80%) of experimental studies while females authored only 126 (20%). Descriptive (39%) and experimental studies (40%) were the most frequently used methods. The results of the study showed that males utilized analytic studies slightly more than the other two types of studies whereas females utilized descriptive studies slightly more. Data collection techniques and data analysis techniques were related to the type of study. While descriptive studies used extensively the questionnaire as an instrument and sums and comparison as data analysis techniques, experimental studies used

standardized instruments and analyzed variances or comparison of variables.

Twelve years later, Novak's (1975) study was extended by another study conducted by Sharmar (1987). The main purpose of the study was to determine the degree and level of research activity in the same college through an examination of 795 of doctoral dissertations abstracts produced by its graduates from 1975 to 1986. The researcher analyzed the dissertation abstracts in terms of the types of the study, focus, subject headings, design characteristics, statistical treatment of data, general results of experimental studies, and data collection techniques. Another purpose of the study was to synthesize the data of the study with that obtained by Novak's (1975) study. The results of the study showed that descriptive methods (50%) were the most common followed by experimental methods (almost 30%). It was also found, as stated in Novak's study, that data collection techniques and data analysis techniques were consistent with the type of study. For experimental studies, the most frequently used instrument was the standardized achievement measure whereas the questionnaire was for descriptive studies.

Sharpe (1993) conducted a similar study in which 280 dissertation abstracts conducted from 1971 through 1991 were analyzed. However, this study was exclusive to the field of higher education administration in the Department of Higher Education at the same mentioned above university. The results of the study showed that the primary focus of dissertations was on academic administration and that the content of these dissertations primarily included descriptive designs, surveys, interviews, and questionnaires as data collection techniques. The results of the study showed that 52% of the dissertations used surveys, which increased over years, 10% used interviews, which increased after 1986, and 8% used questionnaires. Percentages, measures of central tendency, and frequencies (chi-square, analysis of variance, and t-test have increased since 1980) were the most used data analysis techniques. The results of the study showed that descriptive studies were the most often employed research method (76%), followed by historical method (10%) and then correlation (7%).

In a very large scale study, Coorough (1993) analyzed 10,612 dissertation abstracts randomly selected from around the US from 1950 to 1990. The researcher investigated several fields as educational administration (EDAD), guidance & counseling (GC), higher education

(HE), history (H), physical education (PE), educational psychology (PSY), and teacher training (TT). The researcher employed similar attributes that were used in Novak's (1975), Sharmsar's (1987), and Sharpe's (1993) studies. The major theses attributes investigated in this study were: the author, gender, degree, year, topics, research design, statistics, significance of results, target population, type of research, age of the subjects, number of pages, and number of words in the title. The results of the study showed that although males wrote 67% of the dissertations, there was a continual increase in the number of dissertations written by females. It was also found that descriptive research design (33%), predominantly the survey, dominated almost over all categories of research methods for all years and increased from 25% in 1950 to 36% in 1990. On the other hand, the use of analytical designs declined over time from 25% in 1950 to 18% in 1990. In the same way, the use of correlation designs also declined from 30% in 1950 to 12% in 1990. Other results of the study showed that almost one-fourth of the dissertations used no statistics and almost one-third failed to find statistically significant results. In regard to subjects, the results of the study showed that the most common participants included in the studies were college students. In addition, the researcher found that in 1950, there were no dissertations written by women in *Dissertation Abstracts International*. However, by 1990, over half of the dissertations written in four of the seven categories examined were written by women. In general, the results showed that although some differences and trends were detected and featured within some dissertations, the results showed that the dissertation in education has changed very little from 1950 to 1990.

Rone (1998) examined 115 doctoral dissertations completed in the Higher Education Group at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto and compared them with 262 research articles selected from the *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*. Content analysis methodology was used to study several variables of the dissertations as the number of dissertations, degree type, gender, page length, research methods, geographic setting, participants, topics, and published dissertation findings. The results of the study showed that while males wrote 50.5% of the dissertations, females authored 49.5%, and 18% of all dissertation authors had published their findings. The results of the study showed that ninety percent of

dissertations employed one of three research instruments: Historical, survey, and qualitative. Also, the study found that the most popular group of human subjects investigated were university/community college students, followed by university/community college faculty. As for the number of pages of dissertations, the results for the study showed that the students wrote 36,990 pages with an average of 323 pages for each dissertation.

Miklos (1991) studied trends in 319 doctoral dissertations in educational administration conducted between 1958 and 1990. The researcher divided this period of time into three decades: From 1958-1970, 1971-1980, and 1981-1990. The focus of the study was on some attributes of the dissertation like the type of studies, research methodology, instrument, number of instruments, and topics. The results of the study revealed that the percentage of descriptive research increased from 32% in the first decade to 56% in the third whereas relational research declined from 27% in the first to 8% in the third. Regarding research methods, the results of the study showed that while there was a decline in the percentage of surveys from 72% in the first decade to 49% in the third, the percentage of case studies increased from 20% in the first decade to 35% in the third. As for data collection techniques, it was found that the use of questionnaires declined from 68% in the first decade to 53% in the third. Also, the use of records declined from 20% to 10%. In contrast, there was an increase in the use of interviews from 20% to 27%. Using a single method was also declined from 64% to 31% while using multiple methods increased from 23% to 42%, and also using three methods increased from 14% to 25%.

It should be noticed that not all studies arrived at the same results. For example, Davis and Brady (1993) examined research on special education and analyzed 395 dissertation abstracts that addressed early childhood published from 1981 to 1990. The results of the study revealed that only 19% of the dissertations were written by males while the majority (81%) was written by females. In terms of participants, the results showed that there was an increase from 26% to 39% in including youngsters during the second five-year of the examined period. In terms of research methods, experimental designs (39%) were the most commonly used methods compared to non-experimental methods (37%) and qualitative approaches (24%). Regarding the type of instrument, observations were the most frequently instruments used (43%) followed by standardized

instruments (30%); the other two used instruments were questionnaires (21%) and interviews (18%). Dissertations that employed more than one of these instruments were 29% (116).

Finally, Al Kathiri (2002) conducted a study in which he investigated the characteristics of master's theses conducted in the department of curriculum and teaching methods at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia. Based on similar studies in the field, the researcher came up with 20 characteristics that he investigated in 241 theses conducted through 1983 through 2002. The results of the study showed that the most frequently studied population consisted of intermediate and secondary public schools (private schools were rarely studied) while college students and primary grades were rarely studied. Interestingly, the results of the study showed that there was no single study that used the interview as the main instrument for data collection and observation was the least used instrument among all; in contrast, the questionnaire was the most frequently used instrument through the years.

The literature review mentioned above showed that studies conducted on graduate students' research tackled several characteristics and attributes of theses and dissertations for different periods of time and on different fields and specializations. This present study benefited from all of the abovementioned studies in the selection of the appropriate characteristics of the theses to be studied. Also, the review showed that although many results of these studies were in harmony and agreement, others were not. Therefore, this study is showing all results whether they agree or disagree with its results since every study has its own context and circumstances. On the other hand, the literature presented previously ignored many characteristics which this present study considered important and vital for the thesis. Examples of these important elements of the study are: The statement of the problem, the clarity of the purpose, the significance of the study, assumptions, limitations, definitions of terms, implications, conclusions, etc. Therefore, this study came to fill the gap that other previous studies did not pay attention to.

Methods and Procedures

To achieve the purposes of the study, the researcher analyzed 163 (72 from the UJ and 91 theses from the YU) master's theses written by graduated students at both UJ and YU. These theses were written between 1981 and

2008. The total number of the theses conducted at both universities was 249. However, some theses could not be obtained because they were not available in the Deposit Center for Master's and Dissertations at the U J.

A comprehensive review of research conducted on theses and doctoral dissertations was made in order to determine certain descriptive attributes to be used for data collection. With the help of six faculty members in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, the researcher was able to identify many characteristics that were considered to be necessary attributes of any master's thesis. Then, the researcher, with the help of the faculty members, was able to select 16 attributes to be investigated in the theses. These attributes were believed to be the most frequently used in such type of research.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

What makes this particular study different is that most of the attributes of the theses are not just descriptive in nature. Some of these attributes are considered analytical because they provide a different perspective about the thesis in comparison with other previous studies in terms of the ability of this study to judge the quality of the thesis rather than just to describe its features and whether these features and attributes are there or not. So, in order to obtain validity for the evaluation checklist that was used to collect data, a group of six university staff members in the department of Curriculum and Instruction judged the validity of the instrument and made necessary changes to improve the quality of the checklist. By doing so, the researcher was satisfied that the checklist contained the most important attributes that have been approved to be significant for a master's thesis.

To obtain instrument reliability, the researcher and two graduate students analyzed a sample of ten master's theses. A training session for these two graduate students was conducted by the researcher. Inter-rater coefficient reliability between the two raters for the checklist instrument was calculated and found to be 0.90 which was considered satisfactory. After that, the two evaluators checked the 163 theses available in the library of the UJ as the Deposit Center for theses and dissertations from Jordan and Arab universities. After data were coded, percentages and frequencies were calculated for all theses. Another group of three staff members judged the elements of the study that needed more work than just determining the availability of the item or not. Their work was focused on determining the clarity of statement of the

problem, purpose of study, and significance of the study. The inter-rater co-efficient reliability between the three staff members raters for the instrument was also calculated and found to be 0.93 which was considered satisfactory.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study revealed interesting

information about the status of master's theses conducted by Jordanian graduate students in the field of TEFL. In answering the first question of the study "What are the major characteristics of master's theses written by graduated students in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at YU and UJ from the year 1980 through 2008?" the study revealed the following results:

Table 1: Number of theses conducted by years and gender

Years Gender	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008	Total
Males	6 (100%)	24 (75%)	25 (62.5%)	21 (64%)	13 (44.8%)	6 (26%)	95 (58%)
Females	0 (0%)	8 (25.7%)	15 (37.5%)	12 (36%)	16 (55.2%)	17 (74%)	68 (42%)
Total	6 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	33 (100%)	29 (100%)	23 (100%)	163 (100%)

Table 2: Number of theses conducted by years and university

Years University	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008	Total
UJ	4 (66.7%)	6 (18.8%)	21 (52.5%)	7 (21%)	11 (38%)	23 (100%)	72 (44%)
YU	2 (33.3%)	26 (81.2%)	19 (47.5%)	26 (79%)	18 (62%)	0 (0%)	91 (56%)
Total	6 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	33 (100%)	29 (100%)	23 (100%)	163 (100%)

Theses by years and gender: Females' enrollment in education at all levels in Jordan mainly started in the second half of the twentieth century. Naturally, the number of male students exceeded the number of females at both school and tertiary levels. As Table 1 shows, the total numbers of theses written from 1980 through 2008 by both males and females were 95 and 68. While six theses were written during the first five years of the program (from 1980 until 1984), there was no one single thesis written by a female student during this period of time. This result confirms with Novak's (1975) study who found that 80% of the experimental studies were authored by males, and with Coorough's (1993) study in which it was found that in the year 1950 there were no dissertations written by women in the *Dissertation Abstracts International*. In regard to the ratio of male and female students, the results of the study partially confirms with Coorough's study in which 80% and 67% (consequently) of the dissertations were composed by males; however, the later years do not confirm with any other study. The next five year (1985-1989) the total

number of theses increased to 32, with a 25% of these theses written by females. The highest number of theses written (40) was during the third five years (1990-1994). Also, the percent of theses written by females during this period was also increased to 37.5%. The reason behind this increase could due back to the results of the Educational Reform Conference in 1987 that encouraged faculties of education to turn out graduates of all specializations to meet the needs of the market. The number of male graduates during the next thirteen years started to decrease whereas the number of females kept increasing and reached the highest number (17, 74%) since the beginning of the program. A major reason for the increase in the females' numbers in the program was probably that most male English language teachers started to work outside the country, especially in the Gulf States, a situation that encouraged females to fill the gap in males' positions especially in graduated studies.

Theses by years and universities: Although the program of Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) was established in YU and UJ in the academic

year 1980/1981, the first student graduated in 1982. Table 2 shows the frequencies and percentages of students graduated from 1982 until the end of the first semester of 2008/2009. As Table 2 shows, consistency in the number of graduates in the two universities was not available during the last three decades except for the years 1990-1994 during which there were 21 (52.5%) graduates from the UJ and 19 (47.5%) graduates from YU. Other periods show a great discrepancy in the number of graduates that sometimes reached the highest point, that is to say 6 (18.8%) graduates for the UJ and 26 (81.2%) for YU in the year 1985-1990. One reason for this fluctuation in the number of graduates in both universities could be attributed to the availability of staff members in these universities. It is well known that the admission of

graduate students in many cases is affected by the availability or lack of staff members who are supposed to teach the coursework and supervise the students' theses. This number of staff members is also affected by other several factors like the number of sabbatical leaves and non-salary leave. For example, there was only one assistant EFL professor at the UJ during the 1980s; another one joined the program by 1989, four more assistant professors came during the 1997-1999. Therefore, the number of students in the following years increased tremendously, accordingly. However, it should be noticed here that theses from YU during the last five years (2005-2008) were not available for technical reasons.

Table 3: Number of Theses conducted by years and type of research

Type of research	Years							Total
	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008		
survey/descriptive	2	12	14	10	14	12	64 (39%)	
Quasi-experimental	3	12	15	16	10	7	63 (39%)	
Analytical	-	5	4	3	2	-	14 (9%)	
Descriptive/document	-	1	2	1	-	1	5 (3%)	
Conceptual/curriculum	-	2	1	1	-	1	5 (3%)	
Discourse analysis	1	-	-	2	2	-	5 (3%)	
Evaluation	-	-	2	-	-	1	3 (2%)	
Content analysis	-	-	-	-	1	1	2 (1%)	
Course design	-	-	2	-	-	-	2 (1%)	
Total	6	32	40	33	29	23	163 (100%)	

Theses by years and type of research: When students start working on their theses, they usually apply what they learn from the coursework during the masters' program. One component of every master's program is the research-methods course that is supposed to help students later in their theses writing. Such a course should expose students to a variety of purposes, types, and techniques of research. The results of this present study showed that students used nine different types of research. The dominant type of research used by students was the descriptive survey (64 students, 39%) followed by quasi-experimental research (63 students, 39%). While 127 (78%) theses used one of these two types of research, all other five types used 22%. Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentages of every type of research used during the years from 1980 to 2008.

The results of this study confirm with some results of other studies and contradict with others. For instance, while Novak (1975) found that analytic studies ranged from a maximum of 64% to a minimum of 10.5%, experimental studies ranged from 4% to 53% and descriptive studies ranged from 32% to 52%. In this study, analytic studies came in the third place (9%) while descriptive studies (39%) and quasi-experimental studies (39%) were in the first and second rank. As the table above shows, the results of this present study confirm with Sharmsar's (1987) study who found that descriptive methods (50%) were the most common followed by experimental methods (almost 30%). For experimental studies, the most frequently used instrument was the standardized achievement measure whereas the questionnaire was mainly for descriptive studies. In the

same way, Sharpe (1993) found that descriptive studies were the most often employed research method (76%), followed by historical method (10%) and then correlation (7%). Although the results of Sharpe's study concerning descriptive studies confirm with the results of this present study, historical and correlation studies were never found in this study. The reason behind the focus on the first two types of research and ignorance of the other types of

research is due to the complete absence of any coursework in the master's program that offers such varied types of research. Therefore, students find it easier to use what they know. On the other hand, professors may not want their students to conduct their research using certain types of research that they theoretical or practical background about.

Table 4: Number of theses conducted by years and focus of research

Focus of study	Years						Total
	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008	
Reading	1	5	9	5	10	5	35 (21.47%)
Writing	1	5	7	7	4	4	28 (17.18%)
Curriculum	---	4	5	2	3	2	16 (9.82%)
Structure	1	8	3	1	1	-	14 (8.59%)
Vocabulary	---	2	4	5	2	---	13 (7.99%)
Speaking	---	---	1	6	1	3	11 (6.75%)
Language in general	---	2	4	1	1	1	9 (5.52%)
Students' achievement	1	2	1	3	1	1	9 (5.52%)
Methods of teaching	---	1	2	1	1	1	6 (3.66%)
Students' attitudes/needs	---	1	2	---	1	1	5 (3.07%)
Teachers' attitudes/needs	---	1	---	---	1	3	5 (3.07%)
Dictation/Spelling	1	2	---	---	---	---	3 (1.84%)
Dictionary studies	---	---	1	---	1	1	3 (1.84%)
Listening	---	---	---	2	---	---	2 (1.23%)
Literature	---	---	---	---	1	1	2 (1.23%)
Pronunciation	1	---	---	---	---	---	1 (0.61%)
Lesson Planning	---	---	---	---	---	1	1 (0.61%)
Total	6	32	40	33	29	23	163

Theses by focus of topic: When students finish their coursework and start working on their theses, they usually consult with their supervisors to select a topic that is worth writing about. However, the process of finding a suitable topic to write about is one of the most difficult processes that students may encounter. In this study, the results show that the students did not use a variety of topics to write about; instead they conducted their research on a limited number of topics. Table 4 shows all of the topics investigated by the 163 theses from 1980 through 2008 arranged by frequency and percentage.

As Table 4 shows, 63 (38.65%) theses were limited to only two language skills (i.e. reading and writing). On the

other hand, other topics, despite their importance for the language teacher, were tackled only once or twice during the last 28 years. The reasons for the focus on some topics or ignorance of others could mainly due to the encouragement or dis-encouragement of the supervisor of the thesis. Adams and White (1994) indicated that the importance of a dissertation's topic may have been the most subjective criterion in the study, especially when assessing the importance of a topic in a cognate field. Moses (1984) identified a range of student concerns including the adverse impact of personalities on their theses; some of these were the professional factors such as the supervisors' insufficient knowledge in the area

supervised or a lack of interest in students' work, and organizational factors such as too many students, too much administration, poor management of research groups, and failure to provide appropriate student support. Thus, supervisors should play an important role in encouraging their students to conduct research on topics they themselves think important. Another reason

for students not being able to select an appropriate topic could due back to the difficulty of the process of conducting research. The type of data collected, analyzed and interpreted is another issue for the students. It could be an easy job asking students to read a certain text rather than analyzing a pronunciation lesson or commenting on a lesson plan.

Table 5: Clarity of the statement of the problem by years

Clarity \ Years	Years						Total
	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008	
Clear	3 (50%)	18 (56%)	22 (55%)	20 (61%)	10 (34%)	6 (26%)	79 (48%)
Unclear	3 (50%)	10 (31%)	16 (40%)	10 (30%)	17 (59%)	17 (74%)	73 (45%)
Not available	---	4 (13%)	2 (5%)	3 (9%)	2 (7%)	---	11 (7%)
Total	6 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	33 (100%)	29 (100%)	23 (100%)	163

Table 6: Clarity of the purpose of the study by years

Clarity \ Years	Years						Total
	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008	
Clear	5 (83%)	30 (94%)	37 (93%)	30 (91%)	27 (93%)	22 (96%)	151 (92.6%)
Not clear	1 (17%)	2 (4%)	3 (7%)	3 (9%)	2 (7%)	1 (4%)	12 (7.4%)
Total	6 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	33 (100%)	29 (100%)	23 (100%)	163

In this study, all participants in both universities were students in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction; however, only 10% of the theses investigated topics related to English language curricula. Listening, literature, pronunciation, and lesson planning were of the many topics least investigated among all. One possible reason for the lack of theses on these topics is that such topics are hard to investigate. For instance, a lesson plan could be seen as a private issue for many teachers that they refuse to show to others to avoid embarrassment, and the same thing could be said about pronunciation. Another reason could be the lack of engagement of the supervisors themselves to investigate such topics; as a result the students did not follow their supervisors' steps in this regard.

Statement of the problem: One of the elements that makes this study different from other previous studies is that it investigates some theses attributes that are considered vital in judging the quality of the theses. One of these attributes is the statement of the problem. Students usually face problems in writing this section and

they may revise the work several times during the process of writing. Nevertheless, students are usually asked to revise or refine this section after the oral defense of the thesis, when necessary. However, in this study, it seems that the revisions of the statement of the problem made by the students did not follow the exact recommendations of the defense committee members. The results of this study showed that while the statement of the problem section of the thesis was clear in 73 (45%) of the theses, it was not clear in 79 (48%). This result indicates that even after the students submit their theses to the main library as an indication of finishing the major or minor changes or modifications that the committee asked for, these theses proved that they were still having problems in making this section clear. Table 5 shows the number and percentage of theses that had problem of clarity from 1980 through 2008.

As Table 5 shows, theses with unclear statements of the problem increased after the year 1999. In the present study, this issue became very important because more than half of the theses (79) were still with problems of

obscurity. Reasons for such a problem could be due to different possible causes: Firstly, one possible cause could be that the students did not make the necessary modifications or changes as required by their committee members after the defense session. Secondly, another possible cause could be that when the students were asked to make the changes and modifications by the committee members, the students actually did them but according to their own understanding and not according to what their committee members required. The third possible cause for this problem may be due to the fact that

the supervisors did not check with them the new changes and modifications after the defense session. Finally, the supervisors and defense committee themselves may not have noticed that these statements of the problems were not clear and they accepted them as they are without careful investigation. No matter what the cause was, the analysis of the results in this study showed that these theses were of a low quality regarding this aspect. However, one should acknowledge that academic writing is not easy at all and needs a lot of training (Delyser, 2003).

Table 7: Clarity of the significance of the study by years

Clarity	Years						
	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008	Total
Clear	4 (66.7%)	25 (78%)	31 (77.5%)	29 (88%)	18 (62%)	17 (74%)	124 (76%)
Not clear	2 (33.3%)	6 (19%)	9 (22.5%)	2 (6%)	11 (38%)	5 (22%)	35 (21.5%)
Not available	---	1 (3%)	---	2 (6%)	---	1 (4%)	4 (2.5%)
Total	6 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	33 (100%)	29 (100%)	23 (100%)	163 (100%)

Table 8: Availability of the assumptions of the study by years

Availability	Years						
	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008	Total
Available	3 (50%)	7 (22%)	11 (27.5%)	9 (27%)	3 (10%)	---	33 (20%)
Not available	3 (50%)	25 (78%)	29 (72.5%)	24 (73%)	26 (90%)	23 (100%)	130 (80%)
Total	6 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	33 (100%)	29 (100%)	23 (100%)	163 (100%)

Clarity of the purpose of the study: Another important element of any thesis and dissertation is the purpose of the study. In this study, the results revealed that 151 (92.6%) theses had a clear purpose for the study while only 12 (7.4%) theses failed to include a clear one. This result is very reasonable because the major element of the thesis is to determine what the researcher needs to do. However, during the writing process, students may encounter several problems that make them lose focus. The other reason that made this part of the theses easier than the other parts, and relatively had very little problems, is that many of these theses combined the purpose and the questions of the study together. Therefore, they expressed the purpose of the study in the form of the questions to be asked and that reduced and minimized the risk of making a problem in the process of

writing. Table 6 shows the clarity vs. ambiguity of the purpose of study of the theses by years.

As the table shows, some of the theses (12) had a problem in stating the purpose of the study in a clear way. One possible reason for failing to do so may be due back to the possibility that the students thought of the purpose of the study and questions of the study as alternatives. However, the purpose of the study focuses on the major aim that the study intends to achieve while the questions of the study determine the data to be collected in order to achieve the purpose. This distinction is not always clear for some students to make; therefore, they use both expressions interchangeably.

Clarity of the significance of the study: The significance of the study is one of the major elements that should be presented in a clear way in the thesis. Advisors

and committee members usually make it clear for the students that the thesis should prove in a clear way why it is significant and important. This significance is one of the claims that a student can make to show that the thesis is worth conducting. The importance and value of the thesis could be based on some empirical or theoretical bases. Theses that fail to provide this solid justification

may be considered of a low quality. The results of this study showed that the significance of the study in 124 (76%) theses were clear while 35 (21.5%) theses failed to do so. On the other hand, the results showed that 4 (2.5%) theses did not have this section at all. Table 7 shows the clarity of significance of the study of these from 1980 through 2008.

Table 9: Availability of limitations of the study by years

Availability \ Years	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008	Total
Available	4 (67%)	23 (72%)	37 (92.5%)	30 (91%)	24 (83%)	22 (96%)	140 (%86)
Not available	2 (33%)	9 (28%)	3 (7.5%)	3 (9%)	5 (17%)	1 (%4)	23 (%14)
Total	6 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	33 (100%)	29 (100%)	23 (100%)	163 (100%)

Table 10: Availability of definitions of terms in the study by years

Availability \ Years	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008	Total
Available	4 (67%)	26 (81%)	37 (92.5%)	28 (85%)	28 (97%)	23 (100%)	146 (90%)
Not available	2 (33%)	6 (19%)	3 (7.5%)	5 (15)	1 (3%)	---	17 (10%)
Total	6 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	33 (100%)	29 (100%)	23 (100%)	163 (100%)

As the table shows, the clarity of the significance of the study did not follow any trend through the years 1980 through 2008. The highest percentage of unclear significance of the study was 38% during the years of 2000-2004 and the lowest percentage was 6% in the preceded period 1995-1999. These fluctuated results between high and low percentages of clarity for the significance could due to the fact that some theses were replicating other studies; therefore, the students were unable to bring new justifications that make the thesis significant by itself.

Assumptions of the study: Although there are agreed upon elements in the field of educational research, every thesis and dissertation has its own uniqueness. In any thesis or dissertation, the assumptions section is the part in which the researcher assumes certain agreed upon elements or characteristics between the reader and the researcher like the background of the subjects if they come from the same area or share similar social status conditions or have similar educational background, etc. If these assumptions are not stated clearly by the researcher, they may threaten the validity of the design of the study. In this study, the results showed that this element was

highly ignored by the students and their supervisors through all years. The percentage of theses that violated this element in thesis writing ranged between 50% during 1980-1984 years to 100% during the years of 2005-2008.

As Table 8 shows, the lack of the assumptions of the study in the thesis (80%) indicates that most of the students as well as their professors did not consider this element as a part of the study; so, they did not include it in their theses. Whether avoidance or ignorance of this element of the theses is made purposefully or not, its absence deteriorates the quality of the thesis to be a loose and shallow one.

Limitations of the study: Researchers always decide what to study and determine the variables to be included in their studies before they start collecting data. One of the major elements of any study that should be determined before the study starts is the limitations of the study. In so doing, the researcher determines the limits of the study in terms of the size and type of the sample, the duration and location of the study, and the instruments to be used for data collection. In this study, the results showed that 140 (86%) theses mentioned the limitations clearly. As Table 9 shows, the availability of the

limitations of the study increased through years and reached the highest rate (96%) during the years of 2005-2008; however, 23 (14%) theses did not include any limitations section as a part of the study.

Theses that did not involve an empirical research by using a survey or an exam did not use a limitations section. This could be due to the belief that limitations are

limited only to the size of the sample, type of sample, level of students' grade, the location where the study took place, etc. In other words, studies that made generalizations were the studies that involved the limitations of the study section while other types of studies did not include this section.

Table 11: Availability of implications of the study by years

Years Availability	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008	Total
Available	2 (33%)	13 (41%)	10 (25%)	10 (30%)	1 (3%)	---	36 (22%)
Not available	4 (67%)	19 (59%)	30 (75%)	23 (70%)	28 (97%)	23 (100%)	127 (78%)
Total	6 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	33 (100%)	29 (100%)	23 (100%)	163 (100%)

Table 12: Availability of conclusions of the study by years

Years Availability	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008	Total
Available	---	14 (44%)	8 (20%)	13 (39%)	13 (45%)	13 (57%)	61 (37%)
Not available	6 (100%)	18 (56%)	32 (80%)	20 (61%)	16 (55%)	10 (43%)	102 (63%)
Total	6 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	33 (100%)	29 (100%)	23 (100%)	163 (100%)

Definitions of terms: In the field of education, not all terms and expressions are defined or used in the same way. Some terms might be used in different contexts by different researchers to mean different things. Thus, researchers are required to provide operational definitions for major key concepts used in the research in order to make the meaning clearer for the reader. In regards to the theses analyzed in this present study, the results showed that the majority of these theses contained this element. Table 10 shows the availability and lack of the definitions of terms in theses from 1980 through 2008.

As Table 10 shows, the definitions of terms in the theses increased from 67% in 1980-1984 to 100% during the years 2005-2008. The major cause for the availability of this element in almost all of the theses especially during 2000-2004 and 2005-2008 periods of time was that nearly almost all of these theses were of the quasi-experimental research. As mentioned earlier, 127 (78%) of the theses were of the survey and quasi-experimental type. Therefore, when using this type of research, the graduate students were to use certain terms and expressions that might be interpreted by different people to mean different things. To avoid misunderstanding of these terms and expressions, the graduate students

defined almost all of the terms they used in their theses.

Implications of the study: Educational studies are conducted for various reasons; however, most of the theoretical and all of empirical studies share a major element which is the practical value that the study implies. The implications of the study are the fruitful and practical values that the study promises to achieve in reality on research bases. In this study, the results showed that 127 (78%) of the theses did not include this important element. This, of course, is a major defect of the theses because they did not show whether their results had any practical value or not.

Table 11 shows that, in general, the availability of the implications of the study decreased by years. For example, this element was available during the first two periods by 33% and 41% and then decreased to 3% and 0% in the last two periods. This means that of 52 theses, only one included implementations of the study from 2000-2008. These implications were not included in these theses neither directly under a clear title or section nor indirectly with other titles or sections. This result indicates what was mentioned above, that this major element was not seriously dealt with neither by the graduate students nor by their supervisors or committees

because they think that the results, conclusions and recommendations are the most important parts but not the implications.

Conclusions of the study: The conclusion section in any educational study is the part of the study that tells the reader what the study had arrived at in easy, clear, and brief words. This section is based on the actual results of the study under investigation. Therefore, many researchers see that this section is one of the major elements that should be written with care and attention because it shows the major results in a language that everyone can understand. However, in this study, 102 (63%) theses did not include this major element and it was available in only 61 (37%) since 1980.

As Table 12 shows, the availability of this section in the theses was not steady through the years but never exceeded 57% through all the years. The highest percentage of the availability of this element was during the 2005-2008 period. However, 43% of the theses during this same period did not include this element. One possible reason for the lack of this element is that the students thought it was not necessary to arrive at certain conclusions as long as they stated and discussed the results and they forgot that a conclusion is not necessarily a result. Conclusions are always made to make the results clear and they are always based on the results of the study.

Table 13: Type of population in theses by years

Type \ Years	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008	Total
Students only	5 (83%)	26 (82%)	26 (65%)	21 (64%)	20 (69%)	11 (48%)	109 (67%)
Teachers only	---	3 (9%)	5 (12.5%)	8 (24%)	4 (14%)	8 (35%)	28 (17%)
Students & Teachers	1 (17%)	3 (9%)	5 (12.5%)	4 (12%)	3 (10%)	4 (17%)	20 (12%)
Non-School	---	---	2 (5%)	---	---	---	2 (1.3%)
Supervisors	---	---	1 (2.5%)	---	1 (3.5%)	---	2 (1.3%)
Not applicable	---	---	1 (2.5%)	---	1 (3.5%)	---	2 (1.3%)
Total	6 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	33 (100%)	29 (100%)	23 (100%)	163 (100%)

Type of population: Educational studies are always undertaken in educational contexts. One of the major elements that that comprise the context is the population that the study is going to be conducted on. In this study 109 (67%) theses were conducted on students of different types and grade levels. While teachers came in the second place (17%), teachers and students as the target population came in the third rank (12%).

As Table 13 shows, the percentage of using the students as the target population of the study decreased from 83% in 1980-1984 to 48% in 2005-2008; whereas, the percentage of using teachers as the population of the study increased from 0% in 1980-1984 to 35% in 2005-2008. These results show that during the 1980s and 1990s options for the graduate students were open to study the students' problems. However, in the last ten years, professors started to ask their students to study other types of population and not to stick only to students at

schools. One possible reason for this shift is the increasing number of problems and issues related to teachers in the field rather than students' problems. However, other types of population are still in need to be investigated. For examples, several studies should be directed to teacher educators, language supervisors, college students, etc. Coorough (1993) found that the most common participants included were college students.

Type of institution: Comprehensiveness is one of the merits of a good thesis or dissertation. However, it is impossible for one research thesis or dissertation to take into account all types of populations, institutions, or variables, etc. Nevertheless, research over years should take the above mentioned items into account in order to build credibility and authenticity. In the present study, the results showed that the researchers did not conduct their studies across all institutions in a balanced way. That is to

say, the majority of the theses mainly focused on one institution which is the public or government schools and relatively ignored the other types of educational institutions. While 102 (63%) theses were conducted on government schools only 14% (23) theses handled university issues. Schools in the private sector involved only 7% (11) despite the fact that these schools have hundred of thousands of students in all grade levels

especially in the city of Amman which is the biggest city in Jordan in the number of population. These results agree with what Duncan and Pryzwansky (1988) found in their study that most doctoral dissertations focused on public schools. They found that twenty five per cent of the dissertations (17) took place in postsecondary settings while 68% (47) of the dissertations focused on public schools.

Table 14: Type of institution researched by years

Years School	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2008	Total
Government	4 (66.6%)	24 (75%)	25 (62.5%)	20 (61%)	16 (55%)	13 (56.5%)	102 (63%)
Universities	---	3 (9.5%)	4 (10%)	8 (24%)	7 (24%)	1 (4.3%)	23 (14%)
Private sector	---	1* (3%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (3%)	2 (7%)	6* (26%)	11 (7%)
Community Colleges	1 (16.7%)	3 (9.5%)	5 (12.5%)	---	---	---	9 (5.5%)
Not determined	1 (16.7%)	---	2 (5%)	2 (6%)	1 (3.5%)	1 (4.3%)	7 (4%)
UNRWA	---	---	1 (2.5%)	1** (3%)	2*** (7%)	1 (4.3%)	5 (3%)
Not applicable	--	1 (3%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (3%)	1 (3.5%)	1 (4.3%)	5 (3%)
Military	---	---	1 (2.5%)	---	---	---	1 (1%)
Total	6 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	33 (100%)	29 (100%)	23 (100%)	163 (100%)

* This study had combined two types of institutions 1 and 3

** This study had combined two types of institutions 1 and 6

*** This study had combined three types of institutions 1, 3 and 6

In comparison with the public or government schools, Table 14 shows that other educational institutions were hardly investigated. For example, although there are several schools in the country that are owned by the Military Forces, only one study was conducted on these schools during the last 28 years. On the other hand, very few studies combined more than one type of these institutions. Studies that combined more than one educational institution were very limited in number as the table shows.

Table 14 shows that the percentage of theses conducted in the government schools decreased after 1989 in comparison with other years. One reason for this decrease in number might be that new other institutions began to emerge on the surface and that some of the graduated students themselves came from these schools. Therefore, it was easier for them to conduct their studies in their own schools. For instance, the study that was conducted on the military population was conducted by a

student who was in the army forces. Students who came from the private sector and the UNRWA schools did the same thing, too.

Type and Number of Instrument used: Most studies usually use one instrument for data collection. However, some types of studies need more than one type of instruments because of the varied types of data needed for the study. In this study, as Figure 1 shows, 119 (73%) theses used one instrument for data collection. The most frequently used instrument was the text/exam tool (76 theses), then the questionnaire (37 theses) followed by tape recording (2 theses), document analysis (2 theses) and observation and scale tools (one thesis each). On the other hand, 33 theses (20%) used two instruments. Most of these theses focused on the first two tools, text/exam and the questionnaire. Specifically, 7 theses used the test and questionnaire while seven other theses used the questionnaire and interviews. As for the theses that used three tools, the results of the study showed that 2 theses

used the test/exam, interview and observation while three other theses used the questionnaire, interview and observation while the other theses used other instruments.

One possible reason for the overuse of one instrument in the theses is that students may not be trained enough to be qualified enough to use the other instruments. The other possible reason could be that in both universities there are no research courses offered to train the students to conduct a study and write the theses step by step except for the statistics courses that instruct them how to analyze results obtained from a test. Moreover, because the majority of those graduate students are usually in-service teachers, they find it easier to construct an exam for the sake of data collection rather than to conduct a content analysis research or even to engage in a qualitative research.

The results and discussion section mentioned above made it apparent that theses conducted by EFL graduate students in UJ and YU from 1980 through 2008 have certain characteristics that are clear to detect. In answering the first question of the study, it seems that some of the characteristics that were made clear and distinct but exposed the theses to jeopardy and investigation were: the statement of the problem, the significance of the study, the assumptions of the study, the implications, the conclusions, the type of population, institutions under investigation, type of research used, and the topic to be investigated.

In answering the second question, one might find it easy to notice that these characteristics did not appear randomly; instead, these characteristics interweaved together and emerged in away that made them appear as a systemic pattern or trend over a period of almost three decades. That is to say, if change does not happen in the near future, theses will stay the same for a longer time, and the drawbacks, flaws, and violations will stay as is.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this present study, the researcher was able to make some conclusions and recommendation that could be of great benefit for those who have interest in developing the status of research conducted by graduate students in EFL.

Conclusions

1. The case of large numbers of violations in clarity and lack of elements of many theses makes it in no doubt

that this job was not perfectly done. There was evidence that masters' theses were not treated seriously by the supervisors, advisors and committee members from one side and the students from the other side. This piece of research should not be seen as only a training exercise rather than a real piece of research. Anderson, Day, and McLaughlin (2006) indicated that some supervisors see that the master's dissertation "could act as a vehicle for research training". As a result, students may not deal seriously with this piece of research when they know that it is not going to be a genuine piece of research. On the other hand, other researchers see the master's theses as a real piece of research and that it should involve all the characteristics of good research project. Therefore, they deal with it seriously and do not let any chance for flaws or drawbacks to affect this piece of research.

2. While qualitative research was almost ignored by the graduate students and their supervisors, quantitative research dominated almost all types of studies especially the empirical ones. However, there are cases in which we need to have deeper investigation that can be obtained by qualitative research only.
3. The results of the study showed that the majority of the theses implemented only one type of quantitative research (survey and quasi-experimental). Other types of quantitative research (Course design, content analysis, evaluation discourse analysis, conceptual/curriculum and descriptive/document) were almost ignored despite the fact that educational problems and issues need to be investigated by using the appropriate type of research tools and not just by distributing a survey or conducting an experiment.
4. Some of the language elements and skills were almost ignored. Speaking and listening were not investigated enough. One possible reason for this shortage could be the lack of interest or knowledge in such topics by the graduate students.

Recommendations

1. During the writing process of the thesis, students need actual help and guidance from their advisors in all aspects of the process rather than general supervision. Jeske (1984) indicated that universities seldom provide writing instructions at the dissertation level, or even at any level of graduate education. The reason behind this lack of help is the

assumption that graduate students are basically equipped with writing skills needed to handle any rhetorical situation in their disciplines. However, the results of this study proved that this assumption is not true.

2. Academic writing courses should be offered to students in the program at the practical level and not just at the theoretical base. Students should be taught how to develop and write every single element that could be included in the thesis by attending actual workshops and by submitting evidence of ability to perform the job well at the end of the workshop. This could be done through establishing a writing center that provides help and guidance for the students through all of the stages of writing.
3. A clear set of standards and criteria for evaluating the thesis should be established by the various departments across all universities in the country in

order to judge the quality of the thesis and not just the availability of the items in the thesis. No one single thesis should be approved before it meets the agreed upon standards. By doing so, flaws and drawbacks will be reduced to the minimum.

4. Although the two investigated universities are the largest ones in the country and have the majority of students in the TEFL program, this study should be replicated in other curriculum and instruction departments in the other universities across the country in order to generalize the results at the national level.
5. Since the major aim of educational research is to solve a problem or to describe a situation and not just to write a thesis to be put on the shelf in the library, another study is needed to find out how many of these theses were developed into a published research article in a journal or turned into a book.

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