

Jordanian English Language Research: A Meta-Analysis

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Abstract

This study came to identify the key areas of research interests over the years and to highlight the distribution of the topics studied. In particular, an attempt is made to examine the titles of all available theses and or dissertations on the English language. The methodology adopted in this study is basically qualitative and thematic although some frequency count was attempted. A corpus of (550) titles of EL theses and dissertations were identified within the overall database the electronic library at the University of Jordan. A 10-step procedure was followed to categorize and analyze the data. The findings showed that it was possible to identify six major recurring themes or fields under which Jordanian EL research was conducted. The themes were ranked according to their distribution in the corpus as follows: (1) pedagogy or methodology, (2) language description, (3) curriculum studies (4), translation studies, (5) perceptions and attitudes, and (6) error analysis. In light of the findings, areas of neglect as well as aspects of focus in each theme were highlighted.

Key words: Research; English; Jordan; Theses; Meta-analysis; Pedagogy; Translation

1. Introduction

Few would dispute the importance of English as a lingua franca in Jordan. In so far as education is concerned, English is taught in all public and private schools from Grade One throughout the educational ladder of the school system. In tertiary education, English also enjoys a prestigious status as a medium of instruction in most colleges and as an important foreign language in other subjects. Within this context, Al-Abed Al-Haq and Al-Masaeid (2009) identified the status and the use of Arabic and English in Jordan and reported that Jordanians viewed English as 'the language of the future. Over the past five decades or so, much research has been conducted in Jordan with regard to English. But, it seems that little is known so far about the impact of such research as a source of solutions to the many problems reported by researchers. Jordanian academic research is usually conducted by postgraduate students in universities as well as by academic faculty members. It is, however, interesting to note that research conducted by students is rarely published. It is often stored in the archives of university libraries for future reference by other student researchers. In the case of university faculty members, many studies find their way to local and international journals and / or conference proceedings. Sometimes, faculty members publish research that is done by their students. The observation remains, however, that most of students' research submitted as Master and / or PhD dissertations stays to collect dust on library shelves.

One area of neglect in the Jordanian EL research agenda is clearly meta-research. In some sense, in every research document one finds a literature review of some sort that can be considered a form of meta-research. However, literature reviews embedded in isolated research articles or theses are necessarily confined to a specific research topic and, therefore, they do not reflect the overall research agenda in the country. As research continues to be required and produced by university faculty and students, we seem to lack a tradition of investigating and evaluating EL research. This is certainly an unfortunate phenomenon because available EL research does not get analyzed and scrutinized in relation to the overall EL situation. We do not know, for example, the trends that have been setting the scene of Jordanian EL research over the years. Equally important, we do not know enough about the areas or fields that have attracted Jordanian EL researchers. The current practice seems to be that individuals do individual research in isolation and in absence of any public research policy.

Over the past five decades or so, much research effort has been conducted in Jordan as to a variety of EL research topics.

However, it is not known what trends that research was taking over the time. No specific input is available on the scope, width, and depth of this research tradition. It is possible that some research areas were avoided for some reason or another, as was suggested by Ma'ani (1990). It is lamentable here to find that Ma'ani was the only meta-research study on EL Jordanian research. It is acknowledged here that learning English as a foreign language is still a major challenge. The problem seems to be, though, in the lack of any official research policy that can guide researchers as to what is or what is not researchable advisedly. The current practice is quite idiosyncratic. Individual faculty members and individual postgraduate students follow personal preferences and probably their own biases. Research on EL especially that is contained in MA and or PhD theses is largely unattended to. Usually, once the thesis or dissertation is approved, and after a copy is required for the university library, the work itself tends to be forgotten. There is an apparent gap in the Jordanian EL research due to a lack of a synthesized approach.

In this study, an attempt is made to examine the titles of all available theses and or dissertations on the English language. The purpose is to identify the key areas of research interests over the years and to highlight the distribution of the topics studied. The value of such attempt is that the Jordanian EL scenario would hopefully benefit from knowing what EL researchers have been up to so to speak. It could provide some useful insights on how future EL research should be geared. In addition, the results can be used as important indicators for policy makers when considering relevant issues. To be more specific, the following questions were formulated: (1) How can the past Jordanian EL research be categorized? (2) What are the topic areas that have been covered by Jordanian EL researchers over the past 40 years or so? (3) What areas of focus, neglect or bias can be identified in past Jordanian EL research? (4) What implications can be drawn for future EL research in Jordan?

2. Review of the Literature

The only exception I am aware of concerning meta-research on EL in Jordan is that of Ma'ani (1990). In his thesis, Ma'ani investigated (90) theses and dissertations that have been completed between 1980 and 1989 with special reference to the Jordanian EL situation. In particular, the work of Ma'ani, among other things aimed at exploring what topic areas of Jordanian EL dissertations / theses were researched. As far as methodology was concerned, he used what he called 'the outline' and 'the scale' as major instruments, in addition to questionnaires in categorizing his data. The main findings of Ma'ani's thesis indicated that Jordanian researchers seem to have avoided certain important research areas such as course and syllabus design, materials analysis, materials production, and testing. These were considered by the respondents as 'difficult' areas for research! Other results referred to ESP as a 'new' development in Jordan at the time. It should be noted here that the theses / dissertations examined by Ma'ani covered (25) topics produced by an international English language journal i.e., TESOL Quarterly. On the basis of the previous results, Ma'ani concluded that there is a need for a national policy that provides Jordanian researchers with guidance. He urged concerned academic departments to encourage researchers to write on avoided topics albeit important.

Outside Jordan, Lin & Cheng (2010) investigated research trends in M.A. TESOL Programs in Taiwan using a content analysis approach. They examined master's theses produced between 2003 and 2007. Data consisted of (493) thesis abstracts retrieved from the *Electronic Theses and Dissertations System* of National Digital Library. The analysis of the research contexts showed that the two most common contexts were secondary education in high school and undergraduate education in universities. The analysis identified four most frequently investigated topics. These were: (1) language skills, including research on listening, speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, (2) teaching methods or approaches, and (3) materials or curriculum and computer assisted language learning (CALL).

Shih, Feng, and Tsai (2008), cited in Lin & Cheng (2010), conducted a content analysis of journal articles in the field of cognition in e-learning. Shih et al. presented the research trends in their field of interest by analyzing the participants, research setting, research design type, and examined methods used in articles published in five target professional journals between the years 2001 and 2005. They concluded that knowledge about the publishing research trends in major journals of the field can assist educators as well as novice and senior researchers in recognizing research trends and influential studies in the field.

Listings of over (200) graduate theses and dissertations in ESL completed since 1975 were studied by Cooper (1978) to determine apparent topic areas and methodologies.

A wide variety of topics were revealed by the classification according to subject matter. The 'favorites' of researchers were those areas which dealt with pedagogy, like methods, techniques, and materials. Interestingly, the author noted that very few studies dealt with bilingualism, English as a second dialect, testing, or the use of language laboratories in ESL.

Goldberg *et al.* (2003) used a meta-analysis approach to study the effect of computers on student writing. Meta-analyses were performed including (26) studies conducted between 1992 and 2002 focusing on the comparison between K–12 students writing with computers vs. paper-and-pencil. Significant differences were found in favor of computers for quantity of writing and quality of writing. Roessingh (2004) investigated effectiveness of high schools' ESL programs in Canada using a meta-analysis approach. This study analyzed (12) major studies of effective ESL programs conducted over (14) years to provide a background for reflections on program development and successful outcomes for ESL learners, documented and published previously. The effects of hypertext glosses on L2 vocabulary acquisition were studied by Yun (2010) using a meta-analysis approach. The study aimed to synthesize characteristics of studies, technology use and methods from empirical studies for a comprehensible and insightful review of the effect of hypertext glosses on L2 vocabulary acquisition. Meta-analysis as a quantitative method was conducted to synthesize overall findings of (300) empirical studies by calculating a standardized mean difference effect size. The results revealed that various L2 learners, including English as a second or foreign language, benefit from multiple hypertext glosses while reading computerized texts.

Archibald *et al.* (2008) used a meta-analysis method to review research on ESL issues in relation to content-based language learning. They examined books and articles dating back to the 1980s and found that there were many commonalities between the earlier works and the more recent ones. A meta-analysis approach was used by Goldschneider and DeKeyser (2005) to explain the natural order of L2 morpheme acquisition in English. They pooled data from (25) years of research on the order of acquisition of English grammatical morphemes by students of English as a second language. Results showed that a large portion of the total variance in acquisition order was explained by the combination of the five determinants.

Roblyer (1989) provided information about the effect of computer use in schools on student achievement, attitudes, dropout rate, and learning time by analyzing studies conducted between 1980 and 1987. Thirty-eight published and unpublished studies and (44) dissertations were reviewed. Computer-based instruction was shown to be potentially effective in most educational applications. Similarly, Wongtrirat (2010) applied a meta-analysis to study the English language proficiency and academic achievement of international students in higher education institutions in the United States. The purpose was to investigate studies from 1987-2009 that examined the correlation between the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) on grade point average (GPA) and course completion. The results indicated that the TOEFL had a small predictive ability on GPA and course completion of international students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. On the other hand, Willig (1984) conducted a meta-analysis of selected studies on the efficacy of bilingual education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Although the technique of meta-analysis allowed for statistical control of methodological inadequacies, the methodological inadequacies in the synthesized studies rendered the results less than definitive and highlighted the need for quality research in the area of bilingual education. A meta-analysis of group design studies was used by Han (2009) to study evidence-based reading instruction for English language learners in preschool through sixth grades. An extensive search of the research studies identified (29) studies employing group design published in peer-reviewed journals since 1967. Findings revealed that there were more than (10) instructional programs that address phonemic awareness and phonics instruction at preschool to second grade levels, but there were no phonemic awareness and phonics instruction for third to sixth graders. Recently, Tavşancıl and Kezer (2011) have studied abstracts of theses and dissertations in the domain of measurement and evaluation. They covered (90) master theses and (21) PhD dissertations completed in state Turkish universities between 2000 and 2009. Interesting results were reported as to what was included or avoided in the abstracts examined.

3. Method

The methodology adopted in this study is basically qualitative and thematic although some frequency counting was attempted. The data for this study were collected from the electronic library at the University of Jordan.

A corpus of (550) titles of EL theses and dissertations was identified within the overall database. All entries were taken containing the key word "English" in the search. These represent EL theses and dissertations that have been successfully completed and stored at the University of Jordan electronic archives. They represent the period 1974-2010. This corpus is satisfactory for the purposes of this study as it covers four decades of Jordanian EL research. It should be pointed here that before the 1974, no postgraduate programs were available in the country. From 1962 to 1974, only the University of Jordan was providing higher education in the country.

No attempt was made in this study to include titles of Jordanian EL research that has been conducted outside the country or that has been published in journals or books. Also, only Jordanian authors were considered for the inclusion in this analysis. Moreover, no distinction was made between MA or PhD dissertations. Both types were treated equally. However, it is felt that the available corpus is capable of providing significant information as to the questions of the study. It must be stated here that the qualitative approach was chosen to be the most appropriate for the purposes of this study. This is because the nature of the corpus is composed of titles of theses and dissertations. Titles, of course, are relatively short statements indicating the major concepts or variables tackled by the thesis / dissertation author. Therefore, a thematic method of analysis would suffice here. The following 10-step procedure was followed to categorize and analyze the data:

1. The key word "English" was used and entered as a search guide word.
2. All (550) resulting titles of all EL theses or dissertations were surveyed and listed on a source list.
3. The source list was scrutinized for a possible outline of representative themes or fields.
4. The source list was given to a panel of senior five colleagues (professors and instructors) working in the University of Jordan and who were known to have clear interest in EL or linguistics research.
5. The panel members were consulted as to their views on the research method and on possible recurring themes that they were able to observe on the list.
6. A preliminary framework or outline was obtained based on the observations of the panel.
7. Six themes were identified as the major areas under which Jordanian EL research has been conducted over the past four decades.
8. The six themes were color coded on the source list to ease the categorization.
9. A topic search was then applied within each theme or category in the outline.
10. The number and frequency of the topic was counted to obtain an idea on the relative distribution of topics under each major category.

4. Results

Having examined the source list of (550) titles, it was possible to identify six major recurring themes or fields under which past Jordanian EL research was conducted. The six themes were first tabulated in Table (1) as follows:

Table 1: Distribution of Themes Covered in the Corpus

Theme	N	%
Curriculum studies	91	16.54
Perceptions and attitudes	60	10.90
Error analysis	26	04.72
Translation studies	86	15.63
Language description	114	20.72
Pedagogy / methodology	173	31.45
Total	550	100

It is clearly noticed through the table above that research into pedagogy and teaching methods came on top of the list (31.45%). This is followed by research on language description, i.e. linguistics assuming (20.72%) of the total research effort. Curriculum studies took the third rank accounting for (16.54%) of the research topics. Translation studies came fourth in rank representing (15.63%) of the research done over the years. At the bottom of the scale came research on perceptions and attitudes (10.90%) and research on error analysis (4.72%). Table (2) below shows the themes in a ranking order according to their distribution in the corpus:

Table 2: Ranking of Themes Covered in Past Jordanian EL Research

Rank	Theme	N	%
1	Pedagogy / methodology	173	31.45
2	Language description	114	20.72
3	Curriculum studies	91	16.54
4	Translation studies	86	15.63
5	Perceptions / attitudes	60	10.90
6	Error analysis	26	04.72
	Total	550	100

4.1 Findings in relation to Theme (1): Pedagogy and teaching methodology

This category included the following key words or phrases: teaching, learning, methods, and effect of, impact of, techniques, exams, tests, assessment, students' problems, students' difficulties, achievement, motivation, and classroom. As indicated above, this theme claimed a big portion (N=173, %=31.45) of EL research work in Jordan over the past forty years or so. Almost one third of the theses or dissertations were on language teaching topics. The major independent variables apparent in studies carrying the phrase 'effect of' or 'impact of' varied to include a wide range of possible variables. These are listed in the Appendix below. The dependent variables seem to have focused on the following four major issues: students' achievement in any of the four skills, students' attitudes and motivation, students' acquisition of grammar and vocabulary, and students' pronunciation. The findings concerning this theme show that both school students and university students were targeted in these studies. It can also be inferred from the titles surveyed in this category that an experimental approach was being used as a major research technique. This shows that there has been a strong awareness of the importance of following an empirical attitude to EL research in Jordan over the years. It should also be noted here that not all studies were purely experimental in nature. Some, however, followed the correlation method of research. It is interesting to observe here that very little or no research work has been addressed to ESP topics in this category. Only a couple of studies were noted on using ESP texts or authentic materials in teaching.

The effect of using educational technology was evident in the list of topics in this category. This involved language laboratory, audio / visual aids, and software packages. It can also be noticed that there was clear focus on particular age groups such as upper secondary classes, mainly 10th and 11th grades. It is also possible to observe in this category that not much experimental work was done on testing techniques or formats. This could be considered as a case of neglect here. Another case of neglect is also the role of various types of dictionaries in the teaching / learning process.

4.2 Findings in relation to Theme (2): Language description

This category involved the following key words: discourse, varieties, linguistics features, language acquisition, contrastive and comparative analysis. As mentioned above, this theme covered (114) theses / dissertations in the corpus thus representing (20.72%) of the total entries. Therefore, it can be said that fifth or less than a quarter of the past Jordanian EL research was on linguistics, and mainly language description. I attempted to divide this theme into sub-categories so that a clearer picture can be obtained on the status of research into this general field of English studies. The following table shows the ratios of the component topics that received research attention:

Table 3: Distribution of Sub-categories of Language Description Research in Ranking Order

Rank	Topic	N	%
1	Grammar and syntactic features	51	44.73
2	Discourse and pragmatics	36	31.57
3	Vocabulary and lexicology	14	12.28
4	Phonology	13	11.40
	Total	114	100

As the table clearly shows, grammar and syntactic features seem to have received the lion's share (44.73%) in past Jordanian EL research.

Interestingly, research on aspects of discourse and pragmatics (31.57%) came second in ranking before lexicology (12.28%) and phonology (11.4%). Aspects of grammar analyzed in the corpus included almost all aspects of English such as verbs, modality, prepositions, adverbials, conditionals, sentence patterns, verb phrases, interrogatives, tenses, aspect, and voice. The approach used in studying syntactic features was mainly contrastive analysis involving English plus Arabic. The second biggest group was discourse and pragmatics accounting for nearly a third (31.57%) of the category. In this sub-category, the following topics received attention from researchers: paragraph structure, speech acts, language functions, discourse competence, illocutionary forces, proverbs, rhetorical features, communication strategies, stylistics, cohesion and coherence, and politeness. Vocabulary and lexicology did receive research attention but with a low percentage (12.28%). Among the issues studied were loan words, idioms, acronyms, collocations, compound words, and vocabulary acquisition. The last and least studied sub-category was phonology accounting for only (11.40%) of the entries in the second theme. These studies were mainly in the context of contrastive tradition. The features that received attention covered mainly speech sounds, stress, prosodic aspects, accent, and intonation. Strangely enough, one can easily observe the absence of semantics in the sub-category. Unless semantic features have been studied as part of lexical studies, this is clearly a case of neglect in the Jordanian past EL research. There is a straightforward bias towards grammar.

ESP varieties have been touched in this category but certainly not with a significant focus. Some studies involved the analysis of certain linguistics features in varieties such as academic texts, literary texts, political discourse, legal texts, newspaper (editorial) language, TV news, commercial correspondence, journalism, engineering, aviation, banking, and diplomacy. Other varieties have been totally neglected; a case in point is medical English. In general, the methodology adopted in studying language description seems to have been mainly contrastive analysis, and frequency counts as to the description of linguistic features in specific varieties of English.

4.3 Findings in relation to Theme (3): Curriculum studies

What follows is a presentation of the findings related to the first field, i.e. curriculum studies. It should be noted here that this umbrella term covered any theses tackling issues on EL curriculum, syllabus, course, and program, materials in terms of design, analysis, or evaluation. This category also included any thesis or dissertation which focused on CAAL, textbook evaluation, needs analysis, and training activities. The total number of entries, i.e. theses or dissertations under the category of curriculum studies was (91) out of the overall number of the corpus, i.e. (550). This represents (16.54 %) of the corpus.

Table 4: Distribution and Ranking of Sub-categories in Theme (3): Curriculum Studies

Rank	Topic	N	%
1	Program / course effectiveness	33	36.26
2	Textbooks / materials	21	23.07
3	Curriculum	15	16.48
4	CAAL	10	10.98
5	Needs assessment	8	8.79
6	Teacher training	4	4.39
	Total	91	100

The table above shows the distribution and ranking of the major sub-categories included in Theme (3), i.e. curriculum studies. On top of the list came theses / dissertations on program or course effectiveness. This accounted for more than a third (36.26%) of the theses /dissertations in this category. Past EL research seems to have been focused on measuring the effectiveness of EL programs in relation to certain variables such as students' attitudes or achievement. Clearly, the methodology used in such studies was basically experimental. Among the major independent variables investigated in programs or courses were: semantic mapping, brainstorming, communicative approach, whole language approach, private vs. public EL, university BA in English, in-service teacher training, culture-based programs, ESP courses, remedial instruction, pre-service teacher training, and literature-based programs. The dependent variables involved in these studies focused on students' language abilities, writing, reading, vocabulary, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies, students' attitudes, quality standards, teachers' competencies

The second major sub-category was textbooks and materials accounting for (23.07%) of the entries in theme (3), i.e. curriculum studies. These studies investigated school or university textbooks and evaluated their effectiveness. The approach used is mainly content analysis and evaluation usually from the perspectives of teachers and supervisors views. Among the aspects examined in textbooks were question types, children's literature, socio-cultural elements, readability, gender, thinking skills, communication skills, specific language skills and functions. The third sub-category in this theme was curriculum research. This aspect accounted for (10.89%) of the entries in this theme. These studies concentrated on EL curriculum planning and evaluation. In this area, the research focused on concepts such as gender, objectives, language skills, and needs assessment. Some of these studies took an ESP interest for particular learner groups. In the fourth sub-category came three sub-areas, i.e. CAAL, needs analysis, and teacher training, each of which accounted for (0.09%). In this group, multimedia and software packages were tested for their possible effect on EL learning. The approach used was basically experimental taking the effect of computerized materials on dependent variables such as students' achievement of some language skills or attitudes. In needs analysis, researchers have examined EL or ESP teachers' needs. The focus seemed to have been on college or university contexts. In the sub-category of teacher training, the following concepts were studied usually from an evaluative perspective based on attitudes and perceptions of teachers or supervisors: teacher guides, communicative approach, syllabuses, authentic materials, teacher competencies, pre-service training, and in-service training.

4.4 Findings in relation to Theme (4): Translation studies

Translation studies accounted for (15.63%) of the total research corpus. In this tradition of Jordanian EL research, it seems that most of the effort was targeted at investigating problems of translating specific linguistic features of Arabic or English. The flowing list illustrates the kind of problems investigated in terms of translatability: tautological expressions, progressive aspects, conditional sentences, emotive expressions, word order, modality, phonological repetitions, metaphoric expressions, lexical repetitions, and body idiomatic expressions. Emphasis on pragmatics issues is apparent in this trend of Jordanian translation research. Much of this research examined issues of cultural problems, gender, speech acts, Quran expressions, politeness, implicatures, phatic expressions, folklore songs and nursery rhymes. There is a clear orientation to the study of certain aspects of the holy Quran in terms of translatability. In addition, several studies took translation form the angel of special varieties of English or Arabic such as medical terms, journalism, literature, media, tourism, economics and science. Areas of neglect seem to be interpretation, machine translation, and role of lexicography in the translation process. The methodology used was mainly descriptive and error-based.

4.5 Findings in relation to Theme (5): Perceptions and attitudes

This category of past EL Jordanian research accounted for (10.90%) of the total number of entries examined. It seems clear that a substantial portion of research done over the years was taking the perspective of perceptions and attitudes as a major theme in EL. The perceptions or attitudes of students, teachers, and in rare cases parents or supervisors were the main independent variables that were correlated to a number of learning factors. Table (5) below shows the distribution and ranking of perceptions / attitudes research in the corpus.

Table 5: Distribution and Ranking of Perceptions / Attitudes Research in the Corpus

Rank	Topic	N	%
1	Perceptions of students	32	53.33
2	Perceptions of teachers	25	41.66
3	perception of others, e.g. parents, employers	3	5.00
	Total	60	100

Clearly, more than a half (53.33%) of the studies in this category targeted students. Teachers' perceptions accounted for (41.66%) of the entries in this theme. A very small ratio of the studies (5%) was on perceptions of other groups such as supervisors, parents or employers. Perceptions of students and teachers were measured against the following variables in the teaching / learning process: cooperative learning, Arabic intonation, textbooks, achievement, language skills, classroom environment, literature in textbooks, needs, teacher roles, professional development, learning English, teacher training programs, foreign culture, authentic materials, native vs. non native teachers, gender, dictionaries and their uses.

4.6 Findings in relation to Theme (6): Error analysis

The last and least studied area of past EL Jordanian research was error analysis. This accounted for (04.72%) only. Researchers seem to have looked into errors made by mainly undergraduate university level students. Not much was found on other levels. More than half of these studies were on grammatical aspects. The rest were distributed on reading, lexical, writing, and translation errors. Nothing was apparently done on, ESP contexts, aspects of discourse, phonology, morphology, and reference skills. This makes these areas obvious cases of neglect in the Jordanian EL research tradition.

5. Discussion

The majority of Jordanian EL research remains unpublished and is in fact sent to university library shelves to collect dust. EL research in Jordan is usually done in departments of English language and literature in colleges of arts or departments of curricula and instruction in colleges of education. The research in departments of English and literature covers language description, literature, and in some cases translation to and from Arabic. In educational colleges, the EL research naturally takes a pedagogical perspective. The first institution of higher education in Jordan was established in 1962 under the name of The University of Jordan. Other universities came into existence and postgraduate degrees were initiated. Therefore, it can be said that local EL research in Jordan surfaced during the second half of the 1970s. In fact, the first international study on the Jordanian EL situation can be traced back to the early 1970s. In June 1972, the Ford Foundation began a survey of English-language instruction in Jordan, including the English program at the University of Jordan. The survey attempted a critical assessment of various aspects of the English program. The report on the survey described the aims and dimension of English instruction in Jordan, curricula and instructional materials, and teacher-training activities. (Harrison, Prator, and Tucker, 1975).

What is surprising, however, is that this accumulating literature of EL research was never studied as a research topic. In other words, meta-research in the Jordanian EL scene does not seem to exist yet. There is a single exception to this observation. This has been the study conducted by Ma'ani (1990) who surveyed past EL Jordanian research covering the period 1980-1989. It is also surprising that no state-of-the-art review is available as to how Jordanian research has been developing over the years. EL research remains individual and based on personal initiatives rather than on a national research policy or agenda. Therefore, it is possible to consider this study as another step in the direction of building a basis of meta-research tradition in Jordan and probably in other similar countries. Taking a meta-research perspective in Jordan should be quite beneficial as it does indicate areas of neglect as well as topics that may have been over-researched. It could shed more light on past trends and suggest further venues for new research in this vital field. It is also acknowledged here that serious research effort is the only and best way to deal with EFL and language related challenges in the country.

While understanding that any thematic classifying exercise is necessarily difficult and may never be comprehensive, it was possible in this study to categorize past Jordanian EL research into six major themes rather than four. These themes were: curriculum studies, perceptions and attitudes, error analysis, translation studies, language description, and pedagogy (methodology). One can observe here that past Jordanian EL research ignored such fields as computational linguistics, neuro-linguistics, historical linguistics, and to great extent semantics and lexicography. This may be due to the fact that these fields are relatively new in the case of computational or neuro-linguistics or viewed as difficult and requiring advanced expertise as in the case of semantics. Looking at the distribution and ranking of past Jordanian research in EL, Table (1) showed that pedagogical research came on top of the list accounting for (31.45%) of the total number of theses or dissertations included in the survey.

Most of these studies were experimental in that they involved independent variables. Forty five independent variables were identified covering a wide host factors as listed in Table (2). These factors were measured against their effect on students' EL achievement and or motivation. Most of these studies followed statistical methodologies and that indicates awareness or indeed preoccupation with empirical quantitative models rather than qualitative approaches. This can be attributed to the fact that most faculty members working in colleges of education in Jordanian universities were graduates of USA universities which were adopting psychometric methods during the first half of the 20th century. These faculty members are assumed to have influenced the decisions to select research topic as well as type of method.

Another possible reason for doing more research on methodology could be that departments of curriculum were attracting and recruiting more students and faculty members specializing in English. There is a general feeling in Jordan that methodology research is relatively "easier" than other types of descriptive English research. This observation remains to be verified, however.

Looking at the list of independent variables chosen in pedagogical research, we can notice that old as well as modern techniques have been tested to measure their effect on students' achievement. There is also clear awareness of the possible influential effect of technology shown in CALL oriented studies. There is also an apparent awareness of relatively modern trends in EL methods such as cooperative learning and communicative approach. One can also observe some attention given to the role of pedagogical lexicography in the teaching and learning of English. It is interesting to observe here that very little or practically no research work has been addressed to ESP topics in this category. Only a couple of studies were noted on using ESP texts or authentic materials in teaching. In Ma'ani (1990), language pedagogy came fourth as a major category of EL research and that involved topics like language computer models, classroom research, distance learning, curriculum design, teacher education, methodology, materials analysis and testing. Findings of Ma'ani's thesis indicated that Jordanian researchers seem to have avoided certain important research areas such as course and syllabus design, materials analysis, materials production, and testing. In my study, it is also clear that topics such as testing techniques were avoided in the Jordanian EL research tradition. Similarly, Ma'ani showed that ESP was a new topic and not much has been given to that field. Twenty years later, it seems that the same cases of neglect still prevail.

The analysis by Lin & Cheng (2010) identified four most frequently investigated topics: (1) language skills, including research on listening, speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, (2) teaching methods or approaches, (3) materials or curriculum and computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Compared to the results of this study, it seems that Lin and Chen treated teaching methods and curriculum studies including CAAL as separate entries. Their research does not mention any comparison with other major fields such as language description or translation. There is a clear difference between the results of the two studies. As far as language description is concerned, it appears from the findings that this theme second in ranking. This type of research accounted for nearly a fifth of the total amount of the corpus entries. Under this area, topics on discourse, language varieties, linguistic features, language acquisition, contrastive and comparative analysis have received research attention. The bulk of research under this category was targeting grammar and syntactic features followed by discourse/pragmatics, and vocabulary. Interestingly, phonology came at the bottom of the list. This is not surprising as syntax has been at the front of general linguistics for many decades during the twentieth century.

Almost all Jordanian faculty members supervising EL research studied in Anglo-American universities, and that is possibly how exaggerated emphasis was given to language structures rather than other equally important language features. Research on phonology could be viewed by many researchers as a thorny area of investigation requiring expertise and advanced knowledge in techniques and data collection techniques. It is also clear that the approach used in studying syntactic features was mainly contrastive analysis involving English plus Arabic. Strangely enough, one can easily observe the absence of semantics in the sub-category. Unless semantic features have been studied as part of lexical studies, this is clearly a case of neglect in the Jordanian past EL research. There is a straightforward bias towards grammar. ESP varieties have been touched in this category but certainly not with a significant focus. Some studies involved the analysis of certain linguistics features in varieties such as academic texts, literary texts, political discourse, legal texts, newspaper (editorial) language, TV news, commercial correspondence, journalism, engineering, aviation, banking, and diplomacy. Other varieties have been totally neglected; a case in point is medical English. In general, the methodology adopted in studying language description seems to have been mainly contrastive analysis, and frequency counts as to the description of linguistic features in specific varieties of English.

Curriculum studies came in third place in this study accounting for (16.54 %) of the corpus. The distribution and ranking of sub-categories in this Theme suggests that research on program or course effectiveness came on top. The methodology used is basically experimental involving independent variables such as communicative approach, whole language approach, literature or culture-focused programs. Some attention was given to ESP courses though very limited apparently. Both in-service and pre-service teacher training programs were subject of study.

The dependent variables investigated focused on language skills, students' attitudes, and teachers' competencies. Much of the curriculum research effort targeted textbooks and learning materials. The methodology adopted is mainly content analysis and evaluation via surveys exploring students' and teachers' views and experiences with such materials. Almost all aspects and elements of teaching materials were studied. These touched on components such as literature, culture, thinking, communication, and gender issues. We could also notice that Jordanian curriculum research did look into issues such as needs' assessment from an evaluative perspective. The contexts of such research seem to have concentrated on university programs. However, CALL curricular studies seem to have been a scarcity. This is possibly due to the lack of software packages which are usually expensive to obtain. Also, many researchers don't have the necessary expertise in using CALL programs if available.

Looking at the findings in relation to Theme 4, we notice that most of the research effort was targeted at investigating problems of translating specific linguistic features of Arabic or English. Translatability features as the major focus of attention. A wide range of specific types of expressions have been subjected to studies in relation to texts in Arabic and English. Such expressions included almost all aspects of language ranging from grammatical to even non-verbal language. The methodology used is mainly tests given to certain types of audience usually university students. It is interesting to observe here that a good share of translation studies was given to pragmatics. Linguistics features in relation to speech act theory have been examined for translatability. These studies are mostly empirical in nature involving tests. Some translation studies touched upon ESP varieties such as medical English, journalism, and literary texts. Areas of neglect seem to be interpretation, machine translation, and role of lexicography in the translation process.

It seems clear that a substantial portion of research done over the years was taking the perspective of perceptions and attitudes as a major theme in EL. The perceptions or attitudes of students, teachers, and in rare cases parents or supervisors were the main independent variables that were correlated to a number of learning factors. Perceptions of students and teachers were measured against variables in the teaching / learning process. For example, students and teachers were surveyed on their attitudes towards textbooks, needs, culture, gender, and classroom environments. It is observed here that perception studies ignored to a great extent parents, and potential employers. This could be due to the fact that eliciting opinions from students and teachers is considered the most straightforward and probably the easiest methodology. Such methodology employs questionnaires as the major data collection instruments. The least studied area of past EL Jordanian research was error analysis as findings relating to Theme 6 reveal. This tradition of research has been conducted by students and faculty of English departments at Jordanian universities. The majority of this kind of research is concentrated on grammatical features of English. Less attention was directed to errors in reading, writing, or speaking. Cases of neglect are obviously ESP contexts, discourse, phonology, morphology, and reference skills.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

As emphasized throughout this paper, past Jordanian EL research clearly lacks a meta-analysis perspective. Over the past five decades or so, not a single study seems to have been conducted to investigate the state of the art of Jordanian EL research as a whole. The only exception is, however, Ma'ani (1990). This is certainly deplorable because it shows that not much reflection was paid to past efforts. One cannot imagine, therefore, that a research policy for Jordanian EL would be viable without data on how past research has been moving. This piece of research sets the scene for a trend calling for more and better research taking meta-analysis as its approach. This study was restricted to titles of EL theses and dissertations saved at Jordan University Library. It is strongly suggested here that further research should look into full abstracts to identify methodologies used and results reported and possibly various contexts of past Jordanian EL work.

Future researchers should also consider the possibility of exploring Jordanian EL research reported in academic journals. The teaching and learning of English is still widely viewed as a challenge and translation studies are still not much in vogue. Also, research on language description and literature is still lacking a comprehensive review. Therefore, a more thorough approach should be established as to providing a database on the wider situation of English – related research in Jordan. The procedure followed in this study is an attempt to go beyond Ma'ani (1990). It is therefore a good idea if future research would look into testing this 10-step methodology and see what further measures could be introduced. The thematic approach is obviously useful but one would prefer to consider more rigorous frequency counts.

The findings of this study classified topics and themes of past Jordanian research into six categories. These themes were in ranking order pedagogy / methodology, language description, curriculum studies, translation studies, perceptions and attitudes, and finally error analysis. It is surprising to find that the database did not reveal reported research on English literature. This could be a case of neglect despite the fact that major Jordanian universities call the language departments as Departments of English Language and Literature. It remains to be seen if Jordanian researchers do in fact avoid EL literary research. Pedagogical research seems to have taken the lion's share in Jordanian language studies. But it is not clear yet how this abundant work has impacted the situation of learning and teaching of English in the country. Many independent variables have been investigated in seemingly experimental studies. However, it is not clear if the methodology of teaching English has really improved. That is why we need progressive studies to evaluate the effect of past research on the status quo. This study also showed that not much work was done on testing in relation to EL. This is a serious trend because many decisions are being taken on the basis of ad hoc or intuitive work. I therefore, urge Jordanian researchers to engage in testing and evaluation research. Similarly, this study showed that lexical and lexicographical research is minimal so far. This trend should be adjusted to allow more research into this vital field. It is obvious that grammatical analysis was receiving most of the attention.

A more balanced approach should therefore be encouraged. Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that further EL research should consider conducting more qualitative studies. The past trend of experimental work is useful but thematic and qualitative research would produce more informative insights about the realities of language teaching in the country. Clearly, neglected themes should receive more research attention in the future. Topics such as phonology, vocabulary, lexicography, and indeed semantics as well as lexicology are waiting for serious treatments by Jordanian researchers. Equally important are ESP varieties which should receive more focused research attention, a case in point is medical English. In translation research, this study revealed that areas of neglect included interpretation, machine translation, and role of lexicography in the translation process. The methodology used in such research was mainly descriptive and error-based. Therefore, it may be appropriate to suggest here that these cases of neglect should get due attention in the future. Also, more and different approaches should be envisaged as to exploring experimental procedures in the study of translation.

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Appendix: Independent Variables Studied in Pedagogical Research

1. using Arabic (L1) in teaching English
2. teaching composition
3. teachers' pronunciation
4. picture stories
5. teaching dialogue
6. instructional programs
7. teachers' knowledge
8. audio / visual aids
9. communicative approach
10. structural approach
11. traditional methods
12. vocabulary learning strategies
13. conversation
14. deductive vs. inductive methods
15. teaching spelling
16. using language laboratory
17. psychosocial factors
18. structural drills
19. feedback in writing
20. pre-writing activities
21. using monolingual dictionaries
22. using literature
23. free reading
24. games
25. oral questions by teachers
26. drama
27. parents attitudes
28. question types
29. remedial programs and wash-back
30. poetry
31. figures of speech
32. cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies
33. writing techniques
34. authentic materials
35. computer chatting
36. simulation
37. speed reading
38. discourse techniques
39. cooperative learning
40. reading strategies
41. word analysis
42. listening tapes
43. dictionary skills
44. CAAL
45. Play

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