

Constructing Research Preferences by Prospective Indonesian EFL Teachers

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Abstract—Several studies have discussed the features and characteristics of research on English language teaching in Indonesia by both lecturers and students. However, there is very little research that discusses topics, research methods, designs, and reasons for choosing topics, as well as the efforts to improve the quality of research conducted by prospective EFL teachers in the Indonesian context. The study aims to identify, assess, and characterize the research conducted by prospective Indonesian EFL teachers. The study used mixed research methods utilizing 477 research works as the objects of study, while the research participants were 67 prospective Indonesian EFL teachers and 5 heads of the English education program. The results showed that students' selected research topics were the process of learning English at the secondary school level and that their preferred methodologies were quantitative research, qualitative research, and classroom action research (mixed methods). The most popular topics in English language learning research were methods for learning, classroom action research, textbook analysis, media for learning English, and viewpoints on English teaching concerns. The reasons for choosing certain research topics and methods were dominated by issues of ease of research completion. The results contribute as a basis for future research to select variables, designs, issues, or study subjects to explore as well as for directing and defining the themes and research topics in the English Education study program.

Index Terms—constructing, research, preference, prospective, Indonesian EFL teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions must continue to uphold the standard of teaching, research, and community service to improve the quality of education. University graduates contribute significantly to the production of quality human resources (Succi & Canova, 2020; Hassan et al., 2013). As one of the study programs run by the majority of universities in Indonesia, the English Language Education Study Program is responsible for producing highly competent graduates for future EFL teachers in Indonesia. Each English language education study program seeks to generate competent English teachers by integrating aspects of hard skills, pedagogy, and soft skills (Bauer-Marschallinger et al., 2021) based on the needs of their users in the community, as defined in the goals and objectives of the study program. One of the objectives pursued is to encourage its students to graduate on time, 4 years for a Bachelor's degree (Indrawati & Kuncoro, 2021). As a study program planned to prepare quality English teachers in Indonesia, the English Education Department in each university should provide its graduates with research competence as a part of students' requirements to finish their studies.

Based on preliminary observations, English language education study programs have given less substantial consideration to the research conducted by their prospective graduates. As a result, there was an uneven distribution of

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research topics among the subjects previously taught. The reason for selecting the subject and the research strategy used by the students were also the two intriguing aspects of the research topic selection.

An imbalance in the selection of research topics in the early observations of research has been never revealed and published by previous studies. This suggests that neither research supervisors nor the heads of the English language study program have given much thought to equality in the selection of research topics (Puad & Ashton, 2021). Additionally, it is commonly found that most of the research topics chosen do not reflect the most recent advancements in language teaching techniques, which should adjust to advancements in the teaching of English (Pustaka, 2020). In reality, data gathered from some potential EFL instructors showed that the study they conducted was solely intended to satisfy the criteria to finish their studies, not to perfect their abilities in conducting scientific investigations.

Actual issues with teaching and learning English should be reflected in the research conducted by prospective English teachers (Loan, 2019). These issues may be seen from a variety of perspectives, including those related to methodology, linguistics, education, and learning (Çamlıbel-Acar & Eveyik-Aydın, 2022). Aside from that, the chosen study subjects should also take into account how the curriculum's course distribution has evolved, rather than only concentrating on aspects of teaching that are perceived as being simple to grasp.

Briefly, this study investigated the preferred research topics by prospective Indonesian EFL teachers of the English education department, the research methodologies they chose, their reasons for choosing the topics and methodologies, and efforts taken by the head of the program to enhance the quality of their students' research. The results can contribute as basic information for the heads of English education programs, supervisors, lecturers, and students about how to equalize research topics chosen and improve research quality based on the subjects previously learned by the prospective EFL teachers during their study. The findings can also contribute to the body of knowledge on mapping research projects to increase the publication possibility in both nationally and internationally reputable journals.

Briefly, the research seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What research topics do prospective Indonesian EFL teachers select?
2. Which research designs do prospective Indonesian EFL teachers choose for their research projects?
3. What are prospective EFL teachers' underlying reasons for selecting research topics and designs?
4. What do the heads of English education programs do to improve the quality of research works by prospective EFL teachers?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Conducting Research in the Indonesia Context*

Prospective teachers should be equipped not just to teach subject matter in class, but also to assess and design learning materials and approaches (Supriyoko et al., 2022). As a result, they should develop strong research abilities in university. New university graduates in Indonesia are required to conduct research in their specialty. Similarly, a prospective English teacher must be competent in the language as well as capable of undertaking research, preferably in the field of language teaching and learning (Zein, 2016). Because there is a high demand for English language teachers, higher education institutions need to increase the quality of their research programs.

Through research, a future Indonesian EFL teacher can learn about the subject matter, educational technologies, and fresh approaches to numerous issues that arise throughout the teaching and learning process (Sulistiyono et al., 2020). This is highly advantageous for many parties, including potential teachers, schools, universities, and the community. Through research activities, they will be able to critique current teaching methods once they have graduated. They can become active and creative teachers in addition to being passive knowledge consumers. This is why aspiring English instructors are required to do pertinent research in their specialty to enhance already developed course materials. Therefore, a potential teacher might create content through research activities that would be taught to his students later (Saragih, 2019). Through the support of research results, future EFL teachers can be innovative and creative in responding to every challenge in carrying out their duties as professional English teachers.

B. *Research Regulation for Prospective Teachers*

In the eyes of the wider community, a university institution corresponds to a focus on various sciences (Suryani, 2020). Ethically, universities are indebted to participate in refining the lives of the people around them. Through research activities on various education problems, universities can produce solutions or innovations that can provide direct benefits to the surrounding community. In addition, research activities can support community service (Al-Qatawneh et al., 2021). More research produced by lecturers at a university can encourage improvements in the reputation rankings of that institution. Logically, when a researcher publishes in various scientific journals, he will automatically state the name of the institution as an affiliation (Saragih et al., 2023).

In Indonesia's context, the English Language Education study program has a responsibility to raise the standard of research and broaden the research subjects pursued by future graduates (Ma et al., 2022) as one of the study programs that generate prospective English teachers at various levels of education. This study program is expected to map student research by taking into account the applicability of the courses provided to students and the choice of research subjects.

In this regard, the study plan must be able to give students clear direction on the subjects they are researching and choose supervisors based on their expertise and experience in the subject matter they are studying.

C. Pedagogical Benefits to Conduct Research in Teaching and Learning

Prospective English Teachers should conduct research for several reasons (Cheon et al., 2020). Firstly, the activity helps teachers stay updated with the latest educational theories, practices, and technologies, allowing them to continually improve their teaching methods. Secondly, it enables English teachers to identify effective teaching strategies, curriculum materials, and assessment methods that can enhance student learning outcomes. Thirdly, it allows teachers to tailor their instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students, considering factors like learning styles, abilities, and interests.

Some other benefits of conducting research are also identified by some scholars (Magalhães et al., 2020). It develops fair and valid assessments to gauge student progress accurately. This helps in making data-driven decisions about instruction. It helps teachers address specific classroom issues or challenges, such as student engagement, classroom management, or teaching students with special needs. English teachers can engage in research to contribute to the broader field of education. Their findings may be published, shared with colleagues, or used to inform educational policies and practices. It enhances a teacher's professional reputation and opens up opportunities for career advancement. In essence, research is a valuable tool for English teachers to continuously enhance their teaching skills and create a more effective and engaging learning environment for their students.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Objects and Participants

This study was conducted in the second semester of 2022-2023 and aimed at revealing the research topics chosen by prospective EFL teachers at 5 tertiary educations in Medan, Indonesia. These five colleges' English study programs have graduated thousands of students over the course of an average of more than 20 years. The objects of this research were 477 research reports by undergraduate program students in the English education department completing their studies within the last 3 years. The research objects were the collection of research documents obtained from 5 English education departments in Medan City, Indonesia. The university consisted of one state-owned university and 4 private universities. The secondary data from 5 Universities were then filtered or selected based on inclusion criteria, namely research that was concerned with language learning and teaching.

A total of 100 students were asked to respond to the online questionnaire; however, only 67 participants responded to the questionnaires. Therefore, the student participants consisted of 67 undergraduate students of the English education department. They were asked to state three reasons for choosing both research topics and research methods. The allocated time provided to fill out the instrument was 2 months, July and August 2023. The 5 head department participants in this research were selected by using a convenient sampling technique.

B. Design of Study

The research used a case study research design to gather specific, contextual, in-depth knowledge regarding research choices by prospective EFL teachers. The design is appropriate to explore the key characteristics, meanings, and implications of the case to find certain concepts. The design is suitable for exploring the case's important traits, consequences, and meanings to uncover specific concepts to improve research quality and open up new directions for future research. The intention is to comprehend the case and its context with as much detail as possible.

C. Instruments: Procedures and Validation

To collect data, the study used thematic analysis to analyze secondary data (collection of research works), an online questionnaire survey to explore the students' underlying reasons for choosing certain topics and methods and an interview to explore opinions from the head departments to improve the quality of student research. In the thematic analysis, the researcher analyzed qualitative data (research topics) that involved reading through a data set and looking for patterns to derive themes as well as finding meaning within the data.

The questionnaire in this study explored the reasons for choosing research topics and research designs by students. The open-ended questions asked in the questionnaire include the reasons for choosing the research topic and research design. Before being distributed to students, the two questions were validated by the five heads of English Education departments from the five universities. To fulfill ethical clearance in this research, the questionnaire also states permission for data collection, the purpose of using the data, and the transparency of the data obtained.

The purpose of the interview tool in this study is to investigate the efforts made by the study program leader to raise the standard of student research. It also looks at their efforts to ensure that the research topics chosen by students are distributed fairly and accurately reflect the subjects they are studying in the classroom.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

(a). *Preferred Research Topics*

This section examines the topic of interest for the research as well as the decisions made by aspiring teacher candidates. The selection of the research topic was made using secondary data, namely a summary of the three years' worth of student research from five different English Language Education study programs at five different colleges in Medan City, Indonesia in 2020–2022. The following table lists descriptions of the research subject options.

TABLE 1
CHOICE OF RESEARCH TOPICS BASED ON RESEARCH OBJECTS

No	Topics	Total	Frequency
1.	Teaching Methods	87	18.23%
2.	Textual/Content analysis (translation)/Novel/textbook/songs	76	15.90%
3.	Modes of Learning (PBL), CTL	92	19.28%
4.	Linguistic Research; Pure/interdisciplinary/applied	27	5.70%
5.	Language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary)	142	29.76%
6.	Perceptions/Attitudes (teachers/learners)	29	6.07%
7.	Teaching/learning materials/books	24	5.03%
	Total	477	100%

The selections of study subjects made by students are seen in Table 1 above. The majority of the 477 data that were analyzed and divided into seven different categories for research topic choices—142 (29.76%)—were related to language skills, followed by 92 studies on modes of learning (PBL) and 87 studies on teaching methods (18.23%). The three topics that came in last place, however, were researched on learning materials/books with a total of 24 studies (5.03%), pure/interdisciplinary/applied linguistics with 27 studies (5.50%), and 29 studies on instructors' and students' perspectives.

(b). *Preferred Research Methods*

Based on the research methodologies and designs, the codes outline the division and categorization of student-conducted research. Depending on the methodology, the research is divided into four main categories: qualitative research, quantitative research mixed research, and classroom action research. The following figure shows the distribution of student research based on the methodology:

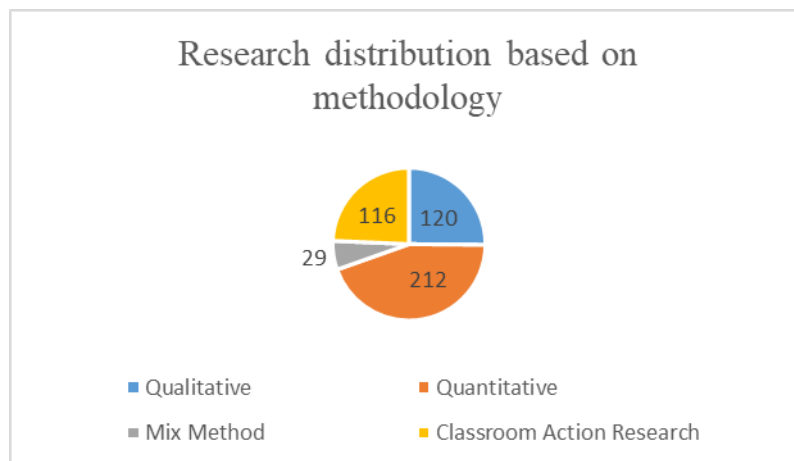


Figure 1. Preferred Research Method

Figure 1 above shows the distribution of research methods chosen by prospective EFL teachers. The order of research method categories based on the number they chose was quantitative methods 212 (44.4%), qualitative methods 120 (25.2%), classroom action research methods 116 (24.3%), and mixed methods 29 (6.1%). Figure 2 below describes the distribution of research in the quantitative research category.

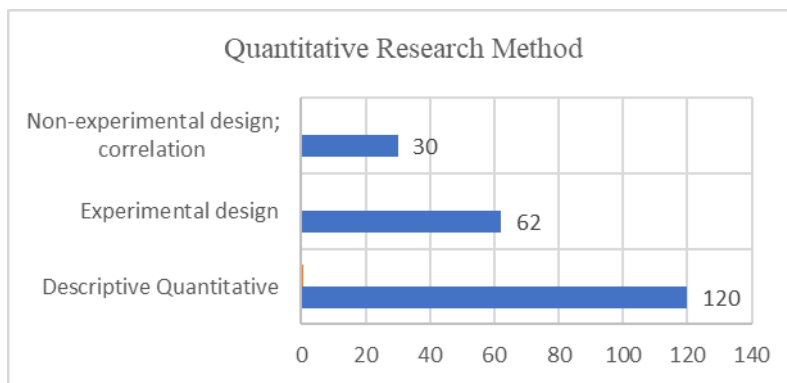


Figure 2. Distribution of Quantitative Research Method

Based on the category of quantitative research method, quantitative descriptive research design was the design most often chosen by students with 120 (56.6%), followed by experimental research design with 62 (29.2%), and non-experimental (correlation) research design with 30 studies (14.2%). Meanwhile, based on the qualitative research method category, the distribution of research designs chosen by students is depicted in Figure 3 below.

The third research method category chosen by students was the classroom action research method which reached 116 research works (24.31%), where this research design emphasized a combination of the research process and research results. The research method category that was chosen least by students was mixed method research reporting up to 29 research works (6.07%).

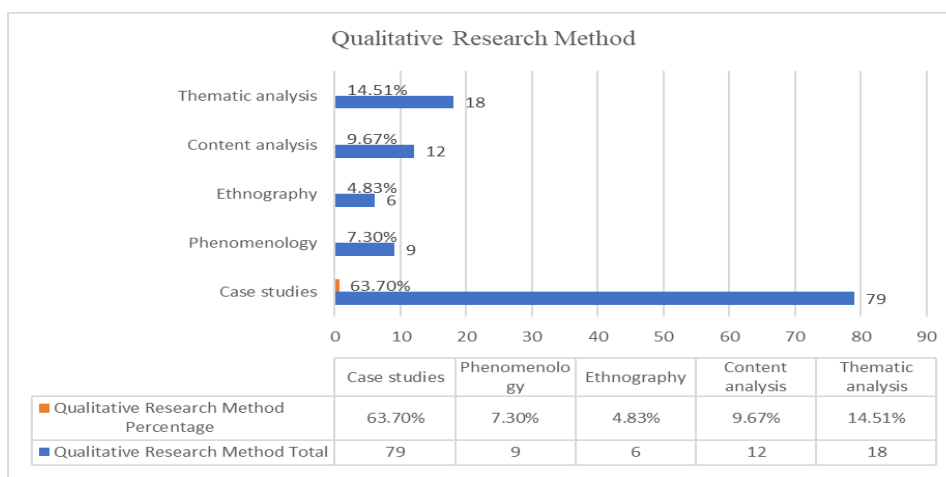


Figure 3. Distribution of Research Design on Qualitative Method

Figure 3 shows that the case study research design is the design most often chosen by students, reaching 79 research works (63.70%). This research design was then followed by thematic analysis design 18 (14.51%), content analysis design 12 (9.67%), phenomenology design 9 (7.30%), and finally ethnography design 6 (4.83%).

In summary, students' choice of research methods and designs to complete their studies in the English language education study program are shown in Table 2 below:

TABLE 2
RESEARCH DISTRIBUTION BY METHOD

No	Method	Total	Frequency
1	Qualitative		120 (25.15%)
	Case studies	79	16.56%
	Phenomenology	9	1.89%
	Ethnography	6	1.26%
	Content analysis	12	2.51%
2	Thematic analysis	18	3.77%
	Quantitative		212 (44.44%)
	Descriptive Quantitative	120	25.2%
3	Experimental design	62	13.0%
	Non-experimental design; correlation	30	6.28%
	Mix Method	29	6.07%
4	Classroom action research	116	24.31%
	Total	477	100%

Table 2 above describes the distribution of student research topic choices based on research methods. Of the 4 categories of research methods chosen by students (quantitative, qualitative, mixed method, Classroom Action Research), the largest portion they chose was the quantitative research method (212 or 44.44%), followed by qualitative research methods (120 or 25.15%), Classroom Action Research (116 or 24.31%) and Mix method (29 or 6.28%). From the quantitative research category, the method most frequently chosen by students was the experimental research design (182=38.15%), followed by the classroom action research design (116 or 24.31%). Meanwhile, from the qualitative research method, the research design that was most chosen was the case study design (120 or 25.15%).

(c). *The Underlying Reasons for Choosing Research Topics and Designs*

In this section, 100 students were asked to state one of their reasons for choosing a research topic or research method that they had previously sent through the former head of the study program on their campus. This question was sent in the form of a Google form. 100 students were asked to fill out the Google form; however, only 67 participants filled out the Google form by the set date. The questions were their three main reasons for choosing the research topics and research methods they had done. The description of their response is described in the following table.

TABLE 3
THE REASONS FOR CHOOSING THE RESEARCH TOPICS AND METHOD (N=67)

No	Topics	Total	Frequency
1	Ease of retrieval of research data	55	82.10%
2	The speed of implementation of the research process	60	89.55%
3	Ease of analyzing research data	45	67.16%
4	Suggestions and input from supervisors	56	83.58%
5	Literature Accessibility/Availability	25	37.31%
6	The research Novelty	14	20.89%

According to the 67 respondents' responses, 6 factors guided their selection of study subjects and techniques. The majority of responders cited the study process' quick completion as the primary factor most frequently, which was mentioned by 60 respondents (89.55%), followed by suggestions or input from supervisors (56 or 83.58%), retrieval ease of research data (55 or 82.10%), ease of analyzing research data (45 or 67.16%), Literature accessibility/availability (25 or 37.31%), and the research novelty reason (14 or 20.89%).

TABLE 4
EFFORTS TO EQUALIZE RESEARCH IN ALL FIELDS OF RESEARCH TEACHING (N=5)

No	Topics	Total	Frequency
1	Disseminate various research methods for lecturers and students	5	100%
2	Equip students with research skills	2	40%
3	Encouraging research collaboration between lecturers and students through the subjects taught	3	60%
4	Provide funds for publication incentives in certain fields	1	20%

The initiatives taken by the study program to encourage lecturers and students to do research in the area of knowledge being studied in balance are detailed in Table 4 above. According to the information gathered, teachers and students should be informed about different research methods. Professors should also be encouraged to collaborate on research projects. Students should also be given research skills that are appropriate for the subject being taught.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study provide a clear description of the selection of the applied linguistics research topic, the selection of the research methodology, and the justifications for these decisions based on what students and the study program director/supervisor of the student thesis thought.

Students' research topic selection typically involves a protracted procedure (Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2020). Students must take a lot of factors into account regarding the length of their studies and their capacity for research because they are inexperienced researchers and writers. This tendency supports the findings of numerous other studies (Zou et al., 2022; Rezlescu et al., 2020) stating that students tend to select research subjects they believe to be simple and the research procedure to be straightforward. Students also steer clear of challenging research data analysis; therefore, they tend to choose research topics that only require simple data analysis (Kalman, 2019).

Based on the research findings, students frequently select quantitative research methodologies for their projects. Naturally, this decision was made since this approach makes it easier to conclude and because conducting research usually takes less time overall (van den Berg et al., 2020). Students often frequently select research techniques that are more comfortable for them, such as testing hypotheses with statistical formulas (Wu et al., 2020). They frequently choose research techniques that demand extensive data processing. The second type of research that students are most interested in is classroom action research. Their choice of this research method is based on their familiarity with the topics they generally find in their learning process (Taatsgen, 2013). Similar to previous studies (Huynh et al., 2021; Mudipanu, 1989; Spiers & Riley, 2019) the findings of this study also reveal that phenomenological and ethnographic research designs receive a very small selection portion. Besides the difficulty of integrating this research design with the

topic of teaching English, these two designs were also not widely socialized either by the supervisors or in the research courses they received (Dennis & Huf, 2020).

According to the study's findings, students frequently choose their research subjects depending on how quickly they can complete the task at hand. They fear that if they pick a subject that necessitates in-depth examination, they won't be able to finish their research before the due date (Goktepe & Kunt, 2021). Additionally, it is frequently difficult for them to combine their study time with their lecture time. As a result, they frequently select study questions that just call for straightforward or descriptive data analysis. They frequently reject their supervisor's recommendations of exciting or new topics because they believe they won't be able to carry them out and complete them in time (Haim et al., 2022).

The head of the English education department needs to take numerous steps to ensure fairness in the research subjects selected by students in the field of language teaching (Zou et al., 2022). This must be performed to evenly examine, research, and develop the domains of knowledge offered in the English Language Education study program. The results of this study indicate that research dissemination to lecturers and students is necessary for English study programs to help students and lecturers make better decisions when choosing, analyzing, and researching a topic. For lecturers and students to do cooperative research on learning English, they must get joint training in conducting research. And to encourage lecturers and students to conduct research, study programs should, if at all possible, allot research funding to them.

The results of this study undoubtedly offer a fresh perspective on how to analyze, rate, and evaluate the research methods used by aspiring English teachers in Indonesia (Zein et al., 2020). The findings of this study are crucial, particularly for administrators of English education institutions who need to be able to map the research on English language instruction in their institutions (Amalia & von Korfflesch, 2021). Based on the objectives of the study program, the research conducted by students should be able to contribute to innovation in research (Balchin & Wild, 2022). The results of this study represent the phenomena of English language education research in Indonesia, despite several limitations in the study's goals, subjects, and methodologies.

V. CONCLUSION

The research seeks to address the preferred research topics, the selection of research methods and designs, the justifications for selection, as well as attempts to improve the research quality as well as keep balance on the selection of topics based on the courses offered in the English education program. The study's findings show that students still select research subjects based mostly on how straightforward they are to complete, disregarding the quality of the research they generate to finish their studies more quickly. This phenomenon shows that to ensure that all applied linguistics clusters receive an equal share of research, English students' research in higher education still needs substantial attention from stakeholders, including study programs, lecturers, and students. For the results of the research to advance the advancement of teaching English in Indonesia, lecturers and academic programs should guide students to carry out studies that would be truly beneficial for enhancing Indonesia's English language instruction. Although this study's findings are very helpful to the people who are involved in English-language learning in Indonesia, it still has some limitations, particularly in terms of the application of the research methods, the number of respondents, and the data analysis that needs to be performed by future researchers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to express their gratitude to The Research Center of Universitas Sumatera Utara which provides funding for this study under research grant No. 10489/LIPI HKI/2023. They also acknowledge the editor and reviewer team who supported to revision the article manuscript to become its present format.

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