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Examining the Components of the Abstracts of the Latest ELT M.A. Theses and PhD Dissertations of the Most Accomplished Universities in Türkiye

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the latest abstracts of M.A. theses and PhD dissertations of 10 ELT departments in Türkiye so as to observe the latest tendency in the abstract components of the ELT field. There seems to be variations in the presence of abstract components. The components of a well written abstract are research paradigms, sample, sample size, method, sample type, research design, data collection tools, data analysis techniques as well as the aim and the results of the study. The abstracts of the latest 10 M.A. theses and 10 PhD dissertations available in “YÖK Ulusal Tez Merkezi” (National Thesis Center) were reviewed and analyzed in terms of the availability of some particular components. These 10 universities were selected from the top achievers determined by University Ranking by Academic Performance (URAP) in 2020-2021. Criterion sampling was employed. This non-interactive qualitative study utilized descriptive document analysis. A constructivist view was taken to interpret the presence and absence of specific element in the abstracts. MS Excel was the program used for analysis. The results showed that none of the students expressed research paradigms but all expressed data collection tools they used. All PhD students stated who their samples were but type of sampling implemented was not stated. While most of the M.A. students specified their samples, only a couple specified type of sampling they used. The availability of sample size was exactly the same for both groups. PhD students named research designs more than M.A. students. Yet M.A. students named more sampling strategies, methods, and data analysis in their abstracts. For pedagogical implications, a mandatory academic writing course is vital and a standard format for abstracts appears to be necessary in ELT.

Key Words: Abstract Analysis, ELT Theses and Dissertations, Paper Analysis

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İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Alanında Türkiye’de En Başarılı Üniversitelerde Yazılan Son Uzmanlık ve Doktora Tezlerindeki Özet Bileşenlerinin İncelenmesi

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ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi alanında özet bileşenlerindeki güncel yönelimi gözlemleyebilmek için Türkiye’deki İngiliz Dili Eğitimi veren 10 bölümün son yüksek lisans ve doktora tezlerinin özetlerini incelemektir. Özet bileşenlerinin varlığı açısından farklılıklar olduğu görülmektedir. İyi yazılmış bir özetin bileşenleri; araştırma yaklaşımı, örneklem, örneklem büyüklüğü, metot, örneklem türü, araştırma deseni, veri toplama araçları, veri analiz teknikleri ve araştırmanın amacı ve sonuçlarıdır. YÖK Ulusal Tez Merkezi’nde bulunan son 10 yüksek lisans ve 10 doktora tezlerinin özetleri incelenip bazı belirli bileşenlerin varlığı açısından analiz edildi. Bu 10 üniversite 2020-2021 de Üniversitelerin Akademik Başarı Sıralaması (URAP) tarafından belirlenen en başarılılardan seçildi. Ölçüt örneklem kullanıldı. Bu etkileşimsiz nitel çalışmada, betimsel doküman analizinden faydalandı. Özetlerdeki belirli elementlerin varlık ve yokluğunu yorumlamak için yapılandırıcı ekol kullanıldı. Analiz için MS Excel programı kullanıldı. Sonuçlar, öğrencilerin hiçbiri araştırma yaklaşımlarını belirtmezken tüm öğrencilerin kullandıkları veri toplama araçlarını belirttiklerini gösterdi. Tüm doktora öğrencileri örneklem kimlerden oluştuğunu ifade etmiş öte yandan kullandıkları örneklem türünü ifade etmedi. Yüksek lisans öğrencilerinin çoğu örneklem türünü belirtirken sadece iki öğrenci kullandıkları örneklem türünü belirtmedi. Örneklem büyüklüğünün varlığı iki grup için tamamen aynıdır. Doktora öğrencileri araştırma desenlerini yüksek lisans öğrencilerinden daha çok adlandırdı. Ancak, yüksek lisans öğrencileri; örneklem stratejileri, metotlar ve veri analizlerine özetlerinde daha çok yer verdiği gözlemlendi. Eğitim bilimsel öneri olarak, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi alanında zorunlu bir akademik yazım dersinin hayati olduğu ve özet için standart bir formun gerekliliği görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Özet Analizi, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Yüksek Lisans ve Doktora Tezleri, Doküman Analizi

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Introduction

The abstracts should report the aims, the scientific methods employed and the results of the research carried out. Thanks to abstracts, readers know exactly what that particular study is about and decide whether to continue with the rest of the document or not. Examining M.A. theses and PhD dissertations, one can observe that different researchers employ different components in their abstracts. So, lack of any components such as research paradigms, samples, sample size, method, sample type, research design, data collection tools, and data

analysis techniques might cause some problems for the readers. Missing significant factors create problems for authors, as well. They could not have the professional audience due to lack of a well written abstract. Even if their research results carry great importance, it would be difficult to reach to the intended readers. In addition, Lores (2004, p.281) claims that abstracts “constitute the gateway that leads readers to take up an article, journals to select contributions, or organizers of conferences to accept or reject papers.”. Thus, this study aims to examine and analyze the top achiever universities’ M.A. theses and PhD dissertations’ abstracts in terms of the availability of research paradigms, samples, sample size, method, sample type, research design, data collection tools, and data analysis techniques. Whether these abstracts include implications, applications or subjects is not studied in this research. It is unimaginable to exclude the aim and the results of the study from the abstract section, so these components were not analyzed. This study will not only describe the recent situation of abstracts in ELT but also shed light on future M.A. and PhD students in preparing a sound abstract in the field.

The Research Questions are as follows:

1. Which components of a well written abstract (research paradigms, samples, sample size, method, sample type, research design, data collection tools, and data analysis techniques) are stated in the abstracts?
2. Is there a difference in terms of the availability of these components in M.A. theses and PhD dissertations?

Literature Review

The goal of M.A. and PhD is to advance the field through research, to contribute to the existing intellectual knowledge, to gather facts and to provide new interpretation. Before researchers start to ask questions and try to find answers, they check the already existing literature. During the literature review, it is impossible to read every sentence written on the topic. A researcher selects the material by reading the abstracts. As Pho (2008, p. 231) states, "it sells the article". Therefore, it is vital what a researcher decide to include in the abstract. “A well- organized abstract would attract more readers and improve the opportunities of indexing and citation.” as Al-Khasawneh (2017, p.1) expressed. The abstract section of the thesis or dissertation act as the first encounter for researchers.

The existing literature in abstract-genre includes various disciplines, such as Medicine, Engineering, and Psychology. Being a fresher area, ELT field needs more work. In Iranian context, Abarghooeinezhad et al. (2015) claim that non-native researchers choose the existing studies’ abstracts as a source to have ideas and a deeper understanding of the structure of an abstract and how to write one. So, an abstract is not just a way to introduce one’s own research but also an example for novice researchers as a genre. This is also valid for native researchers. Function, rhetorical structure, and linguistic realizations (Lores, 2004) of research abstracts are different from the rest of the research thesis or dissertation. Therefore, a need has occurred in the field for analyzing research abstracts in terms of the textual organization.

Hyland (2000) frames abstract components as: Introduction, Purpose, Methodology, Product, and Conclusion (IPMPC). In move analysis, many scholars prefer utilizing Hyland’s ‘The Five Move Analysis’ while studying abstract components (Table 1). A move is any section of a text that has a specific communicative function. Gani et al. compares rhetorical

moves in soft and hard science lecturers' master's thesis and dissertation abstracts in 2020. Analyzing 4 abstracts in Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, studies done by the lecturers from different disciplines all include Introduction, Purpose, Method, Product and Conclusion in their abstracts while the percentage of these differ from each other. So, it is possible to conclude from their research that both soft and hard science abstracts share the same components.

Table 1. Hyland's 'The Five Move Model' (2000)

Move	Step
M1 Introduction	S1 Arguing for topic significance S2 Making topic generalization S3 Defining key term(s) S4 Identifying gap
M2 Purpose	Stating the research purpose
M3 Method	S1 Describing participants /data sources S2 Describing instrument(s) S3 Describing procedure and context
M4 Findings	Describing the main results
M5 Conclusion	S1 Deducing Conclusion S2 Evaluating the significance of the research S3 Stating limitation S4 Presenting recommendation or implication

In Türkiye, there have been valuable contributions to ELT field. To start with, Yağız et al. (2016) conducted a content analysis to examine ELT articles from 2005 to 2015. Their goal was to describe the general situation in terms of subject distributions, research methods, data collection tools, sample size group, data analysis procedures of the recently published articles in the Turkish context. However different from the present study, they analyzed the articles not the abstracts. The predominating data collection tools were found to be achievement tests, questionnaires, and scales. Quantitative research design was mostly preferred among the articles reviewed. "Language learning, language teaching and teacher education" were popular research topics and "CALL, ICT, multimedia" were the least investigated topics. The most frequently preferred sample type consisted of undergraduate students and teachers. Descriptive analysis was utilized the most. In addition, Solak' s (2014) research topic was determining the common trends of recent ELT research papers in in the Turkish context. His findings were that quantitative research design was implemented more than qualitative design. Undergraduates were most commonly selected as participants. Questionnaires and documents had the highest rate as data collection tools. Moreover, Cesur et al. (2018) followed in Yağız et al. (2016) and Solak' s (2017) footsteps by examining 234 abstracts for the distribution of abstract components. They also investigated the availability of abstract, availability of samples, and availability of sampling. Their results indicated that data analysis (f=125), type of sampling (f=110), research design (f=108) were mostly missing

elements in abstracts. In this study, abstracts were inspected in the same way. Yet the abstracts of the present study were selected from dissertations not articles.

Kaya (2015) compared the abstracts of published articles of Turkish scholars' to foreign researchers' abstracts. Her findings showed that Turkish researchers mostly included only 'purpose-method and product' whereas the articles written by foreigners had five moves of Hyland's model. Another valuable study was carried out by Coşmuş (2011). The researcher focused on the abstracts and explored structural organization as well as the similarities and differences between English and Turkish research articles. Coşmuş (2011) stated that Introduction, Methodology and Results existed in both parts. On the other hand, Discussion was included in the half of English abstracts while it lacked in Turkish counterparts.

As it is illustrated in the above mentioned studies, exploring the abstract components would benefit the field scientifically by presenting the current picture. This present study would contribute to the ELT field by examining the availability of the abstract components in the most recent M.A. theses and PhD dissertations in 10 Turkish universities.

Methodology

Research Design

This non-interactive qualitative study utilized descriptive document analysis to investigate the availability of research components such as research paradigms, samples, sample size, method, sample type, research design, data collection tools, and data analysis techniques. It tried to describe the features, the current status of the variables. The focus was mainly on the nature of the present situation.

Sample

Ten M.A. theses and 10 PhD dissertations were retrieved from YÖK National Thesis Center by criterion sampling strategy. First of all, University Ranking by Academic Performance's (URAP) 2020-2021 list was visited. URAP formed this list by comparing the article points, citation points, scientific documents points, PhD points, lecturers' and students' points of Universities in total. The top achiever universities were determined by this way: Hacettepe, METU, İstanbul, Gazi, Boğaziçi, Atatürk, Dokuz Eylül, Çukurova, Anadolu and Mersin. All these universities offer both MA and PhD degrees. In URAP's list, İstanbul Technical University was in the third place; however, it does not offer any degrees in ELT. So, it was skipped and İstanbul University was accepted to be the third one while it was originally in the fourth place. The same procedure occurred for other universities which did not have both MA and PhD degrees, as well. After determining top 10 universities which had MA and PhD degrees in ELT, the input for the search query that constituted the data for this study was "English Language Teaching" in YÖK National Thesis Center. The latest uploaded MA thesis and PhD dissertation of each university was analyzed. In the end, this study examined 10 MA and 10 PhD, 20 documents in total. All these theses and dissertations were open access.

Data Collection Procedure and Data Analysis

In order to analyze and evaluate the abstracts systematically, MS Excel program was utilized. Despite the presence of some ready-made rubrics, MS Excel program was chosen because of the practicality.

Each abstract was analyzed for the presence or absence of research paradigms, samples, sample size, method, sample type, research design, data collection tools, and data analysis techniques. On MS Excel, each component was located in a column. Each study was located in a row. The presence of a component was marked by “+” (plus) and the absence by “x” (cross). The entries were double-checked for the validation of the data by the same rater.

Findings

Research Paradigm

Ontology asks: “Is there a ‘real’ world out there that is independent of our knowledge of it?” (Marsh & Furlong, 2002, p.18). A researcher’s ontological stance differs according to his/her belief in only one possible truth or no single truth. Epistemology answers how we know what we know. It focuses on how knowledge is constructed, interpreted and represented in a specific subject area. Whether a researcher tries to measure the knowledge or interpret the knowledge indicates the researcher’s epistemological stance.

Table 2. The Statement of Research Paradigm

	Master Students	PhD Students
Epistemology	Not Stated	Not Stated
Ontology	Not Stated	Not Stated

Neither M.A. nor PhD students mentioned research paradigms such as positivism or constructivism in terms of epistemological or ontological stances (Table 2). Ontology and epistemology shape the researchers’ beliefs and personal views on the conception of the world and they have methodological consequences for the research subject. Therefore, it is a pity that none of the studies examined included epistemology or ontology. Research methodology courses and student advisers should pay more attention to this general lack.

Sample

Researchers can choose their sample from a wide range of populations. They can examine and collect data from: preschoolers, primary school students, secondary or high school students, undergraduates, graduates, academics, teachers, administrators, parents and so on. In this study, the focus was not on descriptive demographic information but on whether sample was provided or not. All dissertations presented who their sample was. Eight MA theses offered the sample but two did not. As stated above, there is a high ranking possibilities for who the sample can be in ELT. Therefore, expressing the sample in the abstract carries grave importance. Those two MA theses writers might have forgotten to put it in the abstract. Lack of knowledge or experience in the field might have been the reason.

Table 3. The Statement of Sample

Sample	Master Students	Phd Students
Stated	8	10

Not Stated | 2 0

A hundred percent of PhD Students expressed their samples whereas 80% of M.A. Students were able to state their samples as seen in table above (Table 3).

Type of Sampling

Researchers cannot study the whole population for any inquiry. Therefore, they select a subset for participation to their studies. While selecting the participants to represent the population, the researchers employ a plan, a strategy that fits best for their research. Sampling strategies include simple random, stratified random, cluster, systematic and convenience, quota, purposive sampling methods. Their names may change in the terminology. Despite the significance of the sampling strategy, only two MA theses included them. None of the PhD dissertations had sampling strategies in their abstracts.

Table 4. Type of Sampling

Type	Master Students	PhD Students
Stated	2	0
Not Stated	8	10

Only 20% of M.A students included the type of sampling and all PhD students lacked the sampling strategies in their abstracts (Table 4).

Sample Size

To be able to generalize the results of the study, the size of the sample is an important factor, especially in quantitative studies. Eight PhD and eight MA students included the numbers of their participants in the abstracts. Only two in each part failed to mention their sample size.

Table 5. Sample Size

Size	Master Students	PhD Students
Stated	8	8
Not Stated	2	2

In both of the groups, 80% of the students expressed their sample size (Table 5).

Research Method

PhD dissertations and M.A. theses writers take a quantitative, qualitative or mixed approach in their studies. Six M.A. theses writers and five PhD dissertations writers expressed their research methods in the abstract successfully. Some of the writers explained the method without specifying it. As this writing is a very official one, describing the method without stating it explicitly is not enough. Abstract parts are limited, so it is enough to give the name of the method in the abstract and better to give details in the methodology sections. Some students put the research design and it was possible to understand what their research method was. However, not every reader would have the same amount of theoretical research knowledge.

Table 6. Research Method

Method	Master Students	PhD Students
Stated	6	5
Not Stated	4	5

Sixty percent of M.A. students and 50% of PhD students included the name of the method used (Table 6).

Research Design

Seven PhD and four MA students reported the names of the research design they implemented. They would not be expected to give specific details on the research design in the abstract, yet it would be the best to be able to read at least the name of the research design employed as there are many. PhD students must be more aware of the importance of the research designs than the MA students. This awareness might be gained thanks to a longer period of education in the field.

Table 7. Research Design

Design	Master Students	PhD Students
Stated	4	7
Not Stated	6	3

While 70% of PhD students named their research design, only 40% of M.A. students did (Table 7).

Data Collection Tools

All the PhD dissertations and MA theses examined expressed the data collection tools in their abstracts. Stating data collection tools was the only common factor that all the writers in this study reached a consensus. So, one can be sure that data collection tools are indispensable for all the participants and it is definitely clear for the students in this research how essential data collection tools are.

Table 8. Data Collection Tools

Data Collection Tools	Master Students	PhD Students
Stated	10	10
Not Stated	0	0

Both groups scored 100% of presenting their data collection tools (Table 8).

Data Analysis

Most of the students were successfully named the data analysis procedures they conducted. Among MA Students, only one failed and among PhD students the number was three. Researchers should be explicit about how they have gotten a specific outcome, how the procedure has been handled. If they do not state it, it would not be possible to repeat the same study. Being able to repeat the same study is important to prove that the results are scientific, not arbitrary or subjective.

Table 9. Data Analysis

Data Analysis	Master Students	PhD Students
Stated	9	7

Ninety percent of M.A. students and 70% of PhD students stated the data analysis procedures (Table 9).

All Components

In PhD dissertations, students presented 4,7 (mean) out of 8 abstract components. PhD students provided sample and research design more than M.A. students. Data collection tools, sample size and research paradigm had the same number of appearance in both groups' abstracts. In MA theses, students presented 4,7 out of 8 abstract components. They surpassed PhD students by stating more types of sample, research methods and data analysis in their abstracts.

Result and Discussion

Most of the abstracts do not include all the components that are supposed to be included in a well-written abstract. Out of eight components, both MA and PhD students have 4,7 mean in terms of the availability. As both groups' general mean is the same, one can consider they have similar levels of professional knowledge related to abstract writing. Most of ELT programs hold research classes mandatory in either degree. One would expect PhD dissertations to have more components of a well-written abstract. Therefore, it might be a good idea to have mandatory research classes in both of the degrees where they can excel in how to write a research paper. Coşmuş (2011) indicates academic writing courses should be prioritized especially for non-native scholars. The lack of some abstract components in thesis and dissertations supports this suggestion. Also Kaya (2015) emphasizes the necessity of explicit instruction on academic writing in university. For academic writing skills, Abarghooeinezhad et al. (2015, p.150) expresses 'in Iran, no paragraph development skills are offered as part of the curriculum of either primary or secondary education. This lack of knowledge has caused Iranian engineering writers to follow a type of almost unorganized manner of writing styles.' To sum up, abstracts can be improved and organized by mandatory and well-planned academic writing classes at tertiary level for graduate students.

Also, student advisers are highly trained and experienced professionals. They should pay more attention to their students' abstracts and guide them for writing better abstracts. They might consider making their students practice abstract writing at some point of M.A. or PhD periods. None of the PhD students included sampling strategy they utilized, which was unexpected. However, the strategy employed tells the readers a lot about not only the participants but also the structure of the study itself. Furthermore, the students should keep up with the latest research articles, scientific publications at all times and read them critically paying attention to the availability of the necessary components in the abstracts. Generating a standard format including a checklist for abstract items in thesis and dissertations in the field of ELT would be a very useful development.

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