

Long Paper

Tracing Research Trends of AB English Language Theses for a More Responsive Curriculum

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Abstract

This study traced methodological and thematic trends in 475 AB English Language undergraduate theses produced across three campuses of Pangasinan State University from Academic Year 2017–2018 to 2024–2025 to inform a more research-responsive curriculum. Employing a descriptive quantitative design and document analysis, each thesis was coded for research type, research design, framework utilization, data sources, data analysis techniques, sampling methods, and thematic focus. Descriptive statistics summarized distributions, chi-square tests with Cramér’s V examined associations among methodological choices, and concentration indices (Gini coefficient, Herfindahl–Hirschman Index, Shannon’s entropy) quantified methodological concentration across five domains. Results showed a strong dominance of quantitative, descriptive correlational designs, heavy reliance on questionnaires and basic statistical analyses, and widespread use of conceptual rather than purely theoretical frameworks, with very strong associations indicating highly standardized methodological “chains” from research type to sampling, data source, and analysis. Concentration indices consistently pointed to moderate to high levels of methodological concentration, confirming limited diversity despite the availability of alternative approaches. Thematically, theses focused mainly on English language teaching and proficiency, with fewer studies addressing emerging



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priorities such as digital literacies, World Englishes, and critical or policy-oriented topics. Based on these findings, the study recommends restructuring the research component of the AB English Language curriculum into a three-course sequence, supported by targeted faculty development and enhanced research infrastructure, to foster methodological plurality and closer alignment with contemporary trends in language education research.

Keywords – thesis trend analysis, AB English language, quantitative over-reliance, research trends, research-oriented curriculum

INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic and challenging academic landscape, curriculum responsiveness has become an imperative and integral component for graduate success. This is especially true for humanities courses like the AB English Language program. The continuously evolving academic and professional landscape has increased demand for language education programs to align more closely with both research excellence and industry needs (Richards, 2013; Nation & Macalister, 2010). As such, research training has become an ever-present component in developing critical inquiry skills among undergraduate students (Richards, 2013).

Completing an undergraduate thesis has thus become a tangible indicator of students' research competencies and reflects pedagogical approaches in curriculum design. It serves as both the practical portion of their academic journey and the bridge through which they apply accumulated theoretical knowledge to produce and cultivate new knowledge (Rauf, 2016). Therefore, analyzing prevailing trends in undergraduate thesis conduct is important to reveal patterns in methodological training, thematic foci, and the research infrastructure available to students (Badiola, 2022).

Bunrosy (2024) highlights the growing emphasis on mixed-methods approaches, technology integration, and communicative competence as a current global methodological trend in English Language Teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics research. However, the situation is not universally identical. In contrast, Plonsky and Ghanbar (2018) noted over-reliance and quantitative bias in educational research. They applied linguistics, using concentration indices (Gini, HHI, and entropy), and argued that limited methodological diversity severely affects research validity and depth.

In the local context, systematic analyses of undergraduate theses using quantitative metrics of methodological concentration are scarce, particularly in the AB English Language program and similar humanities programs in Philippine higher education. This study aims to provide empirical evidence of research patterns that can inform curriculum development.

By analyzing prevailing methodological patterns, thematic foci, and data collection and analysis practices in AB English Language undergraduate theses, this study seeks to develop actionable inputs for a more research-responsive curriculum, enhance student research competencies, and inform decisions with broader implications for English language education in similar institutional contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trend Studies on Theses/Dissertations in Linguistics/Language Programs

Badiola (2022) conducted a trend analysis of master's theses and doctoral dissertations in the Department of Linguistics at the University of the Philippines – Diliman. The analysis covered the completion dates of the theses and dissertations, main trend variables such as topics covered and linguistic domains, and key conclusions about the department's focus and the historical context that shaped the research. The work showed that conducting a trend analysis of research outputs over time can reveal thematic priorities not only of researchers but also of the current research environment and, more importantly, identify research gaps that will eventually need to be addressed.

Chuenchaichon, Rungruang, Methitham, Channuan, and Jaiyote (2025) also conducted a similar trend analysis, this time in the context of Thai undergraduate research. By analyzing 140 research studies conducted and completed by English major students in the Department of English at Naresuan University, they identified seven (7) research subcategories. The study also revealed a large disparity between quantitative and qualitative research, with quantitative research dominating the field at a staggering 93.6 percent.

Similar to these studies, this research maps the themes and methodologies of undergraduate theses in the English Language departments of Pangasinan State University. Unlike the former studies, however, this research added quantification to measure over-reliance using Gini, HHI, and entropy indices.

Methodological Trends in Applied Linguistics/ELT

Early research in applied linguistics and English language teaching was dominated by experimental and quantitative designs, driven by an objectivist stance in data collection and analysis (Phakiti et al., 2018). In recent years, however, methodological awareness and concern have emerged, paving the way for a shift toward qualitative and mixed-methods approaches, with Byrnes (2012) calling it the field's methodological turn.

Specifically, Li et al. (2023) identified multiple innovations in their open-ended survey of applied linguistics research. Accordingly, they reported that one recurrent form of innovation is combining methods, whether data collection methods, theoretical approaches, or innovative mixed-methods approaches. Technology was also identified as

an important factor in innovation, allowing researchers to collect data remotely, enhance data authenticity, and capture processes otherwise invisible to human senses.

Conceptual vs Theoretical Frameworks in Language Research

The distinction between theoretical and conceptual frameworks is also a key consideration in this research. Theoretical frameworks, which utilize already established theories or models, offer avenues to explain and interpret a phenomenon being studied, while conceptual frameworks, which are researcher-constructed models linking variables and concepts, clarify assumptions about the phenomenon being studied (Luft, Jeong, Idrardi, & Gardner, 2022)

In linguistics and English language teaching, theoretical frameworks like Al-Mutairi (2024), used in a study of collegiate English learners in Kuwait with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, provide a proven structure for analyzing linguistic concepts. Similarly, using a conceptual framework for a linguistic concept such as English proficiency, as Sanchez and Saranza (2023) did, provided a basis for validating the assumed relationship between variables such as academic achievement and English proficiency.

Data Collection and Analysis in Language/ELT Research

While linguistics and literary researchers gather data in multiple ways, questionnaires remain the dominant tool. In fact, Dörnyei & Taguchi (2010) highlight the advantages of using questionnaires in research, particularly their "unprecedented efficiency" in terms of cost-benefit considerations and their versatility. On the other hand, Yongqi Gu (2016) remarks that questionnaires and their use in survey research are, by their nature, "exploratory and shallow". He further adds that the use of questionnaires in applied linguistics has long been a concern.

Other data collection instruments and methods available, such as interviews, focus groups, journals and logs, observations, introspective and retrospective tasks, corpus analysis, and language elicitation tasks, are also growing in popularity and use among researchers in the field (Rose, McKinley & Baffoe-Djan, 2020).

Beyond statistical measures like descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, t-tests, ANOVA, and chi-square, which quantitative research commonly uses to test relationships between variables, qualitative research uses a much wider range of increasingly significant methods. For instance, Paul Baker's seminal work (2006, 2023) introduced corpus linguistics to uncover linguistic patterns in how people use language to construct discourses. While corpus linguistics and discourse analysis were emerging at the time of the first publication, they have become a powerful pairing for exploring topics such as identity, representation, propaganda, and even health services, including patient sentiment and feedback analysis.

Measuring Diversity and Concentration in Educational Research

While frequency tables and descriptive statistics can show imbalance, they cannot indicate its severity and therefore do not allow proper comparison across multiple programs or over time. This creates a need to use formal indices such as the Gini coefficient, Herfindahl–Hirschman Index (HHI), and Shannon’s entropy value. Although these measures were not originally developed for this concept, multiple researchers have used them to quantify better concentrations and diversity of outcomes, resources, and concepts in education (Thomas, Wang, & Fan, 2001; Obasuyi, 2022; Ibourk & Amaghous, 2012).

The Gini index was originally designed to measure how much the distribution of income among households or individuals deviates from perfect equality. As such, a Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality and an index of 1 implies perfect inequality. In educational research, the Gini index has been used to measure equality of opportunity across areas, gender, and age, as in Digdowiseiso (2010) in Indonesia. As for this study, the individual theses analyzed represent the units, while their research types, designs, frameworks, data sources, and data analysis methods are the categories. For the expected values, a Gini of 0.50 indicates moderate inequality: one category accounts for a disproportionately large share of theses, but not all, while a Gini of 0.61 indicates stronger inequality, meaning a small set of designs dominates the design landscape. Thus, the Gini coefficients provide a single, comparable number that summarizes how skewed the methodological profile of the theses is in each domain.

The Herfindahl–Hirschman Index, on the other hand, is a tool originally used to measure industrial concentrations, thereby indicating a monopoly. Expected values range from 0 to 10,000, with 10,000 indicating a monopoly and values between 1,000 and 1,800 representing acceptable dispersion (Johan & Vania, 2021). In this study, each domain can be interpreted as a “market” for methodological choice, with the computed indices showing the diversity of options.

Finally, Shannon’s Entropy measures the degree of disorder and randomness within a system and is used to measure predictability and diversity. Higher entropy values mean greater randomness and therefore more diversity, while low entropy values imply predictability and less diversity.

Overall, the Gini index measures inequality, showing how one or two methodological types occupy disproportionate shares. HHI, meanwhile, measures how dominated a methodological category is, while entropy shows how predictable and limited researchers’ choices are within their methodological categories.

With all the foregoing, from the current calls for methodological innovation, richer qualitative and mixed-methods studies, to the limited availability of thesis-trend studies in the local context, therein lies the gap that this research addresses. No study has

systematically mapped methodological and thematic trends in AB English Language theses using both traditional descriptive statistics and concentration indices. To address this gap, the present study systematically analyzes 475 AB English Language theses produced across all campuses in Pangasinan State University that offer the program, quantifies methodological concentration across several domains, and uses the findings to inform curriculum revision.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a descriptive quantitative design and employed document analysis to map and summarize existing research practices using numerical indicators such as frequencies, percentages, and correlations. Additionally, the descriptive quantitative design is appropriate for identifying patterns and relationships in research practices, as it allows analysis of a large corpus of undergraduate research over an extended period (Morgan, 2022).

Research Context and Setting

Guided by CHED Memorandum Order number 24, series of 2017 (CHED, 2017), the Bachelor of Arts in English Language is designed to “integrate theory and practice to prepare students for effective communication in English in diverse contexts and situations”. It is one of Pangasinan State University's undergraduate degree programs and is offered across three of its nine campuses: Lingayen, Urdaneta City, and Bayambang. Currently, PSU's curriculum contains 152 units, exceeding CHED's prescribed 134 units.

For the research component of the program, PSU's AB English Program also conforms to CHED standards. The table below compares it with the University of Santo Tomas' Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies (University of Santo Tomas, n.d.) and the University of the Philippines – Baguio's Bachelor of Arts in Language and Literature (University of the Philippines – Baguio, n.d.).

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study consisted of all completed undergraduate theses produced by students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in English Language (AB English Language) program across three campuses of Pangasinan State University: Bayambang Campus, Urdaneta City Campus, and Lingayen Campus, covering the period from Academic Year 2017–2018 to 2024 - 2025.

To be included in the analysis, a thesis had to meet ALL of the following criteria:

- Produced as a required undergraduate thesis for the AB English Language program

- Authored by students officially enrolled in AB English Language
- Defended and accepted during Academic Year 2017–2018 to 2024-2025 as evidenced by a fully signed Approval Sheet
- Formally submitted to the institution in its final, bound form
- Contained all standard thesis components: preliminary pages (title page, approval sheet, abstract), Chapter 1 (The Problem), Chapter 2 (Review of Related Literature), Chapter 3 (Methodology), Chapter 4 (Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data), Chapter 5 (Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations), References, and Appendices where applicable
- Methodology section contained sufficient detail to code research type, research design, framework, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and sampling procedures

Table 1. Research Curriculum Offerings Comparison

	AB English Language (Pangasinan University)	Language State	Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies (University of Santo Tomas)	Bachelor of Arts in Language and Literature (University of the Philippines – Baguio)
Number of Courses Allocated for Undergraduate Research	2		3	3
Number of Units per Course	3		3	3
Course Titles	• ELS 119: Language Research 1: Methodology • ELS 120: Language Research 2: Thesis		• Language Research I: Thesis 1 (Proposal) • Language Research II: Thesis 2 (Colloquium) • Language Research III: Thesis 3 (Defense)	• BLL 199.1 (Principles and Methods of Research in Language and/or Literature; Research Proposal Writing in Language and/or Literature) • BLL 199.2 (Research Proposal Writing in Language and/or Literature) • BLL 200 (Thesis)
Total Units Allocated for Undergraduate Research	6		9	9

The study used a complete enumeration (census) approach rather than sampling, analyzing all undergraduate theses that met the inclusion criteria (N = 475). This approach eliminated sampling error and provided a comprehensive portrait of the program's research landscape during the specified period.

Document Analysis Framework

The study followed the READ approach (Ready materials, Extract data, Analyze data, Distill findings), as elaborated by Dalgish, Khalid & McMahon (2020). Using this approach, each thesis was examined to extract specific variables of interest, including methodological, bibliometric, and thematic variables. Specifically, the following variables were given due focus for this study:

1. Research Type (Quantitative, Qualitative, or Mixed-Methods)
2. Research Design (Descriptive-correlational, Comparative, etc.)
3. Framework Utilization (Conceptual Framework, Operational Framework, or both)
4. Data Source (Questionnaire, Corpus of Data, Interview, Observation Checklist, etc.)
5. Data Analysis (Statistical analysis, Content analysis, Discourse analysis, etc.)
6. Sampling Method (Probability vs Non-probability)

Coding Procedure and Reliability

Before the main coding phase, the study developed a comprehensive coding manual to ensure systematic and consistent data extraction. The coding manual specified the variables to identify for each thesis analyzed. The coding manual also operationalizes each variable with specific definitions and decision trees for ambiguous cases, such as when a declared methodological variable does not match the design actually used in the thesis.

Both researchers then independently double-coded all 475 theses to test inter-rater reliability. For discrepancies, the researchers discussed the variable and thesis in question until they reached consensus. Each thesis was treated as a single case, with variables extracted from Chapter 3 (Methodology) and supplemented with information from Chapter 1 (The Problem) and Chapter 2 (Review of Related Literature).

The researchers also maintained reflexive memos noting uncertainties, emergent patterns, and coding difficulties that required discussion. Data were recorded in a

structured Microsoft Excel spreadsheet using numbered codes. For specific theses employing multiple data sources or multiple analysis techniques, all applicable codes were recorded to enable discussions and methodological triangulation.

Inter-rater reliability was duly established using Cohen's Kappa (κ) for pairwise agreement between the researchers. Results indicated strong to almost perfect agreement for most methodological variables (κ ranging from 0.82 to 0.94), with slightly lower but still substantial agreement for thematic classifications ($\kappa = 0.79$).

Statistical Treatment and Concentration Indices Employed

The study used conventional descriptive and inferential statistics, along with specialized concentration indices. The traditional and statistical methods described distributions and tested associations, while the concentration indices quantified the degree of methodological diversity and homogeneity. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS (IBM SPSS Statistics 26), with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ for inferential tests. Concentration indices, however, were computed using Microsoft Excel. Overall, the statistical treatments, along with the variables and domains, and the software used are presented in the table below:

Table 2. Study Variables, Analysis and Software Used for Analysis

Analysis Type	Purpose	Variables/Domains	Software Used
Descriptive Statistics	Characterize distributions of methodological choices	All coded variables	SPSS Version 26
Chi-square Tests (χ^2)	Test associations between categorical variables	5 key cross-tabulations	SPSS Version 26
Cramer's V	Quantify strength of associations	All significant χ^2 results	SPSS Version 26
Gini Coefficient	Measure inequality in distribution	5 methodological domains	Microsoft Excel
Herfindahl-Hirschman Index	Assess concentration	5 methodological domains	Microsoft Excel
Shannon Entropy	Quantify diversity	5 methodological domains	Microsoft Excel

RESULTS

This study analyzed 475 undergraduate theses that met the inclusion criteria. The corpus comprised theses from three PSU campuses: Bayambang Campus (144, 30.3%), Urdaneta City Campus (141, 29.7%), and Lingayen Campus (190, 40.0%), spanning academic years 2017–2018 through 2024–2025. All theses were successfully coded for methodological and thematic variables with complete data across all domains.

Temporal and Campus Distribution

The distribution of theses across academic years showed notable increases and decreases, with the fewest completed theses in 2020 (8) and the most in 2023 (147) (Table 3). Additionally, in terms of theses produced per campus, Lingayen produced the most (190), while Bayambang and Urdaneta trailed at 144 and 141, respectively. It is worth noting that certain years at the Urdaneta City campus (2019 to 2021) and the Lingayen campus (2022) produced no bound theses.

Table 3. Campus and Temporal Distribution of Corpus

	<i>Bayambang Campus</i>	<i>Urdaneta City Campus</i>	<i>Lingayen Campus</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
2017	1	16	24	41	8.6
2018	19	31	46	96	20.2
2019	41	0	8	49	10.3
2020	6	0	2	8	1.7
2021	13	0	27	40	8.4
2022	9	13	0	22	4.6
2023	40	57	50	147	30.9
2024	15	24	33	72	15.2
Total	144	141	190	475	100.0

Thematic Focus Areas

The research themes from the corpus are presented in Table 4. English Language Teaching (ELT) is the most researched area, with 192 studies (40.42%), followed by English Language Proficiency studies (116, 24.42%). Next are studies on English linguistics (77, 16.21%), media studies/analysis (59, 12.42%), literature studies and literary analysis (53, 11.16%), and non-English linguistics (47, 9.89%). Finally, studies on foreign language teaching trail significantly at 18 (3.79%).

Table 4. Thematic Focus Area of Analyzed Theses

	f	%
English Language Proficiency	116	24.42
English Language Teaching	192	40.42
English Linguistics	77	16.21
Media Studies/Analysis	59	12.42
Literature Studies/Literary Analysis	53	11.16
Non-English Linguistics	47	9.89
Foreign Language Teaching	18	3.79
Total	562*	118.31*

**43 studies focused on more than 1 area, while 3 studies dealt with 3 focus areas*

Methodological and Research Structure

Methodological Profile – Research Type

Table 5 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of research types employed in the thesis corpus. Analysis of research types revealed that quantitative methods were most prevalent ($n = 307$, 64.6%), followed by qualitative methods ($n = 131$, 27.6%) and mixed-methods designs ($n = 37$, 7.8%).

Table 5. Research Type Distribution of Analyzed Theses

	f	%
Mixed-Methods	37	7.8
Qualitative	131	27.6
Quantitative	307	64.6
Total	475	100.0

Methodological Profile – Research Design

Table 6 shows the specific research designs. Descriptive-correlational designs were the most prevalent (285, 60%), followed by purely descriptive designs (69, 14.526%), literary analysis/criticism (32, 6.737%), descriptive-comparative (16, 3.368%), and discourse analysis (11, 2.316%). The remaining 62 theses (13.053%) employed diverse designs, including linguistic analysis, morpho-semantic analysis, grammatical analysis, and phenomenological analysis, to name a few.

Table 6. Research Design Distribution of Analyzed Theses

	f	%
Descriptive-correlational	285	60
Descriptive	69	14.526
Literary Analysis/Criticism	32	6.737
Descriptive Comparative	16	3.368
Discourse Analysis	11	2.316
(Other research designs)	62	13.053
Total	475	100

Methodological Profile – Research Framework

In terms of framework use, studies that used only conceptual frameworks (226, 47.6%) are the most dominant, closely followed by studies that used both conceptual and theoretical frameworks (218, 45.9%) (Table 7). In contrast, those that use only theoretical frameworks (26, 5.5%) and no framework (5, 1.1%) trail significantly.

Table 7. Research Framework Distribution of Analyzed Theses

	f	%
Conceptual Framework	226	47.6
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework	218	45.9
Theoretical Framework	26	5.5
No Framework	5	1.1
Total	475	100.0

Methodological Profile – Sampling Methods

In the analyzed corpus of research, 324 theses (68.2%) used probability sampling, while 151 theses (31.8%) used non-probability sampling (Table 8). Within probability sampling, simple random and stratified random sampling were most common, while purposive and convenience sampling dominated non-probability sampling.

Table 8. Sampling Methodology Distribution of Analyzed Theses

	f	%
Probability Sampling	324	68.2
Non-Probability Sampling	151	31.8
Total	475	100.0

Research Infrastructure – Data Collection Practices

Of the multiple data collection methods and sources employed, questionnaires were most common (324, 68.2%), followed by corpus of data/texts (120, 25.3%), interviews (n=51, 10.7%), observation checklists (n=6, 1.3%), and focus group discussions (n=1, 0.2%) (Table 9). Notably, 25 studies used two data sources and 1 used three, indicating limited triangulation despite its recognized value.

Table 9. Data Collection Methods Employed in Analyzed Theses

	f	%
Corpus of Data	120	25.26
Focus Group Discussion	1	0.21
Interview	51	10.74
Observation Checklist	6	1.26
Questionnaire	324	68.21
Total	502*	105.68*

*25 studies used two sources of data and 1 study used three sources of data

Research Infrastructure – Data Analysis

In terms of analytical approaches, statistical analysis dominated (335, 70.5%), followed by content analysis (103, 21.7%) and thematic analysis (81, 17.1%) (Table 10). Other more nuanced analytical approaches like discourse analysis (17, 3.6%), narrative analysis (9, 1.9%), and grounded theory (2, 0.4%) trailed behind significantly. As with data collection practices, several studies used multiple analyses: 71 studies employed two analytical methods, and 1 study used three methods, suggesting some methodological integration but still limited diversity.

Table 10. Data Analysis Methodology Employed in Analyzed Theses

	f	%
Content Analysis	103	21.68
Discourse Analysis	17	3.5
Grounded Theory Analysis	2	.4
Narrative Analysis	9	1.89
Statistical Analysis	335	70.53
Thematic Analysis	81	17.05
Total	547*	115.05*

*71 studies used two data analysis methods, and 1 study used three data analysis methods

Associations and Dependency Texts

Research Focus and Framework Utilization

Table 11 presents the chi-square analysis results showing the association between research focus areas and framework utilization. Because several theses addressed more than one research focus, this section's analysis used only each thesis's primary research focus. This ensured each of the 475 theses was represented once in the contingency table and avoided inflating cell frequencies through multiple coding. Because 12 cells (42.9%) had expected counts below 5 and the minimum expected count was 0.19, we did not interpret the asymptotic chi-square significance. Consequently, a Monte Carlo exact test based on 10,000 sampled tables indicated a statistically significant association between primary research focus and framework utilization. This indicates that framework utilization differed across primary research-focus categories, although the association was small.

Table 11. Correlation Results of Primary Research Focus and Framework Utilization

Association	Test Statistic	df	Exact/ Monte Carlo p	Cramer's V	N
Primary Research Focus x Framework Utilization	57.836	18	<0.001	0.201	475

Research Focus and Research Type

As shown in Table 12, we recorded research focus as mutually exclusive Primary Research Focus, so each thesis contributed to only one cell of the contingency table. Results indicate that six cells (28.6%) had expected counts below 5, with a minimum expected count of 1.40. Similarly, a Monte Carlo exact test based on 10,000 sampled tests yielded a statistically significant association between the primary research focus and research type. Consequently, the effect size indicates a substantial association between the variables, suggesting that the research type employed varied considerably across primary research-focus categories.

Table 12. Correlation of Primary Research Focus and Research Type

Association	Test Statistic	df	Exact/ Monte Carlo p	Cramer's V	N
Primary Research Focus x Research Type	229.654	12	<0.001	0.492	475

Research Type and Sampling Method

For the association between research type and sampling method, chi-square tests showed an extremely strong association ($\chi^2=336.282$, $df=2$, $p<.001$, Cramer's $V=.841$), indicating a near-deterministic relationship: quantitative studies almost exclusively used probability sampling (Table 13). In contrast, qualitative studies predominantly used non-probability approaches.

Table 13. Correlation of Research Type and Sampling Method

Association	χ^2	df	p	Cramer's V	N
Research Type x Sampling Method	336.282	2	<0.001	0.841	475

Research Type and Data Source

As shown in Tables 11 and 12, Table 14 shows the correlation between research type and data source using a Monte Carlo exact test based on 10,000 sampled tables, indicating a statistically significant association between research type and primary data source. As in Tables 11 and 12, Table 14 uses each thesis's primary data source to ensure each of the 475 theses appears only once in the contingency table, avoiding duplicate cases with multiple data sources.

Table 14. Correlation of Research Type and Primary Data Source

Association	χ^2	df	Exact/ Monte Carlo p	Cramer's V	N
Research Type x Primary Data Source	455.402	10	<0.001	0.692	475

Research Type and Data Analysis

Finally, for the correlation between research type and data analysis, we included only the primary data analysis method for each thesis to avoid duplicating cases with multiple analytical methods (Table 15). The Pearson chi-square test indicates a statistically significant association between research type and primary data analysis method. The effect size further shows a strong association between the variables, indicating substantial correspondence between research type and the primary analytical method utilized.

Table 15. Correlation of Research Type and Primary Data Analysis

Association	χ^2	df	Exact/ Monte Carlo p	Cramer's V	N
Research Type x Primary Data-Analysis Method	249.791	2	<0.001	0.725	475

Concentration Matrix

The concentration matrix results using the Gini coefficient, HHI, and Entropy are presented above (Table 16). The Gini coefficient for all domains ranged from 0.50 to 0.61, with research type recording the lowest at 0.50 and research design the highest at 0.61. HHI values ranged from 3,883.6 for research design to 4,998.5 for research type. Finally, Entropy values ranged from 1.21 for research type to 2.35 for research design.

Table 16. Concentration Matrix Results Across the Domains

Domain	Gini	HHI	Entropy (bits)
Research Type	0.50	4 998.5	1.21
Research Design	0.61	3 883.6	2.35
Framework	0.56	4 401.2	1.32
Data Source	0.53	4 667.7	1.53
Data Analysis	0.57	4 347.4	2.03

Specifically, the Gini coefficient of 0.50 for research types indicates moderate inequality in distribution. Consequently, the HHI of 4,998.5 exceeds the 2,500 threshold, indicating a high concentration in one specific research type. Finally, the entropy value of 1.21, when compared to the maximum possible value of 1.58 for 3 categories, suggests limited diversity. Collectively, the 3 concentration measures suggest limited diversity and significant methodological imbalances that favor quantitative approaches.

Research designs, by contrast, recorded the highest Gini coefficient, indicating substantial inequality. The recorded HHI is also the lowest across all domains, indicating moderate-to-high concentration. Entropy at 2.35 is also the highest across all domains, showing some diversity given the large number of design categories. Notably, concentration remains evident, particularly for descriptive-correlational designs, which account for 60% of all theses.

As for framework utilization patterns, the Gini coefficient of 0.56, coupled with an HHI of 4,401.2, does indicate notable concentration. Additionally, the near-equal split between

“conceptual only” and “both conceptual and theoretical” effectively masks the very low usage of theoretical frameworks alone.

In terms of data source and analysis, the Gini coefficients and HHI both indicate moderate concentration. Additionally, the dominance of questionnaires in data collection and statistical analysis reflects both practical constraints and a potential over-reliance on familiar methods.

Overall, the concentration matrix measures indicate a systematic over-reliance on a narrow set of methodological approaches, specifically quantitative research employing a descriptive-correlational design, using a conceptual framework, collecting data through questionnaires, and processing data using statistical analysis. While this concentration is not inherently problematic, the observed levels of concentration constrain the diversity of research questions that can be asked, the phenomena that can be investigated, and, eventually, the insights that can be generated.

DISCUSSION

This study traced methodological and thematic trends in 475 AB English Language undergraduate theses across three PSU campuses (AY 2017-2018 to AY 2024-2025), with the ultimate goal of informing curriculum revision. The findings revealed a pronounced reliance on quantitative, descriptive-correlational designs, questionnaires, and basic statistical analyses, alongside high concentration indices across all methodological domains.

On the Dominance of Quantitative Descriptive-Correlational Designs

The overwhelming preference for quantitative, descriptive-correlational designs indicates that undergraduate research training in the AB English Language program currently channels students into a relatively narrow methodological repertoire. This particular trend can be attributed to a variety of reasons: (1) the perceived objectivity and scientific credibility of quantitative methods, (2) greater familiarity with quantitative methods and techniques among faculty advisors, (3) availability of a university statistician with access to statistical analysis software, (4) shorter timeline for data collection and analysis, and (5) alignment and influence of prior studies. Dörnyei (2007) identified the same reasons to explain the abundance of quantitative research in applied linguistics, particularly since the introduction of the “scientific method” and its close association with numerical values and statistics that are easily replicated and verified.

The relatively low proportion of qualitative (27.6%) and especially mixed-methods theses (7.8%) raises questions about the opportunities and support available to student-

researchers. The results can also be seen as both a mirror and a commentary on the global trend in applied linguistics and language education. Lazaraton (2005) also noted that leading applied linguistics researchers have reported dominance by quantitative approaches, mirroring the analyzed corpus. In contrast, Dornyei (2007) also noted that qualitative research is more likely to cover the full research spectrum. Quantitative studies, by contrast, focus on specific areas of applied linguistics, such as language testing.

On Framework Patterns and Theoretical Engagement

Although almost all theses employed some framework, the distribution shows a heavy reliance on conceptual frameworks (alone or combined), with purely theoretical frameworks used in only 5.5% of studies, and a small minority (1.1%) using no framework at all.

Luft et al. (2022) noted that theoretical frameworks help explain a phenomenon through an established lens, extending existing knowledge within that lens's limitations. Schwandt (2000) further argues that for novice researchers, such as undergraduate students, a theoretical framework is even more important because it provides the point of view through which research questions are asked and answered. A conceptual framework, by contrast, explains and illustrates how a researcher understands and views the factors and/or variables involved in the study and their relationships with others (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009).

Furthermore, the association between primary research focus and framework utilization was statistically significant but relatively small. This suggests that framework patterns differed across focus categories, but research focus alone did not strongly structure framework choice. As such, the findings warrant closer examination of how theories are selected, explained, and used analytically.

The existing situation, therefore, suggests that students and their faculty advisors may be more comfortable assembling concept maps of variables than engaging deeply with established theories from applied linguistics, literature, or language education. As such, this may limit the cumulative value of theses, as they risk being context-bound or atheoretical. More importantly, this result may indicate limited time devoted to theory in the research curriculum.

On Questionnaire Dominance and Limited Source Diversification

The finding that 68.2% of theses relied on questionnaires as their primary data source, with only marginal use of interviews, observations, focus groups, or corpora, points to a strong instrument bias toward self-report surveys.

While questionnaires offer many advantages, including their instrumental value in uncovering patterns and trends across large groups of respondents, multiple researchers in applied linguistics (Yongqi Gu, 2016; Dornyei & Taguchi, 2010) have cautioned that overreliance on them can limit understanding of the target phenomena being studied. Instead, questionnaires should be complemented with more direct or behavior-based measures, such as observation checklists and corpus data.

This pattern of overreliance on questionnaires therefore creates a research landscape that relies heavily on self-reported attitudes and perceptions. Furthermore, because of the nature of questionnaires, phenomena studied through them also risk being oversimplified, with many potential confounding and extraneous variables left unaddressed. It also risks disregarding actual language use and other forms of naturally occurring texts. Overall, this risks mismatches between the constructs measured and the complex phenomena of language, language learning, and literature.

On the Dominance of Statistics and Niche Qualitative Techniques

Analytical practices were dominated by statistical analysis (70.5% of theses), with qualitative techniques such as content analysis and thematic analysis appearing less frequently, and more specialized approaches (discourse analysis, narrative analysis, grounded theory) rarely used.

While statistical treatments provide a powerful tool for generalizing findings and establishing patterns across large populations, applied linguistics researchers have been critiqued for often oversimplifying statistics and underusing rigorous qualitative analytic frameworks (Purpura et al., 2015).

As such, the results suggest that students are trained primarily to run basic descriptive and inferential statistics, which they then apply broadly, even when more context-sensitive qualitative analysis might be more appropriate. This is further evidenced by the fact that one of the General Education subjects all university students take is Mathematics in the Modern World, where mathematical concepts such as statistics are discussed in the broader context of daily life (Commission on Higher Education, 2013). However, no other courses discuss qualitative approaches in detail besides Language Research 1: Methodology and Language Research 2: Thesis. As a result, when qualitative analysis is used, it may not reflect the depth or systematicity advocated in qualitative methods literature, such as rigorous adherence to coding cycles, audit trails, and reflexivity.

To address this issue, we need to allocate enough instructional time to discuss both quantitative and qualitative methods to deepen students' analytical sophistication across both traditions.

On Strong Associations and Methodological “Pathways” and “Default Chains”

The chi-square analyses revealed that methodological choices were highly interdependent: once a research type was selected, sampling method, data source, and analysis technique became highly predictable. Primary research focus had a comparatively limited association with framework utilization but with a stronger association with research type. Research type, meanwhile, is strongly associated with sampling method, primary data source, and primary data analysis method. Conceptually, standardized methodological “pathways” seem to have been established in the program; those being (1) Quantitative → probability sampling → questionnaire → statistical treatment, and (2) Qualitative → non-probability sampling → interviews/texts → content/thematic analysis.

This implies that while coherence, like matching data sources and analyses to research type, is necessary, the very high effect sizes suggest that students may not be engaging in critical methodological choice but are rather following a template that former studies seemingly established. Significantly, this pattern is consistent with a teaching model in which methods are presented as fixed “packages” rather than as flexible tools selected based on research questions and contexts, which, in turn, suggests limited instructional time.

On Concentration Indices

The concentration indices provide quantitative confirmation that methodological diversity is constrained across all domains, with Gini coefficients between 0.50 and 0.61, HHI values above 3,800 (and nearly 5,000 for research type), and entropy values consistently below theoretical maxima. Using the same economics and market-dominance analogy, these values place the methodological “markets” in a highly concentrated, near-monopolistic range.

Additionally, when viewed alongside the descriptive statistics and chi-square results, these suggest that a small subset of methods- those being quantitative in nature, descriptive-correlational design, utilizing conceptual frameworks, and using questionnaires and statistical treatments- account for a disproportionate share of the theses. Finally, Gini coefficients, HHI, and Shannon entropy offer a novel way to view methodological diversity and allow other programs to evaluate and audit their own research profiles.

On Comparison with Global Methodological Trends and Debates

Within methodological debates in applied linguistics and language education, the PSU thesis corpus reflects a persistent quantitative legacy rather than the full range of

contemporary methodological directions. Specifically, the documented international quantitative bias and correlational dominance (Plonsky & Ghanbar, 2018) are directly mirrored in the 64.6% quantitative and 60% descriptive-correlational figures.

Meanwhile, the call for mixed-methods and methodological innovation in applied linguistics is starkly contrasted by the meager 7.8% in the analyzed undergraduate theses. This is also true for the call for greater emphasis on richer data such as corpora and multimodal texts (Faez et al., 2022), which contrasts sharply with the 68.2% use of questionnaires and the marginal use of observation and Focus Group Discussions (FGD).

The corpus is not described as wholly mirroring or simply lagging behind a dominant, single global trend. Rather, it reflects historically persistent quantitative practices while showing comparatively limited uptake of contemporary diversification. This does not mean qualitative or mixed methods are inherently superior. However, the focus should be on whether the selected methods fit the research questions and whether student-researchers have access to a sufficiently broad repertoire.

On Thematic Patterns and Gaps

Thematic distributions show strong attention to traditional topics such as proficiency and teaching methods, but limited engagement with emerging priorities in ELT and applied linguistics, including digital literacies, World Englishes, language policy, and critical perspectives.

Recent studies show that applied linguistics and ELT have increasingly focused on trends such as technology integration, multilingualism, equity and social justice, critical digital literacies, and global Englishes (Vaishnav, 2024; Douglas, 2021), but these remain underrepresented in the analyzed corpus. This suggests that while the current curriculum design allows undergraduate students to research core ELT issues, it does not fully reflect the field's contemporary agenda. As such, this indicates a need to update course content to include more recent topics and trends, allowing students to diversify their choice of research topic and method of inquiry.

Implications for Undergraduate Research Training

Taken together, the output patterns raise serious questions about whether the current two-course research sequence provides sufficient exposure to the growing and broad range of paradigms, data sources, and analytical techniques in the discipline. The thesis corpus shows competence concentrated in a familiar quantitative and descriptive-correlational model. Consequently, students have less exposure to and training in qualitative epistemologies, design logic, and analytic depth. They are even less prepared to integrate methods, design complex multi-layered studies, and work with advanced qualitative techniques.

Therein lies the problem. The current state constrains students' development trajectory. Without an effective curricular intervention, students graduate competent in one “default” paradigm but struggle when faced with more diverse expectations in graduate school, research-intensive environments, and complex institutional research tasks.

Program-level Curricular Option for Formal Feasibility Review

The evidence presented thus far supports a formal curricular-level review of how the AB English Language program at Pangasinan State University sequences and delivers research-methods instruction. One option for the University's curriculum review bodies to consider is a three-stage sequence covering quantitative methods, qualitative and mixed-methods inquiry, and a thesis implementation and defense stage. This particular proposal is not being presented as a mandatory addition of three units. CHED Memorandum Order No. 24, s. 2017 specified a minimum program requirement of 134 units for the AB English Language program. However, CHED also prescribed that any revision must undergo an institutional curriculum and workload audit, comply with applicable approval procedures, and consider effects on students' total unit load. In fact, the current CHED-approved curriculum of PSU's AB English Language program prescribes 152 units, an additional 18 units beyond CMO No. 24's 134-unit minimum.

Two alternative three-course structures may be considered. The first is a method-centered sequence in which quantitative research serves as the basis for implementing the proposed Language Research 1: Quantitative Methods course, where students will deepen their understanding of quantitative research beyond correlational surveys and be introduced to other quantitative methods suited to applied linguistics and ELT research. Consequently, the underrepresentation of qualitative and mixed-methods research forms the foundation for the proposed Language Research 2: Qualitative and Mixed-Methods course, where students receive focused exposure to qualitative logic, design, data collection, and analysis, as Language Research 1 did for quantitative methods. Finally, to address the expected increased load on the students borne of their more rigorous and varied methodological approaches and topics, the third course, Language Research 3: Thesis Defense, will be solely dedicated to data collection, analysis, and research write-up over an extended timeline under the guidance of their faculty advisor, and culminating in a Thesis Final Defense.

An alternative is a process- and discipline-centered sequence consisting of Language Research 1: Principles and Methods in Language and Literature Research, Language Research 2: Research Writing in Language or Literature, and Language Research 3: Thesis Implementation, Writing, and Defense. The main difference from the previous track is that, in this alternative, Language Research 1 will provide a common foundation in research, epistemological and theoretical perspectives, research ethics, problem formulation, literature searching, framework development, and selecting appropriate

research designs. In this track, quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, textual, corpus-based, discourse-analytic, and literary-critical approaches would be taught comparatively rather than as isolated methodological traditions. By doing so, students are expected to better understand that research methods are not fixed packages automatically attached to particular topics. However, they would select individual tools carefully, considering the research problem, theoretical orientation, data, and intended contribution. Consequently, Language Research 2 would focus on developing a complete and defensible research proposal. Throughout the course, students would formulate their respective research problems, synthesize literature, construct or select appropriate theoretical and conceptual frameworks, justify said design, develop data-collection instruments and analysis protocols, and establish analytical procedures and ethical safeguards. This would then culminate in Language Research 3, much like the first proposed 3-course plan.

Both of the three-course configurations offer defensible approaches to strengthening undergraduate research preparation. If the additional three-unit course is not feasible, the same learning outcomes may instead be pursued through a unit-neutral redesign of the existing research sequence, reallocation of current major and cognate units, research-methods modules embedded across courses, or non-credit/co-requisite workshops and colloquiums. As such, the appropriate intervention should be determined through thorough curriculum mapping, consultation with faculty members, students, and stakeholders, and review by the relevant academic councils and curriculum review boards.

Additional Curriculum and Faculty Development Implications

Beyond restructuring the course sequence, the findings also underscore the need for parallel investments in faculty development, research infrastructure, and program-level research culture. Workshops on qualitative research, integrative mixed-methods research, corpus-based inquiry, innovative approaches, and current trends in applied linguistics and ELT should be regularly organized and attended by both students of the AB English Language program and prospective faculty advisors. This is an important step toward enriching the methodological diversity of faculty research, which will, in turn, benefit student research.

Additionally, institutional support should be strengthened further to allow students and faculty members to participate in more conferences and international fora where diverse methods are more visible and valued.

Finally, research infrastructure should also be further enhanced. This can be done by purchasing qualitative analysis software often needed to support more advanced research, and by establishing a linguistics-specific research center where faculty and students can receive specialized research support and guidance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined 475 AB English Language undergraduate theses produced across three campuses from 2017 onward to map methodological and thematic trends and generate evidence-based recommendations for curriculum enhancement. The study used documentary analysis, descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and concentration measures.

Taken together, the results show a thesis landscape heavily dominated by a specific pattern of methodological choices, particularly quantitative research that follows a descriptive-correlational design, gathers data through questionnaires, and analyzes data using statistical treatments. Most studies also rest on conceptual rather than fully articulated theoretical frameworks. Patterns in research type, sampling, data source, and analysis, along with elevated Gini, HHI, and entropy values, point to systemic methodological concentration rather than balanced pluralism. Even the research focus shows a narrow range of topics, primarily focusing on English language proficiency and English language teaching.

The current AB English Language curriculum effectively socializes students into a single dominant research model at the expense of methodological plurality, ultimately missing opportunities for innovative and more globally responsive research. Additionally, methodological choices tend to follow a fixed, highly predictable chain once research foci are identified, suggesting that the program's research infrastructure is template-based rather than driven by critical reasoning. Furthermore, thematic choices also align with traditional ELT and proficiency concerns but lag behind contemporary global trends emphasizing technology integration, multilingualism, and critical perspectives. Finally, the methodological concentration quantified by Gini coefficients, HHI, and Entropy values constitutes a structural feature of the program's research training rather than a random by-product of individual researchers' preferences.

Conceptually, this study shows that thesis-trend analysis can serve as a powerful internal evaluation mechanism for the research component of language curricula. Using three concentration indices also provided a quantifiable, replicable measure of diversity in educational research outputs. As such, the recommendations to enrich the current curriculum by including a 3-course research sequence, along with other institutional and infrastructural reforms, are grounded in empirical evidence.

Implementing the aforementioned recommendations for a three-course research sequence, augmented by targeted faculty development and strengthened research infrastructure, will gradually shift the thesis landscape toward greater methodological diversity and innovation, and thematic alignment with global linguistics and ELT priorities.

Accordingly, these conclusions should be understood as characterizing the research training outcomes of this particular AB English Language program under its current

curriculum, rather than as definitive claims about all undergraduate language research in the Philippines or beyond.

Finally, by grounding curriculum decisions in systematic evidence from students' own research outputs, the program can move toward a more balanced and innovative research culture. In doing so, it positions future AB English Language graduates not only as competent consumers of research, but as confident producers of knowledge in an increasingly complex and methodologically diverse field of linguistics and language education.

IMPLICATIONS

The documented over-reliance on quantitative, descriptive-correlational, questionnaire, and statistics-based studies indicates that the current two-course research sequence does not sufficiently expose students to the full range of methodological options and global trends in linguistics and language education in language research. The evidence supports restructuring the curriculum into three dedicated courses—Quantitative Methods, Qualitative Methods, and Thesis/Defense—to provide balanced, sequenced training in multiple paradigms and allow more time for rigorous proposal development, implementation, and writing.

Pedagogically speaking, research methods instruction in the program should change. It is recommended that instruction move beyond procedural "cookbook" approaches to cultivate critical methodological thinking, such as helping students understand epistemological foundations, evaluate the appropriateness of varied approaches, and make informed methodological decisions. Integrating authentic research experiences, analyzing published studies, and expanding opportunities for methodological experimentation would also be beneficial.

Through the proposed enhancements, increased methodological diversity among student researchers would ultimately strengthen student competencies. Students who can integrate varied research approaches generally have a broader repertoire of research skills applicable to diverse contexts, can critically evaluate and assess research quality, are flexible enough to match methods to research questions rather than forcing questions into familiar methods, and can demonstrate a deeper understanding of the research process and knowledge construction.

The strong methodological concentration also underscores the need for sustained faculty development in qualitative, mixed-methods, and innovative approaches, as well as in advanced statistical and qualitative analysis techniques. Providing access to appropriate software, research databases, and institutional support is essential if faculty are to model and supervise more diverse, higher-order research designs.

By quantifying methodological concentration and linking it directly to curriculum structure, the study offers a replicable model for other language and literature programs seeking to evaluate and reform their research training. Encouraging similar audits across institutions can contribute to a broader shift toward methodologically plural, theoretically grounded, and thematically current undergraduate research, strengthening the research culture in language education more generally.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Informed Consent

All participants were informed of the purpose and scope of the study, and their voluntary participation was secured. Respondents provided informed consent before completing the survey instruments, with assurances of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any stage without repercussions.

Ethics Approval

This study has secured all necessary Ethics Approval as prescribed by the University where the research was conducted.

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