

Thesis information for students in the English Language Instructor MA (ELIMA) programme

Getting supervision

The ELIMA programme requires that all thesis writers seek the assistance of a supervisor from the Department of English Language Pedagogy (DELP). The thesis must be written in English and topics are preferably connected to ELT methodology, language pedagogy or English applied linguistics, so students are free to approach any member of the Department (about the research areas of our staff see <http://delp.elte.hu/staffdetails.htm>). If you need help finding a supervisor, you can turn to the programme coordinator: Zsófia Széll (zsofi.szell@gmail.com).

The supervisor will provide guidance in the following areas:

- clarification of the topic and title of the thesis;
- overseeing the writing of the thesis proposal;
- discussion of the appropriate research questions;
- suggestions for a reading list;
- advice on possible approaches to the analysis;
- advice on the writing process.

Please note that the supervisor is not responsible for editing and proofreading the final draft!

Topics for the thesis

The thesis may be written on any **topic relevant to the teaching of English** (i.e., ELT methodology, language pedagogy, applied linguistics). The thesis should demonstrate a systematic approach to analysis, either theoretical or empirical, which reflects a deep understanding of the language teaching and learning process.

Suggested thesis topics by potential supervisors are listed at <http://delp.elte.hu/staffdetails.htm> for DELP. The list is not comprehensive and should not be treated as a final list. The title of your thesis should be the result of negotiation with your supervisor.

Starting procedures: selecting and registering a topic, preparing a thesis proposal

Your thesis topic and title must be approved by the supervisor before registering the topic/title, that is, before the deadline for the official title proposal (“szakdolgozati témabejelentő”, see below). For this you need to put together a **one-page thesis proposal**, which is a separate document from the “szakdolgozati témabejelentő”, which has to be signed by your supervisor. You should discuss its contents with the supervisor, including:

- the title and topic of the thesis
- how the thesis topic is relevant to English language teaching
- the aim(s) of the research
- what specific questions will be researched (research questions)
- how the research will be carried out (method)
- a list of sources already consulted (in APA format).

The thesis proposal form can be downloaded at
https://delp.elte.hu/DOCS_PDFS/ELIMA%20Statementofintent.doc.

Schedule for submitting the title proposal (“szakdolgozati témabejelentő”):

- for those who plan to defend their thesis in the spring term: October 15
- for those who plan to defend their thesis in the autumn term: March 15.

This is done through a form that you have to submit in the Neptun system (Information/General forms).

Should a student find it necessary to change the submitted title and topic, they need to hand in a modification of the title to the registrar (Tanulmányi Osztály).

Formal thesis requirements

The length of the thesis should be **75-80,000 characters** without spaces, not including appendices, the title page, declarations, table of contents, references, etc. This length is roughly equivalent to about **40 pages**, with a +10% margin of tolerance. The layout should be single or double sided A4 pages printed 1.5 spaced in Times New Roman 12pt font. Margins: 2.5cm on three sides, at the gutter: 3.0 cm. For citations and referencing use a documentation system approved by the host department.

Thesis content

The thesis should be an independent piece of research displaying some original elements, however small in scope. The aim of conducting research and writing a research paper is to find and present the solution to a problem related to English language teaching. The quality of the research should be supported by a coherent research design that has a clear focus. It should demonstrate the writer’s familiarity with the literature, and should have a clear line of argumentation. It should be written in academic English. Overall, it should demonstrate an enhanced understanding of the field.

There are two main types of research: empirical and theoretical. **Empirical research** aims to explore an issue, generate or test hypotheses through gathering and analyzing primary data (i.e., data gained by observation, through interviews, questionnaires, discourse analysis). The focus of empirical research can be on behaviour (e.g., teacher, student or schoolpractices, actions, cognitive processes, perceptions) or products (e.g., various types of studentoutput, texts, films, pieces of art). Empirical research is of three main types: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. Qualitative research studies an individual case or a limited number of cases closely with the purpose of exploring or understanding the particular phenomenon/phenomena from the perspective of the participants, including the researcher. Quantitative studies usuallytake an outsider's perspective and involve a sufficient number of participants or samples so that the findings might allow generalisations about the population or product (e.g., teaching material) investigated. Mixed methods studies merge the approaches and tools of quantitative and qualitative investigations.

Below are a few examples for questions that can be researched through empirical research:

- What kinds of mistakes do beginner learners make when learning the simple present?
- How do teachers see the role of reading skills in the English classroom?
- How can content-based instruction improve the effectiveness of communication in a foreignlanguage?
- What special needs do advanced EFL students have in ESP courses?
- How does the use of ICT affect learners' motivation?

An empirical research project applies various research tools, preferably a combination of the following: Questionnaires / Interviews / Observation / Diaries, journals / Tests / Discourse analysis / Spoken interaction analysis / Analysis of methods, experiments.

Theoretical research aims to answer a question through the review and critique of existing theories about various issues or notions. It is based on a sound understanding and a coherent synthesis of the relevant literature, which enables the writer to arrive at a solution representing a novel approach to or view of a problem.

Below are a few examples of questions that can be researched through theoretical research:

- How do existing constructs contribute to identifying the elements of test-taking skills?
- How does short-term memory influence language learning in young and mature learners?
- What kind of communicative competence model would be the most suitable for ELT in the English as a lingua franca era?
- How can the simplification of the issue of the 'Stolen Generation' in Australia be justified for the purposes of ELT?

The main aim of a theoretical thesis is to show various treatments of the particular problem and to provide a new understanding of or a new perspective on the issue. The paper starts with the comparison of what different authors have said about the same topic, that is, a survey of the relevant literature arranged into some logical framework created by the writer. The overview should be critical, and should be followed by an argumentative proposal of the writer's own opinion and solution to the problem. The author does not use a database gathered specifically for this research but relies on already existing materials including the findings of both theoretical and empirical investigations. This could also take the form of a document analysis, e.g. focusing on a coursebook or other teaching resources.

The structure of the thesis: an empirical research paper

Preliminary pages: a title page in English and Hungarian and a certificate of originality in English.

Abstract: a short summary detailing the purpose, the relevance, the approach and the result of the paper (100-150 words).

Table of Contents: including the chapters of the paper, the References and also the materials in the Appendices.

Introduction: this should introduce the reader to the specific issue under analysis and describe the research approach/strategy. The introduction should:

- specify the point/topic of the study
- explain why the topic is relevant/interesting
- specify the aims and the exact research questions/hypotheses and their relevance
- explain how the study relates to previous work in the field and how it is expected to benefit the profession
- preview the structure/chapters of the thesis

Review of the literature: The purpose of the review is to develop the theoretical background, that is, to discuss the relevant literature in order to give the reader knowledge of the field (specifically relating to the research question), which the writer is researching + establish the research niche. Ultimately, this part of the thesis should inform the reader of the theoretical and experiential basis of the research by synthesizing the relevant literature. The review of literature must define the key terms and concepts, describe relevant theories, and present earlier research concerning the issue.

The literature review can be organized around concepts or the relevant earlier research, but in any case must be focused to suit the purposes of the research. It should be a very thorough and well-structured overview, presented on the basis of an original organising principle. That is, the writer has to make a unique presentation of the existing literature relevant to the topic.

This means, for instance, that a mere summary of what different authors have said about the same topic does not constitute a proper review of the literature. Earlier research results should be evaluated and related to the purpose of the current research. A good overview is relevant, looks at all the aspects of the given topic, uses a minimum of 15 serious reliable and relevant academic sources, and presents the topic in a new light with evidence of the writer's critical judgement, explicitly and appropriately formulated. As regards materials downloaded from the Internet, only sources that have an author and publication data will normally be accepted. The use of other documents, without an author or publication data, for example, has to be justified.

Research design and method: The *Introduction* and the *Review of the literature* are typically followed by a section in which the writer describes in detail how the analysis was conducted, that is, the technical aspects of the study. There is room for variation depending on the qualitative or quantitative nature of the thesis. Either way, the research design should be coherent and complete. In order to meet these criteria, this chapter should include consideration of the following:

Re-statement /refinement of the research question(s) (What questions arise based on the literature review and the researcher's focus/interest?)

The approach of the research (qualitative or quantitative or mixed)

Reference to earlier research to justify the approach and method. Description of the method of data collection: What? Why? How?

Setting (a description of the context, e.g. the place, general and specific background, etc.)

Participants or set of materials(texts) analysed (rationale for selection, variables)

Instruments (questionnaires, interviews, observation protocol, diaries, document analysis, framework for discourse analysis, retrospection, etc.)

Procedures of data collection (What happened, how long did the processes last, etc.)

Method of data analysis (a description of procedures and methods applied in the analysis)

Quality of research (validity, reliability, generalisability/credibility, trustworthiness, transferability): The use of the particular methods must be justified and be an important part of the line of argumentation presented in the thesis. In the justification, reference must be made to literature on research methodology. A good method section describes the procedures in such a detailed way that anyone wishing to replicate the study would be able to do so. Samples of all the data collection materials (e.g. questionnaires, interview protocols, tasks, observation sheets) need to be provided in the Appendix. If a data collection instrument is not in English, it has to be translated into English and included in the Appendices. (N.B. In line with research conventions and common sense, if the mother tongue of the researcher and the participant(s) is the same, interviews and questionnaires are conducted in the mother tongue even if the research is to be written up in English in order to cut down on possible distortions caused by the use of a foreign language.)

Results and discussion: The *Results* section will normally contain the data collected (summarized if appropriate) and the results of the analysis, which will detail and justify the conclusion. This section is often merged together with the *Discussion* section, which includes the writer's discussion (i.e. explanation and interpretation) of the results with respect to the original questions/hypotheses and the consequence of the results, without making overgeneralizations. The explanations should be convincing. Overall, this part of the thesis should demonstrate an enhanced awareness of the field

Conclusion with limitations: This section briefly summarizes the main findings of the analysis, and applies them to the original question(s), discusses possible alternative interpretations and views, examines the pedagogical implications (where appropriate), mentions the limitations of the research, and proposes directions for future investigations. All the conclusions have to be drawn on the basis of the data and not subjective speculations.

References: In this section the writer lists all the references that were cited in the text (and only those!). See the DELP's websites on APA citation guidelines for details: <http://delp.elte.hu/APAGuidelines.htm>.

Appendices: The following materials can be included: blank questionnaires and their English translations, interview questions, observation schedules, information brochures, sample handouts, teaching materials used or designed, raw data, visual aids, scales, tests, less important tables or figures, practical examples, or other kinds of illustrative materials.

Appendices need to contain only a short sample of the data (e.g., examples of filled in questionnaires, extracts from transcripts of interviews, parts of texts produced by the participants). Any material not in English must be translated into English. All the other data have to be made available upon request.

The structure of the thesis: a theoretical thesis paper

Theoretical thesis papers usually follow an argumentative pattern and are organized around the solution of a problem. Questions that are normally addressed in such papers include:

- What is the point/topic of the study?
- Why is this topic interesting/relevant?
- What has been done in the field so far?
- Is there any problem with/is there something missing from what has been done/said so far?
- What is the problem with/What is missing from what has been done/said?
- What solution may be offered?
- Why is this solution good, or better than earlier solutions to the problem?

Depending on the nature of the problem, such papers may be structured in different ways. A typical pattern of organisation is presented below:

Preliminary pages: a title page in English and Hungarian, and a certificate of originality in English.

Abstract: a short summary detailing the purpose, the relevance, the approach and the main arguments of the paper (100-150 words)

Table of Contents: including the chapters of the paper and also the materials in the Appendices.

Introduction: The introduction normally starts by introducing the subject of the paper and its relevance, that is, the reason why it is considered as an interesting issue to explore. This is followed by the statement of the problem related to the issue (i.e., the situation presented) and the author's position regarding the solution of this problem. The exact aim of the paper and the main research question(s) should be clearly formulated. (In theoretical papers, research questions relate to finding possible solutions to the problem.) The introduction generally ends with a brief overview of the analytical approach/strategy to be pursued and the outline of the thesis.

Review of literature: The aim of the literature review is to provide theoretical background to the solution of the problem anticipated in the Introduction. It offers a critical review of the various treatments of the problem under investigation, enumerating arguments representing the body of literature both opposing and supporting the author's position. The survey should be organized into a logical framework invented by the writer. Ultimately, this part of the thesis should inform the reader of the theoretical and experiential basis of

the research.

Analysis (Solution): The analysis (i.e., solution) section offers a thorough and disciplined presentation of the possible solution(s) as envisaged by the writer. It should build upon the work of other researchers in the field, but authors are expected to come up with an original solution. All arguments/claims put forward by the author must be accompanied by some form of supporting evidence (e.g., examples, figures, facts, documents, views of other researchers). The criteria of the analysis (e.g. the set of concepts along which the issue is examined) and the choice of earlier research to be included in the study must be explained and justified. This section ends with an evaluation of the proposed solution(s), showing that it is (or they are) exempt from the weaknesses identified in the opposing view(s). This section is often not presented in a single chapter but in several chapters reflecting the concepts of the framework of the analysis.

Conclusion: Theoretical papers normally end by a restatement of the problem under investigation and a brief summary of the proposed solution(s) discussed. In the conclusion section, authors may indicate in what ways the study contributes to current achievements in the field, examine the pedagogical implications (where appropriate), refer to the limitations of the paper, and point to possible areas for further investigation.

References: See empirical research papers.

Appendices: See empirical research papers.

Suggested length/proportion of chapters

The review of the literature should typically be around one quarter of the total length of the thesis. The research design and method section will typically be around one quarter of the total length of the complete thesis. The results and discussion section should be around one half of the complete thesis.

Submission of the thesis

The deadline for submitting the ELIMA thesis in the autumn term is November, in the spring term is April. For the exact dates in a specific year please consult the Faculty of Arts website at <https://www.btk.elte.hu/academic-calendar>.

The thesis is to be submitted electronically via Neptun. The students will receive specific information regarding the exact deadline and the steps involved in submitting their work.

The assessment of the thesis

The assessment of the thesis is the responsibility of DELP. The thesis is **double marked** by the assessor and the supervisor. The assessment of the thesis will be based on a set of analytical criteria that focus on the following features:

- The quality of research (research methods, focus, analytical framework, etc.)
- The theoretical and experiential basis of the research (quality and number of sources, familiarity with the literature, synthesis of knowledge and skills, etc.)
- Interpretation of findings (implications, enhanced awareness, etc.)
- Independence (contribution to the field, originality, etc.)
- Quality of writing (structuring, argumentation, etc.)
- Quality of language (accuracy and range of English)
- Formal requirements (layout, citation conventions, length)

The scores, with a maximum of 28 are converted to a mark on the familiar 1 to 5 scale on the basis of the following bands: 5= 25 points or above, 4= 18-24 points, 3= 11-17 points, 2= 7-10 points, 1= 6 or below.

As part of the final examination for the ELIMA programme, the thesis writer has to defend the thesis in front of a committee.