

Undergraduate Research Trends in English Language Teaching in Türkiye: Insights from TÜBİTAK 2209-A Project Titles

Türkiye’de İngilizce Öğretiminde Lisans Araştırmaları Eğilimleri:
TÜBİTAK 2209-A Proje Başlıklarından Tespitler

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates current tendencies in undergraduate research in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Türkiye by analysing project titles accepted under the TÜBİTAK 2209-A Research Project Support Programme for Undergraduate Students between 2021 and 2024. A total of 301 project titles were examined using qualitative document analysis and thematic analysis. The findings reveal a diverse research landscape in which undergraduate students engage with both established and emerging areas of ELT. Traditional concerns such as methods and techniques, materials development, language skills, assessment, curriculum design, and psychological constructs remained prominent. At the same time, newer orientations were observed in projects on technology and artificial intelligence, inclusivity and social justice, responses to emerging crises (COVID-19, 2023 earthquake), and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Undergraduate researchers also demonstrated attention to professional contexts through projects on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and teacher education. These findings illustrate how undergraduate ELT research in Türkiye both reflects long-standing scholarly traditions and adapts to global, technological, and social developments. The study highlights the value of undergraduate research in fostering reflective and innovative future teachers, while recommending further inquiry through in-depth interviews and comprehensive project analysis to complement title-based thematic mapping.

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Introduction

Undergraduate research has become an increasingly important component of higher education, as it allows students to engage with authentic academic practices, foster critical inquiry, and contribute to disciplinary knowledge. It also helps students develop their professional skills and clarify academic and career goals (Petrella & Jung, 2008, p. 92). In this sense, undergraduate research is regarded as an important mechanism for moving university teaching beyond traditional lecture-based models toward more active, inquiry-oriented learning (Healey & Jenkins, 2022, p. xxi; Jenkins & Healey, 2010). Within the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), such engagement plays a crucial role in preparing prospective language teachers to become reflective practitioners

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and, potentially, future researchers. Therefore, universities offer students relevant courses, workshops, and research training. However, students might encounter difficulties in understanding research concepts and utilising theoretical knowledge in real-world situations, emphasising the importance of implementing a student-centred pedagogical approach in research methodology instruction that integrates practice-oriented strategies to facilitate authentic research experiences (Muntaha & Kartikawati, 2025).

In Türkiye, undergraduate students in ELT programmes often encounter courses such as Research Methods in Education (a mandatory course) and Project Preparation in Education (an elective course), both designed to develop students' research skills. Those courses aim to familiarise students with core research paradigms, research designs and overall research processes. By guiding students through the entire process from identifying a problem, reviewing the literature, and planning and managing a project, to preparing reports and presenting outcomes, it can be claimed that these courses play a crucial role in cultivating research literacy and academic confidence. Despite curricular research training in the programmes, undergraduates could find these experiences overly theoretical and disconnected from authentic academic practice (Yavuz, 2018, p. 252). Consequently, opportunities for conducting real-world research remain limited outside formal coursework.

The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) has attempted to address this gap through its 2209-A Research Project Support Programme for Undergraduate Students (hereafter referred to as TÜBİTAK 2209-A), which aims to cultivate a culture of research by funding student-led projects across disciplines. Applications for this programme are made through TÜBİTAK's online system and require academic advisor approval, institutional confirmation, and compliance with detailed formatting and ethical requirements. The evaluation process consists of a preliminary review followed by a scientific assessment based on criteria such as scientific quality, methodological coherence, project management, and potential wider impact (TÜBİTAK, n.d.). Since 2022, university students have been encouraged to prepare their projects within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (TÜBİTAK, 2022); however, this provision was removed in the 2025 call, which instead lists priority areas aligned with the 12th Development Plan and the 2030 Industry and Technology Strategy of Türkiye such as digitalisation and innovation in education, cultural heritage and migration studies (TÜBİTAK, 2025). Furthermore, in the 2025 project call, the programme explicitly emphasises that project titles must use precise and scientific terminology that accurately reflects the purpose and content of the research, and must avoid highlighting any institution, organisation, commercial product, or brand (TÜBİTAK, 2025). Within this structure, the 2209-A programme not only supports the technical and procedural aspects of undergraduate research but also creates an accessible platform through which students can engage with authentic inquiry processes. It can be claimed that by offering a formal space for project development, supervision, and evaluation, the programme enables undergraduate students to participate in research experiences that extend beyond course-based assignments. Such projects provide valuable insight into the concerns, interests, and emerging research orientations of pre-service teachers, while also shaping their professional identities (Kadioğlu, 2020; Vekli, 2020).

In the field of ELT, TÜBİTAK 2209-A provides a meaningful arena for undergraduate research, bridging the gap between theoretical learning and applied inquiry as well. Thanks to the programme, undergraduate ELT students are increasingly exposed to opportunities to design small-scale studies, explore discipline-specific issues, and engage with current debates in language education. In this sense, TÜBİTAK cultivates a research-oriented mindset at an early stage of higher education by providing financial support and a formal evaluation process. Despite the growing body of research into postgraduate theses and published ELT articles in Türkiye (e.g., Inal et al., 2016; Gürsoy & Özcan, 2021; Ortaçtepe Hart & Aydın, 2023; Yağız et al., 2016), little is known

about the specific trends in undergraduate research, particularly in the context of initiatives such as the TÜBİTAK 2209-A that actively encourages undergraduate students to engage in structured research. The steady increase in both applications and acceptances over the years (see Table 1) indicates growing interest in the programme, and analysing the titles of projects accepted through this initiative offers an insightful lens into the disciplinary interests and research orientations of future ELT practitioners.

Literature Review

Research in ELT in Türkiye has attracted growing scholarly attention over the past two decades, with numerous content analyses and review studies attempting to capture dominant themes, methodological orientations, and research gaps. Together, these works offer a comprehensive picture of how ELT scholarship has evolved at the postgraduate and professional levels, while also highlighting the relative lack of systematic inquiry into undergraduate research.

Early reviews mapped out the broad contours of the field. Alptekin and Tatar (2011), for instance, examined nearly 130 studies published between 2005 and 2009 in local journals, conference proceedings, and dissertations. They reported that research most frequently focused on foreign language teaching and learning, teacher education, language skills, and assessment, alongside studies addressing cognitive, affective, and social factors in language acquisition. A notable imbalance was identified as that reading was extensively studied, while speaking and listening were comparatively neglected. Similarly, Kırmızı (2012) analysed 212 master's theses produced between 2005 and 2010 in Turkish ELT programmes. Nine categories of research emerged, ranging from teaching methods and learner factors to linguistics and technology. In his study, language skills, teaching methods, psychology, and language teaching stood out as the most frequent topics. Both studies underscored the formative role of postgraduate research in shaping national scholarly priorities.

Analyses of journal publications reinforced these findings as well. Solak (2014), drawing on 189 papers published between 2009 and 2013 in SSCI- and ULAKBİM-indexed journals, found that teaching and learning, often with undergraduates as participants, dominated research efforts. He suggested expanding the scope to include more journals and international comparisons to strengthen the Turkish research agenda. Yağız et al. (2016) reported similar patterns, reviewing 274 articles published between 2005 and 2015 in 15 ULAKBİM-indexed journals. Their analysis revealed a strong emphasis on language learning, teaching, and teacher education, with a predominant use of quantitative, descriptive designs. Despite technological advances in classrooms, topics such as information and communication technology (ICT) and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) were underexplored, as were scale development, testing, and higher education. These studies together illustrate a research landscape focused mainly on traditional pedagogical and learner-centred concerns, while emerging areas remained peripheral.

Doctoral research has offered a more advanced lens on the field. Inal et al. (2016), in their review of 25 dissertations completed between 2009 and 2013, found that most work centred on instructional variables, learner attitudes and autonomy, textbook evaluation, and programme development. Classroom-based research (i.e., instructional variables and designs) was dominant, though often reliant on descriptive survey data rather than naturally occurring interaction. Likewise, a larger-scale review by Özmen et al. (2016) of 137 doctoral theses (2010–2014) revealed three overarching categories: teaching English as a foreign language, teacher education, and second language acquisition. Within these, common themes included language skills, teaching materials, learner and teacher psychology, curriculum design, and technology. Gürsoy and Özcan (2021), analysing 252 doctoral dissertations from 2010–2020, confirmed that teacher professional development was the most frequently studied topic, while social, cultural, and gender-related

issues were the least represented. They also observed that productive skills, particularly speaking and writing, received more attention than receptive skills, though reading continued to outweigh listening.

Recent reviews have pointed to new directions. Aydınli and Ortaçtepe (2018), surveying around 140 articles published between 2010 and 2016 in locally based peer-reviewed journals, identified three major areas as language learning and learners (including anxiety, motivation, learner autonomy, learning strategies and styles and so on), ELT and teachers (including assessment, code-switching, teaching methods, materials and curriculum development and so on), and teacher education/professional development. Their findings highlighted growing interest in technology-enhanced learning and affective factors such as motivation and learner autonomy, though they cautioned that rising research output sometimes reflected institutional pressures rather than organic scholarly priorities. Extending this work, Ortaçtepe Hart and Aydınli (2023) analysed over 170 journal articles published between 2016 and 2022. They confirmed the continued popularity of research on instructional technologies and teacher education but also observed emerging attention to multiculturalism, social justice, critical pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly shaped the research agenda, accelerating inquiry into online learning and new media. Together, these reviews indicate that while ELT research in Türkiye retains traditional emphases, it has also begun to diversify, increasingly engaging with broader social and global issues.

In contrast to this extensive mapping of postgraduate and published ELT research, the landscape of undergraduate research remains comparatively underexplored in Türkiye. Studies focusing on pre-service teachers' engagement with research point to both challenges and benefits. Tanış (2019) underlines that pre-service teachers' conceptions of research are strongly shaped by the structure of research courses and the broader curriculum in which they are embedded. While teacher educators emphasise the role of research engagement in fostering reflective and informed practitioners, pre-service teachers often struggle to transfer research knowledge into practical teaching contexts (Gümüşok et. al., 2024; Tanış, 2019). In line with Yavuz and Zehir Topkaya (2013), Yavuz (2018) found that ELT undergraduates perceived research skills courses as overly abstract, and recommended that they be offered later in the curriculum and linked to practicum experiences. Akyel's (2015) study shows that when pre-service ELT teachers engage in research during their practicum, they investigate issues that emerge directly from classroom realities, such as teaching methods, classroom management, feedback practices, or the use of authentic materials, and this engagement supports their development of reflective thinking and inquiry-oriented teaching. Similarly, Müjdecı (2020) found that when research tasks are integrated into practicum courses, pre-service teachers engage in classroom-focused investigations that help them develop inquiry skills. Research on teachers' perceptions of research engagement in Türkiye also reveals that ELT practitioners generally view research as a scientific and systematic process, emphasising objectivity, hypothesis testing, and data analysis, though they often experience challenges such as limited time, lack of institutional support, and difficulties connecting research to day-to-day teaching practices (Ülker Mermer & Nilüfer Soyer, 2021). Together, these studies illustrate that undergraduate ELT research in the Turkish context emerges from a professional culture that values inquiry but also grapples with structural and conceptual barriers. Despite these challenges, pre-service teachers' engagement with small-scale investigations provides an early foundation for research awareness and contributes to their developing identities as future English language teachers.

In this sense, TÜBİTAK 2209-A has created valuable opportunities for undergraduates to engage in structured research experiences. Research from other fields demonstrates the programme's positive impact. Vekli (2020) reported that science teacher candidates developed skills in

collaboration, problem-solving, and academic writing through TÜBİTAK 2209-A projects. Kadioğlu (2020) highlighted how teacher candidates' participation strengthened their researcher identity and professional development, with motivations often linked to curiosity, employability, and exposure to academic culture. Sevimli et al. (2025), focusing on mathematics teacher candidates, identified not only common challenges such as literature review, academic writing, and ethical approval, but also significant gains in professional growth and readiness for graduate studies. Conversely, Öner and Koçak (2023) found that general awareness of TÜBİTAK opportunities among pre-service teachers was low, although direct engagement increased familiarity and confidence.

Thematic analyses of project titles in other disciplines suggest that examining undergraduate projects can be a valuable way to gauge research trends. For example, Dalkılıç (2025) analysed 269 TÜBİTAK 2209-A projects in health management, identifying twelve themes, with public health, COVID-19, and management among the most prominent. The study demonstrated how project titles alone can reveal orientations and gaps in undergraduate research. Nevertheless, despite ELT being a well-established research field in Türkiye, no equivalent systematic analysis of undergraduate ELT project titles has yet been conducted. This gap positions the present study to make a novel contribution by mapping current trends in undergraduate ELT research in Türkiye through the lens of TÜBİTAK 2209-A projects accepted for funding between 2021 and 2024 call periods. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What thematic trends emerge in undergraduate research projects in ELT in Türkiye, as reflected in the titles accepted for funding by the TÜBİTAK 2209-A programme between 2021 and 2024?
2. In what ways do these project titles reflect evolving priorities and emerging directions in undergraduate ELT research in Türkiye?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative document analysis design, which is widely used to review and interpret textual data systematically (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Document analysis is particularly suitable for uncovering underlying patterns and trends in written records, such as project proposals or titles, which serve as concise indicators of research focus and orientation. Since this study aimed to explore tendencies in undergraduate ELT research in Türkiye, lists of project titles accepted for funding under the TÜBİTAK 2209-A programme served as the primary data source. As will be detailed under the heading "Data Analysis," thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was utilised during the data analysis process.

Data Source

The dataset consists of seven documents that were publicly available on the TÜBİTAK 2209-A website at the time the application results for each call period were announced. During the data collection process, these lists covering all application periods between 2021 and 2024 were downloaded and sorted by the researcher. The original lists include the titles of projects accepted for funding from various departments and faculties, along with the names of the affiliated universities, while the names of students and supervisors are presented in a masked format.

Data Collection and Preparation

The data collection proceeded in three main stages. First, seven files corresponding to the calls between 2021 and 2024 were retrieved from the TÜBİTAK website. Second, the first round of selection aimed to identify projects submitted by ELT departments. In addition, project titles containing ELT-related keywords (e.g., *English*, *language learn-*, *language teach-*, *foreign language*) were included, even if they originated from other departments such as English Language and

Literature, English Translation and Interpretation, Psychological Counselling and Guidance, or Engineering. Third, non-ELT projects were excluded to ensure disciplinary focus. ELT-related titles were recorded in their original wording to preserve the authenticity of their phrasing, and then they were translated into English. The dataset was prepared for coding by entering the application years, universities, departments and titles into a spreadsheet, which facilitated categorisation and thematic clustering. The number of projects for the application periods between 2021 and 2024 is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of projects submitted and accepted for TÜBİTAK 2209-A (2021-2024)

Project call	Submitted	Accepted	ELT-related titles
2021-1	1.998	1.295	14
2021-2	7.005	4.059	31
2022-1	7.764	4.676	27
2022-2	8.649	4.716	32
2023-1	9.334	5.165	25
2023-2	16.694	8.900	55
2024-1	34.762	17.889	159
Total:			343

It should be noted that while the TÜBİTAK 2209-A programme typically announces two calls for applications each year, only a single call was issued in 2024.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method involves six recursive phases: (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87).

A total of 343 ELT-related titles were identified in the initial round based on the presence of ELT-related keywords and/or their association with ELT departments. Each project title was read multiple times during initial coding and coded inductively to capture its implied focus. Upon closer review, 42 titles - although submitted by ELT departments - were excluded for two main reasons:

- They were framed broadly or clearly outside the ELT field regarding their scope. For example, *Prospective Teachers', Teacher Educators' and Teachers' Views and Expectations Regarding the National Education Academy: A Mixed Methods Study* (24-1), *Determination of Financial Literacy Levels of University Students* (23-2) and *The Effect of Creative Drama Based Education on University Students' NGO Perception and Motivation Sources: The Case of LÖSEV* (22-1).
- They were too vague to determine their research orientation. For example, *Learn and Earn* (24-1) and *History that Speaks up* (22-2).

This refinement resulted in 301 titles forming the final dataset for theme development. Related codes were clustered into broader categories such as technology in ELT, language skills, learner autonomy, assessment, teacher education, intercultural competence, and artificial intelligence (AI). Overlaps were retained where necessary, since project titles often embodied more than one dimension. Categories were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and internal consistency in theme development.

Trustworthiness and Rigour

To enhance the credibility of the analysis, coding was conducted iteratively, with themes refined through repeated review and comparison. The themes identified were also cross-checked against existing reviews of ELT research in Türkiye (e.g., Gürsoy & Özcan, 2021; Ortaçtepe Hart & Aydınli, 2023; Yağız et al., 2016). This cross-check suggested substantial alignment between the identified themes and previously reported ELT research trends in Türkiye and did not necessitate major revisions to the original coding scheme, thereby strengthening both dependability and transferability.

Findings

The analysis of 301 project titles accepted by the TÜBİTAK 2209-A programme between 2021 and 2024 revealed a wide range of themes that reflect the interests, concerns, and research orientations of undergraduate ELT students in Türkiye. These themes, while distinct, often overlapped, illustrating the interconnectedness of methods, skills, technology, and broader social issues in ELT. The following subsections present the major categories identified through thematic analysis. To strengthen the interpretation of the findings, illustrative examples from the project titles are woven into the text and they are identified with the specific TÜBİTAK project call (see Table 1) in parentheses (e.g., 23-2 for the second project call in 2023). Moreover, titles originating from non-language-related departments such as Engineering or Tourism, even when containing ELT-related keywords, were not included here, as their focus extended beyond the disciplinary scope of this paper.

Methods, Techniques and Materials in ELT

A substantial proportion of projects focused on methods and techniques for language teaching. Established approaches such as content-based instruction and Total Physical Response (TPR) appeared alongside more innovative or student-centred techniques, including drama and games. These titles included traditional pedagogical approaches and creative methods to foster engagement in ELT.

- *Comparing the Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and Total Physical Response (TPR) Methods in Developing English Sentence Formation Skills in Students with Dyslexia* (24-1)
- *The Effect of English Vocabulary Teaching with Total Physical Response (TPR) Method on Word Retention* (22-1)
- *Content-Based Language Teaching in Foreign Language Teaching* (21-1)
- *Teaching English as a Foreign Language with Metaverse-Supported Gamification Techniques in the Schools of Foreign Languages* (24-1)
- *Investigating the Effect of Using Drama Techniques in English Language Teaching on 5th Grade Public School Students' Attitudes Towards English Lessons: The Case of Elazığ Province* (23-2)
- *Investigating the Contribution of Digital Storytelling to the Development of English Language Teacher Candidates' Writing Skills* (21-1)

Closely connected to methods was materials development and evaluation. While some projects centred on traditional resources such as textbooks and aimed to evaluate their effectiveness or alignment with curricular goals, others investigated alternative materials, particularly mobile applications and digital tools.

- *Examination of the 10th Grade English Textbook Used in State Schools Affiliated with the*

Ministry of National Education in the Context of 21st Century Skills (24-1)

- *Comparing Digital and Traditional Books in the Development of Reading Skills (24-1)*
- *The Contribution of Podcast Use in Foreign Language Learning to Students' Speaking Skills and Self-Regulated Learning: The Case of a Science High School (23-2)*
- *Türkiye's New Language Learning Vision: The Role and Future of Diyalekt (Dialect) in Vocabulary Teaching (23-2)*
- *Investigating Pre-Service and In-Service English Language Teachers' Perceptions and Thoughts on the Use of Materials in English Language Teaching (22-2)*
- *Developing a Box Game to be Used in English Language Teaching: Are You Ready to Learn English by Exploring the Polar Star? (21-1)*

Language Skills Development

Research on language skills formed one of the largest thematic clusters, demonstrating that undergraduates view the four core skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) as central to ELT practice. Many projects explored strategies to enhance skill-specific learning, for instance, using storytelling to improve speaking or task-based approaches for writing development.

- *The Effect of Watching English-Language Videos with English Subtitles on the Four Basic Skills of English (Reading, Listening, Writing, Speaking) (24-1)*
- *The Effect of Project-Based Digital Storytelling on Reading Skills: An Action Research Study on English Teacher Candidates (24-1)*
- *Investigating Positive and Negative Experiences of Collaborative Writing on English Language Teacher Candidates (22-2)*
- *Investigating English Writing and Speaking Skills Needs of 9th Grade Secondary School Students and Course Content Development Based on Needs Analysis (22-1)*
- *Gaining Vocabulary about Healthy Living to Preschool Children in English Language Teaching, Developing English Speaking and Listening Skills and Acquiring Habits (21-2)*

In addition to core skills, projects addressed vocabulary, pronunciation, and digital literacies. In fact, the presence of digital literacy as a focus area highlights a shift towards preparing learners for communicative competence in technologically mediated environments. Overall, the diversity of projects in this category mirrors global ELT research trends, while also illustrating how undergraduates interpret and adapt these concerns to local classroom contexts.

- *The Effect of Digital Storytelling Applications on Gifted Children's English Vocabulary Learning Skills (24-1)*
- *To Teach or Not to Teach "Connected Speech"? The Effect of Explicit Teaching on Pronunciation Skills (23-2)*
- *21st Century Skills Competence Perceptions and Digital Literacy Perceptions of English Language Education Teacher Candidates (24-1)*
- *Improving Digital and Critical Literacy Skills of Secondary School Students by Using Artificial Intelligence in English Lessons (23-2)*

Assessment and Feedback in ELT

Projects related to assessment and feedback covered a broad spectrum, from traditional testing practices to alternative forms of evaluation. A number of projects addressed formative assessment techniques and feedback processes aimed at supporting learners' progress. The titles on innovative or alternative practices mainly reflected how testing and feedback can be reimagined to better serve learners' needs. The inclusion of assessment as a recurring research theme underscores its importance in the undergraduate research agenda.

- *Developing an Artificial Intelligence-Based English Proficiency Test Compatible with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* (24-1)
- *The Effectiveness of Using ChatGPT in Writing Multiple Choice English Paragraph Questions* (23-2)
- *Introducing Corpus Linguistics Tools to Prospective English Language Teachers and Utilising Corpora in Exam Preparation and Evaluation Processes* (21-2)
- *Comparison of Artificial Intelligence-Supported and Human-Based Feedback for Writing Among Students Learning English as a Foreign Language* (24-1)
- *Examining the Effect of Feedback Received by English Preparatory Class Students from Teaching Staff on Their Academic Writing Skills* (24-1)
- *The Effect of Self-Reflective Journals and Peer Assessment on Pre-service Teachers' Self-Efficacy* (22-2)
- *The Effect of Giving Audio Formative Feedback to Digital Texts on English Language Learning* (22-1)

Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in ELT

Technology was a dominant and cross-cutting theme, with projects examining technology-assisted language teaching, the integration of mobile and digital platforms, and the design of online learning environments. More recently, particularly after 2023, AI emerged as a topic, with projects exploring its potential in language teaching and assessment. The prominence of technology reflects both the enduring influence of pandemic-related online learning and the global shift toward AI-driven educational innovation.

- *Supporting English Language Instruction for Primary School Students with Augmented Reality Applications* (24-1)
- *Teaching English to Rural Children: Teachers' Views and Practices on Technology Integration in Vocabulary Teaching* (23-1)
- *The Effect of Technology-Assisted Learning on Primary School Students' Attitudes towards English and Vocabulary Learning* (22-2)
- *Integration of Virtual Reality (VR) Technology into Vocabulary Teaching in Primary School English Lessons* (21-1)
- *Investigating the Contributions of Artificial Intelligence-Supported Linguistic Environment Materials to English Language Teaching* (24-1)
- *A Case Study on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence Outside the Classroom by Learners of English as a Foreign Language: A Perspective Specific to English Language Skills* (24-1)
- *Artificial Intelligence Ethics: Pre-service English Teachers' Views* (24-1)

- *English Speaking Skills and Environmental Education with Artificial Intelligence Supported Role Play Activities* (23-2)

Curriculum in ELT

The dataset included projects that addressed curriculum design, evaluation, and adaptation within English language teaching. Titles focused on examining the effectiveness of existing curricula in meeting learners' needs, while others explored ways to integrate contemporary approaches and topics into ELT programmes.

- *Curriculum Evaluation of an English Language Teaching Department in Türkiye: Stakeholder-Based Student Opinions* (24-1)
- *Evaluation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Course Curriculum of Engineering Faculty Students According to Stufflebeam (CIPP) Model* (23-2)
- *Global Issues and English Language Teaching: An Investigation of Secondary School Textbooks and Teacher Education Programmes* (21-1)

English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

A relatively minor but notable group of projects addressed English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Titles in this category included references to English for tourism, aviation, engineering, and architecture. Some projects concentrated on designing or adapting instructional materials for specific disciplines, while others focused on addressing the particular language needs of learners in professional environments. A few projects highlighted the use of corpus-based approaches in ESP contexts. The projects under this theme demonstrated the presence of discipline-oriented English language teaching among undergraduate research topics.

- *Comparison of General Terminology Used in Field-Based and Academic English in the Fields of Geological Engineering and Mining Engineering* (24-1)
- *The Effects of Professional English Exercises Through Digital Storytelling on Students' Attitudes Towards English and Self-Efficacy Beliefs* (24-1)
- *Preparation of Competency Focused Material to Provide English Communication Skills for Health Tourism* (22-1)

Cultural Awareness and Intercultural Interaction

A group of projects concentrated on topics related to cultural awareness and intercultural communication. Titles in this category referred to fostering intercultural competence, enhancing learners' (inter)cultural sensitivity, and incorporating global or cross-cultural perspectives into ELT practices. Some project titles specifically emphasised intercultural communicative competence, while others examined the role of cultural elements in language teaching and learning.

- *Integrating Literature into the 10th Grade English Curriculum to Foster Cultural Awareness in Students* (24-1)
- *A Cultural Bridge in English Language Teaching: The Contribution of Karagöz and Hacivat Shadow Puppetry to Vocabulary Acquisition* (24-1)
- *Integration of Culture into Language Classrooms: The Views of Two Different Groups of Turkish as a Second Language Learners and English as a Foreign Language Learners* (23-1)
- *Investigating Prospective English Language Teachers' Beliefs about Their Intercultural Communication Competences* (21-2)

- *Investigating the Views of English Language Teachers with and without Refugee Students in the Classroom on Multilingualism and Multiculturalism* (21-2)
- *Investigating the Perspectives and Attitudes of Foreign Language Teacher Candidates Towards Culture.* (21-1)

Inclusivity in ELT

Several projects addressed inclusivity, with particular attention to learners with diverse needs. Titles in this group included references to teaching English to students with special needs and to broader equity-related issues such as social justice in ELT. They collectively pointed to an interest in ensuring that ELT practices take into account different learner profiles and social contexts.

- *Developing an Accessible and Inclusive Board Game Design to Improve the English Vocabulary of Individuals Affected by Visual Impairment* (24-1)
- *Examining the Suitability of Game-Based English Teaching Materials for Students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)* (24-1)
- *Determining the Difficulties Faced by Students with Special Needs in English Language Learning* (23-2)
- *Accessibility of Hearing-Impaired Individuals to Foreign Language Education: Challenges and Solution Suggestions* (23-1)
- *Analysing the Concept of Social Justice in Foreign Language Education* (23-1)
- *Using Storytelling for Teaching Occupations to Raise Awareness for Gender Equality* (22-1)
- *Investigating English Language Teacher Candidates' Attitudes and Views on Social Justice* (21-2)

Psychological Constructs

Many projects explored psychological constructs, including foreign language anxiety, motivation, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and resilience. The titles on anxiety and motivation, in particular, addressed the challenges learners might face in language classrooms and ways to support more positive learning experiences. Projects on self-regulation and resilience further indicated learner autonomy and adaptability, concepts that are especially relevant in today's relatively uncertain educational landscapes.

- *University Students' Foreign Language Speaking and Social Anxiety: A Mixed Methods Study* (24-1)
- *Psychological Factors in the Academic Writing Process: Writing Anxiety and Motivation in English Language Education Programmes* (24-1)
- *The Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence Literacy and Language Anxiety* (24-1)
- *Factors Affecting High School Students' Motivation in Foreign Language Learning* (23-2)
- *The Relationship Between Reflective Thinking, Self-Efficacy and Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement: A Study on English Preparatory Students in Gaziantep Province* (23-2)
- *The Role of Foreign Language Learners' Communicative Competence and Self-Efficacy Levels in Identifying Their Communicative Needs* (23-1)
- *The Relationship Between University Preparatory Class Students' Parasocial Interaction with Foreign TV Series-Film Characters and Their Motivation to Learn English* (22-2)

- *Investigating the Effect of a Mobile Application on Speaking Anxiety in Foreign Language Education* (22-1)

Teacher Education and Professional Development

A significant number of projects dealt with teacher education and professional development. Titles in this category were divided between pre-service teacher education and in-service professional growth. Projects on pre-service education focused on teacher candidates' training processes, skills development, and readiness for professional practice. Projects addressing in-service teachers included references to continuous professional development activities, reflective practice, and the enhancement of teaching competences. The projects as a whole highlighted both the preparation of future teachers and the professional development of those already in the field.

- *The Experiences of English Teacher Candidates During Their Teaching Practice* (24-1)
- *The Role of Artificial Intelligence (ChatGPT) in the Professional Development of English Teachers: A Collective Intelligence Analysis of Behaviour Patterns, Purpose of Use, Opinions, and Recommendations* (24-1)
- *Investigating the Influence of Prospective English Language Teachers' Future Concerns on Teacher Identity Development* (24-1)
- *The Formation of English Language Teacher Candidates' Professional Identity: Problems and Needs* (23-2)
- *Introducing Dialogic Feedback Model to Prospective English Language Teachers, Its Application for Professional Development of Prospective English Language Teachers and Investigation of Its Effect* (21-2)

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Particularly after 2022, projects explicitly aligned with the United Nations' SDGs in their titles. These projects linked ELT research with broader issues such as sustainability, equity, and social responsibility. Some titles highlighted the integration of the SDG-related issues into ELT curricula or materials, while others emphasised raising awareness of global challenges through language education. The appearance of the SDGs in undergraduate research clearly illustrates how ELT is positioned within wider global agendas, moving beyond classroom-level concerns to connect language teaching with long-term societal development goals.

- *Integration of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into English Language Teaching in Türkiye: A Case Study* (24-1)
- *Evaluation of 12th Grade English Textbooks and Workbooks in Terms of Sustainable Development Goals* (24-1)
- *Pre-Service ELT Teachers' Engagement with Sustainable Development Goals Through Recycled Materials* (23-2)
- *Two Birds with One Stone: Reducing English Speaking Anxiety by Raising Awareness of Sustainable Development Goals* (22-1)

Responses to Emerging Situations

Several projects demonstrated responsiveness to emerging societal challenges. In particular, projects addressing the impact of COVID-19 explored how the sudden transition to online learning reshaped teaching practices and learner engagement after 2020. Additionally, some projects explicitly referenced the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye, considering how ELT could be adapted in

crisis-affected contexts. These titles clearly connect research to immediate realities, showing that ELT research is not only theoretical but also responsive to urgent national and global challenges.

- *Preparing a Foreign Language Magazine to Support English Language Learning of Students in Village Schools in the Earthquake Region* (23-2)
- *Adding Earthquake Unit to English Lessons and Observing Its Effectiveness* (23-1)
- *Contribution of English Language Teacher Candidates' Participation in Digital Activities during the Pandemic Period to Their Professional Development* (21-2)
- *The Effect of Flipped Classroom Learning on Turkish Students' Self-Efficacy Levels and Speaking Skills Achievement in a Foreign Language Classroom: Post-Pandemic Evaluation* (21-2)

Discussion

The analysis of TÜBİTAK 2209-A accepted project titles between 2021 and 2024 provides a unique lens on the emerging trends in undergraduate research in ELT in Türkiye. The findings not only confirm patterns observed in earlier reviews of postgraduate theses and published articles but also reveal shifts that reflect the changing educational and social landscape. The strong emphasis on teaching methods, techniques, and materials development aligns with long-established trends in Turkish ELT research. Previous studies (e.g., Kırmızı, 2012; Solak, 20214; Yağız et al., 2016) highlighted the dominance of teaching methods and instructional design in postgraduate theses and journal articles. The continued prominence of these topics in undergraduate projects suggests that they remain central to pre-service teachers' concerns, perhaps because they directly connect with classroom practice. This emphasis on classroom-centred topics is also consistent with research showing that pre-service ELT teachers in Türkiye tend to investigate issues arising directly from their practicum classrooms, such as teaching methods, feedback practices, or classroom management (Akyel, 2015). The exploration of alternative materials such as mobile applications further indicates a growing awareness of digital resources, complementing the technology-focused trends identified by Aydınli and Ortaçtepe (2018). As indicated by earlier reviews (see Alptekin & Tatar, 2011; Ortaçtepe Hart & Aydınli, 2023), the findings of this study are also consistent with those of previous studies on language skills as one of the major themes in ELT research. Moreover, the inclusion of digital literacy as a skill in undergraduate projects signals an expansion beyond traditional categories, reflecting the impact of technological integration into ELT. This demonstrates how undergraduates are beginning to bridge conventional skill-based research with new literacies relevant to 21st-century communication.

The continuing interest in assessment and feedback mirrors findings from doctoral reviews (e.g., Inal et al., 2016) that noted testing and evaluation as a significant area of ELT research. Undergraduate project titles further reflect an increasing engagement with alternative and formative assessment practices alongside more traditional approaches. This may be related to the types of assessment practices and instructional emphases commonly addressed in ELT departments and in curricula. Similarly, curriculum design and evaluation projects resonate with the trends noted in Özmen et al. (2016), highlighting that undergraduates are engaging critically with institutional structures as well as classroom practices. However, in contrast to Gürsoy and Özcan's (2021) content analysis of doctoral dissertations in ELT programmes between 2010 and 2020, which reports curriculum evaluation studies conducted at primary, middle, and high school levels (p. 840), findings from the present study indicate that undergraduate research predominantly concentrates on curricula at the tertiary level.

The widespread focus on technology-assisted language teaching, online platforms, and artificial intelligence demonstrates the extent to which digital transformation has permeated ELT research at all levels. This aligns with global trends highlighted by Ortaçtepe Hart and Aydınli (2023).

Undergraduate projects are particularly forward-looking in adopting AI as a research focus, something not widely reported in earlier Turkish ELT reviews. Undergraduate engagement with these issues demonstrates not only awareness of established and contemporary technological tools and trends but also a willingness to explore their pedagogical implications.

The presence of ESP projects marks a distinctive feature of undergraduate research. While postgraduate reviews (e.g., Özmen et al., 2016) identified ESP as a sub-theme, it was not among the dominant areas. It can be argued that ESP-focused projects reflect a recognition of English as not only a subject of academic study but also a practical skill for professional success. This focus on language use in fields such as tourism, aviation, and engineering shows that students are sensitive to the demands of the job market and are positioning ELT within broader vocational contexts.

The prominence of cultural awareness echoes previous reports that identified increasing attention to intercultural competence in Turkish ELT (Aydınlı & Ortaçtepe, 2018; Ortaçtepe Hart & Aydınlı, 2023). The simultaneous focus on inclusive education and social justice reflects a newer trend. While earlier doctoral research (Gürsoy & Özcan, 2021) found that culture and social issues were under-researched, their appearance in undergraduate projects suggests a generational shift. It can be argued that students are more engaged with issues of equity and diversity, possibly influenced by global discourses on inclusion and sustainable education. This attention to inclusivity indicates a growing social consciousness among undergraduate researchers. By framing ELT as a space that must accommodate all learners, these projects challenge traditional one-size-fits-all approaches and open avenues for considering diversity in classroom practice.

Attention to psychological constructs such as anxiety, motivation, and self-efficacy closely mirrors national and international trends in applied linguistics, where affective factors have long been acknowledged as critical to learning outcomes. Consistent with the findings of Aydınlı and Ortaçtepe (2018) and Ortaçtepe Hart and Aydınlı (2023), undergraduate projects show that students recognise the role of psychology in shaping language learning and teaching. This aligns with long-standing trends reported in both master's and doctoral theses (Inal et al., 2016; Kırmızı, 2012) and journal articles (Yağız et al., 2016). Their focus on resilience and self-regulation highlights continued interest in learner adaptability across varying educational contexts and experiences, a line of inquiry that has long been established in ELT research.

The substantial cluster of projects on teacher education and professional development echoes one of the most consistently reported themes across postgraduate and published research (Gürsoy & Özcan, 2021; Ortaçtepe Hart & Aydınlı, 2023; Yağız et al., 2016). This indicates that undergraduate projects show similar concern with pre-service and in-service development, with particular emphasis on identity, reflection, and professionalism. This pattern is also consistent with previous research suggesting that engagement with research during initial teacher education can contribute to the development of pre-service teachers' professional identities and reflective capacities (Akyel, 2015; Ülker Mermer & Nilüfer Soyer, 2021). It can be claimed that this overlap demonstrates continuity across research levels, suggesting that teacher development remains a pervasive concern within ELT research in the Turkish context.

Incorporating the SDGs into undergraduate projects after 2022 is especially noteworthy. While earlier reviews did not report the SDGs as a theme, their integration into undergraduate ELT research suggests responsiveness to policy-level initiatives (e.g., TÜBİTAK's alignment with the SDGs since 2022). This finding positions undergraduates as active participants in global educational priorities, bridging ELT research with broader social and developmental concerns.

Finally, the responsiveness of undergraduates to COVID-19 and the 2023 earthquake illustrates how ELT research is being contextualised within pressing societal issues. This responsiveness has not been as prominent in earlier reviews of postgraduate or journal research, which focused more

on long-term themes. By addressing emergent challenges, undergraduates demonstrate adaptability and a socially engaged research orientation, broadening the scope of ELT inquiry in Türkiye.

The range of participants in undergraduate projects also mirrors earlier findings that undergraduates and ELT teachers are often the most common sample groups (Solak, 2014; Yağız et al., 2016). What differentiates undergraduate projects is their breadth of focus, extending from preschool to university learners. This diversity demonstrates that undergraduate researchers conceive of ELT as spanning multiple educational levels, contexts, and learner profiles.

Overall, the findings reveal both continuities and shifts in ELT research in Türkiye. Undergraduate projects reaffirm established concerns such as methods, materials, skills, assessment, and learner psychology, but they also highlight newer orientations: inclusivity, crisis-responsive research, AI, and alignment with the SDGs. These tendencies highlight both the relevance of undergraduate research as a reflection of current priorities in education and its potential to anticipate and shape future directions in ELT scholarship.

Conclusion and Implications

This study has examined the titles of undergraduate research projects in ELT accepted within the TÜBİTAK 2209-A programme calls between 2021 and 2024, providing the first systematic mapping of current research tendencies at this level in Türkiye. The thematic analysis of 301 project titles revealed a diverse and dynamic research landscape. Undergraduate students demonstrated strong interest in established areas of ELT such as methods, materials, language skills, assessment, and learner psychology, while also extending their inquiries into newer domains including new technologies and AI, inclusivity, (multi)cultural awareness, crisis-responsive education, and the SDGs. That is, on the one hand, students reaffirm long-standing priorities identified in earlier reviews of postgraduate and published research, thereby aligning themselves with national scholarly traditions. On the other hand, their attention and responsiveness to inclusivity, global citizenship, social justice, emerging technologies and urgent contexts indicate a readiness to engage with broader societal challenges and international educational discourses.

Despite these contributions, the study has some limitations. First, the analysis was based solely on project titles, which, while indicative of general research orientations, do not capture the full scope of research questions, methodologies, or outcomes. Although titles provide useful insight into thematic tendencies, they may oversimplify complex projects that straddle multiple areas. Consequently, the analysis focuses on mapping thematic tendencies rather than making claims about the effectiveness or impact of the projects. Second, the dataset was limited to projects accepted between 2021 and 2024, which may not fully represent longer-term trends or shifts. Future research could address these limitations by adopting a multi-method approach. For example, in-depth interviews with undergraduate students, academic advisors, and project evaluators could provide valuable perspectives on the motivations behind topic selection, the challenges of project execution, and the perceived impact of research participation. Similarly, if they are shared by TÜBİTAK as open access, analysing the complete project reports or outcomes would enable a more detailed understanding of the methodologies employed and their contributions to ELT practice. Longitudinal studies could also track how undergraduate research orientations evolve over time, particularly in relation to national policies and global developments.

In conclusion, the analysis of project titles provides valuable insight into the evolving interests and research orientations of pre-service ELT teachers and highlights areas for further investigation. This study has shown that undergraduate ELT students in Türkiye are active participants in shaping the disciplinary landscape through their engagement in TÜBİTAK 2209-A projects. These projects not only consolidate established research traditions but also reflect emerging orientations

that are critical for the future of ELT, including inclusivity, sustainability, and technological innovation. Supporting and expanding such initiatives will be essential for fostering a generation of teachers who are not only practitioners but also reflective researchers capable of contributing to both local and global educational agendas.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Declaration of AI Use

Any AI-assisted tools, if used, were limited to language editing. No AI tools were used for data collection, analysis, or interpretation of findings. The author(s) assume sole responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and final content of the manuscript.

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