TEACHING RESEARCH METHODS TO MASTER'S STUDENTS IN LINGUISTICS: COMMON DESIGN WEAKNESSES AND A COURSE FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. Master's dissertations and first articles in linguistics in Uzbekistan often share the same design weaknesses: broad topics without research questions, literature reviews that list authors, method sections that name "analysis, synthesis, comparison" instead of procedures, unspecified data and conclusions that go beyond the evidence. This thesis identifies eight such weaknesses and proposes a 15-week research methods course in which each one is addressed by a module and an assessed task, so that students practise research decisions rather than memorise definitions of methods.

Keywords: research methods, research design, master's education, academic writing, study quality, linguistics.

Introduction.

Master's students in linguistics are expected to complete a dissertation and, more and more often, to publish in journals recognised by the Higher Attestation Commission. Supervisors and reviewers, however, keep meeting the same problems: titles beginning "Actual problems of…" that name a field rather than a question, claims of novelty with no account of what earlier studies did, and method sections that list "analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction and comparison" without saying what was analysed or how.

These problems are not unique to Uzbekistan. Reviews of study quality in applied linguistics have found weak reporting of instruments, reliability and effect sizes even in international journals (Plonsky, 2013). Some features, though, are typical of the post-Soviet tradition in the humanities, where methods were described as general scientific approaches and the literature review served to display erudition rather than to build an argument. The research methods course is the natural place to change this, yet it is often taught as a survey of definitions.

Aim and methods.

The aim is to propose a course framework that targets the most common weaknesses directly. The requirements of research design and reporting in the methodological literature (Dörnyei, 2007; Swales, 1990) were compared with patterns frequently observed when supervising dissertations and reviewing student articles. The weaknesses were grouped into eight categories, and a teaching response for each was built into a 15-week course of one 80-minute class per week. The list reflects professional experience and still needs to be checked systematically.

Main part.

The eight weaknesses are: (1) a topic instead of a question; (2) a gap that is asserted but not shown; (3) literature presented as a list of authors; (4) methods described as general logical operations; (5) data whose source, size and selection are unclear; (6) a mismatch between question and design, such as judging

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a teaching method's effectiveness without any learners or measurement; (7) conclusions that go beyond the data; and (8) problems with referencing and integrity.

Each weakness has its module. In a research question clinic (weeks 1–2), students test their draft questions: can they be answered with data, is the data obtainable, and would the answer matter to anyone? "Phraseological units in English and Uzbek" might become "Which body-part concepts are most productive in English and Uzbek somatic phraseology, and how far do their meanings overlap?" In weeks 3–4, students build a synthesis matrix with studies in rows and question, data, method and findings in columns; reading down the columns reveals patterns and gaps, and the gap statement follows the "establish a niche" move of Swales's (1990) CARS model. In weeks 5–6, students match four research questions to four designs (corpus analysis, survey, quasi-experiment, case study) and justify their choice, building the habit of deriving method from question (Dörnyei, 2007).

In weeks 7–8, students design a small instrument for their own study and pilot it with three to five participants or texts. In weeks 9–10, they analyse a shared data set and write one paragraph of results and a separate paragraph of interpretation, which targets weakness 7. Weeks 11–12 are spent writing an introduction on the CARS model, week 13 covers referencing, consent and disclosure of AI tool use, and in weeks 14–15 each full proposal is reviewed by two classmates using a checklist based on the eight weaknesses. By the end of the course, students have produced the core of their dissertation proposal, and the course supports supervision instead of competing with it.

Conclusion.

The weaknesses common in novice linguistic research say less about students' ability than about a methods education that puts definitions before decisions. Mapping each weakness to a module and an assessed task turns the course into practice and brings students' work closer to what international journals expect. A content analysis of master's dissertations coded for the eight categories would test how widespread the weaknesses are and give a baseline for evaluating the course.

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