UNIT 02

Choosing & Developing a Research Topic

From a loose idea to a focused, researchable topic

M. Khames

2.1 What is a research topic?

A research topic is the general subject or area that a researcher wants to investigate. In English Didactics, topics generally concern the teaching and learning of English, classroom practices, teachers, learners, teaching materials, assessment, and educational technologies.

Examples:

- The use of AI tools in EFL writing instruction.
- Teacher feedback and students' writing development.
- Learner autonomy in EFL classrooms.
- The integration of digital resources into English language teaching.
- The use of collaborative learning in teaching English.
- Formative assessment in EFL classes.
- Teachers' beliefs about communicative language teaching.

2.2 Where can research ideas come from?

Research ideas do not necessarily come from complicated theories. They can emerge from everyday educational experiences.

1	**Classroom observations** You may notice that students have difficulties participating in discussions or organizing their written work.
2	**Teaching experiences** A teacher may observe that students receive feedback but do not always use it to improve their writing.
3	**Previous studies** Academic articles can reveal limitations, unanswered questions, and suggestions for further research.
4	**Educational changes** Artificial Intelligence, online learning, and digital assessment create new research opportunities.
5	**Personal academic interests** Writing instruction, learner motivation, teacher development, or assessment.

2.3 From a broad topic to a focused topic

One of the most common mistakes Master's students make is selecting a topic that is **too broad**. A good topic needs to be narrowed down. Follow the funnel:

STEP 1 · BROAD AREA
Technology in Education

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STEP 2 · SPECIFIC AREA
Digital Tools in English Language Teaching

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STEP 3 · RESEARCH FOCUS
Digital Feedback in EFL Writing Instruction

▼

STEP 4 · FOCUSED RESEARCH TOPIC
Exploring the Role of Digital Feedback in Improving First-Year EFL Students' Writing Performance at an Algerian University

Notice how the topic becomes more specific at each stage.

2.4 How to evaluate your research topic

Criterion	Guiding question
Interest	Am I genuinely interested in this topic?
Relevance	Is it related to English Didactics?
Researchability	Can I find academic sources about it?
Feasibility	Can I access the participants and data?
Focus	Is the topic sufficiently specific?
Contribution	Can the study offer useful insights?

2.5 Formulating a research title

A title should communicate the main focus of the study clearly and concisely. A useful title often identifies the main phenomenon, the target population, and the educational context, when relevant.

Good examples:

- Investigating EFL Teachers' Perceptions of AI-Assisted Writing Tools.
- The Role of Peer Feedback in Developing EFL Students' Writing Skills.
- Exploring Learner Autonomy in Algerian University EFL Classrooms.

M. Khames
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AVOID

Extremely long titles.

Vague expressions such as “Some Thoughts about Teaching English.”

Titles that promise more than the study can actually investigate.

Unnecessary words added simply to sound academic.

2.6 Do not choose your method before understanding your problem

Some students decide immediately that they want to conduct an experimental study or distribute questionnaires. This is not the best starting point.

GOLDEN RULE

The **research problem** should guide the choice of **methodology**, not the other way around.

M. Khames
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