

Academic “Applied Linguistic” Research in Algeria

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Abstract:

If theoretical linguistics constructs hypotheses and formulates theories about a language without necessarily applying them in practice, then the task of the applied linguist is to test, employ, and utilize those theories. Undoubtedly, applied linguistics builds upon what has been established by theory and puts it to the test in real-world linguistic practice.

The applied linguist strives to benefit equally from both pure linguistic research and general linguistic studies, working to transform that knowledge into practical actions and procedures. From this, we can conclude that applied linguistics is not a field of theorization, but rather one that applies existing theories to provide solutions to problems in language teaching.

There is no doubt that the term "applied linguistics" has gained significant prominence and widespread usage, thanks to the major contributions of linguists in the field. It is now commonly used in its modern sense, whereas it was once synonymous with foreign language teaching (in Western Europe and America) and with machine translation (in Russia). Accordingly, applied linguistics can be described as a “bridge” connecting all disciplines concerned with language, such as linguistics, psychology, sociology, and education sciences.

Keywords : Applied linguistics, Teaching, University, Algeria.

Introduction:

It is well known that science advances and evolves through renewed theories. Both literary and scientific knowledge require ongoing research across various fields. Since cognitive development is inherently tied to scientific spirit, researchers are constantly striving to explore and uncover the mysteries of various domains of knowledge.

Some expand upon existing theories, others clarify specific issues, and so forth. As a result, scholars have worked diligently to present academic research across multiple fields.

1. Specificity of Academic Research in Applied Linguistics:

We addressed this research for several reasons:

Our specialization in applied linguistics was the primary motivation, along with the fact that language has become a strategic science in today's world. Evidence of this is the evolving status of applied linguistics, which is now shared across other scientific fields like mathematics, medicine, human sciences, and technology, as seen in various specializations such as educational linguistics, machine translation, speech pathology, etc.

To evaluate a significant period [from 1983 to the present], in order to understand the growth of research in this field.

A desire to address field-based, scientific, and technical topics that go beyond merely compiling content from sources and are more practical than theoretical.

To facilitate the task for researchers in conducting inventories and statistics of this type of research. We provide access to a collection of theses written in four languages: Arabic, French, English, and Italian.

Note:

We did not include dissertations under the LMD system (Master's and PhD) and limited our scope to Magister / PhD / State Doctorate theses under the "Sciences" system, for two reasons:

- To allow for historical tracking and a comprehensive survey of applied linguistic research since the 1980s.
- Because of the sheer volume of dissertations produced since Algeria adopted the LMD system in 2004/2005, which would require separate studies to cover comprehensively and complement our current research.

The geographical scope of our research includes the most prestigious universities in Eastern Algeria known for their work in applied linguistics, such as:

- University of Annaba
- University of Constantine
- Universities of El Tarf, Oum El Bouaghi, among others.

We assume similar results would be found in universities in central, western, and southern Algeria, although our current study does not cover all Algerian research in all languages.

Applied Linguistics:

A relatively new and independent discipline, applied linguistics was once a branch of general linguistics. It did not emerge as an independent field until about thirty years ago, even though the term itself appeared around

1946, following the famous American experiment in language teaching, specifically at the English Language Institute of the University of Michigan with prominent linguists such as Charles Fries and Robert Lado (Sari, 2004).

One of the most renowned schools specializing in this field is the School of Applied Linguistics established at the University of Edinburgh in 1957, which played a major role in the wide dissemination of the term "applied linguistics" across many universities worldwide. Scholars from everywhere welcomed this new scientific field and sought to apply it in practical, real-world contexts due to its relevance and importance (Ibid, 2004).

Applied linguistics emerged at a time when there was increasing interest in the challenges of teaching modern (living) languages to foreigners, in parallel with the rise of applied studies and scientific theories that aimed to be implemented in practice. This included the development of teaching materials through pattern-based instruction and the solidification of concepts that transferred theoretical results into applied solutions (Belaid, 2009).

Many linguistic dictionaries define this specialization as the use of linguistic theories and methodologies to solve language-related problems in non-linguistic fields. This field of work is broad and diverse, covering areas such as:

- Teaching foreign languages
- Teaching the national (native) language
- Speech and language disorders
- Translation
- Lexicography (dictionary-making)
- Stylistics
- ... and many others

To better understand applied linguistics, it is crucial to clarify its relationship with theoretical

linguistics and language pedagogy. These two fields are deeply interconnected, each needs the other:

-The linguist finds in the field of language teaching a practical area to test their scientific theories.

-The educator, on the other hand, needs to base their teaching methods on the general linguistic laws established by modern linguistics (Bouguerba).

-This field expands to include sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, biolinguistics, computational linguistics, and information theory.

In his book "Applied Linguistics and the Teaching of Arabic," Abduh Al-Rajhi defines applied linguistics as:

“An independent science in its own right, with its own epistemological framework and internally derived methodology, aimed at solving linguistic problems.” (Al-Rajhi, 1995)

That is, it is one of the knowledge domains that relies on interdisciplinary research.

From here, the importance of applied linguistics becomes evident—it acts as the bridge connecting all sciences concerned with linguistic activity. However, it is not simply an application of general linguistics, as many might think. In fact:

“Applied linguistics is not a mere application of general linguistics, nor does it have its own

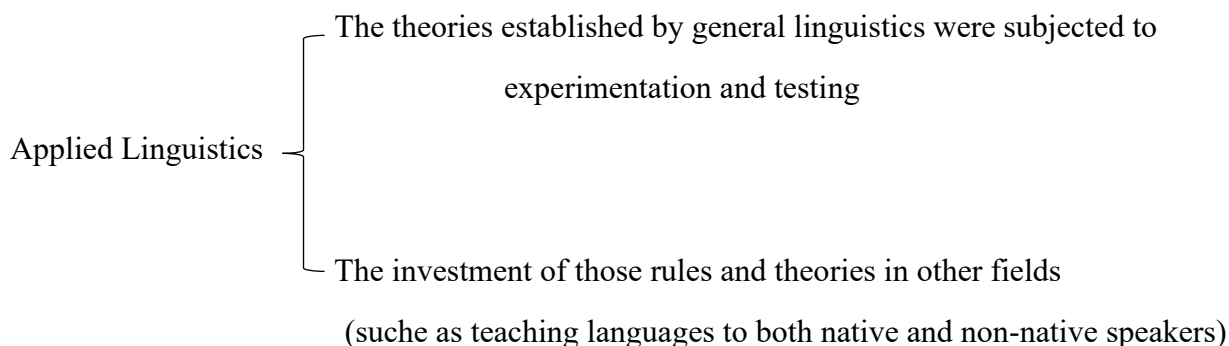
standalone theory. Rather, it is a field where various sciences converge to address human language. It is a science with multiple systematic approaches that leverages their outcomes to identify linguistic problems and propose solutions.” (Ibid)

Thus, it draws on general linguistics for concepts, tools, and terminology and applies them within specific fields such as:

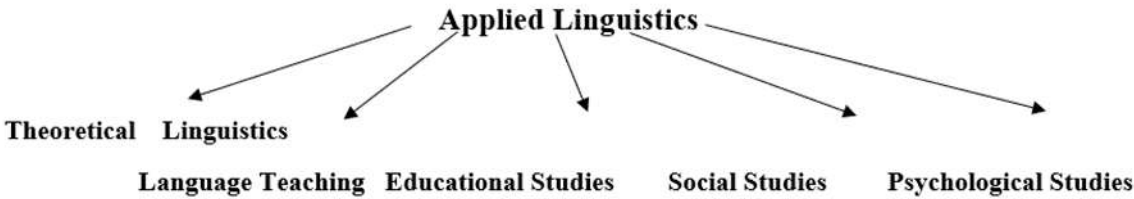
- Mother tongue education
- Foreign language teaching
- Curriculum development for different educational stages
- It is difficult to provide a precise, unified definition of applied linguistics. This is due to:
- The interdisciplinary nature of human sciences
- The relative newness of general linguistics itself
- Another major difficulty in defining applied linguistics lies in the fact that it deals both with:
- Language (from a linguistic perspective)
- And with applications of other sciences (technological, pedagogical, psychological, etc.)

According to linguists, its applications are limitless and cannot be confined.

Its areas of focus can be summarized in the following diagram or outline (Sini, 1987):



Accordingly, Applied Linguistics (Linguistique Appliquée) is described as a science that mediates between theoretical linguistic sciences and real-world language-related problems in society. Its general objective is to develop the way in which linguistic theory is applied to language problems within society, with the aim of resolving them.



2. Study Mechanisms:

This research is based on a statistical and analytical reading of the total body of academic research (Master’s/Doctorate) that has addressed applied linguistics across its various branches and languages. It also aims to answer several key questions. Therefore, we adopted the following approaches:

- 1. Statistical Reading
- 2. Analytical Reading

We will attempt to provide an analytical (interpretative) reading of a set of statistical results that we gathered following a comprehensive survey of academic research in applied linguistics in Algeria, the sample of our study. We also relied on the opinions of specialists and professors in this field.

The findings were as follows:

1. Specialization Criterion:



The didactic field dominated over other specializations, representing 86.92%, which is a relatively high percentage, especially when compared to the field of speech pathology, which accounted for only 2.17%.

Analysis:

This result is due to several factors, including:

-The novelty and importance of this specialization in the educational field. It is closely linked to the educational process in terms of implementation i.e., its connection to practical and pedagogical (pragmatic) language goals.

-The ongoing need for specialists in didactics. Algeria, as a young nation, is in continuous need of educational structuring and reform, which such research can support.

-The focus of most university professors in Algeria on the didactic aspect rather than other areas like speech pathology, which often requires interdisciplinary knowledge (e.g., medicine and psychology)—a challenge for many researchers.

-The dominance of the educational dimension over other specializations through the frequent repetition of similar topics (e.g., error analysis). This could be due to:

A. Lack of specialized professors.

B. Limited guidance toward current or innovative research topics.

Some professors do not encourage students to explore new or timely topics, possibly due to:

2. Criterion of Research Language:

Research in French:

-Their perception of students' limited reading habits and lack of up-to-date awareness in the field.

-A preference for assigning familiar, routine topics year after year.

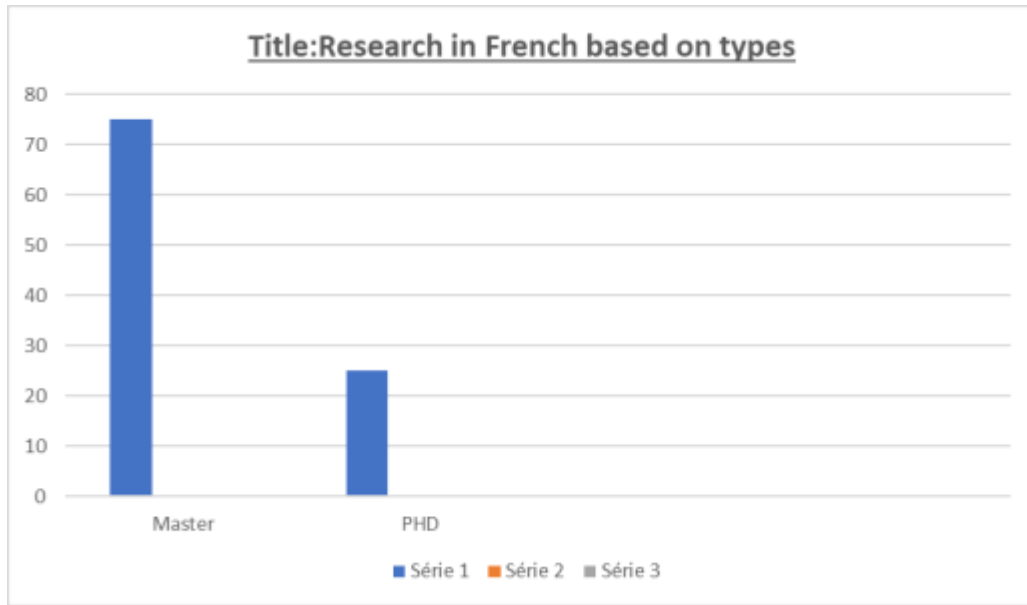
-This conservative approach is problematic, especially in a time when human intellect has uncovered much of the world's complexities. Applied linguistics should keep pace with this evolution.

C. Lack of supervision and scarcity of specialized academic mentors in specific areas of applied linguistics. Generally, students rarely choose their topics independently—they are usually directed by their supervising professor in one way or another.

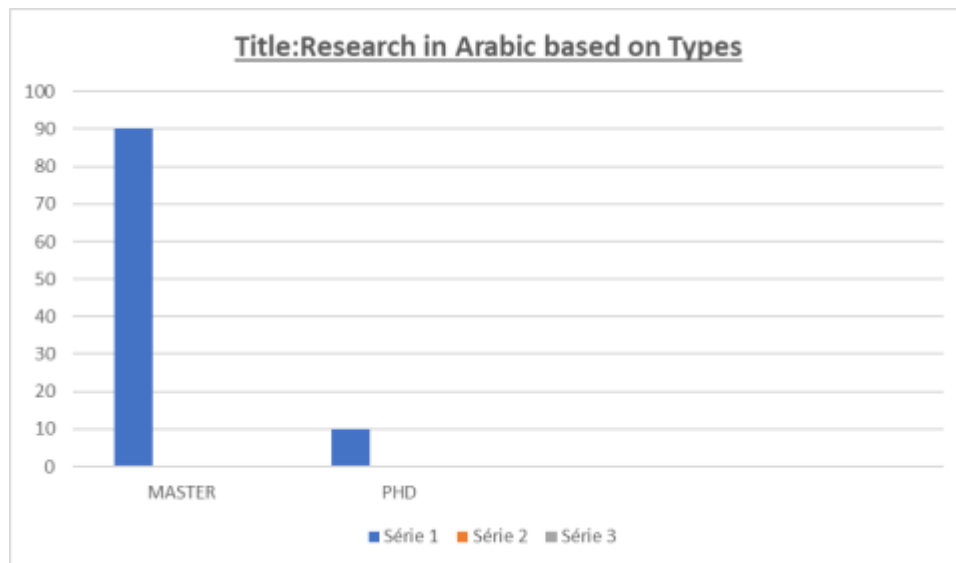
The relative difficulty of conducting field research in applied linguistics, especially when compared to research in literary studies (Master's and Doctorate). This is due to:

- The novelty of the field.
- Its interdisciplinary nature, requiring knowledge from various sciences.

The perception that applied linguistics knowledge is somewhat foreign or imported, and not yet fully mastered in the local context. While this may seem like a harsh judgment, it's based on the fact that most academic supervisors come from literary backgrounds rather than applied linguistic ones.



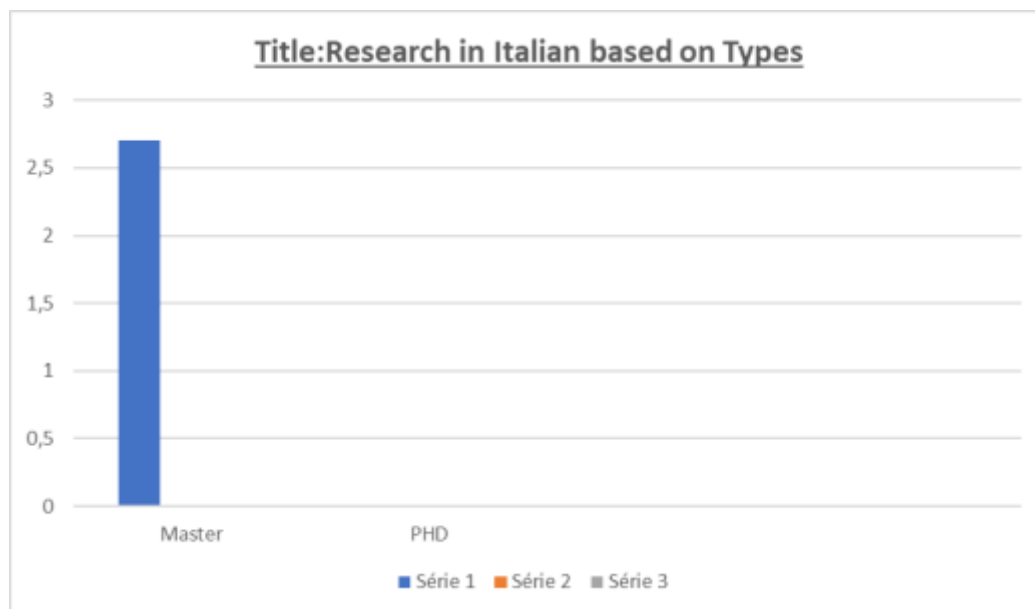
Research in Arabic:



Research in English:



Research in Italian:



The Dominance of Research Written in Arabic
This is considered very natural for the following reasons:

1. The number of students in Arabic Language and Literature departments is significantly higher

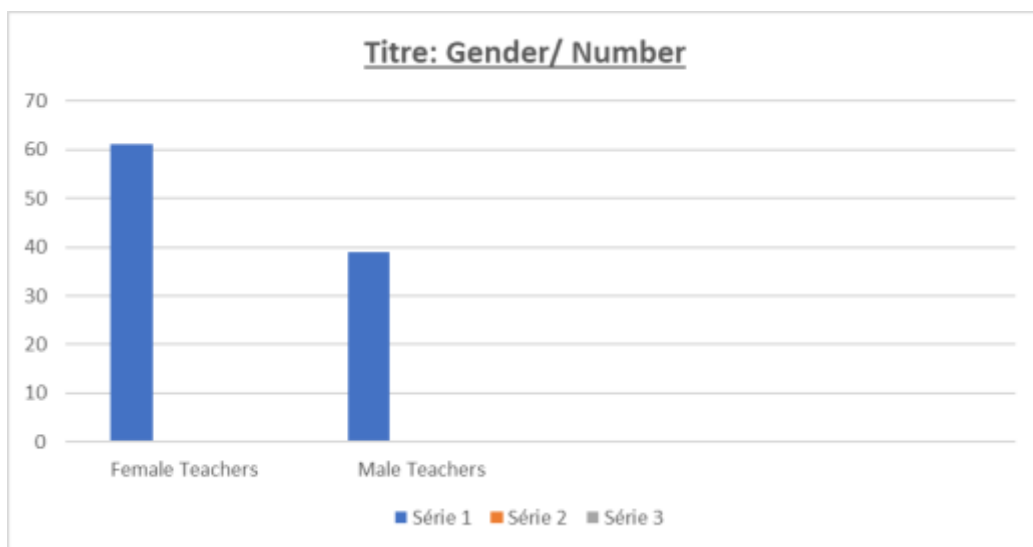
than in other language departments (French, English, Italian).

2. Graduate-level research (Master's/Doctorate) is generally more productive, stable, and better

organized in Arabic compared to other languages.

3. There is a cohesive group of specialized professors in the field of applied linguistics within Arabic departments.
4. Researchers in Arabic applied linguistics often have a good command of multiple languages (at least Arabic and French). On the other hand, researchers in other language departments may be limited, perhaps, to their language of specialization only, which restricts their access to didactics-related references, unlike students in Arabic language and literature.
5. The number of trained researchers in Arabic departments in this specialization far exceeds that of other language departments (larger department size, more students, more resources, more academic supervision).
6. Arabic language departments in Algeria regularly offer graduate programs, with some universities having started these programs as early as 1981 (e.g., University of Annaba).
7. The aim of research and specialization in applied linguistics is to elevate the Arabic language, and native Arabic speakers are the most qualified to undertake this responsibility. They are more passionate about their language, and any call to embrace foreign languages or develop research in them should not come at the expense of our native, classical Arabic, which is the foundation of our national identity, the memory of our nation, and the repository of our cultural heritage.

3. Researcher Gender Criterion:



Explanation:

Gender (male/female) is a qualitative variable that can influence the choice of academic and research specialization. In other words, females

may be more inclined toward certain disciplines compared to males, or vice versa, due to biological or social differences.

Biological Factors: The body's structure is an important factor, even if it's not always visibly obvious (such as in research fields). On an anatomical level, microscopic brain structure differs from one individual to another (Woodworth, 1945), and also varies between men and women.

Findings Based on Gender:

-Despite gender differences, the results in this study were relatively close overall. However, male researchers outnumbered female researchers in the sample, while female participation was more limited. From this, we can highlight several key points:

-Women are not absent from applied linguistics research, on the contrary, many women are passionate about the field. Evidence shows a growing number of female students consistently seeking to join this specialization.

-It is not necessarily true that women, being more emotional, gravitate toward literary research with sentimental elements. In fact, many men are drawn to literature, even though they are generally considered to favor scientific rigor. At the same time, many women are interested in

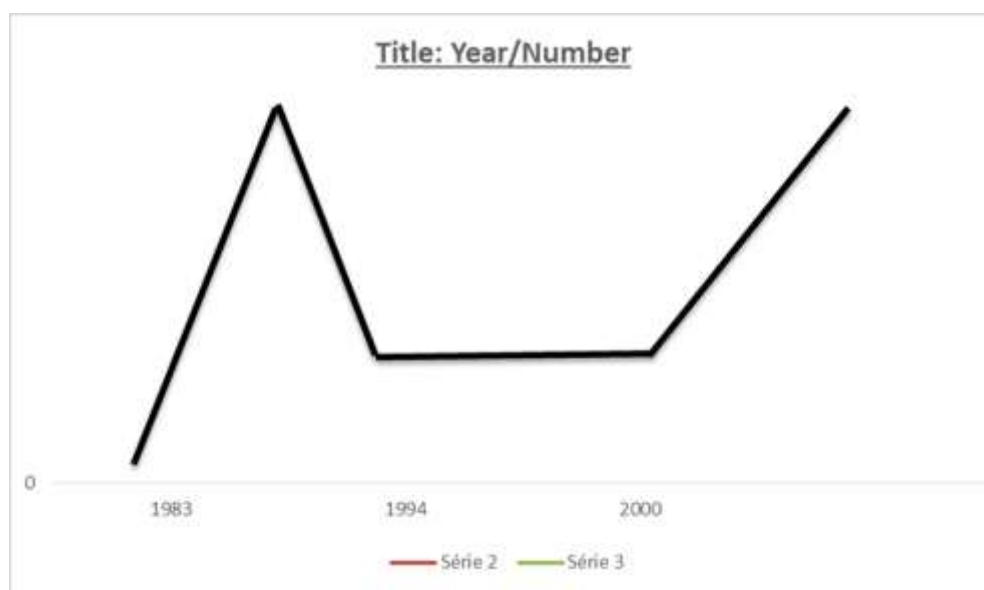
4 . Defense Year Criterion:

scientific topics. Otherwise, how could we explain the high number of female researchers and professors working in scientific fields such as physics, chemistry, and computer science?

-The difference in research participation cannot be explained by assuming that family responsibilities limit women's ability to pursue research, work, or studies. In reality, women have proven themselves fully capable of diving into research with great energy and contributing valuable findings. This is evident across various research domains.

-There is no clear or logical explanation for the numerical gap between male and female researchers. Men and women are equally capable of choosing research topics based on their academic training. However, we note that in the coming years, this gender gap is likely to shift, as more women are enrolling in graduate studies, especially in Arabic literature departments, where female students now outnumber male students.

-It's important to highlight that Algeria offers equal opportunities for men and women in scientific research and participation in graduate programs. True merit and academic excellence—not gender—determine success. The research field is the clearest proof of this conclusion.



Comments:

Research in applied linguistics, like other fields, has witnessed phases of growth, decline, and stability. Sometimes the research trend rises, sometimes it stabilizes, and other times it declines. This observation can generally be applied to research across all languages (Arabic, French, English, Italian). Based on this, the trajectory of applied linguistics research can be divided into three stages:

Stage A: The Peak Phase

Stage B: The Decline and Stabilization Phase

Stage C: The Rising Phase

Analysis:

- This dynamic pattern is almost a universal norm across all fields of research, whether scientific or humanistic. Typically, research starts with enthusiasm and momentum, then experiences some decline or stagnation, and eventually enters a new phase of growth... and so on.
- According to this study, research in applied linguistics has recently been showing a notable upward trend, due to several factors:
- Strategic academic and political planning in graduate programs, which are opened based on field-specific needs.
- Clearer research timelines and shorter durations, which are prompting some specialized professors to expect an increased volume of future research.
- Despite this, some experts have stated that recent research lacks the depth, precision, and analytical rigor compared to earlier studies from previous decades.

Notes:

-It is therefore normal for research activity to ebb and flow over the years. Academic research in applied linguistics, like other disciplines, follows cycles of enthusiasm, activity, and decline, which explains its fluctuating trend over time.

-This variability can also be attributed to other factors. For instance, some professors point to the difficulty of conducting field research, which is a hallmark of applied linguistics. It is challenging to carry out, and for that reason, others believe

the perceived lack of value in such studies discourages consistent research activity.

-As a result, the field may wane at times, surge at others, and then fall again... and so on. Thus, there is no fixed standard to predict the increase or decrease in research activity.

Study Findings:

-We acknowledge the importance of research in the field of applied linguistics, and therefore, research in this field, in all its branches and languages, must be guided and supported appropriately.

-There is no difference between the research of male and female researchers; there is no scientific criterion based on the researcher's gender. Both must be equally encouraged to participate side by side in tackling all applied linguistics issues, so that the benefits can be maximized and the field can thrive in our country.

-All the findings we have presented, even if they seem minor, are actually very important, because a true understanding of the reality of applied linguistics research is essential and must be taken seriously by specialists, particularly those responsible for overseeing postgraduate research topics and thesis supervision.

-To date, research in the field tends to follow a repeated pattern, which is not productive, especially when one branch is prioritized over others, or one language over others. Ideally, applied linguistics research should be diversified according to educational needs and in step with the advancements in this science, and why not even compete with countries where this field has developed significantly? We certainly do not lack either the will or the competence.

-Despite the limited number of studies we were able to review, we found that they were impressive and commendable efforts that reflect the competence and dedication of our specialists and professors in this field.

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