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Promoting Engagement in a Research-Rich Curriculum (on the Example of Enquiry-Based Tasks in Lexicography)

ABSTRACT

Thinking carefully about the impact that research might have on teaching is a topic of international interest. The main aim of the paper is to explore the complexity of the linkage between research and teaching in institutional context, with peculiar reference and on an example of postgraduate program of English philology (Lexicography) at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. Lexicography provides an intriguing test ground on which to examine the connections between research and teaching because of the position it holds at the intersection between the theory and practice (theoretical lexicography and the lexicographic practice).

It is suggested that undergraduate and postgraduate students are likely to gain most benefit from research in terms of depth of learning and understanding when they are involved actively, particularly through various forms of inquiry-based learning (Sambell et. al, 2017). From this perspective, teaching and learning in higher education is a multifaceted process, based on subtlety and artistry, as opposed to more functional definitions of teaching and learning, because it is not just a simple matter of knowledge transfer. Hodge et al. (2007) emphasize how engaging students with research can go further than more traditional paradigms of learning. Their model frames the "student as scholar" (Hodge et al. 2007), rather than simply a learner. At the level of course curriculum design, Healey (2005) noted that the research-teaching relationship can be developed along a spectrum which ranges across several different dimensions: research-tutored, research-based, research-oriented and research-led.

Accordingly, the curriculum of lexicography had been radically redesigned so as to explicitly focus on the research-teaching paradigm. Examples of inquiry-based learning activities in curricular design, that benefit student learning through direct involvement in research, are included in the paper. Lecturers draw upon a wide range of techniques to help make their courses inquiry-driven, student-centered and active, as in the following small-scale examples:

A. To support students to practice data-gathering techniques, under the course of Learner Lexicography and Metalexicography, students were able to explain what is done in research into dictionary use and explain its significance in lexicography, choose an appropriate method for their scientific hypothesis and apply it, analyze scientific publications from the field, formulate problems in the field and solve them through discussion, develop an individual usage study.

B. During the practical course of Georgian-English Lexicography, research tasks provide a compact and hands-on overview of basic tools, methods and technologies in today's digital lexicography (TlTerm, Lexonomy, etc.). The focus is on the use of the tools for the structured representation of lexicographic data as well as on technologies for data management, storage and presentation.

As a result, it is similarly important that university teachers endeavor to reflect upon and seek to enhance the research-teaching nexus because it is often seen as a vital contributory factor to students' all-round development. They have important decisions to make, on personal and professional levels, so they need to become equipped with the skills of critical analysis, gathering evidence, making judgements and the capacity to reflect on what they are doing and why.

Keywords: *active learning, lexicography, research-rich, postgraduate.*

Lexicography is linguistic surgery. There's a ritual preparation, a laying out of instruments… There is the first slice into the patient, which could be the beginning of a very long morning full of unexpected complications or the start of a procedure so routine a seasoned surgeon could do it in their sleep.

- Kory Stamper, "Word by Word: The Secret Life of Dictionaries"

Introduction

In the landscape of contemporary higher education, the relationship between research and teaching is a subject of enduring international interest. While universities have traditionally prioritized the accumulation of theoretical and applied knowledge, the actual integration of these two domains within the learning environment remains a complex challenge. Too often, research and teaching exist in distinct silos, a structure that positions students as passive consumers of established knowledge rather than active participants in its creation (Harvey & Tree, 2025).

This paper explores the complexity of this research-teaching linkage within a specific institutional context: the postgraduate program of English Philology (Lexicography concentration) at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU). We argue that lexicography, a discipline situated uniquely at the intersection of abstract theory and rigorous practice (dictionary compilation), provides an intriguing testing ground for this pedagogical shift. By analyzing specific curricular interventions in the MA program, this paper illustrates how inquiry-based learning can transform students from mere learners into junior researchers. Specifically, this research examines a selection of both compulsory and elective modules within the program to ensure a representative analysis of the curriculum. The primary focus lies on three core courses: Learner Lexicography, Metalexicography, and the Practical Course in General English-Georgian Lexicography. Adopting a qualitative case study design framed within practitioner action research, the paper analyzes curricular documents and student reflections to evaluate the efficacy of the research-teaching nexus in these modules.

Literature Review

The relationship between research and teaching is rarely actualized in a single, uniform way. Traditionally, it has been assumed that active researchers make better teachers simply by virtue of their expertise. However, recent pedagogical scholarship challenges this assumption, arguing that the benefit to students is not automatic, rather, it must be explicitly engineered into the curriculum.

Students may experience research in diverse ways. The research-teaching relationship can be conceptualized along a spectrum ranging across several dimensions (cf. Healey, 2005; Jenkins &

Healey, 2012). These dimensions are categorized as:

- Research-led: The curriculum content is dominated by faculty research interests, and information transmission is the main teaching mode.
- Research-oriented: The curriculum emphasizes the processes by which knowledge is produced as much as the knowledge itself; faculty attempt to engender a research ethos through their teaching.
- Research-based: Students learn as researchers; the curriculum is largely designed around inquiry-based activities, and the division of roles between teacher and student is minimized.
- Research-tutored: Students engage in small-group discussions with a teacher, focusing on research findings.

From this perspective, teaching and learning in higher education function as a multifaceted, complex process grounded in subtlety rather than simple functional definitions of knowledge transfer. Sambell et al. (2017) argue that students gain the most benefit from research not merely by hearing about it, but by being actively involved in inquiry-based learning.

To operationalize this connection, this paper draws upon the framework proposed by Healey (2005) and Jenkins & Healey (2012). The authors argue that the curriculum can be designed along two axes: the emphasis on research content versus research processes, and the student as a participant versus the student as an audience. Complementing this is the "Student as Scholar" model (Hodge et al., 2007), which advocates for a radical reshaping of the curriculum. In this paradigm, a discovery-led frame of mind infuses every module, encouraging students to search for and discover new knowledge (Hodge et al., 2007: 3). This resonates with the constructivist viewpoint: the learners must be empowered to consider the process of their own learning, enabling them to make decisions, solve research problems, and develop effectively as independent scholars.

In enhancing the links between research and teaching, the nature of the discipline itself acts as an important mediator (Breen et.al., 2003). Lexicography provides an intriguing testing ground on which to examine these linkages because of its position at the intersection of theory and practice. The field is inherently dualistic, possessing a rigorous theoretical foundation while maintaining a large interdisciplinary scope. As Fuertes-Olivera (2025) notes, there is "hardly any academic discipline or branch of human knowledge that has not left its traces in lexicographical works." Consequently, lexicography requires not only the theoretical understanding of metalexicography, semantics, and corpus linguistics, but also the technical skill to manage data, define senses, retrieve co-textual and contextual information and utilize digital tools.

At TSU, the lexicography curriculum has been redesigned to integrate all elements of this research-teaching model, aiming to bridge the gap between abstract academic study and the concrete demands of modern digital lexicography.

Methodology

Research Design

/This study adopts a qualitative case study design combined with elements of practitioner action research. A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate as it allows for a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the educational experience. A qualitative approach was prioritsed because statistical data alone cannot fully reveal our research questions and complex shift in student perceptions regarding the research-teaching connection.

The research is situated within a constructivist paradigm, acknowledging that learning in lexicography is not merely the acquisition of facts, but the active construction of professional knowledge. Accordingly, the study focuses on a targeted curricular intervention within the Lexicography program, utilizing Healey's (2005) Research-Teaching Nexus as the primary theoretical lens to observe and analyze the development of students' research skills.

By mapping course activities against Healey's (2005) four quadrants, the research design seeks to evaluate how specific pedagogical shifts (e.g., from passive lectures to active digital tool usage) impact the students' transition from novices to junior scholars.

Context and Participants

The research was conducted within the Department of English Philology at TSU during the Spring semester of the 2024–2025 academic year, specifically within the modules of Learner Lexicography, Metalexicography and the Practical Course in General English-Georgian Lexicography. This timeframe allowed the researcher (who also served as the primary lecturer) to observe the development of the cohort in real-time.

The study focuses on a small, purposive cohort of seven postgraduate students enrolled in the courses. This small sample size allows for a comprehensive description of individual learner development and deep qualitative analysis of student output.

The group was relatively homogeneous in terms of academic background and age, with the majority entering the program directly from their undergraduate studies. The participants (n=7) were all Georgian native speakers with a background in English Philology. Prior to this course, the majority of the cohort had limited exposure to practical lexicography or computational tools, entering the

program with primarily theoretical linguistic knowledge. The courses were delivered in a face-to-face workshop format, consisting of 4 contact hours per week (Practical Course in General Lexicography), 3 contact hours per week (Learner Lexicography), 2 contact hours (Metalexicography). The students were asked to use their computer devices for immediate application of digital tools.

Ethical considerations were important for the research design, particularly given the dual role of the researcher as the module teacher. While the identities of the participants were known to the researcher during the data collection phase (as the reflective essays were part of the formal coursework), confidentiality is maintained in the dissemination of the findings. Codes (Student A, etc.) are used to ensure confidentiality. To mitigate the potential for response bias, for example, students writing favorably to influence grades, the qualitative analysis of these essays for research purposes was conducted after the final course grades were submitted.

Data Collection Instruments

To evaluate the efficacy of the research-teaching linkage, qualitative data was triangulated from three distinct sources: (1) module syllabi, (2) student research outputs, and (3) reflective narratives.

The primary documents analyzed included the redesigned module syllabi, assessment criteria, and teaching materials. These were evaluated against Healey's (2005) framework to verify the extent to which research-based and research-oriented activities were explicitly embedded in the course design. From this standpoint, syllabus is viewed as the interaction between teachers, learners and knowledge, as an action. Viewed like this, the focus is on the processes that help make learning and meaning-making to happen, with room for experimentation and a degree of flexibility.

To visualize how these theoretical frameworks were operationalized within the syllabus, Table 1 outlines the mapping of specific modules against Healey's research quadrants and the corresponding assessment evidence.

Table 1: Integration of Research-Teaching Nexus in Syllabus Design

Target Module	*Healey's Quadrant*	*Syllabus Intervention (Activity)*	*Documented Evidence (Assessment)*
Learner Lexicography	Research-Based *(Students as Researchers)*	Students formulate hypotheses and design original user surveys to test dictionary efficacy.	User Questionnaire Design Usage Analysis Report

Metalexicography	**Research-Tutored** ***(Engaging in research discussions)***	**Critical analysis of macro- and microstructures of existing printed dictionaries;** **Academic article writing.**	**Academic Article Submission** **Evaluation Criteria (Data Reliability, Content Depth)**
Practical Course (English-Georgian)	Research-Oriented *(Learning research processes)*	Application of digital tools (Lexonomy, TlTerm) to compile bilingual entries; Solving equivalence problems.	10 Weekly Lexical Entries Corpus Query Logs

The core of the data consisted of the scholarly products produced by the cohort (N=7) across the three targeted modules. These artifacts served as direct evidence of the students' ability to engage in "research-based" and "research-oriented" learning.

Task of user Research Studies (*Learner Lexicography*): Moving beyond theoretical study, students were tasked with designing and conducting original user research. This involved formulating hypotheses regarding dictionary usage and creating data gathering instruments (questionnaires). Students designed specific items to test user behavior and preferences, such as querying frequency of use, evaluating the clarity of definitions ("Is the definition vague?"), and identifying preferred microstructural elements. Students then distributed these forms, collected the data, and analyzed the results to draw conclusions about user needs.

Task of Critical Dictionary Analysis (*Metalexicography*): In this module, students produced a formal academic article featuring a critical analysis of the macro- and microstructure of a specific dictionary. To emphasize primary source research, students were required to visit the public library and select a printed Georgian dictionary for evaluation. The assignment was graded on strict research criteria: content depth, quality of analysis, data reliability, article layout, and the validity of

conclusions. Following submission, students received extensive feedback to simulate the peer-review process.

Task of Digital Lexicographic Projects (*Practical Course in General English-Georgian Lexicography*): Throughout the semester, students engaged in the ongoing compilation of a bilingual dictionary using industry-standard platforms (Lexonomy, TlTerm). Each student was responsible for processing 10 lexical units weekly. This research-oriented task required them to:

Disambiguate senses and find equivalents.

Translate illustrative examples and identify grammatical, paradigmatic, and syntagmatic relationships.

Utilize corpus data and other lexicographic evidence to support their decisions.

These practical tasks were supplemented by weekly research seminars where students discussed complex challenges, specifically focusing on issues of anisomorphism and equivalence structures.

At the conclusion of the course, all 7 students submitted reflective essays. These narratives required students to self-assess their learning journey, specifically focusing on the challenges of data gathering and their evolving understanding of the lexicographer's role. The reflection was not an open-ended diary entry, rather, it was a guided self-assessment focused on the friction between theory and practice. Students were prompted to deconstruct their decision-making processes during the research tasks. Specifically, the narrative prompts (see Table 2) required students to articulate how they navigated methodological ambiguity, such as resolving issues of equivalence in Lexonomy (Mechura et al., 2017) or designing valid questions for the user survey in Learner Lexicography. These narratives provided the critical qualitative data necessary to answer the research question regarding the shift in student perceptions. They allowed the researcher to trace the cohort's evolution from passive recipients of linguistic theory to active agents capable of defending their lexicographic choices.

Table 2. Guiding Prompts for Reflective Narratives

Guiding Prompts for Reflective Narratives
Methodological Challenges: Describe a specific moment during your data collection (survey or corpus analysis) where the textbook theory did not provide a clear answer. How did you resolve this?
How did using tools like TlTerm/Lexonomy change your understanding of a dictionary entry? Did you feel limited or empowered by the software structure?
Compare your view of a lexicographer's role at the beginning of the semester vs. now. Do you consider yourself a researcher? Why or why not?

Research Results

The analysis of the student research outputs and reflective essays (N=7) suggests that the sillabi redesign successfully facilitated a shift towards the student as Scholar model. The results are categorized into three primary directions: Firstly, in the Learner Lexicography module, students were required to formulate hypotheses (e.g. good dictionaries do not only display a linguistically sound treatment of a specific selection of lexical items, good dictionaries are products that can be used as linguistic instruments by their respective target user groups) and conduct small-scale usage studies. The feedback in the reflective essays reveal that their research preparation was the primary driver of deep learning.

Students reported that the process of gathering original data forced them to move beyond theoretical knowledge. For example, one student noted:

"At the beginning, I was waiting for the lecturer to tell me which learner's dictionary was better. Or what were the specific questions for the questionnaire on the layout of the dictionary. But after designing my own survey, I realized that "better" depends entirely on the user's needs. I had to stop being a student and start thinking like a lexicographer." This aligns with the research-based quadrant of Healey's (2005) model. By dealing with the messiness of real data, students developed the critical skills to evaluate lexicographic resources not as static authorities, but as constructed tools subject to critique.

Secondly, the introduction of TlTerm (Joffe & De Schryver, 2004) and Lexonomy (Mechura et.al., 2017) proved to be a significant catalyst for student engagement. While traditional teaching might focus on analyzing existing dictionary entries, the research-oriented task of creating entries required a higher level of cognitive engagement. Analysis of the student projects in Lexonomy demonstrated a high degree of structural awareness. Students did not merely input words; they had to make active decisions about data structure (XML tags, hierarchy). In their course evaluations, the cohort emphasized that mastering these tools were important:

"Using Lexonomy gave me confidence that I could actually work in a digital publishing house, because I edited the structure of entries, made several editing decisions."

However, in terms of article writing as their assignment in Metalexicography, students mentioned that the instructions were a bit overwhelming: "*The prompt was one long block of text, so a lot of us missed small details—like the requirement to include screenshots or the specific word count for the abstract versus the paper*." Some of them wrote "*I struggled to figure out how much theory (Wiegand/Gouws) to include versus how much actual dictionary analysis to do*." The results showed that they liked the freedom of the assignment, but they struggled significantly with the structure and

density of your instructions.

Perhaps the most significant finding from the reflective essays was the shift in self-perception. At the start of the course, students identified primarily as "learners" absorbing information. By the end of the semester, the requirement to produce original usage studies and digital dictionaries fostered a sense of ownership.

The small cohort size (7 students) allowed for intensive mentoring, which was crucial for this identity shift. As one student reflected:

"The project made me feel like my opinion actually mattered because it was backed up by the data I collected."

Conclusion

The case of the MA Lexicography program at TSU illustrates that integrating research-based and research-oriented tasks into the curriculum does more than teach skills; it reframes the student-teacher relationship. By engaging in the actual practices of lexicographers, gathering data and building digital entries, students moved from passive consumers of knowledge to active producers.

The case study of the MA Lexicography program at TSU illustrates that integrating research-based and research-oriented tasks into the curriculum does more than merely teach skills; it fundamentally reframes the student-teacher relationship. By engaging in the authentic practices of lexicographers (gathering user data, critiquing macrostructures, and compiling digital entries) students moved from the position of passive consumers of knowledge to active producers.

The findings strongly support the application of Healey's (2005) model in postgraduate education. The transition across the elements, from the research-tutored critique of dictionaries to the research-based creation of user surveys - allowed students to experience the discipline not as a static set of rules, but as a dynamic field of inquiry. As evidenced by the student reflections, the lexicographic editing tools served as cognitive scaffolds; they helped students transform the abstract theory into concrete decision-making.

The study reveals that the discomfort associated with research is a necessary component of the "Student as Scholar" identity (Hodge et al., 2007). The student feedback regarding the ambiguity of assignment instructions and the complexity of real usage data highlights an important pedagogical implication. The feedback suggesting that instructions were occasionally "overwhelming" indicates that while autonomy is the goal, adequate scaffolding remains essential.

Declaration on Generative AI

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Gemini in order to: Grammar and spelling check, Paraphrase and reword. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the publication's content.

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