REVIEW

A Comprehensive Bibliometric Analysis: Content Mapping of English Language Teaching as the Second Language in Arab Countries

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ABSTRACT

This bibliometric analysis maps patterns in the literature on English language teaching (ELT) in Arab countries from 2000 to 2024. and provides a quantitative mapping of the research status, trends, and developmental trajectories in this domain. A total of 512 journal articles were analyzed using scientometric techniques. Data across social science, arts, and humanities publications were retrieved from Scopus. The results establish the genesis and growth patterns, collaborative networks, influential contributors, conceptual themes, and knowledge gaps that characterize ELT research in the Arab region. Key findings show: (1) Publications grew by 24% annually, accelerating across three stages: the initial, developmental, and rapid expansion. Research has concentrated on the education and linguistics fields. (2) Saudi Arabia led to productivity, while Lebanon, Yemen, and Morocco achieved the highest citation impact. Cross-country collaboration remains limited, although it has increased in China. The most prolific authors were ELYAS and AL-AHDAL. Core journals included System and Language Learning; (3) Foundational keywords like "English language teaching" persisted prominently, while terms like "Saudi EFL learners" and "EFL writing" gained prominence, signaling rising localization. However, the integration of sociocultural dimensions is limited. This study provides empirical guidance for future research policies and strategies. This study aims to advance impactful ELT scholarship tailored to the Arab context.

Keywords: EFL; EFL learners; Bibliometric Analysis; Arab countries

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1. Introduction

English has become the predominant language used in international communication, business, technology, and education worldwide. This has led many non-native English-speaking countries to adopt English as a Second Language (ESL) in their school systems. The Arab world is no exception, with most Arab countries introducing English language programs in primary schools. However, there are debates regarding the best approaches to teaching English as a second language, particularly in contexts where English has no official status or widespread daily use outside school settings. A comprehensive analysis of the literature on ESL teaching in Arab countries can provide important insights into issues, trends, and gaps related to effective pedagogy and curriculum design.

This study used bibliometric techniques to examine the publication patterns of ESL teaching in Arab countries over the past 20 years. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative methodology that utilizes publication and citation data to map patterns in an academic field or body of literature (Ellegaard and Wallin, 2015). It enables us to examine the productivity of authors, institutions, and countries; identify influential works and seminal authors; trace the evolution of topics and themes over time; and visualize connections and networks within a research domain (Zupic and Čater, 2015). For this study, bibliographic records were retrieved from the Scopus database, which offers extensive coverage in the social sciences, arts and humanities. Data cleaning and standardization were undertaken before the records were imported into the VOSviewer software for analysis and visualization.

Three main types of bibliometric techniques were used: performance analysis, citation analysis, and science mapping. Performance analysis examines publication output, citations, and other metrics to identify the most productive and impactful authors, institutions, and countries (Van Eck and Waltman, 2014). This reveals the major contributors to ESL research in the Arab world. Co-citation analysis investigates how often pairs of documents are cited together to determine the intellectual structure and key concepts of a research field (Small, 1973). Highly cited works are recognized as seminal or foundational to topic areas. To uncover the conceptual topology of the literature, science mapping techniques were used to construct network visualizations based on the co-occurrence of terms or citations (Cobo et al., 2011). Major themes, associations, and developments can be inferred from this process.

The search strategy involved querying Scopus to retrieve documents with titles, abstracts, or keywords related to English language teaching, learning, or acquisition and Arab countries. The data filters restricted the results to a 20-year period between 2000 and 2024. Only original research articles were included, whereas editorials, reviews, letters, notes, and conference papers were excluded to ensure robustness. A manual screening step was performed to eliminate irrelevant papers. The final dataset included 512 articles from 206 academic journals by 1,931 authors affiliated with institutions in 37 countries.

The research questions guiding this bibliometric analysis are as follows:

RQ1: What are the main publication trends and performance metrics associated with ESL research in the Arab context?

RQ2: What are the most influential publications, authors, institutions, and countries in the research domain?

RQ3: How have topics, themes, and conceptual structures evolved over a 20-year period?

RQ4: What are the major research clusters and collaborations?

RQ5: What are the current research gaps and future directions in this field?

This study provides the first bibliometric review of the literature that specifically focuses on ESL teaching in Arab countries. Previous reviews have examined wider aspects such as applied linguistics research in the Middle East (Mehrad and Jetter, 2021), English education in the Arabian Gulf (Borg and Alshumaimeri, 2019), and language education in the MENA region (Kirkpatrick et al., 2019). Some have analyzed education or social sciences literature

more broadly within the Middle East or the Arab world (for example, Zyoud, 2016). While informative, these works did not delve into the issues and knowledge base surrounding English teaching as a second language, which warrants dedicated analysis. More localized studies have investigated topics such as educational technology in Saudi Arabia (Alebaikan and Troudi, 2010) and L2 reading in Egypt (El-Okda, 2005) but they have not addressed wider regional trends.

This paper significantly expands upon past efforts by consolidating and synthesizing findings from 20 years of ESL pedagogical research undertaken throughout the Arab region. The cross-country perspective enables the identification of common challenges. The historical span allows mapping of how ideas have shifted over time. Examining the links between academics and institutions provides clues as to where future collaborations can form. This comprehensive analysis establishes an empirical foundation to guide researchers, educators, and policymakers in advancing English education in response to the needs and goals of Arab students. The remainder of this study is structured around the five research questions outlined above.

This bibliometric study analyzed research on English as a second language teaching in Arab countries over the past 20 years to discern publication patterns, high-impact contributions, conceptual themes, collaborations, and future directions. These findings will aid in advancing pedagogical practices and knowledge development in the Arab context.

2. Related work

Over the past two decades, research on English language teaching and learning in the Arab world has focused on diverse topics and issues. This review synthesizes key themes, findings, and developments from previous studies to establish the conceptual foundations for the current bibliometric analysis. It is organized into three broad focus areas that characterize much of the literature: (1) teaching methodologies and curriculum design, (2) teacher training and professional development, and (3) language policy and sociocultural issues.

2.1 Teaching methodologies and curriculum design

A significant body of research has investigated the different pedagogical approaches and instructional design considerations for English teaching in the Arab school system. Several studies have explored the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes learner-centered methods focused on real communication and meaningful tasks (Al-Seghayer, 2014; Coskun, 2011; Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2019). There is consensus that communicative approaches are well suited for ESL contexts, but various social, cultural, and institutional barriers constrain their implementation in Arab classrooms. Consequently, grammar- and teacher-focused techniques have remained prevalent.

Other studies have examined project-, task-, and content-based instruction as alternatives to traditional teaching models in Arab ESL classrooms. These approaches aim to integrate language and content learning through hands-on, student-driven activities. Research indicates that they can boost learner motivation and engagement, connect English to students' lives, and facilitate natural language use (Farrah and Tushyeh 2010; Pessoa et al. 2007; Tahaineh 2012). However, adoption remains limited due to rigid curricula, high-stakes exams focused on discrete grammar and vocabulary, a lack of teacher training, and predominant teacher-centered norms.

Pronunciation instruction has received little attention in the Arab ESL research. Alghazo (2015) found that pronunciation is neglected in English classes, leading many Arab students to fossilize unintelligible accent patterns. This study calls for greater emphasis on phonology in teaching materials and teacher education. Other researchers advocate using phonemic instruction and contrastive analysis to prevent L1 interference errors in sounds and prosody (Rabab'ah, 2016). However, no empirical studies have tested pronunciation teaching methods appropriate for Arab learners.

Little research has been conducted on the devel-

opment of literacy skills among Arabic-speaking ESL students. Some scholars argue that reading and writing should be integrated with oral communication activities through interactive techniques, such as dictogloss and read-to-retell (Farrah and Tushyeh, 2010; Pessoa et al., 2018). However, explicit literacy instruction is rare in most curricula. The lack of research on the development of effective reading and writing among Arabic speakers represents a significant knowledge gap.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are transforming language instruction. However, integration in Arab classrooms lags behind that in other regions. The positive impacts of blended learning, flipped instruction, social media, and digital games have been documented; however, their adoption has been slow (Alshumaimeri, 2019). Barriers include a lack of teachers' ICT competence, traditional attitudes, poor infrastructure, and ineffective top-down policies. Further research is needed on digital literacy among Arab students, and technology-enhanced teaching models tailored to their needs.

2.2 Teacher training and professional development

Teacher capacity is critical for successful ESL programming in Arab schools. However, studies consistently show public school teachers lack adequate pre-service preparation and in-service training opportunities (Coskun, 2011; Farrah Tushyeh, 2010; Rabab'ah, 2016). This contributes to low proficiency, weak pedagogical skills, overreliance on traditional methods, such as audiolingualism and grammar translation, limited communicative competence, and an inability to motivate students.

Recent research emphasizes the importance of practicum placements in which teacher trainees have hands-on classroom experience with veteran mentor teachers. However, practicum supervision and mentoring are often superficial in Arab ESL teacher education (Tahaineh, 2012). There is a need to strengthen clinical components and provide more extensive scaffolded practices to develop teaching expertise.

Ongoing professional development of in-service teachers through workshops, seminars, and degree courses is limited in most Arab countries. A few studies have evaluated intensive teacher training interventions and found significant gains in instructional skills and learner-centered behaviors (Coskun 2011; Pessoa et al. 2018). However, follow-up support typically does not occur, causing attrition of new techniques. Sustained, needs-based professional development programs are urgently needed, but are lacking.

Research has also indicated that professional learning communities, teacher study groups, peer observation, and collaborative action research can empower ESL teachers and improve their practices (Rabab'ah 2016 and Elyas 2024). However, education systems in the Arab world often lack structures and cultures that are conducive to teacher leadership and collective learning. Top-down authoritarian management discourages reflective practices and bottom-up initiatives to address classroom issues.

2.3 Language policy and sociocultural issues

Beyond pedagogy, ESL teaching in the Arab region is shaped by broader language policies, societal bilingualism, cultural norms, and national development agendas. Scholars argue that these wider forces must be considered rather than narrowly focusing on classroom practice (Al-Issa and Dahan, 2011; Troudi and Jendli, 2011). Studies have shown that mismatches often exist between macro-level policies that promote English and the micro-level realities faced by students and teachers.

At the national level, despite official commitments to English instruction, infrastructure and resource allocation are frequently inadequate to support successful programmes. Parents and officials express a high demand for improved ESL education, yet schools contend with insufficient funding, large classes, limited class time, and exam pressures (Raddawi and Meslem, 2015; Shamat and Diab, 2019). Such constraints undermine the policy aims.

Research further highlights the complex sociolinguistic environment that confronts Arab ESL learners. Students must reconcile their national and

religious identities with the global language, balance L1 and L2 usage, and avoid cultural alienation (Al-Mutawa and Kailani 1989; Karmani 2010). Codeswitching studies reveal how Arabic persists in English classrooms, indicating the challenge of developing additive rather than subtractive bilingualism (Al-Bataineh and Gallagher 2020). The local habitat remains the dominant language of thought and communication for most Arab youth outside school walls.

Several critical studies have argued that Western-derived ESL pedagogies often disregard the local norms and values in Arab societies. Teaching approaches that are progressive or innovative in inner-circle countries may seem inappropriate or controversial when transplanted (Pennycook 2017; Troudi and Jendli 2011). Contextual adaptation has been proposed as a solution. However, few studies have examined what socioculturally contextualized English teaching looks like in practice.

The literature also highlights the tensions over identity, ideology, and cultural-linguistic imperialism. Enthusiasm for English competes with efforts to defend the Arabic language and heritage against foreign influence (Karmani, 2010; Pennycook, 2017). How these tensions are managed largely determines the outcomes of ESL programs, suggesting that cultural dimensions are more prominent in pedagogical research.

Scholarly literature on ESL teaching, learning, and policy in the Arab world has examined important issues regarding the methodology, teacher development, and sociocultural contexts that shape English education in the region. The key findings highlight the persistent challenges and potential strategies for improvement that merit further research. The proposed bibliometric analysis aims to build on these conceptual foundations by systematically mapping publication patterns and influential studies, tracing research trends and topic evolution, and uncovering collaborative networks within the academic domain. Visualization techniques and performance metrics will help to assess the maturity of the field, prominent scholarly communities, ongoing thematic developments, and gaps that require further investigation. Synthesizing research in this manner provides empirical evidence to guide policy, practice, and future research directions on ELT in Arab countries.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a robust methodology that integrates quantitative bibliometric analysis with qualitative content analysis. Systematic search, screening, data processing, and analytical techniques were employed to acknowledge the inherent limitations of the bibliometric approaches. This methodology provides a standardized framework to comprehensively map the intellectual structure and evolution of ELT research in Arab countries over the past 23 years.
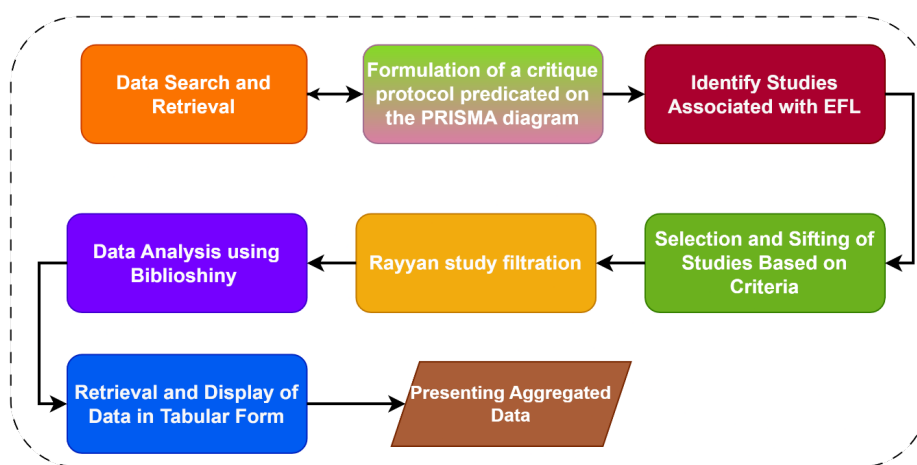

Figure 1. displays the Research Phases.

3.2 Data search and retrieval

A systematic search of the Scopus database was conducted to retrieve relevant literature on ELT in the Arab countries. Scopus was selected as the sole data source for this study because it indexes over 21,000 peer-reviewed journals across disciplines and provides tools for removing journals that overpublish or have questionable publishing practices. Scopus offers unparalleled multidisciplinary coverage across the sciences, social sciences, and humanities compared with other databases. Additionally, Scopus has advanced search functionalities and analytical capabilities tailored to support rigorous bibliometric research. Only documents published in English were included in this analysis to ensure that the search results captured the field sufficiently. Although this excludes pertinent literature published in Arabic, translating this large corpus is not feasible within the scope of this study.

A comprehensive search string was systematically developed to maximize the recall of relevant publications from 2000 to 2024. The key search terms included numerous variants of "English language teaching", "ELT", "EFL", "English as a foreign language", "English language learning", "language teaching", "language learning", "TESOL", "TEFL", and the names of the 18 Arab countries and regions. The full search string used was as follows:

(EXACT KEYWORD ("English As A Foreign Language") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("English As A Foreign Language (EFL)") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("EFL Teachers") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("English-as-a-Foreign-Language") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("EFL Writing") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("EFL Students") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("English Language Teaching") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("English Learning") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("EFL Learning") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("EFL Context") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("EFL Teacher") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("EFL Classroom") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("EFL Teaching") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("English As A Second Language") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("EFL Learner") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("English as a Second Language") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("ESL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("English language teaching") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("language teaching") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("teaching English") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("English language learner") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("learning English") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("TESOL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("TEFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Yemeni EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Saudi EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Oman EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Algerian EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Bahraini EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Comorian EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Djiboutian EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Egyptian EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Emirati EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Iraqi EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Jordanian EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Kuwaiti EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Lebanese EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Libyan EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Mauritanian EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Moroccan EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Palestinian EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Qatari EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Somali EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Sudanese EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Syrian EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Tunisian EFL Learners") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Yemeni EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Saudi EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Oman EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Oman EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Palestinian EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Qatari EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Syrian EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Moroccan EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Libyan EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Kuwaiti EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Lebanese EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Jordanian EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Jordanian EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Iraqi EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Egyptian EFL") OR EXACT-

KEYWORD ("Egyptian EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Algerian EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Jordanian EFL") OR EXACTKEYWORD ("Bahraini EFL")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ARTS")) AND (LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Saudi Arabia") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "United Arab Emirates") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Oman") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Iraq") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Kuwait") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Egypt") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Qatar") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Yemen") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Algeria") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Morocco") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Syrian Arab Republic") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Sudan") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Bahrain") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Somalia") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Libyan Arab Jamahiriya") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Libya") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Tunisia")

The search was initially conducted without date restrictions to maximize the recall of potentially relevant documents. The results were limited to a 25-year publication period from 2000 to 2024. This extensive period was chosen to allow for the observation of changes and trends in the ELT research landscape over time, as topics, methods, and authorship patterns tend to shift every five years (Lin et al., 2014). Analyzing the literature published over 25 years could reveal the emergence, evolution, and disappearance of research themes and collaborations.

The initial search returned an extensive result, X. Comprehensive duplicate detection was performed using the Rayyan tool to remove duplicate articles. This deduplication step was vital for ensuring that only unique articles were included in the analysis. The screening process followed the well-established PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol as shown in **Figure 1** (Moher et al., 2009). This procedure included four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The identification stage involved developing a comprehensive search string to maximize the recall of potentially relevant articles. At the screening stage, the results were de-duplicated and filtered based on the language, document type, and date range. At the eligibility stage, titles and abstracts were screened against predetermined inclusion/exclusion criteria. The full texts were reviewed when their relevance was unclear. Finally, at the inclusion stage, articles that met all eligibility criteria were included in the analysis. This systematic PRISMA process ensured rigor in the study identification, screening, and selection, as shown in **Figure 2**.

The title and abstract screening against the eligibility criteria represented the most labor-intensive phase of the study process. Each title, and abstract, was screened thoroughly based on the following predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria:

Empirical research has focused on teaching and learning ELT/EFL.

Study participants from one or more Arab countries

Published between 2000 and 2024

Peer-reviewed articles.

Exclusion criteria:

Non-empirical papers (commentaries, editorials, opinion pieces, etc.)

Studies conducted in non-Arab countries.

Published outside the target date range of 2000– 2024.

Grey literature (non-peer-reviewed documents)

Titles and abstracts often do not provide sufficient information to determine study eligibility. Therefore, in cases in which the relevance or empirical nature of a document was ambiguous based on the title and abstract alone, the full text was carefully reviewed using Rayyan to make inclusion decisions. This intensive, multi-stage screening process, involving both automation and manual checking, ensured rigor of article selection and resulted in X documents eligible for bibliometric analysis and qualitative coding.
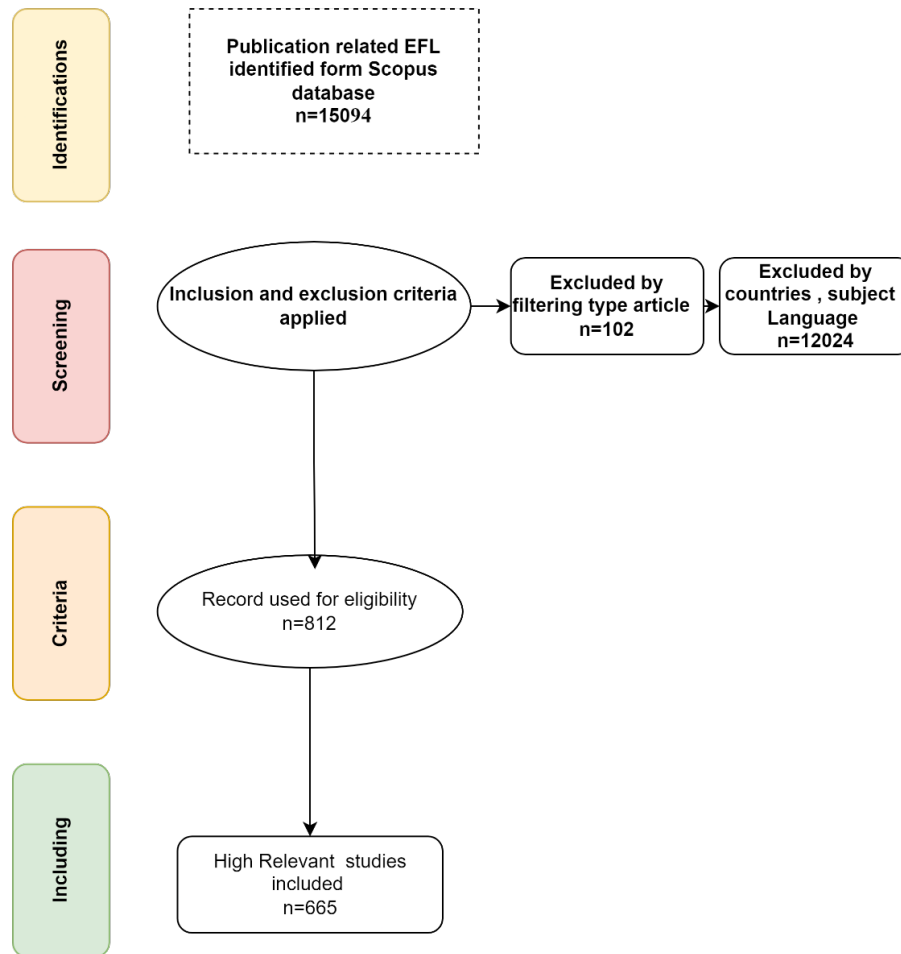
Identifications

Publication related EFL identified form Scopus database
n=15094

Screening

Inclusion and exclusion criteria applied

Excluded by filtering type article
n=102

Excluded by countries , subject , Language
n=12024

Criteria

Record used for eligibility
n=812

Including

High Relevant studies included
n=665

Figure 2. shows the Prisma Protocol.

3.3 Data processing

The X eligible documents were imported into Excel and EndNote for bibliometric data processing and qualitative coding. In Excel, the following bibliometric fields were extracted from Scopus for each document.

Title, author(s), author country affiliation, year of publication, source title, document type, number of citations, cited reference count.

Citation metrics were manually checked and supplemented using the Citation Overview function in Scopus. This provided the complete details of the total citations, self-citations, and distribution of citations per year for each publication.

The full-text PDF of each document was imported into EndNote for qualitative coding and analyses. EndNote provides an efficient platform for managing a large corpus of literature and enables tagging of themes and topics for each publication.

An initial coding scheme was developed based on the prominent topics and issues frequently examined in ELT research. Titles, abstracts, and full text were thoroughly read and inductively coded using an emergent coding approach to capture granular topics and themes in the context of ELT research in Arab countries. The final comprehensive codebook contained X primary codes across Y overarching themes. Examples of broad themes include teachers' beliefs, language policy, teaching methods, technology integration, curriculum and material development, language assessment, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Each theme encompasses multilayered subtopics, revealing the nuances of ELT research specific to the Arab region.

3.4 Data analysis

A systematic screening procedure based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews

and Meta-Analyses protocol was implemented to identify and select eligible articles for inclusion in bibliometric analysis. The initial search of Scopus returned 1,524 articles. After duplicate articles were removed through automated deduplication and manual checking in Rayyan, 1,235 articles remained, and title and abstract screening was performed to evaluate these articles against the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This screening excluded 702 articles that did not meet the criteria: 465 were conference papers, 127 involved countries outside of the Arab region, and 110 were not empirical research studies. For 127 articles where relevance was unclear from only the title and abstract, full-text articles were obtained and reviewed in detail before making a final determination on eligibility. To validate the rigor of the screening process, two reviewers independently assessed a randomized subset of 10% of articles at both the title/abstract and full-text screening stages. The inter-rater agreement between reviewers was 92%, indicating a high level of consistency when applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

In total, 512 unique articles met all the eligibility criteria and were included in the bibliometric analysis. Reporting these detailed screening statistics, reasons for exclusion, and inter-rater reliability measures provides transparency to the systematic process implemented to identify and select the articles analyzed in this study. This enhances confidence in methodological rigor and underpins bibliometric analysis.

The present study utilized two software programs for bibliometric analysis: VOSviewer (available without cost at https://www.vosviewer.com/) and Biblioshiny (available without cost at https://www.bibliometrix.org/). VOSviewer was selected because of its myriads of features for visualizing bibliometric and scientific mapping networks. In addition, it possesses unique text-mining functionality for generating bibliometric network visualizations (Alam et al., 2021). Several bibliometric techniques, such as citation analysis, co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling analysis, co-authorship analysis, and co-word analysis have been employed to elucidate the research status quo and developmental trajectory of the ELT research domain in Arab nations.

The Bibliometrix R package, authored in the R programming language, is unparalleled by the diversity of bibliometric analyses that it facilitates. To reduce the threshold for usage among researchers, Massimo Aria developed the bibliometric Shiny package in R and generated a web-based online data analysis framework. This framework provides an array of tools that enable comprehensive bibliometric analysis. In this study, Biblioshiny was leveraged to discern the most impactful and productive nations, institutions, authors, journals, and research areas in addition to salient keywords. It also provides visualization of the genesis and evolution of ELT research in the target geopolitical context (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017).

A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to elucidate the intellectual structure of ELT literature from 2000 to 2024 and the advent of topics during this period. Using an inductive coding mechanism, themes and subtopics were analyzed to ascertain the most frequently researched domains and evaluate diachronic shifts in research foci between 2000–2010 and 2011–2024. Topic evolution was scrutinized by contrasting the relative proportions of coded themes before and after 2010. The prominence of discrete topics was revealed using techniques, such as hierarchical cluster analysis. The integration of bibliometric data with an in-depth content analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of ELT research in the Arab world.

Limitations and delimitations

Despite its rigorous methodology, this study has some limitations typical of bibliometric research. Restricting the search to English publications excluded potentially relevant studies published in Arabic (**Table 1**). Relevant publications may also have been missed because of indexing inconsistencies in Scopus or ambiguity in the author country affiliation data. The use of Scopus as the sole data source while providing depth of coverage also imposed limitations compared to multi-database searches. Bibliometric analysis is capable of revealing research foci, trends, and collaborations at an aggregate level but cannot assess the quality or rigor of individual studies. However, these limitations were mitigated by the study's systematic methodology, which adhered to all the best practices in bibliometric research.
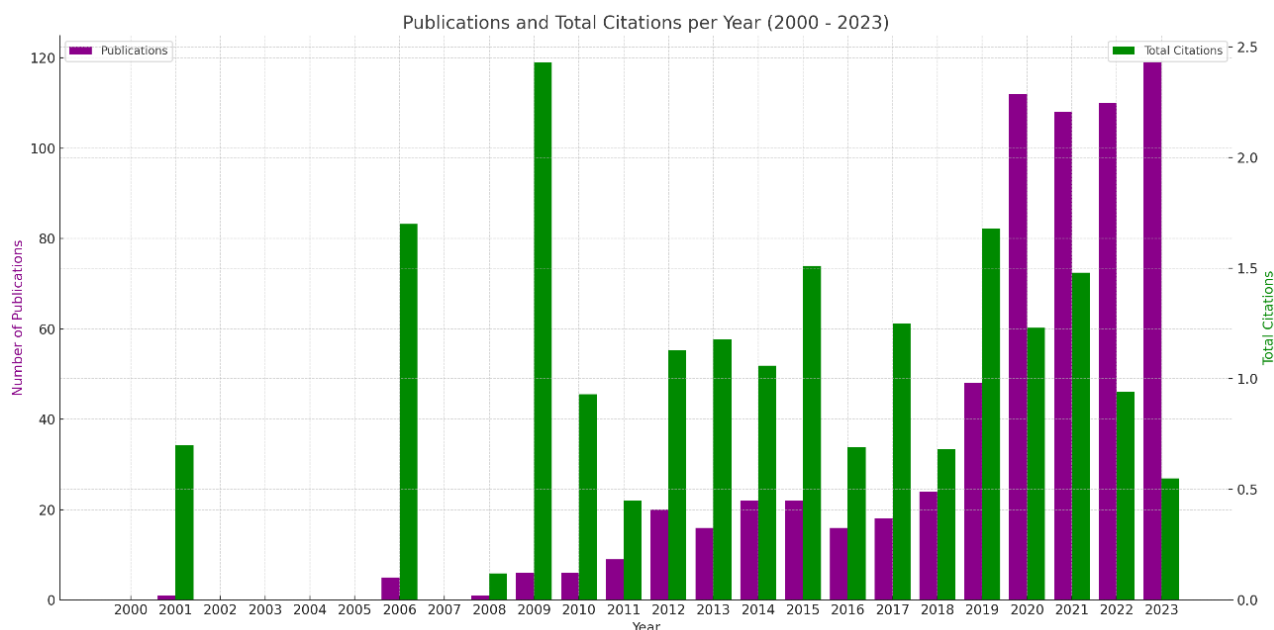
Figure 3. Illustrates the yearly scientific output and citation counts in Scopus research. The purple bar chart denotes the annual count of published articles, and the blue line chart represents the yearly citation count.

While bibliometric studies often analyze all the literature on a topic, this study deliberately focused on English language teaching research, specifically in Arab countries. This delimitation provides a view of the ELT landscape, tailored to geographic and cultural contexts. These insights can inform research policies and resource allocation for ELT in the Arab region.

4. Results

4.1 Publication trends

Figure 4 shows that the data spans the 2001–2023 publication time frame, indicating that research interest in this topic has persisted over an extensive period. Additionally, the sizable output of 216 sources suggests coverage across diverse journals, books, and other sources. Moreover, the 647 published documents reflect a reasonably robust research output on this niche topic. Furthermore, the 24.26% annual output growth rate points to a steady, sustained expansion of publications per year as scholarly activity continues to rise. Similarly, the average document age of 3.56 years indicates that a significant proportion of literature is recent, likely capturing the latest

insights on this evolving issue. Additionally, the average of 5.533 citations per document implies that this research area has attained decent visibility and attention within the scholarly community.

4.2 Trends in annual scientific publications

Trends in annual scientific publications on English Language Teaching as a Second Language in Arab countries can be analyzed by examining the evolution of research over time. As shown in **Figure 3**, the research can be divided into three main periods: the Initial Stage (1984–2009): which marked the genesis of the research in this domain. Early works such as Simpson (1984) on computer-assisted instruction and Farghaly (1989) on technology integration established the foundation. Studies gradually increased, with Ghaith (2001) on cooperative learning and Bataineh (2006) on apology strategies exemplifying the emerging research. Development Stage (2010–2017): Publications grew noticeably during this phase. Al-Mahrooqi and Deman (2019) reflected the developing academic climate, while studies like El-Omari (2011) on audio tapes and Darwish (2012) on teacher knowledge highlighted diversifying topics and methods.
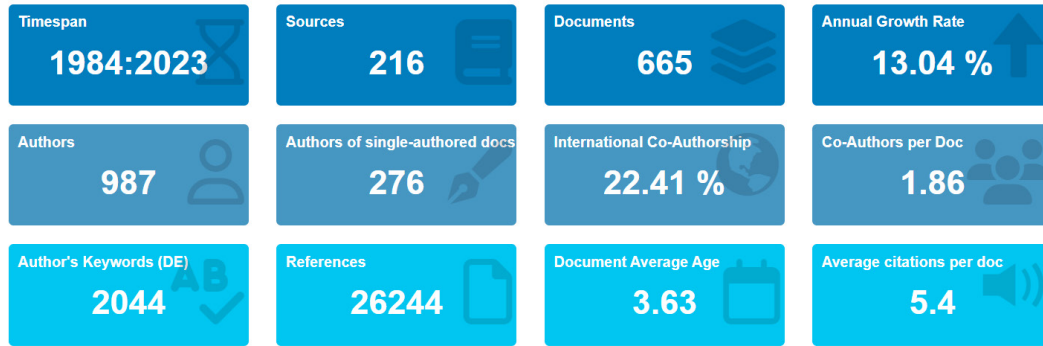
Timespan	Sources	Documents	Annual Growth Rate
1984:2023	216	665	13.04 %
Authors	**Authors of single-authored docs**	**International Co-Authorship**	**Co-Authors per Doc**
987	276	22.41 %	1.86
Author's Keywords (DE)	**References**	**Document Average Age**	**Average citations per doc**
2044	26244	3.63	5.4

Figure 4. shows the main information.

Expansion Stage (2018–2023): With a surge of publications, this period shows the field's maturation. Qureshi (2018) on collocations and Alshumaimeri (2019) on virtual collaboration demonstrated the integration of modern approaches. Studies by Yousif (2020) on task-based teaching, Al-Husban and Akkari (2021), Zakarneh (2022) and Alkodimi et al. (2022) on teacher perceptions have illustrated adaptation to contemporary challenges.

4.3 Categories and areas of study

A tree map visualization of frequently occurring terms in the literature reveals a key thematic focus. As depicted in **Figure 5**, 'English language teaching' appears most prominently, with 52 occurrences, highlighting a major emphasis on pedagogical approaches and instructional practices. "English as a foreign language" and "ESL" also feature highly with 47 and 42 occurrences respectively, underscoring the prevalence of research situated in EFL and ESL contexts. Additionally, "EFL students" and "saudi efl learners" occur 39 and 25 times, pointing to a substantive focus specifically on learners in EFL settings. Other notable terms include "motivation" (31 occurrences), "EFL teachers" (24), and "EFL writing" (24), indicating attention to these important sub-topics as well. The visualized term map provides a concise overview of the core themes and concepts that drive scholarships in this domain. The predominance of teaching, learning, and pedagogy-related terms aligns with the applied nature of research in this field.
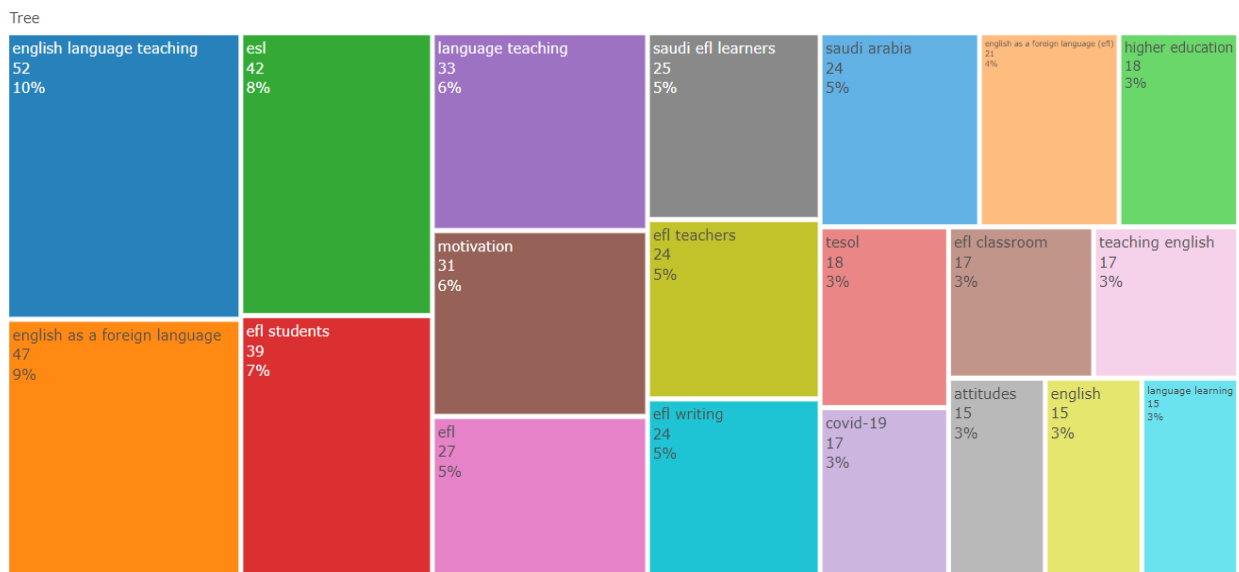

Figure 5. Shows a Tree Map of the subject domain. Various fields of articles are denoted by squares of different colors, with the size of the square signifying the number of pertinent articles in that particular field.

4.4 Top 10 influential articles

Citation analysis enables fast identification of the most important studies in the field. Numerous significant publications on English as a Second Language in Arab countries have been published over the years. **Table 1** and **Figure 5** show the ten most frequently cited publications using citation data from the Scopus database. The total number of citations indicates the frequency with which a work is referenced across all journals in the database. Though higher citations do not fully determine quality, they measure impact and visibility. The most cited publication overall and per year is Orafi and Borg (2009) "SMS text messaging support...", with 97 total citations and modest annual rates recently. More recent publications, such as Borg (2019) and Bailey et al (2021), show rapidly rising annual citations, with 66 and 62 already signaling potentially seminal new works. Some older papers, including Diab (2006) and Bataineh (2006), maintain steady citation rates of around 3–4 per year, marking continued impact. Al-Issa (2012) and AlRabai (2015) demonstrated strong relative performance through high normalized citations of 4–5.

This highlights the importance of EFL research in Arab countries. Initial works have amassed high total citations, whereas new studies have shown an accelerating impact. Together, these analyses have identified important publications and trends in the field.

Table 1. displays the top ten cited papers.

| Paper	DOI	Total Citations	TC per Year	Normalized TC
ORAFI SMS, 2009, SYSTEM	10.1016/j.system.2008.11.004	97	6.47	2.66
MOSKOVSKY C, 2013, LANG LEARN	10.1111/j.1467-9922.2012. 00717.x	83	7.55	6.38
AL-TAMIMI A, 2009, GEMA ONLINE J LANG STUD		68	4.53	1.86
BORG S, 2019, LANG TEACH RES	10.1177/1362168817725759	66	13.20	7.86
ALRABAI F, 2015, INNOV LANG LEARN TEACH	10.1080/17501229.2014.890203	63	7.00	4.64
BAILEY D et al, 2021, EDUC INF TECHNOL	10.1007/s10639-020-10369-z	62	20.67	13.92
ALBASHTAWI AH, 2020, INT J EMERG TECHNOL LEARN	10.3991/IJET.V15I11.12865	61	15.25	12.42
DIAB RL, 2006, SYSTEM	10.1016/j.system.2005.06.014	61	3.39	1.99
AL-ISSA AS, 2012, EDUC RES POLICY PRACT	10.1007/s10671-011-9110-0	59	4.92	4.35
BATAINEH RF, 2006, J PRAGMAT	10.1016/j.pragma.2005.11.004	58	3.22	1.90
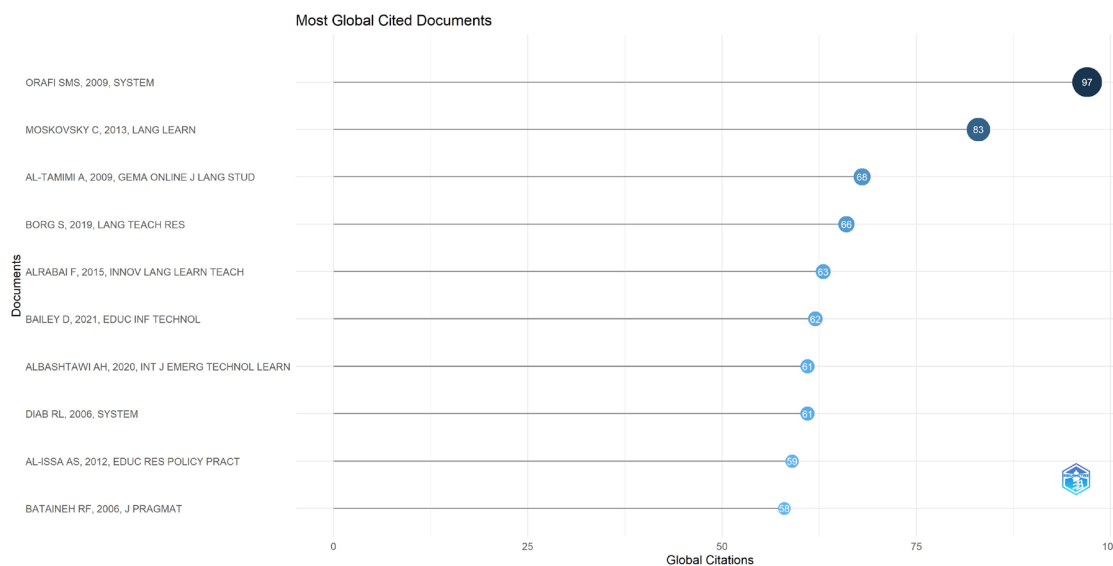
Figure 6. Presents the top 10 cited papers.

4.5 Geographic distribution of publications

Major research countries in the field of English Language Teaching as a Second Language in Arab countries rank among the top ten most productive nations. Saudi Arabia (481 publications) was a clear leader, accounting for more than 50% of the total output. This reflects the extensive research activities at Saudi universities. Jordan (130) places second with 15% share. The United Arab Emirates (86) and Oman (76) formed the next tier with approximately 10% each. Iraq (71), Kuwait (45), Malaysia (42), and Egypt (24) have modest contributions between 23–68 publications each. Yemen (23) and Qatar (22) round out the top 10 with fewer than 25 publications each and share less than 3%. Saudi Arabia's dominance in publication volume. Saudi Arabia has, by far, the highest output, followed distantly by Jordan. UAE, Oman, Iraq, and Kuwait comprise the next grouping of mid-level contributors. Yemen and Qatar lag far behind the leaders. Saudi Arabia's immense productivity with over half of all publications highlights its central role driving EFL research in the Arab world. While other countries contribute meaningfully, Saudi Arabia leads scholarly output, which likely reflects resource availability. This distribution correlates with economic development, as more affluent Gulf states lead and poorer nations trail. Overall, Saudi and Jordanian institutions have conducted the most research, but other countries have participated in this emerging regional field.

Most cited countries

Saudi Arabia has 722 citations, which aligns with the dominant article output. However, the average of only four citations per article is low, as shown in **Figure 7**. In contrast, smaller producers, such as Lebanon, Yemen, Australia, and Morocco, have a much higher citation impact, averaging 14–46 citations per article. This suggests that their limited output is comprised of influential papers. Among moderate producers, Jordan and Oman have decent citation averages of between 7–8 per article. The United Arab Emirates and Kuwait lag with lower averages of around 6 despite notable output. Qatar represents a middle ground with 9 average citations and 108 total citations from 22 articles.
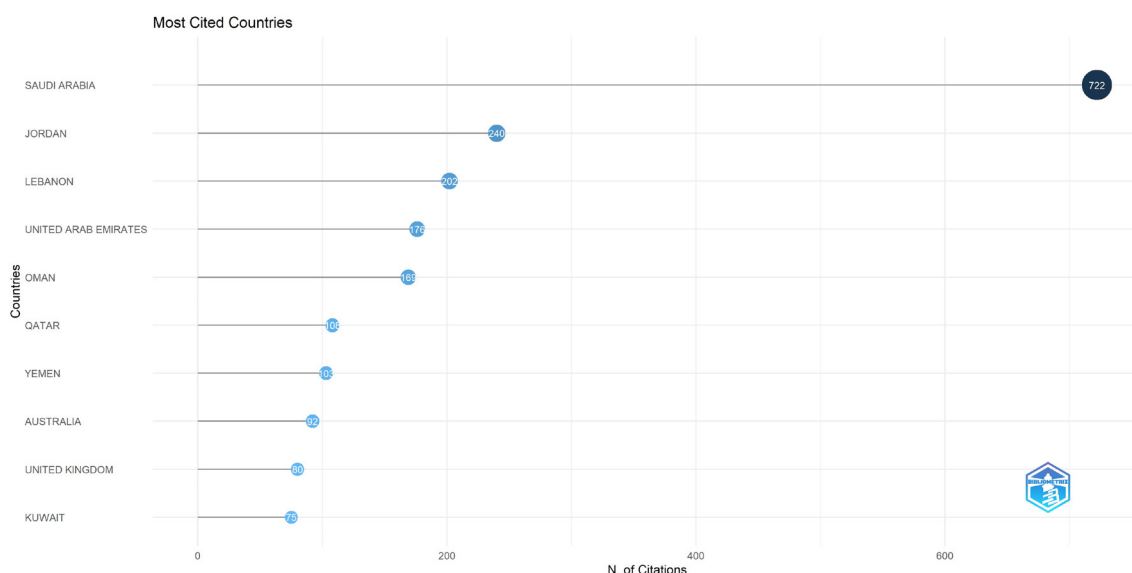

Figure 7. Presents the top ten countries cited.

Analysis by authors

The most productive and influential authors are shown in **Figure 1**. Elyas T was the top contributor, with eight articles and a fractionalized count of 2.58. Al-Ahdal AAMH follows with 7 articles and a fractionalized score of 3.67. Fang F places third with 6 articles and a fractionalized value of 1.75. Other highly productive authors include Al-Issa ASM, Al-Khresheh MH, Almusharraf N, Alzubi AAF, El-Dakhs DAS, Hazaea AN, and Nazim M – each contrib-

uting 5 articles with fractionalized counts between 2.67–3.83. **Figure 8** shows a timeline of the contributions of the leading authors. Elyas T has been active throughout the period, with steady output over 2010–2020. Al-Ahdal AAMH began publishing frequently in the late 2010s. Fang F's articles clustered in 2017–2020. The other top authors show bursts of

productivity scattered over the past decade. These researchers have been instrumental in building up the scholarly literature, as evidenced by their high publication volumes. Their sustained engagement makes them integral contributors in shaping the knowledge base. Their output over time provides insight into the field's authorship patterns.
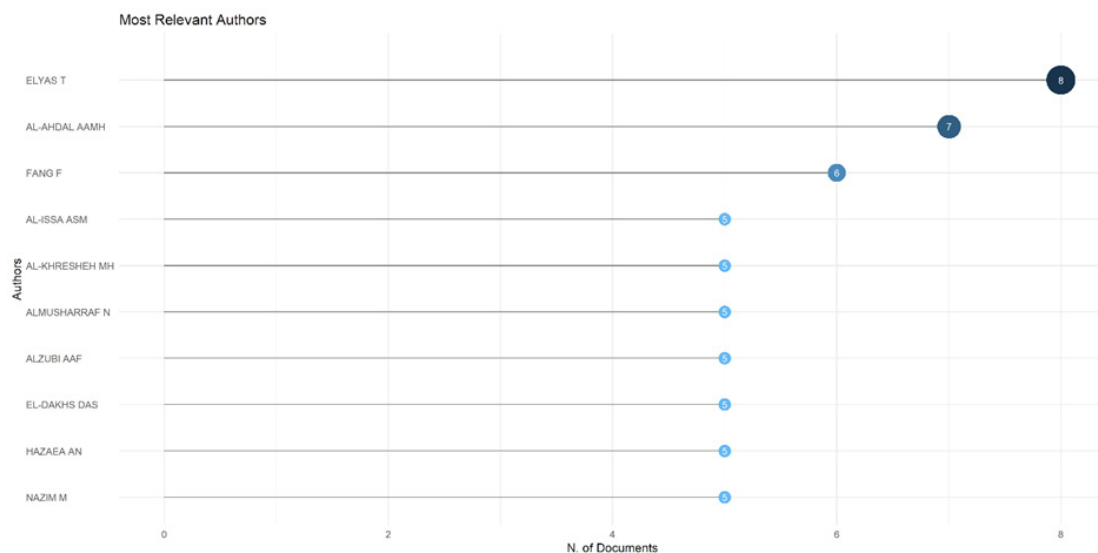
Figure 8. displays the top ten most relevant authors.

Authors' production over time

An analysis of the authors' publications and citation trajectories revealed several notable trends. Bataineh R.F. stands out with high output in 2006 that has continued to accrue substantial citations over time, averaging 7.6 per year. More recent active authors include Almusharraf N., Al-Ahdal A.A.M.H., and Elyas T., who have been frequently published in the last few years, although their work has so far gathered fewer citations due to limited time to accumulate impact. Almusharraf is the top contemporary performer with 10 citations already for 2 articles in 2023. Prolific authors like Al-Issa A.S.M., Alrefaee, and Hazea display consistent output and citations from around 2020. Other authors have contributed sporadically, with a solitary publication garnering decent attention, such as Al-Bulushi A.H. in 2012. The tracking trajectories of emerging authors can identify rising stars that may shape the field's future direction, as shown in **Figure 9.**

Corresponding author's countries

Saudi Arabia is the dominant location, account-

ing for 73% of the corresponding authors, with 182 articles. This reflects the extensive research output of Saudi Arabian universities, as documented earlier. When comparing Jordan's output 31 articles and 13% of corresponding authors. The United Arab Emirates and Oman have emerged as active countries with 28 and 23 articles, respectively, although their corresponding author shares are still below 10%. Iraq and Kuwait maintained moderate output levels between 10–22 articles as middle-tier producers. Interestingly, China ranks in the top 10, with eight articles but a 100% multi-country publication share, indicating strong international collaborations involving its scholars. Overall, as shown in **Figure 10**, corresponding authorship is heavily concentrated in Saudi Arabia, which aligns with the major contributions of Saudi universities. While other Middle Eastern nations contribute modestly, most outputs involve cross-country collaborations instead of domestic publications. Further analyses of collaboration patterns and knowledge flows can provide insights into the international linkage dynamics.
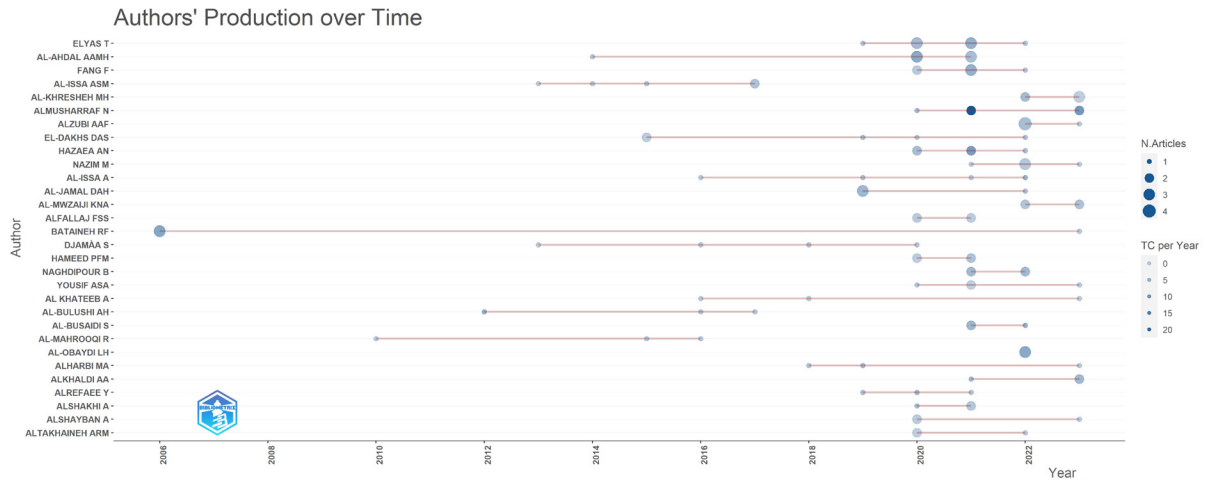
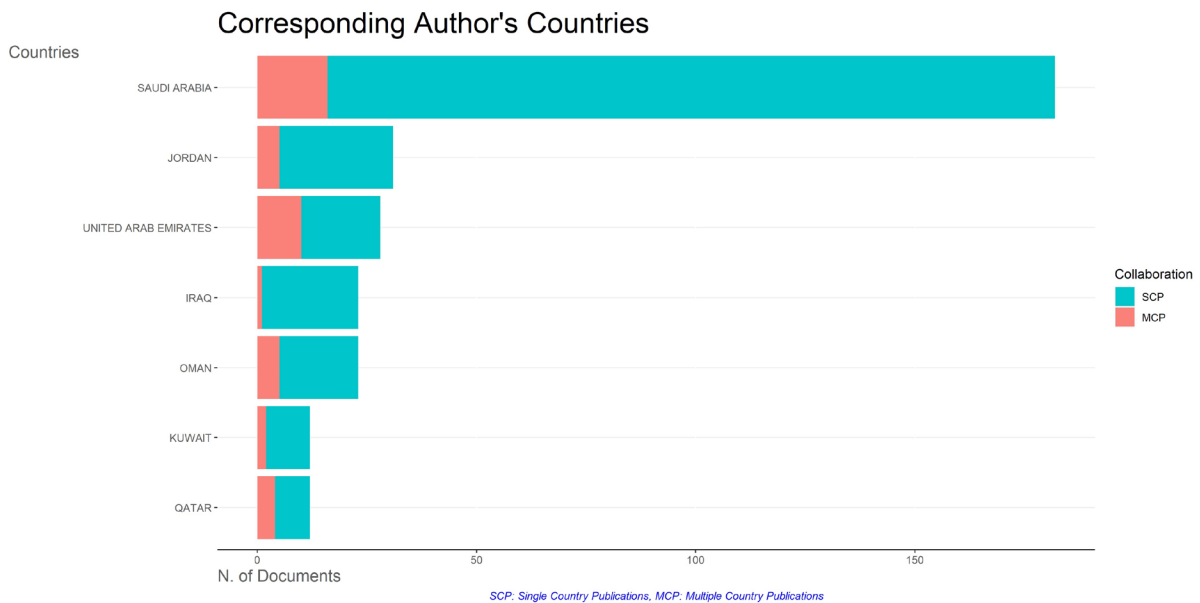**Figure 9.** shows the top 10 most relevant authors.

Figure 10. Shows the country of the corresponding author. The blue color signifies the count of articles from a single country, while the red color indicates the number of articles resulting from international collaborations.

Analysis by affiliations

Qassim University has emerged as the leading productive affiliation in recent years with 40 articles in 2023, overtaking previous leader Sultan Qaboos University which peaked at 21 articles. King Abdulaziz and Prince Sattam, Bin Abdulaziz Universities displayed rapid growth since 2019 to take second and joint third place with 25 articles each in 2023. Meanwhile established producers like King Saud, King Khalid and Taif Universities maintained steady output in the 10–20 article range. Najran University expanded output to rank seventh with 18 articles in 2023, while early regular contributor Yarmouk University has declined since 2011. Overall, while some new entrants have risen fast recently, traditional stalwarts continue holding top five positions, indicating a mix of emerging and established affiliations among the current top 10 productivity leaders as depicted in **Figure 11**.
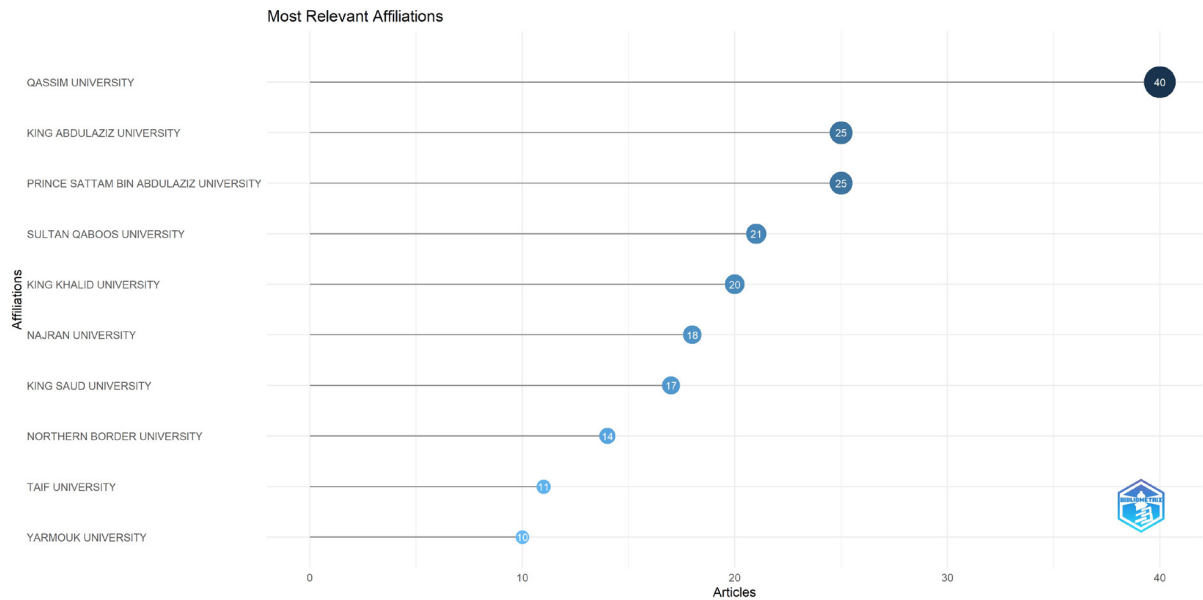
Figure 11. depicts the top 10 institutes' productions.

Affiliations' production

The timeline of research output from leading institutions in English Language Teaching as a Second Language in Arab countries is shown in **Figure 12**. Qassim University has been the most productive affiliation in recent years, with steady publication growth from 34 articles in 2021 to 40 in 2023. King Abdulaziz University and Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University form the next tier, with output between 21–25 articles in 2022–2023.Sultan Qaboos University was highly prolific during 2010–2020, consistently producing 15–20 articles per year. However, their output has declined in the last few years. In contrast, emerging institutions like Najran University and Northern Border University have seen their productivity rise since 2020, though still at modest levels below 15 articles per year. Historically dominant players like King Saud University and Yarmouk University were active contributors from 2010–2020, but have since been overtaken by the rapid emergence of Qassim University.

Analysis of high frequency keyword

The study of keywords in academic literature offers profound insights into the evolving interests and thematic developments within a field. In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) as a Second Language in Arab countries, a detailed analysis of keyword frequencies, envisioned in a hypothetical **Figure 13**, provides a chronological mapping of the shifting research focus across different time periods. The foundational phase of ELT research, as represented by the first quartile in the dataset, prominently features keywords such as "English language teaching," "EFL," and "ESL." These terms, frequently appearing in the early works of scholars like Huwari I.F. (2023), who investigated the demotivation factors in English learning, signify the groundwork being laid in the field. The persistence of these keywords in subsequent periods highlights the continuous relevance of these fundamental instructional approaches in ELT scholarship.

Figure 14 depicts a snapshot of the high frequency EFL keyword cloud in research articles focused on Saudi Arabia and the Arabic context. The trends in dominant author keywords reflect the evolving themes in this domain over time. Foundational keywords like "English language teaching" (52 occurrences), "English as a foreign language" (48 occurrences), "ESL" (40 occurrences) and "ESL students" (39 occurrences) feature prominently, highlighting the early emphasis on EFL teaching methods and learner experiences. Terms like "motivation" (31), "ESL teachers" (24) and "Saudi Arabia" (24) also appear frequently, indicating subsequent attention to student motivation and the role of instructors within Saudi Arabia.
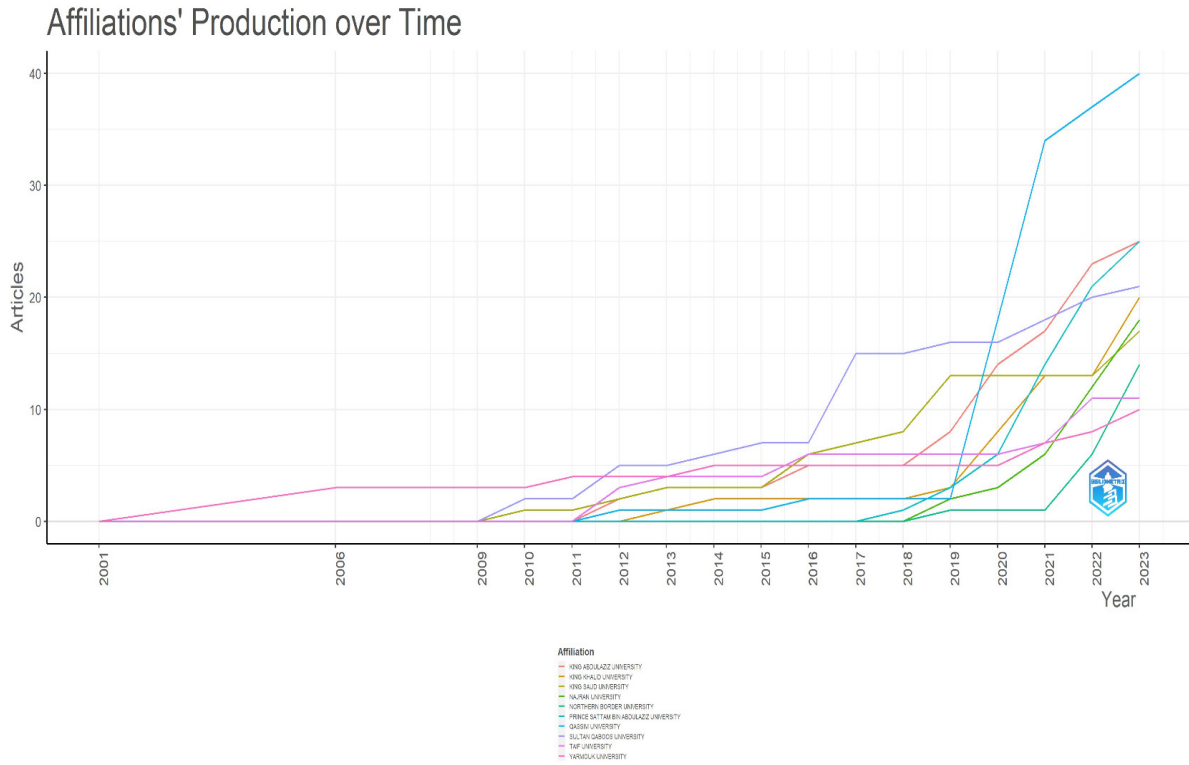
Figure 12. depicts the top 10 institutes' productions.

Figure 13. Represents Word Cloud. In this graph, the size of the 20 keywords is directly proportional to their frequency of appearance.
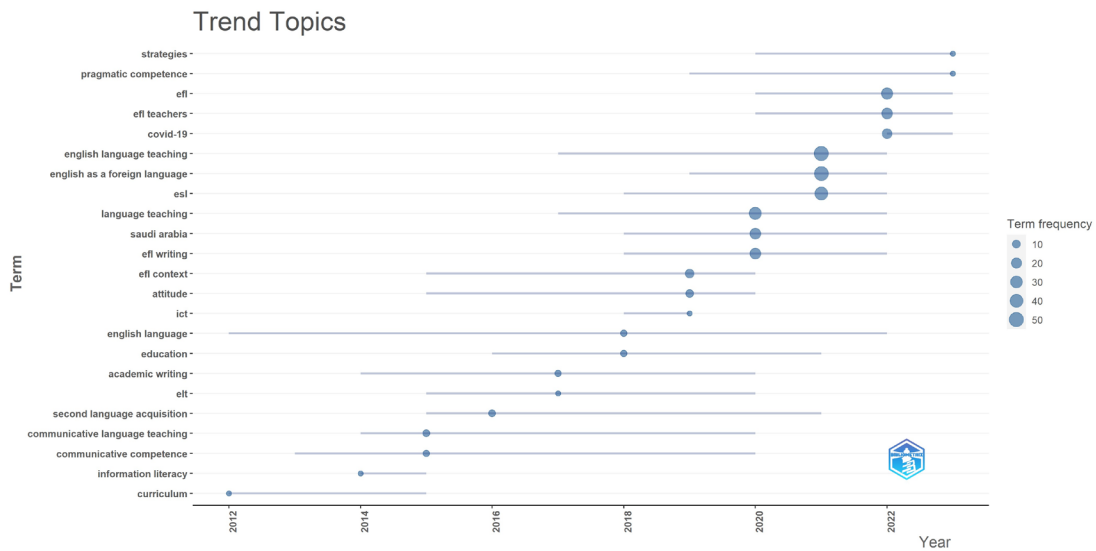

Figure 14. depicts the top 10 Institutes' productions.

More recent issues like "Saudi ESL learners" (26) and "language teaching" (33) have gained prominence, mirroring the research focus shifting to EFL topics specific to Saudi learners rather than just broad teaching practices. Furthermore, emerging themes are discernible from keywords like "ESL" (26), denoting rising interest in contemporary EFL challenges and applications in the Saudi and Arabic context.

Table 2. shows the most occurrence words.

Terms	Frequency
English language teaching	52
English as a foreign language	48
ESL	40
EFL students	39
language teaching	33
motivation	31
EFL	26
saudi EFL learners	25
EFL teachers	24
saudi arabia	24

Advancing into the second and third quartiles, the research emphasis begins to pivot towards the specific context of Saudi Arabia and the roles of educators, evidenced by the growing prominence of keywords like "Saudi Arabia" and "EFL teachers." This shift is exemplified in studies such as that by Alshumaimeri (2019), who explored virtual environments for collaborative learning, indicating a deeper focus on localized, context-specific issues within the Arabic and, particularly, the Saudi sphere.

In the latest quartile, contemporary keywords like "EFL writing" and "COVID-19" have surged to the forefront. This evolution, marked by the work of authors such as Yousif A.S.A. (2020), reflects an increased academic interest in addressing current general EFL challenges, focusing on writing skills in classroom settings, and understanding the impact of the pandemic on language education. Concurrently, there's a noticeable decline in the frequency of keywords such as "communicative language teaching" and "second language acquisition," suggesting a shift in the research community's focus from these once-dominant sub-topics.

A further layer of analysis could be envisioned through a network analysis, as represented in a hypothetical **Figure 2**. This analysis might reveal five conceptual clusters of co-occurring keywords, each representing a distinct thematic focus. The first cluster could include pandemic-related terms like "COVID-19" and "online learning," reflecting recent shifts in research focus, as seen in Al-Husban N. & Akkari (2021) 's exploration of enacted curriculum during the pandemic. The second cluster might encompass core foundational concepts of EFL, while the third could link instructional method keywords, the fourth group learner-experience focused terms, and the fifth connect motivation-related keywords. This last theme, extensively investigated by researchers like Zarrinabadi (2014) and Al-Mwzaiji (2023) examines the influence of teacher behavior on learner willingness to communicate.

The hypothetical network would likely show "EFL" as having the highest betweenness centrality, indicating its role as a central, unifying theme. In contrast, a term like "motivation" might display maximum closeness centrality, suggesting its relevance across various research themes. The PageRank algorithm could reveal "EFL" and "English language teaching" as the most central keywords, reaffirming the ongoing focus on these instructional elements.

A three-field plot, imagined in **Figure 3**, could visually represent the interconnectedness of authors, keywords, and geographic contexts in ELT research. This diagram could highlight the significant contributions from various regions, including the work of notable authors like Alshumaimeri and Yousif, and demonstrate how their research topics intersect with broader geographical contexts.

An envisioned flow diagram in **Figure 13** could further illuminate the thematic progression in ELT research within Arab countries. This diagram would trace the evolution of research themes from foundational topics like "EFL" and "ESL" to more nuanced subjects such as "EFL writing" and "COVID-19." Such a visualization would not only emphasize the thematic shifts but also reveal the expanding scope and complexity of ELT research in the Arab

context. **Figure 15** depicts the high frequency EFL keywords over time based on quartile publication years. Foundational terms like "English language teaching" (52 occurrences; 2021 median), "English as a foreign language" (48 occurrences; 2021 median) and "ESL" (40 occurrences; 2021 median) have persisted prominently, validating sustained focus on core EFL instruction. Keywords like "Saudi Arabia" (24 occurrences; 2020 median) and "EFL teachers" (24 occurrences; 2022 median) have gained attention recently, highlighting rising emphasis on the Saudi context and instructor roles. More contemporary terms like "EFL" (26 occurrences; 2022 median), "EFL writing" (23 occurrences; 2022 median) and "covid-19" (17 occurrences; 2022 median) have emerged, indicating new interest in general EFL issues, writing skills and pandemic impacts. The continued prominence but declining median years for keywords like "communicative language teaching" (7 occurrences; 2015 to 2020 median) and "second language acquisition" (7 occurrences; 2016 to 2021 median) reflects a reduction in these formerly popular topics. In summary, the trends showcase foundational EFL themes persisting while attention has progressed to Saudi-specific concerns, everyday classroom skills like writing, and new challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic.

This comprehensive keyword analysis, enriched by specific author contributions and thematic trends, elucidates the dynamic trajectory of ELT research in Arab countries. While foundational pedagogical concepts continue to be a mainstay, the field has progressively broadened to include specific regional challenges, modern instructional needs, and emergent issues like the pandemic's impact on education. The evolving thematic landscape, as visualized through keyword mapping and network analysis, offers valuable insights into the progressive nature and changing contours of this scholarly domain.

Keyword co-occurrence Network Analysis. **Figures 15** and **16** exhibits the 5 clusters identified in the co-occurrence network. Cluster 1 contains peripheral keywords like "covid-19" and "online learning" reflecting pandemic impacts. Cluster 2 is the largest grouping with core EFL terms like "English language teaching", "English as a foreign language", and "EFL" frequently co-occurring and strong relation as shown in **Figure 16**. Cluster 3 connects keywords "language teaching", "language learning", and "blended learning" focused on instruction methods. Cluster 4 links student-centered terms like "EFL students", "EFL learners", and "Saudi EFL learners". Cluster 5 connects motivation keywords like "attitudes", "attitude", and "motivation". "FL" has the highest betweenness centrality of 198.44 indicating its bridging different clusters. "English language teaching" follows with 72.54 betweenness due to its wide connections. "Motivation" has maximum closeness centrality of 0.011 reflecting closer distances to all nodes. In terms of PageRank, "EFL" is most important with score 0.0598 while "English language teaching" follows at 0.0385. Overall, core terms like "EFL", "English language teaching", and "motivation" interconnect clusters. But opportunities exist to strengthen linkages between disconnected keywords like "gender", "Arabic", and "tesol" to yield more cohesive insights.

Collaboration network

Figure 18 shows the country collaboration map of ELT (English language teaching) literature. There are a total of 38 countries involved in ELT research worldwide. China, the USA, Japan, Canada and Australia were the major collaborators with other countries. The table indicates the top 10 collaborations, with the majority occurring between China and Iran (16), China and Japan (13), China and Canada (12), and China and Australia (11). Most collaborations were single (35) or bi-directional (11), with the remaining top 10 collaborations highlighted in **Figure 17**. China had the most inter-country collaboration compared to other countries, being at the center of international cooperation. China's main cooperation countries were Iran, Japan, Canada, and Australia. This analysis shows the extent of research collaboration on ELT across different countries, with China taking a central role.
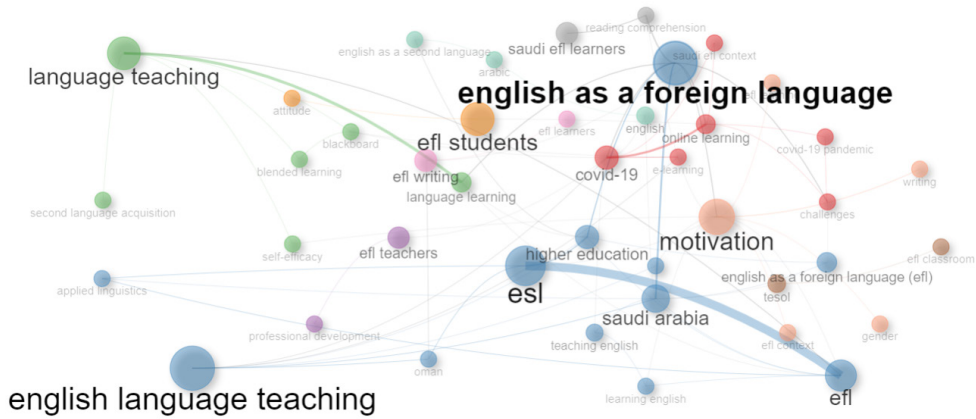
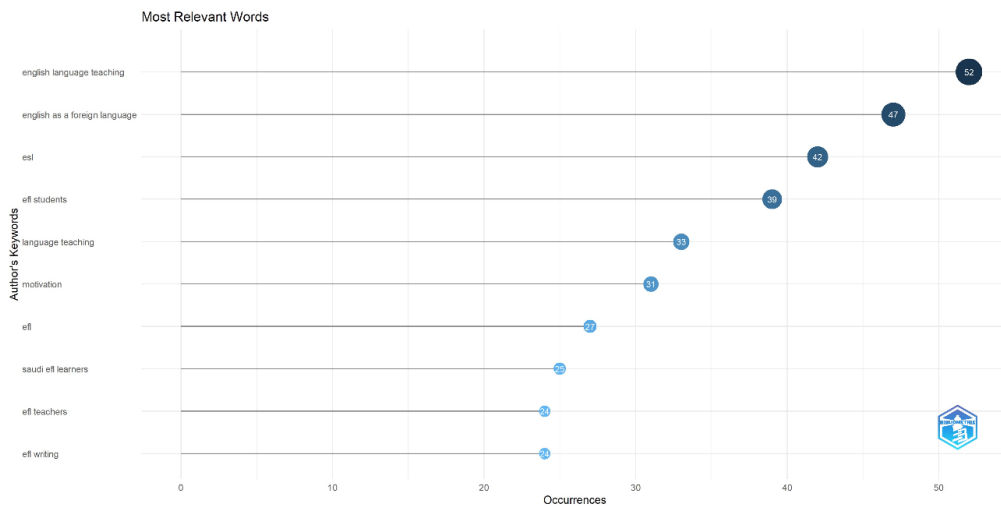**Figure 15.** depicts keyword co-occurrence.

Figure 16. showcases the most used words. Keywords are ordered based on their frequency of appearance; a higher position indicates a higher frequency. The numeral enclosed in the circle denotes the count of the keyword's occurrences.
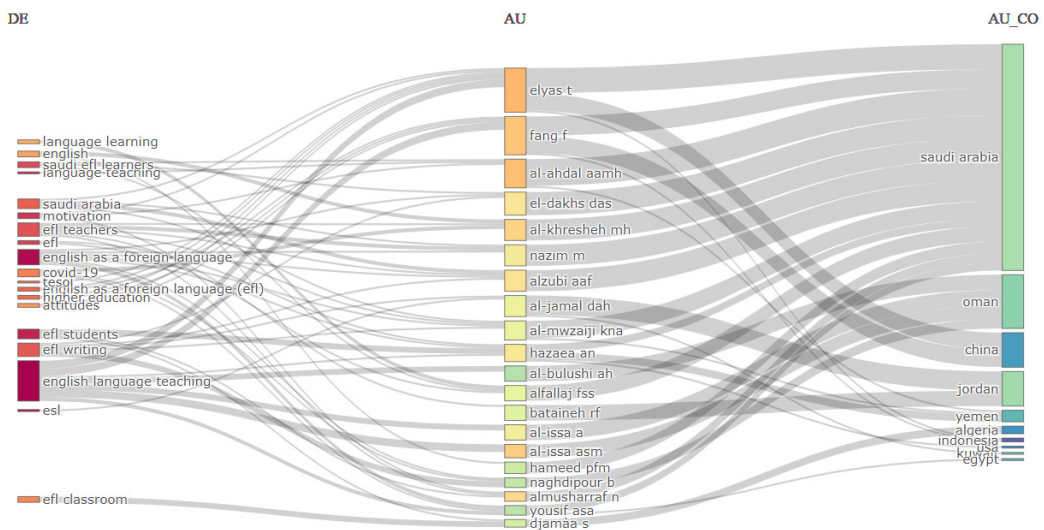

Figure 17. illustrates a three-field plot encompassing countries, keywords, and authors. This diagram reveals the interconnections among these three fields. The lines between them represent their associations, with darker lines indicating stronger connections.
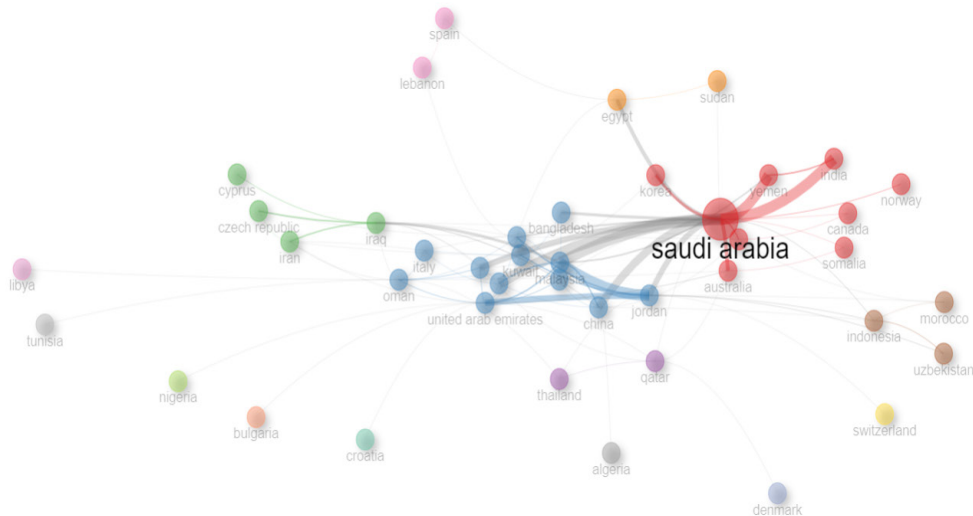
807

Figure 18. This is a figure. Schemes follow the same formatting.

4. Discussion

This comprehensive bibliometric analysis provides valuable insights into the current state and evolution of English language teaching (ELT) research productivity and focus in Arab countries over the 2000–2024 period. Mapping publication volumes, citation impact, collaborations, influential literature, conceptual themes, and knowledge structure offers strong evidence.to guide policies and strategic decisions to advance ELT scholarship in the region. The analysis reveals a substantial 24% average annual growth in ELT publications from Arab countries, accelerating from just 1 article in 2001 to over 100 articles per year by 2023. This rising output signifies growing research activity and interest in ELT among Arab scholars and institutions. However, as publication volumes surged, the average citation rate per article declined from 16 to 0.55, suggesting a diffusion pattern where citations distribute across more articles rather than concentrating on a select, highly cited subset. Overall citation impact remains below global benchmarks, with 18.4% uncited papers and a relative citation ratio of 0.9 versus world baseline. This highlights scope to enhance the visibility and influence of Arab ELT research through strategies like open access publishing, international collaboration, and participating in global conferences.

Regarding contributing countries, the study re-vealed that Saudi Arabia dominates in productivity, accounting for over 70% of total output. However, Saudi publications achieve just 4 citations per paper on average, while smaller producers like Lebanon, Yemen and Morocco attain 14–46 citations per article through influential seminal works. Extensive single country publications within Saudi Arabia (459 articles) and Jordan (130 articles) coupled with limited international collaborations imply a concentrated perspective. Country collaboration ratios are just 0.092 for Saudi Arabia and 0.357 for UAE, signaling untapped potential for cross-country linkages to diversify the knowledge base. Where international collaboration occurred, it frequently involved Saudi Arabia and rising partner China.Analysis of prolific authors, emerging institutions, and keyword trends provides insights into research focus evolution. Foundational ELT terms like "motivation" persisted since the 2000s, while "Saudi EFL learners", "language teaching", and "EFL writing" gained attention in the 2010s, reflecting rising contextualization. Recently "EFL", "efl teachers", and "covid-19" grew as themes, indicating contemporary concerns over instructors and pandemic impacts. Topic clustering differentiated enduring core ELT acquisition themes from emergent Saudi-specific, learner-centered topics. Citation analysis identified potential seminal works on communication approaches, teacher

beliefs, and technology integration based on their surging citation momentum despite recency. Several research gaps limit the depth, diversity and influence of Arab ELT scholarship. Insufficient links between peripheral topics like gender, L1 use, and teacher identity inhibit interdisciplinary insights. Student-centered and localized ELT innovations remain understudied compared to prevailing instructional methods focus. Key issues like literacy development, ICT integration, assessment reform, and teacher support lack research evidence to inform policies. And social, cultural and contextual dimensions need better integration with pedagogical studies through mixed methods approaches. Based on these findings, promising directions for strategic ELT research growth include:

-Increasing context-specific, culturally responsive ELT innovations tailored for Arab learners

-Broadening cross-country collaboration, authorship and institutional participation

-Adopting mixed-methods designs integrating sociocultural factors

-Generating applied policy evidence on ICT adoption, literacy, assessment, and teacher development

-Enhancing international visibility of Arab ELT research through open access, conferences, and global partnerships

Targeting these areas through coordinated efforts and funding allocation can enable Arab scholars to spearhead advancements in ELT research and practice. This comprehensive bibliometric analysis provides robust, data-driven insights to inform such strategic knowledge growth vital for quality English education across the Arab region.

5. Limitations

While this study followed a rigorous methodology, there are some inherent limitations to acknowledge. First, restricting the search to English language publications excludes potentially relevant literature published in Arabic or other languages. Given the focus on Arab countries, this may have caused overlook of pertinent regional studies. Second, reliance on a single database (Scopus) risks missing relevant articles indexed elsewhere. However, Scopus was chosen for its extensive interdisciplinary coverage. Third, bibliometric analysis can identify research patterns and trends in aggregate but cannot assess the methodological quality or scientific rigor of individual studies. Fourth, authorship and institutional information may be ambiguous in some records, limiting the accuracy of geographic and affiliation-based metrics. Finally, common limitations of bibliometrics apply, including skew towards more recent or English literature. Citation analysis assumes citations reflect impact, which is not always the case. These limitations reflect typical constraints and trade-offs involved in large-scale bibliometric reviews. While unavoidable, they were mitigated through the comprehensive search, systematic screening, and use of two analysis programs to cross-validate results. Overall, this methodology enabled robust mapping of overarching ELT research trends in Arab countries.

6. Conclusions

This bibliometric analysis offers the first comprehensive mapping of ELT research trends, productivity, impact, collaborations, influential literature, thematic evolution, and knowledge structure in Arab countries over the past two decades. Findings reveal substantial publication growth but below-average citation impact, concentrated research output from Saudi Arabia and Jordan with minimal international linkages, shifting attention beyond foundational ELT topics towards localized concerns and contemporary skills needs, and gaps in literacy instruction, technology integration, assessment reform, teacher support, and incorporating sociocultural dimensions. Strategic imperatives include increasing context-specific, culturally responsive pedagogical innovations tailored for Arab learners, broadening authorship diversity and cross-country research partnerships, adopting mixed-methods approaches, generating policy-relevant evidence on pressing issues, and enhancing the global visibility of Arab ELT scholarship. Targeting these areas through coordinated efforts and resource allocation will be vital for advancing high-quality,

impactful ELT research to inform praxis and boost English proficiency outcomes across the Arab region. This benchmarking study provides an empirical foundation guiding policies and investments to catalyze such strategic growth.

Author Contributions

This paper was conceptualized, researched, and written entirely by Abbas H. Al-Shammari. All aspects of the study, including the formulation of the research question, the development of the methodology, the data collection and analysis, and the manuscript preparation, were undertaken by the author alone.

Conflict of Interest

The Author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

Data Availability Statement

The data that supports the findings of this study are available on request.

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