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English Language Learning in Primary Schools: A Bibliometric Review of Trends, Collaboration, and Future Research Directions

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to map the research landscape of English language learning in primary schools through a bibliometric analysis. Data were collected from scientific publications spanning 2000 to 2024 and analyzed using VOSviewer. The findings reveal a marked increase in publications, particularly from 2020 onward, peaking in 2022. Language, Culture and Curriculum emerged as one of the most influential journals, while Khon Kaen University was identified as the most prolific contributing institution. Among individual contributors, Halbach A was the most productive author, whereas Al-Issa AS received the highest number of global citations, indicating substantial scholarly influence. Cluster analysis revealed seven major thematic areas, encompassing student and teacher roles, curriculum development, and teacher professionalism. Overlay visualization further highlighted emerging research themes, such as multimodality, gamification, and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), pointing to future directions in the field. These findings carry significant implications for curriculum design, teacher education, and the development of innovative instructional strategies. Notwithstanding its contributions, this study is limited by the scope of data and analytical methods employed. Future research is recommended to adopt mixed-methods approaches and incorporate multilingual data to achieve a more comprehensive mapping.

Keyword:
Bibliometrics; basic English; education; English language learning; primary education

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INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English in primary schools has become a growing focus within educational systems across various countries. English is widely regarded as a vital international language that equips students from an early age to engage effectively in an increasingly globalized world (Mayasari, 2024). In Indonesia, although English is not officially designated as a compulsory subject in primary education, it has been extensively taught as part of the local content curriculum (Jihad et al., 2024; Kurniati et al., 2021). In contrast, several East Asian countries, including Japan, South Korea, and China, have introduced English as a mandatory subject at the primary level (Rao & Yu, 2019; Sun & Rong, 2021). These developments reflect a global trend toward the early introduction of English language education. This shift in policy is often driven by factors such as economic globalization, the belief in a "critical period" for language acquisition, and aspirations to enhance national competitiveness (Lin, 2018; Rao & Yu, 2019).

In response to the increasing demand for English instruction at the primary level, a wide range of teaching approaches and methods has been adopted. These include traditional approaches, such as the Grammar-Translation Method and Audio-Lingual Method, as well as more contemporary, interactive strategies like communicative language teaching, task-based learning, and content and language integrated learning (Abid, 2019; Chen, 2024). Additionally, the integration of digital

technology into language education has gained momentum, with *digital game-based learning* showing promising results in enhancing learner motivation and problem-solving skills (Ongoro & Fanjiang, 2023). Recent research has also emphasized the importance of creating learner-centered environments that accommodate individual differences, thereby supporting more effective language acquisition (Djavadullaevna, 2024).

Despite the growing body of literature on English language learning in primary schools, studies that offer a comprehensive overview of research trends, topical focus, collaborative networks, and the field's developmental trajectory remain scarce. However, such a synthesis is crucial for understanding how the field has evolved over time and for identifying existing research gaps that could inform future scholarly inquiry. To address this need, a bibliometric analysis offers a systematic approach to examining scholarly publications related to this topic. Through bibliometric methods, researchers can assess publication trends, uncover dominant themes, and propose well-informed directions for future research.

Various studies have investigated approaches and strategies for English language learning in primary schools. Fentari (2025), through a systematic literature review, highlights how the integration of digital technology has transformed teacher-student interactions by expanding access to learning resources and creating more engaging and interactive experiences. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and gaps in digital literacy remain substantial barriers. Similarly, Ongoro and Fanjiang (2024) emphasize the effectiveness of digital game-based learning (DGBL) in enhancing student motivation and creativity, though they acknowledge difficulties in the design and implementation of educational technologies. From a socio-cultural perspective, Al-Jarf (2022) explores variations in English learning quality across different types of primary schools in Saudi Arabia, drawing on parental perceptions. Meanwhile, Pérez (2023) underscores the role of task-based learning in developing critical thinking skills, emphasizing the need to enrich the quality of foreign language education from an early age. Collectively, these studies suggest that English learning in primary schools has transitioned from traditional methods toward more technology-integrated, communicative, and student-centered approaches.

Despite the growing number of thematic studies examining instructional methods, technological applications, and stakeholder perspectives, these works have not yet provided a holistic overview of the scientific development in this field. While studies such as those by Fentari (2025), Pérez (2023), Al-Jarf (2022) and Ongoro and Fanjiang (2024) offer valuable insights, they remain limited in scope, focusing primarily on specific themes without addressing broader questions related to publication trends, collaborative networks, keyword patterns, and key contributors. A comprehensive bibliometric mapping of the literature is thus essential to establish a strategic foundation for future research, identify underexplored areas, and foster stronger academic collaboration across institutions and countries. This kind of analysis can complement existing thematic research by offering a quantitative and visual perspective on the evolution of scholarly discourse.

This study makes a distinct contribution by employing a bibliometric approach to comprehensively map and analyze scientific publications related to English language learning in primary schools. Unlike thematic reviews that delve into specific instructional content or pedagogical methods, this study provides a macro-level overview of the research landscape. It examines publication trends, recurring keywords, and collaboration patterns among researchers and institutions and identifies influential authors and journals. Such an approach offers a strategic vantage point to understand how the discourse in this domain has evolved. Specifically, this study aims to (1) uncover publication trends and leading contributors, (2) identify dominant themes in existing research, and (3) explore potential future research directions. These objectives are addressed through the following research questions:

1. What are the trends in scientific publications related to English language learning in primary schools, and who are the most prolific authors, journals, and institutions?
2. What are the dominant themes or key topics in the existing literature on English learning at the primary level?
3. What future research opportunities can be identified based on the bibliometric analysis of this field?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a bibliometric approach to investigate publication trends and patterns, identify dominant research themes, and uncover potential future directions in the field of English language learning at the primary school level. The bibliometric method was selected for its capacity to systematically and objectively analyze large volumes of scientific literature (Donthu et al., 2021). Scopus was chosen as the primary database due to its credibility, extensive coverage of peer-reviewed publications, and user-friendly access (Nasrum et al., 2025; Salido et al., 2024).

Data Collection

Data collection began with a structured search of the Scopus database using the following query: (“elementary education” OR “primary education” OR “basic education”) AND (“English language learning” OR “English language teaching” OR “English language instructional”). This combination of keywords was carefully formulated to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature. As of the search date, June 6, 2025, a total of 98 documents were retrieved. No inclusion or exclusion criteria were applied during the initial screening phase; all retrieved documents were included and subsequently exported in CSV format for analysis.

Data Analysis

Three analytical tools were employed in this study: OpenRefine, R-Biblioshiny, and VOSviewer. OpenRefine was first used to clean and standardize the bibliographic data (Ham, 2013), 2013). The refined dataset was then analyzed using R-Biblioshiny to examine publication trends and identify influential authors, prominent journal sources, and institutional affiliations contributing to the field. VOSviewer was subsequently utilized to conduct a co-occurrence analysis of keywords, enabling the identification of major research themes and emerging topics warranting further investigation. The findings from the bibliometric analysis were interpreted in light of existing literature to ensure contextual relevance and to enhance the depth of discussion.

RESULTS

Trends in Scientific Publications Related to English Language Learning in Primary Schools

The analysis of publication trends reveals a fluctuating yet overall upward movement in the number of publications on English language learning in primary schools, as illustrated in Figure 1. Between 2013 and 2023, the publication counts displayed variability but showed a general increasing trend, with a significant surge beginning in 2020 and peaking in 2022. However, a decline occurred in 2023 and continued into 2024. Although the number of publications appears lower in 2025, this cannot yet be interpreted as a downward trend, as the publication year is still in progress.

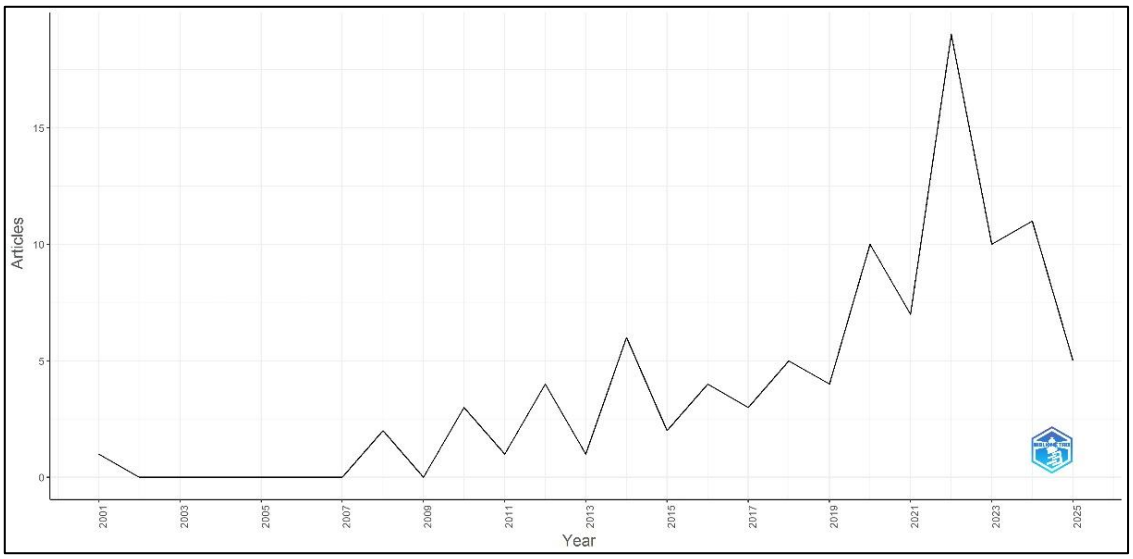


Figure 1. Publication Trends on English Language Learning in Primary Schools in the Scopus Database

Further analysis of the top 10 publication sources shows that research on English language learning at the primary level is distributed across a variety of reputable journals. As presented in Figure 2, the Journal of Language, Culture and Curriculum ranks first, contributing three articles. Nine other journals each contributed two publications, including Calidoscopio, Education Sciences, English Teaching and Learning, European Journal of Teacher Education, Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, International Journal of Educational Development, International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network, and Multilingual Education. The diversity of these journals indicates the interdisciplinary nature of the topic, encompassing areas such as language teaching, teacher education, international educational development, and multilingual approaches.

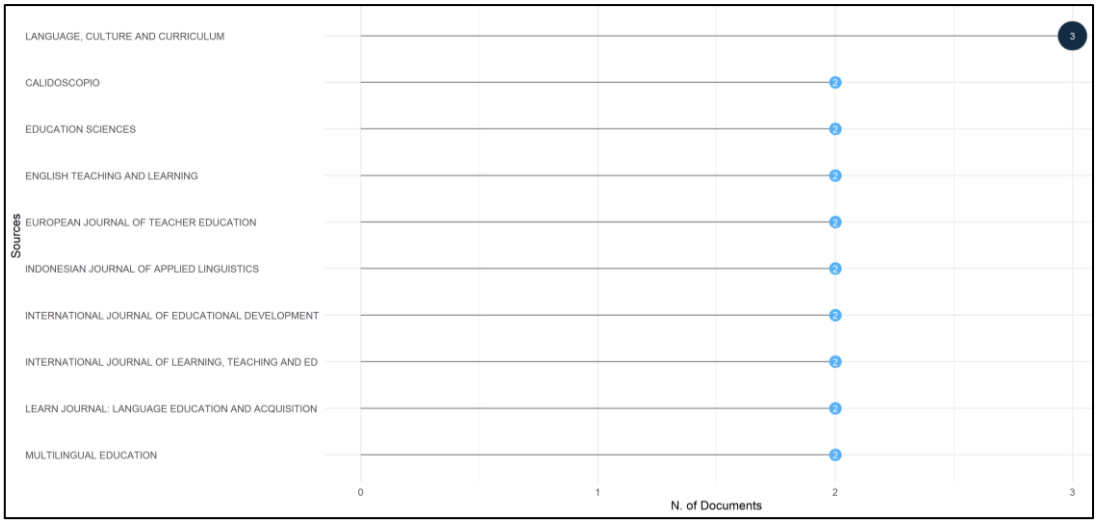


Figure 2. Top 10 Relevant Journal Sources on the Theme of English Learning in Primary School

An analysis of institutional affiliations reveals that Khon Kaen University holds the highest number of publications, with seven contributions (Figure 3). Three other institutions—Universidad de Alcalá, Universidad de Granada, and Universidad Nacional Jorge Basadre Grohmann—each contributed four publications. Six additional institutions were each responsible for three publications: Chulalongkorn University Language Institute, Karaganda State University, Petroleum–Gas University of Ploiești, Ramkhamhaeng University, Sultan Qaboos University, and University of Macau. This distribution underscores the global engagement in this field, with significant contributions from institutions across Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

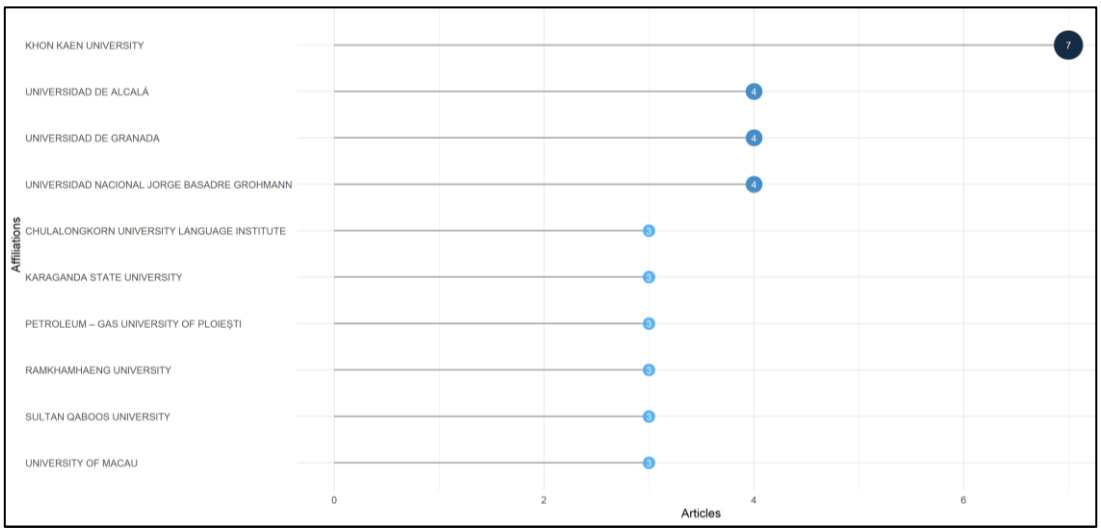


Figure 3. Top 10 Institutional Affiliations in Publications on English Language Learning in Primary Schools

The analysis of the most prolific authors (Figure 4) identifies Halbach as the leading contributor, with three publications on English language learning in primary schools. Four additional authors—Kirkgöz, Poonpon, Sameephet, and Satthamnuwong—each authored two publications. Six other scholars—A-Rahman, Abildina, Aenlle, Al-Bulushi, and Al-Issa—were each associated with a single publication in this field. These findings highlight the concentration of scholarly contributions among a relatively small number of active researchers.

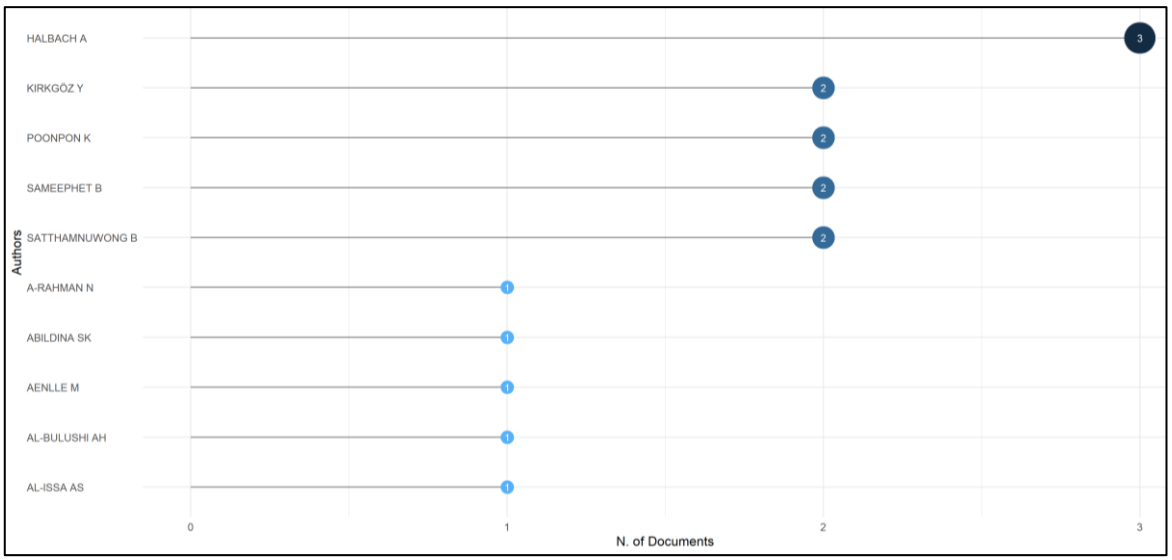


Figure 4. Top 10 Most Productive Authors in Publications on English Language Learning in Primary Schools

The most cited publications globally are presented in Figure 5. The article by Al-Issa AS (2012), published in Educational Research for Policy and Practice, is the most frequently cited, with 74 citations. This is followed by Kirkgöz (2008) in Teaching and Teacher Education with 68 citations. Other highly cited works include Muñoz (2014) with 46 citations, Barahona (2016) with 44, Hardman (2014) with 38, and Al-Issa ASM (2020) with 35 citations. Additional notable contributions include Yurdugul (2017) with 34 citations, Barrot (2019) with 33, Sukamoto (2012) with 30, and Waters (2008) with 28 citations. These results indicate a set of authors whose work has had a substantial global impact in shaping the discourse on English language education at the primary level.

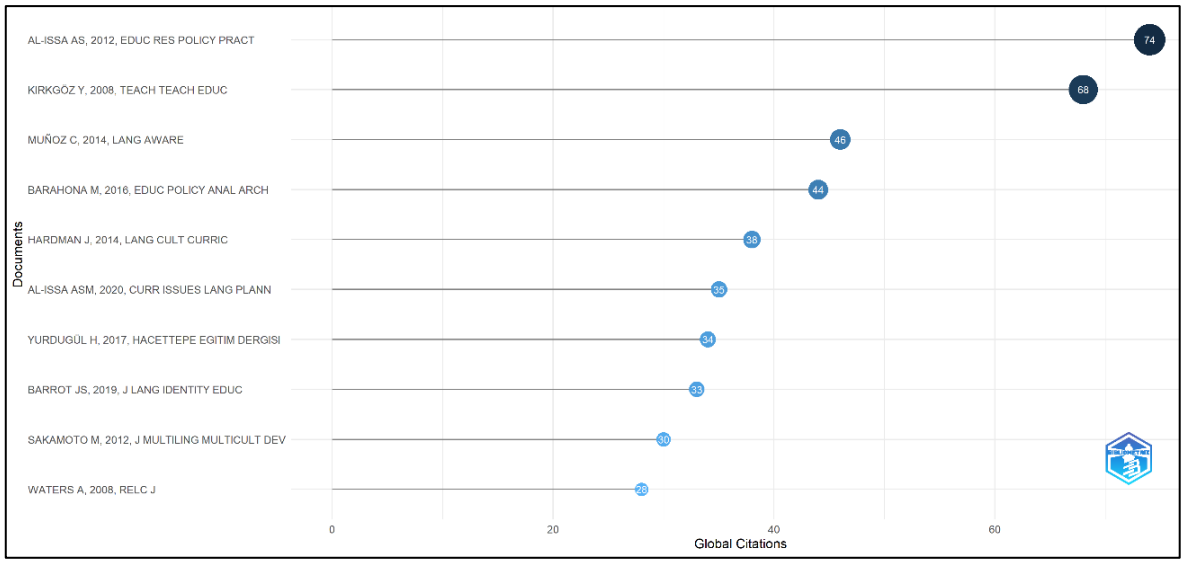


Figure 5. Top 10 Most Influential Authors in Publications on English Language Learning in Primary Schools

Dominant Themes in English Learning Research in Primary Schools

The results of the analysis presented in Figure 6 show that the first cluster consists of six keywords centered on the dimensions of learning and educational actors, namely basic education, English languages, language learning, learning, student, and teacher. The second cluster contains five items that are closely related to innovation in learning practices, namely curriculum, e-learning, elementary education, teaching, and teaching model, indicating attention to curricular approaches and digitization of learning. Furthermore, the third cluster consists of five keywords that emphasize aspects of language teaching methods and approaches, namely curriculum reform, English language learning, English language teaching, multimodality, and primary education. Furthermore, the fourth cluster includes the dimensions of development and learning context, consisting of educational development, gamification, language, primary school, and young learners, which reflects interest in the development of educational systems and learning based on children's experiences.

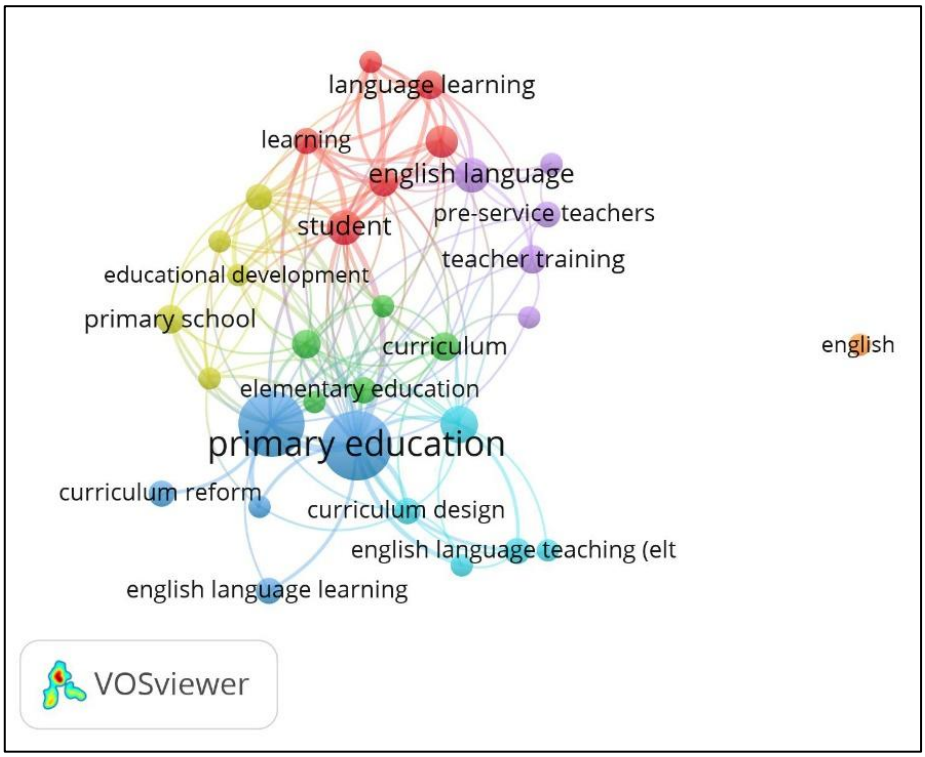


Figure 6. Keyword Linkage in Network Visualization

The fifth cluster leads to strengthening the teaching profession and training, including English language, implementation, pre-service teachers, teacher education, and teacher training. Meanwhile, the sixth cluster contains five keywords that emphasize the curricular framework and global language context, namely content and language integrated learning, curriculum design, English as a foreign language, English language teaching (elt), and world English, hinting at a global orientation in the development of teaching materials. Finally, the seventh cluster consists of only one keyword, namely English, which appears as a common keyword but stands alone because the context is less specific in other networks.

Future Research Opportunities in the Study of English Language Learning in Primary Schools

Overlay visualization based on keyword analysis shows a shift in research interest towards more up-to-date themes in English learning in primary schools. The results of this analysis are presented in Figure 7. The color on the network indicates the time of the keyword's appearance, where greenish to yellowish colors mark the latest topics that have begun to gain attention in the last two years (2023–2024). Keywords such as learning, teaching model, multimodality, gamification, content and language integrated learning (CLIL), and English language teaching (elt) stand out as terms that have emerged relatively recently and are starting to connect with major nodes such as primary education, curriculum, and teacher training.

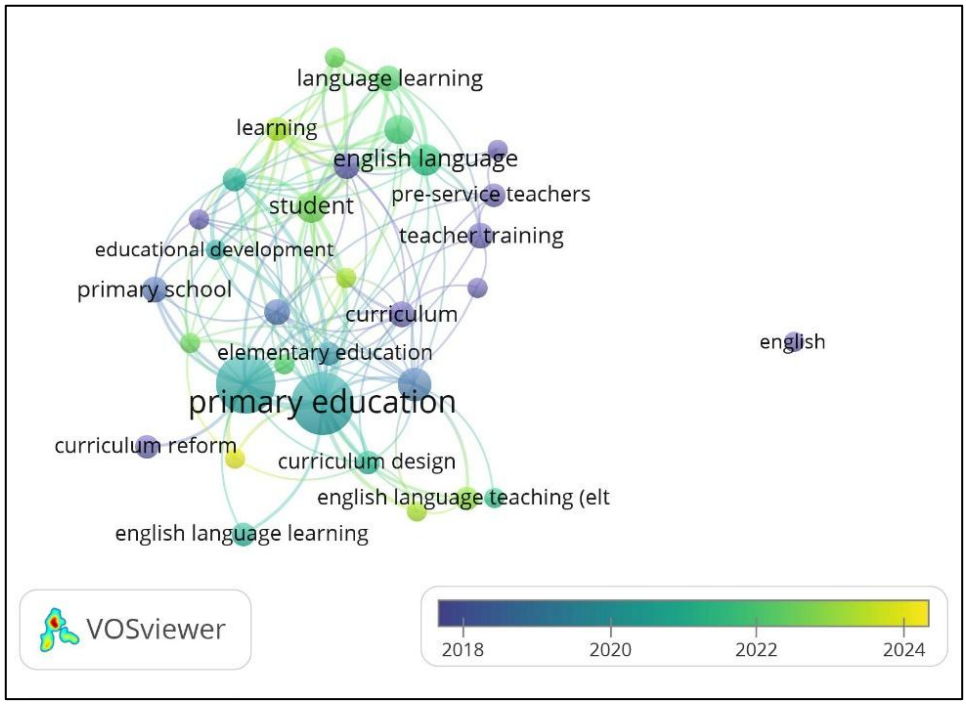


Figure 7. Keyword Linkage in Overlay Visualization

DISCUSSION

Trends in Scientific Publications Related to English Language Learning in Primary Schools

The increase in publications beginning in 2020 aligns with heightened attention to distance education and the integration of digital technology in teaching following the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Durrani & Ozawa, 2024). This momentum has not only spurred innovation-focused research on English language instruction at the primary level, but it has also encouraged the exploration of hybrid and online learning strategies tailored to young learners (Tang, 2024). This trend suggests a shift in pedagogical priorities and instructional design for early language education in response to changing educational environments. Moreover, the growing international awareness of the importance of early English proficiency, coupled with supportive educational policies in several countries, has served as a significant catalyst for research in this area. Meanwhile, a slight decline in publication output observed in 2023 may reflect a post-pandemic stabilization of research agendas or a redirection of scholarly attention toward evaluating long-term, post-crisis learning strategies and outcomes. Taken together, these trends affirm that English language learning in primary schools remains a dynamic and increasingly relevant area of global academic inquiry.

The analysis of publication sources indicates that the topic of English learning in primary education extends beyond specialized language education journals and includes multidisciplinary platforms such as those focusing on multicultural and international education. This broad coverage suggests that the field attracts interest from various disciplinary perspectives, enabling a richer dialogue across research traditions and pedagogical contexts. The prominence of Language, Culture and Curriculum as a leading journal implies sustained scholarly interest in integrating cultural dimensions into English language instruction at the primary level—an approach consistent with the broader agenda of educational globalization. Furthermore, the inclusion of journals outside the domain of applied linguistics indicates the increasing interconnection between language learning, cultural identity, and educational policy.

The wide distribution of publications across multiple international journals highlights the cross-border relevance of this research area, which engages scholars from various academic domains, including basic education, education policy, curriculum development, and applied linguistics. This widespread dissemination reflects the inherently interdisciplinary nature of the field, where research often intersects with sociology, psychology, and international development. The absence of a single

overwhelmingly dominant journal—apart from Language, Culture and Curriculum—further indicates the field's openness to diverse methodological frameworks and theoretical orientations, allowing scholars to explore innovative approaches.

Institutional affiliation analysis reveals a fairly balanced global participation, with Khon Kaen University emerging as a leading contributor from Southeast Asia. This finding suggests a concentrated national focus on enhancing foreign language competencies at the foundational education level, driven by regional education reforms and internationalization strategies. Notably, institutions from Spain and Peru also rank among the top contributors, reflecting the increasing interest of non-English-speaking countries in advancing English language education in response to global educational demands. Further investigation into national language policies in these countries could clarify the institutional motivations behind this output. While contributions from these institutions are notable, the absence of a dominant institutional presence points to opportunities for broader international collaboration and the entry of emerging institutions into the field. This balanced distribution underscores the multidisciplinary and cross-cultural dimensions of English language learning research, which benefits from varied regional perspectives and context-specific educational challenges.

Halbach's position as the most prolific author signals a sustained scholarly engagement and a focused specialization in English language learning at the primary level. Her contributions appear to form a coherent body of work that addresses both theoretical and practical dimensions of early language education, particularly within European educational settings. The contributions of regional scholars such as Poonpon and Satthamnuwong further reflect the growing academic activity in Southeast Asia, emphasizing localized pedagogical practices and national policy frameworks. The relatively even distribution of authorship also suggests that the field remains accessible to new researchers, offering opportunities for fresh contributions and expanded collaboration across borders and institutions, thereby enriching the field with new insights and innovations.

The citation analysis highlights the global influence of certain key studies. Articles by Al-Issa (2012) and Kirkgöz (2008), for instance, are the most frequently cited, demonstrating their significant impact on discussions related to language policy, teacher education, and the implementation of English language instruction in non-native contexts. These works have laid foundational insights into the sociopolitical dimensions of early English education, particularly in regions undergoing curricular reform. The inclusion of articles published in well-regarded international journals illustrates the field's conceptual breadth, encompassing not only pedagogical concerns but also inquiries into identity, policy frameworks, and linguistic awareness.

The relatively even distribution of citations across the top-ranked documents suggests the absence of a singular dominant narrative or theoretical orientation, reflecting instead a vibrant and multifaceted academic conversation. This diversity reinforces the importance of interdisciplinary engagement and the integration of insights from various fields, such as educational psychology, curriculum studies, and global education policy, to enrich research and practice in English language learning at the primary school level. Such variation also points to the need for continued synthesis efforts, including meta-analyses and theoretical reviews, to consolidate knowledge and inform evidence-based policy and pedagogy.

Dominant Themes in English Language Learning Research in Primary Schools

The results of thematic mapping reveal that research on English language learning in primary schools encompasses a broad spectrum of critical dimensions. These themes, distributed across seven major clusters, represent interconnected yet distinct areas of inquiry that reflect the evolving priorities in early English language education. By examining these thematic groupings, it becomes evident that scholarly attention spans both micro-level classroom practices and macro-level curricular and policy considerations, underscoring the field's theoretical and practical complexity. A comprehensive understanding of each cluster's scope is necessary to contextualize their interrelations and distinct contributions.

The dominant theme in Cluster 1 centers on the roles of educational actors—namely students and teachers—and the overall language learning process within the framework of basic education. This cluster reflects foundational aspects of classroom dynamics, including learner engagement, teacher agency, and interactional practices. It underscores the notion that English is not merely treated as a linguistic skill but as an integral component of early educational development, shaped by the socio-

emotional and cognitive needs of young learners. Simanjuntak (2024) and Musinova (2025) stated that introducing English in early childhood education contributes not only to language acquisition but also to the development of children's cognitive, social, and emotional capacities. Previous studies have also highlighted the significance of active student engagement and the role of adaptive, responsive teaching in shaping effective language learning environments. For instance, teachers are encouraged to utilize English children's songs to enhance learners' motivation and reinforce language skills (Assalamah, 2024) and to implement strategic questioning techniques to stimulate student interaction and deepen comprehension (Nurishlah et al., 2024). The teacher-student relationship has also been found essential in establishing synchrony within the learning process (Yamamoto, 2020).

Clusters 2 and 3 focus on the development of innovative curricula and instructional models, but they reflect two distinct directions in the application of innovation. Cluster 2 primarily emphasizes the adoption and integration of technology-driven strategies, including e-learning platforms, digital games, and interactive software tailored for young learners. This thematic area reflects global efforts to modernize English language instruction through the utilization of information and communication technologies, especially in response to pandemic-induced shifts to remote education. Research in this cluster often evaluates the effectiveness of technology in improving vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation accuracy, and learner autonomy. As research reveals, digital tools, including virtual and augmented reality, mobile apps, and AI-based platforms, have improved English language learners' vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation accuracy, and autonomy (Amir & Rustam, 2025; Tang, 2024).

In contrast, Cluster 3 places greater emphasis on instructional design and multimodal pedagogies, such as storytelling, visual literacy, and cross-disciplinary integration. Rather than focusing solely on digital implementation, this cluster explores how multiple modes—textual, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic—can be used to support differentiated learning. This approach is particularly relevant for accommodating diverse learner profiles in primary classrooms and aligns with inclusive education principles. While both clusters advocate innovation, the distinction lies in Cluster 2's focus on technological platforms versus Cluster 3's emphasis on pedagogical format and content delivery. This differentiation is vital for educators and curriculum developers seeking to balance technological advancement with pedagogical soundness. An analytical comparison of studies across these clusters could illuminate best practices in designing multimodal curricula for early English instruction.

Clusters 4 and 5 emphasize both learner development and teacher preparedness, forming a dual focus on internal classroom capabilities. Cluster 4 centers on strategies that support learner motivation and engagement, particularly through gamification, storytelling, and contextually relevant content that aligns with the cognitive and emotional characteristics of young learners. These studies often explore how playful and meaningful activities influence vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and communicative confidence. At the same time, Cluster 5 is concerned with the professional development of teachers, encompassing both pre-service training and in-service support. This cluster includes studies that examine the effectiveness of workshops, mentoring systems, and reflective practices in improving teachers' confidence and competence in teaching English at the primary level. Teacher quality has consistently been identified as a crucial factor in determining the success of English instruction, especially considering the distinct pedagogical needs of young learners (Gonçalves, 2019). The intersection of these clusters' points to the need for a holistic approach where student-centered strategies are supported by well-trained, reflective, and pedagogically flexible teachers.

Clusters 6 and 7 introduce a global and policy-oriented perspective to the discourse on English language learning. Topics such as World English, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and English as a Foreign Language highlight a growing awareness of English as a medium of international communication and the importance of a curriculum that balances local relevance with global competencies. These studies emphasize the role of English as a global language and advocate for instruction that not only develops linguistic competence but also fosters intercultural awareness and global readiness. CLIL, in particular, has gained prominence for its dual focus on content mastery and language proficiency, offering pedagogical models that bridge subject learning with language development (Le & Nguyen, 2022; Shykun, 2023).

Collectively, these clusters illustrate the breadth and depth of contemporary research on English language learning in primary schools. The field exhibits a balance between theoretical exploration and practical implementation while also reflecting ongoing adaptation to technological, pedagogical, and socio-political changes. This thematic diversity demonstrates the dynamic and evolving nature of the

field, wherein multiple perspectives converge to address the complexities of early language education. By highlighting both macro-level educational frameworks and micro-level classroom practices, the current body of research affirms the integral role of English language learning within the broader landscape of primary education.

Future Research Opportunities in English Language Learning in Primary Schools

The overlay visualization reveals a growing interest in several emerging themes within the domain of English language learning at the primary level. Keywords such as multimodality, teaching model, and learning have surfaced more prominently in recent years, indicating a shift toward the development of instructional approaches that are more attuned to the needs and characteristics of 21st-century learners. A multimodal approach, for example, enables educators to integrate various forms of representation—including text, imagery, audio, and video—to enhance learners' comprehension and engagement (Sutrisno et al., 2023). Such strategies are increasingly seen as effective in bridging individual learning style differences and in promoting inclusive classroom environments that accommodate diverse learner profiles (Payaprom & Payaprom, 2020). However, there is a lack of empirical studies evaluating the longitudinal effects of multimodal learning on early language retention and communicative competence, which warrants further investigation.

Additionally, the appearance of keywords like gamification and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) points to promising intersections between entertainment, academic content, and language instruction. Gamification, which incorporates game mechanics into educational contexts, has been associated with increased learner motivation and active participation through the use of point systems, challenges, and interactive storytelling (Qudsi, 2024; Sinaga, 2024). Despite these promising outcomes, studies focusing on the specific application of gamified learning environments for younger learners in different cultural contexts remain limited. Meanwhile, CLIL presents a dual-focused pedagogical model that concurrently supports language development and content understanding, often in subjects such as science, mathematics, or social studies. Research that investigates how CLIL can be adapted for early childhood education, particularly in multilingual or resource-constrained settings, is needed to ensure its feasibility and scalability. Future studies could explore the design and implementation of instructional models that successfully integrate these two strategies, focusing on how they affect cognitive load, linguistic progression, and learner autonomy in primary education settings. Experimental and quasi-experimental research designs would be especially valuable for measuring their pedagogical efficacy across diverse learner populations.

The emergence of keywords such as English Language Teaching (ELT) and curriculum design further suggests a growing emphasis on the contextualization and localization of instructional materials and methods. This trend reflects an increasing awareness that a one-size-fits-all approach to English language instruction may not adequately address the varied linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic realities faced by learners across different countries and regions. As the demand for early English literacy continues to rise, there is a pressing need for research that examines the development of curricula that are both globally informed and locally grounded (Shiroza, 2022). This includes evaluating the alignment between curricular goals and classroom implementation, the integration of culturally relevant materials, and the responsiveness of curricula to learners' first-language influences and learning environments. Such research can inform evidence-based curriculum reform that respects local educational priorities while preparing learners for global communication demands.

Furthermore, studies that address the digital transformation of English instruction—particularly in light of recent global shifts toward blended and remote learning—remain essential. Keywords such as digital learning, ICT integration, and online resources have begun to appear more frequently, indicating a growing interest in leveraging technology to improve language acquisition at the primary level. However, significant disparities in technological access and digital literacy among students and teachers suggest a need for research that not only explores the pedagogical effectiveness of digital tools but also considers issues of equity and infrastructure. Investigating how digital divides impact learning outcomes could contribute to the development of more inclusive and sustainable digital education policies.

Finally, while much of the existing research has been concentrated in specific regions—particularly in Southeast Asia and parts of Europe—there remains a gap in understanding how English language learning unfolds in underrepresented geographical contexts. Expanding the scope of future

research to include countries in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East could enrich the field with new perspectives and inform more globally responsive educational models. Comparative studies that explore how national education policies, teacher training systems, and sociolinguistic environments influence English language instruction in primary schools would offer valuable insights into cross-cultural variations in teaching and learning practices.

CONCLUSION

The results of a bibliometric analysis of the study of English learning in elementary schools show that publications on this topic have experienced a significant increasing trend since 2020, with the peak occurring in 2022. The increase reflects the growing awareness of the importance of early English language proficiency in a global context. The journals that publish the most articles in this field include Language, Culture and Curriculum, Education Sciences, and English Teaching and Learning, which show that these topics are seen as relevant in the realm of language education and curriculum. The institution's most active affiliation is Khon Kaen University, followed by several universities in Spain and Southeast Asia, signaling a major contribution from non-English-speaking regions. In terms of authors, Halbach A emerged as the most prolific author, while Al-Issa AS and Kirkgöz Y were the authors with the most cited publications globally, indicating an important influence in the development of academic discourse in this field.

The mapping of the main theme shows that the current focus of the study is divided into several thematic clusters, including the role of students and teachers in the learning process, curriculum development and learning innovation, reform of language teaching methods, and teacher capacity building. There is also an emphasis on fun and age-appropriate learning approaches such as gamification, as well as global dimensions such as CLIL and world English. Meanwhile, new themes such as multimodality, teaching model, and ELT that have emerged in the past two years indicate great opportunities for further research, especially related to the integration of technology approaches, adaptive pedagogy, and cross-curricular teaching.

These findings provide a comprehensive overview of the research landscape of English language learning in primary schools. For researchers, these results serve as a foothold to identify emerging trends and untapped research gaps. For education practitioners and policymakers, this information can be used as a basis for designing more innovative curricula, supporting needs-based teacher training, and strengthening synergies between local and global approaches to English language teaching. The implementation of approaches such as CLIL and gamification also provides a new direction in designing more relevant and meaningful learning experiences for children.

While the study provides a comprehensive mapping of existing research trends and focuses, there are some limitations. First, the data is sourced from only one database (Scopus) and potentially does not include all relevant publications, especially articles in non-English languages. Second, this analysis is quantitative, so it has not explored in depth the content or methodological quality of the articles. To address this, further research is recommended to use a mixed methods approach that combines bibliometric analysis with content analysis and includes more than one database and language. Thus, the resulting mapping will be more comprehensive and reflect the diversity of basic education contexts in various parts of the world.

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