

A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF FIRST LANGUAGE TRANSFER RESEARCH IN EFL CONTEXTS (2015–2025)

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a bibliometric analysis of research on first language (L1) transfer in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, covering publications indexed in Scopus from 2015 to 2025. Using a systematic search strategy combining terms such as L1 transfer, language transfer, first language transfer, and mother tongue interference within EFL and English writing contexts, a final dataset of 95 articles was retrieved and analyzed. The study employed VOSviewer software to construct co-authorship networks at both author and country levels, as well as keyword co-occurrence maps. Descriptive analysis was conducted using Scopus's built-in Analyze Results feature. Findings reveal a general upward trend in publication output, with a notable surge from 2022 to 2025. China emerged as the most productive country, while the Netherlands served as the primary hub of international collaboration. Six thematic clusters were identified, encompassing EFL transfer in writing contexts, error analysis and contrastive linguistics, crosslinguistic influence and L2 development, EFL writing skills and pedagogy, corpus-based L1 transfer studies, and L1 transfer among Chinese EFL learners. Keywords such as language transfer, L1 transfer, and EFL consistently dominated the field, while English writing and EFL writing contexts have emerged as increasingly prominent themes in recent years. These findings provide a comprehensive overview of the intellectual landscape of L1 transfer research in EFL contexts and offer directions for future inquiry.

Keywords: *bibliometric analysis, EFL, first language transfer, L1 transfer, VOSviewer*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyajikan analisis bibliometrik terhadap kajian alih Bahasa pertama (L1 transfer) dalam konteks Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL), dengan cakupan publikasi terindeks Scopus dari tahun 2015-2025. Melalui strategi pencarian sistematis yang mengombinasikan kata kunci L1 transfer, language transfer, first language transfer, dan mother language interference dalam konteks EFL dan penulisan Bahasa Inggris, diperoleh dataset akhir sebanyak 95 artikel. Analisis dilakukan menggunakan perangkat lunak VOSviewer untuk memetakan jaringan co-authorship pada tingkat individu dan negara, serta co-occurrence kata kunci, sementara analisis deskriptif didukung oleh fitur Analyze Results pada Scopus. Hasil menunjukkan tren peningkatan publikasi secara umum, dengan lonjakan signifikan pada tahun 2022-2025. Tiongkok teridentifikasi sebagai negara paling produktif, sedangkan Belanda berperan sebagai pusat kolaborasi internasional. Enam kluster tematik berhasil diidentifikasi, meliputi alih Bahasa dalam penulisan EFL, analisis kesalahan dan linguistik kontrastif, pengaruh lintas Bahasa dalam pemerolehan Bahasa kedua, keterampilan menulis dan pedagogi EFL, kajian berbasis korpus, serta alih Bahasa L1 pada pelajar EFL berbahasa

Tionghoa. Istilah kunci seperti language transfer, L1 transfer, dan EFL secara konsisten mendominasi ranah kajian ini, sementara focus pada konteks penulisan dalam bahasa Inggris, khususnya dalam kerangka EFL, menunjukkan peningkatan dominasi dalam beberapa tahun terakhir. Temuan ini memberikan gambaran yang komprehensif mengenai lanskap intelektual penelitian alih bahasa pertama dalam konteks EFL, sekaligus menawarkan landasan konseptual dan arah strategis bagi pengembangan penelitian di masa mendatang.

Kata Kunci: analisis bibliometrik, EFL, alih bahasa pertama, L1 transfer, VOSviewer

A. Introduction

Research on first language (L1) transfer has long occupied a central position in applied linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA) studies. L1 transfer, also referred to as language transfer, mother tongue interference, or crosslinguistic influence refers to the phenomenon whereby a learner's knowledge of their first language influences the acquisition and use of a second or foreign language (Odlin, 1989; Ellis, 2015; Ortega, 2014). The foundational premise that native language structures influence foreign language learning was established by Lado (1957), whose contrastive analysis hypothesis proposed that learners systematically transfer the forms, meanings, and distribution of their L1 when learning a new language.

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where English is

learned in environments where it is not the dominant language of communication, the role of L1 transfer has been documented across various linguistic domains, including phonology, syntax, lexis, discourse, and writing. Building on Selinker's (1972) concept of interlanguage, the systematic linguistic system that learners construct during the process of second language acquisition, subsequent research has increasingly examined how L1 knowledge both facilitates and impedes the development of EFL competence (Jarvis, & Pavlenko, 2008).

Despite the extensive body of empirical research in this area, a systematic and quantitative overview of how this field has developed over the past decade remains absent from the literature. Bibliometric analysis, as a method that applies statistical and mathematical techniques to evaluate patterns in scientific publications,

offers a powerful lens through which to examine the intellectual structure, growth, and emerging frontiers of a research field (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). By mapping co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrence patterns, and thematic clusters, bibliometric studies can reveal not only who the leading contributors are, but also what themes dominate the discourse and how the field is evolving (Mukherjee et al., 2022).

While bibliometric studies have been conducted in related areas of applied linguistics and L2 writing (Zupic & Čater, 2015; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Hyland, 2016), no study has specifically examined L1 transfer research within EFL contexts. Bibliometric mapping has been widely used to identify research trends (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). This gap underscores the need for the present study, which aims to provide a data-driven, comprehensive mapping of the field from 2015 to 2025, a period that encompasses significant methodological and theoretical developments in SLA and EFL research.

The present study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How many publications on L1 transfer in EFL contexts were indexed in Scopus during 2015–2025? (2) How has the research trend developed over the years? (3) Who are the most productive authors? (4) Which countries and institutions contribute most? (5) What are the collaboration patterns among authors and countries? (6) What are the dominant thematic clusters? And (7) what keywords have emerged or declined over the period?

B. Research Method

This study adopts a bibliometric analysis design to systematically examine Scopus-indexed publications on L1 transfer in EFL contexts from 2015 to 2025. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method widely used in applied linguistics to map the intellectual structure of a field through statistical analysis of publication data (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Lim et al., 2022). The method is appropriate for the present study as it enables an objective examination of publication trends, collaborative networks, and

thematic patterns across a defined body of literature.

Data were retrieved from Scopus on March 8, 2026, using the following advanced search query applied to Title, Abstract, and Keywords (TITLE-ABS-KEY): "L1 transfer" OR "language transfer" OR "first language transfer" OR "mother tongue interference" AND "EFL" OR "English writing" OR "second language writing". This single-string query was designed to capture publications addressing L1 transfer phenomena within EFL and English writing contexts. Inclusion criteria were applied to ensure relevance and quality: publications were limited to the period 2015–2025, document type was restricted to articles, language was limited to English, and subject areas were confined to Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities. Following this filtering process, the final dataset comprised 95 documents. These were exported in CSV format and analyzed using VOSviewer version 1.6.20 (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010) for network visualization, alongside Scopus's built-in Analyze Results feature for descriptive statistics.

Three types of bibliometric maps were generated in VOSviewer. First, a co-authorship network at the author level was constructed with a minimum threshold of one document per author, yielding 11 authors across 4 clusters. Second, a co-authorship network at the country level was built with the same threshold, producing 14 countries across 6 clusters. Third, a keyword co-occurrence map was created using author keywords with a minimum occurrence threshold of 2. From an initial pool of 37 keywords, five were excluded as noise (dyslexia, developmental language disorder, Russian, Spanish, and English) on the grounds of insufficient thematic relevance to EFL transfer contexts. The final keyword map comprised 32 keywords across 6 thematic clusters (links = 63; total link strength = 78).

C. Results and Discussion

Publication Volume and Trends

The search retrieved a total of 95 Scopus-indexed articles on L1 transfer in EFL contexts published between 2015 and 2025, confirming the field as an active and growing area of applied linguistics research. Table 1 presents

the yearly distribution of publications across the study period.

Table 1 Publication Distribution by Year (2015–2025)

Year	Documents	Cumulative
2015	5	5
2016	4	9
2017	6	15
2018	3	18
2019	11	29
2020	9	38
2021	5	43
2022	14	57
2023	13	70
2024	9	79
2025	16	95

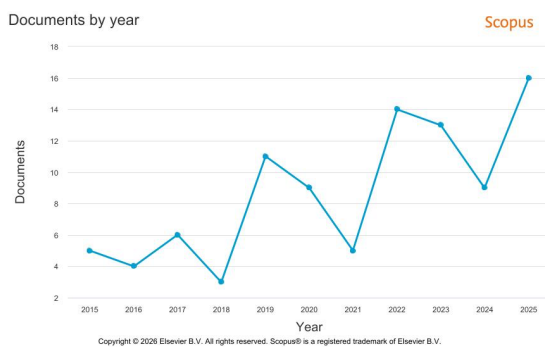


Figure 1. Publication Trend of L1 Transfer Research in EFL Contexts (2015-2025)

The data reveal a generally upward publication trend over the decade, albeit with notable fluctuations. The period from 2015 to 2018 was characterized by relatively modest output, with publications ranging from 3 to 6 articles per year. A first significant surge occurred in 2019 ($n = 11$), followed by a temporary dip in 2021 ($n = 5$), which may be

attributable to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on academic publishing timelines (Myers et al., 2020). A sustained period of high productivity began in 2022 ($n = 14$) and continued through 2023 ($n = 13$), with 2025 recording the highest annual output of 16 documents, indicating growing scholarly interest in L1 transfer within EFL contexts in the most recent years. This upward trajectory is consistent with broader trends in SLA research, where increasing attention has been given to crosslinguistic influence and its pedagogical implications (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; Hyland, 2016).

Productive Authors and Institutions



Figure 2. Co-authorship Network of Authors in L1 Transfer EFL Research

Analysis of author productivity revealed that Tribushinina, E. was the most prolific contributor with five publications, followed by van Vuuren, S. (3 documents) and three authors with two publications each: Larsson,

T., Dubinkina-Elgart, E., and Altakhaineh, A.R.M. The dominance of Tribushinina, E. is further reflected in the co-authorship network, where she emerged as the central hub connecting multiple author clusters (Tribushinina et al., 2021). The most highly cited publication in the dataset was Effect of Alignment on L2 Written Production (2015), with 121 citations, highlighting the enduring influence of early foundational studies in shaping subsequent research directions. The relatively sparse co-authorship network with only 11 connected authors and a total link strength of 18 suggests that research in this field is predominantly conducted independently rather than through sustained collaborative partnerships, a pattern consistent with observations in many applied linguistics subfields (Ellis, 1994).

Country Contributions and Collaboration

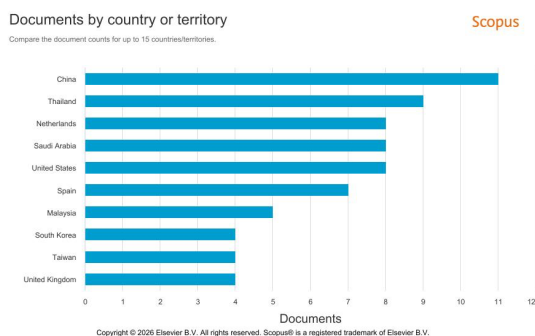


Figure 3a. Documents by Country in L1 Transfer EFL Research

China emerged as the most productive country with 11 publications, followed by Thailand (9) the Netherlands (8), Saudi Arabia (8), United States (8), Spain (7). The prominence of Asian countries particularly China, Thailand, and Malaysia — reflects the growing research capacity of EFL contexts in Asia and the increasing integration of Asian scholars into international applied linguistics discourse (Lee & Bozeman, 2005; Hyland, 2016).

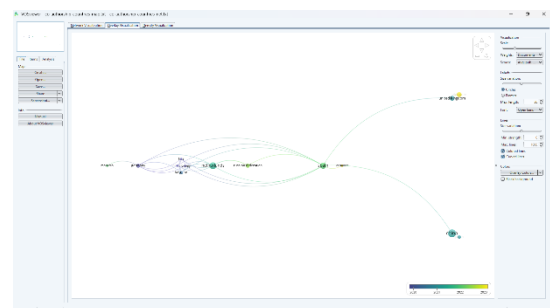
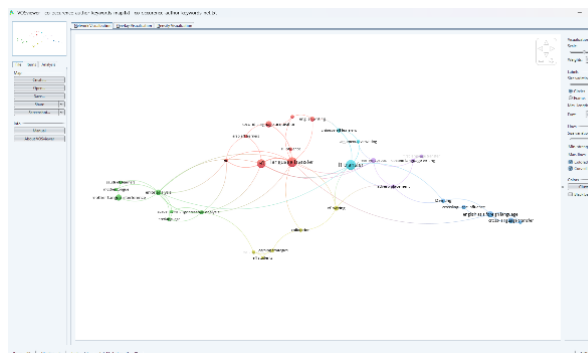


Figure 3b. Co-authorship Network of Countries in L1 Transfer EFL Research

Country-level co-authorship analysis revealed 14 countries forming 6 collaborative clusters, with 29 links and a total link strength of 30. The Netherlands served as the primary hub of international collaboration, consistent with its central role in the co-authorship author network through Tribushinina, E. and her research team. Notably, despite being the most productive country in terms of output,

China exhibited limited international collaboration, appearing as a relatively isolated node in the co-authorship map. This finding aligns with observations in the bibliometric literature that Asian research traditions sometimes favor domestic collaboration over international partnerships (Hyland, 2016; Lee & Bozeman, 2005).

Thematic Clusters and Keyword Co-occurrence



**Figure 4. Keyword Co-occurrence
 Network of L1 Transfer Research in EFL
 Contexts**

Keyword co-occurrence analysis yielded a map of 32 author keywords forming 6 distinct thematic clusters, with 63 links and a total link strength of 78. The six clusters and their core themes are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2 Thematic Clusters Identified in
 Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis**

Cluster	Theme	Key Terms
1	EFL Transfer in Writing	language transfer, EFL, english writing, negative language transfer, SLA
2	Error Analysis & Contrastive Linguistics	error analysis, contrastive analysis, interlanguage, mother tongue interference, academic writing
3	Crosslinguistic Influence & L2 Development	cross-language transfer, crosslinguistic influence, english as a foreign language, L2 writing
4	EFL Writing Skills & Pedagogy	collocation, efl writing, learning strategies, writing skills, efl students
5	Corpus-Based L1 Transfer Studies	adverb placement, first language transfer, learner corpus, second language writing
6	L1 Transfer in Chinese EFL Learners	argumentative writing, chinese efl learners, L1 transfer

Cluster 1, the largest with 8 items, centers on EFL transfer in writing contexts, with language transfer and L1 transfer emerging as the two most frequent keywords (15 and 16 occurrences respectively). This cluster reflects the predominant focus of the field on how L1 knowledge shapes EFL learners' written production. Cluster 2 groups together established theoretical frameworks — error analysis, contrastive analysis, and interlanguage — rooted in foundational work by Corder (1967)

and Selinker (1972), indicating that traditional approaches to studying L1 transfer remain relevant and active in contemporary research.

Cluster 3 reflects growing interest in crosslinguistic influence as a broader theoretical framework encompassing but moving beyond traditional transfer notions incorporating developmental and acquisition perspectives (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). Cluster 4 focuses on the pedagogical dimension of L1 transfer, addressing writing skills, learning strategies, and collocation — areas with direct classroom implications. Cluster 5 represents corpus-based methodological approaches, including learner corpus research and adverb placement studies, suggesting increasing methodological diversification in the field. Cluster 6, the smallest with 3 items, specifically addresses L1 transfer among Chinese EFL learners — the most studied population in the dataset centered on argumentative writing tasks.

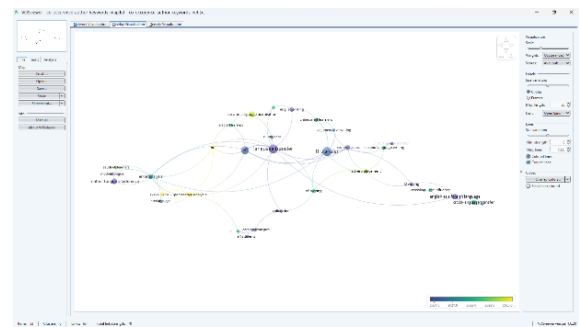


Figure 5. Overlay Visualization of Keyword Trends (2015-2025)

Overlay visualization of the keyword map revealed temporal patterns in keyword usage. Core terms such as language transfer and L1 transfer have been consistently used throughout the study period, while English writing and EFL writing contexts have emerged as increasingly prominent themes in more recent publications (2022-2025), indicating a growing pedagogical orientation in the field consistent with broader trends in applied linguistic research (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

D. Conclusion

This bibliometric study provides a systematic and data-driven overview of L1 transfer research in EFL contexts as indexed in Scopus from 2015 to 2025. The analysis of 95 documents reveals a clear upward trend in publication output, particularly from 2022 onward, indicating growing

scholarly interest in this area. China is the most productive country, while the Netherlands serves as the primary hub of international collaboration. Six thematic clusters were identified, reflecting the diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches employed in the field — from error analysis and contrastive linguistics rooted in Lado (1957) and Selinker (1972) to corpus-based studies and pedagogy-oriented research.

These findings have several implications. For researchers, the identified thematic clusters and emerging keywords provide a roadmap for future inquiry — particularly in the areas of EFL writing pedagogy, corpus-based transfer studies, and crosslinguistic influence in underrepresented EFL contexts. For institutions, the dominance of certain countries and the limited collaboration between Asian and Western research communities suggest opportunities for fostering international research partnerships. Future studies may extend this analysis by incorporating additional databases such as Web of Science or ERIC, and by conducting content analyses of the most-cited

publications to deepen the understanding of theoretical frameworks underpinning the field.

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