52-30 years of EFL studies in Turkey: A bibliometric analysis of research articles

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Abstract

In the 21st century, which can be described as the age of technology, it has become possible for researchers to access all kinds of information via the internet. The direction of the studies in the field of English language education and teaching and the researchers' working styles have changed drastically. *Dergipark* management system in Turkey, on the basis of TUBITAK ULAKBİM, offers the accessibility to the journals and articles electronically which have been published in Turkey and gives the opportunity for the service of editorial process management system. Its main purpose is to increase the visibility and use of national academic journals all over the world. For this reason, in this study, *Dergipark* management system has been used to make a bibliometric analysis on the articles published in the field of English language learning during the last 30 years and 646 articles have been downloaded and analysed. The main aim of the study is to make a detailed quantitative analysis of the contents and research topics. The results of the study indicate that although many of the most frequently discussed topics remain popular for 30 years, some receive significantly increased or decreased attention. Thus, it can be said that the actuality of academic studies in the field of EFL is in a rapid change.

Keywords: Language education, applied linguistics, EFL, concordance, research trends

Türkiye'de 30 yıllık EFL çalışmaları: Araştırma makalelerinin bibliyometrik analizi

Öz

Teknoloji çağı olarak nitelendirebileceğimiz 21.yy'da, araştırmacıların internet aracılığıyla her türlü bilgiye ulaşması mümkün hale gelmiştir. Özellikle dil eğitimi ve öğretimi alanında yapılmakta olan çalışmaların yönü ve bununla birlikte araştırmacıların çalışma şekli büyük ölçüde değişmiştir. Türkiye'de Dergipark yönetim sistemi, TUBITAK ULAKBİM temelinde, Türkiye'de yayınlanan akademik dergi ve makalelerin elektronik ortamda ulaşılabilir olma ve editoryal süreç yönetimi hizmetini sunmaktadır. Temel amacı, ulusal akademik dergilerin tüm dünyada görünürlüğü ve kullanımını arttırmaktır. Bu nedenle, son 30 yılda dil alanında yayınlanmış makaleler üzerine bibliyometrik bir inceleme yapmak amacıyla dergipark yönetim sistemi kullanılmış ve toplamda 646 makale indirilerek analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmanın temel amacı, bu süre zarfında, dil alanında yapılmış olan çalışmaların içeriklerinin ve araştırma konularının ayrıntılı nicel bir analizini yapmaktır. Araştırma sonuçları dil alanında yapılan akademik çalışmaların güncelliğinin hızlı bir değişim içerisinde olduğunu göstermektedir.

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Anahtar kelimeler: Dil eğitimi, uygulamalı dilbilim, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, bağlamlı dizin, araştırma eğilimleri

1. Introduction

In academic life, it is very important to know which study subjects are more popular and which areas are out of date. These types of research areas enable academics to follow current issues more closely and not to stay away from research on these issues. The reason for this is to enable researchers to make faster and more informed decisions about research trends. The term bibliometry was coined and defined by Alan Pritchard in 1969. Pritchard (1969: cited in Lei & Liu, 2018) defined bibliometric studies as a term in which mathematical and statistical methods are used.

While bibliometric studies were mostly related to natural sciences in the past (Lei & Liu, 2018), in recent years it has been used in all kinds of fields of study. Recent studies have shown that combining the use of bibliographic citations with the use of keywords and subject terms significantly increases the effectiveness of accessing research literature (Lei & Liu, 2018; Pao & Worthen, 1989). In Turkey, Dergipark management system have been used to publish academic articles, thus; this single system has facilitated the academics' studies to access the related literature. At this point, the way to do bibliometric studies has also been opened and the possibility of quantitative evaluation on the basis of journals, articles, keywords, or subject has emerged. From this point of view, this study also examines the journals that are suitable for publishing studies on the language field in the Dergipark management system between the years 1990-2020. The articles on language and language teaching have been downloaded, keyword, discipline areas and subject analysis have been made, and the current issues have been analysed bibliometrically.

1.1. Literature review

In addition to bibliometric studies in fields such as science, social sciences, mathematics, and computers, bibliometric studies have also been found in areas related to language in recent years. However, it is an undeniable fact that bibliometric studies are a field that needs to be constantly updated. The rapidly developing technology and the scientifically changing needs bring along language learning needs. When the studies in applied linguistics are examined, it is seen that there are changes on a country basis. Lei and Liu (2018) stated that there has been an increase in topics such as collaborative writing, education policy, teacher education and mixed method in recent studies, while the topics such as phonological awareness, overt subject, optimality theory, (noun) animacy, phonological process, object shift or word order decreased dramatically.

Ching (2012), who also conducted bibliometric studies in the field of language studies, examined the studies conducted in Taiwan for 40 years and analysed 335 articles. In the study, the researcher stated that the most frequently used discipline areas during this period were linguistics, language & linguistics, education & educational research, psychology, and experimental studies. In addition, the author listed the most frequently used keywords in the study as English, Language, Comprehension, Students, 2nd Language and Speech. Meara (2017) examined the articles published in 1985 on L2 vocabulary acquisition and concluded that "there is some evidence that native L2 vocabulary distinctive research program is beginning to emerge. The number of "survivors" from 1984-1985 is larger than the equivalent figure in 1984, and the proportion of new entrants into the list of most significant influences is a bit smaller in 1985 than it was in 1984 (pp.151-152)".

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Yağız et al. (2016) examined the articles published in Turkey between the years 2005-2015 in ELT and made content analysis. A total of 274 articles from 15 different journals in ULAKBIM database were examined and according to the results of the study, it is seen that the fields of study that researchers prefer commonly are language learning & acquisition, language teaching, teacher education, and they mostly use quantitative research design. Cesur, Kök, and Aydın (2018) examined 326000 articles on ELT in their study. The results of the study show that ELT researchers mostly work on teacher education, curriculum and teaching materials, and language teaching.

Karadeniz and Sozler (2016) conducted the content analysis of the articles in the field of Distance English Language Teaching in their study. In the research process, keywords such as English Language Teaching, Distance English Teaching and Distance Foreign Language Teaching were used and 15 articles published between 2002 and 2012 were analysed. Selected articles were analysed using three variables: research titles, sampling and research diversity. The results showed that the most frequently used topics are teaching methods and applied technologies, and qualitative research is more common.

Kırmızı (2012) analysed the theses written in ELT master programs between 2005-2010. 212 master's thesis from five universities in Turkey were analysed in the context of some of the criteria related to the subject and content. As a result of the study, the 9 categories most commonly used in the field of ELT were determined as teaching methods, learner factors, materials or curriculum design and evaluation, teacher factors, language skills, linguistics, computer assisted language learning, literature and culture, psychology.

Solak (2014) aimed to analyse the trends of current research articles in foreign language teaching in Turkish and for this purpose he analysed 189 research articles published in journals indexed in SSCI (94) and ULAKBIM (95) database in Turkey between the years 2009-2013. In the study, it was concluded that the most frequently researched topics were concept analysis, teaching and learning, the most number of articles were published in 2013, most of the authors were Turkish, the articles were mostly published in English, and quantitative method was widely used.

This study using bibliometric data downloaded from Dergipark database detailed the research analysis of the topics on language and linguistics in Turkey for 30 years (1990-2020). A total of 646 articles from different journals were downloaded and analysed. The data includes journals and their affiliated organizations, the year they first started publication, the article titles, article summaries, keywords and discipline of the articles.

The research questions in this study are as follows:

1. What have been the most frequently explored discipline areas, keywords and head words?

2. Have there been any significant changes in terms of topics between the years 1990-2010 and 2011-2020?

2. Method

In this study, journals and publications related to language were used for analysis. As seen in Table 1. based on language teaching and applied linguistics, 11 journals and 646 articles were selected. The primary reason for the change in the number of articles in each journal is that some journals publish more issues each year and more articles with each issue. For example, while JLLS has published 4

issues and approximately 20-30 articles in each issue since 2018, Language Journal publishes 2 issues each year and approximately 8-10 articles in each issue. The secondary reason for the variation in the number of articles is that some journals publish articles not only in the field of English foreign language education, but also on subjects such as teaching Turkish as a foreign language, or mother tongue education and these articles were not included in the study. For this reason, the study considered the articles published in journals as a whole rather than the journals included in the study and examined 646 articles in total.

Table 1. All-time journals (N = 1059) (shows the list of journals related to language in Dergipark system)

	JOURNALS	N	Year	Institution
1	Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies	182	2005	Hacettepe University
2	ELT Research Journal	132	2012	International Association of Educational Researchers
3	Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics	107	2015	Hacettepe University
4	Journal of Linguistics and Literature	57	2004	Mersin University
5	Journal of Language Education and Research	41	2015	Hakan Ülper
6	Journal of Language and Literature Studies (RUMELİDE)	34	2014	Yakup Yılmaz
7	The Journal of Language Learning and Teaching	26	2011	Gazi Foreign Languages Association
8	Journal of Language Research	23	2017	Emrah Ekmekçi
9	Language Teaching and Educational Research	19	2018	Yusuf Demir
10	Journal of Linguistic Research	13	1990	Boğaziçi Publishing House
11	Language Journal	12	2014	Ankara University
	Total	646		

2.1. Data

In order to answer the first research question mentioned above, 30 years of article data were questioned and analysed. Within the scope of the analysis, discipline areas, keywords and article titles published for 30 years (1990-2020) were collected in a single file. In order to answer the second research question, these keywords and article titles were grouped into 1990-2010 and 2011-2020.

Table 2. Article Production between the years of 1990-2020 (N=646)

YEARS	n	%
1990-2000	13	2
2001-2010	68	10,5
2011-2020	565	87,5
Total	646	100

As can be seen in Table 2, the number of articles also varies on a yearly basis. The reason for this is that the studies in the field of language education and teaching have gained speed since 2007 and are more in number. Moreover, the main aim is to reveal the focus of the studies published during the last 10 years and compare it with previous years.

2.2. Data search and analysis

During the data processing phase, keywords and article titles that were converted into a single Word file were translated into TXT file and analysed bibliometrically in AntConc program. The results obtained from the data loaded into this program would determine the most frequently used keywords in the articles and the most frequently used words in the article titles. Accordingly, the most frequently used discipline areas, the 20 most frequently used keywords and the 20 most frequently used headwords were tried to be determined.

Table 3. Relevant Bibliometric Information

ITEMS	COUNTS
Article's age (years)	0-30
Journals	11
Discipline Areas	9
Author Supplied Keywords	6038
Article Titles	10193

As can be seen in Table 3, 9 discipline areas were used most frequently in the articles. While the total number of article keywords was 6038, the number of words in the headings was 10193.

3. Results and discussion

This section is organized around findings regarding the research questions mentioned before: (i) the most frequently explored discipline areas, keywords and headwords and (ii) the significant changes in terms of topics between the years of 1990-2010 and 2011-2020.

3.1. The most frequently explored discipline areas, keywords and headwords

When the discipline areas are examined, it is observed that the most frequently used discipline fields are education & educational (%22,36), language & linguistics (%17,83), psychology & experimental (%11,53) and linguistics (%9,95) (Table 1.). It has been observed that a significant amount of work has been done in the fields of research (%9,66) and teacher training (%8,37). Furthermore, interdisciplinary studies (%7,39), computer science (%7,09) and literature (%5,81) have been mentioned frequently in current language teaching based studies.

Table 4. Article discipline areas (N = 1015) *Note*. Most articles have more than one discipline area.

Discipline Areas	n	%
Education & Educational	227	22,36
Language & Linguistics	181	17,83
Psychology, Experimental	117	11,53
Linguistics	101	9,95
Research	98	9,66
Teacher Training	85	8,37
Interdisciplinary	75	7,39
Computer Science	72	7,09

Literature	59	5,81
Total	1015	100

The keywords of the article studies conducted between the years 1990-2020 have been brought together for analysis. The percentage ratio of the words was determined. As can be seen in Table 5, the most frequently used keyword is language teaching (%8.3) and it is followed by English Language / Learning (%4,59), EFL / ELT (%4,12) and teacher training (%3,69), respectively. In addition, it is seen that the number of articles written on the basis of writing (%1,52) is quite high. Article studies written on the basis of vocabulary and lexical knowledge (%1,31) are also noticeably higher. The topics dealing with reading, language strategies & approach, evaluation & assessment are also mentioned frequently in the literature. Furthermore, it is not surprising that technology based studies such as CALL and eye-tracking have been seen in foreign language teaching literature.

Table 5. Top keywords and keywords provided (N = 6038)

Keywords	1990-2020 (6038 tokens)	
	n	%
Language teaching	501	8,30
English Language/ Learning	277	4,59
EFL/ELT	249	4,12
Teacher Training	223	3,69
Education	101	1,67
Writing	92	1,52
Vocabulary and Lexical Knowledge	79	1,31
Reading Comprehension	75	1,24
Language strategies/Approach	73	1,21
Evaluation and assessment	70	1,16
Technology/CALL/Eye-tracking	68	1,13
Motivation/Anxiety	55	0,91
Young Learners	55	0,91
Pre-service/In-service	53	0,88
Communicative Competence	50	0,83
Cultural Studies	32	0,53
Corpus based Studies	26	0,43
Language acquisition	22	0,36
Grammar Studies	21	0,35
Gender Differences	19	0,31
Total	2141	35,46

Similar to the keywords, the titles of the articles were also collected and analysed in a single file. Thus, the 20 mostly used vocabulary items in article titles were examined. As can be seen in Table 6., it is seen that articles which focused on English Language (%7,41), EFL / ELT (5,98), teachers (%5,29), students (%4,19) and writing (%3,68) are in the majority. In addition, it is seen that pre-service, in-service studies (%2,17) and technology-focused studies (%1,68) are quite high. It should be also stated

that, language skill-based studies including reading, vocabulary, speaking have not been used as much as writing-based studies.

Table 6. Top concordance results on article titles

Headwords	1990-2020 (10193 tokens)	
	n	**%**
English Language	755	7,41
EFL/ELT	610	5,98
Teachers	539	5,29
Students	427	4,19
Writing	375	3,68
Pre-Service/In-service	221	2,17
Technology/ CALL/ Eye-tracking	171	1,68
Strategies/ Approach/Skills	168	1,65
Reading Comprehension	162	1,59
Vocabulary	155	1,52
Pronunciation/ Speaking	141	1,38
Perception	132	1,30
Attitudes	101	0,99
Context/Contextual	95	0,93
Motivation/Anxiety	88	0,86
Assessment/Evaluation	75	0,74
Corpus	52	0,51
Culture	44	0,43
Gender	31	0,30
Fossilized	24	0,24
Total	4366	42,83

3.2. The significant changes between the years of 1990-2010 and 2011-2020.

Concerning the second research question, the 30-year study data was analysed and grouped as 1990-2010 and 2011-2020 instead of dividing them into 3 different groups since there was not been much work between 1990-2000. When the overall results including most popular topics are examined, a small percentage of them has remained constant over the two periods. As seen in Table 7 and Figure 1, when it is considered before and after 2010, it is seen that the studies that remained at a similar rate are focused on reading comprehension, motivation/anxiety and communicative competence. These studies, which were carried out in the previous years, are still up-to-date in recent years.

Table 7. Samples of the most frequently explored topics (remained constant)

Topics	1990-2010 (%)	2011-2020 (%)
Remained constant		
Reading Comprehension	1,17	1,07
Motivation/ Anxiety	0,85	0,72

Communicative Competence	0,68	0,75

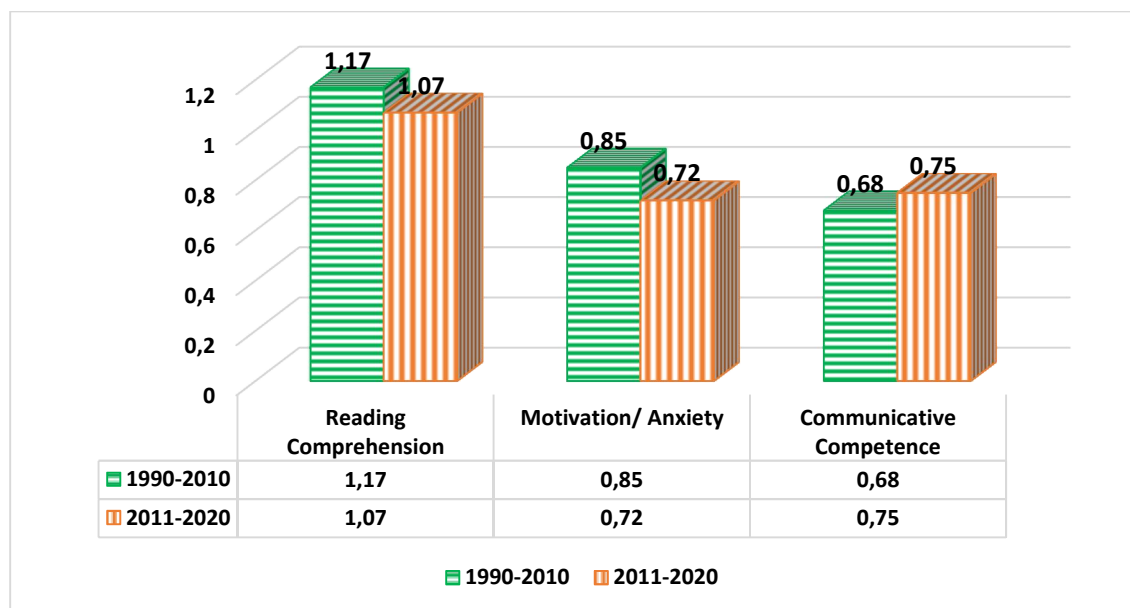|	Reading Comprehension	Motivation/ Anxiety	Communicative Competence
1990-2010	1,17	0,85	0,68
2011-2020	1,07	0,72	0,75

Figure 5. Remained constant topics

As seen in Table 8 and Figure 2., some of the topics had an experience of a significant change. Especially, the topics related to corpus-based studies exhibited a significant increase. Besides, the articles focusing on gender differences have a tendency of increase. Moreover, vocabulary and lexical knowledge studies showed an uptrend movement in recent years. Finally, technology-based studies such as CALL and eye-movement studies, and assessment / evaluation-oriented studies are the leading fields that have increased rapidly in recent years. Especially, CALL and eye-movement studies have become very popular topics with the developing technology in recent years.

Table 8. Samples of the most frequently explored topics (significantly increased)

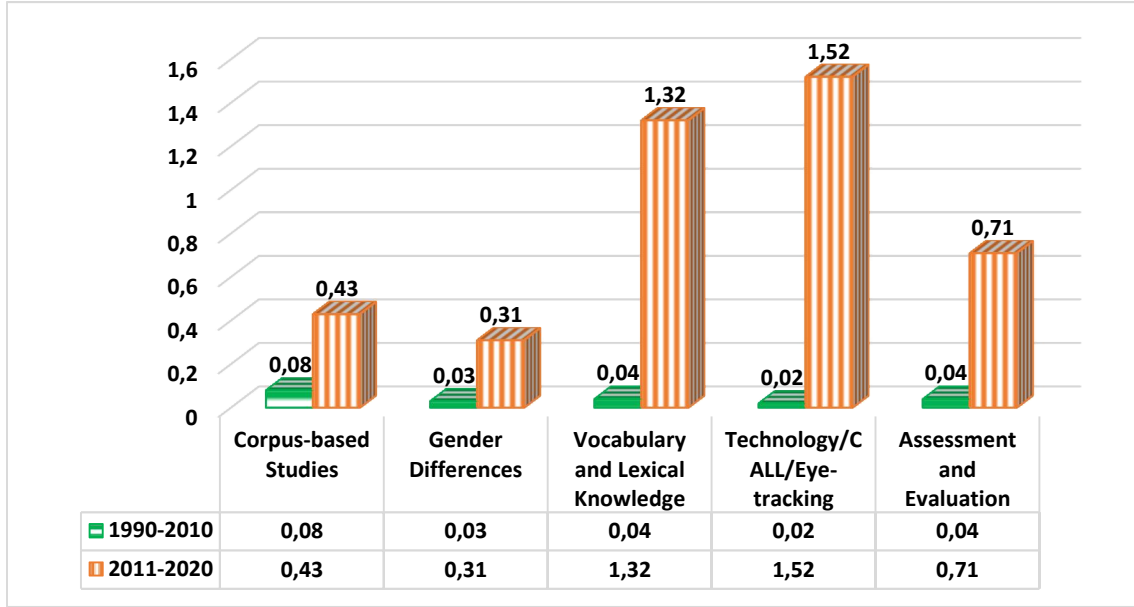| Topics	1990-2010 (%)	2011-2020 (%)
Significantly increased		
Corpus-based Studies	0,08	0,43
Gender Differences	0,03	0,31
Vocabulary and Lexical Knowledge	0,04	1,32
Technology/CALL/Eye-tracking	0,02	1,52
Assessment and Evaluation	0,04	0,71

Figure 6. *Significantly increased topics*

Concerning the decreased topics in recent years, the general findings have been analysed comparatively in literature. As it can be seen in Table 9 and Figure 3, one of the topics that have started to be studied very little in recent years, which have become less popular and out of date are language studies and writing. Furthermore, the topics including strategies and approach, cultural studies and young learners showed a significant decrease. Especially writing studies show a rapid decline. On the other hand, it is highly probable that language studies have left their place to English language studies specifically in recent years.

In terms of fast transportation network growing after 2000s, cultural studies have been studied intensively, however, after 2010s, the interest of foreign language researchers probably shifted to growing technology all over the world. It can be said that the focused research topics show a parallelism with interdisciplinary studies all over the world.

Table 9. Samples of most frequently explored topics (significantly decreased)

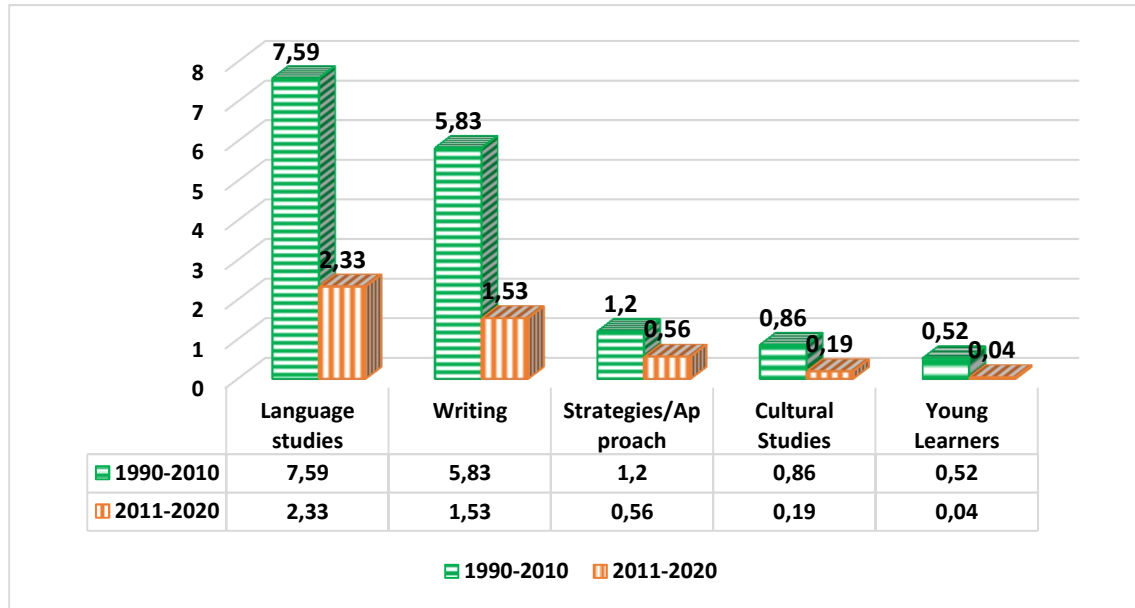| Topics	1990-2010 (%)	2011-2020 (%)
Significantly decreased		
Language studies	7,59	2,33
Writing	5,83	1,53
Strategies/Approach	1,20	0,56
Cultural Studies	0,86	0,19
Young Learners	0,52	0,04

Figure 7. *Significantly decreased topics*

4. Conclusion

This bibliometric study of language and especially English language teaching has revealed several key findings with important implications. First, although many of the most frequently discussed topics (especially those dealing with reading, motivation, anxiety and communicative competence issues) remain popular for 30 years; some receive significantly decreased or increased attention. The topics related to strategies, approach, cultural studies, young learners and writing-based research have declined significantly. On the other hand, for the past 10 years, the research interests are focused on corpus-based studies, gender differences studies that have been emphasized all over the world in recent years. Besides, the analysis of current research showed that the explosion of technological development enhanced the importance of CALL and eye-movement-oriented studies. Most probably, this result is the return of rapidly advancing technology to language education. Furthermore, newer studies showed a great interest in lexical based studies that emphasize the importance of vocabulary in language education, and evaluation or assessment-oriented studies. With the results of this research, it is important for researchers to update themselves, especially in the field of language teaching.

Similar to the results of this study, Lei and Liu (2018), in their bibliometric studies in applied linguistics, examined the data of research articles from 20 different countries for the years 2005-2016, and it is seen that study subjects such as Eye-tracking and EFL learner have become more popular in recent years. In the data collected by Ching (2012) for 40 years of language teaching, it is seen that the most frequently used words are English, language, comprehension and second language similar to the results of this study.

Another important finding of this research is that it reveals that the bibliometric analysis method is very important in learning the research trends of the last years in language teaching. In addition, it is considered very important to conduct a study in which the most cited publications, journals and authors are included in order to fully perceive the trends. It is important to work in this area as further research. In the future, more bibliometric studies are needed in order to accurately analyse the trends

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in language education and teaching, considering the problems, solutions, developing technology and changing needs and requirements.

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