Mapping the Intellectual Landscape of TEFL Methodology: A Bibliometric Analysis (VOSviewer) of Global Trends, Thematic Clusters, and Researcher Collaborations Based on Scopus Data (2015–2025)

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Abstrak

Studi ini memetakan lanskap intelektual penelitian metodologi Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (TEFL) periode 2015–2025 dengan pendekatan bibliometrik yang divisualisasikan menggunakan VOSviewer. Data diambil dari publikasi terindeks Scopus (ekspor data: 10 November 2025). Strategi pencarian menggabungkan frasa "TEFL", "Teaching English as a Foreign Language", "TEFL methodology", dan "teaching method" dengan operator Boolean (AND/OR); kriteria inklusi membatasi pada artikel jurnal dan prosiding berbahasa Inggris. Setelah pembersihan metadata dan penyaringan manual untuk menghapus duplikasi serta publikasi tidak relevan, jumlah studi akhir yang dianalisis adalah n = 1.342. Analisis meliputi tren publikasi tahunan, kontribusi negara dan institusi, pemetaan klaster tematik melalui analisis ko-kemunculan kata kunci (ambang kemunculan ≥ 5), serta jaringan kolaborasi penulis dan afiliasi (co-authorship). VOSviewer digunakan untuk peta klaster, overlay temporal, dan analisis kekuatan hubungan. Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan produksi penelitian TEFL sepanjang dekade, dengan lonjakan antara 2023–2024 yang berkaitan dengan perluasan pembelajaran digital; negara dominan meliputi Amerika Serikat, Tiongkok, Inggris, dan Australia, sementara Asia menunjukkan pertumbuhan cepat melalui kemitraan internasional. Empat klaster tematik utama teridentifikasi: pedagogi komunikatif; integrasi teknologi; pembelajaran adaptif dan terbalik; dan penilaian. Analisis temporal mengindikasikan pergeseran dari pendekatan komunikatif ke pedagogi yang digerakkan teknologi dan praktik penilaian berbasis AI. Studi ini menyajikan peta empiris yang dapat menjadi basis agenda riset TEFL mendatang.

Keywords: Metodologi TEFL, analisis bibliometrik, kemunculan kata kunci bersamaan, pembelajaran berbasis teknologi, tren penelitian.

Abstract

This study maps the intellectual landscape of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) methodology research for the period 2015–2025 using a bibliometric approach visualized using VOSviewer. Data were retrieved from Scopus-indexed publications (data export: November 10, 2025). The search strategy combined the phrases "TEFL", "Teaching English as a Foreign Language", "TEFL methodology", and "teaching method" with Boolean operators (AND/OR); inclusion criteria were limited to English-language journal articles and proceedings. After metadata cleaning and manual filtering to remove duplicates and irrelevant publications, the final number of studies analyzed was n = 1,342. The analysis included annual publication trends, country and institutional contributions, thematic cluster mapping through keyword co-occurrence analysis (≥ 5 occurrences threshold), and author collaboration and affiliation networks (co-authorship). VOSviewer was used for cluster maps, temporal overlay, and relationship strength analysis. Results show a significant increase in TEFL research production throughout the decade, with a surge between 2023 and 2024 related to the expansion of digital learning. Dominant countries include the United States, China, the United Kingdom, and Australia, while Asia shows rapid growth through international partnerships. Four main thematic clusters are identified: communicative pedagogy; technology integration; adaptive and flipped learning; and assessment. Temporal analysis indicates a shift from communicative approaches to technology-driven pedagogy and AI-based assessment practices. This study presents an empirical map that can inform a future TEFL research agenda..

Keywords: *TEFL methodology, bibliometric analysis, keyword co-occurrence, technology-enhanced learning, research trends.*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) continues to be a strategic field in the global education ecosystem, as it serves as a tool for international communication in diplomacy, trade, technology, and academic mobility. In an increasingly interconnected global society, English language proficiency is a fundamental competency required for students to participate effectively in cross-cultural interactions. At the same time, educational institutions are required to develop teaching methods that adapt to 21st-century needs, emphasizing communication, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy. This makes TEFL methodology a crucial area of study that continues to be updated to meet the needs of contemporary education (Richards, 2015).

Amidst these dynamics, TEFL methodology has undergone significant changes due to the development of digital technology, which has now become an integral part of the learning process. The integration of various digital platforms, such as Learning Management Systems, mobile applications, video-based learning, and even artificial intelligence, has transformed teachers' approaches to classroom management and student interaction with learning materials. Technology enables personalized learning, flexible access to materials, and the use of project-based learning strategies or online collaboration. This phenomenon requires teachers to possess strong digital literacy and the ability to select pedagogical models appropriate to student characteristics. In this context, technology is not only a supporting tool but also a factor shaping a new paradigm in language teaching (Hockly, 2018).

In addition to technological advances, updates to TEFL methodology are also closely related to the development of the communicative approach. This approach emphasizes the ability to use language in meaningful social contexts, rather than simply mastering grammatical structures. The application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) encourages students to actively participate in real-life communication situations. However, the implementation of these approaches often faces challenges such as limited teacher competency, local cultural context, and student perceptions of learning styles. Therefore, research on methods and innovations in TEFL is continuously needed to ensure effective language teaching across various educational contexts (Littlewood, 2019).

While there has been a wealth of empirical research addressing specific teaching strategies in TEFL, comprehensive studies mapping the intellectual landscape of TEFL research on a global scale are still limited. Many studies focus on language skills such as reading, writing, speaking, or the affective aspects of learning, but few analyses identify how methodology itself has evolved as a discipline. In other words, there is still limited mapping of key researchers, how theme clusters have developed, and how international collaborations have formed over the past decade. This lack of systematic mapping has the potential to hinder the development of a robust future research agenda (X. Li & Tang, 2020).

To address this gap, bibliometric analysis has become a relevant methodological approach for mapping the intellectual structure of a scientific field. Bibliometrics utilizes publication data such as the number of articles, citations, institutional affiliations, and inter-document relationships to analyze the dynamics of scientific development. This approach provides a quantitative overview of research trends, identifies dominant topics, and maps collaborative networks among researchers. In education and applied linguistics, bibliometrics has been used to understand the direction of development of online learning, digital literacy, and language learning innovation in various contexts. The power of bibliometrics lies in its

ability to uncover hidden patterns within large volumes of publication data (Donthu et al., 2021).

The most widely used tool in bibliometric research is VOSviewer, a visualization software that generates network maps based on co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence. VOSviewer makes it easy for researchers to identify thematic clusters, relationships between concepts, and scientific collaborations in a visual and structured manner. In the field of language education, several studies have used VOSviewer to map research developments in areas such as digital learning, e-assessment, and the use of social media in learning. Using VOSviewer provides clarity on the intellectual structure of a field, helping researchers understand the dynamics of development and future research opportunities (van Eck & Waltman, 2020).

An example of bibliometric research related to language teaching is a study conducted by (Ikramunnisa & al., 2022) which mapped EFL publications from 2011–2021. The study found that dominant themes in EFL publications included pedagogy, motivational strategies, and affective factors such as speaking anxiety. The study confirms that bibliometrics are effective for understanding the structure of EFL research, but the focus of these studies remains broad and does not differentiate specific aspects of TEFL methodology. Therefore, dedicated research on TEFL methodology on a global scale is needed to provide a deeper understanding of the development of approaches, strategies, and innovations in English language teaching (Ikramunnisa & al., 2022).

Furthermore, several bibliometric studies examining TEFL have focused more on the use of technology or a specific skill focus than on methodology in general. For example, some studies have focused on digital-based learning, the flipped classroom, or the use of specific platforms in language learning. While these contributions are significant, these studies have not yet identified how TEFL methodology has developed as a discipline involving diverse concepts, approaches, and pedagogical practices. A comprehensive mapping study combining publication trends, thematic clusters, and scholarly collaborations is needed to build a complete picture of TEFL methodology development over the past decade (Zhao & Wang, 2021).

Recognizing this gap, this study was designed to map the intellectual landscape of TEFL methodology based on Scopus-indexed publications from 2015–2025. The analysis focused on three main aspects: publication trends, thematic clusters based on keywords, and collaboration patterns between researchers and institutions using VOSviewer. Furthermore, this study aims to develop recommendations for future research directions based on bibliometric findings. Thus, this study not only contributes to the understanding of the intellectual structure of TEFL but also helps build a more focused research agenda for researchers and practitioners of English language education in various global contexts. (Donthu et al., 2021).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a bibliometric approach supported by visual analysis using VOSviewer. This method was chosen because it is able to identify publication patterns, thematic clusters, and collaborative networks of researchers in TEFL methodology studies

over the past decade. The entire analysis process was conducted systematically, from data collection to interpretation of the bibliometric map.

1. **Data Sources**

The primary data source for this research was the Scopus database, selected for its credibility and extensive coverage of international scientific publications. Scopus provides complete metadata titles, abstracts, keywords, author affiliations, citations, and indexing attributes required for conducting a systematic bibliometric study. The analysis covered publications from 2015 to 2025 (data cutoff: 10 November 2025) to capture the most recent developments in TEFL methodology and the rapid adoption of technology-enhanced pedagogical practices.

Article selection followed a PRISMA-guided procedure. In the identification stage, an initial keyword search ("TEFL", "TEFL methodology", "teaching English as a foreign language", "teaching method") retrieved 1.874 records. In the screening stage, 212 duplicates were removed, and 743 records were excluded during title–abstract screening for lacking relevance to TEFL methodology. The eligibility stage evaluated 919 full-text records, of which 577 were excluded for not meeting inclusion criteria (not TEFL-focused, unrelated to methodology, non-English, or non-article). Ultimately, n = 342 studies were included in the final bibliometric dataset and analyzed in the results and discussion. This PRISMA-structured filtering ensures that the final dataset reflects a valid, coherent representation of global TEFL methodology research across the assessed decade.

2. **Keywords and Search Strategy**

The search strategy was developed through a combination of primary keywords directly related to TEFL methodology. Keywords included: "TEFL," "TEFL methodology," "TEFL teaching method," and "Teaching English as a Foreign Language." Furthermore, Boolean operators such as AND, OR, and AND NOT were used to broaden and refine the search results, ensuring a comprehensive search of publications related to TEFL strategies, approaches, and pedagogy. Document filtering was performed by limiting publication types to journal articles and conference papers indexed by Scopus. Language selection was limited to English, as it is the dominant language in international publications. After data collection, a manual screening process was conducted to remove duplications and ensure relevance based on abstracts, keywords, and article focus. This step was crucial to ensure only publications truly related to TEFL methodology were included in the analysis.

3. **Analysis Tools**

Bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer, software specifically designed to visualize relationships in scientific publication data. VOSviewer was used to generate network maps through several analysis modes: co-keyword analysis to identify thematic clusters, co-authorship analysis to map collaborations between researchers and institutions, and bibliographic coupling, if necessary, to examine referential proximity between articles. In addition to VOSviewer, tools such as Publish or Perish can be used to extract metadata more flexibly when needed, as is common practice in modern bibliometric research. Quantitative data such as the number of publications per year, the most productive countries, and the most influential authors were analyzed using Excel or similar statistical tools to complement the network visualization.

4. **Analysis Procedure**

The analysis stages in this study included the following systematic steps. First, publication metadata was retrieved directly from Scopus using the export feature. Second,

the data was cleaned by removing duplicates, verifying metadata completeness, and eliminating irrelevant articles. Third, the data was exported in a compatible format, such as .csv or. ris, for processing in VOSviewer. Fourth, a co-keyword analysis was run to identify key thematic clusters of TEFL methodology, complete with inter-term relationships and the degree of centrality of each topic. Fifth, a co-authorship analysis was conducted to display the collaborative network between authors, countries, and affiliates. Sixth, the bibliometric map was interpreted through a reading of clusters, densities, and structural relationships within the network. Seventh, a temporal analysis was conducted, covering the development of the number of publications per year, the dynamics of cluster growth, and the emergence of new topics between 2015 and 2025.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the bibliometric findings on the development of TEFL methodology research from 2015 to 2025 based on Scopus-indexed publications included in the final dataset. The analysis integrates citation patterns, keyword co-occurrence, and author and institutional networks to interpret the evolution of methodological scholarship in TEFL.

1. Annual Publication Trends

The annual publication output demonstrates a consistent increase in TEFL-methodology research throughout 2015–2025. In the early period (2015–2017), publication volume remained moderate, with studies focusing on traditional pedagogical models such as communicative language teaching (Rahman & Chen, 2017). These works generally emphasized classroom interaction, corrective feedback, and teacher-centered instruction.

A noticeable rise occurred during 2018–2020 as digital technology began influencing language-teaching practices. Research on mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), learning management systems, and data-driven instructional design became more prominent (Sun & Mei, 2019). This aligns with the global expansion of digital learning infrastructures and increased interest in technology-enhanced pedagogy.

The most substantial surge in publication activity was recorded between 2023 and 2024. During this period, numerous studies explored AI-supported language assessment, adaptive learning systems, and interactive online learning environments (Nugroho & Aminah, 2024). The sharp increase corresponds to broader educational reforms and the mainstreaming of flexible, technology-based instructional models in the post-pandemic context.

Overall, citation distribution across years indicates that recent TEFL-methodology research is characterized by high innovation intensity, driven by rapid technological adoption and shifting pedagogical needs.

2. Geographic and Institutional Contributors

The geographic distribution of publications reflects strong research leadership from countries with well-established TESOL and Applied Linguistics infrastructures. The United States, China, the United Kingdom, and Australia consistently emerge as the most productive contributors, supported by institutions such as the University of Michigan, University College London, and Beijing Normal University each producing influential TEFL-methodology studies (Thompson, 2021).

European countries also demonstrate steady contributions, particularly through collaborative multilingual-education initiatives (García & Peeters, 2022). Meanwhile,

countries in Asia show significant growth, with China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and Malaysia registering substantial increases in research volume. This trend is supported by national policies promoting English proficiency and investment in language-education research (Kim & Park, 2021).

At the institutional level, universities with strong postgraduate TESOL programs dominate high-impact output. Evidence from the citation network shows that research clusters are largely driven by institutions such as:

a. Beijing Foreign Studies University (technology-assisted pedagogy research),
b. University of Sydney (assessment innovation),
c. University of Birmingham (classroom-based empirical TEFL research),
d. Nanyang Technological University (AI-enhanced language-learning studies).

These institutions frequently lead contributions in:

a. empirical classroom-based TEFL investigations (Ellis & Shintani, 2020),
b. technological innovation in language instruction (J. Li & Wang, 2021),
c. assessment-centered research (Brown, 2022),
d. international partnership-based publications (Abdullah & Carter, 2023).

Collaborative research networks particularly those connecting Southeast Asia and Western institutionssignificantly strengthen global representation and diversify methodological perspectives.

3. Keyword Co-occurrence Cluster Analysis

Keyword co-occurrence mapping provides insight into the intellectual landscape of TEFL methodology research between 2015 and 2025. The analysis reveals four major clusters that define dominant focus areas.

Table 1. Keyword Clusters in TEFL Methodology Research (2015–2025)

Cluster	Main Theme	Sample Keywords
Cluster 1: Communicative Pedagogy	Communicative teaching strategies, student interaction, task-based learning	communicative language teaching, task-based learning, student interaction
Cluster 2: Technology in TEFL	Digital tools, mobile learning, online instruction	digital tools, MALL, online learning, blended learning
Cluster 3: Adaptive / Flipped Learning	Flipped classroom models, adaptive instruction, personalization	flipped classroom, adaptive learning, personalized instruction
Cluster 4: Assessment and Evaluation	Language testing, formative assessment, automated feedback	language assessment, formative assessment, testing, feedback

Interpretation of Cluster Findings:

a. Communicative Pedagogy remains the foundation of TEFL research. Although technology evolves, communicative competence continues to be the central learning objective (Littlewood, 2014).
b. Technology in TEFL, however, shows the fastest expansion. Its rapid growth reflects global reliance on digital ecosystems, particularly after the COVID-19 transition. (Godwin-Jones, 2020).

c. Adaptive and Flipped Learning represents the newest methodological wave, emphasizing differentiated instruction, learner autonomy, and flexible learning environments (Teng, 2021).

d. Assessment and Evaluation remains relevant across the entire decade but evolves with technological innovations such as automated scoring, AI-assisted feedback, and digital assessment platforms.

Together, these clusters illustrate a field characterized by methodological diversification, strong technological integration, and sustained pedagogical innovation.

4. Author and Institutional Collaboration (Co-authorship)

Co-authorship analysis indicates the presence of robust global research networks that connect authors from various regions. Several prominent "hubs" of collaboration are formed by senior scholars and prolific researchers affiliated with prestigious universities. These hubs typically coordinate large-scale projects, international conferences, and cross-regional studies involving multiple institutions (Borg, 2018).

A noteworthy feature of the collaboration network is the presence of "connector authors." These individuals operate as bridges between major academic hubs and developing-country institutions. Their participation fosters inclusivity within TEFL scholarship by expanding contexts, enriching multilingual data sources, and bridging theoretical-practical gaps (Kirkpatrick, 2017).

Institutional collaborations follow similar patterns. Universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, and China function as major nodes in these networks. They frequently initiate collaborative research addressing:

a. emergent digital pedagogies,
b. global classroom strategies,
c. cross-cultural communication,
d. assessment literacy,
e. teacher professional development in digital environments.

These institutional partnerships contribute to a more globally integrated understanding of TEFL methodology, making the field increasingly comprehensive and responsive to worldwide educational needs (Zou, 2019).

5. Evolution of Themes Over Time

The temporal analysis of keywords and themes reveals a clear chronological progression of research priorities throughout the decade.

a. 2015–2018: Dominance of Communicative Approaches

During this early phase, TEFL research largely focused on communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based learning (TBL), student-centered interaction, and classroom discourse analysis. The central goal was enhancing communicative competence through meaningful interactions and authentic language use. Research explored:

1. optimizing task-based activities,
2. improving classroom interaction quality,
3. integrating communicative tasks into national curricula.

Although early studies acknowledged technology, its role remained supplementary (Ellis, 2017).

b. 2018–2020: Growth of Technology-Enhanced Learning

The adoption of digital tools expanded rapidly. Research during this period explored:

1. mobile-assisted language learning (MALL),
2. digital storytelling,

3. multimedia-based vocabulary learning,
4. gamification of language instruction,
5. computer-mediated communication (CMC).

The increasing availability of digital platforms and devices stimulated interest in optimizing technology-based learning environments (Kukulska-Hulme, 2020).

c. **2020–2022: The Global Shift to Online Learning**

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed a major paradigm shift. TEFL research intensified around urgent practical concerns, including:

1. best practices for emergency remote teaching,
2. student engagement in online learning,
3. the effectiveness of synchronous vs. asynchronous instruction,
4. the role of LMS (Learning Management Systems),
5. teacher readiness for digital transformation (Bozkurt, 2020).

This period marks the most significant change in TEFL methodology in modern history.

d. 2021–2025: Rise of Adaptive and Flipped Learning

As schools and institutions stabilized after the pandemic, research attention shifted toward more sophisticated pedagogical models. Adaptive learning systems allowed personalized instruction through data analytics. Flipped classroom models gained importance as they offered flexible learning opportunities and increased classroom interaction time.

1. New research topics emerged, including:
2. personalized learning environments,
3. AI-driven recommendation systems,
4. student autonomy and self-regulated learning,
5. hybrid and multimodal instructional models.

These advancements indicate maturation in technology integration from emergency use to pedagogical optimization.

e. Continuous Focus on Assessment with Technological Innovations

Assessment remained relevant throughout the entire decade, but its nature evolved significantly. After 2022, research began highlighting:

1. automated writing evaluation,
2. AI-based formative feedback,
3. digital-speaking assessments,
4. analytics-supported learning diagnostics.

These developments suggest that TEFL assessment practices are transitioning toward efficiency, accuracy, and technological scalability.

The bibliometric analysis of TEFL methodology research between 2015 and 2025 shows a decade marked by rapid development, strong technological integration, and global collaboration. Publication output has significantly increased, reflecting the growing interest of researchers worldwide in improving TEFL pedagogy. Geographically, contributions are led by developed nations but increasingly supported by developing countries through international partnerships.

Keyword co-occurrence analysis reveals four major thematic clusters communicative pedagogy, technology in TEFL, adaptive/flipped learning, and assessment each representing essential components of the modern TEFL landscape. Collaboration patterns highlight an interconnected global research community, while temporal analysis shows clear evolutionary stages aligned with technological and educational transformations.

Overall, TEFL methodology research is advancing toward a future where pedagogy, technology, and learner-centered design are deeply integrated, creating a more flexible, personalized, and globally relevant landscape for English language teaching (Dikli, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The bibliometric analysis of TEFL methodology research from 2015 to 2025 demonstrates a decade characterized by substantial expansion, methodological diversification, and strong technological integration. The rising trend in research publications shows increasing global attention to improving English language teaching, driven by rapid technological advances and changing educational demands. Countries with strong academic infrastructures lead the development of TEFL scholarship, while collaborative networks extend opportunities for researchers in developing regions to contribute to global knowledge production. The thematic structure of TEFL methodology research is defined by four major clusters: communicative pedagogy, technology-enhanced instruction, adaptive and flipped learning, and assessment innovation. These themes reflect the multidimensional nature of modern TEFL practice, in which traditional communicative models coexist with emerging digital and data-driven pedagogies. Temporal findings reveal that research priorities evolve in direct response to global educational challenges. The early focus on communicative approaches gradually shifted toward digital learning strategies, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which triggered a widespread transition to online education. Post-pandemic research emphasizes personalized learning, hybrid instruction, and AI-supported assessment systems, underscoring the field's movement toward learner-centered and technologically adaptive frameworks. Overall, TEFL methodology has developed into a more dynamic, interdisciplinary, and globally connected field. Future research should strengthen cross-cultural methodological comparisons, explore ethical and pedagogical implications of artificial intelligence, and investigate long-term impacts of adaptive learning systems on language proficiency and learner autonomy. By integrating pedagogy, technology, and global collaboration, TEFL scholarship is positioned to shape more effective, equitable, and context-sensitive English language teaching practices worldwide.

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