# Two Decades of Teaching English to Young Learners: A Bibliometric Study

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**ABSTRACT**

*English acts as a universal language and has become a vital skill in many fields due to globalization and the quick development of technology. Learning English as a foreign language early on improves learners' access to global knowledge, communication networks, and mobility, which in turn increases their future academic and career chances. The early introduction of English language teaching, also known as Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), is one calculated reaction to this worldwide demand. Children in the early phases of formal education are the focus of TEYL, a specialist area of English language instruction. Instruction at this phase frequently utilizes communicative, contextualized, and play-based methodologies. TEYL has become an increasingly important area of study and practice in education. This study employs a bibliometric analysis of TEYL publications for twenty years, it was from 2004 to 2024, using Scopus as the primary data source and VosViewer for analysis. A total of 252 articles were initially identified, which were then screened to 198 high-quality publications. The study reveals three key findings: (1) A gradual increase in TEYL research publications over the past two decades, with a notable surge in 2022, indicating growing interest in the field. (2) Indonesia has emerged as the leading contributor to TEYL research during this period. (3) Co-occurrence analysis of keywords shows a significant expansion in research topics related to Young Learners. These findings highlight the evolving trends and growing attention to TEYL in the global research landscape.*

*Keywords: bibliometric; early English education; teaching English to young learners; young learners*

## INTRODUCTION

Due to English's international role and integration into primary education systems across the globe, Teaching English to Young learners (hereafter TEYL) has grown in importance as a field of practice (Butler, 2019; Garton & Copland, 2019). A widespread agreement on the advantages of starting second language acquisition early in life, utilizing developmental plasticity to promote bilingual or multilingual abilities that provide cognitive, social, and economic benefits, is reflected in the trend toward early English language instruction (McKay, 2020). Moreover, Wahyuningsih and Afandi (2020) assert that teachers who teach young learner are expected to have engaging approaches, strategies, and techniques for teaching English.

According to Uslu (2020), the age of learners, the traits of foreign language instructors, and also the strategies and tactics employed all affect the caliber of foreign language instruction. The children will be faster to learn and understand English as a foreign language than adult. Language development research indicates that young children have a great deal of potential for learning new languages. Their neurological flexibility, cognitive adaptability, and early development receptivity to social and linguistic stimuli are largely responsible for this advantage (Verywell Mind, 2023). Children's brains have increased neuroplasticity during what is known as the "critical period," which enables them to process language input more efficiently than adults (Kuhl, 2000; Verywell Mind, 2023). Additionally, social contacts are essential for speeding up language learning. In order to reinforce language patterns and promote quicker comprehension, adults automatically modify their speech when speaking to infants by employing simpler structures, accentuated intonation, and repetition (Sutherland & Kidd, 2021). It has been demonstrated that these adaptable techniques maximize the learning environment for kids, which greatly aids in their quick language development. Children also have more active statistical learning mechanisms, which enable them to inadvertently identify linguistic patterns in their surroundings. Without explicit instruction, this skill facilitates the internalization of grammatical rules, vocabulary learning, and syntax recognition (Kuhl et al., 2003; ITSW, 2024). Early exposure to a foreign language is therefore essential since it capitalizes on children's natural capacity for language acquisition, which progressively deteriorates with age.

Furthermore, children can understand language structures without actively studying them because they frequently employ implicit learning mechanisms. According to Lichtman (2013) who conducted a study demonstrating that children primarily utilize implicit learning mechanisms when acquiring a second language, children aged 5 to 7 learned an artificial language under both explicit and implicit training conditions. The findings revealed that children effectively acquired grammatical structures even without explicit instruction, highlighting their capacity for implicit language learning. This element facilitates their acquisition of new grammar, phonology, and vocabulary. Additionally, studies reveal that young infants who are exposed to foreign languages typically have pronunciations that are more similar to those of native speakers. Sundara et al. (2020) investigated the effects of early exposure to a second language on children' speech production in their study "Exposure to a second language in infancy alters speech production." After only five hours of exposure to Spanish, they discovered that 12-month-old babies' babbling patterns mirrored the prosody of both Spanish and English interlocutors. This implies that speech production can be influenced to become more native-like by even brief exposure to a foreign language during infancy.

Research is urgently needed to inform successful teaching practices and policies that are tailored to the particular requirements of young learners as TEYL becomes ingrained in early childhood curricula in both native and non-native English-speaking nations (Pinter & Zandian, 2021). For a number of factors pertaining to social and cognitive development as well as contemporary global demands, research on teaching English to young learners (TEYL) has gained significant attention. Given the poor level of English proficiency among the populace, as evidenced by Indonesia's placement in the EF English Proficiency Index, which is still low when compared to other Asian nations, this urgency is growing in Indonesia (Anggraini, 2018; Rachmawati et al., 2025). The fact that teaching language to children is different from teaching language to adults is another reason why this TEYL research is so urgent. Like learning their first language, children acquire a second or foreign language organically and subconsciously. They are more spontaneous in using the language. In order to keep children engaged and not quickly bored, teaching them should be fun, varied, and incorporate activities like storytelling, playing, and singing (Nasution, 2016). According to

Azhar and Islamiah (2022), the educational resources for children also emphasize learning the fundamentals of English, particularly vocabulary and basic expressions, through relevant and contextual exercises. Considering that children have shorter attention spans and are more readily distracted, foreign language instruction for them should also be concise, interactive, and varied. Children's education must focus on social and emotional elements, like fostering self-esteem and establishing a fun and safe setting.

Research in TEYL has grown over many years, addressing topics including the best teaching practices, motivational techniques, the significance of cultural contexts, and the incorporation of digital resources in the classroom for young learners. Age-appropriate pedagogies are essential, according to recent studies, especially play-based and interactive approaches that engage young students and promote their innate learning preferences (Garton & Copland, 2019; Rixon, 2022). Meanwhile, fresh perspectives on the impact of sociocultural elements emphasize how crucial it is to modify instruction to take into account students' varied backgrounds and learning settings in order to maintain TEYL education's accessibility and relevance (Pinter & Zandian, 2021). Even with this increase in research, there are still a lot of unanswered questions, especially about the long-term impacts of early English exposure, best practices in a variety of educational contexts, and the incorporation of new technology into TEYL (Butler, 2019).

The majority of previous research in the topic has mostly used qualitative, conceptual, or pedagogical viewpoints, despite the fact that TEYL has attracted more scholarly and practical attention in the last 20 years. Although our knowledge of successful tactics and classroom procedures has increased because of these contributions, rigorous, data-driven analysis mapping the intellectual and developmental landscape of TEYL research from a macro-level perspective is still lacking.

Few research has used bibliometric techniques to examine the development, networks of collaboration, and theme patterns in TEYL to date. TEYL is frequently treated as a small sub-theme in existing bibliometric research in the larger subject of English language education, lacking the targeted attention it needs as a distinct and dynamic field of study. The global distribution of TEYL research, important contributing authors and institutions, citation patterns, and developing theme issues are only a few of the important gaps this produces in the literature.

Examining TEYL literature produced between 2004 and 2024, this bibliometric analysis attempts to give a methodical picture of publication trends, significant research topics, and cooperative networks within the field. In order to provide an organized basis for developing theory and practice in early English language education, this study aims to trace the development of TEYL research over the course of 20 years in order to identify the most often referenced publications, recurrent themes, and possible future research directions. This research aims to 1) analyze the annual growth of TEYL publications over the past 20 years, 2) analyze the country contributor on TEYL publications in two decades, and 3) the most popular topics discussed in TEYL literature over the past two decades.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is a bibliometric study. A bibliometric study a statistical assessment to analyze scientific publication such as articles, books, to determine the impact the scientific publication in the scientific community (Iftikhar et al., 2019). The basis for identifying the most well-known and important works in a given topic is bibliometrics. Figure 1 shows the steps in bibliometric analysis based on Passas (2024). Bibliometric analysis has some benefits including: 1) recognizing patterns and trends in the expansion of knowledge across

disciplines; 2) examining the novelty, obsolescence, and distribution of the dissemination of scientific references; 3) estimating productivity, publishers, authors, affiliations, nations, or entire disciplines; and 4) acting as a guide for future research to prevent the duplication of previously completed studies (Hanoum & Usra, 2023).
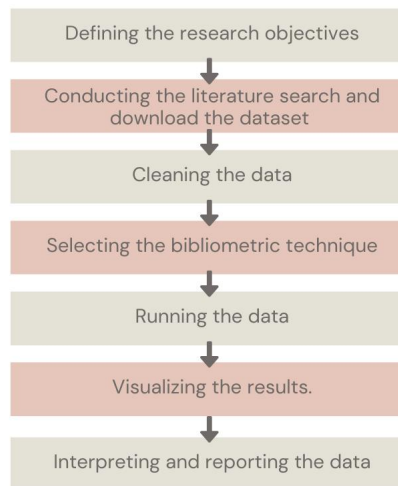
## Steps in Bibliometric Analysis

Defining the research objectives

Conducting the literature search and download the dataset

Cleaning the data

Selecting the bibliometric technique

Running the data

Visualizing the results.

Interpreting and reporting the data

*FIGURE 1. Steps in bibliometric analysis*

The data collection method in this research uses secondary data collection sourced from the Scopus academic database. The following research procedures that was applied to answer the research questions: 1) determining relevant keywords, "Teaching English to Young Learners" and "TEYL" in the Scopus academic database; 2) searching and extracting articles published between 2004 until 2024; 3) analyzing the number of articles found and identifying publication trends; 4) analyzing annual publication growth/time-series trends; 5) identifying the most frequently cited authors in TEYL literature; 6) identifying the main topics in TEYL literature using content analysis and text analysis on VosViewer.

Using 20 years (2004-2024) of metadata retrieved from the Scopus database, this bibliometric research has limitation on document type of article. The researchers also limited the articles that open access and use English language only. The obtained data of 252 articles that has "Teaching English to Young Learners" and "TEYL" in the title or abstract. After applying the inclusion criteria and reading the abstract comprehensively, it is found that 198 articles of 252 belong to TEYL discussion. Thus, this research analyzes the 198 selected articles.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section explains the findings of the bibliometric analysis on TEYL research over the past two decades. The discussion is organized into three main areas: (1) the annual growth of TEYL publications, (2) country contributions to TEYL research, and (3) the most popular topics in TEYL literature.

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THE ANNUAL GROWTH OF TEYL PUBLICATIONS OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS

Publications related to TEYL over the past two decades show a significant growth trend in the number of annual publications. From 2005 to 2015, the growth in the number of publications was relatively gradual, with a slight uptick in the later years of this period. Starting from around 2015, the number of TEYL publications experienced a significant surge, with a sharp increase in the following years. This suggests that the field of TEYL has gained more attention and momentum in the research community during this period. Machata (2023) also stated that the international environment and the introduction of English language as the most often taught foreign language in public schools brought plurilingual competency into focus and created the necessity of teaching English to young children.
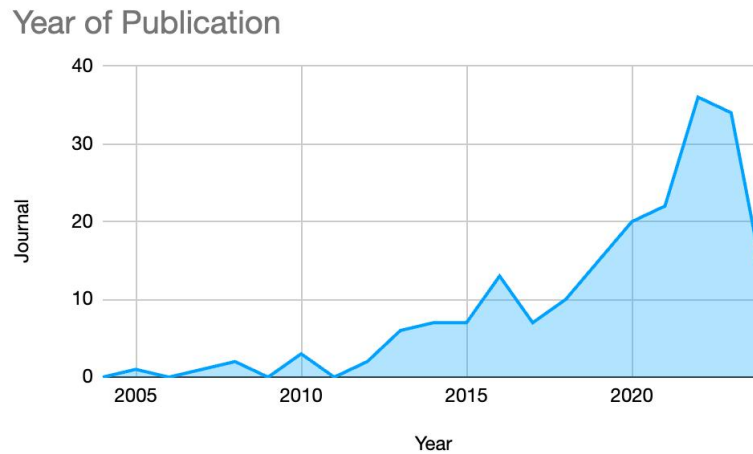


*FIGURE 2. TEYL publications over the past 20 years*

Data obtained from the Scopus database of journal articles published between 2004 and 2024 show that during 2004-2014 there are 22 article publications on TEYL. While the year 2015-2023, there are 176 article publications on TEYL. The number of publications increased highly, with the peak of TEYL-related publications occurring in 2023–2024. This trend aligns with the global emphasis on early English education and the integration of technology in language teaching (Nasution & Batubara, 2023).

The realization of the value of early foreign language acquisition to promote children's cognitive development and global communication abilities has led to a rapid development in the teaching of English to young children in Asian countries.  English instruction at this age is crucial for laying a solid linguistic foundation since young children have enormous potential for language acquisition that exceeds adult expectations. In their book, Curtain & Dahlberg (2016) stress the value of introducing other languages, particularly English, at a young age because children naturally pick up languages more quickly than adults do.

THE COUNTRY CONTRIBUTION ON TEYL PUBLICATIONS IN TWO DECADES

The areas with bright yellow, based on Figure 3. specifically, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam, indicate these countries have a high volume of TEYL related publications. Table 1 describes the number of publications of each country. Indonesia has 30 documents of publication as the highest concentration of publications or collaborations.
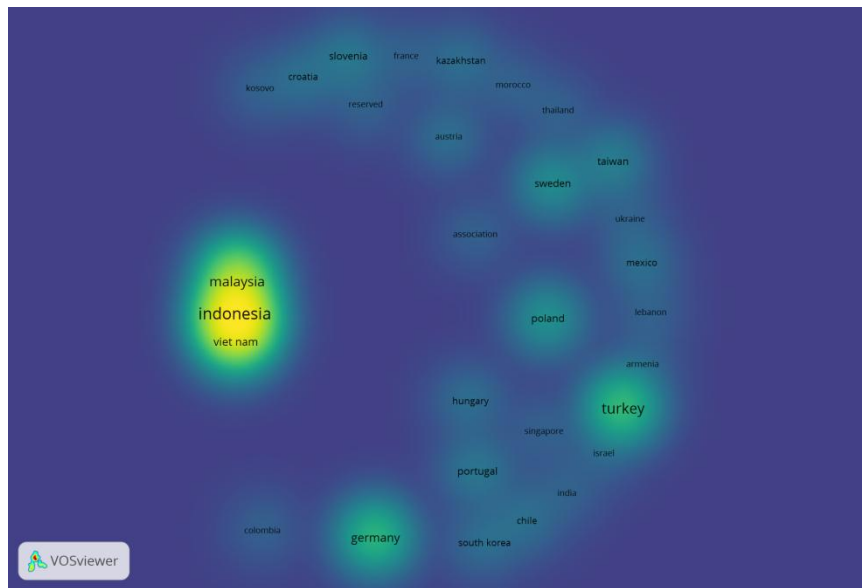
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*FIGURE 3. Density visualization country*

United Kingdom is the third rank in TEYL publications with the highest citation, but it can be seen from overlay visualization that UK is colored in blue. It appears that UK suggests potential collaboration or shared research interests in TEYL in earlier years or recent contributors. Then, Turkey becomes one of the top contributors in TEYL research publications. It can be understood that the government in Turkey reforms and a strong national interest in early language education have led to significant growth in TEYL research. The country has integrated English language instruction starting from primary levels, prompting a surge in academic studies (Ibna Seraj et al., 2024). Indonesia, as the top contributor in TEYL research publication during in the past twenty years is rapidly expanding its TEYL research output, reflecting policy changes to introduce English from the early years in many regions. While English is not mandatory at the primary level, increasing awareness has led to a surge in teacher initiatives and related studies (Nasution & Batubara, 2023).

TABLE 1. Number of articles on TEYL publications in two decades

| Country | Documents | Citation |
|---|---|---|
| Indonesia | 30 | 91 |
| Turkey | 18 | 73 |
| United Kingdom | 17 | 342 |
| Malaysia | 13 | 151 |
| United States | 12 | 224 |
| Spain | 12 | 99 |
| China | 9 | 47 |
| Saudi Arabia | 8 | 34 |
| Iran | 8 | 27 |
| Germany | 7 | 12 |

The density visualization highlights the global distribution and concentration of TEYL research over two decades. Southeast Asia as a leading region for TEYL publications in the past few years. Then, Europe and Turkey are as secondary but significant contributors in TEYL publication. As known from Zhetpisbayeva et al. (2023), students learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL). These nations have recently increased the amount of time students

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have to spend learning English, and English language instruction has begun at the elementary school level. Moreover, United Kingdom and United States are the recent contributors in TELY research. Additionally, a bibliometric study by Chen (2023) highlights that China, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia have emerged as leading contributors in the context of e-learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), indicating a broader commitment to English language education in these countries

THE MOST POPULAR TOPICS DISCUSSED IN TEYL LITERATURE OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES

Based on the Overlay Visualization from the analyzed articles (Figure 4), the term "young learners" appears most frequently, reflecting the increasing attention given to teaching English to children. It is indicating that this has been the primary focus of TEYL research in the past 20 years. Young learners as the most frequently occurring terms in the literature, indicating a central focus on this demographic in TEYL studies. This prevalence underscores the importance placed on early language education and the unique pedagogical approaches required for this age group (Martínez-León et al., 2024).
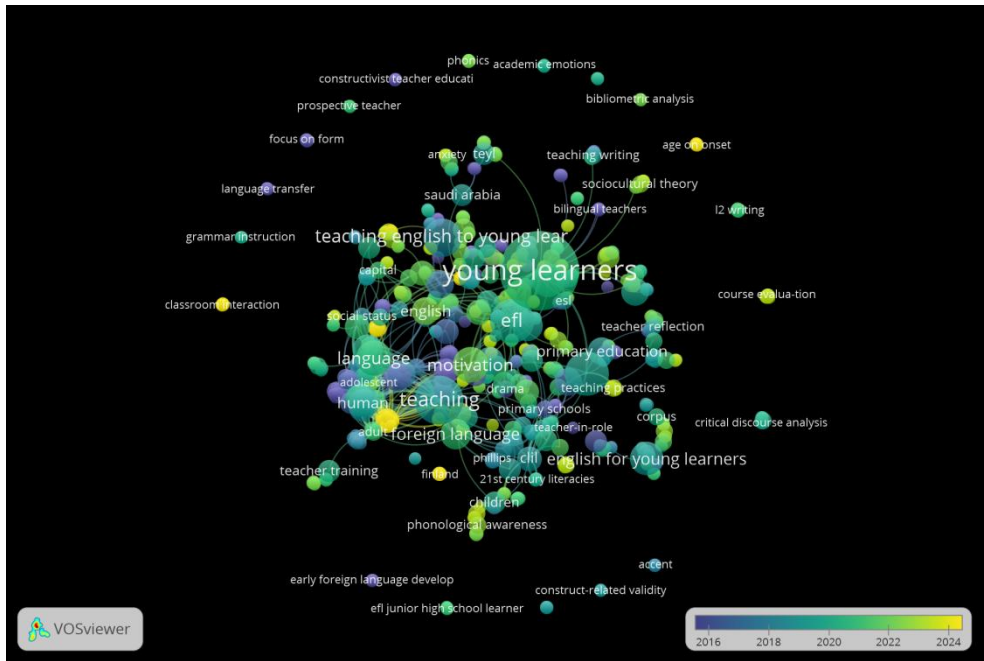


FIGURE 4. Topic identification using VOS viewer

The prominence of "young learners" suggests a strong emphasis on understanding the unique needs, characteristics, and approaches to teaching English to children, particularly in the early stages of language acquisition. As highlighted by Juhana (2014), teaching English to young learners requires special approaches, as they have distinct characteristics and learning needs that differ from adults. Recognizing and addressing these unique aspects are crucial for effective language instruction.

The visualization shows various pedagogical aspects related to TEYL, such as "teaching practices," "teaching writing," "classroom interaction," "grammar instruction," and "language transfer." These clusters highlight the research efforts to explore effective teaching methodologies, curriculum design, and classroom strategies for teaching English to young learners. Numerous studies stress the value of teacher tactics in fostering children's multilingual development, such as using the mother tongue in the classroom and methods that honor students' cultural backgrounds (Tse & Wong, 2022). By using these techniques,

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children can improve their English language proficiency without sacrificing their native tongue. By incorporating augmented reality technology, teachers' methods for instructing young students in English have also changed. Children in rural areas can become more motivated to study English by using Augmented Reality (AR)-based learning tools. This method has been shown to improve learning accomplishment and engagement by teaching English pronunciation and spelling using 3D virtual objects and animations (Murphy, 2023).

The topic of classroom interaction has become widely discussed in recent years, as can be seen from the bright yellow visualization results. In his book Classroom engagement for Language Teachers, Walsh (2014) highlights the importance of classroom engagement in the language acquisition process. To create engaging and meaningful learning, educators and students must become more adept at interacting with one another. Additionally, Garside (2017) highlights the importance of learning methodologies and meaningful contact in English lessons in enhancing the caliber of teacher-student communication.

The visualization also includes clusters related to learner-centered factors, such as "motivation," "language acquisition," "phonological awareness," and "age of onset." These topics suggest a focus on understanding the cognitive, linguistic, and developmental aspects of young language learners, which are crucial for designing appropriate instructional approaches. According to Chen and Lee (2024), psychological elements (like drive and self-assurance), family support (like parental participation in education), and social and cultural influences in the immediate environment all have a significant impact on how well children learn English. A setting that is safe, entertaining, and socially engaging is crucial for promoting a child's language development.

Furthermore, the visualization describes clusters related to teacher-focused aspects, such as "teacher training," "teacher reflection," and "teacher education." This indicates a recognition of the importance of teacher preparation, professional development, and reflective practices in the context of TEYL. The visualization includes also some emerging trends, such as "critical discourse analysis," "corpus," and "21st-century literacies." These clusters suggest that researchers are exploring newer approaches and frameworks to understand and enhance TEYL in the context of evolving educational landscapes and technological advancements. According to Sari (2022), modern technology serves as a digital platform in the English teaching and learning process. Students may benefit from it in their academic pursuits.

Among the subjects highlighted in the VOS visualization is the term "anxiety." This could suggest that anxiousness is one of the difficulties in putting TEYL into practice. This is consistent with Sundari's (2017) research, which demonstrates that students frequently experience anxiety when speaking in English, which prevents them from participating fully in class. Students who must utilize a foreign language in a classroom setting may experience a particular type of anxiety known as "classroom language anxiety." Children typically experience this anxiety because they worry about making errors, not being understood by peers or teachers, or getting unfavorable feedback from the classroom.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study highlights the significant growth and evolution of research in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) over the past two decades, underscoring its increasing prominence in language education. The findings reveal Southeast Asia's leading role in TEYL research, likely driven by the region's emphasis on early English education. The data visualization provides a comprehensive overview of the field, revealing a strong focus on "young learners" as the central theme, while also showcasing the diverse pedagogical, learner-centered, teacher-focused, and contextual factors that have shaped scholarly inquiry in TEYL during

this period. The future researchers can conduct a bibliometric analysis of TEYL-related publications from other databases like Web of Science or Dimensions.ai. Researchers can identify understudied regions and direct both academic research and real-world classroom application by using bibliometric analysis to different TEYL variables. In addition to advancing the academic community, these research aid in the development of more knowledgeable, efficient, and inclusive teaching methods for young English language learners worldwide.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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