Charting the Evolution of Applied Linguistics in Iran: Insights from a Scientometric Analysis

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Abstract: Applied Linguistics has emerged as a crucial interdisciplinary field bridging theoretical linguistics with practical language-related issues, yet comprehensive scientometric analyses of its development in the Iranian context remain limited. This scientometric study investigates the landscape of Applied Linguistics research in Iran through analysis of 339 articles from Scopus (n=208) and Web of Science (n=131) databases containing "Applied Linguistics" as a keyword. Employing VOSviewer and Bibliometrix R Package, the research examines general scientometric information, publication and citation patterns, prolific sources/authors/universities, methodological approaches, and thematic developments from 2005 to 2024. Findings reveal quantitative methodologies were most common within Iranian Applied Linguistics research (42.77 %), followed by qualitative (30.38 %) and mixed-methods (26.84 %) approaches. This imbalance of the methodological orientation within these studies points to a need for exploration of qualitative or mixed-method approaches to address complex issues within the field of Applied Linguistics. As for the prominent entities, *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics* with 15 articles, Alireza Jalilifar with 20 articles, and Islamic Azad University with 80 articles across all branches, emerged as the most productive within their respective categories. Furthermore, articles on academic writing received the highest citation impact among other subjects. Thematic analysis identified "genre analysis," "ELT," and "academic writing" with the highest citation rates. Moreover, themes such as "meta-analysis," and "content analysis" were found to be emerging topics and need greater attention.

Keywords: Applied Linguistics, Iran, Scientometric, Scopus, Web of Science

Introduction

Applied Linguistics has emerged as a distinct field with the publication of a dedicated issue in the journal of *Language Learning* in 1948 (Grabe, 2010). The discipline extends beyond traditional linguistics to address practical language-related challenges within real-world contexts (Grabe, 2010). Over the years, the field has evolved into a extensive interdisciplinary field of study drawing from domains such as psychology, education, sociology, computer science, and anthropology (Grabe, 2010). As James (1993) asserts, the field's significance lies in its application of theories to resolve real-world problems, resulting in the fusion of frameworks and practical solutions.

The evolution of Applied Linguistics has been characterized by methodological diversification and theoretical expansion (Brown, 2004). These paradigm shifts reflect the field's adaptability to emerging demands and technological advancements across various cultural and educational contexts.

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The dynamic landscape of Applied Linguistics is expected to continue to evolve, incorporating modern methodologies and AI-based research, as well as revisiting traditional studies, which facilitate its integration into diverse academic and professional domains worldwide.

Scientometric and bibliometric analyses provide critical frameworks for understanding disciplinary evolution. Both approaches examine quantitative dimensions of scientific literature and knowledge production (Broadus, 1987; Hood & Wilson, 2001) with slight variations in the methodology and goal of each. Within Applied Linguistics, such studies have proven to be instrumental in identifying research gaps, tracking paradigm shifts, and mapping knowledge structures within the field's literature. Despite the established history in other disciplines, bibliometric and scientometric studies have only recently gained prominence within Applied Linguistics research, offering valuable insights into the intellectual structure and development trajectories within the field itself as well as the subdisciplines within (Aryadoust, 2023; Ghorbani, 2024; Meihami & Esfandiari, 2024; Navidinia et al., in press; Zakaria & Aryadoust, 2024). However, scientometric studies exploring the evolution of Applied Linguistics in the Iranian context are lacking. Therefore, this scientometric study aims to address this gap by examining Articles published by Iranian researchers containing "applied linguistics" in their keywords in Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases.

Review of Literature

Multiple researchers have tried to conduct scientometric studies in applied linguistics. For example, in their edited book, Meihami and Esfandiari (2024) aim to help researchers understand the way scientometrics can help them in understanding research studies in applied linguistics. The book also tries to assist researchers in exploring different areas of research in applied linguistics. Furthermore, a special issue of the journal of *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* titled "Introducing Bibliometrics in Applied Linguistics" was devoted to studies addressing this topic. In this special issue, Aryadoust (2023) referred to the growing trend in the bibliometrics studies in applied linguistics, calling on future researchers to address topics such as scale development for measuring perceived prestige and the imbalance in the authors' representation residing in different parts of the world.

Zakaria and Aryadoust (2024) analyzed the field of Applied Linguistics in the span of 52 years. This study explored the methodology and future directions of the field with the analysis of 43,685 published documents within 51 Q1 journals of Applied Linguistics indexed in Web of Science. They found different main research areas in applied linguistics, and they identified that these areas are interconnected theoretically.

Furthermore, Liu and Hu (2024) examined the scientific field of Applied Linguistics with the coverage of more recent studies (2017-2021). They examined the recent research trends of the field by analyzing 7,602 articles and over 198,000 references within 42 Applied Linguistics journals. They investigated highly cited publications, highly cited authors, and frequently discussed topics within these journals. The most popular research topics that they found were "multilingualism, translanguaging, psychological factors, vocabulary learning, teaching methods and teacher factors, linguistic complexity, bilingual advantage, and grammatical processing" (p. 45).

In another study, Ghorbani (2024) tried to explore how bibliometrics can be used for the analysis and visualization of research trends and patterns in a field. He analyzed 881 English documents from Web of Science spanning from 2013 to 2022, with a focus on technology-oriented publications such as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), and Robot-Assisted Language Learning (RALL). The study applied both intellectual structure, which examines key authors, institutions, and influential publications, and conceptual structure, which explores thematic evolution and interconnected ideas of the field. Findings indicated a total of 12 clusters based on the thematic map, out of which the developing clusters included: (English, language, student), (call, knowledge, communication), and (competence, second-language acquisition, and negotiation).

Moreover, Farsani and Jamali (2024) analyzed the landscape of the field, focusing on the topical trends and research frontiers. They conducted a scientometric study on 3,824 documents published within 18 top-tier journals in the span of 9 years from 2009 to 2018. They used co-word analysis using VOSviewer. They also examined the different types of methodological orientation within these published articles. Their findings showed that "quantitative researchers targeted language testing and assessment, qualitative researchers addressed discourse and interaction analysis," and mixed-method researchers focused on SLA (p. 83).

However, the above-mentioned studies have tried to explore the field as an international domain and have not focused on the evolution of applied linguistics in the Iranian context. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap through a scientometric analysis of articles written by Iranian researchers published within Scopus and Web of Science databases. The significance of this study extends beyond reporting only research outputs; it contextualizes findings within broader global trends of Applied Linguistics research. The findings offer practical implications for universities, funding agencies, and journals in planning future contributions to the field. Doing studies of this kind for mapping the research practice of a field is critical for aligning regional scholarship with international paradigms (Farsani & Zonouz, 2025; Meihami & Esfandiari, 2024). Lack of such studies limits researchers from identifying the shared or diverged themes in comparison to the international scholarship.

Eight research questions were formulated to guide this study:

Research Question One: What are the general scientometric metrics of Iranian Applied Linguistics research within the two databases of Scopus and Web of Science?

Research Question Two: What are the annual publication and average citation counts of Iranian Applied Linguistics research within the two databases of Scopus and Web of Science?

Research Question Three: Which sources, authors, and universities are the most prominent in terms of published articles within the two databases of Scopus and Web of Science?

Research Question Four: What is the percentage of research methodology (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method) usage within the published articles?

Research Question Five: Which documents have the most citation frequency?

Research Question Six: Which author-indexed keywords are the most frequent within the published articles?

Research Question Seven: What are the thematic domains of the research done by Iranian scholars within Applied Linguistics inside the two databases of Scopus and Web of Science?

Research Question Eight: What patterns can be seen from the average publication per year vs the average citation of the themes within studies conducted by Iranian Applied Linguistics scholars?

Methodology

This study conducted a scientometric analysis on the publications of Iranian scholars with "Applied Linguistics" as an author-indexed keyword within them. To ensure the validity of the data extracted and relevance of the publications, a precise research design was followed.

Design

Conducting a scientometric study relies heavily on a sound approach for data collection and comprehensive interpretation. Using different approaches for data collection makes such studies unique, giving the ability to grasp the various aspects of the targeted entity. These approaches vary in terms of the goal they want to achieve. The mentioned approaches examine single or plural entities within a field of research, such as journals, a set of keywords, or multiple scholars. After collecting the desired data, authors may manipulate the data to make it more robust, clean, and closer to the final dataset they want to work with.

The present study used a keyword-based approach, which best fits the set goals. Because of the nature of the study, "Applied Linguistics" was chosen as the main keyword of the study to collect the publications explicitly representing the field, though this may exclude the related subdisciplines. Choosing the databases was the next step, and it was decided to choose both of the major databases for Applied Linguistics (Scopus & Web of Science) to have more coverage. The study focused on publications from 2005 to 2024, capturing two decades of Applied Linguistics development in Iran.

Data Collection

After the initial steps, a thorough systematic search was done through both databases on July 17, 2024, in the specific sections of the databases.

For the Scopus database, the mentioned keyword was searched in the ***Titles, Abstracts, and Keywords*** section, and for the Web of Science database, the chosen category was the ***Topic*** section, which represented the same fields as Scopus. After the search, several filters were applied to the results. These two filters included the type of document as well as the country of the publication. The type of documents was chosen to be only "Articles." This meant that all other means of publication, such as books, book chapters, conference papers, notes, and so on, were excluded from the initial dataset. The second filter was the country of articles, which was selected to be based in Iran. This meant that all publications based on other countries were excluded as well.
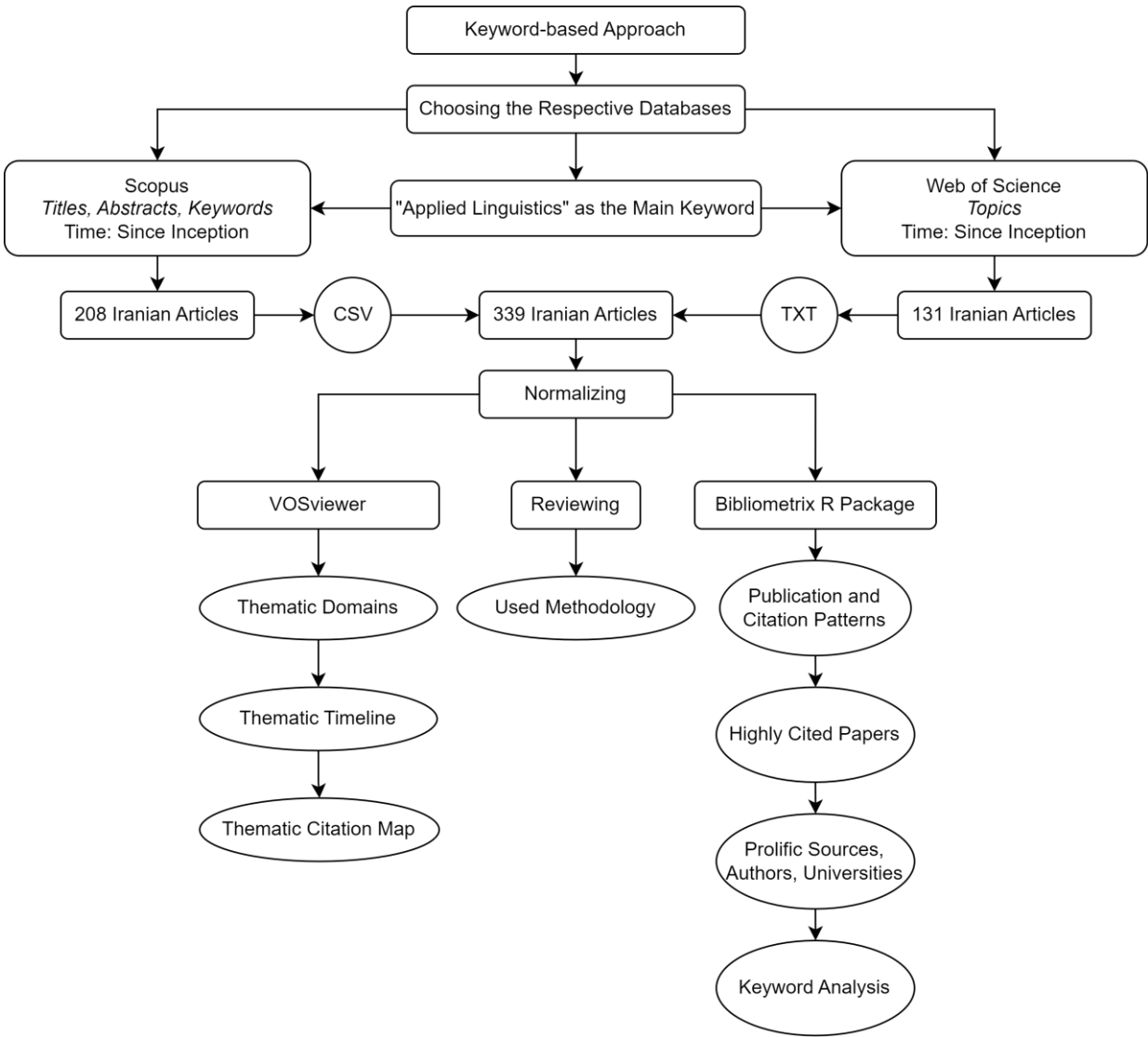
This way, we can ensure that all the scientific articles are Iranian and about applied linguistics. After applying the filters, the data was acquired in the essential formats (CSV for Scopus and TXT for WoS).

Data Cleaning and Analysis

Before analyzing the said datasets, they were normalized. This procedure included the authors manually going through the file with Microsoft Excel, repairing any damaged records and removing any irrelevant data, as well as removing the duplicate values with the duplicate removal function of Microsoft Excel. The final results were 339 articles (131 for WoS and 208 for Scopus). In the end, the data was fed into *VOSviewer* (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010) and *Bibliometrix R Package* (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) software packages to visualize the networks as well as address the prolific entities within the datasets. Figure 1 shows the respective flowchart of the entire methodology procedure.

The Bibliometrix R Package was utilized for its extensive analytical tools. The comprehensive scientific assessment of the field, including prolific entities within the dataset such as sources, authors, universities, the most influential publications, and keyword analysis, was among these options.VOSviewer was used for its ability to create thematic maps of the domain with its visually appealing and color-coded networks. The Thematic Domains map, as well as average publication and average citation networks, were created by this software.

Figure 1
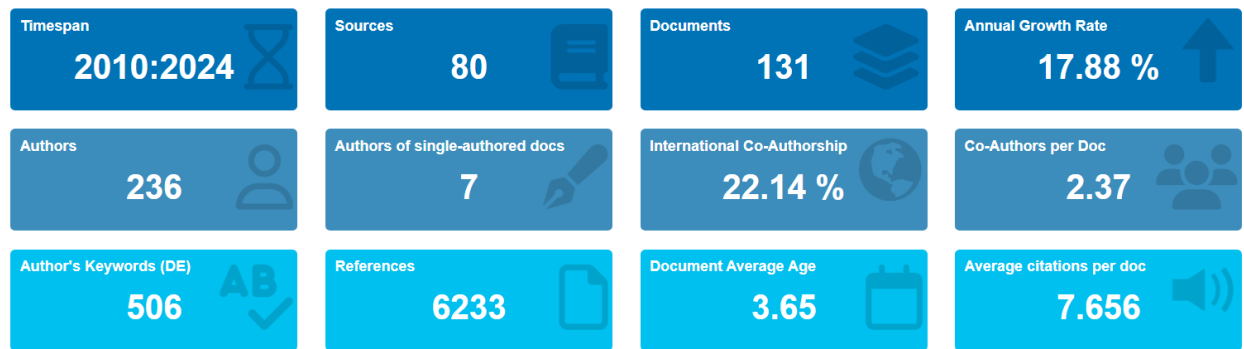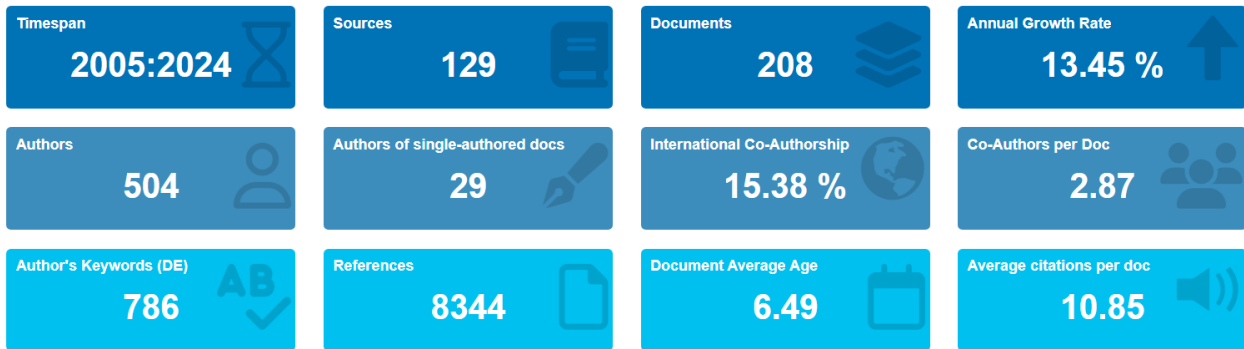
Methodology Flowchart

Results

Main Information

Looking at the general overview of the two datasets side by side, we can see that the first article published in Scopus was in 2005, whereas the one in the Web of Science was published much later in 2010. The number of documents follows a similar trend, and as mentioned before, Scopus has published more documents than WoS, which resulted in more sources, authors, references, and keywords. Even though the number of articles within the Scopus database is higher, the annual growth rate of the database falls short compared to that of the WoS database. However, despite this growth, Scopus has a 10.85 average citation per document, higher than that of WoS with 7.656.
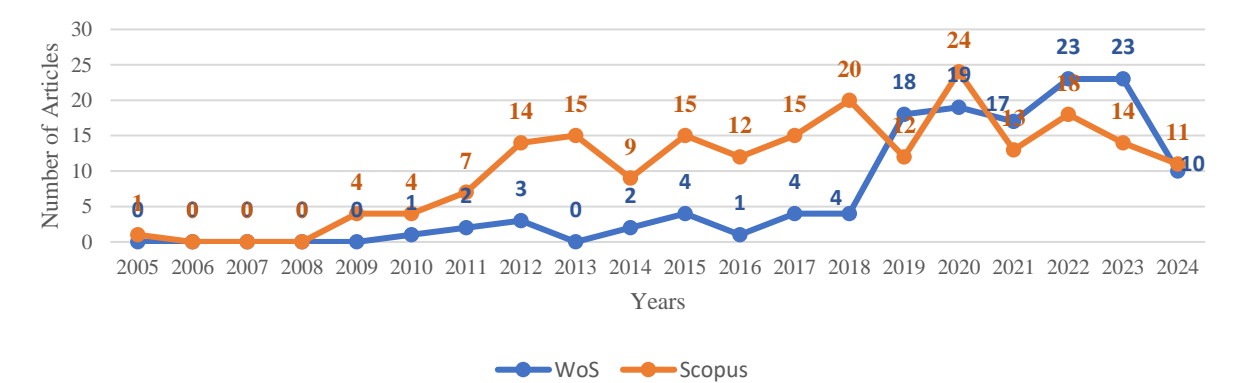
Figure 2

Web of Science Dataset Overview

Timespan	Sources	Documents	Annual Growth Rate
2010:2024	80	131	17.88 %
Authors 236	**Authors of single-authored docs** 7	**International Co-Authorship** 22.14 %	**Co-Authors per Doc** 2.37
Author's Keywords (DE) 506	**References** 6233	**Document Average Age** 3.65	**Average citations per doc** 7.656

Figure 3

Scopus Dataset Overview

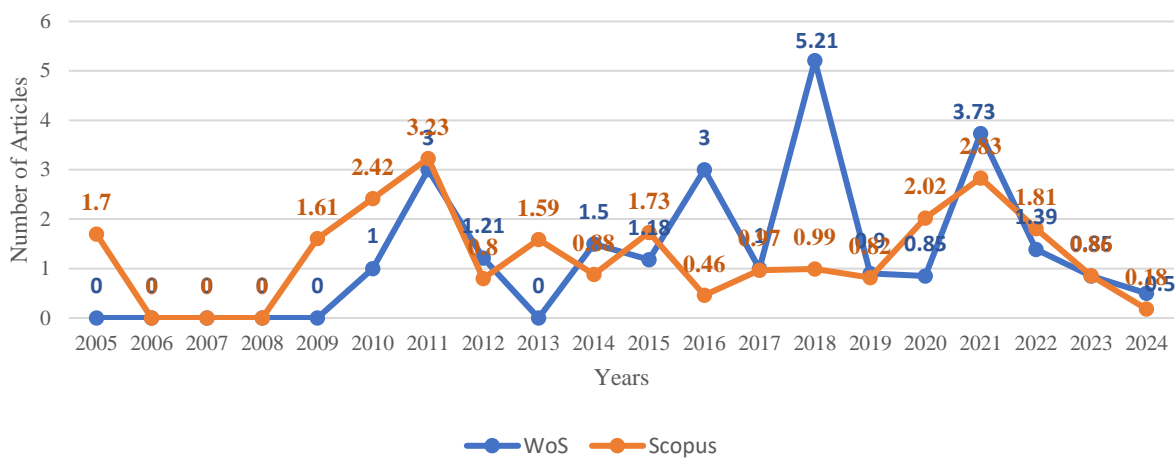| Timespan	Sources	Documents	Annual Growth Rate
2005:2024	129	208	13.45 %
Authors 504	**Authors of single-authored docs** 29	**International Co-Authorship** 15.38 %	**Co-Authors per Doc** 2.87
Author's Keywords (DE) 786	**References** 8344	**Document Average Age** 6.49	**Average citations per doc** 10.85

Annual Publication and Average Citation

The first step when conducting such research is to analyze publication patterns to uncover hidden trends. According to Figure 4, it is evident that Scopus has consistently published more papers than Web of Science since 2005, with a constant increase over the years. Nevertheless, there is a noticeable decline towards the end after a period of fluctuation, during which WoS enjoyed the advantage. Upon examining the blue trend representing WoS, it is evident that a consistently increasing tendency surpasses Scopus from 2019 to 2023, with the exception in 2020, in which Scopus increased the production of papers to 24, with a 5-article difference between the two databases.

Figure 4

Annual Production of Two Datasets

In addition to acknowledging the annual productivity, the average number of citations per year has also been presented. Upon initial observation, the blue trend shows numerous fluctuations over the years. However, in the more recent period, Web of Science has had a higher average number of citations than Scopus. The orange trend initially had a higher average citation but scored lower for the remainder of the years.
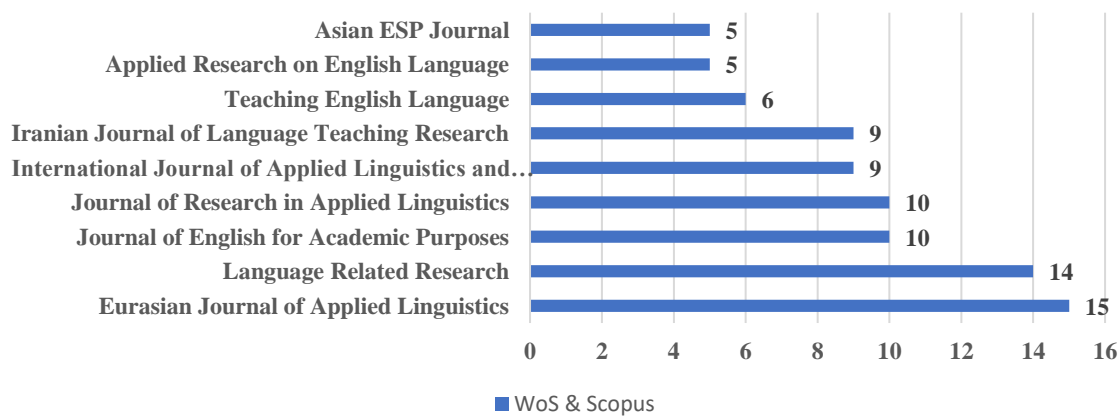
Figure 5

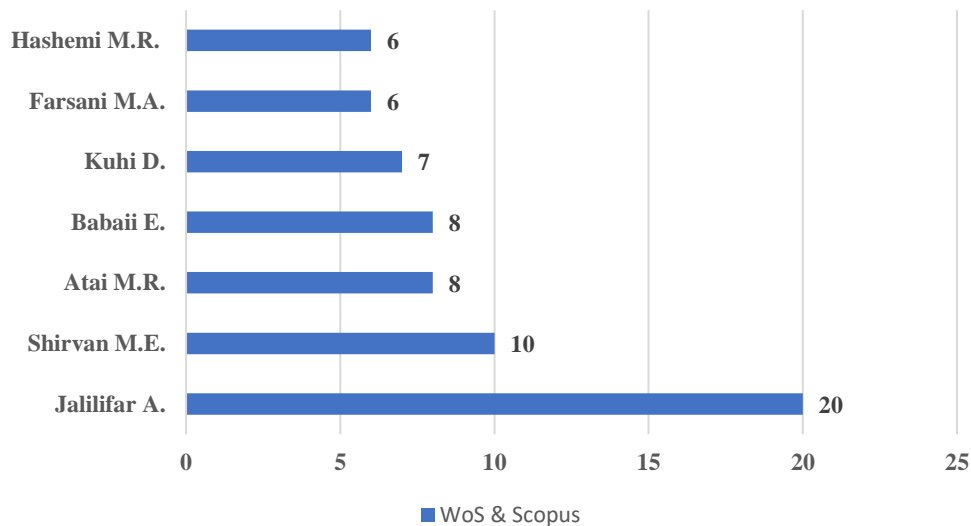*Average Citation per Year for Two Databases*

Sources, Authors, Universities

We consolidated the most widely published sources within these two datasets. Some journals are indexed in both databases, whereas others might be in a single database. To facilitate reporting and enhance clarity, the two databases were considered a unified corpus for this segment of the study. This decision was implemented across all metrics examined within this section. According to Figure 6, the *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics* has published 15 articles, topping the list. It is closely followed by *Language Related Research*, which has published 14 publications. *The Journal of English for Academic Purposes* and the *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics* hold the third and fourth positions regarding the number of published papers, with each journal having 10 papers. Additional publications with a count of 5 or above include *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature* (9), *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research* (9), *Teaching English Language* (6), *Applied Research on English Language* (5), and *Asian ESP Journal* (5).
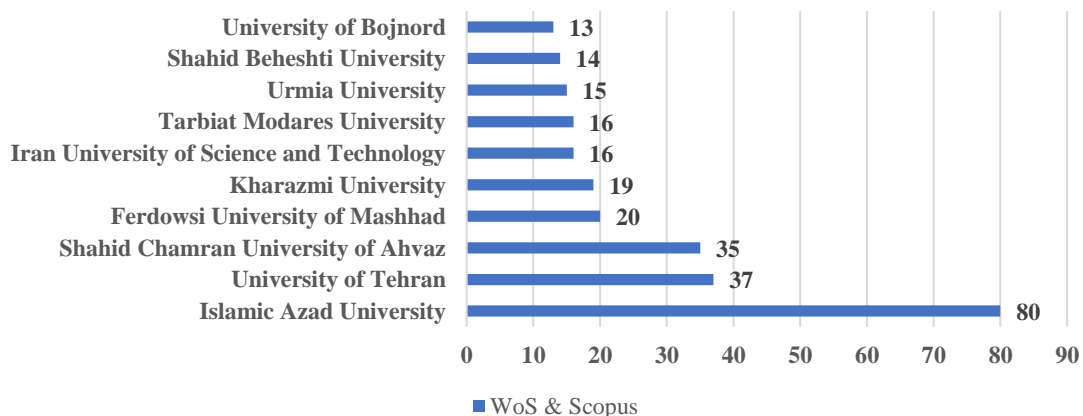
Figure 6

Most Published Sources

Authors are another entity of great value to scientometric researchers. Their collaboration, publications, and citations are crucial for uncovering hidden patterns and comprehending the trends they are pursuing. According to Figure 7, Jalilifar A. has the highest number of publications in these datasets, surpassing other authors by a significant margin of 10 articles. Shirvan M.E. secured second place with 10 articles, while Atai M.R. and Babaii E. tied for third place with eight articles each. Other notable authors include Kuhi D. (7), Farsani M.A. (6), and Hashemi M.R. (6).

Figure 7

Most Prolific Authors

As we delve deeper, we examine the universities with the highest number of publications. Figure 8 demonstrates that Islamic Azad University has the highest number of published articles in these two databases, totaling 80 papers. The University of Tehran comes in second place. Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz secured the third position, publishing 35 publications in the two primary databases. Ferdowsi University of Mashhad and Kharazmi University each have 20 and 19 papers, respectively. Other prominent universities in this section include Iran University of Science and Technology (16 publications), Tarbiat Modares University (16 publications), Urmia University (15 publications), Shahid Beheshti University (14 publications), and University of Bojnord (13 publications).

Figure 8

Most Published Universities

Research Approaches of Published Articles

The next section of the study examines the research approach used within these articles, which can show which of the three methods is favored by the Iranian authors. Therefore, the authors have meticulously analyzed each article to extract this relevant data. Of 339 articles, 145 (42.77 %) employed a quantitative approach, 103 (30.384 %) utilized qualitative research, and 91 (26.84 %) adopted mixed methodology.

The percentages of each research approach for both databases were also calculated separately. In the Web of Science database, 56 publications (42.75 %) used quantitative, 38 (29.01 %) used qualitative, and 37 (28.24 %) used mixed-method approach. In the Scopus database, out of 208 publications collected by the authors, 89 (42.79 %) employed a quantitative approach, 65 (31.25 %) utilized qualitative methodology, and 54 (25.96 %) adopted mixed methodology for their research papers. Table 1 shows a summary of the information.
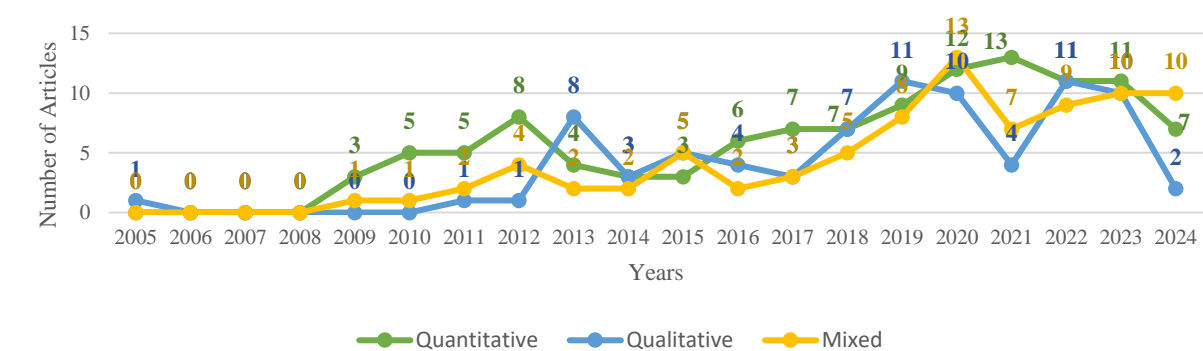
Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Methodologies in Web of Science and Scopus

Method	Web of Science		Scopus	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Quantitative	56	42.75%	89	42.79%
Qualitative	38	29.01%	65	31.25%
Mixed	37	28.24%	54	25.96%

Another aspect to examine in this study is the annual fluctuation in the use of each methodology and its relative importance over the years, which can be retrieved from the gathered data. Notably, the two databases were considered as a unified entity for this portion of the study, comprising 339 publications from 2005 to 2024. Figure 9 illustrates that publishing all three techniques has experienced changes over the years. The figure contains three lines: green shows a Quantitative approach, blue signifies a Qualitative methodology, and yellow indicates a Mixed methodology.

In the initial phases of this figure, it is evident that quantitative research maintained a superior publication rate until 2012. This trend changed when there was a dramatic surge in the publication of qualitative methods, resulting in eight published articles in 2012 and 2013 for both methodologies (qualitative and quantitative). The mixed method, however, exhibited relatively modest numbers compared to others. This alteration occurred in 2015 when mixed and quantitative articles reached five publications. Subsequently, until 2018, quantitative methodology predominated once more, leveling off with qualitative methods in that year. Unexpectedly, the number of mixed-method papers skyrocketed in 2020, resulting in 13 published articles. In 2021, quantitative research produced a total of 13 articles before the numbers shifted again, reaching seven papers in 2024. Finally, mixed-methodology occupies the first position as of 2024, totaling 10 published papers throughout the two databases.

Figure 9

Distribution of Methods across Years

Most Cited Articles

Continuing with this pattern, we are now transitioning to the most frequently cited documents in these datasets. Table 2 displays the papers that the authors have cited the most. This section presents what the papers are mainly about and mentions the impact each one had on the applied linguistics of Iran as a field of study. As indicated in the table, five articles discuss the academic writing approach with different aspects in focus. We can see a variety of topics among these prolific works, such as citation analysis, collaboration analysis, and statistical use analysis. Ansarifar et al. (2018) have accumulated the most citations within this dataset, with 167 citations. Another notable author is Abdollahzadeh (2011), who has 147 citations.

Table 2

Most Cited Papers in Scopus and Web of Science Databases

Document Title	Author(s)	Citations	Year
Phrasal complexity in academic writing: A comparison of abstracts written by graduate students and expert writers in applied linguistics	Ahmad Ansarifar, Hesamoddin Shahriari, Reza Pishghadam	167	2018
Poring over the findings: Interpersonal authorial engagement in applied linguistics papers	Esmaeel Abdollahzadeh	147	2011
Mixed methods research: Toward new research designs in applied linguistics	Mohammad R. Hashemi, Esmat Babaii	93	2013
A cross-disciplinary investigation of multi-word expressions in the moves of research article abstracts	Taha Omidian, Hesamoddin Shahriari, Anna Siyanova-Chanturia	65	2018
Plagiarism Among Iranian Graduate Students of Language Studies: Perspectives and Causes	Esmat Babaii, Hassan Nejadghanbar	54	2017
Levels of Statistical Use in Applied Linguistics Research Articles: From 1986 to 2015	Reza Khany, Khalil Tazik	40	2019
Academic attribution: citation analysis in master's theses and research articles in applied linguistics	Alireza Jalilifar	32	2012
Methodological orientations, academic citations, and scientific collaboration in applied linguistics: What do research synthesis and bibliometrics indicate?	Mohammad Amini Farsani, Hamid R. Jamali, Maryam Beikmohammadi, Babak Daneshvar Ghorbani, Ladan Soleimani	21	2021
Applied linguistics research in three decades: a methodological synthesis of graduate theses in an EFL context	Mohammad Amini Farsani, Esmat Babaii	15	2020
Embodiment of rhetorical moves in lexical bundles in abstracts of the medical sciences	Zeinab Abdollahpour, Javad Gholami	12	2019

Keyword Analysis

The concluding segment of this study centers on the thematic development and analysis of hidden patterns within the datasets. Academics employ keywords to determine the scope and occurrence of subjects across various fields. Accordingly, the authors analyzed and presented the phrases indexed in Table 3. Based on the table, "Applied Linguistics" has the highest occurrence rate. "Research Articles" and "Academic Writing" are ranked second and third, with 16 and 15 occurrences, respectively. The phrase "Research Article" has a frequency of 14, while "Metadiscourse," "Genre Analysis," and "Linguistics" each have a frequency of 11. The phrases "Lexical Bundles," "Discussion Section," and "Discussion" have frequencies of 10, 10, and 8, respectively, and they are located at the end.
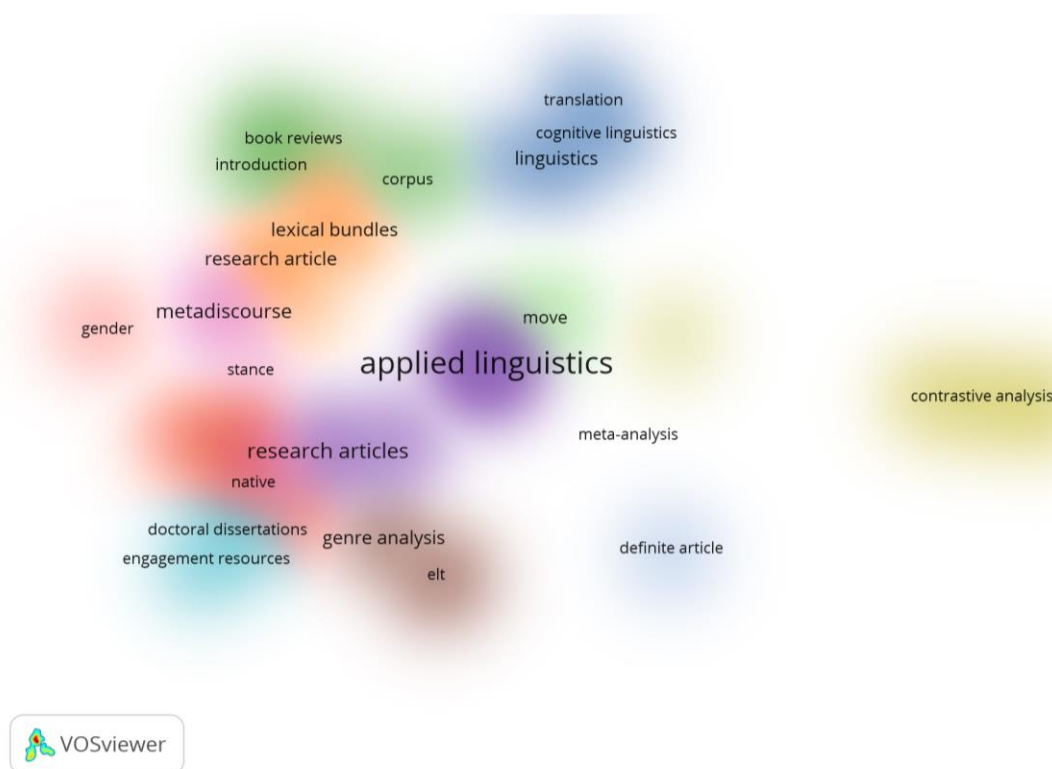
Table 3

Most Frequent Author-indexed Keywords

Keyword	Frequency	Keyword	Frequency
Applied Linguistics	70	Genre Analysis	11
Research Articles	16	Linguistics	11
Academic Writing	15	Lexical Bundles	10
Research Article	14	Discussion Section	10
Metadiscourse	11	Discussion	8

Figures 10 and 11 demonstrate the thematic densities of the two datasets. Clusters consist of distinct objects organized based on the relationship between their shared keywords. Software packages utilize this relationship to identify the appropriate grouping of items inside a cluster. In the upper part of Figure 10, cognitive linguistics and linguistics are visually clustered together, forming a cluster that is colored dark blue. These two keywords are interconnected, and authors frequently utilize them together. Considering this fact, it is evident that Figure 11, also known as the Web of Science clusters, displays more organized and distinct clusters. In contrast, the clusters in the Scopus database appear tangled and even split in half in certain instances.
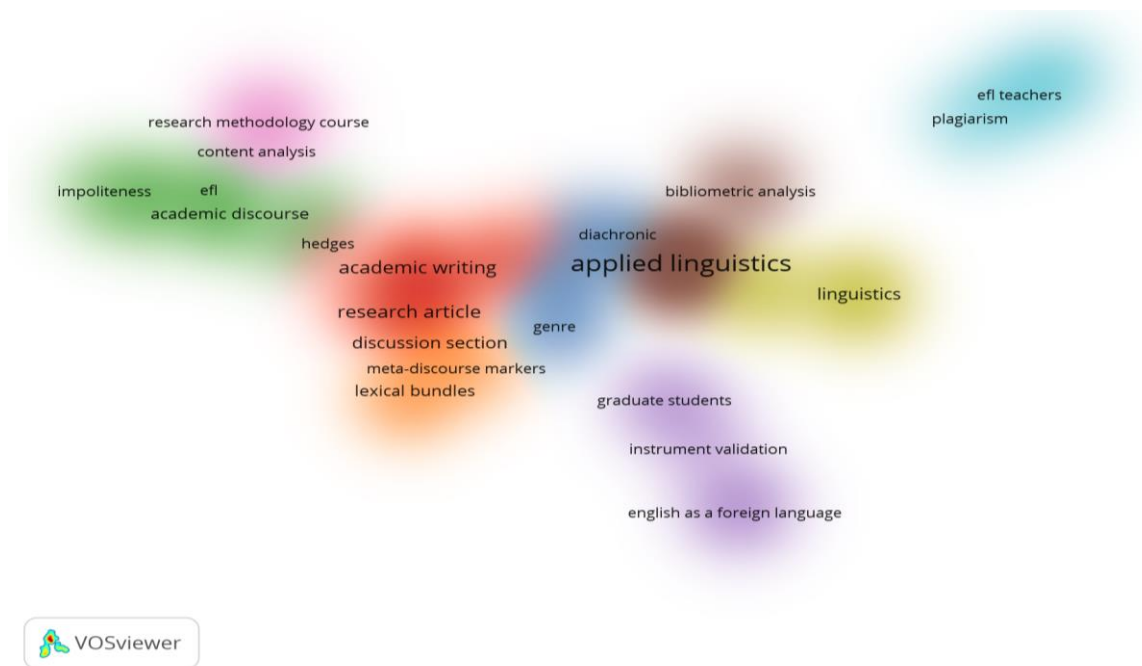
Figure 10

Thematic Density (Scopus)

Figure 11

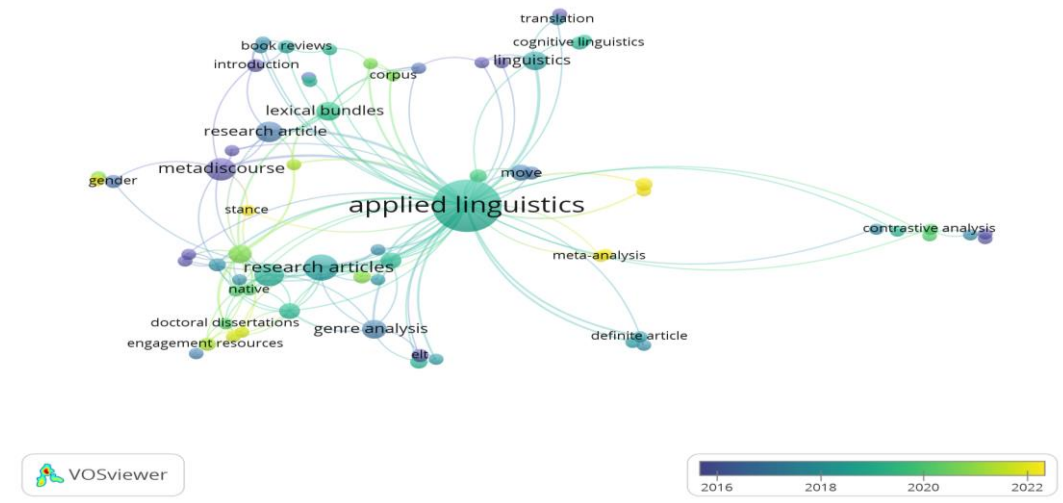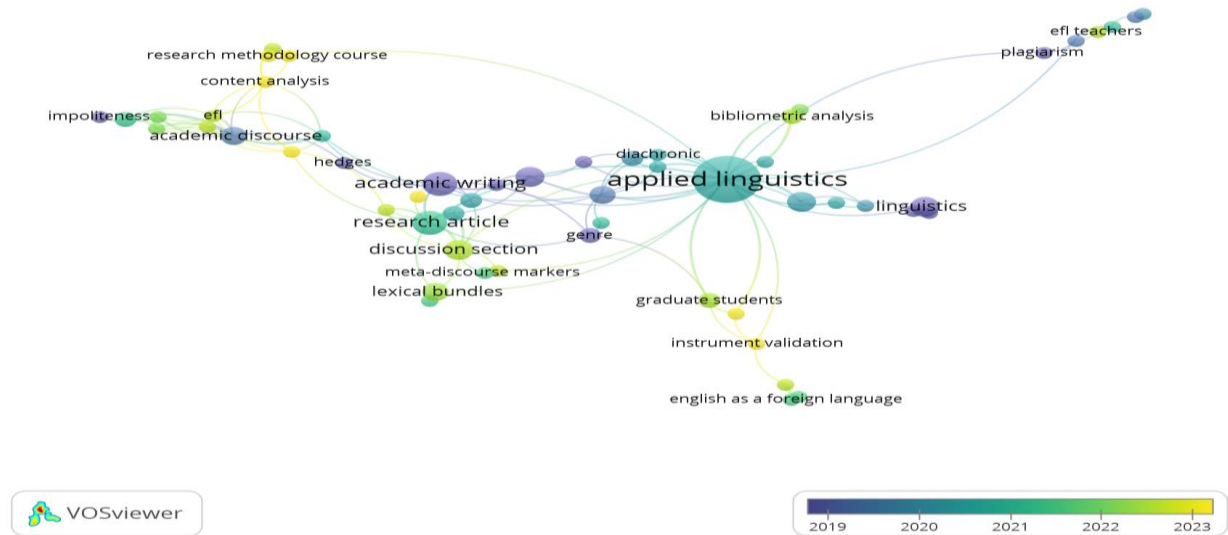*Thematic Density (Web of Science)*

The final segment of this section provides significant insights into the duration and popularity of the subjects represented in these databases. Figures 12 and 13 display the frequency of publications over the years. These maps categorize history into three unique eras: the first period, which encompasses anything before 2018; the second period, from 2018-2019 to 2020-2022; and the last period, which encompasses 2020-2022 and beyond. The color palette for these periods consists of purple, dark green, light green, and yellow.

Examining the maps, it is evident that previous publications published in Scopus have primarily addressed topics such as "metadiscourse," "translation," and "research article." We observe similarities and differences when examining the Web of Science map. The Web of Science articles during that time focused on the topics of "linguistics," "plagiarism," "academic writing," "genre," "impoliteness," "academic discourse," and "hedges."
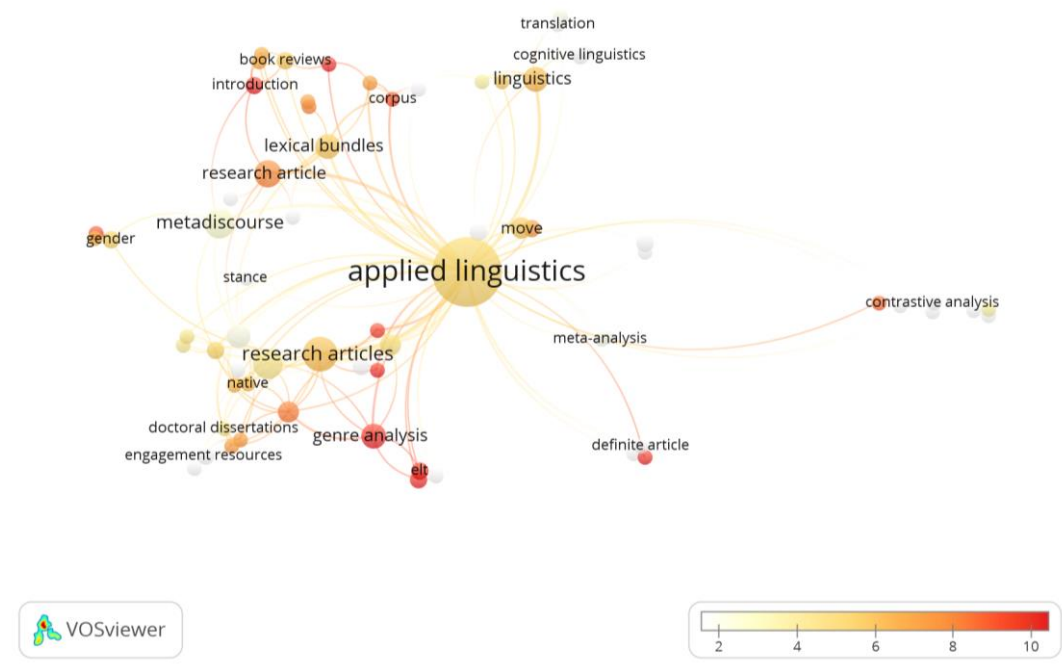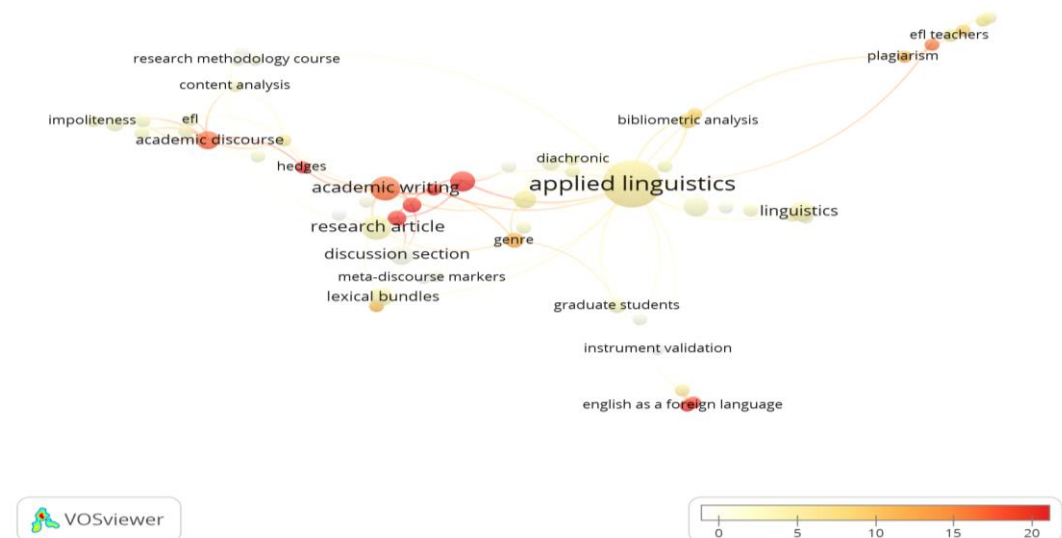
The recent era for Scopus began with the emergence of themes such as "definite articles," "research articles," "linguistics," "cognitive linguistics," "lexical bundles," and "contrastive analysis." The pattern is analogous for the Web of Science database, as demonstrated by Figure 15, which illustrates the simultaneous emergence of terms such as "research article," "meta-discourse markers," and "lexical bundles".

Scopus's contemporary period focused on "meta-analysis," "stance," and "engagement resources," while Web of Science centered on "content analysis" and "instrument validation."

Figure 12

Average Publication per Year (Scopus)

Figure 13

Average Publication per Year (Web of Science)

The last set of maps displays the average citation count for the author-indexed keywords within the two primary databases. The color red is used to highlight frequently referenced keywords and can be considered popular or trending subjects. The yellow color represents keywords with an average level of citation compared to other keywords, while the white color is used for themes with minimal or no citation.

Figure 14 demonstrates that the topics of "genre analysis," "ELT," "introduction," and "corpus" have received a significant number of citations compared to other subjects. In the Web of Science citation map (Figure 15), the keywords with the highest number of citations in the heatmap include "academic writing," "hedges," "English as a foreign language," "genre," and "academic discourse."

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Figure 14

Average Citation of Keywords (Scopus)

Figure 15

Average Citation of Keywords (Web of Science)

Discussion

The analysis of articles written by Iranian authors provides valuable insights into the development and trajectory of the field in this country. The consistent growth since the mid-2000s highlights a steady engagement within the field. This steady increase in output shows the growth and maturation of academia in supporting this field. Islamic Azad University and the University of Tehran have contributed significantly to this growth. Moreover, the analysis of the citation patterns between the Scopus and Web of Science databases shows a disparity in the impact of respective publications, with the WoS having a higher average citation in recent years. This could indicate a shift in scholarly preference toward the WoS journals.

Quantitative methodologies dominate the Iranian Applied Linguistics research landscape. However, the recent rise of mixed-methods research, particularly notable in 2020, suggests an emerging recognition of using quantitative precision with qualitative depth within the research. Globally, this shift parallels efforts to address complex linguistic phenomena that cannot be fully understood through quantitative methodology alone (Farsani et al., 2021).

Analyzing the foundational work within the dataset can help scholars understand the basis of knowledge structure within the field and the research focus of scholars within the field. Starting with the top citation, it is safe to assume that Ansarifar et al.'s (2018) work with the highest citation count (167) addresses the phrasal complexity in abstracts written by graduate students. It shows how language proficiency and writing experience impact the structure of abstracts. This work likely has an important influence in its domain, potentially offering insights into linguistic aspects of academic writing that could aid instructors in refining strategies. The following article from Abdollahzadeh (2011) examines how authors engage with readers in applied linguistics papers through interpersonal metadiscourse such as "hedges," "emphatics," and "attitude markers." Similar to the first article, this work addresses the engagement techniques in academic writing, contributing to a deeper understanding of the voice of authors in scholarly discourse. The third article from Hashemi and Babaii (2013) explores mixed-method research in applied linguistics. This work has addressed further use of mixed-method research, emphasizing the importance of methodological diversity while fostering more holistic research.

The fourth article from Omidian et al. (2018) analyzes multi-word expressions across disciplines in abstracts, similar to the first article. The findings of this study have reinforced the importance of multi-word expressions in academic writing. This study has also led to a better understanding of specific language practices, which supports applied linguistics' focus on phrasal aspects in academic settings. The subsequent work from Babaii and Nejadghanbar (2017) investigates the commonness of plagiarism among Iranian graduate students in language studies, exploring the socio-cultural and educational factors behind it. This article has raised awareness of plagiarism's complex causes in non-Western educational contexts, opening new research opportunities to develop more effective educational mediation.

Jalilifar's (2012) article examines the citation practices in master's theses compared to research articles, exploring how academic attribution reflects upon scholarly communication strategies. The study has contributed to understanding how novice and experienced writers use citations, exploring how citation is taught to graduate students in applied linguistics. The eighth article from Farsani et al. (2021) utilizes bibliometrics and research synthesis to analyze methodological orientations, citation patterns, and collaboration trends in applied linguistics. This work has provided valuable insights into the collaborative and methodological landscape of the field. Farsani and Babaii (2020) review three decades of applied linguistics research, specifically graduate theses in an EFL context, examining shifts in methodology preferences over time. This work has raised awareness, highlighting the evolution of approaches taken within applied linguistics and guiding future research in this area. Finally, the last work by Abdollahpour and Gholami (2019) investigates how lexical bundles embody rhetorical moves in medical science abstracts, highlighting the importance of fixed expressions in academic abstracts. This article has contributed to the genre and discourse analysis by addressing the role of lexical bundles in the mentioned area.

Conclusion

This study utilized scientometric techniques to analyze the Iranian articles that contained "Applied Linguistics" as the keyword in their *titles, abstracts, or keywords*. A systematic search within the Scopus and Web of Science databases yielded 339 articles. The analysis results indicate that Web of Science, with fewer publications initially, recently surpassed Scopus in the number of articles on Applied Linguistics. This increasing pattern of Web of Science is mirrored within the citation metrics as well. Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics was the most prolific journal in terms of published articles, with 15 papers. Among the authors, Jalilifar A. was the most published with 20 papers; among universities, Islamic Azad University was the most published university with 80 articles.

The methodology used in these papers was varied. However, the Quantitative approach was the most used methodology within both databases. The highest number of citations belongs to the Ansarifar et al. (2018) article, which discusses the complexity of academic writing with a total of 167 citations. As predicted, "Applied Linguistics" was the dataset's most frequent keyword. Moving to the citation and publication patterns of themes, "Meta-Analysis," "Stance," "Content Analysis," "Instrument Validation," and "Research Methodology Course" were the emerging topics within the two datasets. Keywords such as "Genre Analysis," "ELT," "Academic Writing," and "English as a Foreign Language" were visualized to be hot topics within the two datasets.

Based on the findings, some implications can be identified for different stakeholders within the field, which not only extend beyond academic interest by providing a map of the field for policymakers and educators but also suggest concrete directions for future research endeavors. First, the dominance of quantitative studies presents a methodological imbalance within the field. Researchers might benefit from exploring qualitative or mixed approaches to address complex issues within the Applied Linguistics discipline that quantitative methods alone cannot capture.

Second, the keyword analysis highlights several high-impact research areas, particularly "genre analysis", "ELT", and "academic writing". These areas have a significant citation impact, indicating a fertile ground for future research. Conversely, the emerging themes within the recent publications, such as "meta-analysis", "stance", "content analysis", and "instrument validation", point to evolving research frontiers and need greater attention. Novice and early-career researchers could strategically position their study to maximize their relevance and impact. Third, as mentioned previously, thematic analysis revealed that academic writing is a core concept for Iranian published research within the Applied Linguistics domain. This topic has also been addressed by multiple researchers in the national journals (Beikian, 2025; Mirsanjari, 2025). Fourth, the significant citation impact of Babaii and Nejadghanbar's (2017) work on plagiarism among Iranian graduate students highlights concerns about the academic integrity within the field, as multiple studies have shown the prevalence of this issue in the Iranian context (Mohseni et al., 2024; Navidinia et al., 2024). This points to a need for targeted educational counseling that addresses plagiarism awareness.

This study, however, comes with certain limitations worth noting. The interdisciplinary nature of the field has resulted in the creation of many subdisciplines that are not related to Applied Linguistics itself, at least on the surface level. Using "Applied Linguistics" as our keyword search for the methodology will only capture a fraction of the scholarly contributions toward this field, as a large number of relevant publications may not mention Applied Linguistics as a keyword in their title, abstract, or keywords. Future endeavors could focus on each of the subfields within Iranian scholarship to further strengthen the understanding of Applied Linguistics as a field of study within the context of Iran, such as English Language Teaching, Sociolinguistics, Psycholinguistics, Corpus Linguistics, CALL, Discourse Analysis, Multilingualism, and Bilingualism, among others. With publications addressing each of these domains, the Applied Linguistics of Iran can be mapped and traced holistically. Moreover, new keywords open research opportunities for scholars and contributors. Future research could build upon these findings by exploring interdisciplinary connections or investigating the factors affecting citation and publication patterns.

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The authors declare no competing interests.

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Data Availability Statement

The raw data were collected from Scopus and WoS. Data will be available upon reasonable request.

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