

Research trends on students engagement in EFL classroom: a literature analysis on online scientific publication from 2020-2023

Yuwin R. Saleh^{1*}, Nirwana Darwis²

¹IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo

²IAIN Bone

✉ yuwinsaleh@iaingorontalo.ac.id*

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Abstract

This bibliometric analysis examines research trends on students' engagement in EFL classrooms from 2020 to 2023, revealing substantial academic interest with a total of 982 publications. The analysis highlights a peak in publications in 2022, underscoring the growing emphasis on student-centered teaching approaches. However, citation metrics show a significant decline over the years, indicating a shift in scholarly attention and citation behavior. The study also identifies a marked disparity in author influence, with the top 20 authors contributing to a significant portion of the citations. Keyword analysis and network visualization using VOSviewer reveal a strong focus on themes like online learning, student engagement, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings suggest that while the field is expanding, there is a need for ongoing research to address emerging challenges and sustain academic impact. This study contributes to understanding the dynamic landscape of EFL education, providing insights for future research and practice.

Keywords: Students' engagement, EFL classrooms, bibliometric analysis, VOSviewer

INTRODUCTION

Students' engagement in the classroom has long been recognized as a critical factor influencing learning outcomes and academic achievement (Amalia, 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Prasetyawati & Ardi, 2020; Thongsongsee, 2022). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, engagement takes on even greater significance, as it directly impacts students' ability to acquire language skills (Alzaanin, 2023; Egbert et al., 2021),

participate actively in class (Morshedian et al., 2023; Vega-Abarzúa et al., 2022), and develop the confidence (Ghanizadeh et al., 2020; Tsang & Dewaele, 2023) needed for language use outside the classroom. The concept of engagement encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, all of which contribute to a student's overall learning experience (Habibie, 2021). In recent years, with the growing emphasis on student-centered learning approaches, understanding and fostering student engagement has become a focal point in educational research, particularly in EFL settings.

However, the EFL classroom presents unique challenges that can hinder student engagement (Khaerani et al., 2023; Westphal, 2022). These challenges are often rooted in broader social problems faced by both teachers and students. EFL teachers frequently encounter difficulties in creating an inclusive and motivating learning environment (Aisyah & Sugesti, 2023; T. D. T. Nguyen & Tran, 2023; Wang et al., 2022), especially in regions where English is not commonly spoken outside the classroom. Students, on the other hand, may experience anxiety, lack of confidence, and motivation issues, which are exacerbated by limited exposure to English in their daily lives. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these challenges, as the sudden shift to online learning environments required both teachers and students to adapt to new modes of instruction and interaction, often with insufficient preparation or resources. This has led to an increased interest in exploring how these social problems affect student engagement in EFL classrooms, particularly in the online context.

A growing body of literature has explored various aspects of student engagement in EFL classrooms, with researchers examining factors such as teaching methods, the use of technology, classroom environments, and student motivation (Hiromori, 2021; Huong, 2022; Istiara et al., 2023; Kolsut & Szumilas, 2023; Shakki, 2023; Zhang, 2022). For instance, studies have highlighted the effectiveness of interactive and participatory teaching methods, such as the flipped classroom model, in enhancing student engagement. Additionally, the integration of digital tools like Kahoot (T. T. T. Nguyen & Yukawa, 2019) and ICT (Adzhari & Din, 2021) has been shown to promote active participation and increase student motivation. However, despite these advances, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the comprehensive analysis of research trends related to student engagement in EFL classrooms, particularly in the context of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. While individual studies have provided valuable insights, a holistic bibliometric analysis of this research area is still lacking.

The novelty of this research lies in its bibliometric approach, which allows for a systematic and quantitative analysis of the existing literature on student engagement in EFL classrooms. By examining publication trends, citation patterns, and the most influential authors and subject areas, this study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of research in this field. Moreover, by focusing on the co-occurrence of keywords related to student engagement, this study will identify emerging themes and research areas that have gained prominence in recent years. This approach not only fills a gap in the existing literature but also offers a unique perspective on how the field has evolved over time, particularly in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the trends in online scientific publications related to student engagement in EFL classrooms from 2020 to 2023. Specifically, this study seeks to quantify the total number of publications and citations, identify the most cited authors and their contributions, and explore the subject areas that have been most frequently addressed. Additionally, this research will examine the co-occurrence of keywords to identify key themes and topics that have shaped the discourse on student engagement in EFL classrooms during this period. By doing so, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the current landscape of EFL research and highlight areas that warrant further investigation.

To achieve these objectives, the following research questions have been formulated: (1) What is the total number of publications related to student engagement in EFL classrooms from 2020 to 2023? (2) How many citations have these publications received, and who are the most cited authors in this field? (3) What are the predominant subject areas covered in these publications? (4) What are the key themes and topics related to student engagement in EFL classrooms, as identified through keyword co-occurrence analysis? By addressing these questions, this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the research trends and developments in the field of student engagement in EFL education.

METHODS

The data for this bibliometric study were sourced from Google Scholar, a widely recognized and accessible database for academic research. To collect relevant articles, the Publish or Perish (PoP) software was employed, which is specifically designed to retrieve and analyze academic citations. The primary keyword used in the search was "Students' Engagement in EFL Classroom," ensuring that the collected data directly related to the focus of this study. This keyword was selected to capture a broad range of research articles that

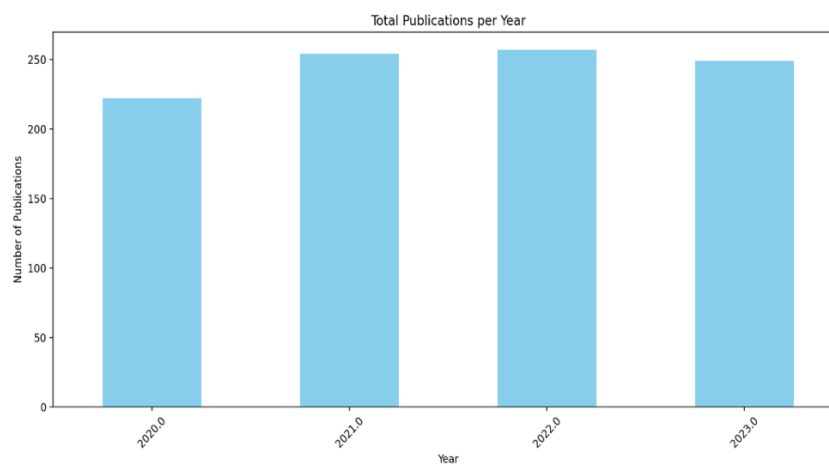
explore various aspects of student engagement within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. The search yielded a total of 982 research articles published between 2020 and 2023, providing a substantial dataset for analysis.

Once the data were collected, a comprehensive bibliometric analysis was conducted to quantify and visualize the research trends in student engagement in EFL classrooms. The analysis included calculating the percentage of publications over the years, identifying the most cited authors, and determining the predominant subject areas covered in the literature. Additionally, the study employed VOSviewer, a specialized software for creating and visualizing bibliometric networks, to map the co-occurrence of keywords within the dataset. VOSviewer was chosen for its ability to generate detailed visualizations that highlight the relationships and clusters among different research topics, thereby offering insights into the thematic focus areas within the field.

The bibliometric analysis was designed to provide a clear and comprehensive overview of the research landscape related to student engagement in EFL classrooms. By using percentages, the study identified trends in the number of publications and citations over the specified period. The visualization of data using VOSviewer further enhanced the analysis by revealing key themes and emerging research areas. This methodological approach ensured that the study not only quantified the current state of research but also provided a visual representation of how various topics within the field are interconnected. The combination of PoP and VOSviewer allowed for a robust analysis, yielding valuable insights into the trends, gaps, and opportunities in research on student engagement in EFL education.

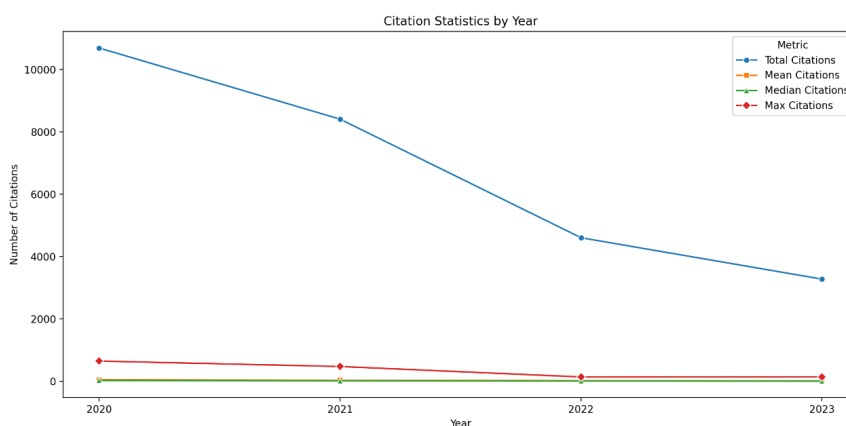
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results



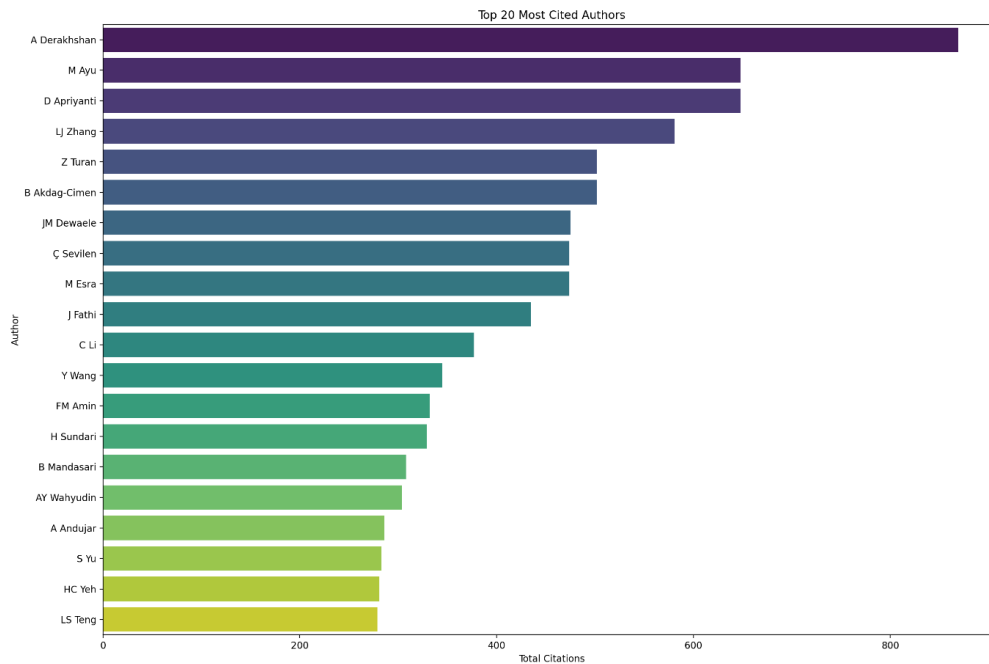
In the analysis of research trends in students' engagement in EFL classroom, a total of 982 publications were identified, reflecting a significant academic interest in the subject. On average, there were approximately 245.5 publications per year, indicating consistent and growing engagement with this innovative approach to education. Notably, the year 2022 saw the highest number of publications, with 257 studies published, highlighting a peak in scholarly attention. This surge in research suggests an increasing recognition of the value and impact of students' engagement in educational settings, particularly as educators seek more effective and student-centered teaching methods.

Citation



The analysis of citation trends from 2020 to 2023 reveals a significant decline across various citation metrics, highlighting a shift in scholarly attention and citation behavior over this period. Total citations reached their peak in 2020 with 10,686 citations, but there has been a noticeable downward trend, culminating in a significant reduction by 2023. This pattern is consistent across other metrics as well: mean citations per paper dropped from 48 in 2020 to 13 in 2023, and the median citations also fell from 23 to 6 during the same period. The maximum number of citations for a single paper was highest in 2020 at 648, but this figure has decreased markedly in subsequent years, underscoring a broader trend of diminishing citations.

Overall, the total citations across all four years amounted to 26,969, with an overall mean of 27.18 citations per paper and a median of 11.0 citations. The maximum citation count for a single paper stood at 648. The percentage change in total citations from 2020 to 2023 is a significant -69.34%. This decline may be attributed to several factors, including recency bias, as more recent papers (from 2022-2023) have had less time to accumulate citations, potential shifts in research focus, changes in the quality of publications, or broader shifts in the field's dynamics and publication patterns.

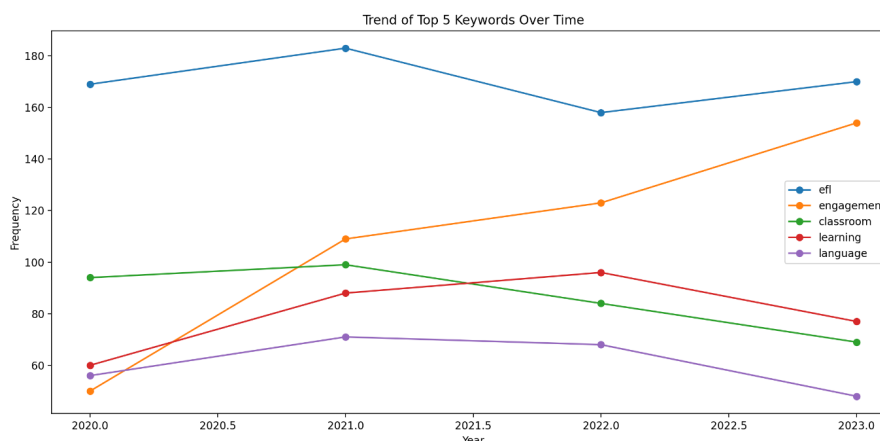


The chart reveals detailed insights into citation metrics for authors within the dataset. With a total of 1,613 authors, the mean number of citations per author stands at approximately 33.74, while the median is significantly lower at 13.00. Notably, the top 20 most cited authors collectively contribute to 16.04% of the total citations, highlighting their substantial influence in the field. Conversely, a considerable portion of the author pool, specifically 63 authors or 3.91% of the total, have received only a single citation, indicating a broad distribution of citation impact. This distribution underscores a marked disparity in citation influence among authors, with a small number of highly cited individuals contrasting with a larger group of minimally cited ones.

Subject Area Related to Students' Engagement Topics

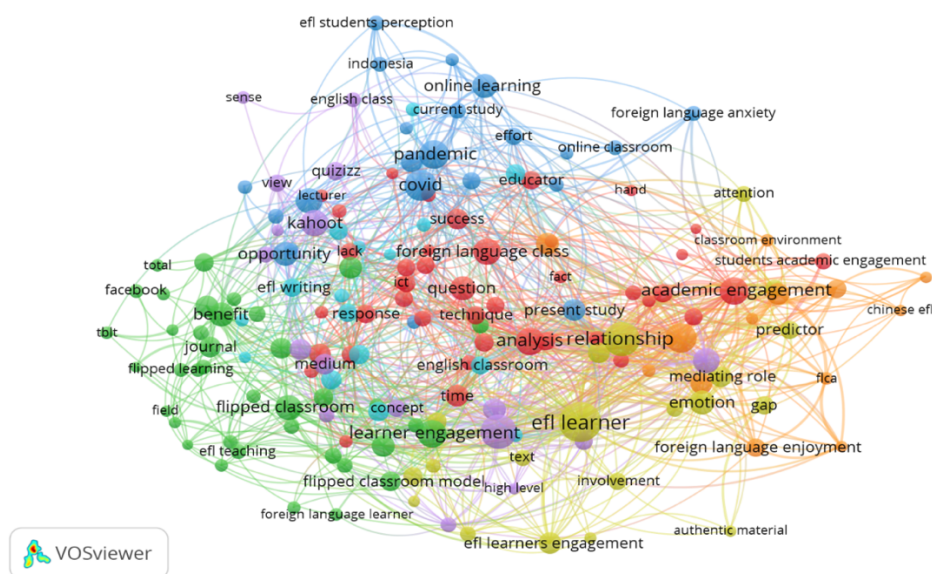
Keyword	Frequency	Percentage of Papers Containing Keyword
EFL	695	69.78%
Engagement	450	45.18%
Classroom	350	35.14%
Learning	323	32.43%
Language	244	24.50%
English	151	15.16%
Online	135	13.55%
Student	113	11.35%
Teaching	81	8.13%
Motivation	67	6.73%
Feedback	47	4.72%

Keyword	Frequency	Percentage of Papers Containing Keyword
Education	39	3.92%
Digital	38	3.82%
Assessment	38	3.82%
Interaction	30	3.01%



The table presents a comprehensive overview of the most frequently used keywords in the research dataset. "EFL" emerges as the most prevalent term, with 695 occurrences and appearing in 69.78% of the papers, reflecting its central role in the field. "Engagement" follows with 450 mentions, representing 45.18% of the papers, indicating a significant focus on interactive aspects of education. Other notable keywords include "Classroom" and "Learning," with frequencies of 350 (35.14%) and 323 (32.43%) respectively, highlighting their importance in the context of educational research. "Language" and "English" are also prominently featured, appearing in 24.50% and 15.16% of the papers, respectively. Keywords such as "Online," "Student," and "Teaching" show lower frequencies but still contribute to the discourse, with "Online" appearing in 13.55% and "Student" in 11.35% of the studies. Less frequent terms like "Motivation," "Feedback," "Education," "Digital," "Assessment," and "Interaction" are mentioned in fewer papers, reflecting their more specific or emerging relevance. Overall, the distribution of keywords underscores the diverse focus areas within the research, from foundational concepts like EFL and engagement to more specialized aspects of education.

Co-occurrence



The network visualization created with VOSviewer software illustrates a complex web of interconnected concepts pertinent to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and teaching. The visualization features numerous colored nodes of varying sizes, each representing a distinct concept or topic. Larger nodes signify more frequently occurring or central themes, while thin lines, or edges, connect these nodes to indicate relationships and associations between the concepts. The density of these connections reflects the strength of relationships among topics. The visualization clusters nodes into color-coded groups, highlighting related themes and research areas. Prominent central concepts include "pandemic" and "COVID" at the core, with "online learning" positioned at the top, underscoring its significance. Other notable concepts include "EFL learner," "academic engagement," and "learner engagement," situated around the core to illustrate their relevance in the context of EFL research.

This comprehensive visualization reveals a substantial focus on online learning, student engagement, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on EFL education. The network encapsulates a wide range of topics, from teaching methods such as "flipped classroom" and "flipped learning" to technological tools like "Kahoot" and "ICT." It also covers various learning environments, student-related factors, and research aspects. The mention of "Indonesia" suggests a specific geographical focus within the broader EFL context. Overall, the interconnected nature of the topics depicted in the visualization points to a holistic approach to EFL education, emphasizing the interplay between technology, pedagogical methods, and student psychology in the wake of recent global challenges.

Discussion

The analysis of research trends in students' engagement within EFL classrooms reveals a robust academic interest, as evidenced by the identification of 982 publications between 2020 and 2023. This period saw an average of 245.5 publications per year, reflecting a steady and growing engagement with this educational approach. The peak in 2022, with 257 publications, indicates heightened scholarly attention, possibly driven by the ongoing need to adapt teaching methods during the COVID-19 pandemic. This surge underscores the critical importance of students' engagement in enhancing the effectiveness of EFL instruction, particularly in challenging and rapidly evolving educational environments.

The citation analysis from 2020 to 2023 presents a contrasting picture, with a notable decline in citation metrics over the period. Despite a strong start in 2020, where total citations reached 10,686, there was a sharp decrease by 2023. This downward trend was consistent across various metrics, including mean and median citations per paper, as well as the maximum citations for individual papers. The overall reduction in citations may be attributed to several factors, including the recency bias that affects more recent publications, shifts in research focus, or changes in publication patterns. The significant percentage change in total citations, -69.34%, further highlights the evolving dynamics within the field, suggesting that newer studies may require more time to gain scholarly traction.

A deeper examination of author influence within this research domain reveals a considerable disparity in citation impact. While the mean citations per author stand at 33.74, the median is notably lower at 13.00, indicating that a few highly cited authors dominate the field. The top 20 most cited authors account for 16.04% of the total citations, reflecting their significant influence on the discourse surrounding students' engagement in EFL classrooms. However, the presence of 63 authors with only one citation, representing 3.91% of the total, suggests a broader distribution of contributions with varying levels of impact. This distribution highlights the competitive and diverse nature of academic publishing in this area, where only a select few studies achieve widespread recognition.

The keyword analysis provides valuable insights into the thematic focus of the literature on students' engagement in EFL classrooms. The dominance of terms such as "EFL," "engagement," and "classroom," with frequencies of 69.78%, 45.18%, and 35.14%, respectively, underscores the centrality of these concepts in the research. Keywords like "learning," "language," and "online" also feature prominently, reflecting the multifaceted nature

of engagement in the context of language education. The presence of less frequent terms, such as "motivation," "feedback," and "interaction," indicates emerging areas of interest that may require further exploration. Overall, the distribution of keywords illustrates the diverse focus areas within the field, ranging from core educational concepts to more specialized aspects of student engagement.

Finally, the network visualization generated using VOSviewer offers a comprehensive overview of the interconnected concepts within the research on students' engagement in EFL classrooms. The visualization highlights the significant focus on online learning, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with central nodes like "pandemic," "COVID," and "online learning" dominating the network. The presence of clusters related to teaching methods, technological tools, and student psychology further emphasizes the holistic approach to understanding and enhancing engagement in EFL education. The inclusion of geographical references, such as "Indonesia," suggests that the research is not only global in scope but also attentive to specific regional contexts. This visualization reinforces the importance of integrating various factors—pedagogical, technological, and psychological—to foster effective student engagement in EFL classrooms.

Overall, these findings highlight the dynamic and evolving nature of research on students' engagement in EFL education, pointing to both established trends and emerging areas of interest. The observed decline in citations suggests a need for ongoing research to maintain relevance and impact, while the keyword and network analyses provide a roadmap for future studies to explore under-researched topics and refine existing approaches. The study underscores the importance of continued scholarly attention to student engagement as a critical component of effective EFL teaching and learning in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

CONCLUSION

The research on students' engagement in EFL classrooms from 2020 to 2023 demonstrates significant academic interest and evolving trends, with a peak in publications in 2022. However, a noticeable decline in citation metrics suggests a shifting focus within the field and potential challenges in maintaining scholarly impact. The analysis reveals a disparity in author influence and highlights key themes such as online learning, student engagement, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as reflected in both keyword frequency and network visualizations. These findings emphasize the importance of continued exploration and

innovation in EFL education to sustain and enhance student engagement in a rapidly changing educational environment.

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