Research Trends in ESL/EFL: A systematic investigation of studies in ELT Journal and TESOL Quarterly

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Abstract

With the exponential rise in scientific research as a result of the spread of information technology, there is an emerging need to process and systemize the information contained in such publications in both national and international settings. The academic journals, in paper as well as electronic forms, are the most used channels of academic communication among researchers, due to the confidence that this information resource enjoys and the standards it applies. In addition, new ideas and developments appear in academic journals long before the books refer to them. Articles, topics, and issues of concern are published in them that do not appear in book form. In this background, this study investigates the research trends in 179 ESL/EFL published studies in *ELT Journal* and TESOL *Quarterly*, journals that are acclaimed universally as the setters of research benchmarks. Results show that the focus subjects in these classify into sub-categories (trends) which include Global English and Lingua Franca, learner's issues, teacher's issues, cultural perspectives, assessment issues, and ESL research methodology and Multimedia & ICT in Language Education. Noticeably, researchers preferred to qualitatively study the Teaching Practices and Methods (f=43) and Global English and Lingua Franca (f=39). However, gaps are perceptible in the ongoing trends to fill which the study makes certain recommendations in its conclusion.

Keywords: Academic ESL/ EFL journals; ELT Journals; investigation; publication; research trends, TESOL Quarterly

1. Introduction

The teaching of English in Saudi Arabia starts from the early education years in both private and public institutions. From this point of view, researchers and teachers concerned with the teaching and training of students in English in KSA need to stay updated with the best international trends in research in this field to benefit from them as well as to contribute meaningfully to the research corpora and develop the teaching practices in English whether as a foreign, second or even, as an international language of communication. Considering the

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importance of English in educational and scientific domains, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is not far from international trends in developing and improving EFL as the means of contributing to many fields of knowledge including educational and scientific research (Yağız et al., 2016).

In most scientific disciplines, such as mathematics, biology, chemistry and educational technology, researchers universally have been conducting deep exploration of trends according to research topic, subject, methodology and content (Yağız et al., 2016). Dissemination and exploitation of concluded research at an international level requires publishing of research results in acclaimed journals (Cavas, 2015). It is also important for such journals to conduct systematic investigation of the research trends in their published academic articles (Cavas, 2015). Academic journals are among the best resources for referring to recent research and studies (Obeid, 2006); in addition to enabling specialists to follow up on what is being researched and added in the field of specialization. They also enable researchers to indirectly communicate with each other in their fields of specialization (Al-Matham, 2013). In Saudi Arabia, though English is taught at every stage of education, English teaching and learning implementations, performances and achievement in the local setting are not up to the desirable standards. This critical situation makes research studies crucial for the foreign language teaching and learning environment (Zohrabi, 2015).

2. Literature Review

Ibn Talib (2020) argues that due to the importance of scientific research and the evaluation of its reality within a certain period of time, researchers have been continuously concerned with it, indicating its great value and continuing importance. For example, the latest issue of Review of Educational Research, ranked No. 1 in the list of Institute of Scientific Information (ISI) journals, includes a follow-up analysis of research related to educational administration from 1960 to 2018 by Hallinger, and Kovačević (2019). The researchers identified 22361 refereed research published in 22 educational administration journals over a period of 85 years. The results of the study showed a significant growth in the knowledge base for scientific evaluation. They also showed that four major schools of thought have emerged over time and focused on leadership for learning, cultural change, school effectiveness, and improving schools and teachers.

Bakí et al., (2011) analyzed the directions in Turkish mathematics research with reference to both master and PhD theses. The researchers examined and reviewed 284 graduate theses in certain topics of research, sample and data collection, and research methodology. Analysis showed that the number of the theses focusing on the research problem concerning teaching mathematics is quite high when compared to other theses that focused on different research topics. Al-Matham (2013) analyzed the research papers in mathematics education published in peer reviewed journals in the Gulf to identify their methodological and thematic trends. They followed the content analysis method using a checklist to analyze 164 refereed research in mathematics education, published in thirty refereed journals in the Gulf. They came up with several results, the most important of which are in the field of methodological trends: Most of the scientific production is directed towards applied research focused on the quantitative method, especially that of descriptive nature, followed by the experimental method. Survey was the most widely used tool in the descriptive method, followed by correlation method. In the field of thematic trends, scientific production focused on the study of general education, followed by

university education. The primary stage was the one most targeted under general education, followed by the intermediate stage while the undergraduate stage was focused more under university education research. Most of the scientific production focused on studying the learner's variables, followed by the curriculum; the teacher and the learning environment received less attention.

Cavas (2015) investigated twenty issues in published articles in SEI journals from 2011 to 2015. The number of submitted papers came to 126 articles by 281 authors who belonged to 43 countries. The findings showed that the highest contributions came from Turkey, America and Australia. Furthermore, the study revealed that most of the published articles in that period focused on teacher education, followed by learning concepts and contexts.

Using visualized bibliographic data and a range of quantitative research methods, the analysis of the International Journal of Technology and Design Education (IJTDE), which is included in the core collection of Social Science Citation Index came up with several conclusions. Xu et al. (2020) concluded that IJTDE is a significant and effective platform for disseminating research findings in the field of educational technology. Secondly, among the research fields found to occur most frequently in the analysis of IJTDE were creativity, problem solving, design education, critical thinking, curriculum improvement, practice, educational engineering between 2000 and 2018.

Gao et al., (2021) examined the research articles published between 2008 and 2020 in terms of research topics, summarizing endeavors of Chinese academics in research on MALL with reference to some special aspects including the definition of concept, the research methods used and the topics researched. They analyzed the prevalent shortcomings and trends of development and concluded in the findings that there was acceleration in the last few years in research on MALL, both locally and internationally. Furthermore, the study identified a need for further studies on pre-service teachers because of a dearth in such studies in the available literature.

Martí-Parreño et al., (2016) focused on the status of current research and assessment in the use of social network by adopting text analysis. The study investigated 139 research articles published in indexed journals from 2010–2014 by applying keywords such as relevant institutions and authors, themes involved and key constructs and area of knowledge enhancement. Findings showed an increasing academic preference the field over the last five years. Moreover, the study clustered four emergent themes viz. social interaction, effectiveness, engagement and acceptance.

Al-Harith and Al-Shehri (2019) identified the methodological trends in research in general teaching methods in master and PhD theses at King Khalid University by analyzing 143 theses granted in the period 1426-1437 AH. The results indicated that the experimental method was the most used at 68%, and the descriptive method was ranked second in frequency of use at 45%.

Canaran and Mirici (2019) summarized the current practices in the areas of teachers' professional development (PD). The study aimed at providing to teachers and teacher trainers a review of methods, techniques, and practices in the literature in the last 25 years to the time of the study in terms of the fundamentals and effectiveness of PD as well as the framework of PD. Furthermore, various types of PD were reviewed to specify the general dimensions which appeared prominently in the review. The findings showed that a correlation existed between the effectiveness of PD and other variables like decision-making in addition to encouraging students to reflect and cooperate in classroom action research.

Öztürk and Güven (2020) explored research conducted in the field of language education in the Turkish setting. Findings showed that most of the studies differed in the methods applied and used, and a majority of the explored studies examined teachers' perceptions. Moreover, the reviewed articles were listed into four categories based on their goals in relation to education, i.e., studies which examined teacher' opinions; focused on tasks and practices applied in lessons; investigated curriculum development; and examined course books.

Alamri et al., (2018) studied both conference proceedings and international journals published from 2012 to 2016 to highlight a major research gap between the Gulf and other countries regarding the areas of professional development. The study found that at the global level, the number of research articles on math teachers' development were greater than the papers published on the same in the Gulf countries: While in the former case, the number of research publications was 161, only 11 publications were found from gulf countries on the topic. The findings also showed a growing body of research interest on the pedagogical contents and PD of math teachers, and a preference for descriptive research followed by the evaluative research designs.

Martynychev (2010) investigated the status of empirical research in applied linguistics by reviewing published articles in nine indexed journals suggested by the American Association for Applied Linguistics (from 2002-2008). Among the research aims was to specify the research methodology used. Furthermore, the study classified qualitative studies according to research method paradigm. The results showed that out of the 636 research papers, 64% pursued quantitative research, 28% used qualitative research design, and only 8% applied the mixed research design. Additionally, amongst the investigated quantitative studies, 42% used Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), 32% performed the t-test wand and 28% of the studies performed the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Similarly, among the qualitative studies investigated, 25% were found to be based in cases studies, while 21% were interview based.

Given the evident preference for applying qualitative approaches in the recent years to the field of research on language teaching and learning, Benson et al., (2009) analyzed qualitative data-based papers published in ten peer reviewed journals from 1997 to 2006. The study showed a significant variation among the journals. Taking approach as the basis of analysis, a tendency to use eclecticism approach was noticeable rather than following the qualitative paradigm dominancy.

Furthermore, Choe and Ma (2013) compared second language research trends (topics and methods) in both local and international journals from 2007 to 2012. The study analyzed a total of 867 research articles classified and analyzed according to: the prominent area of language teaching and learning, the journal impact factors during the data collection the total numbers of published papers during the time of analysis. Two raters were selected to classify the journals in terms of the methodology, themes and skills focused upon. Findings showed the apparent changes in the focus of domestic research journals when analyzed for the results reported in the years selected: Researchers in the local journals tended to widen their research focus to include research methods similar to the trends prevalent in international journals.

Solak (2014) tried to identify research trends in EFL in the Turkish context. The study analyzed 189 articles published between 2009 and 2013. Of these, 94% were indexed in SSCI while 95% of them were ULAKBIM indexed. The criteria used for data analyses were the year of publication, language of the paper, authors, journal index, topic, data collection tools, research

design, sampling and data analysis. Findings showed that teaching and learning and concept analysis were the most frequently studied topics in foreign language research in the investigated period. Moreover, the highest number of articles were published in 2013, the most frequently published authors were Turkish, and English was the language used in most of the published articles. Furthermore, the quantitative paradigm was pursued more frequent than the qualitative research design. Finally, the published studies were conducted with undergraduates as the sample and the numbers of participants were between 31 and 100.

Özmen et al., (2016) examined the PhD dissertations submitted in Turkey between 2010 and 2014 in the field of English language teaching and learning. The study investigated 137 theses indexed in the National Theses Database. The areas of analysis were the topic, research methods, setting, scopes, and data collection authenticity. The categorization of subject areas were found to be: Teaching English as a foreign language, the education of foreign language teacher, and the acquisition of second language. Furthermore, to induce the contextual factors, the funding opportunities, the percentage of international students, and certain demographic features of PhD students were also studied. Findings identified 12 major problems in the investigated dissertations, six of these problems were systemic or macro level in nature and the other six were at the department or micro level. The former included pressures of graduation in addition to the need for international publication whereas the latter comprised issues related to supervision and guidance.

Once again in the Turkish contexts, Yağız et al., (2016) examined 274 ELT research papers published between 2005-2015. The study included 15 journals indexed in ULAKBIM database and other articles indexed in both national and international journals included according to the availability of certain criteria. Content analyses was used to investigate the included papers according to research design, subject, tools of data collection, sampling and analysis of data using the "Article Classification Form". Findings showed that a majority of Turkish EFL researchers were interested in the field of English language teaching and learning. Furthermore, they favored the quantitative paradigm focusing on descriptive analysis while no attention was given to inferential analysis. With reference to sampling, the analysis showed a tendency to recruit territory level students. The emergent themes occurring in the analysis were language acquisition/learning/teaching and teacher-education. As for the data collection tool(s), the survey method using questionnaires was most popular in the studies. The sample in the reviewed studies comprised undergraduate students ranging between 100 and 300 in number.

3. Research Problem

Research contributions in the field of education and learning, education of mathematics, science, educational technology and Islamic studies at the Arab and foreign levels are showing an upward trend. Similarly, research in English language studies including ELT and Applied Linguistics have been observed to be on the rise (Hsu, 2005; Ker et al., 2013; Lazaraton, 2000) but the pattern of trends has not been the subject matter of research so far. This fact led the researcher to analyze and understand the trends in published EFL/ESL research. For the purposes of the limited scope of this study, the researcher purposely chose two of the leading journals in the field of EFL/ESL.

4. Research Questions and Objectives

This investigation tries answer the following questions about studies in *ELT Journal* and *TESOL Quarterly*:

1. What is the distribution of topics in the research publications through (2018- 2020)?
2. What research design has been frequently applied in the investigated research articles?
3. What sample types have been employed in the published articles?
4. What are the most widely used data collection instrumentations in the investigated published articles?
5. What gap exists in the research that needs to be bridged based on the analysis of published articles over the years (2018-2020)?

5. Research Significance

• This paper is Show the trends of research in the field over the past three years through analysis of research in two leading journals (*ELT* and *TESOL Quarterly*) and suggest some new directions of research that might help in bridging gaps in the field.

• Explore the reality of research in the field of curriculum and instruction of English language according to what was published in the two journals, *ELT* and *TESOL Quarterly*, from 2018 to 2020.

• To gain a deeper understanding on the latest trends in ELT research to direct the scope for forthcoming research in the field.

Intended to:

6. Method

This study adopted the descriptive approach in analyzing the quantitative content of the research literature, or what is known as bibliometric research. The merit of this approach lies in its strength to provide quantitative data on research and studies that are subject to analysis and informative indicators on the subject of the study. The study analyzed for the research papers published in *ELT Journal* and TESOL *Quarterly* between 2018-2020 (n = 197). It was decided to focus on these two international journals for one main reason: they are now widely accessible through university library subscriptions to full-text databases. As the study reviewed journals articles, the ethical considerations started from being objective in pursing the research process and then by getting permission from the committee of research ethics at the College of Language and Translation to conduct such a study. Moreover, all sources used in this study were given credited and cited.

6.1 ELT Journal

ELT Journal is a journal which publishes quarterly on ELT, whether ESL, EFL, or even as a Lingua Franca. It brings together the everyday focuses of researchers and teachers and knowledge earned from various academic fields, such as, education, psychology, applied linguistics and sociology. It has been publishing since 1946 up through today with four issues a year and has an

acceptance rate of about 10% and a wait time after the acceptance from twelve to eighteen months for publication.

The aim of *ELT Journal* is to provide a channel for academic discussion of the techniques and methods which specify the ways how English is learnt and taught all over the world. Furthermore, it provides a platform for the sharing and exchange of experiences and practices of members and professionals globally. In the *ELT Journal*, there is a board of editors who support the supported the Editor in developing, improving and guiding the *Journal*. Moreover, a group of Editorial Panel members are responsible for refereeing the submissions before these are sent to the voluntary reviewers who are from different countries and do not belong to the Editorial Panel, or Board, or even the Publisher. The journal is published by the University of Oxford.

6.2 TESOL Quarterly

TESOL Quarterly is one of the most accredited journals internationally in the field. It is a journal refereed by professionals. It fosters and encourages queries into the teaching and learning of English language by establishing a TESOL forum for professionals and practitioners to share the findings of their research and investigate ideas and concerns in ELT. *TESOL Quarterly* has a large readership that includes educators, researchers, ESL teachers, teacher trainers, ESOL teachers, and applied linguists (*TESOL Quarterly*, 2012, para. 1).

It has been publishing since 1967 up through today with four issues a year. It has an acceptance rate of about 8% and a wait time after the acceptance from six to eighteen months. *TESOL Quarterly* accepts papers on a variety of disciplines both practical and theoretical on the following topics: issues in research and research methodology, sociology and psychology of language learning and teaching, curriculum design and development testing and evaluation professional preparation, planning professional standards, materials, teaching methods, and techniques of language teaching (*TESOL Quarterly,* 2012).

Table 1. Brief information on the two journals: ELT and TESOL Quarterly

Journal	Mission or Focus	Issues per Year	Approximate Acceptance Rate	Reviewed Period
TESOL Quarterly	Develops queries into English language teaching and learning/ investigates ideas and concerns in the areas	Quarterly	8% to 8.5%	2018 **to** 2020
ELT Journal	Joins the everyday focuses of researchers and teachers with knowledges earned from various academic fields, say, education, psychology, applied linguistics and sociology	Quarterly	10 %	2018 **to** 2020

Table 2. Number of articles published in ELT Journal by year included in the sample

Year	Vol.	Number	Number of Articles
2018	72	1	8
		2	8
		3	8
		4	9

2019	73	1	8
		2	8
		3	8
		4	7
2020	74	1	8
		2	7
		3	10
		4	11
Subtotal			100

Table 3. Number of articles published in TESOL Quarterly by year included in the sample

Year	Vol.	Number	Number of Articles
2018	52	1	6
		2	6
		3	7
		4	11
2019	53	1	8
		2	8
		3	8
		4	9
2020	54	1	8
		2	8
		3	8
		4	10
Subtotal			97

It is noted that some issues of *ELT Journal* and TESOL Quarterly have Special Issues that focus on certain topics:

Table 4. Journal special issues

Journal	Volume, issue, year	Special issue
ELT Journal Volume	74 (4) 2020	English as a lingua Franca and language teaching
TESOL Quarterly	54 (3) 2020	Equity for Students Learning English in Dual Language Bilingual Education

6.3 Inclusion criteria

A paper classification form adapted by Yağız et al., (2016) was used by the researcher to examine the sources (journals) in terms of the contents of the various disciplines of the studies included. The form describes the required information needed for the specification, such as, topics, methodology, tools for data collection, and sampling. The form used in paper classification is included in Appendix 1.

7. Results and Discussion

To answer the RQ1 which states: What is the distribution of topics in the research publications through, (2018- 2020)? The researcher reviewed results in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of the research designs frequency

Research	Research Design	Research Methods	f	%
	Basic		14	7
	Applied		183	93
Quantitative	Experimental	True-Experimental	13	
		Quasi-Experimental	4	
		Pre-Experimental	1	
		Subtotal	18	10
	Non-Experimental	Descriptive Comparative	30	
		Correlational	2	
		Survey	4	25
		Subtotal	9	
			45	
Qualitative				
	Interactive	basic qualitative research	18	
		Ethnography	15	
		Phenomenology	14	
		Grounded Theory	4	
		Case Study	19	
		Critical Studies		
	Non-Interactive			
		Concept Analysis	12	
		Subtotal	82	44.8
Mixed	Mixed and Action Research	Mixed	22	
		Triangulation	8	
		Action Research	8	
		Subtotal	38	20.8
		Total	183	100

Table 5 summarizes the trends used in the research design published in *ELT* articles *Journal* and *TESOL Quarterly*. Majority of the studies (93%) have conducted applied research and few studies (7%) conducted basic research. The aim of fundamental research is to design studies that can develop, refine, test, or modify, theories. On the other hand, studies on applied research investigate the usefulness and effectiveness of specific educational practices. To sum up, the field of educational research uses both applied and fundamentally basic methods of research (Lodico et al., 2010).

There is an increase in studies that applied the design of mixed and qualitative research, and a decline and regression of experimental research. This result is consistent with what was indicated by various studies in the areas of English language education, and in other disciplines such as mathematics education.

This finding contradicts Martynychev's (2010) investigation of the status of empirical research in applied linguistics by investigating published articles in nine indexed journals suggested by the American Association for Applied Linguistics from 2002-2008. Among the research aims was to specify the research method used. Moreover, the study explored the application of statistical

procedures pursued in quantitative research methodology, concluding that out of the 636 research papers, 64% pursued quantitative research, 28% used qualitative research design, and only 8% applied the mixed research design.

The findings of this study are consistent with Lazaraton (2000) who highlighted one of the crucial issues that applied linguistics specialists faced: the inability to conduct empirical studies. Similarly, throughout the explorations of four journals in applied linguistics published in a period of seven-years, the study found that a majority of the published researched articles (90%) followed the quantitative research methods (Benson et al., 2009).

Surveying the contents of various journals from 1991 to 1997, Lazaraton (2002) pointed out that only 10% of the investigated research articles applied the qualitative approaches. In the survey that extended up to 2001, Lazaraton (1995) found that this percentage increased to 14%. According to the findings, the application of qualitative research in TESOL quarterly journal increased to 40%. Furthermore, Gao et al., (2021) found that acceleration was evident in the last few years in research on MALL both locally and internationally.

Some research findings (Gao et al., 2014; Motha, 2009; Riazi & Candlin, 2014) also pointed out the increased research interest in mixed research design and the crucial need of conducting studies on methodological issues (Yağız et al., 2016). Lazaraton's (2005) reflecting an evident increase in qualitative and mixed studies and a decrease in quantitative studies in 2002-2008.

To answer the RQ2 which states: What samples have been employed in the published articles? The researcher summarized the findings in Table 6.

Table 6. Frequency distribution of the samples in the published articles

Sample				Frequency	%
Sample type	Students	Pre-school		9	5
		Primary		19	10
		Intermediate - Secondary		21	11
		University and Adult		71	39
	Teachers	General education		28	15
		University education		11	6
		Pre-service		9	5
	Managers and supervisors			3	2
	Documents and books			12	7
	Total			183	100

The samples in a majority of the published papers comprised university students and adult learners (f=71). This finding shows that the researchers in *ELT Journal* and *TESOL Quarterly* are mostly focused on higher education insights and issues. This can be attributed to the accessibility of sample. The results also indicated that the kindergarten stage got the least frequency (f = 9)

with a percentage of (5%). The primary stage did not get much research attention (f = 19) with a percentage of (10%); this is surprising as this stage is foundational. It requires much more attention from researchers of English language teaching and learning. This result differed from those of Bakí et al., (2001).

The finding of this study is in line with the previous studies, such as Cheng and Fox (2013). They highlighted the sample type and argued that adults were the majority of the participants, and only the conducted studies with young learners were four (Yağız et al., 2016). The results showed that the category of teachers got the second share of studies after the category of students. Pre-university education was ranked the highest (f=28), with a percentage of (15%), followed by faculty members in universities (f=11) and with a percentage of (6%), followed by student teachers (pre-service) (f=9) with a percentage of (5%). The reason for this may be that it is easier to deal with students than teachers. Teachers assume educational and administrative burdens, which may not allow them to participate in studies. This result differed from some studies such as Ibn Talib, (2020) and Solak (2014). The least frequent studies included supervisors and managers, as the researcher found only three studies: two of them included supervisors and only one included managers. The reason for this may be that their roles are not directly instrumental in education and are therefore, not accorded much weightage as subject areas of research.

To answer the RQ3 which states: What are the widely used data collection instrumentations in the investigated published articles? The findings are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Frequency distribution of the data collection tools (instruments)

Data Collection Tools		f
Questionnaire	Open Ended	11
	Likert	29
Achievement test		39
Interview	Constructed	20
	Semi-constructed	19
	Unconstructed	29
	Focus Group	18
Subtotal		86
Observation		46
Tasks/ Journal writings		14
Documents		25
Scales		6
Other		4
Total		

As some studies used more than one data collection tool, percentages were not calculated. It is noted that the total number of tools exceeded the number of research papers that were analyzed. Table 7 showed that the greatest trend in the use of research tools in the two journals under study was the interview in its various types. It was used 86 times. This result is consistent with the current study: the dominance of qualitative research and mixed research over the research methodologies used in the two journals under study. This result differs from other studies, such as Alamri et al., (2018), and Yağız et al., (2016). Perhaps the high percentage of using the interview,

especially (semi-constructed, unconstructed, and focus group), is due to its association with qualitative research.

Then, the observation was ranked second in use (f = 46); this is also a logical result since different types of observation are commonly used in qualitative research. The achievement tests were ranked third (f=39) in general. However, if they are attributed to quantitative studies, they are more frequent. The reason for this may be due to the importance of "achievement." Achievement is considered as a fundamental variable in many educational researches. This is followed by the quantitative questionnaire, but the studies that used the open-ended form were few. This result was indicated by Ulutaş and Ubuz (2008).

The rest of the tools (journal writings and scales) did not get enough focus in the studies published in the two journals. The researcher found only one study that used the portfolio. This draws much attention to study these tools in conducting future studies in the scope of teaching and learning English language. The tools, such as conceptual maps, diagnostic tests, and portfolios seem to be less of frequently tools applied to collect data.

To answer the RQ4 which states: What are the widely used data collection instruments in the investigated published articles? The researcher reviews what the results in Table 8.

Table 8. Distribution of subjects' frequency in the published articles

Subject of Article	f
Teaching Practices and Methods	43
Communication skills	32
Assessment	15
Learners' Issues	24
Teacher's Issues	26
Cultural Perspectives	
Global English & Lingua Franca	39
ESL Research	5
Multimedia & ICT in Language Education	4

As some studies covered more than one topic, percentages were not calculated. It is noted that the total number of topics exceeded the number of research papers that were analyzed. These subjects classified into sub-categories (trends) which include: Global English & Lingua Franca, learner's issues, teacher's issues, cultural perspectives, assessment's issues, and ESL research methodology and Multimedia & ICT in Language Education. It is noticeable that the great majority of researchers preferred thematic research: Teaching Practices and Methods (f=43) and Global English & Lingua Franca (f=39).

As for the common research interest, Teaching Practices and Methods and Global English & Lingua Franca led the focus areas. However, research in ICT and multimedia in both implementation and materials development in ELT, need the attention of the researchers. Similarly, the research on ESL have been scarcely studied.

The following section summarizes the conclusions that the current research arrived at, and in doing so, also answered RQ5: What gap exists in the research that needs to be bridged based on the analysis of published articles over the years (2018-2020)?

8. Conclusion

Despite of a vast corpora of research on EFL/ ESL, gaps are discernible in the field in the nature of inadequate weightage to certain topics within the field. These gaps of research in the field could be attributed to several reasons. One of the vital reasons is that research in the ESL topic interacts with several disciplines, such as and not limited to applied linguistics, curriculum studies, studies of foundations of education, psychology, sociology, and even anthropology. This broadness of topic shows that it is almost impossible to have researchers in the field who are equally adept in these disciplines. On the contrary, each researcher investigates an issue from an angle he/she is familiar with and sometimes unintentionally neglects vital perspectives from other disciplines that fundamentally interacts with the issue under study.

This is to say that one of the great challenges or noticeable major gaps in the ESL field is the lack of investigation of how other disciplines of knowledge interact with the core of second/ foreign language education, how other disciplines improve our knowledge of the field, and how researchers start this journey of investigation. For the purposes of clarification, an example of this gap can be seen through the negligence of curriculum studies. *Constructivist Best Practice* as a curriculum problem solving paradigm should be a source from which English language teaching methods and practices emerge. If it happened that there were ESL/EFL researchers who discussed this curriculum notion earlier, the TBLT method could have been introduced to the field more than thirty years ago. However, it is still a hard task to find studies in the field in the past ten years that address this curriculum notion. Another gap within research in the ESL field is the need for studies that address the early years of foreign language education (pre and primary school). The researcher did not find studies tackling teaching and learning English during the Corona pandemic, especially evaluation of the missed achievement in English language due to the dramatic shift from face-to-face to online learning. Issues specific to the changes in the educational paradigm in the Corona pandemic aftermath were conspicuous by their absence in the research reviewed here. This is a startling finding given the fact that nothing affected the education sector as drastically and as deeply as did the pandemic. In this background, the researcher recommends greater weightage be placed on these current issues and challenges in ESL/ EFL as far as publication in acclaimed journals such as ELT Journal and TESOL Quarterly is concerned. The researcher hopes that the research results will contribute to uncovering the research gaps in the field of curriculum and instruction of English language, specifying the areas of recent research which can provide policy-makers with the foreground necessary to design and plan research and practices in ELT (Bakí et al., 2011). Hopefully, it will provide new directions for robust research in the field.

9. Recommendations

The aim of the current review of research trends was to identify areas of research that are under-represented in journals of repute. Accordingly, it is recommended that researchers undertake studies in interaction of fields not directly connected with EFL, such as curriculum studies and anthropology which may have a bearing on language learning. With the popularity of interdisciplinary research growing across academia, it is a logical outcome to merge diverse fields in the interest of knowledge building. Further, given the special circumstances of these times,

studies need to focus on the factor of switch to online education and its impact on paradigms that have already been researched.

10. Limitations

This study is limited to research papers published from 2018 to 2020 in two journals: ELT and TESOL Quarterly. Technology for the language teacher, reviews, key concepts in elt, comment, point and counterpoint, survey review and readers respond, brief research reports, invited research issues, invited teaching issues, and invited book reviews were excluded from the sample.
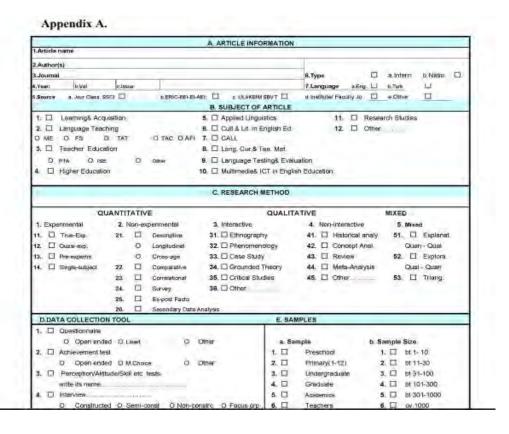
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AUTHOR BIODATA

Dr. Sultan Almuhaimeed is an Associate Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, Buraydah, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. Dr. Almuhaimeed got his PhD in Curriculum and Instruction with emphasis on TEFL/ TESOL from Kent State University, Ohio, the United States, and MA in Curriculum and Instruction from the same University. He has held many administrative positions so far including, the Dean of Development and Quality, Vice Dean of College of Education for Planning, Development and Quality at Qassim University. Besides being a faculty member at the College of Education, he worked as a lecturer in the Department of Education and Psychology, College of Arabic Language and Social Studies, Qassim University. Dr. Almuhaimeed has a very good record of regional and international conferences and seminars. He is also an active member in many scientific, professional and specialized committees and associations, namely, Head of Standing Committee for Quality, Coordinator of the National Transformation Program Initiatives, Qassim University, among others. Apart from his bright academic and administrative record, he is also a deemed expert of Quality Assurance and Accreditation. His research interests include, but not limited to, learning and teaching strategies, PRESET and INSET, and SLA.

Appendix A.

A. ARTICLE INFORMATION

1. Article name			
2. Author(s)			
3. Journal		6. Type	☐ a. Intern. b. Natio. ☐
4. Year:	b.Vol c.Issue	7. Language	a.Eng. ☐ b.Turk ☐
5. Source a. Jour Class. SSCI ☐	b. ERIC-BEI-EI-AEI: ☐ c. ULAKBIM SBVT ☐	d. Institute/ Faculty Jo ☐	e Other ☐

B. SUBJECT OF ARTICLE

1. ☐ Learning& Acquisition	5. ☐ Applied Linguistics	11. ☐ Research Studies
2. ☐ Language Teaching	6. ☐ Cult & Lit. in English Ed.	12. ☐ Other
O ME O. FS □ TAT O TAC O AFI	7. ☐ CALL	
3. ☐ Teacher Education	8. ☐ Lang. Cur.& Tea. Mat.	
O PTA O ISE O Other	9. ☐ Language Testing& Evaluation	
4. ☐ Higher Education	10. ☐ Multimedia& ICT in English Education	

C. RESEARCH METHOD

QUANTITATIVE			QUALITATIVE		MIXED
1. Experimental	2. Non-experimental	3. Interactive	4. Non-interactive		5. Mixed
11. ☐ True-Exp.	21. ☐ Descriptive	31. ☐ Ethnography	41. ☐ Historical analy		51. ☐ Explanat. Quan - Qual
12. ☐ Quasi-exp.	O Longitudinal	32. ☐ Phenomenology	42. ☐ Concept Anal.		52. ☐ Explora. Qual - Quan
13. ☐ Pre-experm	O Cross-age	33. ☐ Case Study	43. ☐ Review		
14. ☐ Single-subject	22. ☐ Comparative	34. ☐ Grounded Theory	44. ☐ Meta-Analysis		53. ☐ Triang.
	23. ☐ Correlational	35. ☐ Critical Studies	45. ☐ Other		
	24. ☐ Survey	36. ☐ Other			
	25. ☐ Ex-post Facto				
	26. ☐ Secondary Data Analysis				

D.DATA COLLECTION TOOL | **E. SAMPLES**

D.DATA COLLECTION TOOL	E. SAMPLES	
1. ☐ Questionnaire	a. Sample	b. Sample Size
O Open ended O Likert O Other	1. ☐ Preschool	1. ☐ bt 1- 10
2. ☐ Achievement test	2. ☐ Primary(1-12)	2. ☐ bt 11-30
O Open ended O M.Choice O Other	3. ☐ Undergraduate	3. ☐ bt 31-100
3. ☐ Perception/Attitude/Skill etc tests	4. ☐ Graduate	4. ☐ bt 101-300
write its name....................	5. ☐ Academics	5. ☐ bt 301-1000
4. ☐ Interview	6. ☐ Teachers	6. ☐ ov. 1000
O Constructed O Semi-const O Non-constrc O Focus grp		

F. DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS		QUAL.DATA ANALYSIS
1. Descriptive	2. Inferential	3. Qualitative Analysis
11. ☐ Frequency/Percentage Tbls	21. ☐ t-test	31. ☐ Content Analysis
12. ☐ Mean/Standard Deviation	22. ☐ Correlation	32. ☐ Qualitative Desc. An
13. ☐ Graphic Display	23. ☐ ANOVA/ANCOVA	33. ☐ Other
14. ☐ Other..............	24. ☐ MANOVA/MANCOVA	
	25. ☐ Factor Analysis	
	26. ☐ Regression	
	27. ☐ Chi-square	
	27. ☐ Non-Parametric tests	
	28. ☐ Other................	