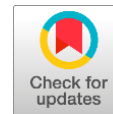


# The universal tongue: Charting the rise of english as a Lingua Franca through bibliometrics



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**Abstract** ELF stands for English as a Lingua Franca and is defined as the use of the English language as a common tool of communication among people of different native languages. This bibliometric study on ELF utilizes Scopus for bibliographic data and employs Biblioshiny, VOSviewer, and CiteSpace software for analysis. It provides an overview of the different aspects of ELF research, including annual scientific production, identification of the most relevant authors and sources, trend topics or thematic mapping, historiographs, topic dendrogram, keyword co-occurrence, bibliographic coupling of documents, cocitation of cited authors, and country collaborations. The results obtained reveal its important growth and a strong increase in the last years in terms of publications and citations. This has led to the recognition of key authors and sources that have been influential and contributed much in the field. The trend topics reflect the dynamism and interdisciplinarity of ELF research, particularly on computational linguistics and teaching. Thematic mapping identifies themes as either motor, niche, emerging or declining, or basic, which gives a breadth-of-field view of research themes. It also highlighted some knowledge gaps, underinvestigated niche themes and a need for further development of basic themes. Practical implications include the whole range of topics in the integration of technology into ELF research and practice, along with interdisciplinary collaboration and policy development that assists in fostering ELF education. This paper allows one to look back through the history and evolution of the research into ELF and draw attention to certain key areas that should be visited and explored in the future.

**Keywords:** lingua, francization, multilingualism, biblioshiny, VOSviewer, citespace

## 1. Introduction

ELF stands for English as a Lingua Franca, which means using English intentionally to communicate between different native speakers (House, 2022; Jenkins et al., 2018; Nickerson, 2012). This phenomenon has become quite significant against the backdrop of globalization, international business, travel, and digital communication (Heinzmann et al., 2024; MacKenzie, 2014). Therefore, ELF plays a very important role in facilitating communication across various settings; hence, it is one aspect of today's interconnected world (Alhasnawi, 2022). Another key factor associated with ELF is its use worldwide. English is used in business, academia, science, and technology as an international means of communication by people who are nonnative speakers and belong to linguistically different backgrounds (Deshors, 2020; Seidlhofer, 2005). This, therefore, indicates the reasonable potential of English as a global language in terms of practical purposes by enabling communication through business or other professional and social means (Junnier, 2024). ELF is also characterized by variability and flexibility. Nonnative speakers often change standard English to meet communicative needs (Seidlhofer, 2004). However, such variability does not hamper communication; it enhances understanding among speakers from different cultures (Elder & Davies, 2006). The adaptability of ELF makes it an effective medium of cross-cultural communication, capturing a range of influences and practices in an appropriate manner (Elder & Davies, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2011).

While English is a native language, ELF is used most of the time in a culturally neutral way, aiming at effective communication rather than allowing cultural subtleties to intervene (Mendes de Oliveira, 2024). In this sense, ELF becomes reachable and feasible because of this kind of cultural neutrality, which enables global interaction. Moreover, along with the spread of ELF, teaching English also starts to shift its emphasis on functional communicational ability rather than a native-like ability (R. T.-H Chen, 2023; Mendes de Oliveira, 2024). It may thus be left to language curricula to increase learners' readiness for using English in diverse international contexts and, therefore, underscore the real-life dimension of communicative competence (Boyle, 2011; Mocanu, 2022).

The challenges and issues raised by ELF are related to the fact that providing mutual intelligibility might be challenging because of differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (Seidlhofer et al., 2006). Inherent in it is the need for flexibility and accommodation on the part of the speaker to understand others and to be understood (McNamara, 2012;



Seidlhofer et al., 2006). There are also issues about linguistic identity and ownership, as nonnative speakers become active participants in shaping the language (Ferguson, 2009). There are possible tensions between standard English norms and embracing various languages in this dynamic (MacKenzie, 2014).

The domination of English may further increase global power imbalances; the ability to speak English usually goes hand in hand with socioeconomic advantages (Sung, 2013). This requires a proper balance between the benefits of having a global lingua franca and the fostering of multilingualism and linguistic fairness (Dewey, 2007). One of the major driving forces behind the spread of ELF is technology (Jenkins et al., 2018; Mares, 2016). In particular, digital communication platforms have started increasing the potential for interlocutors across the world to interact in real time. Machine translations and language learning applications are another way through which English could be accessible and used as a global lingua franca (Pineda & Bosso, 2023).

Future research into ELF could be based on several findings about effective communication strategies, language policies, and educational practices (Albi-Mikasa, 2014; Jenkins, 2017a). The possible implications of ELF for immigration, international relations, and cultural exchange must be considered by policymakers (Eoyang, 1999; Jenkins, 2017a). Further changes in English language teaching methodology might be necessary to ensure that students are given an opportunity to develop their communicative competence in contexts featuring ELF so that they can apply their knowledge in real life (Ehrenreich, 2015). While ELF helps in intercontinental communication, the promotion of multilingualism should not be taken lightly. Mastering a few languages enriches intellectual power and allows a better understanding of different cultures (Baker, 2009b). Thus, the preservation and promotion of indigenous and minor linguistic varieties is something that should not be put on the back burner; rather, efforts toward their preservation and promotion should focus on the use of ELF at the forefront so that linguistic diversity with cultural richness is not lost (Baker, 2009a).

Increasing the use of ELF calls for an analysis of the trends, development, and patterns in this research field. Bibliometric analysis is a comprehensive method used to analyze the literature covering a certain scholarly subject (Achuthan et al., 2023; Ali et al., 2022; Joseph et al., 2024). By applying bibliometric methods, researchers can quantify and visualize the characteristics and dynamics of academic publications, uncovering trends, influential authors, key research themes, and collaborative networks (Agbo et al., 2021; Amaliasita & Rahayu, 2024; Lukose et al., 2025). This study employs three advanced bibliometric tools—Biblioshiny, VOSviewer, and CiteSpace—to conduct a detailed analysis of the research landscape in English as a Lingua Franca (John et al., 2024; Mathew et al., 2024).

Biblioshiny is an R package web interface for bibliometrics, allowing users to compute a wide array of bibliometric analyses: descriptive statistics, bibliographic coupling, cocitation analysis, and keyword analysis (Komperda, 2017; Thangavel & Chandra, 2023; Waghmare, 2021). VOSviewer seeks to build and visualize bibliometric networks; it offers the possibility to explore coauthorship, cocitation, and keyword co-occurrence networks (Abbas et al., 2021; Kuzior & Sira, 2022; Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). CiteSpace is a powerful visualization and analysis tool for understanding the evolution of research topics through time, cluster analysis, and burst detection in the literature (Chen et al., 2023; Ye, 2018; Zhang, 2023). In this framework, this study combines the power of these tools to contribute to an overall understanding of the research landscape of ELF. It will identify significant research trends, influential publications, prominent authors, and emerging topics within the chosen field (Lukose et al., 2025; Mathew et al., 2024). This provides valuable insight for researchers, educators, policymakers, and practising professionals who are interested in the development and functioning of ELF within a variety of contexts.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The data for this study were collected from Scopus, which offers extensive coverage of scholarly literature across various disciplines (Archambault et al., 2009; Harzing & Alakangas, 2016; Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Scopus was selected because it comprehensively indexes peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, and book chapters, ensuring a wide range of relevant documents related to English as a Lingua Franca. A search query was designed to capture pertinent documents by targeting titles, abstracts, and keywords via the query TITLE-ABS-KEY ("English as a Lingua Franca"). The search was conducted without language restrictions to include significant global research outputs and to increase the diversity of the collected data. The PRISMA guidelines were followed for document inclusion and exclusion (Wang et al., 2014). A systematic selection process was managed via the PRISMA flow chart presented in Figure 1. A total of 1395 documents were extracted from 518 different sources, providing a robust dataset for analysis. The collected data encompassed a variety of document types, including articles from peer-reviewed journals, proceedings from relevant conferences, and chapters from scholarly books that collectively contribute to a comprehensive understanding of English as a Lingua Franca. The findings were saved as "CSV" and RIS files, and bibliometric analysis was performed on the data via CiteSpace version 6.2. R3 (Advanced) and Biblioshiny software. The main aspects of this investigation are summarized in Table 1.

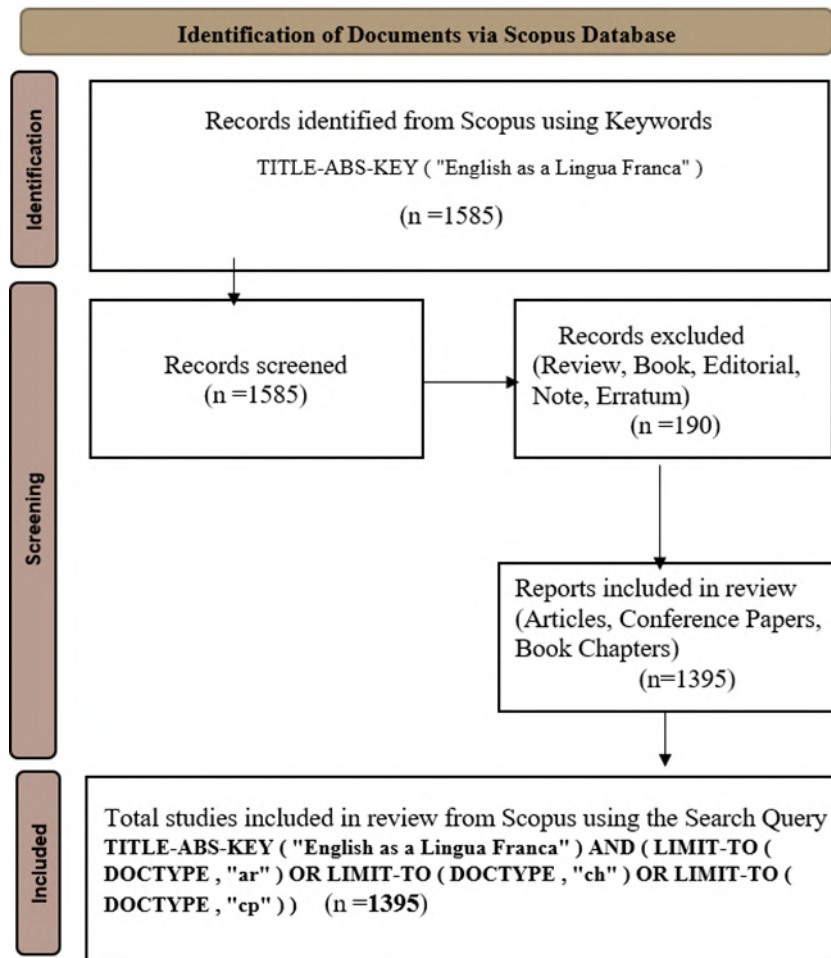


Figure 1 PRISMA flow diagram used to identify, screen, and include papers in the bibliometric analysis.

### 3. Results and Findings

#### 3.1. Key aspects of the investigation

Table 1 illustrates that the key aspect of the bibliometric analysis of English as a Lingua Franca reveals publications from 1984--2024, encompassing 518 different sources, including journals and books, and a total of 1,395 documents. The number of publications shows an annual growth rate of 10.49%, with an average document age of 6.65 years, and each document receives an average of 14.38 citations. The total number of references cited is 47,663. In terms of document content, there are 325 keywords plus and 2,777 specific author keywords. The analysis includes contributions from 1,514 authors, with 559 authors having written single-authored documents. There are 847 single-authored documents, and on average, there are 1.63 coauthors per document, with 13.12% involving international collaboration. The document types include 1,023 articles, 331 book chapters, and 41 conference papers. This analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the research landscape related to English as a Lingua Franca, highlighting the growth, collaboration patterns, and types of publications in this field.

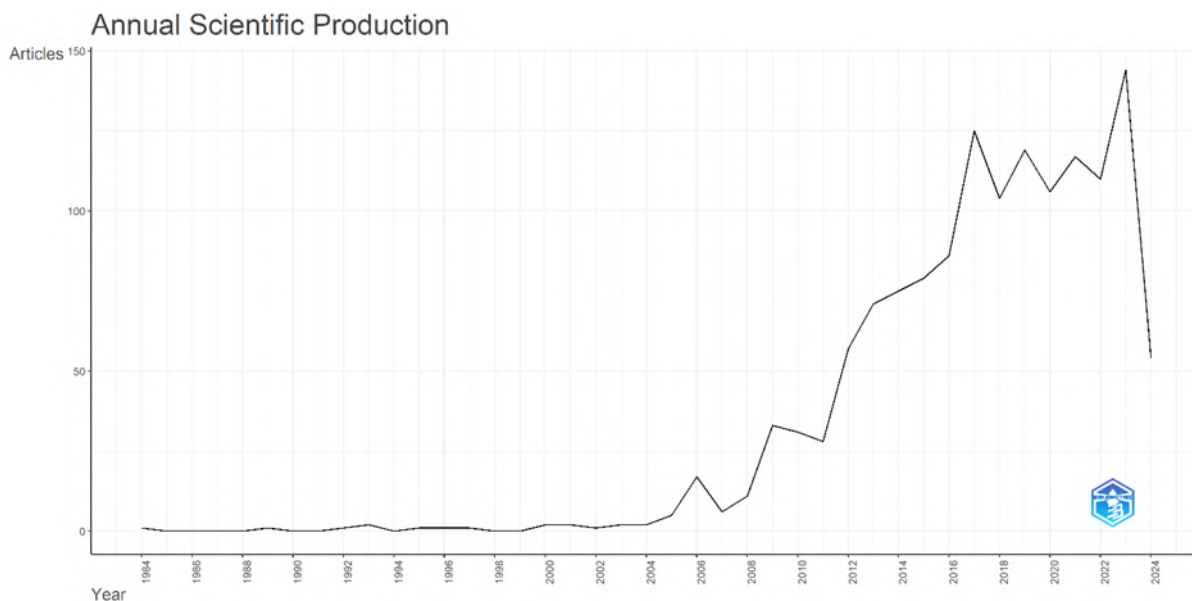
#### 3.2. Annual scientific production

Figure 2 shows that annually, scientific data from 1984--2024 have undergone considerable changes since the beginning of the year. From 1984--2004, the period represented low activity with occasional publications; in most cases, fewer than five articles per year were published. From 2005, there was a gradual increase, culminating in peak form with 17 articles in 2006. This rise continued more dramatically from 2013, and the output has remained above 100 articles per annum from 2017--2023, hitting a peak of 144 articles in 2023. The data for the year 2024, which includes up to May, show that interest and productivity remain high. This trend mirrors the enhanced academic recognition and significance of studying English as an international lingua franca, showing massive and relentless growth in scholarly contributions.



**Table 1** Key aspects of the investigation.

| Description                        | Results   |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA</b> |           |
| Timespan                           | 1984:2024 |
| Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)    | 518       |
| Documents                          | 1395      |
| Annual Growth Rate %               | 10.49     |
| Document Average Age               | 6.65      |
| Average citations per doc          | 14.38     |
| References                         | 47663     |
| <b>DOCUMENT CONTENTS</b>           |           |
| Keywords Plus (ID)                 | 325       |
| Author's Keywords (DE)             | 2777      |
| <b>AUTHORS</b>                     |           |
| Authors                            | 1514      |
| Authors of single-authored docs    | 559       |
| <b>AUTHORS COLLABORATION</b>       |           |
| Single-authored docs               | 847       |
| Co-Authors per Doc                 | 1.63      |
| International coauthorships %      | 13.12     |
| <b>DOCUMENT TYPES</b>              |           |
| Article                            | 1023      |
| Book chapter                       | 331       |
| Conference paper                   | 41        |



**Figure 2** Annual scientific article production from 2017—2024. *Source:* Scopus Database.

### 3.3. Most significant authors

Table 2 presents the most relevant authors and highlights the key contributors in this field. Sung CCM is the most prolific author, with 19 articles, followed by Baker W, with 17 articles. Bayyurt Y contributed 16 articles, and Kirkpatrick A authored 15. House J and Jenkins J have 14 and 13 articles, respectively. Additionally, Cogo A, Seidlhofer B, and Wang Y each contributed 11 articles, whereas Björkman B authored 10 articles. These authors are influential in the field, driving much of the research and scholarly discussion on the topic of English as a Lingua Franca. Their prolific contributions reflect their significant roles in advancing understanding and knowledge in this area.



**Table 2** Most relevant authors.

| Authors       | Articles |
|---------------|----------|
| Sung Ccm      | 19       |
| Baker W       | 17       |
| Bayyurt Y     | 16       |
| Kirkpatrick A | 15       |
| House J       | 14       |
| Jenkins J     | 13       |
| Cogo A        | 11       |
| Seidlhofer B  | 11       |
| Wang Y        | 11       |
| Bjä–Rkman B   | 10       |

*Source:* Generated by the author using Biblioshiny.

### 3.4. Most relevant sources

Table 3 identifies the most relevant sources, highlighting the journals and publications that have contributed to a great extent. The Journal of English as a Lingua Franca stands as the most prolific source, with 86 articles, followed by the Routledge Handbook of English as a Lingua Franca, with 42 articles. Other notable sources in the list were Asian English, with 40 articles, and World English, with 33 articles. The ELT Journal had 28 articles, and the International Journal of Applied Linguistics from the United Kingdom had 27 articles, while the Journal of Pragmatics also contributed 27 articles. The system published 25 articles, whereas the Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development published 22 articles, with English for specific purposes contributing 18 articles. These sources form the hub of any dissemination and discussion of research findings in the domain of English as a Lingua Franca, reflecting their centrality and influence within the academic community.

**Table 3** Most relevant sources.

| Sources   | Articles |
|---|----------|
| Journal of English As A Lingua Franca                         | 86       |
| The Routledge Handbook of English As A Lingua Franca          | 42       |
| Asian Englishes   | 40       |
| World Englishes   | 33       |
| Elt Journal   | 28       |
| International Journal of Applied Linguistics (United Kingdom) | 27       |
| Journal of Pragmatics   | 27       |
| System  | 25       |
| Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development         | 22       |
| English For Specific Purposes                                 | 18       |

*Source:* Generated by the author using Biblioshiny.

### 3.5. Most global cited documents

Table 4 lists the most globally cited documents, detailing total citations, citations per year, and normalized citations. Seidlhofer (2001), Int J Appl Linguist, with 708 total citations and an average of 29.5 per year, has a normalized score of 1.9, indicating substantial influence. Jenkins (2006), TESOL Q, has 600 total citations, averaging 31.58 per year, with a high normalized score of 6.2, reflecting a significant annual impact. Seidlhofer (2005), ELT J, garners 347 total citations with 17.35 per year and a normalized score of 2.63. Jenkins (2009), World Englishes, has 296 citations, 18.5 per year, and a normalized score of 6.69. Louhiala-Salminen, 2005, ENGL SPEC PURP, has 292 citations, 14.6 per year, and a normalized score of 2.21. Neeley (2013), ORGAN SCI, with 243 citations and 20.25 per year, has a normalized score of 11.34. Seidlhofer (2009), World Englishes, which accumulates 190 citations at 11.88 per year, has a normalized score of 4.3. Jenkins (2006), Int J Appl Linguist, has 179 citations, 9.42 per year, with a normalized score of 1.85. Seidlhofer (2006), Annu Rev Appl Linguist, with 166 citations and 8.74 per year, has a normalized score of 1.72. Jenkins (2012), ELT J, with 159 citations, averaging 12.23 per year, has a normalized score of 7. These documents, authored by prominent researchers such as Barbara Seidlhofer and Jennifer Jenkins, underscore their significant contributions to the field, as evidenced by high citation counts and normalized scores, reflecting both historical impact and ongoing relevance.

### 3.6. Historiograph

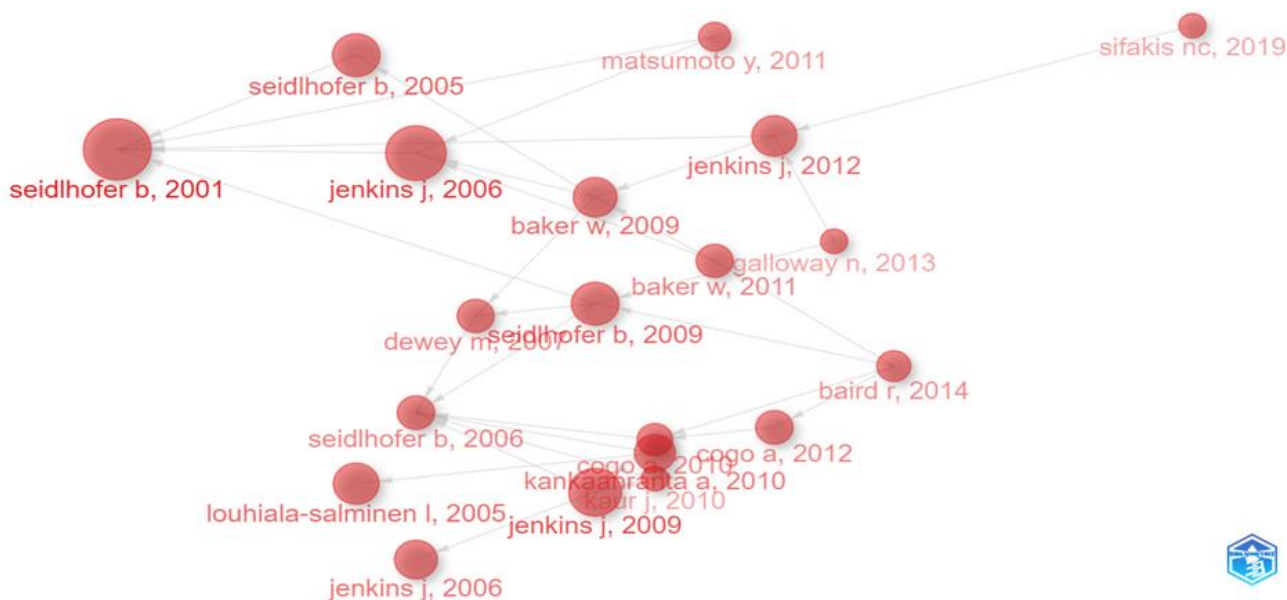


The historiograph in Figure 3 highlights the central influence of seminal papers, particularly Seidlhofer (2001), which stands out as the most cited and foundational work, interconnected with several other key studies. Jenkins (2006) (TESOL Q) and Jenkins (2009) (World Englishes) also appear prominently, reflecting their significant impact on the field. The network illustrates a tightly knit community where influential papers frequently cite each other, highlighting the cumulative and collaborative nature of the research. Emerging works, such as Sifakis (2019), have started to become part of the citation network, thus signaling ongoing and further spreading scholarly discourse. This visualization shows how key these preliminary works were in mapping out an academic landscape and thus underscores the continuous building of knowledge within a field.

**Table 4** Most globally cited documents.

| Authors                         | DOI                              | Total Citations | TC per Year | Normalized TC |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------|
| Seidlhofer (2001)               | 10.1111/1473-4192.00011          | 708             | 29.5        | 1.9           |
| Jenkins (2006)                  | 10.2307/40264515                 | 600             | 31.58       | 6.2           |
| Seidlhofer (2005)               | 10.1093/elt/cci064               | 347             | 17.35       | 2.63          |
| Jenkins (2009)                  | 10.1111/j.1467-971X.2009.01582.x | 296             | 18.5        | 6.69          |
| Louhiala-Salminen et al. (2005) | 10.1016/j.esp.2005.02.003        | 292             | 14.6        | 2.21          |
| Neeley (2013)                   | 10.1287/orsc.1120.0739           | 243             | 20.25       | 11.34         |
| Seidlhofer (2009)               | 10.1111/j.1467-971X.2009.01592.x | 190             | 11.88       | 4.3           |
| Jenkins (2006)                  | 10.1111/j.1473-4192.2006.00111.x | 179             | 9.42        | 1.85          |
| Seidlhofer et al. (2006)        | 10.1017/S026719050600002X        | 166             | 8.74        | 1.72          |
| Jenkins (2012)                  | 10.1093/elt/ccs040               | 159             | 12.23       | 7             |

Source: Generated by the author using Biblioshiny.

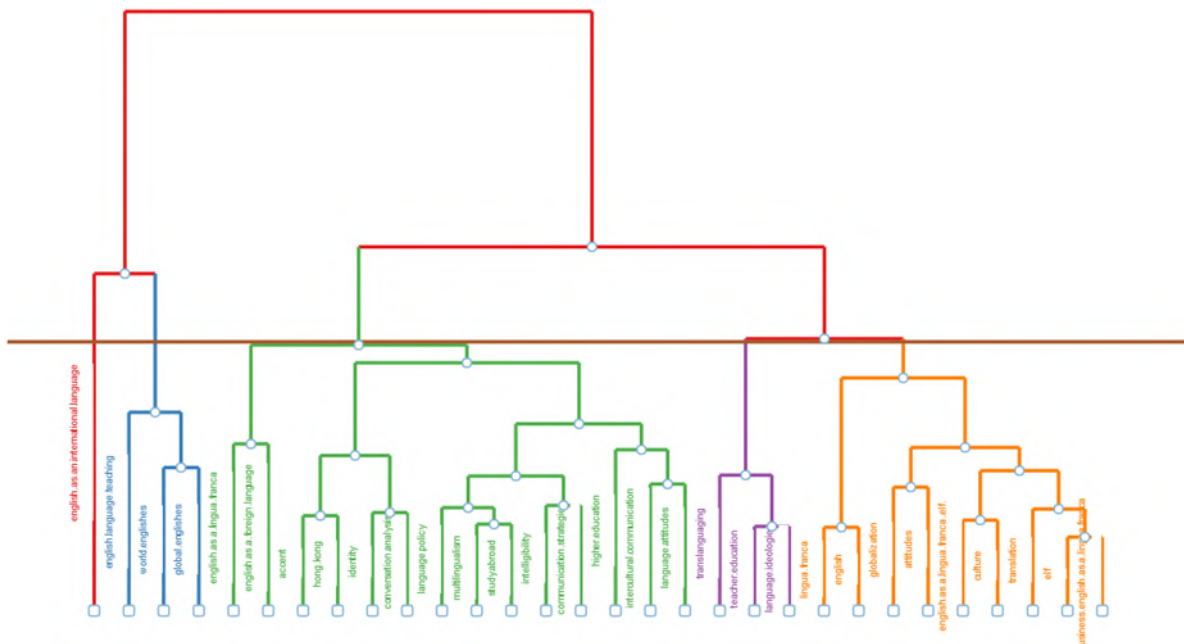


**Figure 3** Historiograph.

### 3.7. Topic dendrogram

Figure 4 illustrates the topic dendrogram representing the hierarchical clustering of research topics. This shows how various topics are grouped together by similarity, resulting in an umbrella topic. In this case, on the horizontal axis, we have the topics, whereas on the vertical axis, we have the distance or dissimilarity between clusters. The major branches in a dendrogram represent major clusters of related topics, where the longest branches indicate the most significant separations between groups of topics. The left branch (red) covers the content "English as an international language" and its subtopics related to "English language teaching," "World Englishes," and "Global Englishes." The central branch provides information on "English as a foreign language," including subjects such as "English language policy," "Multilingualism," "Identity," "Conversation analysis," and "Language attitudes." The right branches, in purple and orange, put together matters of language ideology and its teaching, where "English as a lingua franca in Asia," "Globalization," "Culture," "Translation," and "ELF" can be found. Major branches are further divided, highlighting more specific areas that each primary topic contains and showing how topics are intertwined and the relative importance of clustering within the general landscape of research.





**Figure 4** Representation of hierarchical clustering of topics. *Source:* Generated by the author using Biblioshiny.

**3.8. Trend topics**

Figure 5 shows the evolution and development of themes within the research topic of English as a Lingua Franca over time, indicating key terms and their emergence and frequency from 2006--2024. The different terms are represented on the vertical axis, whereas the horizontal axis shows the timeline. The size of the circles represents the frequency of each term; the larger the circle is, the higher the frequency. This visualization conveys information about how the focus of research into ELF has changed over time, showing both established and newly emerging areas of interest.

Recent and emerging trends in ELF research are encapsulated by the fact that terms such as "spatial repertoire," "ELF pedagogy," "English-medium instruction," or "BELF" have gained circulation only in the course of the last couple of years and have hence become prominent. These subjects identify current interests and areas of study evolving within ELF research, thus indicating new directions for analysis and orientation in research. Additionally, the use of terms such as "translanguaging," "teacher education," and "global English" has taken the front line more recently, showing a shift toward the more dynamic language practices and educational aspects of ELF.

The established trends in ELF research, such as "English as an international language," "English as a lingua franca," "ELF," "world Englishes," and "globalization continue throughout, which alone is evidence of their continuing relevance and centrality to the field. In this case, the size of the outer circles of those terms represents high frequency—further indicating the importance of these terms in ELF research. Other terms, such as "multilingualism," "language policy," "conversation analysis," and "intelligibility," have been more stable over some period, underlining their foundational role in the understanding of ELF and its implications. There have also been shifts and developments in focus over time: terms such as "study abroad" and "internationalization" were quite prominent during the first years but then dropped significantly in recent years, indicating a shift in research priorities. Other terms, such as "communicative effectiveness," "turn-taking," and "sociolinguistics," have likewise gone through their rise and fall, which thus provides evidence for periodic waves of attention when researchers focus on different aspects of ELF communication.

**3.9. Thematic map**

Figure 6 shows the thematic map, which classifies research themes according to development degree density and relevance degree centrality. The theoretical thematic map is divided into four quadrants: motor themes, basic themes, emerging or declining themes, and niche themes. Motor themes in the top-right quadrant are high in centrality and density, indicating that they are highly developed in the field and important. Some of the topics include "ELF," "World Englishes," "English language teaching," "Global Englishes," and "English as an international language." These themes show issues that are central in the field and very active both in terms of research and interrelatedness. The basic themes (lower-right quadrant) are those with a high degree of centrality but low density, suggesting relative centrality to the field but, at the same time, being relatively underdeveloped. Some examples here include "English as a lingua franca," "Multilingualism," "Intercultural communication," "Higher education," and "Language policy." These foundation-building blocks in ELF research are highly informative with respect to the theoretical underpinnings in the field.



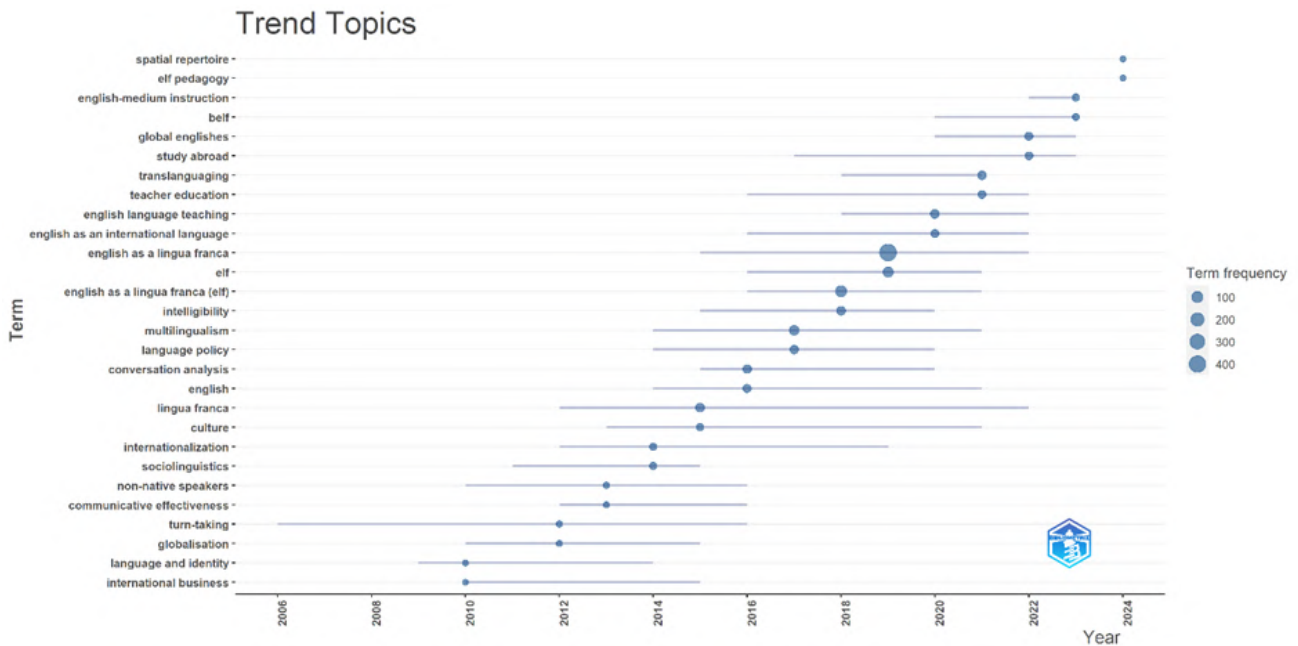


Figure 5 Displays a visual representation demonstrating the popularity of various topics. Source: Generated by the author using Biblioshiny.

The niches in the upper left quadrant show high density but low centrality, indicating their highly specialized and well-developed nature, yet they are less central to the general landscape of research. These include "academic writing" and "business English as a lingua franca," which focus on some areas of research. Emerging or declining themes (lower-left quadrant) are characterized by low density and low centrality, thus suggesting that they are either increasingly an area of interest or falling off the radar of relevance. The themes represented in this quadrant include "Study abroad" and "Translation," which might indicate new frontiers of research or those losing ground within the ELF research community. Topics such as "Conversation analysis", "Intelligibility", "Pronunciation", "Language attitudes," and "English as a foreign language" are roughly centrally located, marking mediums of centrality and density—a hallmark of emerging or stable prominence within the field.

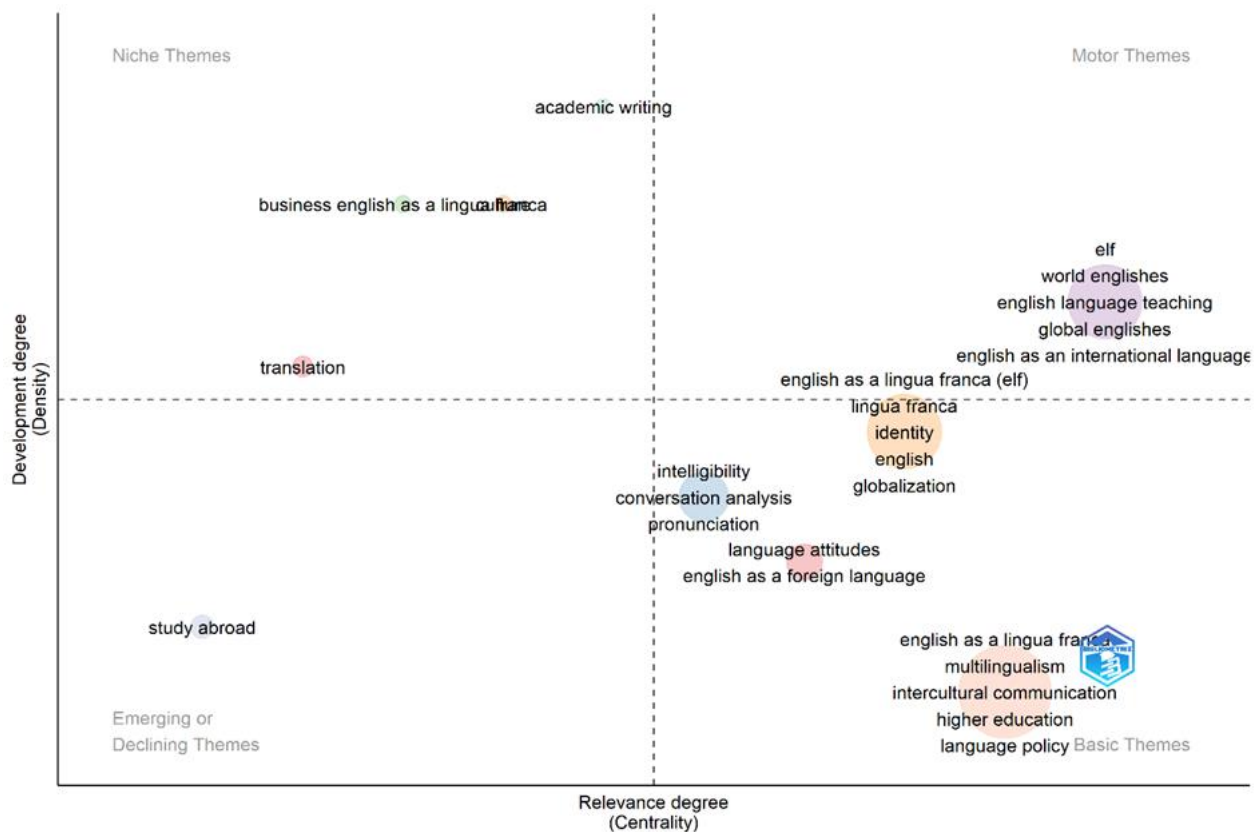


Figure 6 Thematic visualization of Keywords. Source: Generated by the author using Biblioshiny.



### 3.10. Bibliographic coupling of documents

The bibliographic coupling illustrated in Figure 7 identifies and analyzes the shared references between academic publications on the topic to determine their relatedness and uncover patterns and clusters within the research field. This network includes 30 items; using a minimum citation threshold of 5 produces 13 clusters, which means that the research field is interconnected. Among the 1395 documents, 700 have been cited at least five times, indicating good academic engagement in this field. Cluster 1 (Red), the largest with 182 items, indicates a central hub of research with prominent authors such as Jenkins (2006) and Louhiala-Salminen et al. (2005). The second cluster has 132 items with important contributions from authors such as Bayyurt (2018) and Galloway N. Although Cluster 3 has only 106 items, it is in blue, and the most influential are those of Jenkins (2012); McNamara (2014). Cluster 4, in yellow, contains 76 items from authors such as Kuteeva (2020) and Mahboob (2018), dating from 2020. Cluster 5, in purple and with 62 items, is further represented by House (2013) and Mauranen (2018). It is in clusters 6 through 13 that there are fewer items, ranging from 48 to 1, thus grazing on more reclusive or emerging areas of research. Other notable authors belong to these clusters and include Björkman (2011) and Cogo (2012). Notably, network visualization by bibliographic coupling appropriates the cartography of the scholarly landscape of "English as a Lingua Franca." The fact that documents are spread over a number of different clusters underscores the variety and depth of research conducted on this topic. The larger a cluster is, the more central it is to the study, and the more engagement from academics it contains. Smaller clusters are reflective of peripheral subjects that are probably emerging or highly specialized. Contributing much to central clusters are leading authors such as Jenkins, Louhiala-Salminen, and Bayyurt, thus revealing their influential role in shaping research discourses. This visualization offers an overview of connectedness and dynamics regarding academic research in this area.

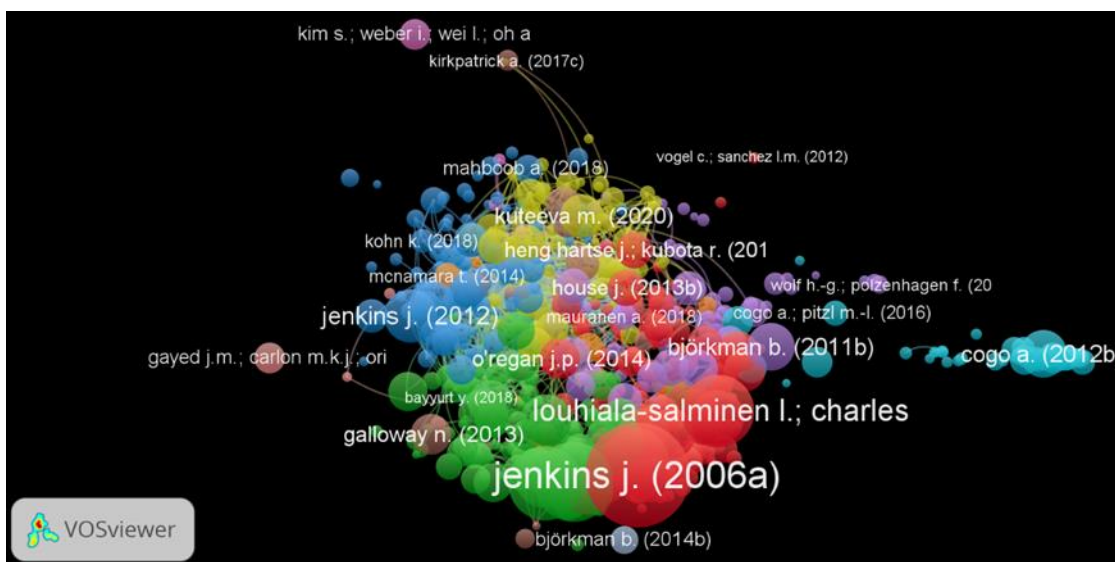


Figure 7 Bibliographic coupling of documents.

### 3.11. Co-occurrence in all keywords

Figure 8 shows the co-occurrence network with an extracted minimum threshold of 5 occurrences. The network consists of 132 keywords from 2991 that fit into 13 distinct clusters, each representing a thematic area within the field, showing great diversity and depth of research in ELF. For example, Cluster 1 has 16 keywords and addresses the academic and pedagogic dimensions of ELF, paying great attention to academic discourse and the role of teaching in applied linguistics. The second, Cluster 2, also 16 strong, is focused on written academic communication, putting rhetorical strategies and genre-specific writing into consideration. With respect to language comprehensibility, policy-making, and second language acquisition, Cluster 3 is constituted.

Cluster 4, marked in yellow and containing 15 keywords, focuses on professional/business domains of ELF and discusses ways in which English is used for workplace communication. Cluster 5, in purple, has 11 keywords and includes themes related to globalization and higher education, as it discusses the role of ELF in international settings and universities. Cluster 6, colored in cyan with 10 keywords, investigates perceptions and attitudes toward ELF, with a special emphasis on Taiwan. Cluster 7, with 10 keywords, focuses on cultural and regional issues, emphasizing how ELF interacts with cultural attitudes and the linguistic landscape, mainly in ASEAN countries. Importantly, Cluster 8, with 9 keywords, looks into the motivation behind ELF use and its pragmatic aspects in Asian contexts.

The smaller clusters are related to second language acquisition and language policies in Asia, such as Cluster 9 with 7 keywords, whereas similar topics within the ASEAN context are represented by Cluster 10 in light green. Cluster 11, light blue,



with 6 keywords, is related to matters of workplace communication and the use of business English, much like Cluster 4. Cluster 12, light yellow, also with 6 keywords, examines the role of international students in a globalized world and questions related to language policy. Finally, Cluster 13 (yellow) also contains 4 keywords. In addition, TESOL is combined with workplace communication and business English, pointing toward more educational and practical dimensions of ELF in professional environments. This comprehensive network underlines the multifaceted and highly interconnected nature of ELF research, thus mirroring its wide scope and interdisciplinarity.

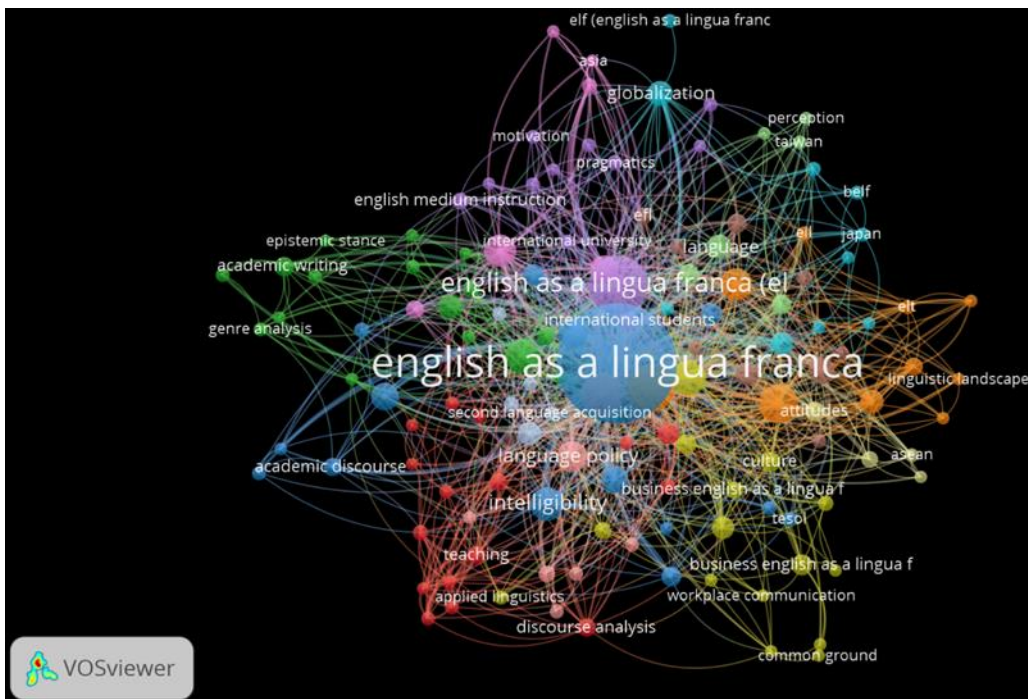


Figure 8 Co-occurrence of all Keywords.

### 3.12. Network visualization of cocitations of cited authors

The network visualization of cocitations among cited authors, as shown in Figure 9, is divided into 14 clusters, each representing a distinct thematic focus. Cluster #0, "Casual ELF Conversation," is the largest cluster, with 133 members and a silhouette value of 0.645. This cluster addresses casual conversations in ELF contexts, spanning Mauranen A (417 citations), Cogo A (345 citations), House J (290 citations), and others. The most influential citing article for this cluster is Si (2019), which concerns new approaches to teaching English in China and increases the role played by casual conversation in ELF. Cluster #1 is "Teaching English," with 130 members and a silhouette value of 0.622, focusing on pedagogical strategies and methodologies pertaining to the teaching of English in ELF contexts. The top cited authors contributing to this topic include Jenkins J, 806; Seidlhofer B, 735; and Kirkpatrick A, 310. The main citing article comes from Si (2019) underlining effective teaching methods in the ELF domain. Cluster #2, "World Englishes," with 87 members and a silhouette value of 0.757, is focused on the global varieties of English. Kachru BB, with 277 citations; Kachru B, with 107; and Canagarajah AS, with 102 citations, are the major representative figures of this cluster. The major citing article is Jenkins (2006), covering almost all available points of view for teaching the world Englishes and ELF.

Cluster #3, "Academic Writing," also with 87 members and a silhouette value of 0.753, centers on the conventions and practices of academic writing in ELF contexts. Influential authors include Crystal D (251 citations), Phillipson R (175 citations), and Hyland K (79 citations). The major citing article by Jenkins (2006), discusses current perspectives on the teaching world Englishes and ELF. Cluster #4, "Lingua Franca Communication," with 85 members and a silhouette value of 0.616, explores the dynamics of communication within ELF interactions. The key contributors are Pennycook A (224 citations), Baker W (190 citations), and Kramsch C (129 citations). Pullin (2015) is the major citing article, highlighting curriculum design and course development in the context of BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca). Clusters #5 through #12 continue to explore various dimensions of ELF. Cluster #5, "Pragmatic Competence," with 81 members and a silhouette value of 0.794, focuses on pragmatic aspects of ELF interactions. Notably, the authors include Kankaanranta A (78 citations), Louhiala-Salminen L (70 citations), and Brown P (50 citations). The major citing article by Ulijn (1995), examines temporal aspects of turn-taking in intercultural business encounters. Cluster #6, "Temporal Aspect," consists of 69 members and has a high silhouette value of 0.992, indicating a well-defined cluster. This cluster, with contributions from Tannen D (20 citations), Wierzbicka A (5 citations), and Hall ET (4 citations), also cites Ulijn, 1995 as a major work.



Cluster #7, "Language Policy," with 47 members and a silhouette value of 0.797, examines policies related to ELF. The key authors include Murata K (43 citations), Shohamy E (40 citations), and Hu G (38 citations). The major citing article by Lan (2022) explores multilingual English–medium instruction in Taiwan. Cluster #8, "Baffin Region," has 42 members and a silhouette value of 0.909, focusing on discourse and identity in the Baffin region. The prominent authors are Bourdieu P (78 citations), Heller M (17 citations), and Grin F (9 citations). Dorais (2000) is the major citing article in this cluster. Cluster #9, "Chinese English users," includes 31 members with a silhouette value of 0.988, highlighting research on Chinese English users. The key contributors are Barbara S (30 citations), Jennifer J (26 citations), and Anna M (22 citations), with Schneider, EW (2012) as the major citing article. Cluster #10, "Expanding Circle," with 29 members and a silhouette value of 0.973, investigates the spread of English in nonnative contexts. Notably, the authors include Unknown (92 citations) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (28 citations). De Kadt (1993) is the major citing article. Cluster #11, "Retos Enfrentado," has 24 members and a silhouette value of 0.935, focusing on challenges in ELF research. The key authors are Cenoz J (46 citations), Swales J (33 citations), and Bamgbose A (15 citations), with Seidlhofer (2003) as the major citing article. Cluster #12, "Language Assessment," includes 23 members with a silhouette value of 0.964, emphasizing assessment in ELF contexts. The prominent authors are Canagarajah S (243 citations), Kubota R (71 citations), and Davies A (46 citations). Holliday (2009) is the major citing article. Finally, Cluster #16, "Communicative Competencies," has 5 members with a silhouette value of 0.996 and addresses the development of communicative competencies in ELF learners. The key figures are O'Dowd R with 17 citations, Dooly M and Helm F with 4 citations each. The major citing article is contributed by Fan (2021), who researched the effects of intercultural telecollaborative environments on Taiwanese ELF learners. This network visualization represents the broad landscape of ELF research, underlines key themes, and influential authors, providing valuable insights into how different themes are interconnected.

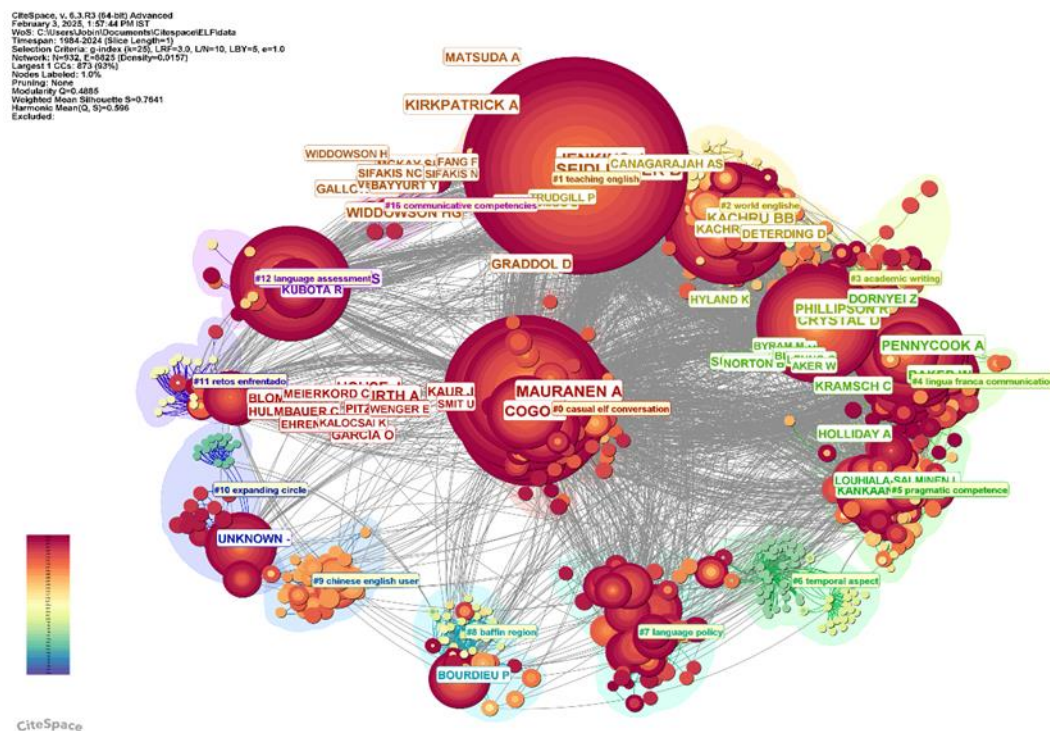


Figure 9 Network visualization of cocitations of cited authors. Source: Generated by the author using Citespace.

### 3.13. Timeline network visualization of countries collaborating

Figure 10 shows the timeline network visualization of countries' collaborations, including six clusters. Each of these clusters indicates an issue of its own and reflects the interrelationship or cooperation between different countries at different times. The largest cluster is "Foreign Language Context", with 15 members, researching settings in which foreign language use takes place in ELF. Although it has a silhouette value of 0, indicating that there is some overlap with other clusters, it still retains significance from the salient members. Another major citing article belongs to Humphries, 2023, who explores the shifts in the speaking ability of Japanese English majors before, during, and after going abroad. The key countries represented by this cluster are the UK, Japan, and Hong Kong, contributing 178, 110, and 68, respectively. This cluster underscores the global interest in how foreign language contexts influence ELF dynamics.

The second-largest cluster, "Turkish Coursebook," has 14 members and addresses the role of Turkish coursebooks in ELF and the pedagogical material related to it. A major citing article is that of Davier (2023), who discusses indirect translation. The



key citing countries include Spain, with 95 citations; Germany, with 67; and Italy, with 48. This cluster contributes important European country contributions to the pedagogical aspects explored in the use of coursebooks and instructional materials. Cluster #2 has 12 members with the name "Teacher Language Awareness", emphasizing issues relating to teacher awareness and training in ELF contexts. Majorly citing article Lee (2024) examines preservice teachers raising their global English awareness using AI chatbots in 3D metaverse environments. The three countries with the highest number of citations in this cluster are the U.S. with 111 citations, Thailand with 43 citations, and Poland with 28 citations, indicating how technological innovation and teacher education contribute to effective ELF education.

The fourth-largest cluster, "Virtual Exchange Setting," has 10 members and addresses virtual exchange programs in the ELF context. One of the major citing articles is Navarro (2022), which provided a critical reconsideration of ELF in scientific-academic contexts. The key contributors to this cluster are Australia, with 60 citations; Sweden, with 41; and Brazil, with 25. Thus, interest in virtual exchange settings as a possible tool for increasing ELF interactions in particular and academic collaboration all around the world is apparent. Cluster #4, "Medical English," has 8 members and addresses the use of ELF in medical contexts. One of the largest citing articles is Song (2020), whose banker discusses translanguaging practices at a Shanghai university. The major citing members are China with 69, South Korea with 33, and Canada with 24—countries to whom ELF is extremely vital in terms of medicine-related education and practice. The smallest cluster, "social inclusion", has only 4 members and addresses the role of ELF in social inclusion. One major citing article by Gerritsen (2009) dealt with BELF. Some of the principal contributors are the Netherlands 17, India 2, Montenegro 1, which is a strong reiteration of the importance of ELF in fostering inclusive communication in different social and business contexts. This allows us to put into perspective all the dominant thematic directions in ELF research and influential countries on a single-time network visualization. This includes eight clusters with distinct focuses: foreign language contexts, virtual exchanges, teacher training, medical English, social inclusion, and others. The visualization underscores how these themes are interlinked and highlights the collaborative efforts of EFL scholars worldwide to better understand and apply ELF.

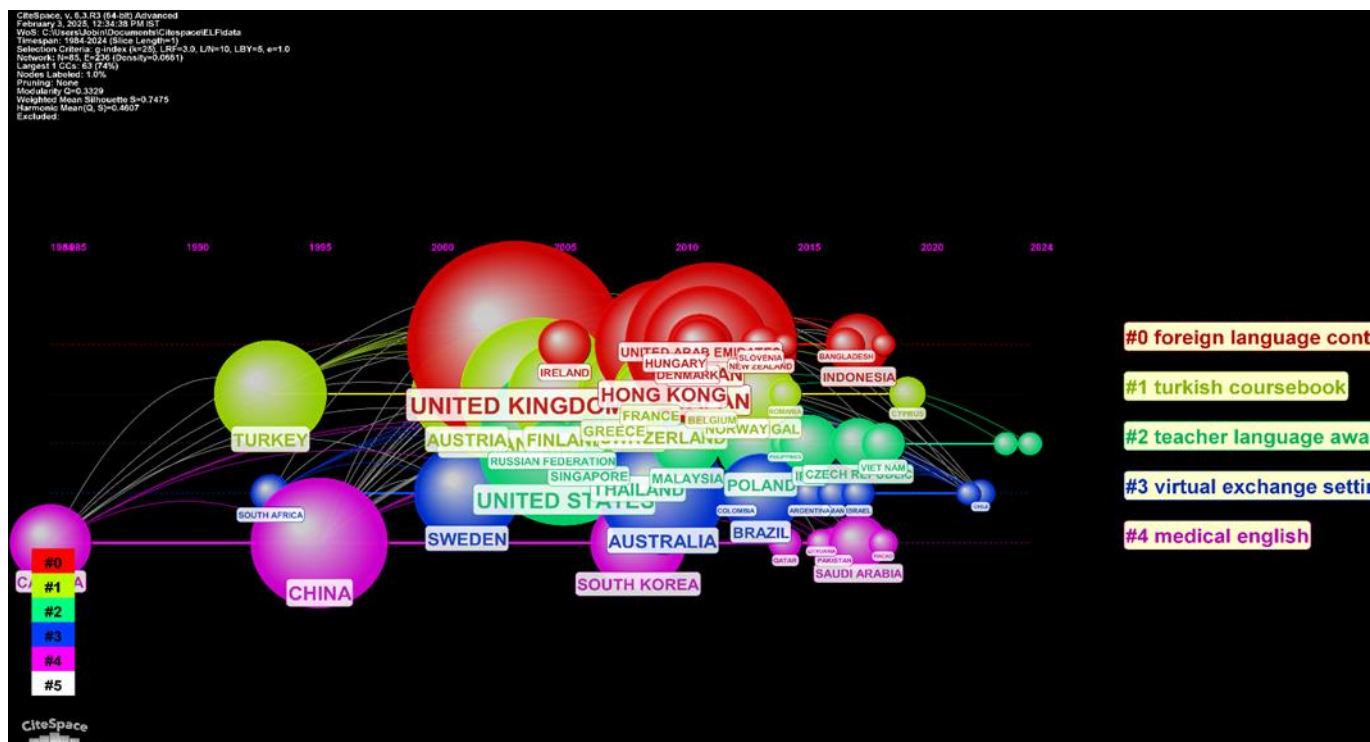


Figure 10 Timeline network visualization of countries' collaborations. Source: Generated by the author using Citespace.

#### 4. Discussions

The bibliometric analysis of English as a Lingua Franca, which spans publications from 1984–2024, reveals significant growth, with an annual rate of 10.49% and an average of 14.38 citations per document. This dataset contains 1,395 documents, 518 sources, and the contributions of 1,514 different authors. Other evidence that points to international collaboration is also available at 13.12%. The increasing centrality of English as a lingua franca (ELF) within global discourse is not only evident from bibliometric data but also aligns with broader sociolinguistic transformations discussed by scholars such as Dewey (2007) and Jenkins (2017). As shown in the literature, ELF functions as a communicative tool that bridges cultural and linguistic diversity. This is reinforced in our analysis by the emergence of pragmatic themes such as “intercultural communication” and “language policy,” which appear to be underdeveloped yet highly central elements in the thematic map. These align with previous



assertions that ELF is less about native norms and more about mutual intelligibility and adaptability House (2022); Seidlhofer (2004). The shift toward these constructs suggests an evolving global pedagogical perspective, one that prioritizes functionality and inclusivity in language use.

Furthermore, Jenkins et al. (2012) emphasized that ELF research must be understood not only as a linguistic trend but also as a reflection of social mobility, global academia, and international policy. Our study supports this view by showing that motor themes such as "World Englishes" and "ELF pedagogy" have increasingly occupied central positions Jenkins (2012). As Baker (2009) noted, cultural identity and communicative competence are negotiated in real time within ELF contexts, making it necessary for future research to bridge language use with dynamic social factors (Baker, 2009b). These findings call for language education frameworks that focus less on native speaker models and more on culturally sensitive pedagogies Boyle (2011); Sifakis (2007).

Additionally, studies by Hanusková (2019) and Metsä-Ketelä (2016) highlight the strategic use of repair mechanisms and general extenders, respectively, in ELF settings, offering support for the thematic clustering seen around academic discourse and pragmatic competence in our keyword analysis. These microlevel communication strategies underscore the growing sophistication of ELF speakers in navigating diverse linguistic interactions. Their prominence in recent research further validates the need to focus on these competencies within educational and policy frameworks, especially in light of the "pragmatic competence" cluster revealed in cocitation analysis Hanusková (2019); Metsä-Ketelä (2016).

In terms of applied implications, educators and policymakers must recognize the growing importance of digital and virtual tools in ELF development. Oliveira (2024) emphasized the role of online intercultural interactions in enhancing ELF communication. This aligns with the visualized trend in our study regarding terms such as "virtual exchange," "metaversion," and "digital pedagogy," suggesting that the future of ELF research may lie in technologically mediated contexts Oliveira (2024). Such trends also suggest increased integration of AI-supported environments in teacher training and ELF-based educational design.

Annual scientific production has increased from a low level before 2005 to more than 100 articles per year since 2017, peaking in 2023 with 144 articles, which means increased academic recognition and importance in this field. Most relevant for this area will be the *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, with 86 articles, and the *Routledge Handbook of English as a Lingua Franca*, with 42 articles. Other major publications include *Asian Englishes* and *World Englishes*, portraying their enormous contribution and influence in this academic field. The most relevant authors are Sung CCM with 19 articles, Baker W with 17, Bayyurt Y with 16, and Kirkpatrick A with 15, which shows an influential role for these persons and their important contributions to the development of this area. On the other hand, globally high-impact documents include a paper by Seidlhofer (2001), *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, with 708 citations and a normalizing score of 1.9; another one is an article written by Jenkins (2006) in *TESOL Quarterly*, 2006, which has 600 citations but is claimed to have an extremely high normalized score: 6.2, showing considerable influence. Other leading publications include the article by Seidlhofer (2005), *ELT Journal*, with 347 citations, and Jenkins (2009), on *World English*, with 296 citations, showing the important contributions these two researchers have made.

The historiograph shows the central influence of seminal papers, notably Seidlhofer (2001), as the most cited and foundational work, with Jenkins (2006) (*TESOL Q*) and Jenkins (2009) (*World Englishes*) also significantly impacting the field, highlighting a collaborative and cumulative academic community. The thematic map reveals that well-developed and central themes in ELF research include "ELF," "World Englishes," and "English language teaching," whereas foundational themes such as "Multilingualism" and "Intercultural communication" are underdeveloped. Specialized areas such as "Academic writing" and "Business English as a lingua franca" are highly developed but less central, and emerging or declining themes such as "Study abroad" and "Translation" suggest potential new research frontiers or areas losing relevance. Recent and emerging trends in ELF research include "spatial repertoire," "ELF pedagogy," and "English-medium instruction," which have gained prominence in the last few years, indicating new research directions. Established trends such as "English as an international language," "world English," and "globalization" have consistently appeared over the years, underscoring their ongoing relevance and centrality to the field. Recent and emerging trends in ELF research include "spatial repertoire," "ELF pedagogy," and "English-medium instruction," which have gained prominence in the last few years, indicating new research directions. Established trends such as "English as an international language," "world English," and "globalization" have consistently appeared over the years, underscoring their ongoing relevance and centrality to the field.

The visualization of the bibliographic coupling network shows 30 items grouped into 13 clusters. It highlights the interconnected scholarly discourse, with core clusters led by prominent authors such as Jenkins J., Louhiala-Salminen I., and Bayyurt Y. It also showcases emerging niche areas, demonstrating robust academic engagement and diversity in this field." The co-occurrence network of keywords consists of 132 keywords grouped into 13 clusters. It shows the wide range and depth of the field, covering topics from academic discourse and teaching (Cluster 1) to professional contexts (Cluster 4) and globalization (Cluster 5). There are also smaller clusters that focus on specific aspects, such as second language acquisition, language policies in Asia, and the role of international students. This illustrates the broad and interdisciplinary appeal of ELF research. The highest-ranked item by citation count is Jenkins J in Cluster #1, with 806 citations. Seidlhofer B in Cluster #1 follows with 735 citations. Mauranen A in Cluster #0 is third with 417 citations, and Cogo A in Cluster #0 is fourth with 345 citations. Kirkpatrick

A in Cluster #1 ranks fifth with 310 citations, whereas House J in Cluster #0 is sixth with 290 citations. Firth A in Cluster #0 holds the seventh spot with 286 citations, Kachru BB in Cluster #2 is eighth with 277 citations, Crystal D in Cluster #3 is ninth with 251 citations, and Canagarajah S in Cluster #12 is tenth with 243 citations. The timeline network visualization of the countries involved reveals six distinct clusters, illustrating the interconnectedness and collaboration between countries over time. The largest cluster, "Foreign Language Context," includes key contributors such as the United Kingdom, Japan, and Hong Kong, whereas other clusters such as "Turkish Coursebook" and "Teacher Language Awareness" highlight significant contributions from Spain, Germany, Italy, the United States, Thailand, and Poland, highlighting a global interest in various aspects of ELF research from pedagogical materials to technological advancements in teacher training.

## 5. Research Gaps, Practical Implications and Future Directions

The analysis of the thematic map and trend topics reveals several research gaps in the field of English as a lingua franca (ELF). While motor themes such as "ELF," "World English," "English language teaching," and "Global English" are well developed and central to the field, there is a need for deeper exploration into basic themes such as "Intercultural communication," "Higher education," and "Language policy." These themes are fundamental but appear underdeveloped in terms of density, thus indicating opportunities for stronger theoretical and more efficient empirical research. Furthermore, niche topics such as "Academic writing" and "Business English as a lingua franca" represent specialized fields that are dense but not central, thus pointing to the potential for bringing these specialized insights together with more general ELF frameworks. Emerging or declining themes, such as "Study abroad" and "Translation", delimit areas that may be either on the verge of gaining importance or, on the opposite side, once important but now losing relevance; therefore, longitudinal studies are needed to identify their trajectory and potential integration with more central themes.

The practical implications of these gaps in trends are perhaps most visible among educators, policymakers, and practitioners in the field of ELF. For example, themes such as "ELF pedagogy" and "English–medium instruction" suggest an interest in innovative teaching strategies and dramatic curriculum designs to accommodate diverse linguistic backgrounds. As such, through such insights, teachers can now develop more inclusive and effective teaching methodologies to address the needs of EFL learners. Attention to "translanguaging" and "global English" marks a turn toward the acknowledgment and integration of dynamic language practices in educational settings, which can assist in communication and promote better learning outcomes in multilingual classrooms. Research related to the topics of "language policy" and "multilingualism" could help policy-makers develop policies that consider linguistic diversity and foster a more inclusive approach to language education.

Further research should aim to address the gaps in basic themes by conducting in-depth studies that connect them with established and emerging topics. For example, research into how "Intercultural communication" and "Higher education" interact with "Global Englishes" and "ELF pedagogy" would be helpful in understanding effective practices of language education in a globalized world. In addition, there is a need to revisit those themes that are emerging or declining, so horizontal analysis is performed on the basis of their current relevance and potential impact on the field. Longitudinal studies of the development of certain themes, such as "Study abroad" or even "Translation," might reveal certain trends and pointers to future directions of research. By addressing these gaps and integrating findings across different themes, researchers can help present a more holistic understanding of ELF and its implications for language education and policy.

## 6. Conclusion

This bibliometric study of English as a lingua franca (ELF) shows, in particular, how dynamic and fast-moving the research landscape is. Large increases in the number of publications and citations have been reported over recent years, highlighting the increasingly genuine status of ELF in global communication. Identifying key authors and sources underscores, at least, leading works by influential researchers and publications that shape this field. Very important aspects that have emerged from trend topics and thematic mapping are that ELF research increases centrality in areas such as computational linguistics and teaching, hence underpinning its interdisciplinarity. Progress notwithstanding, gaps still exist in research—in particular, on underexplored niche themes and basic theme development. First, this can be bridged by future research that pays more attention to encapsulating small niche themes, such as "human" and "female," into the larger general ELF discourses for added relevance. Second, further development of basic themes such as "business communications" and "multilingualism" is necessary to solidify their foundational roles in the field. Third, sophisticated computational methods need to be incorporated into ELF research in a way that effectively bridges the potential use of technology in understanding and teaching ELF. In general, this study provides an overview of the state of the art in ELF research and points toward key areas of future exploration and development, thus assuring further substantial growth and relevance of this crucial field.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the editor and anonymous reviewers for their comments, which helped improve the quality of this work.

## Ethical Considerations

Not applicable.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

## Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

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