

## Mapping the Landscape of Sociocultural Factors on English Learning (2020-2024)

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### Abstract

**Background:** In recent years, English language education has increasingly shifted from cognitive-oriented paradigms to socially situated and culturally mediated perspectives grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT). This framework emphasizes interaction, mediation, identity negotiation, and collaborative meaning-making as core mechanisms of language learning. While sociocultural research in English education has expanded rapidly, a systematic bibliometric synthesis focusing specifically on undergraduate English language learning remains limited.

**Purpose:** This bibliometric analysis aims to map and analyze global research trends on the sociocultural impact on undergraduates' English language learning between 2020 and 2024, identifying intellectual structures, key contributors, and emerging thematic directions, thereby offering a clearer understanding of the field's development and informing future research and practice.

**Materials and Methods:** This bibliometric analysis was conducted using the Dimensions AI database, focusing on articles published between 2020 and 2024. Following PRISMA guidelines, 352 open-access, peer-reviewed articles were selected using the keywords "Sociocultural" and "English study". Data were analyzed through performance analysis, bibliographic coupling and co-occurrence keyword mapping in VOSviewer to uncover conceptual linkages and thematic clusters including top authors, influential documents, prominent sources, and emerging thematic clusters.

**Results:** Findings indicate a steady growth of publications and citations during the 2020-2024 period, reflecting the expanding influence of sociocultural perspectives in English language education. Three major thematic clusters emerged: (1) Sociocultural Agency and Identity Construction, emphasizing multilingual identity, learner agency, and contextual negotiation; (2) Pedagogical Innovation and Cultural Interaction, focusing on interaction, development, digital mediation, and culturally responsive teaching; and (3) Global Perspectives on Linguistic Diversity, addressing English as a lingua franca, cross-cultural communication, and internationalized English learning environments. Leading contributors included the United Kingdom, China, and the United States, demonstrating strong cross-regional engagement.

**Conclusion:** The results collectively signify a shift in pedagogical paradigms ranging from traditional cognitive frameworks to sociocultural embedded approaches that foreground learner participation, collaborative meaning-making, and cultural mediation. By mapping these developments, the study provides conceptual and empirical foundations for advancing future research, innovative curriculum design, and informed policy formulation, establishing sociocultural perspectives as a cornerstone of contemporary English language education.

**Keywords:** sociocultural theory, English language learning, bibliometric analysis, higher education, pedagogical approaches

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Introduce the Problem

In recent decades, English language education has undergone a paradigmatic transformation, evolving from cognitive-

centered paradigms toward socially situated and culturally mediated frameworks. This intellectual shift has been primarily guided by Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory (SCT), which conceptualizes learning as a process co-constructed through social interaction, cultural tools, and mediation. Within the field of English language learning (ELL), this theoretical orientation has offered profound insights into how learners construct linguistic competence through participation, collaboration, and identity negotiation. The sociocultural approach situates language learning within its social milieu, recognizing that meaning and knowledge are jointly produced rather than individually acquired (Hennessy et al., 2021; Liang & Fung, 2020).

In higher education, this perspective has gained increasing importance, especially for undergraduates learning English in multilingual and multicultural contexts. As globalization reshapes educational environments, English has become both a communicative bridge and a site of sociocultural tension, requiring learners to engage with issues of identity, cultural hybridity, and agency (Soltani & Tran, 2022; Schwartz & Mazareeb, 2023). Sociocultural approaches thus emphasize interactional dynamics which includes dialogue, scaffolding, and collaborative learning as central to the acquisition of linguistic and communicative competence (Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022; Noroozi et al., 2020).

### *1.2 Explore Importance of the Problem*

Despite the growing number of empirical studies integrating SCT into English language education, comprehensive bibliometric syntheses remain scarce. Prior studies by Islam and Stapa (2021) and Luo and Watts (2022) have provided valuable case analyses but have not mapped the broader intellectual structure of sociocultural research. Moreover, much of the existing literature has focused on single pedagogical settings or regional case studies, leaving the global diffusion, intellectual linkages, and thematic evolution of this research underexplored. To fill this gap, the present study employs a bibliometric analysis to systematically examine publications from 2020 to 2024 that address the sociocultural dimensions of English language learning at the undergraduate level.

The bibliometric method allows for a quantitative yet interpretive exploration of scholarly trends, revealing how research communities, theoretical perspectives, and key concepts interconnect across time (Wider et al., 2024). Specifically, this study identifies leading authors, institutions, countries, and thematic clusters shaping the sociocultural discourse in English language education. The dataset, extracted from the Dimensions AI database, includes 352 open-access articles that align with the Fields of Research (Education) classification, thereby ensuring disciplinary consistency and accessibility.

Building on Vygotsky's principles and contemporary developments, this analysis aims to capture both the epistemological coherence and methodological diversity characterizing sociocultural research in English learning. By integrating bibliographic coupling and keyword co-occurrence analyses, the study not only maps intellectual linkages but also highlights emerging research themes and conceptual innovations within the field.

To guide the analysis, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the major research trends and thematic structures in sociocultural studies on English language learning from 2020 to 2024?
2. Who are the key authors, institutions, and countries contributing to the development of this field?
3. What conceptual and pedagogical directions can be identified through bibliographic coupling and keyword co-occurrence analyses?
4. How do these findings reflect the theoretical evolution and practical implications of sociocultural perspectives in English language education?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to an integrated understanding of how sociocultural theory continues to shape pedagogical practices, research collaborations, and global discourse in English language education.

### *1.3 Describe Relevant Scholarship*

#### *Theoretical Foundations of Sociocultural Perspectives in Language Education*

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory remains the foundational framework underpinning the current study. SCT posits that cognitive development and language acquisition are mediated by social interaction, cultural tools, and semiotic systems. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) indicates that the gap between what learners can achieve independently and what they can accomplish through guided assistance has become central to understanding scaffolding in language education (Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022). Within this framework, learning is not a solitary cognitive act but a socially co-constructed process shaped by cultural and communicative contexts.

Research adopting SCT in language education emphasizes the interplay between agency, identity, and interaction. For instance, Villacañas de Castro et al. (2020) examined how underprivileged students in Spain construct linguistic agency

within sociocultural constraints, while Namgung et al. (2020) explored teachers' professional agency in South Korea. These studies demonstrate that sociocultural learning encompasses not only linguistic development but also empowerment, cultural participation, and social transformation.

Additionally, studies such as Soltani and Tran (2022) and Schwartz and Mazareeb (2023) highlight the importance of silence, space, and agency in multilingual identity construction, reinforcing the idea that language learning reflects broader sociocultural negotiations. This view is supported by Leontjev and deBoer (2022), who frame teachers as "creators" of learning environments that mediate development through meaningful social interaction. Collectively, these theoretical developments affirm that English learning operates within a dynamic network of cultural, psychological, and institutional mediations.

### Pedagogical Applications of Sociocultural Theory in English Education

Pedagogical research inspired by SCT has focused on implementing dialogic and collaborative approaches that foster learner autonomy and cultural awareness. Hennessy et al. (2021) provide one of the most influential empirical contributions, demonstrating that dialogic teaching through the characterization of reciprocal questioning, reasoning, and scaffolding enhances students' critical engagement and linguistic performance. Similarly, Liang and Fung (2020) found that exploratory talk in WebQuest-based learning environments encourages critical thinking and co-construction of knowledge, aligning directly with Vygotskian principles.

Recent studies have also extended SCT to digital and multimodal environments. Luo and Watts (2022) explored the use of smartphones as cultural artifacts facilitating sociocultural mediation, while Li (2024) analyzed vocabulary learning apps that integrate motivational and interactive elements grounded in sociocultural pedagogy. Islam and Stapa (2021) and Abdel-Al Ibrahim and Karimi (2023) further examined how technology and peer assessment reduce anxiety and foster cooperative learning. These studies collectively affirm that sociocultural pedagogy is adaptable to both face-to-face and online modalities, promoting context-responsive, interactive learning.

Moreover, global engagement with SCT has expanded, as shown in Kos (2023) and Waked et al. (2024), who emphasize socio-emotional and cultural dimensions of learning in diverse EFL contexts. Together, these pedagogical applications illustrate how sociocultural theory informs inclusive, collaborative, and reflective practices in English language education, supporting the holistic development of learners' linguistic, cognitive, and intercultural competencies.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 *Bibliometric Analysis*

Bibliometric analysis offers a systematic, quantitative approach to map the intellectual structure and developmental dynamics of a research field (Donthu et al., 2021; Ninkov et al., 2022). It is particularly valuable for identifying prolific authors, influential publications, leading journals, country/institutional contributions, and thematic evolutions over time (Zupic & Čater, 2015). For this study, bibliometric analysis serves as the foundational method to investigate how sociocultural perspectives have been applied to English language learning between 2020 and 2024.

#### 2.1.1 Data Source and Search Strategy

Dimensions AI was selected as the primary database because it provides broader coverage of open-access research in the field of education than Scopus or Web of Science (WoS), particularly within applied linguistics and Global South research contexts. Whereas Scopus and WoS predominantly prioritize high-impact, subscription-based journals, Dimensions adopts a more inclusive indexing strategy that encompasses a wider range of publication venues. This inclusivity aligns with the study's objective of capturing global trends in sociocultural research on English language learning. Consequently, the bibliometric findings should be interpreted with reference to this broader and more inclusive database scope.

To enhance the comprehensiveness of the literature retrieval process, synonymous and theoretically related terms were systematically incorporated during the pilot search stage. These terms included English language learning, EFL/ESL, higher education, and Vygotsky. Based on the outcomes of the pilot searches, the final search string was refined to balance retrieval precision with the reduction of irrelevant records. The complete Boolean search strategy and logic are presented in Table 1.

#### 2.1.2 Inclusion Criteria and Screening

To ensure comparability and replicability, the following filters were applied: (a) publication year between 2020 and 2024; (b) peer-reviewed journal articles (excluding editorials, conference papers, book chapters); (c) classification under Education/Language Studies in Dimensions; and (d) open access status to guarantee full-text availability for any necessary follow-up checks. The PRISMA framework was used to document screening and selection steps (Moher et al., 2009). After applying these criteria, 352 records were retained from an initial set of 526,264 search results. A PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flowchart documented each stage of the inclusion and exclusion process to ensure procedural transparency.

### Operational Definition of Undergraduate Studies

In this study, the term undergraduate refers to learners formally enrolled in bachelor's degree programs within recognized higher education institutions. Eligible studies were required to explicitly identify their participants as undergraduate, university, higher education, or bachelor-level students. In cases where study samples comprised mixed populations (for example, both undergraduate and postgraduate learners), inclusion criteria were applied selectively. Such studies were considered eligible only if undergraduate students constituted the primary target group or if findings related to undergraduates were clearly reported and analytically separable from those of other learner groups.

#### 2.1.3 Software and Metrics

Bibliometric mapping and network analyses were performed primarily with VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010) for visual network generation. Standard bibliometric indicators reported include publication counts, citation counts, and network metrics such as Total Link Strength (TLS) produced by VOSviewer. Fractional counting was applied where appropriate to mitigate bias from multi-authored works (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Using fractional counting, VOSviewer clustered the data into thematic categories based on the strength of linkages among documents, sources, and keywords. The bibliometric approach adopted here enables a comprehensive assessment of how sociocultural theory has evolved and diversified across global English language education research.

#### 2.2 Bibliographic Coupling Analysis

Bibliographic coupling groups documents that cite the same references and therefore reveals contemporaneous conceptual or methodological affinities among recent works (Kessler, 1963). Unlike co-citation analysis, which is retrospective, bibliographic coupling is forward-looking and well suited to mapping the current intellectual structure of an emergent or rapidly evolving domain. In this study, bibliographic coupling was conducted using VOSviewer's citation network function. Each article in the dataset was represented as a node, while shared references formed weighted edges connecting them. The software algorithm calculated Total Link Strength (TLS) to quantify the degree of similarity between publications. The bibliographic coupling analysis thus enabled the visualization of the field's intellectual organization and the identification of its most cohesive theoretical frameworks. Bibliographic coupling is particularly useful here because it highlights contemporary research fronts, including dialogic pedagogy, technology-mediated sociocultural mediation, and identity/agency by connecting papers that draw on similar prior literatures (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Therefore, this technique is indispensable for tracing research frontiers, revealing evolving intellectual structures, and informing meta-analytic syntheses in education.

#### 2.3 Co-occurrence Keywords Analysis

Co-occurrence (co-word) analysis identifies thematic structure by examining which keywords appear together within documents; frequent co-occurrence signals conceptual linkages and topical clusters (Wider et al., 2024). This method maps the cognitive landscape by revealing core concepts, emerging subtopics, and interdisciplinary intersections. The analysis used author-provided keywords extracted from the Dimensions dataset. VOSviewer's co-occurrence mapping function generated a network visualization in which nodes represented keywords and edge thickness reflected co-occurrence frequency. The keywords that co-appeared in multiple documents were clustered based on association strength. Co-occurrence analysis offers a valuable lens for identifying emerging interdisciplinary intersections. By charting how central terms coalesce around sociocultural theory, this method reveals a growing convergence between cognitive, cultural, and technological paradigms in English language education research.

### 3. Results

A comprehensive search of the Dimensions AI database initially yielded 526,264 records related to sociocultural research in English studies. To ensure relevance and analytical focus, the dataset underwent a systematic filtering process based on predefined inclusion criteria. Specifically, 206,170 records published outside the target period of 2020-2024 were excluded. This refinement ensured that the final dataset reflected contemporary trends and recent scholarly developments in the field.

Table 1. Inclusion Criteria

|                       |                                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Dimension AI Database | ALL                                 |
| Time period           | 2020 to 2024                        |
| Search keywords       | "Sociocultural" and "English study" |
| Research categories   | Education                           |
| Publication type      | Article                             |
| Open Access           | All OA                              |

#### Statistics and Data Analysis

Following the document-type screening, 318,480 non-research items, including reviews, editorials, and commentaries, were excluded from the dataset. Subsequently, 1,262 additional records were removed during the eligibility assessment for failing to satisfy three key inclusion criteria: they were (1) not aligned with Language Studies, (2) unrelated to the theme of Fields of Research (Education), and (3) lacked open-access availability. These systematic exclusions ensured that the final dataset comprised only peer-reviewed scholarly publications of high relevance, accessibility, and academic significance, thereby strengthening the analytical precision and validity of the bibliometric results.

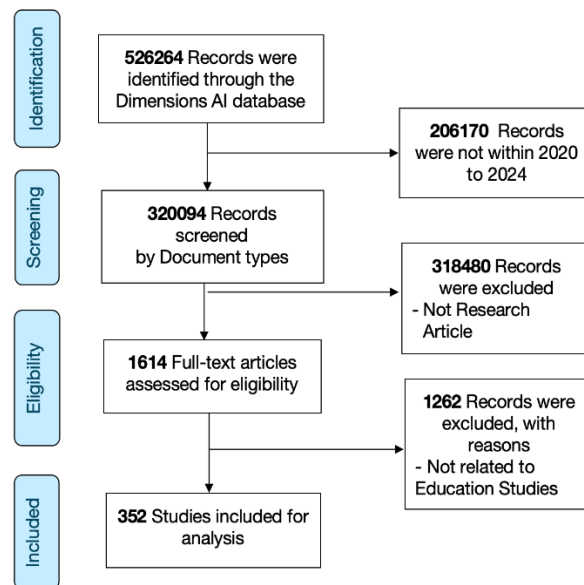


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart

After the application of all filtration procedures, a total of 352 research articles were retained for bibliometric analysis. These publications met the established inclusion standards by being open-access, peer-reviewed, and published between 2020 and 2024. Each article was directly relevant to language studies and aligned with the Fields of Research (Education) classification. To ensure methodological transparency, a PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flowchart was employed to visually document the entire screening and selection process. This structured representation enhances the study's scientific rigor, procedural clarity, and replicability.

The substantial reduction from the initial search results to the final dataset can be attributed to three main factors: (1) the high generality of the term “sociocultural” across disciplines, (2) database indexing practices that retrieve non-educational records, and (3) disciplinary naming conventions that use “English” in non-pedagogical contexts. These filtering steps were necessary to ensure analytical focus and thematic coherence.

#### *Trend Analysis*

The trend analysis offers a detailed overview of the publication and citation patterns observed between 2020 and 2024. As indicated in the “Analytical Overview”, a total of 352 scholarly articles were retrieved from the Dimensions AI database, forming the basis of the bibliometric dataset. These publications achieved an average citation rate of 3.72, reflecting a moderate but growing academic influence. Furthermore, the annual distribution graph illustrates fluctuations and progressive growth in publication output across the examined years, revealing the increasing research attention devoted to the sociocultural dimensions of English language learning within the specified period.

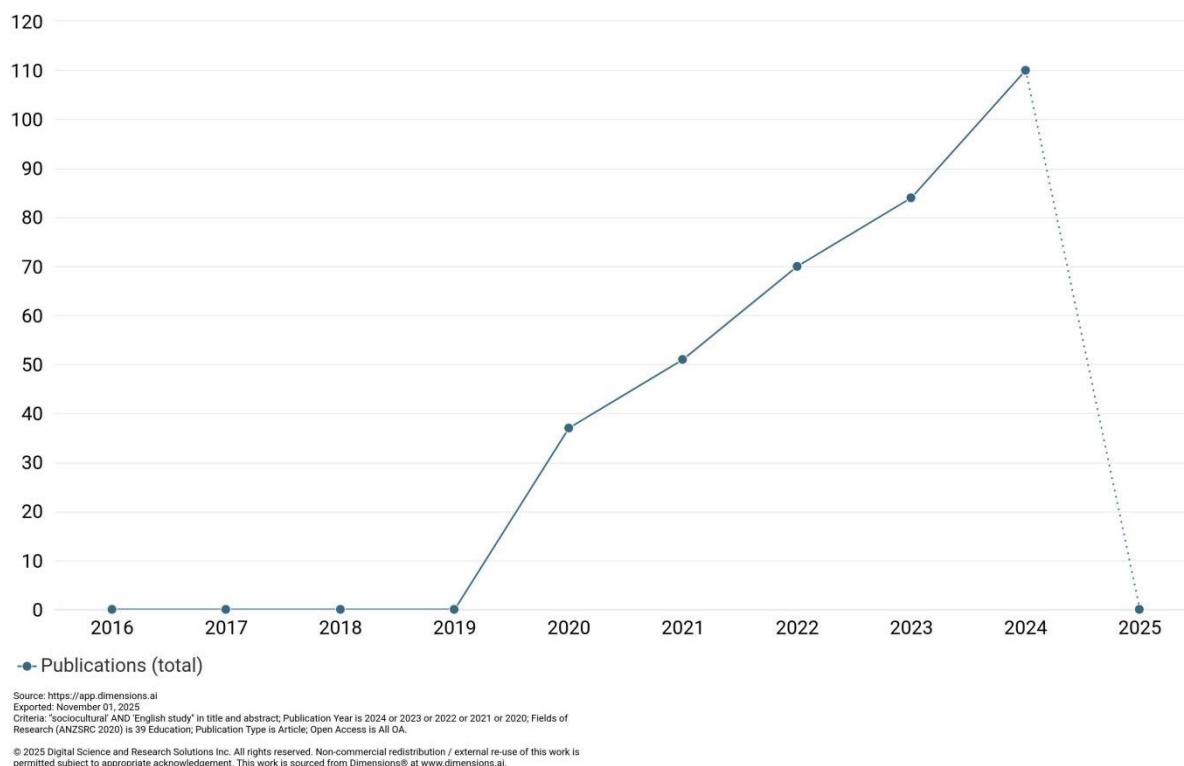


Figure 2. Quantity of publications and citations between 2020 and 2024

### 3.1 Performance Analysis

#### 3.1.1 Document-Level Performance

The top ten most-cited documents in the dataset collectively illustrate the intellectual core of sociocultural research in English language education, with citation frequencies ranging from 27 to 54. The most influential work, Hennessy et al. (54 citations), examines productive teacher-student dialogue, reinforcing the centrality of interaction in sociocultural learning. Following closely, Van Ha et al. (52) and Jiang et al. (47) extend this perspective through studies on corrective feedback and academic success, particularly within Asian higher education contexts. Notably, Motteram et al. (42) and Islam and Stapa (35) highlight the intersection of technology, social context, and linguistic development. Collectively, these publications demonstrate an expanding interest in dialogic pedagogy, cultural mediation, and digitally mediated learning. The relatively moderate citation counts suggest that while the field is emergent, it has begun to consolidate around sociocultural interaction as a theoretical and pedagogical lens. This corpus provides the empirical foundation for understanding how cultural context and communicative engagement shape undergraduate English language acquisition.

The prominence of these highly cited documents suggests that dialogic interaction, feedback, and mediated learning have become central research foci within sociocultural approaches to English language education. Their influence also reflects a broader shift toward empirically grounded pedagogies that foreground classroom interaction and learner participation in higher education contexts.

#### 3.1.2 Source-Level Performance

The analysis of journal sources identifies ten primary outlets, with frequencies ranging from three to five documents per journal. The International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research and TESL-EJ each contributed five documents, indicating their prominence as key publication venues for sociocultural studies in English language education. The International Journal of Educational Research Open (four documents, 68 citations) stands out for its high citation rate, reflecting its emerging influence in disseminating contemporary pedagogical research. Similarly, System (three documents, 63 citations) continues to serve as a leading journal bridging applied linguistics and education. Other notable outlets, such as Language Testing in Asia (45 citations) and English Language Teaching (34 citations), demonstrate the field's disciplinary diversity, which includes spanning linguistics, pedagogy, and educational innovation. Collectively, these journals form a cohesive yet multidisciplinary network that foregrounds the sociocultural dimension in language learning, promoting cross-institutional dialogue and the global diffusion of educational research.

The concentration of publications in these journals indicates that sociocultural research on English language learning is

primarily disseminated through interdisciplinary outlets that bridge applied linguistics and educational research. This pattern suggests that sociocultural inquiry is valued not only for linguistic insights but also for its pedagogical and institutional relevance.

### 3.1.3 Author-Level Performance

A total of ten core authors were identified, each contributing between two and three documents to the dataset. Sharma, Uma Nath emerged as the most prolific author (three documents), though citation impact remained modest (two citations), suggesting a focus on niche or regional contexts. Kim, Deoksoon stands out with two publications but the highest cumulative citation count (53), highlighting significant scholarly recognition, possibly due to her integration of sociocultural theory into literacy and science-based English instruction. Maftoon, Parviz (14 citations), and Knutsson, Ola (seven citations, link strength = 2) also show growing engagement within international collaborations. The diversity of author affiliations spreads across Asia, Europe, and North America which illustrates a cross-continental scholarly dialogue. Despite limited total link strength values, these authors collectively represent the foundational contributors shaping the discourse around sociocultural paradigms in English learning. The distribution pattern reflects a developing yet globally connected authorship base, emphasizing both theoretical pluralism and pedagogical applicability of sociocultural research.

The variation between publication volume and citation impact among core authors suggests that influence in this field is shaped more by theoretical contribution and contextual relevance than by productivity alone. This pattern reflects the evolving and conceptually driven nature of sociocultural research in English language education.

### 3.1.4 Organizational-Level Performance

Institutional performance analysis reveals that the University of Cambridge leads with four documents and 91 citations, underscoring its dominant role in sociocultural and dialogic pedagogy research. The University of Hong Kong follows closely with three publications and the highest citation total (106), reflecting the university's strong research presence in language education within East Asian contexts. Other significant contributors include Monash University (three documents, 22 citations), Boston College (two documents, 53 citations), and the University of Valencia (three documents, 21 citations). These figures suggest that both Western and Asian institutions are actively engaged in advancing sociocultural perspectives on English learning. Notably, Hue University and Independent University (Bangladesh) demonstrate emerging contributions from Southeast Asia, highlighting regional engagement with sociocultural frameworks. Although total link strengths remain low, the overall pattern suggests a globally distributed academic collaboration where leading universities contribute theoretical development, while regional institutions contextualize sociocultural approaches within localized educational settings.

The prominence of institutions from both Anglophone and non-Anglophone regions indicates that sociocultural research is shaped by diverse educational traditions and localized pedagogical concerns. This distribution suggests a growing recognition of context-sensitive approaches to English language learning in higher education

### 3.1.5 Country-Level Performance

The geographical distribution reveals the United States (20 documents, 111 citations) and China (15 documents, 163 citations) as the two major contributors to sociocultural research in English language learning. The United Kingdom also demonstrates high scholarly impact, with 14 publications generating 251 citations which is the highest among all countries, indicating its central influence in theoretical and pedagogical discourse. Other active contributors include Indonesia (19 documents, 26 citations), Vietnam (8, 67), and Australia (8, 77), reflecting the expanding research engagement from the Asia-Pacific region. Meanwhile, Iran, Turkey, South Africa, and Malaysia (6, 44 citations) illustrate emerging voices in culturally responsive education. Despite varying citation frequencies, this distribution underscores a strong internationalization trend in sociocultural language research. The cross-national collaboration among Anglophone and non-Anglophone countries signifies a shift toward decolonizing English education, situating language learning within sociocultural realities rather than monolingual standards.

The strong representation of both traditionally dominant research countries and emerging contributors reflects the global diffusion of sociocultural theory in English language education. This pattern may be influenced by national language policies, higher education internationalization strategies, and the expanding role of English in multilingual academic settings.

## 3.2 Bibliographic Coupling Analysis

Bibliographic coupling, first conceptualized by Kessler (1963), is a foundational scientometric technique used to reveal conceptual relationships between academic documents based on shared references. According to Kessler's proposition, when two publications cite the same set of prior studies, they are considered "coupled" indicating that the authors draw from similar theoretical foundations or methodological frameworks. This shared intellectual lineage allows bibliographic

coupling to serve as a forward-looking analytical tool. It maps contemporary research structures without relying on citation accumulation, making it particularly valuable for emerging or rapidly evolving fields. By identifying how documents are linked through common references, the method uncovers active research fronts and clusters that represent current scholarly conversations.

Building on this conceptual foundation, van Eck and Waltman (2010) further advanced the operationalization of bibliographic coupling by implementing it within VOSviewer, a software designed for visualizing bibliometric networks. Their work demonstrates how coupling techniques can generate comprehensible maps of intellectual structure, where nodes represent publications and edges correspond to coupling strength. These visual networks make it possible to detect thematic clusters, trace conceptual overlap, and observe the degree of relatedness among studies. As a result, bibliographic coupling not only highlights dominant research trajectories but also helps scholars identify emerging themes, influential works, and potential gaps within a field. Its integration into modern bibliometric tools has solidified bibliographic coupling as an essential method for analyzing knowledge organization and scholarly development.

Table 2. Bibliographic Coupling (Top 10 Articles)

| Rank | Authors                | Title                                                                                                                                                                            | Citations | Total Link Strength |
|------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| 1    | Hennessy et al. (2021) | An analysis of the forms of teacher-student dialogue that are most productive for learning                                                                                       | 54        | 7                   |
| 2    | Van Ha et al. (2021)   | Oral corrective feedback in English as a foreign language classrooms: A teaching and learning perspective                                                                        | 52        | 12                  |
| 3    | Jiang et al. (2022)    | International medical students' perspectives on factors affecting their academic success in China: a qualitative study                                                           | 47        | 8                   |
| 4    | Liang & Fung (2020)    | Development and evaluation of a WebQuest-based teaching programme: Students' use of exploratory talk to exercise critical thinking                                               | 45        | 5                   |
| 5    | Motteram et al. (2020) | WhatsApp supported language teacher development: A case study in the Zataari refugee camp                                                                                        | 42        | 16                  |
| 6    | Islam & Stapa (2021).  | Students' low proficiency in spoken English in private universities in Bangladesh: reasons and remedies                                                                          | 35        | 18                  |
| 7    | Kim & Kim (2021)       | English learners' science-literacy practice through explicit writing instruction in invention-based learning                                                                     | 31        | 4                   |
| 8    | Alghasab (2020)        | Flipping the Writing Classroom: Focusing on the Pedagogical Benefits and EFL Learners' Perceptions                                                                               | 28        | 0                   |
| 9    | Liu et al. (2020)      | Characteristics, issues, and future directions in Chinese multicultural education: a review of selected research 2000-2018                                                       | 28        | 1                   |
| 10   | Chung & Fisher (2022)  | A dialogic approach to promoting professional development: Understanding change in Hong Kong language teachers' beliefs and practices regarding vocabulary teaching and learning | 27        | 9                   |

The top 10 articles in the bibliographic-coupling network collectively represent the intellectual core of sociocultural research in English language learning. These publications share substantial overlaps in referenced literature, indicating strong thematic and theoretical alignment. Studies such as Hennessy et al. (2021), Van Ha et al. (2021), and Jiang et al. (2021) focus on teacher-student dialogue, feedback, and learning interaction making them the central constructs in Vygotsky's sociocultural framework. Their high link strengths suggest that dialogic pedagogy and mediated learning form a major research front. Meanwhile, Liang and Fung (2020), Sarmiento-Campos et al. (2022), and Mohammadzadeh et al. (2020) extend sociocultural theory into scaffolded instruction, flipped classrooms, and exploratory talk, demonstrating how guided interaction fosters higher-order thinking and linguistic performance.

Other documents, including Kos (2023) and Noroozi et al. (2020), highlight peer support, collaborative learning, and technology-enhanced environments, reflecting the diversification of sociocultural applications into digitally mediated contexts. The convergence of these documents within the coupling map indicates a cohesive scholarly cluster grounded in mediation, scaffolding, and interaction. Their citation impact and strong cross-referencing patterns confirm that sociocultural pedagogy in particularly dialogic and collaborative learning. This remains a dominant and evolving paradigm in English language education between 2020 and 2024.

### 3.3 Bibliographic Coupling Analysis by Clusters

#### 3.3.1 Cluster 1 (Red): Sociocultural Agency, Identity, and Multilingual Education

Cluster 1, comprising eight articles, centers on sociocultural agency, identity formation, and multilingual educational contexts. Representative works such as Villacañas de Castro et al. (2020), Namgung et al. (2020), Soltani and Tran (2022), and Schwartz and Mazareeb (2023) illustrate how learners and teachers negotiate language, culture, and identity across



diverse sociocultural spaces. The studies span contexts from Spain, South Korea, and Brazil to South Africa, reflecting a global engagement with issues of linguistic agency and equity. A common thread is the examination of language learning as a socially mediated process influenced by ideology, socioeconomic positioning, and cultural belonging. The frequency of eight publications in this cluster indicates a robust research interest in understanding how multilingual and multicultural dynamics shape English education. This cluster can be labeled “Sociocultural Agency and Identity Construction”, as it encapsulates how learners exercise agency within the constraints of language policies, cultural expectations, and educational structures. Collectively, these works underscore the transformative potential of sociocultural perspectives in promoting inclusive and dialogic learning environments.

### 3.3.2 Cluster 2 (Green): Motivation, Technology, and Sociocultural Mediation in EFL Contexts

Cluster 2 consists of seven interlinked studies emphasizing learner motivation, affective engagement, and technological mediation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Seminal contributions by Islam (2021), Luo and Watts (2022), and Li (2024) explore digital tools such as smartphones and vocabulary learning apps as cultural artifacts that facilitate situated language learning. Complementary works by Zadorozhna and Datskiv (2022) and Abdel-Al Ibrahim and Karimi (2023) investigate how socio-emotional factors (e.g., anxiety, motivation, and perfectionism) interact with cultural learning environments. The recurrence of authors across Asian and Middle Eastern settings (e.g., Saudi Arabia, China, and Bangladesh) highlights the globalization of sociocultural theory in EFL pedagogy. With seven articles linked through theoretical affinity, this cluster may be labeled “Technology, Motivation, and Sociocultural Mediation in EFL Learning.” Collectively, these studies extend Vygotskian principles to modern digital and affective learning spaces, emphasizing learner autonomy, cultural context, and dialogic engagement as determinants of successful English acquisition in technology-integrated classrooms.

### 3.3.3 Cluster 3 (Blue) Dialogic Pedagogy and Sociocultural Scaffolding in Language Learning

Cluster 3, comprising seven core publications, converges on the application of dialogic pedagogy and sociocultural scaffolding in language education. Foundational studies such as Hennessy et al. (2021) and Liang and Fung (2020) provide empirical evidence on how teacher-student dialogue enhances critical thinking and knowledge co-construction. Similarly, Sarmiento-Campos et al. (2022) and Mohammadzadeh et al. (2020) operationalize Vygotskian scaffolding to examine learner development in speaking and writing proficiency. Other contributions (e.g., Noroozi et al. (2020); Kos, 2023) highlight the effectiveness of collaborative and peer-supported learning environments. This cluster, labeled “Dialogic and Scaffolding-Based Pedagogies in Sociocultural Language Education,” represents the theoretical heart of the field, bridging cognitive, social, and communicative dimensions of learning. With seven interrelated works and strong coupling strength, it signifies a consolidated academic focus on how dialogic interaction, teacher mediation, and peer collaboration embody sociocultural principles within English language classrooms.

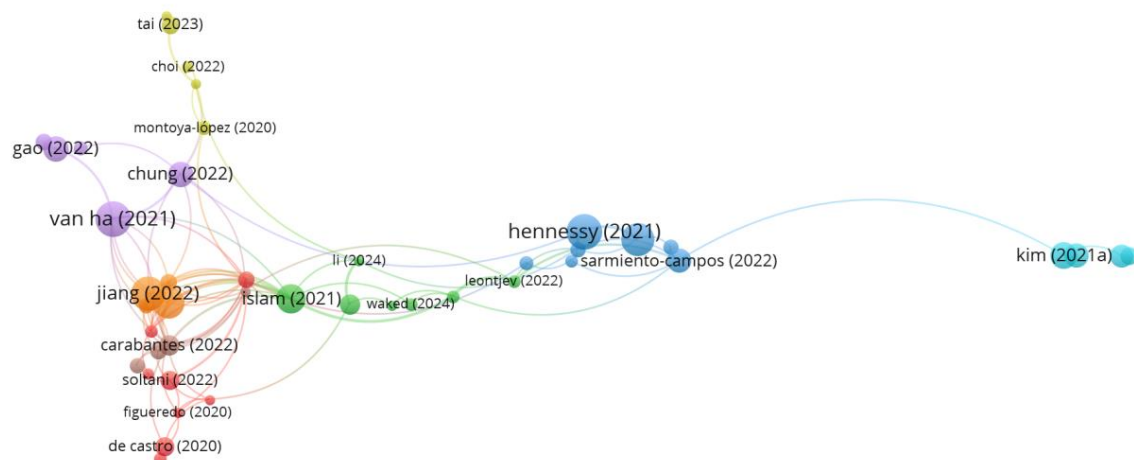


Figure 3. Bibliographic Coupling Analysis (Source: VOSviewer visualization by authors)

Table 3. Bibliographic Coupling by Cluster

| Cluster No and Colour | Cluster Labels                                                       | No. of Articles | Representative Publications                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cluster 1 (Red)       | Sociocultural Agency, Identity, and Multilingual Education           | 8               | Villacañas de Castro et al. (2020); Wu (2024); Soltani & Tran (2022); Namgung et al. (2020); Schwartz & Mazreeb (2023); Nkomo (2021); Chung (2020); Figueredo (2020) |
| Cluster 2 (Green)     | Motivation, Technology, and Sociocultural Mediation in EFL Contexts  | 7               | Islam & Stapa (2021); Luo & Watts (2022); Waked et al. (2024); Abdel-Al Ibrahim & Karimi (2023); Leontjev & deBoer (2022); Li (2024); Zadorozhna & Datskiv (2022)    |
| Cluster 3 (Blue)      | Dialogic Pedagogy and Sociocultural Scaffolding in Language Learning | 7               | Hennessey et al. (2021); Liang & Fung (2020); Sarmiento-Campos (2022); Noroozi et al. (2020); Kos (2023); Mohammadzadeh et al. (2023)                                |

### 3.3.4 Theoretical overlap among clusters

The observed conceptual overlap among clusters reflects both the integrative character of sociocultural theory and the methodological principles underpinning bibliometric clustering. Core constructs such as interaction, mediation, and agency are foundational across diverse sociocultural traditions and research strands. As a result, thematic intersections emerge organically across clusters, indicating conceptual continuity rather than rigid or mutually exclusive boundaries.

### 3.4 Co-Occurrence Analysis

#### Top 15 Keywords Analysis

The co-occurrence analysis of the bibliometric dataset provides critical insights into the conceptual landscape of sociocultural research within English language studies. The following fifteen most frequent keywords – study (336 occurrences), student (221), english (205), teacher (173), data (134), interview (122), education (120), development (118), language (103), sociocultural theory (90), participant (87), school (81), foreign language (78), interaction (67), and use (67) – collectively reveal the field's theoretical orientation, methodological tendencies, and pedagogical focus.

Table 4. The 15 most frequent keywords in the co-occurrence analysis

| Rank | Keyword              | Occurrences | Relevance |
|------|----------------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1    | study                | 336         | 2.7959    |
| 2    | student              | 221         | 1.2144    |
| 3    | english              | 205         | 1.3535    |
| 4    | teacher              | 173         | 0.9113    |
| 5    | data                 | 134         | 0.9288    |
| 6    | interview            | 122         | 1.3007    |
| 7    | education            | 120         | 0.831     |
| 8    | development          | 118         | 0.6729    |
| 9    | language             | 103         | 0.7061    |
| 10   | sociocultural theory | 90          | 0.522     |
| 11   | participant          | 87          | 0.7165    |
| 12   | school               | 81          | 1.0184    |
| 13   | foreign language     | 78          | 2.6423    |
| 14   | interaction          | 67          | 0.4515    |
| 15   | use                  | 67          | 0.5919    |

Taken together, the co-occurrence of these keywords delineates a research domain characterized by theoretical coherence, methodological diversity, and pedagogical applicability. It reflects a steady convergence toward a holistic understanding of English language education where one that situates linguistic proficiency within its sociocultural, cognitive, and institutional frameworks. This constellation of keywords thus captures the evolving priorities of the field, from micro-level classroom interaction to macro-level educational and cultural transformation.

Methodological keywords such as “study”, “data”, and “interview” were treated as procedural indicators rather than core theoretical constructs. Interpretive emphasis was therefore placed on theoretically substantive terms including “interaction”, “sociocultural theory”, and “agency”.

#### 3.4.1 Co-Occurrence Analysis by Cluster

##### Cluster 1 (Red) – Sociocultural Dynamics in Educational Research and Practice

Cluster 1, comprising 16 keywords, represents the methodological and conceptual foundation of sociocultural research in English language education. The most frequent keywords to the like of study (336), student (221), teacher (173), and sociocultural theory (90), reflect the central focus on human interaction and contextualized learning processes. The recurrence of methodological terms such as interview (122), data (134), and participant (87) underscores a strong qualitative orientation, emphasizing lived experiences and interpretive inquiry. Additionally, the inclusion of school (81),

university, and questionnaire highlights the integration of both institutional and learner-centered perspectives. This cluster, labeled “Sociocultural Dynamics in Educational Research and Practice,” captures the dialogic interplay between theory and empirical observation. The dominance of ‘study’ and ‘student’ indicates that current scholarship not only adopts sociocultural theory as a guiding framework but also employs it to examine authentic learning environments where language, identity, and pedagogy converge. The cluster signifies the methodological and epistemological coherence of sociocultural inquiry in language education.

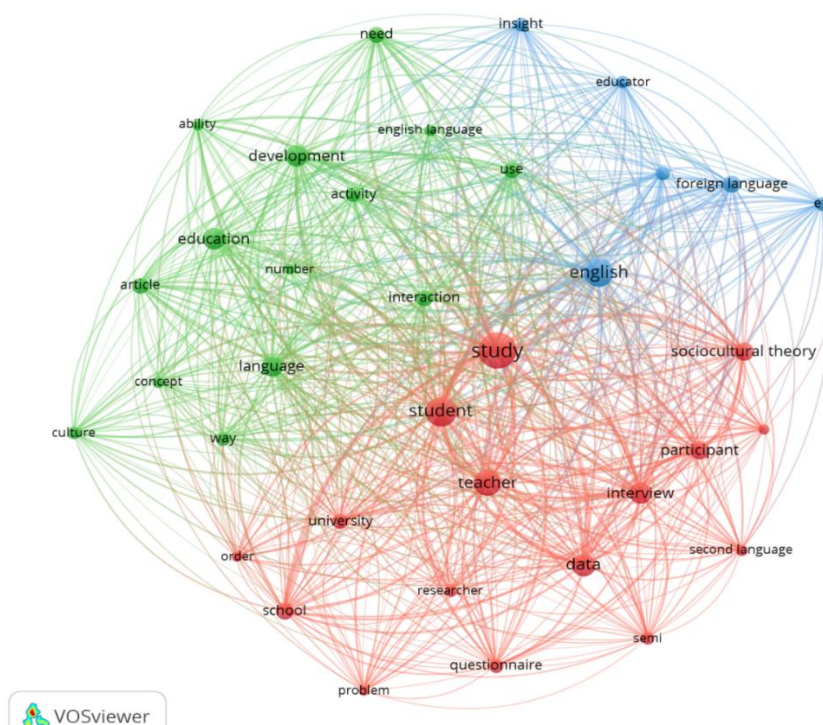


Figure 4. Co-Occurrence Analysis (Source: VOSviewer visualization by authors)

### 3.4.2 Cluster 2 (Green) – Pedagogical Innovation and Cultural Interaction in Language Development

Cluster 2 consists of 14 interrelated keywords, centering on education (120), development (118), language (103), and interaction (67). The co-occurrence of terms such as ‘culture’, ‘use’, and ‘need’ illustrates the shift toward context-responsive and learner-driven pedagogical models. This cluster, labeled “Pedagogical Innovation and Cultural Interaction in Language Development,” captures the integrative focus of recent scholarship that connects sociocultural constructs with classroom practice. The moderate frequency of terms like ‘article’ and ‘way’ also implies an analytical emphasis on research dissemination and the exploration of effective teaching strategies. Collectively, the keywords depict a movement from abstract theorization to applied inquiry indicate how language learning develops through interaction, cultural mediation, and purposeful engagement. The presence of ‘development’ reinforces Vygotsky’s conceptualization of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), positioning language education as a collaborative and culturally situated process. This cluster reflects a paradigm shift toward adaptive, intercultural, and socially meaningful learning frameworks.

### 3.4.3 Cluster 3 (Blue) – Global Perspectives on English and Foreign Language Education

Cluster 3 encompasses six keywords notably English (205), foreign language (78), educator, ELF (English as a Lingua Franca), group, and insight. Despite its smaller size, this cluster reveals significant global engagement with the sociocultural dimensions of English language learning. The prominence of ‘English’ and ‘foreign language’ underscores the continuing centrality of English within transnational educational discourse, while the inclusion of ‘ELF’ highlights the shift from native-speaker norms toward pluralistic linguistic identities. This cluster can be labeled “Global Perspectives and Linguistic Diversity in English Language Education.” The co-occurrence of ‘educator’ and ‘group’ signals a collaborative orientation, suggesting that sociocultural learning extends beyond individual cognition to encompass collective, intercultural experiences. The keyword ‘insight’ represents reflective and interpretive dimensions in cross-linguistic education, emphasizing teacher awareness and learner agency. Overall, Cluster 3 encapsulates the global diffusion of sociocultural frameworks across English and foreign language education, marking a move toward inclusive, contextually grounded, and interculturally competent pedagogies.

Table 5. Co-Occurrence Analysis by Cluster

| Cluster No and Colour | Cluster Label                                                           | Number of Keywords | Representative Keywords                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cluster 1 (Red)       | Sociocultural Dynamics in Educational Research and Practice             | 16                 | “study”, “student”, “sociocultural theory”, “teacher”, “interview”, “data”, “participant”, “school”, “university”, “questionnaire” |
| Cluster2 (Green)      | Pedagogical Innovation and Cultural Interaction in Language Development | 14                 | “education”, “development”, “language”, “article”, “interaction”, “need”, “use”, “way”<br>“culture”                                |
| Cluster 3 (Blue)      | Global Perspectives on English and Foreign Language Education           | 6                  | “English”, “foreign language”, “educator”, “insight”, “ELF”, “group”                                                               |

#### 4. Discussion

The bibliometric findings reveal that sociocultural perspectives have become a defining paradigm in English language education research from 2020 to 2024. The inclusion and performance analyses demonstrate that studies increasingly explore how teacher-student dialogue, peer collaboration, and cultural context shape language learning outcomes (Hennessy et al., 2021; Liang & Fung, 2020). The clustering patterns further highlight three major thematic trajectories: sociocultural agency and identity formation, technology-mediated motivation, and dialogic pedagogy underscore the centrality of interaction and cultural mediation in learning. The prominence of authors and institutions from the United Kingdom, China, and the United States suggests a cross-continental scholarly dialogue advancing Vygotsky’s theoretical legacy in diverse educational environments. Keyword co-occurrence analysis reinforces this trend, emphasizing student, teacher, interaction, and sociocultural theory as recurring conceptual anchors. Collectively, these patterns suggest a paradigm shift from purely cognitive approaches toward socially situated and culturally embedded pedagogies. The growing citation and publication trends affirm that sociocultural theory continues to offer fertile ground for understanding how undergraduates acquire English through participation, collaboration, and identity negotiation within specific educational ecologies.

Although sociocultural theory is treated as an overarching analytical framework in this study, it comprises multiple theoretical traditions, including classical Vygotskian theory, activity theory, and dialogic pedagogy. The present analysis is grounded primarily in Vygotskian and dialogic interpretations that foreground processes of mediation, interaction, and instructional scaffolding, rather than in activity-system-oriented modeling approaches.

##### Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this bibliometric investigation reinforces the centrality of Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory (SCT) as the principal lens through which English language learning is conceptualized, taught, and researched in higher education. The consistent recurrence of core constructs such as interaction, dialogue, scaffolding, and agency found across the bibliographic coupling and co-occurrence analyses highlights how learning is increasingly understood as a socially mediated and culturally contextualized process rather than a purely cognitive endeavor (Hennessy et al., 2021; Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022). The emergence of dialogic pedagogy and collaborative learning as dominant theoretical trends indicates a paradigmatic consolidation of SCT in applied linguistics and education. Moreover, the integration of technology-mediated communication, as observed in studies by Luo and Watts (2022) and Islam and Stapa (2021), extends sociocultural theory into the digital domain, supporting an evolving framework of “digital socioculturalism” in English learning. The bibliometric mapping thus advances theoretical understanding by revealing how SCT has diversified across research contexts ranging from identity formation (Soltani & Tran, 2022) and multilingual agency (Schwartz & Mazareeb, 2023) to motivation and affective engagement (Abdel-Al Ibrahim & Karimi, 2023).

##### Practical Implications

Practically, the findings carry significant implications for pedagogical design, teacher training, and institutional policy. The prominence of keywords such as student, teacher, education, and interaction underscores the need for dialogic and participatory classroom environments where learners construct meaning through collaboration and reflective discourse. Teachers are encouraged to adopt scaffolding-based instructional approaches, promoting peer dialogue and contextual feedback that align with learners’ sociocultural realities (Liang & Fung, 2020; Noroozi et al., 2020). The strong presence of technology- and motivation-related research further suggests the value of digital integration through the use of mobile and web-based platforms to facilitate interactive, culturally responsive learning experiences (Li, 2024). At the institutional level, fostering intercultural competence, multilingual sensitivity, and collaborative professional development among educators is crucial, as supported by high-impact studies from the United Kingdom, China, and Vietnam. Collectively, these implications advocate for an ecological model of English language education as one that situates learning within the interplay of culture, technology, and social interaction.

Thus, the global distribution of sociocultural research also raises critical issues of linguistic power and academic inequality.

English dominance and center-periphery dynamics shape not only research production but also whose sociocultural experiences are theorized and disseminated.

## 5. Conclusion

This bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the evolving intellectual structure and research trajectories surrounding the sociocultural impact on undergraduates' English language learning between 2020 and 2024. Drawing from 352 systematically selected publications, the study reveals an expanding and diversifying body of scholarship grounded in Vygotskian sociocultural theory and its extensions into dialogic pedagogy, technological mediation, and intercultural communication. The performance and coupling analyses demonstrate that key contributors such as Hennessy, Islam, and Fung have advanced empirical and theoretical dialogues linking social interaction, identity, and language development. The co-occurrence network further underscores the prominence of keywords like student, teacher, interaction, and sociocultural theory, reflecting the field's sustained focus on collaborative, context-dependent learning processes.

Geographically, the distribution of research across leading institutions in the United Kingdom, China, the United States, and Southeast Asia signifies an increasingly globalized orientation in sociocultural language education. Collectively, the findings aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) that English learning is no longer viewed as a linguistic or cognitive pursuit alone but as a culturally embedded, socially negotiated, and technologically enhanced process in education. This study thus contributes to a nuanced understanding of how sociocultural theory continues to shape pedagogical innovation, cross-cultural discourse, and the redefinition of language education in a rapidly globalizing academic landscape.

### 5.1 Limitations and Future Research

This study is subject to several limitations. First, reliance on a single database (Dimensions AI) may exclude some indexed studies. Second, keyword-based retrieval may overlook theoretically aligned studies using alternative terminology. Third, bibliometric methods emphasize structural patterns rather than in-depth qualitative insights. Future research may integrate multiple databases and combine bibliometric mapping with qualitative systematic reviews to deepen theoretical interpretation.

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## Authors contributions

Xizi, H.: Conceptualization, formal analysis, and writing. Pek, L. S.: Funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, and project administration. Yusof, S. K. M.: Resources, software, supervision, and writing - review & editing. Ne'matullah, K. F.: Data curation, investigation, resources, software, validation, visualization, and writing - review & editing. Magulod Jr., G. C.: Investigation, visualization, and writing - original draft. Elfi: Data extraction and proofreading.

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## Competing interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Informed consent

This study did not involve human participants, the collection of personal data, or any form of primary data gathering. It solely relied on secondary data derived from previously published peer-reviewed articles. As such, ethical approval from an institutional review board or ethics committee was not required.

## Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

## Provenance and peer review

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## Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

## Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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