

A Bibliometric Analysis of Research on CEFR-Based English Speaking Pedagogy: Trends and Directions

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Article information	
Abstract	<p>This study presents a bibliometric analysis of research on CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy, aiming to examine publication patterns, leading journals, and emerging thematic trends. Following PRISMA guidelines, a systematic search was conducted in the Web of Science Core Collection. The dataset spans from 2009 to 2026, covering nearly two decades of research on CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy. The analysis combined performance analysis in order to investigate yearly publication trends, geographic hotspots, and journal impact, with science mapping to explore keyword co-occurrence, thematic clusters, and the conceptual structure of the field. Data processing and visualization were conducted using Tableau and VOSviewer 1.6.20. The findings indicate a steady growth in publications over time, with Spain, Russia, and Malaysia emerging as top contributing countries and seven nations demonstrating collaborative research efforts. The top journals reflect both the breadth of scholarly engagement and varying levels of influence. Analysis of 592 author keywords identified the ten most frequently used terms, forming five</p>

	thematic clusters that reflect the conceptual focus of the field. The research trends show a progression from technology-mediated teaching innovations to CEFR-aligned assessment research, and more recently toward affective dimensions of speaking performance. These insights provide a foundation for future research, collaboration, and exploration in CEFR-based speaking pedagogy.
Keywords	CEFR, English language education, speaking skills, bibliometric analysis
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1. Introduction

The development of additional language proficiency has remained a central concern in applied linguistics in the 21st century, with researchers and educators seeking frameworks that can guide teaching, learning, and assessment in increasingly multilingual societies (Roehr-Brackin, 2024). Over the past two decades, globalization, migration, and international education have resulted in classrooms where learners have diverse linguistic repertoires, prompting renewed attention to how second language (L2) instruction, particularly English, can be delivered in ways that foster communicative competence across varied contexts (Strand & Lindorff, 2020). In this landscape, the teaching of English speaking skills has attracted particular attention due to its central role in academic, professional, and intercultural communication.

Efforts to strengthen L2 teaching have drawn insights from a wide range of disciplines, including linguistics, education, psychology, and sociology. Across these fields, a recurring priority has been the need for shared standards that allow educators to describe, evaluate, and support learners' language development in

consistent and transparent ways. This need for common benchmarks has intensified as education systems worldwide attempt to address concerns about instructional quality, assessment validity, and the comparability of learning outcomes across regions and institutions (North & Piccardo, 2023). By highlighting these challenges, North and Piccardo (2023) argue that adopting standardized frameworks can provide a common reference point that fosters coherence in curriculum design and assessment practices.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), developed by the Council of Europe, emerged as a response to these concerns. Since its publication in 2001, the CEFR has become one of the most influential global reference frameworks for language teaching and assessment as it has shaped curriculum design, textbook development, language testing, teacher education, and increasingly, national language policies across diverse educational settings (Viora & Surya, 2025; Zaki & Darmi, 2021). While its impact has been well documented, research by Jamain and Jamaludin (2023) has also highlighted persistent challenges in how educators interpret, contextualize, and operationalize the CEFR, particularly when applying its broad descriptors to classroom practice.

Despite these challenges, the CEFR has stimulated pedagogical shifts in many countries, with studies noting improvements in curriculum coherence and instructional alignment when the framework is appropriately implemented (Astrianingsih & Dwinalida, 2024). In the domain of speaking instruction specifically, CEFR descriptors have played a key role in shaping performance-based teaching and assessment practices, offering a structured way to articulate communicative expectations at different proficiency levels (Ch'ng et al., 2024; Hadianti et al, 2025). Given the centrality of spoken interaction in modern English use, research on CEFR-based speaking pedagogy is witnessing a steady rise, reflecting the framework's practical relevance as well as the need for more refined approaches to oral proficiency development (Sahib & Stapa, 2021).

Although individual studies on CEFR implementation continue to grow, there remains limited understanding of the broader research landscape, including how this body of work has evolved over time, where it is geographically situated, and which areas remain underexplored. A growing body of literature has examined CEFR-related research in various contexts and domains, often through bibliometric or systematic reviews. For example, Nadtayay and Wongsaphan (2025) analyzed CEFR-based English teaching models at only the primary school level, highlighting a need for more comprehensive analyses. Viora and Surya (2024) provided a systematic review and bibliometric analysis of CEFR studies; however, their work is published in Bahasa Indonesia, limiting the reach of wider global audience. Similarly, Jeon (2022) examined CEFR-related English education research in South Korea, offering valuable regional insights but limiting the scope geographically. These studies highlight the geographical focus and scope limitations of existing CEFR research, revealing the need for a comprehensive, global perspective specifically targeting English speaking pedagogy.

Other studies have explored the socio-cultural and policy dimensions of CEFR adoption. Ngyun and Hamid (2020) investigated CEFR implementation in Vietnam, emphasizing the socio-political factors driving its adoption rather than pedagogical applications. Further, Sahib and Stapa (2021) conducted a bibliometric analysis of CEFR publications, revealing global dissemination patterns, yet their study largely focused on the framework's influence at a macro level rather than specific pedagogical practices. Runnels and Runnels (2019) mapped the general influence of the framework across language education literature, lacking a specific focus on English language.

These studies demonstrate the breadth of CEFR research but reveal notable gaps. First, there is a lack of bibliometric analyses specifically addressing CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy. Second, many existing studies are regionally or topically constrained, limiting the understanding of global trends and research directions in CEFR-informed speaking instruction. Therefore, by focusing

specifically on speaking, this study provides a targeted overview of research trends, influential journals, and emerging themes in CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy for identifying areas that require further scholarly investigation.

Given the rapid expansion of CEFR adoption worldwide and the pedagogical importance of speaking skill development, a systematic mapping of this research field is both timely and necessary. Bibliometric analysis provides a powerful tool for identifying publication trends, geographical hotspots, prominent journals, and emerging research directions, and has been increasingly employed in English language education research to synthesize large bodies of literature and to reveal thematic structures of the field (Wang et al., 2022; Zhang & Umeanowai, 2025).

Specifically, mapping geographical hotspots and international collaborations is crucial for understanding which countries and research communities are driving innovation in CEFR-based speaking pedagogy. As noted by Hassan and Duarte (2024), it also reveals patterns of scholarly interaction, helping to identify potential cross-national partnerships and regions where research is underrepresented. Examining journals with the highest publications is important because it highlights the most influential outlets shaping CEFR-based speaking pedagogy research. Identifying these journals will help future researchers locate high-impact sources, understand publication norms, and target venues for disseminating their own work (Abdullah et al., 2023; Donthu et al., 2021). Finally, analyzing frequently occurring keywords, thematic clusters, and emerging research trends will allow scholars to trace the evolution of the field and forecast future directions (Passas, 2024). Such analysis provides a structured overview of the conceptual landscape and informs curriculum development, teacher training, and research agendas (Wang & Jia, 2023).

By synthesizing patterns in the existing literature, a bibliometric analysis can provide valuable insights into the development, structure, and trends of CEFR-based speaking pedagogy research, helping to identify influential journals, key

collaborative networks, and emerging thematic areas across different contexts. The present study, therefore, conducts a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of research on CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What were the yearly publication patterns, geographic hotspots, and collaborations among the countries on CEFR-based speaking pedagogy research?
2. What were the journals with the highest publications on CEFR-based speaking pedagogy research?
3. What were the most repeated keywords, the conceptual structure, the emerging research trends, and topical foci shaping the future directions of CEFR-based speaking pedagogy research?

2. Methodology

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative approach within scientometrics that utilizes bibliographic data from scholarly databases to examine the development, structure, and influence of research domains (Hassan & Duarte, 2024). This method serves two main purposes: performance analysis and science mapping (Öztürk et al., 2024). Performance analysis evaluates the scholarly contributions of entities such as authors, journals, and countries, using indicators such as publication counts and citation impact. In contrast, science mapping explores the structural relationships within a field, employing techniques such as citation analysis, co-citation analysis, and co-word analysis to reveal the thematic evolution of a discipline (Donthu et al., 2021). In this study, bibliometric methods were applied to systematically collect, analyze, and visualize research on CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy, as this approach allows for a comprehensive and objective synthesis of a rapidly expanding body of literature, which would be difficult to capture through traditional narrative reviews alone.

2.1 Database Selection

Retrieving data from multiple bibliographic databases is often recommended in order to ensure broader and more comprehensive coverage of the literature (Lim et al., 2024). Indeed, recent bibliometric workflows, such as those of Caputo and Kargina (2022) and Echchakoui (2020), have demonstrated that datasets from multiple sources, such as Web of Science and Scopus, can be combined through extensive data cleaning, normalization, and deduplication procedures using specialized tools. However, they rely substantially on Excel-based preprocessing and deduplication strategies, which may introduce data integrity issues, particularly when handling long or complex bibliographic fields. Moreover, deduplication based primarily on article titles or automated duplicate-removal functions can yield questionable results if records are not rigorously cleaned beforehand, a step that is insufficiently documented in both studies (Nowakowska, 2025), leading to researcher subjectivity and affecting the comparability and reproducibility of results (Dagli et al., 2025).

Given the objectives of the present study, in order to provide a transparent and methodologically consistent mapping of research on CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy, this study deliberately restricted its data source to the Web of Science Core Collection. Web of Science was selected due to its standardized indexing practices, consistent citation metadata, and widespread use in high-impact bibliometric research within applied linguistics and education (Ghorbani, 2024). Importantly, relying on a single, well-curated database allowed for the preservation of metadata integrity and minimized distortions arising from cross-database inconsistencies in author names, source titles, and keyword indexing (Dagli et al., 2025). This controlled approach enhances the reliability, replicability, and interpretability of the findings, while still capturing a robust and representative body of peer-reviewed research relevant to CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy.

A structured search strategy was developed in order to ensure the inclusion of only finalized, peer-reviewed publications, following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to maintain transparency and rigor in the selection process (Page et al., 2021). Inclusion criteria were carefully defined to ensure a systematic and reproducible search (see Table 1).

Table 1

Inclusion Criteria

Criteria	Description
Focus	CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy
Period	No time restriction applied (records retrieved: 2009-2026)
Document Type	Articles, conference papers, book chapters, books, and reviews
Document Language	English

2.2 Data Extraction

Data extraction was performed on November 1, 2025. A comprehensive query string was designed in order to capture the full scope of CEFR-based English speaking research. TS = (("Common European Framework of Reference" OR "CEFR" OR "CEFR-based" OR "CEFR aligned" OR "CEFR alignment" OR "CEFR level*" OR "CEFR scale*" OR "CEFR descriptor*") AND ("English" OR "English language" OR "EFL" OR "ESL" OR "English as a Foreign Language" OR "English as a Second Language") AND ("speaking" OR "speaking skill*" OR "oral skill*" OR "oral proficiency" OR "spoken English" OR "oral communication" OR "oral production" OR "speaking assessment" OR "speaking pedagogy" OR "oral assessment" OR "speaking task*" OR "speaking instruct*" OR "oral instruct*")).

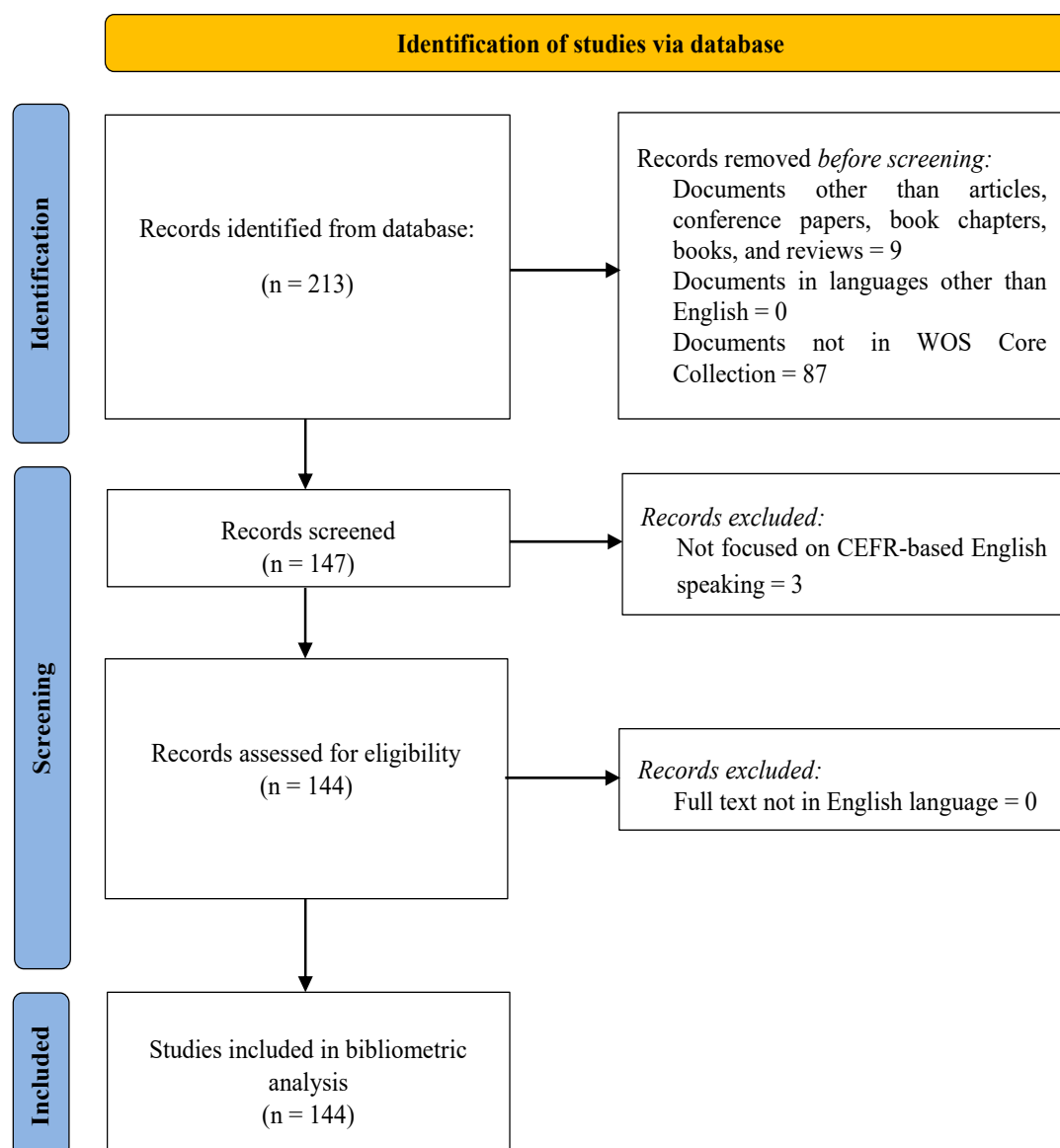
The initial search yielded 213 documents, covering all years. No time restriction was applied during the search process; however, the retrieved records

indexed in the Web of Science Core Collection spanned the period from 2009 to 2026, reflecting the database coverage up to November 2025, when the search was conducted. Among the records, three were dated later than November 1, 2025 (two from late 2025 and one from 2026) and were classified as Early Access publications, which are available and retrievable prior to their official issue year.

After limiting the document types to articles, conference papers, book chapters, books, and reviews, 204 records remained. These included publications indexed across multiple Clarivate databases, including Web of Science Core Collection, ProQuest™ Dissertations & Theses Citation Index, SciELO Citation Index, KCI-Korean Journal Database, and Grants Index. For the purpose of this study, only the Web of Science Core Collection was retained, as it provides complete bibliographic data necessary for rigorous bibliometric analysis.

As shown in Figure 1, following this refinement, a total of 144 records were finalized for analysis. Only three records, with a focus other than CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy, were excluded during the earlier screening stage. The search strategy and subsequent refinements were highly specific, resulting in a dataset in which all of the remaining records met the predefined inclusion criteria based on title and abstract review. These records included journal articles, conference papers, book chapters, books, and review articles. Of the 144 records, 106 were journal articles. While all 144 records were used to address research questions 1 and 3, the analysis of leading journals and journal productivity for research question 2 was conducted exclusively on the subset of journal articles (N = 106). This distinction is made explicit in the corresponding results section.

These records were exported in two formats. An Excel (.CSV) file for manual screening and visualization in Tableau, and a plain text file (.txt) for network and co-occurrence analyses in VOSviewer, ensuring both flexibility and precision in subsequent data processing and mapping.

Figure 1*PRISMA Flow Diagram of Article Selection Process*

2.3 Data Screening

The exported records underwent a rigorous screening process in order to ensure accuracy and consistency. Titles and abstracts were reviewed multiple times, and where necessary, full texts were consulted to clarify ambiguous entries. No records were removed at this stage, indicating that the initial query and filtering were very precise.

It is noteworthy that the total number of studies retrieved for CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy is relatively small. This likely reflects the niche and

emerging nature of this research area, as most CEFR studies focus on general language skills, or assessment frameworks, rather than specifically on English language speaking. Additionally, research on speaking pedagogy aligned with CEFR descriptors is often context-specific, conducted in localized educational settings, and may not always be published in international peer-reviewed journals. These factors contribute to the limited volume of publications currently available for bibliometric analysis, highlighting both the specificity and the emerging status of this field.

2.4 Data Analysis

The analysis employed a dual approach of performance analysis and science mapping. Performance analysis evaluated the publication patterns over time, geographic hotspots, collaborative networks among countries, and the contributions of journals; and science mapping explored structural and conceptual relationships within the field, using co-occurrence and keyword analyses to identify thematic clusters, research trends, and emerging directions. For the data processing and visualization, Microsoft Excel, Tableau, and VOSviewer 1.6.20 were utilized to generate the analysis, the visual maps of collaborations, and the network representations of the thematic and conceptual structures.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the bibliometric analysis, the visualizations, and the discussion structured around each research question.

3.1 Research Question 1: What were the yearly publication patterns, geographic hotspots, and collaborations among the countries on CEFR-based speaking pedagogy research?

This first research question focused on identifying yearly publication patterns, geographic hotspots, and international collaborations in CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy research. The annual publication trends were examined using full counting (Gauffriau, 2021), where each publication was

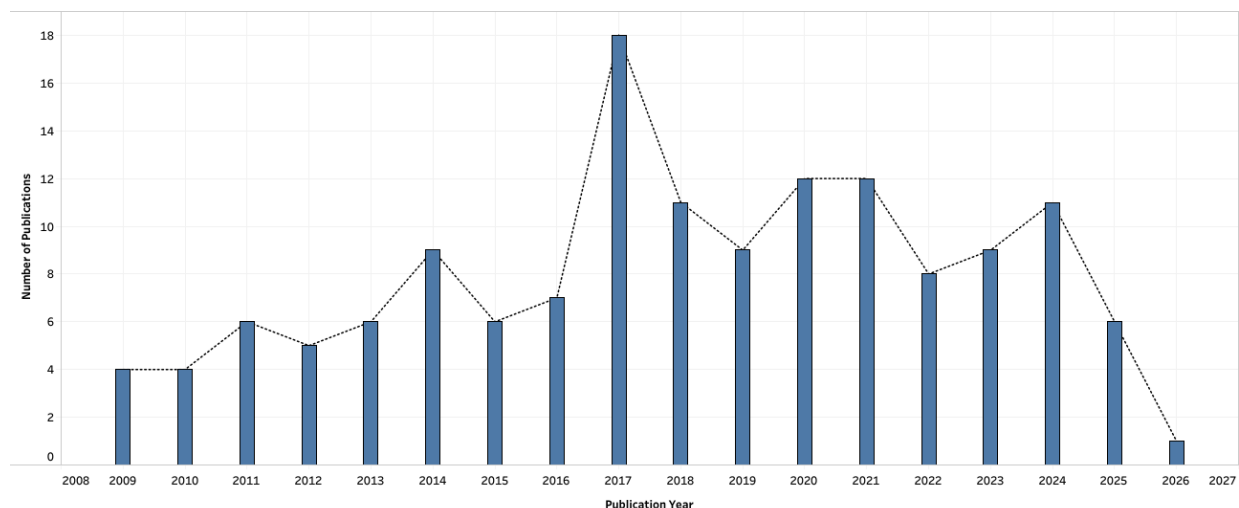
counted once per year, regardless of the number of authors or countries involved. Geographical hotspots were determined based on the distribution of publications across countries. These analyses were conducted using Tableau for effective visualization. Finally, international collaborations among the countries were mapped and analyzed using VOSviewer, providing insights into the global research network in this domain.

3.1.1 Yearly Publication Patterns

The yearly distribution of publications (Figure 2) revealed a clear upward trajectory in research on CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy over the past decade and a half. The earliest record in the dataset appeared in 2009, marking the beginning of scholarly engagement with the topic. From 2009 to 2013, publication output remained relatively modest, fluctuating between four and six papers per year. Despite this, the trajectory showed a gradual build-up, which suggests a slow but steady emergence of interest in the field.

Figure 2

Yearly Publication Patterns



A more pronounced rise became visible from 2014 to 2016, culminating in a dramatic peak in 2017, which recorded 18 publications, which was the highest in the dataset. Although bibliometric data alone cannot establish causality, this spike represented a significant moment in the field and can be situated within broader

global institutional adoption of the CEFR, curricular reforms, and increasing scholarly attention to speaking assessment frameworks. In particular, the sharp increase in publications in 2017 coincided with several global developments, including the widespread adoption of CEFR in national curricular reforms across Asia from 2017 onwards (Lee et al., 2023) and other regions (Gorter & Cenoz, 2017). These shifts contributed to increased scholarly activity during this period. Consistent with this pattern, prior studies have noted that policy-level adoption of the CEFR often precedes subsequent growth in empirical and pedagogical research, especially in areas related to speaking assessment and proficiency benchmarking (Zaki & Darmi, 2021).

Following the peak in 2017, the trend stabilized rather than collapsed. Although the number of publications declined to 11 in 2018 and fluctuated around eight to 12 publications between 2019 and 2024, the overall volume remained considerably higher than in the pre-2014 period. This indicated sustained academic interest, reaffirming CEFR's relevance in guiding speaking pedagogy research across diverse educational contexts. Further, the slight decline observed in 2025 (six publications) may reflect a temporary lag in research dissemination or delays in journal publication cycles, rather than a true reduction in scholarly interest. Interestingly, even in 2026, despite the year 2025 being only partially complete, one publication had already appeared, suggesting that research activity in CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy continues and may well increase as more studies from the year are indexed. This early appearance hinted at the field's ongoing vitality and the likelihood of growth in coming years.

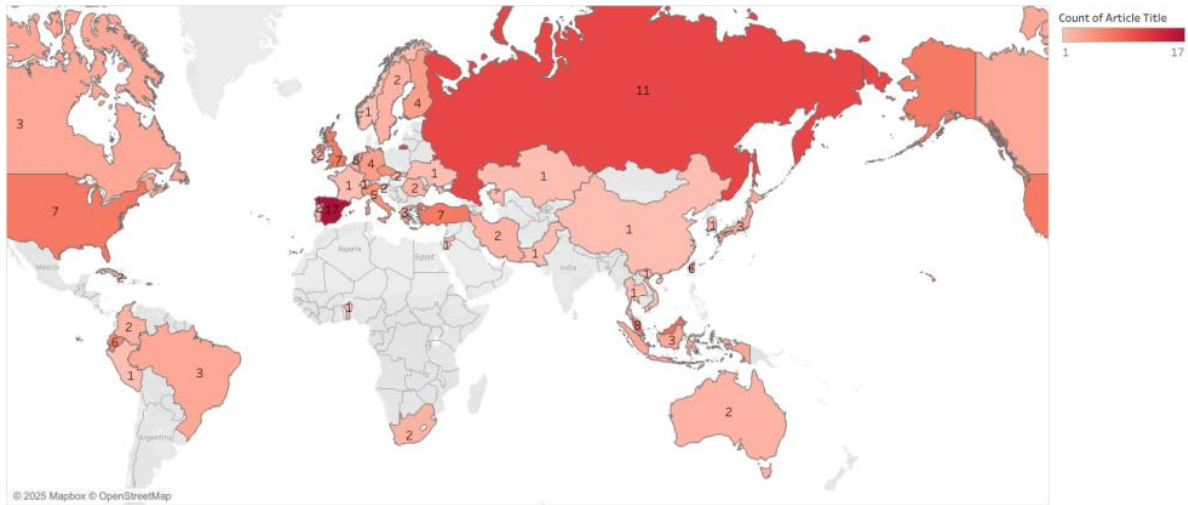
These patterns demonstrated that research on CEFR-aligned English speaking pedagogy has expanded substantially, with a major surge around 2017 and continued with steady engagement in the years that followed. This trend reflected the field's maturation and the growing global emphasis on standardized frameworks for evaluating English spoken language proficiency.

3.1.2 Geographic Hotspots

The geographical distribution of research on CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy demonstrated a broad yet uneven global engagement across 43 countries. As can be visualized in Figure 3, scholarly activity spanned to Europe, East and Southeast Asia, and parts of the Western Hemisphere, yet the density and consistency of contributions varied considerably.

Spain emerged as the most prolific contributor, with 17 publications, representing approximately 11.81% of all studies included in this review. This strong lead may be attributed to Spain's long-standing national commitment to the CEFR, positioned as the central framework shaping curricular design, language policy, and assessment practices across its education sector (Agulló & Díez-Bedmar, 2025). The substantial volume of research suggests that CEFR implementation in Spain has progressed beyond policy adoption towards systematic pedagogical investigation, particularly in productive skills such as speaking (e.g. Cózar et al. 2020).

In the Eurasian region, the next notable contributor was Russia, with 11 publications, indicating a growing scholarly focus on aligning national language policies and university English instruction with CEFR benchmarks (e.g. Taquechel et al., 2023). This aligned with a broader regional shift toward standardized proficiency scales amidst internationalization pressures. Other European countries with moderate yet meaningful outputs (five to seven publications) included Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and Portugal, reflecting established traditions in language education research but more selective focus on CEFR-oriented speaking pedagogy.

Figure 3*Geographic Hotspots of CEFR-Based English Speaking Pedagogy Research*

The Asia-Pacific region also presented a significant cluster of activity, though contributions were varied. Notably, Malaysia stood out prominently with eight publications, making it the third most productive country globally and the leading contributor in the Asian region. This strong presence highlights Malaysia's ongoing educational reforms aimed at strengthening English proficiency through explicit CEFR alignment in curriculum, assessment, and teacher training. The concentration of studies suggests both policy-driven imperatives and active academic engagement with CEFR implementation challenges (e.g. Lim et al., 2023). Other Asian contributors included Japan, Kazakhstan, China, Indonesia, and South Korea.

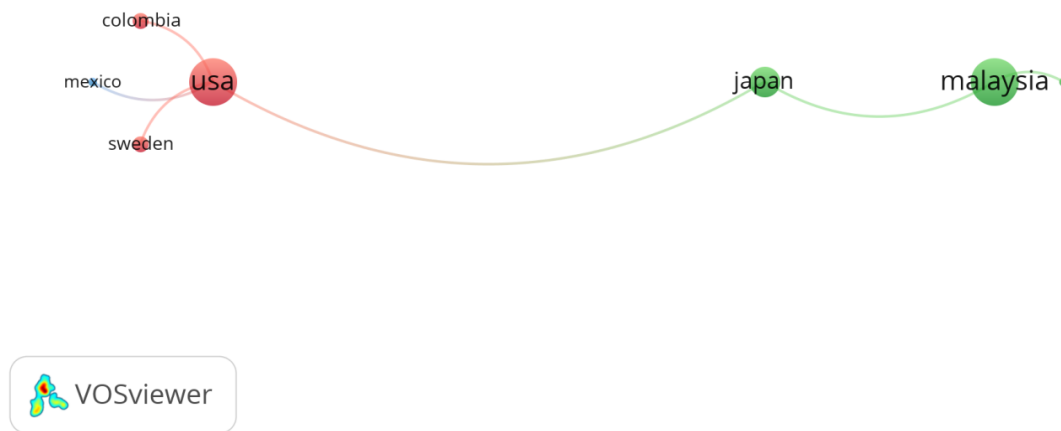
While figure 3 shows widespread global involvement, many countries contributed only one to three publications. These included nations across the Americas (e.g., the U.S.A., Brazil, Colombia, Canada), Africa (e.g., South Africa), and Oceania (e.g., Australia). This pattern suggests that although CEFR-based English pedagogy has gained global recognition, its research penetration remains uneven, possibly influenced by policy exposure, institutional priorities, or resource limitations. From the analysis, several insights have emerged from this distribution. First, policy adoption directly influenced research productivity as countries with national CEFR alignment, such as Spain and Malaysia, have demonstrated

significantly higher outputs, implying that systemic integration stimulates applied and pedagogical research and assessment-focused inquiries. Second, Europe has remained the intellectual anchor of CEFR research, unsurprisingly given the CEFR's origins; however, strong Asian participation indicates a shifting geography of English language pedagogy research, where the CEFR is increasingly used to shape curriculum reforms. Third, the low publication numbers in many countries reflects limited research specialization, not necessarily a lack of CEFR engagement. In some contexts, research may prioritize reading or writing, or may adopt alternative local proficiency frameworks.

The absence of strong clusters in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America suggests regional opportunity gaps. These areas could benefit from targeted capacity-building to support CEFR-informed speaking pedagogy, particularly given the growing worldwide need for standardized benchmarks. Thus, the geographic hotspots visualization illustrates that CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy has become an internationally relevant but unevenly distributed research domain. For the global field of CEFR-based teaching and assessment, this distribution points to emerging regional leaders and also areas where deeper scholarly engagement remains necessary.

3.1.3 Collaborations Among Countries

The VOSviewer analysis was conducted with a threshold of one publication per country, resulting in 43 countries meeting the initial criterion. However, only seven countries were part of active collaborations and are displayed in the network based on their total link strength (see Figure 4). The network formed three clusters with a combined link strength of 12, suggesting that inter-country collaboration in CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy research is currently low but meaningful.

Figure 4*Country Collaboration Network*

Among the countries, the U.S.A. occupied the most central position, forming the largest collaboration cluster with the highest total link strength (TLS = 4), connecting with four other countries. Malaysia followed, collaborating with two countries (TLS = 2), while Japan also showed collaboration with two countries (TLS = 2). Colombia, Mexico, Sweden, and Vietnam each participated in a single collaboration (TLS = 1), indicating initial but limited engagement in international research networks.

These findings have suggested that while the U.S.A. is deeply embedded in the global collaborative network, other countries are contributing more modestly. This network reflects emerging collaborative efforts and highlights opportunities for strengthening international partnerships, which could further advance research on CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy.

3.2 Research Question 2: What were the journals with the highest publications on CEFR-based speaking pedagogy research?

The second research question examined the journals that have published the highest number of studies on CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy. For this analysis, only journal articles from the WoS Core Collection were retained, while books, book chapters, and conference proceedings were excluded in order to

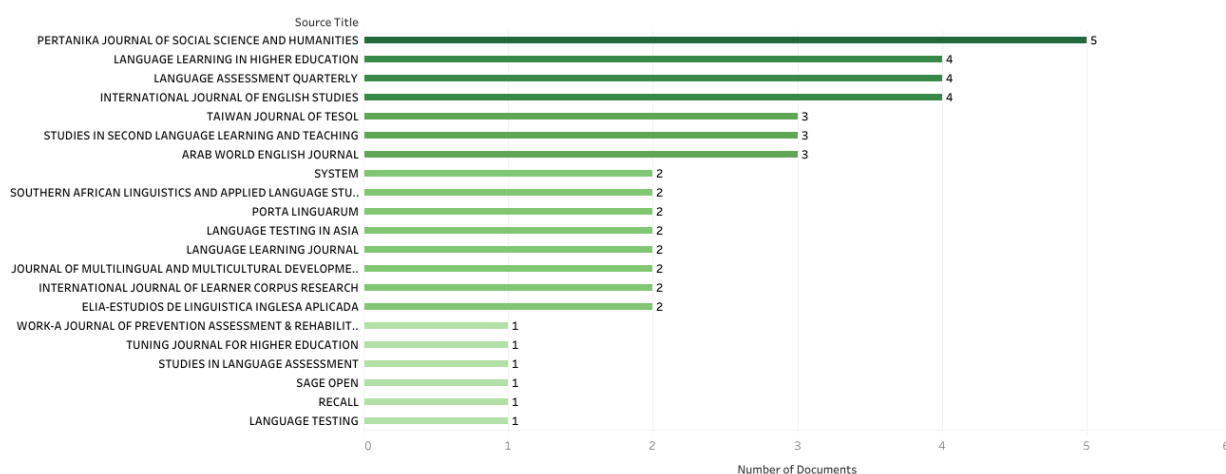
ensure consistency in evaluating journal-level contributions. The prominent journals were identified by calculating the total number of publications per journal, supported by citation indicators available within the WoS database. Microsoft Excel was used to organize and compute the journal metrics, while Tableau was employed to visualize the distribution of publications across journals.

3.2.1 Prominent Journals

An examination of the leading journals contributing to research on CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy has highlighted both the breadth of scholarly engagement and the varying levels of impact across publishing outlets. Figure 5 presents some of the top journals along with the number of contributing documents in the field.

Figure 5

Prominent Journals



Although the journals differ considerably in their impact profiles, as shown in Table 2, together they revealed how the topic has gained attention across diverse academic contexts and research traditions. In this study, journal prominence was operationalized in terms of publication productivity rather than citation-based influence. While output volume highlighted journals that serve as key publication venues for CEFR-based speaking pedagogy research, it did not necessarily indicate the relative impact of individual articles.

Table 2*Top 10 Prominent Journals*

Source Title	JIF 2024	JCI	JCI Quartile	Country
<i>Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities</i>	0.7	0.29	Q3	Malaysia
<i>Language Learning in Higher Education</i>	0.6	0.31	Q3	Germany
<i>Language Assessment Quarterly</i>	2.8	1.22	Q1	USA
<i>International Journal of English Studies</i>	0.3	0.32	Q3	Spain
<i>Taiwan Journal of TESOL Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching</i>	0.6	0.24	Q4	Taiwan
<i>Arab World English Journal</i>	0.7	0.70	Q2	Malaysia
<i>System</i>	5.6	3.12	Q1	England
<i>Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies</i>	0.5	0.49	Q3	South Africa
<i>Porta Linguarum</i>	2.1	1.48	Q1	Spain

A striking pattern in the dataset was that several journals with moderate impact metrics, particularly those in Q3 and Q4, host a substantial portion of the research output. This was evident in the prominence of regionally influential journals such as the *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* and *Language Learning in Higher Education*, which together accounted for a notable share of publications. Their prominence suggests that much CEFR-related

speaking research continues to emerge from practice-oriented, context-specific investigations, often driven by local curricular reforms or institutional adoption of CEFR descriptors (e.g. Can, 2023; Musa et al., 2021).

In contrast, a smaller number of publications appeared in high-impact Q1 journals, including *System*, *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, *Language Assessment Quarterly*, and *Porta Linguarum*. While these journals had lower counts in our dataset, previous research suggests that publications in top-tier journals often reflect more mature or theoretically grounded work within a field, especially when the topic is emerging or interdisciplinary (Havey & Chang, 2022). For example, recent reviews by Ali et al. (2025) and Sahib and Stapa (2022) on CEFR educational trends indicated a sustained influence of CEFR frameworks on curriculum design and assessment practices internationally, even if total publication counts remained modest.

Another notable feature was the geographical diversity among the contributing journals. The presence of research from Malaysia, Taiwan, Spain, and South Africa corresponded with broader trends documented in CEFR literature, where non-Anglophone contexts increasingly adapted and investigated the framework's applications in local curricula and assessment practices (Ali et al., 2025). This diversified authorship and dissemination has reflected a broader shift in CEFR research leadership, where these countries increasingly contribute empirical insights into how CEFR descriptors have been interpreted and adapted in English speaking classrooms, even as their work sought greater visibility in global high-impact venues (Musa et al., 2021). Future bibliometric studies may complement productivity-based analyses with citation concentration or Bradford-type source dispersion analyses in order to further distinguish core and peripheral journals.

3.3 What were the most repeated keywords, the conceptual structure, the emerging research trends, and topical foci shaping the future directions of CEFR-based speaking pedagogy research?

The third research question sought to identify the most frequently occurring author keywords, the conceptual structure of the field, and the emerging research trends that shape future directions in CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy. In order to address this, author keyword frequencies were analyzed to determine dominant thematic foci within the literature. The conceptual structure of the field was mapped through keyword co-occurrence analyses, which revealed how concepts were interconnected. These relationships, along with emerging thematic clusters and trend patterns, were examined and visualized using VOSviewer. This combined analysis provided insight into both the conceptual foundations and the evolving research trajectories of CEFR-informed speaking pedagogy.

3.3.1 Most Repeated Keywords

Using a minimum threshold of three appearances, 20 keywords from a total of 592 keywords were extracted. For clarity and focus, the ten most frequently occurring keywords were selected for in-depth analysis, as shown in Table 3. These keywords, accompanied by their total link strength (TLS), provided insight into the prevailing thematic directions and conceptual focus within CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy research. Consistent with the guidance of Firoozeh et al. (2020), variations in keywords generally represent the same underlying concept within a shared research context, and therefore different forms of the same keyword were combined for this analysis. In order to maintain coherence in the thematic interpretations, all of the keywords were standardized, primarily converted to singular forms and checked for semantic duplication. For this, a customized thesaurus file was created and applied in VOSviewer to merge equivalent terms, correct spelling variations, and to eliminate redundancies, ensuring that the keyword analysis accurately reflected the conceptual structure of the dataset.

Table 3*Top Ten Most Repeated Author Keywords*

Keywords	Frequency of occurrence	Total link strength
Speaking proficiency	49	83
English	29	47
CEFR	39	44
Speaking assessment	19	30
Fluency	10	29
EFL	10	21
L2	10	21
Accuracy	4	15
L1	4	14
Learner corpus research	5	11

The findings indicated that “Speaking proficiency” (frequency = 49; TLS = 83) was the most dominant concept, reflecting the centrality of learners’ ability to attain English speaking proficiency within CEFR-aligned frameworks. Similarly, “CEFR” (frequency = 39; TLS = 44) emerged as a pivotal term, highlighting the widespread use of the framework as a benchmark for designing, assessing, and evaluating speaking skills. The high TLS values associated with these keywords suggested that they frequently co-occur with other key terms, indicating strong thematic connections and reinforcing their conceptual prominence in the field.

Keywords such as “English” (frequency = 29; TLS = 47), “Speaking assessment” (frequency = 19; TLS = 30), and “Fluency” (frequency = 10; TLS = 29) further illustrated the field’s focus on both language proficiency and performance evaluation. The presence of terms such as “Accuracy” (frequency = 4; TLS = 15) and “Learner corpus research” (frequency = 5; TLS = 11) indicated emerging attention toward linguistic precision and data-driven approaches in the assessment of speaking skills.

Interestingly, keywords such as “L2” (frequency = 10; TLS = 21) and “EFL” (frequency = 10; TLS = 21) demonstrated the field’s engagement with second language acquisition frameworks and pedagogical settings beyond native English contexts. The inclusion of “L1” (frequency = 4; TLS = 14) suggested a consideration of the learners’ first language influence on speaking skills, albeit with less prominence compared to core CEFR-related themes.

The co-occurrence patterns revealed three critical insights. First, CEFR-based research was strongly centered on speaking proficiency and assessment, with fluency and accuracy as recurring concerns. Second, the conceptual network was interconnected, as reflected by high TLS values, indicating that studies often address multiple interrelated aspects of speaking pedagogy simultaneously. Third, emerging but less frequent terms, such as learner corpus research and L1 influence, pointed to innovative directions that could gain more attention in future studies, particularly in data-informed or cross-linguistic investigations. Thus, the author-keyword analysis provided a clear picture of the conceptual priorities in CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy, highlighting both dominant research areas and potential gaps for future exploration. Further, the network map and co-occurrence analysis (Figure 6) illustrated how these terms cluster and relate to one another, offering a clear representation of the conceptual landscape within CEFR-based English speaking research.

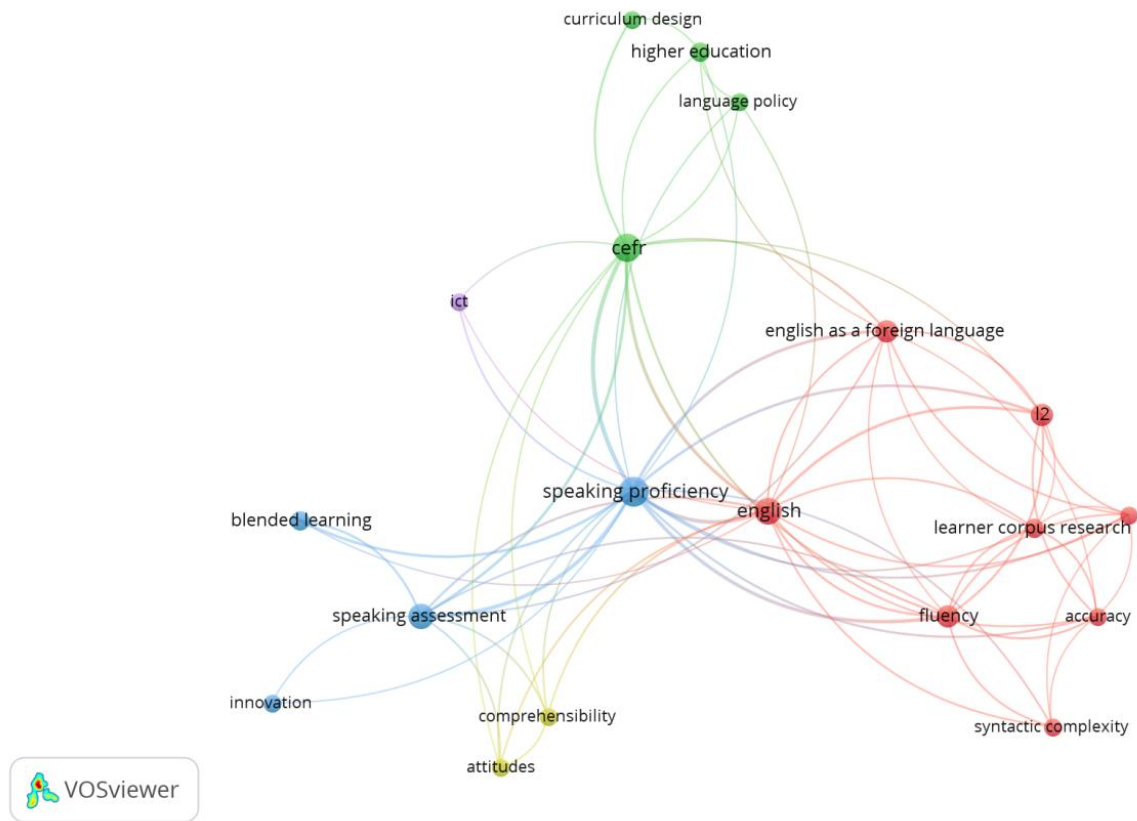
3.3.2 The Conceptual Structure of the Field

Analyzing frequently co-occurring keywords offered a window into the thematic organization and conceptual structure of research within a particular domain. As noted by Hallinger (2019), keyword co-occurrence can highlight dominant topics and emerging trends, while network visualizations reveal both the prominence of individual concepts and the strength of their interrelationships (Pillai et al., 2021). In these visualizations, node size represents keyword frequency, and proximity reflects co-occurrence strength, allowing clusters of related terms to emerge clearly. In the context of research on CEFR-based English

speaking pedagogy, the conceptual network organized into five distinct clusters, each reflecting a specific thematic focus.

The Red cluster was anchored by 'English' and encompasses keywords such as "ELF," "L1," "L2," "fluency," "accuracy," "syntactic complexity," and "learner corpus research." This cluster reflected the field's attention to the linguistic and cognitive dimensions of English language learning, including both learner proficiency and cross-linguistic influences. The inclusion of L1 and L2 indicated a consideration of how first-language knowledge interacts with second-language acquisition, while fluency, accuracy, and syntactic complexity highlighted ongoing concerns with measuring and developing English speaking competence, a focus consistently highlighted in CEFR-informed speaking and second language research, as noted in a recent review study by Hamid et al. (2025).

The Green cluster, centered on "CEFR," highlighted "curriculum design," "language policy," and "higher education." This suggests that CEFR served not only as a proficiency benchmark but also as a framework for educational planning and institutional alignment, reflecting its influence on pedagogical practices and policy decisions in formal learning contexts. This interpretation is supported by the work of Musa et al. (2022), who have documented the systematic integration of CEFR into national and institutional curricula.

Figure 6*Author Keyword Co-Occurrence Map*

The blue cluster, with “speaking proficiency” at its core, emphasized “speaking assessment,” “innovation,” and “blended learning.” This cluster pointed to a practice-oriented strand of research, where the measurement of speaking skills and the exploration of technology-supported instruction are central concerns. Similar to what Nageen et al. (2025) have highlighted, the prominence of speaking assessment situated the CEFR framework both as an effective evaluative tool and as a catalyst of pedagogical innovation.

The yellow cluster focused on “attitudes” and “comprehensibility,” reflecting studies that investigate learner perceptions, motivation, and intelligibility. These affective dimensions have been shown to mediate successful spoken communication and CEFR-based performance outcomes (Cuartas & Toro, 2024; Muhammad et al., 2021).

The purple cluster, consisting solely of “ICT,” indicated a more specialized line of inquiry centered on technology-mediated language learning, which, while narrower in scope, signals the growing role of digital tools in CEFR-aligned speaking pedagogy.

The analysis of the keyword co-occurrence map has revealed a well-structured conceptual landscape, balancing core language proficiency concerns, policy-oriented frameworks, assessment practices, and emerging technological and affective dimensions. The clustering highlighted the interconnectedness of foundational concepts such as English proficiency, fluency, and CEFR, and the emergence of specialized thematic areas that could guide future research. Particularly, clusters focusing on assessment and blended learning suggested active innovation in pedagogy, whereas clusters such as ICT-only reflected nascent yet focused research avenues.

3.3.3 The Emerging Research Trends and Topical Foci

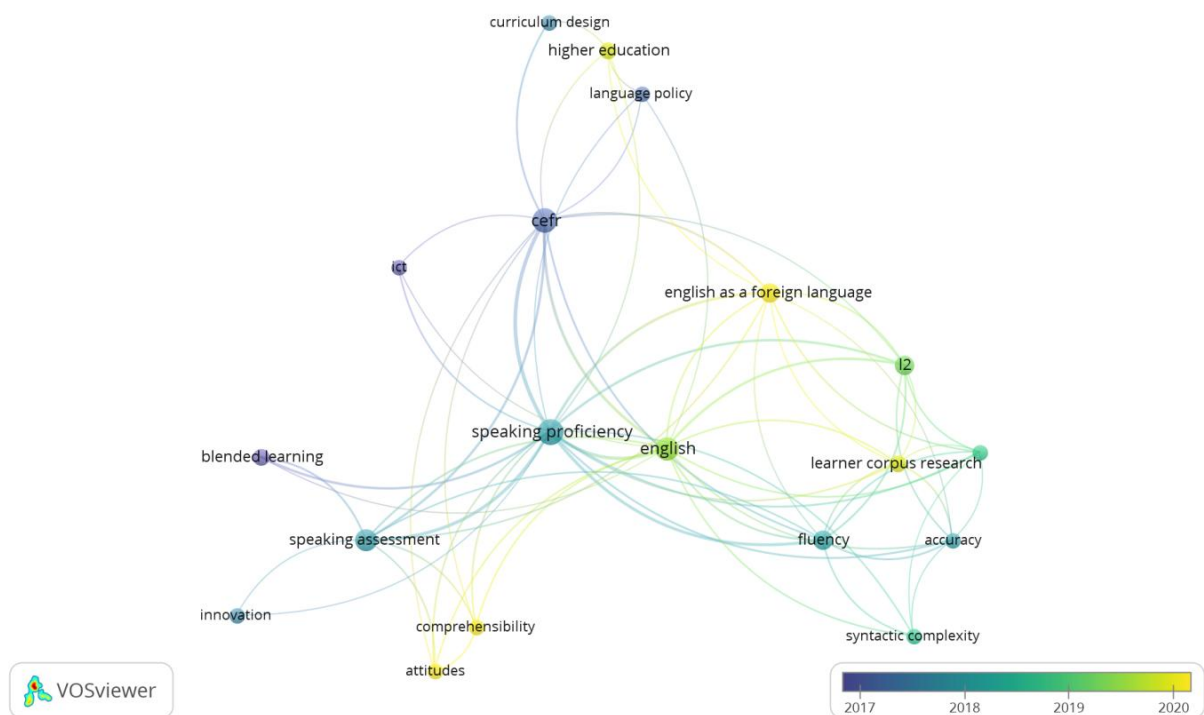
The temporal overlay visualization of the author keywords captured how the research on CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy has evolved conceptually over time. Temporal co-occurrence mapping offers a dynamic view of scholarly development, as keyword color gradients represent the chronological emergence of research themes, with yellow indicating recent topics and purple representing earlier ones. A bubble size denotes frequency of occurrence, while spatial proximity reflects thematic relatedness and the degree to which concepts co-appear within the same body of literature (Nicolas et al., 2020; Punnakitikashem & Hallinger, 2020). These features revealed both the conceptual progression and the current topical foci shaping the field.

As shown in Figure 7, the trajectory of research in this domain has expanded steadily, moving from foundational explorations of digital modalities and instructional innovations toward more refined examinations of speaking

constructs, assessment, and corpus-based inquiry. The earliest significant topics appearing around 2011 included “blended learning,” followed by “ICT” around 2015. These early themes suggested that the field initially focused on the integration of technology-enhanced learning environments and investigated how digital tools could support CEFR-aligned instructional practices.

Figure 7

Temporal Overlay Map



Although “CEFR” and “language policy” appeared on the map as emerging around 2017, the dataset revealed earlier foundational work dating back to 2009 (e.g., McCarthy, 2009; Mesh, 2009). This indicated that conceptual engagement with CEFR principles had begun much earlier, but gained stronger scholarly attention only later, when researchers increasingly connected CEFR to curriculum design, policy implementation, and assessment practices.

A notable thematic expansion occurred after 2017, where “innovation,” “speaking proficiency,” and “speaking assessment” emerged as influential topics.

This period marked a shift from technological experimentation to more direct engagement with the core constructs of spoken language ability and CEFR-aligned evaluative frameworks (e.g., Özdemir-Yılmaz & Özkan, 2017).

By 2018, research attention had moved toward more fine-grained linguistic constructs, such as “fluency,” “accuracy,” and “syntactic complexity.” This shift pointed to a growing emphasis on empirical examination of specific components of spoken performance, which is an indicator that the field was maturing toward more measurement-driven analytic approaches to speaking pedagogy.

From 2019 onwards, keywords such as “English,” “L2,” and “learner corpus research” became increasingly prominent, reflecting a broader disciplinary integration with second language acquisition and corpus-based methodologies. This suggested that CEFR-based speaking research was becoming more empirically grounded and data-driven, making use of learner corpora to analyze spoken output at scale. Late 2019 also marked the appearance of “higher education,” indicating growing interest in CEFR implementation within university-level speaking curricula.

More recent years showed continued diversification of topical focus. The year 2020 saw the rise of “EFL” and “attitudes,” pointing to increased uptake of CEFR in non-English-dominant contexts and a qualitative turn toward learner perceptions and behavioral factors. The year 2021 introduced “comprehensibility,” reflecting a shift toward listener-based measures of spoken performance and more contemporary perspectives on intelligibility within CEFR-aligned assessment.

The temporal evolution highlighted a field that has transitioned from technology-mediated teaching innovations to CEFR-aligned construct-focused assessment research and, more recently, toward data-driven corpus analysis and affective dimensions of CEFR-based speaking performance. This progression highlighted a broadening and deepening of scholarly engagement, foregrounding a

mature research landscape increasingly aligned with contemporary concerns in applied linguistics, language assessment aligned with the CEFR, and second language speaking proficiency development.

Moreover, the temporal evolution of CEFR-based speaking research observed in this study aligned with broader trends documented in prior literature. Several review and empirical studies have noted the increasing emphasis on construct-based assessment, fluency, accuracy, and corpus-informed methodologies in recent years (Lee, 2025; Sahib & Stapa, 2022). The expansion into affective and perception-related topics, as well as the growing focus on higher education and EFL contexts, is consistent with findings reported in longitudinal CEFR studies (Tikhonenko, 2023) and meta-analyses of spoken language pedagogy (Batmaz, 2023). Thus, this discussion situated the observed keyword trends within the broader applied linguistics and second language research landscape, demonstrating that the shifts captured by bibliometric analysis reflect ongoing developments in CEFR-aligned speaking pedagogy.

4. Limitations and Implications of the Study

While this study provided a systematic and comprehensive mapping of CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy research, several considerations should be noted for contextual interpretation and future inquiry. First, the analysis was restricted to publications indexed in the Web of Science Core Collection, which may exclude relevant studies available in other databases such as Scopus, ERIC, or Google Scholar. Second, only documents published in English were considered, potentially overlooking valuable research in other languages. Third, bibliometric methods capture trends and patterns in published literature but do not provide in-depth qualitative insights into pedagogical practices or contextual understanding.

Looking at the implications, this bibliometric review offered a roadmap for researchers, educators, and policymakers in CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy. First, scholars can use the identified thematic clusters and keyword

trends to prioritize underexplored topics in their future studies, such as affective factors, corpus-based assessments, and technology-mediated speaking tasks, which have appeared more recently in the literature and represent emerging areas of interest. Second, the country-level and journal-level analyses highlight potential avenues for international collaboration and dissemination, encouraging researchers to engage with networks or journals that are currently underrepresented but influential in shaping the field. Third, educators and curriculum designers can use these trends to improve teaching and assessment, focusing on CEFR-aligned practices that are learner-centered and evidence-based.

Finally, future research could expand this work by conducting bibliometric analysis utilizing other databases and non-English publications to provide a more global perspective. Additionally, combining bibliometric analyses with qualitative syntheses or meta-analyses could offer richer insights into pedagogical approaches, learner outcomes, and the practical implementation of CEFR-aligned speaking instruction. Investigating emerging topics such as affective factors, corpus-based assessments, and technology-mediated speaking tasks could further guide future scholarship in this field.

5. Conclusion

This bibliometric review provided a comprehensive understanding of the research landscape on CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy. Analysis of the yearly publication patterns revealed a steady growth in scholarly output over time, with a notable peak in 2017, followed by a slight decline in subsequent years. The study also identified the top contributing countries, led by Spain, Russia, and Malaysia, with seven countries demonstrating small collaborative networks in advancing research in this area. Further, the investigation of the top journals highlighted both the breadth of scholarly engagement and the varying levels of impact across publishing outlets, reflecting a field that is disseminated across diverse academic platforms. Additionally, the examination of 592 author keywords

allowed for the identification of the ten most frequently occurring terms, revealing key thematic areas and the conceptual structure of the field. From this analysis, five distinct thematic clusters have emerged, illustrating the field's conceptual diversity and areas of concentrated research interest.

The analysis of research trends indicated that the field has progressed from an initial focus on technology-mediated teaching innovations to CEFR-aligned, construct-focused assessment research, and more recently toward data-driven corpus analysis and affective dimensions of CEFR-based speaking performance. This trajectory demonstrated both the deepening and broadening of scholarly engagement, marking an evolving research landscape that aligns with contemporary concerns in English language pedagogy. Thus, this bibliometric analysis highlighted the growing academic interest in CEFR-based English speaking pedagogy and mapped the conceptual and thematic directions of the field. These insights provide a foundation for future research, guiding scholars toward underexplored topics, potential collaborations, and emerging areas of inquiry in both theoretical and applied contexts.

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8. Declaration of AI Use

The authors declare that AI tools, specifically Grammarly, a GPT-based APA reference tool, and ChatGPT, were used solely for grammar checking, reference formatting, and minor language refinement, respectively. The authors declare that no AI tools were used for data analysis or interpretation of the research findings. The authors take full responsibility for the content.

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