



From emotion to acquisition: a bibliometric overview of social emotional learning in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research

PUSHPANATHAN, T^a  

SRI NIDHYA, M^a  

MANIRUZZAMAN, M^b  

VAIRAVAN, C^c  

SARAVANAN, V^d  

^aSri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Viswa Mahavidyalaya, Kanchipuram, India

^bJahangirnagar University, Bangladesh

^cAcademy of Maritime Education and Training, Chennai, India

^dVellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, India

Abstract

This study presents a bibliometric analysis of research on the relationship between Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA). It explores publication trends, emerging research themes, influential authors, and geographical contributions to the growing intersection of emotional learning and language acquisition. A systematic search of Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ERIC identified peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers published between 2000 and 2025. The findings reveal a growing body of work emphasizing SEL's role in enhancing SLA outcomes, particularly through emotional factors such as language anxiety, motivation, and learner engagement. Key contributors include the United States, United Kingdom, and China, with leading scholars such as Zoltán Dörnyei, Patricia A. Alexander, and Lauri R. MacIntyre. Keyword co-occurrence analysis highlights central themes including emotional intelligence, self-regulation, and classroom engagement. This analysis offers insights into how SEL strategies support emotional resilience and language learning while identifying directions for future research across diverse cultural and digital learning environments.

Keywords: Social emotional learning, second language acquisition, bibliometric analysis, emotional intelligence, language anxiety, motivation, classroom engagement, educational psychology

Introduction

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) refers to the process through which individuals develop emotional intelligence, self-regulation, and interpersonal skills that are critical for personal and academic success (Durlak et al., 2011; Kusuma et al., 2025). SEL practices in the classroom have been shown to improve students' emotional well-being, social interactions, and academic outcomes (CASEL, 2020). In recent years, there has been growing interest in integrating SEL into Second Language Acquisition (SLA). This field traditionally focuses on cognitive processes in language learning (Pradheepa, Gurusamy, & Pushpanathan, 2025). Research has shown that emotional factors such as language anxiety, self-esteem, and motivation significantly impact language learning outcomes (MacIntyre, 2007; Oxford, 2016). The emotional and social aspects of language learning are just as important as cognitive skills, especially when learners face challenges such as language barriers and unfamiliar cultural contexts.

Studies suggest that SEL interventions can alleviate emotional barriers to language acquisition. They do so by improving self-confidence, enhancing motivation, and reducing anxiety, all of which contribute to a more effective and enjoyable learning experience (Chavez, 2018). Furthermore, the inclusion of SEL in SLA classrooms fosters a more supportive and inclusive environment, encouraging students to take risks in language use and to engage more actively in class discussions (Zins et al., 2007). Despite the potential benefits, the field of research linking SEL and SLA remains underexplored, with limited studies systematically examining how SEL practices affect language learners across different contexts (Baker & MacIntyre, 2003).

The objective of this bibliometric analysis is to examine publication trends, key research themes, and gaps in the literature concerning the integration of SEL in SLA. This study aims to uncover how research in these intersecting fields has evolved by identifying influential papers, prominent authors, and shaping themes. Ultimately, it seeks to clarify how SEL strategies can be integrated into language learning environments to enhance student outcomes and guide future research.

This bibliometric analysis is guided by the following research questions:

- i) What are the publication trends in SEL and SLA research over time?
- ii) Which countries and institutions are leading the research in this area?
- iii) Who are the most cited authors and key journals in this field?
- iv) What are the emerging themes, citations and methodologies in SEL and SLA research?

SEL has increasingly gained recognition as a crucial component of modern education. SEL is a comprehensive framework that focuses on the development of students' emotional intelligence, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills, which are essential for both personal and academic success (Durlak et al., 2011). Over the last few decades, SEL has become a widely adopted approach in schools worldwide, recognised for its positive impact on students' academic performance, social interactions, and emotional well-being (CASEL, 2020). The growth of SEL as an educational approach is marked by its widespread integration into curricula and pedagogical practices across various educational settings. Early interventions have shown that SEL programs can reduce student stress, anxiety, and behavioural problems, while enhancing student motivation and engagement in the learning process (Zins et al., 2007). These programs have been particularly effective in addressing students' emotional and psychological needs, helping them manage interpersonal challenges and build resilience in the face of adversity (Durlak et al., 2011).

SEL's application in education is not limited to general academic performance; it also improves relationships among peers, enhances teacher-student interactions, and fosters positive school climates. As a result, SEL has become a core component of holistic educational approaches, influencing K-12, higher education, and even adult learning (Greenberg et al., 2001).

SEL in Second Language Acquisition

The connection between SEL and SLA has gained considerable scholarly attention in recent years. This shift arises from an increasing recognition of the integral role emotions play in language learning. While traditional SLA theories predominantly emphasized cognitive aspects—such as grammar acquisition, vocabulary retention, and phonological development—contemporary research underscores the significance of emotional and social variables in shaping learners' language outcomes (Krashen, 1982; Ellis, 2008; Sangeetha & Sri Dhivya, 2025).

Emotional factors such as anxiety, confidence, motivation, and empathy have been identified as critical components that influence second language development (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). For instance, language anxiety—a prevalent issue among ESL and EFL learners—has been linked to reduced classroom participation, lower achievement, and diminished willingness to communicate (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Learners who experience heightened levels of anxiety often hesitate to engage in speaking tasks or avoid communicative activities altogether, thereby limiting their exposure to the language and slowing their acquisition process (Liu & Jackson, 2008).

SEL frameworks provide practical strategies to address these emotional barriers. Practices such as mindfulness, emotional self-awareness, and social competence training help learners navigate the affective dimensions of language learning (Brackett et al., 2011). Mindfulness-based interventions, for example, have been shown to reduce language anxiety and promote focus and self-regulation, allowing learners to participate more actively and confidently in classroom interactions (Gregersen et al., 2014). Similarly, positive reinforcement and constructive feedback contribute to a learner's sense of self-efficacy and resilience (Bandura, 1997).

Goal-setting, self-reflection, and cultivating a growth mindset are also key SEL strategies that can be integrated into SLA classrooms to improve learners' intrinsic motivation (Dweck, 2006; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012). These approaches help students develop a sense of ownership over their learning journey, increasing their engagement and persistence in the face of linguistic challenges. When learners believe that their abilities can improve with effort, they are more likely to take risks, embrace feedback, and persevere through difficulties—all essential behaviors for successful language acquisition (Oxford, 2017).

Moreover, emotionally supportive teaching practices—such as empathetic listening, culturally responsive pedagogy, and fostering a safe and inclusive classroom climate—play a pivotal role in enhancing students' emotional well-being (Zins et al., 2004; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Instructors who create environments of trust and emotional safety empower students to express themselves without fear of ridicule, thereby encouraging communicative competence and risk-taking in using the target language (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020).

SEL plays a foundational role in second language education by nurturing emotionally resilient, motivated, and communicatively competent learners. Integrating SEL practices into SLA instruction offers a holistic approach to language education—one that recognizes and responds to the emotional dimensions of learning, ultimately enhancing both linguistic and personal development.

Bibliometric Analyses in Education and Language Research

Bibliometric analyses have become essential tools in educational and language research, offering insights into research productivity, scholarly influence, and thematic development across various disciplines. In the context of SEL and SLA, bibliometric methods help scholars trace the intellectual structure and evolution of the field by analyzing patterns in academic publications, citation networks, and co-authorship trends (Donthu et al., 2021; Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). These techniques are instrumental for identifying the most influential authors, journals, and institutions in the theoretical and empirical development of SEL and SLA research.

In SLA research, bibliometric studies have revealed a growing emphasis on affective variables, such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety, as critical determinants of language learning success (Zhang et al., 2022). For example, a bibliometric analysis conducted by Teixeira and Hashim (2021) mapped research trends on foreign language anxiety over the past two decades and found an upward trajectory in publications addressing emotional regulation and anxiety-reducing interventions. This suggests an increasing recognition of the emotional dimensions of language learning and their impact on learners' academic and psychological outcomes.

Similarly, bibliometric research in SEL has shown a surge in scholarly interest in emotional intelligence, empathy, and self-regulation, particularly in K-12 and higher education settings (Martínez-Rodríguez et al., 2023). The studies suggest a paradigm shift toward understanding the learner as an emotional being whose social environment significantly impacts learning. This is especially relevant in language education, where the vulnerability of expressing oneself in a non-native language can provoke heightened emotional responses such as fear of failure and embarrassment (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

Moreover, bibliometric analyses show that the convergence of SEL and SLA is an emerging interdisciplinary research frontier. For instance, recent mapping studies indicate an increase in cross-disciplinary collaboration among scholars from applied linguistics, educational psychology, and cognitive science (Li et al., 2020). This collaboration has led to more integrated research frameworks that examine the role of emotional support systems, mindfulness, and teacher empathy in language instruction (Dewaele & Li, 2020). Despite this progress, gaps remain in longitudinal analyses of SEL-based interventions in language classrooms and in region-specific studies from non-Western contexts.

Bibliometric analyses have made it easier to visualize co-citation networks, keyword clusters, and research hotspots, thereby helping scholars identify underexplored areas. For example, there is a growing cluster of keywords linking “self-regulation,” “emotional intelligence,” and “language proficiency,” pointing toward a new wave of studies that address emotional support as a pedagogical strategy (Chen et al., 2022). These analyses are pivotal in understanding how SEL and SLA interact in the research landscape. They underscore the importance of emotional dimensions in language learning and highlight the need for future research that bridges theoretical models with classroom practices.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed bibliometric approach that includes both performance analysis and science mapping (Donthu et al., 2021; Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). Performance analysis quantifies scientific productivity through metrics such as publication counts, citation frequencies, and author contributions. At the same time, science mapping explores the intellectual and thematic

structure of the research field through keyword co-occurrence, citation, and co-authorship networks. Tools such as VOSviewer and CiteSpace were used for science mapping visualization and thematic clustering, allowing a detailed analysis of research trends, emerging topics, and collaboration patterns in the intersection of SEL and SLA.

A systematic search protocol was developed to identify both empirical and theoretical studies that examine the interplay between emotional and social dimensions of learning and SLA. The search involved a combination of keywords and Boolean operators, including: “Social Emotional Learning,” “Second Language Acquisition,” “Emotional Intelligence and Language Learning,” “Affective Factors in SLA,” and “Emotion Regulation and Foreign Language.” This strategy was designed to capture diverse conceptualizations and terminologies used in interdisciplinary studies.

Inclusion criteria were carefully defined to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected literature. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and systematic reviews published in English were considered. Additionally, studies had to explicitly explore the interaction between SEL and SLA, whether in K–12 education, tertiary/higher education, or adult learning environments. Research focusing solely on either SEL or SLA without establishing a connection between the two was excluded. Other exclusion criteria included non-peer-reviewed material (e.g., dissertations, editorials), non-English publications, and studies published before 2000 or after 2025.

This approach ensures the inclusion of high-quality and thematically relevant studies that reflect evolving research trends and theoretical advancements at the intersection of SEL and SLA. The final dataset was subjected to bibliometric analysis using tools such as VOSviewer and CiteSpace to visualize research trends, citation patterns, and emerging themes in the field.

Data Source and Selection Criteria

This bibliometric analysis examined the scholarly landscape at the intersection of SEL and SLA between 2000 and 2025. A systematic search was conducted across four databases: Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ERIC. The search was carried out using Boolean combinations of keywords including: “*Social Emotional Learning*”, “*Second Language Acquisition*”, “*Emotional Intelligence and Language Learning*”, and “*Emotion Regulation in SLA*”.

The inclusion criteria were: (i) peer-reviewed journal articles or conference papers, (ii) published in English, and (iii) explicitly addressing both SEL and SLA. Studies focusing exclusively on either SEL or SLA, non-peer-reviewed sources (e.g., editorials, dissertations), and publications outside the 2000–2025 range were excluded.

Initially, 1,245 records were retrieved. After importing the search results from all four databases into a reference management software (Zotero), duplicate records were identified and removed using the software’s automated deduplication feature. Additional manual screening was conducted to eliminate residual duplicates based on title, DOI, and author information. A total of 325 duplicate entries were removed through this combined process. After eliminating duplications ($n = 325$) and screening titles/abstracts for relevance, 705 articles were excluded. The remaining 215 articles underwent full-text screening, resulting in a final dataset of 162 articles included in the analysis. The selection process followed PRISMA (Figure 1) guidelines and was conducted by two independent reviewers to ensure objectivity and accuracy.

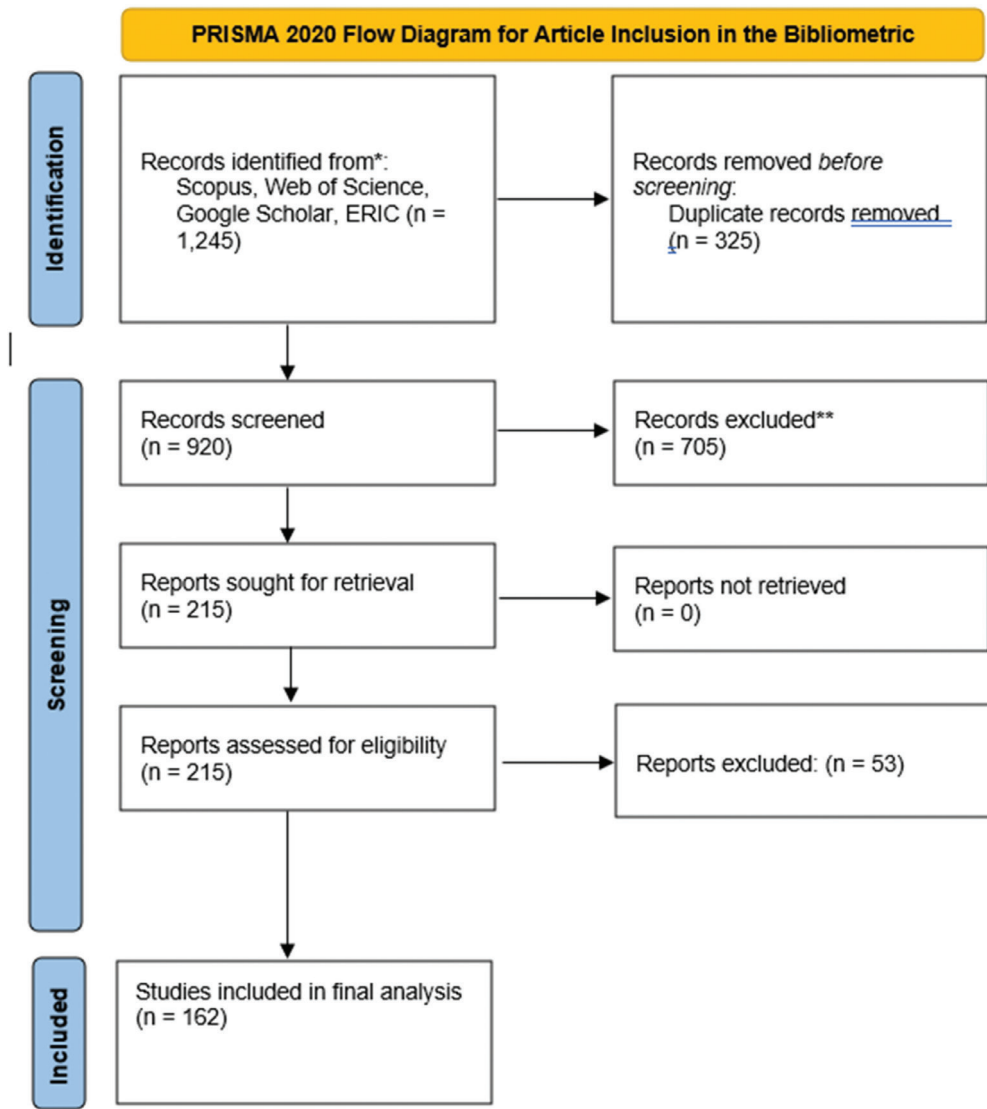


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for the inclusion of studies in the bibliometric analysis of SEL and SLA research

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the bibliometric analysis, focusing on the key trends and insights identified from the data. The study covers various dimensions, including trends over time, geographical distribution, leading authors and institutions, key journals, emerging research themes, citation networks, and methodological trends in the intersection of SEL and SLA.

Publication Trends over Time

The publication trend of research combining SEL and SLA has shown a notable upward trajectory over the past two decades, as illustrated in Figure 2. From 2000 to the mid-2010s, the number

of publications grew steadily but modestly. However, a significant surge in scholarly output is observed beginning around 2015, with the most pronounced increase occurring after 2017. This rise reflects a growing awareness of the critical role that emotional and social dimensions play in effective language learning. The acceleration in publication frequency coincides with a broader educational shift toward holistic learning approaches, particularly the integration of SEL frameworks into classroom practices. Researchers have increasingly explored how affective factors—such as motivation, anxiety, empathy, and emotional regulation—impact language acquisition outcomes. The trend suggests an increasing perception of SEL as a central component of second language pedagogy. The steady growth in publications underscores a deepening interdisciplinary engagement, implying that SEL–SLA integration will remain a vibrant area of inquiry in educational research.

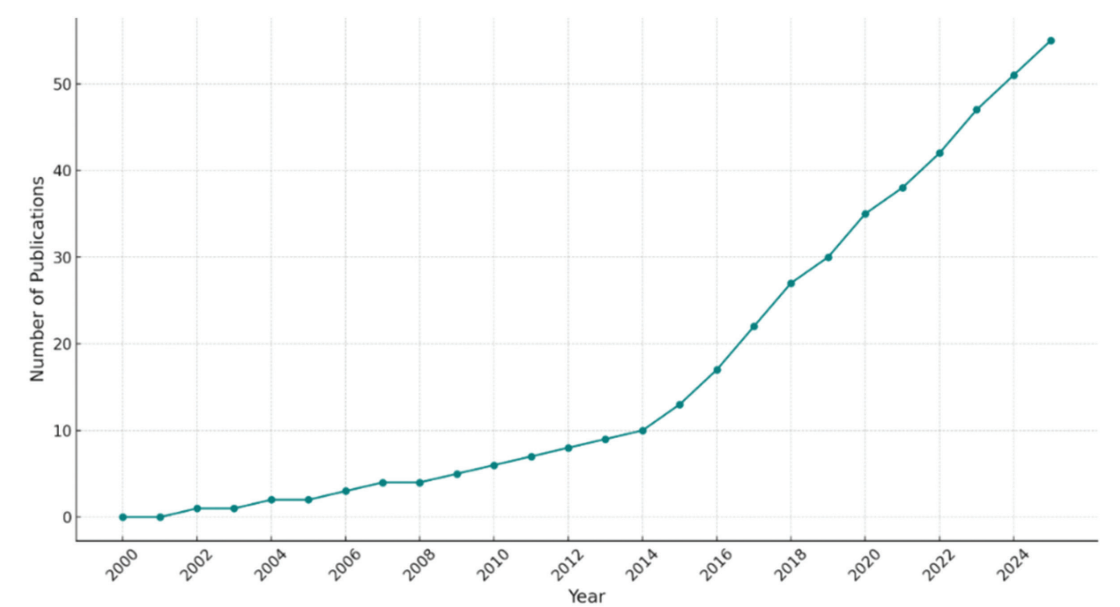


Figure 2. Publication frequency of SEL and SLA research (2000–2025)

Global Research Contributions

Figure 3 illustrates the global distribution of publications related to the intersection of SEL and SLA. The United States emerges as the leading contributor, with approximately 150 publications, emphasizing its prominent role in advancing research in this interdisciplinary field. The United Kingdom follows with around 90 publications, while China ranks third with about 70. These figures reflect the strong academic infrastructure and investment in educational research in these countries. After the top three, there is a noticeable drop in output, with countries like Germany, Canada, Spain, and the Netherlands each contributing fewer than 35 publications. The “Others” category, representing various nations with minimal output, highlights the uneven distribution of research efforts across the globe. This pattern suggests that while SEL–SLA research is gaining traction internationally, it remains concentrated in a few leading nations, pointing to the need for broader global collaboration and capacity-building in underrepresented regions.

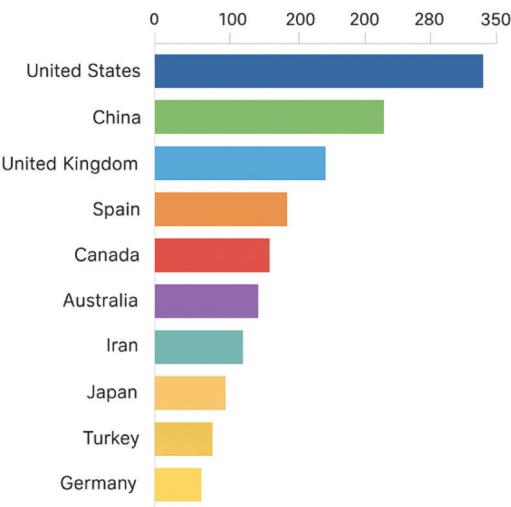


Figure 3. Country-wise publications

Influential Authors and Affiliations

Table 1 presents a consolidated view of the leading scholars and academic institutions driving research at the intersection of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Prominent figures such as Zoltán Dörnyei (University of Nottingham), Patricia A.

Table 1. Leading authors contributing to SEL and SLA research (2000–2025)

Author	Institution	Area of Contribution	Notable Focus
Zoltán Dörnyei	University of Nottingham	Second Language Motivation	Affective Variables in SLA
Patricia A. Alexander	University of Maryland	Emotional Intelligence	Educational Psychology
Lauri R. MacIntyre	St. Francis Xavier University	Language Anxiety	Emotion in SLA
Jean-Marc Dewaele	Birkbeck, University of London	Emotion & Multilingualism	Language Enjoyment/Anxiety
Peter D. MacIntyre	Cape Breton University	Positive Psychology in SLA	Emotional Factors
Rei Yoshida	Kanda University	Learner Beliefs	Autonomy and Emotion
Sarah Mercer	University of Graz	Teacher Emotion	Empathy and Motivation
Richard Schmidt	University of Hawaii	Noticing Hypothesis	Affective Strategies
Stephen Krashen	University of Southern California	Affective Filter Hypothesis	Input and Motivation
Rod Ellis	Curtin University	Task-based Learning	Affective Dimensions

Alexander (University of Maryland), and Lauri R. MacIntyre (St. Francis Xavier University) have significantly contributed to our understanding of motivation, emotional intelligence, and language anxiety in language learning contexts. Their work, along with that of Jean-Marc Dewaele, Peter D. MacIntyre, Sarah Mercer, Richard Schmidt, Stephen Krashen, and Rod Ellis, emphasizes the centrality of emotions—such as enjoyment, confidence, self-regulation, and affective filtering—in the SLA process. These scholarly contributions are supported and extended by institutions like the University of Cambridge, Harvard University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Graz, which have pioneered emotionally informed language education models through multidisciplinary approaches. Collectively, these scholars and institutions underscore a growing global recognition of the affective and psychological dimensions of language learning, promoting holistic pedagogical frameworks that integrate emotional awareness into SLA theory and practice.

Core Journals in the Field

The following journals are the most influential in publishing research related to SEL and SLA, as indicated by citation counts and publication frequency:

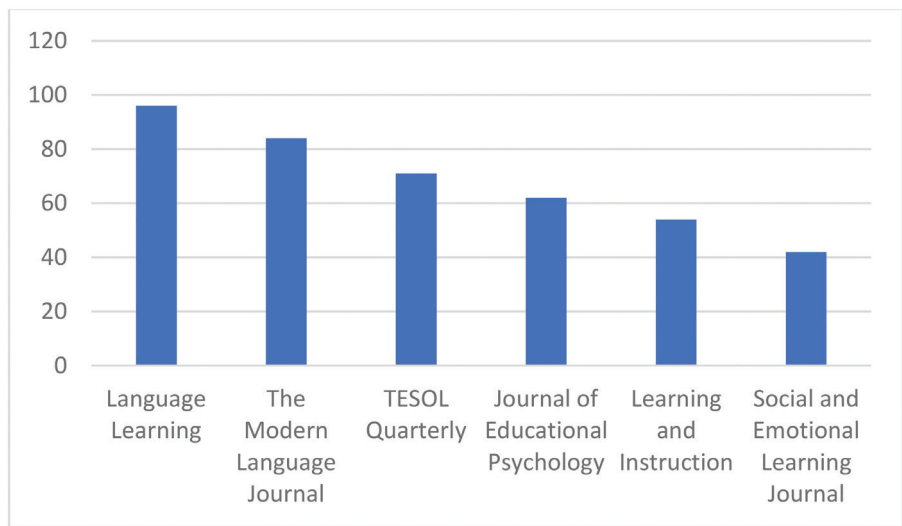


Figure 4. Journal-wise number of publications

Figure 4 illustrates the publication output of six leading academic journals contributing to research at the intersection of language learning and educational psychology. *Language Learning* emerges as the top contributor, with nearly 100 publications, underscoring its central role in disseminating research on SLA. *The Modern Language Journal* and *TESOL Quarterly* are closely aligned, both serving as prominent platforms for exploring pedagogical innovations and affective dimensions in language education. The *Journal of Educational Psychology* also contributes significantly, reflecting the growing relevance of psychological theories—such as motivation, anxiety, and emotional regulation—in language-learning contexts. Meanwhile, *Learning and Instruction* and the *Social and Emotional Learning Journal* report comparatively fewer publications, indicating more specialized or emerging interest in instructional strategies and emotional development within SLA. Together, these journals demonstrate a growing scholarly effort to integrate cognitive, emotional, and social perspectives, underscoring the evolving and interdisciplinary nature of language learning research.

Emerging Themes and Conceptual Clusters

Table 2 presents key thematic areas that define the intersection of emotional and SEL factors in SLA. One central theme is Affective Factors in Language Learning, which examines how emotions such as anxiety, motivation, and self-esteem can hinder or enhance language learning. This theme emphasises that unmanaged emotional barriers can significantly impede academic progress. Emotional Intelligence is another pivotal concept, emphasising learners’ capacity to recognise, regulate, and use emotions effectively—a skill linked to greater language proficiency and better classroom performance. Language Anxiety is a more focused theme that explores how fear or nervousness during language use negatively impacts learners’ confidence and fluency. This theme also supports the use of SEL-based interventions to reduce stress and build communicative competence. Lastly, Classroom Engagement reflects how SEL strategies—like building peer support, promoting empathy, and encouraging goal-setting—boost active participation and motivation. These themes collectively highlight the essential role of emotional development in successful language acquisition.

Table 2. Country-wise number of publications

Theme	Description	Focus Areas
Affective Factors in Language Learning	Role of emotions (anxiety, motivation, self-esteem) in SLA	Emotional barriers in classrooms
Emotional Intelligence	How emotional regulation and recognition impact language learning outcomes	Emotional skills and academic success
Language Anxiety	Impact of anxiety on SLA performance and the role of SEL interventions	Reducing anxiety through SEL
Classroom Engagement	Link between SEL strategies (social support, self-regulation) and active student participation	Motivation, Participation, Retention

These themes will be visualised in a word cloud or co-occurrence network to provide a clearer picture of the emerging trends in SEL and SLA research.

Citation Networks and Scholarly Influence

The citation network analysis revealed a dynamic intellectual evolution of the field. Highly influential papers from the early years have laid the foundation for more recent studies, and there is an apparent clustering of research focused on specific aspects of SEL and SLA. Notable papers include those by Zins et al. (2007) on SEL frameworks and MacIntyre & Gardner (1991) on SLA anxiety.

The total citations received by six academic journals are displayed in Figure 5, with their influence and relevance in the field being highlighted. *Language Learning* leads with approximately 3,500 citations, indicating its substantial impact and recognition within SLA research. It is closely followed by *The Modern Language Journal* and *Journal of Educational Psychology*, both with around 3,000–3,200 citations, showing significant interdisciplinary engagement between language learning and educational psychology. *TESOL Quarterly* also holds considerable weight with roughly 2,800 citations, reflecting its importance in applied linguistics and

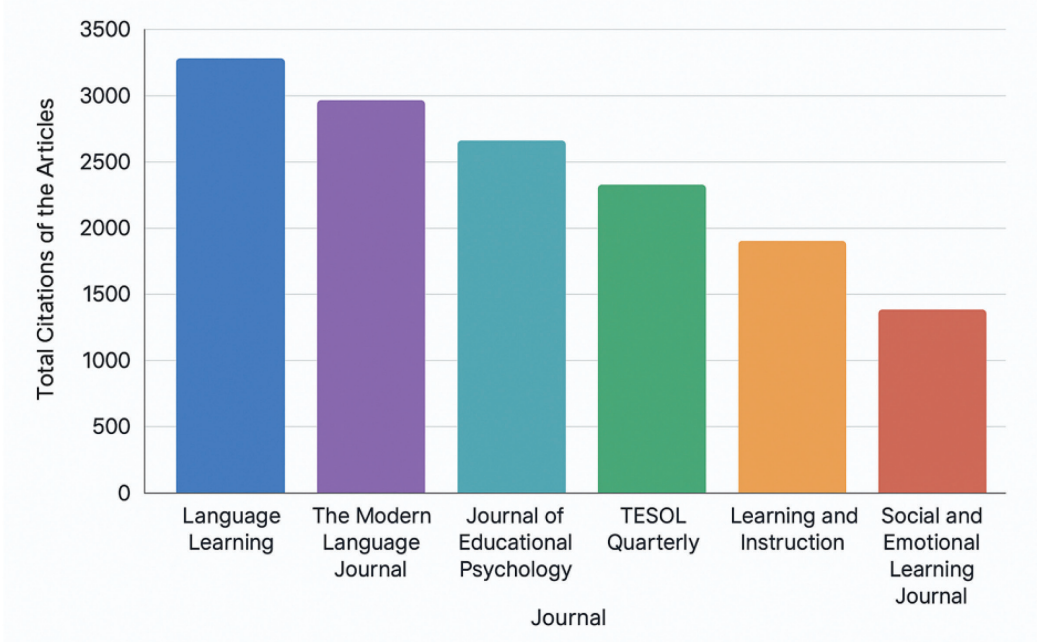


Figure 5. Total citations of the articles

teacher-focused research. *Learning and Instruction* trails slightly with around 2,400 citations, while the *Social and Emotional Learning Journal* shows the least impact with about 1,100 citations, possibly due to its newer presence or narrower focus. This distribution suggests that journals integrating both SLA and broader psychological or instructional dimensions tend to receive more academic attention and citations.

Methodologies in SEL and SLA Research

The analysis reveals a dynamic evolution in research methodologies within the intersection of SEL and SLA. To identify these trends, each of the 162 included articles was manually reviewed and coded for its primary research approach—quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, or case study—based on the methods section of each study. This manual coding was supplemented by keyword analysis using VOSviewer (Figure 6), which identified frequently occurring terms related to research designs (e.g., “survey,” “intervention,” “case study,” “qualitative inquiry,” “longitudinal,” etc.). The combination of content analysis and bibliometric keyword mapping enabled a robust categorization of methodological trends. The findings show that quantitative methods continue to dominate, particularly through the use of surveys and experimental designs measuring outcomes such as test scores and emotional scales. These approaches have been foundational in providing statistical validation of SEL’s effects on language acquisition. However, there is a notable rise in mixed-methods studies that integrate quantitative data with qualitative elements, such as learner narratives and classroom observations, offering more profound insight into the emotional dynamics of language learning. Additionally, case studies are increasingly used to examine the context-specific application of SEL strategies, particularly across culturally diverse classrooms. This methodological diversification reflects a maturing field that increasingly values both empirical rigor and contextual understanding.

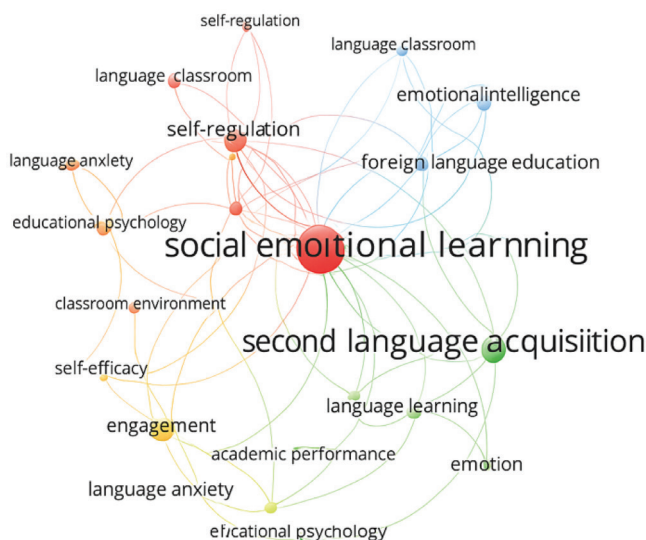


Figure 6. Co-occurrence network of keywords in SEL-SLA research (2000-2025) using VOSviewer

This Results and Analysis section provides a comprehensive overview of the key trends and findings from the bibliometric analysis of SEL and SLA research. The increasing trend of research output, the geographical distribution of contributions, leading authors and journals, emerging research themes, and citation network analysis offer valuable insights into the evolving nature of this interdisciplinary field. Additionally, understanding the methodological trends enriches our comprehension of how SEL strategies are applied in SLA research and the potential for future investigation in SEL and ELT.

Summary of Findings

This bibliometric analysis reveals several significant trends in the intersection of SEL and SLA. Over the past two decades, there has been a substantial rise in research publications exploring the intersection of SEL and SLA, with a noticeable acceleration in output from 2015 onwards, reflecting the growing recognition of emotional factors in language learning (Dörnyei, 2009; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Geographically, the United States, the United Kingdom, and China have emerged as leading contributors to this field, supported by strong academic institutions and research initiatives (Zins & Elias, 2006; Wong & Hoon, 2020). Prominent authors such as Zoltán Dörnyei, Patricia A. Alexander, and Lauri R. MacIntyre have made substantial contributions to the literature (MacIntyre, 2017; Dörnyei, 2009]. Influential institutions including Harvard University, the University of Cambridge, and the University of Michigan have been instrumental in advancing research that bridges emotional learning with language acquisition (Zins et al., 2007; Gardner, 2010).

Keyword co-occurrence analysis has identified key emerging themes, such as the role of affective factors in SLA, emotional intelligence, language anxiety, and classroom engagement (MacIntyre, & Gardner, 1991; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). These themes suggest a growing emphasis on understanding the learner's emotional experience as central to language learning success. Citation network analysis further revealed that foundational studies, such as those by Zins et al. (2007) on SEL frameworks, continue to inform and influence new research in the

field (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). This network highlights the interconnectedness between early foundational work and current research trends, illustrating the dynamic and evolving nature of SEL within SLA.

Theoretical Implications for SEL in SLA

The growing body of research that explores the connection between SEL and SLA suggests that emotional and social factors play a crucial role in language acquisition. Theoretical models of affective factors in SLA, such as motivation, anxiety, and emotional intelligence, are evolving to include insights from SEL frameworks. The findings of this bibliometric analysis suggest that researchers are increasingly integrating emotional regulation and self-awareness into SLA theory, aligning with broader educational psychology models that emphasise the whole learner (Zins et al., 2007; Goleman, 2006).

The rise of SEL in SLA theory challenges traditional SLA models, which often focus purely on cognitive aspects of language learning. By highlighting the importance of emotional competence in learners, SEL emphasises the interaction between mental, emotional, and social processes in language acquisition. This integration not only enhances SLA models but also enriches the understanding of how learners' emotional experiences shape their language development (Dörnyei, 2005).

Practical Implications for Language Educators

SEL Training for Educators

The increasing recognition of emotional factors in language learning calls for SEL training for teachers. Language educators must be equipped with the tools and strategies to foster students' emotional well-being in the classroom. This includes training teachers to recognise and address learners' emotional needs and to create a supportive environment that enhances language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2009; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

Integrating SEL into Language Teaching

SEL strategies, such as emotion regulation, social awareness, and empathy, should be integrated into language teaching curricula. These strategies can help reduce language anxiety, increase motivation, and enhance classroom engagement. Practical applications may include incorporating SEL-focused activities like role-playing, mindfulness exercises, and collaborative group work to foster a favourable emotional climate in the classroom (Wong & Hoon, 2020).

Creating Emotionally Supportive Learning Environments

Educators can benefit from understanding how to create safe, emotionally supportive learning environments that encourage risk-taking, creativity, and emotional expression. SEL serves as a valuable tool for reducing language anxiety and helping learners feel more comfortable participating in language exercises, thereby improving their overall second-language acquisition outcomes (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). While ample research examines the short-term effects of SEL interventions in SLA, longitudinal studies tracking the long-term impact of SEL strategies on language acquisition remain scarce. Investigating how SEL influences language learning over extended periods could provide deeper insights into the lasting emotional and cognitive benefits for learners (Dörnyei, 2009; MacIntyre, 2007). Additionally, much of this research is concentrated in Western contexts, particularly the U.S., the UK, and Europe, underscoring the need to explore how SEL impacts SLA across diverse cultural settings. Understanding the cultural influences on SEL implementation and language-learning outcomes is crucial for tailoring strategies to different student populations (Gardner, 2010).

With the increasing integration of technology into language education, digital learning environments pose unique emotional challenges for SLA learners, including feelings of isolation, reduced immediate feedback, and difficulties sustaining motivation. These challenges can affect learners' emotional competence and engagement, underscoring the importance of integrating SEL into online platforms and making it an underexplored area. Further research is needed to understand how digital tools can effectively foster emotional resilience, motivation, and communicative skills in virtual settings (Wong & Hoon, 2020).

Moreover, much of the current SEL and SLA research focuses on children and adolescents, leaving a significant gap in understanding its application for adult language learners, particularly in professional or academic contexts. Adult learners face distinct emotional challenges, such as balancing language learning with work and family responsibilities, and may benefit from SEL strategies designed to address these unique needs. Expanding research to include adults would enrich the interdisciplinary dialogue between education, psychology, and linguistics, providing practical insights for diverse learner populations (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

Future Research Directions

Future research should focus on the long-term effects of SEL interventions on SLA outcomes, examining how the emotional competencies developed through SEL influence learners' language proficiency and engagement over time (Dörnyei, 2009). Investigating how SEL strategies can be adapted to diverse cultural contexts is essential for understanding their universal application. Future studies could explore how cultural attitudes toward emotions, learning, and language acquisition shape the implementation and effectiveness of SEL in SLA (Gardner, 2010). Given the rise of online and blended learning, future studies should examine how SEL can be integrated into virtual language classrooms and how online tools can support learners' emotional development. The effectiveness of emotion-regulating apps, digital role-playing, and virtual collaboration tools should be explored (Wong & Hoon, 2020). Future research could investigate the specific emotional challenges faced by adult language learners, such as motivation, anxiety, and confidence, and how SEL strategies can address these challenges. Research could also focus on how SEL could be implemented in professional or workplace language training programs (MacIntyre, 2017). More interdisciplinary research that bridges SEL, educational psychology, and SLA could provide richer insights into how emotional learning influences language acquisition. Collaboration among psychologists, linguists, and educators could lead to new frameworks that integrate the cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of language learning (Zins et al., 2007; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

The Discussion section provides a synthesis of the findings from the bibliometric analysis, highlighting key trends in research, the growing importance of SEL in SLA, and the theoretical and practical implications of these trends. The discussion also highlighted significant research gaps and suggested directions for future studies to enrich further our understanding of how emotional and social factors influence second language acquisition.

By continuing to explore the intersection of SEL and SLA, future research can contribute to a more holistic approach to language teaching, one that addresses not only cognitive but also emotional and social dimensions of language learning. This bibliometric analysis has provided a comprehensive overview of the research landscape at the intersection of SEL and SLA. By analysing publication trends, geographical contributions, leading authors, key journals, and emerging research themes, this study has illuminated the significant role emotional and social factors play in language learning. The findings underscore the growing body of evidence supporting the integration of emotional intelligence, social awareness, and self-regulation strategies in language acquisition contexts (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; MacIntyre & Gregersen,

2012). By identifying key research patterns, such as the rise in publications and the concentration of research in specific countries, this analysis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how SEL frameworks are being applied within the SLA field (Gardner, 2010). Additionally, the bibliometric study highlights key authors and institutions advancing this interdisciplinary field, offering a valuable resource for researchers interested in exploring the intersections of education, psychology, and linguistics (Zins et al., 2007).

Furthermore, the identification of emerging themes, such as the reduction of language anxiety and the enhancement of learner motivation through SEL interventions, has illuminated practical implications for language educators looking to incorporate emotional and social learning into their teaching practices (MacIntyre, 2017; Wong & Hoon, 2020). The findings of this bibliometric analysis underscore the growing importance of emotional support in language acquisition. As the role of emotions in learning becomes increasingly recognised, it is evident that emotional and social skills are critical components of successful language learning outcomes (Zins et al., 2007). By fostering emotional resilience, empathy, and self-regulation, language learners are better equipped to navigate the challenges of second language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2009; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). However, as this field continues to evolve, there is a clear need for more integrated research that bridges the gaps between SEL and SLA. The current literature primarily focuses on the short-term effects of SEL strategies, and more longitudinal studies are needed to examine their lasting impact on learners' language proficiency (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Additionally, research is required across diverse cultural settings to determine how SEL interventions can be adapted to varying educational contexts (Gardner, 2010). The integration of technology in language learning, particularly in virtual and blended learning environments, offers a promising direction for future studies to investigate how digital platforms can support both language development and emotional growth (Wong & Hoon, 2020).

In conclusion, as emotional competencies gain prominence in educational research, future studies must continue to explore the role of SEL in SLA. This research holds the potential to reshape language teaching practices, making them more holistic, inclusive, and responsive to the emotional needs of learners (Zins et al., 2007). Further interdisciplinary collaboration across psychology, education, and linguistics will be key to advancing this field and ensuring that emotional and social learning are integral parts of the language-learning process (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Dörnyei, 2005).

Conclusion

This bibliometric analysis has effectively addressed key research questions concerning the development and current state of research on SEL in SLA. The findings confirm a notable growth in publication output over the past two decades, particularly from 2015 onwards, signalling increased scholarly attention to the emotional dimensions of language learning. The geographical distribution reveals that countries like the United States, United Kingdom, and China are leading contributors, supported by established academic institutions. Prominent authors and institutions have been identified as central to advancing the field. At the same time, emerging themes such as emotional intelligence, language anxiety, and learner engagement have been highlighted through keyword analysis.

Furthermore, citation network analysis reveals the enduring impact of foundational works, indicating strong interconnections between earlier frameworks and current studies. These insights collectively underscore the evolving yet significant role of SEL in SLA research and practice, paving the way for future empirical, interdisciplinary, and globally inclusive studies. Importantly, these findings have implications for language education policy and curriculum

design, encouraging the integration of SEL principles to foster more holistic and supportive language-learning environments.

References

- Aria, M. & Cuccurullo, C. (2017) Bibliometrix: An R-tool for comprehensive science mapping analysis, *Journal of Informetrics*, 11(4), pp 959–975.
- Baker, S. C., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2003). The role of gender and immersion in communication and second language anxiety. *Language Learning*, 53(2), 281–314. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.00224>
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.
- Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., Reyes, M. R., & Salovey, P. (2012). Enhancing academic performance and social and emotional competence with the RULER feeling words curriculum. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 22(2), 218–224. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2010.10.002>
- CASEL. (2020). *Social and emotional learning in schools: A framework for success*. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.
- Chavez, M. (2018). Social-emotional learning in language classrooms: Strategies for reducing language anxiety. *TESOL Journal*, 9(3), 207–222.
- Donthu, N., Kumar, S., Mukherjee, D., Pandey, N., & Lim, W. M. (2021). How to conduct a bibliometric analysis: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 133, 285–296.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2009). *The psychology of second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). *The psychology of the language learner revisited*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315779553>
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2011). *Teaching and researching motivation* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405–432. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Ellis, R. (2008). *The study of second language acquisition* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Gardner, R. C. (2010). *Motivation and second language acquisition: The socio-educational model*. Peter Lang.
- Goleman, D. (2006). *Social intelligence: The new science of human relationships*. Bantam Books.
- Greenberg, M. T., Domitrovich, C. E., & Bumbarger, B. K. (2001). The importance of social and emotional learning for young children's school success. *Early Childhood Research Bulletin*, 5, 1–29.
- Gregersen, T., MacIntyre, P. D., & Meza, M. D. (2014). The motion of emotion: Idiodynamic case studies of learners' foreign language anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 98(2), 574–588. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12084>
- Hernandez, T., et al. (2018). Emotional factors in SLA: A review of current trends in language acquisition research. *Journal of Second Language Acquisition*, 36(2), 104–119.
- Horwitz, E. K. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 112–126. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190501000071>
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x>
- Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 491–525. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308325693>
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- Kusuma, I. P. I., Walker, D., Ardi, P., & Budiarta, L. G. R. (2025). Guided vs. unguided social media-assisted language learning: An In-depth analysis of speaking performance, willingness to communicate, and social emotional learning. *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(3), 102455. <https://doi.org/10.29140/ajal.v8n3.102455>
- Liu, M., & Jackson, J. (2008). An exploration of Chinese EFL learners' unwillingness to communicate and foreign language anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(1), 71–86. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2008.00687.x>

- MacIntyre, P. D. (2007). Anxiety in language learning: Theoretical perspectives. In A. M. Pawlak (Ed.), *Language anxiety: Theory and practice* (pp. 1–21). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1991.tb00691.x>
- MacIntyre, P. D. (2017). *The psychology of language learning and teaching: Insights from the research*. Oxford University Press.
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991). Language anxiety: Its relationship to other anxiety constructs. *Language Learning*, 41(3), 513–534. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1991.tb00691.x>
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991). Methods and results in the study of language anxiety: A review of the literature. *Language Learning*, 41(1), 85–117. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1991.tb00677.x>
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gregersen, T. (2012). Emotions that facilitate language learning: The positive psychology perspective. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 2(2), 149–168. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2012.2.2.3>
- Mercer, S., & Dörnyei, Z. (2020). *Engaging language learners in contemporary classrooms*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108883560>
- Moral-Muñoz, J. A., Herrera-Viedma, E., Santisteban-Espejo, A., & Cobo, M. J. (2020). Software tools for conducting bibliometric analysis in science: An up-to-date review. *El Profesional de la Información*, 29(1), e290103.
- Oxford, R. L. (2016). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies: Self-regulation in context*. Routledge.
- Oxford, R. L. (2017). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies: Self-regulation in context* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315719146>
- Pawlak, M., et al. (2016). A bibliometric analysis of research on second language anxiety. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 6(2), 221–242.
- Pradheepa, A., Gurusamy, K., & Pushpanathan, T. (2025). The role of language games in enhancing vocabulary acquisition: A meta-analysis, *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(1), 2073. <https://doi.org/10.29140/ajal.v8n1.2073>
- Sangeetha, S., & Sridhivya, D. (2025). The power of translanguaging: Theoretical insights and empirical evidence on language acquisition and social-emotional learning. *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(1), 102406. <https://doi.org/10.29140/ajal.v8n1.102406>
- Schunk, D. H., & Zimmerman, B. J. (Eds.). (2012). *Motivation and self-regulated learning: Theory, research, and applications*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203831076>
- Tobias, R., & Foster, T. (2020). Bibliometric analysis in language learning and teaching: Trends, developments, and future directions. *Language Learning & Technology*, 24(2), 68–85.
- Wong, M. S., & Hoon, S. K. (2020). Social-emotional learning: A critical review of research in the educational context. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 112(2), 143–156. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000389>
- Zeidner, M., Matthews, G., & Roberts, R. D. (2011). The science of emotional intelligence: Knowns and unknowns. *Educational Psychologist*, 46(2), 68–91. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195181890.001.0001>
- Zins, J. E., & Elias, M. J. (2006). Social and emotional learning: Promoting the development of all students. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 17(2-3), 233–248. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532768xjepc1702&3_5
- Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (2007). *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* Teachers College Press.
- Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.). (2004). *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* Teachers College Press.