Global Insights into Idiom Teaching for English Language Learners: A 20-Year Bibliometric Review

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A B S T R A K

Idiom merupakan hal yang menantang namun sangat penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa, terutama bagi pelajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL). Meskipun banyak penelitian telah mengeksplorasi strategi pengajaran idiom, hanya ada sedikit analisis bibliometrik untuk melacak tren penelitian global di bidang ini. Penelitian ini mengisi kekosongan tersebut dengan melakukan analisis bibliometrik selama 20 tahun untuk mendapatkan pandangan yang komprehensif mengenai studi tentang idiom dalam pembelajaran EFL. Studi saat ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis jumlah publikasi yang telah dibuat, penulis yang telah berkontribusi, jumlah negara yang memproduksi artikel, tren kata kunci untuk menyoroti bidang minat yang sedang berkembang, dokumen yang paling banyak dikutip, dan negara yang paling banyak dikutip dalam artikel-artikel tentang pengajaran dan pembelajaran idiom. Metode Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) diterapkan untuk menganalisis 131 artikel yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2004 dan 2024 di database Scopus dengan menggunakan perangkat lunak VOSviewer dan Biblioshiny-R, dengan fokus pada idiom dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Temuannya menunjukkan tren publikasi artikel yang menunjukkan peningkatan kesadaran akan topik ini. Ahmadi A. adalah penulis yang menghasilkan jumlah publikasi terbesar di mana kontribusi yang signifikan ditemukan dari negara-negara seperti Iran dan Cina. Kata kunci yang sering muncul antara lain "idiom", "budaya", dan "penerjemahan" yang menyoroti pentingnya budaya dan penerjemahan dalam pembahasan idiom. Selain itu, artikel yang paling banyak dikutip dapat dilihat dari artikel Hayati dan negara yang paling banyak dikutip adalah Iran. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penelitian di masa depan harus mengeksplorasi lebih lanjut integrasi ekspresi idiomatik ke dalam kurikulum pembelajaran bahasa.

A B S T R A C T

Idioms are a challenging yet essential subject in language learning, especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Although many studies have explored idiom teaching strategies, there has been little bibliometric analysis to track global research trends in this area. This study fills this gap by conducting a 20-year bibliometric analysis to gain a comprehensive view of the study of idioms in EFL teaching. The current study aims to analyze the number of publications produced, authors who have contributed, the number of countries producing articles, keyword trends to highlight emerging areas of interest, the most cited documents, and the most cited countries in articles on idiom teaching and learning. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) method was applied to analyze 131 articles published between 2004 and 2024 in the Scopus database using VOSviewer and Biblioshiny-R software, focusing on idioms in English language teaching and learning. The findings show a trend of article publications indicating an increasing awareness of this topic. Ahmadi A. is the author who produced the largest number of publications where significant contributions were found from countries such as Iran and China. The keywords that often appear include "idiom", "culture", and "translation" which highlight the importance of culture and translation in the discussion of idioms. In addition, the most cited article can be seen from Hayati's article and the most cited country is Iran. This study concludes that future research should further explore the integration of idiomatic expressions into language learning curricula.

1. INTRODUCTION

Idioms are an important yet challenging feature of language acquisition, particularly for English learners. Native speakers frequently utilise idiomatic terms in ordinary speech that cannot be comprehended based on a literal understanding of their constituent components. It is critical to evaluate the larger context of an idiomatic statement or expression (Chang, 2018; Tabatabaee & Rezvani, 2019). Failure to do so may result in confusion between speaker and listener. A full comprehension of idioms allows language learners to become better

communicators and apply their knowledge in suitable settings, therefore mastery is required for fluency and cultural competence (Kecskes, 2021; Ngoc Tu & Thao, 2019).

Idioms are one of the components of language that require special attention in language programs and should not be delegated to a lesser priority in the curriculum because they are so common in written and spoken communication. This is due to the frequent use of idioms by native speakers during language vocabulary acquisition. As a result, knowing and comprehending idioms in the target language becomes even more important for efficient communication, fluency development, and intercultural competence (Hubers et al., 2022; Mohamadi, 2018). Due to the importance of learning idioms, it is highly recommended for English learners to learn idioms, idioms must be taught to language learners even at a reasonably high proficiency level. Idioms have a significant impact on language learning because of their significance in the classroom. As a result, ignorance of idiom meanings might impede language acquisition. For students who wish to acquire a second language, understanding idioms is actually just as crucial as understanding communicative elements. Since idioms are essential in learning English, it is important for language teachers to design different activities for students so that they can learn English idioms more efficiently (Jawas, 2019; Supriyanti, 2012).

Currently, the utilization of idioms learning for English language learners is being employed as a research study. In Indonesia itself, a previous study was conducted regarding strategies that students use to translate English idioms into Indonesian. The results showed that the students used four strategies. First, they use idioms that have the same meaning and form. Secondly, students translate by using idioms that have the same meaning, but with different form strategies. Students who do not know the same idiom from the original use the third strategy, which is translation by paraphrasing to see the whole context and paraphrasing to find the meaning, changing idioms into non-idioms to make it easier to understand the meaning. The last strategy is translation by omission, if paraphrasing the idiom is difficult then students will omit the whole idiom or sentence (Lee & Heinz, 2016; Lutviana & Mafulah, 2021). Another previous study on idiom learning approaches in the EFL classroom is on the use of role-playing strategies to improve students' idiomatic expression proficiency. This study discovered that while the first cycle was implemented well, it was not conducive. Based on later findings, existing issues have been addressed, and students' comprehension of learning has risen. This demonstrates a positive improvement in student performance between the first and second cycles, and it was discovered that students were interested in learning through the use of role-playing strategies (Arphattananon, 2021; Sari & Saputro, 2014).

Furthermore, the literature has shown the wide interest of researchers in idioms learning, not only in Indonesia but also in other countries. The study explored the perceptions of Iranian language learners studying in American institutions. Where learning was conducted using a website called drawing on the Idiom Diffusion Model created by the author, and the results obtained were. The survey results confirmed that the website was an effective and motivating way to learn idiomatic expressions (Alenezi, 2020; Peper et al., 2021). Whereas, another study developed a new learning mode in the development and application of teaching English idiomatic in the contemporary digital age by examining how Chinese EFL learners' idiomatic competence in learning English vivid phrasal (VP) idioms develops in classrooms that support WeChat use versus classrooms that support traditional language teaching modes without WeChat (Istima & Polisida, 2016; Manik et al., 2013).

Despite the growing importance of idioms in English learning for English language learners, the existing literature lacks comprehensive bibliometric studies that map the development of research in this field. Bibliometric analysis provides valuable insights into the productivity, impact, and trends within a given research domain, yet no study has systematically examined idioms learning for English language learners from this holistic perspective (Mahendra et al., 2018; Shahriari et al., 2019). Bibliometric analysis is a methodology that identifies global contributions, trends, and research that will provide valuable insights into how idiomatic teaching or learning practices have evolved and where further research is needed (Abad-Segura et al., 2020; Qureshi et al., 2021). The novelty of this study lies in the use of a comprehensive bibliometric analysis to examine global research trends in idiom learning for English language learners to understand how research in this area has evolved and what future directions might be expected.

Therefore, this research fills the gap in the literature by conducting a bibliometric analysis on idioms learning among English language learners. This study conducts a bibliometric analysis of idiom learning for English language learners by using VOSviewer and Biblioshiny-R software, offering insights into the most influential authors, countries, and emerging trends in the field. The objective of this study is to identify: 1) number of publications that have been created on the teaching of idioms each year, 2) authors who have contributed to this field, 3) the number of country' productions on the teaching of idioms, 4) the keyword trends to highlight emerging areas of interest in the field, 5) the most cited documents on the teaching of idioms, and 6) most cited country on the teaching of idioms.

2. METHOD

In this study, researchers will conduct bibliometric analysis. Bibliometrics is a quantitative analysis technique that measures the number of papers published in the literature that is the object of research (Donthu et al., 2021). In this study, VOSviewer and Biblioshiny-R software were used to visualize network mapping of co-authorship, co-occurrence, citations, bibliometric coupling, and others. Biblioshiny-R software was chosen because it can present bibliometric data in the form of tables, lines, treemaps, and world maps, besides that this software can provide data analysis results in excel as a whole. Meanwhile, VOSviewer was chosen because it can present data in the form of co-authorship, co-occurrence, and others in the form of links related to the relationship between each object with three views, namely network visualization, overlay visualization, and density visualization. In addition, less relevant terms can be removed from VOSviewer and the frequency of keywords can be changed as needed (Al Husaeni & Nandiyanto, 2022; Ejaz et al., 2022).

The data collection was conducted using the PRISMA standards for systematic analyses. First of all, the first researcher searched data from the Scopus database on the "article title" of "English Idioms". The search generated 168 publications after screening the complete year of idioms study. It was discovered that the years prior to 2004 had many inconsistencies in article output, therefore the selection criteria employed a 20-year time range. Furthermore, in the data selection process in addition to the range, the selection was made on 'document type', 'source type', and 'publication stage'. Therefore, this study only included publications in the final stages of publication and those sourced from journals; articles published in book chapters and proceedings were eliminated. After eliminating journals that did not fulfill the criteria, the first researcher checked whether there were duplicates in the Scopus database and removed them to avoid duplication. Thus, from this data process, 131 articles were included as show in Figure 1.
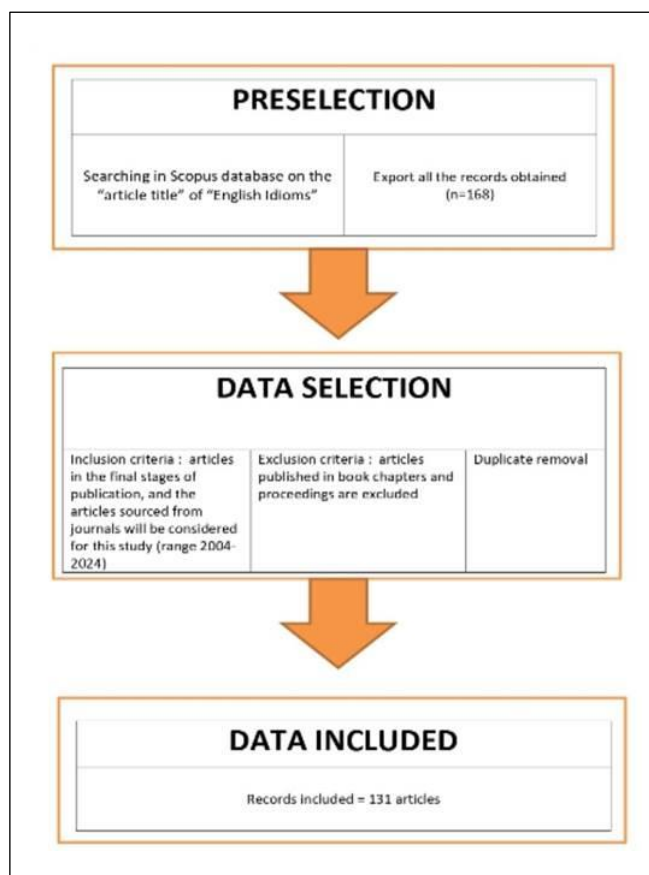

Figure 1. The Data Process

Although the data analyzed only amounted to 131, the diverse contexts or trend focuses of the article helped the researchers to conduct this bibliometric analysis. The process mainly consisted of preselection, data selection, duplicate removal, and data inclusion. The flowchart for data collection can be seen in Figure 1. Furthermore, to ensure the validity of the data collection and analysis, the second researcher reviewed the results obtained from the abovementioned steps to make sure that inter-rater consistency was achieved. After both data

analysts reached an agreement on all of the collected data, they moved on to the interpretation analysis stage, which was based on the results of the established data collection and analysis.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result
Annual Scientific Production

Annual Scholarly Production is a bibliometric data analysis that displays the rise of article production in terms of time units each year. From 2004 to 2024, scholarly production statistics on the issue of acquiring idioms for English language learners were reviewed, and the results had many inconsistencies in the numbers. The lowest publications occurred in 2005 and 2009 with 0 articles. Although there are inconsistencies related to the increase and decrease in the number of publications each year, the articles published since 2011 have never shown 0. This can be interpreted that each year there are indications of an increased awareness of idiom learning for English language learners. An illustration of the annual scientific production is depicted in Figure 2.
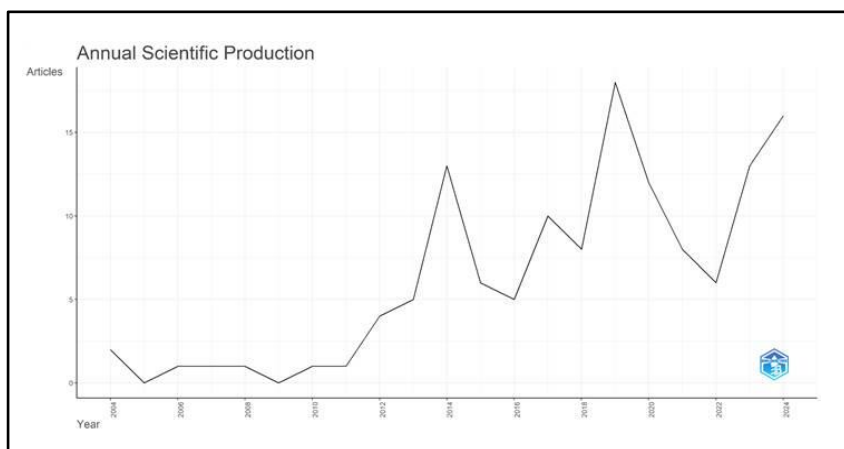

Figure 2. Annual Scientific Production from 2004 to 2024

Most Relevant Author

Most Relevant Author is a bibliometric analysis result that includes people who have published the most works on a specific research topic. The results of bibliometric analysis using R and visualization using VOSviewer get as many as 248 authors in this field. Bibliometric analysis using R displays the 10 most relevant authors which can be seen in Figure 3.
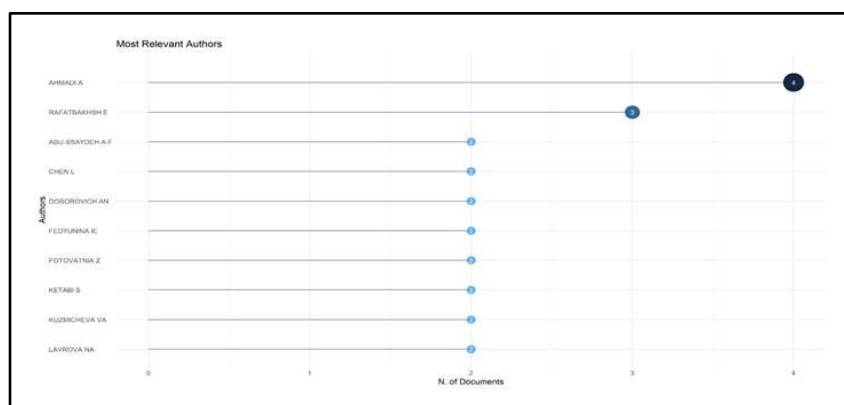

Figure 3. Top 10 Most Relevant Authors by Articles

Base on Figure 3, the author with the most publications on the topic of idioms in teaching English to EFL learners, namely Ahmadi A. with four articles, followed by Rafatbakhsh E. with three articles. As for the other 8 authors, namely Abu-Ssaydeh A.F, Chen L, Doborovich A, N., Fedyunina I.E., Fotovatnia Z., Ketabi S., Kuzmicheva V.A., and Lavrova N.A., published two articles. Then the VOSviewer visualization is show in Figure 4.
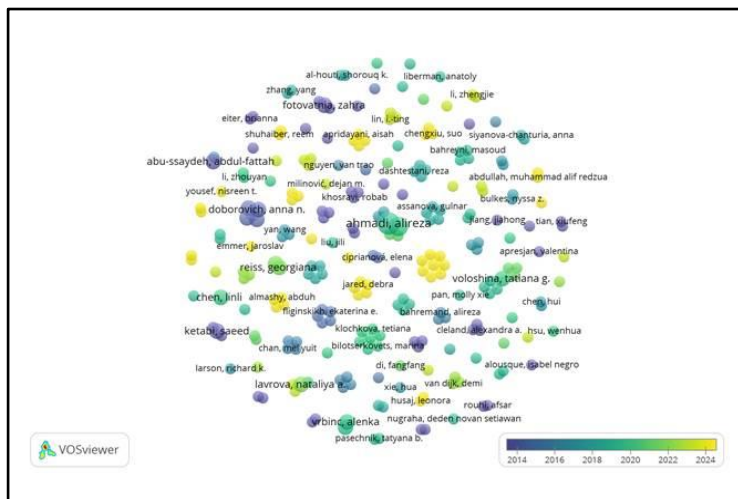
Figure 4. Visualization of The Most Relevant Authors by Articles

Base on Figure 4 presents the author network in the idioms learning study. This network includes 248 items with 119 clusters. Items in this network represent authors identified by the number of articles they published, while clusters represent co-authorship among authors. Larger items indicate that an author is more influential in that domain than other authors. In addition, if the color is lighter (yellow), it explains that the publication by the author is more recent, while the darker indicates that the publication of the article has been done in the past few years.

Country Scientific Production

According to the bibliometric analysis, several were collected from countries that published the most articles linked to idiom learning for English language learners, including Iran, China, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Jordan, Malaysia, Romania, Ukraine, and Canada. Iran and China are the top-ranked countries, measured in terms of the quantity of publications, significantly higher than other countries. Iran with 39 published articles and China with 38 published articles played a dominant role in publishing articles in this field. Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, USA are the next countries to publish articles with a total of 9, followed by Jordan, Malaysia, Romania, Ukraine with 8 articles and Canada with 6 articles. The top 10 country production rankings with idiom learning topics are shown in Figure 5.
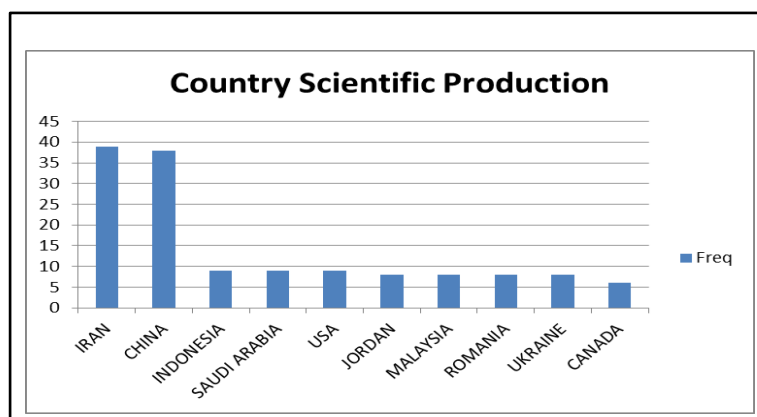

Figure 5. Top 10 Country Scientific Production

Furthermore, the USA itself has started this research from 2016 and has increased. Although in 2019 to 2022 producing articles is constant or stable, there is no decrease in production. In addition to the USA, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia produced articles starting in 2018. Although the production of articles each year feels constant, the production has not decreased, and there is an increase in the same amount in 2024. This shows that the production over time of each country is increasing every year, especially in 2024, which can be interpreted that the topic of idioms learning is starting to attract the world's attention to the importance of learning by English language learners. Country production over time can be seen in Figure 6.
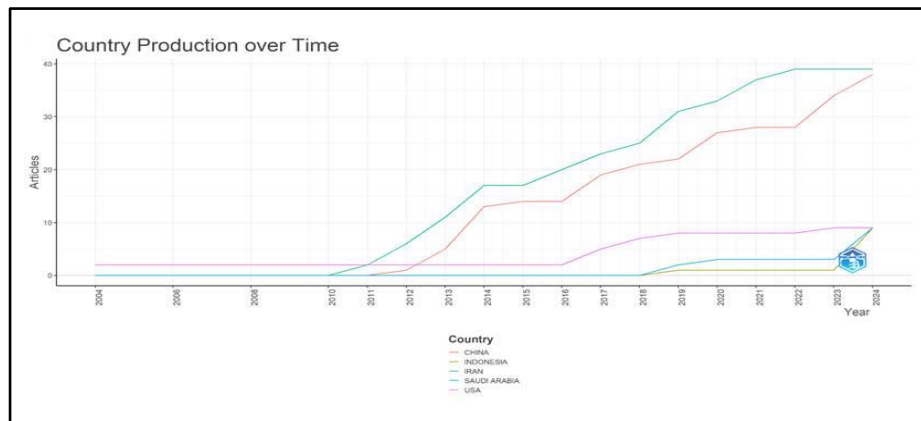
Figure 6. Country Production Over Time

Most Frequent Keywords

The most popular keywords are the keywords used by various authors in their research, as shown in the figure below. VOSviewer analyzed 340 items, 31 clusters and 1010 links. Items here are the keywords analyzed, clusters are a collection of keywords that are related and usually appear together, while links are the relationship between one keyword and another. In VOSviewer, the keywords that appear most often have a larger bubble size, while keywords with small bubble sizes indicate that the keywords are rarely used. As shown in the figure 7 below. it can be seen that.
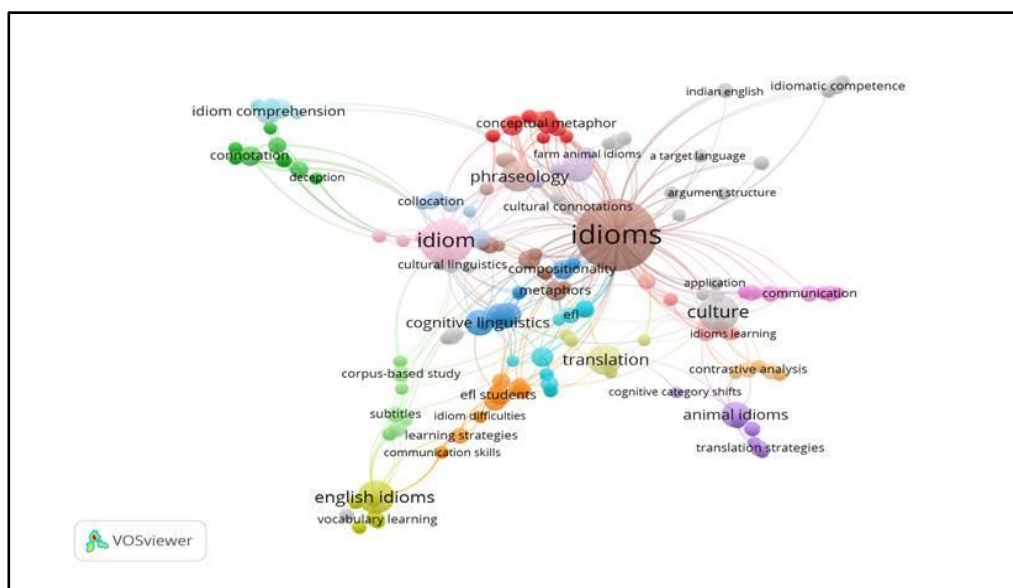

Figure 7. Most Frequent Keywords

As shown in Figure 7, it is observed that the most frequent keywords are idioms, idiom, culture, English idioms, translation, animal idioms, metaphors, and cognitive linguistics are the most frequently used keywords by the authors in their research.

Most Global Cited Documents

The top ten authors with high document citations are: (1) Hayati (2013) with 74 citations; (2) Nordmann (2014) with 33 citations; (3) Mohamadi (2018), with 28 citation; (4) Pitzl (2016) with 26 Citation; (5) Ashby (2006) with 26 citations; (6) Muller (2018) with 23 citations; (7) Bulks (2017) with 21 citations; (8) Ahmadi (2017) with 15 citations; (9) Grami (2020) with 13 citations; and (10) Miller (2020) with 13 citations. The amount of citations is considered to be a fairly influential document for global scholars looking at works relevant to the research field. A published document's influence on other publication documents can be determined by the number

of citations; the more citations a document has, the greater its influence on the research topic under consideration. Figure 8 displays the most frequently cited documents on the topic of idiom learning for English language learners.
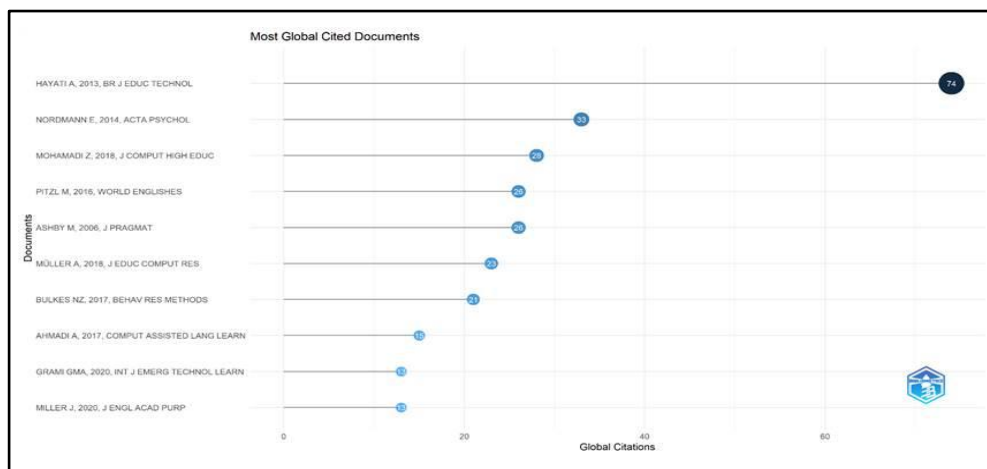

Figure 8. Authors with Highest Citation of Documents

The most cited country. Among the countries, Iran tops the list with 130 citation, followed by the United Kingdom with 59 citation, the USA with 51 citation, Austria with 26 citations, Australia with 23 citation, China with 17 citation, Saudi Arabia with 15 citations, Spain with 14 citations, Afghanistan with 11 citations, and United Arab Emirates with 8 citations. Cited country is show in Figure 9.
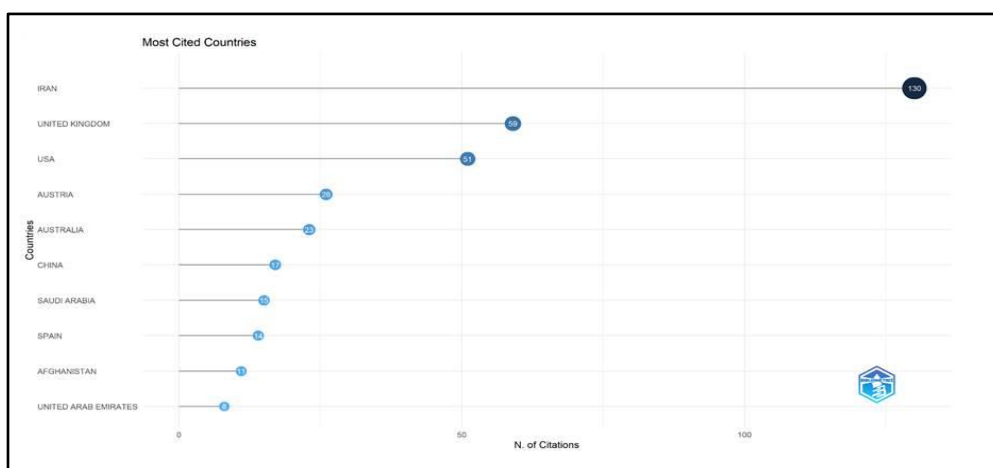

Figure 9. The Most Cited Country

Discussion

In the annual scientific production data, it can be seen that recent research related to idioms has begun to increase since 2011, which never showed 0. Especially in 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2024 where articles on the topic of idioms began to increase. The article "It is all 'English' to me: Can Cross-Cultural Overlaps Facilitate the Teaching of L2 Idioms?" was one of several that introduced new trends in 2024. The idea of cross-cultural overlaps is introduced in this article to help English language learners acquire idioms. According to the study's findings, students can profit from the cross-linguistic overlaps between the two situations, and they will learn significantly more if semantic overlaps are taught more effectively. As a result, it is wise for language instructors to intentionally emphasize semantic congruence and pair up L1 and L2 idiom words that have similar meanings (Luo et al., 2022; Ma'yuuf & Hasan, 2021). This most recent study offers fresh perspectives on the field of teaching English, particularly in relation to idiom comprehension.

The most relevant author on the topic of idiom research for learners. One of Ahmadi A.'s four publications from 2019 discusses creating more authentic and organized materials to improve the teaching and learning of idioms by categorizing them according to common themes and subjects using an extensive corpus. It is based on the traditional approach and intuition-based materials commonly used in learning or teaching idioms, that this trend of using corpora was developed. In the further research, in collaboration with Rafatbakhsh E, based on idioms

which are one of the important components but quite difficult to teach and learn, and they are often neglected especially in ESL/EFL settings, they developed their further research by using corpus linguistics in prioritizing materials in language classes based on frequency information (Hubers et al., 2022; Ngoc Tu & Thao, 2019). This certainly brings a new trend into the world of idiom learning for ELL students.

On the related side, the countries that contribute to the production of articles related to idioms learning for English language learners have increased from year to year in terms of country production. Iran itself has developed idioms learning in 2010, and has increased every year, although in 2014 it did not increase but the country's scientific production has not decreased or stabilized. Iran is a country that makes significant contributions, which is consistent with a study conducted by other study find out how Iranian EFL learners experienced acquiring and employing English idioms (Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020). The data revealed that these students held an extremely positive mindset. This is also consistent with some studies that looked at the difficulties Iranian EFL secondary school students face in understanding English idioms, and the results showed that the participants complained that idioms were difficult primarily because they were not taught well in class and were not part of the subject syllabus, so they needed more strategies to overcome such difficulties, such as teachers providing students with idiomatic expressions in context. The second treatment group included MALLs that were contextualized or used podcasts to learn Iranian English idioms and vocabulary (Jahanbakhsh et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2023). They found that Iranian students had a very positive attitude towards picking up English idioms, which is why the Iranian researchers are paying more attention to this subject.

In addition, China began publishing articles in 2011 about idiom learning for English language learners. Initially, the graph following 2011 did not exhibit a significant growth, but following 2012, the production began to rise and did not decline. One of the concerns for China to explore more about this topic is because China has its own idioms that are very different from English idioms. As a result, Chinese EFL learners frequently struggle to understand idioms because of these differences and because the Chinese curriculum does not cover idioms, which makes it difficult for Chinese high school students to understand idioms (Li et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2024). Therefore, research on idioms was conducted considering these issues.

Subsequently, in the topic of the most frequent keywords, the idioms keyword itself is the most widely used, it can be seen that idioms have the largest bubble size which indicates that idioms is the most frequently used keyword. Keyword idioms in VOSviewer analysis have the most links as many as 127 links. This means that keywords with high frequency have a close relationship with each other. In the analysis related to this topic, the keyword "idioms" often appears closely related to metaphors, idiomatic competence, corpus, proverbs, figurative language, teaching activities, English, and others. "Idioms" were also found to be related to culture, cultural elements as in the example also apply to other languages (Kecskes, 2021; Tabatabaee & Rezvani, 2019). Culture in research on idioms learning for English language learners has a wide range of links. Thus, it is understandable that language learners will come across and be exposed to idiomatic expressions as part of their language learning process if figurative language—such as idioms, metaphors, and metonymies—is widely used in everyday life and is ingrained in the culture (Alenezi, 2020; Heru, 2018). Because of the cultural context, each word, phrase, clause, and sentence is unique to that society. Although some cultural terms can be transmitted based on their literal meaning, others cannot be conveyed using literal meaning. Idiomatic expressions must be learnt and understood in order to gain a deeper grasp of a language and culture. This becomes the concern of translation as each culture has distinctive characteristics that idioms are relatively stable language forms with significant cultural connotations that persist in terms of meaning and structure (Bai, 2020; Wambugu, 2014). Therefore, some studies combine the concept of approach with culture in learning idioms.

Furthermore, "idioms" are strongly tied to semantic analysis and cognitive linguistics, as many cognitive semantics specialists emphasise the reasoning of idioms above arbitrary language patterns, with a focus on the importance of metaphor in idiom comprehension. Cognitive semantics enables students to better comprehend, memorise, and use English idioms. Cognitive linguists agree that cognition is a thinking process that aids in determining the meaning of the idiom expressed. In other words, the cognitive perception of an idiom is primarily concerned with guessing and interpreting its meaning (Andesta et al., 2018; Krause et al., 2017).

The other most frequently used word is translation, animal idioms. Translation of idioms is one of the many research trends related to the topic of idioms learning. Translation is done to learn idioms and understand the meaning of these idioms to be translated into the target language. One of the articles that discusses the translation of idioms is an article which investigates the translation of idiomatic expressions of the English version of "Bumi Manusia" novel. The study determined what kinds of translation techniques translators used to replicate SL idioms in TL (Hubers et al., 2022; Ngoc Tu & Thao, 2019). In addition, another study also discusses the translation of idioms in movies, stating that word or text translation is a difficult task because the translator must not only understand the language to be translated, but must also be able to capture the message in the text and reproduce it. From this study, idioms are translated in several ways such as using the same meaning but different forms, paraphrasing, and omission was also developed (Mohamadi, 2018). Furthermore, animal idioms are related to idioms that have elements of animal words but cannot be translated literally. Two of studies that discuss the

animal idioms are first discussed animal imagery metaphors, language speakers are used to describe conditions or reality in their life by using animal metaphors (Huda, 2019) and a study that compare animal idioms in English and Chinese from a cultural perspective, aiming to make individuals realise cultural differences, develop an awareness of other cultures, and employ animal idioms effectively, in order to foster intercultural communication more effectively and appropriately (Cole & Feng, 2015; Wen et al., 2020).

In addition, from the data presented, the other researchers have different focuses on their research, such as the extended examination and interpretation of decomposability in relation to other idiomatic phrases, such as literality, meaning, and familiarity by previous study that investigates the use tools such as the collocation and idioms checker to evaluate English writing online and automatically (Wei et al., 2024; Yılmaz et al., 2020). Other study the effects of project-based learning (PBL) and electronic project-based learning (EPBL) on gaining and maintaining knowledge of English idioms by Iranian intermediate learners were examined (Aliftika et al., 2019; Kwon et al., 2021). The documents were cited based on a focus that matched the trends among researchers related to the field of idioms learning.

Furthermore, in the most cited country data, Iran is in the top rank because many researchers in Iran are interested in the topic of idioms learning because Iran has varied strategies related to idiom learning. The first study conducted is about the effectiveness of using Instagram as a smartphone-assisted method for teaching idioms to Iranian upper-intermediate EFL students. This study focuses on several keywords such as information and communications technology (ICT), Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), idioms (Suryani, 2018; Wahyuni & Kurniawan, 2019). In addition, a study that examined the utilisation of films to teach idiomatic vocabulary in English Language Teaching (ELT), emphasised the opportunities and difficulties that teachers may encounter when using films into their teaching strategies in order to maximise the effectiveness of learning (Damar et al., 2017; Suryana et al., 2021). Thus, that study also develops trends where researchers combine digital media that can enhance idiom learning in collaborative educational settings. This could be one of the reasons why Iran is the most cited country with up to 130 citations.

Teachers should design interactive exercises that allow students to practice idioms in context, such as through role-playing, conversation simulations, or multimedia resources like movie clips and social media. For curriculum developers, the results indicate a need to incorporate idioms into language learning curricula at all levels, not just for advanced learners. Developing structured, thematic idiom modules that align with key cultural and communicative goals will enhance students' overall language proficiency. Additionally, curriculum developers should explore collaborative learning approaches, leveraging cultural overlaps and translation techniques to make idiom learning more accessible and engaging. Future research should explore more innovative methods for teaching idioms, particularly by using data from diverse educational contexts and incorporating more comprehensive databases. Expanding the scope of analysis to include collaborative efforts across countries and educational systems will provide further insights into best practices for teaching idioms to EFL learners

4. CONCLUSION

This bibliometric analysis of idiom learning for English language learners reveals important trends and insights. The growing global interest in idiomatic expressions underscores the need to prioritize idioms in EFL curricula to enhance students' fluency and cultural competence. Significant contributions from countries like Iran and China demonstrate a strong focus on idiom teaching strategies, while emerging keywords such as "culture" and "translation" highlight the importance of contextualizing idioms within broader cultural frameworks. For teachers, integrating idioms into everyday lessons can be highly beneficial for learners, particularly when using authentic materials, cross-cultural comparisons, and technology-assisted tools, such as mobile apps or online platforms.

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