Discovering the Role of Student Motivation in EFL Learning: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract. This article presents a systematic review of students' motivation to learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) over the past decade. The study examines publication trends, identifies relevant authors, analyzes article production from various countries and their collaborations, and explores commonly used keywords on this topic. Through bibliometric analysis, this research addresses gaps in previous studies, which predominantly focused on specific contexts or approaches. Instead, it provides broader findings that are not confined to certain settings. Data were collected from the Scopus database and analyzed with RStudio, which served as the primary tool for this study. Article selection adhered to the PRISMA guidelines, yielding 176 relevant articles published between 2014 and 2024. The findings indicate that research on student motivation in EFL learning has been consistently pursued over the past decade. This study also identifies an author from Indonesia as notable. Meanwhile, countries in the Middle East have produced the most publications and exhibit the highest collaboration on this topic. Additionally, the findings reveal that "learning" is the most frequently used term in research regarding student motivation in EFL learning.

Keywords: Student motivation, EFL, Bibliometric analysis

Introduction

Students' motivation in language learning remains a central focus in educational research due to its significant impact on language acquisition outcomes. Motivation determines students' engagement, persistence, and success in acquiring foreign or second languages (L2). According to Hadfield and Dörnyei (2013, p. 1), motivated students learn about L2 more productively than less motivated students. The researchers Liu and Chen (2015, p. 1) shared a similar view and stated that the lack of motivation may lead to disengagement, test failure, and anxiety, which adversely inhibit students' chances of English language learning. The complexity of motivation in language learning can best be understood using key theories such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) which underlines the role of intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and competence, and Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 2002) which shows how setting specific and challenging goals increases motivation and achievement. Despite the robustness of these theories, their practical application in modern educational contexts, particularly with the rise of digital learning environments and post-pandemic educational practices further exploration (Muthmainnah et al., 2024; Ushioda, 2011; Dörnyei, 2019). Recent studies have delved into various factors influencing student motivation.

For example, Kondrateva et al. (2023) highlight that enhancing motivation is a complex process requiring both teacher support and personal student effort. According to Drakulić (2019, p. 364), a supportive environment created by teachers is a critical and very powerful

factor in motivating students. The motivational factors identified by Ebata (2008) include teacher-student relationships, experiences of success and satisfaction, and self-confidence. This study was conducted to fill the gaps in the previous literature. Like the gap in the research by Hasanzadeh et al. (2024), which examines the role of teachers in providing or withholding empathy in terms of students' motivation. The results are limited, as the authors only used questionnaires as the research instruments. Likewise, the study of Aldaghri (2024) examines the effectiveness of the flipped learning FL model concerning student motivation. He notes some positive changes as enhanced classroom participation and self-autonomy of the learners (p. 870). Aldaghri's research method has a restricted scope, and his mixing of approaches restricts generalizability. These gaps thus seem to indicate a need for an overall, systematic approach to grasping motivation in a wide set of contexts, methodologies, and timelines. The fragmented nature of motivational studies calls for comprehensive analyses to trace the trends, contributors, and networks.

With the gap in previous research (Hasanzadeh, 2024; Aldaghri, 2024), especially on the problem of limited research scope which only narrows to a specific focus and not to the general picture of the role of student motivation in EFL learning, also the gap in the methodology used, this study is held which aims to fill the gap. This study aims to present a systematic review of motivation research in EFL learning over the past decade, with the object of study being broader using bibliometric analysis. According to Passas (2024), bibliometric analysis is perfect for identifying research gaps, major publications, and trends that develop over time. This Bibliometric study is important because it examines the evolution of annual publications, whereby it can be known that the research topic regarding the role of student motivation in EFL learning can be increased or decreased. In addition, this study also aims to identify leading authors and their contributions so that this can make it easier for future researchers to collaborate or even find the main reference for research on the topic of student motivation in EFL learning. Furthermore, the study is also useful for knowing the mapping of countries active in publishing and their collaborative networks, as well as the key keywords and trends that define motivational research in the context of EFL. This study will address the fragmented nature of motivational research knowledge by offering a structured and data-driven approach.

This research departs from four specific research questions that guide this study:
1. How many studies have been conducted each year on "the role of students' motivation in EFL learning" over the last 10 years?
2. Who are the most relevant authors in this field, and how many articles have they produced?
3. Which countries produce more articles, and what are the patterns of international collaboration?
4. What are the most relevant and trending keywords regarding students' motivation in EFL learning?

Answers to such questions will contribute to the added value of this study since a complementary, macro-level analysis of the existing micro-level studies is provided. Passas (2024) explains that bibliometric analysis not only maps the current landscape of motivational research but also identifies under-explored areas and emerging trends, providing valuable insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers. The present research advances the understanding of motivation in EFL contexts and further informs the development of more effective evidence-based teaching practices.

Theoretical Framework
Motivation

Motivation is a word that is often used by teachers in learning when they want to provide students with an understanding of successful learning and unsuccessful learning. Hadfield and Dörnyei (2014) said that persistence, enthusiasm, and dedication are the keys to determining the success or failure of learning. Hadfield and Dörnyei also believe that motivation is very important in the success of learning, so the teacher's ability to motivate

students is needed as a measure of teaching effectiveness. According to Hadfield and Dörnyei, rather than just giving rewards or punishments in learning, teachers can create various other types of activities as a strategy to motivate students. However, this is not deemed easy, considering that this is the second most difficult thing faced by teachers after difficulties in managing discipline in the classroom (p. 1).

In connection with the role of motivation in EFL learning, Ryan and Deci (2020) stated that an outcome is not more important than good and maintained psychological conditions and well-being in students. In fact, according to them, schools should pay more attention and provide facilities that can support students' mental health because not all students are at the same level to be able to achieve the cognitive goals that are usually the focus of many schools. According to Ryan and Deci (2020) and Apriani (2016), basic support provided by the surrounding environment, including schools and teachers, is an important point in maintaining students' mental well-being. This is a form of inclusiveness in this environment, which can eliminate disparities caused by age, ethnicity, and culture. These results are in accordance with research on Self-Determination Theory, which was also put forward by both of them.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory assumes that human nature has an active tendency that is then expressed in the form of intrinsic motivation, where intrinsic motivation itself is the initial focus of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020). According to Ryan and Deci, intrinsic motivation is something that naturally occurs due to human desires and feelings of comfort and satisfaction to encourage them to do something without any interference or influence that is external or outside themselves. Both of them also said that intrinsic motivation has clear benefits in the realm of formal education. For example, the increasing performance of high school students and also college students in Canada and Sweden is often influenced by the existence of intrinsic motivation within them (Taylor et al., 2014, as cited in Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Over time, the Theory of Self-Determination developed by not only focusing on intrinsic motivation but also extrinsic motivation, or motivation that comes from external to the human self. However, according to Ryan and Deci (2020), from an SDT perspective, the definition of extrinsic motivation is not limited only to encouragement from outside humans. Ryan and Deci divide extrinsic motivation into four subtypes; external regulation - related to encouragement or coercion from outside because it is controlled by humans themselves, introjected regulation - in the form of encouragement from outside because of the desire to achieve something or anxiety about self-esteem, identification regulation - motivation that comes from a feeling of admiration for the value of an activity or even support for that activity, integration motivation - the urge to do something which is usually caused not only by an assessment of something, but also by the birth of interest in that thing (Apriani, 2017). The importance of SDT in learning is proven by the results of research by Hwang and Chang (2024), which found that SDT applied to learning media in the form of games made nursing students have better attitudes during the EMP (English Medical Professional) program than students who used conventional approaches as the medium.

Goal-setting Theory

Apart from Self-Determination Theory, research on student motivation in EFL learning also refers to the theory put forward by Locke and Latham, namely Goal-Setting Theory. Goals are created because they aim to force someone to achieve the goal themselves (Cheng, 2023). According to Locke and Latham (2019, p. 97), a good goal begins with a clear key concept to measure the success of something. For example, to measure a person's best goal, they can standardize what form of success causes their satisfaction and what form of failure causes their dissatisfaction. Locke and Latham (1990) stated that someone with specific goals and achievements is superior when compared to those who only aim to be the best without specific goals because this is considered too biased (as cited

in Locke & Latham, 2019). Apart from having to be specific about a goal, hard and difficult efforts are also needed to achieve these goals; this is what is defined as effective goals (Locke & Latham, 2019).

Locke and Latham (2019) also identified that there are four moderators for the goals themselves. The first is feedback, when goals run together with feedback, both are considered more efficient at improving performance than alone. Second, what is considered a moderator for goals is commitment; without commitment, a goal will be in vain and will not provide any results for one's efforts. The moderator for the third goal is skill. Someone who has goals but does not have the ability to carry them out will not be able to achieve their goals. Finally, the fourth moderator for goals is situational factors. A goal is greatly influenced by situational factors in the surrounding environment, this influence can become a facilitator or even a threat to the goal itself (p. 98). Furthermore, Locke and Latham (2019) found that many studies stated that goals have a correlation with satisfaction. The more difficult a goal is, the less likely it is to be achieved. However, when a goal is felt to be easy, the level of satisfaction obtained will be smaller (p. 98).

Furthermore, regarding the relationship between Goal-Setting Theory and its application to learning, Locke and Latham (2019) said that making specific goals at the beginning is useful as a guide that acts as a motivator in carrying out an activity. Apart from that, according to Locke and Latham, structuring learning goals at the beginning can also cover the impact of previous performance on following performance. Moreover, in the learning context, learning goals are considered effective when there is negative feedback delivered in response to a learning task (Cianci et al., 2010, as cited in Locke & Latham, 2019). Locke and Latham also said that it is visible that the existence of choices and several efforts to achieve a goal (including goal setting) is a natural trait possessed by humans, which is the core form of something called "motivation".

Building upon the gaps identified in previous research (Hasazandeh et al., 2024; Aldaghri, 2024), this study seeks to provide broader insights through a bibliometric approach. This research was carried out at the end of 2024 using Scopus as the data source, so that the bibliometric research results obtained in this research came from data that existed at that time.

Material and Method

The aim of conducting this bibliometric research is to enhance the trends of research on the topic of Student motivation in EFL learning. Bibliometrics demonstrates its value in handling large quantities of scientific data and its important role in research impact (Passas, 2024, p. 1014). According to Page et al. (2021), this technique can answer questions that may not be answered by individual research (p. 1). To reach the research goals of this study, the Scopus database was designated as the primary data source by the authors because the Scopus database provides complete data, including titles, authors, institutions, countries, and other publication information (Christian et al., 2024). Moreover, according to Can and Hou (2021), a vast collection of high-quality, peer-reviewed scholarly literature is contained in Scopus, providing extensive coverage of academic research from around the world. For this bibliometric analysis, the data collection process was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009), as illustrated in Figure 1.
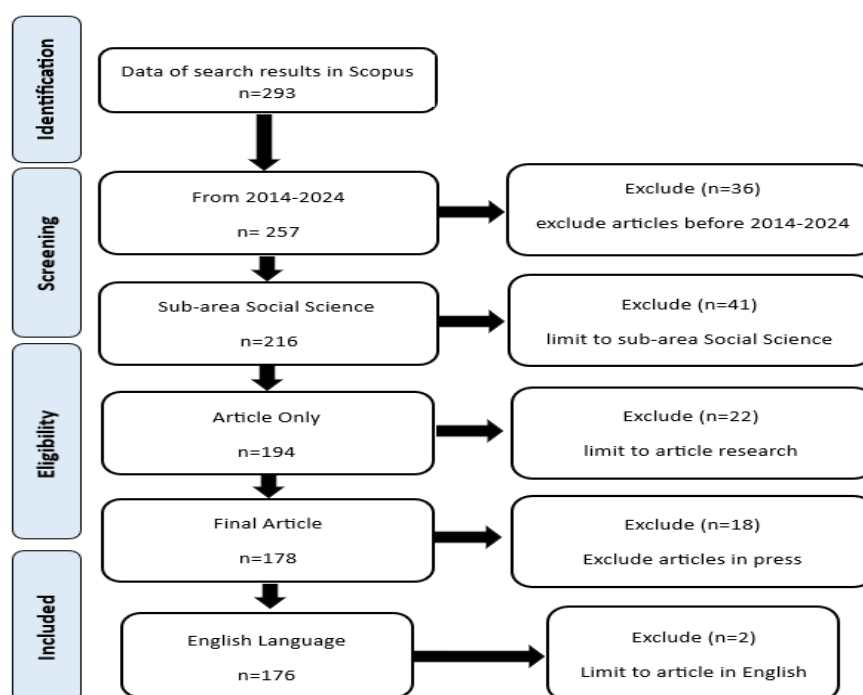
Figure 1
Systematic literature review diagram flow
PRISMA flow diagram dealing with database, searches, number of abstracts screened, and
final article

This bibliometric analysis was conducted in November 2024. The process of data collection is presented in Figure 1. Following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA), the authors began gathering data using the search terms "the OR role OR of OR Students' OR Motivation" and "in OR EFL OR Learning on the Scopus database. As a result of this step, the authors collected a total of 293 articles shown by the database. After gathering the initial data, the authors continued the data collection process by applying a publication date filter to include only articles published from 2014 – 2024, covering the last decade. After applying the publication filter, researchers obtained 257 articles by excluding articles that were published outside of 2014-2024. In the next step, the authors refined the search by applying a filter to focus solely on articles within the field of Social Science, ensuring that any documents outside this area were excluded. After applying the filter, the resulting dataset comprised 216 articles specifically within the field of Social Science. Next, the researchers filtered out any document types that were not articles, which left them with 194 articles. They then focused only on the final published articles, reducing the number to 178. Finally, by only including articles in English, they ended up with a total of 176 articles for their analysis.

After getting the final dataset results, the authors downloaded the data records from Scopus in BibTex file format and then exported them into Biblioshiny in RStudio. Biblioshiny in RStudio is a software tool designed for analyzing data related to various aspects of academic publishing that can help users examine the most relevant authors, the distribution of scientific publications and citations by country, the affiliations of researchers, the most productive journals, frequently used keywords, and the relevant keywords chosen by authors (Ivan et al., 2024). The data exported to Biblioshiny in RStudio will be analyzed using the same software. Once the data is successfully loaded and analyzed, the results will be displayed within Biblioshiny.

Results and Discussion
Results

The results from bibliometric research regarding student motivation in EFL learning with a data source of 176 articles will be explained clearly in this section. From the results obtained, the researchers grouped them into several key areas based on the research questions presented in the introduction section. 4 key areas will be explained; trends in annual scientific production - explains the results in the form of the number of articles produced over the last ten years, most relevant authors and their contributions - explains the authors who have produced the most articles on the topic of students' motivation in EFL learning and the contributions they have made, leading countries and their collaboration networks - describes the countries that have produced the most articles along with the collaborations they have carried out with other countries, and most relevant and trending keywords - displays research results regarding the most relevant and most widely used words in research about students' motivation in EFL learning in the last 10 years. Each of the aspects provides a different insight, including the current research landscape, key contributors, and emerging themes in the field of student motivation in EFL learning research.

Annual scientific production

The results indicate trends in the annual scientific production key areas regarding research articles on student motivation in EFL learning in the last decade, 2014-2024. This analysis of bibliometric data, which uses Biblioshiny as a tool, found that the year in which the most articles about student motivation in EFL learning were published in the last 10 years was 2023-2024, namely 33 articles published each year. So, the number of articles published in 2023 and 2024 is 66. In contrast, the lowest output was produced in 2017, with only 3 articles successfully published. Although there is quite a difference in the number of articles that are most published and articles that are least published, there was no year in the past decade with zero publications, reflecting a consistent academic interest in the topic. Interest in this topic is based on the important role of student motivation in language learning. This correlates with the opinion of Lapadat and Lapadat (2024), who say that motivation plays an important role in achieving success in language learning.
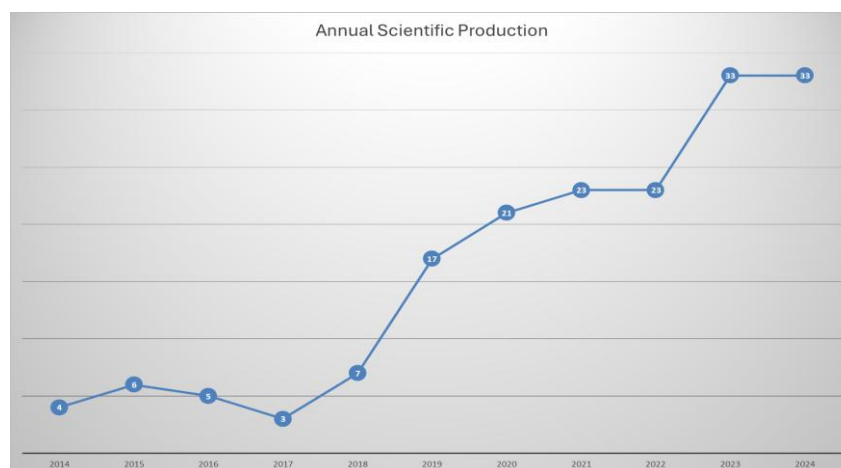

Figure 2.
Chart of annual scientific production
The figure presents the number of articles produced each year over the last 10 years.

Figure 2 shows a modest increase in publications between 2014 and 2015, followed by a decline leading up to 2017. However, starting in 2018, there is a significant upward trend, culminating in the peak years of 2023 and 2024. This may be due to the increased usage of digital learning tools and the move toward student-centered pedagogies as a result of the educational changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The increase in research would

seem to indicate that educators and scholars are increasingly aware of the importance of student motivation in EFL contexts and are looking for new ways to improve it.

These findings are in line with mainstream motivational theories, such as the Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan (2000). Given the rising interest in student motivation in the last couple of years, it seems that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors have received increasing attention in EFL settings. The rise may reflect an increasing concern about how extrinsic rewards and digital learning environments affect motivation. Surprisingly enough, the data suggests that online learning students may depend on external rewards more than one might have thought. This finding supports Deci and Ryan's differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and points to a necessity for teachers to nurture autonomy and competence if they want to sustain motivation. The findings highlight the need to further adapt motivational strategies to today's educational contexts and ensure that students are engaged and motivated both in traditional and digital EFL classrooms.

Most relevant authors and author production over time

The topic of "the role of student motivation in EFL learning" has become a trend in the last 10 years, as viewed from the number of articles produced on the topic. This is none other than because there are productive authors who produce studies on the topic. Figure 3 presents the most relevant authors who have produced studies in the last 10 years. The data shows that Cahyono, B.Y., is the author who has produced the most articles on the topic of the role of student motivation in EFL learning in the last 10 years, with a total of 4 articles. Bambang Yudi Cahyono is Indonesian professor. He is a professor at the State University of Malang, Indonesia. He is an expert in the field of materials, media, and technology in ELT.
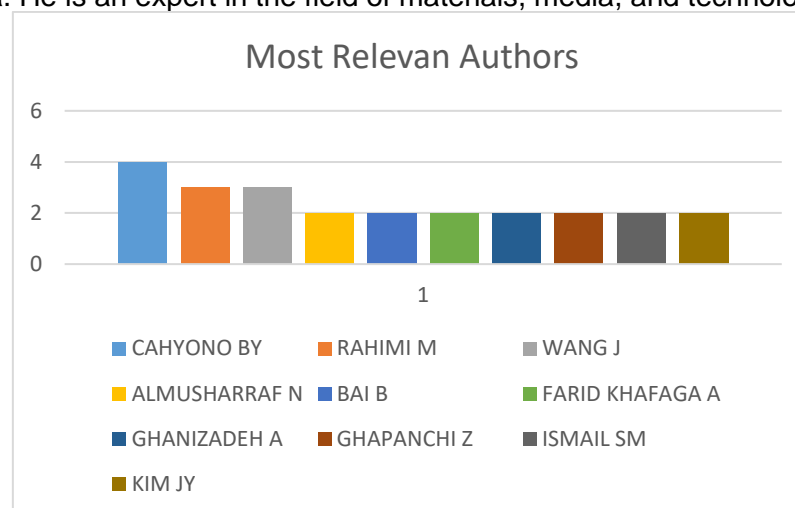

Figure 3.
The most relevant authors

Figure 4 shows four articles by Cahyono, B.Y., that were published in different years, with a period of 2 years between each article publication. In addition to his research, Cahyono B.Y. also often collaborates with other researchers. The first article by Cahyono et al. (2016) discusses students' motivation in English learning and their literacy skills across gender. In the next article, Cahyono and Rahayu (2020) examine the role of student motivation in EFL learning, especially in the field of writing. They stated that this research is still rarely discussed. Still around the topic of the role of student motivation in EFL learning, Cahyono and Janah (2022) examined students' motivation in online learning caused by the massive spread of COVID-19. Cahyono et al. (2024) is the latest article discussing the topic of the role of students' motivation in EFL learning, published by him.

In Figure 4 several different point shapes. The dot shows the number of articles produced by a researcher. The smaller the dot size, the fewer articles will be produced, and vice versa. Based on the appearance in Figure 4, there is one point that has the largest size

among the other point shapes. From this figure, it was found that Farid Khafaga published 2 articles at once in the same year, precisely in 2022. Thus, the researcher who published the most articles in the same year was Farid Khafaga.
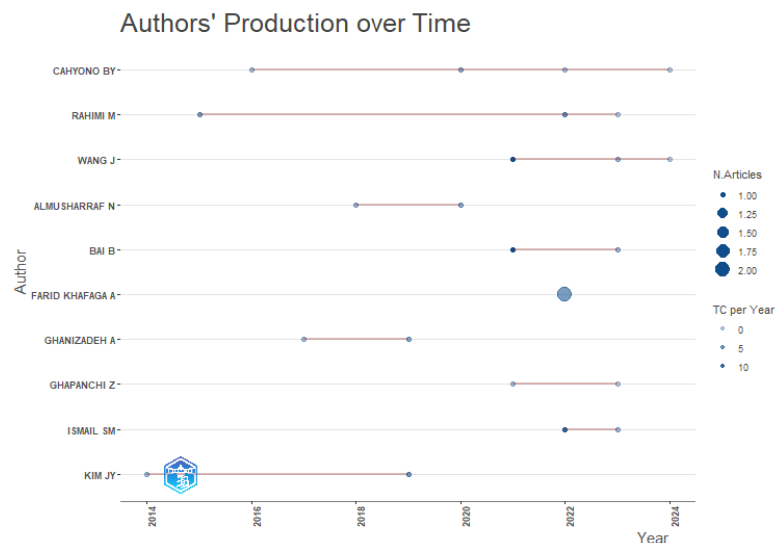

Figure 4.
Authors' production over time

Country scientific production and Collaboration World map

Although the previous findings mentioned that the author who published the most articles on the topic of the role of student motivation in EFL learning, Cahyono, B.Y., came from Indonesia, it turned out that this is not the case with the country that produced the most articles on the topic. Figure 5 provides the country that produced the most articles on the topic of the role of student motivation in EFL learning. The country that produced the most articles on this topic was Iran, with a total production of 44 articles. This finding is in accordance with Aliakbari and Monfared (2014), who stated that Iranian students' awareness of the need for English language learning in their country is high (p. 203). Moreover, in Figure 5, it is also shown that there are 26 countries with the least number of articles produced about students' motivation in EFL learning. The articles produced by these 26 countries are 1 article per country.
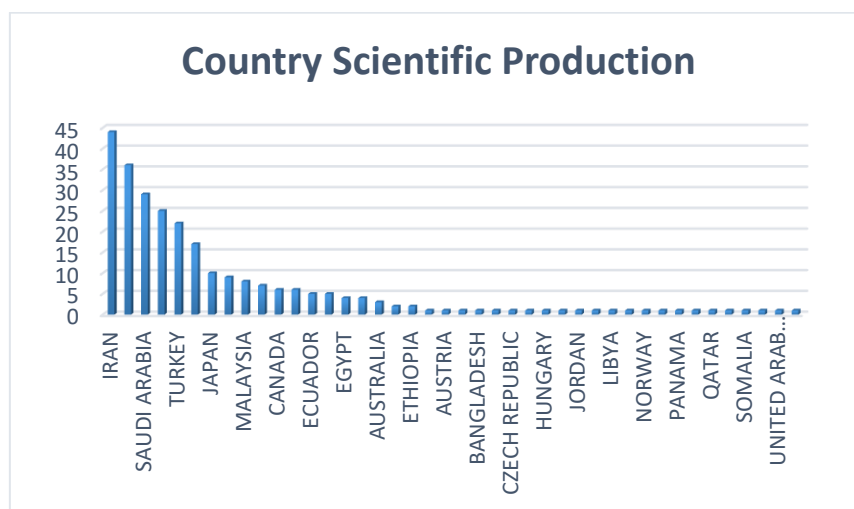

Figure 5.
Chart of country scientific production
This figure presents the highest number of articles produced at 44

As a country with the largest number of articles produced on the topic of the role of students' motivation in EFL learning, as many as 44 articles, it is undeniable that Iran has also carried out several collaborations with other countries. This is an effort for countries to build a network with each other. Figure 6 displays a world map of collaborations from the dataset obtained by the author, which also shows which countries collaborate with Iran. From Figure 6, Iran, as the country with the most article production, has collaborated with as many as eleven countries: Canada, China, Croatia, Egypt, India, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Of the eleven countries collaborating with Iran, Saudi Arabia is the country that has collaborated in producing the most articles, with a total of 3 articles produced as a result of their collaboration.
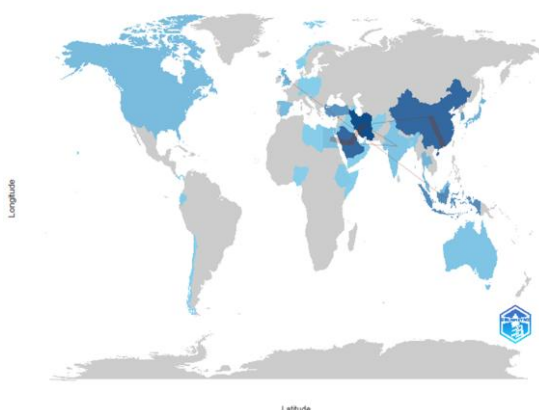

Figure 6.
Collaboration world map

Wordcloud

Responding to the last research question of this study, the most relevant and trending keywords from the data presented in this section. From several articles on the topic of "the role of students' motivation in EFL learning," the authors present Figure 7, which contains the most frequently used terms and words. It can be seen in Figure 7 that there are differences in size for each word displayed. The size of each word in the figure is proportional to its frequency of occurrence in the dataset. Thus, the larger the size of a word displayed in Figure 7, the greater the frequency of its use in articles in the data obtained by the authors.

Figure 7.
Wordcloud This figure shows the most relevant word used in the dataset of 176 articles.

According to the data obtained by the authors, from 176 articles produced, the word "learn" has the largest size among the others. This indicates the highest frequency of use of

the word "learning" in the articles about students' motivation in EFL learning. This means that motivation is mostly related to learning. This is followed by the words "female," "male," "language," and "multilingualism," which have quite a large size but are not bigger than the word "learning". This is defined as the use of the words "female", "male", "language", and 'multilingualism' which are quite widely used but not as much as the word "learning" is used.

In fact, even these terms, though they show up in the word cloud, have a rather low frequency within the dataset. The word "learning" itself only appears 6 times, which is actually a modest figure against the total number of articles. Similarly, the next most frequent terms-"female," "male," "language," and "multilingualism"-are each 4 times. This relatively low frequency suggests that while these terms are relevant, they are not dominant keywords consistently driving research on student motivation in EFL contexts.

The diversity of the terms in this word cloud reflects the broad and multifaceted nature of motivation research, where various themes, such as gender and multilingualism, are explored without a singular focus. Such fragmentation may indicate that the field lacks a cohesive set of keywords or that research interests are dispersed across multiple subtopics. As a result, the finding points to possible gaps in the literature and show avenues for future research regarding clearer focal points to establish and identify consistent themes that are associated with student motivation in EFL learning.

Discussion

Based on the results of this bibliometric study, the topic of the article on student motivation in EFL learning has remained active over the past decade. The findings present how important the role of student motivation is in learning, so it continues to be researched by many authors. This is in line with the opinion of Filgona et al. (2024), who stated that student motivation is a crucial thing needed to achieve quality educational outcomes (p. 17). Likewise, Davidovitch and Dorot (2023) stated that motivation is a part of the main key of learning and teaching that can influence the student learning process (p. 124). In the findings by the authors in this study, the latest article in the data obtained by the authors was written by Namaziandost et al. (2024).

Furthermore, from the data obtained in this current study, the author with the most articles produced in the last 10 years is Cahyono, B.Y., who is a professor at the State University of Malang, Indonesia. He has produced many articles on the scope of English language education. This further validates that the State University of Malang deserves the predicate of excellence in its English language education study program. Indonesia, as the country of origin of Cahyono, B.Y., is also a country that is aware of education. This is proven by the many changes in the education curriculum that have been adjusted to the conditions and situations of the country's society by the government since the independence of country. The changes made are certainly the focus of the government in Indonesia to create an efficient curriculum in line with changing situations and conditions over time.

The findings of this study also show that Iran has become the country with the most production of articles on student motivation in EFL learning in the past decade. In addition, Iran also collaborates with other countries in producing articles on this topic. Currently, the Iranian government has expanded the ban on the entry of foreign languages, including the teaching of English in kindergartens and elementary schools, to preserve the identity of Iranian citizens in children (Al Arabiya English, 2023). However, according to BBC News (2023), English language teaching is still allowed at the secondary school level and in institutions operating outside the formal educational system in Iran. The delay in the teaching of the new English language in secondary schools can be a strong reason why Iran is quite intense on the motivational role of students in learning English.

Quite unexpectedly, despite the steady rise in the number of publications, the key terms related to motivation have come out as relatively low in frequency. Whereas intrinsic motivation was expected to be the leading discussion, the salience of terms such as "female," "male," and "multilingualism" suggests that gender and linguistic diversity are emerging themes that influence motivation in EFL contexts (Alshehri & Etherington, 2017). This might

point to an increasing awareness of sociocultural perspectives on language learning, as identified by Wei et al. (2019). The preponderance of these themes demands closer scrutiny of how gender and multilingual backgrounds influence motivational processes in EFL learning.

Overall, from all the results, this study effectively addressed all research questions and achieved its primary objectives. Unlike previous studies with narrow focuses, this study successfully provides a more comprehensive overview of the topic, fulfilling the authors' aim to bridge the gap in existing literature.

However, some limitations should be acknowledged in this study. The results may be influenced by sampling biases inherent in the Scopus database. Many aspects have not been explored by the authors in this study. Future research could address this gap by investigating areas that were not fully explored by the authors of this study.

Conclusion

This study, entitled "Discovering the Role of Student Motivation in EFL Learning: A Bibliometric Analysis," gives a wide view of research trends over the last decade. Analysis of articles using a bibliometric approach in this study found that 176 articles were published in the last decade. Not only that, but the results obtained also show that research output is increasing significantly in 2023 and 2024. Cahyono, B.Y., was the author who succeeded in producing the largest number of articles. Then, Iran, as the country that has the highest number of publications of articles, also collaborates with other countries, one of which is Saudi Arabia, with 3 collaborations. The word cloud analysis highlighted words such as "learning," "female," "male," "language," and "multilingualism," although their low frequency indicated fragmented research themes.

Not only that, the findings from this study also identify great interest and concern regarding students' motivation, especially in EFL learning. This is indicated by the absence of a single year without the publication of an article on the topic of students' motivation in EFL learning. Apart from that, many researchers have jumped in and taken up this topic, indicating the existence of this topic in the world of education. It is also supported by various countries that have also produced articles about students' motivation in EFL learning and collaborated in conducting one or even several studies with other countries.

No study is without its weaknesses and limitations. One of the limitations of this research is that many aspects of student motivation in EFL learning remain unexplored through bibliometric analysis. Therefore, future researchers are advised to explore aspects that have not been researched in this study. Future researchers can also research at longer intervals for their studies. Finally, the authors also suggest that future researchers use other research methods to research the topic of students' motivation in English as a foreign language learning on a larger and broader basis with various other focuses and scopes.

Acknowledgement

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