



The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety: A Bibliometric Analysis in the Last Two Decades (2005-2025)

Qianru Li^{1*}, Yongqi Han², Kerui Chen³, Min Song⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Guangdong University of Foreign Studies

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Corresponding Author

Qianru Li

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ABSTRACT: Emotional intelligence (EI) has been considered its correlation with foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA). The present study explores their research landscape and hotspots by conducting a bibliometric analysis. The results of bibliometric analysis based on 242 published peer-reviewed articles presented that there is a steady growing number of articles related to this research area. Different research hotspots throughout the timespan were identified. The current review provides implications for students and educators.

INTRODUCTION

Foreign language speaking is widely regarded as the most anxiety-provoking of the four language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing), particularly under several conditions such as classroom participation, oral examinations, and public speaking (Li & Chan, 2024; Zhang & Zhang, 2024). Learners who experience foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) are more likely to avoid oral participation, to be perceived less favorably by peers and instructors, and to develop low-proficiency spoken language as a result (Hu & Wang, 2023).

Emotional intelligence (EI) appears to be related to the degree of FLSA, potentially either reducing or enhancing it (Ho, 2024; Pishghadam, 2009). Foreign language learners with higher EI are better able to control impulses, manage stress, maintaining a positive attitude when facing challenges and frustrations in speaking performance (Pishghadam, 2009). On the contrary, foreign language learners who have lower EI may influence their communicative strategies, resulting in higher level of FLSA (Ho, 2024). Although a systematic review and a meta-analytic evidence on the association between EI and foreign language anxiety has been found (Babanoğlu, 2025), an in-depth exploration to chart the research landscape and hotspots in terms of EI and FLSA is still lacking.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Emotional Intelligence

EI was considered as the subset of social intelligence, involving the ability to monitor people's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Martinez (1997) added that EI influences a person's ability of coping with demands and pressures. Goleman (1998) further defined EI as one's ability to recognize one's own feelings. Following Goleman's definition, Boyatzis (2009) considered EI is an ability to recognize both own and others' feelings.

2.2 Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

FLSA tends to be caused by speakers' worry towards their incorrect pronunciations or negative comments given by their peers and teachers (Dewaele, 2007). Aydin et al. (2017) found that younger learners experience higher level of speaking anxiety compared to their older counterparts. In addition, language learners encounter FLSA when they are asked to speak in front of others (Tadjouri, 2017).

2.3. Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

The existing literature has found that there is a relationship between EI and FLSA (Ateş & Bahşi, 2022; Bata & Castro, 2021). Bata and Castro (2021) conducted an experiment to examine how elementary students studying English as a foreign language perform their speaking exams by managing their EI. The results showed that students who are equipped with higher level of EI tend to perform better in speaking exams. This finding was supported by Ateş and Bahşi's (2022) study, claiming that students with higher level of EI have solutions to manage their emotions related to reduced speaking anxiety.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Though existing studies have focused on the relationship between EI and learning language (Ouaja et al., 2020; Shao et al., 2013; Zafari & Biria, 2014), scant articles explored its relationship with FLSA. The present study tries to map the development trend of EI and FLSA, as well as the hotspot. There are two research questions (RQ) guided this study.

RQ1: How do the articles published on the relationship between EI and FLSA evolve over time?

RQ2: What is research hotspot towards the relationship between EI and FLSA?

METHODOLOGY

The present study retrieved relevant literatures published between 2005 and 2025 from six databases including EBSCO, ERIC, Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA), ProQuest, Scopus and Web of Science.

Firstly, the following search keywords for EI were selected: ("EI (ei)" OR "affective (affectional) intelligence" OR "mental intelligence" OR "emotional excellence" OR "interpersonal intelligence" OR "emotional engagement" OR "emotional ability" OR "social-emotional intelligence" OR "emotional competence" OR "emotional maturity" OR "emotional skills" OR "social-emotional competence" OR "emotional awareness" OR "emotional understanding")

Secondly, the following search keywords for FLSA were selected: ("foreign language" OR "non-native language" OR "target language" OR "additional language" OR "other tongues" OR "non-native tongues") AND ("oral communication anxiety" OR "oral communication apprehension" OR "oral anxiety" OR "speaking anxiety" OR "communicating anxiety" OR "speaking nervousness" OR "talking anxiety" OR "fear of speaking").

After the initial search, 5,421 articles were found. The following criterion was used to exclude articles not suitable for bibliometric

analysis (Fig.1):

- (a) not written in English;
- (b) not peer-reviewed journal articles;
- (c) not journal relevant based on titles and abstracts.

The process of study selection is exhibited in a format congruent with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis requirements (PRISMA) (Moher et al., 2010).

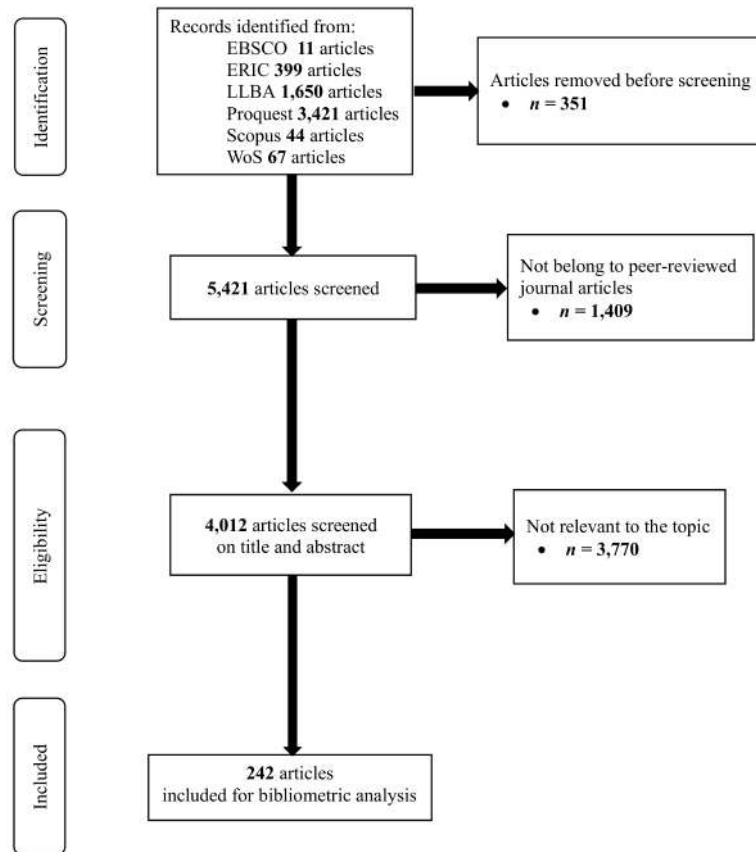


Fig. 1. Selection flowchart

RESULTS

5.1. Number of Articles by Years



Fig. 2 Number of articles from 2005 to 2025

The number of the articles related to the topic from 2005 to 2025 is presented in Fig. 2. Over the past two decades, the average annual growth rate of publications was 11.42%, reflecting that the scientific community attached great importance and investment to in this area (Dong et al., 2025). It can be seen that the number of publications was less than four between 2005 and 2008, while

the number of articles obviously started to increase after 2022. Moreover, the number of articles reached its peak in 2024, which means that researchers are paying attention to the relationship between EI and FLSA.

5.2. Development of the Research Hotspots in the Recent Years

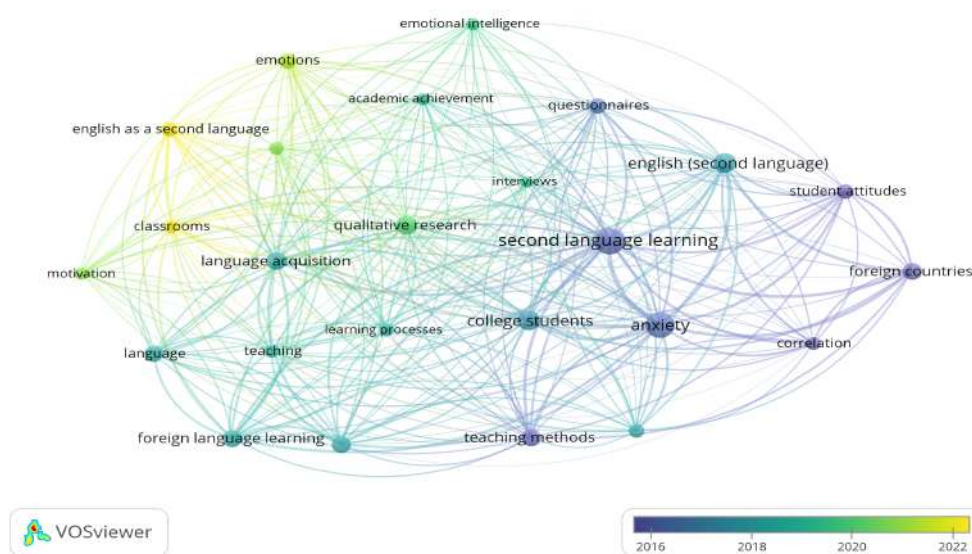


Fig. 3 Research hotspots

To show relevant research hotspots, the keyword's minimum repetition count in VOSviewer program was selected as 30. A total of 22 keywords met this threshold. As shown in Fig. 3, the research hotspots related to EI and FLSA were different throughout the timespan. From 2016 to 2018, student attitudes and teaching methods were studied in foreign countries to explore anxiety in second language learning. From 2018 to 2020, different research methods applied to understand the impact of EI on foreign language learning and teaching. From 2020 to 2022, more attentions had been paid to examine students' emotion and motivation when they learn English as a second language in classrooms.

DISCUSSION

The steady growth of research trend related to EI and FLSA is consistent with previous studies (Babanoğlu, 2025; Dewaele et al. 2008). This implies that this research area has received attention in recent years.

As for research hotspots, second language learning is the most frequently mentioned one, what comes next are English as second language because English remain a widely used foreign language in the world (Zhang, 2023; Zou & Park, 2024).

Recently, researchers focused on how to motivate students and make advantage of their emotions in the classroom.

CONTRIBUTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This article contributes to the existing development of exploring the relationship between EI and FLSA in the following three aspects. Firstly, it visualizes the research trend, thus enhancing the understanding of the growth rate and hotspots.

The current research has important practical implications for students and educators. This finding suggests that students should be aware of how EI influences their speaking anxiety in the process of learning. If they take actions to try to improve their EI skills, the level of FLSA could be reduced. Educators are encouraged to think of teaching strategies to help students increase their EI and thus reducing their FLSA. For example, they can provide students with positive reinforcement by offering positive comments.

Although the present study offers significant contributions to the understanding of the research trend and hotspots for EI and FLSA,

this study only adopts bibliometric analysis rather than systematic review and meta-analysis by considering the limited number of empirical studies. Therefore, systematic review and meta-analysis are encouraged to be adopted to draw a comprehensive understanding in this research area.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this article is to map the research trend and hotspot on the relationship between EI and FLSA. The results from bibliometric analysis present a growing research trend. In addition, the research hotspots have shifted from only focusing on teacher's guidance to teacher's teaching strategies and student's learning experience.

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