

Research Mapping of Arabic Reading Skills: A Scopus-Based Bibliometric Analysis, Systematic Review, and Pedagogical Implications for Arabic Language Teaching

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Abstract:

Research on Arabic reading skills has increased substantially in response to the growing demand for Arabic proficiency in academic, religious, and foreign language education; however, existing studies remain fragmented and lack an integrated overview. Bibliometric analysis combined with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) provides a comprehensive framework for mapping publication trends, collaboration networks, research themes, and knowledge gaps. This study aims to analyze global research trends on Arabic reading skills during 2016–2025 and identify their pedagogical implications for Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) instruction. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the study analyzed 105 Scopus-indexed journal articles selected through the PRISMA protocol. Data were collected from the Scopus database and examined using VOSviewer through co-occurrence, co-authorship, citation, and thematic analyses. The findings reveal a significant increase in publications after 2019, five dominant research clusters, and limited international collaboration, with notable gaps in higher education and non-Arab AFL contexts. The study concludes that Arabic reading research has become increasingly interdisciplinary but requires stronger international collaboration, broader contextual research, and more integrative pedagogical frameworks to support future Arabic language teaching and research.

Abstrak:

Penelitian mengenai keterampilan membaca bahasa Arab mengalami peningkatan signifikan seiring meningkatnya kebutuhan penguasaan bahasa Arab dalam konteks akademik, keagamaan, dan bahasa asing, namun kajian yang ada masih terfragmentasi dan belum memberikan gambaran yang komprehensif. Analisis bibliometrik yang dipadukan dengan *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) memberikan kerangka untuk memetakan tren publikasi, kolaborasi, tema penelitian, dan kesenjangan riset. Penelitian ini bertujuan memetakan perkembangan penelitian global tentang keterampilan membaca bahasa Arab periode 2016–2025 serta mengidentifikasi implikasinya bagi pembelajaran *Arabic as a Foreign Language* (AFL). Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan analisis bibliometrik dan SLR terhadap 105 artikel jurnal terindeks Scopus yang dipilih melalui protokol PRISMA. Data dikumpulkan dari basis data Scopus dan dianalisis menggunakan VOSviewer melalui analisis *co-occurrence*, *co-authorship*, sitasi, dan tema. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan peningkatan publikasi sejak 2019, terbentuknya lima klaster tema utama, serta masih

terbatasnya kolaborasi internasional dan penelitian pada konteks pendidikan tinggi serta AFL di negara non-Arab. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kajian keterampilan membaca bahasa Arab berkembang menjadi bidang interdisipliner, namun memerlukan kolaborasi global, penelitian yang lebih kontekstual, dan kerangka pedagogis yang lebih integratif.

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Introduction

Reading skills are among the most fundamental competencies in Arabic language learning because they involve not only recognizing letters and vocabulary but also higher-order cognitive processes, including meaning construction, inference, and critical evaluation of texts (Haris, 2022). The linguistic characteristics of Arabic, such as its rich morphological system, complex syntactic structures, and diglossia, make reading comprehension considerably more challenging than in many other languages (Hassanein, Johnson, Ibrahim, & Alshaboul, 2023). At the same time, the growing global demand for Arabic proficiency across religious, academic, diplomatic, and professional contexts has accelerated research on Arabic reading skills. Recent studies increasingly integrate technological innovations, including natural language processing, machine learning, and readability analysis, into Arabic reading research (Allaithy & Zaki, 2025). Nevertheless, the rapid expansion of publications has created a fragmented body of knowledge, making it difficult to obtain a comprehensive understanding of global research trends, collaboration patterns, thematic developments, and pedagogical implications for Arabic language teaching.

To address fragmented knowledge development, bibliometric analysis and the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) are widely recognized as complementary approaches for synthesizing scientific evidence. Bibliometric analysis enables researchers to map publication growth, citation structures, collaboration networks, and thematic evolution within a research field (Donthu, Kumar, Mukherjee, Pandey, & Lim, 2021). Meanwhile, the SLR provides a transparent, systematic, and replicable procedure for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant studies, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of research findings (Rojas-Sánchez, Palos-Sánchez, & Folgado-Fernández, 2023). Although previous studies have examined Arabic language teaching and Arabic proficiency from bibliometric perspectives, comprehensive mapping focused specifically on Arabic reading skills remains limited, particularly studies that integrate quantitative bibliometric mapping with qualitative synthesis and interpret pedagogical implications for Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL). Therefore, this study offers novelty by integrating bibliometric analysis and the SLR to construct a comprehensive research map of Arabic reading skills based on Scopus-indexed publications from 2016 to 2025, identify dominant themes and collaboration networks, reveal research gaps, and connect these findings with pedagogical implications for AFL instruction (Abdulroya Benseng & Sakirin Tam, 2024).

Building on the background above, this study maps the global development of research

on Arabic reading skills published in Scopus-indexed journals from 2016 to 2025 using a bibliometric analysis integrated with a Systematic Literature Review. Specifically, it seeks to identify publication trends, the most productive countries, institutions, and journals, international collaboration networks, dominant research themes, and existing research gaps, while examining their pedagogical implications for Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) instruction (Siregar, 2025). Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How has research on Arabic reading skills developed globally during 2016–2025? (2) Which countries, institutions, and journals have contributed most significantly to this field? (3) What collaboration patterns and thematic trends emerge from the bibliometric analysis? (4) What research gaps and pedagogical implications can be identified for Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) instruction?

This study contributes to Arabic language education research across theoretical, methodological, and practical domains. Theoretically, it offers an integrative framework that links linguistic, cognitive, technological, and pedagogical perspectives on Arabic reading skills. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of combining bibliometric analysis with a Systematic Literature Review to provide both comprehensive quantitative mapping and qualitative synthesis. Practically, the findings inform curriculum development, instructional innovation, digital literacy integration, and future research, particularly in higher education and non-Arab contexts. The study also highlights the need to strengthen international collaboration and broaden participation in research from underrepresented countries to support a more comprehensive, globally relevant framework for Arabic language teaching and learning.

Method

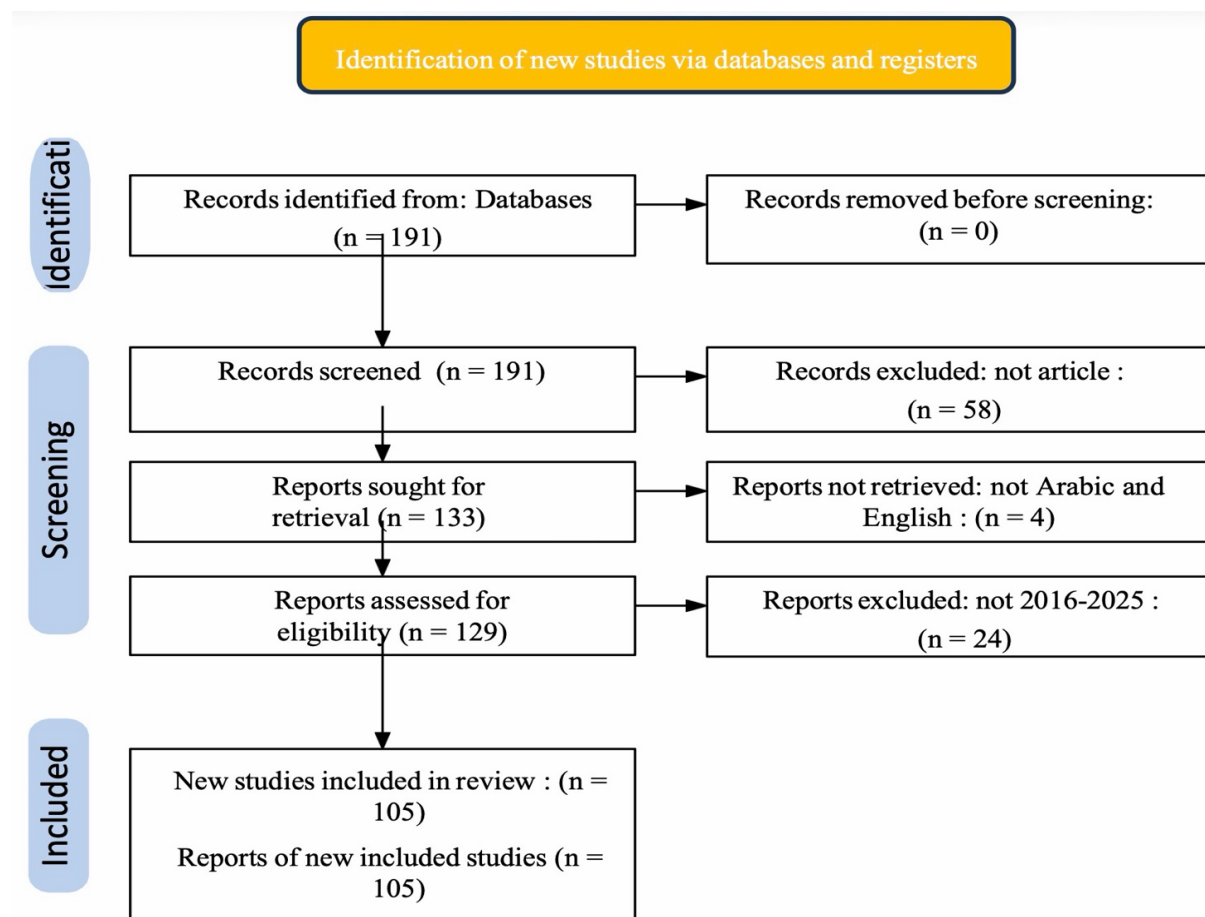
Research method: This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach, combined with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis, to map and analyze the development of research on Arabic language learning and reading skills. The main source in this study is the Scopus database, which provides several key features, including links to citing and cited documents and indexes to millions of relevant publisher web pages (Yunita, Baroroh, Sri Utami, & Yulianingsih Riswan, 2024). Data collection was conducted on January 5, 2026, using a Scopus-based search formula, namely (TITLE (arabic) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (learn OR teach*) AND TITLE (read*)) AND PUBYEAR > 2015 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English") OR LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "Arabic"))*. This formula is designed to capture articles that specifically discuss Arabic, with a focus on learning and reading skills, published between 2016 and 2025, in the form of journal articles, and in English or Arabic.

The article selection process was conducted systematically in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, including identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. During the initial identification stage, a Scopus search yielded 191 articles (Zikriah & Mauludiyah, 2024). Subsequently, the articles were screened to eliminate duplicates, exclude non-journal articles, restrict the publication language, and adjust the publication year range. Articles that passed the screening stage were then further reviewed for alignment of their titles and abstracts with the research focus, resulting in 105 articles that met all inclusion criteria and were used as the final research dataset.

Bibliographic data from selected articles were exported in two formats, namely CSV

and BibTeX. The CSV format was used for descriptive analysis and statistical processing of publication trends, author productivity, and publication-year distribution, while the BibTeX format was used for bibliometric network analysis and visualization. Bibliometric analysis was performed using VOSviewer software. This tool was used to identify trends by analyzing simultaneous keyword occurrences, co-author groups, and bibliographic links between countries, and to create maps based on the abstracts and titles of the identified articles (Pham & Le, 2024). The research was conducted through keyword co-occurrence analysis, co-authorship, citation, and co-citation analysis. The results of the visualization, in the form of network maps, overlay visualizations, and density visualizations, were used to identify collaboration patterns, dominant themes, and research developments over time. The validity of the research data was maintained through the use of reputable databases, the systematic application of the PRISMA protocol, and clear, measurable selection criteria. In the diagram, the stages of the research conducted are as follows:

Table 1. *Bibliometric Research Flow*



Results and Discussion

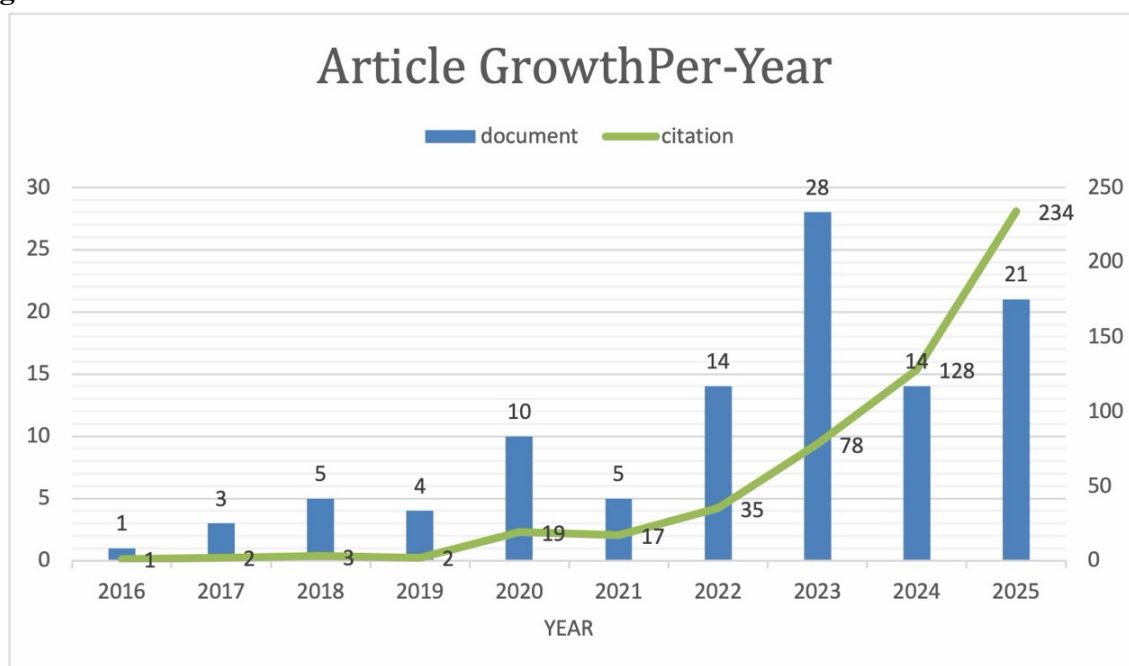
Result

1. Annual Publication Growth

Based on Scopus bibliometric analysis for the period 2016–2025 on the topic of "Arabic reading skills," it was found that out of a total of 105 documents with 520 citations, the annual growth in research publications showed a significant upward trend in terms of both the number of documents and the impact of citations (Suyanto, Samhati, Aisyah, & Antrakusuma, 2024).

In detail, the growth in document publications per year is as follows:

Figure 1. *Article Growth Per-Year*

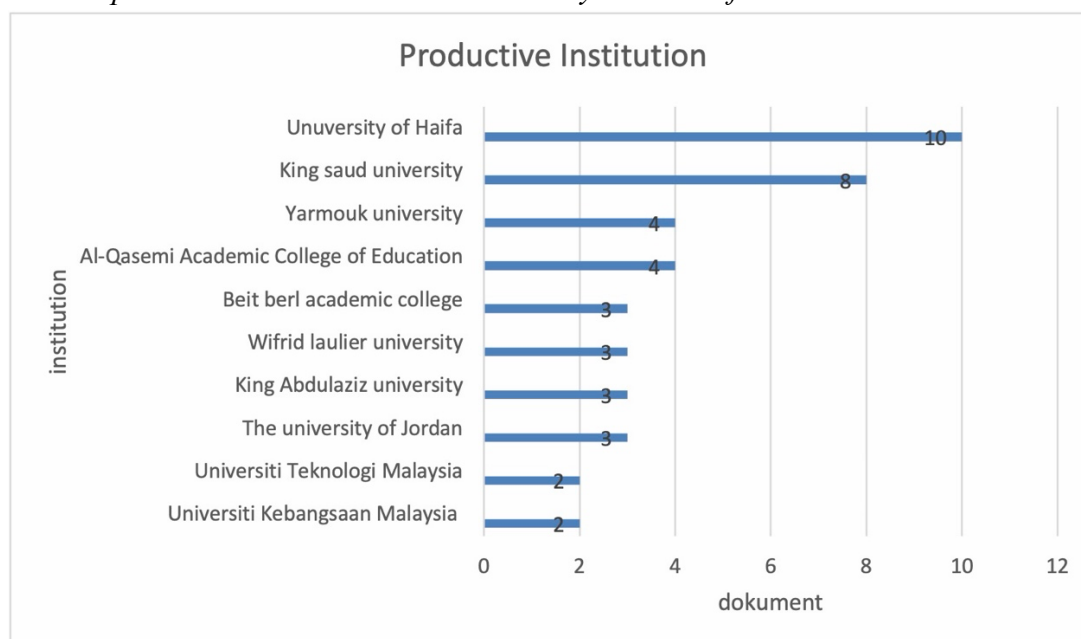


The lowest point in the publication of articles on "Arabic reading skills" occurred in 2016, when only one article was published. In 2017–2018, the number of publications remained relatively low, with limited citations: 3 (2017) and 5 (2018). This pattern indicates the early phase of developing research interest. It was only in 2019 that a consistent increase began (Alfurochmatin & Jusoh, 2024), , with the number continuing to rise to 4 (2019), 10 (2020), 5 (2021), and 14 (2022) publications per year. The growth in publications was followed by an increase in citations, indicating the growing relevance and quality of the studies conducted. The peak of development occurred in the 2023–2025 period, marked by a very significant increase in the number of documents and citations, namely 28 (2023), 14 (2024), and 21 (2025) publications per year, reflecting the strong academic influence of this topic in international literature. Overall, this pattern confirms that research on Arabic reading skills is maturing as a field of study and gaining widespread attention in language learning research, with the potential for an increase in publications in the coming years.

2. Most Relevant and Productive Institution

The image below shows the ten most productive institutions based on the number of publications over the past 10 years. In the top ten, three Israeli institutions ranked 1st (Haifa University), 4th (Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education), and 5th (Beit Berl Academic College), respectively. Saudi Arabia ranks 2nd (King Saud University) and 7th (King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology) as the campuses that contribute the most publications on Arabic language skills. Two Jordanian universities also rank 3rd (Yarmouk University) and 8th (The University of Jordan). Two other countries that complete the top ten are Malaysia, which ranks 9th (Language Studies Academy, Universiti Teknologi MARA) and 10th (Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia), and Canada, which ranks 6th (Wilfrid Laurier University). For more details, see the following diagram:

Figure 2. *Top Ten Most Productive Institutions by Number of Publications*



The first place was taken by the University of Haifa, Israel, with 10 documents, showing the dominance of non-Arab institutions in Arabic language studies. The second place was taken by King Saud University, Saudi Arabia, with 8 documents, representing the strong role of Arabic-speaking countries in the development of linguistics and Arabic language education. Third and fourth place went to Yarmouk University, Jordan, and Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education, Israel, with 4 papers each. Next, Beit Berl Academic College (Israel), Wilfrid Laurier University (Canada), King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (Saudi Arabia), and The University of Jordan (Jordan) each produced 3 papers. In ninth and tenth place, the Language Studies Academy, Universiti Teknologi MARA, and the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, each contributed 2 documents.

Geographically, institutions from Arabic-speaking countries (Saudi Arabia and Jordan) focus on Arabic as the national and academic language, so research is directed towards strengthening science, pedagogy, and language preservation (Abdelmaksoud, Hassan Serour, & Hadi Musolin, 2023). Meanwhile, institutions in non-Arab countries (Israel, Canada, and Malaysia) research Arabic for academic and strategic reasons, such as the study of minority languages, multicultural education, Islamic studies, and Arabic as a foreign language and as a global language.

3. Co-authorship between writers of different nationalities

This study also produced output in the form of information on correspondence between countries and authors active in research on Arabic language skills. The minimum number of publications per country was set at 1. Of the total number of countries involved ($n = 28$), 19 countries met the criteria and were displayed in the network visualization. A total of five clusters were formed. The maximum cluster size was 4 (cluster 1: Canada, Lebanon, Qatar, and the United States), followed by cluster 2 (4 items, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam), cluster 3 (4 items, Australia, Israel, New Zealand, and the United Arab Emirates), cluster 4 (3 items, Algeria, France, and Spain), cluster 5 (3 items, Bahrain, Iraq, and Jordan), and cluster 6 (1 item, Egypt). Based on TLS, the top three most collaborative countries are Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates. shows that the country is among the

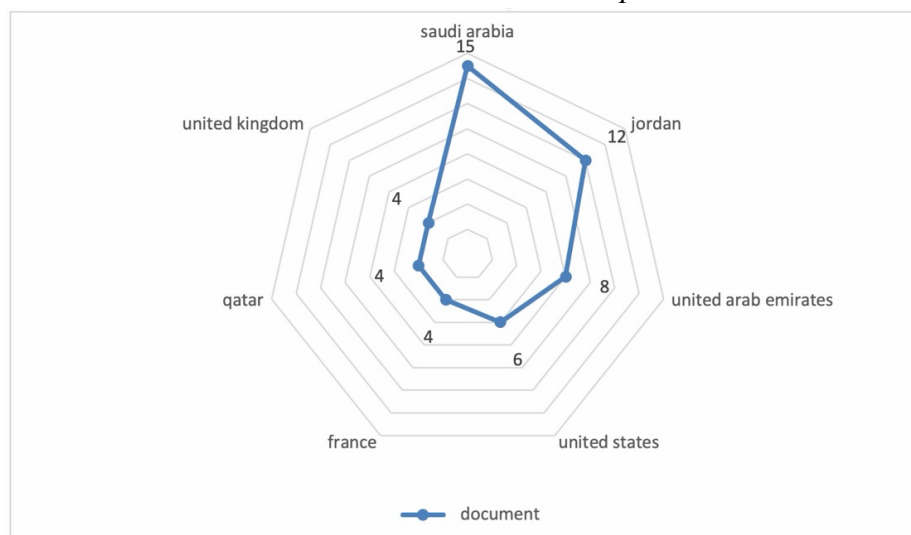
top contributors to Arabic language research in the world, demonstrating the institution's commitment to the development of Arabic language studies and linguistics.(Abdulroya Benseng & Sakirin Tam, 2024) The collaboration of these countries is shown in Figure:

Figure 3. *Countries and Authors with International Correspondence*



Based on VOSviewer analysis, Saudi Arabia is the most dominant country, with 23 documents and the highest total link strength (15), indicating strong productivity and international collaboration in Arabic-language research. Jordan is next with 17 documents and a TLS of 12, confirming its role as a center of Arabic-language studies. Meanwhile, Israel produced 18 documents but had a low TLS, indicating that its publications are more national in nature. The United Arab Emirates (10 documents; TLS 8) and the United States (11 documents; TLS 6) showed active involvement, particularly in cross-border collaboration. France (3 documents), Qatar (5 documents), and the United Kingdom (3 documents) are countries with the same TLS score of 4, indicating active involvement in Arabic-language research through cross-border collaboration. Other countries, such as Malaysia (7 documents; TLS 0), Morocco (6 documents; TLS 0), Indonesia (5 documents; TLS 0), and Egypt (4 documents; TLS 3), complete the top ten documents, with relatively limited collaboration patterns.

Figure 4. *Countries and Authors with International Correspondence*



4. Journal Productivity Ranking

A bibliometric analysis of Scopus journal articles from 2016 to 2025 on Arabic language proficiency shows that only 4 journals have published more than 3 articles. The four journals, along with their affiliations, are:

Table 2. *Most Productive Journals*

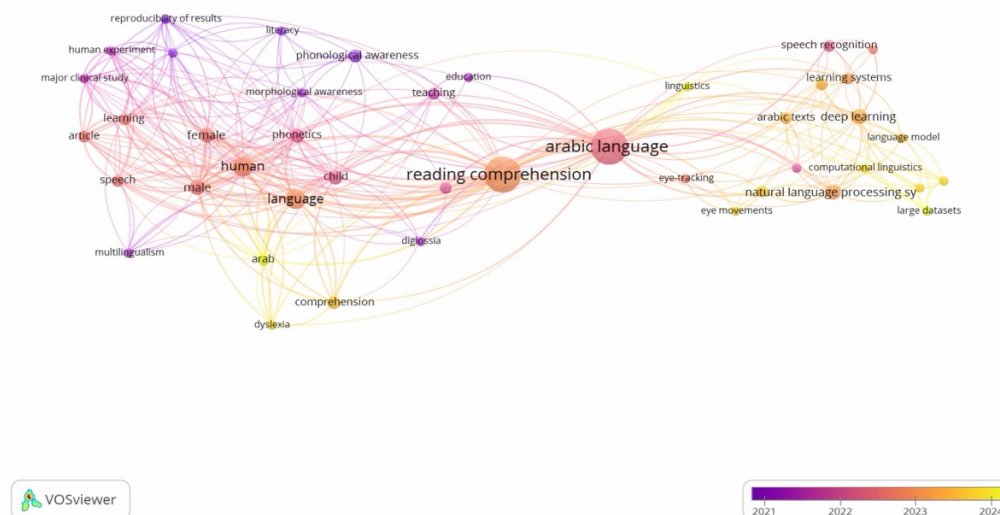
NO	JOURNAL NAME	AFILIATION/NATIONS	ARTICLE NUMBERS
1	ACM Transactions on Asian and Low-Resource Language Information Processing	Association for Computing Machinery (ACM)/ United States (US)	5
2	Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics	Hacettepe University/ Turkey	3
3	Reading and Writing	Springer Science+Business Media/ Netherlands (Belanda)	3
4	Information Sciences Letters	Natural Sciences Publishing/ International / USA-oriented (Natural Sciences Publishing) US	3

The relatively small number of articles per journal, despite the substantial total number of publications, indicates that research on Arabic reading skills is widely dispersed. This phenomenon aligns with the principle of scientific literature distribution in bibliometric analysis, where publications are not concentrated in a single or two journals but are distributed across a range of journals with different academic scopes. This is also influenced by the multidisciplinary nature of research topics, which encompass linguistic, educational, and technological aspects, leading researchers to choose journals that align with their respective research foci. Additionally, the rigorous selection process of international journals and the absence of a dominant core journal in this field further contribute to the low concentration of articles in any single journal.

5. Frequently Occurring Words

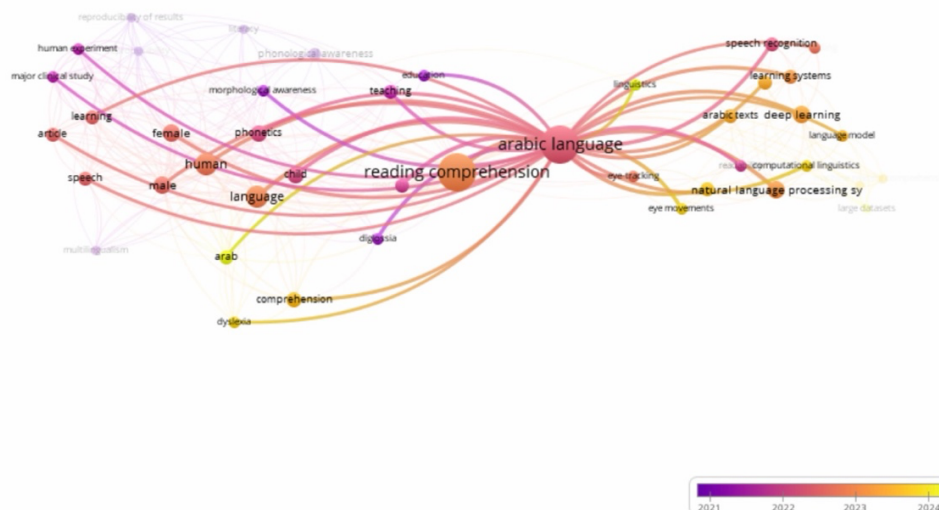
Keyword analysis identifies trends in the field. The more frequently a word is found, the more closely it is related to the themes that emerge in the field. In the diagram, the larger the text displayed, the more frequently the word is used by authors (Lu et al., 2021). The word "reading comprehension" has the highest frequency compared to other words. The number of research topic keywords that can be linked to VOSviewer is limited to two. After that, a collection of research articles is gathered to analyze the relationship between these terms. The data obtained on Arabic reading skills consists of 43 keywords divided into 5 clusters, namely:

Figure 5. Keyword Frequency



Cluster 1 focuses on Arabic reading skills and uses technological and computational approaches. Keywords in this cluster indicate the use of machine learning, deep learning, natural language processing, language models, and machine reading comprehension in analyzing Arabic texts. In addition, studies on readability, question answering, and large datasets confirm that Arabic reading research is not only pedagogical in nature but is also developing towards automatic text processing and artificial intelligence to understand, evaluate, and improve the ability to read Arabic texts digitally (Abdallah et al., 2024).

Figure 6. Keyword Frequency

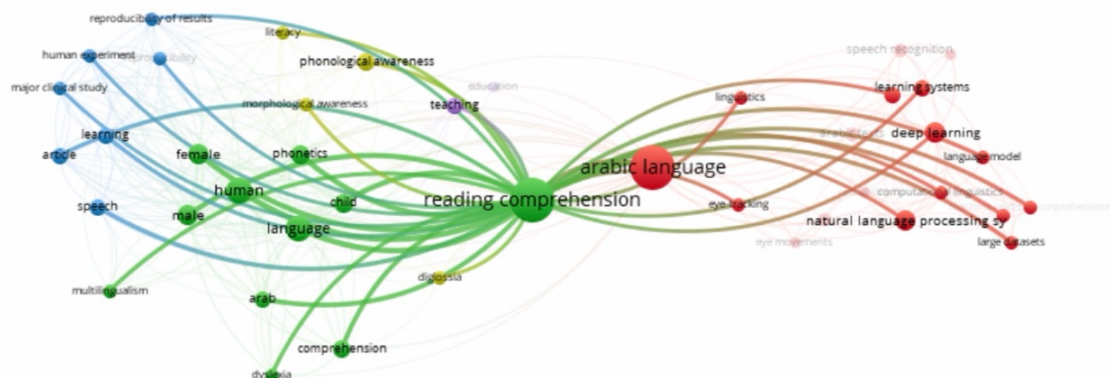


Note. kluster 1

Cluster 2 describes research on Arabic reading skills from the perspective of readers as human subjects. Keywords such as child, male, female, dyslexia, multilingualism, and reading comprehension indicate a focus on individual differences, age development, and specific challenges in understanding Arabic texts. The main focus of this cluster is reading comprehension, which is influenced by linguistic, phonetic, and language background factors, especially in the context of child learners and multilingual communities. These results are consistent with his research (Papastefanou, Marinis, & Powell, 2021), which shows that vocabulary, grammar/morphosyntax, and narrative strongly predict reading comprehension,

often more than mere word-reading speed.

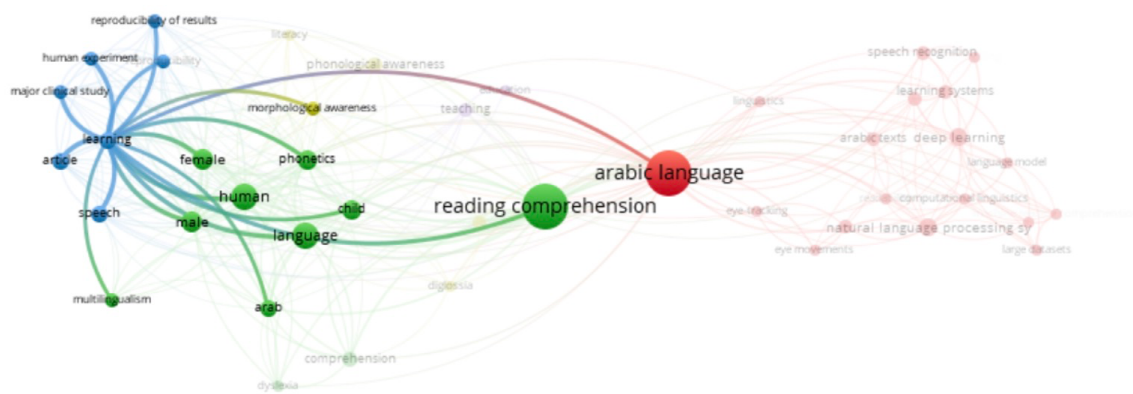
Figure 7
Keyword Frequency



Note. kluster 2

Cluster 3 reflects studies that emphasize research design, human experiments, and scientific validity in Arabic reading skills studies. Keywords such as human experiment, learning, major clinical study, and reproducibility indicate that research in this cluster focuses on empirical testing, evaluation of the learning process, and efforts to ensure the reliability and repeatability of research results. Thus, this cluster underscores the importance of a robust methodological approach in Arabic reading research.

Figure 8
Keyword Frequency



Note. kluster 3

Cluster 4 is closely related to basic linguistic aspects in Arabic reading skills. Keywords such as diglossia, literacy, morphological awareness, morphology, and phonological awareness indicate that research in this cluster highlights the role of Arabic language structure, the differences between Fusha and Amiyah Arabic, and phonological and morphological awareness in improving reading literacy skills. This cluster emphasizes that understanding the sound system and word forms is crucial to success in reading Arabic.

[illegible]

Cluster 5 represents research oriented towards the context of formal education. The keywords education and teaching indicate that studies on Arabic reading skills are largely directed towards teaching strategies, curriculum, and learning practices. This cluster emphasizes that Arabic reading skills cannot be separated from educators' roles, learning methods, and the educational environment in supporting student literacy achievement.

This is the last interesting point to be discussed here. Research on Arabic language skills related to "higher education institutions" and "language learning for foreigners" has not been conducted extensively. In the context of Arabic language courses at the university level (both undergraduate and graduate), this topic appears to be only part of the curriculum that may be worth discussing in class, but not for researching its application in the field. The effectiveness of teaching Arabic speaking skills in higher education classrooms has not been explored in depth.

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language is not yet fully developed and is less integrated with other countries than in non-Arab countries such as Malaysia, France, and the United States. Indonesia ranks only 9th on this theme, lagging behind Malaysia, which ranks 6th.

From the bibliometric data above, several factors are lacking in Arab studies in Indonesia, including collaboration with other universities, journal productivity, diversity of study topics as research objects, and non-academic factors such as Israel and other factors. Of course, in addition to the above factors, there are other factors that can be further explored, both through bibliometric analysis and qualitative library analysis, so that Arabic research and Arabic studies in Indonesia can become more interesting and more developed.

6. Systematic Review Synthesis: Approach, Contributions, Gaps, and Agenda

a. Dominant Approaches and Core Contributions

Based on an analysis of 105 articles indexed in the Scopus database from 2016 to 2025, research on Arabic reading skills exhibits multidisciplinary characteristics and has grown significantly. There are four main approaches that dominate studies in this field.

First, technological and computational approaches are becoming an increasingly prominent trend in cutting-edge research. Studies in this field utilize technologies such as machine learning (Pham & Le, 2024), deep learning (Pham & Le, 2024), and natural language processing (Rekan et al., 2025) to analyze Arabic texts, readability levels, and automated reading comprehension systems. The primary contribution of this approach is to expand the study of Arabic reading toward digitalization and artificial intelligence, thereby enabling the development of technology-based learning systems.

Second, cognitive and psychological approaches place the reader at the center of analysis. Research in this area highlights factors such as age-related development, bilingualism (Zikriah & Mauludiyah, 2024), dyslexia (Suyanto et al., 2024), and individual linguistic abilities (Osman, Safwat, Mohammady, & Hamid, 2021). Its contribution lies in providing a deeper understanding of the mental processes involved in reading, particularly in the context of Arabic, which possesses morphological (Allaithy & Zaki, 2025) and phonological complexities (Alshahrani, 2023).

Third, the linguistic approach focuses on the structural characteristics of Arabic, such as diglossia (Asadi & Kawar, 2024), phonological awareness (Layes, Lalonde, & Rebaï, 2023), and morphological awareness (Amin & Gottardo, 2022). This approach makes an important contribution to explaining how language structure influences reading ability and literacy.

Fourth, pedagogical and educational approaches focus on learning strategies (Almsbhiheen, Fahid Aljazi, Alhasanat, & Rababah, 2023), curriculum design (Almujaiwel, Premasiri, Ranasinghe, El-Haj, & Mitkov, 2025), and reading instruction methods (Gharaibeh & Basulayyim, 2025). Their primary contribution is to provide a practical foundation for more effective Arabic language instruction across various educational contexts.

Overall, these four approaches demonstrate that research on Arabic reading skills has evolved into an interdisciplinary field, integrating aspects of linguistics, education, psychology, and technology.

b. Persistent Gaps and Limitations in the Included Scholarship

Although they demonstrate significant progress, the studies analyzed still have several gaps and limitations that need to be addressed.

First, there is a geographical disparity in research contributions. Publications are dominated by certain countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel, while contributions from other countries, including Indonesia, remain relatively low. This indicates that the distribution of knowledge in this field is not yet equitable on a global scale.

Second, international collaboration remains limited. Only a few countries have strong collaborative networks, while most research is still conducted at the national level. This limitation has the potential to hinder knowledge exchange and the development of more comprehensive research.

Third, research remains concentrated on the context of elementary education and child learners (Papastefanou et al., 2021), while studies at the higher education level are still scarce. In fact, Arabic language learning in higher education involves different complexities and needs. Fourth, research on Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) has not received sufficient attention. Most studies still focus on the context of native speakers or Arabic-speaking environments.

Fifth, research themes are fragmented, as existing studies have not yet been fully integrated into a single robust theoretical framework. This results in knowledge development that tends to be piecemeal rather than cumulative.

c. Research Agenda: Toward a More Cumulative and Integrative Field

Based on the identified gaps, several research priorities can be formulated to advance this field in a more structured and sustainable manner.

First, there is a need to strengthen international collaboration among researchers and institutions. Cross-border collaboration can improve research quality, expand the scope of data, and enrich analytical perspectives.

Second, future research should focus more on the higher education context, particularly on the effectiveness of Arabic reading instruction methods, the integration of digital technology, and the development of a curriculum tailored to students' needs.

Third, further research is needed on the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language, particularly in non-Arab countries such as Indonesia. This is important for understanding the dynamics of language learning in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

Fourth, it is important to promote the integration of various approaches—linguistic, cognitive, pedagogical, and technological—to develop learning models that are more innovative and adaptable to changing times.

Fifth, future research is expected to develop a more comprehensive and systematic theoretical framework, so that studies on Arabic reading skills are not merely descriptive but also capable of making sustained theoretical contributions.

d. Pedagogical Implications for Arabic as a Foreign Language Instruction

The findings of this bibliometric and systematic review demonstrate important pedagogical implications for Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) instruction, particularly in higher education and non-Arab contexts where Arabic is learned for academic, religious, and professional purposes. The identified thematic clusters—technological and computational approaches, linguistic awareness, and educational practice—indicate that Arabic reading instruction should move beyond traditional grammar-translation methods toward more integrated, evidence-based approaches. University curricula should therefore foster not only lexical and syntactic knowledge but also higher-order reading skills, including interpretation, critical evaluation, and contextual inference. Moreover, the limited representation of AFL research in non-Arab countries highlights the need for curricula that address multilingual learners' linguistic backgrounds, academic objectives, and sociocultural contexts.

The growing prominence of digital technologies, including machine learning, natural language processing, and readability analysis, underscores the importance of integrating digital literacy, AI-assisted learning resources, corpus-based materials, and adaptive assessment into Arabic reading instruction. At the same time, effective teaching should explicitly address the linguistic complexity of Arabic through morphology-based vocabulary instruction, phonological awareness, and activities that bridge *fushā* and colloquial varieties. The findings also emphasize the central role of teacher competence in implementing innovative and evidence-based instruction. Future research should therefore prioritize university-level AFL contexts, particularly in non-Arab countries such as Indonesia, by examining curriculum implementation, technology-enhanced learning, teacher preparedness, and learner engagement to develop more contextual, innovative, and globally relevant models of Arabic reading instruction.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that research on Arabic reading skills experienced significant growth during 2016–2025, particularly after 2019, with publication peaks occurring in 2023–2025. The bibliometric mapping revealed that research in this field has developed into an interdisciplinary domain integrating technological, cognitive, linguistic, and pedagogical perspectives. The dominant contributors were countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel, while international collaboration remained relatively limited. Thematic analysis identified five major research clusters: technological and computational approaches, cognitive and psychological factors, experimental and methodological studies, linguistic awareness, and educational practice. Despite these developments, research concerning higher education and Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) contexts remains underrepresented. These findings indicate that Arabic reading research is evolving rapidly but still faces fragmentation in theoretical orientation and global participation (Donthu et al., 2021); (Abdulroya Benseng & Sakirin Tam, 2024).

The present findings are highly relevant to contemporary educational and social transformations, where Arabic is increasingly learned not only as a religious language but also as a language of scholarship, diplomacy, and global communication. The increasing emphasis on digital literacy and technology-enhanced learning has encouraged researchers to explore machine learning, natural language processing, and readability analysis as innovative approaches to Arabic reading instruction (Allaithy & Zaki, 2025). At the same time, the uneven distribution of research productivity reveals disparities in research capacity among countries. Institutions from the Middle East continue to dominate scholarly production, whereas contributions from developing countries, including Indonesia, remain comparatively limited. Such inequality can influence the direction of knowledge production, as dominant research agendas remain concentrated in particular academic regions (Safrudin et al., 2024). Consequently, strengthening international collaboration and promoting greater participation from non-Arab countries are essential to producing more inclusive evidence that represents diverse educational contexts and multilingual learners.

From a theoretical perspective, the results reinforce the understanding that Arabic reading is a multidimensional process involving interactions among phonological awareness, morphological knowledge, syntactic processing, vocabulary development, and higher-order comprehension. The prominence of studies on morphology, phonological awareness, and diglossia supports the argument that Arabic's linguistic complexity substantially shapes reading acquisition and comprehension (Asadi & Kavar, 2024). Likewise, evidence emphasizing vocabulary, morphosyntax, and phonological awareness is consistent with the *Simple View of Reading*, which conceptualizes reading comprehension as the interaction between decoding ability and linguistic comprehension (Papastefanou et al., 2021). Moreover, the emergence of artificial intelligence and computational linguistics reflects a theoretical shift from conventional cognitive perspectives toward sociotechnical approaches, where literacy development is increasingly mediated by digital technologies. Nevertheless, the bibliometric evidence also demonstrates that Arabic reading research still lacks an overarching theoretical framework capable of integrating linguistic, cognitive, pedagogical, and technological dimensions into a cumulative body of knowledge.

Beyond mapping publication patterns, this study offers several important insights into the future direction of Arabic reading research. The transition from traditional instructional approaches toward interdisciplinary and technology-oriented studies indicates that Arabic literacy is no longer viewed merely as an educational issue but also as part of broader scientific and technological development. However, the limited attention devoted to AFL contexts and higher education suggests that existing knowledge does not yet fully address the needs of multilingual learners studying Arabic outside Arabic-speaking societies. Another important lesson concerns the relatively weak international collaboration network identified through bibliometric analysis. Stronger collaboration among researchers, institutions, and countries is likely to facilitate comparative studies, enrich methodological diversity, and produce more globally applicable instructional models. Therefore, sustainable progress in Arabic reading research depends not only on publication growth but also on stronger collaboration, contextual diversity, and cumulative theoretical development.

The present findings corroborate previous bibliometric studies, which report the rapid expansion of Arabic language research over the last decade. Similar trends were identified by (Zikriah & Mauludiyah, 2024) and (Safrudin et al., 2024), who observed increasing publication output and the continuing dominance of Middle Eastern institutions. Likewise, (Yunita et al., 2024) highlighted the growing integration of pedagogical and technological perspectives in Arabic language research. Nevertheless, this study extends previous investigations in several important respects. Unlike earlier bibliometric analyses that examined Arabic language teaching more broadly, this research specifically focuses on Arabic reading skills while combining bibliometric analysis with a Systematic Literature Review, thereby providing both quantitative mapping and qualitative synthesis. Furthermore, whereas previous studies primarily described publication trends, the present research interprets bibliometric findings through pedagogical and theoretical lenses by identifying persistent gaps in higher education, AFL instruction, and international collaboration. The continuing importance of phonological and morphological awareness reported by Layes et al., (2023) is also confirmed, while the findings simultaneously reveal the growing influence of artificial intelligence and digital technologies that were less emphasized in earlier investigations (Allaithy & Zaki, 2025).

The findings provide several implications for future research, educational policy, and instructional practice. First, universities and research institutions should establish stronger international research partnerships involving Arab and non-Arab scholars to reduce geographical disparities and enhance the global visibility of Arabic studies. Second, future empirical research should prioritize Arabic reading instruction within higher education and AFL contexts, particularly in multilingual countries where Arabic functions as a foreign language. Third, curriculum developers should systematically integrate morphology-based instruction, critical reading strategies, digital literacy, and AI-assisted learning resources into Arabic language programs to address emerging educational demands. Fourth, teacher education programs should strengthen professional competencies in technology-enhanced pedagogy, reading assessment, and evidence-based literacy instruction to improve learning quality. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to develop integrative theoretical frameworks that combine linguistic, cognitive, pedagogical, and technological perspectives, enabling Arabic reading studies to evolve from a fragmented field into a cumulative, internationally connected, and globally relevant discipline capable of addressing the challenges of twenty-first-century language education.

Conclusion

This study mapped the global development of Arabic reading skills research through a bibliometric analysis and Systematic Literature Review of 105 Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2016 and 2025. The findings reveal a substantial increase in scholarly publications, particularly after 2019, indicating that Arabic reading has evolved into an increasingly interdisciplinary field. Five dominant thematic clusters were identified, covering technological and computational approaches, cognitive and psychological perspectives, methodological studies, linguistic awareness, and educational practice. Despite this progress,

the analysis also highlights persistent gaps, including limited international collaboration, the underrepresentation of higher education and Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) contexts, and the fragmentation of research themes across disciplinary perspectives.

This study contributes both theoretically and methodologically to the development of Arabic language education research. Theoretically, it provides an integrative perspective by connecting linguistic, cognitive, technological, and pedagogical dimensions within a comprehensive framework for understanding Arabic reading research. Methodologically, integrating bibliometric analysis with a Systematic Literature Review offers a robust approach to combining quantitative mapping with qualitative synthesis, enabling a more comprehensive identification of publication trends, collaboration patterns, thematic developments, and research gaps. These contributions provide a valuable evidence base for future curriculum innovation, technology-enhanced Arabic reading instruction, and the advancement of Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) education.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. This study was restricted to Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2016 and 2025 and, therefore, may not fully represent the broader body of Arabic reading research available in other databases or publication formats. In addition, bibliometric analysis primarily emphasizes publication patterns and citation relationships rather than the effectiveness of classroom implementation or instructional practices. Future studies are therefore encouraged to expand data sources by incorporating databases such as Web of Science and regional indexes, conduct comparative studies across Arab and non-Arab educational contexts, strengthen international collaborative research, and develop empirical investigations that integrate linguistic, cognitive, technological, and pedagogical perspectives into more comprehensive models of Arabic reading instruction, particularly within higher education and AFL settings.

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