

Bibliometric Analysis of CEFR-Based Strategies in University-Level Speaking Instruction

Jeanne Tuilan¹, Pratomo Widodo², Nur Hidayanto Pancoro Setyo Putro³, Ignatius Javier C. Tuerah⁴, Ni Wayan Surya Mahayanti⁵

Abstract

A bibliometric analysis was conducted on CEFR-based strategies in university-level speaking instruction, based on data from 43 publications from 2014 to 2024. The CEFR's significant global influence on curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and assessment practices was substantiated. The data revealed an increase in the number of publications in 2016, 2019, and 2022, with a decline in other years. This pattern is likely influenced by external factors, such as the impact of the global pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The primary focus was on linguistic and cultural dimensions, with "Language Communication and Culture" representing the most highly-cited publication. The most frequently cited sources, such as "Speaking Teaching" and the "International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)," emphasized the integration of technology in language instruction. Co-authorship analysis revealed the existence of well-established regional collaborative networks, which underscored the importance of collaborative efforts. The analysis confirmed the CEFR's enduring impact on speaking education and identified trends and gaps, which highlighted the need for greater international collaboration and diversity to enhance effective language teaching practices and inform policy decisions.

Keywords: *bibliometric, CEFR, Speaking, University.*

Introduction

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has profoundly influenced speaking education worldwide, serving as a standardized framework for curriculum design, teaching methodologies, assessment practices, and learner self-assessment (Council of Europe, 2001; North, 2014). Initially developed to facilitate language learning, teaching, and assessment across European nations, CEFR has since been widely adopted in non-European contexts, including Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America (Little, 2020; Piccardo et al., 2022). The framework categorizes language proficiency into six levels—ranging from A1 (Beginner) to C2 (Mastery)—providing a universal scale for measuring communicative competence. By establishing common descriptors for language abilities, CEFR enables comparability in assessment, ensuring that learners, educators, and policymakers have a shared understanding of language proficiency standards (North & Piccardo, 2016). Over the past two decades, numerous studies have examined the CEFR's influence on various aspects of language education, including its role in curriculum development, teaching strategies, speaking proficiency assessment, and the factors influencing speaking skill acquisition (Fitria, 2023; Hakim, 2024; Foley, 2021; Demirel & Fakazli, 2021). As CEFR-based approaches continue to gain traction in university-level speaking classrooms, the need to evaluate their effectiveness and identify research trends becomes increasingly significant.

Research on the CEFR's role in curriculum development underscores its impact on language course design, instructional materials, and pedagogical innovation (Byram & Parmenter, 2012; Little, 2022). Several studies have emphasized how the integration of CEFR descriptors enhances the alignment between learning objectives and teaching outcomes, ensuring that students progressively develop speaking competencies across proficiency levels (Fitria, 2023; Hakim, 2024). Furthermore, CEFR-aligned curricula have been instrumental in shaping language policies at the national level, particularly in countries such as Malaysia, Japan, and Thailand (Ng & Ahmad, 2021; Vajirakachorn, 2023). Beyond curriculum design, the CEFR has

¹ Faculty of Language, Arts, and Cultures, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia; Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Manado, Indonesia. Email: jeanetuilan@unima.ac.id

² Faculty of Language, Arts, and Cultures, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

³ Faculty of Language, Arts, and Cultures, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

⁴ Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Manado, Indonesia

⁵ Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Indonesia

significantly influenced teaching methodologies, encouraging a shift from teacher-centered approaches to learner-centered, communicative, and task-based instruction (Foley, 2021; Piccardo et al., 2022). Educators incorporating CEFR-based strategies often employ interactive classroom activities, such as role-plays, debates, and spontaneous discussions, to enhance students' oral fluency and pragmatic competence (Council of Europe, 2018). Additionally, the CEFR's emphasis on real-life communication has led to an increased focus on authentic materials, multimodal learning, and digital tools to support speaking instruction in university settings (North, 2020; Emecen, 2023).

Despite its global acceptance, the implementation of CEFR in speaking classrooms is not without challenges. Several studies have pointed out that many educators lack a comprehensive understanding of CEFR principles, leading to inconsistent application in classroom practices (Raof & Yusof, 2021; Singh et al., 2021). Moreover, national curricula often struggle to fully align with CEFR levels due to differences in educational policies, teacher training, and institutional constraints (Alias et al., 2021; Abidin & Hashim, 2021). Another concern is the overemphasis on assessment-driven learning, which sometimes hinders creativity and communicative spontaneity in speaking activities (Fulcher, 2015; Little, 2022). Furthermore, CEFR's descriptive nature allows for varied interpretations, which can lead to discrepancies in how proficiency levels are measured across different institutions (North & Piccardo, 2016). Despite these limitations, research continues to highlight the benefits of CEFR-based instruction, particularly in enhancing students' confidence, fostering cultural awareness, and promoting plurilingual competence (Emecen, 2023; Piccardo et al., 2022). The CEFR not only serves as a linguistic benchmark but also fosters an intercultural perspective, preparing students for global communication in academic and professional contexts (Byram & Parmenter, 2012).

Given the growing body of research on CEFR-based strategies in speaking instruction, a bibliometric analysis serves as a crucial tool for synthesizing and mapping research trends in this field. Bibliometric studies provide a quantitative overview of scholarly publications, revealing emerging themes, influential authors, key journals, and citation patterns (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). By identifying trends and research gaps, bibliometric analysis enables scholars to trace the evolution of CEFR-based strategies and assess their impact on language education (Donthu et al., 2021). Moreover, such an analysis can help educators and policymakers make informed decisions regarding curriculum design, teacher training programs, and assessment reforms. The increasing availability of large-scale academic databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, has facilitated the systematic study of research output and citation networks in CEFR-related publications (Zupic & Čater, 2015). By leveraging bibliometric methodologies, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the CEFR's role in university-level speaking education, offering insights that will contribute to the ongoing discourse on language teaching effectiveness and policy development.

The objective of this study is to conduct a bibliometric analysis of CEFR-based strategies in university-level speaking instruction, building upon the extensive research cited. By systematically examining scholarly publications, citation patterns, and thematic trends, this analysis will provide valuable insights into the adoption, impact, and evolution of CEFR in speaking education. Furthermore, the study will explore how CEFR-based strategies have been implemented across diverse linguistic and educational contexts, identifying best practices, existing challenges, and potential future directions. The findings of this bibliometric analysis will not only contribute to the academic discourse but also inform language educators, researchers, and policymakers on the effectiveness of CEFR-oriented speaking instruction. By synthesizing current knowledge, this study seeks to enhance understanding of evidence-based teaching strategies, ultimately supporting more effective, inclusive, and adaptable speaking curricula in university settings.

Method

A bibliometric analysis was conducted to systematically examine publication trends, citation patterns, and research networks related to CEFR-based strategies in university-level speaking instruction. This method provides quantitative insights into the development of research in this domain, allowing for an in-depth exploration of emerging themes, influential authors, co-authorship collaborations, and citation dynamics.

Bibliometric analysis is widely used in educational research as it helps map the intellectual structure of a field, uncover key research clusters, and track the evolution of scholarly contributions over time (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). By employing bibliometric indicators such as citation counts, co-citation relationships, and keyword co-occurrence, this study offers a comprehensive overview of the research landscape on CEFR-based speaking instruction at the university level.

The dataset for this analysis was sourced from Google BigQuery using Dimensions AI, a large-scale academic research database known for its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, and other scholarly publications. Dimensions AI was chosen for its advanced indexing capabilities and ability to facilitate bibliometric research across disciplines (Herzog et al., 2020). To ensure relevance, a systematic search strategy was applied, using the keywords “CEFR,” “Speaking,” and “University” to retrieve studies published between 2014 and 2024. This timeframe was selected to focus on recent trends and developments in CEFR-based speaking education. The initial search retrieved 49 articles, which were further screened for relevance to ensure that only publications directly related to CEFR-based speaking instruction in university settings were included. After applying inclusion criteria, such as relevance to higher education, language assessment, and CEFR-driven pedagogical approaches, the dataset was refined to 43 studies for analysis.

To ensure a systematic and transparent selection process, this study adopted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) model. The PRISMA framework is commonly used in systematic reviews and bibliometric studies to enhance the rigor and reproducibility of literature selection (Page et al., 2021). The application of PRISMA involved four stages: Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion. In the Identification phase, 49 relevant publications were initially retrieved using search queries in Dimensions AI. The Screening stage involved removing duplicate and irrelevant studies, resulting in the exclusion of six articles. During the Eligibility phase, the remaining 43 studies were assessed based on their direct relevance to CEFR-based speaking instruction at the university level, ensuring that only high-quality and peer-reviewed publications were included. Finally, in the Inclusion stage, the selected 43 studies were used for bibliometric analysis.

The application of PRISMA helped ensure that the study selection process followed a structured and transparent methodology, reducing potential bias. This approach not only streamlined the data collection process but also enhanced the validity of the findings. The integration of VOSviewer visualization techniques further strengthened the analysis, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of research patterns in CEFR-based speaking education. By systematically tracking publication trends, citation impact, and co-authorship networks, this study provides valuable insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers looking to understand how CEFR-based strategies have shaped university-level speaking instruction over the past decade.

Table 1. Relevant Articles

N o.	Title	DOI	Author
1	Developing an Assessment System of Speaking Skills in English as a Foreign Language Based on CEFR-J	10.21820/23987073.2021.2.56	(Yoshitomi, 2021)
2	Looking beyond scores: validating a CEFR-based university speaking assessment in Mainland China	10.1186/s40468-017-0034-3	(Liu & Jia, 2017)
3	The CEFR-TBL in Fostering Thai Pre-service Teachers' English-Speaking Ability Using the Peer Interview Task	10.7575/aiac.all.v.10n.5 p.10	(Phaisannan et al., 2019)
4	Bringing Pop-Culture into Classroom: Speaking's Got Talent Activity to Enhance Speaking Skill of University Students	10.31958/jt.v19i2.462	(Hasbi, 2017)

No.	Title	DOI	Author
5	The Global Impact of CEFR in Higher Education: A Case Study in Kazakhstan and Insights from a Pedagogical Experiment	10.48081/obvs7996	(Amrenova & Rakhymova, 2024)
6	Language Assessment at a Thai University: A CEFR-Based Test of English Proficiency Development	10.61508/refl.v31i1.270418	(Waluyo et al., 2024)
7	Speaking CEFR about Local Tests: What Mapping a Placement Test to the CEFR Can and Can't Do	10.1007/978-3-031-33541-9_4	(Springer & Kozłowska, 2023)
8	Towards a CEFR Framework for Workplace Communication: Students' Perceptions of the Sub-Skills, Use and Importance of Language Productive Skills (LPS)	10.47836/pjssh.29.s3.02	(Muhammad et al., 2021)
9	Assessing Reading Texts for Non-Native Arabic Speaking Students at the University of Jordan in Light of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages from the Students' Perspective	10.17507/tpls.1406.23	(Alrababa'h et al., 2024)
10	Development of French Learning Module for Visually Impaired Learners	10.2991/assehr.k.201215.026	(Marsyelina et al., 2020)
11	Aligned ICTs to the CEFR in the Cuban foreign language teaching program.	10.48185/tts.v5i1.1026	(Cardoso, 2024)
12	The Curriculum of Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language in the Light of CEFR	10.17240/aibuefd.2023..-1327769	(DALGAÇ et al., 2023)
13	A CEFR-J Based Speaking Program for a Self-Access Learning Center	10.37237/080105	(Worth et al., 2017)
14	A Cross-Linguistic and Cross-Skill Perspective on L2 Development in Study Abroad	10.1007/978-3-030-01006-5_12	(Davidson & Shaw, 2018)
15	Topic Familiarity Effects on Performance in Speaking Assessment Tasks	10.24093/awej/vol14no4.13	(Bukhari et al., 2023)
16	How new CEFR mediation descriptors can help to assess the discussion skills of management students - Global and analytical scales	10.37546/jaltsig.cefr1-3	(Lankina, 2019)
17	Topic Familiarity Effects on Performance in Speaking Assessment Tasks	10.31235/osf.io/93wyf	(Bukhari et al., 2023)
18	Need Analysis of Flipped Learning English-Based Speaking Materials for Faculty Economics and Business Students	10.18860/jeasp.v6i2.23532	(Chusna et al., 2023)
19	Path to Success or Failure in Foreign Language Speaking	10.5817/casalc2022-1-4	(Staňková, 2022)
20	Speaking assessment perceptions and practices of English teachers at tertiary level in the Turkish context	10.1515/cercles-2017-0015	(Özdemir-Yılmaz & Özkan, 2017)
21	Expanding lindsei to spoken learner English from several L1s across CEFR levels	10.3366/cor.2021.0220	(Huang & Gráf, 2021)
22	The Oral Standardized English Proficiency Test: Opportunities Provided and Challenges Overcome in an Egyptian Context	10.1007/978-981-33-4232-3_24	(Boraie & Shabara, 2021)
23	Improving Advanced Interaction Skills	10.1007/978-3-030-79241-1_17	(Savukova & Richter, 2021)

No.	Title	DOI	Author
24	Enhancing Thai Students' Oral Language Experience using the CEFR-PBA through the Technique of Oral Presentation	10.7575/aiac.all.v.10n.5 p.59	(Worawong et al., 2019)
25	Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) and Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK)	10.1515/ijas-2016-0003	(Won, 2016)
26	Helping aerospace engineering students develop their intercultural communicative competence	10.14705/rpnet.2021.54.1315	(Di Sarno-García, 2021)
27	Development of intercultural competence in foreign language classes at the medical university	10.29051/el.v8iesp.1.16921	(Olshvang, 2022)
28	The Use of Digital Portfolios to Enhance English as a Foreign Language Speaking Skills in Higher Education	10.3991/ijet.v15i24.15103	(Cabrera-Solano, 2020)
29	Students' perceptions with different CEFR levels on foreign teachers using L1 in EFL instruction	10.24815/siele.v8i3.19629	(Anggoro & Nguyen, 2021)
30	Exploring Thai EFL Students' Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) Strategies and English Proficiency	10.61871/mj.v46n1-17	(Apridayani, 2022)
31	Development and demonstration of a method for assessing learners' English-speaking ability	10.21820/23987073.2023.1.44	(Onaka et al., 2023)
32	Collaborative and Self-directed Learning Strategies to Promote Fluent EFL Speakers	10.5539/elt.v10n5p139	(Buitrago, 2017)
33	Designing tasks for developing complex language skills and cognitive competence in the distance learning of Slovak as a foreign language	10.14705/rpnet.2019.38.1028	(Mošat'ová & Výškrabková, 2019)
34	The Concept of English Philologists' Training at Swiss Universities	10.1515/rpp-2016-0024	(Zasluzhena, 2016)
35	Explicit Frameworks to Teach Spoken Discourse Markers: Present- Practice-Produce and Illustration-Interaction-Induction	10.25130/jls.7.1.6	(Haji Mohammed & Abbas, 2023)
36	Policies on minimum English language requirements in UK higher education, 1989-2021	10.1080/0309877x.2021.1945556	(Pearson, 2021)
37	Global Interactional Patterns in Group Oral Interaction	10.20581/arele.22.0_33	(NEGISHI, 2017)
38	Collaborative Learning with CCC Members in Learning 21st Century Skills and Worldviews During the COVID-19	10.52987/edc.2022.004	(Obari, 2022)
39	The Correlation of English Proficiency Level and Translation Strategies Used by Indonesian EFL Learners	10.24071/llt.v24i1.2812	(Yulita, 2021)
40	Deliberate Techniques in Teaching ESP at Polytechnic University of Tirana	10.14738/assrj.91.11657	(Vrapi & Karapici, 2022)
41	Linguistic Intercomprehension in Vocational Translation Training (The Case of English, Spanish, Russian)	10.2139/ssrn.3504164	(Blinova, 2019)
42	Establishing quality criteria and an EMI certification procedure	10.4324/9781003025115-6	(Dubow et al., 2021)

No.	Title	DOI	Author
43	The Effect of Teaching Structural Discourse Markers in an EFL Classroom Setting	10.5539/elt.v9n7p16	(Alraddadi, 2016)

To analyze and visualize the data, VOSviewer was employed, a widely used bibliometric tool that allows for the visual representation of research networks. The analysis focused on publication trends from 2014 to 2024, identifying key research categories, frequently cited journals, and co-authorship patterns. Network visualization in VOSviewer enabled the detection of keyword co-occurrence trends, showing which CEFR-related topics have been most studied. Additionally, co-citation analysis was conducted to map intellectual relationships among studies, identifying landmark papers and influential researchers in CEFR-based speaking instruction. The study also examined institutional and international collaborations, highlighting how different research groups contribute to this field. By employing a bibliometric approach, this research provides valuable insights into knowledge dissemination and academic impact within the CEFR-speaking education research community.

Findings

Publication Trends

The analysis of publication trends from 2014 to 2024 on "CEFR," "Speaking," and "University" reveals significant fluctuations. Significant increases in research output were evident in 2016 (7 publications), 2019 (10 publications), and 2022 (6 publications), indicating periods of heightened interest. On the other hand, there were noticeable declines in 2017 (1 publication), 2020 (2 publications), and 2021 (0 publications). These fluctuations are likely influenced by external factors such as the global pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The preliminary count for 2024 indicates a potential decline with only 1 publication so far. These findings highlight the necessity for continued attention and effort to improve and maintain research output in this area.

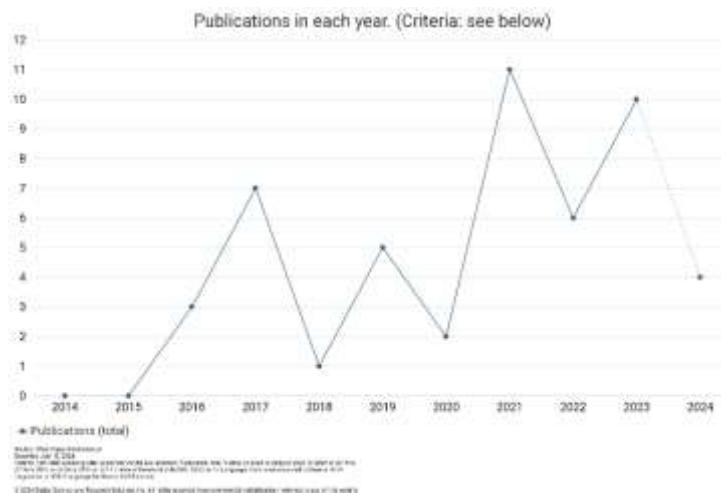


Figure 1. Publication Trends

Research Category

The distribution of articles published between 2014 and 2024 on “CEFR”, “speaking”, and “university” exhibits a clear focus on three distinct research categories. The category "Language, Communication and Culture" leads with 45 publications, which indicates a strong focus on linguistic and cultural dimensions. The "Education" category follows with 22 publications, which indicate a significant interest in pedagogical aspects and applications within academic settings. Lastly, the interdisciplinary area of Creative Arts and Writing has only one publication, indicating minimal exploration in this field. This distribution underscores

the predominant emphasis on linguistic and educational research, while revealing a potential gap in integrating creative arts perspectives. To enrich the research landscape, there is a need for a more interdisciplinary approach that includes underrepresented fields like Creative Arts. Such diversification could foster innovative methodologies and comprehensive insights into the application and impact of CEFR in Speaking education at the university level.

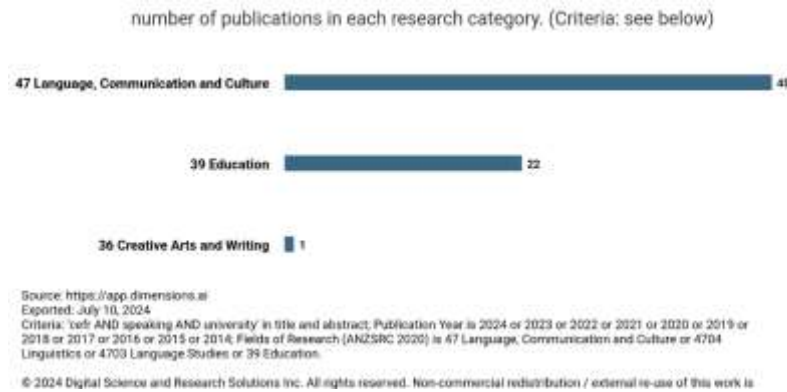


Figure 2. Research Category

Most Cited Source

The analysis of the most frequently cited sources in the fields of "CEFR," "Speaking," and "University" reveals a clear emphasis on applied linguistics journals, particularly "Speaking Teaching," which has been cited a total of 20 times across two publications. This highlights a primary focus on pedagogical approaches and practical classroom applications of the CEFR framework within university-level Speaking instruction. The significant number of citations to the International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET), with 15 citations in a single publication, highlights the growing interest in the integration of technology in Speaking teaching at the university level. This trend indicates a recognition of the potential of technological tools to enhance language learning experiences and outcomes. Furthermore, the presence of "Educational Linguistics" with six citations across two publications suggests an acknowledgment of the value of linguistic theory and research in informing pedagogical practices. Collectively, this citation pattern reflects a dynamic and evolving research landscape that seeks to optimize Speaking education in universities through a combination of evidence-based pedagogy, technological innovation, and linguistic insights.

Table 2. Most Cited Journal

No.	Journal	Publication	Citation
1	Speaking Teaching	2	20
2	International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)	1	15
3	Educational Linguistics	2	6
4	Language Testing in Asia	1	6
5	International Journal of Area Studies	1	4

Co-Authorship Analysis

The co-authorship network on "CEFR," "Speaking," and "university" for the period between 2014 and 2024 illustrates the existence of two main clusters. The red cluster, which includes Noor Lide Abu Kassim and Lilliati Ismail, indicates a high level of collaboration. The green cluster, which includes Nooreen Binti Noordin and Nurul Iman Ahmad Bukhari, demonstrates a high level of focused cooperation. Central authors such as Noor Lide Abu Kassim suggest a strong collaborative presence. The network implies active research and high productivity in CEFR and Speaking education in universities. Encouraging cross-cluster collaboration and involving more international researchers could enhance the research diversity and impact.

The co-authorship analysis reveals established collaborative networks among researchers, primarily within specific institutions and regions. This suggests that institutional and national-level research collaborations play a pivotal role in advancing CEFR-based instructional strategies (Little, 2020; Zupic & Čater, 2015). However, the findings also indicate a lack of extensive international and interdisciplinary collaboration, pointing to an area that requires greater emphasis. Expanding cross-border and cross-disciplinary research efforts would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of CEFR implementation in diverse linguistic and educational settings (North & Piccardo, 2016). The CEFR's influence extends beyond language proficiency, fostering cultural understanding, multilingual competence, and global citizenship education (Abidin & Hashim, 2021; Emecen, 2023). By strengthening collaborative initiatives and incorporating perspectives from sociolinguistics, intercultural studies, and digital humanities, researchers can deepen the conceptual and practical applications of CEFR-based speaking instruction.

The fluctuations in publication trends observed in this study, with notable peaks and troughs, may be attributed to global events and shifts in language education priorities. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on language teaching methodologies, accelerating the transition to online and blended learning environments (Herzog et al., 2020; Page et al., 2021). During this period, educators adapted CEFR-aligned speaking instruction to virtual classrooms, utilizing digital tools such as speech recognition software, automated feedback systems, and online oral assessments to maintain instructional effectiveness (Little, 2020; Vajirakachorn, 2023). The increasing volume of research focusing on technology-enhanced CEFR instruction post-pandemic suggests that digitalization in language education is a long-term trend rather than a temporary response to crisis-driven teaching challenges (Donthu et al., 2021; Foley, 2021).

This bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview of research trends, key contributors, and thematic directions in CEFR-based strategies for university-level speaking instruction. The findings confirm that CEFR remains a cornerstone of language education, influencing curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and assessment frameworks (North & Piccardo, 2016; Foley, 2021). The study also highlights emerging trends, such as the integration of technology, the emphasis on communicative competence, and the importance of collaborative research networks.

Despite significant advancements, several areas warrant further investigation. Addressing the existing gaps in international collaboration, fostering greater interdisciplinarity, and exploring innovative pedagogical approaches will enhance the effectiveness of CEFR-based speaking instruction in higher education. By adopting a multifaceted approach that integrates educational technology, linguistic theory, and empirical research, scholars and practitioners can continue to refine CEFR implementation strategies, ultimately contributing to more effective, inclusive, and globally relevant language education policies (Abidin & Hashim, 2021; Emecen, 2023).

Moving forward, continued investment in empirical research, digital learning tools, and professional training programs will be essential for sustaining the impact and adaptability of CEFR-based methodologies in speaking instruction. Strengthening research collaborations across geographical and disciplinary boundaries will further enrich the field, ensuring that CEFR-based approaches continue to evolve in response to changing educational needs and technological advancements. This study serves as a foundation for future research, offering insights that can inform evidence-based policy decisions and pedagogical innovations in university-level language education.

Conclusion

The bibliometric analysis of CEFR-based strategies in university-level speaking instruction offers valuable insights into the current research landscape. The findings indicate a predominant focus on linguistic and cultural dimensions, an increasing interest in technological integration, and the growth of established collaborative networks among researchers. However, the analysis also reveals opportunities for further research, particularly in the interdisciplinary application of CEFR and the necessity for more diverse and international collaboration.

To further advance the field, future research should aim to explore underrepresented areas such as the integration of creative arts perspectives and the practical pedagogical applications of CEFR-based strategies. Furthermore, the fostering of international collaborations and the encouragement of cross-disciplinary research may result in the development of more innovative methodologies and a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of CEFR on Speaking education at the university level. By addressing these gaps, the research community can contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective language teaching practices and inform future policy decisions in the field.

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