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Academic-Scholarly Publications in the Iranian Applied Linguistics Journals (2008-2019): A Comprehensive Review

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Abstract: The first step in the optimization of research is to analyze and review the conducted research to gain a comprehensive overview. Therefore, this study was set to delve into the contributions made to Iranian Applied Linguistics Journals approved by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology from 2008 to 2019. To analyze the data, frequency analyses were run on 1419 publications. The findings indicated that TEFL-related topics received the most coverage (88%) compared to the other prevalent majors: Linguistics, Translation, and Literature. The study revealed that male contributions (63.7%) far outweighed those of females (34.4%). Furthermore, it came to light that co-authorship (59.95%) was more appreciated among contributors to Iranian applied linguistics journals. Moreover, Islamic Azad University collectively (25.34%) followed by University of Shiraz (11.3%) and University of Isfahan (10.25%) had the highest number of publications. Assistant (32.12%) and associate professors (21.86%) had the highest number of publications. It was also found that the US contributors (28.75%) followed by Australian and Malaysian contributors (13.75%) made the highest number of foreign contributions to the Iranian EFL journals. Finally, it was revealed that writing-related topics was the most frequently-explored topic (n=164). Corpus-related studies (n=132) and teacher education (n=118) came second and third respectively. The study provides practitioners and researchers with relevant and missing information about the most frequently-explored topics, the most prolific authors, the most productive universities, and the number of foreign contributions.

Keywords: Applied linguistics, TEFL-Related Topics, Linguistics, Literature, Translation, Iranian Applied Linguistics Journals.

Introduction

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The first step in the optimization of research in applied linguistics is to analyze and review the recently-conducted research. For many practitioners and researchers within the field of applied linguistics, it is deemed rather necessary to have relevant and up to date information about the most-frequently explored topics, (i.e. the most popular research topics and endeavors), the most influential (highly-cited) authors, and the most productive universities and research institutes in terms of publications in prestigious journals. Such information would certainly be of great benefit to the researchers of applied linguistics for several reasons. First and foremost, they will stay fresh and up to date on the most recent research trends in applied linguistics. Second, such information will undoubtedly help them make more informed, plausible, and conscious choices with regard to what to engage in. Third, based on the obtained information, both governmental and private agencies, research institutes, and universities would be able to make more informed decisions on allocating sufficient research funds and formulating appropriate language policies (Lei & Liu, 2019). This research sets to investigate such issues concerning applied linguistics in Iran within the last 12 years (2008–2019).

The current research is motivated by the previously-done studies, particularly (Lei & Liu, 2019), the only in-depth investigation to date on research trends in Applied Linguistics from 2005 to 2016. More specifically, this study aims to investigate the academic-scholarly publications approved by Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology in applied linguistics journals in Iran from 2008 to 2019. Applied Linguistics is chosen as the target discipline for three reasons. First, applied linguistics is rather multi-disciplinary in nature and seems to cover a wide range of topics. Second, the development of applied linguistics has not been thoroughly investigated from this specific vantage point in Iran. Researchers have only investigated disciplines such as Quoranic sciences (Hosseininasab, Mohammadi, & Talei, 2016). Third, the researchers of the present study are professors of applied linguistics. Therefore, the choice is not merely the one of convenience, but rather that it springs from the researchers' familiarity with the field that might, in turn, facilitate the interpretation of the findings.

All academic-scholarly journals have their own stated objectives, agenda and scope, i.e., the particular research topics or themes and research types they each cover. Having detailed information about the most prolific authors, most-frequently explored topics, single, co-, or multiple authorship, foreign contributors, various academic institutions' scholarly contributions and MA or PhD students' contributions can be of interest and significance to

not only its stakeholders (its publisher, editors, and editorial board) but also its potential audience and contributing authors. Such information can help the professionals and practitioners within the field of applied linguistics to more effectively attain the objectives of the journals while enabling the individuals to make more informed decisions concerning whether to read and/or submit manuscripts to the journal, where to head, who to turn to for professional advice, and how to pick the right topic for the right journal. More specifically, the provided information will hopefully add to the existing literature and fill the gap as stated.

Literature Review

Alan Pritchard (1969) was the first to bring the term Bibliometrics into existence. The term was used to refer to “the application of mathematics and statistical methods” to analyze scientific publications (Pritchard, 1969, p. 348). However, according to Lei and Liu (2019), there had been related attempts to quantitatively analyze publication information long before the term bibliometrics came into existence. Cole and Eales (1917) statistically analyzed more than three centuries’ publications (1543–1860) in comparative anatomy, in which they evaluated the development rate of research in the field and how much each European country had contributed to the research. Broadly speaking, early bibliometric studies were primarily restricted to disciplines in natural science and were mainly utilized to track, grasp, and unravel the growth of knowledge in an academic discipline as contrasted with the quantification and calculation research output and the effect of publications (Lei & Liu, 2019).

With the advent and emergence of Eugene Garfield’s Science Citation Index (SCI), and the proposal of a well-designed citation indexing system by Garfield (1955), new developments transpired. The SCI allows all-inclusive, exhaustive, and thorough bibliographic citation information of the publications in science journals to be systematically compiled and stored (Lei & Liu, 2019). The incorporation of citation information in such analysis has been both influenced and prompted by the fact that the research is in dire need of “the most accessible and visible tracks of this double movement of complying with the past while projecting into the future” (De Bellis, 2009, p. 17). Prior to the emergence of the SCI, keywords and subject indices were the only means to search through the research literature. However, bibliographic citations were added as a new tool for such searches via the SCI (Qui, 2010).

The efficacy of citation-based literature search was soon strongly corroborated by empirical findings (Salton, 1971). Moreover, later research further indicated that the application of bibliographic citations along with the use of keywords and subject terms remarkably improved the effectiveness of the retrieval of research literature (Pao & Worthen, 1989). In addition to that, present-day bibliometrics in the shape of SCI and Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) have not only facilitated and expedited searching through the literature and finding bibliographic and citation information but have also allowed to quantitatively assess and evaluate the effect of publications, journals, and authors, and the productivity of academicians, programs, and universities (De Bellis, 2009; van Raan, 2005). Garfield (2007, p. 65) stated that “the SCI’s success did not stem from its primary function as a search engine, but from its use as an instrument for measuring scientific productivity”. Furthermore, currently, such information has been applied to quantify and rank the research productivity of not only individual researchers and institutions but also countries (Leydesdorff, 2005; Leydesdorff & Wagner, 2009; Moiwo & Tao, 2013). However, bibliometric information to assess and rank authors, programs, and institutions will have to be used cautiously since there is always room for misinterpretation of the data (Lei & Liu, 2019; van Raan, 2005; Zhang, Patton, & Kennedy, 2013).

Previous studies have been conducted on science or social science as a general field (Liu, Hu, Tang, & Wang, 2015; Ma, Li, & Chen, 2014; Zhou, Thijs & Glanzel, 2009). A few discipline-specific ones have also been done, like Xie and Willett (2013) on computer science and Liu, Xu, and Li (2015) on business management. However, only one has been carried out on linguistics (Lei & Liao, 2017), a couple of recently-published papers on translation studies (van Doorslaer & Gambier, 2015; Zanettin, Saldanha & Harding, 2015), and one on research trends in applied linguistics (Lei & Liu, 2019).

Zhou, Thijs and Glanzel (2009) delved into the patterns and dynamics of China's social science research through bibliometric analyses. The study revealed that in spite of the national orientation of social science research and the linguistic barrier of publishing for an international audience, China's academic contributions in the SSCI dataset have been on the rise with regard to volume, global share, and ranking. However, China cannot be regarded as a pivotal player in the realm of social sciences, as documented by the number of Chinese journals indexed in SSCI. Although China's international publishing is featured in social science, the research outcomes are very disproportionate and off-balance at regional and institutional levels.

van Doorslaer and Gambier (2015) provide an analysis of some academic dimension of publishing in Translation Studies. The analysis was carried out based on the data accessible in the databases of the online *Translation Studies Bibliography*. It mainly focuses on the geographical dissemination and development of Translation and Interpretation research measured via academic affiliations, and keyword frequency links and journals, and the journal's language. First and foremost, justifications and elaborations are provided for the importance and significance of scientometrics and bibliometrics. Furthermore, bibliometric or scientometric works in translations studies are investigated.

Zanettin et. al. (2015) probed into the way subdivisions within translation studies have been redefined and the way research interests have undergone shifts of focus over the years. To this end, data from the Translation Studies Abstracts (TSA) online database were utilized. Drawing upon the notions of 'landscape' and 'sketch maps', they attempted to ponder upon the role that TSA editors, authors of articles and abstracts, have played in the dynamics of the field. First, an overview of the contents of the database is offered, and the way bibliographical tools ultimately represent partial views of a disciplinary landscape is then reflected upon. Furthermore, the way various bibliographies could be used to design and work out categories to describe research topics and therefore construct maps to navigate that landscape were thoroughly looked into. Nevertheless, maps could not be representative of the way the landscape was shaped historically because they are merely static tools. Accordingly, a TSA corpus was employed to observe the way classifications and the frequencies of keywords had developed at various junctures in time.

Lei and Liao (2017) reported on a bibliometric analysis on China's development of linguistics research from 2003 to 2012. The bibliometric information of SSCI academic contributions by researchers from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau was retrieved from the Web of Science. The number of contributions, impact factors, citations, and academic works published in high-impact and prestigious journals were investigated. Findings indicated that the numbers of contributions in linguistics journals from all the four above-mentioned regions had remarkably boosted within that period. Furthermore, Hong Kong was ranked first in terms of linguistics research in China. Taiwan came second and had attained the greatest amount of progress from 2003 to 2010. Nevertheless, Mainland China outdid and excelled Taiwan from 2011 with regard to the academic contributions within the realm of linguistics. Macau had also witnessed its considerable progress while its

improvement was considered the least amongst the four regions. Reasons for China's rapid growth and expansion in linguistics research are elaborated on.

Lei and Liu (2019) conducted a bibliometric analysis of the 2005–16 research trends in the field using a dataset of articles from 42 Social Science Citation Index (SSCI)-indexed journals of applied linguistics. The analysis concentrated on the most frequently-debated topics, the most highly cited academic works, and the developments that have transpired in the research trends. The findings indicated that the popularity of the most controversial topics have remained unchanged over the last 12 years. More specifically, sociocultural/functional/identity issues have undergone a tremendous boost of interest, while some others issues like phonological, grammatical, generative linguistic topics have seen a major decline of interest. Moreover, though the number of academic contributions from traditional publication powerhouses, such as the USA, has declined slowly and steadily, some other countries' contributions like those of China have increased remarkably. The overall increase in such contributions has led to the discussion of more specific issues in their settings.

However, no study has been conducted to delve into research trends of applied linguistics in the Iranian-published journals. Considering the fact that no such study has been conducted in Iran within the field of applied linguistics, the current study seeks to find answers for the following research questions:

1. What has been the most-frequently explored major from among the four existing prevalent English-related majors (TEFL, Linguistics, Literature, and Translation) in the Iranian EFL academicians' publications?
2. Has gender impacted the scholarly contributions of Iranian authors within the field of applied linguistics in Iran?
3. How many of the contributions were written by a single author, co-authored, or completed by several authors at the same time (single-authored, co-authored, or multi-authored)?
4. Which universities or academic institutes have been the most productive in research and publication?
5. What have been the contributions of each of the different levels of specialists, including MA students, Ph.D. students, assistant professors, associate professors and full professors in producing papers within the field of applied linguistics in Iran?

6. Which foreign countries had the highest number of contributions to the Iranian applied linguistics journals?

7. Who have been the most active and prolific authors in the Iranian applied linguistics journals?

8. What have been the most frequently-explored topics in the Iranian applied linguistics journals?

Method

This research is descriptive in nature and did a frequency analysis to answer all the research questions. The following list of the applied linguistics journals in Iran approved by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology in February 2019 was adopted for the analysis.

As Table 1 reveals, there are 13 journals published in English language within the realm of applied linguistics that are approved by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology. Journal of Teaching Language Skills published by University of Shiraz received its academic-scholarly status in 2008 and stands on top. This journal has the longest publishing background with a total number of 232 published articles accounting for 16.34% of the total publications from 2008 to 2019. Language Horizons Journal published by Al-Zahra University, Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research published by Urmia University, and Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies published by Imam Khomeini International University have been recently promoted to the academic-scholarly status and received this status in 2017. Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research and Language Horizons Journal are ranked at the bottom with a total number of 43 and 25 publications respectively from 2008 to 2019 accounting for only 4.7 % of the overall publications within that period.

From among the 13 approved journals by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology, Journal of Teaching Language Skills (JTLS), Journal of Language and Translation (JLT), Applied Research on English Language (AREL), Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes (IJEAP) and Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies (JMRELS) are published quarterly. The remaining eight are published semi-annually (biannually).

Table 1. *Academic-Research Journals Approved by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology in February 2019*

| | Journal Title | Publisher | Frequency | Date of Academic-Scholarly Status | Editor-in-Chief | Number of Articles |
|---|---|---|------------------|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Journal of Teaching Language Skills (JTLS) | University of Shiraz | Quarterly | August, 2008 | Rahman Sahragard | 232 |
| 2 | Iranian Journal of Applied Language Studies (IJALS) | University of Sistan and Balouchestan | Biannual | Spring / Summer, 2009 | Ali Asghar Rostami Abu Saeedi | 169 |
| 3 | Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning (JELTL) | University of Tabriz | Biannual | May, 2001 | Farahman Farrokhi | 146 |
| 4 | Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL) | Kharazmi University | Biannual | December, 2002 | Mahmood Reza Atai | 143 |
| 5 | Applied Research on English Language (AREL) | University of Isfahan | Quarterly | September, 2011 | Saeed Ketabi | 140 |
| 6 | Journal of Research in Applied Linguistic (JRAL) | Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz | Biannual | Fall, 2011 | Alireza Jalilifar | 140 |
| 7 | Teaching English Language (TEL) | Teaching English Language and Literature Society of Iran (TELLSI) | Biannual | August, 2004 | Reza Khany | 139 |
| 8 | Issues in Language Teaching (ILT) | AllamehTabataba'i University | Biannual | June, 2012 | Mohammad Khatib | 79 |
| 9 | Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes (IJEAP) | Chabahar Maritime University | Quarterly | December, 2016 | Esmail Zare-Behtash | 58 |

| | Journal Title | Publisher | Frequency | Date of Academic-Scholarly Status | Editor-in-Chief | Number of Articles |
|----|---|--|-----------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 10 | Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies (JMRELS) | Imam Khomeini International University | Quarterly | Winter, 2017 | Abbas Ali Zarei | 55 |
| 11 | Journal of Language and Translation (JLT) | Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch | Quarterly | March 17, 2018 | Hamid Marashi | 50 |
| 12 | Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research (IJLTR) | Urmia University Press | Biannual | May, 2017 | Karim Sadeghi | 43 |
| 13 | Language Horizons (LH) | Alzahra University | Biannual | Volume 1, Issue 1, Spring/Summer 2017 | Elaheh Sotoudehnama | 25 |
| | | | | | | 1419 |

Data Collection Procedure

The following methodological steps were taken to achieve the stated objectives of the study. First, the above-mentioned list of the applied linguistics journals in Iran approved by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology was adopted for the analysis. In order to answer the first research question, frequency analyses were run to discover what the most-frequently explored major from among the four existing prevalent English-related majors (TEFL, Linguistics, Literature, and Translation) has been in the Iranian applied linguistics journals from 2008 to 2019. To decide whether a topic belonged to TEFL, Linguistics, Literature, or Translation, the three researchers of this study considered each topic thoroughly. In most cases, the decision as to what major the topics belonged to was agreed on unanimously; however, in case of a controversy, if two of them agreed on a topic, it would be selected.

To probe the second research question, frequency analyses were conducted to find about the gender effect and whether male or female contributions differed or displayed a specific pattern. To investigate the third research question, frequency analyses were carried out to delve into the number of the contributions made by a single author, co-authored, or completed by several authors at the same time (single-authored, co-authored, or multi-authored).

To answer the fourth research question, frequency analyses were also done to probe into the total number of contributions from all universities and academic institutes across the

country and their rankings accordingly. However, the affiliations of the authors in some issues in a number of journals had not been alluded to. It has to be mentioned that the Islamic Azad University and Payame Noor universities were regarded as one university since several branches of these universities had not been specified. Moreover, if, for example, three authors had participated in one contribution (paper) from the same institute, that institute was counted three times.

To examine the fifth research question, frequency analyses were run to find about the contributions of each of the different levels of specialists, including MA students, Ph.D. students, assistant professors, associate professors and full professors in producing papers within the field of applied linguistics. When going through the data collection procedure, the researchers of this study encountered a lot of missing data as many researchers' level of specialty had not been specified in several journals. Moreover, almost all MA and Ph.D. students had co-authored with their supervisors. This was due to the fact that their contributions had been extracted from their theses or dissertations.

To answer the sixth research question, frequency analyses were conducted to discern which foreign countries had the highest number of contributions in the publications in the Iranian applied linguistics journals. To shed light on the seventh research question, frequency analyses were run on all 1419 published papers from 2008 to 2019 to find the most prolific authors.

Finally, to better keep track of what has been transpiring in the field of applied linguistics in Iran, the present study also sought to delve into the most-explored topic within that realm from 2008-2019. In spite of the inherent challenges and difficulties in the categorization and specification of the most- frequently explored topics, the researchers strained every nerve to achieve the above-stated objective. To this end, based upon the existing literature, consultations with a number of well-reputed TEFL experts and common trends in language teaching, the three researchers of this study came up with the following research subcategories to be further investigated in the academic-scholarly journals approved by the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research and Technology: Speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar and form-focused instruction, vocabulary and idioms, ESP/EAP, culture, pragmatics, corpus-based studies, teacher education, discourse analysis, task-based instruction, CALL, individual learner differences, testing and assessment, Material/Syllabus/Curriculum Development and Evaluation, and learning strategies. The already-mentioned journals were thoroughly looked into to find about the frequency of each

topic in general, and to determine the most frequently-explored ones in particular in terms of coverage. The researchers had to meticulously go through the titles and abstracts of all the articles published in the Iranian applied linguistics academic-scholarly journals approved by the Ministry of Science, Education, and Technology from 2008-2019 and decide to which subcategories each article belonged. For instance, the following research article entitled *'The Impact of Sequence Map, 1 2 3 Technique, and Answering Question on EFL Learners' Summary Writing Ability'* was counted as a writing-related topic. Furthermore, if two or three categories could be found in one research article simultaneously, all the existing subcategories would be counted separately. For instance, as it can be readily discerned from the following article entitled: *'The Effect of Online Learning Tools on L2 Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Learning'*, three subcategories exist at the same time: CALL, reading, and vocabulary. Accordingly, the researchers counted each separately for the already-determined subcategories; one for reading-related topics, one for CALL, and one for vocabulary-related ones. One thousand four hundred nineteen titles and abstracts of the already-mentioned articles were thoroughly examined this way to determine the most frequently-explored research topics within the realm of applied linguistics in Iran.

Results and Discussion

The First Research Question

The first research question sought to probe into the most-frequently explored major from among the four existing prevalent English-related majors (TEFL, Linguistics, Literature, and Translation) in the Iranian EFL academicians' publications in the Iranian applied linguistics journals from 2008 to 2019. As Table 2 reveals, an overwhelming majority of the publications (a total of 1249 accounting for about 88% of the publications) falls within the scope of TEFL or teaching-related topics. Linguistics with a total of 70 accounting for 4.93%, Literature with a total of 52 accounting for 3.66% of the overall publications and Translation-related topics with a total number of 48 (3.38%) are ranked respectively.

Table 2. *The Most-Frequently Explored Major from among the Four Existing Prevalent English-Related Majors*

| | Major | Number of Publications |
|---|-------------|------------------------|
| 1 | TEFL | 1249 |
| 2 | Linguistics | 70 |
| 3 | Literature | 52 |
| 4 | Translation | 48 |

Reasonably enough, translation-related topics have received the least amount of coverage in the Iranian EFL academicians' publications. This might have emanated from the fact that translation as an emerging field at the PhD level in Iran hasn't earned its rightful place yet. Interestingly enough, translation-related issues have had their highest contributions only during the years 2017 and 2018. Majority of such contributions were published in one specific translation-related journal: *Journal of Language and Translation (JLT)*. Prior to that period, the contributions of translation-related topics to Iranian EFL publications in applied linguistics journals nearly amounted to a marginal number. Another possible explanation might be the very nature of translation and its related concepts which make it hard to establish a proper linkage with teaching-related issues. The surprising fact is that even literature-related topics published in the Iranian applied linguistics journals outnumbered the translation-related ones. This could be reasonably justified by the fact that literature has had a long-standing history and tradition and is a more well-established major than translation.

The fact that TEFL-related topics have received the most coverage in Iranian applied linguistics journals can be ascribed to the fact that the total number of TEFL-related journals far outweighs the other three majors: Translation, literature, and linguistics put together. Furthermore, this increasing contribution of TEFL-related topics in the Iranian applied linguistics journals could also be readily explained by the fact that TEFL in Iran has been expanded and the number of its applicants, MA and Ph.D. graduates, and university faculty members of TEFL has been constantly on the rise.

The Second Research Question

The second research question dealt with the gender of the authors in the publications of Iranian applied linguistics journals. As it can be easily discerned (Table 3), male authors with a total number of 1966 publications (63.7%) far outnumbered their female counterparts with a total number of 1061 contributions (34.4%) by an approximately 30% margin.

Table 3. *Gender Effect on the Scholarly Contributions of Iranian Authors within the Field of Applied Linguistics in Iran*

| Gender | Number of Publications |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| Male | 1966 |
| Female | 1061 |
| Unknown | 55 |

This wide margin could be ascribed to the fact that males in the traditional socio-cultural context of Iran still have the upper hand even when it comes to academic contributions and engagement. Although women enjoy higher admission rates to the Iranian universities than men, the number of hired faculty members at Iranian academic institutes within the realm of applied linguistics is much higher than their female counterparts. The Iranian culture though heading fast towards modernity still favors at-home women rather than working ones to a great extent. This general tendency might have impacted the active participation, involvement, and scientific contributions of female graduates in the Iranian academic community.

The Third Research Question

The third research question delved into the number of authors for the publications in Iranian applied linguistics journals. The intention was to find out how many of the contributions were written single-handedly or by a single author, co-authored, or completed by several authors at the same time (single-authored, co-authored, or multi-authored). As shown in Table 4, co-authored works with a total number of 794 (55.95%) had the highest number of contributions in publications in the Iranian applied linguistics journals. Scientific works accomplished by three authors with a total number of 354 (24.94%) and papers written by a single author with a total number of 216 (15.22%) came in second and third, respectively.

Table 4. *Single-Authored, Co-Authored, and Multi-Authored Contributions*

| Number of Authors | Number of Publications |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| One Author | 216 |
| Two Authors | 794 |
| Three Authors | 354 |
| Four Authors | 53 |
| Five Authors | 2 |

The fact that co-authored publications in the Iranian applied linguistics journal far outweighed and outnumbered the other ones (single-authored or multi-authored works) can be logically justified on a number of grounds. First and foremost, co-authorship is highly-valued and appreciated due to the fact that typically a joint and cooperative endeavor can be more quickly and thoroughly achieved than a work done single-handedly. As the saying goes, two heads are better than one. Therefore, the process of accomplishing a joint scientific endeavor can be facilitated and expedited. Coming up with a relevant and innovative topic

worthy of conducting a research on, reviewing the related literature, collecting the data, conducting the data analyses, interpreting the results, discussing the findings, and proper referencing and citations all constitute different parts of preparing and writing a research paper which is definitely a time-consuming process that can be better achieved if done cooperatively. In the same vein, when these responsibilities are shared between two or three, the heavy burden on a single person is removed and the research process seemingly goes more smoothly. In fact, the spirit of cooperation that exists between the individual authors might also contribute to the speed and velocity with which a scientific work is done. Another likely explanation can be ascribed to the fact that all the theses and dissertations are to be completed under the supervision of assistant, associate, and full professors. Such collaborative and joint academic works could have contributed to the advantage and preference of co-authored works over the other ones as well.

Although co-authorship was highly preferred over the other ones, works done with four with a total number of 53 (3.73%) and five authors with a total number of 2 (only .14%) lay at the bottom. This could be explained by the fact that a cooperative and joint scientific endeavor is deemed acceptable as long as every individual's share of the work remains manageable. This manageability issue might have been the logic behind the depreciation of the works done by more than three contributors.

The Fourth Research Question

The fourth research question investigated the contributions of all Iranian universities and academic institutes with regard to their publications in applied linguistics journals approved by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology. As Table 5 shows, Islamic Azad University (including all its branches across the country) had the highest number of publications with a total number of 435 (25.34%) from 2008 to 2019. University of Shiraz (11.3%), Allameh Tabataba'i University (10.25%), University of Isfahan (9.49%), Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz (8.97%), ShahreKord University (7.34%), Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (7.22%), Kharazmi University (6.87%), Payame-Noor University (including all its branches across the country) (6.7%), and University of Tehran (6.46%) were respectively ranked in terms of their contributions in the Iranian applied linguistics journals.

Table 5. *The Most Productive Universities Regarding Publications in the Iranian Applied Linguistics Journals*

| | University | Number |
|----|------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Islamic Azad University | 435 |
| 2 | University of Shiraz | 194 |
| 3 | Allameh Tabataba'i University | 176 |
| 4 | University of Isfahan | 163 |
| 5 | Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz | 154 |
| 6 | ShahreKord University | 126 |
| 7 | Ferdowsi University of Mashhad | 124 |
| 8 | Kharazmi University | 118 |
| 9 | Payame Noor University | 115 |
| 10 | University of Tehran | 111 |

The fact that the Islamic Azad University had the highest number of publications can be reasonably justified on the ground that all branches and sub-branches of Islamic Azad University were included and counted as belonging to the main one. Had it not been for the inclusion of all branches and sub-branches, the Islamic Azad University ranking with regard to their publications in the Iranian applied linguistics journals would have been different. Likewise, it can be easily seen that an absolute majority of the universities ranked among the top ten universities with regard to their overall contributions in the Iranian applied linguistics journals offer TEFL at the postgraduate levels specifically PhD level. This could have been a contributing factor since PhD candidates will have to publish one or in some cases two papers extracted from their dissertations in order to be allowed a viva session. This publish-or-perish tendency among PhD candidates could have been a driving force that might have contributed to the increasing publications at the above-mentioned universities. Moreover, the number of faculty members and most specifically the number of associate professors at these universities is higher than the other universities since such universities offer courses at both graduate and postgraduate levels and enjoy more admission rates as well.

The Fifth Research Question

The fifth research question intended to find out about the number of contributions of each of the different levels of specialists, including MA students, PhD students, assistant professors, associate professors and full professors in producing papers within the field of applied linguistics in Iran.

Table 6. *The Contributions of Each of the Different Levels of Specialists to the Iranian Applied Linguistics Journals*

| Academic Level | Number of Publications |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| MA Students | 394 |
| Ph.D. Students | 425 |
| Assistant Professors | 701 |
| Associate Professors | 477 |
| Professors | 185 |

As displayed in Table 6, assistant professors with a total number of 701 (32.12%) publications outnumbered their associate and full professor counterparts. This could be explained by the fact that at the outset of their academic career, most assistant professors are in dire need of promotion and credit. To gain a respectable credit and establish a good reputation in the field, they have no option but to promote to a higher level and become associate professors. This entails and requires a great number of publications as stipulated by rules and regulations, otherwise, they will be at a standstill and won't promote. Associate professors with a total number of 477 (21.86%) publications came in second and outdid the MA students with a total number of 394 publications (18.05%) only with a 3.8% margin. This could be ascribed to the fact that an associate professor might feel that he or she has done it all and there is no need for further improvement and progress. This self-gratification with the gained social status and academic position could have been a mitigating factor. The same argument goes for the full professors who find themselves at the peak and zenith of scientific growth and development. Another possible justification is the overall fewer number of full professors compared to their assistant and associate counterparts. Given this, their contributions in the Iranian applied linguistics journals from 2008 to 2019 are approximately 9% that is almost less than half of the contributions made by MA students who are just getting their feet wet and are striving hard to succeed, go higher and higher, and accomplish more and more.

Interestingly enough, Ph.D. students with a total of 425 (19.47%) marginally outnumbered their MA counterparts with a total of 394 (18.05%) publications in applied linguistics journals in Iran and came third and fourth, respectively. These statistics point to an overall increasing tendency among both MA and Ph.D. students to publish papers. This could be explained by the fact the students are running neck and neck. Actually, there is a tight race and competition going on among MA students to be admitted to Ph.D. courses and for Ph.D. candidates to find their ways into academic institutes. The intense desire and ambition to

climb up the career ladder intensified by the strong rivalry could have contributed to the overall publications of both MA and PhD students. The desire to stand on top and move to higher levels of education could be the driving force as well. However, studying for the sake of knowledge itself has apparently faded away, and students these days are more extrinsically-motivated rather than intrinsically-motivated to earn a higher salary or find a prestigious job.

The Sixth Research Question

The sixth research question sought to discover which foreign country had the highest number of contributions to the Iranian applied linguistics journals. As it is evident from Table 7, contributors from the US with a total number of 23 (28.75%) publications had the highest engagement. Australian and Malaysian contributors jointly came second with a total number of 11 (13.75%) publications in the Iranian applied linguistics journals. Swedish, Indonesian and British contributors jointly came third with a total of 6 publications accounting for 7.5% of the overall foreign contributions made to the Iranian applied linguistics journals. Many of the high-indexed ELT- related journals are located in the US, and this could be a logical reason that Iranian editors receive papers authored by Americans with open arms in order to add more scientific value and prestige to their journals and gain a better reputation. The inclusion of papers authored by foreigners can also expand their readership and the Iranian journals can reach to a wider audience outside of their local milieu. Therefore, a well-established and more respectable international image of the journal can be both built and projected outside of the country.

Table 7. *International Contributors to the Iranian Applied Linguistics Journals*

| Rank | Country | Number of Publications |
|------|-----------|------------------------|
| 1 | USA | 23 |
| 2 | Australia | 11 |
| 2 | Malaysia | 11 |
| 3 | Sweden | 6 |
| 3 | UK | 6 |
| 3 | Indonesia | 6 |
| 4 | China | 5 |
| 5 | Turkey | 4 |
| 5 | Mexico | 4 |
| 5 | Thailand | 4 |

The Seventh Research Question

The seventh question set to investigate who the most active and prolific authors have been in the Iranian applied linguistics journals. According to Table 8, Alireza Jalilifar with a total number of 39 from Shahid Chamaran University of Ahvaz, Mahmood Reza Ataei from Kharazmi University with a total number of 36 and Zia Tajeddin with a total of 35 publications from Allameh Tabatabai University (up to the moment of data analysis in this study) came first, second, and third, respectively.

All the prolific authors within the field of applied linguistics in Iran have deservedly earned their current status. All are honorable faculty members of the top state universities of Iran and offer courses at MA and Ph.D. levels. The fact to the matter is that many Ph.D. candidates and MA students have had the opportunity to work under the supervision of these great professors. Had it not been for invaluable suggestions, insightful comments, and constructive views of such knowledgeable professors, many studies might have not come into life. Another interesting fact is that many of these prolific authors are or were editor-in chiefs of applied linguistics journals and are fully aware of the ins and outs of the publishing process in the Iranian EFL context.

Table 8. *The Most Prolific Authors in the Iranian Applied Linguistics Journal*

| Rank | Name | Affiliation | No. |
|-------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|
| 1 | Alireza Jalilifar | Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz | 39 |
| 2 | Mahmood Reza Ataei | Kharazmi University | 36 |
| 3 | Zia Tajeddin | Allameh Tabataba'i University | 35 |
| 4 | Ali Roohani | ShahreKord University | 27 |
| 5 | Ayatallah Razmjoo | Shiraz University | 24 |
| 5 | Reza Pishghadam | Ferdowsi University of Mashhad | 24 |
| 6 | Parviz Birjandi | Islamic Azad University | 21 |
| 6 | Naser Rashidi | Shiraz University | 21 |
| 6 | Mansoor Tavakoli | University of Isfahan | 21 |
| 6 | Alireza Ahmadi | Shiraz University | 21 |
| 6 | Manoochehr Jafarigohar | Payame Noor University | 21 |

The Eighth Research Question

The last research question delved into the most-frequently explored topics in the Iranian applied linguistics journals from 2008-2019. As it can be readily discerned from Table 9, writing-related topics came first and received the most comprehensive coverage with a total number of 164 publications. Corpus-related studies and teacher education came second and third with a total number of 132 and 118 publications, respectively. Bilingualism and

multilingualism was the least frequently-explored topic with a total number of 15 publications. From among the four major skills, listening was the least-explored one with a total number of 32 publications. As for the subcomponents of the language skills, pronunciation was the most underexplored topic with a total number of 32 publications.

The fact that writing-related topics have received the most extensive coverage compared to other topics and have been the most frequently-explored topics can be explained by the objectivity inherent in the administration, instrumentations, and evaluation of the writing tests and materials. However, pronunciation and listening-related topics were less frequently-explored since the researchers mostly encounter feasibility problems with regard to administration, instrumentation, and assessment within classroom settings. For instance, listening entails a number of cognitive and metacognitive processes that are not directly observable and measurable by the researchers. Although a number of listening strategy inventories have been developed and proposed, it is still a daunting and challenging task to know what is exactly transpiring in the minds of language listeners to help them develop the most appropriate listening strategies.

Table 9. *The Most Frequently-Explored Topics in the Iranian Applied Linguistics Journals*

| Rank | Topic | Frequency |
|------|---|-----------|
| 1 | Writing | 164 |
| 2 | Corpus-based Studies | 132 |
| 3 | Teacher Education | 118 |
| 4 | Testing and Assessment | 108 |
| 5 | Vocabulary and Idiom | 100 |
| 6 | Reading | 94 |
| 7 | Pragmatics | 92 |
| 8 | Individual Learner Differences | 90 |
| 9 | Grammar and Form-focused Instruction | 85 |
| 10 | CALL | 81 |
| 11 | Task-based Instruction | 77 |
| 12 | Material/Syllabus/Curriculum Development and Evaluation | 71 |
| 13 | Speaking | 69 |
| 14 | ESP/EAP | 66 |
| 15 | Discourse Analysis | 63 |
| 16 | Strategy | 53 |
| 17 | Culture | 33 |
| 18 | Listening | 32 |
| 19 | Pronunciation | 32 |
| 20 | Bilingualism/Multilingualism | 15 |

Conclusion

This study was an attempt to delve into the contributions made to Iranian applied linguistics Journals approved by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology from 2008 to 2019. The findings indicated that TEFL-related topics received the most coverage compared to the other three prevalent majors: Linguistics, Translation, and Literature. The study also found male contributions far outweighed those of females. Furthermore, it came to light that co-authorship was much more appreciated among contributors to Iranian applied linguistics journals. In addition to that, Islamic Azad University had the highest number of publications compared to other universities across the country. Though, it has to be borne in mind that all branches of Islamic Azad University were counted as belonging to the central branch. Another important finding of the study was that assistant and associate professors had the highest number of publications in the Iranian applied linguistics journals. Finally, the study came up with the top ten prolific authors from 2008 to 2019 and also found that the US contributors made the highest number of foreign contributions to the Iranian applied linguistics journals within the same period.

The study has important implications for the field of applied linguistics in general and TEFL in specific. First and foremost, the revealing and organized information provided by the authors of this work can add significant missing data to the existing literature on applied linguistics in Iran. Second, both Iranian EFL teachers and learners will be made aware of publication information in general, and relevant up-to-date information on the most-researched areas, the most frequently-explored topics, the most prolific authors, authorship patterns, international readership, and university rankings with regard to their overall contributions in particular. Such invaluable and crucial information will provide the practitioners, educators, and EFL learners with proper insights into how to make the most appropriate, timely, and pertinent contributions to the most relevant journals within the realm of applied linguistics in Iran. Being aware and cognizant of the information presented in this research project will certainly be a motivating factor and a step in the right direction for many would-be teachers, researchers, practitioners, and learners to make informed decisions about how to publish scholarly articles, under whose supervision to work with, and what journal to pick when in two minds about choosing the right journal. Such consciousness-raising aspect of this paper can be highly instrumental as most post-graduate students lack such information. For instance, it is important to know that the review time and publication process of semi-annual journals typically takes longer than it does for a quarterly journal.

Another important contribution of this study is that the intended audience gets to be familiarized with all English journals within the realm of applied linguistics in Iran and their editors-in-chief so that they will get to know where to head for their future academic works and also become a member of the Iranian applied linguistics community. However, the study only delimited itself to the applied linguistics journals approved by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology within the time limit of 2008-2019. Future in-depth similar works can be done in other majors as well as in some interdisciplinary fields to enable interested researchers to make suitable comparisons and contrasts. The analogies can lead to revealing information that can be of great value for many academicians not only in Iran but also outside of the Iranian academic context.

The present research endeavor had its own limitations. First, the data collection procedure and data analysis posed a great challenge and was a tedious, time-consuming process where approximately 1500 research articles had to be downloaded, then properly examined to not only find about the most frequently-explored topics, but also to determine the frequency of single-authorship, co-authorship, and multiple-authorship, foreign contributors, and identify the most prolific authors and their affiliations. However, the researchers hope to have done a pioneering work on the academic-scholarly articles published within the realm of applied linguistics in Iran and provide the intended audience with some valuable and missing information so that their overall consciousness about the field including the most frequently-explored topics, the most prolific authors, foreign contributors, different universities' contributions, and authorship information would be enhanced. Apart from the consciousness-raising aspect of the present research, the provided information will most probably help perspective students, instructors, and practitioners in the field to make more informed decisions with regard to the topic and journal selection or even who to turn to seek academic expertise and advice to do future research.

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