# Mapping Current Trends of EFL Teaching and Learning Research Practices in Indonesia

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#### **Abstract**

To date, there have been very few studies that map the major research trends in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, such as those in Indonesia. To address that gap and to benefit undergraduate and graduate students, EFL researchers, or practitioners looking for a current research topic and theories to frame their studies, this paper reviews the past research studies (n=53) published in four Indonesian national journals to explore Indonesia's EFL research trends in 2020, including research topics, theoretical frameworks, and research methods. The journals were selected because of their focus and scope related to English language teaching and education as well as their rank in *Sinta 1* and *Sinta 2* (two of the highest levels out of six Sinta levels) of the Indonesian web-based research information system. Based on a holistic review of the articles checked by the peer-debrifing strategy to ensure the review's credibility, the analysis results show that the previous studies mainly explore English teaching strategy and education technology research areas and use fairly old theories as their theoretical framework. As for the research method, most of the studies use a qualitative research method, take place in university settings, and involve university students as their research subjects. The meanings of the analysis results, teaching implications for a research class, and directions for further research are presented.

Keywords: EFL; Indonesia; literature review; research methods; research topics; research trends

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## INTRODUCTION

Renandya (2020) talked about the essence of researching a current topic approached with current theories to enhance possibilities of getting a paper published in a journal. In line with that, researchers should also discuss recent debates, trending issues. current events, or situations surrounding a particular problem in their research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019); Wallwork, 2011). Similar to Renandya (2020), Lee (2014) also mentioned the importance of reading articles published in a target journal "to identify the current 'hot' topics, to see if we are likely to make a publishable contribution" (p. 259) in the journal. Around the year 2014, Sun (2014) identified some major research trends in English Language Teaching (ELT) fields, such as changing perspectives on English teaching and learning, changes in goals of English teaching and learning, changes in approaches to teaching, expanding the dimension of communicative competence, rapid development and integration of information technology in ELT, and changing roles and increasing responsibilities of teachers. More recently, Mambu (2020) informed other areas of research relevant to the field of ELT. Some of them are linguistics, curriculum, the place of ELT worldwide, identities of language learners/teachers/educators, focus on teachers (e.g., pedagogy, teaching strategy), focus on learners (e.g., motivation, learning strategies), and Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL).

However, to date, there have been very few studies that map the major trends in EFL contexts, such as those in Indonesia. Previous studies that explored Indonesia's EFL research trends were only limited to reviewing students' undergraduate theses in a university setting (see Iftanti & Shofiya, 2017) and the EFL writing research (see Fatimah & Masduqi, 2017). A further literature review on more various educational settings in Indonesia and language skills might provide a clearer picture of EFL research trends in the country and extend what Fatimah and Masduqi, 2017); Iftanti and Shofiya (2017) have explored in their studies.

Besides a current topic, the literature's currency in a study is also essential to show researchers' present understanding of a particular topic (Egbert &

Sanden, 2015). Egbert and Sanden (2015) instanced two reviewers' comments on a paper that presented out-of-date literature. "Part of the problem might be that [...] some studies are old (e.g., in 1996, 2000) for a field that grows daily (reviewer 1); the literature you cite [...] is in no way recent. Has any work been done in this area in the last 15 years? (Reviewer 2)" (p. 45). This study needs to be conducted to investigate if Indonesian EFL researchers commonly used recent or out-of-date literature specifically when they frame their research. The expectation is that future researchers will not receive the same comments from the reviewers as reported by Egbert and Sanden (2015) when submitting their future papers in academic journals.

Furthermore, Indonesia is well known as a multilingual and archipelagic country that is home to more than 300 ethnic groups (e.g., the Acehnese, the Javanese, the Ambonese, the Balinese, the Dayaks, and the Papuans); these groups have different ways of life, unique cultures, and customs (Widodo, 2016) that might influence the country's research practices. However, studies bringing and offering local-cultural nuances of EFL teaching and learning in Indonesia cannot always attract the eyes of international readership because these studies are published in local journals in Indonesia, not in those owned by overseas publishers or universities. Therefore, it might be fruitful to highlight the contributions of more local Indonesian researchers who have strived to disseminate their research and make their voices heard through their publications in academic journals (Zein et al., 2020). Based on all those theoretical foundations, the authors feel the need to explore Indonesia's current EFL research trends in 2020. More specifically, this study aims to explore (1) the research topics represented in the EFL teaching and learning research fields in Indonesia in 2020; (2) the theoretical/conceptual frameworks (if any) that underpin the current body of the research fields in Indonesia in 2020; and (3) the types of EFL research methods that have been used in Indonesia in 2020.

The exploration and answers to the research objectives (1-3) will be hoped to benefit undergraduate and graduate students, EFL researchers, or practitioners looking for a current research topic and theories to frame their studies. They might also see and learn different types of research methods to replicate in their future studies. Besides, the investigation might help them view the trends that impact Indonesia's EFL research in 2020 and research areas that Indonesian researchers less explore that might be fruitful for their future research agendas. The findings and discussions presented in this paper might also be useful for the head of an English Department to plan a research roadmap for his or her faculty members.

This paragraph clarifies major terms in the research questions (1-3), namely EFL, research topics, theoretical/conceptual framework, and research methods. *First*, the term *EFL* indicates a setting where

English is learned by people who live in non-Englishspeaking countries or where English is not the first language or the official [or second] language of the country" (Si, 2019, p. 34), such as in Indonesia, Japan, and China. In Indonesia, students study English only in a formal English classroom in a school, but they have limited opportunities to use the language outside their class because they always speak in Bahasa Indonesia or their local language for daily communication. Additionally, in the EFL setting, English is "typically taught as school subjects to communicate with foreigners or for reading printed materials in English" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, pp. 224-225). Second, like Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), the authors defined research topics as an overview of study's focus or purpose. Third, the term theoretical/conceptual framework draws on theory, previous studies, and experience and examines the relationship among ideas; this framework can then role as a ground to develop the research and analyze research findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). For a clear illustration of what a theoretical framework looks like, see Coiro et al. (2015, p. 2); Newcomer (2017, p. 4). Fourth, the term, research methods, explains research settings, information about research participants, and data collection instruments used in a study (Egbert & Sanden, 2015).

#### **METHOD**

This paper reviewed fifty-three (53) articles from four peer-reviewed national journals in Indonesia. First and foremost, the journals were selected because of their focus and scope related to English language teaching and education. Other considerations are related to their rank in Sinta 1 and Sinta 2 (two of the highest levels out of six Sinta levels) of the Indonesian webbased research information system, indicating the quality of the national journals (see Table 1 for the list of journals). In brief, Sinta (Science and Technology Index) is a web-based research information system that (1) delivers access to citations and expertise in Indonesia, (2) offers fast access, easy and comprehensive to measure the performance of researchers, institutions, and journals in Indonesia, as well as (3) analyzes the trends of research and expert directories (see https://sinta.ristekbrin.go.id/about, for more detail info).

Table 1 - Information about the selected journals.

Journal Title	H-Index	Citations
TEFLIN	29	3265
Studies in English	13	670
Language and Education		
Journal on English as a	11	569
Foreign Language (JEFL)		
IJoLE: International	9	231
Journal of Language		
Education		

Note. This information was taken from Sinta's website on February 11, 2021, when the authors started to analyze research articles in the journals. In short, "the

*H-index* is an author-level metric that measures both the productivity and citation impact of the publications by an author or researcher or group. The index can also indicate the productivity and impact of a scholarly journal" (Bond, 2018, n. p.). Watch Bond (2018); Joe (2020) for ideas about and ways to calculate *H-Index*.

All articles (see Table 2) reviewed in this paper are related to Indonesia's EFL teaching and learning practices and written by authors from various institutions and places in the country. Besides, to the best of the authors' knowledge, all the articles have passed a rigorous peer-reviewed process or more than one review process from the journals' peer reviewers and editors.

Table 2 - The distribution of empirical studies reviewed in this article

reviewed in this article.			
Journal Title	Authors	# of	
		Articles	
TEFLIN	Abdurahman and Rizqi	6	
	(2020); Cahyono and		
	Rahayu (2020); Meisani et		
	al. (2020); Milal et al. (2020); Puspita and		
	Mambu (2020); Triastuti		
	(2020)		
Studies in	Akmal et al. (2020); Amin	18	
English	and Sundari (2020);		
Language	Budianto et al. (2020);		
and	Deliany and Cahyono		
Education	(2020); Devira (2020);		
	(Erdiana et al., 2020);		
	Manan et al. (2020);		
	Nafiah (2020); Prasojo et		
	al. (2020); Rahayu (2020);		
	Rahman and Sahayu		
	(2020); Setiawan and		
	Wiedarti (2020); Silviyanti		
	et al. (2020); Sulistyo et al. (2020); Surdyanto and		
	Kurniawan (2020);		
	Susanto et al. (2020);		
	Syahabuddin et al. (2020);		
	(Telaumbanua et al.,		
	2020)		
Journal on	Akmal et al. (2020);	14	
English as a	Aunurrahman et al.		
Foreign	(2020); Hadijah et al.		
Language	(2020); Jumariati and		

Appendices<sup>1</sup>) to categorize the coded empirical studies based on general research topics. C put those Tables on the second *Google Docs* file. After that, A checked and made necessary modifications to the information presented in the Tables. The authors then

(JEFL)	Febriyanti (2020); Luthfiyyah et al. (2020); Mahbub (2020); Nindya and Widiati (2020); Nugroho et al. (2020); Prastikawati et al. (2020); Putra et al. (2020); Riyanti (2020); Romios et al. (2020); Syafii and Miftah (2020); Wiraningsih and Santosa (2020)	
IJoLE: Internationa I Journal of Language Education	Ammade et al. (2020); Kusumawati (2020); Maru et al. (2020); Nariyati et al. (2020); Pitoyo et al. (2020); Pratiwi et al. (2020); Rido (2020); Rosmaladewi et al. (2020); Setyowati et al. (2020); Suastra and Menggo (2020); Sujana et al. (2020); Suma (2020); Sunra et al. (2020); Suryani et al. (2020); Wulandari and Hustarna (2020)	15

Non-empirical studies or those that only provide theoretical insights and/or suggest teaching and learning implications without collecting research data were excluded from the analysis. The authors also excluded studies *not* related to EFL teaching and learning practices in Indonesia and written by *non*-Indonesian authors.

In analyzing the articles, the authors took a holistic review (following Li, 2012) and used a matrix to present a general picture of the fifty-three empirical studies. The first author (C) reviewed the first twentyfive articles and put the summarized information in the matrix on the first Google Docs file. The second author (A) did the same tasks for the other pieces on the same document. The authors then took a turn to read each other's work put on the matrix to make them immersed with the data. Then, C initially open-coded all the information in the matrix using Microsoft Excel. Open-coding refers to an activity to label and categorize phenomena that emerged in research data (Arv et al., 2019). C then used some Tables (see double-checked one another's work. left comments on the second Google Docs file, responded to the comments, and saw if all the data presented in the Tables were all reasonable. This peer debriefing strategy enhances research credibility (see Ary et al., 2019). After a consensus was reached, the authors presented the findings of their review to answer the research questions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Due to the word and page limitations in the journal, the appendices are not shown in this paper. Readers may see the appendices in this Google Drive: <a href="https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T9XqT\_3wA-oq0t9DTSv4YToQR55YIkO/view?usp=sharing">https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T9XqT\_3wA-oq0t9DTSv4YToQR55YIkO/view?usp=sharing</a>

In this section, review results in order of the research questions followed by a brief discussion and conclusion of the review will be presented.

## The Represented Research Topics

The research topics represented in Indonesia's EFL teaching and learning research fields in 2020 are

shown in Figure 1. There were various topics, but most of the studies were related to English teaching strategy (13.8%), such as the use of genre pedagogy to teach English (Aunurrahman et al., 2020), the practice of active learning (Devira, 2020), and the use of venn-diagrams in writing classes (Syafii & Miftah, 2020).

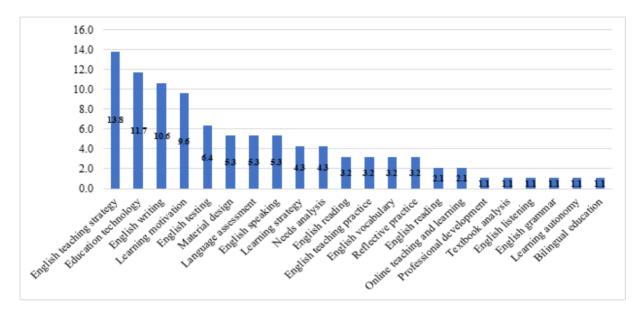


Fig. 1 - The research topics of the previous studies (%).

Note. One study might have more than one research topic (e.g., English teaching strategy and English writing, see Syafii & Miftah, 2020).

#### The Theoretical Frameworks

The majority of the studies (60.3%) explicitly state their theoretical frameworks in the paper (see Appendices for more details). Some studies used recent theoretical frameworks, such as CALL evaluation (by Jamieson et al., 2013), systemic functional linguistics (by Cahyono, 2018), critical language pedagogy (by Mambu, 2016), process writing model (by Abas & Abd Aziz, 2018). Meanwhile, some other studies still used fairly old theories to frame the research, such as Jacobs ESL

Composition Profile (by Jacobs et al., 1981), levels of reflection (by Moon, 2004), types of motivations (by Gardner, 1985), stages of content analysis (by Storch, 2002), and pedagogical reasoning model (by

Shulman, 1986, 1987). In general, however, the authors revealed that most of the studies used theories more than ten years old in the past to frame their research.

#### **Types of EFL Research Methods**

Methods. Regarding the research methods (see Table 3), most of the studies were approached qualitatively (52.8%), drawing on multiple data sources. For example, some studies obtained their research data from in-depth interviews (Akmal et al., 2020; Hadijah et al., 2020), classroom observation (Puspita & Mambu, 2020; Rido, 2020), lesson plans (Riyanti, 2020), curriculum documents (Sujana et al., 2020), and students' essays (Nindya & Widiati, 2020).

Table 3 - The research methods of the previous studies.

No	Research	f	%	Brief Ideas
	Methods			
1	Qualitative	28	52.8	Using a variety of research approaches that generally gather non-numeric data to study phenomena from the perspective of human participants in natural settings, without any predetermined hypothesis (Ary et al., 2019, p. 10)
2	Quantitative	16	30.2	Gathering numeric data through controlled procedures and analyses to

				answer predetermined questions or test hypotheses (Ary et al., 2019, p. 10)
3	Mixed-method	5	9.4	Combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches in the same investigation with each approach contributing to the understanding of the research question (Ary et al., 2019, p. 10)
4	Research and development	4	7.5	Using research findings to design new products or procedures, followed by the application of research methods to field-test, evaluate, and refine the products and procedures until they meet specific standards or quality (Gall et al., 2003, p. 635)

Meanwhile, other studies (30,2%) reviewed in this paper were approached quantitatively, such as using pre-test and post-test (Budianto et al., 2020; (Maru et al., 2020), scores of essay writing tasks (Cahyono & Rahayu, 2020), and numeric data from questionnaires (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Deliany & Cahyono, 2020; Meisani et al., 2020). A few other studies adopted mixed methods (9.4%), drawing on qualitative and quantitative data. For example, Syahabuddin et al. (2020) conducted a statistical analysis to see the correlation between the teacherstudent relationship and the English teaching-learning process. Afterward, they conducted a semi-structured interview to investigate (1) problems teachers faced when interacting with their students and (2) the teachers' perspectives about how the teacher-student

relationship might influence the teaching and learning process in an English classroom. Worth noting, a small number of studies (7.5%) used a research and development method, such as to design teaching (Wulandari & Hustarna, 2020) and English learning materials that incorporate character education (Milal et al., 2020), Islamic values, and local wisdom in Jambi (Nafiah, 2020).

Contexts and participants. The studies were conducted in various contexts (see Figure 2), mainly in university or tertiary institutions (50.9%), junior high schools (24.5%), and senior high schools (15.1%). A small portion of the studies did their research in vocational schools (3.8%), elementary schools (3.8%), and a language center (1.9%).

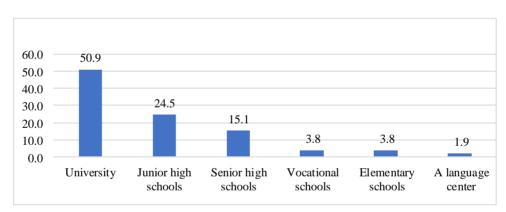


Fig. 2 - The settings of the previous studies (%).

The studies also involved various research participants (see Figure 3), such as students (33.3%) (e.g., see Manan et al., 2020; Rahayu, 2020) and lecturers (9.5%) (e.g., Rosmaladewi et al., 2020) in universities and teachers and students in junior and senior high schools. Meanwhile, a small number of studies involved a department head (Wulandari &

Hustarna, 2020), the general public (Pratiwi et al., 2020), school principals (Milal et al., 2020), students, and language teachers in vocational schools (e.g., Suryani et al., 2020).

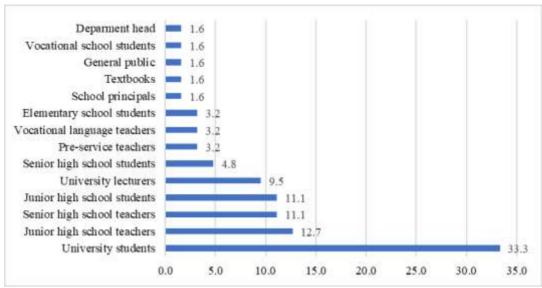


Fig. 3 - The subjects of the previous studies (%).

To sum up, the analysis results indicate that most of the EFL research trends in Indonesia in 2020 have the following characteristics:

- Research topics: related to English teaching strategy and education technology
- Theoretical framework: used fairly old theories to frame their research
- Method: used a qualitative approach
- Contexts: conducted in university settings
- Participants: were involving university students

What do the research trends mean? Related to the research topic, first, conducting further research with similar characteristics above might enhance the possibility of being accepted in the four Indonesian journals reviewed in this study. Of course, the research paper should be written well and meet the journal's specific scope and requirements. Second, the most common research topics in Indonesia in 2020, as reported in this paper, are different from what Iftanti and Shofiya (2017) found in their review of 450 Indonesian students' undergraduate theses in 2005-2015. Most of the theses at that time were related to "describing problems, cases, and phenomena in the instructional process of English language" (Iftanti & Shofiya, 2017, p. 29); none discussed the education technology-related topics. The exponential growth of

#### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The authors have examined fifty-three empirical studies published in four peer-refereed journals to investigate the EFL research trends in the year 2020. In conclusion, most of the EFL-related studies in Indonesia in 2020 explored the research areas of English teaching strategy and education technology, used old theories as their theoretical framework, used

technology in education might have affected the change of the research trends in Indonesia.

Related to the research methods, the authors find that the trends of using the qualitative research method by the Indonesian researchers in 2020 is still the same as the trends several years ago, as reported in Iftanti and Shofiya's (2017)literature review. However, the trends of using the qualitative research method in Indonesia contradicts that in Iran. For example, Farsani and Babaii (2018) reviewed a sample of 663 unpublished applied linguistics MA theses distributed over 30 years to represent the status of research phenomena in an EFL setting. They found that most of the studies (72%) were approached quantitatively.

Related to the theoretical framework used by the researchers, it seems that Indonesian journals might still tolerate using old theories to frame a research study and not consider having the recent theories as a primary factor in accepting and publishing a paper. This view might be different from what Egbert and Sanden (2015); Renandya (2020) believe about the essence of using current theories to enhance the possibilities of getting a paper published in an academic journal. However, what they think might be true when publishing research articles in international iournals with higher impact factors.

a qualitative approach, were conducted in university settings, and involved university students.

Based on this conclusion, the authors propose some practical recommendations that might be fruitful for future research agendas.

 Conducting more material design studies to offer English learning materials that incorporate character education and local wisdom (e.g., see Milal et al., 2020; Nafiah, 2020), not only in junior high school contexts but also in senior high school or university settings. The designed materials might be adapted by language teachers in Indonesia or overseas who wish to introduce and offer more Indonesian local-cultural nuances in EFL learning to their (international) students.

- Exploring the less researched areas of English grammar and listening supporting students' learning autonomy might contribute to various discussions, debates, and knowledge production in the Indonesian EFL research fields. For the same reasons, future researchers might explore some research practices involving a department head (like Wulandari & Hustarna, 2020). school principals, students, and language teachers in vocational schools. Hopefully, these types of research can attract a much wider readership of the journals (e.g., more than just those working and studying in the university settings and in favor of technology).
- Studying the integration and place of technology in the less explored areas, such as English reading, listening, grammar, and vocabulary might also be fruitful, especially in the current COVID-19 situation. Hopefully, from these types of research, readers or EFL teachers can learn teaching strategies or practices with the best and wisest use of technology to apply in their online learning environment.
- Conducting and researching the area of EFL and hybrid learning that seem to be appearing today. The hybrid learning model blends and mixes face-to-face classroom instructions and the online environment. Future classrooms, including the English classrooms, may start to offer more class meetings that are online and offline at the same time.

Additionally, the authors would like to tell some implications of the current study for teaching and learning activities, specifically in a research (proposal) class at a university level. First, the lecturers should always encourage their (graduate) students to read enough literature and find the most current theories to frame their research. As Renandya (2020) said, using current theories in a research paper might enhance the possibility of getting the paper published in an academic journal. Practically, the lecturers can first introduce some journals in language teaching and learning fields. Then, they can assign the students to download three to five articles published in the last five years, read and study the literature review part of the articles, and find current theories they can use to frame their research. The lectures can then assign each student to present the theories in class, so the other students can listen to the presentation and learn from one another in finding the current theories for their research.

After that, the lecturers can also share any theories they have read from various sources that might benefit their students' research. For example, those interested in teaching and learning strategies or project-based learning might frame their research using the recent Mahboob and Cheng's Credible approach (in preparation) (also watch TESOL Society of Bangladesh., 2020). Ideas of an emergency remote teaching in language teaching by Hazaea et al. (2021) might also benefit the students interested in researching English teaching and learning practices with technology in the current Covid-19 pandemic. Recently, Mali (2021) developed a theoretical model of attribution theory that might benefit students interested in reflecting and researching reasons for their success or failure in language learning.

Future researchers, especially novice ones, will probably have a higher chance of having their journal articles accepted if they write a study discussing a trending topic (e.g., see Figure 1) at the moment when the paper is written. Researchers may also avoid topics that are out of date or they can probably combine an 'old topic' with something that is more timely-relevant, to make the research more up to date or interesting.

For journal editorial boards, the knowledge of the research trends will help them in deciding whether an article should be accepted. This is because probably more trending research topics will also enhance the readability of the journal. If they want to be specific, editorial boards can also have special editions with a particular trending research topic.

In closing, the authors would like to acknowledge that the discussions presented in this paper are only based on their analysis of four academic journals (see Table 1). Future researchers need to include more articles from more different journals (e.g., those indexed in *Sinta* 3-6) in their literature review to supplement the current study discussions and have a clearer picture of Indonesia's future research trends.

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