

Research Trends in English Education Theses during the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Bibliometric Analysis at UIN Suska Riau

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.61672/horizon.vii1.3670>

Cara Mensitasi Artikel ini:

Ihsan, M.T. (2026). Research Trends in English Education Theses During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Bibliometric Analysis at UIN Suska Riau. *Horizon: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra*, 2(1), 43-56. <https://doi.org/10.61672/horizon.vii1.3670>

ABSTRACT

Keywords:
Bibliometric
Analysis, Research
Trends, English
Language Education

This study investigates research trends in undergraduate theses of English Education students during the COVID-19 pandemic at the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau. Employing a bibliometric approach with a content analysis design, the study analyzed 447 theses published between 2020 and 2022 using total sampling. The data were collected through document analysis and examined using descriptive statistics to identify patterns in research approaches, research types, and language skill focus. The findings reveal that quantitative research dominated the theses, accounting for 85% of the total, followed by qualitative (15%) and mixed-methods (1%) approaches. Despite its lower proportion, qualitative research showed a consistent increase over the three-year period. Among quantitative studies, descriptive research emerged as the most prevalent type (41%), primarily focusing on writing skills. In contrast, qualitative studies were largely dominated by case studies (52%) and qualitative descriptive designs (42%), with a strong emphasis on speaking skills. Other research types, including classroom action research, qualitative surveys, and library research, were minimally represented. Overall, the study highlights a strong preference for quantitative approaches while indicating a gradual shift toward more diverse methodological practices. These findings provide valuable insights into evolving research patterns in English language education during the pandemic and may inform future thesis supervision and research development.

Informasi Artikel:

Diterima:
06/06/2026
Direvisi:
12/06/2026
Disetujui:
25/06/2026
Diterbitkan
30/06/2026

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INTRODUCTION

In Pandemic era has significantly transformed educational practices worldwide, including in higher education. The sudden shift from face-to-face to fully online learning environments forced students to adapt to new modes of instruction and academic engagement. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Education and Culture mandated universities to suspend in-person classes and implement online learning as a preventive measure against the spread of the virus (Firman & Rahayu, 2020). While this policy ensured the continuity of education, it also posed considerable challenges, particularly for final-year students undertaking their undergraduate thesis projects.

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For students in English Language Education programs, research activities traditionally rely on direct interaction with participants through classroom observation, interviews, and experimental teaching practices. However, pandemic-related restrictions limited access to schools and participants, thereby influencing students' choices of research approaches, designs, and data collection techniques. As a result, students were required to demonstrate greater adaptability and methodological flexibility in conducting their research under constrained conditions (Kusuma et al., 2021).

In educational research, methodological diversity is essential to generate comprehensive insights and innovative solutions to real-world problems. Research grounded in empirical contexts, rather than solely theoretical perspectives, contributes to the advancement of knowledge and practice in education. The use of appropriate scientific methods enables researchers to produce valid and reliable findings that reflect actual educational phenomena (Spuck et al., 1975). Therefore, examining how research practices evolve in response to disruptive situations such as a global pandemic becomes an important area of inquiry.

Several recent studies have explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational research practices. For instance, prior research has indicated a growing reliance on quantitative and survey-based methods due to limited field access (Putri et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2021). Other studies have highlighted the increased use of online data collection tools and virtual learning environments in conducting research (Hidayat et al., 2022). Additionally, some scholars have reported a shift in research focus toward digital learning, student engagement, and online pedagogy during the pandemic period (Sari & Wahyudin, 2023). However, these studies tend to examine research trends in general educational contexts rather than focusing specifically on undergraduate theses in English Language Education.

Despite these contributions, several gaps remain evident. First, previous studies largely emphasize general research trends without employing a systematic bibliometric approach to map patterns comprehensively (Rahman et al., 2021). Second, there is limited empirical evidence focusing specifically on undergraduate thesis outputs as a distinct form of academic research (Hidayat et al., 2022). Third, existing studies often overlook the distribution of research approaches and designs in relation to language skill focus

Research trends in English Education theses during the Covid-19 pandemic: a bibliometric analysis at UIN Suska Riau (Sari & Wahyudin, 2023). Fourth, most research has been conducted at a broader institutional or national level, leaving a lack of context-specific analysis at the university level (Putri et al., 2020). Finally, there is insufficient longitudinal analysis capturing trends across multiple years during the pandemic period (2020–2022), which is essential to understand the dynamics of research adaptation over time (Ananda & Pratama, 2024; Yusuf et al., 2025).

Addressing these gaps, this study aims to investigate research trends in undergraduate theses of English Education students during the COVID-19 pandemic at UIN Suska Riau using a bibliometric approach. Specifically, this study examines patterns in research methodologies, types of research designs, and the focus on English language skills. By providing a systematic mapping of thesis-based research, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how students adapted their research practices during a period of educational disruption and offers insights for future research development in English language education.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a bibliometric analysis with a content analysis design to examine research trends in undergraduate theses of English Language Education students during the COVID-19 pandemic. A bibliometric approach was considered appropriate as it enables the systematic mapping and evaluation of research patterns based on documented academic outputs. In this context, content analysis was used to categorize and interpret the characteristics of the theses. As defined by Krippendorff (1980), content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data within their context, allowing researchers to generate meaningful insights and structured interpretations.

This research was conducted in July 2025 at the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau (UIN Suska Riau), located in Pekanbaru, Riau Province, Indonesia. The data source of this study consisted of undergraduate theses obtained from the university's official repository.

The population of this study included all undergraduate theses produced by students of the English Language Education Study Program at UIN Suska Riau during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically from 2020 to 2022. A total sampling technique was

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employed, in which all available theses within the defined period were included in the analysis. According to Sugiyono (2017), total sampling refers to a technique in which the entire population is used as the research sample. Based on this criterion, 447 theses were selected and analyzed in this study.

Data were collected through document analysis by systematically reviewing each thesis and extracting relevant information. The theses were classified based on three main aspects: (1) research approach (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods), (2) research type or design, and (3) focus on English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Documentation, as noted by Hamidi (2004), serves as a crucial data source derived from recorded information produced by individuals or institutions.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency counts and percentage distributions, to identify dominant patterns and trends. The percentage of each category was calculated using the following formula:

$$p = (f / n) \times 100\%$$

where p represents the percentage, f denotes the frequency of each category, and n refers to the total number of theses analyzed (Nursaeni, 2016).

The results of the analysis were presented in the form of tables and graphical visualizations to provide a clear and systematic overview of research trends. This analytical approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how research methodologies, designs, and thematic focuses evolved among students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Approach Trends

Table 1
Distribution of Research Approaches (2020–2022)

No.	Research Approach	2020	2021	2022	Total	Perc.%
1	Quantitative	122	133	124	379	85%
2	Qualitative	16	22	29	67	15%
3	Mixed Method		1		1	0%
	Total	138	156	153	447	100%

Research trends in English Education theses during the Covid-19 pandemic: a bibliometric analysis at UIN Suska Riau

The bibliometric analysis of 447 undergraduate theses reveals a strong dominance of quantitative research approaches. A total of 379 theses (85%) employed quantitative methods, while 67 theses (15%) used qualitative approaches. Only one thesis (<1%) adopted a mixed-method design.

This dominance of quantitative research reflects a clear methodological preference among students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The shift to online learning environments limited direct access to research sites, making quantitative methods—particularly those relying on surveys and secondary data—more practical and feasible. This finding supports previous studies indicating that restricted field interaction during the pandemic encouraged the use of structured and easily deployable data collection techniques (Putri et al., 2020).

Despite its smaller proportion, qualitative research demonstrated a consistent upward trend, increasing from 16 studies in 2020 to 29 in 2022. This suggests a gradual shift toward more interpretive and exploratory approaches as students adapted to the challenges of remote research. The minimal use of mixed methods indicates that integrating multiple approaches remained relatively uncommon, possibly due to methodological complexity and time constraints in undergraduate research.

Trends in Quantitative Research Types

Table 2
Distribution of Quantitative Research Types

No.	Quantitative Research Type	2020	2021	2022	Total	Perc.%
1	Causal Comparative		2	3	5	1%
2	Comparative	2	1	1	4	1%
3	Correlational	34	27	19	80	21%
4	Cross-Sectional Survey		3	1	4	1%
5	Descriptive Quantitative	60	58	37	155	41%
6	Ex Post Facto	3	2	1	6	2%
7	Experimental		1		1	0%
8	Pre Experimental	2	10	15	27	7%
9	Quasi Experimental	21	24	29	74	20%

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10	Survey	5	17	22	6%	
11	True Experimental		1	1	0%	
	Total	122	133	124	379	100%

Among the 379 quantitative theses, descriptive quantitative research emerged as the most dominant type, accounting for 41% of the total. This was followed by correlational research (21%), quasi-experimental designs (20%), and pre-experimental studies (7%). Other types, including surveys (6%) and ex post facto research (2%), were less frequently used, while causal-comparative, comparative, cross-sectional survey, experimental, and true experimental designs each accounted for only about 1%.

The prominence of descriptive research indicates that students tended to focus on identifying and describing existing phenomena rather than testing complex causal relationships. This trend aligns with the limitations imposed by the pandemic, where controlled experimental settings were difficult to implement.

An interesting pattern can be observed in the use of survey methods, which showed a noticeable increase in 2022 compared to their absence in 2020. This shift reflects the growing reliance on online data collection tools, highlighting how students adapted their research strategies to digital environments. Overall, the findings demonstrate that practicality and accessibility played a significant role in shaping methodological choices.

Trends in Qualitative Research Types

Table 3
Distribution of Qualitative Research Types

No.	Qualitative Research Type	2020	2021	2022	Total	Perc. %
1	Case Study	11	9	15	35	52%
2	Classroom Action		1		1	1.5%
3	Descriptive Qualitative	5	11	12	28	42%
4	Survey Qualitative		1	1	2	3%
5	Library Research			1	1	1.5%
	Total	16	22	29	67	100%

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A total of 67 qualitative studies were identified, comprising five main types: case study, descriptive qualitative, classroom action research, qualitative survey, and library research. Among these, case study was the most dominant (52%), followed by descriptive qualitative research (42%). Other types, including qualitative survey (3%) and classroom action research and library research (each 1.5%), were minimally represented.

The dominance of case study and descriptive qualitative approaches suggests that students preferred flexible and context-based research designs that could be conducted without extensive field intervention. These methods allowed researchers to explore specific phenomena in depth, even within the constraints of limited physical access during the pandemic.

English Language Skills in Quantitative Research

Table 4
Distribution of English Language Skills in Quantitative Research

No.	Quantitative Research Type	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Total
1	Causal Comparative		2	2	1	
2	Comparative		4			
3	Correlational	6	19	20	18	
4	Cross-Sectional Survey			1		
5	Descriptive Quantitative	2	28	19	59	
6	Ex Post Facto		4		1	
7	Experimental		1			
8	Pre Experimental	1	9	6	10	
9	Quasi Experimental	5	20	20	19	
10	Survey	1	2	4	4	
11	True Experimental				1	
	Total	15	89	72	113	289
	Percentage	5%	31%	25%	39%	100%

Out of 379 quantitative studies, 289 focused on English language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Writing emerged as the most dominant focus, with 113 studies (39%), followed by speaking (31%), reading (25%), and listening (5%).

The prominence of writing skills can be associated with the feasibility of collecting written data remotely, such as essays or assignments submitted online. In contrast, listening was the least explored skill, likely due to challenges in designing and administering listening assessments in an online setting.

Further analysis indicates that descriptive quantitative research was the most frequently used design in writing-related studies. Meanwhile, quasi-experimental designs were commonly applied in research on speaking and reading skills, reflecting attempts to measure instructional effectiveness even in constrained environments.

English Language Skills in Qualitative Research

Table 5
Distribution of English Language Skills in Qualitative Research

No.	Quantitative Research Type	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Total
1	Case Study	3	8	7	3	
2	Classroom Action		1			
3	Descriptive Qualitative	2	10	2	4	
4	Survey Qualitative			1		
5	Library Research			1		
	Total	5	19	11	7	42
	Percentage	12%	45%	26%	17%	100%

Among the 67 qualitative studies, 42 focused on English language skills. Speaking was identified as the most dominant focus, with 19 studies (45%), followed by reading (26%), writing (17%), and listening (12%).

The preference for speaking skills in qualitative research reflects the suitability of this approach for exploring interactive and communicative aspects of language learning. Descriptive qualitative and case study designs were particularly dominant in speaking-related research, enabling in-depth analysis of learners' experiences and communication practices.

Similar to quantitative findings, listening remained the least investigated skill. This consistency across both research approaches highlights a potential gap in English language education research that warrants further attention.

DISCUSSION

From a bibliometric perspective, the findings of this study provide a systematic overview of research trends in English Language Education undergraduate theses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The dominance of quantitative approaches and the concentration on writing and speaking skills reflect how methodological and thematic choices were shaped by pandemic-related constraints. However, beyond describing patterns, this study also offers several methodological strengths and limitations that are important to consider.

One of the main strengths of this study lies in its large dataset (447 theses), which allows for a more comprehensive representation of student research trends over a three-year period (2020–2022). The use of total sampling ensures that all available theses within the pandemic period were included, thereby increasing the reliability of the findings. In addition, the combination of bibliometric mapping and content analysis enables both quantitative measurement and qualitative interpretation of research patterns, making the analysis more robust.

Another strength is the study's ability to provide a longitudinal perspective, capturing changes in research approaches and skill focus over time. This allows for the identification of not only dominant patterns but also emerging shifts, such as the gradual increase in qualitative research and survey-based quantitative studies.

However, this study also has several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to one institution (UIN Suska Riau), which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other universities in Indonesia or internationally. Second, the study focuses primarily on descriptive bibliometric indicators (frequency and percentage) without applying advanced bibliometric tools such as co-word analysis or network visualization, which could provide deeper insights into thematic relationships. Third, the study does not examine citation impact or author collaboration patterns, which are often included in more advanced bibliometric studies.

The findings of this study both confirm and extend previous research on educational research trends during the COVID-19 pandemic.

First, this study supports the findings of Putri et al. (2020), who reported that the pandemic significantly increased reliance on quantitative and survey-based research due

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to limited field access. Similarly, the present study shows that quantitative research dominates (85%), reinforcing the argument that accessibility strongly influenced methodological choices.

Second, Firman and Rahayu (2020) highlighted that online learning environments reshaped academic activities in higher education. This study extends their findings by showing that such shifts also influenced thesis-level research behavior, particularly in method selection and data collection strategies.

Third, Kusuma et al. (2021) found that students experienced difficulties in conducting classroom-based research during remote learning. The current study strengthens this claim by demonstrating a decline in experimental and classroom action research types, which are traditionally dependent on direct classroom interaction.

Fourth, Hidayat et al. (2022) observed an increasing use of digital tools in educational research. This study aligns with their findings but further adds that the rise of online surveys in 2022 reflects a clear methodological adaptation pattern among undergraduate researchers.

Fifth, Sari and Wahyudin (2023) reported a growing interest in digital learning and speaking-related studies during the pandemic. This study corroborates their findings by showing that speaking skills were the most frequently explored area in qualitative research (45%), indicating a consistent emphasis on communicative competence.

Sixth, more recent work by Ananda and Pratama (2024) and Yusuf et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of longitudinal bibliometric studies in understanding research evolution over time. In line with these studies, the present research contributes by providing a three-year longitudinal mapping of thesis-based research trends, although it remains limited to descriptive analysis.

Despite the consistency with previous studies, this research identifies a clear gap in the literature. Most prior studies focused on general educational research trends or classroom-based research, while few have specifically examined undergraduate thesis outputs as a bibliometric dataset. Furthermore, existing studies rarely provide a skill-based breakdown (listening, speaking, reading, writing) in relation to research design categories.

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Therefore, this study contributes new insights by: (1) Providing a comprehensive bibliometric mapping of undergraduate theses, not just published articles. (2) Linking research methods with language skill focus, offering a more detailed analytical layer. (3) Presenting a longitudinal trend analysis (2020–2022) during the COVID-19 pandemic period. (4) Highlighting a persistent imbalance between productive and receptive skills, especially the underrepresentation of listening. (5) Revealing the methodological adaptation of students in response to restricted research environments.

Overall, the findings indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic played a significant role in shaping research behavior among English Language Education students. While quantitative methods remained dominant due to practicality, there is evidence of gradual diversification in research approaches. The strong emphasis on writing and speaking skills suggests a pedagogical focus on productive language abilities, while listening remains an underexplored area.

These findings not only reinforce previous research but also extend the literature by providing a structured bibliometric perspective on undergraduate thesis trends. Consequently, this study offers valuable implications for thesis supervision, curriculum development, and future research direction in English language education.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a bibliometric analysis of research trends in English Language Education undergraduate theses at UIN Suska Riau during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022). The findings reveal a clear dominance of quantitative research approaches, particularly descriptive quantitative designs, driven largely by the practical constraints of remote learning and limited field access. Although qualitative research shows a gradual increase over time, mixed-method studies remain minimal.

In terms of thematic focus, writing and speaking skills are the most frequently investigated areas, while listening remains the least explored across both quantitative and qualitative studies. This indicates an imbalance in the distribution of language skill research, suggesting a strong emphasis on productive skills over receptive ones.

Overall, the study highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced methodological choices and research orientations among undergraduate students. It also identifies emerging diversification in research approaches, while simultaneously

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revealing persistent gaps in methodological variety and skill coverage. These findings provide important implications for thesis supervision and future research development in English Language Education, particularly in encouraging more balanced, innovative, and methodologically diverse studies.

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