Thematic and methodological trends of research articles published in the Ethiopian Journal of Language, Culture and Communication (EJLCC)

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Abstract

This research examined the thematic and methodological trends of research articles published in the Ethiopian Journal of Language, Culture and Communication from 2016- 2021. A total of 52 research articles were downloaded from the data base of the journal. It was then skimmed, classified and analyzed based on the classification scheme developed for this study. The results indicated multifaceted patterns of research trends across the years. While a wide range of research themes were explored quantitatively and qualitatively, classroom pedagogy was the most focused theme. Mixed method studies prevailed overthe studies while interest in theoretical research had gained momentum across the years. Researchers were increasingly exploring theoretical frameworks and concepts to deepen their understanding and contribute to the theoretical foundations of their respective fields. Strikingly contrasted with this result was the absence of synthesis research works published in the journal. Implications for better research publications and further research that could shed light on the research trend of articles published in other language education journals were presented.

Keywords: systematic review, research trends, skills, research themes, research approaches

Introduction

Excellence in education has recently been defined by the high-quality published studies in various indexed journals across the world. In essence, academic research findings published in these prestigious journals are considered a foundation for the improvement of educational fields (Olizko&Saienko, 2020). In the literature, the significance ofscientific research results in affecting policies and establishing basis for the effective implementation of education has been well-documented (Karadağ, 2009). Further, the results of such studies can inform policy designers to incorporate a variety of research-based activities in their curriculum for the production and accumulation of knowledge in that

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field (Yılmaz&Altnkurt, 2012). This in turn can serve higher education institutions as an important indicator for various educational reforms (Gülmez&Yavuz, 2016).

A plethora of research in education science has helped us in understanding the nature of the research processes and the possible reasons for the failure or success of research outcomes. Consequentially, research has consistently suggested different strategies to improve the research processes. Scientific research results play an essential role in understanding educational practices; one among these prominent strategies is content analysis, which is a deciding factor that potentially affects our understanding of the complex academic and research trends (Olizko&Saienko, 2020). So as to figure out the promising results of scientific research and address the limitations of academic studies published in education journals and thereby fill the research gap, content analysis plays vital role to examine the current research trends of research works published in education journals.

The quality productivity of research journals is directly or indirectly related to the quality of research articles submitted to journals. On the one hand, IbnTalib (2020) maintained that there has been a growing concern among researchers with regard to the value of scientific research as it is systematically evaluated and reviewed across years (Cited in Almuhaimeed, 2022). On the other hand, based on their journal policy, journals have attempted to screen out research articles submitted to them for publication. In such situations where journals and researchers establish correspondence, a journal may serve researchers as a flat form in the system to publish quality research or academic articles. The stakes are; therefore, high from both the researchers' perspective and from the perspective of journals to produce quality research outputs.

Despite these demands and expectations, there has been a growing empirical and theoretical research gap related to the pedagogical processes and outputs of second language (L2) learning both in quality and quantity, which was attributed to a considerable number of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) publications in journals, books, and conferences for the last one hundred years (Choe& Ma, 2013). On the other hand, the development of language, culture and communication research in general was not only in the amount of research articles produced but also in the quality of research publications including the diverse research themes, data gathering tools, research methods or approaches and contexts.

The role of synthesizing previous SL research themes and methodologies in understanding the development of SL and thereby identifying the current status of language teaching has been reiterated in the literature (Ellis, 2013). Consequently, a large body of systematic analysis of previous research has examined research articles published in various journals across the world concerning the themes and methods researchers used in the field of language education (Choe& Ma, 2013; Gao et al., 2021; Özmen et al., 2016; Öztürk & Güven, 2020; Solak, 2014).

Apart from the cumulative report of research themes, it is necessary to note that the validity and reliability of researches highly depends on the method of data collection and analysis utilized by researchers. At this juncture, it is essential to make clear distinctions between research design and methods of data collection and data analysis. Research design is a master plan that provides detailed insight on how the research is to be conducted. It focuses on the type of study planned to attain the desired research objectives. On the other hand, methods of data collection and analysis focus on the various research processes and the type of instruments, the data analysis and research procedures to be employed in the research (Gao et al., 2021). To ensure excellence and meaningful research process; therefore, researchers need to develop systematic procedures to test, analyze and verify the validity of their research: methods of data collection and analysis.

In the literature, five prominent methods of data collection and analysis applicable to educational settings have been categorized. These methods usually employed by language researchers include (1) theoretical: when a non-empirical or demonstrative article exploring concepts, beliefs and assumptions related to language teaching and learning, (2) quantitative: when the data was analyzed quantitatively using statistical techniques, (3) qualitative: data obtained from interview, observation or ethnography was analyzed qualitatively, (4) mixed: when the data was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively and (5) synthesis: the research article reports research review, synthesis, and meta-analysis of previous research studies(Choe& Ma, 2013). Therefore, the phrase "research trends" in this study refers to group of researchers' shared views and actions in the research where each researcher pays considerable attention to specific scientific themes, data gathering tools and research approaches when publishing their research articles in a journal.

Research Trends in Language, Culture and Communication Journals

This study reviewed related literature and empirical research articles related to language teaching, culture and communication. The reviewed data was used to analyze the results of this study with reference to the frequency of themes investigated, the foci of data gathering tools and the research methods or approaches employed by researchers for several years. The next paragraph was devoted to synthesizing the research articles downloaded from various language education journals across the world.

Research related to language and communication unfolded epistemological diversity of researchers regarding research themes (Ortega, 2012). A systematic review of research articles published in two volumes of Language Teaching Research journal from 1987 to 2011 also disclosed that research topics in the later volume were associated with teaching and culture (Ellis, 2013). Ma and Kim (2014) also reported that while research articles related to socio-cultural factors were most frequently studied in TQ, classrooms pedagogy was the most preferred topic in ET journal. Choe and Ma (2013) reported that classroom pedagogy was the most favored research area of domestic journals, whereas research related to individual learner traits accounted for the highest proportion in the international journals. In a similar vein, Demir and Koçyiğit (2018) conducted a systematic review of research on English Language Teacher Education published in three flagship journals: Teacher Education, Second Language Teacher Education, and English Language Teaching from 1997 to 2016 and revealed that teaching and learning was the most investigated research theme. The comparison results of the study of Seong and Nam (2010) also revealed language acquisition/learning and teaching methodologies as the most preferred and most frequently examined research in both the domestic journal, Modern English Education, from 2000 to 2009.

A recent research has offered ample evidence of research trends of language, culture and communication teaching journals concerning methods of data collection and analysis (Choe&Ma, 2013; Demir&Koçyiğit, 2018). Among the range of studies, which offered a snapshot of results,Choe and Ma (2013) reported that researchers from both the local (Korean) and international journals were found to favor the use of mixed research methods. The researchers' preference for mixed

research methods might be because of the potential of mixed research method in substantiating data obtained from one to the other, and hence it is the best method when it comes to methodological triangulation. With no marked contrast between domestic and international journals in qualitative and synthesis research, statistical techniques accounted for approximately 50% of both journals where theoretical research received little attention from both journals though it was used more frequently by international journals (Choe& Ma, 2013).

In contrast, qualitative research has significantly increased in recent years (Demir&Koçyiğit, 2018), and the development of diverse research areas in the second language education such as communicative language teaching, conversation analysis, linguistic ethnography, and longitudinal studies has been attributed to the rise of qualitative methods (Richards, 2009). Ma and Kim (2014) also revealed that although quantitative and qualitative research methods were the most popular in the second language education, the use of diverse research methods was also detected. Articles in TQ employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods proportionally, whereas more quantitative than qualitative research methods were used in the ET journal articles. The present research sought to examine the thematic and methodological preferences of researchers who published their research articles in the EJLCC because of the potential of these variables in improving the quality and practice of educational research. To this end, this systematic review was delimited to analyzing research articles published in the Ethiopian Journal of Language, Culture and Communication (EJLCC) from 2016 to 2021.

The researcher was interested in conducting a content analysis to understand the current research trends of articles published in the journal because the journal publishes research articles across various disciplines encompassing a multidisciplinary approach in the humanities. Further, the journal publishes issues related to the humanities in general and language learning and teaching in particular. This inspires the researcher as he is currently an English language educator. A close scrutiny of the journal for the last five years sparked the motivation as the journal is requesting national education index. This systematic research was aimed at providing additional insight into the essence of human values particularly to language, culture and communication research by examining the current research trends of articles published in the EJLCC for the last five years as the growth of knowledge is believed to be the cumulative development of new ideas based on previous recent empirical

and scientific studies (Liu et al., 2013). In light of the evidence reviewed from the literature, the following research questions were formulated.

Research questions

1. What were the most frequently addressed research themes in EJLCC from 2016-2021?

2. What were data collection tools most frequently employed by the researchers published in EJLCC?

3. What wereresearch approaches most frequently employed by the researcherspublished in EJLCC?

Research Methods

Data collection

The major aim of this systematic review of research was to examine the thematic and methodological trends of research articles published in the Ethiopian Journal of Language, Culture and Communication (EJLCC), from 2016 -2021. The journal publishes scholarly research articles and book reviews periodically. This scholarly, double-blind peer-reviewed journal is published by the Faculty of Humanities, Bahir Dar University. EJLCC publishes two volumes annually: The journal aims at publishing articles on a wide range of topics relevant to current language, communication and cultural enquiry in Amharic and English languages. These include studies related to folklore and cultural studies, journalism and communication, foreign language learning and teaching, teaching and learning materials development, language testing and assessment, curriculum design and development and language program evaluation.

Overall, EJLCC welcomes submissions of articles in four categories, namely research articles, academic articles, short discussion articles (including interviews and idea sharing) and book reviews. However, this systematic research included research articles based on the purpose of the study. Short discussion articles and book reviews were not included in this study, for it was reasonably assumed that they were not data driven or most of them were based on the author's reflection. Accordingly, only data-based research studies were included as empirically driven content analysis can inform educational research trends better than other articles do. The data obtained from the collected articles were analyzed systematically after the documents were reviewed or evaluated (Bowen, 2009). A total of 52 research articles in the journal were downloaded

from the website of the journal and examined with regard to research themes and methodological issues.

Data classification

The classification scheme for this systematic review was adapted from the study of Choe and Ma (2013). In order to analyze the research articles, this study focused on four major areas for classification. These are target language skills, research themes and methods of data collection and analysis. Their classification was illustrated in the following table.

Table 1: Classifications of research themes, data collection tools and research methods

Research Themes	Data Collection Tools	Research Approaches
Classroom pedagogy	Questionnaire	Theoretical
Testing/ Assessment	Achievement test	Qualitative
Curriculum/ Materials	Perception/ Attitude/ Skill Tests	Quantitative
Sociolinguistic analysis	Interview	Mixed
Sociocultural factors	Focus Group	Synthesis
Psychological factors	Observation	
Skills	Documents	

The Coding System and Coding Categories

The research themes, data collection tools and research methods/ approaches were described and classified as follows. Both the classification and the coding schemes were first reviewed by two experienced researchers in the field of language education before analysis.

Research Themes

Drawing from the systematic review of the articles published in EJLCC from 2016 to 2021, the following thematic areas were identified.The research themes the researchers focused on in the journal were classified based on the literature review as presented below.

1. Classroom pedagogy: classroom-based/-oriented, learning strategies

2. Testing/ Assessment

3. Curriculum/materials: curriculum, policy, programs, teachers

4. Sociolinguistic analysis: CA, DA, ethnographic descriptions

5. Sociocultural factors: identity, socialization, learning contexts, etc.

6. Psychological factors: memory, motivation, attitude, perception, anxiety, preference

7. Skills: Communication skills, media, language, thinking/reasoning and teamwork skills

Data Collection Tools

The researcher skimmed the abstract section or read the whole manuscript to identify the data collection tool (s) used for each study. Accordingly, the following data collection tools were identified.

1. Questionnaire: Open ended, Likert and others

2. Achievement test: Open ended, multiple choice and other

3. Perception/ Attitude/ Skill Tests

4. Interview: Structured, semi-structured, and unstructured

5. Focus Group Discussion/ FGD

6. Observation: Participatory and non-participatory

7. Documents

Research Approaches

Articles were classified as theoretical, quantitative, qualitative, mixed method and synthesis based on the following criteria.

1. Theoretical when a non-empirical or demonstrative article that explores concepts, beliefs and assumptions related to language teaching and learning was detected in the article

2. Quantitative when it was explicitly stated in the article, or the data was analyzed quantitatively using statistical techniques.

3. Qualitative when it was explicitly stated in the article, or the data obtained from interviews, observation or ethnography was analyzed qualitatively

4. Mixed when it was explicitly stated in the article, or the data was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively

5. Synthesis when it was explicitly stated in the article, or the article reports research review, synthesis, and meta-analysis of previous research studies

Data analysis

After skimming each article downloaded from the journal's website, the researcher developed a coding scheme appropriate for the purpose of this review. Once the coding scheme was determined, the articles were then categorized and analyzed quantitatively based on the category schemes (research themes, data collection tools and research methods/ approaches used) developed for this study.

Results

A total of 52 research articles were downloaded from the data base of EJLCC. (See Table 2 below) The results of this study were presented using descriptive statistics and summative interpretations in light of the review schemes developed for the study.

### Table 2: The Total Number of Articles Reviewed from EJLCC

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
7	9	8	4	12	12	52

Table 2 shows the articles published in the EJLCC from 2016 to 2021. The present research sought to examine the research articles published in the journal from 2016 to 2021 pertaining to three research essentials: research themes, data collection tools used and methods of data collection and analysis.

Table 3: The Frequency Distribution of the Research Themes

Research Theme	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total	Percentage
Classroom pedagogy	1	3	3	2	6	3	18	35
Testing/assessment	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	4
Curriculum/materials	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Sociolinguistic analysis	3	3	2	1	3	3	15	29
Sociocultural factors	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	6
Psychological factors	2	2	1	0	1	2	8	15
Skills	1	0	2	0	0	2	5	9
Total	7	9	8	4	12	12	52	100

Figure 1: Histogram for the Distribution of the Research Themes
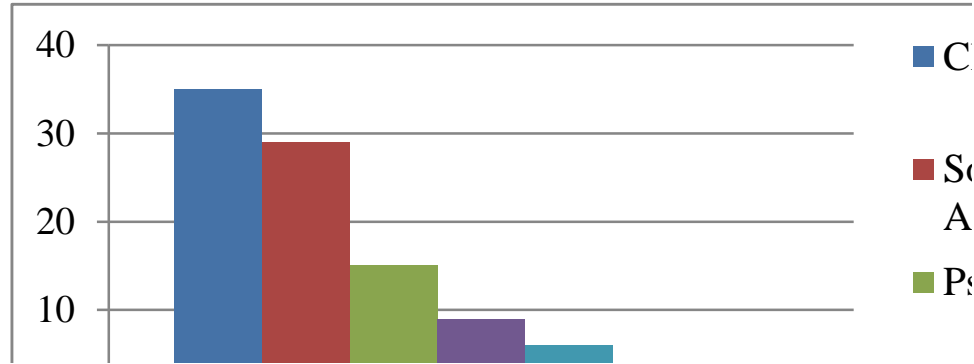
The first research trend investigated in this study was the focused thematic areas of the research articles published in EJLCC from 2016 to 2021 to understand the research themes most frequently explored by the researchers. Table 4 indicates three research themes with the highest percentages. According to the information in the table, more than one-third of the studies, 35 %(a total of 18 studies from 52) focused on classroom pedagogy. Classroom pedagogy which refers to classroom-based/-oriented, learning strategies was the most popular research theme for the vast majority of research articles. Regarding this, the experimental study of Wubalem (2018) examined learner attention drawing tools namely, enhanced input, oral prompt and inner speech ways of balancing the distribution of attentional energy between meaning and form in content-based language instruction that seeks to attain content comprehension and language learning at the same time. The results showed the possibility of drawing the attention of learners to target language structures, and hence attaining grammatical accuracy without a counter effect on content comprehension.

Recalling from the previous classification of research themes in the methods section of this study, it was apparent that learning strategies are categorized under the sub-category of classroom pedagogy. Abeba and Marew (2019) is another work with a similar theme. In a quasi-experimental study, the researchers sought to see the effects of transactional learning strategies in improving the reading comprehension and motivation of Amharic as a first language students in a middle school where positive result was reported.

Sociolinguistic analysis (29 %) was the second major concern of the researchers who published their research articles in EJLCC. A typical example to this was the study of Gashaw (2019) that aimed at analyzing conceptual metaphors of time as realized in Amharic spatial expressions. The results of the analysis revealed that orientational metaphors suggest Amharic speakers understanding of time via spatial frames of reference. In contrast, only three studies reviewed for this research investigated sociocultural factors. Among these studies, Hirut et al (2020) examinedthe depiction of strong female protagonists and their male counterparts and the gender power relationship between male and female characters in two selected Amharic feature films. The results showed that the selected Amharic films demonstrate a positive change in the portrayal of women beyond the male gaze.

Table 4: Frequency Distribution of the Data collection Tools

Data Collection tool	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total	Percentage
Questionnaire	2	5	0	1	5	0	13	20.6
Achievement test	0	1	2	1	4	0	8	12.7
Perception tests	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	3.2
Interviews	1	2	1	1	5	2	12	19.1
FGD	0	0	1	1	2	0	4	6.3
Observations	0	2	0	0	1	3	6	9.5
Documents	3	4	2	3	3	3	18	28.6
Total	7	14	6	7	21	8	63	100

Figure 2: Histogram for the Data Collection Tools Used
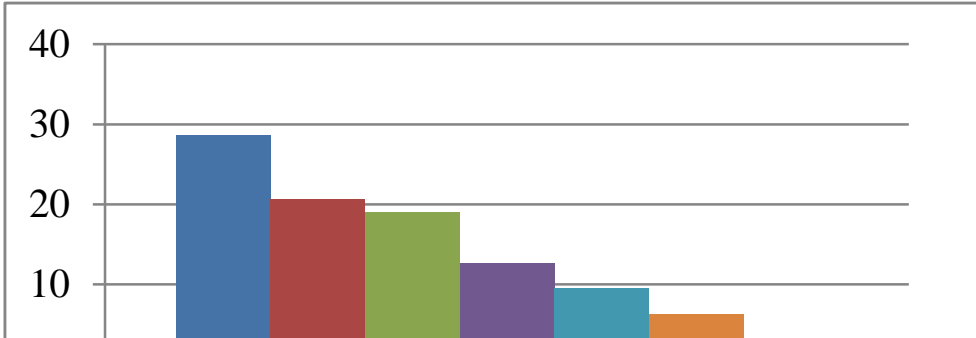
Inferring from table 4, it was evident that document (28.6%) and questionnaire (20.6%) were the first and second most popular data gathering tools used by the researchers. Further, these tools were either independently employed or with other data collection tools. For example,

while documents were employed alone or combined with interviews, questionnaires, achievement tests or FGDs, questionnaires were used alone or combined with achievement tests, interviews, documents, reflective journals and FGD. In contrast, in comparison with the other data gathering tools, FGD (6.3%) and perception tests (3.2 %) received the least attention. Four studies were investigated using FGD with interview and reflective journal, and only two studies used perception test alone and it was also used with an achievement test.

Michael (2016) argued that human rights are one of the factors that ensure the hopes of the common man. The author used ChimamandaNgoziAdichie's Two African short stories to substantiate his argument. The analysis of the document revealed that Adichie shows how the basic human rights articles in the UNDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights), including freedom of expression and the right to work and to work in safe and favorable conditions, are ignored and violated in the two stories set in two different African nations. In a similar vein, Biset and zelalem (2021) examined the framing of the 2016 Amhara protest in Ethiopia by Amhara Television (ATV) and Aljazeera. The authors utilized a text to analyze the thematic framing of the two media where the findings revealed two extremely divergent understandings regarding the foci of reporting news about the conflict. While ATV reports focused on reducing unrest and government initiatives, Aljazeera focused on ethnic tensions, human rights, and the magnitude of the crisis. Aljazeera and ATV also differed in reporting the causes and solutions to the problem where the authors hypothesized that the differences might have been because of their distinct organizational culture, editorial policy, and the general media philosophy adhered to by journalists in their respective media. Although both paid equal attention to articulating and defining the problem, the tone of the stories also differed in which Aljazeera was positive about the public protest, but ATV condemned the persistence of the protest.

A questionnaire has turned out to be the second most popular data gathering tool in the journal in the research period. It was also evident that the majority of the researchers combined two or more data gathering tools to substantiate their data. Therefore, one possible reason for the highest frequency of questionnaires may be because using a questionnaire as a standalone instrument or to support data obtained from other tools was the most common. A case in point was the study of Emily and Mandante (2016) that examined how Ethiopian primary teachers perceive the use of language games in their classrooms using a questionnaire, the

data of which was substantiated with a document data. The results concluded that most primary English teachers have favorable perceptions about the importance of language games in regard to students' learning of English, collaborative work, critical thinking and problem solving skills, and thereby suggest designers of English textbooks to critically consider the quantity and variation of games.

Table 5: Frequency Distribution of the Research Methods

Research Approach	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total	Percentage
Theoretical	3	2	2	1	3	3	14	27
Quantitative	1	1	1	1	3	3	10	19
Qualitative	1	0	1	1	1	2	6	12
Mixed	2	6	4	1	5	4	22	42
Synthesis	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	7	9	8	4	12	12	52	100

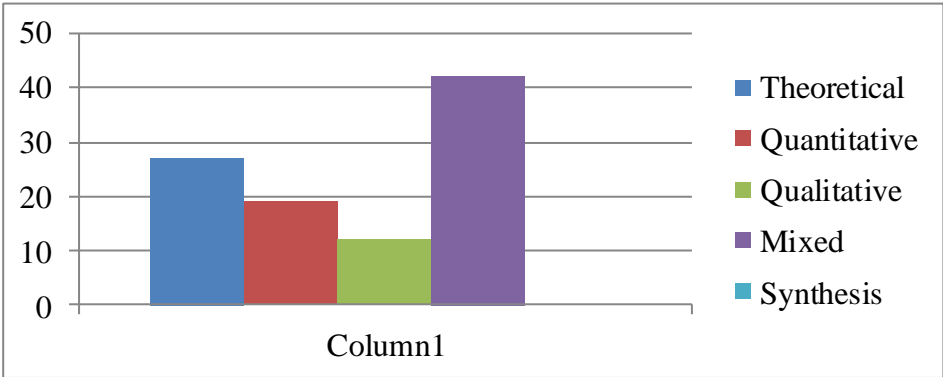**Figure 3: Histogram for the Research Methods/Approach**

Table 5 indicates the most frequently used methods of data collection and analysis or research approaches across the years (2016 to 2021). Based on the percentages calculated, mixed method was the most popular research method or approach (42%). In his quasi-experimental study, Bantalem(2020) investigated the effects of teaching critical thinking skills on EFL high school students' reading comprehension using an achievement test, reflective journal, and interview. The results of the study obtained from the descriptive and inferential statistical analysis of the quantitative data and the thematic analysis of the qualitative data of

the study revealed significant reading comprehension performance in favor of the experimental group.

The use of theoretical methods (27 %) to collect and analyze data was also the second most preferred method of data collection and analysis for researchers who published their research articles in the Ethiopian Journal of language, Culture and Communication (EJLCC). To illustrate this fact with examples from the published studies, Abeselom (2020) analyzed the Chronicle of Bäkaffa (1721-1730) using content analysis and revealed the role of chronicles for studying the philology, history, literature and culture of the past. On the contrary, unlike mixed, theoretical, qualitative and quantitative approaches, synthesis research approach was the least common research approach used by researchers who published their studies in the journal. Although synthesis approach provides a more comprehensive understanding about the meta-analysis of previous research studies, which can help future researchers, identify and address research gaps, the results generally showed that no research was conducted using this research approach. To illustrate, out of the total research articles reviewed from the journal, even a single article that employed synthesis approach for data gathering and analysis was not detected.

Taken together, the majority of the studies have demonstrated a wide range of data gathering tools for a single educational study. A closer look at the studies published in the journal across the five years showed that most of the researchers shared similar trends in employing a wide range of data gathering tools and research approaches for a single research theme. For example, as it is noted from the data, three studies with a mixed research design (Berhanu&Dawit, 2017; Tazebachew, 2017; Tigabu, 2020) investigated classroom pedagogy using the three most prominent data gathering tools, namely questionnaire, observation and interview. This indicates that the researchers seemed to take advantage of employing more than one data gathering tool, which may ultimately be attributed to having a mixed research design in their studies.

The study of Berhanu and Dawit (2017) that investigated implementation of group work in EFL classrooms was categorized as a mixed study. Their research specifically addressed the successes and the challenges the teachers face in using group work at secondary schools where the findings revealed that the teachers reckoned the considerable role group work could play in helping students learn English well, but the teachers noted some difficulties they faced when they attempted to use group work. Tazebachew (2017) also employed a questionnaire, observation

and interview to assess the practices of one-to-five cooperative language learning of grade 9 students in EFL speaking classes at three governmental general secondary schools where the results of the study revealed the teachers' failure to facilitate, encourage, support and evaluate properly; students develop dependency and lack of interest to work in groups and were permanently grouped. In a similar vein, Tigabu (2020) examined a possible difference between EFL teachers' teaching strategies and students' learning styles at a preparatory and secondary school. The results showed that while visual style was the learning style of the majority of students, note and lecture, pair work and group discussion were the most dominant teaching strategies used by teachers.

Discussion

This systematic review research investigated a total of 52 research articles published in the Ethiopian Journal of Language, Culture and Communication (EJLCC) for the last five years to understand current research trends in a the journal. The findings of the present study showed several research patterns with regard to the frequency of the research themes explored by researchers, and the data collection tools and the research methods or approaches employed by the researchers who published their research articles in the journal for the last five years.

An Examination of the research articles under scrutiny indicated that a wide range of research themes were explored by the researchers who published their research articles in the journal from 2016 to 2021. Concurrent with these diverse varieties of research topics, previous research on education has uncovered epistemological diversity of researchers in language and communication journals (Ortega, 2012). Among these, teaching methodologies, which were classified as classroom pedagogy were the most preferred topics published in the Modern English Education from 2000 to 2009 (Seong&Nam, 2010). On the other hand, as sociocultural factors were rarely investigated by researchers who published their articles in the journal, this tendency was not supported by previous researches that examined the research trends of Teaching Quarterly Journal where research articles related to socio-cultural factors were most frequently studied themes (Ma and Kim, 2014).

The findings of this study revealed classroom pedagogy or classroom-based/-oriented, learning strategies as the most popular research theme for the vast majority of research articles published in EJLCC for the past five years. This finding supports other empirical studies conducted to

analyze research trends across three flagship international journals and revealed that researching classroom pedagogy including language acquisition/learning and teaching methodologies was the most investigated research theme which received considerable attention from researchers (Choe& Ma, 2013;Demir&Koçyiğit, 2018; Seong & Nam, 2010).The choice of classroom pedagogy as the most favored category might be because of the potential of this variable in transforming the practice and development of educational research. This study also showed that data collection tools and approaches were largely determined by the purpose of studies or research themes investigated by the researchers.

The second theme of the present research was to examine the most frequent data gathering tool used by researchers who published their research articles in the journal under study from 2016-2021. While the researchers used a wide range of data gathering tools for a single study, questionnaire was found to be the researchers' second most preferred data gathering tool. This is partially concomitant with the results of previous research that analyzed research articles published across various language and communication journals where the researchers most widely used questionnaire as the data gathering tool in various research contexts (Gülbahar&Alper, 2009; Selçuk et al., 2014; Yılmaz&Altınkurt, 2012).

The three most visibly employed methods were mixed, theoretical and quantitative research approaches. Mixed method that reached its peak in 2017 was the most popular research method for the studies. This result correlates with the results of previous research that offered ample evidence on the diverse research methods used by researchers (Choe& Ma, 2013; Demir&Koçyiğit, 2018; Ma & Kim, 2014), and using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to validate their results and gain better insight from their research (Hashemi, 2012). Further, with no marked contrast between domestic and international journals, an overwhelming number of studies synthesized research articles and reported that mixed research was the most popular research method/approach (Choe& Ma, 2013).The tendency of combining quantitative and qualitative methods together may provide corroborative evidence for the notion that methodological eclecticism has now become the prominent feature in the field of education (Motha, 2009).

This systematic review also showed that theoretical research was the second most popular research method or approach for the researchers. Although other plausible reasons could be cited for this, the development of diverse research areas in education such as communicative language

teaching, conversation analysis, linguistic ethnography, and longitudinal studies has been attributed to the rise of the theoretical method (Richards, 2009). In contrast, synthesis research was the least preferred method employed in the research articles reviewed for this study. This result substantiates the result of research that compared research articles in three flagship journals: English Teaching (ET) and TESOL Quarterly (TQ) and revealed that articles using synthesis research were not published in TQ over the last three years, whereas around three percent of articles utilized research synthesis methodology in ET (Ma & Kim, 2014).

Conclusion

Based on the results of this systematic review, the following conclusions were made. While a wide range of research themes were explored in the Ethiopian Language, Culture and Communication Journal (EJLCC) from 2016-2021, classroom pedagogy was the most preferred theme. Besides, document and questionnaire were the most frequently used data gathering tools by the researchers who published their articles in the journal. On the other hand, a mixed method that reached its peak in 2017 was the most popular method of data collection and analysis for the research articles reviewed for this study. Moreover, theoretical research received more attention, whereas there was limited number of studies on synthesis research.

Research Implications

This systematic study sought to examine the research articles and thereby contribute to the education research by analyzing the research publications of the Ethiopian Journal of Language, Culture and Communication (EJLCC) from 2016 to 2021. Having reviewed the research articles published in the journal, this systematic review research has disclosed empirical evidence that has significant implications for language, culture and communication research.

Given language, culture and communication are taught across universities, classroom pedagogy as the most popular research theme in the journal can be taken as practical and useful, which can be interpreted as that the researchers effort may contribute to the improvement of courses across these disciplines. In contrast, unlike other research themes, testing and assessment were the most underrepresented themes reviewed for this study. Thus, although continuous assessment has recently been the buzzword in higher education institutions, the research gaps

noticeable in testing/assessment implies the necessity of more studies related to this timely theme needsmore attention.

The findings of this study also offer implications for researchers in that as the focus of language, culture and communication is multifaceted, they require diverse methods of data collection and analysis to better understand the overall picture of the education processes. The results of this study are also hoped to provide inputs to existing literature in terms of understanding the research trends of researchers who will have to be better prepared to keep track up to date research themes and methods in the face of the advancement of the current education research. The results of this study can be used as a baseline data for language education researchers who intend to further review research articles in EJLCC in the future, or for those who seek to systematically analyze language education research articles in other journals.

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