

Research Orientations in the Applied Linguistics Journal of Roshd: A Longitudinal Analysis from 1984 to 2020

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 [10.22080/iselt.2025.29702.1112](https://doi.org/10.22080/iselt.2025.29702.1112)

Received

July 18, 2025

Accepted

September 10, 2025

Available online

October 9, 2025

Keywords:

Applied Linguistics
Journal of Roshd,
Confluence of
Research
Orientations,
Creativity and
Culture.

Abstract

The Applied Linguistics Journal of Roshd is a prominent Iranian journal that has been publishing research articles in applied linguistics since 1984. The research orientations of papers published in the Applied Linguistics Journal of Roshd have rarely been systematically investigated. To address this gap, the present study aimed to explore the research orientations of papers published in the journal from 1984 to 2020. A total of 403 papers from various issues of the journal were selected and analyzed based on Meihami (2020) twelve research orientations framework. The findings indicated that the primary focus of research in the journal during this period was on teaching and teachers, and it shows a gradual tendency towards assessment, materials, and technology in recent years. However, orientations such as creativity, culture, pragmatics, and academic language were notably underrepresented. The analysis also revealed some overlap between certain orientations, such as between learner and learning, and among culture, material, and creativity. These findings suggest potential areas for the Roshd Journal editors to consider refining and expanding the journal's scope, encouraging more research into the less-explored orientations to diversify and enrich the field of applied linguistics.

1. INTRODUCTION

The early decades witnessed a substantial increase in the number of papers published annually. Correspondingly, the emergence of new theories and methodologies has presented challenges for novice researchers navigating the field (Druckman & Donohue, 2020; Lei & Liu, 2019). Research-oriented articles reflect the specific topics that researchers focus on to address key issues within their disciplines. For instance, fundamental research orientations in second language teaching include L2 learning and teaching, L2 assessment, L2 material development, and L2 skills (Meihami, 2020). Each orientation encompasses various sub-orientations; for example, material development can be divided into studies on the principles of design, implementation, and evaluation of language teaching materials (Tomlinson, 2012). Additionally, factors such as a journal's publication policies and prevailing trends in the field influence research orientations (Meihami, 2020).

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Although some studies have examined research methods in applied linguistics, relatively little attention has been paid to research orientations and preferences that reveal the approaches of researchers and journals (Hafez & Soodmand Afshar, 2023; Meihami, 2020). This study, therefore, aims to fill the gap by systematically analyzing the research orientations of papers published in applied linguistics journals to help researchers identify under-investigated topics and make informed decisions about future research directions (Lei & Liu, 2019). Moreover, gathering data on the research orientations of journals can broaden researchers' understanding of the field. Firstly, novice researchers gain insight into both current and historical trends in research orientation. Secondly, it assists academic students in identifying new research directions. Finally, such studies provide journal editorial boards with valuable information to evaluate their journals' past orientations and to make strategic decisions for future publications. In this study, research orientation refers to the focus and interests reflected in studies published in the Roshd Journal, particularly regarding different modes of research, including teaching, learning, and assessment. Accordingly, the research aims to fill the existing gap by investigating the research orientations of papers published in the Iranian English Journal of Roshd from 1984 to 2020. To achieve this, the study addresses the following research question:

- What is the research orientation trend of papers published in the Roshd applied linguistics journal from 1984 to 2020?
- Is there any overlap and confluence between research orientations in the Journal of Roshd from 1984 to 2020?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature reveals that studies investigating journals' research orientations are scarce, and there is a noticeable gap in this area (Li et al., 2023). Although many studies have explored research methods, there is still limited research on the orientations of applied linguistic articles (Farsani et al., 2021). One notable exception is the study by Sahragard and Meihami (2016b), who examined the research methods and orientations of articles published in the Journal of Teaching Persian to Speakers of Other Languages (TPSOL). They analyzed 58 papers from TPSOL spanning 2012 to 2015. Their findings indicated a clear imbalance in research orientations, with a predominant focus on learning and learner orientations, while teacher and assessment orientations received considerably less attention.

Previous Research on Research Orientations

In another study, Meihami (2020) examined the research methods and orientations of papers published in applied linguistics journals from 1980 to 2019. The researcher analyzed a corpus of 3,491 papers from seven applied linguistics journals. The papers were categorized according to their methodology—quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods—and their research orientations, based on ten key topics representing the major areas of applied linguistics research. The study's findings revealed that between 2000 and 2019, Journals' papers mostly focused on topics such as teacher, teaching, and assessment reached a peak in publication frequency.

Lei and Liu (2019) conducted a study to explore research trends in applied linguistics journals from 2005 to 2016. They examined papers published across 42 social sciences journals within the field, focusing on topics, research trends, and citation patterns. Their findings revealed that sociocultural, functional, and identity issues were among the most frequently studied topics in applied linguistics. Conversely, there was a noticeable decline in research on grammatical, phonological, and generative linguistic topics.

Building on this, [Sahragard and Meihami \(2016a\)](#) proposed a framework to categorize the scope of applied linguistics journals into six main categories, as follows:

- Teaching orientation: studies which mirror the procedure of teaching L2, techniques, methods, and activities which are used in the L2 classroom to improve the teaching process.
- Learning orientation: the studies regarding learning and cognitive aspects of learning. Moreover, the process of learning in different contexts is categorized under learning-oriented research.
- Teacher orientation: the studies focusing on teachers' processes and forms of L2 learning. For example, the Teacher's method of teaching is an aspect of teacher-oriented research that needs teaching workshops and training courses for teachers.
- Learner orientation: the studies seeking to understand how learners' traits influence learning and teaching procedures. One example is to study the intelligence or personality traits of L2 learners, such as stress, self-confidence, and make a relationship with other aspects of L2 learning.
- Assessment orientation: As it is observable, assessment orientation studies are connected to the investigation in terms of evaluation of L2 learners, such as achievement or placement tests, and terms such as validity or reliability of assessment.
- Material orientation: studies that remark on the materials used in L2 Learning. Content analysis of material is also under this research orientation.

In a related study, ([Tomlinson, 2012](#)) investigated the presence and frequency of creativity elements in ELT textbooks from inner, outer, and expanding circle countries, as well as the overlap among these elements. He found that creativity overlaps with cultural, social, and material content, such as textbooks, and noted that research addressing the relationship between culture and creativity in ELT textbooks remains scarce.

In another study, [Shao et al. \(2019\)](#) highlighted the significant influence of culture on creativity, emphasizing that conceptions of creativity vary across cultural contexts. Their review reveals that individualistic and collectivistic cultures differ not only in how creativity is defined but also in the creative processes they prioritize, where collectivist cultures tend to value the usefulness of ideas over novelty, whereas individualist cultures equally emphasize both novelty and utility. Moreover, the authors underscore the importance of culturally appropriate assessment tools for accurately measuring creativity, noting that standardized evaluations may not fully capture culturally specific expressions of creativity. This nuanced understanding underscores the need to consider cultural dimensions when exploring creativity in educational materials and practices.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Corpus

To investigate the role of research orientation in papers published in the Roshd Journal, the researcher analyzed articles available on the journal's official website (roshdmag.ir) from 1984 to 2020. In this vein, the researcher used a diachronic (longitudinal) analysis to trace and understand how research orientations in the Roshd Journal evolved over a long period of time. This approach helps to reveal:

- Trends and shifts in the focus areas of published papers over time, such as the increase or decrease of particular orientations like teacher, learner, or technology.

- How editorial policies, disciplinary developments, and academic priorities may have influenced these shifts.
- The stability or variability of certain research themes, showing which topics dominated and which were underrepresented or emerging.
- The study also aimed to help researchers and editors recognize gaps and opportunities for future research directions by understanding the historical trajectory of journal content.

In other words, diachronic analysis allows for a comprehensive picture of the journal's intellectual landscape and research priorities across decades rather than a snapshot limited to one time period.

Criteria for article selection from Roshd Journal (1984–2020):

- The researcher selected only original research papers published in the applied linguistics section of the Roshd Journal.
- Papers were included if their research orientation was explicitly mentioned or clearly identifiable by the authors themselves. This was to ensure accurate and unbiased classification.
- The corpus excluded other types of publications, such as commentaries, narrative stories, or opinion pieces that did not focus on a clear research orientation.
- The total number of selected papers for analysis was 1365.
- The corpus consisted of research papers published over the course of 35 years. After selecting the journal, the researcher systematically traced and reviewed papers spanning four decades. Since the journal includes various types of publications—such as empirical studies, commentaries, and narrative articles—the researcher focused exclusively on those papers where the research orientation was explicitly stated by the authors. In total, 1,365 original research papers were extracted and analyzed to identify their research orientations.

Instruments

The framework for this study is based on the model developed by (Sahragard & Meihami, 2016b). Accordingly, the researcher examined the topics and content of papers published in the Roshd Journal to identify their research orientations, using the 10 research orientations outlined in Sahragard and Meihami's framework. This framework categorizes the main research orientations commonly found in applied linguistics journals into ten components, providing a comprehensive structure for analysis.

- Teaching orientation: studies indicating the procedure of teaching L2. Approaches, strategies, and tasks that are used in L2 classrooms to improve teaching quality.
- Material orientation: studies focusing on materials employed in L2 teaching. Scrutinizing the materials is also under this research orientation. Furthermore, the investigation on how to provide and create new materials for L2 classrooms according to different criteria is within this research orientation domain.
- Assessment orientation: As the name itself suggests, the explanation for assessment orientation studies can be associated with an investigation addressing the assessment and evaluation of L2 learners in the process of learning L2.
- Learning orientation: the studies relating to the process of learning and the cognitive, psychological, and social aspects of learning. Moreover, the situation of language learning in different contexts is classified under learning-oriented research.

- Learner orientation: studies focusing on the way learners' characteristics can influence language learning and teaching. One example is investigating learners' motivation and finding any relation with other L2 learning factors.
- Teacher orientation: studies that track the teacher-related aspects of L2 learning. Similarly, Teacher training is an aspect of teacher-oriented research on how to educate and up-to-date teachers for L2 teaching.
- Identity orientation: the studies focused on identity construction and a variety of identity types, such as cultural identity, social identity, and professional identity.
- Language learning and technology orientation: the studies that address the integration of technology in language and teaching.
- English for academic and specified objectives: studies whose topics are related to English teaching and learning for specific and academic purposes. The specialized coursebooks and students' needs analysis.
- Pragmatic orientation: studies that are focused on social and norm/function aspects of English language learning. For example, how to speak or write appropriately and meaningfully.

Table 1 shows examples of research papers that were published in the Journal of Roshd for 4 decades from 1984 to 2020 ,with different research orientations.

Table 1: Example of papers with different research orientations

Research orientations	Examples
Teaching orientation	The characteristics of reflective teachers and reflective teaching
Material orientation	Lexical cohesion in high school English Textbooks
Assessment orientation	Fair assessment
Learning Orientation	verbal humor in a learning environment
Learner orientation	Individual differences in strategy use in second language reading
Teacher orientation	The communicative approach and the teaching of vocabulary
Technology orientation	A news-oriented Website for Learning English
Language for academic Purpose orientation	Teaching at colleges and universities
Pragmatic and discourse orientation	The effect of instructions on the development of pragmatic orientations
Culture orientations	the new year, new perspective

Procedure

The coding procedure was straightforward, with coders scanning the papers and classifying them according to the established research orientation framework by using MAXQDA 2020 to assign them the related pre-determined codes. Figure 1 shows an example of how codes were made over different research and papers in the Roshd Journal.



Figure 1: Roshd journal research orientation analysis by MAXQDA 2020

As can be seen in Fig. 1, this article in the Roshd journal provides an avenue for the overlap of two research orientations of teaching and technology. The researcher codified this part as such because this selected article provides a context for other researchers and teachers to observe a type of research that has an overlap between research orientations of teaching and technology.

To ensure the reliability of data analysis and extract valid results from the collected studies, it is essential to demonstrate inter-coder agreement and minimize bias (Ary et al., 2014). In this study, to address reliability, a second coder—holding a PhD in applied linguistics and familiar with the study’s design—was invited to independently code the corpus based on the predetermined framework. Prior to coding, the researcher thoroughly explained the framework and coding process to the second coder. The inter-coder agreement, calculated using MAXQDA 2020, reached 90%, indicating strong reliability in the coding process.

4. RESULTS

The primary research question of the current study was to identify and analyze the research orientations of papers published in the Roshd Journal from 1984 to 2020. The collected papers were systematically examined to determine their research orientations. The results of this analysis are presented in Figure 2.

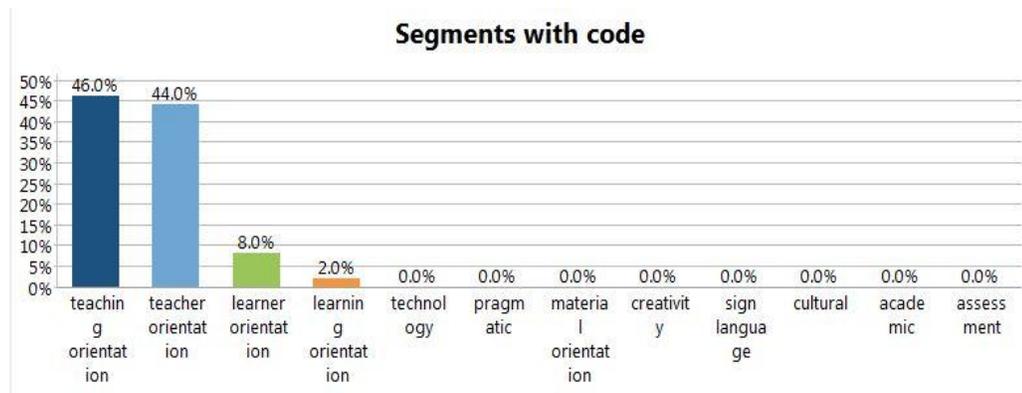


Figure 2: Frequency of research orientation in the Roshd Journal from 1984 to 1988

Figure 2 provides valuable information on the overall trajectory of research orientations in papers published in the Roshd Journal from 1984 to 1988. As shown in Figure 2, the majority of papers during this period focused on teaching and teacher orientations, comprising approximately 86% of the total corpus analyzed. In contrast, learner and learning orientations accounted for about 8% and 2% of the papers, respectively. Figure 2 also reveals that topics related to technology, pragmatics, material development, creativity, culture, and assessment were not addressed at all in papers published between 1984 and 1988.

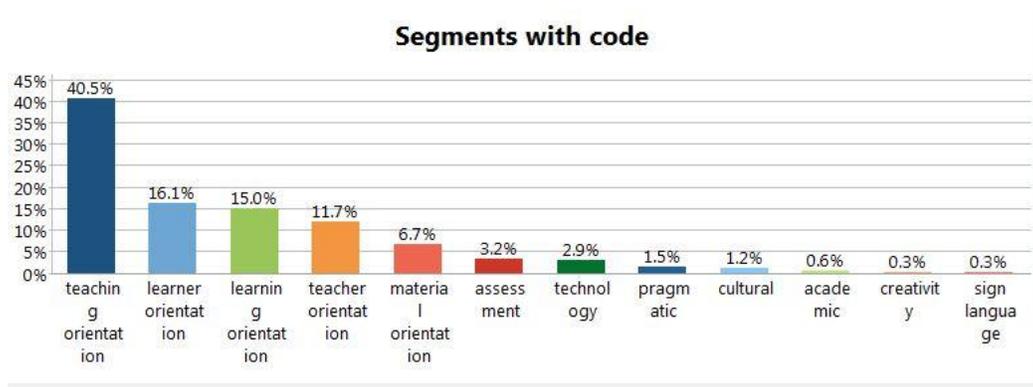


Figure 3: Frequency of research orientation in the Roshd journal from 1988 to 2020

Figure 3 illustrates fluctuations in the research orientations of papers published in the Roshd Journal across different time intervals. Some orientations received more attention during certain periods compared to others, indicating shifts in research focus over time. According to Figure 3, the majority of published papers centered on teaching, teacher, learner, and learning orientations. Additionally, there is an observable decreasing trend in the teacher orientation from 1988 to 2020 compared to earlier years.

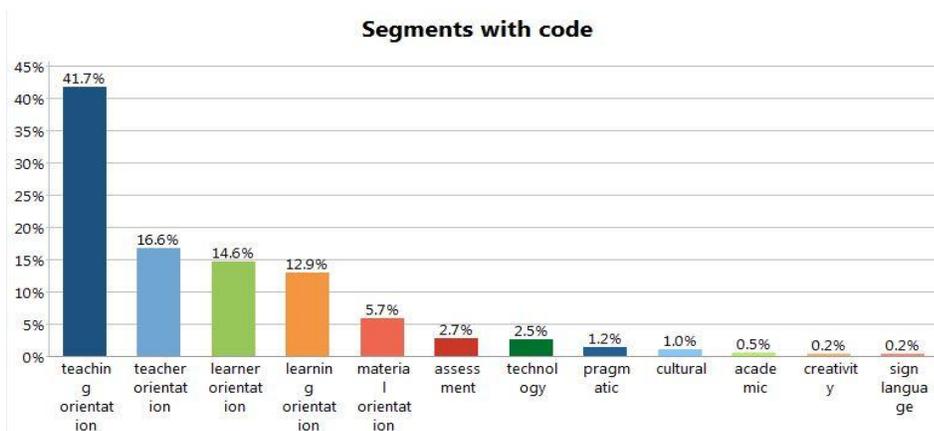


Figure 4: Frequency of research orientation in the Roshd journal from 1984 to 2020

Finally, to determine the overall trend of research orientations in papers published in the Roshd Journal from 1984 to 2020, the researcher analyzed data presented in Figure 4. This figure provides valuable insights into the evolving focus of research topics over the years. One striking observation is that throughout this period, a significant proportion of papers focused on the teaching orientation. Figure 4 also reveals varying trajectories for other research orientations. While papers addressing learning, learner, and material orientations showed steady growth, other orientations did not follow such consistent trends. Notably, research on creativity (0.2%), academic topics (0.5%), culture (1%), pragmatics (1.2%), technology (2.5%), and assessment (2.7%) remained scarce.

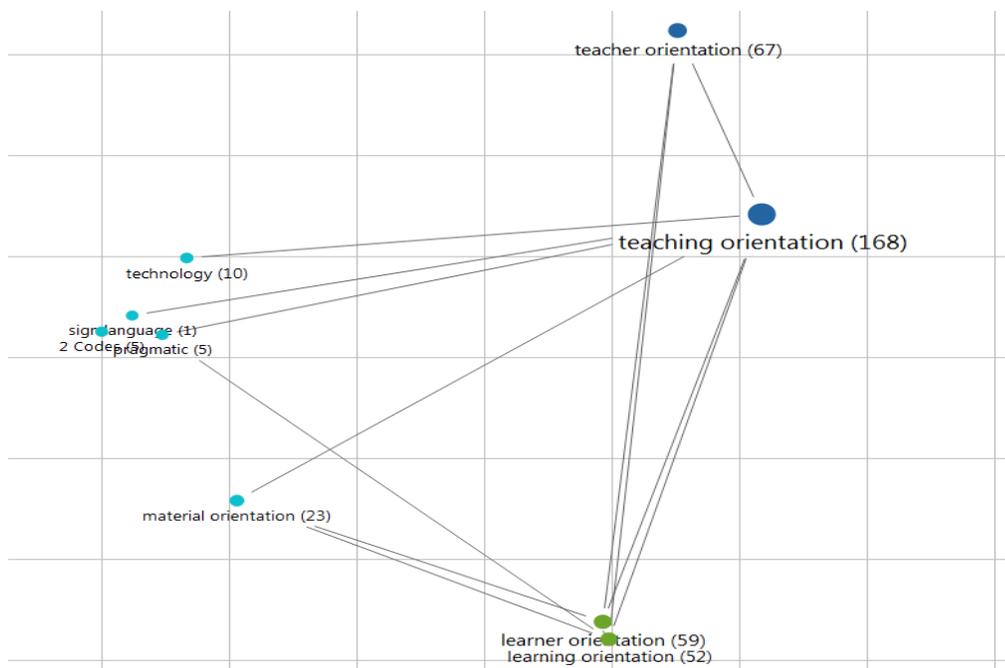


Figure 5: Code map of research orientations in the Roshd Journal from 1984 to 2020

Although the frequency figures (Figures 2, 3, and 4) provide valuable insights into the distribution of research orientations in the Roshd Journal from 1984 to 2020, they do not reveal the potential overlaps or interrelationships among these orientations. To address this limitation, a code map was employed to explore the correspondence and interconnectedness of research orientations. The researcher applied a distance matrix clustering method, a widely accepted approach for visualizing clusters of related codes. In this method, colors are assigned to codes based on their group membership, which is determined by the calculated distances between them. Codes with similar colors and close proximity in the map suggest a meaningful overlap or co-occurrence.

Figure 5 illustrates the overlap and clustering of research orientations in the Roshd Journal. The figure reveals a strong confluence among five research orientations: creativity, culture, pragmatics, technology, and assessment. These orientations are closely grouped, indicating frequent co-occurrence and conceptual alignment. In contrast, the remaining orientations are more dispersed. Notably, learner and learning orientations appear closely aligned, suggesting a conceptual and thematic overlap. Similarly, teaching and teacher orientations demonstrate partial correspondence, reinforcing their interrelated nature in educational research. Interestingly, material orientation is positioned remotely from most other orientations, reflecting its relatively independent trajectory. However, some linkage is observed between material, learner, learning, and teaching orientations, indicating shared areas of interest or research themes.

The results presented in Figure 5 suggest that policymakers and editors of the Roshd Journal have consistently prioritized teaching orientation over other research orientations. This dominant focus is reflected not only in the frequency of teaching-related papers but also in the way other orientations tend to align with or connect to teaching. The data indicate that orientations such as creativity, culture, pragmatics, and technology often seek relevance through their association with teaching.

The orientation of published papers in the Roshd Journal appears to be shaped by the editorial policies and priorities of the journal's leadership over the 36 years from 1984 to 2020. This trend aligns with findings in other national and international journals, where editorial direction significantly influences the research orientations represented (Meihami, 2020).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the research orientations of papers published in the Roshd Journal's applied linguistics section from 1984 to 2020. The findings revealed that journals tend to have their own indexical preferences (Sahragard & Meihami, 2016a), which impose certain restrictions and limitations on researchers (Meihami, 2020). Consequently, researchers often align their work with these preferences to increase the likelihood of publication (Meihami, 2020). According to Meihami (2020), changes in the editorial boards over different decades can lead to shifts in a journal's research orientations. Reflecting this, the chief editor of the Roshd Journal formally announced in 2017 that the journal's main focus would be on teaching. This announcement aligns with the data presented in Figure 2, which shows that from 1984 to 2020, 46% of papers published in the Roshd Journal centered on teaching orientation.

The data on research orientations in the applied linguistics papers published in the Roshd Journal (Figure 2) indicate that teaching, teacher, learner, and learning were the most frequently investigated topics from 1984 to 2020. Examining the trends over different time intervals reveals a declining trajectory for the teacher orientation, while the learner and learning orientations show a positive and increasing trend. Additionally, recent years have seen a steady growth in research focused on material development, assessment, and technology (Figure 3). It appears that since 1984, the main focus of published papers has been on teaching, teacher, learner, and learning

perspectives. Given the relative stability of these dominant topics, it is now timely for researchers to expand their focus to less-explored areas such as materials, assessment, culture, creativity, pragmatics, and technology.

The results shown in [Figure 5](#) also provide valuable insights regarding the material orientation. According to the figure, material orientation is directly connected with teaching, learning, and learner orientations. This connection aligns with the practical application of English language teaching materials, such as the Prospect textbooks, which are developed based on a learner-centered approach emphasizing the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method and aimed at enhancing the learning of the four language skills.

However, [Figure 5](#) reveals a lack of connection between material orientation and other research orientations such as creativity, culture, pragmatics, technology, and assessment. This finding contrasts with [Shao et al. \(2019\)](#), who reported that material developers have not sufficiently integrated creativity and cultural aspects into ELT textbooks. Given the established confluence between creativity and culture, it highlights the significant influence of culture on creativity, emphasizing that conceptions of creativity vary across cultural contexts. Their review reveals that individualistic and collectivistic cultures differ not only in how creativity is defined but also in the creative processes they prioritize, where collectivist cultures tend to value the usefulness of ideas over novelty, whereas individualist cultures equally emphasize both novelty and utility. Moreover, the authors underscore the importance of culturally appropriate assessment tools for accurately measuring creativity, noting that standardized evaluations may not fully capture culturally specific expressions of creativity. This nuanced understanding underscores the need to consider cultural dimensions when exploring creativity in educational materials and practices. Neglecting one inevitably leads to a decline in the other. Furthermore, the results indicate that research on creativity tends to focus on teaching, learner, and learning orientations, while largely overlooking culture, materials, pragmatics, assessment, and technology ([Shao et al., 2019](#)).

Moreover, the study highlighted the overlap and confluence between certain research orientations, particularly among creativity, culture, pragmatics, technology, and assessment with teaching orientation. These overlaps suggest the need for a more integrated and diversified research agenda in journal publication practices. Notably, [Figure 5](#) illustrates the dominance of teaching orientation, which often serves as a central theme connecting other orientations. However, this strong focus may unintentionally marginalize other valuable research areas, indicating a need for balance in editorial policy and journal scope. This is in line with [Meihami \(2020\)](#) and [Hafez and Soodmand Afshar \(2023\)](#), who found that while these orientations are present in applied linguistics publications, they are often embedded within a dominant teaching orientation rather than being explored as independent lines of inquiry or confluent with each other.

This convergence suggests that, despite thematic diversity on the surface, much of the research remains fundamentally grounded in pedagogical and teaching concerns. Similarly, [Farsani et al. \(2021\)](#), through citation and collaboration network analysis, demonstrated that citation and collaboration networks tend to form around teaching-oriented research, reinforcing its central role. This is consistent with our findings, as illustrated in [Figure 5](#), which shows the persistent dominance of teaching orientation, often serving as the thematic axis connecting other strands of research.

The researcher found that Iranian ELT journal's editors (Roshd Journal) tended to use teacher and teaching orientations more than other orientations as their journal's acceptance criteria. This might be argued from different perspectives. First, teaching orientation is regarded as the main source of language-related knowledge; the editors of the Roshd Journal might believe in developing other orientations through developing teaching orientation in their Journal's papers.

This is related to what [Daumiller et al. \(2020\)](#) stated, which is how teaching orientation contributes to a flexible, innovation-friendly learning environment. Moreover, [Lazarides et al. \(2018\)](#) found that teachers with strong teaching orientation enhance learning goals. Such beliefs might be held based on studies that showed a positive relationship between teaching knowledge orientation and other orientations ([Hafez & Soodmand Afshar, 2023](#); [Meihami, 2020](#)). However, focusing too much on teaching orientation might hinder researchers from thinking divergently ([Sternberg, 2012](#)).

The result of this study also indicated that there should be a partial confluence of orientations, such as creativity, culture, pragmatic, materials, and technology, which are less observable in the Rosh Journal papers from 1984 to 2020. The partial confluence of orientations might have different reasons. First, there is a threshold for some of the orientations, such as teaching and teacher orientations ([Sternberg & Lubart, 1991](#)), meaning that low and high teaching and teacher orientations in Journals' criteria may hinder creativity, culture, technology, and other orientations. This might be the reason why Roshd Journal editors do not use teaching orientation in conjunction with other orientations as expected. Second, there is a negative correlation between the orientations, meaning that addressing one orientation too much will lead to the weakness of others. For instance, addressing teaching and teacher orientations too much might lead to the weakness of culture, creativity, technology, and other orientations, which is related to what the researcher found about the partial confluence of orientations in the Roshd journal.

Limitations and Delimitations

While efforts were made to minimize limitations—such as selecting only clearly oriented papers and employing a second coder—this study was limited to the Roshd Journal publications from 1984 to 2020. Future studies could extend the analysis to include more recent publications up to 2024. Additionally, comparative studies examining research orientations across multiple national and international journals can offer a broader perspective on global publishing trends in applied linguistics.

Finally, future research could delve deeper into how overlapping orientations impact pedagogical practices, material development, and curriculum design. Investigating the practical implications of research orientation trends may provide valuable insights into how scholarly publishing influences the real-world practice of language education.

6. CONCLUSIVE IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The implications of these findings are twofold. First, editors and policymakers of applied linguistics journals should be mindful of their publication trends and actively work to diversify the range of accepted research orientations. This approach would help ensure that underrepresented topics—such as creativity, culture, pragmatics, and assessment—receive more scholarly attention. Second, for novice and experienced researchers, awareness of journal trends can guide topic selection and increase the likelihood of publication success by aligning with the journal's evolving interests.

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