

UDC 37.026.9:81

IRSTI 14.25.09

<https://doi.org/10.48371/PEDS.2026.82.3.034>

BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Abstract. The study of foreign languages has acquired new significance in today’s increasingly globalized world, as learning a language serves various purposes and motivations, and it becomes more challenging because every student is unique and has their learning style and needs. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an inclusive framework that effectively addresses diversity through differentiation and inclusive educational practices. While there are studies on the implementation of UDL in language education in the Western context, there are currently no studies in the Kazakhstani context. Furthermore, there is a notable gap in bibliometric analyses, specifically in the combination of UDL with language education. This study conducted a bibliometric analysis of UDL in foreign language education using 4,055 research articles from 2015 to 2025 in the WOS (Web of Science) Core Collection – SSCI database. The findings defined the core directions in foreign language education; the key research “hub” is the USA and China and also highlighted an increasing trend in recent years of new research in UDL within the field of language education. The value of this article lies in the development of bibliometric maps that provide an overview of the current state of research in language education by identifying leading authors, countries, organizations, and major research themes. Furthermore, the study identifies existing research gaps and serves as a roadmap for future research. The key topics revealed in this research have practical significance for the development of professional training programs for teachers, support the creation of syllabuses and educational programs grounded in UDL principles, and inform foreign language educational policy.

Keywords: Universal Design for Learning, Language Education, Bibliometric Analysis, major topics, key organization, countries, authors, knowledge map

Introduction

Language education has taken on a new significance in today’s unprecedentedly interconnected world. Nowadays, people learn languages to have more opportunities in personal and professional life, such as employment and study abroad, visiting new countries, and developing a cultural background and communication. Furthermore, it develops their critical and analytical thinking skills. However, inaccessibility and inequality might create social gaps

and challenges that hinder the provision of quality education for all. One of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promotes “inclusive, equitable and quality education” [1, p.130], which is reaffirmed as a fundamental human right and regarded as an ethical approach to a fair and equitable society [2, p.20].

Originally, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is linked with the names of David Rose, Anne Meyer, and their colleagues to address the challenges within the broad policies of disability inclusion. Further, CAST (the Center for Applied Special Technology) developed UDL to remove barriers to access and participation in general schools. The 1997 reauthorization of the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) helped to attract attention to the involvement of students with disabilities in general schools by developing the principles of UDL. These efforts contributed to students’ participation in general schools, but mostly through physical access; however, access to the curriculum remained and emerged as a new barrier [3, p. 67].

Meyer et al. [4, p.3] define UDL as an ‘educational approach’ that encompasses areas related to the functioning of the biological education process, curriculum, methods, and educational aids. CAST defines Universal Design for Learning as based on scientific knowledge of how people learn, which makes it possible to tailor the learning process effectively for all without exclusion and improve it [5]. This framework reflects well the achievements of science in the field of cognitive brain processes, the learning process, and, most recently, the use of digital technologies. Rose and Meyer (2002) argued that, given students’ diverse needs and abilities, standard curricula designed for an average student type may create barriers. Initially, the development of the UDL concept was based on the broader idea of universal design, which aimed to create barrier-free access in architecture and in products accessible to people with various needs. Later, CAST took this principle as the basis for designing syllabuses and educational programs. This idea made it possible to take into account the various individual needs of students and their differences when developing educational programs and teaching methods.

There are three principles of UDL [6, p.5]. The first principle is the principle of the Multiple Means of Engagement. This principle points out the active participation of learners in learning. The activities could be different, like warm-up exercises in small groups or pairs, breaking-up activities, and other approaches such as learner-to-learner, learner-to-teacher, and learner-to-content. The second principle is the principle of Multiple Means of Representation. This principle points out the differentiation of teaching materials. The diversity of students is about diverse learning abilities and diverse physical and mental abilities, so all the presented materials must be adapted to the needs of students. The same material could be presented in written and oral forms; the written information could be presented in images, printed texts, slides, and other interactive forms. Videos and imagery can help students overcome existing barriers. These formats

can be combined with readings to make a lesson more understandable to more students. Multimedia with captions or transcripts helps students with hearing impairments or language differences. Multimedia can also help students with visual impairments. Well-narrated multimedia allows students to learn completely through audio. Accessible electronic media can be viewed on multiple screen sizes and at different speeds and allow screen readers to dictate digital readings out loud. In summary, one size does not fit all. Varied content in multiple formats addresses barriers to learning and helps all students achieve learning goals. The third principle is Multiple Means of Action and Expression. This principle points out the possibility for students to show their knowledge as they could do it. The students have different abilities and different cultural and social backgrounds, so they demonstrate their skills in multiple ways. To assess written exams, students, in case of their disability or specific skills, may pass the oral exam or a project work.

Many studies showed that the use of UDL could enhance language proficiency. For instance, Rose and Meyer's [7] research revealed that implementing UDL in language teaching improved their communication skills. The researchers discovered that the students' skills were developed through numerous ways of engagement, representation, and expression. The study made by Kuh et al. [8, p.2] highlighted that the differentiated methods of teaching and multiple ways of representation help students to face their fears and enhance their self-confidence. Nieves and Ortega's empirical research [9, p.11] showed that the UDL-based approach could meet the needs of neurodiverse learners and help them deal with challenges. At the same time, the Agalyasri and Bhuvanewari research [10, p.267] emphasizes the effectiveness of UDL in improving the speaking skills of students with speech impairments.

Despite the increasing significance of UDL implementation in language education, many of the studies stem from the USA and other developed countries, but still fewer studies in developing countries [11]. In this regard, reaching academic research on the implementation of UDL in language education through the Web of Science, this study aimed to go deeper through bibliometric mapping analysis. The main aim of this research work is to investigate the thematic literature on UDL and Language education and define the context of the interconnection of UDL and Language Education, the key authors, and organizations. To explore the interconnection of UDL and Language Education, the current research was guided by three questions:

RQ1. Which thematic directions characterise research on UDL in language education?

RQ2. Which authors have made the strongest contribution to this research area?

RQ 3. Which countries and organizations were most involved in this area of research?

To analyse the structure

The first step was to select a search term. The literature search was designed to capture studies addressing both Universal Design for Learning and language education. Therefore, the database inquiry combined UDL-related terms with expressions referring to language teaching and foreign-language education: “UDL” OR “universal design for learning” and “language education” OR “language teaching” OR “foreign language education” OR “foreign language teaching.” The WoS database was selected as a principal search engine for completing the extensive literature evaluation. Following the implementation of the search criteria, a total of 4055 records were obtained from the Web of Science Core Collection – SSCI databank. The available records have been selected for extraction, and the next step was to export them into a VOSviewer. The study used Vosviewer to construct a map of research at the intersection of Universal Design for Learning in foreign language education. The retrieved records were exported to VOSviewer for network visualization. The software was used to analyse relationships among authors, organizations, countries, and keywords and to identify clusters within the research trend.

The conducted co-occurrence

PHILIP TING, GAIL J. KILPATRICK, and K. LINDA WILSON

These clusters present different thematic groups in the research area of language learning and teaching:

The red thematic group including keywords such as “education,” “multilingualism,” “language teaching,” “ESL,” “translanguaging,” “collaboration,” reflecting the main directions in language education. According to UNESCO, the concept of “multilingual education” is an educational approach that involves three or more languages, typically including the learner’s first language, a national and an international languages. Using these languages is an important indicator of inclusion and quality of education. It means that, nowadays, the role of languages increases even more, and has a great interest and need for society because of socio-economic conditions, technological development, and other reasons.

The second is yellow, including keywords such as “students,” “universal design for learning,” “experience,” and “resources,” reflecting the role of the student and educational framework, which is focused on the student as UDL. UDL is an emerging trend in language education, which is why there are not many studies in this field. This inclusive framework responds to students’ diverse needs and provides effective ways for language learning through the core principles. UDL is based on the student-centered approach. The core focus of the UDL framework and student-centered approach is on student with their learning style, needs, and motivations. The framework and the approach are not a trend but a response and a need for changing society and the needs of learners. Furthermore, UDL stimulates students to participate in curriculum design and to survey their goals and achievements.

The third is blue, including “motivation,” “self-efficacy,” “performance,” “positive psychology,” and “willingness,” reflecting that modern education is focused on psycho-pedagogical aspects in the process of language education.

The fourth is green, including keywords such as “English,” “language,” “learners,” “2nd language”, and “acquisition.” This cluster is the biggest one and shows that English is one of the most studied languages in the world because it is important for personal and professional development, international networking, and mobility. In the Kazakhstani context, the trilingual policy requires that English be a must-learn foreign language.

The fifth is violet, including the keywords “proficiency,” “accuracy,” “teaching,” “lexical and syntactic complexity,” and “writing,” reflecting the importance of the teaching process and the key skills in language education.

A total number of 6488 authors were considered, and after implementing the threshold of a minimum number of citations of 30 and a minimum number of documents of 10, 26 authors were left (Figure 2).

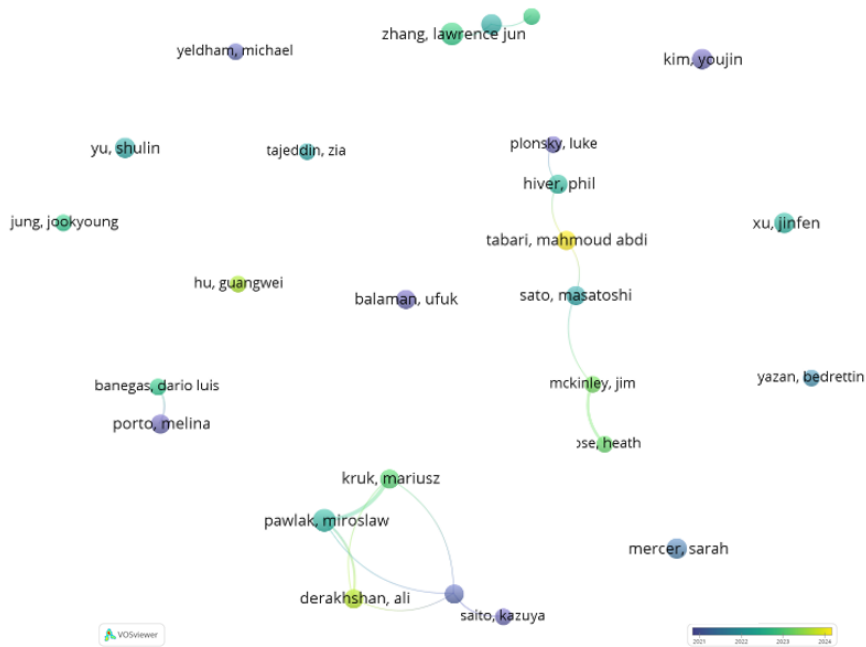


Figure 2 – Knowledge map on co-authorship analysis of authors

The map of co-authorship demonstrates the extensive fragmentation of the research field. The network between the authors forms the less linked groups. One of the clusters focused on Pawlak Miroslaw and his collaboration with authors such as Mariusz Kruk, Ali Derakshan, and Saito Kazuya. These authors are the most cited and focus on psycholinguistics, on students’ motivation and engagement in language education.

The second cluster presents the collaboration between Tabari Mahmoud Abdi, Jim McKinly, Sato Masatoshi, Rose Heath, and Phil Hiver. These authors focus on English as a second language acquisition.

The highly cited authors with high h-index from 2024 are Tabari Mahmoud Abdi, Ali Derakshan, and Hu Guangwei.

The existence of numerous small and isolated groups suggests that, even though there are several distinct centers, the research community continues to be quite decentralized.

The country map (Figure 3) shows that the dominant places occupied by the USA, China, and England highlight their important role in forming global research discourse in the field of language education. The USA acts as a key “hub” and collaborates with other countries such as Germany, Spain, England, Canada, South Korea, and China. The other countries are less connected and integrated.

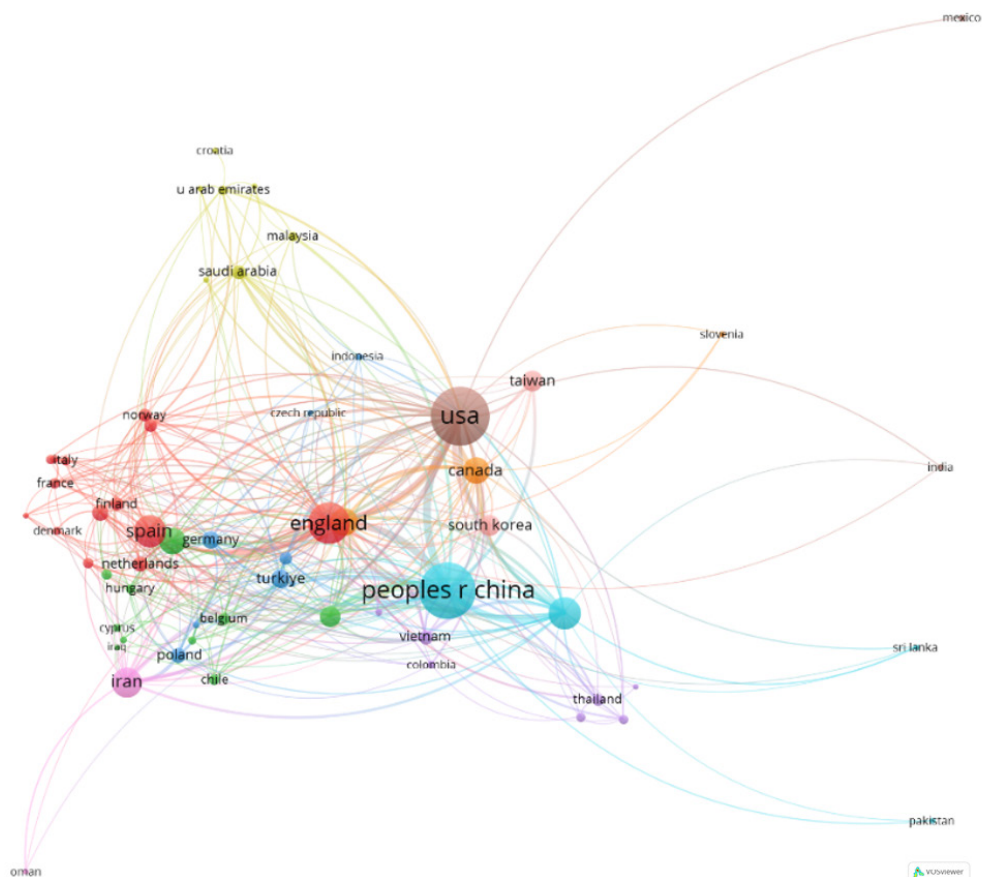


Figure 3 – Knowledge map on co-authorship analysis of countries

Van Raan [17, p.138], in his research, highlights the idea of the leading position of English-speaking countries in global science. The vast network between the USA and European countries confirms the observation of Wagner and Leydesdorff [18, p.4] about the increase of international co-authorships and the globalization of science through transnational collaborations. At the same time, there is a significant rise in the scientific contributions from Asian nations like China and South Korea, which corresponds with the trends highlighted by Marginson [19, p.9], pointing to the escalation of scientific endeavors in the Asia-Pacific area.

Thus, the map of countries confirms the existence of centers of high research activity and reveals trends toward a gradual globalization of research in the field of language education.

A total of 4,055 publications were considered, and after implementing the threshold of a minimum of 10 co-authored papers, 145 organizations constituted the final network. These organizations are presented in Figure 4 and Figure 5.



Table 1. Top 10 Organizations by Total Link Strength (TLS), Documents, and Unique Partners

Rank	Organization	Documents (Co-authored)	Links (Unique Partners)	Total Link Strength (TLS)
1	Chinese Hong Kong University	78	32	63
2	Michigan State University	48	26	43
3	University of Cambridge	30	22	30
4	Educ University Hong Kong	55	22	43
5	UCL	54	20	53
6	University of Hong Kong	60	20	31
7	Adam Mckievich University	33	17	41
8	University of Macau	50	17	31
9	Georgetown University	25	17	21
10	Penn State University	27	16	18

The primary focus is on two clusters presenting Chinese and American organizations (Figure 5). Chinese organizations are mainly represented by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the University of Hong Kong, and the University of Macau, and they actively collaborate with other international organizations. From 2020, collaborations were mainly between American organizations and European organizations, but since 2022, there has been an increase in national-level collaborations between Chinese organizations and their international collaborations (Figure 4).

The transition from national to international collaborations noted since 2021 corresponds with larger trends in global research policy that promote partnerships across borders. The findings emphasize the leading roles of Michigan State University and Chinese Hong Kong University within the collaborative environment of language education and UDL. These universities emphasize the role of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in education. Michigan State University has conducted research in the field of UDL since 2017. Moreover, organizes professional development programs for implementing UDL in teaching programs. The Chinese Hong Kong University has been studying this field for years. The observed cluster arrangement indicates that both geographical closeness and thematic connections impact the collaborations among organizations from all over the world.

The clusters present the organization, its structure, and differences in its communication over time, reflecting internationalization processes in science. Moreover, it indicates an extension beyond the structural features of the language education field. The growing density of cross-border co-authorship ties is consistent with earlier evidence that scientific knowledge production is increasingly organised through transnational networks, in which collaboration functions as a driver of visibility and cumulative impact [18, p7-8]. From this perspective, the leading positions of highly connected institutions reflect not

only thematic engagement, but also their capacity to maintain international research infrastructure and stable publication activity—factors that bibliometric methodology has long highlighted as key determinants of institutional prominence in global rankings and network-based indicators [17, p.134].

The country-level dominance of the USA and the rapidly strengthening contribution of China and other Asia–Pacific countries can be interpreted through two complementary lenses. First, the continued centrality of English-speaking systems is consistent with longstanding observations about their structural advantages in global science and access to major international publication channels [17, p.138]. Second, the expanding visibility of China and Asia–Pacific partners correspond to analyses pointing to increased research investment and a broader reconfiguration of academic influence in the region [19, p.11]. Taken together, these dynamics help explain why organisational maps highlight strong nodes in Hong Kong and mainland-linked networks, and why collaboration patterns have become more internationally oriented over time (Figure 4).

From a thematic standpoint, the co-occurrence structure suggests that the field is increasingly situated at the intersection of inclusion, multilingual education, and learner-centred pedagogy. This configuration is conceptually consistent with rights-based and policy approaches that treat inclusion as a necessary condition for equitable access and educational quality [2, p.5]. At the level of instructional design, the cluster connecting “students”, “experience”, and “resources” implies that inclusive design is enacted through flexible learning pathways and differentiated support, which corresponds to the theoretical understanding of UDL as a framework for optimising teaching and learning through evidence-informed principles and adaptable curriculum design [5–6]. The applied emphasis of this strand also aligns with higher-education research showing that inclusive design frameworks are most effective when integrated into everyday pedagogical routines (e.g., assessment options, accessible learning materials, structured support), rather than remaining at the level of broad declarations [7, p.5].

The prominence of motivational and affective constructs (self-efficacy, positive psychology, willingness) may signal a gradual convergence between inclusive design and socio-psychological explanations of language learning outcomes. This convergence is supported by evidence that supportive learning conditions and flexible participation formats are associated with stronger persistence and engagement, which are key predictors of academic success [9, p69-70]. It also aligns with practice-oriented research suggesting that inclusive design can reduce barriers for neurodiverse learners and support more sustainable participation trajectories in language classrooms [10, p.7]. In this sense, the bibliometric shift toward psychological constructs may reflect not only theoretical interest, but also an effort to account for variation in implementation processes and learning outcomes.

Another implication relates to the fragmentation observed in the authors’ co-authorship network (Figure 2). The presence of several weakly connected groups suggests that research efforts are developing in parallel, with limited integration across thematic centres. Such a pattern is common in emerging or rapidly

expanding domains and supports the methodological caution that bibliometric connectivity captures collaboration structures but does not necessarily indicate theoretical consolidation or shared research standards [17, p.135]. Accordingly, future work would benefit from study designs that strengthen cumulative evidence – particularly through transparent reporting, shared operationalisations of inclusive design constructs, and the use of comparable outcome measures.

The results also point to a database-related limitation that affects how the “research landscape” should be interpreted. Because the present analysis draws on WoS SSCI data, its coverage is intentionally selective, and relevant strands indexed in other systems may be less visible. It has to be noted, that bibliometric profiles might vary depending on database used and search parameters. In this regard, expanding the range of data sources appears methodologically justified. Extending the analysis to Scopus and Google Scholar would strengthen robustness and enable triangulation of the observed country- and organisation-level patterns.

Thus, in contexts where empirical evidence remains limited – such as Kazakhstan, as noted in the introduction – bibliometric maps can be used strategically to frame an evidence-building agenda rather than simply to describe international trends. Systematic reviews indicate that technology-enhanced implementations represent a particularly active strand of inclusive design research, while also pointing to uneven geographical coverage and the need for more context-sensitive evaluations [13, p.10-11]. Practically, this opens a clear niche for studies that test UDL- and inclusive design-based interventions in language education under local curricular conditions and multilingual policy realities, combining rigorous outcome measures with implementation-focused analysis to address the gap between conceptual frameworks and classroom feasibility.

Conclusion

This study offers a bibliometric synthesis of 4,055 WoS SSCI-indexed publications (2015–2025) on the intersection of Universal Design for Learning and language education. Keyword co-occurrence mapping shows that the field is organized around several dominant thematic strands: multilingualism and translanguaging; ESL/EFL pedagogy; learner outcomes (proficiency, accuracy, writing development); and psycho-pedagogical constructs such as motivation and self-efficacy. Overall, the patterns suggest that inclusive instructional design is most often framed through learner engagement and differentiated support, while its links to measurable, performance-oriented outcomes have become more pronounced.

The co-authorship analysis indicates a decentralised collaboration pattern, with several relatively weakly connected clusters rather than a single cohesive research community. At the macro level, the country and organisational networks place the USA in a central role while showing the increasing prominence of China and other Asia-Pacific partners, evidenced by strongly connected institutional nodes and strengthening cross-border collaboration.

Methodologically, the study offers a transparent bibliometric “roadmap” that maps key actors and thematic concentrations and may inform evidence-

building strategies in settings where local empirical research is still limited. However, the results must be read within the constraints of the data source and search strategy: because the analysis relies on WoS SSCI records and the applied query, relevant work indexed in Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar may be underrepresented. Future studies should triangulate across databases, extend the agenda through mixed-method and longitudinal designs, and evaluate context-sensitive interventions that connect inclusive design principles with language learning outcomes and implementation feasibility – especially in developing-country contexts and multilingual policy environments.

Overall, the study maps the field's intellectual structure and collaboration landscape, providing a baseline for advancing inclusive language teaching through stronger empirical validation and more coordinated international research.

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ТІЛДІК БІЛІМ БЕРУДЕГІ УНИВЕРСАЛДЫ ОҚЫТУ ДИЗАЙНЫНЫҢ БИБЛИОМЕТРИЯЛЫҚ ТАЛДАУЫ

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Аңдатпа. Шет тілдерін үйрену бұрын-соңды болмаған жаһанданған әлемде жаңа мағынаға ие болды. Тілді үйренудің әртүрлі мақсаттары мен мотивтері бар және бұл қиындай түсуде, өйткені әрбір студент бірегей және өзіндік оқу стилі мен қажеттіліктері бар. Универсалды оқыту дизайны (УОД) – бұл әртүрлілікті саралау және инклюзивті білім беру тәжірибелері арқылы

тиімді қарастыратын инклюзивті жүйе. Батыс контекстінде УОД-ны тілдік білімге енгізу бойынша зерттеулер болғанымен, қазіргі уақытта қазақстандық контексте зерттеулер жоқ. Сонымен қатар, УОД-ны тілдік біліммен байланыстыратын библиометриялық талдауда айтарлықтай алшақтық бар. Бұл зерттеуде Веб оф Сайенс базалық жинағынан — СССИ дерекқорынан 2015-2025 жылдар аралығында 4055 ғылыми мақаланы пайдалана отырып, шет тілдерін оқыту саласындағы библиометриялық талдауы жүргізілді. Нәтижелер негізгі зерттеу орталығы АҚШ пен Қытай болып табылатын, шет тілдерін оқытудың негізгі бағыттарын анықтады, сонымен қатар соңғы жылдары тілдік білім берудегі және УОД жаңа зерттеулердің өсу тенденциясын анықтады. Мақаланың құндылығы тілдік білім беру саласының қазіргі жай-күйін көрсететін ғылыми карталарды құруында. Бұл карталар негізгі авторларды, елдер мен ұйымдарды, сондай-ақ зерттеулердің басым бағыттарын айқындауға мүмкіндік береді. Сонымен қатар, мақалада қазіргі зерттеу олқылықтары анықталып, болашақ ғылыми зерттеулер үшін өзіндік жол картасы ұсынылады. Практикалық маңыздылығы анықталған негізгі тақырыптардың шетел тілі оқытушыларының біліктілігін арттыру курстарын әзірлеуге, инклюзивті шетел тілін оқыту саласындағы білім беру саясатын қалыптастыруға, сондай-ақ тілдерді оқытуда әмбебап оқыту дизайнының (UDL) қағидаттарын қолдануға ықпал ете алатындығында.

Тірек сөздер: универсалды оқыту дизайны, тілдік білім, библиометриялық талдау, негізгі тақырыптар, негізгі ұйымдар, елдер, авторлар, білім картасы

БИБЛИОМЕТРИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ УНИВЕРСАЛЬНОГО ДИЗАЙНА ДЛЯ ОБУЧЕНИЯ В ЯЗЫКОВОМ ОБРАЗОВАНИИ

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Аннотация. Изучение иностранных языков приобрело новое значение в современном беспрецедентно глобализованном мире. Изучение языка имеет разные цели и мотивы, и это становится все труднее, потому что каждый студент уникален и имеет свой стиль обучения и потребности. Универсальный дизайн обучения (УДО) — это инклюзивная система, которая эффективно учитывает это разнообразие посредством дифференциации и интеграции инклюзивных образовательных практик. В то время как в западном контексте существуют исследования по внедрению УДО в языковое образование, в казахстанском контексте на данный момент исследований нет. Кроме того, существует заметный пробел в библиометрическом анализе, конкретно связывающем УДО с языковым образованием. В этом исследовании был проведен библиометрический анализ УДО в области обучения иностранным языкам с использованием 4055 научных статей за период с 2015 по 2025 год из базовой коллекции Веб оф Сайенс — базы данных СССИ. Полученные

результаты определили основные направления в обучении иностранным языкам, ключевым исследовательским “центром” которого являются США и Китай, а также выявили тенденцию к увеличению в последние годы новых исследований в области УДО и языкового образования. Ценность статьи заключается в создании карт, которые показывают актуальное состояние в области языкового образования, выявляя ключевых авторов, страны и организации, а также важнейшие направления исследований. Более того, статья выявляет существующие исследовательские пробелы и служит своего рода дорожной картой для будущих исследований. Практическая значимость заключается в том, что выявленные ключевые темы могут помочь в создании курсов повышения квалификации для преподавателей ИЯ, в формировании образовательной политики в области инклюзивного иноязычного образования, а также возможности применения принципов UDL в преподавании языков.

Ключевые слова: Универсальный дизайн обучения, языковое образование, библиометрический анализ, главные темы, ключевые организации, страны, авторы, карта знаний

Received / Мақала түсті / Стаття поступила: 05.01.2026

Accepted: / Жариялауға қабылданды / Принята к публикации: 25.09.2026

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