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Research Article

Language Development in Early Childhood Education: A Bibliometric Analysis in Scopus Using PRISMA

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Abstract
Language development in early childhood education is a research field of increasing interest because of its influence on children's overall development and learning. The objective of this study was to analyze the scientific production on language development in early childhood education indexed in the Scopus-Elsevier database through a quantitative bibliometric study, identifying publication trends, the evolution of the field, and research gaps. The study was conducted as a quantitative systematic review following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. The search was performed in the Scopus database using terms related to language development and early childhood education in the title, abstract, and keyword fields. Publications from 2022 to 2026 were selected according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, resulting in a final sample of 75 studies. The findings showed that scientific production reached its highest level in 2024, with Spain recording the largest number of publications, followed by Chile and Ecuador. Scientific articles predominated, while Social Sciences was the main subject area, together with Psychology, Medicine, and Health Professions. In conclusion, the study provides an updated overview of research trends and offers evidence to guide future studies and strengthen knowledge in early childhood language development.

Keywords: Language Development, Initial Education, Bibliometric Analysis, Scopus, Systematic Review.

INTRODUCTION

The development of language in early childhood education is configured, on the international scene, as a widely consolidated field of study enriched by contributions from various disciplines, such as psychology, linguistics and pedagogy. In this sense, multiple studies show that the first stages of life constitute a crucial period for the acquisition of communication skills, which have a direct impact on the cognitive, social and emotional development of children. Thus, in educational contexts in countries belonging to Europe, Asia and North America, pedagogical and innovative practices are identified aimed at enhancing oral expression, linguistic comprehension and communicative comprehension from an early age, through active didactic strategies, literate environments and the relevant use of technological resources (Gómez-Parra & Huertas-Abril, 2023).

Along the same lines, the educational systems of these contexts promote continuous teacher training, as well as the implementation of flexible curricula that prioritize language development according to the needs and interests of children (Liu et al., 2026). These experiences at the international level help to identify important advances in the assessment of children's language using standardized instruments and rigorous methods, which allows for the generation of solid scientific evidence in this field (Naranjo Sevilla et al., 2024). Similarly, there is an increase in the scientific production recorded in databases such as Scopus-Elsevier, which demonstrates a constant interest in studying the dynamics of language development in early childhood from both quantitative and bibliometric approaches (Ovati et al., 2026). Therefore, the comparative analysis between different countries shows a global trend aimed at strengthening educational practices that promote the integral development of language in formal and informal contexts.

On the other hand, when looking at Latin America, different scenarios are identified in relation to the development of language in early education. In countries such as Chile, Colombia, Peru and Mexico, educational policies have been implemented aimed at strengthening communication skills from an early age; however, the results are not always homogeneous, as they depend on contextual, socioeconomic, and cultural factors (Pintado et al., 2022). In some cases, progress is evident in the incorporation of active pedagogical strategies and specialized teacher training, while in others there are still limitations related to the availability of resources, continuous training, and curricular articulation (Bergroth et al., 2026).

Similarly, there is a growing interest in the region in conducting bibliometric studies that help examine scientific production on language in early childhood, allowing us to see trends, research gaps, and new lines of study (Pontier & Fallas-Escobar, 2026). However, the distribution of this research is not balanced, as some countries concentrate more on academic production, while others have a more limited participation in international databases. This reality shows the need to strengthen educational research in the region, promoting the creation of contextualized knowledge that responds to local realities without neglecting international standards (Schemes Prodanov and de Azevedo Baladão, 2026).

In the case of Ecuador, this situation presents personal characteristics that require a deeper and more organized mention. Despite the institutional commitment to improving the quality of early education, there are transcendental limitations in the development of language in young children linked to traditional pedagogical practices, little application of active strategies, and limited teacher training in this specific field (Thieme et al., 2026). In addition, failures are observed in the evaluation of language development, which implies the early detection of possible delays or difficulties in its acquisition (van Driel et al., 2026).

In this context, national scientific production on language development in early childhood education is still insufficient, especially with regard to bibliometric studies that allow for a quantitative analysis of research trends in high-impact databases such as Scopus-Elsevier. This lack limits a comprehensive understanding of the state of the art in the country and makes it difficult to make decisions based on scientific evidence (Johnson et al., 2026). Also, the absence of systematic analyses prevents the identification of the main lines of research, the most influential authors, and the academic collaboration networks around this topic, which reduces the possibilities of strengthening educational research at the national level (Delgado-Cruz et al., 2024).

If this situation continues without a rigorous and systematic review, there is a risk that educational practices related to language development in early childhood education will remain disjointed and not very affective, directly affecting children's learning process and limiting their integral development. Likewise, the lack of bibliometric studies could generate a stagnation in national scientific production, reducing the visibility of Ecuadorian research in the international arena and making it difficult to generate evidence-based educational policies (Howells & Huggett, 2026).

Based on the above, the need arises to pose a question that guides the present study and allows us to address the problem identified from a rigorous scientific and methodological perspective: What are the trends, characteristics and evolution of the scientific production on the development of language in early education indexed in the Scopus-Elsevier database during the established period of analysis?

In coherence with this question, the general objective is to analyze, from a bibliometric and quantitative approach, the scientific production related to language development in early childhood education indexed in the Scopus-Elsevier database, with the purpose of recognizing research trends, relevant authors, collaboration networks and knowledge gaps that contribute to the strengthening of educational research and the improvement of practices pedagogical measures in this area (Laura De La Cruz et al., 2026).

To analyze the scientific production on language development in early education, cataloged in the Scopus-Elsevier database, through a quantitative bibliometric study, in order to recognize research trends, evolution of the field and knowledge gaps that guide future research.

1. To generate a search formula regarding language development in early childhood education in the Scopus-Elsevier databases.
2. Establish the filtering of the studies by applying the PRISMA method.
3. Carry out a bibliometric analysis of the studies obtained.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was developed under a quantitative approach, which allowed to organize in an objective, systematic and measurable way the scientific production related to the development of the image in early education. This approach was characterized by the collection and analysis of numerical data from indexed scientific documents, in order to identify patterns, trends, and relationships within the field of study. In this sense, the quantitative approach facilitated the interpretation of interpretation through descriptive statistical procedures, contributing to the generation of verifiable and replicable knowledge (Pintado et al., 2022).

The study corresponded to a type of bibliometric research of a descriptive nature. Bibliometric research made it possible to examine scientific production through

quantifiable indicators, such as number of publications, most influential authors, collaboration networks and temporal evolution of knowledge. Likewise, the descriptive level made it possible to detail the main characteristics of the studies analyzed without intervening in the observed reality, focusing on the organization, classification, and analysis of the information available in academic databases (Pontier & Fallas-Escobar, 2026; Schemes Prodanov & de Azevedo Baladão, 2026).

The design of the research was non-experimental, since variables were not manipulated, but existing data from documentary sources were analyzed. In addition, it was developed under a cross-sectional design, because the collection of information was carried out in a certain period, allowing to observe the current state of scientific production on this topic. This design was relevant for bibliometric studies, since it focuses on the retrospective analysis of academic publications (Delgado-Cruz et al., 2024; Johnson et al., 2026).

The sources of information used were of a secondary type, because previously published scientific documents were analyzed. Specifically, high-impact academic databases such as Scopus-Elsevier were used, which guaranteed the quality, rigor and validity of the indexed studies. These databases were selected for their relevance in the dissemination of scientific knowledge at an international level and for their wide coverage in the educational and linguistic fields.

Similarly, scientific articles obtained directly from these databases, which constituted the unit of analysis of the study, were considered as primary sources. This combination of sources made it possible to ensure the reliability of the data and strengthen the theoretical-methodological basis of the research (Bergroth et al., 2026; Thieme et al., 2026).

The search for information was carried out through a systematic and structured strategy, using Boolean operators and key terms related to the object of study. A homogeneous search formula was designed that included keywords such as "language development" and "bibliometric analysis", combined using the AND and OR operators.

This strategy made it possible to optimize the retrieval of relevant information, guaranteeing the relevance and accuracy of the results obtained. In addition, filters related to the period of publication, type of document and thematic area were applied, in order to delimit the corpus of study (Pontier & Fallas-Escobar, 2026).

The data collection technique used was a systematic literature review, applied under the guidelines of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews) method. This procedure made it possible to identify, select and rigorously evaluate the studies included in the analysis.

The process comprised 4 phases: identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion, which facilitated the filtering of the documents and the final selection of the most relevant articles for the study. This technique guaranteed the transparency and reproducibility of the research process (Delgado-Cruz et al., 2024; Johnson et al., 2026).

A bibliometric analysis matrix was used as the main instrument, in which variables such as year of publication, authors, country of origin, journal, keywords and number of citations were recorded. This instrument made it possible to organize the information in a systematic way and facilitate its subsequent quantitative analysis.

In addition, digital bibliographic management tools were used for the storage and classification of documents, which contributed to an adequate organization of the data collected (Bergroth et al., 2026; Schemes Prodanov & de Azevedo Baladão, 2026).

The data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistical techniques, which allowed the information to be interpreted through frequencies, percentages and trends. This

analysis was complemented with a critical interpretation of the results, aimed at identifying patterns in scientific production, research gaps, and emerging lines in the field of language development in early education.

In addition, a bibliometric analysis was developed that included indicators such as author productivity, temporal evolution of publications and scientific communication networks. This approach made it possible to comprehensively understand the behavior of the field of study from a quantitative and analytical perspective (Pintado et al., 2022; Thieme et al., 2026).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results presented below were obtained from the bibliometric analysis of the scientific production related to language development in early education, indexed in the Scopus database during the period 2022-2026. The information was organized using descriptive indicators that allowed the identification of the temporal evolution of the publications, the distribution by countries, the predominant documentary types and the main thematic areas of research. The findings are represented by statistical graphs that facilitate the interpretation of the trends observed in the field of study.

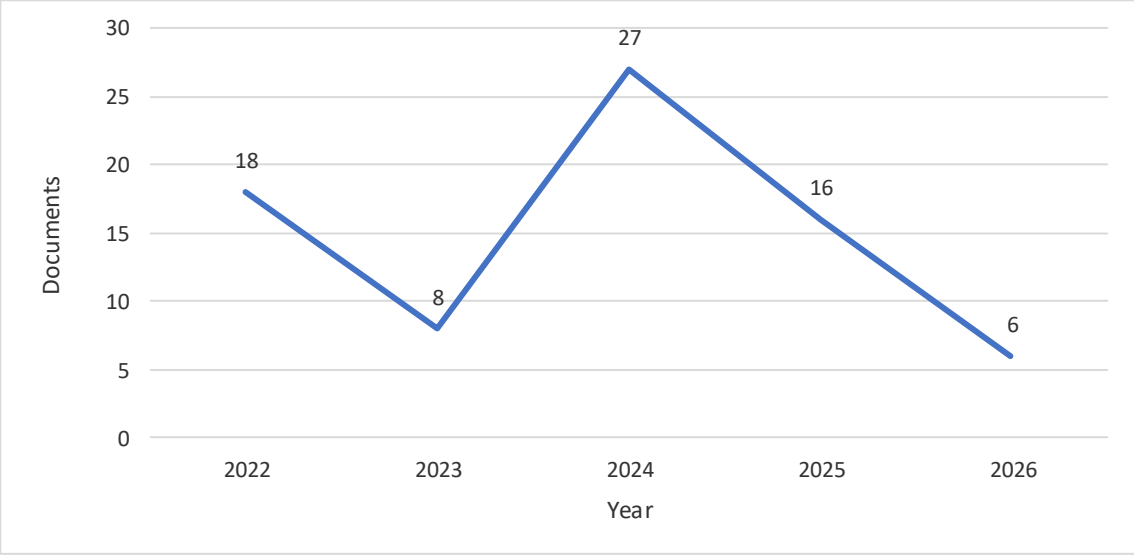


Figure 1. Documents per year on language development in early education, obtained from the Scopus-Elsevier database.

The analysis of scientific production by year showed a fluctuating behavior during the period 2022-2026. It was observed that in 2024 it registered the highest number of publications with 27 documents, reflecting the point of greatest research activity on language development in early education. In contrast, 2026 presented the lowest production with 6 documents. Likewise, in 2022, 18 publications were identified, while in 2023 and 2025, 8 and 16 documents were registered, respectively. These results allowed us to identify a growth trend until 2024, followed by a decrease in subsequent years, evidencing variations in scientific interest in the subject during the period analyzed.

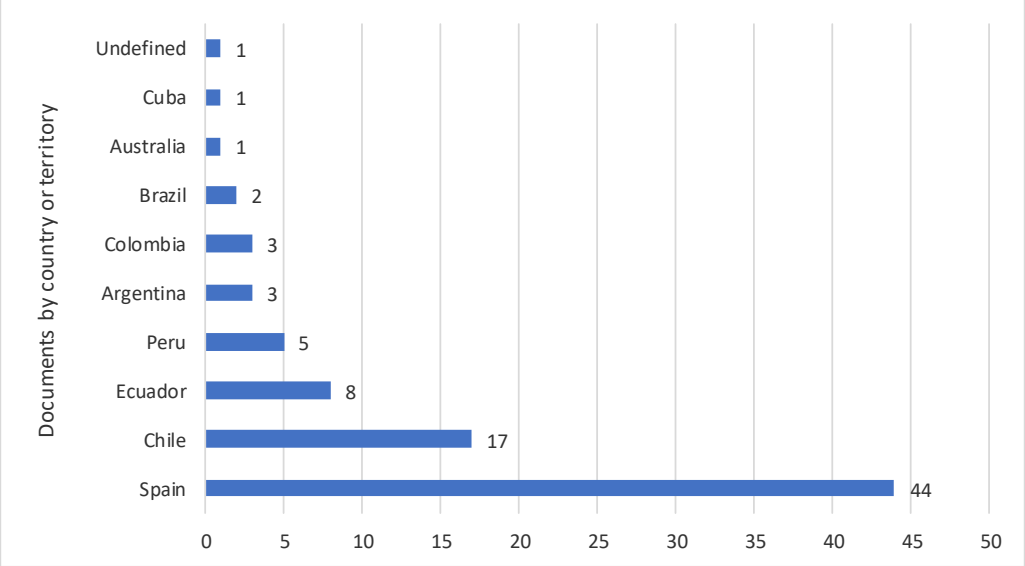


Figure 2. Documents by country obtained from the Scopus database between 2022 and 2026.

The distribution of publications by country showed a significant concentration of scientific production in Spain, with a total of 44 documents, positioning itself as the main contributor to research related to language development in early education. Chile ranked second with 17 publications, followed by Ecuador with 8 documents and Peru with 5. Argentina and Colombia registered 3 publications each, while Brazil submitted 2 documents. For their part, Australia, Cuba and the category of undefined origin registered one publication respectively. These results showed a predominant participation of Spanish-speaking countries in the generation of knowledge on this topic.

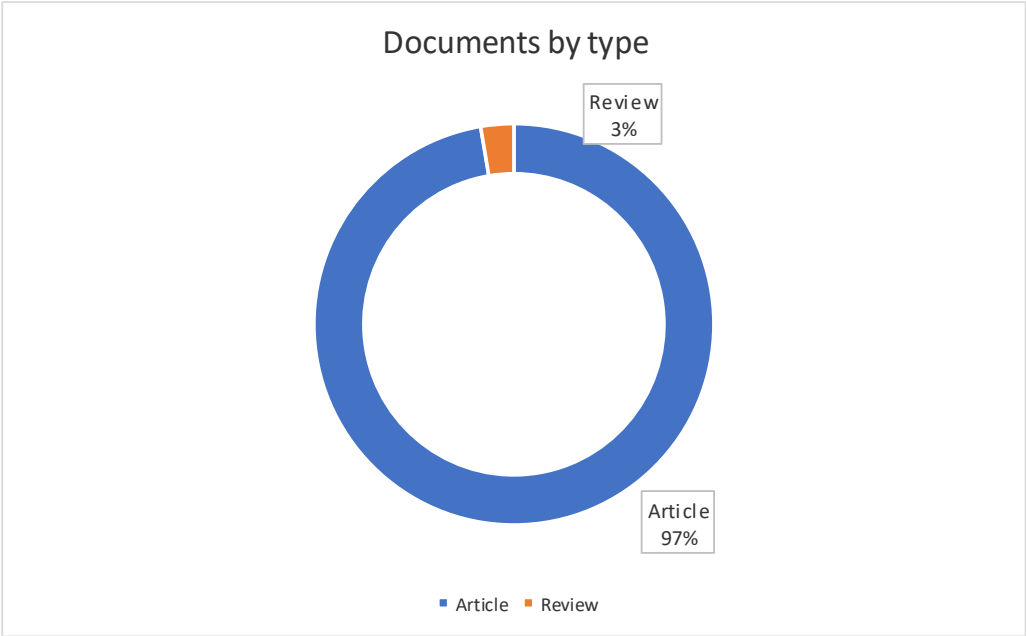


Figure 3. Documents by type obtained from the Scopus database between 2002 and 2026.

The results corresponding to the type of document revealed a marked predominance of scientific articles within the academic production analyzed. It was identified that 97% of the documents corresponded to research articles, while only 3% belonged to bibliographic reviews.

This distribution reflected a greater orientation towards the generation of original scientific evidence related to language development in early education. In addition, the scarce presence of review documents indicated that the production was mainly focused on empirical studies and research reports, contributing to the strengthening and expansion of the knowledge available in the area.

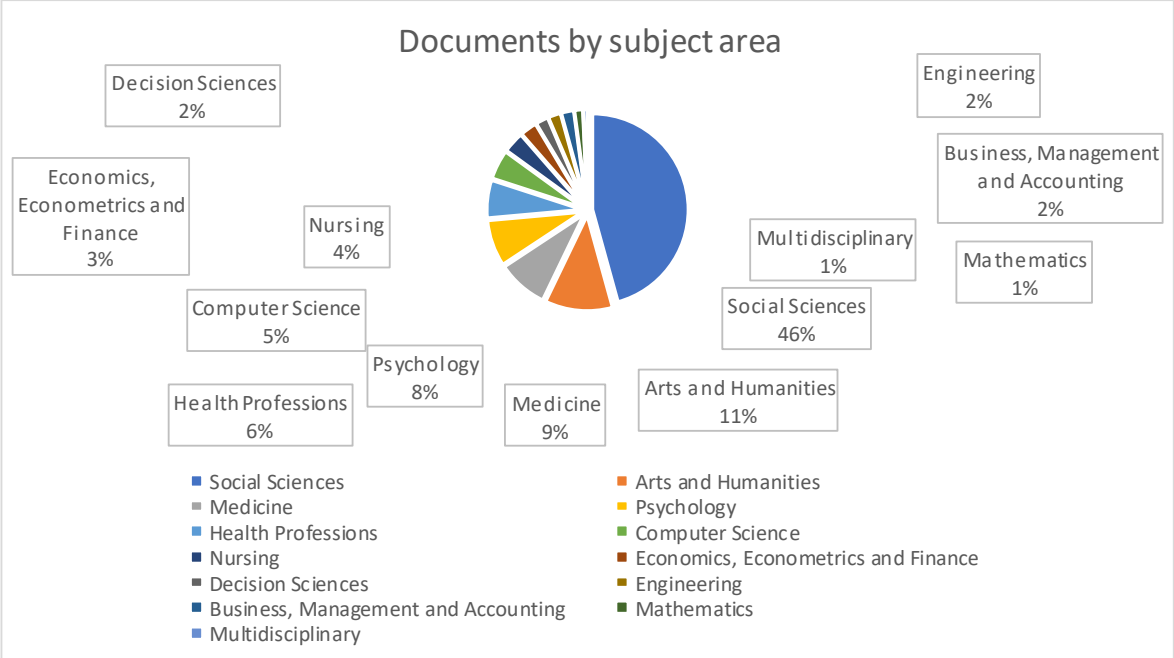


Figure 4. Documents by area obtained from the Scopus database between 2022 and 2026

The classification of the documents by thematic area showed that the Social Sciences concentrated the highest proportion of publications with 46% of the total analyzed. Subsequently, the areas of Arts and Humanities were identified with 11%, Medicine with 9% and Psychology with 8%. Areas such as Health Professions with 6%, Computer Science with 5% and Nursing with 4% also participated. Economics, Econometrics and Finance were recorded in a smaller proportion with 2% each, while in Mathematics and Multidisciplinary language development in early education, although with a clear predominance in approaches linked to the educational and social spheres.

Discussions

In the bibliometric analysis carried out, it was possible to identify that the scientific production on language development in early childhood education presented a variable behavior during the period 2022-2026, reaching its highest level of publications in 2024. This behavior showed that academic interest in understanding the processes of linguistic acquisition in early childhood continued to strengthen in recent years, especially due to the relevance of language in children's cognitive, social, and educational development. These results were related to research that recognized language development as an essential element to promote participation, learning, and the construction of meanings from an early age (de Castro et al., 2019; Lipka & Siegel, 2010; Villar-Cavieres et al., 2026)

The growth trend observed until 2024 could be associated with the expansion of studies focused on early stimulation strategies, educational inclusion, and strengthening of

communicative competencies within school contexts. This interpretation coincided with findings that highlighted the need to generate enriched educational experiences to promote integral development during the first years of life (Bohórquez et al., 2026; Howells & Huggett, 2026; Pintado et al., 2022). Similarly, it was observed that technological advances and the increase in interdisciplinary research contributed to the strengthening of new lines of study related to children's language (Laura De La Cruz et al., 2026; León Paredes et al., 2026).

In terms of geographical distribution, Spain concentrated the largest number of publications, followed by Chile and Ecuador. This predominance reflected the leadership that certain Spanish-speaking countries have achieved in educational research related to language and early childhood. The results coincided with studies that pointed to a growing consolidation of international academic networks focused on early childhood education, bilingualism, and communicative practices in school contexts (Bergroth et al., 2026; Pontier & Fallas-Escobar, 2026; Thieme et al., 2026).

Ecuador's participation in the scientific production analyzed was a relevant aspect, although still limited compared to other countries. From an interpretative perspective, this finding showed that there are still challenges related to the generation of scientific knowledge of international scope. Similar situations have been described in Latin American research that highlighted the need to strengthen educational research and expand the dissemination of the results developed in local contexts (Bohórquez et al., 2026; Pintado et al., 2022; Schemes Prodanov & de Azevedo Baladão, 2026; (Gómez-del-Castillo & Aguilera-Jiménez, 2026).

Regarding the documentary type, a marked predominance of scientific articles over bibliographic reviews was identified. This result suggested that the academic community has focused its efforts mainly on the generation of empirical evidence and the analysis of concrete experiences related to children's linguistic development. Similar results were reported in recent research that highlighted the importance of producing knowledge applicable to real educational contexts and evidence-based pedagogical decision-making (Cruz et al., 2025; Delgado-Cruz et al., 2024; Johnson et al., 2026).

However, the low presence of review studies also allowed us to identify an important gap within the field analyzed. Systematic and bibliometric reviews facilitate the organization of accumulated knowledge, the identification of trends, and the detection of underexplored areas. Therefore, it is necessary to increase this type of research to strengthen the comprehensive understanding of language development in early childhood education (Carabias et al., 2025; Pontier & Fallas-Escobar, 2026; Schemes Prodanov & de Azevedo Baladão, 2026).

The thematic classification showed that the Social Sciences constituted the main field of scientific production. This finding confirmed that language development has been predominantly approached from educational and sociocultural approaches. This situation coincided with several studies that recognized the role of social interaction, teaching practices, and learning environments as determining factors in the acquisition of communication skills during childhood (Delgado-Cruz et al., 2024; Gómez-Parra & Huertas-April, 2023; Naranjo Sevilla et al., 2024).

At the same time, the presence of areas such as Psychology, Medicine and Health Professions allowed us to recognize the multidisciplinary nature of the phenomenon studied. Language development does not depend only on educational factors, but also on biological, cognitive and emotional elements that interact permanently during child growth. This interpretation was supported by research that analyzed the influence of genetic,

environmental, and neuropsychological variables on language acquisition processes (Moriano-Gutiérrez et al., 2017; Salamanca-Zarzuela et al., 2018; Schemes Prodanov & de Azevedo Baladão, 2026).

The results also allowed us to observe an important presence of research related to bilingualism and multicultural education. This reflected an emerging trend to understand how diverse linguistic contexts influence children's learning and communicative development. Recent studies have shown that early exposure to different languages favors more complete interaction processes and expands opportunities for social participation within educational spaces (Bergroth et al., 2026; Pontier & Fallas-Escobar, 2026; Thieme et al., 2026).

Another aspect identified was the relevance given to active didactic strategies to stimulate language. Various studies highlighted the effectiveness of shared reading, children's theater, guided conversations and playful resources as tools capable of strengthening oral expression and linguistic comprehension. The results obtained coincided with research that demonstrated positive effects of these practices on children's communicative development (Carabias et al., 2025; Naranjo Sevilla et al., 2024; van Driel et al., 2026).

Also, the research analyzed showed a growing concern to serve child populations with specific educational needs related to language disorders or difficulties. In this sense, different authors pointed out that early interventions significantly improve communication skills and reduce future learning difficulties (Cruz et al., 2025; Delgado-Cruz et al., 2024; Fortea-Sevilla et al., 2015). In a complementary way, Baixauli-Fortea et al. (2015) identified a close relationship between linguistic alterations and the socio-emotional development of children.

From a historical perspective, the findings obtained were consistent with classic theoretical contributions that recognized early intervention as a fundamental element to enhance child development. Previous research highlighted that adequate stimulation during the first years favors language acquisition, cognitive development and social integration of children. (Bugié, 2002; García-Sánchez, 2002; M. Monfort, 2004). Similarly, Monfort and Monfort (2012) argued that the early identification of language difficulties contributes significantly to improving educational intervention processes.

The results also made it possible to recognize that current scientific production has begun to incorporate innovative approaches linked to technological resources, artificial intelligence and emerging methodologies. This phenomenon evidenced a progressive transformation of contemporary educational scenarios and a constant search for alternatives to strengthen teaching and learning processes with language (Bohórquez et al., 2026; Laura De La Cruz et al., 2026; León Paredes et al., 2026).

Overall, the findings confirmed that language development in early childhood education was an expanding field of research, characterized by increasing thematic, methodological, and disciplinary diversity. However, gaps were also identified related to the scarcity of bibliometric studies, the limited scientific production of some Latin American countries, and the need to increase synthesis research to consolidate existing knowledge. This evidence supported the relevance of the present study and showed the need to continue strengthening educational research aimed at understanding the factors involved in language development during early childhood.

CONCLUSIONS

The general objective of this research was achieved by analyzing the scientific

production on language development in early childhood education indexed in the Scopus-Elsevier database through a bibliometric study. The results made it possible to identify the main trends in publication, the temporal evolution of the field, the geographical distribution of the research, the predominant documentary types and the thematic areas with the greatest presence. In this way, the question to the research question was answered by showing that scientific production on this topic has shown a variable behavior during the period analyzed, with a greater number of publications in 2024 and a decrease in subsequent years. This panorama reflects that language development continues to be a topic of interest for the scientific community, due to its relationship with learning, communication and integral development during early childhood.

The analysis also established that Spain concentrated the largest number of publications, followed by Chile and Ecuador, which shows differences in scientific production between the countries analyzed. Although Ecuador is part of this research scenario, its participation is still small compared to other contexts, an aspect that shows the need to strengthen the generation and dissemination of field research. Likewise, it was identified that articles constitute the main means of dissemination of knowledge, while reviews represent a smaller proportion. Similarly, the Social Sciences gathered the highest percentage of publications, accompanied by contributions from Psychology, Medicine and other related areas, which shows that language development is approached from a multidisciplinary perspective that integrates different approaches to understand this process in early education.

The findings show that scientific production on language development in early childhood education continues to expand and diversify its lines of research, incorporating educational, social, and health approaches. At the same time, gaps were identified related to the limited production of some Latin American countries and the scarce presence of bibliometric and review studies, aspects that limit a broader understanding of the evolution of the field. In this sense, the study provides an organized view of the current state of research, facilitates the identification of trends and areas with less development, and provides a basis that can guide future research interested in strengthening scientific knowledge on language development and its contribution to early education.

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