
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Examining the debatable concept of the Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary fields of research from EFL students' perspectives

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| ABSTRACT

This study attempts to investigate the of the Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary fields of research from EFL students' perspectives field of research from EFL students' perspectives. A vast literature review shows that many Applied Linguistics contributors believe that the field necessitates insights from diverse academic disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, and education. Therefore, researchers are attempting to determine how EFL students may find it challenging to differentiate between interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary and grasp the connection between linguistic studies and other fields such as psychology, sociology, education, and cultural studies. To conduct this investigation, the researchers used a quantitative research methodology. A questionnaire of 15 items was distributed to a sample of 48 study subjects randomly selected during the academic year 1441 – 1442 at Qassim University, KSA. One of the key findings indicates that it is challenging to differentiate between the primary focus of applied linguistics and certain theoretical linguistics areas like sociolinguistics. The study also shows that the subjects are aware that areas like computational linguistics and clinical linguistics are also branches of applied linguistics.

| KEYWORDS

Applied linguistics, Interdisciplinarity, Multidisciplinary, EFL, Perspectives

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Kramsch (2000) contends that applied linguistics is fundamentally an interdisciplinary topic that was founded as such by European linguists and educators in the late 1950s as a multidisciplinary area of study for the investigation of all aspects of language usage (Kramsch, 2000, p. 316). As a result, it has links to fields such as communication studies, psychology, education, and sociology, and it has grown into a dynamic and diverse field (Cook, 2003; Kaplan, 2010). Widdowson (2005) addresses the disciplinarity debate by rejecting the idea that Applied Linguistics is not disciplinary at all. He supports this claim by pointing out that applied linguistics is more concerned with practical problems than with abstractions, which characterise other disciplines. It is challenging to understand the current state of Applied Linguistics research because of the notion put forth by Coron (1973) and Davies (2007) that Applied Linguistics is somehow developed from Linguistics. It would seem difficult to support the assertion that Applied Linguistics "presupposes linguistics" (Bourdieu, 1982), given the nature of research published under the title of "Applied Linguistics," which seems to have little to do with linguistics as an enlightening discipline—for example, work on language maintenance based on Bourdieu's work.

1.1 Research Problem

Applied Linguistics requires interdisciplinarity, although many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students find it difficult to completely comprehend. They may often find it difficult to understand the differences between interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary, as well as the connections between linguistic studies and other fields such as education, sociology, psychology,

and cultural studies. Their capacity to interact critically with scholarly writings and evaluate literary and linguistic resources from many angles may also be hampered by the ambiguity. Their understanding and analytical abilities can therefore be restricted to a small linguistic framework, neglecting to acknowledge the more extensive social, cognitive, and cultural aspects of language acquisition. Therefore, further study is required to determine how EFL students view and comprehend interdisciplinarity and how this comprehension affects their academic and critical thinking abilities.

1.2 Research Objectives:

1. Determine how EFL students perceive and define interdisciplinarity in Applied Linguistics.
2. Assess EFL students' ability to distinguish between interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary.
3. Examine how students' understanding of interdisciplinarity affects their critical reading and analytical skills in literary and academic settings.
4. Propose effective strategies and approaches to enhance EFL students' awareness and practical application of interdisciplinary thinking in language learning.

1.3 Research Questions

The present research seeks to comprehend the debatable perception of Applied Linguistics as an interdisciplinary field to determine its challenges and awareness among EFL students. The researchers endeavour to uncover solutions to these inquiries, aiming to achieve the stated objectives:

1. How do EFL students conceptualize interdisciplinarity in Applied Linguistics ?
2. To what extent can EFL students distinguish between interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary ?
3. How does an individual's understanding of interdisciplinarity impact their critical analysis of literature and academic texts ?
4. What strategies or approaches can EFL students apply to interdisciplinary thinking in language learning?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research is important from an academic and educational standpoint. For instance, academically, it facilitates EFL learners' comprehension of the Applied Linguistics notion of interdisciplinarity. It additionally provides a theoretical framework for upcoming research and curricular development in language education by differentiating between interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary. It highlights the connection between higher-order cognitive abilities, such as text analysis and critical reading, and transdisciplinary awareness. In terms of pedagogical importance, the results can assist professors in creating interdisciplinary lesson plans for EFL classes, which will increase the significance of language acquisition and link it to larger social, cultural, and cognitive contexts. Furthermore, curriculum designers can produce resources that encourage learning that goes beyond language to include analysis and reflection. Through the development of their cross-disciplinary thinking abilities, the study seeks to enhance academic performance and get students ready for challenging research assignments in higher education. Finally, the study endeavours to fill a knowledge gap regarding how interdisciplinarity affects EFL learners' critical thinking, academic development, and engagement with language learning as a related field of study.

2. Literature Review

According to Grabe (2002), the traditional definition of applied linguistics refers to language proficiency to solve practical issues, particularly those related to language pedagogy and acquisition. Thus, applied linguistics has connections to several disciplines, including psychology, education, sociology, and communication studies; it has developed into a vibrant and varied field (Cook, 2003; Kaplan, 2010). The question of whether Applied Linguistics qualifies as an interdisciplinary field has been debated by numerous academics. According to some scholars, its multidisciplinary nature is a strength that empowers a more thorough comprehension of language in context (Cameron et al., 1992; Kramsch, 2006). For example, Hall (2011) highlights that to comprehend complicated language phenomena, Applied Linguistics employs a range of theories and methodologies, from sociocultural theory to cognitive psychology. However, some fear that interdisciplinarity would lead to a loss of identity or theoretical fragmentation (Seidlhofer, 2003). The vast literature also shows that it is difficult for students and academics to identify what constitutes essential knowledge in the field of applied linguistics because the boundaries of the discipline are still ambiguous (Bachman, 2000). Some scholars claim that the interdisciplinary aspect of applied linguistics is sometimes both enlightening and perplexing for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. Students who are mainly trained in language education and have not been exposed to related fields like sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, or discourse analysis may find it challenging to navigate various theoretical frameworks and research traditions (Widdowson 2005; Hyland 2009). An experimental study was carried out by Gieve and Cunico (2012) to determine how language learners felt about interdisciplinarity in their coursework. From a pedagogical perspective, rigorous curriculum preparation is required to integrate interdisciplinarity into Applied Linguistics. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), educational programs for EFL students should introduce them to multiple viewpoints on language while being cohesive and pertinent to their academic objectives to explain the connections between applied linguistics and

disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, and education. Perceptions and definitions of interdisciplinarity in applied linguistics. According to recent research, many EFL students struggle to define interdisciplinarity, frequently conflating it with related concepts such as multidisciplinary or cross-disciplinarity (Tang, 2021). Interdisciplinarity in applied linguistics entails using insights from psychology, sociology, education, and linguistics to solve language-related problems (Kramsch, 2021). However, students' perceptions differ significantly depending on their exposure to various academic contexts and instructional strategies (Ahn, 2022). Furthermore, EFL students with monodisciplinary backgrounds frequently regard interdisciplinarity as abstract or irrelevant unless it is directly related to language learning practices (Gao & Zheng, 2023). This gap is exacerbated by a lack of curricular emphasis on interdisciplinary discourse and its terminological distinctions (Mahmoud, 2022).

2. Differentiating Interdisciplinarity from Multidisciplinary

Several scholars have highlighted students' conceptual confusion between interdisciplinarity (method integration) and multidisciplinary (methods applied in parallel without integration) (Klein, 2020; Becher & Trowler, 2021). This confusion frequently occurs in EFL settings when students encounter content from other disciplines (e.g., literature, media, culture) without explicit guidance on how these areas interrelate (Smith & Lee, 2023). In a comparative study, Alharthi (2024) discovered that only 38% of Saudi undergraduate EFL learners could correctly distinguish between interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary. This demonstrates a general lack of theoretical literacy in students' engagement with cross-domain content.

3. The Effect on Critical Reading and Analytical Skills

Understanding interdisciplinarity improves students' higher-order thinking, especially when evaluating texts through multiple lenses. For example, literature can be examined not only aesthetically, but also through sociolinguistic or psychological frameworks (Park, 2022). This integrated lens promotes critical literacy, enabling EFL students to engage with texts more reflectively and with greater comprehension (Lau & Tan, 2021). Recent empirical research indicates that EFL learners who were trained in interdisciplinary methods performed significantly better on tasks involving critical discourse analysis and interpretive reading (Choi & Abbas, 2023). They were also better at detecting implicit ideologies and cross-cultural perspectives embedded in literary and academic texts.

4. Strategies for Enhancing Interdisciplinary Awareness and Application

Curriculum integration (Nguyen & Pham, 2021), collaborative projects (Alshammari, 2024), explicit instruction (Wang, 2022), and reflective writing (Ahmed & Gutiérrez, 2023) are all effective strategies for increasing EFL students' interdisciplinary awareness. Padlet and concept maps are two digital tools that are effective in visualizing connections across disciplines, thereby supporting interdisciplinary learning in virtual EFL contexts (Rahman and Hwang, 2022). To accommodate diverse EFL learners, interdisciplinarity should be taught intentionally, contextually, and multimodally.

Additionally, the literature review shows that project-based learning and reflective conversations are examples of student-centered and participatory approaches that can assist students in creating their perspective of interdisciplinarity (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). A variety of theoretical and methodological techniques are used in applied linguistics; for instance, the sociocultural theory put out by Lantolf and Thorne (2006) places a strong emphasis on learning via cultural resources and interaction. Pennycook (2001) defines critical applied linguistics as the study of social justice and power relations in language use, followed by the integration of quantitative and qualitative research using concepts from computer science and sociology, corpus linguistics, and discourse analysis.

3. Methodology

The researchers gathered the necessary data for this study through a quantitative data collection method that entails obtaining and analyzing numerical data to perform a statistical evaluation. During the academic year 1441–1442, (48) students of EFL were randomly selected at Qassim University, KSA, to provide their opinions on a questionnaire containing (15) items. To guarantee the effectiveness of the participants' answers to the questionnaire items, which were crucial for collecting the necessary data, the researchers answered their questions about the research inquiries favorably before they began sharing their opinions. Moreover, the survey aimed to ascertain the subjects' viewpoints regarding the contentious idea of Applied Linguistics as a research domain from the standpoint of EFL students.

3.1 Instrument

The researcher first developed and distributed a questionnaire using a five-point Likert-type scale, with responses ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." The researchers assessed the questionnaire and made minor structural adjustments before it was distributed to study participants. Every questionnaire question asked for a response that measured the respondents' opinions on the subject. The following tables and charts make it evident that the most important results were thematically studied and presented once the data had been gathered and examined.

4. Discussion and Results

As clearly stated above, the current study endeavours to investigate the debatable concept of Applied Linguistics as an Interdisciplinary field of research from EFL students' perspectives. Accordingly, the author aims to find answers to the following questions, aiming at accomplishing the goals above:

1. How do EFL students conceptualize interdisciplinarity in Applied Linguistics?
2. To what extent can EFL students distinguish between interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary?
3. How does an individual's understanding of interdisciplinarity impact their critical analysis of literature and academic texts?
4. What strategies or approaches can EFL students apply to interdisciplinary thinking in language learning?

Table 1 displays the frequencies of the study participants' replies to the entire questionnaire's items (1– 15).

Item no.					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Q1	21	29	1	0	0
Q2	24	22	5	0	0
Q3	21	29	1	0	0
Q4	24	25	1	1	0
Q5	30	18	1	2	0
Q6	21	28	1	0	1
Q7	21	29	1	0	0
Q8	20	28	1	2	0
Q9	19	29	1	1	1
Q10	21	29	1	1	0
Q11	24	26	1	0	0
Q12	18	31	2	0	0
Q13	21	27	1	0	2
Q14	19	29	3	0	0
Q15	21	26	1	3	0

Table 1. The above table clearly shows that the study participants' answers were most often in accordance with the first two points of the Likert scale (Strongly Agree and Agree), which shows the frequency of their responses to all the questionnaire's items (1– 15)

Chart 1. displays the frequencies of the study participants' replies to the entire questionnaire's items (1– 15).

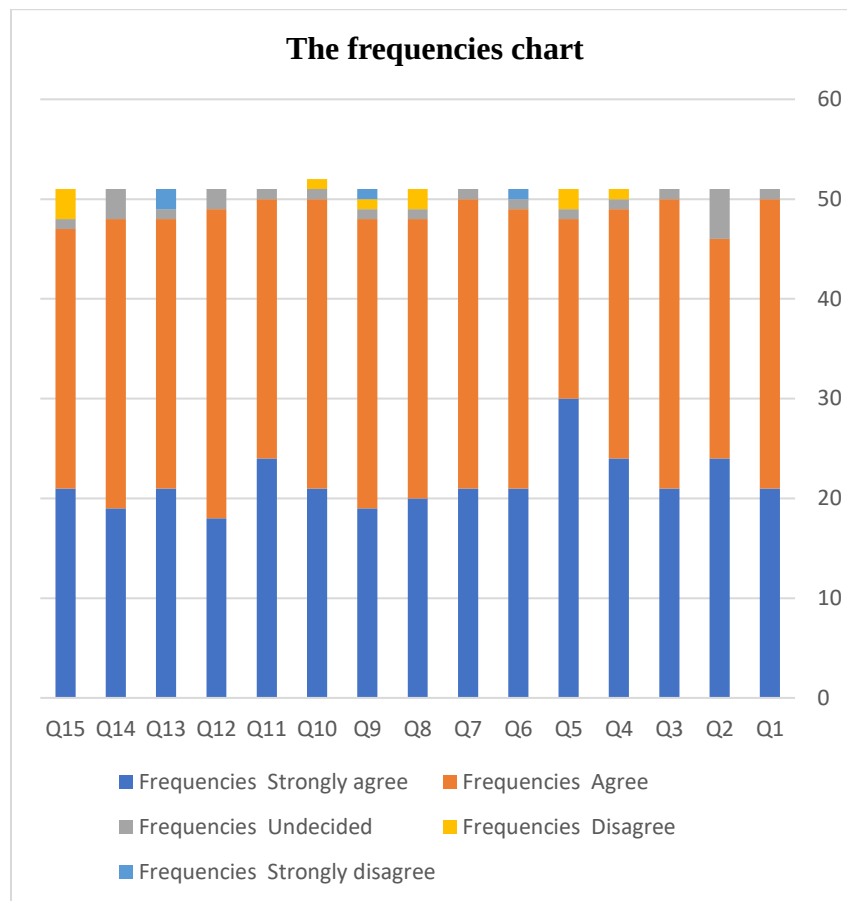


Chart 1. The attached chart provides a five-point Likert scale summary of the key findings based on the study participants' answers to all 15 questionnaire items.

Table (2) shows the percentages of study participants' responses to the entire questionnaire's items, ranging from 1 to 15, along with the standard deviation.

Item no.	Percentage					Standard Deviation
	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Q1	41.1	56.8	1.09	0.0	0.0	27.18
Q2	47.5	43.1	9.08	0.0	0.0	24.68
Q3	41.1	56.8	1.09	0.0	0.0	27.18
Q4	47.5	49.1	1.09	1.09	0.0	26.39
Q5	58.8	35.2	1.09	3.09	0.0	24.86
Q6	41.1	54.9	1.09	0.0	1.09	26.76
Q7	41.1	56.8	1.09	0.0	0.0	27.18

Q8	39.2	54.9	1.09	3.09	0.0	26.38
Q9	37.2	56.8	1.09	1.09	1.09	26.6
Q10	41.1	56.8	1.09	1.09	0.0	27.08
Q11	47.05	50.9	1.09	0.0	0.0	26.76
Q12	35.2	60.7	3.09	0.0	0.0	27.1
Q13	41.1	52.9	1.09	0.0	3.09	26.22
Q14	37.2	56.8	5.08	0.0	0.0	26.45
Q15	41.1	50.9	1.09	5.08	0.0	25.68

Table 2: The percentages of study participants' answers to each item on the questionnaire, which range from 1 to 15, are displayed in Table 2 along with the standard deviation approach. This indicates that the participants' overall answers on all items are incredibly close to the first two points of the five-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Agree and Agree).

Chart (2) shows the percentages of study participants' responses to the entire questionnaire's items, ranging from 1 to 15, along with the standard deviation.

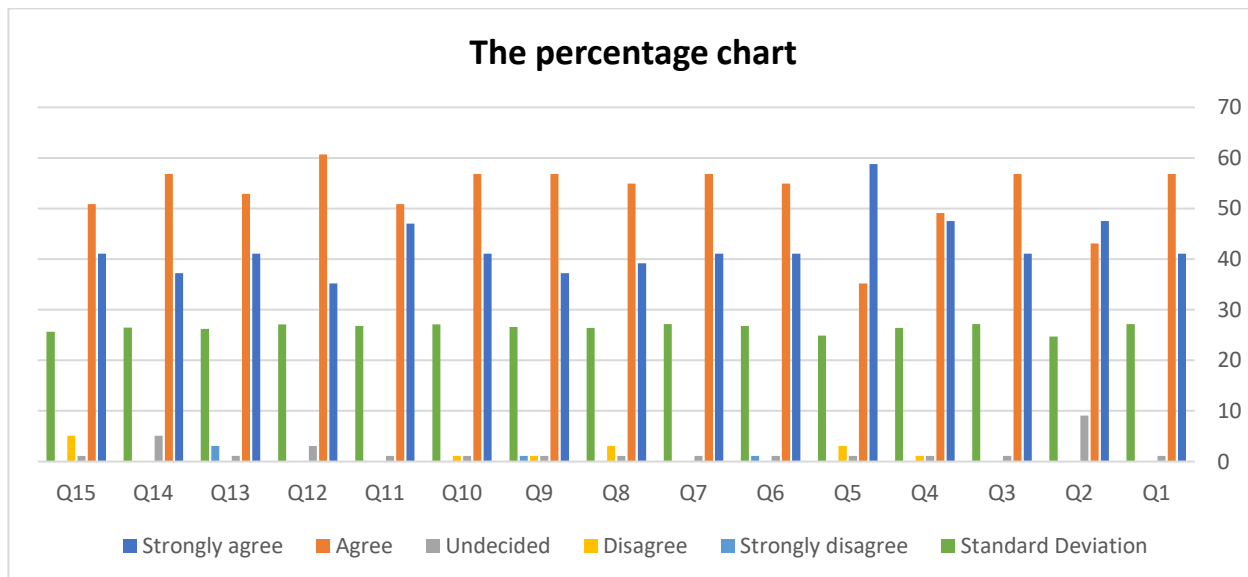


Chart 2. Based on the study participants' answers to all fifteen topics on a five-point Likert-type scale—strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and strongly disagree—the accompanying graphic summarises the key findings.

Concerning the most important findings, the tables and the chart show that almost 98% of the study subjects are aware of the concept of an interdisciplinary field, which refers to the combination of various areas as stated by the first questionnaire item: **"An interdisciplinary field combines two or more areas of study."** Thus, the researchers believe that the study subjects have a broad idea of applied linguistics as an interdisciplinary field that focuses on practical research on language and communication problems. This essence is clearly stated when (90 %) of the participants agreed with the second article, or the questionnaire item **"Applied linguistics is an interdisciplinary field of research."**

The study also shows that approximately 98% of participants refer to different disciplines associated with applied linguistics as an interdisciplinary field, as indicated by the following questionnaire item: "It has links to several different disciplines because it is an interdisciplinary field." Such awareness is vital for EFL students; for instance, it may enable them to understand the differences

between interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary, as well as comprehend the connections between linguistic studies and other fields, such as education, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies. Furthermore, the tables and the chart illustrate that most of the panelists know that topics such as computational linguistics and clinical linguistics are also fields of applied linguistics. Besides, the subjects' awareness of the relation between applied linguistics and areas such as workplace communication is clearly stated by questionnaire no 15, **"Issues of workplace communication are also included within the domains of applied linguistics."** Thus, the researchers firmly believe that this broad view of an interdisciplinary area makes it easier for EFL learners to understand the concept of interdisciplinarity in applied linguistics. By distinguishing between interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary awareness, the current study offers a theoretical framework for future research and curriculum development in language education. Ultimately, EFL students find it simpler to make the connection between transdisciplinary awareness and higher-order cognitive skills like text analysis and critical reading.

5. Conclusion

According to the literature reviewed, applied linguistics is an interdisciplinary field by nature, which both challenges and empowers EFL students. Thus, it is significant to investigate students' viewpoints to better understand how this complexity is received, processed, and managed in academic contexts. The study contributes to current debates over how Applied Linguistics might embrace multidisciplinary breadth while maintaining coherence.

6. Recommendations

1. To comprehend the concept of interdisciplinarity in linguistics, it is essential to use a teaching methodology that helps EFL students to enhance their overall academic performance and equip them with the cross-disciplinary thinking skills necessary for challenging research assignments at the tertiary level.

2. It is also important to encourage EFL students to pursue self-learning, aiming to understand how interdisciplinarity shapes their academic development, critical thinking, and engagement with language learning as an interconnected field of knowledge.

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