

CHARACTERISTICS OF ARTICLE TITLES IN HIGH-IMPACT LINGUISTIC AND ENGLISH EDUCATION JOURNAL

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Abstract

The title is a crucial component of a journal article, as it serves to attract readers and reflect the essence of the study. However, studies on the characteristics of article titles published in reputable journals in Applied Linguistics and English Language Education are scarce in the literature. Based on quartile rankings, this study compares the linguistic features and content structure of scientific article titles in reputable international journals in Applied Linguistics and English Language Education. Using a content analysis design, 982 article titles from 12 international journals published between 2022 and 2024 were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The results showed that the title length varied according to quartile: Q1 and Q3 had a higher average title length than Q2 and Q4, reflecting the tendency to use more descriptive titles in highly reputable journals. Linguistically, noun phrases were the most commonly used syntactic structure, but Q1 journals used compound constructions and -ing verb phrases that reflected the complexity and dynamics of ideas. Regarding content, the research method feature appeared most frequently, followed by data and findings, especially in Q1 and Q3 journals. In contrast, topic-only titles were more dominant in Q4 journals. These findings confirm that the structure of article titles reflects a scientific communication strategy tailored to the Journal's reputation. This study offers a conceptual contribution through a combined classification framework between linguistic features and title content. It provides practical guidance for academic authors in designing effective titles according to the expectations of target journals.

Keywords: Article Title, Linguistic Features, Content Feature, Comparative Study

INTRODUCTION

The title of a scholarly article serves as the primary identity of a study and a vital means of capturing readers' attention. An effective title not only succinctly reflects the substance of the research but also determines the article's readability and visibility within academic databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and Scopus. In this regard, a well-constructed title has direct implications for citation potential and the dissemination of scientific knowledge. Previous studies have emphasized that the appropriate linguistic structure—whether morphological, syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic—significantly contributes to the accessibility and academic impact of research articles (Olsen, 2016; Setton, 1998). Therefore, examining the linguistic and content characteristics of article titles is essential, particularly in the rapidly evolving fields of applied linguistics and English education.

Although numerous studies have analyzed the structure and features of academic titles across disciplines, there remains a research gap in studies specifically focusing on applied linguistics and English education. Most existing research has concentrated on disciplines such as medicine, law, or business, while linguistic studies remain relatively underexplored (Appiah et al., 2019). This gap raises a fundamental question: how do linguistic structures and content features differ in academic titles published in reputable international journals in applied linguistics and

English education, particularly across different journal quartiles? Consequently, this study aims to examine the extent to which such differences influence title-writing strategies and their implications for readability and academic credibility.

Prior research has revealed varying tendencies in title construction across disciplines. Moattarian (2015) found that average title length differs by field, with 12.88 words in applied linguistics, 13.54 in civil engineering, and 10.38 in dentistry. Yang (2019) further reported that longer titles tend to contain more keywords, thereby increasing both visibility and citation potential. Kerans et al. (2020) argued that including research methods in titles can enhance credibility, while Paiva et al. (2012) demonstrated that titles emphasizing research findings receive more citations. Cheng et al (2012) and Jasrial et al (2024) identified five major syntactic structures in applied linguistics article titles: nominal phrases, compound structures, full sentences, V-ing constructions, and prepositional phrases. However, Appiah et al. (2019) noted that cross-disciplinary studies still dominate the literature. In contrast, comparative analyses focusing on linguistic and content patterns within applied linguistics and English education journals remain limited.

Given these gaps, this study holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it broadens the understanding of linguistic patterns and content characteristics in the titles of high-impact academic journals. Practically, the findings provide valuable guidance for academics and researchers to craft effective, engaging, and internationally competitive titles (Kerans et al., 2020; Paiva et al., 2012; Hakim et al, 2025). Thus, this research contributes not only to the development of academic discourse studies but also to the enhancement of scholarly writing quality.

To address the identified gap, this study employs a comparative approach to analyze article titles from applied linguistics and English education journals across different quartile rankings (Q1–Q4). This approach enables an in-depth examination of three key aspects—title length, linguistic structure, and content features. Through a descriptive-comparative analysis, the study aims to identify both similarities and differences across journal quartiles and to offer practical recommendations for authors to construct titles that align with academic conventions and enhance scholarly visibility. Ultimately, the study seeks to deepen the understanding of how linguistic and content elements interact to shape the effectiveness of research article titles in applied linguistics and English education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Title Length

The length of a research article title has increasingly become a central focus in scientometric and linguistic investigations, as it directly affects the discoverability, readability, visibility, and potential citation impact of scholarly work. Recent studies classify title length into three main categories: short (≤ 10 words), medium (11–15 words), and long (≥ 16 words). Short titles are concise, memorable, and easily processed by readers and search algorithms, yet they often lack sufficient key terms for effective indexing and retrieval (Pottier et al., 2024). Medium-length titles, typically between 11 and 15 words, are widely considered the most effective for balancing informativeness and clarity (Kousha & Thelwall, 2024). They enable the inclusion of essential methodological or thematic keywords without diminishing cohesion or reader engagement. In contrast, longer titles, though capable of conveying complex research designs or results, may

reduce communicative efficiency and appear less appealing in citation databases (Khatoon et al., 2024). Empirical evidence further suggests that the relationship between title length and citation performance is not linear but discipline dependent. In applied linguistics and education, moderately long titles perform better due to their descriptive precision and inclusion of pedagogical or methodological dimensions (Rajakumari, 2025; Rossi & Brand, 2020; Hakim & Medina, 2017), whereas in technical and natural sciences, concise titles tend to attract higher citation counts because brevity enhances retrieval efficiency and user attention (Pottier et al., 2024b).

Several studies have also linked title length to citation impact and perceptions of professionalism in academic writing. Letchford et al. (2015) reported that shorter titles tend to receive more citations because of their memorability, while Paiva et al. (2012) observed a positive association between longer titles and citation frequency, implying that additional descriptive detail can enhance relevance for targeted readers. In the context of applied linguistics and language education, (Apriani & Arsyad, 2022) identified an optimal title length of 10–14 words, consistent across various journal tiers. These findings indicate that title length is not merely a technical formatting concern but a strategic component of scholarly communication. Therefore, determining an “ideal” title length should not be based solely on word count but should consider disciplinary conventions, journal style guidelines, and communicative intent. In alignment with current academic writing practices, researchers are encouraged to craft titles that are both informative and succinct—preferably within the 10–15-word range—to optimize readability, visibility, and citation potential across digital research platforms.

Linguistic Features of Titles

Linguistic features of titles include syntactic structure, lexical complexity, and keyword placement, which influence the article's appeal and visibility. Apriani & Arsyad (2022) found that nominal structures dominate in linguistic articles because they can concisely convey the research focus without the use of verbs, while -ing phrases convey a dynamic impression of the research process. Diao (2021) added that high lexical complexity can enhance scientific eloquence but decrease readability, requiring authors to strike a balance between technical terminology and ease of understanding.

In addition to structural aspects, grammatical form and rhetorical style also reflect research orientation and disciplinary norms. Jasrial et al. (2024) showed that titles in the form of nominal phrases are more frequently used in formal scientific articles, while full sentences tend to appear in the humanities. The linguistic features used in titles thus serve as rhetorical tools to position research within the appropriate academic context. Therefore, a thorough understanding of these linguistic aspects is crucial for authors targeting reputable international journals to ensure their titles are effective, representative, and appealing to a global academic audience.

Content Features of Title

The content features of a title relate to the extent to which the title explicitly represents the topic, methods, and contributions of the research. Swales & Feak (2012) emphasized that a good title reflects the research focus without exaggeration, while Arsyad et al. (2024) found that many authors added methodological information such as "case study" or "survey" to clarify the research

scope. Apriani & Arsyad (2022) also noted the increasing use of method-based terms, such as "corpus-based" or "qualitative study," which enhance scientific transparency and research relevance. Thus, the content elements in the title not only highlight the topic but also serve as a means of scientific communication, concisely explaining the research approach.

Authors also often highlight the research contribution or results in the title as a form of attraction. Paiva et al. (2012) showed that titles highlighting findings, such as "Effects of X on Y" or "Towards a Model of...", tend to attract more readers, although overly explicit claims should be avoided. Arsyad et al. (2024) added that a balance between brevity and comprehensiveness is key to a successful title; being too general can diminish its appeal, while being too long can dilute its focus. Therefore, an effective title is one that is able to provide an accurate description of the substance of the research while maintaining concise form and clarity of meaning.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a content analysis design following the framework proposed by White & Marsh (2006), who highlight its flexibility and broad applicability across research disciplines, especially in library and information science. Content analysis enables both replicable and valid inferences from textual content. The current study used a descriptive content analysis with a mixed-method approach to explore the linguistic and content features of article titles in reputable international journals within the domains of applied linguistics and English language education. The mixed-method design integrated quantitative analysis (e.g., frequency and percentage distributions of title lengths, syntactic structures, and content types) and qualitative interpretation (e.g., semantic and contextual patterns) to provide a comprehensive understanding of how titles reflect academic discourse conventions.

Corpus

The corpus consisted of 982 article titles purposively selected from eight international journals indexed in Scopus, covering the years 2022 to 2024. These journals represented a geographically and topically diverse sample, with publications from Africa, Asia, Europe, America, and Australia, and varied across quartile rankings (Q1–Q4). Selection criteria included: journal focus on English education and applied linguistics, Scopus indexing, and accessibility of full-text titles. This sampling ensured a representative and balanced dataset for cross-comparison based on journal quartile and region.

Instrument of Research

The primary instrument was a coding matrix developed to classify each article title according to three analytical dimensions. First, title length was categorized as short, ideal, or long based on word count, following the guidelines by Gastel & Day (2016). Second, Syntactic structure was analysed in term of noun phrase, compound, full sentence, V-ing phrase, and prepositional phrase, based on the framework of Cheng et al (2012). Third, Content features were identified and categorized as topic-only, method, data, finding, and closure, following the classification by Xiang & Li (2020). The matrix enabled systematic classification of each title, ensuring both quantitative tallying and qualitative labelling.

Procedure for Data Collection

Article titles were manually retrieved from the official journal websites or the Scimago Journal Rank platform. Titles were compiled into a dataset, and each was analysed for word count, excluding numbers, symbols, and punctuation. Each title was subsequently classified into one of the three length categories. For syntactic and content analyses, titles were manually examined to determine their grammatical structure and informational content based on pre-established criteria. All classifications were recorded in a structured table, including the journal name, quartile ranking, word count, length category, syntactic structure, and content type.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in three stages to comprehensively examine the characteristics of journal article titles. The first stage, length analysis, classified titles based on word count into three categories: short (≤ 10 words), ideal (11–15 words), and long (≥ 16 words). The distribution of these categories across journal quartiles was analysed to identify emerging patterns. The second stage, syntactic analysis, involved categorizing titles into five structural types noun phrase, compound, full sentence, V-ing phrase, and prepositional phrase and examining their frequency by quartile to reveal stylistic tendencies. The third stage, content analysis, coded titles into five categories topic-only, method, data, finding, and closure according to their semantic content, enabling the identification of content trends and their association with journal ranking. Both quantitative frequency statistics and qualitative observations were integrated to triangulate the findings and generate meaningful insights into the linguistic and rhetorical patterns of academic article titles

FINDINGS

The length of a scientific article title plays a pivotal role in academic writing, as it contributes to the clarity, comprehensiveness, and appeal of a publication. Within reputable journals in the fields of Applied Linguistics and English Education, decisions regarding title length are typically aligned with editorial guidelines and tailored to the preferences of the intended readership. An effective title, in this regard, not only encapsulates the core subject matter succinctly but also offers a preliminary indication of the research's scope and focus. Consequently, recognizing the prevailing patterns in title length across journals of varying reputational tiers is essential for authors seeking to craft titles that meet the standards and expectations of their target academic outlets.

The Average Length of the Article Titles

Data analysis of the average results of the article title length in each quartile, published in High-Impact Applied Linguistics & English Education Journals, is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 1. The Average length of the title article

No	Name of Journal	Quartile	Total Articles	The title length
1	Applied Linguistics (ALJ)	Q1	123	13.56
2	South African Journal of Communication Disorders (SAJCD)	Q1	38	14.84
3	Studies in English Language and Education (SIELE)	Q1	234	13.19

Total/Average			395	13.86
4	Reading And Writing	Q2	48	11.68
5	Australian Review of Applied Linguistics (ARAL) Journal	Q2	40	9.87
6	LLT Journal: Journal on Language and Language Teaching	Q2	172	12.59
Total/Average			260	11.38
7	JALT Journal	Q3	29	12.10
8	Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics	Q3	45	13.33
9	Per Lingua (PL)	Q3	35	14.65
Total/Average			109	13.36
10	The IUP Journal of English Studies	Q4	114	12.01
11	Learning Landscape (LL)	Q4	55	11.76
12	Southern Semiotic Review (SSR)	Q4	49	11.10
Total/Average			218	11.62

The analysis results of the average title length of articles in four quartiles of international journals show significant variations between quartiles. In the first quartile (Q1), which consists of three journals, namely Applied Linguistics Journal (ALJ), South African Journal of Communication Disorders (SAJCD), and Studies in English Language and Education (SIELE), it found that the average title length was 13.86 words. According to the title length classification, this average is in the "ideal title" category, between 8 and 15 words. This reflects the tendency of journals with high reputations to maintain title lengths within the ideal range that can reflect clarity and depth of study.

This differs from the second quartile (Q2) journals, namely Reading and Writing, Australian Review of Applied Linguistics (ARAL), and LLT Journal, which show a lower average title length of 11.38. Although still in the "ideal title" category, this average is close to the lower limit of the classification. This condition may indicate that journals in Q2 tend to be more concise in conveying their study topics, perhaps to attract a broader readership. However, this approach can impact the limitations of information communicated through the Title so that the potential context or scope of the study becomes less comprehensively described. Journals in the third quartile (Q3), namely JALT Journal, Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics, and Per Lingua, show an average title length of 13.36 words. The third quartiles journal is included in the "ideal title" category.

Meanwhile, the fourth quartile (Q4), represented by The IUP Journal of English Studies, Learning Landscape (LL), and Southern Semiotic Review (SSR), shows an average title length of 11.62 words. Like Q2, this figure is also in the "ideal title" category but tends to be shorter. This may indicate that journals in Q4, despite being lower in the quartile ranking, still follow the convention of academic title length but may prioritize clarity and simplicity. This strategy may be relevant to their broader or regionally based target audience, where the need for clarity is emphasized. A comparison across quartiles shows that the first quartile has the highest average title length (13.86 words), followed by Q3 (13.36 words), Q4 (11.62 words), and Q2 as the lowest (11.38 words). This trend suggests that journals in the upper quartiles (Q1 and Q3) use longer and more descriptive titles than those in the lower quartiles (Q2 and Q4). That is in line with the

premise that highly reputable journals emphasize clarity of information and comprehensive topic coverage through titles, thereby better representing the complexity of the content in the article.

In terms of title length, no journal in the sample showed an average title length in the "short title" category (≤ 8 words). All journals were in the "ideal title" category, with only a few approaching the upper threshold towards "long title" (≥ 15 words), such as SAJCD and Per Lingua. Indicates a consensus in the academic community across quartiles that an ideal title should be long enough to explain the topic but still concise to avoid confusing the reader. Thus, the title length indicates the quality of the scientific writing structure that reflects scientific communication's substance and effectiveness. Below are examples of the length title categories based on the quartile of journals.

Analyzing article titles across journals from various quartile rankings reveals a consistent pattern in title length within each quartile category, characterized by distinct word count ranges while preserving classifications into short, ideal, and long titles. Generally, titles from quartile 1 through four journals exhibit an average length falling within the ideal range of approximately 11 to 14 words, reflecting a well-balanced combination of clarity and informational completeness. This trend suggests that despite differences in journal prestige, authors consistently strive to craft sufficiently informative titles without being overly lengthy, thereby capturing reader interest and accurately conveying the core focus of the study. Consequently, maintaining an optimal title length is critical in scholarly communication across journal tiers, facilitating effective dissemination of research findings.

Linguistics Feature Forms of Article Titles

Data analysis of the linguistic features of the article title in each quartile, published in High-Impact Applied Linguistics & English Education Journals, is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 2. Linguistics Feature Form of article title

Linguistics Feature Form	Q1 (n=395)	%	Q2 (n=260)	%	Q3 (n=109)	%	Q4 (n=218)	%	Total (N=982)	%
Noun phrase	94	23.80	104	40.00	39	35.78	82	37.61	319	32.48
Compound construction	110	27.85	70	26.92	29	26.61	39	17.89	248	25.25
Full sentences	30	7.59	17	6.54	8	7.34	20	9.17	75	7.64
Verb-ing phrase	100	25.32	57	21.92	29	26.61	55	25.23	241	24.54
Prepositional phrases	61	15.44	12	4.62	4	3.67	22	10.09	99	10.08
Total	395	100	260	100	109	100	218	100	982	100

Table 3 presents the distribution of linguistic feature forms in article titles published in Applied Linguistics and English Education journals based on quartiles (Q1 to Q4). The data show that the five types of linguistic features – noun phrases, compound constructions, complete sentences, verb-ing phrases, and prepositional phrases – are used in varying ways depending on the journal quartile level. The total number of titles analyzed was 982, with Q1 contributing 395 titles, Q2 260, Q3 109, and Q4 218 titles. This variation in distribution indicates certain stylistic tendencies associated with journal rankings. Noun phrases are the most dominant Form, with 319

titles (32.48%). However, this Form is not the highest in Q1 journals; instead, it appears more frequently in Q2 journals (40.00%), followed by Q4 (37.61%) and Q3 (35.78%). In Q1 journals, its use is only 23.80%, which is relatively lower than the other quartiles. This finding suggests that Q1 journals use more complex or varied title structures. In contrast, journals Q2 to Q4 rely on nominal phrases as the primary Form, reflecting a desire to emphasize topical focus directly and efficiently.

In contrast, compound constructions are more widely used in Q1 journals (27.85%), making them the most dominant linguistic Feature in this highest quartile. This tendency decreases in Q2 (26.92%) and Q3 (26.61%) and becomes lower in Q4 journals (17.89%). Compound constructions generally reflect the complexity of ideas or the combination of two aspects of a study in one Title, an approach that tends to be more appreciated by journals with high reputations. Thus, using this Form in Q1 journals can be interpreted as a strategy to reflect the depth or dual scope of the reported studies. The use of V-ing phrases also shows an interesting pattern. Although overall, this Form is in third place (24.54%), its distribution is relatively even between Q1 (25.32%), Q3 (26.61%), and Q4 (25.23%), but slightly lower in Q2 (21.92%). V-ing phrases give a dynamic impression, indicating a process, activity, or methodological approach, and may be used to indicate the study's activeness or the researcher's active role in the research process. This almost balanced distribution suggests that this Form is relevant across quartiles, although it is not a dominant feature in any journal.

Meanwhile, prepositional phrases experience significant distribution inequality. The number of uses is highest in Q1 journals (15.44%) and decreases drastically in Q2 (4.62%) and Q3 (3.67%) but increases again in Q4 (10.09%). Prepositional phrases are used to express a study's spatial, temporal, or dimensional relationships, such as "in higher education" or "among EFL learners." The high use of this Form in Q1 journals suggests a concern for clarity of scope, while the low percentage in Q2 and Q3 may indicate that these journals are more focused on more direct title forms.

The full sentence title is the least used Form (7.64%). This proportion is slightly higher in Q4 (9.17%) and Q1 (7.59%) than in Q2 (6.54%) and Q3 (7.34%). The complete sentence form provides more explicit information, including the main findings or claims. However, its limited use suggests that most journals avoid overly descriptive forms in titles, preferring concise and to-the-point forms. High-reputation journals place greater emphasis on formality and brevity in titles.

Overall, there are significant differences in the preference for linguistic feature forms across journal quartiles. Q1 journals tend to diversify forms, using compound constructions, V-ing phrases, and prepositional phrases. In contrast, journals in the lower quartile, especially Q2 to Q4, more often use nominal phrases as the main Form. This finding suggests that the stylistic characteristics of title writing are not only influenced by the topic or field of study but are also closely related to the reputation and academic standards of the Journal. Therefore, understanding the distribution of these linguistic features is essential to help authors compose informative article titles that meet the target journal's expectations. Below are examples of the Linguistics feature form, organized by quartile of journals.

In quartile four journals, article titles also show linguistic diversity using the same structural forms but with a stronger inclination towards expressive and conceptual styles. Some titles adopt a more philosophical or reflective tone when addressing educational and language-

related themes, as seen in examples like “Signifying Goethe’s Semiotic Words...” or “Towards a Theory of Collective Care...”. suggested that quartile four journals often favor more artistic and abstract titles, although these may be less explicit in articulating the specific focus of the study.

An analysis of article titles across quartiles 1 to 4 reveals that all five linguistic structures—nominal, compound, V-ing phrase, complete sentence, and prepositional phrase—are consistently employed at each quartile level, indicating a broadly uniform pattern of structural usage. However, titles in quartiles 1 and 2 journals tend to be more concise and informative, emphasizing methodological and empirical content. In contrast, titles in quartile 3 and 4 journals are generally longer, more descriptive, and occasionally conceptual or reflective. These variations reflect differences in scholarly orientation and title composition strategies corresponding to each quartile level's specific focus and editorial preferences.

Content Feature Form of article title

Data analysis of the Content Feature of the article title in each different quartile, published in High-Impact Applied Linguistics & English Education Journals, is shown in Table 7 below.

Table 3. Content Feature Form of Article Title

Content Feature Form	(Q1) (n=395)	%	(Q2) (n=260)	%	(Q3) (n=109)	%	(Q4) (n=218)	%	Total (n=982)	%
Closure	28	7.09	12	4.62	13	11.93	13	5.96	66	6.72
Data	101	25.57	79	30.38	26	23.85	38	17.43	244	24.85
Finding	75	18.99	46	17.69	8	7.34	16	7.34	145	14.77
Method	138	34.94	74	28.46	40	36.70	53	24.31	305	31.06
Topic-only	53	13.42	49	18.85	22	20.18	98	44.95	222	22.61
Total	395	100.	260	100.	109	100.	218	100.	982	100

Table 4 presents the distribution of content feature types in the titles of scientific articles published in Applied Linguistics and English Education journals, categorized according to quartile rankings (Q1–Q4). The analysis identifies five primary content feature types: Closure, Data, Finding, Method, and Topic-only. Drawing upon a corpus of 982 titles, the data reveal distinct patterns and preferences across journal quartiles regarding the type of information emphasized in article titles. Each quartile exhibits a characteristic tendency, which may reflect strategic considerations in title construction aligned with the targeted journals' perceived prestige and editorial expectations.

The Method category is the most prevalent content feature, accounting for 305 titles (31.06%). This Form is most frequently employed in Q1 journals (34.94%) and remains prominent in Q3 (36.70%), Q2 (28.46%), and Q4 (24.31%) journals. The high proportion of methodological references suggests that highlighting research procedures or approaches is a key strategy, particularly in journals with higher or moderate reputations. This tendency indicates that methodological elements are valued not only for signaling technical rigor but also for establishing the credibility and potential impact of the research.

The Data category emerges as the second most frequent content feature (24.85%), with the highest concentration found in Q2 (30.38%) and Q1 (25.57%) journals. Its prevalence diminishes in Q3 (23.85%) and is lowest in Q4 (17.43%). Titles emphasizing data—such as the nature of the

dataset, participant characteristics, or contextual specifics—appear to reflect a deliberate effort by authors to foreground the empirical basis of their work. In higher-quartile journals, such specificity is likely appreciated for enhancing contextual clarity and identifying the scope of the research. Conversely, the lower occurrence in Q4 journals may suggest a reduced emphasis on these elements, potentially due to differing editorial priorities or authors' limited attention to empirical framing. The

The finding category ranks third in frequency (14.77%) and is particularly prominent in Q1 (18.99%) and Q2 (17.69%) journals. However, its representation declines sharply in Q3 and Q4 journals, registering at 7.34%. Titles that explicitly present research outcomes are often employed to convey the substantive contribution of a study. Their greater occurrence in high-reputation journals indicates the value placed on novelty and research significance. In contrast, such an approach is less emphasized in lower-ranked journals, possibly due to less pressure to articulate assertive claims within the Title. Titles classified under the Topic-only category—those which state only the subject matter without reference to data, method, or findings—display a markedly different pattern. While constituting 22.61% of the overall corpus, their proportion in Q4 journals is notably high (44.95%), compared to a much lower rate in Q1 journals (13.42%). This disparity suggests that titles in lower-quartile journals are more generic or descriptive, often lacking specific informational cues in higher-tier journals. Such a trend may be indicative of limited strategic title formulation or reflect editorial practices that are less rigorous in demanding detailed title content.

The Closure category, encompassing titles that convey conclusions, implications, or impacts, is the least frequent overall (6.72%). Nevertheless, this category appears to have some regularity in Q3 journals (11.93%) but is less represented in Q1 (7.09%) and even more so in Q2 (4.62%) and Q4 (5.96%). The relatively low frequency of closure-focused titles, particularly in high-ranking journals, suggests that overly conclusive titles may be avoided to preserve curiosity or openness regarding the study's contributions. As such, this format might only be employed in specific cases where the finality of the message serves a particular communicative purpose.

In summary, the findings indicate that journals in higher quartiles (especially Q1 and Q2) tend to favor titles that foreground methodological, empirical, and results-oriented content. In contrast, journals in lower quartiles (particularly Q4) are more likely to feature topic-only titles with less specific informational content. This distribution underscores the existence of differentiated editorial expectations and scholarly communication strategies across quartiles. Therefore, researchers aiming to publish in high-impact journals should be mindful of these content feature preferences when formulating their article titles, ensuring alignment with the conventions and expectations of their target publication venues. Below are examples of the Content feature form based on the quartile of journals.

The analysis of article title content features in journals in quartiles 1 to 4 revealed a consistent pattern of variation across the categories of closure, methods, data, findings, and topics alone, indicating a diversity of strategies in presenting research focus. The differences in emphasis of these content features reflect different characteristics and expectations across journal levels, with journals in quartile 1 tending to emphasize findings and methods more. In contrast, the four quartile journals are more varied in approach and context. Thus, variation in title content features not only serves as a tool.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to identify and compare the characteristics of research article titles in internationally recognized journals in the fields of Applied Linguistics and English Education, focusing on variations across journal quartiles (Q1–Q4). The results revealed significant variations across three main aspects—title length, linguistic features, and content features. These variations demonstrate a direct relationship between journal reputation and the academic writing strategies authors employ in title construction. Generally, higher-quartile journals (Q1 and Q3) tended to feature longer, syntactically complex, and more content-rich titles, whereas lower-quartile journals (Q2 and Q4) preferred shorter and simpler titles. These findings indicate that title-writing strategies reflect the differing editorial expectations and academic conventions across quartile levels.

The first major finding concerns title length. Journals in Q1 had the longest average title length (13.86 words), followed by Q3 (13.36), Q4 (11.62), and Q2 (11.38). Although all quartiles fall within the “ideal title length” range (11–15 words), this pattern suggests that higher-ranked journals favor more descriptive and informative titles. An optimally long title allows authors to convey the scope and depth of their research without sacrificing clarity. This finding aligns with those of Moattarian (2015 and Yang (2019), who observed that longer titles tend to attract readers and improve visibility in academic databases. Moreover, Kerans et al. (2020) asserted that longer titles positively correlate with scientific clarity and appeal because they provide a more comprehensive picture of the study’s content. Thus, the preference for moderately longer titles in top-tier journals can be understood as a communicative strategy that balances precision and completeness.

The analysis of linguistic features revealed that nominal phrases were the most dominant structure overall (32.48%), followed by compound constructions (25.25%), V-ing phrases (24.54%), prepositional phrases (10.08%), and full sentences (7.64%). Interestingly, the distribution varied across quartiles. Q1 journals tended to display greater structural diversity, frequently using compound and V-ing constructions that reflect conceptual complexity and analytical depth. In contrast, journals in Q2–Q4 often relied on simple nominal phrases. These results are consistent with (Cheng et al., 2012; Paiva et al., 2012), who found that syntactic variation enhances the formality and rhetorical appeal of academic titles. Hence, the linguistic structure of titles serves not only as a form of linguistic expression but also as a rhetorical strategy representing the scholarly identity and editorial standards of the publishing journal.

Regarding content features, method-based titles were the most prevalent (31.06%), followed by data-focused (24.85%), finding-based (14.77%), topic-only (22.61%), and closure (6.72%). Journals in Q1 and Q2 were more likely to feature method- and finding-oriented titles, while Q4 journals favored general topic-based titles. This suggests that highly ranked journals demand a greater level of specificity and clarity in title content to reinforce credibility and scholarly significance. Xiang & Li (2020) also noted that the inclusion of methodological and results-related information strengthens a title’s academic appeal and reader trust in research validity. Therefore, variations in content features not only highlight different stylistic preferences but also reflect the epistemological orientations and target audiences of the respective journals.

Overall, this study demonstrates that journals in higher quartiles exhibit greater linguistic and content complexity in their titles, while lower-quartile journals employ simpler and more

descriptive forms. This pattern underscores a close relationship between journal prestige and the rhetorical sophistication of academic titles. In this context, a title functions not merely as an identifier but also as an indicator of academic professionalism and communicative strategy in scholarly writing.

These findings are consistent with prior research (Hyland & Zou, 2022; Kerans et al., 2020; Yang, 2019), who suggesting that longer and syntactically complex titles enhance academic competitiveness and citation potential. However, some scholars (Anstey, 2014; Grant, 2013; Hartley, 2007) argue that excessively long titles may reduce communicative effectiveness by confusing readers. Thus, the effectiveness of a title should be viewed contextually—depending on its communicative purpose, disciplinary norms, and intended readership. This reinforces the notion that academic title construction requires balance between clarity, completeness, and scholarly appeal. The novelty of this research lies in its cross-quartile comparative approach, which is rarely applied in studies within Applied Linguistics and English Education. The study not only identifies structural and semantic differences in article titles but also explains how journal reputation shapes linguistic and rhetorical strategies adopted by authors. By integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses, this study provides new insights into the relationship between linguistic elements, content, and academic credibility in international publishing contexts.

Conceptually, this research contributes to the development of a three-dimensional analytical framework encompassing title length, linguistic structure, and content features. This framework can serve as a theoretical foundation for future studies in academic discourse analysis. Practically, the findings offer strategic guidance for academics and researchers to construct effective, credible, and publication-ready titles that align with the editorial standards of high-impact international journals.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that there are significant differences in the linguistic and content characteristics of article titles across quartiles in Applied Linguistics and English Education journals. High-ranking journals (Q1 and Q3) tend to employ longer, syntactically complex, and content-rich titles, whereas lower-ranking journals (Q2 and Q4) favor shorter, simpler, and more general topic-based titles. Therefore, the hypothesis that journal reputation influences the linguistic and content characteristics of article titles is supported.

This research expands the understanding of the relationship between journal reputation and academic writing strategies, introducing a new analytical framework that integrates title length, linguistic structure, and content dimensions. From a scholarly perspective, it enriches the literature on academic discourse analysis, while practically, it offers implications for enhancing global academic communication.

The study's limitation lies in its focus on two fields Applied Linguistics and English Education during the 2022–2024 period, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other disciplines. Future studies are encouraged to extend the framework to different academic domains. Based on these findings, authors and editors are advised to strike a balance between title length, linguistic clarity, and content relevance to enhance readability, scholarly appeal, and citation potential in academic publishing.

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