

Studies on teaching and learning foreign languages in Mexico (2012–2021)¹

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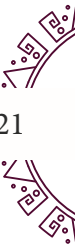
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Abstract: This article describes and reflects on research related to the teaching and learning of foreign languages in Mexico published in indexed journals between 2012 and 2021. The paper is organized into four sections: the first provides an overview of the context in which research in this field is being carried out in Mexico, while the second presents the conceptual approach and methodology used. The third section describes the central results related to the publications reviewed, and the fourth section closes with some conclusions and final reflections.

Keywords: teaching, research, Mexico (Thesaurus); state of knowledge, foreign languages (keywords suggested by the authors).

Investigaciones sobre la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras en México (2012-2021)

Resumen: El artículo describe y analiza investigaciones relacionadas con la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras en México publicadas en revistas indexadas entre 2012 y 2021. El trabajo está organizado en cuatro secciones: en la primera se ofrece un panorama general del contexto en el que se desarrolla la investigación sobre este campo en México, mientras que en la segunda se presenta el enfoque conceptual y la metodología utilizados. En la tercera sección se describen los resultados centrales relacionados con las publicaciones revisadas, para cerrar en la cuarta, con algunas conclusiones y reflexiones finales.

Palabras clave: enseñanza, investigación, México (Tesauros); estado del conocimiento, lenguas extranjeras (palabras clave sugeridas por los autores).

Pesquisa sobre ensino e aprendizagem de línguas estrangeiras no México (2012-2021)

Resumo: O artigo descreve e analisa pesquisas relacionadas ao ensino e aprendizagem de línguas estrangeiras no México publicadas em revistas indexadas entre 2012 e 2021. O trabalho está organizado em quatro seções: a primeira oferece uma visão geral do contexto no qual foi desenvolvida a pesquisa neste campo no México, enquanto o segundo apresenta a abordagem conceitual e a metodologia utilizada. A terceira seção descreve os resultados centrais relacionados às publicações revisadas, encerrando na quarta, com algumas conclusões e reflexões finais.

Palavras-chave: ensino, pesquisa, México (Tesauros); estado do conhecimento, línguas estrangeiras (palavras-chave sugeridas pelos autores)

Introduction

Documentation and analysis of research on foreign language teaching (FLT) in Mexico have been approached by several authors, including Brambila Rojo et al. (2007), Da Silva and Gilbón (1993), Ignatieva et al. (2016), and Ramírez-Romero (2007, 2010, 2013). The most recent and geographically comprehensive study was coordinated by Ramírez-Romero et al. (2022), in which the authors reviewed the research production generated in 28 states (90%) of the country. This project involved approximately 150 investigators and research

assistants affiliated with 34 higher education institutions and was part of the state of knowledge of educational research conducted in Mexico between 2012 and 2021 by the Mexican Council of Educational Research (COMIE).

Based on the production documented in the work of Ramírez-Romero et al. (2022), this article focuses on the research production published in indexed journals. The decision to include only articles published in this type of journal was intended to generate information that could be contrasted with that of other Latin American countries, assuming that journal indexing is an indication of high-quality research and as such, it could be used to conduct literature searches of articles of a similar quality.

The paper is organized into four sections: the first provides an overview of the context in which research in this field is carried out in Mexico, while the second presents the conceptual approach and methodology used. The third section describes the central results related to the publications reviewed, and the fourth section closes with some conclusions and final reflections.

National context

Given Mexico's situation as a border country with English-speaking nations both to the north (United States) and to the south (Belize), as well as the predominance of English as a lingua franca in the current era, this language is the most widely used foreign language (FL) in Mexico. Similarly, FL education in Mexico is dominated by English, which is de facto the only FL taught in the public schools that make up the country's compulsory education system, which ranges from preschool to high school (K-12). As for higher education, while other FLs are taught, English still predominates. The same is true for the training of FL teachers in both normal schools and universities, where, with the exception of a handful of degrees in teaching French, and to a much lesser extent Italian and German, the vast majority are aimed at training English teachers (Ramírez-Romero et al., 2022). As expected in the aforementioned context, research on FLT focuses predominantly on English, and according to the same authors, 80% of the academic production related to such research in Mexico is about this language and 40% is written in English (the largest percentage for FL).

Research in the field of FLT in Mexico is mainly carried out by researchers primarily affiliated with public higher education institutions. These investigators hold graduate degrees, especially at the master's level; have obtained their degrees from Mexican universities in the areas of FLT, education, or applied linguistics; and tend to produce collaboratively with colleagues from their own institutions, particularly in small teams. Additionally, only a small percentage (7%) belong to the National System of Researchers (SNI), and less than 20% have received any type of funding for their work (Ramírez-Romero et al., 2022). Among the most relevant problems faced by FLT Mexican researchers are those related to the lack of training and extrinsic motivation, as well as the scarce support they receive from their institutions, as evidenced by researchers' poor working conditions and unsatisfactory



access to specialized databases, as well as a low-quality mentoring system (Reyes Cruz and Hernández Méndez, 2014).

An additional feature of the context that frames research in FLT in the country is the existence of professional associations, specialized periodical publications, and conferences. There are 11 associations related to this field: one for FL teachers in general, three for English teachers, and the remaining seven composed of teachers of various languages (see the complete list in Ramírez-Romero et al., 2022, p. 771). There are also several specialized periodical publications, such as *Relingüística*, *Lenguas en Contexto*, *MEXTESOL Journal*, and *Estudios de Lingüística Aplicada*; and a growing number of conferences focused on FLT, especially on ELT. However, the emphasis on most associations, publications and conferences is on teaching, not on research.

Conceptual and methodological approach

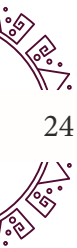
Our conceptual framework is based, as mentioned in Ramírez-Romero et al. (2022): [o]n the proposals of López and Mota (2003) of the Mexican Council for Educational Research (COMIE), who envision the state of knowledge as «the systematic analysis and review generated around a field of research during a specific period» (p. 25), whose product is «a synthetic, critical, and reflective report of academic research that has as its empirical and theoretical references the educational phenomena, topics, and/or issues published in a certain period» (Rodríguez Pineda, 2020, p. 3). (pp. 20-21)

The concept of foreign languages, on the other hand, "refers to all those languages that are not the native language of the country where they are studied or learned (i.e., the language of another country)" (Pato and Fantechi, 2012, p. 1, cited in Ramírez-Romero et al., 2022, p. 21).

The methodological approach used in our project followed in general the guidelines provided by COMIE, but instead of conducting searches on online databases and major journals we invited researchers from across the country to organize local work teams to document and analyse what was produced in each state or by authors residing in them. The idea was to cover the whole country and as many documents and researchers as possible.

The inclusion criteria for the selection of the corpus of documents were the following: the documents should be articles, graduate theses or dissertations, books, book chapters, or peer-reviewed conference proceedings that reported results from studies on FLT conducted in Mexico or about this country for researchers from Mexican institutions or working in collaboration with them, and that were published or presented between 2012 and 2021.

The selected works were concentrated by teams from each state in a national database designed by COMIE that included the following fields: topics or themes, objectives, theoretical or conceptual approach, methodology, and results. Afterwards, each team reviewed the information related to their own state, first field by field, trying to detect patterns, and



second across fields, with the purpose of detecting and analysing the main advances and problematic issues and the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological challenges looming ahead in their own states. Finally, the national coordinators of the project conducted a global analysis of the data from the entire country first following a similar path to the one used by the state teams, and then establishing comparisons with data from previous decades (for further details see Ramírez-Romero et al., 2022, pp. 22–28).

For the elaboration of this particular paper, we browsed the COMIE national database focusing exclusively on articles published in indexed journals, verifying that they included the necessary data to allow them to be understood and reviewed, especially regarding the topic, objectives, theoretical or conceptual approach, methodology, and results. We included journals that were listed in any index, such as Scopus, Latindex, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Emerging Sources Citation Index (Clarivate Analytics), the European Reference Index for the Humanities and the Social Sciences (ERIH PLUS), LatAm Plus, Matriz de Información para el Análisis de Revistas (MIAR), SciELO Citation Index (Web of Science), Sherpa RoMEO, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, and Publindex – Minciencias.

The articles selected were examined first from a quantitative perspective and then from a qualitative one. For the former, basic descriptive statistics were calculated about the following issues: themes and languages examined and in which the papers were written; objectives, theoretical approaches, educational levels, subjects, and types of populations studied, as well as the coverage and methodological designs (paradigms, approaches, and data collection techniques) of the research projects. For the qualitative analysis, we decided to carry it out in two phases: one centred only on those papers that reported research based on the qualitative paradigm and another one that encompassed all the works globally. In the first phase we focused on those writings that addressed emerging or still incipient issues in the field of FLT, trying to generate a brief mapping of how those issues were treated in FLT in Mexico in the last decade. In the second one, the purpose was to critically review all the articles, regardless of the paradigm they used, addressing the following points: theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of the studies; challenges or pending issues; and recommendations to improve research in the field.

Results

In this section, a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the selected works is carried out, followed by a global assessment of them and the field.

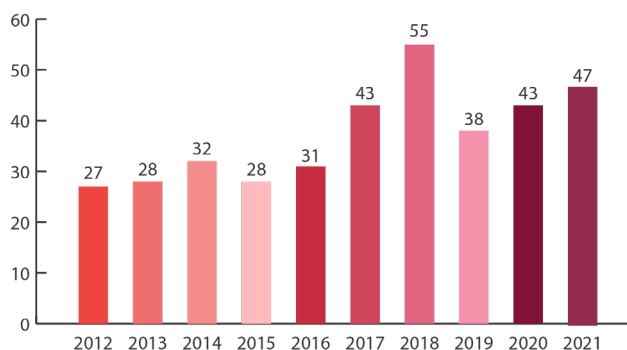
Quantitative analysis of the production

In a first search, we identified from the COMIE database 529 articles satisfying our inclusion criteria. From these, only 372 were published in indexed journals and were finally chosen for the analysis. Figure 1 shows the works published per year.



Figure 1

Articles published per year

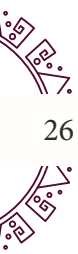
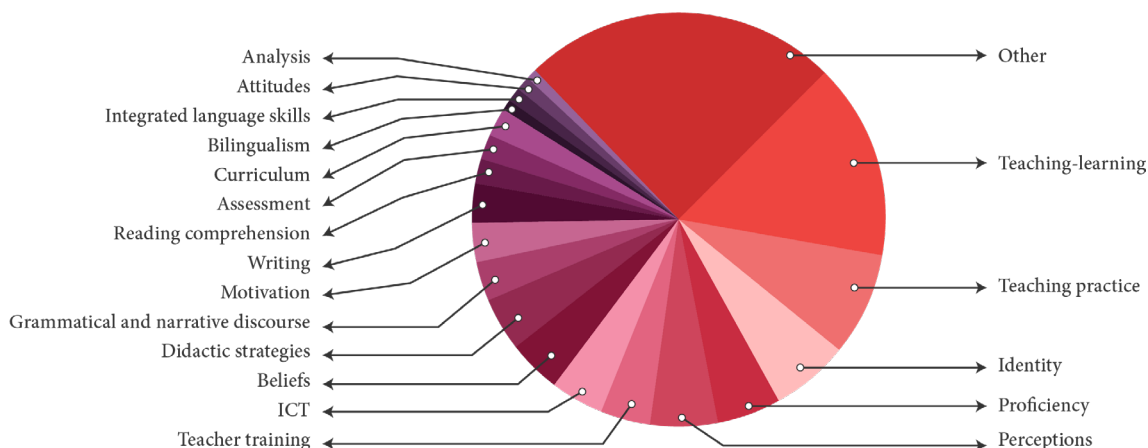


As can be seen in Figure 1, starting from 2015, the publication of articles in indexed journals in the field seemed to have experienced sustained growth; however, this was drastically affected in 2019, decreasing from 55 publications to 38. A year later, in 2020, despite the health emergency caused by COVID-19, there was a slight increase (43 papers), with a return to levels observed pre-pandemic. In the following year (2021), production increased again, so it is safe to assume that it will continue growing in the coming years.

Multiple topics were examined in the papers. As shown in Figure 2, of the 289 articles that specified the topic addressed, the ones that made up the highest percentage of works (15%, n=44) were related to the processes involved in foreign language teaching and learning, followed by research on teaching practice with 8% of the sample (n=23), and investigations on identity (n=17, 6%), language proficiency (n=15, 5%), and perceptions (n=14, 5%). The rest of the topics were studied by percentages ranging from 1 to 4 %, as shown in Figure 2, or were grouped under the category of “other” because they appeared only once, constituting the remaining 24% (n=69).

Figure 2

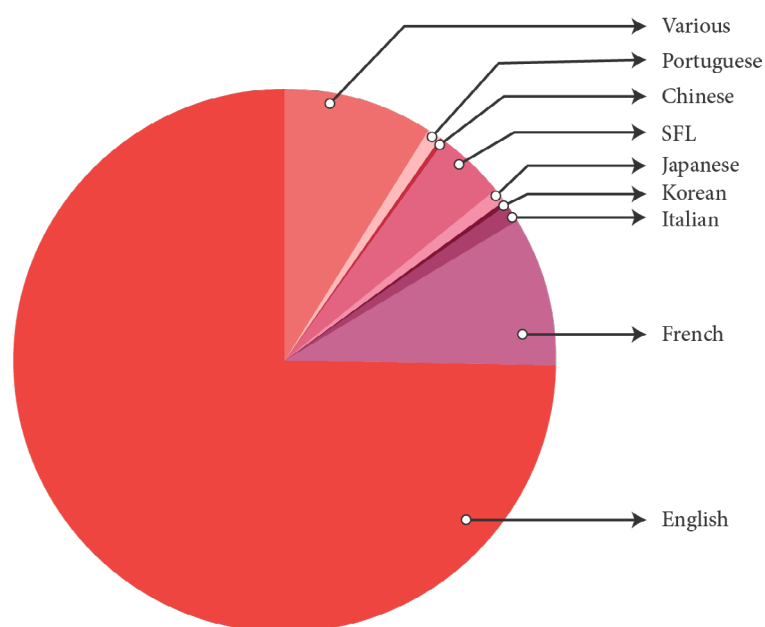
Topics of study



Only 296 publications specified the language under study, with English being the most examined one, covering 75% (n=221) of the total sample, followed by French with 9% (n=27) and several languages studied together also with 9%. Within this latter percentage, Spanish as a foreign language accounted for 4% (n=11) of the production, Portuguese for 1% (n=4), Italian and Japanese for less than 1% (n=2) respectively, and finally Korean and Chinese were placed last with only one article each (0%) (see Figure 3). The above data show a preference among researchers to focus on the examination of English as a foreign language, which may be due to the fact that English continues to be the lingua franca of the current era (Serrano, 2016), and due to the national geographical context mentioned earlier. Furthermore, since English is the language taught in most of the institutions where authors work or study, it is quite understandable that they focus on it not only as their topic of interest but also as the raw material of their professional activity, both in teaching and in writing.

Figure 3

Languages studied

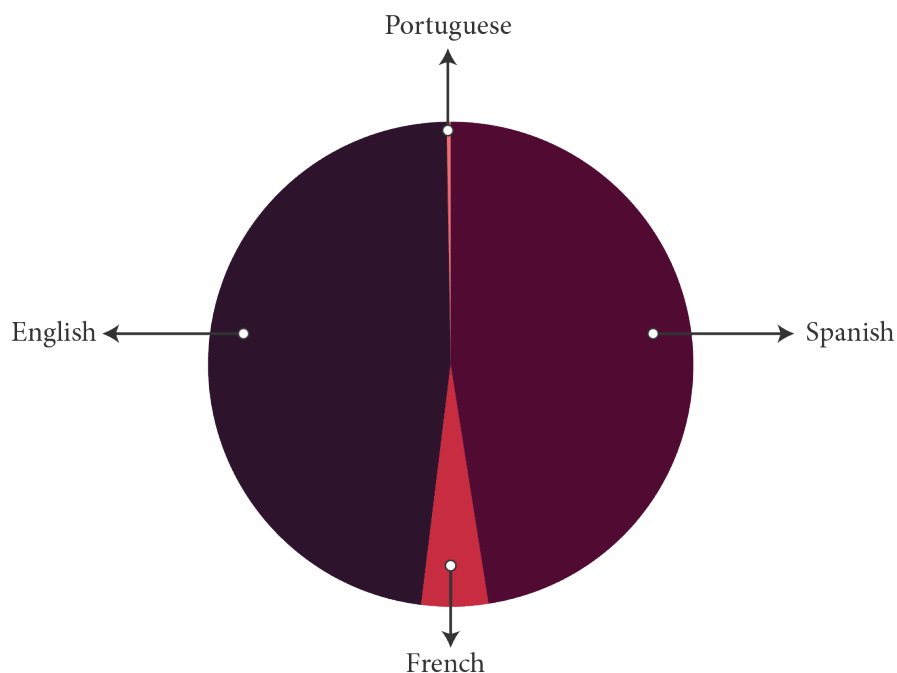


Of the 372 selected articles, the largest proportion (48%, n=178) were written in English and a very similar proportion (47%, n=176) in Spanish. Only a small number of papers were found in French (5%, n=17) and one in Portuguese (0%). Although English is the most studied language in this type of publication, its dissemination is not necessarily done using the same language; instead, authors use the language that is most widely spoken in Mexico, namely Spanish (see Figure 4).



Figure 4

Language of the articles



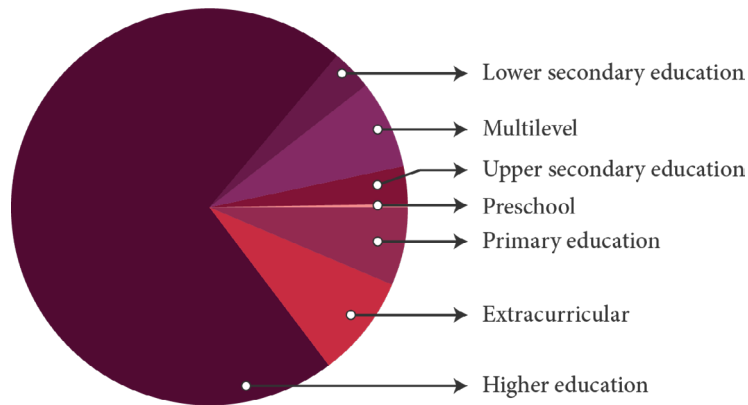
With regard to the educational levels examined, 364 articles provided information on this criterion (see Figure 5). Of this number, 72% (n=260) correspond to higher education; they are followed by studies carried out in extracurricular settings (such as language courses in private institutions or other instances), which comprise 8% (n=30); while 7% (n=26) are investigations with subjects of different educational levels or multiple levels, and the same percentage are carried out in primary education (n=24). To a lesser extent, some projects were identified in lower secondary (n=12) and upper secondary (n=11) education, with 3% each, and finally, a study was detected in preschool education, representing less than 1% of our data. This data indicates little diversification of studies in relation to educational levels, making it difficult to know what happens in other grades besides higher education. For Sayer (2023):

(...) it seems problematic that most of the students studying English in Mexico are in secundaria and primaria but only about 13% of research is done in this context. Researchers may be prioritizing projects that are easy and accessible over those that are more important but require more work to organize. (p.1)

This situation seems to be explained by the fact that the vast majority of the inquiry is conducted by researchers affiliated with university institutions and, as mentioned earlier, who have no financial support or the necessary working conditions or personal contacts to collect data somewhere else.

Figure 5

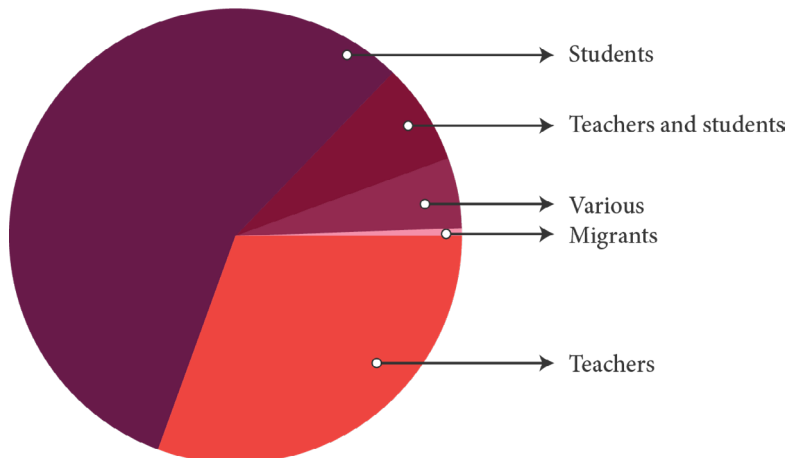
Educational levels of interest



Out of 345 articles that mentioned the subjects, as illustrated in Figure 6, over half of them focused on student performance (57%, n=195), followed by those centred on teachers with 31% (n=106) of the papers. In addition, there were pieces that analysed both teachers and learners simultaneously, with 7% (n=25). Furthermore, 18 articles in our data set obtained data from a mix of groups such as teachers, coordinators, and administrators; teachers, administrators, and state authorities; or students, teachers, and administrators. Moreover, one piece was found that examined migrants. The above percentages reflect a tendency to investigate language students and teachers, and only tangentially other educational agents. This could be attributed to the fact that teachers and learners (particularly those in graduate level) are indeed the authors of the investigations. Similar results were reported in Ramírez-Romero (2013), which shows that we have been studying the same subjects during the last few decades.

Figure 6

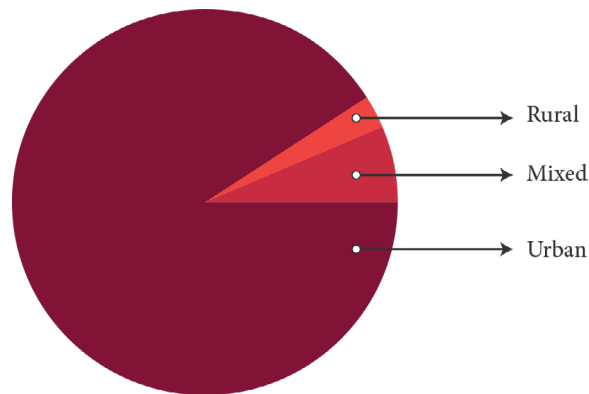
Subjects of the studies



From the 372 articles, 367 contained information about the context where the studies were conducted (see Figure 7). Out of the 367, 91% (n=334) were conducted in urban environments, 6% (n=23) in mixed settings, and the remaining 3% (n=10) were investigations carried out in rural areas. The above data suggest that in Mexico, research in the field of foreign languages has mainly been developed in urban spaces to the detriment of mixed or rural areas, despite a high percentage of the Mexican population (21% according to INEGI, 2020) living in the latter.

Figure 7

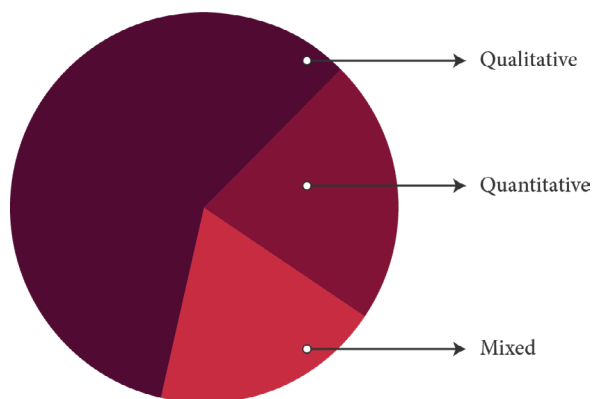
Contexts studied



As regards the paradigms employed, as shown in Figure 8, 221 (59%) were qualitative, 81 (22%) were quantitative, and 70 (19%) were mixed. These results show a predominance of qualitative research, as is the case with most research conducted on education (McMillan and Schumacher, 2005).

Figure 8

Paradigm

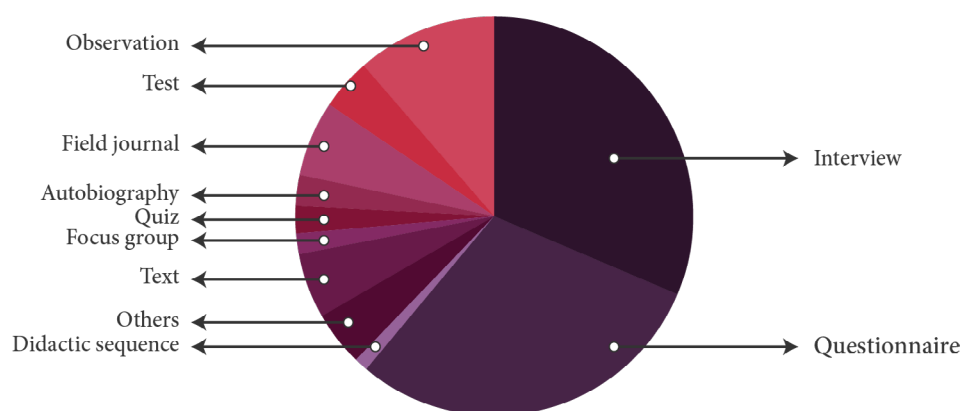


As shown in Figure 9, 31% of the studies relied on interviews for data collection, 30% used questionnaires, 11% conducted observations, and 6% recorded information in field

diaries. Other techniques and instruments such as tests, focus groups, didactic sequences, autobiographies, and exams, among others, were used in the remaining 28% of the works. These findings indicate that the instruments most frequently used by researchers are interviews and questionnaires. It is noteworthy that although the majority of the articles stated that their studies were conducted from a qualitative paradigm perspective, questionnaires, more typical of quantitative approaches, were the second most commonly used instrument, and that observations and field diaries, closer to the qualitative paradigm, ranked third and fourth, respectively. This mismatch between the paradigms and the instruments selected could be attributed to weak or insufficiently robust training in relation to the specific characteristics of the paradigms and the instruments or data collection techniques that are best suited to each of these paradigms.

Figure 9

Techniques and instruments



Qualitative assessment

Since the number of indexed articles was very large, we decided to organize this section into two subsections. In the first, we examine papers that report research conducted only from a qualitative perspective; in the second, we aim to provide a more general overview of the production, regardless of the paradigm used.

Analysis of studies conducted from a qualitative paradigm perspective

As previously mentioned, due to the complexity of reviewing all the selected articles, both in terms of their quantity (372) and the multiple approaches that can be used, we decided to focus on those that report research conducted using a qualitative approach (221), and more particularly on those (41) that addressed emerging or still incipient issues in the field of FLT that highlight social interactions, such as interculturality, identity processes, teachers' development and mentoring, migration, and literacy. The decision to pay greater attention to these items is largely related to our own professional practice and research to-



pics of interest and seeks to provide a brief mapping of how the above-mentioned themes have been treated in FLT in Mexico in the last decade.

Intercultural competence. The concept of intercultural competence in most articles included in our sample is studied from theoretical frameworks related to critical pedagogy. For example, Villalobos Rodríguez and Castillo Zaragoza (2019) question the old archetype of the native speaker as the ideal teacher. Even though the piece itself does not delve into the characteristics of intercultural competencies, it argues that, despite linguistic prejudices such as that of a single pronunciation model, other forms are valid. Intercultural competence is also examined from a sociocultural theoretical framework, as seen in Thomas-Ruzic and Encinas (2015), where the *glocal* responsibility of participants in teacher exchanges between Mexico and the United States is privileged, as it facilitates interactions between people from different nations and promotes internationalization. In a similar vein, Walsh (2011) argues the need to develop intercultural competencies to coexist in contact situations, especially travel or temporary situations that require the use of a foreign language. In these situations, there is recognition of diversity by the government, and interculturality is functional to the system and compatible with the logic of the neoliberal model to maintain social stability (Walsh, 2011). Finally, Perales Escudero (2013) goes beyond the position that sees intercultural competence as a tool for fostering coexistence between people from different nations and argues that it is also necessary to analyse the importance of cultural context and the ideologies underlying it. Additionally, he proposes that greater cultural consciousness can be achieved through critical reading.

For other authors who have also approached the issues of interculturality from the critical pedagogy perspective such as Schissel et al. (2018), one of the ultimate objectives of critical interculturality is decolonization. These authors work in contexts of linguistic diversity where integrating a translanguaging approach has been useful in questioning monolingual values in proficiency standards. Interculturality is approached as a descriptive and prescriptive concept, following both static and dynamic notions of culture and identity (Dietz, 2017).

Professional identity processes. This issue has been approached from several perspectives. For example, ethnographic approaches are privileged to address identity issues from the theoretical framework of social representations, as in the case of Villegas-Torres and Lengeling (2021) who studied the professional trajectory of a female subject for whom agency, more than the passage of time, played a fundamental role in the identity process. Some authors, such as Oxford and Cuéllar (2014), used intercultural narratives from Seligman's PERMA model to account for identity changes. Other authors, such as Crawford and García-Ponce (2019), employed a dual ethnographic methodology, derived from the theory of multivocality, to study academics' compliance with requirements of the National Council of Science and Technology. Others, including Olmos-López (2019), conducted professional auto-ethnographies as English language teachers, using introspective techniques, academic writing journals, and analysis of their own texts, while yet others, such as Mora et al. (2014), were interested in the role of



agency in the development of the professional identity of English teachers. Gutiérrez Estrada and Schecter (2018) also addressed agency, in this case teacher agency, to understand the transformation of language policy and planning where agency is a tool for linguistic maintenance. Lastly, another group of authors have examined the construction of identity, using case studies – such as Bufi Zanon (2014), who focused on prejudices and stereotypes – and have concluded that the construction of identity always goes hand in hand with cultural factors.

Teachers' development and mentoring. With regard to this issue, the importance of reflection and mentoring in the construction of intercultural competences for the training of second language teachers has been looked into by studies such as those conducted by Dzay and Mann (2017), Lengeling et al. (2019), and Flores-Delgado et al. (2020). In the first article the authors described how pre-service teachers require the guidance of their mentors to improve their reflection practices. In the second one, Lengeling et al. (2019) examined dialogue and negotiation within the framework of mentoring. In the last one, Flores-Delgado et al. (2020), based on critical thinking, explored the development of professional identity in teacher trainees through mentorship.

From other perspectives, Eid et al. (2013) addressed the training of French teachers, highlighting the importance to them of ICT in the stages of text composition and revision, while Velázquez et al. (2021) indicated that indirect corrective feedback was a good way to develop linguistic competence in the training of English teachers.

Migration. This issue has been studied from different perspectives. For example, Mora Vázquez et al. (2021) refer to three patterns of transnationalism understood as "dynamic instability" to document processes of identity and agency development. In a different vein, Núñez Asomoza (2019) explored how remittances and transnationalism have affected young people studying tertiary education in Mexico. Another group of articles focused on the formation of identity in children who have returned to Mexico, such as the ones by Avilés and Mora-Pablo (2014), Cortez et al. (2015), Toledo Sarracino and García-Landa (2018), and Mora-Pablo et al. (2015). The first authors analysed the formation of identity in transnational children and their sociolinguistic adaptation to the Mexican educational system. Cortez et al. (2015), examined the return migration of young people and concluded that the bilingual and transcultural competencies that these individuals bring with them must be recognized. Toledo Sarracino and García-Landa (2018) addressed the linguistic needs of returned students as new borderlanders. Mora-Pablo et al. (2015) also report cases of young people who acquired English as children of Mexican immigrants in the United States, concluding that this intersection has allowed them to be at the forefront of identity construction.

Very close to the previous group of studies are those centred on the examination of educational policies designed to help returning migrants as they readapt socially in Mexico with new language competencies, such as the one by Mora-Pablo and Basurto (2019) who concluded that the lack of recognition of balanced bilingualism, coupled with anti-immigrant ideologies, suggests that the Mexican educational system does not have a clear strategy to ad-



dress and integrate university students who had multilingual childhoods in the United States.

Another line of inquiry is the one that have dealt with returned young people who teach English in Mexican public schools, such as the study by Mora-Pablo et al. (2019) or those, like the one by Mora Vázquez et al. (2020), that have compared the professional identities of educators between the United States and Mexico.

Literacy. This topic has been a central concern of research on FLT in Mexico, especially at the university level. For example, Mora (2017) examined repatriated students from a graduate programme in applied linguistics and their use of English; Jiménez López (2019) highlighted the importance of formal instruction on structural forms of language in achieving grammatically correct usage in ESL; and Perales et al. (2015) examined how the development of metalinguistic awareness favours reading comprehension.

In addition, we detected works that have looked at issues related to academic literacy, such as those by Becerra-Polanco et al. (2014), who documented reading strategies for academic purposes used by learners; Garduño Moreno and Gómez Pezuela (2015), who explored students' weaknesses in the comprehension of academic texts; and Ferrá Peralta et al. (2019), who demonstrated that it is necessary to design foreign language courses for specific purposes to respond to the need for training in reading comprehension of academic articles.

The issue of evaluation is also a topic of interest for researchers who focus on academic writing. For example, Mendoza Ramos (2015) discussed how in English writing exams, students may use writing skills essential for communication but not for constructing knowledge; González et al. (2017) examined how the assessment of EFL writing is influenced by subjectivities that hinder their objectivity, while Betancourt González and Alvarado Martínez (2020) analysed how errors can account for the interlanguage production process in English language learners.

Traditionally, approaches to academic literacy have been based on structuralism and the communicative approach. However, in more recent works, a framework that seems to be increasingly used is that of the new literacy studies from a critical perspective, such as the one employed by Crhová et al. (2014) in their inquiry about teachers' beliefs related to how the development of better literacy in a first language leads to better performance in a second and subsequent languages. Along the same lines, Domínguez-Gaona et al. (2012) investigated the convenience of following the approaches of the new literacy studies in the design of materials for self-access centres.

General overview of all articles

In this section, as mentioned in the introduction, the aim is to examine, from a more general perspective, all the articles, regardless of the research paradigm used, addressing the following points: theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of the studies; challenges or pending issues; and, recommendations to improve research.



Theoretical, methodological, and educational practice contributions.

Upon reviewing all articles, we identified several significant theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions stemming from research on FL teaching in Mexico. These contributions have helped to enrich and promote positive changes in the field over the past 10 years.

In terms of theoretical contributions, we documented several innovative theoretical contributions in the study of foreign languages related to the incorporation and consolidation in Mexican FLT discourses, research, and practices of various emerging concepts and themes, such as hybrid learning, collective support, gender, multiculturalism, migration, agency, interculturality, identity processes, and literacy, that enriched and widened our views and understanding of the field.

We also identified some important methodological contributions from articles that described with precision and rigor the methodology used for data collection and analysis, thus opening the door for replication in other educational contexts. Similarly, we found studies with sophisticated methodological designs that can serve as a guide or model for future research, as well as methodologies that are increasingly being used, such as biographical narratives and ethnographies.

The findings presented in the articles also include contributions towards a better understanding of specific FLT practices and issues, primarily from research conducted on diverse social, cultural, and geographic contexts. In addition, there are contributions related to motivations, attitudes, perceptions, problems, and students' learning, as well as to the teaching approaches, beliefs, or agency of teachers, providing insights that could help improve our understanding of what happens around FLT in our country and contribute to the improvement of the teaching practices of FL teachers. Furthermore, research has contributed to a deeper comprehension of the challenges that educational actors in the field of FL in Mexico have been facing and of the importance of diversifying teaching to enhance the educational provision for traditionally marginalized subjects and groups such as indigenous people, migrants, and learners facing "barriers to learning and participation, and...eliminating educational practices that have generated segregation, discrimination, or exclusion in schools with respect to the most vulnerable or at-risk groups" (Covarrubias Pizarro, 2019, pp. 135–136). The articles reviewed have also helped to promote inclusion and respect for diversity as well as intercultural competencies, expanding our views on evaluation and providing information about students' learning, and maintaining a critical stance towards the assessment and certification processes carried out in the country and the neocolonial and discriminatory discourses and practices still in use in Mexico.

Finally, we also believe that the dissemination of research promotes the consolidation of a reflective and self-critical knowledge society, facilitates the collective construction of new epistemologies that contribute to the advancement of FLT, and opens the path for the replication of previous studies without neglecting the possibility of making contextual, methodological, and theoretical changes.

Challenges or pending issues.

As a result of our inquiries, we identified some obstacles that have hindered or slowed down research activities or the implementation of more and better research. The first ones are institutional and are related to unfavourable working conditions that those who do research in the area must face, such as teaching and administrative overload and a lack of institutional funding. The second ones are related to the practical ethos of the profession that emphasizes the use of magical solutions to everyday problems or the implementation of models designed for wealthy countries. A third obstacle is the initial and ongoing training of professionals in the field, which is limited to the uncritical reproduction of language teaching models considered successful in first-world nations. This training disregards, minimizes, or, at best, ignores the value of research, theory, or theoretical reflection.

Another pending issue, already mentioned in the examination of qualitative studies, is the depoliticization of the curriculum and the training of teachers and researchers. This absence makes it difficult to visualize and therefore address research topics that are specific to our idiosyncrasies and cultural and social contexts.

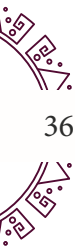
Finally, another challenge is the limited number of collaborative networks both with colleagues in the same field and with those in other disciplines to undertake and support more complex and sophisticated inter- or multidisciplinary research projects.

Recommendations to improve research.

In order to improve research processes, we believe that it is necessary for institutions to increase their support for researchers by providing them with adequate financial resources and favourable labour conditions. In relation to the predominantly practical ethos of the profession, we consider it necessary to promote spaces for critical and self-critical discussions and analyses of the working field and its requirements, the professional identity and the social and educational commitment of FL teachers, as well as the opening or strengthening of independent professional organizations, separated from employer institutions, publishers, and foreign representations.

Referring to the importance of improving training processes and professional practices, we suggest evaluating the purposes, contents, and methods of initial and ongoing training of professionals, giving greater weight to theoretical reflection, critical thinking, decolonial interculturality, and training for research or at least to encourage consultation of research to understand and solve problems related to teaching practices.

With respect to research topics, we propose to emphasize the investigation in FLT of aspects that allow for a greater and better understanding of the problems faced by our students when learning FLs, especially those in public schools located in less privileged areas who face some form of marginalization. This research should provide elements for critically reviewing the purposes, objectives, and content of FLT, as well as the relevance of teaching FLs in the Mexican public education system. Additionally, research in the field should inclu-



de the examination of other foreign languages, Spanish, and indigenous languages as foreign languages for speakers of other countries. Along the same lines, we reiterate that it is urgent to move towards an intersectional interculturality paradigm that considers the diversity of diversities from a multidimensional approach of varied and even divergent perspectives, allowing the study of identities as processes and phenomena of discrimination that occur in those processes. Finally, in order to expand and sophisticate the research on FLT, we suggest promoting a greater number of interinstitutional and interdisciplinary research networks and projects, and incorporating digital tools that will help streamline the processes of data collection and analysis.

Conclusion and final reflections

In this paper, we documented and reviewed 372 research articles published in indexed journals from 2012 to 2021 in FLT. Among the main findings, we can highlight the following: indexed papers experienced a sustained growth from 2015 to 2019, and after slowing down temporarily they seem to have resumed their upward path in subsequent years; a wide variety of topics have been studied, with a marked preference for conducting inquiries about English; research has been focused mainly on higher education institutions located in urban areas and on teachers and students from that level, and the greatest proportion was framed in the qualitative paradigm and used interviews and questionnaires for data collection.

Our work aimed to provide a critical account of the achievements in the field, as well as the challenges that researchers have had to face in conducting their investigations. Based on the analysis carried out, our recommendations are to improve research projects, as well as to optimize the working conditions of researchers and the initial and ongoing training of professionals.

As a temporal closure of the ideas presented here, but also as an opening to new positions and perspectives, we want to conclude in the light of the articles we examined that, even though the field of research in FLT has not experienced the quantitative and qualitative growth we forecasted a decade ago, we did notice some progress in terms of a greater number of pieces and an incipient shift towards an explicit decolonial interculturality. In addition, although the theoretical approaches, methodological proposals, and topics of interest of researchers from hegemonic countries are still predominantly employed in the field, the adoption by a small but growing group of researchers of critical positions and of emerging theoretical and methodological approaches, as well as the study of issues more in line with our realities and contexts, constitute from our perspective a positive advancement.

In this sense, we anticipate that research in FLT in Mexico will strengthen and have a greater impact on teaching, educational practices, and on curriculum design and educational and linguistic policies. In summary, despite the challenges and the work ahead, we remain hopeful.



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