State of knowledge of research on the teaching-learning process of foreign languages in Colombia (2011-2021)[1]

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Abstract: Foreign language teaching in Colombia has received attention over the past 15 years. Such attention has materialized in government investment and research by the academic community. However, further analysis is required so that the academic community of Foreign Languages can make informed decisions and guide efforts to improve the quality of language teaching in the country. This paper reviews the literature on the teaching and learning processes of foreign languages from 2011 to 2021. The purpose of the study is to identify theoretical and methodological trends and potential areas for development. Thus, the PRISMA guidelines were used for systematic reviews and meta-analyses. After applying inclusion, exclusion and thematic relevance criteria in Scopus, WoS (Web of Science), Publindex and Google Scholar, a sample of 129 studies was formed. The selected studies show trends in terms of language, region of publication, research methods, and topics. Our conclusions indicate that foreign language research in Colombia is mainly related to the teaching of English. There is a clear preference for qualitative methodologies and a predominant focus of research on technology and its associated topics. Finally, there is a marked disparity in regional research outcomes, revealing systemic inequalities in the opportunities and resources available for academic research and highlighting the urgency of channeling efforts to improve underrepresented regions, ensuring that all areas of Colombia have an equitable position in the global academic context.

Keywords: learning, Ecuador, teaching (Thesauri); foreign languages (Keywords suggested by the author)

Estado del Conocimiento de las Investigaciones sobre la Enseñanza y el Aprendizaje de Lenguas Extranjeras en Colombia (2011-2021)

Resumen: La enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en Colombia ha recibido atención durante los últimos 15 años. Dicha atención se ha materializado en inversión gubernamental e investigación por parte de la comunidad académica. Sin embargo, se requiere mayor análisis para que la comunidad académica de Lenguas Extranjeras pueda tomar decisiones informadas y orientar esfuerzos para mejorar la calidad de la enseñanza de idiomas en el país. Este trabajo revisa la literatura sobre los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje de LE desde 2011 hasta 2021. El propósito del estudio es identificar tendencias teóricas y metodológicas y áreas potenciales de desarrollo. Se utilizaron las directrices PRISMA para revisiones sistemáticas y meta análisis. Tras aplicar criterios de inclusión, exclusión y relevancia temática en Scopus, WoS (Web of Science), Publindex y Google Scholar, formamos una muestra de 129 estudios. Los estudios seleccionados muestran las tendencias en cuanto a idioma, región de publicación, métodos de investigación y temas. Nuestras conclusiones indican que la investigación en lenguas extranjeras en Colombia se relaciona principalmente con la enseñanza del inglés. Hay una clara preferencia por metodologías cualitativas y un enfoque predominante de la investigación en la tecnología y sus temas asociados. Existe una marcada disparidad en los resultados de la investigación regional, lo que revela desigualdades sistémicas en las oportunidades y los recursos disponibles para la investigación académica

y pone de relieve la urgencia de canalizar los esfuerzos para mejorar las regiones menos representadas, garantizando que todas las áreas de Colombia tengan una posición equitativa en el ámbito académico mundial.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje, Colombia, enseñanza (Tesauros); lenguas extranjeras, revisión (palabras clave sugeridas por los autores).

Estado do Conhecimento da Pesquisa sobre Ensino e Aprendizagem de Línguas Estrangeiras na Colômbia (2011-2021)

Resumo: O ensino de línguas estrangeiras na Colômbia tem recebido atenção durante os últimos 15 anos. Essa atenção se materializou em investimentos governamentais e em pesquisas da comunidade acadêmica. Contudo, são necessárias mais análises para que a comunidade acadêmica de Línguas Estrangeiras possa tomar decisões informadas e orientar esforços para melhorar a qualidade do ensino de línguas no país. Este trabalho revisa a literatura sobre os processos de ensino e aprendizagem de LE de 2011 a 2021. O objetivo do estudo é identificar tendências teóricas e metodológicas e áreas potenciais de desenvolvimento. Foram utilizadas diretrizes PRISMA para revisões sistemáticas e meta-análises. Após aplicação de critérios de inclusão, exclusão e relevância temática no Scopus, WoS (Web of Science), Publindex e Google Scholar, formamos uma amostra de 129 estudos. Os estudos selecionados mostram tendências em idioma, região de publicação, métodos de pesquisa e temas. Nossas conclusões indicam que a pesquisa em línguas estrangeiras na Colômbia está principalmente relacionada ao ensino de inglês. Há uma clara preferência por metodologias qualitativas e um foco predominante de pesquisa em tecnologia e temas associados. Há uma disparidade acentuada nos resultados da investigação regional, revelando desigualdades sistémicas nas oportunidades e recursos disponíveis para a investigação académica e destacando a urgência de canalizar esforços para melhorar as regiões sub-representadas, garantindo que todas as áreas da Colômbia tenham uma posição equitativa no campo académico global.

Palavras-chave: aprendizagem, Equador, ensino (Tesauros); línguas estrangeiras (palavras-chave sugeridas pelo autor)

Introduction

The Colombian linguistic landscape is rich and diverse. Recognition of such richness and diversity has been a long process; the most important milestone is the 1991 Colombian constitution. This document does not only recognize the country's linguistic and cultural diversity but, at the same time, the right to bilingual education. Guerrero-Nieto and Quintero-Polo (2021) explained that public policies related to language teaching in Colombia began with this Constitution, which presents Spanish as the official language throughout the Colombian territory while recognizing local and ethnic languages as official languages in their territories. This document still needs to mention foreign languages, and it is with the promulgation of the General Education Law, or Law 115, in 1994 that educational ins-

titutions are mandated to teach foreign languages from elementary school onwards. The Ministry of Education conceives foreign language as a synonym for English. Consequently, bilingualism was also associated with English, reinforced by the Curriculum Guidelines for Foreign Languages publication in 1999, which kept English as the foreign language in the Colombian educational system. (Guerrero-Nieto and Quintero-Polo, 2021).

Colombian educational system ranges from preschool to the higher education level. Primary education lasts five years, and secondary education lasts six years. After secondary education, citizens can opt to pursue technical or higher education. Today, the Colombian educational system is regulated by national standards issued by the Ministry of Education. As mentioned earlier, Spanish is considered the official language, and the 65 aboriginal languages of the different ethnic groups are recognized as the main languages for such populations and Spanish as their second language. However, English has been given a principal place, and different nationwide plans have been set up and financed to develop citizens' English language proficiency levels to keep up with the demands of The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The predominance of English has happened at the expense of the Spanish, indigenous, and other foreign languages that have been back-grounded in investment and academic competence development. In other words, the priority given to the English language over the official and aboriginal languages has created a social imaginary eroding cultural and linguistic identity features and creating socio-cultural imbalances. That is, English language teaching has been critiqued by scholars who have framed these practices as the continuation of historical colonialism and imperialism, reinforcing ideological notions of global power structures and not necessarily aligned to educational goals and human development agendas but to the global neoliberal demands for mere economic growth. (Guerrero-Nieto and Quintero-Polo, 2021).

Governmental efforts related to foreign language teaching and learning have been varied regarding initiatives and regulations. However, as briefly introduced earlier in this paper, the Colombian Ministry of Education has proposed and developed a series of initiatives related mainly to English language teaching. Usma-Wilches (2009), listed the English Syllabus (1982), the COFE project (1991), the General Law of Education (1994), and the Curricular Guidelines for Foreign Languages (1999) among the initiatives. In the last ten years, policies related to English language teaching have continued to emerge.

The national bilingual program launched in 2005 by the Ministry of Education is a well-recognized language policy. This program aimed at contributing to "the education of citizens capable of communicating in English, with internationally comparable standards" (MEN, 2006, p. 6). Within this program, the government developed the national standards for foreign language teaching and learning, nationwide professional development programs aiming at language teachers' proficiency development and the updating of their teaching practices, standardized testing of Colombian students' English skills, and guidelines for English teaching institutions accreditation processes (Herazo et al., 2012). As reported by

Pérez et al. (2019), the political changes in the Colombian government have given rise to changes or adjustments to initiatives. The change in the name of the National Bilingual Program to the Foreign Language Competence Development Strengthening Project in 2010 is an example of such variation. The constant change of programs and the changing nature of initiatives have also fueled researchers' proposals and academic publications.

The publication of the English National Standards has originated numerous research endeavors and growing scholarship that explore, among other issues, the pertinence of such standards, the underlying ideology, the distance between these standards, and the practice and realities of English language teachers in Colombia. Another issue that has received attention is the ideological nature of governmental programs and initiatives. Some publications in the field have pointed out that Colombian language policies reflect processes of internationalization and neoliberal globalization by emphasizing the preparation of citizens to access universal knowledge to eventually generate social and economic development for the country (Reyes, 2015) and neglecting human development goals crucial to Colombians in post-conflict times (Birch, 2009).

The language and methodology education programs for in-service teachers deriving from governmental initiatives have been the subject of reflection, critique, and evaluation of students' language skills. The design and release of textbooks (English, please!) have also been researched, although not as extensively, and the presence of international volunteers in charge of co-teaching English with local teachers to strengthen students' and teachers' language development (Bonilla and Tejada-Sánchez, 2016) have received both criticism and praise.

In sum, publications account for themes and needs deriving from the Colombian context (Lucero and Castañeda-Londoño, 2021). Researchers have also associated the increase in publications with the formalization of research in initial teacher education programs, academics' involvement in research in national and international scenarios, and their subsequent interest in sharing their work (Cárdenas, 2021). In a similar vein, Mosquera Ayala (2019) has referred to the increasing number of publications in English language teaching journals (104) in comparison with other general education journals, such as TICs (61) and Pedagogy (71) between 2015 and 2019.

In this context and over the last decades, Colombia's English language teaching field has received considerable attention from governmental agencies, media, and scholars. The underlying narrative is that initiatives and efforts in this field would redefine the quality of foreign language education for Colombian citizens. Despite the growing interest and emerging research, there is a need to explore the meaning of such research for the foreign language teaching or ELT community in Colombia in this case. In this regard, scholars (Cárdenas, 2021; Lucero and Castañeda-Londoño, 2021) have made a call for analyzing "the rich, yet scattered scholarship" (Mejía-Jiménez, 2011, p. 9) created in Colombia that would allow deriving implications that contribute to the development of English language teaching based on evidence obtained from a systematic analysis.

This review arises from the importance placed on Foreign Language teaching in Colombia due to its role in shaping the country and its citizens into an interculturally aware community that recognizes the importance of foreign languages as part of a well-rounded education. It also aims to make visible the potency and emergence of locally produced scholarship. However, there has yet to be a comprehensive analysis of research in the field that allows drawing a map of the FL teaching and learning terrain. However, several reviews of this issue have progressed toward a greater understanding of some theoretical and methodological issues concerning FL teaching and learning in Colombia (see *How Journal*, special issue, 2021). However, there are still some questions that still need to be solved. Therefore, the theoretical and methodological trends in FL teaching and learning in Colombia, along with the potential areas of development, should be explored in greater depth, thus allowing decision-makers to move forward using evidence systematized from previous research.

In short, this review synthesizes the relevant literature on FL teaching research to analyze trends related to this topic. Specifically, this study raises two research questions:

Q1. What are the theoretical and methodological trends in FL teaching and learning in Colombia?

Q2: What are the potential areas of development in FL teaching and learning in Colombia?

Methodology

This research was conducted as a state-of-the-art article following the criteria developed by Moher et al. (2009) in the PRISMA guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses group). The study adhered to these parameters to improve the reliability and relevance of the analyzed data.

Procedure for searching, identifying, and selecting articles

The literature search was performed in three online databases: Scopus, Publindex, and Google Scholar. Additionally, the search was advanced using Colombian-indexed journals such as HOW, Profile, GIST, Íkala, Matices, Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal, Lenguaje, and Zona Próxima, among other journals published by Colombian universities.

As for the selection of declared sources, the databases provide indexed, high-quality results warranted by their widespread international recognition and reliance. Secondly, the journals guarantee that the information is representative of the Colombian context, which is crucial for this research.

Regarding identifying the articles, the search included research published between 2011 and 2021. The previous decade was outlined to analyze the current state of the country's FL field. Furthermore, the key terms used were: 'FL Colombia,' 'Foreign Language Teaching,' and 'Foreign Language Learning.' Additionally, for an advanced search in field-related journals, other descriptors were referenced, such as: 'Skills,' 'Policy,' 'assessment,' 'pre-service teachers,' 'ICTs,' 'method,' and 'curriculum.'
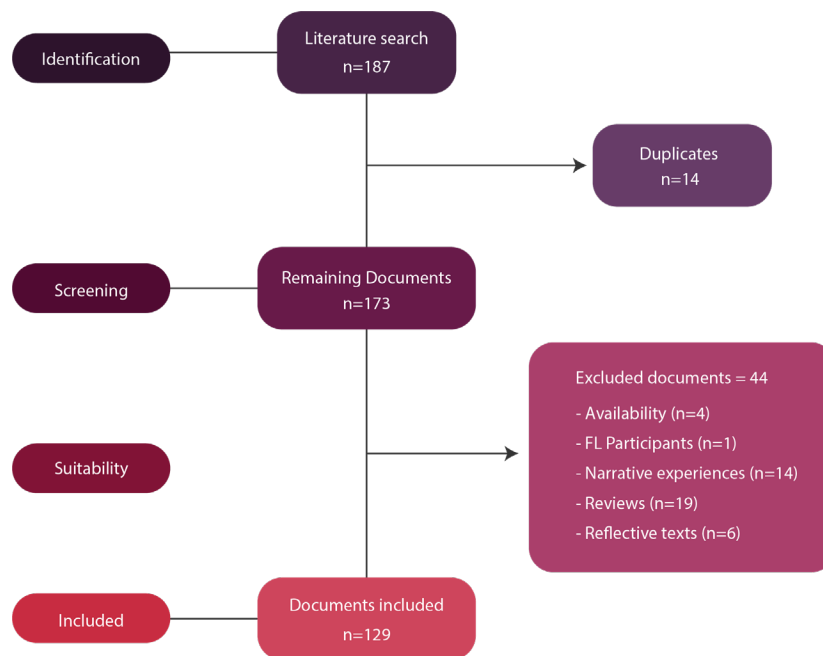
Criteria for inclusion

The ultimate list consisted of articles that were (1) published from January 2011 to December 2021; (2) based on reports of investigations that have been concluded or were about to be concluded; (3) structured with a problem or research objective, approach or theoretical framework, methodology, and results; and (4) related to the teaching or learning of foreign languages in Colombia.

In terms of the exclusion criteria, documents were deleted if they (1) were not fully available for open access, (2) did not include students or teachers, or (3) were narrative experiences, systematic reviews, reflective texts, or theoretical proposals.

Figure 1

Study selection process

Selection procedure

To develop the selection process, the researchers created a shared registration document. The latter action was significant in accurately analyzing the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Moreover, multiple copies of the registration document were created after modifications in the screening process. The purpose was to compile the excluded and included documents, avoiding article deregistration.

The aspects taken into consideration for article scrutiny are listed as follows:

- Reference
- Year
- Author (s)
- Journal

- Abstract
- Research topic
- Objectives
- Population type
- Colombian regions
- Key findings
- Keywords
- Language
- Theoretical framework
- Study Coverage
- Methodological design

We needed to visualize data to have a comprehensible look at the conglomerate of studies. To that end, we used tools such as the computing platform Jupiter, along with two Python libraries: Matplotlib and Pandas. These allow researchers to visually represent the insights from the data in mathematical graphs such as pie charts and bar graphs. The mentioned graph representation was relevant to reviewing data on research trends in terms of years and place of publication, research subject, language, and research methodologies akin to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods.

Study selection and data extraction

In the first instance, 187 articles were compiled in the registration document. Then, the screening process was carried out, and as a result, a total of 129 studies remained without duplicates in the referenced publications from 2011 to 2021 in the FL Colombian field.

This total of 129 articles was subject to scrutiny based on the criteria for inclusion, excluding 44 studies due to availability, participants, and type of studies. The primary reason for exclusion was the type of studies; 39 were narrative experiences, reviews, and reflective texts (articles 14, 19, and 6, respectively). A smaller sample was excluded after bearing in mind that one study did not include language teachers or learners among the participants, and the other four studies were not available for open access. As the PRISMA declaration guidelines indicate, this procedure is represented in a flow chart (see Figure 1).

Data analysis procedure

Regarding analyzing and interpreting the literature related to foreign language teaching in Colombia, we used descriptive, qualitative, and quantitative techniques in conjunction with studying keywords, methods, and research results. We carried out content analysis employing qualitative methodologies to get in-depth insights into the results and implications of the data analysis. In addition, we emphasized categorizing the research to reduce the overlap between the texts included.

We recorded the data into a spreadsheet in which we identified the most relevant information to analyze each of the selected articles. We organized the columns under the following headings: reference, author, year, Journal, abstract, objectives, theoretical framework, population type, study coverage (local, regional, national, or global), Colombian region (if mentioned), methodological design, key findings, and assessment/conclusions. We classified

the studies considering the type of study, the methodology used, and their general characteristics. Furthermore, we organized the articles according to the database in which they were found, the Journal in which they were indexed, and their year of publication.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings and their discussion considering relevant literature. Results are organized around guiding questions.
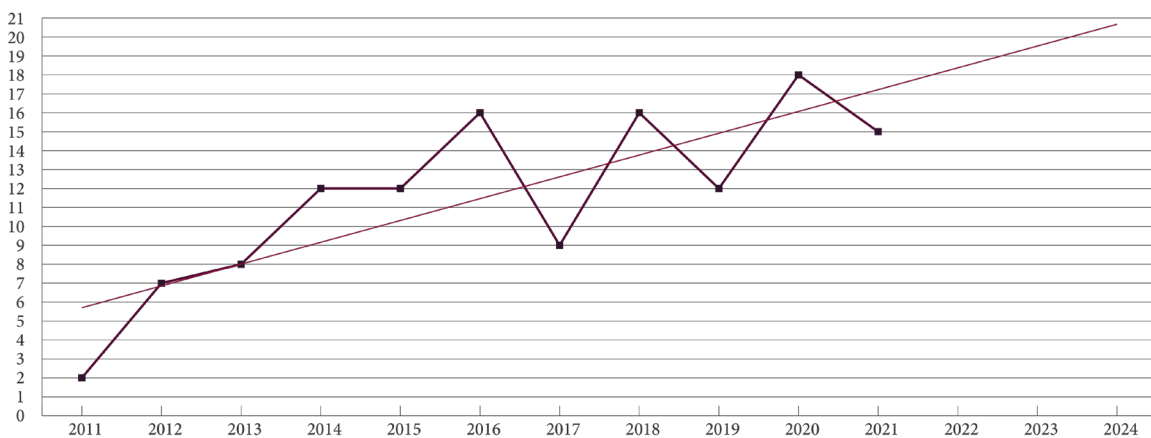
Q1. What are the theoretical and methodological trends in FL teaching and learning in Colombia?

A quantitative look

The number of articles published in Colombia's language teaching and learning field has been increasing since 2011, reaching its maximum in 2020 with 18 articles.

Figure 2

Articles published 2011-2021

The publication trend is characterized by peaks and valleys in the last five years and a gradual rise in the previous five years. There is an unstable trajectory, which might suggest that we have unstable research and publishing traditions in the FL field in Colombia. In a recent article, Cárdenas (2021) indicated a surge in publications and explained that this could be related to the institutions' interest in encouraging research production and dissemination as part of their national and international agendas. Increased participation of language teachers and teacher educators in research endeavors could lead to increased "contributions to the productivity and visibility of both the country and its educational institutions" (Cárdenas, 2021, p. 33). In a more general outlook, Narvaez-Cardona et al. (2016) underline that in Latin America, the academic literacy tradition is emerging, and there is no systematic coherence in publications across the different educational levels and probably across timelines.

Regarding the population and context of the studies, it is interesting to note that most

studies (84) focus on students from schools (42) and universities (39). Out of the 39 studies developed in the university context, nine were public, five were private, and 25 did not specify the nature of the university. Out of the 129 articles, 31 were about teachers.

Table 1

*Distribution of population and context*

Population		Times used in articles		
Students	84	University	School	Not specified
		39	42	3
University	39	Public	Private	Not specified
		9	5	25
Teachers		31		
Others		19		

Language of publication

This section reports the distribution of languages used in the articles reviewed. The languages of publication are English (106 articles) and Spanish (23 articles), as depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Language of publication

Languaje distribution in 129 articles

Español 17,8%

English 82,2%
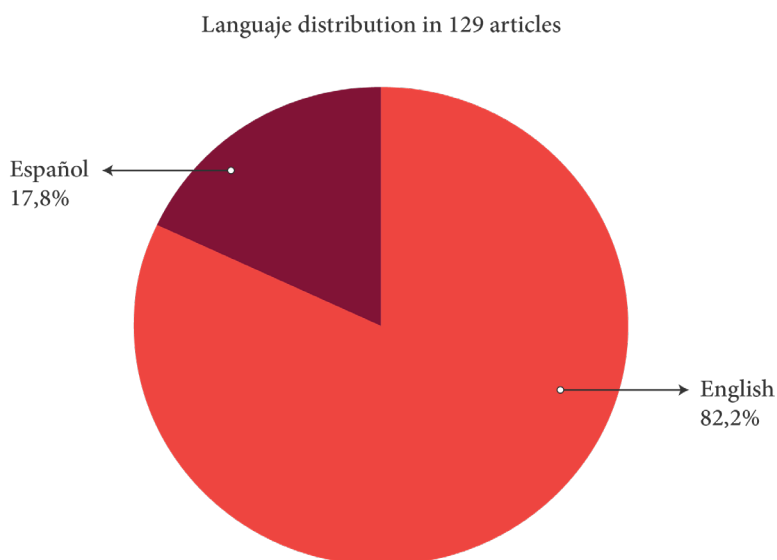
These results, regarding the linguistic distribution of the articles, indicate the predominance of English in academic publications related to FL. Since writing and publishing in English is not easy for ELT teachers (Cárdenas, 2021), it may be worth exploring the reasons for this pattern in our context.

The preference for publishing in a foreign language instead of Spanish, the official language in Colombia, may have to do with most articles about English language teaching. Hence, writing in the language subject of research may be coherent. Besides, journals and educational institutions are interested in disseminating their work internationally to position the country and the institution's research and academic productivity (Cárdenas, 2021). The status of English as an international language may serve this purpose (Crystal, 1997).

Methodology reported in studies

As shown in Figure 4, most of the articles reviewed (96) used a qualitative methodology. In contrast, mixed and quantitative methodologies showed a lower predominance with 30 and 3 articles, respectively. From these findings, one might identify a preference for qualitative methodologies in studying, analyzing, and researching foreign language teaching in Colombia. This preference might result from many undergraduate and graduate programs' adherence to a qualitative paradigm tradition owing to the complexities of the English language learning processes (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013). In contrast, fewer researchers have opted to carry out quantitative studies, and a slowly increasing trend in assuming a mixed research approach, a tendency that has become popular since mixed-method research can analyze educational problems from multiple angles, and researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding and capture the complexities of teaching and learning English.

The prevalence of qualitative methodologies has been increasing in foreign language teaching (Nimehchisalem, 2018; Richards, 2009). This tendency coincides with what is reported in a study by Lopez-Pinzón et al. (2021) in which qualitative approaches were predominant and recognized by different stakeholders as pertinent to conduct research in their contexts. Some academics associate these movements in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) as the result of trying to understand the complex teaching and learning particularities that have arisen in the Colombian teaching context (Castañeda-Londoño, 2020).

In the case of the articles under the qualitative methodology umbrella, the majority were case studies in which researchers used data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews, recordings of interactions, reflective records, field notes, and surveys. Articles such as *EFL Learners' Intercultural Competence Development Through International News* (Gómez-Rodríguez, 2018), *Intercultural Communicative Competence: In-Service EFL Teachers Building Understanding Through Study Groups* (Cuartas Álvarez, 2020), and *Fostering Intercultural awareness through vocabulary activities in an EFL classroom* (Bohórquez, 2018) are examples of articles with a qualitative methodology. The study by Lopez-Pinzón et al. (2021) also found case studies ranking as the second most selected option for conducting research in the Colombian context, after action research was rated number one. In contrast, Granados-Beltrán (2018) found action research to be the default method for many educators, and many have used it in an instrumental way devoid of its ideological foundations and purposes. The study by Guapacha-Chamorro and Chaves-Varón (2023) found this to be the case in a review done about writing, too. This misconception of action research has also permeated

many undergraduate programs, disfavoring reflective practice, pedagogical empowerment, professional development, and practical knowledge in student teachers and educators.

Concerning the mixed-method methodology group, a growing trend is detected in the data, representing 23.3% of the reviewed articles. Compared with the qualitative methodology, the mixed approach articles rely on tests and other quantifiable data collection strategies while maintaining instruments such as interviews. Examples of articles under this methodology are *Self- and Peer-Assessment of Student-Generated Podcasts to Improve Comprehensibility in Undergraduate EFL Students* (Cadena-Aguilar and Álvarez-Ayure, 2021), *The Use of Language Learning Apps as a didactic tool for EFL vocabulary building* (Guaqueta and Castro-Garces, 2018) and *Demotivating Factors in Learning English as a Foreign Language: Case in Colombian vulnerable rural schools* (Abaunza et al., 2020). Lopez-Pinzon et al. (2021) also detected the growing interest in mixed methods. The authors pose that this "method seems to be a trend since respondents referred to it as a practical way to combine varied techniques and instruments to enrich data collection and analysis" (Lopez-Pinzon et al., 2021, p.31). It seems the trend has continued to grow.

Studies developed under a quantitative methodology were scarce in this review. The three studies using the quantitative methodology used questionnaires, surveys, tests, and typical data collection procedures of a quantitative nature. Studies such as *Aceptación y uso del aprendizaje de idiomas asistido por dispositivos móviles por parte de profesores de idiomas de educación superior* (García-Botero et al., 2022) and *Can Working Memory Strategies Enhance English Vocabulary Learning?* (Ibarra-Santacruz and Martínez-Ortega, 2018) put this methodology to use.

Figure 4

Distribution of articles by methodology
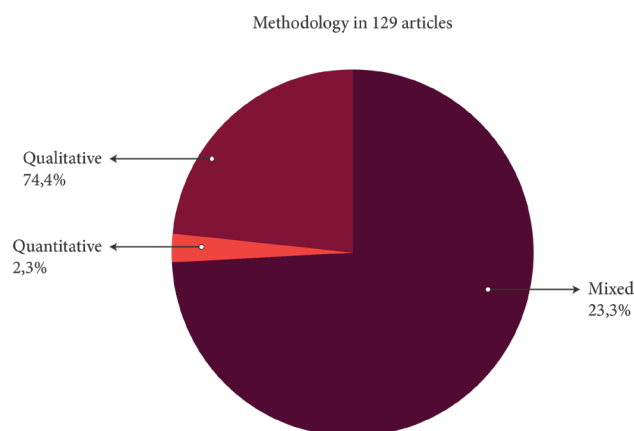
Methodology in 129 articles

Qualitative 74,4%
Quantitative 2,3%
Mixed 23,3%

Quantitative research methods that aim to identify and manipulate variables have been scantily used; this suggests an epistemological and ontological misalignment with a positivist positioning towards knowledge construction that relies on empirically testing strategies. Foreign language teaching researchers may rely on something other than quantitative

methods because language learning and teaching is a complex and multifaceted process that involves numerous variables and individual differences. Therefore, they find qualitative methods, such as interviews, observations, and case studies, better suited to help them understand language learners' and teachers' experiences, motivations, and perceptions. These methods capture rich, nuanced data that may need to be more easily quantifiable. However, it also indicates a need for more literacy in quantitative research methodologies.

Topics addressed in publications

The following section is about the frequency and percentage of the topics reported in the articles as derived from the keywords. The most frequent topic identified in this review is technology and related themes (16.74%). Here, we grouped 37 research studies about information and communication technologies using computers, apps, social media, games, and remote teaching and learning experiences. Mosquera Ayala (2019) also found ICT to be a frequent research focus in Colombian journals between 2015 and 2019; however, in a lesser proportion (6.2%). Granados-Beltrán (2018) found a similar interest in technology-related topics in a study at the BA level.

The second most frequent topic is skills (9.95%). The frequency of research in skills coincides with what is reported by Lopez-Pinzon et al. (2021) in their review of research conducted in Master programs in Colombia and a review of BA research projects conducted by Granados-Beltrán (2018). Concerns about skills development start in their undergraduate studies, extend to their graduate studies, and then to publications in the field. Intercultural education and culture have also been a research trend in the last decade. This tendency has been identified in previous studies (Moya-Chaves et al.,2018) associated with the need for FL learners to expand their vision of others and for teachers to include educational experiences that promote localized intercultural knowledge construction. Such constructions must involve a research orientation from teachers and students and an interdisciplinary approach. Many researchers have been integrating cultural values, beliefs, customs, and materials in this area as meditational tools for language learning from a decolonial perspective. Vocabulary is the following most frequent topic found in the review.

Then, we find articles related to communicative competence and articles referring to rural schools. Communicative competence remains a topic of interest in FL research and a challenge. The tendency is for teachers in state and rural schools to resort to traditional methodologies (e.g., grammar translation method and drills) that translate into few opportunities for students to complete communicative/functional tasks (Becerra-Posada et al., 2022).

Assessment is an emerging topic in the Colombian context. This local tendency coincides with the global one in language testing and assessment to consider teachers' Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) as a core component of the foreign language teaching profession requiring attention. This emerging trend reflects the advances happening at the global level (Giraldo, 2021). The assessment-related articles are followed by articles related to autonomy, awareness, beliefs, motivation, the experience of pre-service or novice teachers, and spea-

king. Collaborative learning is mentioned six times, followed by scattered topics such as community, critical thinking, curriculum, didactic, experience, grammar, metacognition, needs analysis, academic writing, discourse, identity, and the Common European framework.
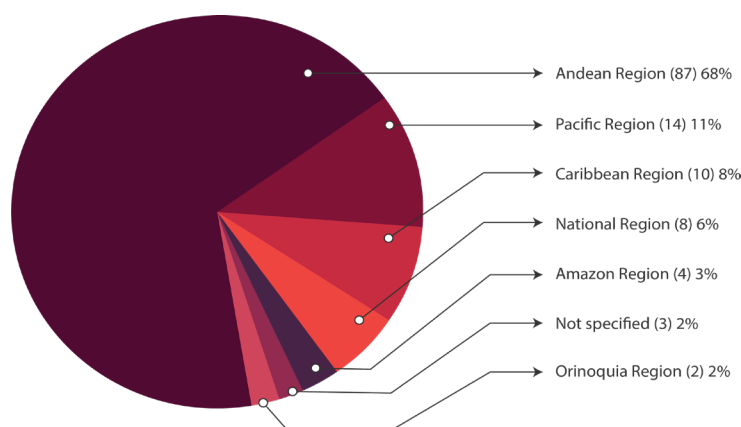
Topics with one mention include bilingualism, decolonization, inclusion, blind people, literary development or competence, and policy. The scanty research on these topics could have different readings: these topics are emerging due to scholars beginning to assume a more critical position towards English teaching and learning ideologies. Another reading may be that researchers have mainly conformed to current research trends. It also may suggest that initial and continuous teacher education is slowly imprinting researchers towards embracing critical positioning in their inquiry (Granados-Beltrán, 2018; Mosquera et al., 2018; Herrera Molina and Portilla Quintero, 2021). We concur with Herrera Molina and Portilla Quintero (2021) that the low presence and frequency of topics such as decolonization, inclusion, literary development, competence, and policy is intriguing in countries such as Colombia, where we are surrounded by systemic inequality that is crudely evident in FL language classrooms. Authors such as Guerrero-Nieto and Quintero-Polo (2021) report the "beginnings of the research area that studies public language education policies" (p,120) in Colombia, which, according to the mentioned authors, started in the mid-90s in the context of the 1991 National Constitution.

Publications in different Colombian regions

Regarding the distribution of articles published by region, it was found that the region with the highest publication rate is the Andean region, with 87 articles published, followed by the Pacific and Caribbean regions, with 14 and 10 articles, respectively. The Amazon and Orinoquía regions are at the lower limits with 4 and 2 articles, respectively. There is a notorious contrast between the region that publishes the most and the region that publishes the least, with a difference of 85 articles.

Figure 5

Distribution of articles by region

Andean Region (87) 68%
Pacific Region (14) 11%
Caribbean Region (10) 8%
National Region (8) 6%
Amazon Region (4) 3%
Not specified (3) 2%
Orinoquia Region (2) 2%

Given that Colombia has a centralized structure, most research production has traditionally occurred in the major cities near Bogota (as shown in Figure 5). This social and political structure has also facilitated the development of undergraduate and academic programs for EFL (English as a Foreign Language), resulting in research groups and English language teaching associations like ASOCPI, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), and ELT congresses. However, this same social and political structure has hindered the academic and research progress in other regions of Colombia, such as the Caribbean, Pacific, Amazonian, and Orinoquia regions. In addition, in the Minciencia index, a few EFL journals are ranked: The Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal, Profile, Ikala, Matices, and HOW, making the article publishing demands challenging for new researchers of the different Colombian regions.

Despite university autonomy, decentralization of higher education, and the creation of new undergraduate and graduate programs, research groups need to be faster to develop. Colombia's SNIES (National System of Higher Education) reports 17 universities with qualified records and 20 with high-quality accreditation, 12 universities offering master's degrees in English Language Teaching, of which only two programs have high-quality accreditation. Within this academic landscape, it is evident that a research culture is emerging primarily in universities that have achieved a top-tier MinCiencias A rank and high-quality accreditation.

A qualitative look

Q2: What are the potential areas of development in FL teaching and learning in Colombia?

The Colombian FL field is Colombian ELT

The many articles published in Colombian Journals indicate an emerging research culture committed to disseminating their findings. The fact that most articles are in English and about English teaching and learning in the country talks about, on the one hand, the sustained production and scholarly interest in exploring the specificities of the Colombian ELT field; on the other hand, the impact that policy making has had on the increase of scientific production in the country.

Concerning the choice of English as the language of publication, researchers' reasons usually derive from an instrumental need to reach a global audience. They hope that publication in English will grant them more readers and citations, leading to a more significant impact on said research. Choosing English benefits the researcher due to the advances publications may bring to her career, new funding opportunities, and potential collaboration with other like-minded scholars (Li, 2014; McGrath, 2014; López-Navarro et al., 2015). The institutions benefit as well, as they are increasingly competing to get a place in international rankings schemes that include citations and visibility of researchers and their research among its review criteria (Li, 2014; McGrath, 2014).

However, there are concerns related to choosing English as the publication language.
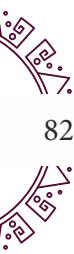
One concern relates to failing in the responsibility with their local audience, who would benefit the most from understanding the findings and reflections gained by research. Another concern is the missed opportunity to contribute concepts and metalanguage in Spanish to explain issues related to teaching and learning foreign languages in the local context (Li, 2014; Bocanegra-Valle, 2014; López-Navarro et al., 2015).

It is interesting to note the low percentage of Spanish publications about foreign language teaching and learning issues. Questioning if this could indicate the promotion of linguistic imperialism at the expense of the Spanish and other 63 languages spoken in Colombia is necessary. Is the promotion of publications in English in a Spanish-speaking context promoting a sort of elitism that aligns with the hegemony of the English language? (Glanbock et al., 2020). The choice of language used to communicate research results should become a matter of linguistic, ideological, and political reflection and actions across institutions, research groups, and thought centers. Who benefits if local foreign language teaching and learning issues are published in languages that local teachers and researchers cannot access? How can we advance as a community if these issues are not considered?

From this review, it is worth highlighting the implications of these linguistic choices regarding the accessibility and ease with which the information included in the articles reviewed can be disseminated. Given that English is not the dominant language in Colombia and that these publications are carried out in specific locations and educational contexts, the question arises regarding the accessibility of information in these texts. Since most people in Colombia do not speak English, it is plausible to infer that they may need help using the information or reflecting on the authors' findings in the articles.

As mentioned earlier, linguistic policymaking in Colombia has tremendously impacted scholarship in the field. Only in this review, which focuses on just a portion of academic production, we screened 129 articles. Besides, the strengthening of the research component in initial teacher education programs has increased since most undergraduate programs integrate research competencies across the curriculum and have created research initiatives in collaboration with student teachers. We concur with Le Gal (2018) that regardless of the context, foreign language teaching is a "complex phenomenon intertwined with sociopolitical and socio-cultural issues" (p. 157); therefore, exploring the specificities of the local context is crucial to continue growing as a unique and potent academic community. Language teacher education programs that foster intellectual curiosity and theoretical and practical knowledge through research and affect will make a difference in the ELT context in Colombia. The tremendous growth of scholarship in the field is a welcome side effect of a hardly critiqued foreign language policy in Colombia.

The case is different for foreign languages different from English in the country. Even though initial language teacher education in the country also includes preparation in French and German, publications about those other languages were scarce between 2011

and 2021. In the case of this review, the articles identified were not included as they were either reflective or pedagogical. We agree with Mejía (2006) that expanding the notion of bilingualism beyond English is essential to recognizing and valuing this country's linguistic and cultural diversity and the richness of other foreign languages and cultures. This way, we could embrace "the complex interrelationships between languages, cultures, and identities in the Colombian context" (Mejía, 2006, p. 165). If this is to happen, foreign language teachers, teacher educators, and researchers of other foreign languages must take action. For instance, they could use the advances deriving from strengthening the research component in teacher education programs to explore the specificities of learning and teaching foreign languages other than English in the Colombian context.

Publications in FL teaching and learning originating at the center

Many articles and publications on foreign language teaching in Colombia are generated in university journals located in the major cities in Colombia. These universities have developed significant research traditions not only in language teaching but also in education. Their research groups have a higher classification in the Colombian Ministry of Science, allowing these major universities access to research funds from the government and foreign research centers. Besides, universities located in urban areas have had an offer of master's and doctoral programs for more than two decades, contributing to sustained research traditions and increased publication compared with other regions that have recently been offering similar postgraduate programs.

Intellectual elitism could be contributing to the creation of an expansion of a knowledge dissemination gap between researchers and many FL teachers who scarcely have access to English-published articles. Concerning this, we concur with the ideas of Fandiño-Parra (2021), who affirms that it is necessary to deconstruct the way English, as a hegemonic language, has normalized the language teaching and learning discourses to open to more indigenous and localized discourses that reflect the cultural ways of thinking, learning and solving our socio-cultural problems. One way to start decolonizing writing is by using translanguaging as an intercultural and multimodal mediational tool to decolonize language writing, knowledge dissemination, and discussion among FL educators and researchers (Sah and Kubota, 2022).

Researching Colombian ELT research: A qualitative endeavor

Conducting research in FL teaching and learning in Colombia is entrenched in qualitative traditions. Academics associate this movement centering on qualitative research in EFL as the result of trying to understand the complex teaching and learning particularities in the Colombian teaching context (Castañeda-Londoño, 2020). Although they have brought meaningful insights into contexts, they have also depicted a fragmented representation of the Colombian EFL context. The lack of studies incorporating statistics that can help systematize data has scarcely favored the operationalization of relevant policies and strategies that impact more localized teaching and learning processes.
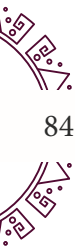
On the other hand, quantitative research methods that aim to identify and manipulate variables have been scantily used; this suggests an epistemological and ontological misalignment with a positivist positioning towards knowledge that has disregarded some of the advantages of testing empirical strategies that might inform national relevant policies and significant gains in language learning. However, the increasing number of mixed methods studies that some researchers assume have the potential to bring a more comprehensive view of the current status of English language teaching and learning in Colombia. Although all these research methods have contributed to understanding and transforming our teaching practice, we must engage in more decolonial research methods (Wilson, 2001) that help us better understand our educational and socio-cultural reality. Using translanguaging and intercultural perspectives as indigenous research methods tools could facilitate this process.

Even though the most recurrent research topics such as ICTs, gaming, skills, interculturality, vocabulary, and culture are relevant and responsive to modern research trends, it is necessary to research topics that have been affecting not only the learning of the English language in primary, secondary and tertiary levels but also topics related to peace education, assessment and evaluation and interculturality to be more accountable to the local pedagogical demands of the different regions as well as the social inequities that have pervaded all over the country. In other words, English language teaching research in Colombia should be tackled beyond the umbrella of topics related to the particularities of the language teaching process and encompass our sociohistorical context as a mediational tool to negotiate the meaning of who we are as citizens.

Conclusions and implications

The publication trends in the FL field in Colombia over the past decade present an inconsistent trajectory. The initial gradual rise in publications followed by the more recent fluctuating pattern indicates the changing interests and focus of the research community and possibly the influence of institutional policies and national agendas. While there has been an emphasis on research dissemination recently, the field across Latin America is grappling with establishing a cohesive academic literacy tradition, leading to the observed disparities in publication regularity and focus across educational levels and timelines.

Given the observed trends and the context in which the research is being conducted, there is a clear need for structured guidelines and a shared research direction in the FL field in Colombia. The substantial number of studies focusing on students at school and university levels compared to those on teachers implies that there might be untapped potential in understanding the pedagogical aspects and the educator's perspective. Moreover, the unspecified nature of many university-based studies suggests a need for more transparency and clarity in future research endeavors. While promoting research, institutions should also emphasize clarity, consistency, and coherence to enhance the field's productivity and visibility at national and international levels.

The data underscores the pronounced dominance of English in academic publications related to FL, with a significantly higher number of articles published in English than in Spanish. Even though writing in English poses challenges for ELT teachers, its prevalence can be attributed to the research subjects and the strategic interests of journals and educational institutions to position their research globally. This dominance suggests several critical implications for the research landscape and academic community. Firstly, the trend emphasizes a potential need for more focused professional development for ELT teachers, aiding them in enhancing their academic writing proficiency in English to maintain research quality. Educational institutions and journals also contemplate advocating bilingual research approaches, such as offering bilingual abstracts, to balance local engagement and international appeal. By doing so, they address the global aspirations of academic reach without neglecting the richness of local linguistic and cultural contexts. Furthermore, understanding researchers' motivations for language choice in publications is pivotal to better navigating this linguistic balance. Investigating whether their preferences lean towards English due to its broader international reach, institutional pressures, or its alignment with their research topic can provide invaluable insights into Colombia's evolving academic milieu.

The data reveals a distinct inclination towards qualitative research methodologies in the field of foreign language teaching in Colombia. Given the apparent proclivity for qualitative research, educational institutions and research programs in Colombia may need to strengthen their curricula' qualitative research training components. While quantitative research has merits, the Colombian EFL research environment is more receptive to qualitative insights that capture the unique challenges and experiences of EFL teaching and learning. However, the rising trend in mixed-method research signals an emerging acknowledgment of the benefits of a holistic approach that combines qualitative and quantitative insights. Institutions should consider encouraging mixed-method research as a middle ground, ensuring researchers have the skills to navigate both methodologies. Additionally, recognizing and addressing any barriers or misconceptions that deter researchers from utilizing quantitative methods could lead to a more diversified research landscape, enhancing the depth and breadth of knowledge in EFL in Colombia.

The analysis of the research articles reveals a clear trajectory in the topics of interest within the Foreign Language (FL) field in Colombia. The current research landscape in Colombia's Foreign Language (FL) field has several implications for educators and policymakers. The pronounced focus on technology signifies that educational institutions must prioritize integrating modern technological tools into their curricula, ensuring educators can effectively leverage them. Additionally, frequently exploring skills in the literature underscores the importance of fostering holistic language proficiency, necessitating comprehensive course designs at all educational levels. As intercultural education gains momentum, curricula must adapt to imbue students with a deeper appreciation of diverse cultures. However, the observed gaps in research areas like decolonization, inclusion, and policy emphasize the need for targeted scholarly attention, especially given Colombia's distinct

socio-cultural challenges. The emerging interest in assessment methodologies calls for ree-valuating current practices, integrating more comprehensive techniques, and emphasizing teachers' Language Assessment Literacy. Furthermore, as scholars gradually adopt a more critical perspective, it is crucial for institutions to nurture this evolution, particularly in areas that address Colombia's systemic inequalities. Lastly, Colombia's historical and current context underscores the importance of intensifying research on language education policies, driving reforms tailored to the country's unique needs.

The data reveals a significant disparity in research publication rates across Colombia's regions, with a noticeable concentration in the Andean region. The disparity in research output across Colombia's regions underscores an urgent need for strategically redirecting educational resources and policies. A more equitable distribution of opportunities is vital, requiring targeted support mechanisms for emerging researchers, especially those in less-represented regions. Such support might manifest in mentorship programs, grants, or specialized training. As the current number of recognized EFL journals is limited, there is an evident need to foster the growth and recognition of more journals, allowing a broader platform for researchers nationwide. Furthermore, as the quality of university programs plays a pivotal role in cultivating a research culture, there is an imperative to uplift and standardize the quality across all institutions. Collaborative endeavors, fostering partnerships between well-established and nascent research institutions, could serve as a conduit for knowledge transfer, bridging the evident regional research gap and creating a more cohesive academic landscape in Colombia.

In conclusion, several salient trends emerge in the EFL research landscape within Colombia. A clear preference for qualitative methodologies signals the nation's commitment to understanding English language teaching and learning intricacies and nuances. The predominant research focus on technology and its associated themes underscores the significant role of digital tools in contemporary pedagogical strategies. There is a stark disparity in regional research outputs, with the Andean region leading significantly, revealing systemic inequities in opportunities and resources available for academic research. The centralized structure of Colombia, with a majority of academic activities near Bogotá, has facilitated the growth of some regions while leaving others, like the Caribbean and Orinoquia, at a disadvantage. Such disparities highlight the necessity for more inclusive strategies, fostering collaboration, mentorship, and an equitable distribution of resources to ensure a balanced academic ecosystem. There is an evident urgency to channel efforts into uplifting lesser-represented regions, ensuring that all areas of Colombia have an equitable footing in the global academic arena. Ultimately, the combined efforts of various stakeholders can lead to advancements in language teaching and learning in Colombia, resulting in better opportunities for individuals and the country.

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