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## Research Engagement and Research Culture in Spanish Language Teaching (SLT): Empowering the Profession

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# Research Engagement and Research Culture in Spanish Language Teaching (SLT): Empowering the Profession

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Teacher training programs and models recognize research engagement as a key competency of qualified professionals. However, despite current calls from scholars to bridge the divide between research and practice in second language teaching, little is known about how teaching professionals engage with existing research or carry out their own research. This study is the first to address this issue with regards to Spanish Language Teaching (SLT) professionals, aiming to understand if and how they engage with and in research, and identify what they would need to increase their engagement. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of online survey responses from 1675 SLT professionals from 84 countries show that research engagement is dependent on the job description. Coding of free-text responses into eight themes (motivation, prestige, support, training, professionalization, resources, community, and research areas) reveals that the main barrier to greater research engagement is lack of support. Our results contribute to the understanding of the concepts of research engagement and research culture within the context of SLT and inform future initiatives to strengthen the research-practice nexus.

## Research engagement in second language teaching

Language learning scholars and teaching professionals are often seen as two distinct groups who share an interest in the same subject matter. On the one hand, scholars collect data on teaching and learning and use this information to assess the impact of teaching techniques, propose new approaches, or inform the development of teaching materials. On the other hand, language teaching professionals may engage *with* and *in* research, for example, to inform their teaching practices.

The extent to which language teaching professionals engage with and in research, and how, affects their professional identity (Winch et al. 2015; Barkhuizen 2021) and pedagogical expertise (Furlong et al. 2014). The ability to apply research findings to classroom practices is also a key characteristic of accomplished, reflective practitioners and is, thus, an essential component of teaching preparation programs, with positive effects (Shrum and Glisan 2015; Altstaedter et al. 2016; Vaattovaara 2017; Lowe, Turner, and Schaefer 2021). In the US and the UK (Baxter and Santos 2008, 14), many language programs allow students to enroll in an independent study course, i.e., writing a supervised research paper or dissertation, which allows them to obtain college credits. In the European Union and in other signatory countries of the 2010 Bologna Accord, students need to complete a research project in their final year. Likewise, as part of the same Bologna process, a research project has been a requirement to obtain a language teaching MA in the European higher education area since 2013, while in the United States, most MA students need to complete either a capstone project or a research thesis.

Yet, despite research being an essential component of the education of language teaching professionals, little is known about how those professionals engage *with* and *in* research (Borg 2010), or how they contribute to or benefit from advancements in the theory of language learning and applied linguistics. The goal of this study is to understand *if* and *how* Spanish Language Teaching (SLT) professionals engage *with* and *in* research, and to identify what they believe they would need to increase such engagement. This study is the

first to address these questions in the context of SLT by drawing on quantitative and qualitative analyses of data from a large-scale online survey completed by 1675 SLT professionals in 84 countries.

In the field of language teaching and learning, the term *research* can refer to conventional theory-building research, more situated action research (Burns 2005; McDonough 2006), or exploratory practice (Allwright 2003, 2005). Research engagement encompasses both engagement *in* research, such as designing and conducting a study, publishing a research paper, or presenting it at a specialized conference, as well as engagement *with* research, such as reading research articles, attending conferences, and applying the results of research to teaching (Borg 2010).

In the case of L2 teachers, engagement *in* research has received the most attention in the form of Action Research projects, ('taking action for change,' Allwright and Hanks 2009: 172), or Exploratory Practice ('taking action for understanding,' Allwright and Hanks 2009: 172). The popularity of this approach is reflected in the multitude of journals, such as *Educational Action Research*, *Action Research: Research and Practice*, and *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, and specialized conferences targeted at teachers. For SLT, these include the international conferences organized by the *American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese* (AATSP) and the *Asociación para la Enseñanza del Español como Lengua Extranjera* (ASELE), or the national conferences organized by Spanish language professionals from 21 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America registered in the *Federación Internacional de Asociaciones de Profesores de Español* (FIAPE). However, despite its emergence in 1980s (Hollingsworth 1995; Villegas-Reimers 2003), the notion of teachers as researchers, that is, as professionals able to investigate and improve their practices by engaging *in* research, is still not widespread or even accepted among teachers (Goodson 2000). One reasons for that could be that teachers face a series of identity dilemmas as researchers, related to their stage of career, past experience, desire, imagined future, moral stance (Barkhuizen 2021: 372).

Engagement *with* research has also received some scholarly attention. Scholars and applied linguists have long attached importance to finding, reading, critiquing, and applying the findings of existing research as an important skill that language teachers should develop during training (Brown 1991, 1992; Gass 1995; Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 1997; Fradd and Lee 1998). In the few existing studies on this topic, teachers consistently indicated having problems understanding the main arguments of scholarly articles (McDonough and McDonough 1990; Zeuli 1994; Nassaji 2012), or that they found the information too theoretical, distant, and not necessarily applicable to the classroom (Eykin 1987; MacDonald et al. 2001; Nassaji 2012; Richards and Farrell 2015). If 'teachers no longer have the theoretical knowledge or desire to read journals' (Rose and McKinley 2017: 603), the gap between research and practice may widen. In bridging that gap, 'a key problem [is that]: if teachers feel researchers do not understand their task in classroom teaching, they are unlikely to be persuaded to innovate or experiment' (Kiely 2014: 443; see Gironzetti and Koike 2016: 90; and Muñoz-Basols 2019a: 316; for a discussion of this problem in the fields of pragmatics and translation, respectively). Additionally, in a survey study with 391 UK teachers, Marsden and Kasproicz (2017) found that foreign language teachers do not generally read research-oriented publications, but are exposed to their findings through professional, teaching-oriented publications that reference these studies. However, the extent to which these studies were referenced was found to be low, as on average each research-oriented journal was referenced just 0.17 times per professional article.

The tension between language teaching researchers and language teaching practitioners has been documented quantitatively both in terms of engagement *with* and *in* research. In a survey study with an international sample of 1160 teachers of English as an L2,

Borg (2009, 2010) concludes that even though 75% of participants indicated reading research at least sometimes, this positive figure should be treated with caution for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, each language teacher may have a different perception of what ‘sometimes’ means, as it could denote very infrequent and incidental engagement with research. Secondly, each individual teacher’s perception of what constitutes ‘research’ may vary, with some claiming to be reading authentic research when, in fact, they are reading practical teaching ideas (Borg 2010: 412). While practical teaching ideas are certainly valuable, they may or may not be research-informed and that link is not always explicit.

In another longitudinal study, in which three teachers of English were followed for two years, Macaro and Mutton (2002) proposed an effective but demanding (in terms of time and personnel) co-researcher model for teacher professional development, in which teachers and researchers jointly discuss classroom practices, goals, and improvements based on recordings and analyses of lessons. In a later, small-scale survey with 80 teachers of English, Macaro (2003b) reported that, despite having a generally positive attitude towards research, teachers often had issues with access, comprehensibility, and applicability of research articles and findings, and indicated lacking skills or time to conduct research (Vaattovaara 2017: 470).

Likewise, few academic initiatives have been designed to provide practitioners with access to academic research. Noteworthy exceptions are the *International Festival of Teacher-Research in English Language Teaching* (ELT; <https://trfestival.wordpress.com/>), a platform to encourage teachers to find pathways through the difficult circumstances they find when carrying out research (see Smith and Bullock 2018), or *OASIS*, the *Open Accessible Summaries in Language Studies*, at the University of York (UK), which aim to make research findings on language learning and teaching available and accessible to a wide audience. In summary, empirical work on language teachers’ practices is limited and focused mostly on the teaching of English (Borg 2010). It also suggests that the reasons for the divide between scholars and language teaching practitioners are not fully understood. Our study helps understand that divide better in the context of SLT.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. First, we discuss the current research culture in the field of SLT, which is the context of our study. Second, we describe our survey data and the process of coding qualitative responses. Third, we present the results and relate them to the topic under investigation, research engagement within the context of SLT research culture. Fourth, we discuss the results, focusing on the respondents’ research profiles and needs. Finally, we outline some of the limitations of this study and conclude with the implications and recommendations arising from our results.

### **Research culture in Spanish Language Teaching (SLT)**

Studies on L2 teachers’ research engagement tend to focus on English language teachers. In the field of ELT, there have been renewed calls for a reassessment of the teacher-researcher divide and the teaching-research nexus (Vu 2021: 577). The ELT community has been urged to evolve its understanding of the teaching-research nexus (McKinley 2019), to dismantle the ivory tower (Rose 2019), and to produce more teaching-informed research (Hanks 2019; Sampson and Pinner 2021). This growing interest in narrowing the teacher-researcher divide is also demonstrated by the publication of books and handbooks devoted to Instructed Second Language Acquisition (ISLA) (see, e.g., Loewen and Sato 2017; DeKeyser and Prieto Botana 2019), and by action research projects and publications from the scientific community in journals such as *The Journal of Teacher Action Research*, founded in 2014, and *Action Research*, founded in 2003 (see the AERA resource page for more details, <https://sites.google.com/site/aeraarsig/publishers-action-research>). Our study expands this area of inquiry to the field of SLT. However, to adequately represent the research

engagement of SLT professionals it is necessary to understand the research culture of the field in which they have been trained to work. Hence, in the following paragraphs, we offer a brief discussion of SLT research culture.

The field of SLT has grown and gained international visibility as well as academic reputation in recent decades (Fuertes Gutiérrez et al. 2021; Lacorte and Suárez García 2014; Muñoz-Basols *et al.* 2014; Muñoz-Basols *et al.* 2017; Carrera Troyano 2014). According to the Instituto Cervantes (2020), 7.5% of the world population speaks Spanish, and 27 million students in 110 countries were learning Spanish as a second or foreign language in 2020. As a result of this growing demand, numerous teacher training programs exist worldwide, including undergraduate and graduate options as well as professional development courses offered by publishers, private schools, associations, and conferences. Moreover, as the field of SLT established itself as an independent area of inquiry, the number of specialized journals, book series, and conferences also increased.

However, as explained by Lacorte and Krastel (2002), for a long time SLT researchers and teachers alike were told, and to an extent believed, that each should do their job and only their job, with little overlap. On the same hand, researchers in Spanish applied linguistics and pedagogy were not expected to teach Spanish L2 (well) or be interested in teaching it. On the other hand, with the exception of when they were taking courses at the postgraduate level, teachers were not expected nor encouraged to conduct research and so they were not taught the skills or knowledge to be able to do so. Ortega (2005) highlights a similar concern for researchers: for what and for whom is our research? In the same vein, Sato and Loewen (2019) wonder: do teachers care about research? More recently, Consoli and Kenan Dikilitaş (2021: 350) broaden the scope of the question by asking: *who* are language education researchers and *what* do they actually do? These questions are still a matter of active scholarly debate in the field.

Many research publications within applied linguistics focus on how to tackle specific language learning and teaching issues with the goal that their findings transcend the academic community—whether this is because of the applicability of the content or because an experiment was conducted in a classroom environment. Some academic publications, such as *Hispania*<sup>1</sup>, also focus on classroom issues and include specific sections on what teachers can do with the results of a study. While this is a clear attempt to engage and involve more practitioners in scholarship, little is known about SLT teachers' engagement *with* research: whether they read these publications, which ones they do read, and if and how they apply the results of these studies to their classroom practice.

Recognizing the value of research engagement, early publications in SLT called for a new teaching model that considered the role of teachers as researchers by means of emphasizing critical and reflective practices (Mendoza 1998; Suso López 2005), but research culture has not kept pace with the SLT discipline's own growth. Nonetheless, two recent initiatives aim to address this gap while highlighting the need to foster a stronger, wider, and more global research culture. The first initiative is PortaELE ([www.porta-ele.es](http://www.porta-ele.es)), a repository of SLT publications, originating as part of an unpublished doctoral project (Lloret Cantero 2020; Lloret Cantero et al. 2021). PortaELE includes metadata for each publication, including the period it covers, where it is based, its periodicity, content, indexing and a classification into research-oriented (R-OP) or teaching-oriented (T-OP) focus. This new resource allows Spanish researchers and practitioners to familiarize themselves with the variety and range of SLT publications, compare them, and follow their evolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Since 2019, this journal includes a section with short-form articles authored by teacher-scholars that consider in-depth topics of interest to K-20 educators, which are editorially reviewed instead of peer reviewed.

The second initiative is the *Comunidad de Investigadores del Español* (COMUN-ES, [www.comun-es.com](http://www.comun-es.com)), a global online research exchange platform launched in 2020 for researchers in three broad fields: Hispanic Literature and Cultural Studies, Hispanic Linguistics, and Spanish Language Teaching. The platform was developed by researchers from the universities of Salamanca and Oxford in collaboration with Cairo University, University of Hong Kong, University of Maryland, and National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). The platform, the first of its kind, aims to promote research and become the main point of contact for Hispanists and SLT language professionals alike because of the way in which it combines and integrates language teaching practices and culture. Both initiatives aim to reinforce research culture in SLT—a relative newcomer to the research landscape as compared to English (Muñoz-Basols *et al.* 2019b; Muñoz-Basols and Hernández Muñoz 2019)—and shine a spotlight on this growing field of inquiry.

As we have discussed so far, research engagement is generally recognized as an important component of L2 teachers' education and professional career, and many efforts have recently been made to foster its development. However, within SLT, this topic has only recently begun to be considered explicitly, as previous studies looked almost exclusively at the field of ELT without addressing the research culture and engagement of practitioners in different L2 teaching contexts.

### **This study**

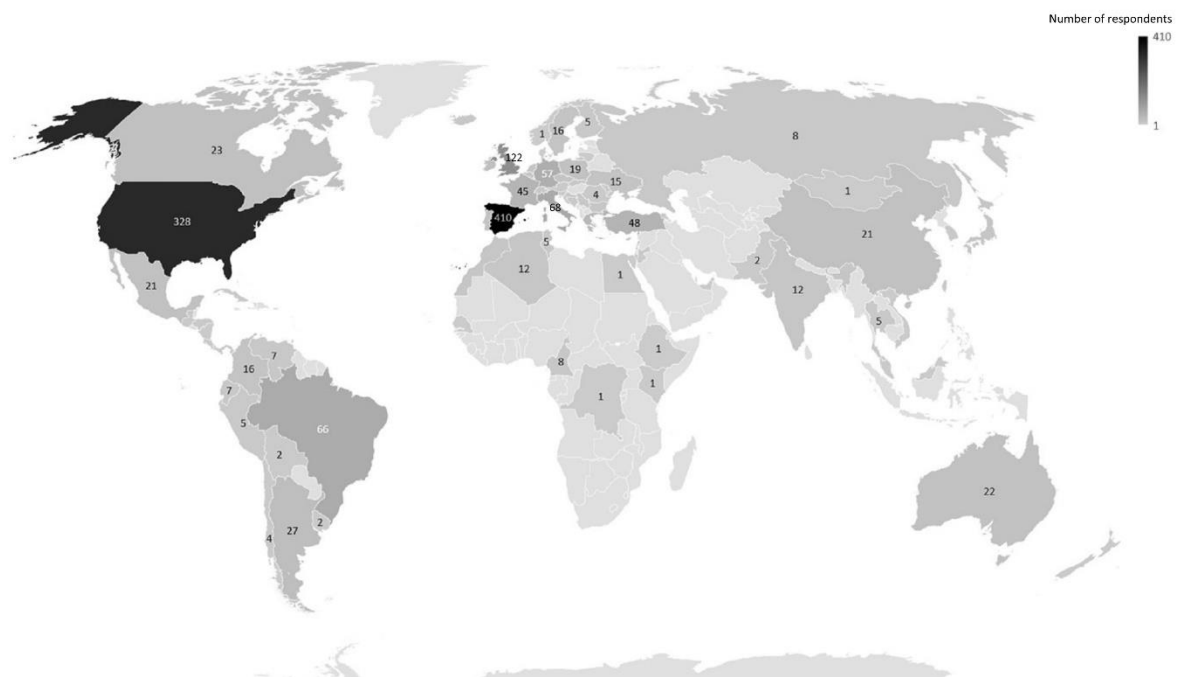
Our research draws on a large set of self-reported data to understand how language teaching professionals engage *with* and *in* research. In contrast to previous research in this area that has focused mostly on English through data proceeding from Anglophone contexts or ELT professionals (Shkedi 1998; Borg 2007; Marsden and Kasprovicz 2017; Rahimi and Weisi 2018; McKinley 2019; Rose 2019), this study focuses on the teaching of Spanish globally, with data from teachers with Spanish as their L1, L2, L3, or L4, working in a variety of contexts in primary, secondary, and higher education in 84 countries. The study follows a mixed method approach by integrating the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data and aims to offer a panoramic view of these professionals' research engagement within the research culture of SLT. Quantitative data comprise answers to close-ended and multiple-choice answers to survey questions focusing on participants' research background, production, and engagement. Qualitative data comprise answers to two open-ended questions focusing on participants' perceptions of research needs in the field of SLT and the necessary changes, namely: a) what would be necessary to achieve greater engagement (aimed at professionals not engaged in research); and b) what changes need to occur in the field of SLT with respects to research, and why (aimed at people engaged in research).

### **Respondents**

The survey was answered by 1675 self-reported Spanish Language Teaching professionals at different stages of their careers, including in-service and retired teachers, in 84 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, South America, and Australia. Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents around the world (see Muñoz-Basols *et al.* 2017: 3, for a detailed breakdown of countries and respondents' demographic profiles). To this date, this is the largest poll of teacher respondents who chose to participate in a study about research engagement. The five countries with the highest number of respondents were Spain (N = 410), the United States (N = 328), the United Kingdom (N = 122), Italy (N = 68), and Brazil (N = 66). While the number of respondents per each country is not necessarily representative of all SLT teachers, our goal here is not to compare or discuss the distinctiveness of SLT in each of those countries. Rather, we offer a first global look at the SLT profession. As such, we consider SLT professionals' research engagement within the framework of the SLT

research culture understood globally. This information is important because being part of the SLT research culture, that is, engaging *with* and *in* research, has a direct impact on various aspects of SLT professionals' careers such as training, teaching experiences, beliefs and the pedagogical choices they make in the classroom (Borg 2007, 2009, 2010, 2015; Comajoan-Colomé 2021).

The average respondent age was 41. Most were women (74.1%), and Spanish was their first or native language (70.2%). Before beginning the survey, each respondent gave their consent to take part in the study. Respondents were not asked to share personal information that could make their identity known, and all responses were anonymized using an ID code based on the order in which they were received (e.g., ID 1, ID 2, etc.).



*Figure 1. Geographical distribution of respondents*

### ***Survey instrument***

The survey was distributed online through social media, email, and local advertising between 2016 and 2017 in order to collect a large sample of responses from a wide range of geographical settings. It was written in Spanish and comprised 57 questions organized into four sections: demographic profile, professional profile, educational profile, and research profile. The questions included open-ended, multiple choice, yes/no, and Likert-scale questions. This study focuses on demographic and research information provided by respondents in the first and fourth sections of the survey (see repository link for the questions included in these sections as well as the instructions that were given to respondents), including the two open-ended questions reported in Table 1.

Table 1

*Open-ended questions about research*

#	Original question	English translation
Q56	En caso de no investigar, ¿qué cree que necesitaría para lograr este objetivo? ¿Por qué?	If you are not involved in research, what would you need to do so? Why?
Q57	En caso de investigar, ¿qué cambios cree que deberían producirse en el campo de ELE [Español Lengua Extranjera]? ¿Por qué?	If you are involved in research, what changes do you think need to occur in the field of Spanish Language Teaching? Why?

***Data analysis and qualitative coding***

All data were analyzed quantitatively to provide a snapshot of SLT professionals' research engagement. *Research engagement* was measured in terms of self-reported research engagement, attendance to conferences, publications authored, and types and numbers of publications read.

The answers to the open-ended questions in Table 1 were analyzed qualitatively. Coding of answers followed a bottom-up procedure comprising three phases and involved two coders (the authors), who worked independently. During the first phase, each coder read all the answers to each question and identified recurring categories, themes, and subthemes. The categories, themes, and subthemes were shared and compared between the two coders to create a detailed and structured coding scheme (investigator triangulation, see Stake 1995) that could be applied to coding all answers using NVivo software. The final coding scheme, including main categories, themes, and subthemes within each category, is reproduced in Table 2. The main categories are presented in the first column in alphabetical order (1. Community; 2. Motivation; 3. Prestige; 4. Professionalization; 5. Research areas; 6. Resources; 7. Support; 8. Training; 9. Unclassified). Each category is given a general descriptive label that encompasses all themes and subthemes that were mentioned in either positive or negative ways. Each category identifies the main areas that respondents recognized as necessary to either begin or improve their research engagement (e.g., 7. Support [a. better contracts; b. grants; c. institutional guidelines; d. job stability; e. money [better salary; paid research; unclassified]; f. promotion of research within the profession; g. time [reduced teaching load; unclassified]; h. unspecified]). Themes within each category are alphabetized and listed with subthemes italicized in squared brackets. The category "unclassified" was applied to answers that did not necessarily answer the question or did not interpret it correctly, while the tag "unspecified" was used for generic answers within a category that did not fall under any of the specific themes or subthemes.

To ensure consistency in the application of the coding scheme (summarized in Table 2) by both coders, interrater reliability scores were calculated using NVivo. The outcome indicated good interrater reliability ( $k = 0.63$ ), as detailed for each coding category in Table 3. The researchers then discussed all cases where they disagreed until reaching a final, unanimous coding scheme. The results discussed next are based on categories agreed upon by both coders.



Table 2

*SLT professionals' research engagement needs: categories, themes, and subthemes*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Themes [subthemes]</b>	
<b>1. Community</b>	a. exchanges and research stay b. interdisciplinarity c. mentors and colleagues d. research community	e. research groups f. research network g. virtual communities h. unspecified
<b>2. Motivation</b>	a. interest b. intrinsic motivation c. opportunities	d. willingness e. unspecified
<b>3. Prestige</b>	a. institutional recognition b. international visibility c. pedagogical validation of research	d. professional dignity e. research quality and rigor f. unspecified
<b>4. Professionalization</b>	a. consolidated professional profile b. dissemination and publication of results c. institutionalization	d. reduced professional intrusion e. unspecified
<b>5. Research areas</b>	a. corpora b. cultural studies c. instructional SLA d. languages for specific purposes e. phonetics and phonology f. pragmatics	g. speaking skills h. teaching materials i. teaching methods j. use of technology k. unspecified
<b>6. Resources</b>	a. bibliography b. instruments	c. journals d. unspecified
<b>7. Support</b>	a. better contracts  b. grants  c. institutional guidelines  d. job stability	e. money [ <i>better salary; paid research; unclassified</i> ] f. promotion of research within the profession g. time [ <i>reduced teaching load; unclassified</i> ] h. unspecified
<b>8. Training</b>	a. experience b. linguistics training c. ongoing training  d. online training	e. research training f. sociolinguistic training g. Spanish language teaching training h. unspecified
<b>9. Unclassified</b>	[comments that did not fit into other categories]	

Table 3  
*Interrater reliability scores*

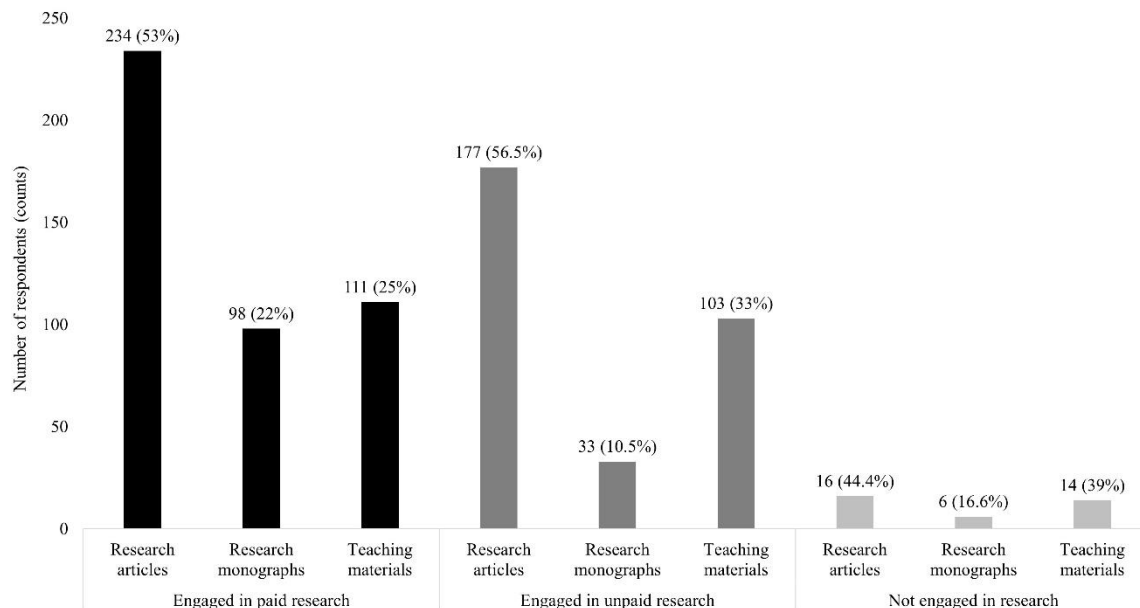
Categories	Kappa	Agreement (%)	Disagreement (%)
1. Motivation	0.6381	97.44	2.56
2. Prestige	0.6241	90.20	9.80
3. Support	0.7415	90.21	9.79
4. Training	0.4576	94.18	5.82
5. Professionalization	0.7087	95.87	4.13
6. Resources	0.6040	97.02	2.98
7. Community	0.6487	93.45	6.55
8. Research Areas	0.6166	87.09	12.91

## Results

### *Research engagement*

Research engagement was measured as a function of self-reported engagement *in* paid or unpaid research and publications authored, as well as engagement *with* research in terms of number and type of specialized publications consulted and attendance to conferences. Self-reported data indicate that 33.7% of respondents (N = 564) are not engaged in research activities, 36.0% (N = 604) are engaged in research activities even though this is not part of their job responsibilities, and 29.9% (N = 501) are engaged in research activities as part of their job responsibilities. Six respondents (0.4%) did not provide an answer to this question.

When asked to report the type and number of publications authored on average in a year (Q50 ‘If you do research, which of the following do you publish regularly?’ [see repository link]), 498 (29.7%) respondents, including some of those who were not engaged in research, indicated publishing at least one manuscript per year among research articles, research monographs, and teaching materials (such as textbooks and other resources). Figure 2 summarizes the number of respondents within each group (engaged in paid research, engaged in unpaid research, and not engaged in research) who reported publishing each type of publication regularly. Respondents who did not answer the question or indicated not publishing regularly (N = 361) are not included in Figure 2. Of these, 223 were respondents who indicated not being engaged in research (this is 91.4% of all respondents not engaged in research), 95 were engaged in unpaid research (this is 16.0% of all respondents engaged in unpaid research), and 43 were engaged in paid research (this is 8.5% of all respondents engaged in paid research). It should also be noted that respondents who did answer the question were able to select multiple types of publications in their responses.



*Figure 2. Publication types and numbers (Q50) by self-reported engagement in research (Q49)*

As shown in Figure 2, the number of authored publications changes significantly depending on participants' self-reported research engagement, with those not engaged in research making up 4.5% of all publications, followed by those engaged in unpaid research (39.5%) and those engaged in paid research (56.0%). It may seem surprising or contradictory that respondents not engaged in research indicated that they published research articles and monographs. Several possible explanations exist to justify these answers, including: (a) having a different understanding of what research means in this context, or what is typically considered a research article or monograph, (b) having occasionally collaborated on a publication with a colleague who regularly engages in research, (c) having engaged in research in their own time and maybe only occasionally, such as when completing their MA, and (d) not having interpreted the question correctly. This suggests that there are different ways to define what research is.

The types of publications authored also vary by research engagement category, with research articles as the most frequently authored type of publication among language teaching professionals engaged in paid and unpaid research (53.0% and 56.6%, respectively), and a much higher number of respondents engaged in paid research publishing research monographs than in the other two groups.

Regarding engagement with research, when asked about which SLT journals they read or consulted (Q51) 'Which SLT journals do you consult or follow? How do you rate these journals?', a large group of participants indicated not reading any specific publication ( $N = 730$ ). Others reported reading several different publications without willing or being able to recall any title in particular ( $N = 53$ ) or consulting unspecified online publications ( $N = 21$ ). The number and type of specific journals mentioned by the remaining respondents was quite diverse, including 159 distinct publications. Table 4 includes the titles of the 19 publications read by more than 10 respondents with information about how many respondents reported reading each publication, the type of access they provide (either Open Access, OA, or Paid Access, PA), and the year the first issue was published. These publications are further classified into 3 categories as indicated in the first column: 1) research-oriented publications (R-OP) that publish peer-reviewed research articles, often of an empirical nature, many of

which are generally indexed in Scopus or in similar databases, and have an SJR impact indicator, which measures the scientific influence of a journal; 2) teaching-oriented publications (T-OP) that are not indexed in Scopus and thus lack an SJR indicator, which publish articles including a mixture of practical teaching ideas, class reports, and some research articles, often not of an empirical nature; and 3) web-based publications (W-BP) including teaching or research resources other than journals.

Table 4

*Publications with more than 10 mentions by number of total mentions (Q51)*

Category and title of the publication	Number of Respondents	Published since	Type of access
[T-OP] <i>MarcoELE</i>	244	2005	OA
[R-OP] <i>Hispania</i>	112	1917	PA
[T-OP] <i>RedELE</i>	72	2004	OA
[R-OP] <i>Journal of Spanish Language Teaching</i>	59	2014	PA
[R-OP] <i>Foreign Language Annals</i>	33	1967	PA
[W-BP] <i>Todoele</i>	29	2002	OA
[T-OP] <i>Boletín de ASELE</i>	23	1988	OA
[T-OP] <i>Punto y Coma</i>	22	2006	OA
[R-OP] <i>Studies in Second Language Acquisition</i>	22	1978	PA
[R-OP] <i>Modern Language Journal</i>	18	1916	PA
[T-OP] <i>Cuadernos Cervantes</i>	17	1995	OA
[R-OP] <i>Porta Linguarum</i>	16	2004	OA
[W-BP] <i>ACTFL</i>	15	1967	OA
[W-BP] <i>ProfeDeELE</i>	14	2012	OA
[T-OP] <i>Frecuencia ELE</i>	12	1996	OA
[R-OP] <i>Language Learning</i>	12	1948	PA
[R-OP] <i>Actas de ASELE</i>	11	1989	OA
[R-OP] <i>Language Teaching</i>	11	1968	PA
[T-OP] <i>Tecla</i>	11	2005	OA
<b>Total</b>	<b>753</b>		

Note: [R-OP] indicates research-oriented journals that publish peer-reviewed research articles, many of them of an empirical nature; [T-OP] indicates teaching-oriented publications that include a mixture of mostly practical teaching ideas, class reports and some research articles, often not of an empirical nature; [W-BP] indicates web-based publications, i.e., teaching or research resources other than journals

Teaching-oriented publications accrued the highest number of mentions within the set of titles with more than 10 mentions (N = 381) despite not representing the largest category, with 7 titles mentioned. Research-oriented publications, on the other hand, were more numerous, with 9 titles mentioned, but accrued fewer total mentions (N = 294). Some other established research-oriented journals that publish only in English were also mentioned, but by fewer than 10 respondents, such as *Applied Linguistics* (first published in 1980, mentioned 6 times) or *Language Teaching Research* (first published in 1997, mentioned 3 times). Finally, three web-based resources were also included by participants among the journals (*revistas*) that they frequently read, for 58 mentions in total. As illustrated in Table 4, accessibility is a factor to be considered, as 14 out of the 19 most popular publications mentioned in the survey are Open Access (OA). Access to all the research-oriented publications, Paid Access (PA), requires either an individual or and institutional subscription or the purchase of individual articles. Besides reaching practitioners via OA options, some

journals offer access as part of the benefits of membership in practitioner-oriented associations such as *AATSP* and *ACTFL* in the North American context.

Finally, if we break down the number of respondents who indicated reading each publication based on whether they engage in research (paid or unpaid) or not, some important differences emerge. Table 5 shows the five most read publications per group.

Table 5

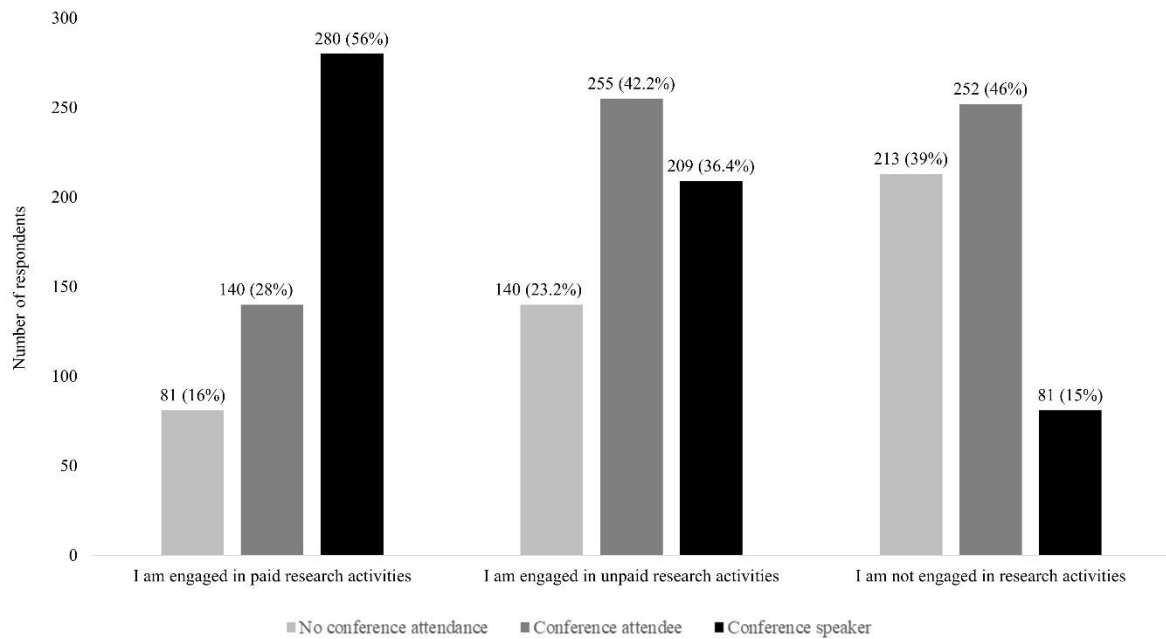
*Journal readership (Q51) by respondents' research engagement (Q49)*

Engaged in Paid Research		Engaged in Unpaid Research		Not Engaged in Research	
<i>Journal</i>	#	<i>Journal</i>	#	<i>Journal</i>	#
[T-OP] <i>MarcoELE</i>	105	[T-OP] <i>MarcoELE</i>	81	[T-OP] <i>MarcoELE</i>	57
[R-OP] [SJR 0.29] <i>Hispania</i>	65	[T-OP] <i>RedELE</i>	41	[T-OP] <i>RedELE</i>	21
[R-OP] [SJR 0.64] <i>Journal of Spanish Language Teaching</i>	48	[R-OP] [SJR 0.29] <i>Hispania</i>	35	[W-BP] <i>Todoele</i>	17
[R-OP] [SJR 1.72] <i>Foreign Language Annals</i>	21	[W-BP] <i>Todoele</i>	16	[R-OP] [SJR 0.29] <i>Hispania</i>	11
[R-OP] [SJR 3.97] <i>Modern Language Journal</i>	18	[T-OP] <i>Cuadernos Cervantes</i>	13	[W-BP] <i>ACTFL</i>	7
<b>Total</b>	257	<b>Total</b>	186		113

Note: [R-OP] indicates research-oriented journals that publish peer-reviewed research articles, many of them of an empirical nature; [T-OP] indicates teaching-oriented publications that include a mixture of mostly practical teaching ideas, class reports and some research articles, often not of an empirical nature; [W-BP] indicates web-based publications, i.e., teaching or research resources other than journals; [SJR] indicates the 2019 Scimago Journal Rank as provided by Scopus: <https://www.scimagojr.com/>.

As can be seen in Table 5, *MarcoELE*, an open-access, teaching-oriented publication, is the journal with the highest number of readers in each of the three groups. Teaching-oriented publications and web-based publications have larger numbers of readers among professionals not engaged in research and those engaged in unpaid research, while research-oriented publications—such as *Hispania*, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *Journal of Spanish Language Teaching*, and *Foreign Language Annals*—have larger numbers of readers among SLT professionals engaged in paid research.

Another measure of research engagement that we considered was conference attendance. Figure 3 shows data on conference attendance according to self-reported research engagement. A total of 1651 people responded to the two questions that led to the creation of Figure 3 (Q47 ‘Do you attend conferences/symposia/workshops on a regular basis?’ and Q49 ‘Do you carry out research on the teaching/learning of Spanish?’ [see IRIS repository]).



*Figure 3. Conference attendance (Q47) by self-reported research engagement (Q49)*

As shown in Figure 3, conference attendance changes based on whether the respondent reports to be engaged or not in paid or unpaid research. When research is part of their professional responsibilities, respondents indicated that they normally attend conferences as speakers, in contrast to the other two groups, who mostly attend conferences as attendees or, if they are not engaged in research tend not to attend.

### ***Research culture***

Research culture in SLT was also investigated from a qualitative perspective by means of analyzing participants' answers to the two open-ended questions included in Table 1 using the coding scheme summarized in Table 2. The purpose of this was to identify respondents' perspectives and needs regarding research in SLT.

Figure 4 summarizes the number of times respondents identified each area as requiring improvements for the field to advance. It should be noted that these open-ended questions were not answered by all respondents (we received 635 responses for Q56 'If you do not carry out research, what would be necessary for you to do so? Why?', and 728 responses for Q57 'If you carry out research, what changes do you think should take place in the field of SLT? Why?'), and that respondents could mention several areas in any one comment. Therefore, the percentages represent the relative weighting of each area with respect to the total number of comments made by people who answered these questions.

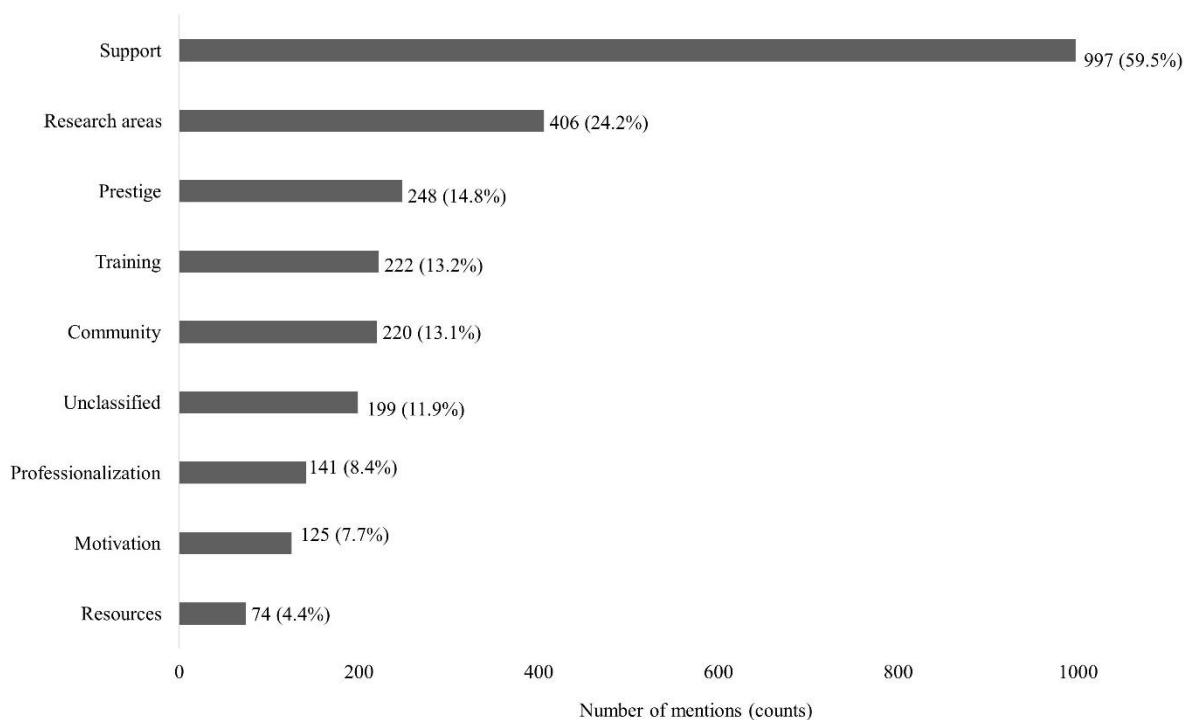


Figure 4. Overall distribution of respondents' comments across categories (Q56 and Q57, see Table 2 for a detailed list of themes and subthemes within each category).

Figure 4 shows that, overall, when asked about what should change for them to be more engaged in SLT research, most of the respondents' comments discussed *Support* (59.5%), with specific references to *Time* (e.g., a reduced teaching load) and *Money* (e.g., paid research, grants, and better salaries), as illustrated by the quotations in Example 1.

#### Example 1. *Research support*

ID 91 (male / Spanish L1 / Ph.D. / university / China)

*Facilidades en los centros educativos: complementos salariales, asignación de horas específicas para investigación, creación de equipos de investigación [Accommodations provided by educational centres: salary supplements, allocation of specific hours for research, creation of research teams].*

ID 295 (female / Spanish L1 / some graduate coursework / language school / Spain)

*Tiempo y dinero. Para realizar una investigación se necesita dedicarle tiempo y, por otra parte, dinero. Los profesores de enseñanza no reglada estamos supeditados a las horas que trabajamos por lo tanto el tiempo que le dedicas a la investigación debes descontarlo de tu salario [Time and money. You need time and money to do research. Teachers who work in language schools work by the hour, therefore the time you dedicate to research must be deducted from your salary].*

ID 1386 (female / Spanish L1 / some graduate coursework / Cervantes Institute / Germany)

*Más recursos y más seguridad laboral (si se investiga gratis quita tiempo de trabajo que sí se cobra) [More resources and job security (if you do research for free, it takes away work time that you are being paid for)].*

Table 6 shows the breakdown of respondents' comments within the *Support* theme by subtheme, including *Unspecified* comments, with a sample quote for each subtheme.

Table 6

*Mentions of subthemes and sample quotes within the theme of “Support” (Q56 and Q57)*

<b>Subtheme</b>	<b># Mentions</b>	<b>Sample quote</b>
Support [unspecified]	391	ID 85 <i>Más diversidad de centros de investigación de ELE</i> [More diversity of research centers for Spanish L2]
Time [teaching load]	283	ID 161 <i>Menos horas docentes y más horas para dedicar a la investigación</i> [Fewer teaching hours and more hours for research]
Money [grants, paid research, better salary]	220	ID 23 <i>Una contribución económica por esa labor</i> [Financial compensation for the work]
Research Incentives	41	ID 60 <i>Incentivar a los profesores para que investiguen</i> [Encourage teachers to do research]
Job Stability	27	ID 137 <i>Tener un trabajo estable en un solo lugar</i> [Having a stable job in just one place]
Institutional Guidelines	17	ID 391 <i>El establecimiento de marcos comunes para realizar investigaciones con un carácter más científico</i> [The establishment of common frameworks for conducting more scientific research]
Better Contracts	18	ID 196 <i>Más instituciones que ofrezcan plazas de tiempo completo a profesores de ELE</i> [More institutions that offer full-time contracts for Spanish L2 instructors]

The second most mentioned category was *Research areas* (22.0%), in which participants identified specific gaps in the field that required more attention. These included more connections between SLA research and classroom practice, teaching methods, and the use of instructional technology, as shown in Example 2.

#### Example 2. *Research areas*

ID 26 (female / Spanish L1 / some graduate coursework / university / Germany)

*Conexión entre las últimas investigaciones en adquisición de segundas lenguas y la práctica docente, con enfoques CONCRETOS* [Connections between the latest SLA research and teaching practice, with a CONCRETE focus].

ID 124 (female / Spanish L4 / some graduate courses / middle/high school / Portugal)

*Mayor coherencia teórico-práctica, más sentido crítico.* [More coherence between theory and practice. More critical thinking].

ID 936 (male / Spanish L1 / MA / language school / Guatemala)

*Considero que en nuestro medio debe trabajarse más la investigación en el ámbito de la metodología y la didáctica para la enseñanza del español LE en contextos personalizados, el español con fines específicos y las tic's en la enseñanza del español LE* [I believe that in our field we should have more research on methods for teaching Spanish as a foreign language in a personalized setting, with specific purposes, and the use of instructional technology for teaching Spanish].



Table 7 summarizes the number of respondents who identified any of the thematic categories as requiring improvements. Respondents are grouped by self-reported research engagement (Q49) ‘Do you carry out research on the teaching/learning of Spanish?’, excluding respondents who did not answer the question or comments that were marked as *Unclassified* (N = 36). It should be remembered that each respondent could identify more than one area of improvement in their answers, and that not everyone answered these open-ended questions. The grayed cells in Table 7 provide complementary information within each group by highlighting the three categories with the highest number of mentions within each group (not engaged in research, engaged in unpaid research, and engaged in paid research).

Table 7  
Number of times each improvement areas was identified (Q56 and Q57) by respondents’ reported research engagement (Q49)

Categories	Engaged in Paid Research	Engaged in Unpaid Research	Not Engaged in Research	Total
<i>Support</i>	165	358	449	972
<i>Research areas</i>	150	180	71	401
<i>Prestige</i>	86	113	49	248
<i>Community</i>	70	97	50	217
<i>Training</i>	70	91	59	220
<i>Professionalization</i>	53	67	21	141
<i>Motivation</i>	23	35	67	125
<i>Resources</i>	36	29	8	73
<b>Total</b>	653	970	774	

The data in Table 7 are a breakdown by self-reported research engagement of the data summarized in Figure 4. As shown in Table 7, respondents engaged in paid and unpaid research identified the categories of *Support*, *Research areas*, and *Prestige* as improvement areas. Respondents who are not engaged in research identified *Support*, *Motivation*, and *Research areas* as important areas for improvement. Notably, among the numerous research areas that respondents recognized as needing more research attention, *Instructed SLA* was the one that received the highest number of mentions across all three groups (Engaged in paid research, N = 21; Engaged in unpaid research, N = 23; Not engaged in research, N = 12), who often explicitly referred to the need to strengthen and further develop the links between SLA research and SLT teaching practices (e.g., ID 26, *Conexión entre las últimas investigaciones en adquisición de segundas lenguas y la práctica docente, con enfoques CONCRETOS*). Of all areas mentioned by respondents, *Instructed SLA* is the one that best embodies the connection between research and practice in SLT. Example 3 summarizes representative quotations from participants in each research group (not engaged in research, engaged in unpaid research, engaged in paid research) that illustrate their research needs in the categories of *Motivation*, *Support*, *Resources*, *Prestige*, *Professionalization*, *Community*, and *Research areas*.

### Example 3. Research needs

ID 471 (female / Spanish L1 / with a BA / secondary school / Italy / not engaged in research / research needs: motivation and support)

*En realidad, creo que algunos profesores de ELE se interesan bastante por la investigación y muchos otros no. Me parece que a muchos les falta motivación y sobre todo orientación para desarrollar su perfil investigador. [Actually, I think that many Spanish L2 teachers are quite interested in research, but many others are not. It seems to me that many lack the motivation and, above all, the guidance to develop their research profile].*

ID 8 (female / Spanish L1 / PhD / university / Spain / engaged in unpaid research / research needs: resources)

*Dar importancia y medios para la investigación: bibliografía disponible, tiempo. [Give more importance to, and means for research: available bibliography, time].*

ID 183 (male / Spanish L1 / PhD coursework / university / Spain / engaged in paid research / research needs: prestige, research areas)

*Por desgracia, la mayoría de las investigaciones en ELE carecen del necesario rigor científico, de ahí que muchos lingüistas no consideren la investigación en ELE como investigación "seria". ... La lingüística teórica nutre a la lingüística aplicada de contenidos, mientras que la lingüística aplicada plantea preguntas que pueden dar origen a investigaciones y debates teóricos y técnicos. La relación entre ambas debe ser biunívoca. [Sadly, most Spanish L2 research lacks the necessary scientific rigor, and that is why many linguists do not consider it as "serious" research. ... Theoretical linguistics feeds contents to applied linguistics, while applied linguistics asks questions that can lead to technical and theoretical research and debates. The relationship between both should be biunivocal].*

ID 535 (male / Spanish L1 / PhD / university / Canada / engaged in paid research / research needs: community)

*Que haya por lo menos 2 personas que investigan seriamente sobre el campo en cada departamento de español y que haya reuniones frecuentes entre los profesores para poder discutir ideas, posibilidades y mejoras. [There should be at least 2 people who do serious research in the field in each Spanish department and there should be frequent meeting with teachers to discuss ideas, possibilities, and improvements].*

ID 1199 (female / Spanish L1 / PhD / university / US / engaged in paid research / research needs: professionalization)

*El campo debe establecerse como disciplina académica, lo cual implica la creación de más revistas especializadas, congresos de mayor altura académica. [The field needs to establish itself as an academic discipline, which implies creating more specialized journals, conferences with more academic importance].*

### Discussion

Our data indicate that SLT professionals are characterized by high research engagement, as shown by self-reported engagement in research activities (76% of respondents), and the number and type of publications consulted. However, half of the people who report being engaged in research do so in their own time, voluntarily, and without being compensated for it, since research engagement tends not to be included in many SLT job descriptions and

contractual responsibilities. Nonetheless, SLT professionals do perceive research as an important component of their job and practice it by attending conferences and reading scholarly publications.

However, this positive number should be interpreted with caution, as what SLT professionals understand as research varies a lot. Based on their answers to questions that asked about the journals they typically read, many opt for teaching-oriented publications, that is, journals or web-based platforms providing teaching resources. Looking at data focusing on the type of self-reported research engagement, it becomes clear that SLT professionals have a different understanding of what research is, depending, at least in part, on the role that research plays in their professional life. Respondents who were mostly engaged in the profession by teaching the language and whose job description did not include research seemed to conceptualize it as a process that serves teaching purposes. For example, to them, engaging *with* research includes reading web pages to search for new classroom activities, reading journals to discover innovative teaching approaches, and so on. On the other hand, those professionals who reported being engaged *in* research, and whose job responsibilities include research, seemed to conceptualize this process as one of discovery and creation of knowledge that fits with the common definition of academic research. To them, engaging *with* research means, among other activities, reading academic articles, studies, and research reports.

Regardless of how SLT professionals understand research, overall, they do consider it valuable and an important part of their professional profile. All respondents, notwithstanding their research responsibilities, identified *Support*, as defined in Table 6, as a common need and listed many research areas and topics that they consider understudied and that they would like to see receiving more attention and space in scholarly publications. Among these, the research areas that were mentioned the most included *Instructed SLA*, *Teaching methods*, *Technology for L2 teaching*, and *Teaching materials*.

However, based on how they engaged in and with research, respondents also expressed additional needs and identified different areas for improvement. Thus, *professionals who are not engaged in research* would need more motivation to do so, through appropriate remuneration and a reduced teaching load that would allow additional research responsibilities to be undertaken. The needs of this group of respondents, together with their engagement with research and what they consider it to be, highlight one of the challenges of the SLT field, which is still polarized around the concepts of practitioner and researcher as if these were two separate and incompatible roles. Thus, while practitioners recognize the need for and the importance of research, they are not provided with the necessary support to engage in research or do not have the necessary motivation to do so.

In contrast, *professionals who are engaged in unpaid research* as well as *professionals who are engaged in paid research* recognize the lack of prestige as major obstacles. *Prestige* was recognized by survey participants as the lack of recognition that the field of SLT and language teaching in general faces within institutional contexts and from scholars in other, more mature fields of teaching and research. Desired improvements included more visibility as well as more emphasis on research quality and rigor, as several researchers called for fewer teaching-oriented materials and publications and more empirical studies, which, in their opinion, would help to consolidate the field.

The different needs of the three subgroups identified in the study underscore the heterogeneous nature of SLT research culture and needs, and the importance of not conflating all the profiles of SLT researchers under one, prototypical profile. Instead, these differences should be recognized and addressed. In the next section, we propose some desirable initiatives that the field at large, as well as institutions and professional collectives and

associations, should consider to foster engagement with and in research across different research profiles.

### **Limitations, conclusions, and implications**

The large sample of respondents that informed this study made it possible to explore how SLT professionals worldwide engage with and in research and understand how this came about within the frame of global SLT research culture. Data from this study show that SLT professionals consider research engagement to be an important component of their profession that they believe should be recognized and promoted in systematic ways by means of institutional support, salary compensation for research, and specialized training opportunities. The data also identified further areas that need to be addressed in order to foster a growing and impactful SLT research culture, such as the lack of prestige associated with the profession and the field in comparison to adjacent fields (e.g., literature or cultural studies), the high teaching load that often takes priority over and limits any research activity, and motivation (see a related discussion of the concepts of ‘precariousness of work’ [*precariedad laboral*] and unqualified practice [*intrusismo laboral*] in Muñoz-Basols *et al.* 2017 and Österberg 2021, in the case of Sweden).

Together with current initiatives aimed at fostering a stronger connection between research and practice within SLT, such as COMUN-ES ([www.comun-es.com](http://www.comun-es.com)) or PortaELE ([www.porta-ele.es](http://www.porta-ele.es)), described earlier in this article, this study contributes to empowering SLT professionals by allowing them to: 1) take stock of the situation and get a general view of the SLT profession and its research culture globally, by learning what other professionals think; 2) assess what they need to be able to engage with and in research if they choose to do so at some point in their careers, and 3) learn about opportunities and resources that aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Additionally, this study offers important insights into the SLT profession globally, which should be considered by scholars, publishers, and teacher trainers when making decisions about where and what to publish (e.g., choosing practitioner-oriented venues or including a classroom implication section in their studies), how to connect with a readership of SLT practitioners (e.g., including non-technical abstracts), and what topics to cover in teacher training programs (e.g., teaching research methods). This study is but one step towards empowering SLT professionals and fostering research engagement and a stronger research culture. A future line of research could compare and contrast the two most important research cultures in SLT as measured by the quantity of scientific production, namely the US and Spain, considering national-level, institutional-level, and individual-level factors.

One limitation of this study relates to SLT language professionals’ interpretations and perceptions of what research is, as already demonstrated by Borg (2010). While this has not been the focus of this investigation, we do assess this in part by asking about journals and publications authored, and the results discussed do shed new light on SLT professionals’ understanding of research. Future studies should investigate this further by also considering respondents’ working conditions and teaching environment. As discussed in the Results section, half of those who report being engaged in research do so on their own time, voluntarily, and without remuneration, since research tends not to be included in many SLT job descriptions and contractual responsibilities.

A second limitation of this study that should be investigated further is that we do not have information on whether the language of publication is a barrier for SLT language practitioners in three main areas: a) accessing and reading the research, b) applying it in their teaching practices, and c) contributing their own research. Most research in Second Language Acquisition is published in English. Yet, while some Spanish L2 teachers around the world are proficient in English, many are not. The ability to write in academic English may also be

a hurdle for those SLT language professionals who want to publish the findings of their own research.

Three important recommendations can be drawn from this study as regards SLT research culture and research engagement. First, research needs to be more accessible to language teaching practitioners. Many of the research-oriented publications listed in Tables 4 and 5 are not Open Access (OA). This limits readership to those who have access through their institutions. While the OA movement has existed for several years (since the 2002 *Budapest Open Access Initiative, BOAI*) and is being currently encouraged through a number of associations and initiatives (such as the *Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association, OASPA*, or the *Declaration on Research Assessment, DORA*), it has still not materialized in such a way that would make academic journals fully accessible to the wider educational community. It would be worth bringing this aspect to the attention of academic publishers, who might offer reduced fees to individual language professionals or professional bodies/institutions willing to benefit from these publications and adopt a research-driven approach to their curriculum.

Second, an additional factor that emerges from the data in Table 5 is that very few SLT journals, and only those that publish more empirical studies, are indexed in Scopus or similar databases, and offer an SJR indicator. This division seems to reinforce the idea that teaching-oriented publications are not considered to be a part of scientific academic discourse and the underlying assumption that applied research, such as the work done by many practitioners, is not valued. To alter this perception and foster the development of a stronger and more inclusive research culture in SLT, awareness raising should be undertaken focusing on the importance of journal indexing in international databases, making them more accessible to a wider audience as well as guaranteeing standards of academic quality. This, above all, requires an effort and a commitment from the editorial teams of these journals to develop a strategy for meeting the requirements to be indexed in those databases. At the same time, it is also the responsibility of the field to foster a more critical approach to research training, to promote academic multilingualism, and encouraging practitioners to access research-oriented publications as an instrument of continuous professional development and self-learning. After all, 'teacher quality requires high levels of academic and practical preparation, and systems to ensure that quality is sustained over the long term' (Tatto 2015: 186).

Third, the results of the survey indicate that research engagement has many benefits, also pointed out by Borg and Sanchez (2015: 7-8), such as some of the needs highlighted by respondents: more teaching resources, prestige within the profession, an increase in the professionalization and consolidation of the discipline (Gironzetti and Belpoliti 2021), and a greater sense of community, participation, and involvement in research initiatives (see also Vaattovaara 2017: 470). There is no doubt that keeping abreast of developments in the field and integrating some of these findings into teaching can positively inform teachers' understandings of their role, make them more confident, enhance and impact their teaching practices (Stapleton 2013: 2014) and, ultimately, empower them as language teaching professionals. However, it is often up to them to pursue such integration. As seen in the results of this study, this is not the teacher's responsibility alone as it entails the assistance of administrators (e.g., heads of departments, language directors, schools) and is also directly related to the characteristics and expectations within the research culture(s), including the various determinants of research engagement at the individual, institutional, and national level (Heng, Hamid, and Khan 2020: 968-976). Such research-informed practices need to be fostered and encouraged not only as bottom-up practices, as seems to be the case now, but also as top-down policies so that research constitutes a springboard for informing and developing teaching (Vu 2021: 585). Many practitioners declared that they were engaged in

research on an individual basis in their own time without appropriate institutional support. Further studies on SLT research engagement should also include interviews with those responsible for professional development to ascertain their views on what can be done to develop research-informed approaches to SLT, leading to a richer research culture and a more prominent role for research in informing teaching practices.

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