

The demographic landscape of Spanish language teaching research: A cross-national study

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Abstract

Engagement with research has long been recognized as a key driver of improved language teaching practices and teachers' professional growth. Yet, language teaching practitioners often remain distanced from research activities, thus perpetuating a well-documented gap between research and practice. While much of the existing scholarship has centered on English language teaching, this study shifts the focus on the rapidly growing field of Spanish language teaching (SLT). Drawing on data from 738 SLT professionals in Spain and the United States, we explore their research engagement and demographic profiles through the lens of communities of practice. Furthermore, we argue that combining these demographic insights with the concept of life capital—the accumulated wealth of one's personal and professional experiences—may uncover the human dimensions that shape a community of practice, thereby opening new avenues for promoting deeper research engagement. Finally, and equally important, by broadening the conversation to include languages other than English and adopting a comparative perspective, this study reveals overlooked factors that shape the research–practice divide, ultimately offering fresh insights and targeted initiatives to reconcile this longstanding research–practice gap.

KEYWORDS

community of practice, research culture, research demography, research engagement, teacher–researcher, teaching–research divide

While a significant body of research on second language acquisition (SLA) seeks to inform and enhance teaching and learning practices (Stapleton, 2013, 2014), researchers and practitioners, despite sharing an interest in the same subject matter, often find themselves navigating two distinct and sometimes disconnected worlds (Hall, 2023; Vu, 2021). This longstanding divide is well documented across

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the field and continues to challenge efforts to better align research with classroom realities (Gironzetti & Muñoz-Basols, 2022; Hanks, 2019; McDonough & McDonough, 1990; McKinley, 2019; Rose, 2019; Sampson & Pinner, 2021).

To help bridge the gap between research and practice, researchers have emphasized the importance of incorporating teachers' and learners' perspectives in research endeavors as well as published outputs (Coles-Ritchie & Lugo, 2010; Consoli, 2022) and proposed ways to address this gap beyond traditional approaches, for example, through a collaborative textbook development project (Shu et al., 2023). Initiatives of this kind are not new; in fact, the "teacher research movement" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) began several decades ago with publications that pointed to the role of teacher research as a means of promoting change (Goswami & Stillman, 1987) and to the importance of preparing and supporting teachers as "expert knowers" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 16). However, gaining an accurate understanding of language professionals' research engagement is crucial for their growth and development. A key challenge in this process concerns how the term "research" is conceptualized and understood. Within the field of language teaching and learning, the term "research" has taken various connotations, such as traditional theory-building research, situated action research (Burns, 2005; McDonough, 2006), or exploratory practice (Allwright, 2003, 2005). As such, the concept of research can be difficult to define and conceptualize (Borg, 2010; Consoli & Dikilitaş, 2021; Gironzetti & Muñoz-Basols, 2022; Hanks, 2017), as it presents a number of challenges, including the distinction between teacher research and academic institutional research (Barkhuizen, 2020) and the various labels that research activity may entail, such as the dichotomy between research versus scholarship (Barkhuizen, 2021, pp. 350–351). Therefore, understanding research engagement necessitates "an examination of the identities of the very actors who conduct, consume, own, disseminate, and benefit from research in language education" (Consoli & Dikilitaş, 2021, p. 350).

Traditionally, most studies on the research–practice divide and teachers' research engagement have primarily focused on English language teaching (ELT; Gironzetti & Muñoz-Basols, 2022; Hall, 2023; Hanks, 2019; McKinley, 2019; Nunan, 1997; Rose, 2019; Sampson & Pinner, 2021; Vu, 2021). In the last few years, however, the teacher research paradigm has gained traction within languages other than English, with studies that examine the divide between research and teaching in Spanish language teaching (SLT; Carrera Troyano, 2014; Lacorte & Suárez García, 2014) and explore how SLT professionals both contribute to and benefit from advancements in language teaching research and applied linguistics (Bardovi-Harlig & Comajoan-Colomé, 2022; Borg, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2015; Borg & Sánchez, 2015; Comajoan-Colomé, 2021; Gironzetti & Muñoz-Basols, 2022; Gutiérrez et al., 2021; Lamb & Simpson, 2003; Lightbown, 2003; Muñoz-Basols et al., 2014, 2017; Sato et al., 2022). While several studies have indicated that language teaching professionals view research as an important aspect of their professional development and practice (Gironzetti & Muñoz-Basols, 2022; Muñoz-Basols et al., 2017), little attention has been paid to how their professional identities might shape their engagement with and in research.

This study adopts a community-of-practice (CoP) perspective, where CoPs are defined as groups of people who participate in, contribute to, and engage in shared practices (e.g., teaching) and activities (e.g., conferences) and by doing this, create and develop their (shared) identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). It also incorporates the theoretical lens of life capital (Consoli, 2022) to better understand the research engagement of SLT professionals. Life capital, defined as the accumulated wealth of one's personal and professional experiences, interacts with CoPs by helping us articulate how individuals engage with and contribute to research within their professional communities. In turn, CoPs serve as spaces where life capital is mobilized, expanded, and validated. By integrating these two perspectives, we gain a more holistic understanding of research culture, moving beyond institutional factors to consider the lived trajectories of SLT educators within their professional networks.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the demographic composition of SLT professionals across its two largest communities of practice—the United States and Spain—alongside the defining features of their research engagement profiles. In doing so, we seek to foreground the human dimensions that influence research cultures and to propose new directions for narrowing the

research–practice divide in SLT, with implications that extend to professional communities in other languages.

SPANISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

For language teaching professionals, participation in CoPs can involve various dimensions such as teaching and/or research. These practices contribute to the formation of both local and global CoPs, as we will explore further below.

SLT has recently emerged as a global CoP, driven by the growing popularity of Spanish and the related increasing number of speakers worldwide. This community is characterized by strong institutional connections and global interconnectivity, bolstered by international initiatives such as the International Spanish Conference (CILE, a major event held every 3 years to discuss the Spanish language and its future), jointly organized by the *Real Academia Española* [Royal Spanish Academy] and *Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española* [Association of Academies of the Spanish language] (ASALE), which is a group of Spanish language academies from around the world. The *Instituto Cervantes*, a global organization created by the Spanish government to promote the teaching and study of the Spanish language and to share Hispanic cultures around the world, also plays an important role in promoting the Spanish language and Hispanic cultures internationally. These institutional efforts and coordinated initiatives to promote the language contribute to shaping the development and coherence of the global SLT CoP.

In terms of its research culture, the global SLT CoP comprises three main groups, distinguished by their professional identities and levels of research engagement (Gironzetti & Muñoz-Basols, 2022). These groups coexist, interact, and rely on one another for key activities, including data collection, publication of research findings, adoption of innovative methodologies, dissemination of results, and the application of research outcomes to enhance teaching practices. The three groups are as follows: language professionals who are engaged in paid research (EPR) as part of their formal contractual obligations; professionals who, although not contractually required, contribute to the research culture by being engaged in unpaid research (EUR), and individuals who, while not directly participating in research, can benefit from its disciplinary developments, classified as not engaged in research (NER). These three categories of research engagement can be further understood through the lens of life capital. Professionals who engage in paid research (EPR) often enjoy institutionalized life capital—such as doctoral training, academic networks, and diverse academic experiences—allowing them to participate centrally in the SLT research culture. In contrast, those EUR may have relevant training but lack institutional support, requiring them to rely on CoPs for mentorship and collaboration. Meanwhile, NER professionals may have untapped life capital—such as classroom experience or pedagogical expertise—that, if recognized and nurtured within CoPs, could be leveraged to bridge the research–practice divide.

In addition to the global SLT CoP, it is essential to acknowledge the existence of multiple local SLT CoPs, each shaped by the specific contexts in which language teaching professionals operate—as teachers, researchers, and administrators. Since local and global CoPs are part of the same ecosystem, understanding their members and the ways in which they coexist and interact within the broader global community is crucial for developing initiatives that promote global research engagement. For the purposes of this study, we focused on the United States and Spain, two key contexts that have historically played a leading role in SLT and continue to do so today.

The United States hosts approximately 973 institutions offering Spanish language and literature programs across all degree levels (UnivStats, 2024), including over 40 doctoral programs (Lacorte & Suárez-García, 2016), and awards more PhDs in SLT than any other country. Spain, by contrast, boasts the highest concentration of SLT master's programs, with 29 programs listed on the TodoELE platform (www.todoele.net/cursos), many of which serve as trainee teachers' entry point into research in the field. Together, the United States and Spain occupy a central position in shaping the research

culture of SLT, influencing both the academic preparation and professional development of future SLT educators.

The United States, home to the largest number of Spanish language learners (34% of the total number of students of Spanish worldwide; Instituto Cervantes, 2021), also has a significant number of academic job opportunities related to Spanish. From 2015 to 2020, the percentage of Spanish language-related academic job postings in the United States increased from 28.4% to 34.3% (Modern Language Association, 2015–2020). However, it is worth noting that the type of positions available in this field have changed, with a decrease in the number of tenure-track positions and an increase in fixed-term positions such as visiting professorships and teaching-track faculty positions, which often have lower salaries and are therefore more cost-effective for institutions (Sánchez-Naranjo, 2022). Spain, in contrast, has fewer academic jobs in the SLT domain but remains a principal destination for language tourism, immersion, and study abroad programs (FEDELE, 2021; Pandor et al., 2025). However, despite the growing interest in studying Spanish, many jobs in this context, particularly in language schools, are often temporary and entail high teaching loads, low salaries, and a lack of job stability (Gironzetti & Muñoz-Basols, 2025; Muñoz-Basols et al., 2025).

Next, we discuss how adopting a dual methodological approach—incorporating both demographic and research profiles of language educators—may offer a more nuanced picture of the research culture within their CoPs.

A DUAL METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT: DEMOGRAPHIC AND RESEARCH PROFILES

To understand its research culture and foster research engagement, we approach SLT as a system of people, places, practices, and power (Bourdieu, 1993). While CoPs provide the structural foundation for professional learning and research engagement, life capital acts as an individual's set of personal and professional resources that may determine how members navigate and contribute to these communities. Drawing on Consoli (2022), life capital here concerns an SLT professional's accumulated training, skills, networks, and broader lived experiences, all of which influence their ability to engage with research. Understanding research engagement, therefore, requires an examination of how CoP facilitate the exchange and development of life capital, thus enabling members to transition from peripheral to more central participation in research activities (Wenger, 1998). Our dual approach describes the demographic profile of the professionals who make up the CoP and their research profile, which relates to how these individuals engage with existing research or engage in research by carrying it out. This allows us to determine the extent to which language professionals are interested in research (Sato & Loewen, 2019), who language education researchers are, and what they actually do (Consoli & Dikilitaş, 2021).

This dual approach is important because tracing a research demography in the case of language teaching and learning involves not only examining the outputs (i.e., publications) or setting (i.e., those contexts in which researchers might be more active, like universities), but also considering the people who act as agents in generating, promoting, and disseminating research at any stage of their careers and across contexts. By adopting a dual approach that examines both demographic and research profiles, this study highlights how life capital interacts with structural factors that shape research engagement. Therefore, while demographic characteristics (e.g., education, language background, job stability) provide a broad understanding of who engages in and with research, the concept of life capital allows us to move beyond static variables to explore how personal and professional trajectories influence participation in CoPs. This approach enables us to identify barriers to research engagement while also recognizing opportunities that may be leveraged to foster a more inclusive research culture.

For this reason, it is equally crucial to consider these SLT agents' personal and professional life experiences or life capital (see Consoli, 2021, 2022), as reflected in the respondents' narratives gathered in our survey. Specifically, drawing on Bourdieu's (1993) work of capital, life capital extends beyond economic, cultural, or social forms of capital to capture the unique, evolving repertoire of

TABLE 1 Demographic and research profiles: Variables and justification.

Variable	Justification
Demographic profile (personal characteristics, skills, education, and experience)	
Location and educational context	Settings where Spanish is taught and learned, relevant for understanding the mobility that characterizes the profession and any new, emerging contexts for the learning of Spanish around the world
Age and experience in the field	Relevant for understanding how survey responses vary depending on the career stage of respondents
Gender	Relevant for understanding the composition of the workforce (who enters the field) of the pool of SLT professionals
Language skills	Relevant to understanding mobility and employability (access to crossborder opportunities and broader job markets)
Educational profile and training received	Relevant for analyzing routes into the profession and familiarity with research
Research profile (engagement with and in research)	
Researchers' engagement with publications	Relevant for understanding how SLT professionals stay abreast of the latest advances in the discipline
Authorship	Measure of engagement in research, including the types of publications respondents contribute to the research community
Conference attendance	Measure of engagement in research, including the regularity with which professionals attend events related to research, as this is one of the main forums in which advancements in the discipline are disseminated
Perceptions and research needs	Relevant to understanding professionals' needs and ability to engage in and with research in a fulfilling manner

Abbreviation: SLT, Spanish language teaching.

lived experiences that shape individuals' engagement with SLT research and pedagogy. In this sense, considering life capital enables a more holistic understanding of the factors that influence an individual's research trajectory and their engagement with/in knowledge production. By incorporating these insights, we not only capture diverse SLT research profiles but also identify their specific needs within a given geographical and institutional context. Recognizing life capital as a key dimension in this survey approach underscores the human-centered nature of SLT as a CoP, moving beyond reductive binaries of access and participation to honor the richness of personal and professional journeys in the field. In this study, we therefore use the above-mentioned dual approach, focusing on a series of specific variables to shed light on SLT professionals' demographic and research profiles (see Table 1).

Understanding the demographic profiles of language practitioners can help identify potential barriers to their research engagement, thereby enabling us to explore ways to sustain or enhance their involvement in research.

By applying life capital as a conceptual lens, we move beyond demographic factors as mere statistics and instead view them as resources that shape an individual's engagement with research. Crucially, for this analysis to be impactful, it necessitates the inclusion of not only the views of researchers in higher education, but also underresearched populations such as SLT language professionals from any educational background and context employed in both permanent and fixed-term contracts, on a research and/or teaching track. After all, 95% of L2 researchers who now present their research at international conferences were or have been L2 teachers (Sato & Loewen, 2022; Sato et al., 2022). Therefore, including a diverse range of professionals can therefore offer a more holistic and insightful picture of the status quo of SLT professionals' research engagement.

Our study follows a mixed-methods approach to answering two questions to understand SLT professionals' research engagement:

- RQ1. What is the general demographic profile of SLT professionals in the United States and Spain?
RQ2. What are the core characteristics of SLT research profiles in these countries?

To answer these two questions, we collected responses to close-ended and multiple-choice questions focusing on participants' demographic profile—such as location, age, gender, language, and education, as well as researchers' engagement with publications, authorship, conference attendance, and research needs—and responses to two open-ended questions about their perceptions of research needs in the field of SLT.¹ This study builds upon the findings of a previous project, in which responses from 1,675 participants from 84 countries (individuals actively engaged in the teaching of Spanish as a second or foreign language) were aggregated to offer a global view of SLT professional, educational, and research profiles (see Muñoz-Basols et al., 2017, for a complete description of the survey). The study used an online questionnaire consisting of 57 items, organized into three main thematic sections: professional and teaching background, educational profile, and engagement with research. Participants were recruited through a wide range of channels, including professional associations, educational centers, language institutions, universities, education agencies, and social media platforms. Data analysis combined quantitative and qualitative analysis based on thematic evaluation of open-ended responses, where key terms were highlighted and contextualized within participant testimonies. Crucially, participants represented a range of professional contexts, including university settings, nonformal education (language academies and private institutions), and secondary education. In addition, several participants were engaged in other categories (private tutoring, non-governmental organizations, adult education, online teaching, volunteer work, or were currently unemployed).

This broad perspective, however, hides substantial heterogeneity across local CoPs in how language teaching professionals engage with and in research. The present study thus addresses this limitation through a comparative analysis of two key contexts that have historically played a leading role in SLT, focusing on the comparison between participants who indicated working in Spain ($n = 410$) and in the United States ($n = 328$) at the time of the survey. By analyzing the demographic and research profiles of professionals within the field, this dual approach offers a novel methodological contribution to studying research engagement. Significantly, this methodological lens may be adapted across disciplines beyond SLT.

In the following sections, we show the general profile of informants from both countries, according to their self-reported research engagement and considering their location, age, gender, and whether Spanish was their first (L1), second (L2), third (L3), or fourth language (L4). We then move on to illustrate a research profile of SLT professionals in each country that accounts for these variables as well as their previous education, participation in conferences, and publications they read and contribute to. Each demographic factor can influence research engagement in meaningful ways. Location shapes access to institutional support and academic culture; age may reflect career stage and associated opportunities or constraints; and gender can intersect with structural barriers to participation. Language background affects access to academic discourse, particularly in multilingual contexts. Whether one is actively teaching may provide both motivation and context for classroom-based research. Education level and formal qualifications often determine exposure to research training and confidence in engaging with scholarly work. Considering these variables allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions that support or limit research engagement. Finally, we explore the specific factors that help explain variations in how, and to what extent, individuals participate in research.

FINDINGS

Respondents were initially grouped based on their self-reported research engagement to identify the categories EPR, EUR, and NER. When asked directly whether they thought that it is increasingly common for Spanish L2 professionals to be engaged in research, most informants agreed that this

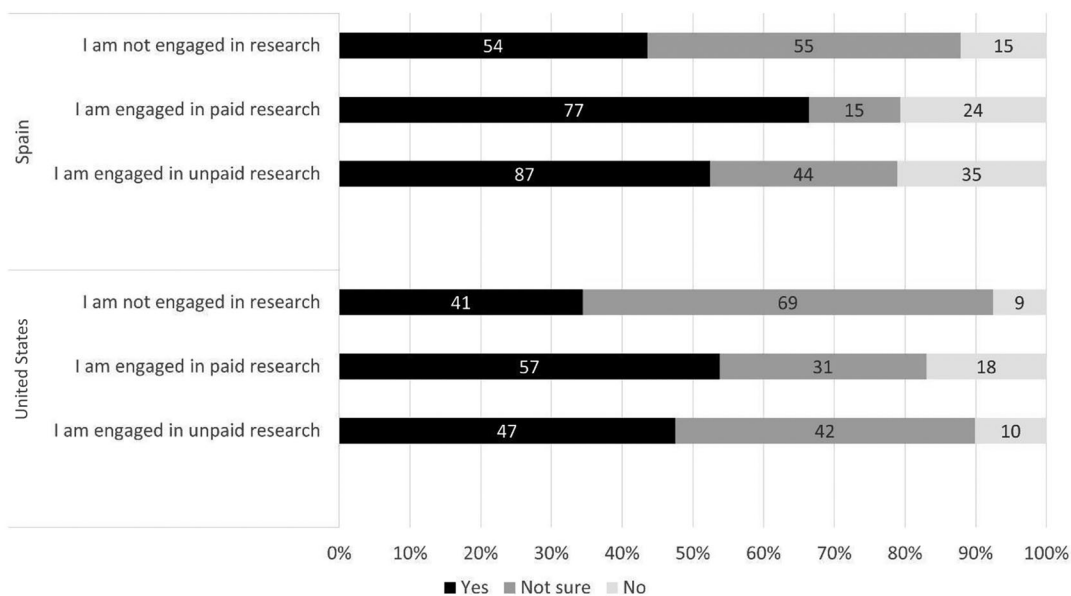


FIGURE 1 Perception of research engagement being more common in the profession (Q55) by country (Q4) and self-reported research engagement (Q53).

was the case (see Figure 1). Given that SLT, as a distinct discipline within applied linguistics, is relatively young (Muñoz-Basols et al., 2019), this finding is critical in highlighting that a research dimension is growing and gaining momentum within the SLT profession, thereby signaling the need to offer research training and relevant support among SLT professionals. In order to explore these needs, we move on to examine the demographic and research profile of these participants in more depth.

Demographic profile

Location

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the geographical distribution of informants based on their self-reported work location at the time of the survey. It should be noted that 10 of them did not specify their location within the United States and 9 did not specify their location within Spain. These informants were not included in Figures 2 and 3.

In the United States, informants from five states make up more than one third of the total: California ($n = 29$), Texas ($n = 23$), Illinois ($n = 22$), Florida ($n = 19$), and New York ($n = 18$). These states have a large population overall—a large and fast-growing Hispanic population more specifically—and a high number of higher education institutions. In Spain, the regions with the highest number of informants are areas with a large number of private language schools and higher education institutions, and these are also characterized by significant language tourism. Notably, these regional concentrations align with external data reported by Serrano García (2019), who documented that, across several different SLT institutions—including universities, official language schools (*Escuela Oficial de Idiomas*), and private language centers—the highest numbers were found in Andalusia ($n = 90$), Catalonia ($n = 77$), Madrid ($n = 58$), Castile and León ($n = 51$), and the Valencian Community ($n = 46$). In our data, these five regions had the largest number of informants: Madrid ($n = 93$), Andalusia ($n = 92$), Valencian Community ($n = 54$), Catalonia ($n = 48$), and Castile and León ($n = 45$).

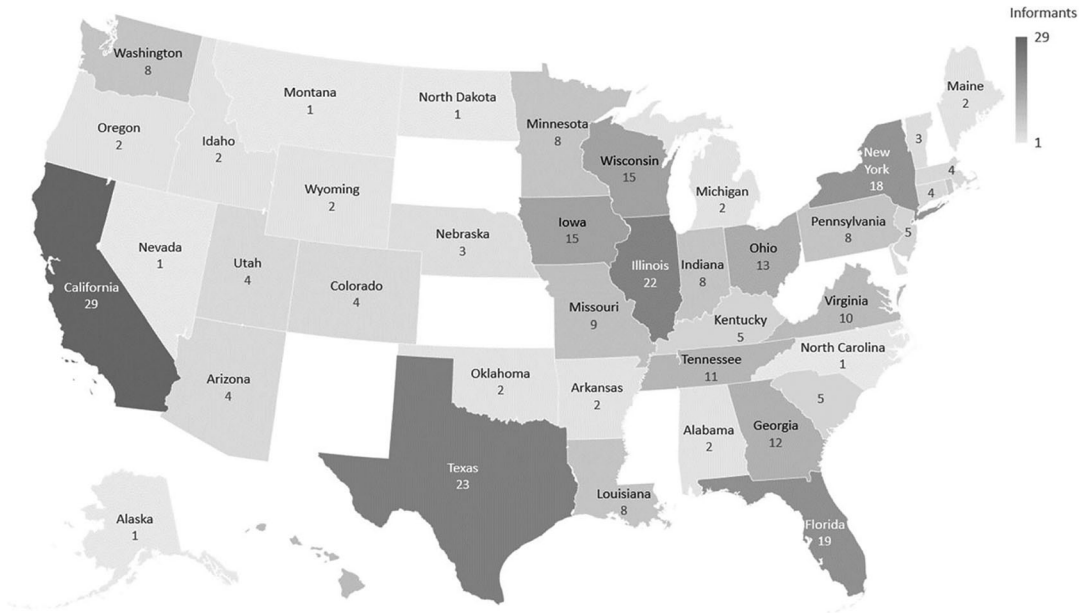


FIGURE 2 Number of informants by US states.

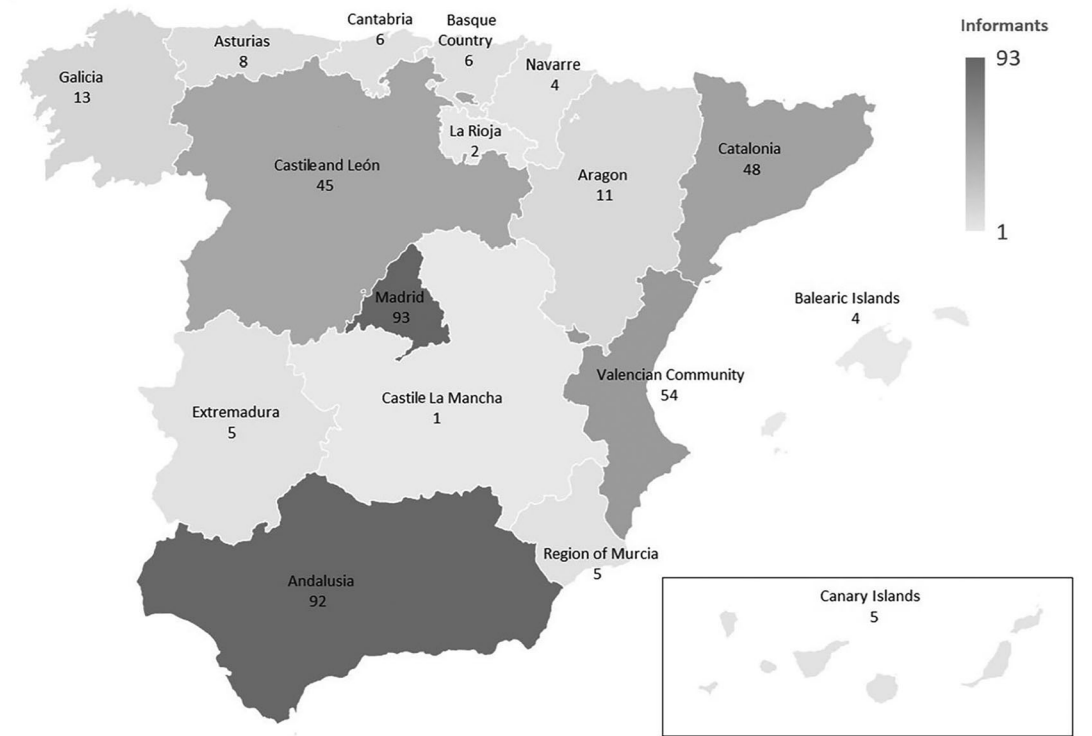


FIGURE 3 Number of informants by Spanish region.

TABLE 2 Average age of informants (Q2) by self-reported engagement in research (Q53) and country (Q4).

Country	Engaged in paid research	Engaged in unpaid research	Not engaged in research	Average
United States	43.7 ($n = 106$)	43.8 ($n = 99$)	45.2 ($n = 119$)	44.2
Spain	43.0 ($n = 116$)	40.7 ($n = 166$)	35.9 ($n = 124$)	39.9
Average	43.4	42.2	40.6	42.1

TABLE 3 Odd ratios for the multinomial logistic regression.

Predictor	Research engagement	Odds ratio	p value	95% Confidence interval
Gender Male	Unpaid vs. not engaged	0.704	.081*	[0.474, 1.040]
Gender Male	Paid vs. not engaged	0.908	.009***	[0.438, 0.890]
Country US	Unpaid vs. not engaged	0.62	.635	[0.610, 1.350]
Country US	Paid vs. not engaged	0.953	.797	[0.662, 1.370]

* $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

Age and experience

The second variable we considered was age. In the United States, informants had, on average, 16 years of experience in the field, while in Spain the average was 12 years. In Table 2, we report the average age of informants based on 406 answers from Spain and 324 from the United States (11 informants did not answer one or more of the questions considered to build Table 2).

Table 2 illustrates two contrasting trends in the relationship between self-reported age and research engagement. In Spain, the youngest group reports the lowest research engagement, whereas in the United States, the youngest group is the most likely to be EPR. Similarly, in Spain, the oldest group is the most involved in paid research, while in the United States, the oldest group reports the least research engagement.

Gender

The third variable we considered is self-reported gender and the differences that may emerge in terms of research engagement across gender groups. Participants were given the choice to select their gender from two options (male and female), or to not answer the question. A total of 324 people from the United States and 406 from Spain responded, with a larger number of women than men overall, consistent with data from other studies (Bárkányi & Fuertes Gutiérrez, 2019; Muñoz-Basols et al., 2017; Österberg, 2021). Figure 4 reports the number of male and female informants based on their self-reported research engagement. Two multinomial logistic regressions were conducted in R, one with and one without interaction of gender and country, to examine the effect of gender and country on respondents' research engagement. The model with no interaction had a slightly lower Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and fewer parameters ($df = 6$). Data from this analysis, summarized in Table 3 and Figure 4, show that males have 30% lower odds than females to be EUR versus NER, and 9% lower odds (significant at $p = .009$) than females of being EPR versus NER. Additionally, respondents based in the United States have 38% lower odds of being EUR and 5% lower odds of being EPR compared to those based in Spain. Therefore, compared to females, male SLT professionals are less likely to be involved in unpaid and paid research, although the difference is small for paid research. Similarly, SLT researchers in the United States are less likely to be involved in unpaid and paid research than in Spain, although again, the difference is small for paid research.

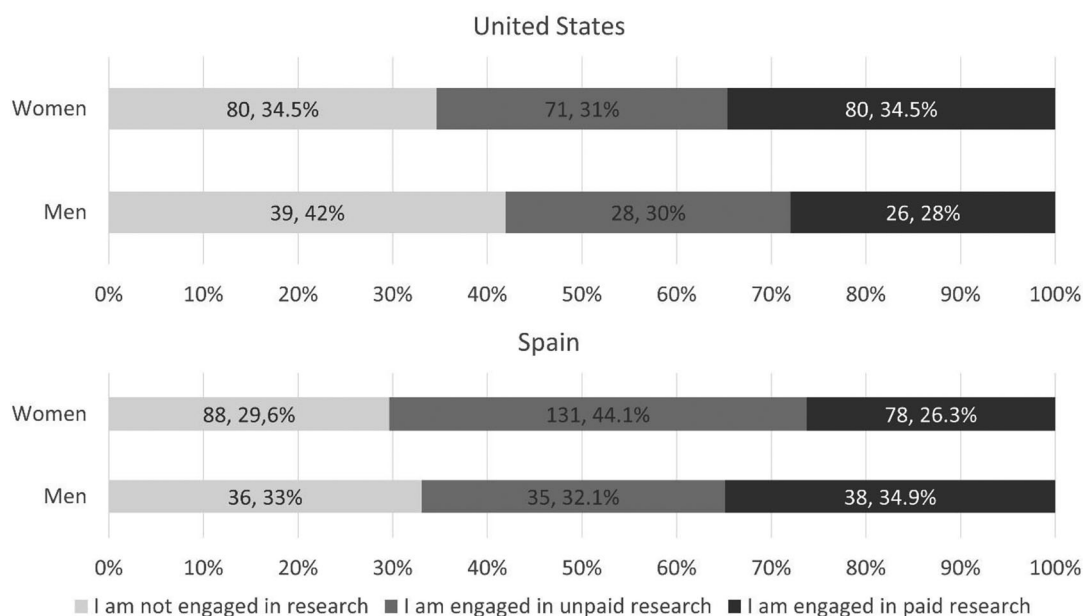


FIGURE 4 Predicted probability of research engagement by gender and country.

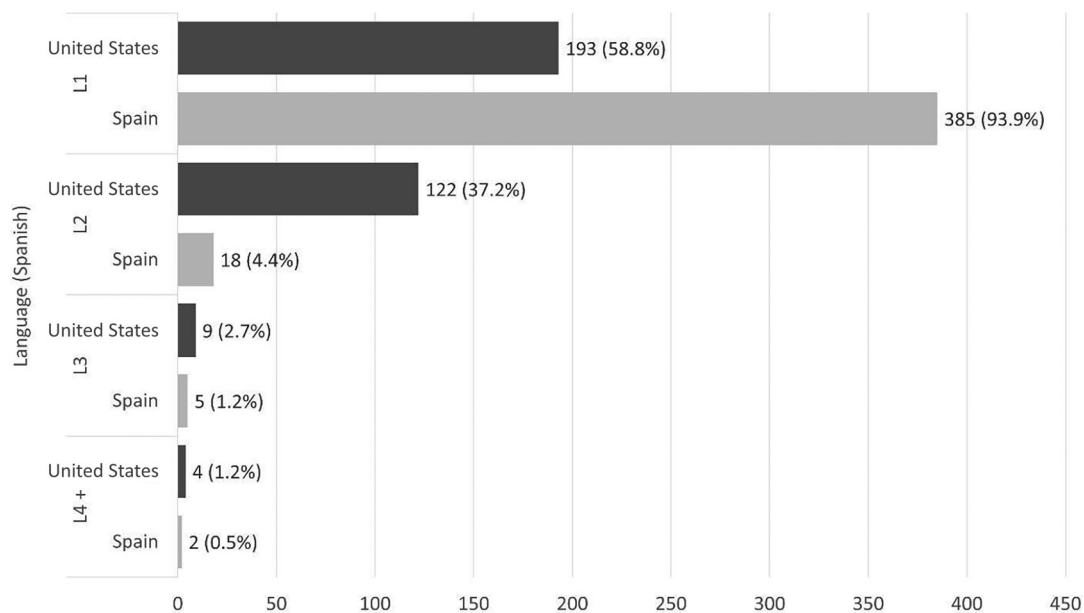


FIGURE 5 Informants' language (Q6) by country (Q4). Note: Question was whether informant spoke Spanish as their first (L1), second (L2), third (L3), or fourth language (L4).

Language repertoire

The fourth variable considered was language, that is, whether participants reported that Spanish was their L1, L2, L3, or L4 (Q6). A total of 328 people from the United States and 410 from Spain answered this question. Figure 5 shows the percentage of informants grouped according to their self-reported

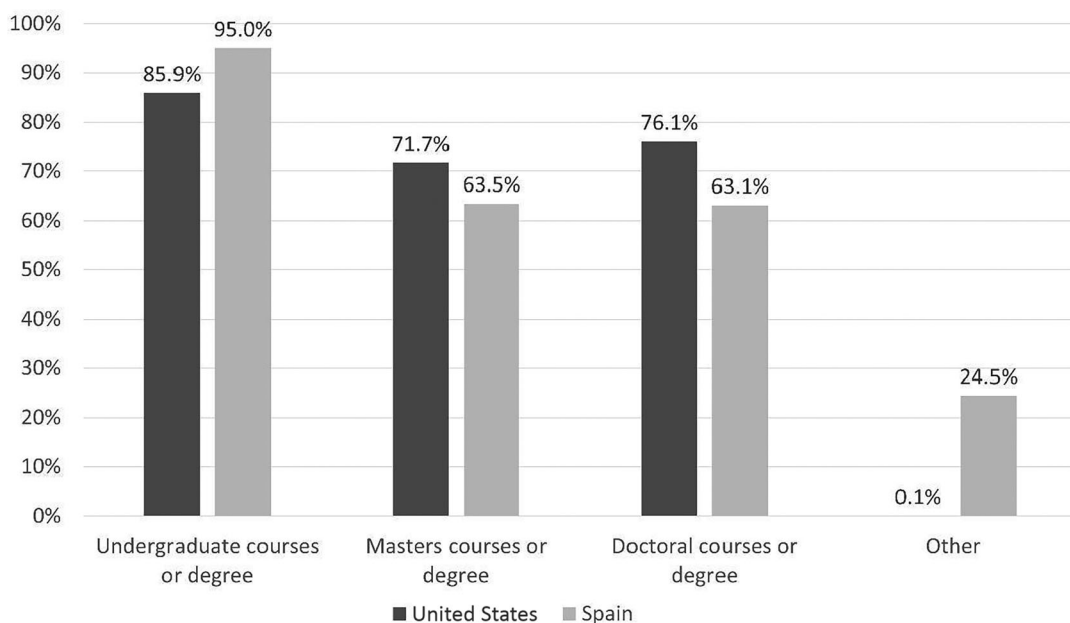


FIGURE 6 Informants' prior education and qualifications (Q42) by country (Q4).

language and country. The majority of informants in Spain reported Spanish as their L1 ($n = 385$; 93.9%). In contrast, only 58.8% ($n = 193$) of informants in the United States identified Spanish as their L1, while 37.2% ($n = 122$) indicated Spanish as their L2. This variable can influence how SLT instructors are perceived and valued based on their status as either L1 or L2 Spanish speakers (Thompson & Cuesta Medina, 2019). This factor may also influence instructors' ability to secure employment and pursue opportunities in different locations—key for accessing crossborder positions and wider job markets—since employability and mobility are closely linked to the unique socioeconomic and educational conditions of each region (see Llurda, 2016; Llurda & Calvet-Terré, 2022; Moussu & Llurda, 2008).

Education and qualifications

In terms of prior education, both Spain- and US-based respondents have similar profiles, summarized in Figure 6. Most have completed graduate studies, and a significant percentage of informants in both regions reported having completed at least some doctoral-level coursework. One notable difference is the percentage of people who reported having obtained nonofficial or alternative qualifications, which is significantly higher in Spain (24.5%). Among the degrees indicated by informants are stand-alone professional courses, qualifications to become language examiners (e.g., the *Diplomas de Español como Lengua Extranjera* [DELE] examinations from the Instituto Cervantes), courses to obtain a teaching certificate (e.g., *Certificado de Aptitud Pedagógica*), and nonofficial postgraduate qualifications (e.g., *Experto en ELE* in Spain).

Research profile: Engaging with and in research

Spanish language teaching professionals' engagement with publications

In this section, we present data concerning the quantity and the types of publications that paid and unpaid researchers engage with. Figure 7 lists the publications that were explicitly mentioned by

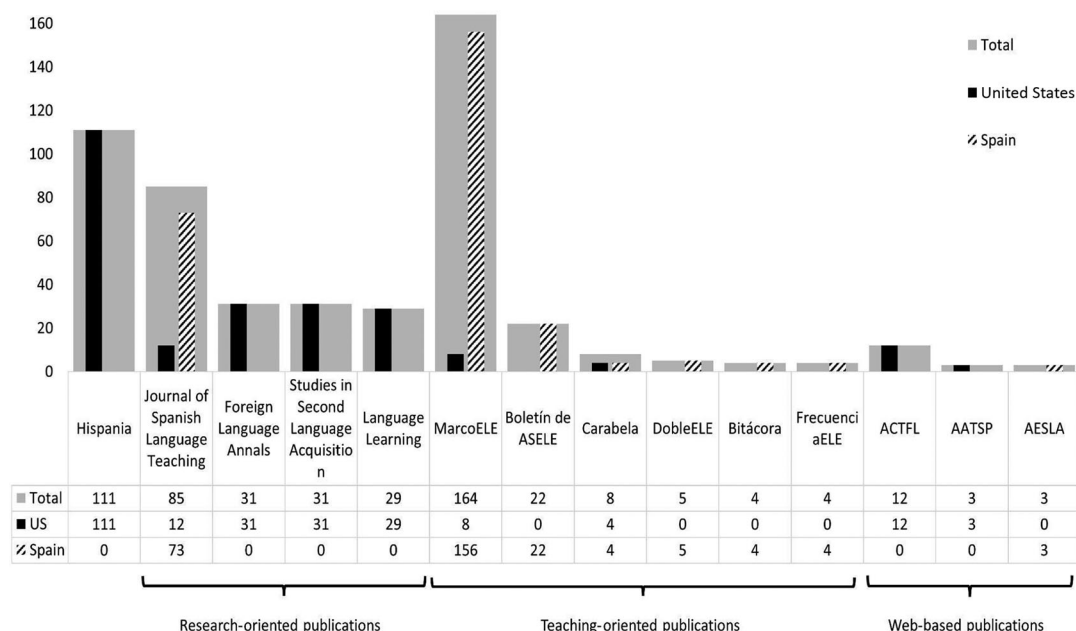


FIGURE 7 Key research-oriented, teaching-oriented, and web-based publications mentioned by paid researchers.

informants EPR in Spain and the United States, whether each publication is research oriented, teaching oriented, or web based, and how many times each publication was mentioned. Figure 8 displays the same information as reported by informants EUR in Spain and the United States. The publications represented in Figures 8 and 9 have been classified into three categories: research-oriented publications (R-OPs) if they publish peer-reviewed research articles, often of an empirical nature, and have been indexed in a database, such as Scopus; teaching-oriented publications (T-OPs) if they publish class reports, teaching materials, and research articles with a strong applied component and often not of an empirical nature; and web-based publications (W-BPs) if they represent teaching or research resources other than scholarly journals, such as the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) or the *Asociación Española de Lingüística Aplicada* [Spanish Association of Applied Linguistics] (AESLA) websites.

Figures 7 and 8 show that paid and unpaid researchers in each country engage with different types of publications. Among paid researchers, despite similar numbers in both countries (106 in the United States and 116 in Spain), US-based researchers referenced a greater number of R-OPs. This difference is evident both in the variety of sources (10 different publications) and tokens (271 total mentions). In contrast, Spain-based researchers mentioned more T-OPs than their North American colleagues, again, both in terms of sources (9 different publications) and tokens (201 total mentions). It is also worth mentioning that among all T-OPs, *MarcoELE* is the most popular journal in both countries (mostly in Spain, with 156 mentions), while among all R-OPs, *Hispania* is the most popular in the United States (111 mentions), and the *Journal of Spanish Language Teaching* in Spain (72 mentions).

A similar trend is also observed among unpaid researchers. In this case, the total number of unpaid researchers in Spain is almost double that of those in the United States. Nonetheless, US-based unpaid researchers mentioned more R-OPs than their Spanish colleagues in terms of tokens (110 total mentions) but not types (Spain-based researchers mentioned 13 different publications and US-based researchers only mentioned three), and Spain-based researchers mentioned more T-OPs, both in terms of types (9 publications) and tokens (145 total mentions). The most popular publications are: *redELE*, a T-OP with 41 mentions in Spain and 23 in the United States; among the R-OPs, *Hispania* is the most

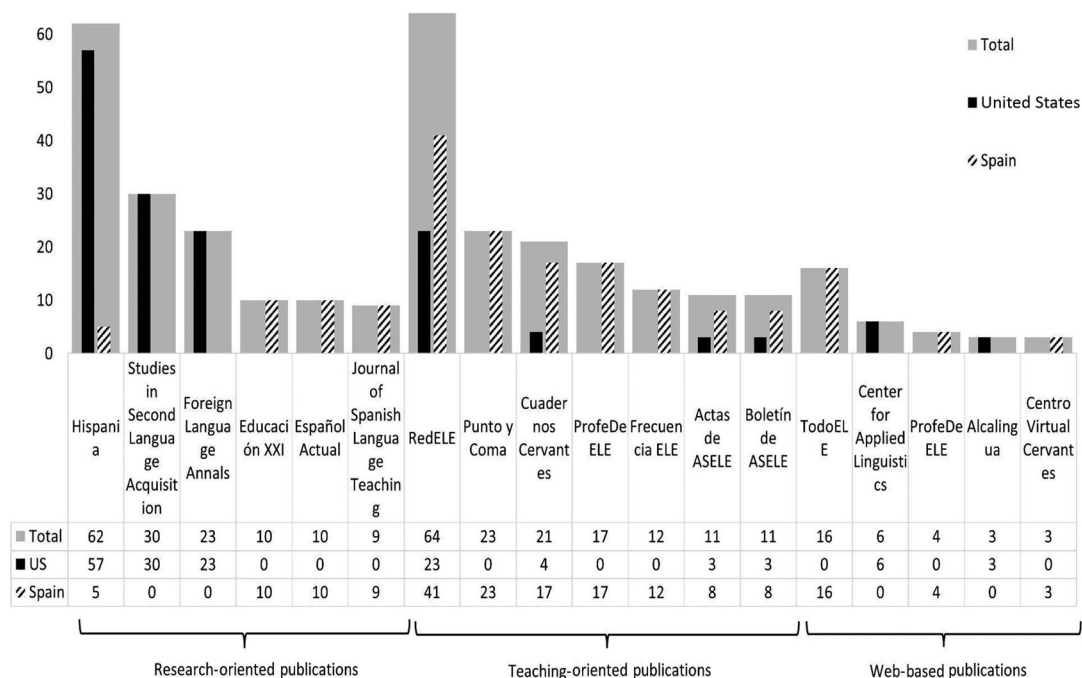


FIGURE 8 Key research-oriented, teaching-oriented, and web-based publications mentioned by unpaid researchers.

popular journal in the United States, with 57 mentions, while *Educación XXI* and *Español Actual* are the two most popular ones in Spain, with 10 mentions each.

If we apply life capital as a conceptual framing, this discrepancy between T-OPs and R-OPs in different demographics could be understood through life trajectories: Professionals in Spain may prioritize pedagogical applications due to their formative experiences and institutional expectations, whereas those in the United States may have access to research-focused training and academic resources that reinforce engagement with empirical studies. Therefore, these figures reveal how the field of SLT is evolving in these countries, suggesting the value of academic research in the United States and, in contrast, a more applied and classroom-oriented approach in Spain. These data also offer an insight into how SLT is conceptualized by professionals in these two geographical contexts: as an applied and classroom-bound activity in Spain, where most researchers engage with T-OPs, and a theory-driven, research-oriented one in the United States, where most researchers engage with R-OPs.

Moreover, as illustrated in Tables 4 and 5, researchers tend to engage with publications that are specific to their linguistic and geographical context: US-based researchers tend to read publications in English produced in the United States or other English-speaking countries, and Spain-based researchers tend to read publications in Spanish that are generally produced in Spain or other Spanish-speaking countries. Last, we also see that researchers in the United States tend to engage with publications that entail paid access to their content (e.g., *Hispania*), which is often granted via an institution or an association; in contrast, in Spain open-access publications are more popular and, in most cases, backed by institutional support (e.g., *redELE*). These observations point to how accessibility not only influences research impact but also contributes to sustaining and enhancing a research culture. First, it indicates, as evidenced by the type of academic journals consulted in the United States (more research based) and Spain (more teaching based), that SLT professionals in the United States show greater awareness of a range of publications across varying levels of academic genre. Second, it reflects the presence of specific events in the United States catering to SLT, such as the AATSP annual conference, as well as broader language-focused gatherings like the annual meetings

TABLE 4 Publications with more than 10 mentions by US-based researchers.

Category and title	Mentions	Published since	Access	Language/s of publication
[R-OP] <i>Hispania</i>	168	1917	PA	English, Portuguese, Spanish
[R-OP] <i>Foreign Language Annals</i>	54	1967	PA	English
[R-OP] <i>Studies in Second Language Acquisition</i>	30	1978	PA	English
[R-OP] <i>Language Learning</i>	29	1948	PA	English
[T-OP] <i>redELE</i>	23	2004	OA	Spanish
[R-OP] <i>Language Teaching</i>	20	1968	PA	English
[R-OP] <i>PMLA</i>	13	1884	PA	English (additional languages with translation)
[R-OP] <i>Journal of Spanish Language Teaching</i>	12	2014	PA	English, Spanish
[W-BP] ACTFL	12	1967	OA	English, Spanish (additional languages)

Abbreviations: ACTFL, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages; OA, open access; PA, paid access (via membership of an affiliated association or subscription); PMLA, Publications of the Modern Language Association; R-OP, research-oriented journals that publish peer-reviewed research articles, many of them of an empirical nature; T-OP, 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, web-based publications such as teaching or research resources other than journals.

TABLE 5 Publications with more than 10 mentions by Spain-based researchers.

Category and title	Mentions	Published since	Access	Language/s of publication
[T-OP] <i>MarcoELE</i>	156	2005	OA	Spanish
[R-OP] <i>Journal of Spanish Language Teaching</i>	73	2014	PA	English, Spanish
[T-OP] <i>redELE</i>	41	2004	OA	Spanish
[R-OP] <i>Porta Linguarum</i>	24	2004	OA	English, Spanish
[T-OP] <i>Punto y Coma</i>	23	2006	OA	Spanish
[T-OP] <i>Boletín de ASELE</i>	22	1988	OA	Spanish
[T-OP] <i>Cuadernos Cervantes</i>	17	1995	OA	Spanish
[W-BP] ProfeDeELE	17	2012	OA	Spanish
[W-BP] <i>Todoele</i>	16	2002	OA	Spanish
[W-BP] ACTFL	15	1967	OA	English
[R-OP] <i>Calidoscopio</i>	15	2004	OA	English, Portuguese, Spanish
[R-OP] <i>Language Testing</i>	12	1984	PA	English
[T-OP] <i>Frecuencia ELE</i>	12	1996	OA	Spanish
[R-OP] <i>Revista de Lingüística Teórica y Aplicada</i>	11	1963	OA	English, Spanish
[R-OP] <i>Español Actual</i>	10	1963	OA	Spanish
[R-OP] <i>Educación XXI</i>	10	1998	OA	English, Spanish
[T-OP] <i>Tecla</i>	10	2005	OA	Spanish

Abbreviations: ACTFL, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages; ELE (Español Lengua Extranjera); OA, open access; PA, paid access (via membership of an affiliated association or subscription); R-OP, research-oriented journals that publish peer-reviewed research articles, many of them of an empirical nature; T-OP, 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, web-based publications such as teaching or research resources other than journals.

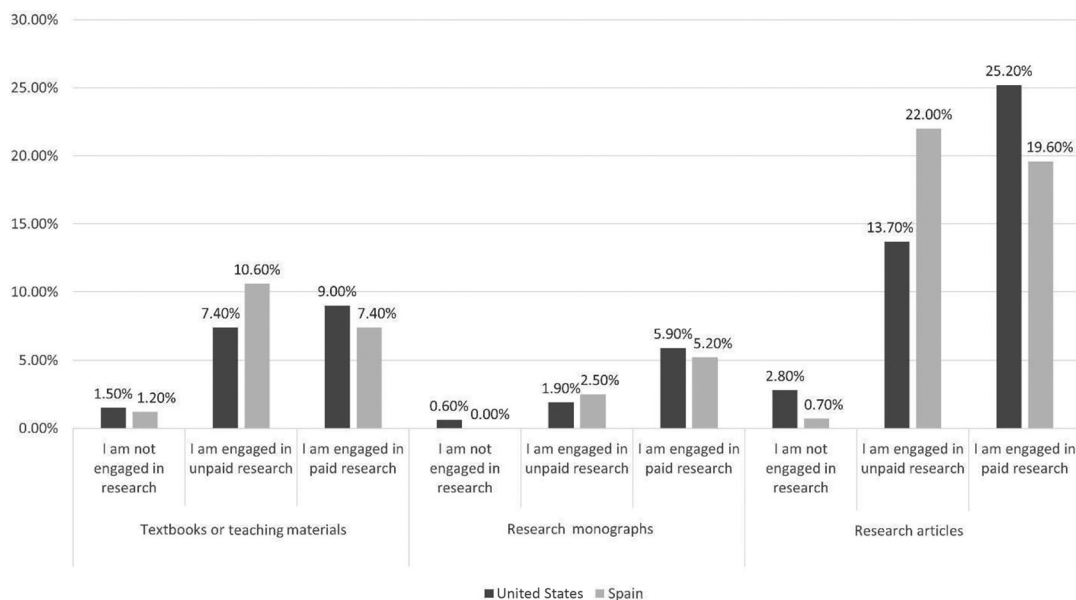


FIGURE 9 Percentage of Spanish language teaching researchers who publish different types of publications (Q50) by self-reported research engagement (Q53).

of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) or the American Association of Applied Linguists (AAAL), whose associations oversee publications like *Hispania* for AATSP or *Foreign Language Annals* for ACTFL. These forums play a vital role in professional networking and development. Third, the study highlights differences in institutional support between the United States and Spain, with professionals in the former often benefiting from greater access to resources, including paid repositories as opposed to relying solely on open-access journals. These data suggest a potential gap between how the field is developing within individual local CoPs and the broader need for increased dialogue and collaboration among language teaching professionals across different educational contexts on both sides of the Atlantic, to help encourage the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives. Issues of research accessibility need to be addressed at the level of language and open research practices in order to promote equal participation of local CoPs. Using Consoli’s (2022) life capital lens, these findings can be interpreted in terms of institutional privilege, training opportunities, and accumulated professional experiences. The difference in publication engagement is not merely a structural issue but also reflects how individuals perceive and navigate research spaces based on their personal and professional trajectories. Those in Spain may see research as an adjunct to teaching, while their United States counterparts may view it as a core professional expectation.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning trends in how researchers engage with W-BPs. Paid researchers in both countries, but more so in the United States, engage primarily with learned societies in L2 teaching and research. However, unpaid researchers in Spain report a high number of websites that primarily offer teaching materials and resources for the classroom, thereby underscoring the relevance of a more hands-on, practical teaching-oriented approach in the Spanish context.

Authorship as a measure of engagement in research

Figure 9 summarizes the data regarding how many informants, per country, reported publishing textbooks or teaching materials, research monographs, or research articles, grouped according to their self-reported research engagement. Authorship of research articles or monographs is considered here

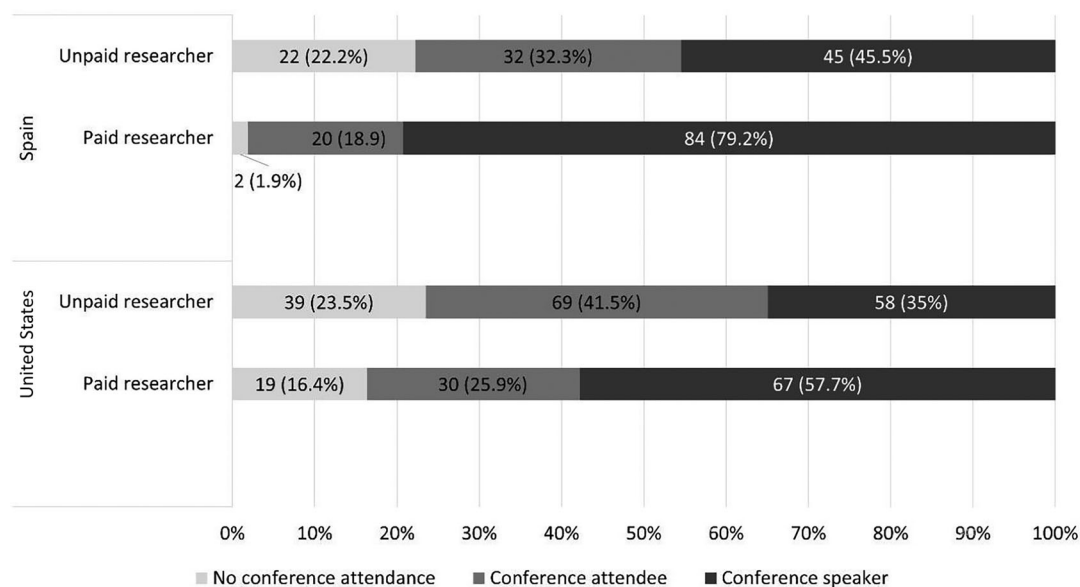


FIGURE 10 Conference attendance (Q47) by country (Q4) and researcher type (Q53).

as another measure of research engagement, since these represent the primary form of engagement in academic research (e.g., as opposed to the publication of teaching materials).

Conference attendance as a measure of engagement with and in research

The last measure of research engagement is conference attendance. Informants indicated whether they generally attend conferences without presenting, present their work at conferences, or do not attend conferences at all. These data are summarized in Figure 10.

When examining conference attendance and participation across different countries and researcher types (paid and unpaid), we observe that unpaid researchers exhibit similar engagement patterns in both Spain and the United States. These individuals, despite lacking formal institutional support, demonstrate a strong commitment to their field, with a relatively small percentage not attending conferences and a significant number actively participating and even presenting their work. This suggests that unpaid researchers rely on their accumulated life experiences, knowledge, and intrinsic motivation to engage with academic communities and sustain their professional development. However, notable differences emerge among paid researchers in Spain and the United States. In Spain, nearly all paid researchers attend conferences, and the vast majority present their work. This trend reflects not only professional and contractual expectations but also the embedded nature of CoPs within the Spanish academic and research ecosystem. The dense network of specialized conferences in Europe provides regular opportunities for researchers to exchange knowledge, strengthen their professional identity, and cultivate shared practices within their disciplinary communities. These conferences function as hubs where knowledge is created, refined, and disseminated, thus reinforcing the collective expertise of the field.

Conversely, in the United States, a greater proportion of paid researchers report not attending conferences, with fewer than 60% regularly presenting their research. This divergence may be attributed to several factors, including the financial constraints associated with attending US-based conferences, which are often more expensive than their European counterparts. Moreover, the relative scarcity of Spanish-focused conferences in the United States may hinder the formation and sustainability of CoPs,

making it more challenging for researchers to maintain sustained engagement with their peers. Ultimately, these patterns of conference participation underscore the interplay between life capital and CoPs in shaping researcher engagement. While life capital, comprising personal experiences, professional resources, and motivations, drives individual researchers to seek professional growth, the presence of strong, institutionalized CoPs provides the infrastructure necessary for sustained participation in academic discourse. Understanding these dynamics is essential for fostering more inclusive and accessible research environments, ensuring that knowledge production is not solely dictated by economic and institutional barriers but also by the shared commitment of researchers to their field.

Spanish language teaching professionals' research needs

Responses to two open-ended questions (Q56: If you do not carry out research, what would be necessary for you to do so? Why? and Q57: If you carry out research, what changes do you think should take place in the field of SLT? Why?), which asked participants what they would need in order to engage in research, were analyzed qualitatively. This involved a bottom-up, recursive process through which thematic categories were identified inductively, rather than applying a predefined coding framework. To ensure consistency in the coding process, interrater reliability was assessed using NVivo, resulting in a Cohen's kappa score of 0.63, indicating a satisfactory level of agreement between coders.

When reading Table 6, it should be noted that each informant could mention more than one category in their answers. The percentages refer to the number of informants within each research-engagement and country group who mentioned any given category, with bolded text to highlight values above 10%. The categories are defined as follows:

1. *Resources*: tools and materials necessary for conducting research (e.g., access to bibliographic databases and journals, instruments that support scholarly work).
2. *Community*: professional and academic networks that support research engagement (e.g., research fellowships, mentorship, and collaboration across disciplines, research groups, and networks).
3. *Motivation*: personal and professional drivers behind research activity (e.g., intrinsic interest, willingness, access to opportunities, and general motivation to contribute to the field).
4. *Prestige*: perceptions of the field's academic status (e.g., need for institutional recognition, international visibility, pedagogical validation, and innovations in research quality and rigor).
5. *Professionalization*: formal development of SLT as a recognized field (e.g., establishing a consolidated professional profile, disseminating research, institutional support, and reducing unqualified entry into the profession).
6. *Research areas*: specific topics or domains where research is focused or needed (e.g., corpus linguistics, pragmatics, phonetics, teaching materials, instructional SLA, cultural studies, and technology).
7. *Support*: structural and financial conditions that enable research (e.g., grants, job stability, institutional guidelines, reduced teaching loads, and appropriate pay).
8. *Training*: educational and professional development needed for effective research (e.g., ongoing training in linguistics, sociolinguistics, SLT, and research methods).

Several differences and commonalities between Spain- and US-based researchers can be observed in Table 6 (these values are bolded in the table). First, the *support* category—which includes comments on contracts and paid research, access to grants, promotion of research within the profession, institutional guidelines, and reduced teaching load—emerges as a key need for all informants in both countries, but particularly for those not (yet) engaged in research and those based in Spain. Second, although respondents were not asked to identify specific research topics or areas that would need to be addressed for the advancement of the field, participants engaged in research (paid and unpaid) mentioned several, while those NER did not mention any. While the percentages of these mentions are

TABLE 6 Percentage of informants who mentioned each research need (per country and self-reported research engagement) and definitions of each need identified.

Thematic categories	Spain (<i>n</i> = 406)		United States (<i>n</i> = 324)			
	Not engaged in research (<i>n</i> = 124)	Engaged in paid research (<i>n</i> = 116)	Engaged in unpaid research (<i>n</i> = 166)	Not engaged in research (<i>n</i> = 119)	Engaged in paid research (<i>n</i> = 106)	Engaged in unpaid research (<i>n</i> = 99)
Resources	0	4.31%	2.41%	0%	6.6%	5.05%
Community	2.42%	6.9%	7.83%	7.56%	3.77%	5.05%
Motivation	7.26%	3.45%	3.61%	9.24%	3.77%	1.01%
Prestige	5.65%	16.38%	10.84%	4.2%	6.6%	6.06%
Professionalization	1.61%	8.62%	11.45%	1.68%	3.77%	4.04%
Research areas	5.65%	13.79%	17.47%	5.88%	20.75%	17.17%
Support	31.45%	17.24%	25.3%	28.57%	11.32%	20.2%
Training	4.84%	3.45%	4.82%	4.2%	0.94%	1.01%

low because respondents were not required to provide this information, a comparison across countries reveals that SLT professionals in both geographical contexts commented on the need to increase research that clearly connects SLA and classroom instruction (instructed SLA), although in the United States this was mostly mentioned by those EPR.

Last, prestige and professionalism emerge as key needs for Spain-based researchers but not as much in the case of US-based researchers. Comments related to prestige highlighted the various challenges that researchers in the field of SLT encounter, which in turn affect the field's broader academic perception as a less consolidated field than others (see comment below from ID 5). Some of them perceive the research produced in some SLT journals as poorly designed and believe that the overall quality of scholarly publications within the field is limited (ID 323). Furthermore, the limited presence of SLT research in international journals was highlighted as a significant challenge. For example, in contrast to ELT, there are fewer studies on SLT in international journals and academic journals devoted to SLT (ID 246) that are indexed in major databases; notably, the *Journal of Spanish Language Teaching* remains the only publication in the field currently indexed in Scopus. Furthermore, as demonstrated in Tables 4 and 5, most publications dedicated to SLT teaching are primarily pedagogical in focus, rather than emphasizing empirical research. Additionally, there is a prevailing perception among more established neighboring disciplines—such as Hispanic theoretical linguistics (ID 1633), which benefits from a larger number of academic positions within language departments—that SLT remains an emerging field requiring further consolidation, despite often facing greater student demand and overall interest, and contributing significantly to pedagogical innovation and curricular development (see Gironzetti & Muñoz-Basols, 2025). Sample excerpts related to the lack of prestige of SLT previously described above include:

Debería ser un campo consolidado en la investigación. En la enseñanza del inglés sí lo es y no veo que haya muchas diferencias cualitativas.

It should be a well-established research field. This is the case for English language teaching, and I don't see many qualitative differences.

ID 5 (Spain, EPR)

Creo que las investigaciones en ELE no están siempre bien valoradas por los estudiosos de la lingüística teórica.

I think SLT research is not always valued by theoretical linguistics researchers.

ID 1633 (Spain, EPR)

Mayor presencia en publicaciones académicas internacionales especializadas en lingüística aplicada.

More presence in international scholarly journals in the field of applied linguistics.

ID 246 (Spain, EPR)

Creo que debería haber mayor control sobre lo que se publica. A veces los artículos no están a la altura de una investigación científica.

I think there should be more control over what gets published. Sometimes, articles do not meet the standards of scholarly research.

ID 323 (Spain, EUR)

A life capital framing applied to this discussion would suggest that researchers' past experiences, motivations, and disciplinary training influence the ways they engage with research. For instance, Spanish SLT professionals may struggle with institutional recognition because SLT research has not been as firmly established as ELT. Conversely, a US-based researcher may prioritize an empirical research agenda because their professional trajectory has placed them in research-intensive environments.

TABLE 7 Comparison of Spain- and US-based researcher profiles (paid and unpaid).

Profile	Spain	United States
Engaged in paid research	41.1%	51.7%
Average age (years, months)	41,6	43,7
Gender	74.1% female	73.6% female
Spanish first language	93.9%	58.8%
Publishes research articles	59.6%	60.9%
Publishes research monographs	10.9%	11.7%
Publishes teaching materials	25.8%	25.8%
Presents at conferences	44.3%	62.9%
Works at a university	45.7%	87.3%
Needs	Prestige, professionalization, support, research areas	Support, research areas

DISCUSSION

Overall, the majority of informants reported being engaged in research, with 205 (63%) in the United States and 282 (70%) in Spain. However, a higher proportion of informants in Spain (41%) engage in unpaid research compared to those in the United States (30%). This section examines the profiles of research-active informants—both paid and unpaid—in each country, considering their educational background, participation in conferences, engagement with academic publications (both as readers and authors), and their research needs.

Responses from informants engaged in research suggest that the profile of a SLT researcher in Spain tends to be someone who self-identifies as a woman (74.1%), speaks Spanish as their L1 (93.9%), and is, on average, 41.8 years old. This researcher is often involved in unpaid research activities (58.9%) and commonly contributes to the field through the publication of research articles (59.6%) and teaching materials (25.8%), as well as through conference presentations (44.3%).

In the United States, the profile of an SLT researcher appears to generally align with someone who self-identifies as a woman (65.5%), speaks Spanish as either their L1 (58.8%) or L2 (37.2%), and is, on average, 43.7 years old. US-based researchers in this sample are somewhat more likely to be involved in paid research (51.7%) and often engage with the field through publishing research articles (60.9%) and presenting at conferences (62.9%). Table 7 offers a comparative overview of the research profiles of paid and unpaid researchers in both countries based on these data.

Table 7 reveals that US-based researchers appear to be more engaged with research and SLT more broadly. This is reflected in their higher publication rates of research articles and research monographs, as well as their more frequent presentations at conferences compared to their counterparts in Spain. This phenomenon may be partly attributed to the higher prevalence of paid research among US-based researchers (51.7%) compared to unpaid research, which is more common in the Spanish context. The higher prevalence of paid research among SLT professionals in the United States suggests that research is more commonly recognized as an integral or at least important aspect of their professional roles. In contrast, this perception appears to be less established in Spain, despite a larger proportion of Spain-based researchers believing that having a research profile is increasingly common among SLT professionals (Spain: 58.1%; United States: 50.7%; see Figure 1).

It is also worth considering the context in which informants were working at the time of the survey. In the United States, most of our informants were based in areas with a high number of higher education institutions (Figure 2), and 87.3% of those who reported being EPR or EUR were working at such institutions ($n = 95$), two factors that may contribute to fostering their research engagement. However, only 45.7% of Spain-based informants were employed at a higher education institution ($n = 67$).

The majority reported working in regions with a high concentration of language schools and language tourism (Figure 3), which may limit their research engagement. Instead, their professional focus and time investment are more likely directed toward practical teaching concerns. Our data suggest that the divide between practice and research in SLT, as well as the separation between the roles of teacher and researcher, is less pronounced in the United States than in Spain. Additionally, institutional support for SLT professionals to engage in research appears to be more prevalent in the United States compared to Spain. In the United States, teaching Spanish at the university level is a more common professional path because of the number of opportunities available (Gironzetti & Muñoz-Basols, 2025), which may explain why US-based SLT professionals report higher levels of engagement in paid research, as there are more research opportunities at this level. In contrast, in Spain, there are fewer SLT opportunities available at universities, something that may contribute to their unpaid research not being recognized as part of their job remit. Overall, SLT seems to be more widely recognized as a research area in the United States compared to Spain.

These differences across geographical contexts also impact the internationalization of the field (Muñoz-Basols et al., 2014), as they affect how SLT professionals engage with different types of publications. A key finding in our data shows that SLT professionals based in Spain (see Table 4) predominantly read open-access publications written in Spanish, possibly due to the cost of accessing paid publications, language barriers that prevent them from accessing publications written in English, and their limited availability to people not affiliated with a higher education institution. In contrast, US-based professionals read a larger number of paid-access publications in both Spanish and English (see Table 4) and are therefore able to participate more actively in SLT international academic discourses. This finding signals the urgency for the field to move toward an open-access model for research to be available to language practitioners worldwide and for Spanish to be more widely accepted for academic purposes. While the issue of open access is actively being addressed and gaining momentum (as exemplified by the Barcelona Declaration on Open Research Information, <https://barcelona-declaration.org/>), the call for greater academic recognition of Spanish requires more complex structural changes to academic policies and procedures. These include allocating resources for journals to publish articles in Spanish and addressing the perceived impact and relevance of such publications for career advancement. Although progress is being made, these changes are being adopted at a much slower pace within the scholarly community.

LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The relatively large sample size of respondents in this study, along with its focus on SLT professionals' perceptions and priorities regarding research, offers a useful basis for contributing to ongoing discussions in the field. Additionally, it establishes the basis for developing a truly collaborative research agenda on the demographics of SLT research culture, which can be adapted and replicated in other language teaching CoPs. However, this research is not without limitations. Although the data provide valuable insights, one limitation is the potential for different interpretations of the concept and/or activity of research among L2 teaching professionals (Barkhuizen, 2020, 2021; Borg, 2010; Consoli & Dikilitaş, 2021; Gironzetti & Muñoz-Basols, 2022; Hall, 2023; Hanks, 2017). While in this study a broad view of the term "research" and its key characteristics has been applied to enable the examination of critical issues and discussions (Hall, 2023), individuals may interpret "research" differently due to their exposure to different education systems, institutions, and contexts throughout their careers. As Bai (2018) highlighted, important questions to consider in this debate include what counts as research for language educators and the value of research for them.

A second limitation of this study is the lack of insight into what motivates researchers to engage in and with research, and at what stage in their careers this engagement occurs. Factors that may be influential include peer dynamics, specific training received, or the need to adapt to changes in the SLT discipline (e.g., new requirements at tertiary level or managerial reforms). Additionally, to

gain a fuller understanding, it would be necessary to analyze why some language practitioners have no interest in engaging with research and what can be done to shift their mindset (e.g., a teacher research program as part of their training, as proposed in Atay, 2008) so that they may recognize the benefits of staying informed about new developments in the discipline and the positive impact this can have on their teaching careers. Examining the primary motivations behind the development (or lack thereof) of a research profile among language educators and the relationship with teacher identity construction (Asadnia et al., 2022; Bao & Feng, 2022; Taylor, 2017) would also be a significant aspect to consider. Despite these limitations, the data from this study demonstrate that research is viewed as a crucial dimension of the SLT profession—both for informing current pedagogical practices and for theorizing new approaches. However, language professionals in the United States and Spain face two primary barriers: a lack of support for engaging in and with research, and a lack of disciplinary prestige, respectively.

After comparing SLT professionals' engagement in and with research in the United States and Spain, three key overarching conclusions can be identified, which not only apply to SLT but are also relevant to other language teaching CoPs. First, the consolidation of a research culture in the field of SLT may represent a more immediate priority in the Spanish context than in the United States. This involves not only professionalizing and formal recognition of the field, but also greater institutional support from employers. Importantly, SLT must be acknowledged as a legitimate area of language research—on par with established disciplines such as linguistics, philology, and literature and cultural studies.

Second, increasing the internationalization of research by improving visibility, connectivity, and accessibility is necessary in both the United States and Spain. Findings from this study suggest that research engagement is not solely a matter of institutional access or professional status but is also shaped by an individual's accumulated life capital. Significantly, CoPs play a crucial role in this process by serving as conduits for the development and exchange of life capital, providing professionals with opportunities to gain research experience, mentorship, and collaborative networks. Encouraging engagement at different levels of research—whether through informal collaboration, pedagogically focused research, or structured academic projects—can help professionals with diverse life trajectories to integrate more fully into the SLT research culture. Future initiatives should aim to create pathways that recognize and build upon the life capital of all language professionals, thereby ensuring that research engagement is accessible beyond traditional academic hierarchies.

Improved communication through collaborative efforts between associations of Spanish teachers could foster a better understanding of the discipline with a global perspective. This, however, should be done while addressing issues of accessibility of the research and invisibility of academic work. In the first instance, publications should be made available to the global CoP by means of open research practices, which are particularly important for those who do not have access to paywalled publications via their institution, as is the case of most SLT professionals in Spain. Similarly, research-oriented publications should develop guidelines and best practices to address teachers' concerns regarding their applicability and relevance to the classroom (see Coss & Hwang, 2024) to engage not only with researchers but also with language practitioners. In the second instance, issues regarding the invisibility of academic work by minoritized groups should be considered when designing initiatives to foster research engagement. For example, although the majority of SLT professionals in our study were women, only a minority of them reported being EPR in Spain, which highlights the gender gap and brings issues, as in other studies (Guarino & Borden, 2017; McIntosh et al., 2022), of invisibility and compromise in academic work due to systemic disadvantages, adjunctification (Gironzetti & Muñoz-Basols, 2025), and precariat (O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019) at the forefront.

Third, both the United States and Spain share a need for expanded training in research methods—to support individuals currently conducting research independently, without institutional support, as well as those aspiring to engage in research due to their awareness of its benefits and its positive impact on teaching practices.

In addition to these conclusions and recommendations pertaining specifically to SLT, based on our findings, we can also identify four main areas of action to foster a global research culture in language teaching CoPs—namely, (a) research education, (b) research accessibility, (c) research applicability, and (4) research connectivity. This study thus highlights the importance of considering both structural and individual factors in fostering research engagement among SLT professionals. By integrating the concepts of CoP and life capital, we provide a perspective that accounts for both the collective and personal dimensions of research engagement. While CoPs offer professional support, collaboration, and knowledge sharing, life capital determines how individuals engage within these communities. Recognizing the interplay between these elements allows for a more nuanced approach to research engagement—one that values not only formal qualifications and institutional roles but also the lived experiences and professional trajectories that shape educators' participation in research. We therefore believe that addressing the above challenges through well-planned and articulated initiatives at the local and global level could contribute to narrowing the research–practice divide and increasing research engagement.

Research education

Teacher education programs at both undergraduate and graduate levels could extend beyond the development of practical skills and classroom content to cultivate research engagement as an essential dimension of professional identity and continuous development. Research could be framed less as an isolated academic endeavor but rather as an integral part of the life capital that educators accumulate throughout their careers (Consoli, 2022). From a CoP perspective (Wenger, 1998) teacher education programs may help prepare future practitioners to see research engagement not as a rigid requirement but as a socially embedded practice that enriches their professional trajectory. Engaging in research would allow teachers to connect with a global network of educators, share experiences, and contribute to the evolving knowledge base of language education. This process is therefore crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and identity within the broader teaching and research community (cf., Banegas & Consoli, 2021). To support research engagement, teacher education programs could:

1. Emphasize the role of life capital in shaping teachers' engagement with research. This means recognizing how personal experiences, prior learning, and professional interactions and relationships influence one's approach to language education inquiry.
2. Embed research activities within collaborative, practice-based learning environments, where teachers engage in inquiry alongside peers and mentors, mirroring the organic learning structures of CoPs.
3. Provide flexible entry points into research, ensuring that all educators—regardless of whether research is a formal part of their role—develop the ability to access, interpret, apply, and generate knowledge.
4. Foster a culture of inquiry where teachers see research not as an external requirement but as a practical tool for innovation, problem solving or well-being in their classrooms and professional settings (e.g., Hanks, 2019).

Research accessibility

Research should be accessible to the global language teaching CoP in terms of cost, platforms, and language. Initiatives such as the Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA; www.oaspa.org) or the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA; www.sfdora.org) demonstrate the importance of making research free and fully accessible to all in order to increase tangible impacts and knowledge transfer. While the availability of open-access publications and platforms is certainly a useful initiative, this is not enough to make research accessible to all language teaching professionals.

First, often language teaching practitioners who are not directly engaged in research do not know about open access; therefore, as a first step, it is crucial to make these platforms more visible to this target audience by bringing them to their attention, for example, at teaching conferences and similar events, or through social media. Second, the tone and style in which these publications are written may not be accessible or familiar to practitioners, and they may struggle to identify what parts to focus on based on their interests and goals. Scholars and publishers should consider developing and applying a set of guidelines and best practices (see Coss & Hwang, 2024) to maximize the tangible impact of research for language teaching. Third, and last, the language in which the publications are written matters. In the case of SLT, we saw that many informants, despite being multilingual, relied on publications written in the language they teach. This calls for more diversity within academic publications, that tend to be written in English regardless of the discipline or target audience, and the possibility of exploring multilingual publications (Warren & Sato, 2024) as a step toward creating more inclusive and diverse SLT communities.

Research applicability

For research to be truly impactful, it must be relevant and applicable to the immediate needs of language professionals, fostering stronger links between theory and practice. Rather than functioning in a top-down vacuum, research is more effective when it emerges organically from practice (McKinley, 2019). From the perspective of life capital (Consoli, 2022), educators bring a wealth of accumulated experiences, including professional insights to the field. These life trajectories influence how they interpret, apply, and contribute to research. However, when research fails to acknowledge or incorporate the lived realities of educators, it risks becoming detached from the pressing concerns of language teaching professionals. By valuing teachers' life capital, research engagement can be reframed as a dynamic and evolving process that respects and celebrates the expertise that practitioners already possess. At the same time, CoPs (Wenger, 1998) serve as critical spaces for knowledge co-construction, where theory and practice intersect in meaningful ways. These communities facilitate collaborative inquiry, knowledge exchange, and shared problem solving, enabling both researchers and educators to develop effective, research-informed methodologies together. To ensure that research is both useful and accessible, the following strategies could be prioritized:

1. Creating shared spaces for dialogue (e.g., collaborative forums, participatory workshops, teacher-researcher networks) where practitioners and researchers can discuss urgent challenges, emerging themes.²
2. Recognizing teachers as knowledge producers by valuing classroom-based inquiry as legitimate research, aligning research questions with teachers' lived experiences and professional challenges (see, for example, Rose, 2019).
3. Encouraging reciprocal research engagement, where researchers learn from teachers' insights and teachers feel empowered to engage in research-related activities without formal academic barriers.
4. Embedding research within the life capital and CoPs of language professionals, we can foster a more inclusive and practitioner-driven research culture, ultimately enhancing both teaching practice and professional identity. After all, "teachers are capable agents of change who can generate powerful transformations and insights through research engagement" (Consoli & Dikilitaş, 2021, p. 350).

Research connectivity

For researchers and practitioners to truly belong to the same CoP, they must actively engage in shared activities and processes that foster mutual learning and collaboration. Wenger's (1998) work

on CoPs highlights that knowledge is best created and sustained through participation in meaningful, practice-driven interactions. However, our findings suggest that while researchers regularly attend and present at conferences, language practitioners often do not. Addressing this gap requires making conference participation more accessible and relevant for practitioners. Drawing on Consoli's (2022) concept of life capital, which emphasizes the value of individuals' lived experiences and the social structures that shape their professional engagement, we argue that enabling practitioners to participate in conferences can enhance their research engagement and professional identity. By recognizing practitioners' life capital—their unique trajectories, professional knowledge, and social contexts—we can create more inclusive professional spaces that bridge the research–practice divide. To achieve this, conferences must become economically and logistically accessible to practitioners without institutional support. This could include offering online participation options, reduced registration fees, and scheduling sessions outside of standard working hours. Furthermore, conferences should integrate practitioner-oriented sessions, interactive forums, and clear, actionable pedagogical takeaways to ensure relevance for those not directly involved in more traditional research. By fostering these changes, the language education community may enjoy a more dynamic, interconnected professional ecosystem that values both research and teaching as essential components of knowledge production and innovation.

Throughout this article, we have argued that there is a need to shift the perception of language learning scholars and practitioners as distinct CoPs: an “often-parasitical relationship” between researchers and practitioners, in which researchers need practitioners (as a source of data and as an audience for their findings) far more than practitioners need researchers (Hall, 2023). Instead, it may be helpful for each group to view the other as a complementary part of a shared ecosystem, as fostering collaboration could contribute to narrowing the gap between theory and practice. In addition to recognizing the interconnectedness and mutual dependence of these two groups, it is also important to consider them as dynamic entities whose roles and relationships evolve over time. SLT professionals may be empowered to engage in research at some point in their careers through training, connecting with research groups, or peer influence. Finally, it is important to advocate for the often-overlooked group of unpaid researchers who contribute to the field in their own time, without institutional recognition or support—such as allocated research time, sabbaticals, or access to grants. Institutions and senior managers should therefore recognize that the motivations of this group to engage in research often stem from their belief that it is beneficial for their professional development and necessary for improving and understanding their own teaching practices. The insights provided here offer opportunities for further discussion and can contribute to a deeper understanding of second language practitioners research culture(s), the CoPs they belong to and language education at large, ultimately supporting language professionals and empowering them through research.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Javier Muñoz-Basols: Conceptualization (lead); project administration (lead); supervision (lead); methodology (lead); investigation (lead); formal analysis (lead); data curation (supporting); writing—original draft (lead); writing—review and editing (lead). **Elisa Gironzetti:** Conceptualization (lead); project administration (supporting); supervision (supporting); methodology (lead); investigation (lead); formal analysis (lead); data curation (lead); writing—original draft (lead); writing—review and editing (supporting). **Sal Consoli:** Conceptualization (supporting); investigation (supporting); formal analysis (supporting); review and editing (lead).

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ENDNOTES

¹ See the full instrument at IRIS link: <https://www.iris-database.org/details/9p8vz-1iEiv>.

² Some examples of these exist; see the Fully Inclusive Practitioner Research: <https://www.fullyinclusivepr.com/>.

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