Profiling ESL research in Colombia… A growing need?

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Abstract

Purpose: To increase awareness of the special importance of profiling research. **Topics**: Indexed journals, types of reviews and research profiles. **Development**: Selecting a research topic could be a hard task for young researchers or experienced researchers exploring different subjects. As ESL research works have been gradually growing during the last decades, trying to have a general view of all research done on its diverse related topics is a utopian aim. Considerable efforts such as handbooks, literature reviews and states of the art have been made in order to make visible and organize different types of literature texts and scientific publications by adopting any selection criteria. However, such works, although very valuable, serve very specific purposes so that they cannot give a general picture of the different published research studies on an academic arena. Research profiles can meet such a need, of course, through inclusion criteria such as time frames or geographical contexts. Also, they help research works to be known and categorized according to any parameters so that research lines can be traced and regional or national bodies or research can be acknowledged. Besides, they are the starting point of more systematic reviews and complex tasks. **Conclusions**: Research profiles serve different purposes such as helping researchers select research topics, track and acknowledge research works, create research lines and set research agendas in a country.

Keywords: research profile, reviews, research on research, research topic.

La investigación de evaluación por perfiles de ESL en Colombia... ¿Una necesidad creciente?

Resumen

Propósito: aumentar la conciencia sobre la importancia especial de la investigación de evaluación por perfiles. **Temas**: revistas indexadas, tipos de revisiones y perfiles de investigación. **Desarrollo**: seleccionar un tema de investigación puede ser una tarea difícil para los investigadores jóvenes o investigadores experimentados que exploran diferentes temas. Debido a que los trabajos de investigación ESL han incrementado gradualmente durante las últimas décadas, tratar de tener una visión general de toda la investigación realizada sobre los diversos temas relacionados es un objetivo utópico. Se han realizado esfuerzos considerables tales como manuales, revisiones de literatura y estados del arte para hacer visibles y organizar diferentes tipos de textos literarios y publicaciones científicas, adoptando cualquier criterio de selección. No obstante dichos trabajos, aun cuando muy valiosos, sirven a propósitos muy específicos y por ende, no pueden dar un panorama general de los diferentes estudios de investigación publicados en un ámbito académico. Los perfiles de investigación pueden satisfacer dicha necesidad, por supuesto, a través de criterios de inclusión tales como marcos temporales o contextos geográficos. Asimismo, ayudan a hacer visibles y a clasificar los trabajos de investigación de acuerdo con cualquier parámetro, de tal manera que se puedan rastrear las líneas de investigación y se puedan reconocer los cuerpos de investigación regionales o nacionales. Además, los perfiles de investigación son el punto de partida de revisiones más sistemáticas y tareas complejas. **Conclusiones**: los perfiles de investigación sirven para propósitos diferentes, como ayudar a los investigadores a seleccionar temas de investigación, rastrear y reconocer trabajos de investigación, crear líneas de investigación y establecer agendas de investigación en un país.

Palabras clave: perfil de investigación, revisiones, investigación sobre la investigación, tema de investigación.

Perfis de pesquisa de ESL na Colômbia… Uma necessidade crescente?

Resumo

Propósito: Aumentar a conscientização da especial importância de um perfil de pesquisa. **Tópicos**: Publicações indexadas, tipos de resenhas e perfis de pesquisa. **Desenvolvimento**: Selecionar um tópico de pesquisa pode ser uma tarefa difícil para jovens pesquisadores ou investigadores experientes que exploram diferentes assuntos. Como os trabalhos de pesquisa em ESL têm crescido gradualmente durante as últimas décadas, tentar ter uma visão geral de toda a pesquisa realizada sobre seus diversos tópicos relacionados é um objetivo utópico. Esforços consideráveis, como manuais, resenhas de literatura e avanços foram feitos para dar visibilidade e organizar diferentes tipos de textos literários e publicações científicas ao adotar qualquer critério de seleção. No entanto, tais trabalhos, embora sejam muito valiosos, servem a propósitos muito específicos de forma que não podem dar uma ideia geral dos diferentes estudos de pesquisas realizados em uma área acadêmica. Perfis de pesquisa podem sanar uma necessidade, obviamente, através da inclusão de critérios como períodos de tempo ou contextos geográficos. Ainda, eles ajudam trabalhos de pesquisas a serem reconhecidos e categorizados de acordo com quaisquer parâmetros para que as linhas de pesquisas possam ser traçadas e as instituições regionais ou nacionais ou as pesquisas possam ter reconhecimento. Além disso, elas são o ponto de partida para resenhas mais sistemáticas e tarefas complexas. **Conclusões**: Perfis de pesquisa servem a diferentes propósitos tais como ajudar pesquisadores a selecionar tópicos de pesquisa, rastrear e conhecer trabalhos de pesquisa, criar linhas de pesquisa e estabelecer planos de pesquisa em um país.

Palavras-chave: perfil de pesquisa, resenhas, metapesquisa, tópico de pesquisa

Introduction

Nowadays, ELT[1] research has won more followers. Professors, teachers and students are getting more and more interested in doing research in order to both grow professionally and improve English language teaching and learning in different contexts (Dörnyei 16; Ellis 25; Anderson et al. 7). However, it is not always easy to choose a research topic. Bean argues that "the selection of topics for study is neither innocent nor rational" (167). He explains that it is not innocent since selecting makes visible that which is studied and those who are studied, and that it is irrational because personal interests play a role in deciding on the research topic. The fact is that whether intentional or irrational, researchers have different motivations for choosing their research topics. In education, day after day, a greater number of researchers are or have been teachers (Wilkins 12), which makes them design their research works around their teaching needs, their learners' needs, their institution needs, their research group needs, their particular academic and/or professional interests, or any other driving force. However, whatever motivations researchers can have, topic selection must be made on an informed basis.

When we want to choose a research topic, the first questions that most often arouse are: What is going on with ELT research around here? Are there any papers that give a general picture of what has been researched lately? What is trendy and why?, and What research approaches have been used the most? Then, we start searching for different papers that help us answer the questions above. We go through databases in indexed journals and other sources, and gradually narrow the scope of the search by setting parameters as we become interested in particular topics. Let us take the case of focusing mainly on research reports published in four ELT Colombian indexed journals (category A1, A2 and B) between 2011 and 2015. In a broad sense, we will get the following findings:

There are many research reports on different applied linguistics studies done in and outside Colombia;

- There are a lot of research reports on ELT topics in different Colombian contexts;
- There is one research report aimed to profile Latino American research works on discourse studies within a specific research focus;
- Even though, there are many literature reviews or states of the art about specific applied linguistic topics, there are no research reports describing all the research works on ELT done in Colombia within a certain period of time.

Those general findings might indicate that: First, no research aimed to describe all ELT research works done in Colombian contexts within a given time frame has been done. Second, if it has been done, it has not been published as research report in any Colombian indexed journal of applied linguistics between 2011 and 2015. Still having in mind the need to know about the research done and published lately in four indexed ELT Colombian journals as well as the need to narrow the scope even more, more questions can arouse and a more exhaustive search can be set. This shows that choosing a research topic is time-consuming mainly when lines of research have not been traced in a region or country. Therefore, research aimed to profile research works are highly useful for researchers to know what topics have been studied or need to be studied so that they can make informed decisions about the topic they want to contribute to and benefit from.

Are research profiles needed?

According to Brown, in general terms, second language research "is any systematic and principled inquiry in second language studies" (190). It is systematic since it follows an established procedure, and it is principled as it adopts a paradigm such as post-positivist, constructivist, transformative, or pragmatic which call for certain research designs (Mertens 8). Research on English as a Second Language (ESL) comprises a variety of topics related to: language skills development, language systems knowledge, teaching and learning in different social and educational contexts, literacy achievement, language policies, materials design and use, learners' needs, teachers' needs, the role of English in academic subjects and its integration to specific contents, theoretical insights on the nature of language learning, and research approaches, among other important topics that have contributed to the expansion of knowledge

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1   ESL is not used here only to refer to the teaching and learning of English in a context where it should be used for immediate social interaction (Oxford); it is used as an umbrella term embracing different many topics related to the teaching and learning of English after the first language. Thus, sometimes it will be used interchangeably with English Language Teaching (ELT).

on the academic field (Hinkel xiii; Anderson et al. 8). Examining how research is done is called research on research by Brown (195).

In order to increase knowledge, new research studies wisely use research works and reviews not only to better understand their research topic and their research approach, but also to fill or highlight gaps in knowledge, explain their studies from theoretical points of view, compare their results, confirm or reject hypothesis, support other studies' findings, etc. In the four journals searched, we find examples of studies on the same topics that could have been used by other researchers to expand their knowledge on the topic and support their views or results. For example, there are three reports on research on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) done in Colombia. Rodríguez (79) provides a critical overview of the adoption of the Colombian governmental language policy and CLIL by different institutions and the challenges faced during the process. Then, Muñoz-Luna (167) makes a diachronic review of the origin of CLIL and its evolution. Later, McDougald (25) presents preliminary results on the project "CLIL State-of-the-Art" carried out with 140 teachers implementing CLIL in their teaching practices. He explores teachers' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards CLIL in their teaching contexts.

Another example is illustrated by the following articles addressing language policy from different points of view. Thus, a new researcher in the topic can trace its development in our country by reading these papers and, of course, others published before or after them. Valencia gives a critical appraisal of the National Program of Bilingualism by revising different texts such as articles and documents to analyze the rationale of the program and its role as facilitator of "foreign intervention through free trade agreements, and the progressive dismantling of public education'" (27). In the same issue, the paper by Escobar approaches a problematic situation caused by a specific document published by the Colombian Ministry of Education (MEN), whose message reinforces unequal relationships through "power structures, means of control, and subject positioning of submission and dominance inherent in three main categories: Being bilingual, being successful, and being Colombian" (45). Correa and Wilches share their findings of a project aimed to get insights into the stakeholders' perceptions of the "Program for Strengthening the Development of Competencies in a Foreign Language," which clearly show that "these actions fit a bureaucratic policymaking model which has been highly questioned by policy experts" (226). Therefore, a new model equally favoring all the stakeholders should be proposed.

This use of previous and recent research could be extremely demanding and challenging since there are a lot of studies on the same topic worldwide. Even though searches are done for specific topics, there is also variety within them in terms of, for example, contexts, research approaches and cross-discipline themes as second language "research is an extremely rich and diverse subject, drawing on aspects of linguistics, psychology, sociology and education" (Cook 6), and other related fields. Therefore, efforts have been made to organize research studies so that tracing knowledge development on certain topics might not be such a laborious task.

Let us take the case of handbooks which are publications that compile research studies and organize them around particular topics. However useful they are, their purpose is not to describe existing research around specific topics, but to show the works considered as worthy of most attention about certain topics, which narrows the scope to the editor's point of view. Consequently, efforts to organize research should also be made from a more descriptive point of view in order to give more visibility to the diversity of research works on ESL. Of course, such efforts must be undertaken within set parameters such as time, geographical context, topic, indexed or non-indexed publications, or any other criteria that make the research profile not only manageable but effective. Therefore, such research descriptions can be, for instance, the starting points for different research studies and also be used for setting national research agendas in the field.

Research on ESL started to be published in indexed Colombian journals of applied linguistics approximately 15 years ago (Colciencias 3). Obviously, it does not mean that research on different topics related to this academic arena began at that time since there are a lot of previous studies which were published in non-indexed journals, books, proceedings, etc., or which were not published at all. Publication of studies as research reports serves different purposes: acknowledgment of research, recognition of its quality and dissemination, which are related to visibility of research groups and accreditation of programs and institutions (Molina-Molina and De-Moya-Anegón 530). Sharing of research studies helps researchers feel satisfied with their hard work, disseminate findings,

get feedback from other researchers or academicians, gain academic status, and move up the career ladder (Utsey 5). However, publication *per se* is not enough if research reports are not profiled in relation to others, in order to trace contributions to the scholar research done in the academic field, and help researchers plan what to do research on and how to better approach it.

During the last five years, over 100 esl studies done in Colombian contexts have been published as research reports in Colombian indexed journals of applied linguistics, which means that there is a growing interest in exploring, describing or explaining realities to get insights into different esl topics. Besides, it shows that research quality is improving since indexed journals are becoming more and more demanding in order to meet indexing requirements. Notwithstanding, the significant improvement in terms of quantity and quality of research reports is not immediately observed and/or might be underestimated if not shown as a national research body developing knowledge on a variety of topics regarding esl (Castañeda 10) in order to enhance its teaching and learning in our country.

Regional and national lines of research need to be noticed in order to avoid dispersion of knowledge. A great number of works about the same topic might have been done, but as they have not been analyzed together, knowledge on their contributions has not been expanded. Besides, regional and national needs in English teaching and learning must be academically acknowledged. However, if research works about the same topic are not shown together, needs only matter to those involved in a specific research project; but, if related to others, needs can be approached by more researchers or, at least, although being particular, they can be recognized as needs experienced in other Colombian contexts. Consequently, a profile of research is required as a starting point to improve knowledge on esl in our country, make regional or national contributions to different topics in the arena more visible (Castañeda 11), identify regional and national needs, and set a national research agenda in the area.

Moreover, it is undeniably true that all components of a research article are potentially enriching to new research work. However, sometimes when searching for previous research works in order to propose a new study, results do not show all published research reports about a specific topic due to different reasons such as researcher's lack of experience to trace documents or time constrains to do the

search. Thus, these research reports which are out of the scope might be underused and/or stand as detached research studies since they might not be cited in new works, which is also dispersion of knowledge. In addition, researchers echo the studies which serve their own research work, but if their research topic is still unexplored or is not of considerable or increasing interest, those research efforts might be not further developed by other researchers. Nonetheless, describing research studies in a general picture acknowledges these research reports so that they might interest other researchers as well as encourage them to build knowledge on the research done.

A profile is defined in the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary as "a description of somebody/something that gives useful information" ("Profile"). This term clearly highlights the descriptive rather than evaluative nature of a research profile, which makes it different from existing types of reviews such as literature reviews or state of the arts (Grant and Booth 97) with which it may overlap.

As we see in Table 1 above, another difference among literature reviews, states of the art and research profiles is that a profile includes only published research works. Also, it can be broader in scope regarding the field of study. Whereas literature reviews and states of the art are focused on specific topics, a research profile embraces different topics inside a discipline and can be as narrow or broad as researchers need (Castañeda 11). In addition, literature reviews and states of the art are not only descriptive but also analytical and evaluative.

As said before, one of the great advantages of having a profile of research works on the arena is the possibility of setting a research agenda that guides research decisions, practices and developments. Even though the context of the paper so far has been Colombia, it is known that researchers need to have a general idea about what is being researched in other countries and periods of time. Therefore, some documents portraying esl research in different contexts are considered here. The first publication below is worthy of attention since it describes research topics of interest in the past and current decades from the perspective of the largest international organization of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (tesol), whose research examines different areas related to English language teaching and learning as well as materials and program design. Another reason to describe this document here is the importance

for Colombian ESL researchers to be aware of the research topics that have attracted more interest worldwide in order to identify similarities and diffe-rences between international and national concerns.

Table 1. Three types of reviews

Literature review	State of the art	Research profile
-describes recent published materials about a certain topic	-aims for comprehensive searching of current literature matters about a specific topic	-describes research works according to set parameters (e.g. time, educational contexts, geographical settings…)
-involves process for identifying materials for potential inclusion and analyzing their contribution or value	-may offer new perspectives on an issue or highlight an area in need of further research	-includes published research work
-includes different types of literature and scientific publications	-includes different type of literature and scientific publications	-includes at least topic, research approach and findings
-may include research findings	-includes research findings and is time bound (Grant and Booth 101)	-describes research on different related topics
-seeks to identify what has been accomplished, allowing for consolidation, for building on previous work, for summation, for avoiding duplication and for identifying omissions or gaps (Grant and Booth 97)	-is an analytical study of all the accumulated knowledge on a certain academic area (Montoya 74)	-helps find relations among topics -helps systematize academic fields and organize research studies -helps find research topics of common interest (Castañeda 10, 11)

Source: Prepared by the author.

TESOL's Research Agenda is set periodically by a group of experts appointed by the president of the association. The latest agenda was published last year and the previous one in 2004. The aim of the document is to describe recent and emerging trends in the theoretical knowledge and practices in the teaching and learning of English. The agenda developed in 2014 has six objectives:

- Foreground research trends as identified by members of the field.
- Support the efforts of individuals new to conducting their own research.
- Provide guidance about potential topics and ethical methods for inquiry.
- Promote dialog between doers and users of research.
- Advocate for funding that prioritizes key gaps in current knowledge.
- Remind all of the need to question assumptions and test theories through systematic investigation. (Anderson et al. 1).

The agenda is organized around four main topics: The Expanding Parameters of TESOL Research, Ethics in Research, Directions for Research Inquiry and Use, and The Research Agenda as a Flexible Model (Anderson et al. 4). The first part starts by referring to research as a systematic inquiry aimed to develop knowledge on a certain area and its substantial role in policy-making, planning and activity coordination and performance. In addition, it highlights the benefits of research to the TESOL community in terms of professional development, improvement of pedagogical and assessment practices, materials and program design, recognition of social and political needs, enlightenment on moot topics and deconstruction of myths in the arena.

Regarding some changes in research, it affirms that the last decade improved theoretical knowledge on different aspects of language teaching and learning such as the cognitivist perspective of language mastery; but social and critical views have been given a more significant role lately and language learning has been studied more from a multilingual perspective rather than a second language one. Also, it states that teacher development and materials as well as program design have always been growing fields. Besides, it states that research studies have been done through qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method approaches, and from descriptive and critical views. There have been research works of different types and

done by different people: "large and small scale; cross sectional and longitudinal; observational, experimental, and hermeneutic. Research may be conducted by university researchers or by teachers in their own classroom as a means of personal and professional development" (Anderson et al. 7). It concludes by saying that research in tesol moves in both ways from theory to practice and vice versa.

As far as Ethics in Research is concerned, the document reminds esl researchers of the importance of being ethical in terms of proper gathering and analysis of data, honesty in the report of results, acknowledgement of intellectual property, consideration of research beneficiaries, impacts, risks, treatment of participants, and respect for confidentiality agreements, among other aspects needed to make research an ethical practice.

In the third part, Directions for Research Inquiry and Use, the document identifies three main language learning and teaching areas:

- Research on how individuals, be they students or teachers, develop in and respond to language learning and language use environments, given changing perspectives on what it means to acquire a second language.
- Research on learning and teaching in community settings, such as classrooms, online social networks, or the workplace.
- Research on relations between societal change and language learning and teaching (Anderson et al. 10).

Even though it recognizes that there are studies across the domains identified, they serve as parameters to organize research works. Regarding mediation of the process, it affirms that the last decade has witnessed significant changes in the use of technology to promote and assess language teaching and learning through different ict tools. The tesol community is becoming more and more interested in "technology in the classroom, online delivery of courses, and mobile devices" (11) according to a survey they conducted. Thus, this growing interest in the role of technology in the classroom creates a need for doing research on topics such as "who has access to high-quality learning environments, what kinds of materials best support language learning of different types and with different goals, how to connect assessment with learning, and, most important, how the roles and responsibilities of teachers are changing"

(11). Finally, it mentions that the last decade has seen more reflective teachers who are concerned about their social context and its effects on learning, and who do action research in order to improve language teaching and learning and grow professionally. The document also provides tables showing directions for research inquiry and directions for research use.

Finally, in part four, The Research Agenda as a Flexible Model, it affirms that the two previous agendas (2000 and 2004) admit that "any agenda is the product of a distinct period in the evolution of a field" (16) so that they must be flexible in the sense of changing along with the academic field:

> Any inquiry is, by nature, contextualized and dynamic. Topics of relative importance today may be less important years from now, as new knowledge emerges and as world and educational settings change. Similarly, topics popular in the past may later reappear as their focus again attracts interest and debate; therefore, any research agenda must reflect the changeable nature of its discipline and, consequently, of research priorities. In a field such as tesol, which involves language professionals from every nation, flexibility and responsiveness to changing world conditions [are] particularly important. A research agenda must therefore be open, be inclusive, and represent the best interests of the field at large (Borg et al., 2004, p. 15). (Anderson et al 16)

Therefore, the authors of this agenda propose, among other important things, to review the agenda every five years in order to decide if any updates and revisions must be done, based on the observed trends in recent published research.

Still in the international context, the research report Approaches and Methods in Recent Qualitative Research (Harklau 175) illustrates an example of research description. It profiles over 230 qualitative research works published in peer-reviewed indexed journals of linguistics and language behavior between 2003 and 2009 in order to identify trends in the adoption of the qualitative research approach. It clarifies that research studies following an explicit mixed approach or described as experimental or quasi-experimental were excluded. The paper starts with an overview of the research studies, then it describes them in terms of data collection methods and methodological frameworks, and finally it offers some reflections upon future directions for qualitative research. This work is an example

of how a research profile is the starting point of more elaborated reviews.

In the Profile of Recent Research section, it explains that:

- Most research studies were published in leading international journals such as "Applied Linguistics, Language Learning, Modern Language, and TESOL Quarterly." (75)
- The most studied target language was English with more than 110 research works identified, followed by Spanish with 10 studies.
- Most research works focused on second language learners at college, followed by language learner teachers and teacher education programs, and secondary schools.
- Most research studies in the field focused on school settings.
- Most research works were done in the United States of America (over 70 studies), followed by The United Kingdom (14 studies) and Canada (13 studies).

In the Methods of Data Collection section, it asserts that the four most common methods or techniques in the works revised were "interviews, observations, audio- and video-recordings of interaction, and collection of print artifacts" (Harklau 176). As far as interviews are concerned, it says that:

- Most research studies that used interviews did not specify them or defined them as semi-structured.
- Most interviews were held face-to-face.
- Most interviews were recorded and transcribed. However, the use of transcription conventions was not explicitly informed.

Regarding observations, the report affirms that:

A lot of studies used observations and field notes.
- Observations were usually done in classrooms and other school settings.
- Participant observation was the most common technique.
- Some studies used non-participatory observations.
- Very few research works implemented protocols or rubrics for observations.

Concerning recordings, the paper mentions that:

- A lot of studies used audio-recordings or video-recordings of classroom activities and that such recordings were done "often focused on specific portions or sequences of classroom proceedings or on selected participants." (177)
- The rare cases where recordings took place out of the classroom, they were done in the contexts of conversation partner sessions, police interrogations, peer tutoring and learners' homes conversations.

With regard to artifacts, the article asserts that:

- The textual data most common collected and analyzed was texts written by students where they expressed their feelings and opinions on a given topic, for example, diaries, blogs and essays.
- Other documents analyzed were "autobiographies; teacher diaries and journals; students evaluations of classroom activities; e-mail correspondence between learners and researchers and instructor; and records of learners interactions in public and course-based chat sessions and discussion groups" (177).
- Data coming from posters, correspondence, language policies, and learning standards was also analyzed.

In relation to supplementary methods, the paper says that:

- The most common methods to supplement primary data collection were surveys and questionnaires of learners.
- Other supplementary methods were think aloud protocols, recorded conversations, and videoed classes.

As far as methodological approaches are concerned, the research report asserts that two frameworks could be observed: analysis of sociocultural context and analysis of discourse and interaction. Table 2 presents a summary of the two approaches regarding methodology and elements in the research that make it a good practice; they are referred in the paper as "methodologies" (178) or "research traditions" (181), and "characteristics of good research" (180), respectively. Also, it mentions some weaknesses.

In the last section, the Future Directions section, the report affirms that, in general, qualitative research had good representation in the works reviewed. Also,

sla started to embrace qualitative research approaches more enthusiastically, even though political and economic forces had always openly supported quantitative research. However, research was focused on English learners in college settings in Western countries so that it also should be done in other languages and cultural contexts.

Table 2. Methodological frameworks in qualitative research in Harklau

Analysis of Sociocultural Context	Analysis of Discourse and Interaction
Research Traditions	
Some studies described their research as qualitative without no further explanation. Many studies showed associated qualitative designs. Some works used the term case study in a broad sense. However, some others specified it; for example, multiple case, ethnography case, interpretative case. Some studies used grounded theory as the explicit research methodology while some others did it implicitly. Some works used ethnography or participant observation. However, the terms were used generically and they did not follow "the anthropological tradition of sustained engagement at a site" (179). Several studies described their methodology as practitioner inquiry, also referred as action research. A few studies used phenomenology, hermeneutics and content analysis. A few studies identified an epistemological or ontological view in their research.	Most studies used conversation analysis and "related traditions of ethnomethodology, interactional sociolinguistics, and microethnography or microanalysis" (181). The use of close discourse analysis with ethnographic information was also present. Many studies used narrative analysis and life history research. Some research works called their analysis "systemic functional linguistics or a 'genre-based'" or critical discourse analysis (181).
Characteristics of Good Research	
Development of an "'indepth' and 'complex' understanding of a phenomenon and a focus on second language learning as occurring in and through sociocultural context"(180). Use of recursive and inductive qualitative analysis. Use of participant verification to show validity and increase credibility. Use of post-positivist and realist approaches (e.g. emergent themes and emic portraying). Use of triangulation. Development of criteria "including 'trustworthiness,' 'verisimilitude,' inter-subjective validation, analytic generalization to a broader theory, transferability to other settings, aesthetic merit, and sociopolitical impact" (180).	"Collection and analysis of naturalistic interactional data" (181) is considered as the essential aspect of quality.
Weaknesses	
Some studies did not provide complete explanations of participants and settings selection. Few studies "explicitly note searchers for discrepant or disconfirming data" (181). Few works discussed the effect of researchers and recording equipment presence. Many studies did not discuss on the "researcher role on the continuum from observer to full participant" (181). Very few studies addressed ethical issues in the research. Few studies clearly explained "how the researcher's background and perspective potentially influences research questions, methods, and findings" (181).	Methodologies do not fit into distinct categories, which sometimes resulted in improved designs. However, it also led to "philosophical and methodological incompatibilities that are left unrecognized or unaddressed by researchers" (181). Second language acquisition theories did not often fit into distinct research methodologies.
Source: Summarized by the author.	

Concerning methodologies, it says that "there is considerable diversity in perspectives regarding the purposes and ends of qualitative research" (183); also, there was still disagreement on the extent to which qualitative and quantitative approaches could be used together, and to how closely qualitative features should be retained throughout the studies. Nevertheless, while those debates continued, there was a call for research in the field to "become more

attuned to the multiplicity of qualitative research traditions and their underlying premises" (183).

Now, in the American context, the report Research in English Language Teaching and Learning in Mexico: Findings related to Students, Teachers, and Teaching Methods by Ramírez-Romero and Pamplón, presents the results of a review of Mexican ELT research whose starting point was a research profile. It is divided into four parts: Mapping the Research Territory in Mexico; Methodology; Review of Findings on Students, Teachers, and Teaching Methods and Resources; and Conclusions.

In the first section, it claims that even though the English "expansion circle" (Krachru qtd in Ramírez-Romero and Pamplón 43) is the largest, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) practices in countries located in it such as Mexico, are not well known because their research studies have been hardly reported. It explains that ELT in Mexico has grown along with global trends, and a proliferation of language courses and undergraduate and graduate ELT teacher education programs has been seen over the last decades. Consequently, ELT research began with some individual and collective efforts which were not much appreciated because of their not being published or available for future research. Therefore, a need to trace Mexican research in the arena was felt and effective action taken:

> …research was started in the field of language teaching through individual dissertations and by groups of academics that shared common interests. Unfortunately, much of the work was not published or readily available and new researchers could not benefit from past experiences and findings. There was a need for an overall view of the different topics, research methods, and results that these studies were telling us about Mexican language learners and programs. In other words, there was a need to map the territory to see where we stood, how far we had travelled, and how we could help new travelers in their teaching and researching journey.

> With this frame of thought in mind, from 2005 to 2008 a group of academics from several Mexican universities collaborated in an initiative to collect and review research on foreign language teaching and learning developed in Mexico from 2000 to 2007. The aim was to establish the state of knowledge of this field in our country. The results of the study, as well as the research methodology and analysis of the

data at a national and state level were published in two volumes which were coordinated by one of the authors of this paper (Ramírez-Romero, 2007, 2010). (Ramírez-Romero and Pamplón 44)

The paper explains that the starting point was the description of fifty research works in order to understand ELT practices in Mexico in terms of learners, teachers, teaching methods and materials. Therefore, the report aimed to give an overview of Mexican ELT practices during 2000 and 2007 so that the academic community could benefit from those pedagogical experiences

> …this review will allow teachers to make better informed decisions about crucial aspects of their professional practice. They can use the studies as a point of reference with which to compare and contrast their own practices and situations. This work is also a useful resource for beginning researchers and research methods students who can locate different references to support their literature review. By looking further into the studies that are mentioned throughout the chapter, students can see other methodological perspectives that have been used when researching topics that are similar to their own. (Ramírez-Romero and Pamplón 44)

It points out that even though profiled research studies contribute to knowledge development on Mexican ELT research, they should be used as reference texts since teaching contexts vary.

In the second part, it states that a research systematic review was done to have a clear view or comprehension of the academic field at the period of time chosen in order to generate a state of knowledge. Researchers in charge of the project were chosen through a national open call inviting academics to join the research; they were assigned research papers from 26 different Mexican states. The documents analyzed included research reports, articles, books, undergraduate and graduate thesis and dissertations. Criteria for selecting the documents was set (e.g. time, context, field, papers published or presented at conferences, or graduation projects) and 548 papers were studied. Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics and content analysis. Besides, the report clarifies that two reviews were previously made, one in 2007 and the other in 2010, which lent some insights for the last review. The findings presented in the report come from the analysis of fifty

papers, and are divided into students, teachers, teaching methods and resources. They are summarized below:

Students

- Several studies affirm that students with higher English linguistic competence had more hours of instruction at school.
- Some studies argue that students' L1 and L2 linguistic competence is directly related to their family and education background and language exposure.
- Many studies recognize the influence of students' socio-cultural background, their gender, and age in their L2 learning.
- One study confirm that there is "a relation between students' learning styles and their age, gender, level of schooling, and area of study" (Hernandez qtd in Ramírez-Romero and Pamplón 48)
- Results of these studies are similar to others conducted in different countries which confirm that L2 learning is influenced by diverse factors. Therefore, teachers should diagnose students' individual learning needs.

Teachers

- Some studies reveal "poor professionalization of academic personnel, the frequent rotation of foreign language personnel, and the lack of academic criteria for the hiring of teachers" (Ramírez-Romero and Pamplón 49).
- Several studies recognize the need to improve teachers' English proficiency level and pedagogical knowledge and skills.
- Several studies reveal that education administrators and teachers have different views on the benefits of teacher training programs.

Teaching methods and resources

- Most studies related to teaching show the implementation of cognitive teaching and learning strategies.
- Most studies promote L2 use in order to learn it rather than rote memorization.
- Several studies report improvement of L2 reading comprehension through the use of reading strategies.

- Some studies report the use of games to improve reading comprehension.
- One study shows the positive use of discrimination listening exercises in order to improve L2 letter-sound correspondence.
- One study shows that there was no L1 transfer of writing skills to L2 due to poor L1 writing practice and skills.
- One study reports L2 students' difficulties in writing because of poor vocabulary and their preference for plagiarism.
- Some students report improvement in L2 students' speaking skills through explicit explanation of speech acts and discourse issues.
- One study affirms that class time for speaking practice was not enough for students to develop strong speaking skills so that extra class activities such as clubs should be promoted.
- Some studies show the increasing use of multimedia and technology to enhance different L2 language skills and perceive language as a tool for communication. However, teachers need more training in their use.
- Some studies report the use of authentic materials to improve listening comprehension.
- Some studies affirm that complementary materials to the course-book should be used.
- Some studies report that the board and the course-book are the main classroom materials.

The report concludes by stating that it only presented a short summary of the studies reviewed and that more research was needed in order to better understand the multiple factors affecting Mexican L2 learners. Also, it suggests not trying to find definite answers. Besides, it affirms that even though several studies showed the use of cognitive teaching and learning strategies, teachers needed to implement a wider variety of such strategies and use different materials from the board and course-book.

Another use of profiling research is to identify needs in some areas in the field. An example of this is the editorial titled Research Tendencies in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language. It briefly describes Latin American thematic trends in elt in the 41 research papers published between 2013 and 2015 in the Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal. It identifies five topics of primary interest:

a) Trends and Approaches to teaching English as a foreign language, with the highest number of arti-

cles, followed by b) language learners' processes and outcomes, c) teacher education for both preservice and inservice teachers, d) critical literacy and literacy involving social development, and d) uses of Spanish as expression of popular culture and English as a sociolinguistic phenomenon in San Andres. The variety of research reflected in these five thematic groups certainly contributes to addressing the two target disciplines our journal is interested in: Applied Linguistics and English Language Education in the context of Colombia and Latin America. (Clavijo 5)

After observing the trends, they were used as parameters to comment on the changes that TEFL emphasis has had in Latin America over the past 25 years. One of them is the evolution of TEFL from a view of English as a dominant foreign language with cognitive and grammar based teaching approaches, to a more critical attitude towards the language evident in more genre based practices (e.g. project work, CLIL, ELF), subject content, local education contexts and language formation. One of the causes of this change has been the recognition of the use of English by more nonnative speakers.

Another change is the increasing interest in local contexts that has given a significant role to social needs reflected in "research on community based pedagogies [which] engage students in local community situations beyond the classroom" (Clavijo 5), which encourages teaching practices based on learners' real needs. To illustrate this, the paper mentions examples of research done in the multicultural context of San Andrés Island and Bogotá.

The paper concludes by affirming that TEFL in Latin American should be oriented locally, incorporate content and meet diverse learners' needs, and that teachers should take part in EFL social practices as part of their professional development in the field.

Profiling academic research on discourse studies and second language learning by Castañeda provides another example of a paper profiling research. It describes studies related to discourse and second language learning in order to give a general overview of "research around these two interrelated fields in the Latin American context" (10) published in the bibliographic web-based portal, Dialnet. The author explains that he took an active interest in profiling discourse studies since they had not been seen in terms of their relation to TEFL and the knowledge Colombian scholars had developed on them.

The report is organized in four parts: First, it clarifies some differences between a traditional literature review and a research profile; second, it describes the steps taken to profile research; third, it presents the results, and fourth, the author reflects on the research studies in the issue of the Colombian Applied Linguistic Journal where his paper was published.

In the first part, Castañeda, following Porter et al. (qtd in Castañeda 10), affirms that literature reviews focus on one specific topic, choose a narrower range of studies and use narrative reports. On the contrary, research profiles not only concentrate on one topic but also on its related academic fields, offer a wider range of studies and report not only through narrative but also graphic description. Besides, he argues that "profiling academic fields is important to undertake more informed research processes" (10), and therefore it should be done before a more systematic revision of literature is carried out. He adds: "The main idea behind this claim is that both novice and more professional researchers see the trees but cannot see the whole forest" (Porter et al. qtd in Castañeda 10).

In the second part, the author explains that he used text-mining through different combinations of keywords to get a number of references to be cleaned up later. After refining the tagged references, he profiled them in terms of what (authors + topics), when (authors + publications) and who (author + networks), in order to answer the following questions: "What is being sought when researching discourse and second language learning? When has discourse and second language learning research been conducted? Who has researched discourse and second language learning?" (10); next, he used a program to extract quantitative information.

In the third part, the author presents the results which showed that out of 94 registers:

- 67 discourse studies were related to general education, and their research topics were children education, discourses around education professorship, curriculum and policy making, genre studies, and classroom discourses and interaction (Castañeda 13).
- 27 discourse research works were directly connected to second language learning where the research topics were Spanish as a second language, comparative studies and EFL/ESL. Within EFL/ESL, the research topics were related to skills

development, material design, testing, teacher education, classroom and language education discourses, and socio-cultural and genre-based studies. Studies were not profiled only statistically but also in terms of the scholars who did them and some of their main contributions to the different topics in the field, which constitutes the most noteworthy aspect of this paper.

Then, in the fourth part regarding papers in that calj issue, the author briefly describes a research study using ethnography to understand interactional patterns in the classroom; three research papers implementing Critical Discourse Analysis, narratives and interaction to approach language learning from a gendered point of view; three studies about classroom interaction analyzing how teachers promoted certain interactional patterns, how students' identities shaped classroom interactions, and how different discourses co-existed in the classroom. Finally, he presents a report on the use of discourse strategies by teachers and learning materials, and two studies about language education discourses.

Even though Castañeda considers his study as narrow in scope, he thinks it is valuable since it profiles some studies in the arena; "[h]owever, there is still a felt need to systematize the field and review regional contributions in order to introduce what constitutes scholarly work around the field" (10).

Finally, the graduation project Perfil Académico de Investigación de los Trabajos de Grado de la Licenciatura en Lenguas Modernas de la Pontificia Universidad Javeriana: 2001 – 2009 illustrates another example of description of research. The study aims, first, to profile all research works in order to inform the language department and the undergraduate program about the studies done; second, to identify topics and possible trends in research so that research lines can be proposed, and third, to allow students and research tutors to make more informed decisions on their future research projects.

> Construir un perfil académico de investigación de los trabajos de grado de la Licenciatura comprendidos dentro de un periodo de tiempo específico (2001-2009) podría conducir a identificar tendencias investigativas y posiblemente vislumbrar y proponer temáticas para la construcción de nuevas líneas de investigación para el Departamento de Lenguas Modernas. (Hoyos 14)

Así mismo, la intención de este trabajo es servir de herramienta para que los profesores de las asignaturas de investigación, asesores y estudiantes lleven a cabo la búsqueda de propuestas de investigación de una manera más acertada y segura. Los estudiantes tendrán acceso a la información de lo que se ha producido en la Licenciatura y las temáticas abordadas; podrán proponer nombres tentativos de sus asesores de grado ya que el perfil de investigación académica pretende presentar una estrategia en la que los educandos puedan conocer los nombres de los asesores que han acompañado investigaciones afines a sus intereses. (16)

In order to achieve its aim, the author explains that, first, she compiled and systematized all research works within the scope (140 in total); second, she identified topics, and third, she did a bibliometric analysis. Also, the researcher clarifies that her study followed a mixed-method approach since both quantitative and qualitative data and analysis were required so that a more comprehensive account could be given. Hoyos used the library catalog, RefWorks and VantagePoint. In addition, she set the following criteria: 'When' (2001-2009), 'Who' (secondary authors / research tutors), 'What' (key words), 'What + When' (correlation 1), and 'What + Who' (correlation 2).

Her findings show that:

- First, most research works were done in the years 2003, 2004, 2007 and 2009, which corresponded to the number of students enrolled in the program and dropout rates during 2001 and 2009.
- Second, full-time teachers produced more graduation projects than part-time teachers, even though the difference was not big. Besides, it gave a top ten list of full-time teachers regarding the number of projects they participated as research tutors.
- Third, the main areas of research of the top ten research tutors were human sciences whose most common related topics were education, teaching, learning, curriculum, action research, and language studies regarding human sciences. Linguistics and arts which dealt with linguistics, modern foreign languages, foreign language teaching, argumentation, discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis in educational settings, sociolinguistics and dialectology, ethnography of communication and speech, linguistic theory and analysis, text translation, autochthonous languages, and language

comparison. Finally, applied social sciences whose topics related to communication.

- Fourth, the most common key words were: teaching, culture, foreign language, methodology, discourse analysis, reading comprehension, communicative approach, motivation, second language acquisition, and conceptual pedagogy. After that, she grouped the research works around the ten key words and analyzed them by finding topic subcategories.
- Fifth, among other correlations found, topics related to methodology, communicative approach, culture and teaching tended to co-occur in the same years, and language acquisition and discourse analysis started in 2003 and continued to 2009.
- Sixth, some research tutors were interested in more than one research topic.

Finally, the author makes some recommendations such as getting research tutors and students to use the study to choose their research topics, and profiling research works periodically in order to find emergent topics.

Conclusions

Description of research serves different purposes. It helps track regional and national ESL research studies and observe how Colombian or any other country or region research in this academic arena has evolved over the years (Castañeda 10). Besides, it encourages awareness of common topics of interest within the field and in relation to other disciplines, unexplored areas, common research approaches, and English language teaching and learning needs. In addition, knowledge on specific topics can be expanded by reviewing and discussing related research studies. Therefore, national lines of research to address different topics and needs can be created or consolidated, and a national ESL research agenda can be set in order to guide research efforts and contributions.

Also, profiling research gives researchers a starting point to do in-depth reviews of previous works in the field in order to, for example, compare findings in similar studies or identify theoretical developments. It allows research studies to be acknowledged sooner by more researchers and other people interested in ESL. In addition, it gives studies more visibility so that their contributions can be better exploited and helps researchers make informed decisions about research topics and approaches for their future research, and the researchers they can ask for advice, support or feedback.

Finally, research profiles give a panoramic view of the research studies related by different criteria (time, topic, research approach, etc.) so that research topic selection can be made on a more informed basis. Therefore, researchers can have a greater awareness of the topics that have been studied and pursue their special interest.

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