

## A Synthesis of EFL Research in Chilean High Schools: Research Shortage or Research Opportunities?

Una síntesis de la investigación del inglés como lengua extranjera en la enseñanza media chilena: ¿escasez de investigación u oportunidades de investigación?

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This article is a configurative literature review that aims to synthesize available research on English as a foreign language education, undertaken specifically in Chilean high-school settings. Drawing on a pre-COVID-19 research corpus, I identified a limited number of concordant accounts ( $n = 23$ ) published during the last decade. I used a critical interpretive synthesis methodology which yielded three research fields ranging from didactics to socio-structural problematics. The synthesis shows that the research addresses curricular aspects devoid of socio-political and historical contexts, emphasizing primarily teachers' teaching tensions and challenges. Finally, I discuss the English as a foreign language research limitations and implications for the Chilean context, for which I suggest some innovations to broaden future inquiry critically.

*Keywords:* Chilean high school, critical interpretive synthesis, English as a foreign language, EFL research

Este artículo es una revisión configurativa que apunta a sintetizar la literatura sobre la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera específicamente en contextos de enseñanza media en Chile. A partir de un corpus pre-COVID-19, identifiqué un número acotado de estudios conexos ( $n = 23$ ) publicados durante la última década. Utilicé el método de síntesis interpretativa crítica la cual reveló tres campos de investigación que abarcan temas desde la didáctica hasta problemáticas socio-estructurales. La síntesis interpretativa crítica demuestra que la investigación se centra preponderantemente en áreas curriculares ligadas a las tensiones y desafíos del docente y su enseñanza. Finalmente, discuto las implicancias y limitaciones en la investigación en inglés como lengua extranjera en el contexto chileno, para las cuales sugiero algunas innovaciones con el fin de ampliarla críticamente.

*Palabras clave:* educación secundaria chilena, inglés como lengua extranjera, investigación en ILE, síntesis interpretativa crítica

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## Introduction

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2017) reports that “[educational] research activity is incipient in Chile” (p. 48). This observation is consistent with English as a foreign language (EFL) education research. Barahona (2016) and Lizasoain (2017) point out that, overall, research is scant. Indeed, EFL inquiry, particularly in high school settings, is even more limited. High-school EFL education has so far been largely overlooked, thus, needing more critical and in-depth inquiry.

Interestingly, this high school research shortage is particularly relevant because it signposts unexplored areas requiring critical examination that are fundamental for teacher education programmes, curriculum, and policy. Additionally, researching these areas entails unpacking a wider debate among researchers and school communities. In this article, I suggest that a critical synthesis of the current research findings of high-school EFL classroom life can help set focalized informed parameters to characterize and discuss fundamental aspects of its complex reality. These parameters may bring directionality to such inquiry and future pedagogy-oriented attempts to explore how we understand these classrooms, what happens in them, what their outcomes are, how they are investigated, and how they serve as reference for future teacher training. I also argue that we need to examine current research boundaries. They can compel inquiry initiatives to expand and crystalize additional areas beyond the prevailing linguistics-oriented paradigms.

Given the lack of more comprehensive EFL research in high-school classrooms, high-stakes statistical information from standardized testing, such as SIMCE Inglés,<sup>1</sup> has been the primary source

of data (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2018). These data have been gathered during three time periods, 2010, 2012, and 2014. Since 2017, the source has been replaced by the National English Language Study.<sup>2</sup> As placeholders, both tests’ purpose has been to serve curricular navigation and other educational support initiatives based on the results collected from Grade-11 students across Chile. In general, their results have provided us with fragmentary descriptions of students’ low linguistic attainment. Even though being system-level assessment instruments (Creswell, 2016) with an ample sampling, there remain several aspects of the EFL classroom life about which relatively little is known.

## Aims

In this article, I synthesize the available EFL studies undertaken in high school settings using a critical interpretive synthesis (CIS; Gough et al., 2012). Further research in this area would help position high schools as a pivot for inquiry to shape further explorations. I hope with this CIS to help depict more thoroughly what happens in Chilean high-school EFL classrooms. The aims of this article are:

1. to map the broader English language education research landscape in Chile.
2. to generate a critical interpretive synthesis of the evidence obtained from high-school research accounts.

## Method

Syntheses are useful in various ways. They can account for how knowledge is generated and how much we know, thus providing foundations for engaging in new research endeavours (Depraetere

since 1988. Its English battery was first administered in 2010.

<sup>2</sup> National English Language Study (*Estudio Nacional de Inglés*) is a purposive representative test that replaced the SIMCE Inglés as of 2017.

<sup>1</sup> SIMCE stands for *System Measurement of Quality of Education*. This is a nation-scale standardized test administered in Chilean schools

et al., 2020; Flemming, 2010; Gough et al., 2012; Hannes & Macaitis, 2012). Gough et al. (2012) also note that reviews expand broader discussions “with explicit assumptions and leveraging many studies rather than debates about individual studies” (p. 12). In this study, the mosaic metaphor is essential to understand and visualize the nature of a synthesis. I undertook a configurative review approach, which “can be likened to the patterns in a mosaic, in which the findings from each study are slotted together to form a coherent whole” (Gough et al., 2012, p. 51), using as method a CIS (Depraetere et al., 2020; Flemming, 2010).

The CIS is an approach that “draws on traditional systematic review methodology whilst incorporating a qualitative tradition of enquiry [and that] enables the generation of theory with strong explanatory power” (Flemming, 2010, p. 202). As my primary method, the synthesis of qualitative, mixed, and quantitative evidence becomes compatible regardless of their distinct epistemological origins. The CIS develops output from the evidence collected into a synthesizing argument (Dixon-Woods et al., 2005; Flemming, 2010). Schick-Makaroff et al. (2016) review the main approaches to research synthesis to combine research findings. This meta-analysis approach is critical in that it explicitly allows an interpretative process, providing new directions in research in a way primary authors have not previously considered (Dixon-Woods et al., 2005; Flemming, 2010; Schick-Makaroff et al., 2016).

Accordingly, a critical paradigm underpins this review. I situate this article on the premise that facts can never be isolated from their ideological inscriptions and sociohistorical conditions in which they take place (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Kincheloe et

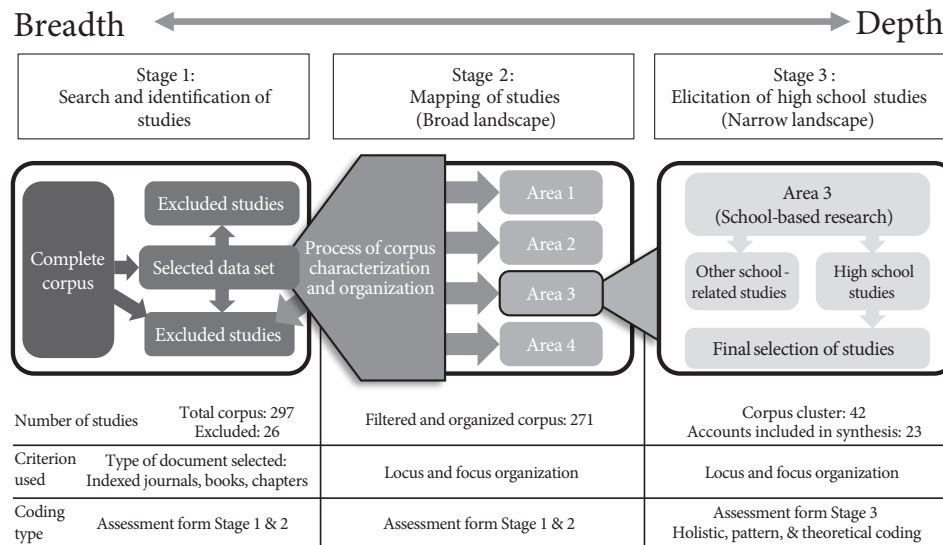
al., 2018; Lincoln et al., 2011). Also, I intend to signal critical aspects of research as a form to understand—and enact—power relations (Kincheloe et al., 2018; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). I approach facts within a value-laden context. Therefore, such facts are read, interpreted, and discussed using this critical scope.

This synthesis is also exploratory in nature. I have reviewed the literature extensively to identify relevant sources—no previous synthesis reports, of any type, on English language teaching (ELT) research education existing in the Chilean context. The findings and the discussion are presented in a narrative format (Hoon, 2013) rather than as a statistical aggregative report (Garg et al., 2008). Although simple descriptive statistical figures will be used to portray some of the findings, this qualitative discussion is centred on the studies’ synthesis implications. In this report, I use the terms *secondary school* and *high school* indistinctively.

### Stages of the Corpus Construction Process

The corpus analyzed is the result of a two-year review and systematization of literature I conducted as part of my doctoral dissertation. I proceeded in three stages: first, the identification of studies; second, the mapping of research areas in the corpus; and third, the organization of high-school studies to perform a closer examination. I provide a two-layered characterization based on the studies collected: breadth (in a broad research landscape in less detail) and depth (in a narrow landscape in higher detail). The process of data collection, and the stages of organization and analysis are depicted in Figure 1, which I will explain in the subsequent sections.

**Figure 1.** Process of Collection, Organization, and Selection of High School Based Studies



**Stage 1: Search and Identification of Data**

The first stage consisted of a purposive and flexible search and identification of studies conducted in English language education at all levels and settings within the Chilean context published until November 2020. WOS, ERIC, EBSCO, ScieLO, and Scopus databases were consulted. Additionally, I complemented the search with examinations of journal websites, online repositories, and other academic websites through which researchers disseminate their academic work (e.g., Academia, ResearchGate). Once the broader corpus was finally constructed, I started with its appraisal.

Additionally, I conducted a comprehensive review of the various academic formats identified, including all types of sources and documents available, that is, articles, books, studies, reports, and conference papers available in online repositories. The refined criterion I applied to this corpus was the revision of the documents' purposes. This revision resulted in selecting only empirical accounts over more informal documents, such as EFL magazines, reports, and other studies in which research methodologies were not explicit. As a result, three academic formats were considered: Indexed articles, books, and chapter contributions in edited books. By indexed articles, I refer to an analysis of short extension

inquiry based on empirical evidence related to an educational problem that is searchable in available databases (Corvalán & Ruffinelli, 2007; Dochartaigh, 2012). In the case of books, only those reporting complete research accounts were selected (e.g., Glas, 2013).

**Stage 2: Mapping the Broader Research Landscape**

The second stage of this corpus construction consisted of mapping the collected documents, recording their date and area of study. At this stage, I did not intend to elicit important details or theoretical nuances, but simply to identify their general information to outline clusters of similar studies. I defined the initial sampling criterion by adapting Hawker et al's (2002) analytical framework, which I display in Figure 2. I pre-defined categories that later resulted in the definition of the broader areas of research interest. The initial strategy to set a preliminary order was the publication year. The chronological organization enormously facilitated the snowball search to trace further references. The assessment form was used to characterize the studies. This organization quickly yielded a more refined delineation of boundaries among the different EFL research areas. Table 2, which is provided later in this paper, offers detailed results.

## Assessment form: Broad corpus Stages 1 & 2

**S1**

**Author(s):**                      **Title:**

**Date of publication:**              **DOI/ISBN:**

**S2**

**Study design**

Quantitative

Qualitative

Mixed

**Format**

Indexed article

Book

Book chapter

Reports/study

Conference paper/ppt

Dissertation

Other

**Locus of study**

University settings

School settings

Primary

Secondary

Adult

Other

Mixed settings

Not mentioned

Other

**Area of study**

Teacher education

School (all provisions)

Curriculum, policy

ELT research

Critical approaches

Applied linguistics

Teaching practices, strategies, and methods

Others

**Study specific topic**

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Note. Adapted from Hawker et al.'s (2002) analytical framework.

Figure 3. Assessment Form Stage 3

## Assessment form Stages 3: Narrow corpus (high school)

**Author(s):**

**Title:**

**Date of publication:**

**DOI/ISBN:**

**Study design**

Quantitative

Qualitative

Mixed

**Format**

Indexed article

Book

Book chapter

**School provision**

Private

Subsidized

Public

Delegated

Mixed settings

Not mentioned

Other

**Location**

Metropolitan

Regional-urban

Rural

Other

**Specifics**

**Topic**

**Participants**

Students

Teachers

Mixed

Other members

**No. of participants/**

**Size of data**

**Data collection**

**Research questions/Objectives**

**Time frame**

**Journal**

**No. of references**

**Language**

**Key findings**

### Stage 3: The Narrow Research Landscape Construction

Once I organized the broad landscape clusters, the school studies cluster was thoroughly reviewed. The number of micro corpus studies found ( $n = 42$ ) was more straightforward to arrange, given its lower quantity than other larger clusters. In this stage, the identification of the focal studies required a third criterion to identify their locus. The studies locus allowed identifying three settings: primary, secondary, and mixed educational settings. After compartmentalizing the total number of high-school studies, a similar process was used to organize the broader landscape: chronological organization and the analysis of structural components. In Figure 3, I present the criteria used. Additionally, the analysis in this stage required several rounds of coding, including holistic, pattern, and theoretical coding (Saldaña, 2009) to review the studies' findings.

#### Limitations

Some limitations encountered in the organization of studies were the oftentimes blurriness in the formalities, such as misleading titles, unclear abstracts, and an opaque research design missing relevant specification about the context and participants. Thorough examination of concepts was required in some articles describing "teachers' beliefs" or "applied linguistics" to determine the study's locus (not always explicit, e.g., either in schools or universities). Once the study's setting was determined, the second filter (the focus) was applied. This focus consisted of discriminating studies based on their inquiry focus, that is, whether they reported sheer language analysis, or the analysis of a pedagogical situation embedded into a high school setting. In these cases, the latter case was selected for Stage 3.

#### Findings

This section will follow the same structure as the three stages, that is, from the broader to the narrower landscapes' findings. I will consider the stages'

organization to present the findings, that is, stage one, the general search results; stage two, the thematic mapping of studies; and stage three, the characterization of high school research.

#### The Broader Landscape

The final scrutinized corpus resulted in 272 documents. Of the total 298 documents that were found (which included all kinds of publications), only 26 were discarded because they did not comply with the primary selection criterion (i.e., type of publication). Additionally, their sources and purpose differed significantly with research accounts and format, such as PowerPoint presentations, book reviews, editorials, essays, ELT magazine articles, agency reports, and dissertations.

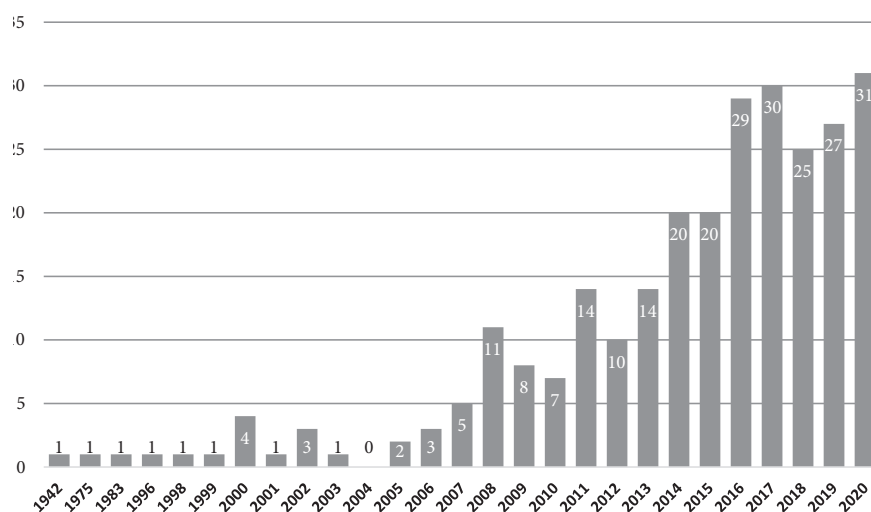
The spread shown in Figure 4 is the outcome of Stages 1 (the search) and 2 (the mapping). The spread shows the available online published English language research collected, ranging from 1942 to 2020. The numbers included in the bars represent the number of indexed publications, books, and book chapters. The findings show a gradually increasing production of scientific work in the field. This growth in publication coincides with other macro reports on research in Latin America, which also show a similar systematic expansion (Guzmán-Valenzuela & Barnett, 2019).

Although the EFL Chilean research production is not extensive in terms of quantity, it has sustained a steady growth. The most preferred publication formats identified are the article, followed by the edited book chapter contribution, and finally, books. The average number of publications is 10 per year. In Table 1, I present the publication preference distribution.

**Table 1.** Format Preference in Publications

Type	Books	Chapters	Articles	Final corpus
<i>n</i>	7	25	240	272
%	2.6	9.2	88.2	100.0

**Figure 4.** Spread of the Analysed EFL Research 1942–2020



Eight thematic areas were identified in the corpus. In Table 2, I have mapped a broad summary of Stage 2 assessment, which consisted of categorizing areas with a focus on research interest and a thematic emphasis description. These areas served to configure the map of the nature of inquiry in the broadest Chilean ELT field. For this paper’s purpose, I only focus on the cluster related to high schools. I present this broader data set to underpin some claims later in this paper. However, I would like to draw attention to some of the points found at this synthesis

stage. It is important to note that over 65% of the research has been conducted within the boundaries of teacher education programmes at universities, including Area 1, *ELT teacher education*, 2, *teaching methodology*, and 4, *applied linguistics*. In the case of the applied linguistic area, 89.5% of the inquiry was undertaken in undergraduate programmes. These results frame the inquiry agenda in the Chilean context as teacher-education centred. These results frame many of the findings I discuss in the following sections concerning the high school studies.

**Table 2.** Summary of Pivotal EFL Research Interests

Research area of interest	Broader themes and emphases	Frequency	%
1. EFL teacher education	Teacher-student’s beliefs, cognitions, practicum stage, teacher education practices, professional identity development in teacher education programmes.	105	38.6
2. Teaching methodology	Language teaching strategies, group dynamics, teaching methods, activities and practices, types of tasks, assessment.	59	21.7
3. School (all provisions)	Pedagogical focus on motivation, teaching methodology, strategies and educational beliefs, socioeconomic conditions.	42	15.4
4. Applied linguistics	The learning of some linguistic items within the context of teacher education, language form, and focus learning.	39	14.3
5. Curriculum and language policy	A heterogeneous topic that comprehends material design, standards, syllabus design, the state of EFL in Chile, and other legally related issues, implementation, discussion or evaluation of initiatives in EFL education.	10	3.7
6. Critical approaches	Exploration of neoliberalism impact on the identities and roles teachers fulfill in the Chilean society.	8	2.9

Research area of interest	Broader themes and emphases	Frequency	%
7. Other humanistic approaches (Sociolinguistics in education, pedagogy)	Cultural aspects of EFL provision and other sociolinguistic aspects.	6	2.2
8. ELT research	New aspect in the local EFL milieu, and with a clear focus on action research as the main discussion topic.	3	1.1
		272	100.0

### The Narrow Landscape: EFL High-School Studies

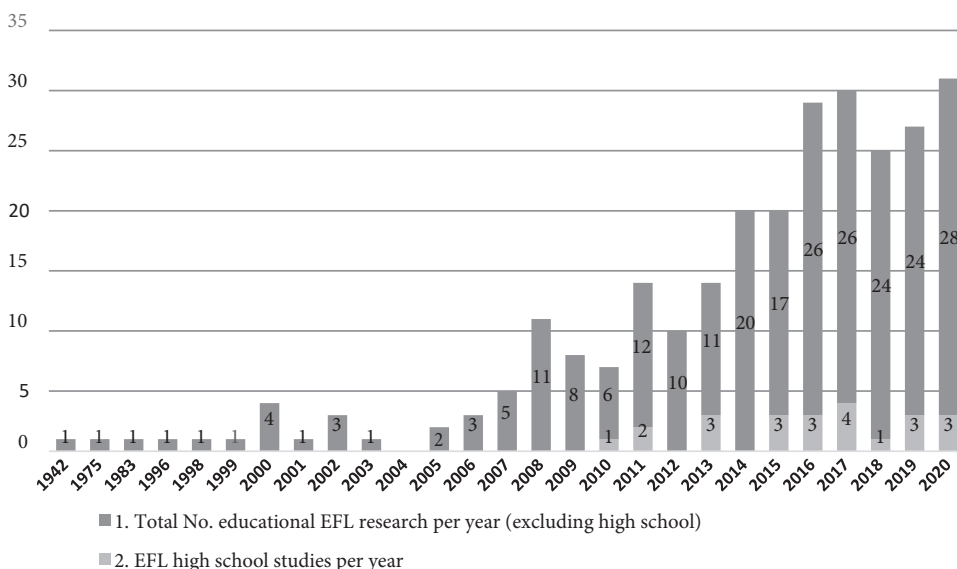
One of the readily observable characteristics of the general EFL school research—with primary, mixed levels, and secondary considered all together—is its limited number. The school cluster is divided into three subareas: primary education ( $n = 16, 38.1\%$ ), high school education ( $n = 23, 54.8\%$ ) and mixed accounts ( $n = 3, 7.1\%$ ). The mixed accounts' findings were not always distinctive in relation to either the type of school (e.g., public–private) or the (sometimes mixed) teaching level (primary, secondary, university, and language institute). As such, these findings were discarded. In Figure 5, I contrast the available broad landscape and the EFL high school proportions per year.

The nature of EFL research conducted in high-school settings differs in many aspects. This variability involved a more detailed analysis of its thematic variability, contexts, choice of methods, procedures, and theoretical framing. In Table 3, I display the Stage 3 final corpus

of high school studies search. Together they provide findings that help us visualize the little variability of foci, regardless of their diverse nature, centred mostly on teachers, teaching, and to a lesser extent, on the students. Most of these studies relate to action-oriented and decision-making challenges that teachers regularly face in their classrooms, addressed from their perspectives.

The research traditions are well balanced among the EFL high-school studies, as presented in Table 4. Several reflections emerge from this panoptic review of the research on secondary school realities. I have summarised the studies following the research traditions to reach a holistic synthesis of the research findings. I begin this report addressing the mixed methods tradition ( $n = 5$ ), followed by quantitative ( $n = 7$ ), and I conclude with the qualitative ( $n = 7$ ) contributions, which include non-empirical works ( $n = 2$ ) that do not make explicit their orientation, yet they can be allocated in this group. Then, I continue with a critical synthesis of findings.

Figure 5. Stacked Contrast Between EFL Broader and School Research Accumulation





**Table 3.** Summary of Chilean High School EFL Research

Author(s)	Year	Title of publication	Approach	Type of publication	Central topic	Journal/ Editorial & language
Díaz et al.	2010	A snapshot of a group of English teachers' conceptions about English teaching and learning in Chilean public education	Mixed	Article	Teachers' cognition	<i>Folios</i> (Spanish)
Díaz et al.	2011	Comparing teaching styles and personality types of EFL instructors in the public and private sectors	Does not report	Article	Teaching styles	<i>Profile</i> (English)
Díaz	2011	Exploring knowledge of English-speaking strategies in 8 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup> graders	Quant.	Article	Students' knowledge of speaking strategies	<i>Profile</i> (English)
Correa et al.	2013	The impact of explicit feedback on EFL high school students engaged in writing tasks	Qual.	Article	Teachers' feedback provision in writing tasks	<i>Profile</i> (English)
Glas	2013	Teaching English in Chile, a study of teacher perceptions of their professional identity, student motivation and pertinent learning contents	Mixed	Book	Teacher identity explorations in EFL classrooms	Peter Lang (English)
Kormos & Kiddle	2013	The role of socioeconomic factors in motivation to learn English as a foreign language: The case of Chile	Quant.	Article	English language learning motivations	<i>System</i> (English)
Gómez & Pérez	2015	Chilean 12 <sup>th</sup> graders' attitudes towards English as a foreign language	Quant.	Article	Students' attitudes to English learning	<i>Colombian Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> (English)
Díaz et al.	2015	A case study on EFL teachers' beliefs about the teaching and learning of English in public education	Qual.	Article	Teachers' beliefs	<i>Porta Linguarum</i> (English)

Author(s)	Year	Title of publication	Approach	Type of publication	Central topic	Journal/ Editorial & language
Glas	2016	Opening up 'spaces for manoeuvre': English teacher perspectives on learner motivation	Qual.	Article	Teachers' perspectives on students' motivation	<i>Research Papers on Education</i> (English)
Sato & Viveros	2016	Interaction or collaboration? Group dynamics in the foreign language classroom	Qual.	Chapter	Forms of interaction moves and collaborative patterns in peer interaction	John Benjamins (English)
De la Barra van Treek	2016	Cooperative learning in English language classes in four subsidized schools in Santiago	Mixed	Article	Variables affecting classroom management and teaching	<i>Pensamiento Educativo</i> (Spanish)
Pereira & Ramos	2016	Design of textbooks for teaching English: A curriculum proposal	Does not report	Article	Textbook design	<i>Colombian Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> (Spanish)
Saavedra & Brauchy	2017	The use of digital video making projects to enhance motivation in the English foreign language teaching high school classroom	Qual.	Article	Use of video projects tasks to enhance motivation	<i>The LEC Journal</i> (English)
Correa et al.	2017	Relationship between group seating arrangement in the classroom and student participation in speaking activities in EFL classes at a secondary school in Chile	Qual.	Article	Sitting arrangement during speaking activities	<i>Folios</i> (English)
Walczak et al.	2017	Which factors affect English language attainment? A study of school students in Chile. Impact of Cambridge English exams and English language learning programmes in a variety of contexts	Quant.	Article	Factors affecting language attainment in the SIMCE 2014	<i>Research Notes</i> (English)

Author(s)	Year	Title of publication	Approach	Type of publication	Central topic	Journal/ Editorial & language
Jorquera et al.	2017	High school students' affective reaction to English speaking activities	Qual.	Article	Exploration of attitudes in speaking activities	<i>HOW</i> (English)
Cárcamo	2018	Types of listening comprehension promoted in the Chilean EFL textbook Global English	Qual.	Article	Listening comprehension activities in textbooks	<i>Colombian Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> (English)
Farías & Radu	2019	From looking north to participating globally as empowered users of the language: International posture in Chilean learners of English	Mixed	Chapter	Students' postures about English	Eduel (English)
Walper	2019	An exploration of Chilean EFL teachers' interactional practices in feedback provision	Quant.	Chapter	Interactional practices during feedback provision	Cambridge Scholar Publishing (English)
De la Barra & Carbone	2020	Bridging inequality: Cooperative learning through literature in two vulnerable schools in Santiago	Qual.	Article	Cooperative learning through the use of literature	<i>Profile</i> (English)
Cárcamo	2020	Readability and types of questions in Chilean EFL high school textbooks	Quant.	Article	Readability inconsistencies in high school textbooks	<i>TESOL Journal</i> (English)
Cancino & Díaz	2020	Exploring the code-switching behaviours of Chilean EFL high school teachers: A function-focused approach	Quant.	Article	Teachers' code-switching	<i>Profile</i> (English)
Sato & Oyadenel	2020	"I think that is a better way to teach but ...": EFL teachers' conflicting beliefs about grammar teaching	Mixed	Article	Teachers' beliefs on grammar teaching	<i>System</i> (English)

Table 4. Methodology Preferences per Research Domain in EFL High School Studies

Methodology	Number of publications	%	Methodological design choices	Language
Quantitative	9	39.1	Experimental and quasi experimental Psychometric scale measures (Likert, surveys) Correlational measures Descriptive statistics Non-participant observation	English 100%
Qualitative	7	30.4	Descriptive and interpretive approaches Action research Case studies Interviews Document analysis	English 100%
Mixed	5	21.7	Psychometric scale measures (Likert, surveys) Correlational measures Descriptive statistics Interviews Class observations	English 60% ( <i>n</i> = 3) Spanish 40% ( <i>n</i> = 2)
Non-empirical	2	8.1	Descriptive document analysis (with qualitative orientation)	English 50% ( <i>n</i> = 1) Spanish 50% ( <i>n</i> = 1)
Total	23	100		

First, the mixed-methods studies have been relatively continual across time. Their findings are diverse, holistic, and speak primarily about how EFL pedagogy is implemented. They provide evidence on teaching conditions in high-school settings and the relations between practices and the beliefs that inform those practices. A recurrent theme in nearly all the studies examined is the dissonance between teachers' practices, belief systems, and discourses. In these reports, teachers' identities are reported as constant-struggling selves that strive within constrained spaces—schools and classrooms—ruled by tensions and contradictions and inconsistencies. These studies have provided evidence drawing on teachers' discourses, beliefs, and practices (De la Barra van Treek, 2016; Díaz et al., 2010; Díaz et al., 2012; Glas, 2013; Sato & Oyanel, 2020). Additionally, these studies consistently suggest the gap between school reality and teacher training as an

unattended issue (Díaz et al., 2012; Sato & Oyanel, 2020). They report how teacher training programmes do not link the schools with their sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts. These contradictions have also been reported elsewhere in teacher education settings and policy analysis studies (see Lizasoain, 2017; and Martin & Rosas-Maldonado, 2019, for further discussions). Certainly, this misalignment is an important issue for future research.

The Chilean quantitative studies stand out in their large sampling techniques in relation to the other approaches. They have been relevant for generating more and farther-reaching synchronous portraits of the Chilean high school EFL population. High-school EFL quantitative inquiry is generally bounded to the pedagogical outcomes and linguistic performance in the English class. To some degree, these studies also map classrooms and schools demographically, that is, who those people

are. An interesting aspect of these studies is that most of them are focused exclusively on the students.

The quantitative findings, and subsequent discussions, establish a strong correspondence between an EFL pedagogy and the surrounding immediacy of the socioeconomic and sociocultural spaces in which students learn English (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013). For instance, Walczak et al. (2017) report that the socioeconomic background is a “strong predictor of language attainment” (p. 64), raising concerns to look at classrooms and their challenges embedded in particular socioeconomic conditions (e.g., private and public settings) and geographical (e.g., urban and rural) contexts. Nevertheless, these studies’ contributions are descriptive in their nature. The impracticality of complementary narrative inquiry prevents us from understanding the causality of such characterizations. Other studies in this approach focus on pedagogical dynamics (Díaz et al., 2011; Walper, 2019) and linguistic factors (Cancino & Díaz, 2020; Cárcamo, 2020).

Qualitative inquiry has zeroed in the tensions among the high school system and the members’ professional relationships and a comprehensive gaze on the particularities of the contexts, focusing on interaction between teachers and students. These studies also examine the pedagogical relations among the development of teaching skills, the mediating instruments (e.g., textbooks), and the socio-cognitive foundations of these groups’ interactions. Some of these works provide compelling findings. For example, in Díaz et al. (2012), teachers’ identity tensions are explored. Teachers are reported as dealing with the tensions between being either educators or linguists as separate components of their professional identities. In a similar tone, and in more depth, Glas (2013) provides an analysis of the professional views of teachers who experience tensions and negotiate with their social spaces, beliefs, disciplinary knowledge, socioeconomic conditions, and material support, which create a sensation of powerlessness. As in the mixed methods studies, teachers are similarly described as holding inconsistencies between their discursive repertoires, pedagogical actions, and beliefs.

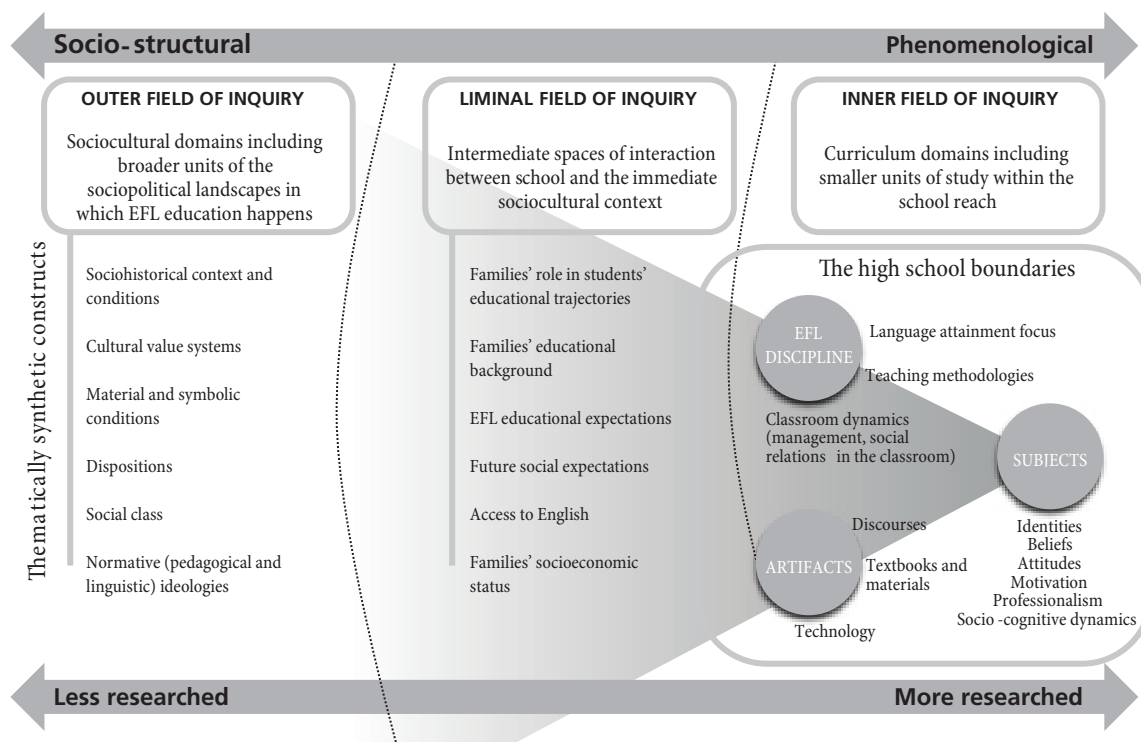
An overriding characteristic reported is that communicative language teaching underpinnings dominate their teaching discourses but not their teaching practices (De la Barra van Treek, 2016; Díaz et al., 2010, Díaz et al., 2015). These inconsistencies are suggested to be contextually and personally constrained.

### CIS Outcomes: Mapping Fields of Inquiry

The map of inquiry fields, shown in Figure 6, results from the thematically synthetic constructs emerging from the research findings’ codification nodes and their connections. Subsequently, the synthetic constructs and the studies’ interpretation were combined, producing specific topics that led towards larger theoretical clusters. The three distinct fields of inquiry identified were (a) the outer, (b) the liminal, and (c) the inner. The conceptualization I used emerged from the data during the analysis, that is, I have not used predefined conceptualization to interpret or classify the data. These three fields are configured within a continuum that ranges from themes rooted in structural-functional views to more phenomenological perspectives of EFL education. Their boundaries are well-defined. For example, teachers’ classroom management research findings are rarely associated with social dynamics or issues of power dynamics in the classrooms but to practical methodological concerns.

First, the *outer field* considers aspects of the sociopolitical world (Lo Bianco, 2008). This inquiry field is the least represented, and it consists of all the broader sociopolitical research areas that inscribe the normative, cultural, ideological, and social parameters, determining value systems and material and symbolic conditions in relation to EFL education. The findings reported in this field, as in Farías and Radu (2019) and Walczak et al. (2017), point to the correspondence between social class and language attainment opportunities and the sets of values that sustain the relations with English as a world dominant language. Nevertheless, EFL education is generally presented as detached from its sociohistorical conditions.

Figure 6. Fields of Inquiry Map in High School EFL Education



Next is the *liminal field* of inquiry. This field encompasses those intermediate spaces in which relationships between the broader sociopolitical landscape and the school members operate. This field includes the connections between youth learning experiences and their immediate sociocultural environments (e.g., students’ family sociocultural backgrounds). One key concept in this field (and also mentioned in the other two fields studies) is *access*, which seems to be a recurrent metonymy that needs careful unpacking and cautious exploration.

A better understanding may lead to deeper comprehension of issues related to discourses that justify and sustain segregation, inequality, vulnerability, and learning attainment failure (De la Barra & Carbone, 2020; Glas, 2008; Gómez & Pérez, 2015; Kormos & Kiddle, 2013; Walczak et al., 2017). English enjoys high social value, which sustains English as a desired “tool” across all the socioeconomic groups in our society (Glas, 2008). Consequently, the “access to better opportuni-

ties” that the English language grants is reported as being construal in a way that shapes identity, world visions, and expected (socio)economic paths (Glas, 2008; Kormos & Kiddle, 2013; Kruglanski & Higgins, 2007; Matear, 2008).

The third and last field of inquiry, the *inner field*, includes three clusters: EFL discipline, teacher cognition, and artifacts. They narrow the focus on the instrumental aspect of teaching, that is, teaching methods and strategies, classroom management, use of materials, quality of teaching delivery, and students’ engagement (Correa et al., 2017; Saavedra & Brauchy, 2017; Walper, 2019). They also incorporate various aspects of dynamics involving interaction, negotiation, decision making, resistance, and change (Farías & Radu, 2019; Gómez & Pérez, 2015). At the core of this field, there is a clear focus on subjects, particularly on the teachers. Issues revolve around characterizing their cognitions: who these teachers are, how they think, how they perform,

and what instruments they implement to reach their aims (Cárcamo, 2020; Díaz et al., 2010; Walper, 2019). As a secondary subject, we can find some discrete descriptions about students, mostly characterized and reported through psychometric scales, as in Gómez and Pérez (2015).

In relation to the formal aspects of high-school research, the CIS, and in particular three fields' sum of evidence, signals prosperous directions regarding new research methods, design and opportunities to be revisited, hoping that they may trigger further critical research on issues relevant to the schools. The overall characterization shows that:

1. Research on high-school EFL education is recent (2010–2020) and scant.
2. Studies vary widely in depth, scope, complexity, and reflection.
3. Research about EFL education undertaken in high school is teacher-centred.
4. Research design is consistently balanced among the three traditions (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed).
5. The contextualization of the studies is oftentimes unclear and brief.
6. None of the studies reviewed uses participatory methods or polyvocal designs.

The final outcomes of this critical interpretive synthesis of the Chilean high-school EFL research in the synthesis below, contains the interpretative portion, and as such, I provide the new configuration of the findings in the studies discussed, which suggest that:

1. The conditions and dispositions in EFL education have changed very little in ten years.
2. The communities' socioeconomic conditions are a powerful force that profoundly constrains teachers' decisions, students' *fate*, and the school structures in terms of control and power-share. Teachers struggle with these underlying socioeconomic forces, which seem to cause their disassociation

between their practices, beliefs, and discourses, thus affecting their imaginaries and pedagogical expectations.

3. EFL teachers are little prepared to understand and contest socioeconomic condition forces. Consequently, they readily resort to behaviorist teaching methods as a form of control, and seemingly, as professional validation mechanisms.
4. A factor underlying part of this dissonance is the lack of updated disciplinary knowledge, still rooted in the earlier stages of the communicative approach merged with elements of grammar-centred/translation teaching.
5. Secondary students' perceptions are characterized as contradictory. Students' motivation is generally low, yet their attitude towards EFL education is positive and favorable. Although they acknowledge the relevance of the English language in their future careers and lives, they exert little effort in learning. This may be the result of an (EFL) educational system that struggles with inconsistencies.
6. Supporting materials for the EFL class, in particular textbooks, need better alignment with the diverse educational realities and needs of the country.

In the following section, I will discuss some considerations I deem relevant in relation to these synthesis findings and the Chilean EFL contextual particularities to finally conclude with a reflection.

## Discussion

This CIS set out to examine the overall Chilean ELT research advancement, focusing on high school studies. The overall ELT research has steadily increased from 2000 to 2020, unlike high school studies, which have seen meagre growth. The CIS also shows that several essential areas in high-school EFL education remain unexplored in this respect.

The EFL high schools research pivots primarily around teachers' perspectives and teaching dynamics.

When the focus is placed on students, this pivots around their dispositions, attitudes, and motivation. Accordingly, the analyzed research corpus results converge on the curriculum implementation, although not necessarily connected to the national curriculum itself, which remains unscrutinized. Given the teacher-bound nature of the available research, addressing the curricular policy may help understand the multiple dissonances surrounding pedagogical practices, particularly addressing the identity and sociopolitical dimension of EFL education and its ultimate purposes for the Chilean society. These angles may also help expand our understandings of the EFL educational complexities in radical ways beyond the interests of practices grounded on verbocentrism, that is, a restricted approach centred on language proficiency as the dominant curricular goal.

Understanding high school-based research, as a powerful belief-shaping instrument, could help outline the exercise of educators' pedagogical hermeneutics. What information do future teachers receive for their professional development? Is it only informed by the international experience? What is the role of local research? The relevance of empirical evidence from local school settings is utterly necessary to appraise and critique curricular development decisions, policies, and above all, better teacher education program alignments with the local educational system. Sato and Loewen (2019) argue that EFL pedagogy may benefit significantly from research. High-school teachers' needs primarily revolve around (urgent) pragmatic and complex questions deeply rooted in knowledge repertoires that need constant updating (Bellei et al., 2020; Herrada et al., 2012; Joram, 2007; Manzi et al., 2011). Thus, a situated knowledge-oriented EFL discipline, enacted through local inquiry-based practices, may gradually propel critical approaches to understanding and transforming their educational landscapes. The question is then how such features could be effectively articulated *collaboratively*. Thus,

the importance of imagining gradual forms of collaborative inquiry-based practices.

The value of CISS is that they illuminate future initiatives to better align research with local needs. Indeed, all these new directions may contribute to rethinking EFL research and pedagogy in high schools, particularly considering the COVID-19 pandemic hiatus. Revisiting EFL education in high schools in light of covidian times will yield new perspectives on researching the prevailing construals. Some of them involve what key factors mean for EFL education, such as successful relationships in the classroom, teaching practices, learning experiences, the influence of the abysmal socioeconomic gap between social classes, and technology access. Most likely, these dimensions will need further revisiting considering the covidian conditions. This CIS also points at a pending task, questioning the currently implemented EFL curricula and their impact on the communities.

Regarding EFL practices in research, they are still profoundly entrenched in the binary relationship between researcher and researched. This limitation is another opportunity to better understand EFL research repertoires by selecting non-traditional research methods to further integrate voices. For instance, using polyvocal and collaborative inquiry research methods (e.g., duoethnography, bricolage, collaborative research) is a possibility to strengthen critical ELT pedagogy in a move towards more equal and sustainable research practices.

Furthermore, incorporating critical and intersectional frameworks such as decolonial, racial and feminist approaches, to name but a few, would also enrich our interpretations of the context. By adding to this equation the geographical location and the diversity of sociocultural contexts across Chile, EFL educational research may also take an enriching turn involving minorities, racialized and Indigenous communities, and rural educational communities. Such views grant a fertile landscape to embed criticality and social justice as part of the EFL research agenda to counter prevailing positivist logic, challenge colonizing epistemologies, and neoliberal capi-



talist interests in educational research (Casassus, 2010; Giroux, 2001; Habermas, 1968/1971; Quijano, 2007; de Sousa Santos, 2016).

### Conclusions: Not Seeing the Forest for the Trees?

*If you want to research us, you can go home. If you have come to accompany us, if you think our struggle is also your struggle, we have plenty of things to talk about. (Glesne, 2007, p. 171)*

In this article, I have mapped, synthesized, and discussed indexed EFL high-school research. Critically framed research remains utterly necessary to defy the rigid patterns in the current research cannons in various ways, such as exploring those classrooms beyond the logic of the language-attainment-only paradigm. A social turn in our EFL high school research—and pedagogy—would involve revisiting our secondary classrooms' overt and latent structures of power, inequality, marginalization, ideological underpinnings, and forms of oppression. How will these characteristics in high schools evolve as a result of the pandemic? Perhaps, and hopefully, new meaningful possibilities of linking school and academia may emerge.

Finally, taking stock of critically comprehensive research in high schools may allow us to understand that sheer teacher-centred research may only contribute to a more restrictive understanding of the spaces we are trying to improve. Classrooms are complex social systems that are not only occupied by teachers. Naturally, I do not wish to convey the idea of excluding teachers from the picture; on the contrary, I have argued that the teachers' portrayal in the research accounts addressed in this article is somewhat incomplete. The larger picture is missing; there is more to it, and there is more beyond the instrumental aspects of verbocentric goals. Moreover, broader educational changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic are rendering new dimensions to undertake research. Therefore, amplifying research

alternatives and extending participatory opportunities to other members with equal prominence and voice can stimulate us to explore the forest and not just focus on the trees.

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