



19<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium | September 6-8, 2023

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## **Research on Simultaneous Second Language and Literacy Acquisition in Adults: A Scoping Review of the LESLLA Symposium Proceedings**

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### **Abstract**

This article provides a thematic content analysis of papers published in the LESLLA Symposium Proceedings from 2005 through 2019, with the aim to provide an overview of the trends in research topics since the establishment of the network as well as to identify gaps in knowledge and opportunities for future research. Through a scoping review, the LESLLA proceedings articles (N=186) are categorized in line with the micro, meso, and macro levels of the transdisciplinary framework of language learning and teaching, developed by the Douglas Fir Group (2016). The review reveals a lack of attention to factors at the DFG framework's macro level, i.e. the ideological and political conditions for language learning, in research on LESLLA learners. While micro level factors were dominant in the early years, particularly cognitive aspects of language and literacy acquisition, research on DFG meso level has gained ground over the last 15 years. We suggest that future research strive to maintain and further investigate topics at the micro and meso levels, while also considering the institutional and ideological factors that influence language and literacy acquisition.

**Keywords:** research trends, scoping review, LESLLA research, The Douglas Fir Group transdisciplinary framework for SLA

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This article presents an overview of research on non- and low-literate adult second language learners, hereafter referred to as LESLLA<sup>2</sup> learners, conducted within the international LESLLA network, over a fifteen-year period from its establishment in 2005 until the present day. The LESLLA network is a professional network of researchers and practitioners focusing on second language learning and emergent literacy in adult learners. In this article, we examine all papers published in the LESLLA Symposium Proceedings from 2005 to 2019. Our article presents as a *scoping review*, the purpose of which is to survey the existing research within a particular field, as well as the topics and questions addressed by the research (Munthe et al., 2022).

There is broad consensus that print literacy is of great importance for second language learning. However, although the research attention has increased considerably over the past 20 years, knowledge about how literacy, or lack thereof, affects second language development in adults is still dispersed and only to a limited extent taken into account in the larger field of second language acquisition (SLA). Moreover, this group of adult learners is underrepresented within the research and theoretical developments of second language learning (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, pp. 30–31; Tarone, 2010; Tarone et al., 2009). Owing to this, the aim of this article is to provide an overview of the existing research, as well as to identify any gaps in knowledge and opportunities for future research. On the one hand, the article presents an overview of the research on LESLLA learners over the past 15 years within a dominant professional network focusing on simultaneous second language learning and literacy development in adults, and on the other hand, it examines how this research has changed since the LESLLA network was established in the early 2000s.

The article seeks to answer two research questions:

- 1) What are the main developments in research focus in the LESLLA network from 2005 to 2019?
- 2) What are main research focus and gaps within the LESLLA network?

In the analysis, we sort the articles according to a transdisciplinary framework for second language learning developed by a group of researchers referred to as The Douglas Fir Group (DFG). The framework consists of three levels: micro, meso, and macro. The articles are categorized thematically within these three levels, providing an indication of the breadth and topics of interest within the LESLLA research, and, as a next step, we also briefly survey the research conducted within each level, highlighting selected key contributions and developments within the field. We start by giving a brief presentation of the LESLLA network, followed by an overview of the DFG framework, with particular emphasis on describing the three levels that form the basis for categorizing the data, before moving on to methodology, findings, and discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> This text is a translation of a chapter, first published in Norwegian. The translation has minor adaptations to fit the purpose of the LESLLASP. Original version: Nordanger, M, Carlsen, C. H. & Bugge, E. (2023). Forskning på samtidig andrespråks- og litterasitetstillegg hos voksne. En sonderende oversikt over LESLLA-nettverkets konferansepublikasjoner. In E. Bugge & C. H. Carlsen (Eds.), *Norsk som andrespråk – voksne innvandrere som utvikler skriftkyndighet på et andrespråk* (pp. 21–48). Cappelen Damm Akademisk. The results from the study were also presented at the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual LESLLA Symposium in Barcelona, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> LESLLA stands for Literacy Education and Second Language Learning in Adults. *Non- and low-literate adult second language learners* is used to refer to the same group in the Council of Europe Reference guide, LASLLIAM (Literacy and Second Language Learning for the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants) (Minuz et al., 2022). The terminology applied in this article is used in consistency with this.

### **The LESLLA network**

In August 2005, the LESLLA network was established by a small group of researchers gathering at Tilburg University in the Netherlands with the aim of creating an international forum for research, classroom practice, and policy focusing on second language learning in adult learners with limited formal schooling and little or no literacy skills. At the time of our review, the following vision was stated on the official website, [www.leslla.org](http://www.leslla.org):

LESLLA aims to support adults who are learning to read and write for the first time in their lives in a new language. We promote, on a worldwide, multidisciplinary basis, the sharing of research findings, effective pedagogical practices, and information on policy.

In second language research, basic education and literacy skills are often taken for granted in adult second language learners (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Tarone et al., 2010). However, taking into account the knowledge we have today about variation in literacy and prior opportunities for education and formal schooling among second language learners, this is an assumption that should be questioned and examined critically when developing theories of second language learning, to ensure that research provides both educators and policy makers with more precise knowledge regarding learners with limited formal education and literacy skills. The research conducted by the LESLLA network makes an important contribution in this regard. Since 2005, the network has held annual symposia, alternating between an English-dominant and a non-English-dominant country (usually in the United States and Europe, respectively). In all respects, LESLLA strives to be a gathering place for researchers from all over the world. In this regard, the LESLLA Symposium presents a diversity of contexts for language skills and literacy training. Most participants are working from the United States and Europe, with a majority from the United States, followed by the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Finland (Young-Scholten, 2018, p. 80). From 2020 to 2022, the symposia were conducted digitally due to the COVID-19 pandemic. After each symposium, articles are published in a peer-reviewed series of proceedings based on a selection of presentations. At the time of writing this article, there are annual LESLLA Symposium Proceedings available from the 2005 to 2019 conferences.

To the best of our knowledge, this study figures among the first comprehensive surveys of the LESLLA Symposium Proceedings. While Young-Scholten (2018) provides a review of LESLLA Symposium presentations given at 13 symposia spanning from 2005 to 2017, Pettitt (2022) represents a recent review focusing on the conceptualizations and definitions of literacy adopted in the total body of LESLLA proceedings from 2005 to 2019, both providing important insight into the current state and scope of the LESLLA research. Young-Scholten (2018), covering a total of 418 presentations, discussions and workshops, finds that a majority of the LESLLA Symposium contributions are concerned with LESLLA learners from countries with general low literacy rates, and that the predominant thematic emphasis is on teaching and pedagogy. Out of the 418 presentations, 141 have a broad general focus, covering various language, literacy, and life skills. The remaining 277 presentations are targeted towards specific language sub-skills and sub-components, such as digital skills, health literacy, identity, and motivation. Only 3% of the examined presentations are categorized as thematically related to policy. Moreover, Young-Scholten finds a great methodological diversity, where most of the presentations (114 out of 418) are descriptive and mainly concerned with teaching practices. Lastly, 75 out of 418 presentations are categorized as action research and small-scale classroom studies, while 56 out of 418 are classified as systematic studies with more than 500 participants.

In line with the current study, the corpus underlying Pettitt (2022) encompasses all LESLLA proceedings from 2005 up to 2019. However, whereas our objective is a broad thematic one, Pettitt

draws specific attention to the diversity of literacy definitions adopted in the research, and how these attach to the larger debates and developments in the scholarly field of literacy studies. She finds that the large majority of publications implicitly or explicitly adopts a psycholinguistic definition of literacy, while social and critical approaches are less common. Finally, Pettitt (2022) addresses a lack in the incorporation of LESLLA learners' own perspectives and voices in research (p. 12).

Summarized, Young-Scholten (2018) provides a comprehensive overview showcasing the great diversity in methodological approaches and research topics covered in the presentations given at LESLLA symposia, representing an invaluable point of departure for our scoping review presented in this paper. Still, our study differs from Young-Scholten's, as well as from Pettitt's, in several ways. First, the data are different: Whereas Young-Scholten examines topics in all the presentations and workshops held within the framework of LESLLA symposia, we have limited ourselves to examine peer-reviewed publications only. Second, while both Pettitt's and Young-Scholten's overviews are synchronic, our analysis provides a diachronic overview by examining whether the LESLLA research has changed from its inception in 2005 to the present day. And lastly, the methodological and theoretical approaches are different, as we structure our categorization of the text material according to the Douglas Fir Group (DFG) Framework's three levels. In this manner, we aim to provide a systematic overview of the LESLLA research where the application of the DFG framework as well as the diachronic perspective enables a contextualization of the analysis in relations to developments in the broader field of second language learning.

### **The DFG framework for SLA**

The DFG framework emerged from an initiative among a group of key researchers in the United States and Canada to establish a transdisciplinary and holistic approach to SLA for both research and teaching. This transdisciplinary collaboration lays the groundwork for innovation in SLA research and aims to describe the SLA process with increased ecological validity, i.e. without reducing individual language learning to an isolated mental process, but also including the opportunities and limitations for language learning inherent in the social environment of learners, from the micro level to the macro level over time (DFG, 2016, p. 39). A further ambition of the group is to promote research which addresses "the pressing needs of people who learn to live – and in fact do live – with more than one language at various points in their lives" (DFG, 2016, p. 20), which can contribute to better and more sustainable conditions for language learning in the multilingual world of today. Their aim is described as follows:

A new SLA must be imagined, one that can investigate the learning and teaching of additional languages across private and public, material and digital social contexts in a multilingual world. We propose that it begin with the social-local worlds of L2 learners and then pose the full range of relevant questions—from the neurobiological and cognitive micro levels to the macro levels of the sociocultural, educational, ideological, and socioemotional. (DFG, 2016, p. 20)

Against this backdrop, the group developed a concentric model for the factors influencing an individual's second language learning process.

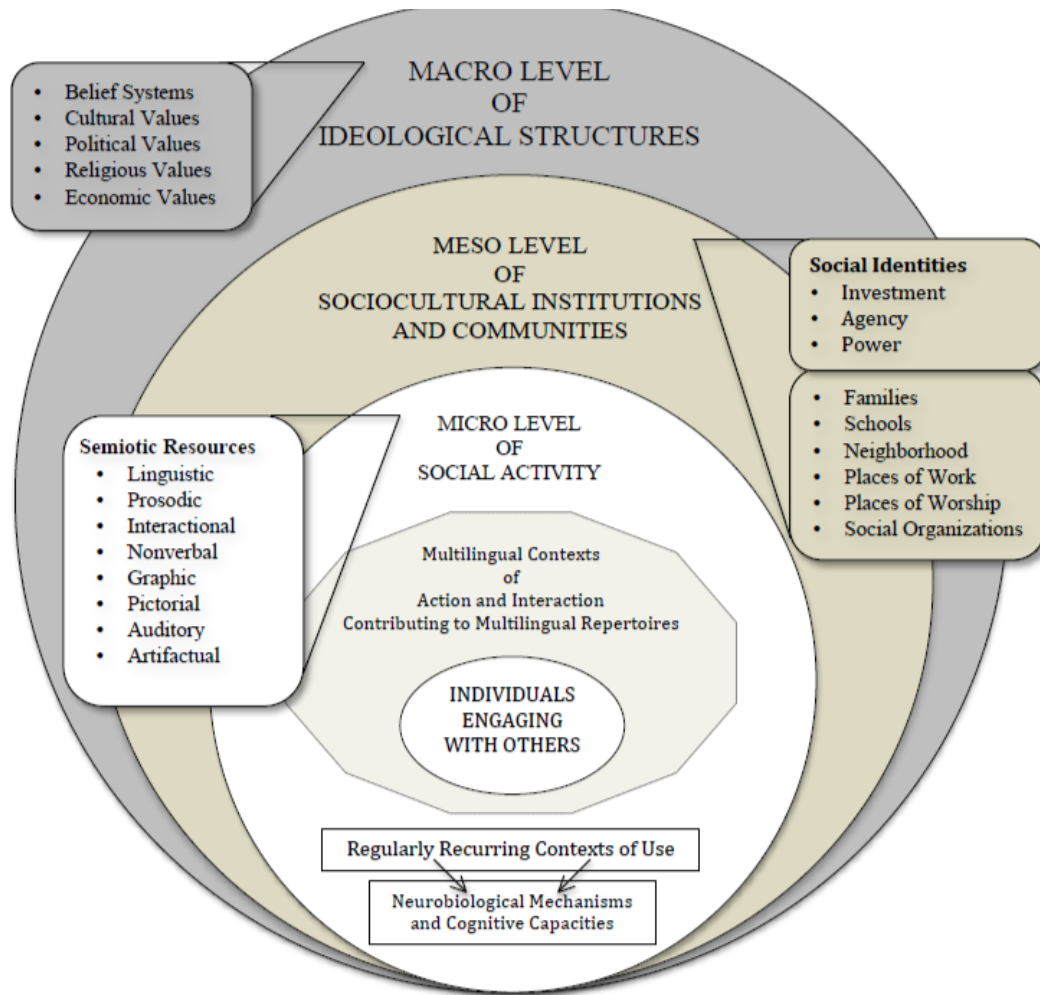


Figure 1. The DFG Model (2016, p. 25)<sup>3</sup>

The model is based on the premise that language learning starts with social activity and presents second language learning and teaching as processes involving factors at the micro, meso, and macro levels, with individual social interaction at the core. The innermost circle, representing *the micro level*, includes cognitive abilities and processes, neurological mechanisms, and emotional involvement. These are activated when the second language learner interacts with others in a multilingual context, and draws on their semiotic resources (linguistic, non-verbal, interactional, etc.). The contexts of social activity are situated in and shaped by sociocultural institutions in which the second language learner participates, such as the family, school, neighborhood, workplace, religious community, sports team, and digital fora, comprised by the middle circle, representing *the meso level*. Finally, the outermost circle, *the macro level*, includes overarching societal and ideological structures that affect language use and language learning. The macro level also includes underlying cultural, economic, political, and other beliefs and values which shape the conditions for language learning and linguistic interaction. These three levels

<sup>3</sup> Permission to print the model in the original Norwegian version of the article was obtained from the publisher (28.09.22).

interact and intertwine: For instance, social activity at the micro level is determined and influenced by access to and participation in sociocultural institutions, such as access to basic schooling. Educational institutions influence attitudes and values, but also reflect ideology and policy at the macro level. Similarly, ideologies at the macro level, such as a monolingual ideology of correctness, may reduce the individual's linguistic agency and thus affect the conditions of second language development at the micro level.

In the description of the framework, print literacy is highlighted as a factor influencing how second languages are learned, and as a mediating tool for second language learning (DFG, 2016, pp. 30–31). Also addressing the need for more knowledge on simultaneous second language and literacy acquisition in order to properly represent and meet the spectrum of learners with different levels of literacy and prior schooling experience. As with second language learning in general, simultaneous literacy and second language learning take place in contexts shaped by the levels of the DFG framework. One aim of the present study is thus to provide insight into whether LESLLA research meet DFG's call to examine all the different levels relevant to language learning, more specifically for simultaneous language and literacy acquisition.

## Method

The present study is a *scoping review*, which according to Colquhoun et al. (2014, p. 1292, 1294) can be described as:

[...] a form of knowledge synthesis that addresses an exploratory research question aimed at mapping key concepts, types of evidence, and gaps in research related to a defined area or field by systematically searching, selecting, and synthesizing existing knowledge.

A scoping review is considered a method of surveying with the aim to describe and map existing research in a specific field (Munthe et al., 2022). A scoping review differs from a systematic review to the extent that it does not attempt to analyze or outline the research results or examine the validity of the research in question. A scoping review is well-suited for gaining insight into what researchers in a field are interested in, as well as any potential gaps in the research, while it is less suitable for providing clear answers to, for example, the effect of various measures (Munn et al., 2018; Peters et al., 2020). Furthermore, a scoping review can help determine whether it is appropriate to conduct a more thorough systematic review targeting more specific topics of interest or research questions at later stages. We have chosen the scoping review as our method to meet a goal of surveying predominant interests and possible gaps in the research, rather than drawing conclusions about, for example, what works or what does not work in the education of LESLLA learners. This is also a suitable method to provide an overview of trends in research interest in the field over time. However, it should be noted that this study does not seek to survey everything that has been written about LESLLA learners. Indeed, as our scope is limited to the LESLLA Symposium Proceedings, studies published in other journals and by other publishers are excluded from our analysis. As a result, this review may be regarded as a first step, with the potential to open new avenues for laying the ground for a more comprehensive scoping review or a *systematic review*. Below is an outline of our methodological approach, based on the following guidelines for scoping reviews, as outlined by Peters et al. (2020): inclusion criteria, participants, search strategy and criteria, and categorization criteria.

### **Inclusion criteria**

We have included all articles published as part of the annual LESLLA Symposium Proceedings from 2005 to 2019 (N = 203). Our review does not include studies about LESLLA learners published outside the LESLLA Symposium Proceedings. Given the lack of attention to this group of learners in the past, and the additional challenge for many in the practical field to publish studies with few participants or action research in peer-reviewed journals (Feldmeier, 2007, p. 8), we nevertheless assume that a significant proportion of published studies on LESLLA learners are covered in our review. A possible future systematic review would be strengthened by including scientific articles published through other channels.

### **Participants and sample**

The publications included in our survey are all concerned with *adult* second language learners who have had limited opportunities for formal schooling in their home countries and beginning or no literacy skills, in line with the LESLLA network's vision, quoted above. The vast majority of articles deal with simultaneous second language and literacy acquisition among adult learners. A smaller number of papers focuses on adolescents, but none are concerned with children under thirteen. While the LESLLA network has adopted the UNESCO definition of adult learners as 15 years and up (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.), we have chosen to include adolescents in consistency with SLA research usually drawing a line at the age of twelve (Ortega, 2009), also allowing us to include also those few LESLLA papers focusing on young adolescents.

### **Search criteria**

When constructing a review based on database searches, it is crucial to specify clear search criteria to ensure that all relevant articles are included, and less relevant articles are excluded from the search. However, the present study does not require a comprehensive search process, as our sample is restricted to the articles published in the LESLLA Symposium Proceedings from 2005 to 2019, that were available in pdf format before the journal went online (N = 203). That said, our final analysis is the result of a systematic, manual process of inclusion and exclusion (see Figure 2). Upon reviewing the titles and abstracts, it became clear that six papers had to be excluded because they were not included in the publications themselves, although they were listed in the table of contents. After careful examination of the remaining 197 articles, eleven were excluded as they served as editorial introductions to the edited volume, and hence could not be meaningfully categorized according to the levels of the DFG model (see Table 1). As a result, the final sample consists of 186 articles, forming the basis for our analysis. The selection process is presented as a Prisma flow diagram in Figure 2.

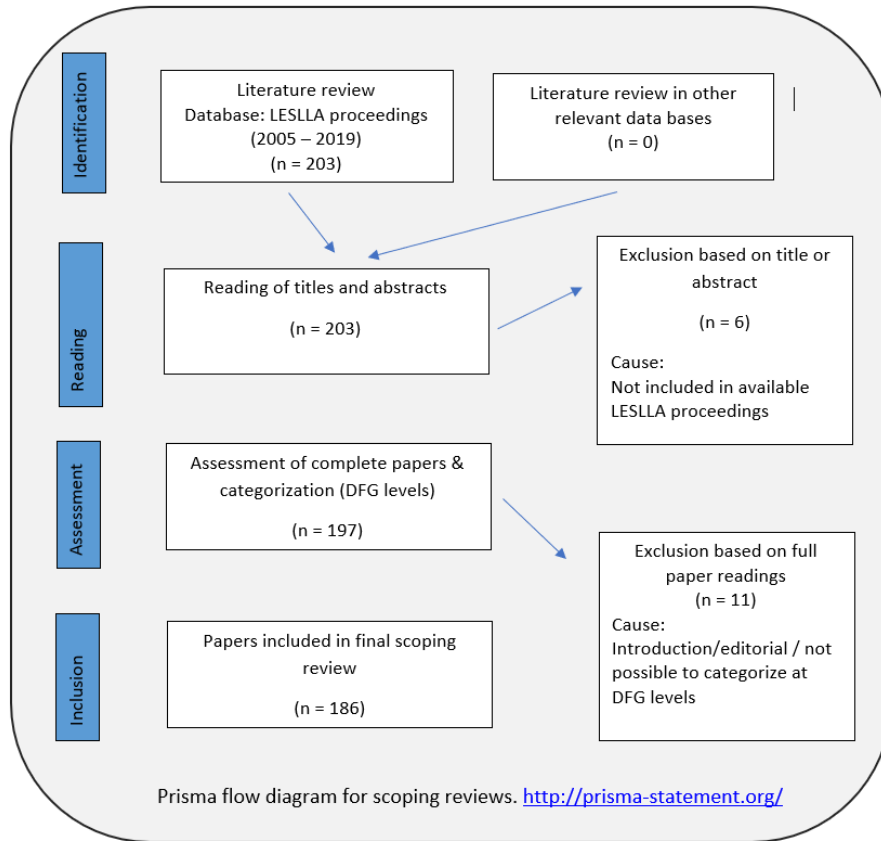


Figure 2. PRISMA flow diagram for scoping reviews. Selection process overview.

### Categorization criteria

Due to the large number of research papers included in our scoping review, the work of reading and coding the papers was divided between the three researchers. For the coding to be as consistent as possible, each paper was read and coded independently by at least two of the three researchers based on a common *coding frame* as recommended by O'Connor & Joffe (2020). The coding frame, presented in Table 1 below, is based on the three levels of the DFG framework, micro, meso, and macro, but further specified for LESLLA research. This specification was necessary since the DFG framework is not primarily aimed at LESLLA learners, but is concerned with SLA in general, and because research on LESLLA learners may be presumed to be highly interdisciplinary, due to the complexity which arises when language and literacy are acquired simultaneously (e.g. research on literacy in pedagogy and psychology). This specification resulted in a set of sub-categories, shown in Table 1. The sub-categories are based on our understanding and interpretation of the DFG model (2016), and they also involve adaptations and clarifications necessary to incorporate the LESLLA research (e.g. the inclusion of *literacy* in Me-1 and 2 and *lack of schooling* in Mi-1). Table 1 presents the three levels in more detail, with clarifications for research on simultaneous second language and literacy acquisition.



Table 1 Coding Frame Further Specifying the Overarching DFG Categories: Micro, Meso, and Macro

<b>MICRO</b>	<p><i>Mi-1: The effect of lack of schooling and/or literacy on the learning and/or use of the L2</i></p> <p><i>Mi-2: Cognitive challenges, learning difficulties, dyslexia, e.g.</i></p> <p><i>Mi-3: Cognitive/psychological challenges, trauma, PTSD, e.g. which affects learning</i></p>
<b>MESO</b>	<p><i>Me-1: Learners' motivation, investment in language and/or literacy learning</i></p> <p><i>Me-2: Learners' social context, networks, and literacy practices</i></p> <p><i>Me-3: Classroom studies, learning and context, classroom practices</i></p> <p><i>Me-4: Teachers' competence and/or measures for raising teachers' competence (teacher training programs)</i></p> <p><i>Me-5: Teaching material, teaching methods, and curricula</i></p>
<b>MACRO</b>	<p><i>Ma-1: Language ideologies</i></p> <p><i>Ma-2: Values and belief systems/language myths</i></p> <p><i>Ma-3: Language and education policies, integration policies, language testing and assessment practices, language requirement policies</i></p>
<b>Not Categorized</b>	<p><i>Not possible to categorize according to micro, meso, or macro levels (for instance editorials/introductions to proceedings)</i></p>

As mentioned previously, there is mutual interaction between the levels, which also entails fluid transitions and potential overlap between categories. This point is important in the sense that behind our specification of sub-categories, there are various choices, interpretations and considerations, which also affect the categorization of the research articles. For example, we chose to place motivation and investment at the meso-level (Me-1), to highlight the significance of the social aspect of motivation rather than the psychological aspect but seen as something that relates to the individual and something a person may engage in or not, it also relates to the micro level. The sub-levels (Mi-1, Mi-2, and so on) are included as a basis for discussing the research interests within each level.

Once the coding frame was specified and agreed upon, the three researchers first read the same subset of proceeding papers as a basis for discussion and revision of the coding frame. To ensure reliability of the final coding and categorization, two researchers read and coded each of the 197 papers independently as recommended by O'Connor & Joffe (2020). We divided the articles between us according to the following design:

Table 2 Design for Assigning Publications to Researchers/Coders, based on Issue Publication Years.

Researcher 1	x	x	x	x	x	x					x	x	x	x	x
Researcher 2	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x
Researcher 3				x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x			
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019

The design of double coding of each paper allowed analyses of inter-coder reliability (ICR) (Hallgren, 2012). ICR is a statistical calculation of the agreement between different coders about how data should be coded (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020:2). High ICR values indicate a high level of agreement between different coders, which in turn can be interpreted as a sign of the coding frame being sufficiently clear and well-specified. Assessing ICR is important for the trustworthiness and quality of the study at hand.

### Findings

As a measure of inter-coder reliability, we employed *Cohen's Kappa*, in line with Larson-Hall's (2010) recommendations for calculating agreement between raters. The advantage of statistical tests over calculations of percentages of agreement, is the correction for agreement as a result of chance.

Table 3 Calculation of Agreement for Article Categorization (Cohen's Kappa)

Symmetric Measures					
		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error <sup>a</sup>	Approximate T <sup>b</sup>	Approximate Significance
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.702	.045	15.131	<.001
N of Valid Cases		197			

- a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
- b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Kappa values range from -1 to 1, where 0 indicates no agreement between raters and 1 indicates perfect agreement. A Kappa value of .70 is considered substantial (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020), reflecting agreement in the categorization by the two independent coders for 164 out of 197 articles. The finding is significant (p-value < .001) and the standard error is low (.045) indicating a strong evidence that the agreement between coders is not due to chance. For 33 articles where there was disagreement between coders, in which case, a final categorization was reached through discussion and revision of the relevant papers (coding and categorization results are provided for each paper in Appendix A). An example of such cases is the unclarity in categorization of learning strategies conducted in a classroom setting as belonging at the micro or meso level. In such and similar cases, we have tried to determine whether the study is generally oriented towards the micro or meso level, i.e. whether it says something about the learning strategies themselves and the individual (micro level) or about their use in sociocultural contexts (meso level).

### Research focus and trends over time

The first question we addressed in our study was what represents the main developments in research focus in the LESLLA network from 2005 to 2019. This question was examined by categorizing the articles according to the three levels of the DFG model.. Once all the papers were categorized, we calculated the proportion of studies in each volume assigned to the micro, meso, or macro level. Because the number of articles varies from volume to volume (e.g. seven articles

in 2015 and 2017, and 25 articles in 2018), we used relative figures (the number of articles at each level relative to the total number of articles in the current volume).

The graph in Figure 3 provides an overall picture of how research interest, understood as the focus area of the different studies and their categorization according to the DFG framework levels, has changed from year to year.

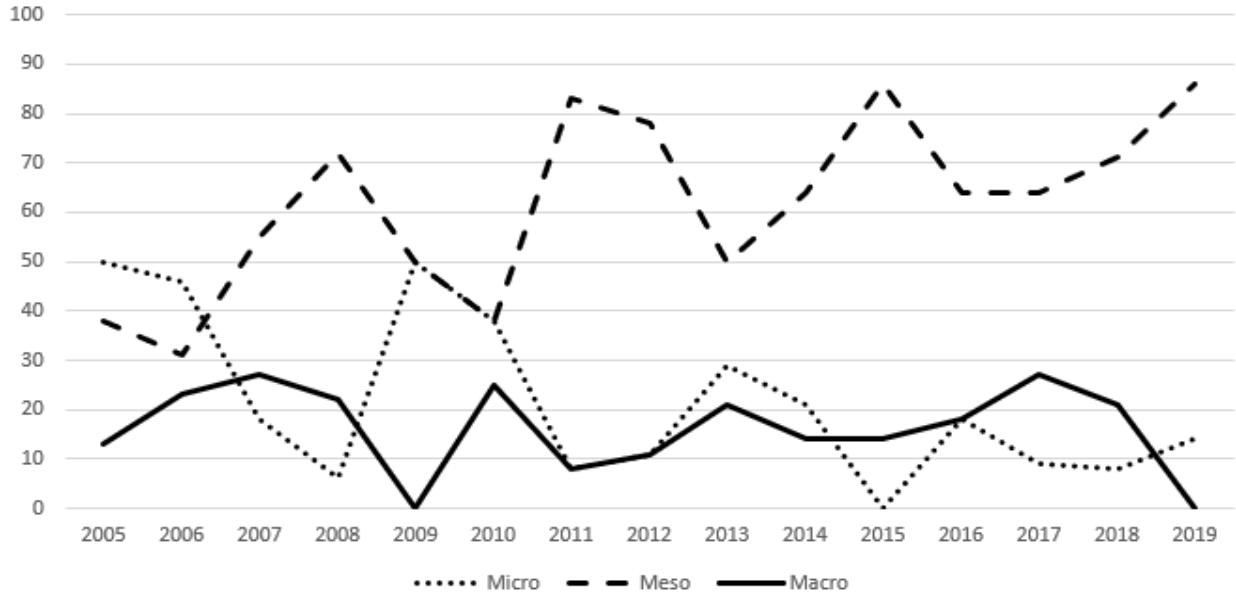


Figure 3 Development in Research Interest in Percentage from 2005 to 2019 at the Micro, Meso and Macro Levels

The numbers the x-axis in Figure 3 above refer to the year in which the symposium was held, and not the publication year<sup>4</sup> (we follow the same practice in the level-based review below). This is in line with how the volumes are presented on the official LESLLA website (LESLLA.org).

As illustrated in Figure 3, there is a consistent dominance associated with research targeting the meso level, with the exception of the first two publications in 2005 and 2006, where a majority of the articles can be placed at the micro level. The orientation towards the meso level is also evident from a gradually rising curve from less than 40% of the articles in the 2005 volume, and slightly lower in 2006, to more than 80% of the articles in 2019. Articles concerned with language and literacy acquisition at the micro level were predominant in the first two years (2005 and 2006), peaking in 2009 and 2010, but have later declined. Regarding the macro level, the graph indicates that it is a less explored area of research in the analyzed papers than the micro and meso levels. However, research addressing the macro level has been the subject of relatively consistent and stable interest, with a slight decline in the last couple of years. Notably, there were no articles categorized at the macro level in the 2019 volume. In what follows, we review the research within the three levels in greater detail.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A for overview of symposium year and LESLLASP publication year.

## Topics of interest

The second research question we set out to answer was what the main research focus and gaps within the LESLLA network have been. Based on the overarching categorization, we conducted a thematic content analysis of the 183 articles to describe the main trends and focus areas within the three levels of the DFG model. Furthermore, the articles were categorized according to the sub-levels presented in Table 1. Main trends are outlined below.

### *The micro level*

The micro level, the innermost circle of the DFG model, refers to the cognitive and semiotic level, including the linguistic resources employed when the individual is engaged in social activity. It includes neurobiological mechanisms and cognitive operations, as well as emotional and affective processes. 37 articles, or 19% of the articles published in the LESLLA Symposium Proceedings, were categorized at the micro level. As displayed in Figure 3, the overall attention related to the micro level has varied and been declining, yet research on micro-level issues maintain a considerable presence throughout the period. However, research at the DFG micro level can only be described as predominant in two shorter periods (2005–2006 and 2009–2010), and the proportion of published works declined throughout the 2010s. In our analysis, the micro level primarily contains research on the effect of limited or lacking education and literacy skills on language learning (Mi-1), other cognitive challenges and learning difficulties (Mi-2), as well as various psychological and emotional challenges and traumas (Mi-3). In addition, we have found that the majority of articles at the micro level concerns topics which fall under the category of Mi-1. Indeed, much research revolves around the complex relationship between literacy, language, and cognition, and many papers placed at the Mi-1 sub-level are concerned with the characteristics of development of second language literacy in adults (22), as well as second language learning and use in adults with little or no literacy skills (9), in addition to learning and reading strategies (2). With the exception of two studies focusing on East Timor, most of the research was conducted in a migration context either in Europe or the United States. Lastly, within the categories of Mi-2 and Mi-3, we found studies focused on individual factors, such as the significance of age and trauma (3), or the emotional aspects of second language learning (1).

Adult second language learners with emerging reading and writing skills find themselves in a learning situation where both the second language and basic literacy are to be acquired in a more or less simultaneous process. Indeed, much of the research within the category of Mi-1 deals with the characteristics of adult literacy development in languages with alphabetic writing systems. Interestingly, several articles concerning phonological and metalinguistic awareness compare the literacy development of adults and children (e.g. Geudens, 2005; Kurvers et al., 2006). Signs of emerging linguistic awareness, such as rhyming, are not considered dependent on literacy skills, while phonetic awareness, as well as distinguishing words and manipulating the smallest segments of words, seem to require experience with written language. Furthermore, several articles touch on the so-called *literacy hypothesis*, i.e. the hypothesis that learning to read affects and alters cognition (including metalinguistic awareness, classification and memory) (e.g. Kurvers & van Hout, 2005; Kurvers et al., 2014), while others question whether there is a critical period for print literacy acquisition, and whether adults have the same potential to become competent readers as children (Young-Scholten & Strom, 2005). Another group of studies is concerned with working memory as a key component in both language and literacy development (Juff, 2005; Kurvers & van de Craats, 2006). Although the causal sequence is unclear, and there is some uncertainty about the effectiveness of currently available measures, the research highlights the relationship between

working memory, reading skills and vocabulary acquisition (Kurvers & van de Craats, 2007). Moreover, because adults mostly encounter new vocabulary through writing, literacy is important for the further development of a second language. For this reason, teaching should not focus solely on the oral aspect (although oral second language skills are crucial for learning how to read and write; see also "The Meso Level"). And finally, the LESLLA literature includes studies on writing skills (Kurvers & Ketelaars, 2010), as well as studies on language-specific and cross-linguistic aspects of learning how to read in a second language (Nicholas, 2011).

Research focusing on literacy is for the most part only indirectly concerned with second language learning and use. According to Tarone et al. (2006), we are yet to determine the role of alphabetic literacy in the oral development of a second language. However, one group of studies, which we have categorized as belonging to Mi-1, examining the characteristics of the second language of learners with limited or no literacy skills, describes features of both syntactic, morphological, and phonological development (e.g. Maffia & DeMeo, 2014; Tammelin-Laine, 2013, Tarone et al., 2006; Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 2006; Vainikka et al., 2016; van de Craats, 2006). In addition, Tarone et al. (2006) note that literacy and oral skills seem to positively influence each other. A second group of studies, here categorized as Mi-2 and Mi-3, seeks to broaden the perspective on adult and adolescent literacy and second language development by identifying factors of success (e.g. Kurvers et al., 2009) and characteristics of students with unfinished or limited education who nevertheless manage to meet the examination requirements for high school in the United States ("educational resilience", see Bowder, 2013). In this context as well, literacy is recognized as a catalyst for SLA. While the use of language tutors is highlighted as a positive factor, both age and trauma correlate negatively with print literacy development (Kurvers et al., 2009). Finally, elderly individuals (60–80 years) with limited schooling are the subject of one study which focuses on the emotional aspect, exploring the relationship between different knowledge systems and epistemologies in the encounter between an oral culture and a Western writing-based classroom through personal narratives (Vogl, 2017). This study illustrates how trauma affects memory and learning conditions and is a reminder of the importance of maintaining an instructional practice which acknowledges the experiences and knowledges adults bring to the learning process.

### ***The meso level***

The DFG meso level includes the sociocultural and institutional frameworks for interaction and language learning. A total of 117 out of the 197 articles in our sample are categorized at this level, corresponding to 59%. As shown in Table 1, the meso level has been divided into five sub-levels, for the purpose of our study. Notably, two sub-levels contain the majority of the articles at the meso level: 39% of the 117 articles present and discuss teaching materials, teaching methods, or curricula (Me-5), and 30% present classroom studies and discuss learning and context, or practices, in the LESLLA classroom (Me-3). Beyond this, 17% of the articles address teacher competence or the need for competence building measures for LESLLA teachers (Me-4), and 10% deal with the social contexts, networks, and literacy practices of LESLLA learners (Me-2). The least represented sub-level is Me-1, regarding learners' motivation and investment in language learning and literacy: Only 4% of the articles at the meso level are placed in this sub-category. However, motivation is mentioned in articles on other topics, as a part of interpretation and explanation of findings. One such example is an article at sub-level Me-3, in which Strube et al. (2012) examine the effects of different teaching practices in six LESLLA classes over one year. Here, the authors question whether class attendance may be interpreted as an indirect measure of

motivation (Strube et al., 2012, p. 106). Similarly, there are several articles presenting teaching materials and classroom practices where (conditions for) motivation is mentioned as one of several factors.

The high number of DFG meso level articles (59%) compared to micro (19%) and macro level (17%), and the steady historical rise in meso level (see Figure 3) deserves a comment. Though our analyses do not include a systematic review, we note that a general characteristic of the the articles at the meso level appears to be the diversity in the range of methodological and theoretical approaches, and the diversity in the professional backgrounds of the authors. The diversity in author backgrounds is not surprising given the emphasis of the LESLLA network and its associated field to include author voices with practical experience from outside the higher education sector. Articles presenting or discussing experiences from the author's own teaching practices in adult education are commonly found at the DFG meso level, and primarily in sub-categories Me-3 and Me-5, with focus on teaching materials, methods, and organization, as well as the sharing of best practices from the LESLLA classroom. Beyond these, 31 of the articles present empirical data from interviews or surveys of LESLLA learners, ranging from case studies of individual learners to studies examining the effects of various interventions or group differences among a large number of LESLLA participants. The most comprehensive effect studies in terms of participants are Condelli and Cronen's (2008) study on the effects of different teaching materials on oral and writing skills, with 1,310 LESLLA participants (randomized design), and Condelli and Wrigley's (2005) longitudinal nine-month study of 495 participants in 38 classrooms using various teaching practices. The median number of LESLLA participants in these 31 studies is 18. On the whole, these articles provide a rich knowledge base for the pedagogical choices of LESLLA teachers, consistently finding that participants make better progress in classrooms with varied teaching practices, where instruction is connected to real-life contexts outside the classroom, and where the participants' own languages are used in the classroom. Regarding the organization of instruction, the studies find that extensive whole class instruction has a negative impact on progress in oral skills, reading, and writing, compared to instructional approaches with a focus on individual work, either on paper, with a teaching assistant, or with digital tools. In addition, shorter sessions yield better results than longer ones (e.g. as measured in Strube et al., 2012, where the length of each session ranged from 1.5 to 2.75 hours), while the use of digital tools adapted for LESLLA yields measurable positive results. Such early findings may explain the focus on the development of digital tools in articles at the Me-5 sub-level. Lastly, participants with strong oral skills also show better progression and performance regarding writing skills. However, there are some obvious biases in the empirical data in the 117 articles.

More than half of the articles at the meso level cover learning contexts where English is the target language, and the vast majority of these are written from a North American perspective. A quarter of the total describe contexts in which Dutch is the target language, followed by German (9), Italian (7), Finnish (3), Spanish (2), French (1), Catalan (1), Tetum and Portuguese (1), Japanese (1), Turkish (1), and Hebrew (1). Few articles compare different target language contexts and countries (an important exception being articles from the CALL project, such as van de Craats and Young-Scholten (2013) and Malessa and Filimban (2016)). Such bias in target languages and contexts may be problematic for the collective knowledge in the overall field, as different social and language contexts provide different conditions for instruction: English language teaching materials are more available and widespread than is the case for teaching material for other languages; there is considerable variation between countries in how language, reading and writing instruction for adults is organized and funded; and different migration patterns contribute to

regional and global differences in LESLLA populations, both with regard to learners' country of origin, their primary reason for immigration, age and gender composition, and social integration in the host country. Examples of such vastly different contexts are Muth's (2006) study of beginner-level English and literacy instruction in US prisons, where participants are primarily adult male inmates with Latinx backgrounds, in comparison with Di Rosa et al.'s (2018) survey of newly arrived unaccompanied minors in Sicily: These contexts differ both in terms of the target language and framework of instruction, as well as the learners' age, language background, migration history, connection to the host country, social networks, and future aspirations.

### ***The macro level***

The DFG macro level covers topics related to value systems, discourses, ideologies, and policies surrounding language and literacy learning. Out of the 197 articles in our sample, a total of 32 articles are categorized to the macro level, corresponding to 17%. The framework developed for this study divides the DFG macro level into the following sub-categories: language ideologies (Ma-1); values and belief systems (Ma-2); and language and education policies, integration policies, testing and assessment practices, and policy requirements (Ma-3). The majority of the LESLLA Symposium Proceeding papers categorized at the DFG macro levels (27 out of 32, corresponding to 84%) are concerned with policy making, either education or integration policy, including policies related to language and knowledge of society requirements. Only one article can be said to address ideology (Fariás & Cabezas, 2014), while two articles apply ideology to a discussion of current national or European politics (Grotlüschen, 2017; Minuz, 2017). Lastly, two articles (Fontana, 2018; Peyton, 2011) are primarily concerned with values and belief systems, while two articles address values and simultaneously either policy or ideology (Pettitt et al., 2015; Vinogradov et al., 2013).

Most articles at the macro level are clearly rooted in the respective country's policy making related to LESLLA learners or, in some cases, LESLLA teachers. However, the content may often be applied to other contexts. Nine articles consider education or integration policy in the US; five articles are concerned with the U.K, three articles address the Netherlands/Belgium (particularly Flanders); two articles address Germany; and two address Italy. Lastly, five articles consider policy making in the EU, or across member states of the Council of Europe.

A key point raised in several of these articles is that policy making, including both education and integration policy, does not adequately meet the needs of adult learners with limited or no formal schooling and limited print literacy. Janssen-van Dieten (2005) points to the challenges of letting the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR)(Council of Europe, 2011), which was developed with formally educated learners in mind, form the basis for the education and assessment of LESLLA learners. The Council of Europe has addressed this challenge by developing a new framework of reference specially adapted to LESLLA learners, the LASLLIAM framework (*Literacy and Second Language Learning for the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants*, Council of Europe, 2022), with descriptions of four levels of proficiency below the CEFR level A1. The development and content of the LASLLIAM framework is presented in Minuz and Kurvers (2018). Moreover, Young-Scholten et al. (2014) highlight the lack of attention to the special needs of LESLLA learners in teacher education as a problem in Europe, while Minuz (2017) and Beacco (2018) discuss the Council of Europe's values and emphasis on human rights as a foundation for European integration policy to meet the needs of immigrants in general, and of LESLLA learners in particular. Several articles from the US and UK address a lack of coherent national education policies with adequate frameworks for LESLLA learners (e.g. Cowie, 2018 and

Wrigley, 2008). Others highlight challenges with testing and assessing LESLLA learners (Carlsen, 2016; Flores, 2017; Gonzalves, 2016), or challenges in measuring learners' literacy skills using standardized tests (Vermeersch et al., 2008). Lastly, there are several articles concerned with barriers to citizenship and democratic participation, highlighting language requirements, which are often difficult to meet for LESLLA learners (e.g. Chenoweth, 2006; Feldmeier, 2007; Kurvers & van de Craats, 2007; Simpson, 2006).

### Summary and discussion

In this scoping review of the LESLLA Symposium Proceedings, we have outlined the current state of research on adult second language learners with less experience with formal schooling and beginning literacy skills, and how this research has developed in the LESLLA network from 2005 to 2019. Broadly speaking, our analysis shows that while the micro level, i.e. the level of individual cognitive, social, and emotional process, was predominant in the initial period, the meso level targeting the institutional and social contexts for language and literacy learning, has emerged as the dominating research area in the publications from the LESLLA proceedings. Moreover, while research at the meso-level has gained in prominence from the late 2000s to 2019, research at the macro level, referring broadly to the discourses, ideologies, and policies surrounding language and literacy learning, has remained relatively stable between 10% and 30% of the total research throughout the period. Resonating well with Pettitt's (2022) observation of a predominantly psycholinguistic approach to literacy, our thematic content analysis reveals a prevailing emphasis on cognitive, rather than social, aspects of literacy and language acquisition at the micro level. However, it is important to note that there is more research on print literacy acquisition in adulthood than on oral second language learning in LESLLA learners. Consequently, there is a potential for deepening the insight into the nature of second language development in non- or low literate adults. Likewise, in line with Pettitt (2022), we note that studies that examine and highlight personal and emotional aspects of the learning process from an emic perspective, including concepts such as investment and motivation, are to date poorly represented in the literature.

Similar to the concerns raised about the underrepresentation of various populations in SLA research (see Bigelow & Tarone, 2004), the field has received ongoing criticism for its lack of attention to the context and frameworks for language learning, which may in part explain the DFG call to strengthen second language research through a more transdisciplinary approach. This criticism is largely rooted in what is referred to as "the social turn" in second language research in the late 1990s (e.g. Block, 2003; Firth & Wagner, 1997), which highlighted the shortcomings of cognitive research in which SLA is regarded as a mental and individual process, advocating for more research on the role of social environments in individual language learning. Indeed, the importance of expanding interest from the cognitive to the social level has also been highlighted for LESLLA research in particular. Simpson et al. (2008, p. 25) write:

For some, the clearest focus for research into literacy acquisition of adults is cognitive: What are the distinct mental processes at play when adults are learning to read and write for the first time, and in a new language (Kurvers 2007, Van de Craats et al 2006)? Yet the need to situate adult L2 literacy research within its contexts of practice has not always been well recognised. There are recent moves, associated with the social turn in second language acquisition research more generally (Block 2003), to address this need, and to connect linguistic and applied linguistic research to broader matters.



Looking at the developments within the LESLLA network, it seems that the research has to some extent responded to the call: As our findings indicate, the cognitively oriented research characteristic of the micro level has become less predominant, while research at the meso level addressing the importance of the sociocultural environment, including teaching, has grown significantly. However, the same is not true for research at the macro level, as there is a notable lack of attention paid to the overarching educational frameworks and policy for LESLLA learners. This lack of attention may lead to an unfortunate and somewhat surprising gap in the knowledge production, given the fact that most European countries have introduced or raised formal language requirements for family reunification, permanent residence, and citizenship over the past 20 years (Rocca et al., 2020), significantly impacting both the learning process, prospects and well-being of LESLLA learners (Carlsen et al., in press), as well as the agency and autonomy of their teachers (Nordanger & Egeland, 2024). Nevertheless, the impact of policy on those struggling the most with meeting the formal requirements of language learning remain largely unexplored within the LESLLA network before 2019.

### Conclusion

Our review of articles published in the LESLLA Symposium Proceedings from 2005 to 2019 reveals a lack of attention to the ideological and political conditions for language learning in research concerning LESLLA learners. In our view, future LESLLA research should address this issue by focusing on the overarching institutional and ideological factors which influence the conditions for simultaneous second language and literacy acquisition in different countries. It is important to note that such a new initiative should not come at the cost of maintaining and developing research at the micro and meso levels: It is just as crucial to keep abreast of the theoretical and methodological developments in adjacent fields within psychology and social sciences, addressing both the cognitive and social processes at work in simultaneous second language and literacy acquisition in adults. Continued research efforts within these areas are necessary in order to meet the needs of this group regarding the education and assessment of language skills. Lastly, we note a predominance of some geographical and linguistic contexts over others, and we encourage LESLLA researchers and teachers from the broader sphere of professional communities across the world to share their research and experiences with an international audience.

The aim of this scoping review has been to outline the research trends and foci within the LESLLA network, as well as changes in the research focus over time. In addition, we have presented the readers with a selection of key findings that serve to illustrate the richness and state of the LESLLA research as it appears in the LESLLA proceedings. We have not ventured to assess the validity of the different studies or provide a comprehensive overview of the results produced by the research. To this end, a *systematic review* is required, which should also include studies published outside the LESLLA network. Despite these limitations, we believe our study offers new insight into the aspects of second language and literacy acquisition in LESLLA learners which are relatively well documented by research, and which areas are insufficiently explored. Finally, though, we recognize the importance of research reflecting the complexity of second language learning for LESLLA learners, this being in line with the work of the DFG group, we wish to conclude with a call for more research concerning the external frameworks for language learning for this group, including attention to societal barriers to language learning and integration. This research, recognizing the complexity of the language learning process, is necessary in order to

achieve a more comprehensive understanding of simultaneous second language and literacy acquisition in a contemporary migration context.

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