



Uysal, M. and Öznacar B. (2022). An Analysis of the Current Studies Conducted in The World on Foreign Language Teaching Policy: A Meta-Synthesis Study. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 10(1). 99-116.

Received : 25.08.2022
Revised version received : 22.10.2022
Accepted : 24.10.2022

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STUDIES CONDUCTED IN THE WORLD ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING POLICY: A META-SYNTHESIS STUDY

Research article

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An Analysis of the Current Studies Conducted in The World on Foreign Language Teaching Policy: A Meta-Synthesis Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the studies conducted between 2017 and 2021 in the world on foreign language teaching policies under various themes and to display the general tendency. In the study, which was structured according to the case study, one of the qualitative research designs, meta-synthesis approach was adopted to reveal the relevant situation. The results of the study are presented in tables by giving frequency values. As a result of the examination, it was determined that the most studies were journal articles as the type of publication, the most of the studies were conducted in 2020, and the case study was more preferred as the research design. In addition, legal documents were the focus of the majority of the studies examined, followed by academics as a sample group. It was determined that document analysis was mostly used in the analysis of the data. When the research topics of the studies are examined, the majority of studies dealing with the foreign language education policies of the countries come to the fore. Thus, some suggestions have been developed based on the results of the research.

Keywords: foreign language education policy; meta-synthesis; analysis

1. Introduction

With its functions, education is the leading element of the individual and social structure that is aimed in a country. Education policy, which is an important public policy area, determines how education systems will be shaped and what should be done in this process. It is essential to formulate, develop and implement the sub-dimensions of education policies, which have a multifaceted and complex structure, in line with the changes in the country or around the world. In all areas where change and progress occur rapidly, the individual must have several qualities in order to keep up with them. It is clear that knowledge of a foreign language is among the most necessary equipment. In today's post-modern world, the need for communication is increasing on a daily basis. One of the factors which enable societies to build bridges between each other is knowledge of a foreign language. The global spread of English language has served as an essential element of language policies of all countries worldwide (Spolsky, 2004; Bamgbose, 2020). Which foreign language will be taught for what purposes and for how long is the individual foreign language education policy decision of each country (Trim 1994 as cited in Hu, 2007). The foreign language education policy is defined in the literature as "efforts to create a realistic and unbiased country profile within the framework of foreign language teaching" (Bausch, Christ & Krumm, 2007). The aim of the foreign language education policy is to improve the foreign language teaching of a country unilaterally or mutually with other countries, depending on the economic, cultural and educational conditions, together with foreign affairs.



In the past, humanitarian objectives were pursued primarily in foreign language teaching. However, foreign language teaching today has a more utilitarian focus (Spolsky & Shohamy, 1997) and it is mostly encouraged for “cultural, practical and general educational reasons”. Among the reasons behind the promotion of foreign language education are the increase in diversity over time, globalization, and the intensification of interdependence among nations around the world. Countries may aim to meet the increasing demands for inter-lingual and intercultural communication resulting from globalization. Therefore, they can update foreign language education policies to equip their citizens with the necessary foreign language skills. In addition, the acquisition of a foreign language is sufficient in itself to contribute to citizens’ sensitivity to ‘global diversity’ (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996) and to expand the country’s language capital. In general, in the current context of globalization, most countries tend to expand foreign language education by introducing foreign languages to young learners and involving students of various ages in learning processes.

Foreign language education has accelerated recently, especially due to globalization, as it serves as an important tool for communication, education and knowledge. Thus, people are trying to learn foreign languages to lead better lives. Parents are aware that their children need to learn at least one foreign language in order to be find a good job. Business people want to learn a foreign language in order to carry out commercial activities abroad. Educational institutions want their students to learn foreign languages so that they can catch up with the technology of developed countries. In addition to these instrumental motivations behind learning a foreign language, there are other reasons as well. Foreign languages offer the opportunity for individuals to meet with a variety of cultures. In other words, individuals learn about different cultures and customs by learning different languages. On the other hand, this also contributes to discovering their respective culture and language. Regarding the choice of foreign language, English has advantages over other languages, as it has worldwide usage. At this point, it should be noted that this study focuses on the foreign language education policy followed specifically for English, since it is the language that is spoken and desired to be learned by more people in the world compared to foreign languages such as Greek, German and French. English, which is spoken by much more people in the world compared to other languages, has become the language of war, peace, trade, science, technology and communication in the international arena (Crystal, 2003). As mentioned above, English has advantages compared to other languages as it is used worldwide. It has been accepted in almost all countries as the leading foreign language. As underlined by Shohamy (2006), in countries where it is not natively spoken, English is the most preferred language in foreign language teaching. In fact, this preference has almost become a general rule. In this way, it has affected foreign language teaching policies at international level from several perspectives. Factors such as population, prestige, status, functionality, and nationality determine the importance of a language policy. English shows all these factors in different countries, and it can contain one or more factors in the same country. As a result, English has gained validity as a world language (Jenkins, 2009; Bamgbose, 2020). Therefore, it is not surprising that it plays an important role in the formulation of foreign language education policies and in the literature as a result of the said policies.

It is seen that the studies on English, which is of great importance for countries in the 21st century, have increased in number. It is important to consider these studies with a holistic perspective and to determine their tendency, in terms of guiding the researchers who will work in the future. When the studies in the literature are examined, it is observed that in recent years they have mainly focused on the use of English in different countries and its teaching as a second and foreign language. In addition, other notable topics in the articles are multilingual reviews, local language reviews, and bilingual comparisons. English is also in the first place in studies in which two or more languages are discussed (Yıldız, 2016). Although English, which

is the most widely spoken language in the world, ranks first in their studies, papers conducted directly in the context of foreign language education policy are still not very common. Naturally, the contributions of studies on foreign language education policy to the field are essential. In addition, classification of studies, determination of trends, and evaluation of research results are just as critical. Thanks to such studies, it is possible to describe the current situation in the field of foreign language education policy and to determine the trends that change from year to year, as well as to predict the future situation. In this context, theses and articles about foreign language education policy in the world between 2017 and 2021 were examined by meta-synthesis method. Within the framework of the main purpose in question, the studies published between 2017 and 2021 (article + thesis) were analyzed in order to seek answers to the following questions:

- What is the distribution by type of publication (article/thesis)?
- What is the distribution by year of publication?
- What is the distribution by research model?
- What is the distribution by sample group?
- What is the distribution by collection tools?
- What is the distribution by data analysis?
- What is the distribution by research topics?

1.2. Limitations of the Study

The research is limited to a total of 22 qualitative studies, including 18 journal articles, 3 doctoral dissertations and 1 master's thesis, which were published in the world between 2017 and 2021 on English language in the context of foreign language education policy.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

In this study, which aims to examine and interpret the scientific studies on foreign language teaching policies in the world, case study design of qualitative methods was adopted and meta-synthesis approach was used. The meta-synthesis method is employed to combine the findings of independent studies with their similarities and differences by creating themes or matrices (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003). This method helps to understand the subject and general lines of the research conducted in a certain content area more clearly and to deal with it with a holistic perspective (Çalık & Sözbilir, 2014). In this research, a synthesis study was carried out in order to reveal the position of foreign language education policies in both national and international literature in a wider framework.

2.2. Scope of the Study

The Google Akademik and Higher Education Institution (YÖK) Thesis Search system was used for the Turkish thesis and articles to be examined within the scope of the analysis. For studies in English, Google Scholar and Scopus databases were searched. In order to determine the studies published in the mentioned databases, the following criteria were taken into consideration:

1. The studies were designed with the qualitative research method,
2. The studies were carried out between the years 2017 and 2021,
3. The studies were published in Turkish and English,
4. The full text of the studies can be accessed,

5. The studies have open access to all databases scanned.

The key concepts used in the Turkish language during the screening process are ‘yabancı dil eğitim politikası’ and ‘yabancı dil politikası’. In the English language search, the keywords ‘foreign language education policy’, ‘foreign language policy’ and ‘English language policy’ were used. As a result of the screening, 1 master’s thesis written in Turkish, based on the subject of foreign language education policy, was found and examined by considering certain criteria. In addition, a total of 22 studies, including 3 doctoral theses and 18 journal articles, were included in the study, which aimed to examine the articles and theses published in the English language.

2.3. Data Collection

The data of the studies on foreign language education policy in the national and international literature were collected in a systematic way in the light of the meta-synthesis method. The steps followed during data collection include the following five stages suggested by Aspors & Fransson (2015) for meta-synthesis research:

1. Designing the method and deciding on the research questions,
2. Selecting the sources to be included by determining the criteria for the literature review,
3. Re-reading in detail the scientific studies included in the research,
4. Analyzing selected scientific studies and revealing common themes, similarities and differences,
5. Reaching a final synthesis by explaining the findings obtained within the framework of the determined themes.

2.4. Analysis of Data

Content analysis technique, which is one of the qualitative analysis methods, was used in order to reach the concepts and relations necessary to analyze the data. Within the scope of the research, the content analysis technique was preferred in order to classify and compare the data and to reach conceptual conclusions accordingly (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). For this purpose, the data obtained were passed through three stages: coding, theme determination, and inferences. While analyzing the studies on the subject, the needed sections were examined based on the problems of the current research and common themes were developed. While selecting sub-themes in line with the common themes in question, the statements in the analyzed studies were taken into consideration. The data obtained by considering the selection and screening criteria within the scope of the study were presented in a way that also expresses the frequency values.

2.5. Validity and Reliability

In qualitative studies, detailed reporting of the analysis of obtained data and the steps taken by the researcher to reach a conclusion are among important criteria of validity and reliability. Within the scope of this study, the steps in all processes related to the subject were defined in a step-wise and detailed manner so as to ensure external validity. In addition, agreement was sought between two researchers on the themes formed so as to ensure internal reliability. Therefore, after the first researcher decided on the themes, the second researcher reviewed the themes and marked the points he/she agreed and disagreed with. For the reliability of

comparison, the reliability formula of Miles and Huberman (1994) was used. Reliability was calculated as $\text{Agreement} / (\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement})$ and the agreement between researchers was found to be 90%. As a result of the reliability calculation, studies with research reliability over 70% are accepted as reliable (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus, a desired level of reliability was achieved with the results obtained within the scope of this study.

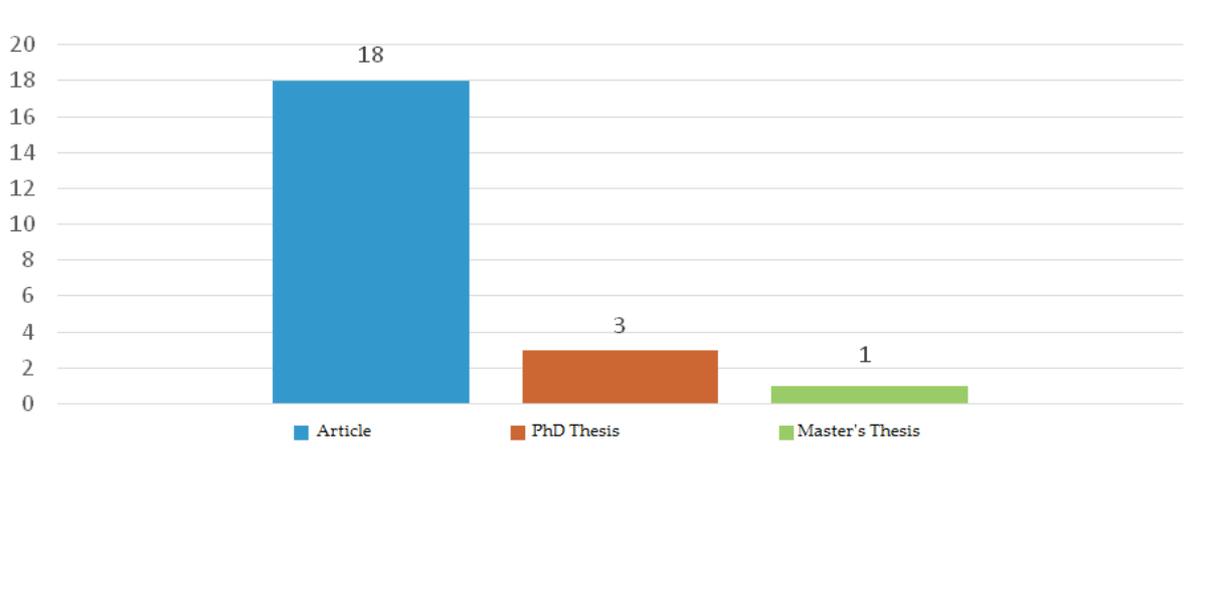
3. Findings and Interpretations

The findings obtained within the scope of the study are presented in tables following each research question.

a) Distribution of studies by type of publication

The distribution of studies on foreign language education policy according to the type of publication is given in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Distribution of studies by type of publication (2017-2021)

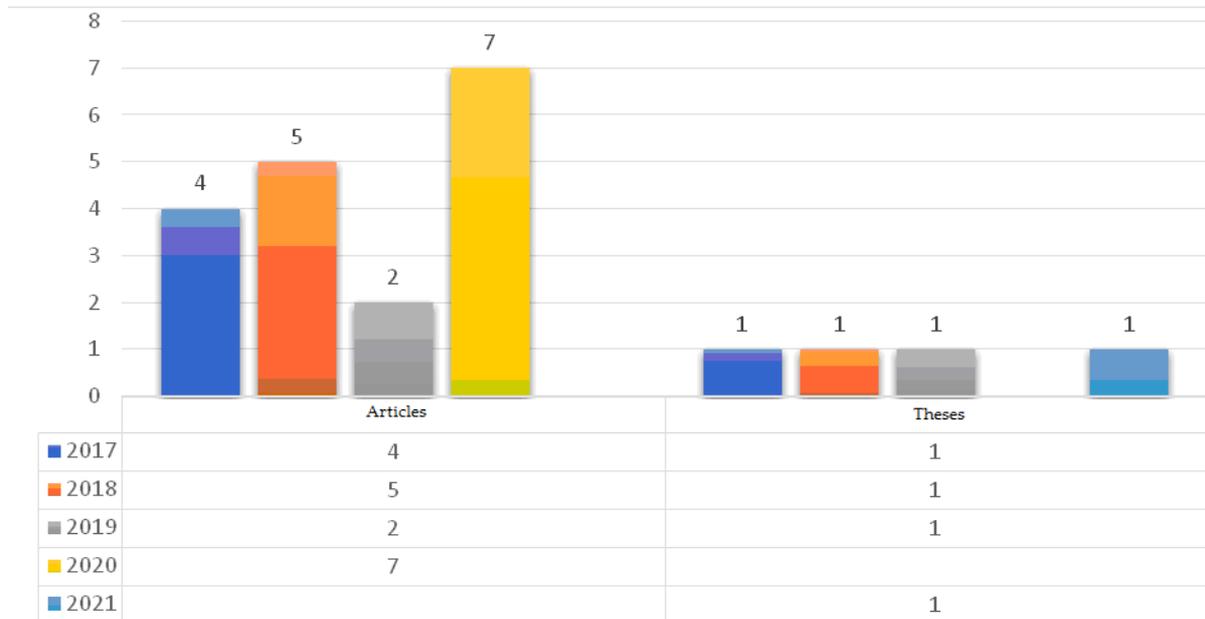


When Figure 1 is examined, it is seen that a total of 22 studies, including 18 articles, 3 doctoral dissertations and 1 master's thesis, were conducted on foreign language education policy. Based on the five-year period, 18 articles on the subject were found worth publishing. In terms of theses, unfortunately, it is seen that only 4 theses have been studied in the last five years. Considering that theses are searched from accessible sites; this figure is considered as exhaustive.

b) Distribution of studies by years

The distribution of studies on foreign language education policy by years is given in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Distribution of studies by years (2017-2021)

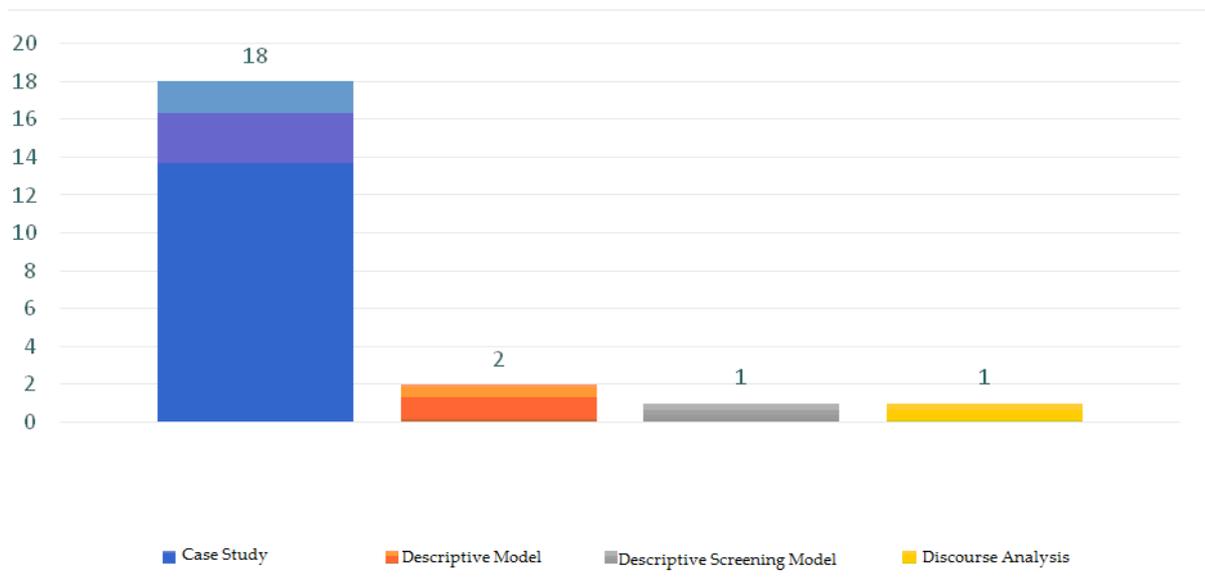


According to the data in Figure 2, 2020 stands out as the year in which the studies conducted in the field of foreign language education policy between 2017 and 2021 were most concentrated. In 2021, it was determined that no journal article on the subject was published in any of the databases included in the research. Considering the five-year period, it was found that the intensity of the studies showed variance.

c) Distribution of the studies by research model

The distribution of studies on foreign language education policy according to the research model is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Findings as regards research model



When Figure 3 is examined, which shows the research models used in the articles and theses written in the last 5 years in the field of foreign language education policy, it is seen that they mostly prefer the case study model (18). In addition, it was determined that 2 studies were designed using the descriptive model and 1 study each was designed using the descriptive survey model and discourse analysis technique.

d) Distribution of the studies by sample group

The data regarding the sample group determined in the studies on foreign language education policy between the years 2017 and 2021 are presented in detail in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Findings regarding the sample group

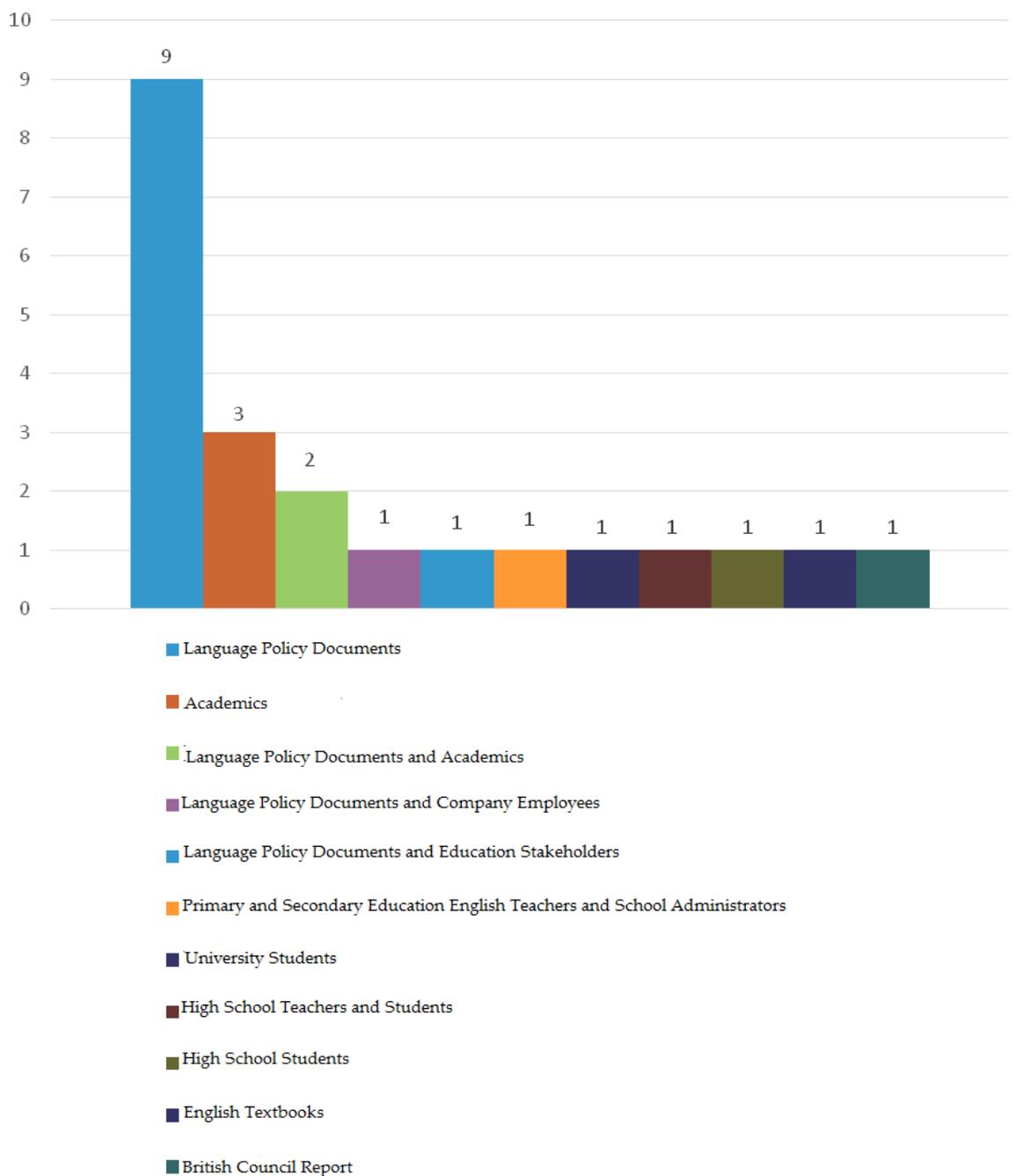


Figure 4 shows the sample/study groups of the articles and theses written between 2017 and 2021 covering the subject of foreign language education policy. When the figure is examined, it can be seen that the studies conducted by the researchers on foreign language education policies in the light of the language policy documents of their respective countries rank first. This is followed by studies with academics (3) and language policy documents plus academics (2). Accordingly, it can be claimed that the studies conducted in the micro context are in the majority. It has also been determined that there are few studies that include English textbooks or reports prepared by international organizations such as the British Council, the UK's largest organization responsible for international education and cultural opportunities. In addition, it has been found that there is no study involving decision makers who formulate foreign language education policy.

e) Distribution of the studies by data collection tool

Findings on data collection tools used in studies published on foreign language education policy are given in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Findings on data collection tools

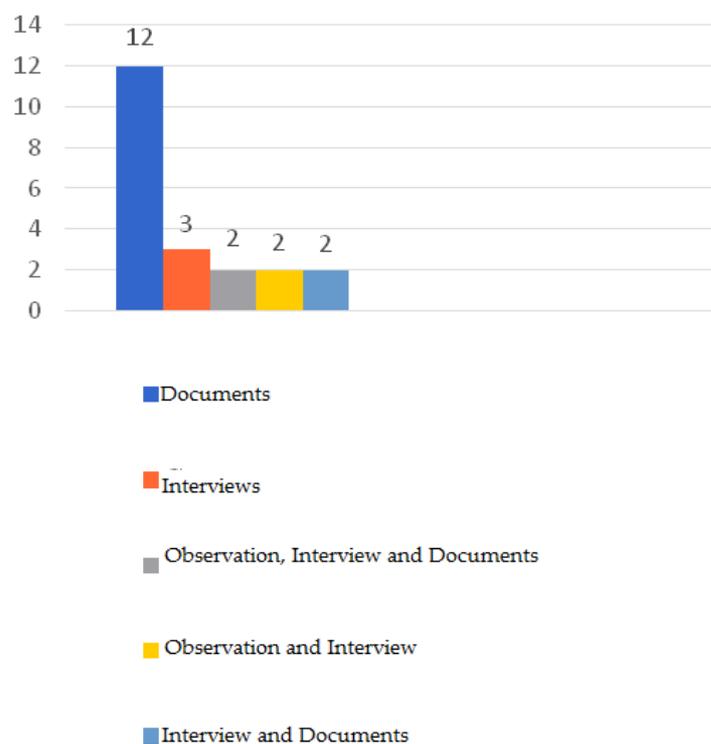
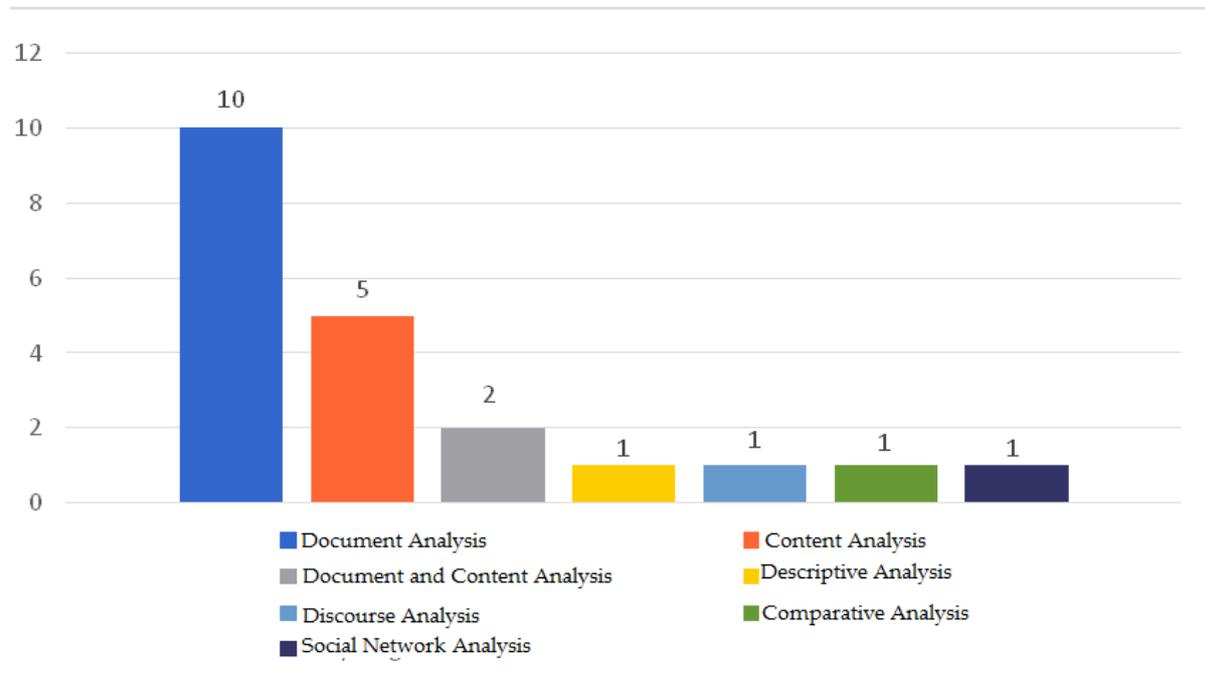


Figure 5 shows the data collection tools used in the studies conducted in the last 5 years period which is covered by this paper. According to the figure, it is seen that studies which chose document analysis as the data collection tool are well ahead (12), followed by studies based on interview (3) and studies that used observation, interview and document analysis altogether (2), which are the leading data collection tools in qualitative research.

f) Distribution of studies by data analysis techniques

Findings on data analysis techniques used in studies published on foreign language education policy are given in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Findings on data analysis

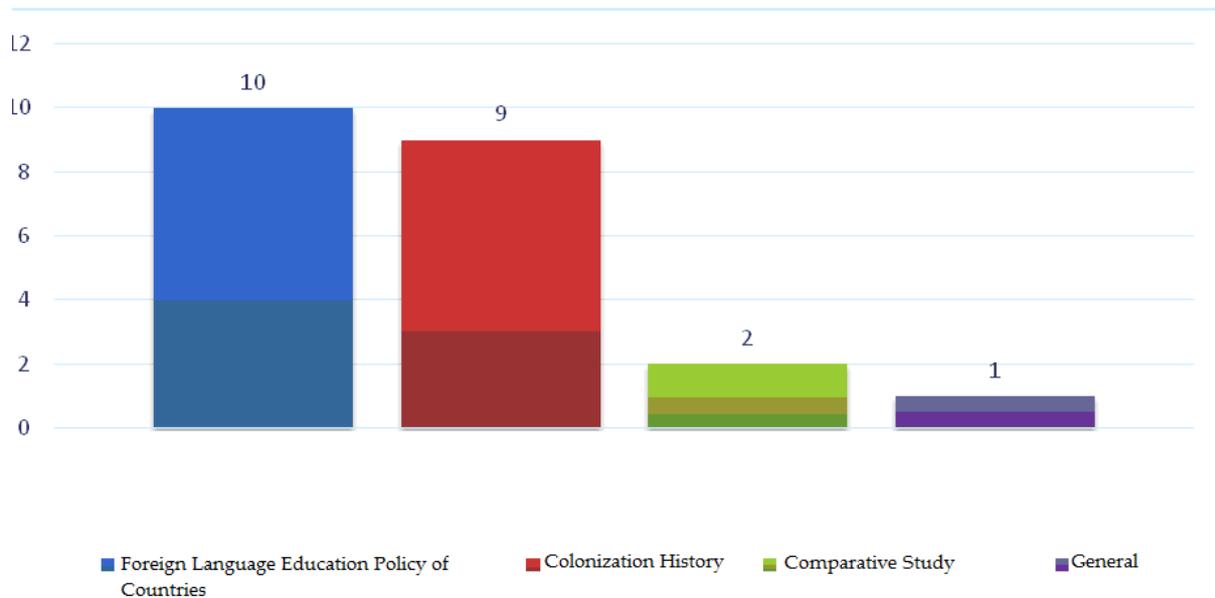


When Figure 6 is examined, it can be seen that document analysis is the most popular technique in theses and articles in terms of data analysis. Then, it was found that content analysis (5) and document analysis combined with content analysis (2) were preferred.

f) Distribution of studies according to research subjects

The findings on the subject areas related to the studies published on foreign language education policy are given in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Findings on subject areas



According to the data presented in Figure 7, studies on foreign language education between 2017 and 2021 focused on various subject areas. Examination of subject areas shows that some researchers focused on foreign language education policies of countries that have always been independent in their historical past (e.g. Japan) while others examined the impact of the ideological, historical and religious discourses underlying the policy texts prepared by the decision makers on the agenda of these texts. In addition, the common point of these studies can be the comparison of official political goals with teachers' classroom practices. In addition, studies on the communities those were under colonial rule for years before they gained their independence are increasing on a daily basis. The extent to which the foreign language education policies of such countries are affected by their colonial past, or at what points they carry their traces to the present, is a matter of curiosity for the researchers. In addition, it is important to study and analyze foreign language education policies of other countries and to identify solutions to potential problems in order to follow what is happening in the world in the development of contemporary education policies and to provide the necessary solutions to the problems that may arise in the field. Depending on this purpose, comparisons are made with successful examples and practices of foreign language education policies in other countries.

In terms of research topics, studies conducted in a micro context including subjects related to practitioners is on increase in recent years. On the other hand, it is also witnessed that studies based on critical approach are gaining popularity recently. For example, there are studies conducted in the context of language ecology, focusing on the possibility of the disappearance of local and minority languages in countries with a colonial past in the face of the dominant foreign language. In addition, in the light of the communicative language approach adopted in the last 20 years, teaching has been more student-centered, which introduced the concept of 'learner autonomy' and incorporated into the visionary studies.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study is to examine the theses and articles published between 2017 and 2021 in the world on foreign language teaching policy using meta-synthesis method and to display the tendencies. Thus, 22 qualitative studies, including 18 journal articles, 3 doctoral theses and 1 master's thesis, were examined according to publication type, publication year, research model, sample group, data collection tool, data analysis method, and research topics. First of all, when we look at the studies examined, it can be concluded that most publications were in the type of article and the fewest studies were in the type of a master's thesis according to the type of publication. When examining the studies on meta-synthesis, it was seen that most articles were preferred according to the publication type (Deveci & Çepni, 2017; Gökçen & Arslan, 2019; Oyar, 2021; Akgöz, 2022; Oğuztekin, Bektaş, Karaca & Kızılay, 2022). When the last five-year period related to foreign language education policy is examined, it is seen that this phenomenon is not usually dealt with in master's theses, but mostly comes to the fore in doctoral theses. On the other hand, when meta-synthesis studies in the literature are considered, a master's degree is preferred in graduate theses (Karadal, Duman & Saygın, 2017; Akyar & Sarıkaya, 2022). The fact that it has a structure that is sophisticated by nature and includes several stakeholders may be the reason for which it was selected for doctoral dissertations, which are long-term studies. Another result obtained from the research is that when the distribution of the studies conducted is examined according to the years, it has been found out that the studies vary according to the years, but the majority of studies were conducted in 2020.

In addition, it is seen that in the studies covered by this paper, researchers usually preferred case study model which is popular both in policy studies and qualitative research. Case study is one of the most preferred research methods in policy studies due to its effectiveness in in-depth analysis of a policy and its processes. Besides, in recent years, the use of case studies, one of the qualitative research methods, in policy research has increased due to the rising interest in understanding different cultures, systems and sociopolitical relations (Heck, 2004). Thus, researchers focusing on education policy (Keser-Aschenberger, 2012; Kaya Kaşıkçı, 2016; Korumaz, 2017) or foreign language education policy (Carilo, 2018; Cushing, 2020; Tajeddin & Chamani, 2020; Yeni Palabıyık, 2021) often prefer case studies. In terms of sample diversity, it was concluded that the researchers conducted studies on the legal documents of the countries. Similarly, it is seen that some studies are carried out with academicians, and therefore higher education level is also preferred.

Another result reached in the study is that the most popular data collection tool is document analysis. This result is similar to the results of different meta-synthesis studies (Özalp & Akpınar, 2018; Çakmak & Taşkıran, 2020). In some studies examined, it was observed that there was diversity in data collection tools and all available data collection tools were used. When the distribution of studies according to data analysis is examined, it is seen that document analysis is most frequently used. In the studies examined, it was seen that the analyzes were carried out in the form of document analysis, based on the fact that the researchers preferred documents as a data collection tool. In addition, it was concluded that they frequently applied to the content analysis technique. When the distribution of studies on foreign language education policies according to research topics is examined, it is seen that different subjects are discussed in the studies. Thus, it was determined that the studies included in the research were original subjects. Considering the subject areas, the studies written about the foreign language education policies of the countries are in the majority. However, it has been concluded that foreign language education policies followed in countries with a colonial past are put under the scope. Thus, not only the foreign language education policy of the last

period, but also the effect of the establishment history and the colonial past on foreign language education policy has been examined. In addition, after the policies have been formulated, whether they have been implemented and the change they have caused is evaluated. Since the 1990s, studies on multilingualism and endangered languages have come to the fore (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997), it is thought that the number of studies on language planning with a critical approach will increase. From the same point of view, it is expected that studies examining linguistic human rights and language rights of minorities with their legal dimensions will increase. In addition, within new approaches as regards language policy and planning, it is accepted that language planning can be performed at all levels including macro, mezzo and micro levels. As a result of this change, the idea that language policy and planning research area should be redesigned, especially in the micro context, is gaining popularity. Recent years have thus witnessed a diversification of language policy and planning contexts, both international and sub-national (Hamid & Baldauf, 2014). Therefore, while the macro-level organization remains very important, the representation of actors in narrower and broader contexts has received considerable attention. Accordingly, 'individual agency' has received significant attention, especially at the micro level (Baldauf, 2006; Zhao, 2011; Zhao & Baldauf, 2012; Nguyen & Bui, 2016). The family, educational institutions, or religious organizations can be the best examples at the micro level.

Considering the results of this study, the following recommendations can be made for future research:

- In future studies, articles can be examined using different research methods. For example, the most frequently cited authors and the most frequently used references in research articles can be identified.
- The theses and articles used in this study were accessed from Google Akademik, YÖK Thesis Search, Google Scholar and Scopus databases. For further research, a meta-synthesis study can be conducted using different databases.

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