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Double responsibility of foreign language teachers: Primary student-teachers' perceptions of linguistic and cultural content

ABSTRACT. Scholars all over the world have been arguing for foreign language instruction which combines linguistic and cultural content. Eliminating the cultural side results in a deficient process. This study explored prospective teachers' perceptions of both constituents, since they will ultimately be responsible for their implementation in the foreign language classroom. To this end, 137 students from three European universities were chosen and asked to fill out an online questionnaire with Likert scale items. Data was collected and interpreted using the free statistics software package R (R Core Team, 2019). The findings confirmed that the relevance of linguistic / cultural issues was unanimously acknowledged (98,5%), speaking was appointed as the most desired target skill (97,1%), interpersonal relations (88,3%) as the most important aspect of socio-cultural knowledge, and lessons with native speakers (94,2%) as the most relevant classroom resource.

KEYWORDS: double responsibility, communication skills, (inter-)cultural education, foreign language instruction, student-teacher, teaching and training.

1. INTRODUCTION

As early as 1982, among general measures in relation to language learning in schools, the Committee of Ministers called for the teaching of a European language, other than the national one, in ways that enable young learners to use it effectively for communication with other speakers of that language to establish professional and personal relations (Council of Europe 1982). They argued for teacher training programmes that prioritized the acquisition of knowledge and skills to teach a foreign language (henceforth FL) effectively for communicative purposes.

To pursue this further, the Council for Cultural Co-operation recommended that Europe's rich cultural and linguistic heritage be viewed as a valuable com-

mon resource and a means to promote mobility and co-operation. The convergence of different education policies would assure that these objectives could be reached, providing for successful communication, interaction and understanding of the state members (Council of Europe 2001). Local education authorities would act upon these recommendations and, as a result, help stimulate an interest in language and culture in primary education settings and teacher training programmes, among others.

We would like to present the repercussions of that line of action on the figure of the FL educator in terms of a mathematical formula: $RL + RC = 2RT$. This article, embracing FL teachers' responsibility for the linguistic (RL) and the (inter)cultural (RC) development of learners, will investigate the overall contribution (2RT) of FL educators to the implementation of the linguistic / cultural approach in primary schools.

It has been our intention to find out whether the recommendations made by the Committee of Ministers and the Council for Cultural Co-operation have stood the test of time and whether primary teacher training programmes are still knowledge-and-skills acquisition-oriented, as they were conceived to be.

Since we have had the opportunity to work with tertiary students from three different European institutions, who are enrolled in the courses that offer among others an insight into foreign language learning and teaching practices, we will try to establish whether they are inclined to acknowledge the relevance of the double role of teachers that derives directly from the recommendations mentioned above. In order to do so, the level of importance attributed by them to aspects related to the early learning development of intercultural communicative competence – namely, language skills and linguistic and intercultural sub-competencies, as well as classroom resources – will be taken as a conditioning factor. Should this be the case, it will demonstrate that a new generation of student-teachers is being trained in the development of the competences which will contribute to the mutual understanding of European learners / citizens.

2. TEACHERS' RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' LANGUAGE SKILLS

Scholars have been advocating for linguistically qualified teachers who focus on the development of learners' language skills, identified in national curricula (e.g. in Poland Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 lutego 2017; in Spain the Primary Education syllabus in the Region of Murcia 2014). The comprehension and production of utterances, and the successful engagement in intercultural communication which the free movement of European citizens

ought to bring about, seem to depend on such skills (Darancik 2018: 166). Their development can unfold in numerous ways (Harmer 2007; Pfeiffer 2001; Róg 2017; Rubio & Lirola 2010; Yükseltürk, Altiok & Baser 2018).

Traditionally, these four skills have been divided into the so-called active and passive skills. On the one hand, speaking and writing are to be considered productive skills (active) since, while using them, the learner becomes a language producer who generates sounds (speaking) and symbols (writing).

Speaking is seen as one of the most desired and significant target skills for learners (Kalayo 2007: 101). It can be developed through task-based, topic-based activities, pictures and role-playing, which demand from learners creative, spontaneous, coherent and informative initiative (Szpotowicz & Szulc-Kurpaska 2009). The ability to use the foreign language orally, especially in stressful and problematic situations, is also viewed as a valuable social competence in the present times (Ur 1991: 131–134).

The skill of writing is viewed as causing such trouble for learners that they would appear to benefit from “in-and-out” writing tasks and activities (Guzmán-Alcón 2019; McClure 2015; Pfeiffer & Sivasubramaniam 2016), such as writing a book report or review, describing a person, place or event, or preparing instructional material (Ur 1991: 159). It must be noted that language skills cannot function separately and that the proficient mastery of one of them does not guarantee meaningful use of the target language. Therefore, other skills need to be developed as well (Gower, Philips & Walters 1995: 85; Widdowson 2001: 74).

Unlike the aforementioned skills, receptive or passive skills turn the individual into a language recipient (passive) who is capable of receiving auditory (listening) or visual (reading) information (Harmer 2007: 246; Huneke & Steinig 2002: 145).

In the development of the listening skill, internet platforms such as Youtube or audiovisual resources like DVDs or audio graded readers are highly recommended, as they feature different types of spoken language (formal, informal), accents, and genres (songs, debates), and thus learners may practise identifying the auditory forms of the target language (Ghasemi 2011; Nejati 2010; Wagner 2010). They are also extremely helpful in promoting extensive listening, including listening for pleasure (Waring 2010), both inside and outside the language classroom (Bingham & Larson 2006; Uacán 2010; Vo 2013). The key to listening activities is that for the general comprehension of messages in (potentially) real life situations recreated in the classroom, the learners should feel encouraged and motivated; this is as important as their sense of hearing (Ur 1991: 111–112). The teaching of essential grammar structures and vocabulary or a discussion of the contents may constitute follow-up activities (Komorowska 2002: 134).

Some activities devised for practising speaking skills require the understanding of written texts. In this sense, techniques such as *skimming* and *scanning* can

help to develop general and detailed understanding of a text, to analyze its structure, and the ability to use the information it contains in an effective way (Komorowska 2002: 144–146; Ur 1991: 146–147). Reading materials are good for introducing and discussing up-to-date topics, promoting reflection and interpretation of surrounding reality and encouraging learners to relate the texts to their life experiences (Cook 2001: 89; Ediger 2001: 154; Grabe & Stoller 2002: 14).

Mastery of the four language skills enumerated above has been said to rely on the development of students' grammatical and lexical knowledge (Cabrejas Peñuelas 2013; Cortés Moreno 2005; Kłos, Sikorzyńska & Czarnecka-Cicha 2012; Krajewska 2012; Piotrowska & Szyber 2017; Stefańska 2017). This kind of information will undoubtedly facilitate language skill improvement and communication in modern societies (Cook 2001; Gozdawa-Gołębiowski 2010; Komorowska 2002; Kondrat 2010).

In order for FL educators to be able to cater for primary education learners' grammatical and lexical development, and to master the specific skills essential to their linguistic role in the classroom, they need to be equal to the challenge of continual upgrading of their communicative competence (Komorowska 2002; Krawiec & Mikłasz 2018; Pfeiffer 2001). The integration of the cultural element (Gil Ruíz & Soto Pallarés 2015) will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

3. TEACHERS' RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL SKILLS

Educationalists concerned with foreign-language learning (Byram 1989, 1997, 2003, 2008; Byram & Morgan 1994; Dervin 2010; Kic-Drgas 2017; Krawiec 2007, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2015; Róg 2013, 2014; Sánchez-Sánchez 2018; Siek-Piskozub 2013, 2014, 2018) and teachers-practitioners (Król 2002; Marcinkowska 2002; Pogwizd & Sekwerda 2002; Rzeźnik-Konopa 2006) seem to agree on the important role cultural content plays, and have assigned such roles to the FL teacher as *cultural tour organizer* (Krawiec 2015: 169), *cultural attaché* (Sánchez-Sánchez & Krawiec 2018: 101) or *intercultural mediator* (Siek-Piskozub 2018: 48).

The role that FL educators should represent owes a great deal to the recently promoted intercultural communicative competence (henceforth ICC) approach that prioritizes effective communication between people representing different cultural milieus (Kic-Drgas 2017: 97). According to this proposal and exploring the ICC with our own understanding, it seems to be crucial to bring into focus cultural differences in a lesson and to develop the skills that would help students to successfully interact with representatives of other cultures in a foreign language (Szczepaniak-Kozak 2013: 74). In the development of these skills, it is

necessary to implement affective, cognitive and behavioural elements in classroom activities (Byram 2003: 61–62). One of these elements, *knowledge (savoirs)*, is said to fall into categories that include social practices related to everyday living, living conditions, interpersonal relations, values, beliefs and attitudes, body language, social conventions and ritual behaviour (Council of Europe 2001: 102–103).

Just as FL educators help learners acquire language, so are they responsible for providing them with familiarity with the foreign culture; that is, with specific values, beliefs and attitudes (Huang 2014). In so doing, the initial development of an ICC at primary education level may be more effectively implemented by our student-teachers. This, however, requires them to have acquired some specific sociocultural knowledge during their initial training. As scholars emphasize (Pfeiffer 2001; Rakhimova, Yashina, Mukhamadiarova & Sharipova 2017; Siek-Piskozub 2018), formal and informal meetings with representatives of other cultures, and participation in different conferences, seminars, and workshops and mobility programmes, may be decisive for teachers' gaining insight into the world of another culture, and in their analysis and interpretation of specific socio-cultural content. They can subsequently relate and highlight this in their work with learners.

One should, however, keep in mind that apart from possessing that knowledge, the FL teacher must be provided with resources that can present it to learners. Krawiec (2015: 177–178) enumerates some of them:

- iconographic materials, exemplified by pictures, photos, drawings, maps, posters, slides and diagrams, which provide information about foreign milieus and their characteristic features;
- mind maps, which are also called association or mental maps;
- audio-visual materials, which allow learners to become familiar with the reactions and behaviours of foreign groups of people and to comprehend distinctive elements of their cultures;
- websites, podcasts, blogs, videoconferences and e-mails, which guarantee students an insight into the given milieu and which motivate them for intercultural recognition of notions;
- literary and authentic texts, which provide information about customs, traditions and beliefs cultivated in particular cultures;
- drama with elements of movement and verbalization, which draws learners' attention to people's behaviour in various situations;
- project activities, which lead to the presentation of cultural information through such end products as leaflets, brochures, collages, pictures, paintings, albums and guidebooks.

The incorporation of socio-cultural content into listening and speaking exercises and writing tasks, as well as reading materials, suggests that the activi-

ties which mostly serve the development of students' language skills can also lead to the enhancement of their socio-cultural knowledge. Ultimately this will promote language and culture learning and teaching in classroom conditions (Krawiec 2010: 15).

On the basis of what has been presented and implied above, it can be stated that this positive relationship, reported between language education and intercultural teaching and learning, certainly speaks to the need for further related research.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND PROCEDURES

4.1. Research questions

The goal of this study was to gather opinions from university students (prospective language teachers) on different aspects related to the integration of linguistic and cultural content in the FL teaching and learning process. To that end, this study sought to answer such research questions as:

- R.Q.1. What is the perception of university pre-service teachers on primary FL teachers' linguistic and intercultural competences?
- R.Q.2. What is their viewpoint on the importance in the development of language skills in class by the FL teacher?
- R.Q.3. What are the participants' opinions about the importance of sociocultural knowledge and classroom resources in the development of intercultural competence?

4.2. Approach and design

In order to respond to our research objectives, we took a quantitative and descriptive research approach, in which quantitative data collection techniques and instruments were used. Within the survey design, by means of a questionnaire, researchers are able to present opinions, behaviours, beliefs, attitudes or characteristics of a given group of subjects on the issues in question (Creswell 2012).

4.3. Sample / Participants

The subjects of this research were 137 students from language departments at three universities: Università degli Studi di Padova (Italy), Università degli Studi di Ferrara (Italy) and Universidad de Murcia (Spain). The initial rationale behind the

selection of these subjects was that the authors of the paper had an opportunity to work with them as part of their classes at university: either as visiting professors in Ferrara and Padova or as lecturers at their home institution in Murcia. It was also taken into account that all the participants had classes on foreign language learning and teaching as part of their university education. Information on the number of participants, their gender and year of studies is summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Distribution of participants by home university and gender (number and percentage)

University	Male	Female	Total subjects
Padua	3 (2,19)	33 (24,09)	36 (26,28)
Ferrara	3 (2,19)	17 (12,41)	20 (14,60)
Murcia	21 (15,33)	60 (43,80)	81 (59,12)
Total by gender	27 (19,71)	110 (80,29)	137 (100)

Out of the 137 participants who took part in the study, 110 were female students (80,29%) and 27 (19,71%) were male. The majority of the subjects were in their third year of their studies (72,26%) which, in the case of the Spanish university, meant that they were one year away from finishing their degree (8,03%) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of participants by year of studies (number and percentage)

University	3.º	4.º	5.º
Padua	31 (22,63)	1 (0,73)	4 (2,92)
Ferrara	1 (0,73)	6 (4,38)	13 (9,49)
Murcia	67 (48,91)	11 (8,03)	3 (2,19)
Total	99 (72,26)	18 (13,14)	20 (14,60)

4.4. Instrument

An anonymous questionnaire was used for collecting the data. Calls for participation were sent through e-mails to Italian and Spanish colleagues, asking them to forward the link to the participants. The questionnaire remained online for 2 months (May and June 2019). It started with a demographics section in which information about respondents' gender, their year of studies and their home institution was asked (see Tables 1 & 2). The other questions appeared in two sections, one related to the development of language skills and the other to intercultural competence.

The section about the development of language skills gathered student-teachers' perceptions about the importance of FL teachers' linguistic com-

petence in general and about their grammatical, lexical, and phonetic sub-competences in particular. Respondents in this section could also express their beliefs about how essential it is for educators to develop learners' language skills in class and which skills they thought were the most crucial in such development.

The intercultural section, on the other hand, posed questions about teachers' intercultural competence. It aimed to establish how decisive the development of learners' intercultural skills in a foreign language class is and how important specific contents and resources are for the development of learners' intercultural knowledge.

Participants were asked to answer according to two 5-point Likert scales. In the first one, answers ranged from "not important" (value 1), through "slightly important" (2), "moderately important" (3), "important" (4), to "very important" (5); and in the second scale, from "not useful" (value 1), through "slightly useful" (2), "neither useful nor unuseful" (3), "useful" (4) to "very useful" (5). The items in these two scales were intertwined with open-ended questions, which allowed the subjects to justify their answers.

The questionnaires' internal reliability and consistency were calculated jointly using Cronbach's Alfa with a result of $\alpha = 0,864$. According to George and Mallery (2003), this result is positive, and would be considered excellent when $\alpha = 0,9$.

4.5. Data collection

In our study, the participants were asked to fill in an open-access online questionnaire which was elaborated using Google forms so that it could be completed using a number of electronic devices (i.e. a computer, a tablet, a mobile phone, etc.). It would also allow it to remain available at all times, which made it unnecessary for us to take any of the participants' classroom time.

4.6. Data analysis

The free statistics software package *R* was used to analyze the information and to process the data obtained from the questionnaire (R Core Team 2019). Significant differences were also sought according to the membership of a certain institution, gender or year of studies using the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test, as it is the most powerful for ordinal data, setting the significance level at $\alpha = 0,05$. A Pairwise Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test was used as a post-test procedure.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS

The analysis of the data obtained, classified according to the research questions and the study objectives, is presented below.

To present the subjects' perception of the importance of the FL teacher's linguistic and intercultural abilities, a descriptive analysis of the responses to items in the questionnaire related to this objective is shown in Figure 1 and in Table 3.

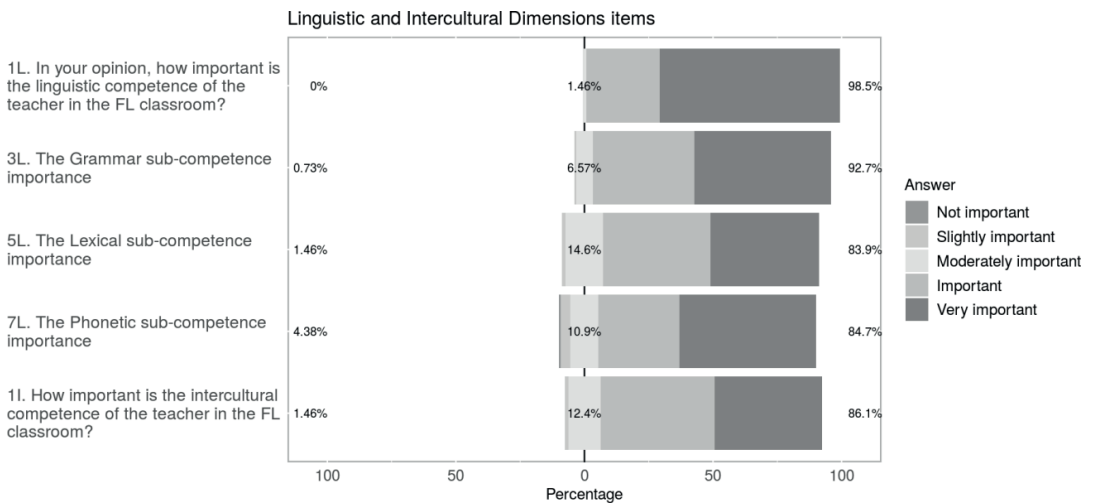


Figure 1. Items associated with the perception of linguistic and intercultural ability

Table 3. Descriptive statistics associated with the perception of linguistic and intercultural ability

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Likert scale point percentages					Sd
						1	2	3	4	5	
1L. In your opinion, how important is the linguistic competence of the teacher in the FL classroom?	137	3	5	4,69	5	0,000	0,000	1,46	28,5	70,1	0,50
3L. Importance of the Grammar sub-competence	137	2	5	4,45	5	0,000	0,73	6,57	39,4	53,5	0,65
5L. Importance of the Lexical sub-competence	137	2	5	4,25	4	0,000	1,46	14,6	41,6	42,3	0,76
7L. Importance of the Phonetic sub-competence	137	1	5	4,33	5	0,76	3,65	10,9	31,4	53,3	0,87

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Likert scale point percentages					Sd
						1	2	3	4	5	
11. How important is the intercultural competence of the teacher in the FL classroom?	137	2	5	4,26	4	0,000	1,46	12,4	44,5	41,6	0,73

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics of the items related to this objective, as well as the percentage of each one of the points in the 5-point Likert scale. Respectively, 83,9% and 98,5% indicated that these questions are important or very important in the development of linguistic and intercultural abilities. The subjects agreed that “the teacher needs to know all about the language he / she is teaching” in order for him / her “to transmit an increasingly detailed vocabulary”. As for intercultural competence, they argued for the “development of intercultural competences, so that the student becomes not only a good [FL] speaker, but also a good citizen of the world”. As revealed by the Kruskal-Wallis test, no significant differences according to institution, gender or grade were found in these items.

In Figure 2 and in Table 4 below, the descriptive analysis of the items related to the subjects’ viewpoint on the importance of the development of language skills in class by the FL teacher is presented.

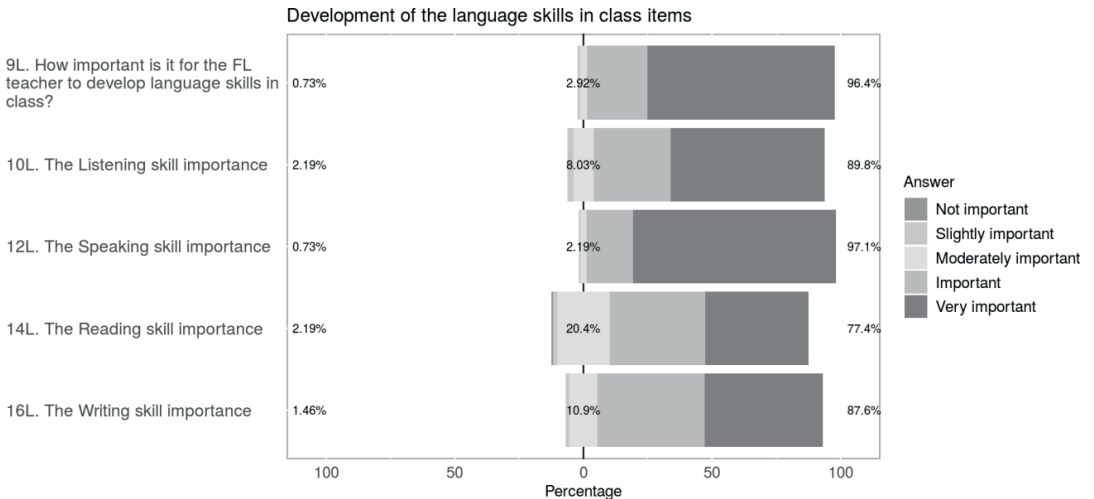


Figure 2. Items associated with the development of language skills in class

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the items associated with the development of language skills in class

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Likert scale point percentages					Sd
						1	2	3	4	5	
9L. How important is it for the FL teacher to develop language skills in class?	137	2	5	4,69	5	0,000	0,73	2,92	23,4	73,0	0,57
10L. Importance of the Listening skill	137	2	5	4,47	5	0,000	2,19	8,03	29,9	59,9	0,74
12L. Importance of the Speaking skill	137	2	5	4,75	5	0,000	0,73	2,19	18,2	78,8	0,53
14L. Importance of the Reading skill	137	1	5	4,15	4	0,73	1,46	20,4	37,2	40,1	0,84
16L. Importance of the Writing skill	137	2	5	4,32	4	0,000	1,46	10,9	41,6	46,0	0,73

Once again, all the items related to this objective were evaluated highly by the study participants. 77,4% opted for reading since it "...enable[s] [working] on grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, expressions, spelling...", while 97,1% indicated that speaking is important (18,2%) or very important (78,8%) "...because speaking skills are a vitally important method of communication."

Significant differences were detected only with regard to university in Item 12L ($p = 0,0435$) and Item 14L ($p = 0,0353$). In the post-hoc analysis, the differences were located between students from the University of Murcia and students from the Italian universities in the first case, and between students from the University of Murcia and students from the University of Ferrara in the second case. The descriptive statistics of these items are presented in Table 5 according to the university they are affiliated with.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the significant items according to institution

Item	Insitution	N	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Likert scale point percentages					Sd
							1	2	3	4	5	
12L. Speaking skill importance	Ferrara	20	3	5	4,60	5	0,000	0,000	5,00	30,0	65,0	0,6
	Murcia	81	2	5	4,81	5	0,000	1,23	2,47	9,88	86,4	0,53
	Padova	36	4	5	4,69	5	0,000	0,000	0,000	30,6	69,4	0,47
14L. Reading skill importance	Ferrara	20	3	5	3,85	4	0,000	0,000	45,0	25,0	30,0	0,88
	Murcia	81	1	5	4,27	4	1,23	2,47	12,3	35,8	48,1	0,87
	Padova	36	3	5	4,03	4	0,000	0,000	25,0	47,2	27,8	0,74

Figure 3 and Table 6 – with features identified on the basis of CEFR (Council of Europe 2001: 102–103) – show the answers in relation to the importance of socio-cultural knowledge in developing intercultural ability.

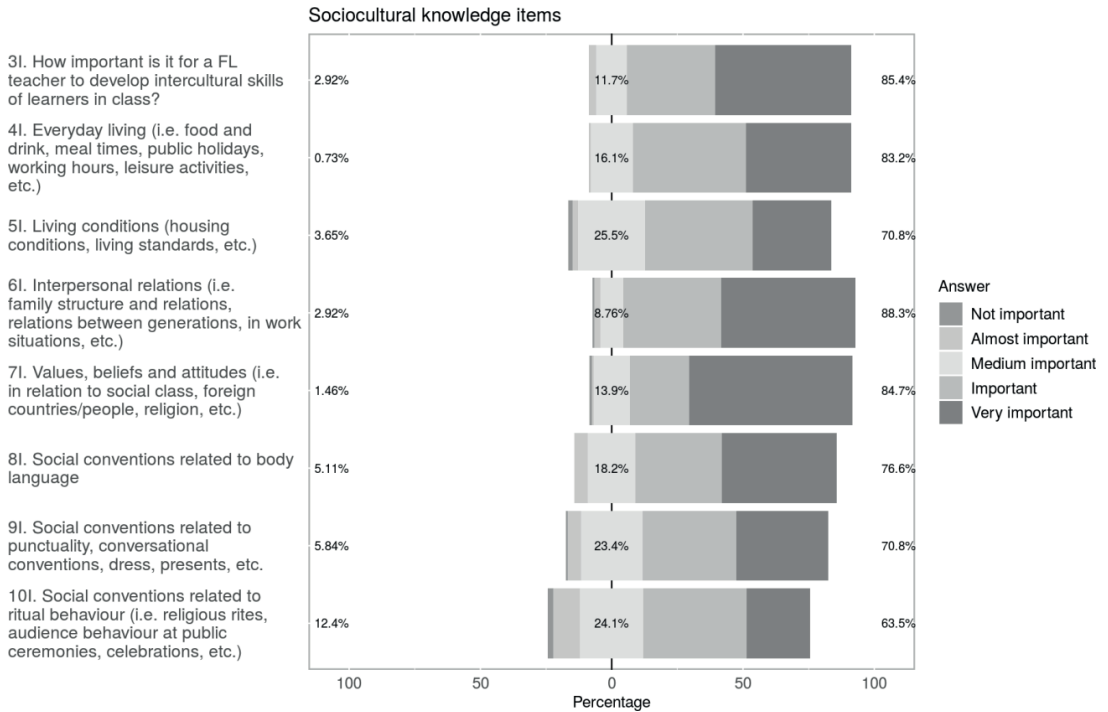


Figure 3. Items related to socio-cultural knowledge

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of the items related to sociocultural knowledge

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Likert scale point percentages					Sd
						1	2	3	4	5	
3I. How important is it for a FL teacher to develop intercultural skills of learners in class?	137	2	5	4,34	5	0,000	2,92	11,7	33,6	51,8	0,80
4I. Everyday living (i.e. food and drink, meal times, public holidays, working hours, leisure activities, etc.)	137	2	5	4,23	4	0,000	0,73	16,1	43,1	40,1	0,74

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Likert scale point percentages					Sd
						1	2	3	4	5	
5I. Living conditions (housing conditions, living standards, etc.)	137	1	5	3,96	4	1,46	2,19	25,5	40,9	29,9	0,88
6I. Interpersonal relations	137	1	5	4,36	5	0,73	2,19	8,76	37,2	51,1	0,79
7I. Values, beliefs and attitudes	137	1	5	4,45	5	0,73	0,73	13,9	22,6	62,0	0,81
8I. Social conventions related to body language	137	2	5	4,15	4	0,000	5,11	18,2	32,8	43,8	0,90
9I. Social conventions related to punctuality, conversational conventions, dress, presents, etc.	137	1	5	3,99	4	0,73	5,11	23,4	35,8	35,0	0,93
10I. Social conventions related to ritual behaviour	137	1	5	3,73	4	2,19	10,2	24,1	39,4	24,1	1,01

In this section, Item 6I stands out as 88,3% of the interviewed participants indicated it was important or very important, while 12,4% indicated that Item 10I is not very important or not important at all.

Statistically significant differences according to gender were only found in Item 8I ($p = 0,041$) and Item 19I ($p = 0,031$). The descriptive statistics of these items are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of the significant item according to gender

Item	Gender	n	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Likert scale point percentages					Sd
							1	2	3	4	5	
8I. Social conventions related to body language	Female	110	2	5	4,22	4	0,000	5,45	15,5	30,9	48,2	0,9
	Male	27	2	5	3,89	4	0,000	3,70	29,6	40,7	25,9	0,85
19I. Lesson with native speakers	Female	110	2	5	4,70	5	0,000	0,91	2,73	21,8	74,5	0,57
	Male	27	2	5	4,33	5	0,000	7,41	7,41	29,6	55,6	0,92

The responses obtained in reference to the materials used in class, based on the participants' observations and experience, are presented in Figure 4 and Table 8.

From the data obtained, we must highlight that 94,2% of the students thought that the use of native speakers is of greater benefit and 87,6% emphasized the use of ICT, while only 14,6% believed that books are not useful.

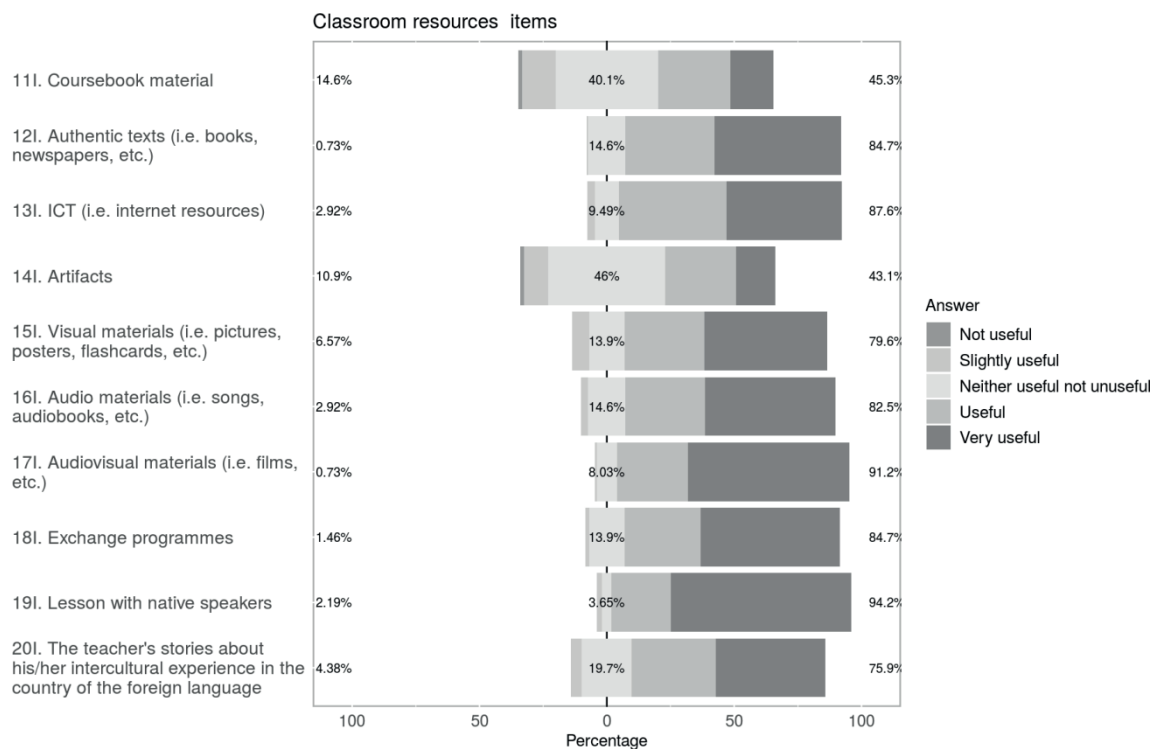


Figure 4. Items related to the materials used in the classroom

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of the items related to the materials used in the classroom

Item	n	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Likert scale point percentages					Sd
						1	2	3	4	5	
11I. Course book material	137	1	5	3,46	3	1,46	13,10	40,10	28,5	16,8	0,97
12I. Authentic texts	137	2	5	4,34	4	0,00	0,73	14,60	35,0	49,6	0,75
13I. ICT	137	2	5	4,30	4	0,00	2,92	9,49	42,3	45,3	0,76
14I. Artefacts	137	1	5	3,46	3	1,46	9,49	46,00	27,7	15,3	0,92
15I. Visual materials	137	2	5	4,21	4	0,00	6,57	13,90	31,4	48,2	0,92
16I. Audio materials	137	2	5	4,31	5	0,00	2,92	14,60	31,4	51,1	0,83
17I. Audiovisual materials	137	2	5	4,54	5	0,00	0,73	8,03	27,7	63,5	0,68
18I. Exchange programmes	137	2	5	4,38	5	0,00	1,46	13,90	29,9	54,7	0,78
19I. Lesson with native speakers	137	2	5	4,63	5	0,00	2,19	3,65	23,4	70,8	0,66

Item	n	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Likert scale point percentages					Sd
						1	2	3	4	5	
20I. The teacher's stories about his / her intercultural experience in the country of the foreign language	137	2	5	4,15	4	0,00	4,38	19,70	32,8	43,1	0,89

In the statistical analysis of these items differences were identified according to institution in Item 14I ($p = 0,0034$), Item 15I ($p = 0,0065$), in Item 16I ($p = 0,0099$) and Item 18I ($p = 0,0088$). In the post-hoc analysis, the differences were identified between the University of Murcia and the University of Padua in all cases and also between the University of Ferrara and the University of Padua for Item 14I. The descriptive statistics of these items are presented in Table 9 according to the university the students came from.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of the significant items according to institution

Item	Institution	n	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Likert scale point percentages					Sd
							1	2	3	4	5	
14I. Artefacts	Ferrara	20	2	5	3,75	4	0,000	5,00	40,0	30,0	25,0	0,91
	Murcia	81	1	5	3,58	3	1,23	7,41	42,0	30,9	18,5	0,92
	Padua	36	1	5	3,03	3	2,78	16,7	58,3	19,4	2,78	0,77
15I. Visual materials	Ferrara	20	2	5	4,25	4,5	0,000	5,00	15,0	30,0	50,0	0,91
	Murcia	81	2	5	4,40	5	0,000	3,70	8,64	32,1	55,6	0,80
	Padua	36	2	5	3,78	4	0,000	13,9	25,0	30,6	30,6	1,05
16I. Audio materials	Ferrara	20	3	5	4,50	5	0,000	0,000	10,0	30,0	60,0	0,69
	Murcia	81	2	5	4,43	5	0,000	1,23	11,1	30,9	56,8	0,74
	Padua	36	2	5	3,92	4	0,000	8,33	25,0	33,3	33,3	0,97
18I. Exchange programmes	Ferrara	20	3	5	4,45	5	0,000	0,000	10,0	35,0	55,0	0,69
	Murcia	81	2	5	4,22	4	0,000	2,47	18,5	33,3	45,7	0,84
	Padua	36	3	5	4,69	5	0,000	0,000	5,56	19,4	75,0	0,58

Statistically significant differences were noted for grade in Item 12I ($p = 0,0326$). The differences were identified between fourth and fifth year students in the post-hoc analysis. The descriptive statistics of the last item are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Descriptive statistics of the significant item according to grade

Item	Year	N	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Likert scale point percentages					Sd
							%1	%2	%3	%4	%5	
12I. Authentic texts	Third year	99	3	5	4,36	4	0,000	0,000	12,1	39,4	48,5	0,69
	Fourth year	18	2	5	3,94	4	0,000	5,56	22,2	44,4	27,8	0,87
	Fifth year	20	3	5	4,55	5	0,000	0,000	20,0	5,00	75,0	0,83

6. DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research was to find out whether there is still any evidence of implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee of Ministers and the Council for Cultural Co-operation in relation to FL teaching and learning and teacher training programmes for primary education. Evidence can clearly be found in the official documents published by local education authorities (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 lutego 2017 in Poland and the Primary Education syllabus in the Region of Murcia 2014 in Spain). Inspired by the recommendations presented in these documents, scholars (Kic-Drgas 2017; Shaded 2013; Szczepaniak-Kozak 2013) agree with the role of a well-qualified teacher who can teach linguistic and cultural content to enable young learners to communicate effectively. Being 'well-qualified' would imply that the FL educator has been trained to turn the rich linguistic and cultural heritage of Europe into a valuable resource applicable to early FL learning.

Evidence can also be found in the material gathered from university students who in their responses to the distributed questionnaire expressed their views and opinions on linguistic and cultural responsibilities of the FL educator and the notions related to them. Students from three European institutions (Padua, Ferrara and Murcia) who were surveyed by the authors of this paper in fact agreed on the importance of both duties (98,5%). They also concurred that speaking is the language skill *par excellence* (Kalayo 2007: 101). Aspects such as family, generational, and professional relations (88,3%) were identified as the most relevant features of sociocultural knowledge. As a result of that, lessons with native speakers (94,2%) were perceived as the most appropriate resource.

Nevertheless, significant differences were found with regard to language skills, socio-cultural content and resources. As mentioned before, the speaking skill was highly valued. Although the three institutions had very high scores in this respect, significant differences were found in the score obtained in the Universidad de Murcia in comparison to the two Italian institutions, with the Universidad de

Murcia's results being the highest. In addition, differences were also found between subjects from Murcia and those from Ferrara regarding the reading skill. Acquiring social conventions related to body language and letting the native speaker conduct the linguistic and cultural teaching and learning process was especially highly thought of by the female subjects from the Spanish institution. All this evidence points to the debate about the native speaker as the ideal teacher. In EFL contexts where exposure to English is limited to a few hours a week and societies where the chances to interact with speakers of the foreign language are also limited, the native speaker is considered to make *the best and ideal teacher*. It is believed that due to his or her command in the language, particularly in speaking (i.e. pronunciation), he or she will correctly teach it to the learners (Alseweed 2012; Al-Nawrasy 2013; Coşkun 2013; Mariño 2011). At the same time, by being exposed to the native-speaker-turned-ideal-teacher, learners will be expected to acquire a degree of familiarity with conventions related to his or her body language (Huang 2014). This debate is totally oblivious to the recent ICC approach which argues for a communicative interaction in the foreign language with people from various cultural milieus and not just with native speakers (Kic-Drgas 2017; Szczepaniak-Kozak 2013). It is the authors' belief that female subjects from the Spanish institution may go along with the native-speaker-ideal-teacher ongoing debate because they might view themselves as *the victims* of an educational system in which the speaking skill, as in the case of the listening skill in Turkey, has traditionally been considered the 'Cinderella skill' (Solak & Altay 2014). That is to say, the speaking skill is rarely taught and / or tested during the compulsory education period (primary and secondary). That may also explain why the oral test gets the highest number of failing students in the FL subject in the teacher-training programmes held in the Faculty of Education at the Universidad de Murcia.

With respect to resources, it was found out that artefacts, also known as cultural realia, were highly valued by subjects from Ferrara and slightly less valued by subjects from Murcia. Curiously enough, however, the latter recognized how much visual materials, and even audio materials, can contribute to the process of becoming intercultural in the FL classroom. A possible explanation could be found once again in the educational system. Unlike the use of realia, the FL teaching process in Spanish classrooms has found in audiovisual material (such as video, DVDs and You Tube programmes) the key tool to help learners develop intercultural competence (Barabar & Caganaga 2015). Serving as a substitute for exposure to native (and / or non-native) speakers of English, audiovisual materials have been used to expose Spanish learners to a variety of oral and written forms that the English language can take (Gracia 2015), possibly improving at least their speaking and reading skills. The Spanish subjects in our study may have been able to appreciate the value of this resource in the acquisi-

tion of unconscious non-linguistic codes (such as body movements, gestures and facial expressions), the ones people tend to look for when the language barrier hinders comprehension of verbal messages (Damanhoury 2018; Gracia 2015; Gülsünler & Fidan 2011; Pratolo 2019). Although considerably less impressed by audiovisual resources, subjects from Padua showed preference for exchange programmes while the ones from Murcia were less inclined to value the benefits that could derive from those programmes such as, for example, participating in formal and informal meetings with representatives of other cultures (Pfeiffer 2001; Rakhimova et al. 2017; Siek-Piskozub 2018).

One last difference was discovered between fourth and fifth-year student-teachers. The use of authentic texts in the FL classroom seems to have been more appreciated by final year trainees. This finding may be interpreted as a greater interest in the development of the receptive or passive language skill (reading).

As suggested by educational authorities, the key to a successful interaction in today's European multilingual and multicultural society is inherent to the acquisition of some specific knowledge and skills. This type of education should be provided by linguistically and culturally well-qualified educators. We would like to conclude by claiming that the subjects' perceptions may constitute enough evidence to demonstrate that the recommendations made by the end of the last century are still relevant. Their opinions show how that they are embracing, to a greater or a lesser degree, the dual responsibility they are being trained for.

There are a number of limitations to this study that must be taken into consideration. First, the subjects were selected from two Italian and one Spanish institution. It would have been recommendable to have parity of subjects and home institutions. This would have allowed the authors to contrast the results obtained in Murcia with those offered by, for example, subjects from another Spanish institution.

Another limitation to the study involves the design of the questionnaire. In order to carry out an international study, we needed to gather information from subjects who had previously experienced and been influenced by two different compulsory education systems. This fact may have had an effect on item 12 and 14 (*The speaking and reading skills importance*, respectively), item 14I (*Artifacts*), 15I (*Visual materials*), 16I (*Audio materials*) and 19I (*Lesson with native speaker*), as these items failed to provide a clear explanation of why they had been asymmetrically valued. In light of these limitations, research on the similarities and differences between the Italian and Spanish compulsory education system is needed. Likewise, research on the *subjectiveness* regarding social conventions related to body language, and the contribution of the native speaker to the learner's process of gaining intercultural competence, would be instrumental in the understanding of females' and males' subjective preferences.

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