

**Bridging the Gap Between
Expectations and Teaching on
the Field Practice:
Instituto Franklin-UAH as
Intercultural Mediator for
Language Assistants in
Spain**

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ABSTRACT

Basic research has shown that some differences between educational aspects of Spanish and American culture, such as perceptions about roles, attitudes, communication, teaching methods and even expectations, can manifest into actual academic difficulties for American Language Assistants in Spanish bilingual schools. This paper will focus on describing the elements that, when analyzed, outline the role of Instituto Franklin-UAH as an intercultural and academic mediator between two cultures and education systems (Spain and US) and the context that justifies the different measures taken to attend to the particular needs or circumstances of the agents involved (students, teachers and academic advisors). Two perspectives will be included: a) a historical one, related to Instituto Franklin-UAH's background and context related to bilingual teaching; b) an analytical one, focusing, on the one hand, on the perception of the agents involved and, on the other hand, on the actions that have turned Instituto Franklin-UAH into an actual mediator between its students and the schools where they act as Language Assistants. Ultimately, the paper underlines the difference in terms of the perception

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of the same aspects by the groups involved and the need for measures to improve the communication process between American LAs and Spanish lead teachers in bilingual schools.

Key words: intercultural mediation, Language Assistants, Instituto Franklin-UAH

INTRODUCTION

Instituto Franklin-UAH (IF-UAH) has offered, for more than ten years, a program of master's degrees that train American students and, at the same time, place them in bilingual schools in Madrid (Spain) to act as language assistants (LAs). In this context, IF-UAH has balanced and adapted to the needs of the agents involved (in this case, American students-LAs and Spanish teachers) in order to provide an effective training and teaching environment in bilingual schools. At the same time, IF-UAH has worked to help its students anticipate and counteract potential challenges they might face during their training period and in the actual teaching environment in Spain. On the other hand, specific basic research (Vescan & Vitalaru 2017; 2018; Vitalaru & Vescan 2017)² has shown that some differences between the Spanish and American cultures considering educational

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aspects, such as perceptions on roles, attitudes, communication, teaching methods these aspects can result into actual academic difficulties for English-speaking/American³ Language Assistants (LAs) in Spanish bilingual schools. In this context, Instituto Franklin-UAH has played an essential role from two points of view. First, as an institution that offers a postgraduate teacher training opportunity for English-speaking LAs. Second, as an intercultural mediator between the English-speaking students/LAs and the bilingual schools who rely on those LAs as important agents in the implementation of their Bilingual Program that the Spanish Regional Ministry implemented in the Madrid region in 2004.

² There are very few studies that focus on aspects related to the LA's activity or role in Spain. One that is of particular interest is Espigares- Espigares' graduate final paper (2017) *The effectiveness of assistants to improve foreign language development in education*, which focuses on showing the positive effect LAs have in the learning of English.

³ The program is addressed to native English language speakers although the majority of the students in the program are Americans due to the fact that Instituto Franklin-UAH is a Research Department at Universidad de Alcalá that focuses on American Studies. 2% of students in the program come from Canada, Australia, New Zealand or the UK.

Most of the times, as the practicum advisors' reports at Instituto Franklin-UAH show (section 5.2), students require assistance and support from the university academic advisors in order to face the challenges the reality of professional teaching in Spain, to avoid misunderstandings and even deal with anxiety. In fact, in the context of the general gap between academic expectations and teaching in the field practical requirements, as Linda Darling-Hammond points out, "The teaching practicum is important for bridging the gap between what student teachers have learnt in the program and the reality of teaching practice in schools" (cited by Azkiyah & Mukminin 2017). This importance is why LAs who lack specific teaching practice in Spain tend to experience a certain anxiety associated with teaching practices, at least at the beginning of their training process. In fact, in the 'Teach & Learn in Spain (TLS)' program itself, 90.5% of the total 105 students in the 2016-2017 cohort lacked specific teaching practice before enrolling. This implied a certain level of stress that required mediation from IF-UAH university advisors, as shown in the latter's own testimonials. Moreover, the exposure to a different culture, which is reflected in the educational

**"The teaching practicum is important for bridging the gap between what student teachers have learnt in the program and the reality of teaching practice in schools".
(Linda Darling-Hammond)**

and communication settings as well, can potentially result as or increase the amount of cultural shock experienced by students-LAs who are not properly exposed to the differences involved in living in a new country. According to the theory of culture shock, moving to a different country, in a different ethnic and cultural environment and distant from familiar behaviors, images and expectations, can cause feelings of loneliness, helplessness, anxiety, frustration, and symptoms of depression (Oberg 2006: 142-143). Culture shock⁴ is a key concept in fields such as psychology, anthropology, and intercultural communication, and is commonly used in "orientation and reentry training" in "education abroad" and in a "corporate context" (La Brack).

In view of this context, this paper will focus on describing the elements that, when analyzed, outline the role of Instituto Franklin-UAH as an intercultural and academic mediator between two cultures and education systems (Spain and the US) and the context that justifies

⁴ Originated in the 1950s by Cora Dubois and expanded by Finnish-Canadian anthropologist, Kalervo Oberg (La Brack).

Moving to a different country, in a different ethnic and cultural environment and distant from familiar behaviors, images and expectations, can cause feelings of loneliness, helplessness, anxiety, frustration, and symptoms of depression.

(Oberg 2006: 142-143)

the different measures taken to attend to particular needs or circumstances. For this purpose, two perspectives will be included:

- a) a historical one, based on research about the origin of the institution, which has operated at the *Universidad de Alcalá* since 1987, and its specific training program for LAs in Madrid in the context of the Bilingual Education Program in Spain and European policies regarding teaching and learning foreign languages; and
- b) an analytical one, focusing, on the one hand, on the perception of the agents involved and, on the other hand, on the actions that have turned Instituto Franklin-UAH into an actual mediator between its students and the schools where they act as Language Assistants.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intercultural Mediation: Definitions and Perspectives

The term 'mediation' can refer to two perspectives that are significant in this study as both of them involve the knowledge of communication and cultural patterns and background to have an effective outcome.

One of the meanings is specific for the legal settings and refers to the "voluntary and confidential process" in which a "neutral third party" helps disputants come to an agreement that is fair and acceptable for those involved. Understanding the cultural background and characteristics of the parties involved and even communication factors is, thus, key for the professional mediator to achieve a successful outcome (Sgubini & Simon 2006; *People's Law Dictionary*).

In the general sense, mediation is defined as "a tool that helps to 'bridge the gap' between differences, and this requires knowing and respecting the culture of people that you meet" (Sgubini, 2006). In fact, mediation can be used whenever communicative and cultural obstacles occur, especially if we consider that each culture has its own communication methods and strategies depending on a variety of factors that form its historical and social development:

Communication methods vary from country to country, depending on the historical development, legal systems, and ethnic and cultural background of each area. The key to make mediation successful globally is to understand the cultural effect on both business negotiation and communication techniques (Sgubini 2006).

Intercultural mediation, on the other hand, is studied from three perspectives (Cohen- Emenique 2003, as cited in Díaz Pena et al., 2014: 6):

1. Situations in which a third party makes a complicated communication possible or facilitates it.

2. Conflictive situations in which a mediator helps the parties agree and solve the conflict.
3. Transformation process in which the mediator promotes important social or structural changes (e.g local policies).

Other significant definitions underline its characteristics as a process of particular social relevance:

- A “process that contributes to improving communication, the relationship and the intercultural integration between people or groups of people from a territory and that belong to one or several cultures and that have different cultural codes” (Grupo Triángulo 2007).
- “an intercultural mediator [...] is an operator in charge of facilitating communication between individuals, families, and community as part of measures to promote and facilitate the social inclusion of immigrants” (Catarci 2016: 128).
- the mediator promotes “the removal of cultural and language barriers, the development of a culture of openness, inclusion and the advocacy of rights, and observance of the duties of citizenship” (Catarci 2016: 128).

Finally, Eugenia Arvanitis (2014: 3-4) discusses mediation from three perspectives that show its central role in “an inclusive and pluralistic society” as: a process that helps “negotiate differences in a cohesive society” in an effective way, a “reflexive and dialogical process” that provides the opportunity for intercultural exchange and a process where “the devolution of social, personal and cultural responsibility takes place in the context of civic pluralism.”

In terms of mediation’s main functions, they can be indexed into three types based on Cohen Emenique’s classification (1994, 2003)⁵, which has been extensively used by many authors that researched or analyzed the topic⁶. Although it has mainly been applied to communication with foreigners in public services (European project TIME project partnership 2016: 22) and has specifically been explained with examples from the healthcare settings based on several studies (Díaz Pena et al. 2014, 7-9)⁷, mediation can be applied to any field where cultural differences influence a conflict (Urruela Bolaños 2012: 121):

1. **Preventive**, with the purpose of preventing potential conflicts and misunderstandings by answering questions and clarifying aspects and context apart from translating message in a contextualized way, adapted for the agents involved. In this context the mediator also helps with administrative formalities.

⁵ See a more detailed new version in Cohen-Emerique (2007). “Intercultural Mediators: Bridges of Identities”. *InterCulture*, 153, p. 7-22.

⁶ The following studies include several references.

⁷ See a more thorough analysis in Díaz Pena et al., 2014.

2. **Rehabilitating**, in which the mediator is a consultant for both parties to help solve a conflict between public service staff and foreigners by eliminating cultural barriers.
3. **Transforming**, referring to social mediation in general, which focuses on changes in regulations to include intercultural aspects; or in the mediation between associations, healthcare services and foreigners' communities (Díaz Pena et al. 2014: 7-9; European project TIME project partnership 2016: 22).


Combined, they reflect the pre-requisites that public policies on intercultural counselling entail in general: equality, inclusion, active participation and an intercultural goal (Giménez 2010: 37 as cited in Díaz Pena et al. 2014).

Thus, it can be said that the mediator is perceived as an educator him/herself, since he/she “plays an educational role” (Catarci 2016: 129) and requires a solid linguistic and cultural knowledge base, as well as “adequate communication, relationship and conflict management skills” (130). Generally, the abilities required to be an effective mediator are specific to the application of several principles and practices in intercultural mediation settings, so as to “create an operational intercultural space of mutual understanding, empathy and collaborative ethos using culturally appropriate behaviors”: *flexibility, tolerance, hope, respect and reciprocity, inquisitiveness to learning* (Townsend 2002: 4).


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Finally, in the education context, authors such as Bilgehan (2012: 1125) highlight the potential that communication has in solving conflicts in the context of mediating in education settings: “Mediation education is based on focusing the communication skills on resolving problems and involves negotiation and conflict resolution education as well”. It necessarily includes a negotiation process, through specific meetings aimed at resolving difficulties and strengthening collaboration. Finally, a specific strategy recommended for training programs in universities to make mediation effective “include[s] the griefs of world nations in the training process” (1126) since empathy is key for solving (political) disagreements and conflicts in general. Thus, redefining each party's perception of the conflict and creating a new story that is acceptable for both parties, as well as “Sharing each other's griefs” and “Owning other's grief for a while” are essential for solving situations of disagreement.

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The Bilingual Program and European Policies: Bilingual Schools in Spain & Madrid

Two aspects are particularly relevant in the context of this paper and for explaining the actions taken to implement the use of Language Assistants in bilingual schools:

a) The linguistic policies developed in 1995 by the European Union focusing on the improvement and diversification of language learning and teaching within the Education systems of the EU. Its original goal was to: “provide a basis for reflection on how the educational systems themselves can continue the construction of a Europe without internal frontiers, and strengthen understanding between the peoples of the Union” (Council resolution March 31, 1995).

As stated in the above named law, the emphasis was, for the first time, on promoting the qualitative improvement of language knowledge, focusing especially on the development of communication skills and on increasing the diversification of the languages taught from school to higher education as a strategy to offer EU citizens the opportunity to become proficient in several of the EU languages.

For the current analysis, it is important to underline the fact that the law actually establishes a high priority in EU actions on the beginning of foreign language learning during childhood and specifically mentions the need to encourage learning in primary schools (Council resolution March 31, 1995). The Council resolution also emphasizes the need to promote actions directed towards the contact with native speakers of the languages studied through programs such as, for instance, mobility programs or language visits. The stress on bilingual teaching through “the teaching of classes in a foreign language for disciplines other than languages” and the provision of an exchange of teaching staff that are native speakers are extremely significant as they explain the current situation characterized by the teaching of content core subjects (“Content and Language Integrated Learning” or CLIL) and the use of Language Assistants, some of them through the ‘Teach & Learn in Spain’ program at Instituto Franklin-UAH.

b) The implementation of the Bilingual Programs in Spain, particularly of the Bilingual Program in the Region of Madrid, our main focus, based on the basic principles established by previous European policies.

In the region of Madrid, the local government started to implement the Bilingual Program in Public Bilingual Schools run by the Department of Education (*Ministerio de Educación*) and the Education Department of the region of Madrid (*Consejería de Educación e Investigación*) in 2004. Since then, the Public Bilingual Schools are required to have Language Assistants (*auxiliares de conversación*) (*Orden 162/2011, de 21 de enero*). Moreover, this requirement was extended to the charter and private schools in 2008 (*Orden 9932/2012, 30 de agosto*). Linares and Dafouz (2010) provide a detailed description of the CLIL programs/projects in the Madrid region and some of its outcomes and challenges.

In accordance with the before mentioned European policies and regulations, the main goals of the Bilingual Program are twofold: to improve the communicative skills of students in schools and to provide cultural references related to English speaking countries through contact with English language native speakers and by implementing mobility programs for teachers and students (Education Department of the region of Madrid).

METHOD

As mentioned in the introduction, the objective of this paper is to describe the elements that, when analyzed, outline the role of Instituto Franklin-UAH as an intercultural and academic mediator between two cultures and education systems (Spain and US) and specific details. The two following perspectives will be included:

a) The historical perspective, related to Instituto Franklin-UAH's background and context related to bilingual teaching. The main research method is the systematic review of the main theoretical background that is relevant considering the IF-UAH's activity and context regarding the Bilingual Program in Spain. Further information will be included in section 4.

b) The analytical perspective, focusing, on the one hand, on the perception of the agents involved and, on the other, on the actions that have turned Instituto Franklin-UAH into an actual mediator between its students and the bilingual schools where they act as Language Assistants. For this perspective, the following methods are used to gather data:

b.1. Analysis of regulations and guides that were designed by the Ministry of Education and the regional government in order to regulate the role and responsibilities of the LAs (in Madrid) were analyzed from a qualitative point of view considering the reference to roles and responsibilities in the classroom (section 5.1.1).

b.2. Questionnaires sent to LAs from the 2016-2017 cohort as a mid-term assessment during the month of February, aimed to gather information about their perception regarding several concepts related to what we defined as 'role,' 'communication,' 'culture' and 'perception of difficulties,' among other aspects (section 5.1.1).

b.3. Questionnaires sent to lead teachers at schools, as mid-term assessments of LAs and that were analyzed from a qualitative point of view. The analysis focuses on the lead teachers' perspective regarding the LAs' role at school and their performance regarding the collaboration with the teacher, preparing classes, teaching cultural aspects, improvising, creativity, or being proactive (section 5.1.3).

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b.4. A qualitative analysis of university practicum advisors' observation reports. This analysis focuses on a selection of the most common causes of difficulties that required mediation in the academic course 2016-2017, with 59% of the students identifying the following as the most common needs for mediation: class management strategies, class management collaboration, collaboration in planning, planning meetings and giving feedback to students.

Finally, the observations will be based on both quantitative and qualitative data obtained through the different tools described and a proposal regarding possible solutions will be made.

INSTITUTO FRANKLIN-UAH AND PROGRAMS: DESCRIPTION

Historical perspective and context

The historical perspective offers a deeper understanding of the analytical analysis of the gathered data. The historical context regarding the origin and goals of the Instituto Franklin-UAH's program provide an insight into the shaping of this institution as a cultural mediator, which promotes an intercultural dialogue between its students and bilingual schools where they act as Language Assistants.

Instituto Franklin-UAH (IF-UAH) is a research department at Universidad de Alcalá, which has a multidisciplinary focus and serves as a cooperation platform through the celebration of conferences and events, publications, research projects, collaboration agreements between colleges and universities and the organization of training programs offered for North American students. It was originally founded in 1987 by the President of the Universidad de Alcalá at that time, Manuel Gala, who was also chosen as the first director at Instituto Franklin-UAH.

The original name of the institution was CENUAH (*Centro de Estudios Norteamericanos*) and its goals were to foster links between Spain and the United States and to establish actions that would promote the exchange of knowledge between both countries.

Its name changed to *Instituto Universitario de Estudios Norteamericanos* (IUIEN) and finally, in 2009, the name "Benjamin Franklin" was approved by the Academic Board; since then it has been known as "Instituto Franklin-UAH" (IF-UAH website a). The name was mainly chosen as it represents the multidisciplinary nature of the institution in the same way Benjamin Franklin shapes a multidisciplinary person as politician, inventor and writer. In fact, Benjamin Franklin was also known as the first Ambassador of the United States in Spain, who initiated the first Spanish teaching course in the US in his Philadelphia Languages Academy (IF-UAH Website a), promoting Spanish language and culture.

When founding and creating the curriculum for the Philadelphia Languages Academy, Benjamin Franklin had an innovative idea: to promote "an education that stressed practical skills that would serve students regardless of the line of work they took up" (Penn University). Following its mentor's model, IF-UAH offers a practical perspective for its Study Abroad programs by offering both hands-on training and practice and, at the same time, focusing on the reinforcement of

the relations with the US. The main academic programs offered are 'Study Abroad Program' and 'Teach & Learn in Spain' Master's Program. They both represent IF-UAH's main goal to focus on the promotion of knowledge between Spain and the United States. This paper will focus particularly on showing the role the second program plays in the context of the mediation nature of the IF-UAH itself.

'Teach & Learn in Spain' Master's Program

The 'Teach & Learn in Spain' Master's Program was created in 2008 by Instituto Franklin-UAH. The objective of the program, as stated on IF-UAH's website (b), is "to offer native English speaking students the opportunity of studying a Master's Degree and be a language assistant in a bilingual school of the region of Madrid." The program combined, until recently, four master's degree courses (one academic year duration) with the acquisition of practical teaching experience as a Language Assistant in bilingual schools in the region of Madrid:

- Master in Bilingual and Multicultural Education
- Master in International Education
- Master in Teaching
- *Master en aprendizaje y enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera* (in Spanish)

Students in the program need to complete an amount of 30 credits throughout the academic year for their teaching practicum experience in bilingual schools in Madrid as language and culture assistants (IF-UAH Website b) through the Bilingual School Program implemented by the Spanish Regional Ministry in 2004-2005.

In terms of the type of schools where they act as LAs, there are two options in the program: charter and private schools (18 hours or 25 hours/week) or public schools (16 hours/week).

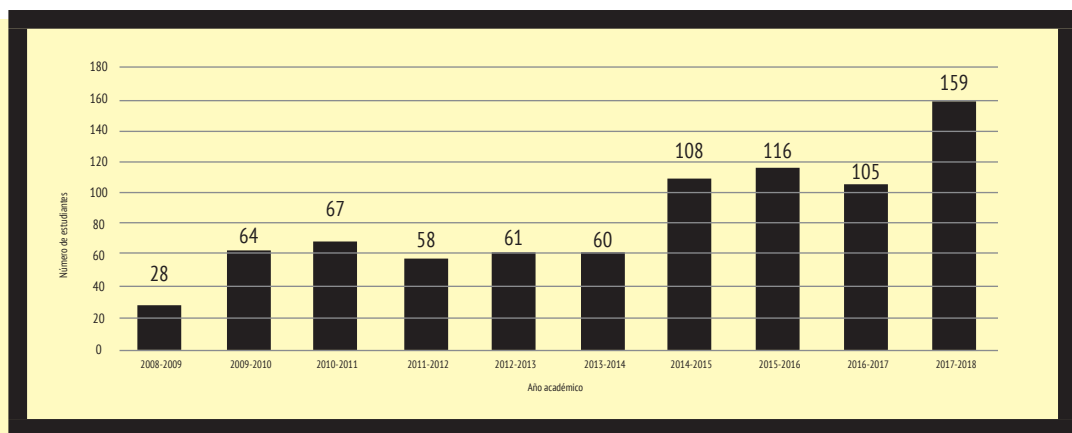
The program has had a total of 826 students since its origin in 2008 and the number of students has increased gradually from 28 to more than 60 students in the consecutive the next five consecutive academic years (except in 2011-2012, when the number was slightly lower) and to an average of 110 between 2014 and 2017. Finally, it had 159 students in the last academic year, showing a fivefold increase compared to the initial interest in this program in its beginnings (Figure 1).

INSTITUTOFRANKLIN-UAHANDINTERCULTURALCOMMUNICATION: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Perception of roles and communication

"The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place"
(George Bernard Shaw cited by BookBrowse)

FIGURE 1
Students in the
'Teach & Learn in Spain' Program. 2008-2018



The data analyzed in the current paper comprises students from the 2016-2017 cohort, which consisted of 105 students with a specific profile, as explained in section 5.1.1.

The program has had a total of 826 students since its origin in 2008 and the number of students has increased from 28 to an average of 110 students between 2014 and 2017.

A previous study (Vescan & Vitalaru 2018) showed that there is a difference regarding the perception of the role of the Language Assistants in Bilingual Programs in Madrid in the 'Teach & Learn in Spain' Master's Program, each one associated with the agent involved: American/English-speaking Language Assistants (LAs) and Spanish Lead teachers at schools. On the one hand, we observed that the role of the Language Assistants is not equally defined and perceived by the agents involved in the Bilingual Program and, on the other hand, that this perception is due to the differences between the education systems involved, which are reflected in several aspects.

In fact, several observations based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from regulations and guides, questionnaires to LAs, school's assessment reports on LAs' activity, and university practicum advisors' observation reports reflect the aspects that are differently perceived as part of what is considered 'role' and 'responsibilities'.

First of all, it is important to clarify the meaning of the concept of ‘role,’ since, in spite of its outward simplicity, when discussed in the context of education, it seems to be quite subjective and difficult to define. When analyzing this concept, we will be using two criteria: specific content-related functions, referring to the type of content taught as well as skills developed, and class responsibility, referring to the extension of control and limitations over the class and students. ‘Communication,’ on the other hand, is used to refer to the process used to discuss details about the content, methods, type of exercises, functions during lessons and to provide feedback or impressions after the class on a systematic basis.

Analysis of current regulations

The current regulations significant regarding the functions and role of LAs can be observed in Table 1:

A deeper insight into aspects such as the level of responsibility regarding planning, decisions regarding content taught, skills to be developed, assessment and class management (Table 2) shows that the LA has responsibility in four of these aspects and no responsibility in terms of planning, assessment and class management.

First, it is important to mention that ‘planning’ as a concept used by the authors in Table 2 refers to the taking of responsibility for the development of the syllabus, lesson planning and evaluation. This task is not actually the LAs responsibility as stated in *Orden 2670/2009, de 5 junio*.

Second, the main observation we can draw from the analysis of the current regulations and guides in Table 2 is that they are rather limited as to the specific information that can help students-LAs and teachers understand the extent of their functions and responsibilities.

TABLE 1
Basic regulations

LAWS AND REGULATIONS	GUIDES
Agreements between: Spanish Ministry of Education and British Council (1996) Spain and USA (1995 and 2005)	- Guía del Tutor. Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte Programa de Auxiliares de Conversación en España 2017-2018
Orden 2670/2009, de 5 de junio, por la que se regula la actividad de los auxiliares de Conversación seleccionados por el Ministerio de Educación y por la Comisión de Intercambio Cultural Educativa y Científico entre España y Estados Unidos de América, en centros docentes públicos de la Comunidad de Madrid. Boletín Oficial de la Comunidad de Madrid.	- Guía del Auxiliar. Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte Programa de Auxiliares de Conversación en España 2017-2018 - Spanish Language and Culture Assitants Program: Guidelines for Teaching Institutions in the United States and Canada 2017-2018. MECD
ORDEN 161/2011, de 21 de enero, por la que se modifica la Orden 2670/2009, de 5 junio	

Particularly, the content-related function mentioned in Section 3, as expressed in *Orden 2670/2009, de 5 junio and Guía del tutor, 2017-2018 (2018)* focuses on the teaching of cultural aspects, representing English speaking countries: language & culture and developing students' oral skills. As far as the second parameter, which we tagged as 'responsibility,' the reference is

TABLE 2
Basic aspects and laws

ASPECTS	RESPONSABILITY	
	YES/NO	SPECIFIC ASPECT IT REFERS TO (<i>Orden 2670/209, de 5 junio</i>)
PLANNING	NO	
TEACH	YES	To assist the lead leachers in the classroom Collaborate with teachers in creation of teaching materials
CONTENT	YES	To teach cultural aspects
	YES	To represent English speaking countries: Language & Culture Bring them closer to geographical, social, cultural and economic aspects
SKILLS	YES	To develop oral communication skills Correct grammar and pronunciation
ASSESSMENT (evaluation, grading, exams)	NO	
DISCIPLINE	NO	

Source: Vescan & Vitalaru (2018)

twofold although basic: on the one hand, to assist the lead teachers in the classroom and, on the other hand, not to take full responsibility in the classroom and no responsibility in terms of assessment (evaluation and grading and preparing or correcting exams), discipline, planning or the final year report.

We may say that in the case of both parameters the tasks are quite general and open to interpretation for both agents. 'Cultural aspects' can refer to a variety of elements (more or less related to the topics of the course subjects) and 'assisting' the teacher depends on several factors such as the type of subject and specific requirements considering the variety of subjects taught in English as part of CLIL (from Arts to Sciences), the teacher's experience and work method, knowledge of co-teaching strategies, planning strategies, communication system, to name a few.

This means that, in order for collaboration to be effective in terms of teaching a class in which both teachers and assistants feel that they have fulfilled their role, these elements have to be considered by both agents prior and during the program.

In light of the above mentioned synthesis and bearing in mind the data provided by all stakeholders involved in the teaching experience in the TLS Program (Language Assistants, lead teachers and university advisor's feedback), a more specific analysis which provides a deeper analysis has been included in Section 5. Starting from the current regulations, specific examples regarding the different difficulties experienced by the groups involved have been provided:

- The differences in the perception of LA's role at the school and in the classroom.
- Different interpretations of related regulations.
- Differences of communication styles rooted in cultural differences between both systems in an education context and more specifically in the classroom collaboration.

Analysis of 2016-2017 students' profiles and their perception

In this section two aspects will be discussed: on the one hand, aspects related to the students' profile and, on the other hand, to the results of the questionnaire that gathers information about their perception regarding different aspects.

First, the profile of the 2016-2017 students is essential to understand the context regarding training and needs. Therefore, aspects such as admission criteria, the field of their previous training (Bachelor degree major), prior teaching/education training, and student teaching practicum experience will be briefly discussed.

Regarding the admission criteria, the following criteria are essential: academic achievement, previous experience or interest in education settings, university studies related to teaching or languages, and additional training related to intercultural communication.

Considering the students' previous degrees or training, the fields are quite varied, as shown in Figure 2.

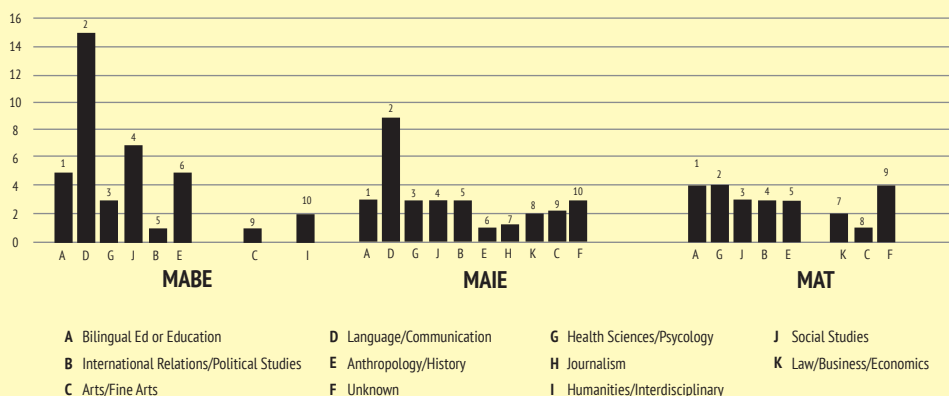
As observed, the fields with a higher percentage are Language and Communication, with 28 (31%) students in the three programs (15 in MABE, 9 in MAIE and 4 students in MAT); Social Studies, with 13 (14.4%) students (7, 3 and 3 students in the same respective MAs); Health Sciences, with 10 (11.1%) students (3, 3 and 4 students); Anthropology/History, with 9 (10%) students (5, 1 and 3 students); and Education, with 8 (8.8%) students (5 in MABE and 3 in MAIE).

Moreover, considering prior student teaching practicum experience, only approximately 10% of the students completed one, specifically those who majored in Education. Therefore, as mentioned in the Introduction, in the Teach and Learn program itself, 91.2 % of the total 105 students in the 2016-2017 cohort lacked specific teaching practice before enrolling.

In this context, the second research method used to gather data for our analysis was a questionnaire with 25 questions sent to LAs in the academic year 2016-2017. Its objective was to provide quantitative and qualitative information about aspects such as the students' impressions about their experience at the schools up to that point, the teaching methods used, their expectations

FIGURE 2
Students' profiles in the three programs

Students degrees profiles by master's 2016-2017



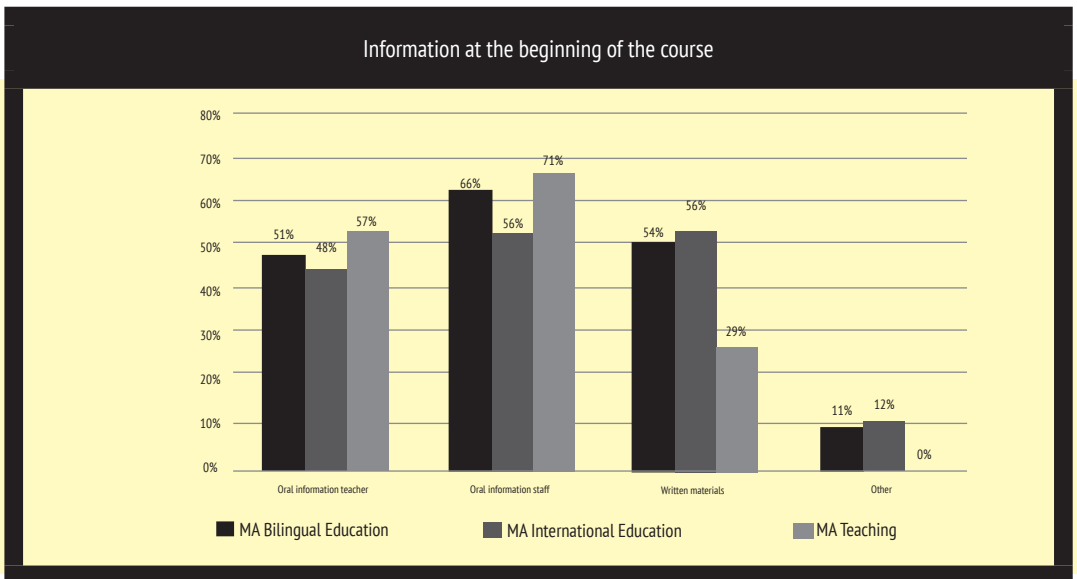
about relationships and collaboration with the lead teachers and staff, positive aspects as well as challenges and possible improvements of their experience at the schools. Its specific focus was on their perception regarding several ideas related to what we defined in Section 5.1 as 'role,' and 'communication,' as well as their perception of difficulties. The analysis of this paper focuses particularly on the following elements:

- How information was provided by the schools.
- Information about LA's roles and responsibilities.
- Feedback provided to teaching strategies.
- Responsibility: classroom management/discipline.
- LA's perception of potential causes of the difficulties/differences.

The results from the academic year 2016-2017 showed that, in spite of the general good results for 74 of the students (70%) in terms of the communication between teachers and assistants and their task completion, the perception of that communication process was very different for the teachers and LAs involved. In fact, there seemed to be a gap between the LA's expectations considering the communication system and the actual manifestation of their role, which affected their level of satisfaction with the completion of the task. Specifically, results from the academic year 2016-2017 in the MA in Bilingual Education reflected that, although most LAs had been given information at the beginning of the school year by the schools, only half of them

had received specific information on aspects that would facilitate coordination with the teacher, such as their role and that of the teacher, the system that would be used for communication during classes, and the planning of sessions and meetings for feedback, among other aspects (Vescan & Vitalaru 2018). If we compare the three MA programs taught in English, we can observe, in Figure 3, that the results are similar, showing that an average of 52% received more or less specific information on these aspects orally from the teacher and/or from another member of the school staff (64%) and 46% through written materials (brochures, leaflets, syllabi).

FIGURE 3
MAs in English 2016-2017



Moreover, the results to the question on aspects that need improvement considering the three MAs show the students' perception as to the success in the communication process. Figure 4, below, shows two of the aspects they listed within this topic, planning system and communication.

In all these programs, 'communication' and 'planning' were chosen as deficient from a list of six aspects⁸ by more than half of the students in each MA, with 76% and 77% for 'communication' in two of the programs and with 68% and 71% for 'planning' in the same programs. The total number of students who completed the questionnaire in each program is of 35, 25 and 14 (in the same order from Figure 4), which means that 53 students (72%) of a total of 74 underlined 'communication' and 48 (65%) underlined 'planning' as deficient. This suggests that expectations regarding roles were quite different and more specific than one would believe. An example of a comment from an MA in International Education student (Table 3) gives a clearer idea of the specific expectations students had particularly about the definition of their role and knowledge of the teacher's expectations.

⁸ Class management, disciplining, teaching methods and other.

FIGURE 4
Communication and planning needs.
Students' perception

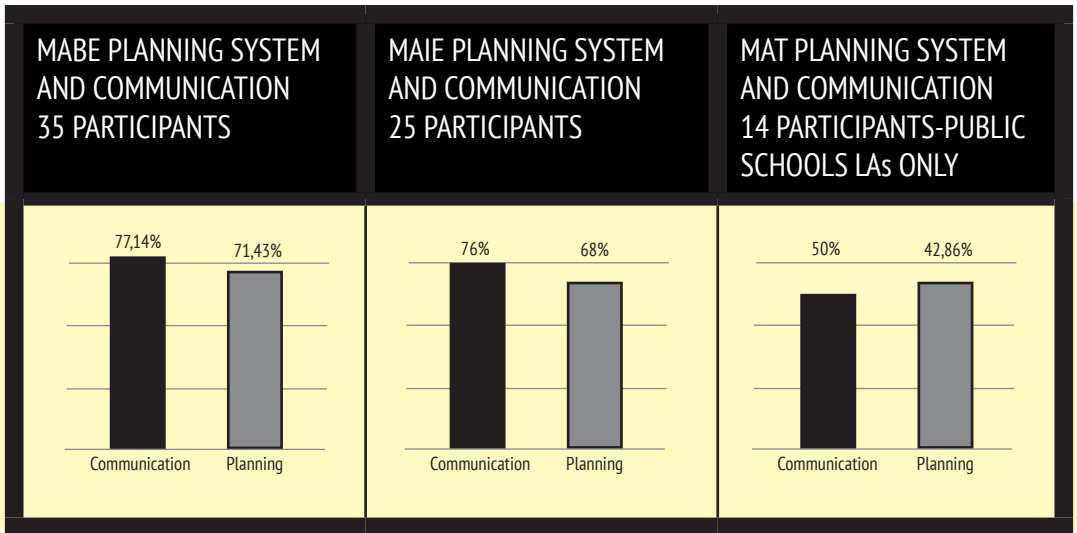


TABLE 3
Comment student MA in International Education.
(Questionnaire to students, 2016-2017)

In general, it was a good experience and I had a good relationship with the teachers. The staff and the teachers were nice and very welcoming, they made us feel comfortable at the school. The only problem as I mentioned various times it was unclear what their expectations were and they did not communicate on a regular basis what they wanted me to plan or prepare. I believe with more effective communication and more prior planning the lessons would of been smoother and more valuable. I also had new substitute teachers come in throughout the year with made it more difficult to adapt to the teacher's expectations, since it was various individuals. Individuals who also seemed to be unclear of my role as an assistant.

Further examples of comments included in Table 4, in this case, from the Advice for other LAs section of the questionnaire, show their impressions about the communication system in general. They encourage future LAs to be proactive, ask questions and not expect to be informed as specifically as they might be used to in the education system of their home country.

Finally, a specific question from the same survey allowed us to underline the perception LAs had regarding the causes of the difficulties they experienced due to cultural/educational differences. The high percentages in Figure 5, below, suggests that, in fact, the most frequent causes in the same three Master's were related to the LA's role (43-80%), the teacher's role (56-64%), communication (50-80%), general expectations (50-74%), and specific expectations (43-64%).

TABLE 4
Advice for future LAs

Be prepared for a lack of clear communication from staff. If you have a pending question, make sure to ask the staff instead of waiting for them to tell you.
Take initiative!
Yes, you have to be proactive in your job. They will really appreciate you.
Set up clear expectations from the beginning, ask a lot of questions about your role and define your role with them. Request meeting with the coordinator and follow up, because she won't. Ask for what you need until you get it.
Ask questions to the teachers, coordinators, everyone. If you don't ask, nothing will be told to you. Be relaxed and go with the flow because the school is in a difficult area and many of the students and families have difficult home situations.
Listen to the students's ideas on how they want to learn. They'll probably be vague, like "videos" or "games", but each class is different and it is up to you to work with the teacher to bring and interesting lesson.

Analysis of lead teachers' perspective

Two other sources of data for analysis were the school/lead teachers' assessment of LAs' activity at the schools and the university practicum advisors' observation reports. Each of them will be briefly explained to show their main focus.

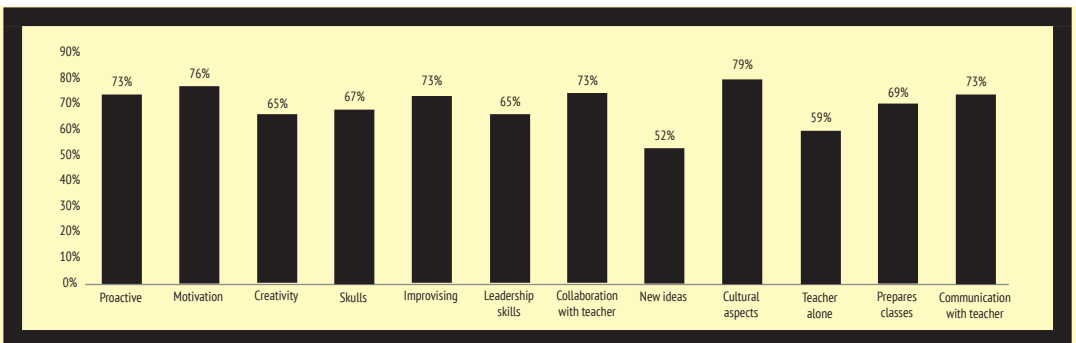
The results from the quantitative analysis of data from teachers showed that they seemed to believe that the basic information that the LAs needed to carry out his/her task was, in fact, provided at the beginning and during the course. The assessment that teachers normally provide to the university advisors for each LA focuses on aspects related to the fulfilment of his/her tasks/role and the acquisition of specific skills. Considering the accomplishment of tasks, teachers said that they highly valued both the teaching of cultural aspects as specific for content taught and skills related to planning, communication, initiative and creativity, which they seemed to expect from the LA without actually stressing their importance verbally. Thus, when we analyzed academic achievement for students in the MA in Bilingual Education by levels (excellent, good, average and poor) (Vescan & Vitalaru 2018) we observed that a high percentage of LAs (65 and 79%, respectively) had excellent and good levels of achievement for all the aspects included in the assessment report: collaboration with the teacher, preparing classes, teaching cultural aspects, improvising, creativity, being proactive (Figure 6).

The aspects that were most highly valued apart from content were attitude-motivation (73%) and communication through aspects such as collaboration with teachers (73%) and communication (73%), included in the report. On the other hand, skills that showed initiative and autonomous abilities were also highly valued through the following aspects: being proactive (73%),

FIGURE 5
Causes of difficulties from the LAs' perspective



FIGURE 6
Teacher's assessment. Good and excellent results



improvising (73%), preparing classes (69%), leadership (65%), proposing new ideas and teaching independently (52% and 59%) (Vescan & Vitalaru 2018). These results suggest that, although not openly expressed to students, most Spanish teachers perceive high communicative skills in the assistants and seem to assume that the communication process is effective in both directions⁹. Moreover, they expect a high degree of autonomy from them, which contrasts with the LAs' own expectations of clear-cut, specific instructions about the entire communication, coordination and teaching process.

IF-UAH AS MEDIATOR: UNIVERSITY PRACTICUM ADVISORS

University practicum advisors' perspective

Finally, the university advisors' observation reports on the LA's individual classes also provided qualitative information based on their direct observation of 62 students of the program (59% of all the students) while assisting teachers as LAs in bilingual charter or private schools during the first five months of the program. They provided specific feedback to each LA after each class specifically about teaching methods and attitude as a twofold strategy: first, for raising the LA's awareness about the teaching process and thus, help him/her improve practical knowledge and, second, for diminishing the gap between the two education systems involved, in an attempt to compensate for the lack of specific feedback from the lead teachers at schools, which LAs usually expect. At the same time, they drafted an observation report for each of the sessions they attended during the same period. The observation report for each student measured teaching procedures and behavior, attitude and strategies used to organize teaching and manage their class during specific classes. From this point of view, some of the difficulties shaped in the feedback provided to LAs by the advisors were related to different teaching aspects and to classroom management (eye contact), using demonstration and body language to provide explanation during class time, control of the academic learning time and the duration of each task, and different strategies that are effective for providing instructions to Spanish students.

In this context, we can say that the advisor's role is essential from two points of view. On the one hand, the advisor becomes a mentor that explains and employs strategies to help raise the student's self-awareness and improvement of pedagogical strategies throughout the program while acting as LA in schools. In general, the supervisor's observation reports and feedback notes reflected the pedagogical challenges for LAs in their teaching practice. By using this strategy, it provided the university advisors with a tool to improve the communication process between Spanish teachers and LAs and the effectiveness of their collaboration in the teaching practice. On the other hand, the advisors' reports are particularly relevant for the types of difficulties mentioned by the student or teacher and they reflect a need of mediation required from the advisor to prevent a potential conflict, help the student improve or solve the problem.

⁹ From this point of view, we are aware that this research has its limitations and that this aspect would have to be confirmed through a specific survey to teachers.

Taking into account the background information provided before and of the advisors' perception of 'roles' and 'communication,' it can be said that both concepts are essential for the program to be successfully completed by students. Thus, the advisors make sure that the roles of the agents involved (in this case, advisors, teachers and students) are clear from the first orientation session and that the communication with the advisor is constant throughout the program. Some examples will be discussed in the next section.

University advisors provided specific feedback to each LAs specifically about teaching methods and attitude in order to raise his/her awareness about the teaching process and to diminish the gap between the two education systems involved.

University practicum advisors as intercultural mediators

At a specific level and as seen in the previous section, practicum university advisors act as intercultural and academic mediators between the students-LAs and the lead teachers from the schools where they act as LAs. Therefore, they play an essential role in facilitating the communication process and providing context to possible difficulties by performing different tasks:

- a) Informing LAs about their tasks before starting the teaching practicum.
- b) Staying in contact with the LAs and guiding them through the process as well as keeping informed of the LA's difficulties.
- c) Assessing the LAs' activity during and after their teaching practicum, especially when they face difficulties.

The different types of elements that make that process possible are the orientation and observation sessions, feedback meetings, mid-term school assessment, the end-of-term evaluation (Vescan & Vitalaru 2018), and constant contact during office hours.

In order to provide examples of the topics that required mediation and their perception by the parties involved, a selection of the most common causes of difficulties that required mediation in the academic course 2016-2017 were analyzed: class management strategies, class management collaboration, collaboration in planning, planning meetings, and feedback to students. The analysis included the topic, the perception of the same aspects by each group, the difficulty involved, the feedback provided by the advisor to both groups and outcomes.

Part of the analysis was included in different tables (Tables 5-9). An explanation about each aspect follows.

In Table 5, we offer a synthesis of one of the most common topic that caused difficulties in the collaboration between the LAs and the lead teachers: ‘classroom management’ and ‘discipline/class management strategies’. As observed, the two different perspectives regarding this topic caused miscommunication the way that the pupils’ behavior should be managed in the classroom. The university advisors offered feedback to both LAs and lead teachers and helped in finding a common agreement about the strategies put into practice in the classroom.

TABLE 5
Examples and analysis.
Class management strategies

TOPIC/ RESPON- SABILITY	LAS’ DIFFICULTIES	LEAD TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVE	UNIVERSITY ADVISOR’S FEEDBACK
Class management & discipline strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtaining authority in the classroom as they were not familiar with strategies used by lead teachers. • Found out that each teacher has it’s own strategies • General practice of lead teachers raising their voice louder to their students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A need to immediately correct negative behaviors in the classroom even if raising their voice is necessary. • A common strategy in Spanish classrooms. 	<p>Communication difficulties raise when LAs and Lead Teachers have different perspectives regarding the strategies that are more effective for behavior correction in the classroom.</p> <p>Feedback for both agents: In Spain: generally accepted to raise the voice in order to get the group’s attention. LA: feels uncomfortable as in the US the perception is different.</p> <p>Solutions: Both teachers and LAs: Found a common understanding in order to be more effective in the classroom. Established some common strategies e.g. using attention grabbers, a voice signal in order to get students attention as “Class Class” and the class would answer “Yes yes” or they would call the class “I loly moly” and the class would answer “guacamole!”.</p> <p>Outcome: teachers would not need to raise their voice louder constantly in order to get students attention. LA: comfortable.</p>

Moreover, collaboration in the classroom is differently perceived by both LAs and lead teachers. This is the result of the difference in focus considering the two countries involved. While the teacher training programs in Spain do not focus on co-teaching strategies, in the US it is a common practice. In Table 6, both perspectives are summarized and a common strategy is established through the feedback received from the university advisors:

TABLE 6
Examples and analysis.
Class management strategies

TOPIC/ RESPON- SABILITY	LAs' DIFFICULTIES	LEAD TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE	UNIVERSITY ADVISOR'S FEEDBACK
Class management & discipline collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing discipline individually as they expect specific instructions regarding rules. • Expecting constant support and collaboration in the implementation of disciplining strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authority and leadership in the classroom is lost when discipline is not implemented individually. • If they provide consistent support in class regarding class management and behavior control, they would take part of LAs' authority in the classroom. 	<p>A dialogue regarding cultural differences in the way two educators are expected to collaborate in the classroom is necessary.</p> <p>Feedback for both agents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Spain, in teacher training programs Co-teaching strategies are not a focus in the curriculum and Lead teachers are not familiar with these strategies. As a result, they have a common belief that when two educators are in the classroom, they need to teach individually in the benefit of class management and discipline. • Co-Teaching is more common in the US and there is research (Peery, 2017) that proves that there is an academic and behavioral improvement in students when co-teaching occurs. <p>Outcome: awareness; some feedback provided when necessary; specific strategies depending on the circumstances.</p>

Another common challenge that the advisors identified is related to planning, collaboration, and meetings. In Tables 7 and 8, we can observe that there are different cultural perceptions regarding the planning of collaboration. From the LA's perspective, pedagogical planning requires more support from the lead teachers, while from the lead teachers' perspective it is considered an individual task. Thus, they expect a proactive attitude and more individual work from LAs.

Furthermore, in Table 8, we can observe that there is certain lack of time for actual meetings. On the other hand, the different perception of the dynamics and content that should be discussed during the meetings affects the impression that it gives to its participants. In this case, the university advisors provided feedback to both LAs and lead teachers helping them to establish common strategies to foster collaboration more effectively.

In Table 9 we can observe a summary of the different insights about the correction of English mistakes in the classroom and that commonly create a conflict between LAs and lead teachers. The university advisors helped to establish a dialogue regarding the differences in the perception of error correcting and pointed out the need to balance different error correction strategies that would facilitate the most effective collaboration in the class instruction.

TABLE 7
Examples and analysis. Planning collaboration

TOPIC/ RESPON- SABILITY	LAs' DIFFICULTIES	LEAD TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE	UNIVERSITY ADVISOR'S FEEDBACK
Planning collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receiving the specific information about the content they have to focus on in their teaching. Expecting collaboration and specific details in order to plan effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning is an individual task rather a collective task with other teachers. Students must show creativity, proactive behavior and autonomous skills. 	Lack of collaboration when planning can cause apparent lack of coordination and affect content taught and methods used by LA as well as students' behavior and attitude in the classroom. Feedback: Lead teachers: LAs' expect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A planned and guided collaboration to happen before the programs starts and during the course. Information regarding the next session's content beforehand so they can plan effectively. LAs: lead teachers expect them to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be able to improvise or to plan some activities individually without requiring their constant guidance. Bring suggestions or ideas regarding the content. Outcome: meeting to discuss the content of next sessions; LAs are more comfortable when improvising if necessary.

TABLE 8
Examples and analysis. Planning meetings

TOPIC/ RESPON- SABILITY	LAs' DIFFICULTIES	LEAD TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE	UNIVERSITY ADVISOR'S FEEDBACK
<p>Planning meetings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expecting to have specific meetings for planning content purposes. • Not attending regular meeting of the staff. • If forced to attend regular meetings, a conflict aroused. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings should provide dates or general information of school events. • Planning is an individual task. • No especific meetings for planning content purposes. 	<p>Not planning meetings on a regular basis specifically for organizing content can be a cause for misinterpretation and conflict.</p> <p>Feedback:</p> <p>Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAs need to have specific meetings to plan together. • In the US system, it is common to use planning meetings for lesson planning. • It is more common for teachers or educators to co-plan. <p>LAs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Spanish schools: meetings organized for general information and socializing with the rest of the staff. • Teachers plan more individually. • Teachers expect LAs to be more proactive in meetings and in getting the information from lead teachers regarding the lessons plans. <p>Outcome: more frequent and specific meetings; more socializing.</p>

IF-UAH AND STRATEGIC MEASURES FOR DIMINISHING CULTURAL GAPS

After the specific analysis of circumstances that required mediation from IF-UAH university advisors explained in the previous section, this section focuses specifically on describing the measures taken by Instituto Franklin-UAH to facilitate communication and training. Its actions, developed over the years, can be considered actual mediation acts, since their purpose was to provide context before the actual experience and whenever necessary in order to facilitate effective interaction between the agents involved. Ultimately, it can also be said that those actions were also aimed at preventing culture shock in a teaching context in Spain. A brief description of each follows:

TABLE 9
Examples and analysis. Feedback to students

TOPIC/ RESPON- SABILITY	LAs' DIFFICULTIES	LEAD TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE	UNIVERSITY ADVISOR'S FEEDBACK
Feedback to students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing feedback to their students by using the expected correction techniques commonly used by teachers. • Preferred using self-correction or peer correction techniques. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expecting LAs to correct immediately. • Believing that students would not learn English correctly and will not improve their mistakes if the teacher would not point out immediately. 	<p>Over-correction can be a source of misunderstanding and create conflict.</p> <p>Feedback:</p> <p>Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAs believe students will lose their motivation speak English if there are over-corrected. <p>LAs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead teachers preferred them to correct pronunciation or grammar immediately. • Teachers believe that this would avoid students making the same mistakes over time. <p>Outcome: found a balance between using different correction mistakes strategies by combining peer correction, self-correction or instant correction in some occasions.</p>

1) Initial workshop for LAs on differences between American and Spanish education systems since 2008. The topics that have been approached (gradually) ever since are the following:

It is important to mention that this workshop started as a basic general orientation session. However, it has been adapted based on the LAs' reaction to class experience each year and on the information provided through surveys by both LAs and teachers regarding ways of expression and communication styles in educational settings.

On the other hand, the coordinator has focused more and more on the definition of aspects that have proved to be problematic: roles, expectations and responsibilities in terms of specific ideas, such as "functions," "methods and strategies," and "specific tasks". Clarifying aspects related to "communication" has also become a priority. Thus, ideas such as who initiates encounters and how, who plans meetings and how often, if a specific procedure should be followed, among others, are also discussed with LAs at the beginning of the course.

TABLE 10
Topics workshop for LAs

Specific characteristics of Spanish education system in primary and secondary education.
Role as LA and expectations from teachers.
Role of main teachers and own expectations.
Information of planning regular meetings for discussion.
Cultural differences in general.
Discuss aspects related to classroom management based on hypothetical situations.
Discuss planning on a weekly basis/establish frequency.
Cultural differences in general.

TABLE 11
Topics workshop on co-teaching

Regulations regarding role of the Language Assistants.
Culture shock and cultural differences at school.
Co-teaching strategies.
Examples on how to collaborate in the classroom.
Lesson plan and activities for language assistants.

2) Workshop for main teachers and LAs on co-teaching (first edition in 2017). The different models of co-teaching are presented and shown with examples and, in mixed discussion groups, both categories reflect and discuss them based on possible applications. On the other hand, they share both difficulties and previous experience applied to different courses. The specific topics included in the syllabus are:

3) Feedback provided to LAs individually after observing them in class regarding both teaching aspects such as attitude, method, class management, among others, and cultural aspects that caused difficulties.

4) Workshop for lead teachers on American students since 2008. The topics discussed include:

TABLE 12
Topics workshop for lead teachers

Introduction to the objectives of the 'Teach and Learn in Spain' Master's program.
Introduction to culture shock and its symptoms.
Cultural differences between US and Spain.

5) Constant contact with the LA during the Practicum as an opportunity not only to stay informed about the process but also to avoid possible misunderstandings and compensate for the lack of specific feedback regarding LAs' teaching practice, which they tend to expect from the lead teachers. This is also an opportunity for the LA to receive feedback (written or oral) from the coordinator.

Finally, if we consider the three functions of the mediation process discussed in section 2, we could say that all the examples above show both rehabilitating and preventive actions from IF-UAH as, at some point, each was necessary to facilitate (further) communication and collaboration. Moreover, the actual changes that affected the IF's instructions policy and specific measures taken over the years to raise awareness and improve the situation can also be considered as a transformation process although at a very basic scale.

CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL IMPLICATIONS

As seen throughout our research, some differences between the Spanish and American education systems and particularly different perceptions regarding roles and communication not only reflect how culture can affect the perception of basic daily actions but also how it can result into actual training difficulties for the different groups involved. The different perspectives and groups that provided the data helped us draw conclusions about the types of challenges involved and their potential causes.

More specifically, the results from questionnaires to LAs from the academic year 2016-2017 showed that, in spite of the general good results for three thirds of the students in terms of the completion of their task and communication between teachers and assistants, the perception of that communication process was very different for the two stakeholders involved. In fact, it suggested an actual gap between expectations and experience. This refers mostly to the communication methods used, which show a certain lack of uniformity regarding systematic procedures of information and feedback in the different stages of the teaching practicum process. On the other hand, the analysis of lead teachers' assessments suggests that, although not openly

expressed to students, most Spanish teachers perceive high communicative skills in the assistants and seem to assume that the communication process is effective in both directions. Moreover, Spanish teachers expect a high degree of autonomy from LAs, which contrasts with the LAs' own expectations of clear-cut, specific instructions about the entire communication, coordination, and teaching processes from the Spanish teachers.

In this context, it is important to underline the essential role that the practicum university advisors and Instituto Franklin-UAH itself play in the effective communication process between Spanish teachers and the 'Teach and Learn in Spain' American LAs in bilingual schools. In fact, as seen through different examples and reflections, IF-UAH's actions are threefold: 1) preventive, by facilitating the communication process, providing context to possible difficulties; 2) rehabilitative, by solving conflicts; and 3) transformative, by changing basic regulations in the 'Teach and Learn in Spain' program's policy, information in the syllabi, guides, leaflets and, in general, influencing the actions of both the program and schools. Thus, based on the analysis of changes and factors that characterize the program as well as our experience in the program, it can also be said that Instituto Franklin-UAH itself plays a fundamental role as a mediator. In fact, IF-UAH acts as an intercultural and academic mediator between the education systems of two cultures, by identifying cultural differences, preventing misunderstandings and possible communication problems and solving difficulties that occur. IF-UAH has had more than 800 students in the TLS program since its beginnings in 2008, who were specifically trained not only to teach students at schools but also to identify cultural differences and challenges on their own and be able to face those differences, always with the support and understanding of their advisors. All of the actions taken by the program are designed to help students understand cultural context, and, ultimately prevent LAs from suffering from culture shock, which underlines IF-UAH's mitigating nature. In turn, these students help promote the cultural interchange in a dynamic and more comprehensive way as intercultural ambassadors and even mediators in their countries of origin or workplace.

Finally, we would like to draw attention to the different perceptions of the same aspects from the groups involved, how those perceptions can actually result in anxiety and stress, and the need for an actual intercultural mediator that understands, clarifies context, and prevents misunderstandings. The actual description of an effective communication system as well as a specific definition of roles, tasks and their application considering the intercultural background of all the agents involved is a gap in the current policy of the program in the region of Madrid. Our experience shows that these aspects should be part of what we envision as a 'cooperation system' which involves a specific knowledge of intercultural aspects and different collaboration strategies in the teaching instruction process in schools.

Although this research is limited considering the amount of data analyzed and the depth of the analysis carried out, it can serve to raise a deeper awareness on the topic and to provide some ideas for the implementation of practical solutions adapted for the groups involved in the near future.

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