

Master's Dissertation/
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**EXPLOITATION OF RESOURCES IN
CLIL SETTINGS. A PROPOSAL FOR
THE OPTIMIZATION OF THE ROLE OF
LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS**

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Exploitation of resources in CLIL settings. A proposal for the optimization of the role of language assistants.

Abstract

The present Master's Thesis aims to examine the current situation of language assistants in Spanish schools of Primary Education. In particular, relying on an extensive literature review in the field, this dissertation is intended to clarify what are the assets and shortages of having language assistants in CLIL programmes. Moreover, the purpose of this project is to focus on the shortages of language assistant programmes and point out possible pedagogical implications and a proposal for the optimization of the role of language assistants in CLIL contexts. The introduction of language assistants may promote some of the strengths of CLIL, such as its communicative nature. However, recent research points out that there are still some lacunae concerning the role of language assistants in bilingual education. Hence, the purpose of this dissertation is to clarify what could be improved through a proposal for training language assistants in this specific setting.

Key words: Language assistants, bilingual projects, CLIL, Primary schools, language assistant training.

La presente tesis tiene como objetivo examinar la situación actual de los asistentes de idiomas en los colegios españoles de educación primaria. En particular, basándose en una extensa revisión de la literatura en dicho campo, esta tesis está destinada a aclarar cuáles son las ventajas y las carencias de contar con asistentes de idiomas en los programas AICLE. Además, el propósito de este proyecto es centrarse en las carencias de los programas de asistentes de lenguas y señalar posibles implicaciones pedagógicas y una propuesta para la optimización del papel de los asistentes de idiomas en contextos AICLE. La introducción de los asistentes de idiomas puede promover algunas de las fortalezas de AICLE, como su enfoque comunicativo. Sin embargo, investigaciones recientes señalan que todavía hay algunas lagunas con respecto a su explotación y el propósito de esta tesis es aclarar qué podría mejorarse a través de una propuesta para capacitar a asistentes de idiomas en este contexto específico.

Palabras clave: Asistentes de idioma, proyectos bilingües, AICLE, colegios de primaria, formación para asistentes de idiomas.

1. INTRODUCTION. AREA AND FOCUS OF RESEARCH

One of the main promoters of the changes in foreign language teaching in the last 20 years in the Spanish education system is the enactment of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages or CEFRL (Council of Europe, 2001). This establishment has introduced some innovations in the teaching-learning process of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Spanish classrooms: The implementation of the communicative approach, the development of the four skills (listening, writing, reading and speaking), and the theoretical implications that Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory (1983) has in the planning and design of activities.

In this context, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has emerged as a timely approach that encompasses the teaching of content and language along with innovative techniques that place students at the center of the learning process. As Dalton-Puffer (2011: 189) points out, CLIL instruction has at times been constructed as a kind of catalyst for change in classroom pedagogies, implying that it somehow causes a shift from (traditional) teacher centered practices to (more innovative) student centered learning arrangements. It also implies the teaching of the L2 integrated with contents. Therefore, the L2 is not isolated as a subject becoming more dynamic and applicable to students' real lives, which makes CLIL an approach based on meaningful and lifelong learning.

In line with CLIL projects, the Spanish Ministry of Education has incorporated a network of collaboration with English native speaking countries to provide CLIL programmes with language assistants (henceforth LA), whose duty is to bring about not only the language but also their culture into the classrooms. However, the presence of LAs in the bilingual sections has received little attention so far from the academic field, and there is no abundance of research in which it is studied how coordination with teachers is, what are the functions developed, or the main methodological difficulties of the LA (Fernández-Costales, 2019).

In this regard, the role of the LAs is unclear and the guidelines offered in the "*Functions of a language assistant*" guide published in the website of the Ministry of Education are not sufficient for the implementation of a co-teaching model within the classroom and, quite

frequently, teachers report not being given consistent instruction on the practices that should be observed for effective co-teaching strategies (Méndez García and Pavón, 2012).¹

Fernández-Costales (2019) in his research *“The LA as a support of bilingual teachers”*, remarks that LAs demand greater coordination with teachers, identifying this as the main deficiency of the program; for their part, bilingual education teachers believe that more rigorous criteria should be established in the selection of LAs in relation to their didactic and pedagogical training. In accordance with these facts, the main requirement for the assistants is that they are native speakers of English, not that they are qualified as English language teachers (Crump, 2007). Summarized from Jenkins (2006), LAs are not required to have teacher training nor have any previous experience teaching. As a matter of fact, LAs are neither instructed nor introduced to student-centered methodologies which are the cornerstone of CLIL approaches and their contribution is merely based on their previous knowledge or other experiences in different classrooms.

On this basis, this study will analyse the role of LAs in the Spanish primary school classrooms and pinpoint their contributions and the room for improvement based on prior research and literature review. More specifically, the main objectives are the following: 1) To identify the lacunae and needs of LAs from both teachers' and LAs' points of view through an extensive literature review; 2) To categorize the findings in different groups of needs; 3) To design a proposal for the optimization of the role of language assistants in CLIL contexts. The manuscript will take into account previous research in the field and the theoretical guidelines available for LAs. Finally, a proposal for LAs training in different aspects related to classroom management and collaboration with teachers will be drawn in order to contribute to the improvement of CLIL approaches in bilingual projects.

¹ <http://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/dam/jcr:cf554e15-451f-4d92-a286-5dbf76c268eb/funciones-auxiliar-2019-en.pdf>

2. THEORETICAL BACKGORUND

There have been many authors and renowned educators who have shed light on the current change of paradigm in education due to the socio-economic, demographic, and technological changes in last decades. As a consequence of globalization, languages have become one of the main assets and tools to deal with in this new scenario, and their teaching is of the utmost importance in every education program all across the European continent. Nonetheless, most countries have explicitly or implicitly acknowledged the relevance of national languages as well as foreign language(s) (Ngoc, 2014). In fact, a white paper published in 1995 by the Commission of the European Communities, entitled *teaching and learning: Towards the learning society*, placed great importance on foreign/second language learning and teaching, by proposing the formula 2+1 (i.e., two foreign languages + mother tongue) as a priority strategy in education (Grenfell, 2002).

This is the reason why European policies require and encourage the learning of foreign languages as a part of the teaching process in schools and as part of its multilingualism policies prioritizing foreign language education within the EU. The objective of the European Parliament (2016) is for every citizen to master two languages in addition to his or her mother tongue as another way to unify and integrate citizens. In order to facilitate this integration, the EU has placed great importance on second language learning and teaching (Grenfell, 2003).

As a direct result of the European policies on languages and the enforcement of school linguistic projects in the Spanish context concretely, CLIL has emerged as one of the most widespread approaches enacted to introduce bilingual education. To put the readers in perspective, it would be convenient to mention that the term CLIL was coined by David Marsh (1994) and refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language. The implementation of CLIL programmes in linguistic projects is diverse and it differs from one school to another since sometimes it is imposed by the administration or it can be chosen by schools.

In contrast with other language teaching programmes, CLIL not only integrates the teaching of content and language but also changes the students' and teachers' willingness towards the teaching and learning process. Accordingly, it is easy to think that in CLIL settings students

feel more integrated and relaxed as they see the usefulness of learning a second language. In fact, students in CLIL classes are attributed with significantly more positive attitudes towards language learning. Indeed, CLIL classes seem to exert a positive influence on students' desire to learn and develop their competences in the foreign language (Merisuo-Strom, 2007).

It must be mentioned that Spain is one of the leading European countries in the widespread implementation of CLIL programmes (Coyle, 2010). However, as education is the competence of each autonomous community, not that of the central government, there is a wide variety of CLIL models throughout the country (Fernández Fontecha, 2009). Furthermore, what makes CLIL so suitable is its flexibility since there is not a unique CLIL approach and depending on the school structure and curriculum, it can be adapted to cover every kind of demand and attention to diversity. An evidence of this flexibility and adaptability is that Spain is a multilingual country where not only Castilian Spanish is spoken.

There are other official languages that coexist with Castilian Spanish depending on the community and these languages are also present in education: Languages such as Basque in the Basque Country, Catalán spoken in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, Valencian spoken in the Valencian Community, and Galician (spoken in Galicia). Thus, in the bilingual communities, Spanish is spoken alongside another official language and therefore, the main curriculum is taught through some combination of the co-official language and Spanish, while CLIL is taught through one or two foreign languages (Lasagabaster and Ruiz de Zarobe, 2010). Adaptability and flexibility materialized by the fact that Spain is one of twenty European countries to offer CLIL through three languages: the state language, the foreign language, and the regional language (Eurydice, 2012).

Additionally, to understand the Spanish model it must be highlighted that within the Spanish education system there are different programmes and models for the teaching of languages and within the schools:

- Ministry of Education – British council bilingual project: This is the oldest bilingual program implemented in Spain and the most widespread. It was created in 1996 with an initial implementation in 43 schools and the initial model was based on the British Council school in Madrid, where Spanish students are taught an “enhanced curriculum” in English (Reilly and Medrano, 2009).

- European and bilingual sections: These sections are available in some monolingual and bilingual communities. The main asset of these programmes is that they increase the teaching time through a foreign language being English the main L2 and CLIL approach is predominant. In these programmes, teachers are obligated to present official accreditation of a particular level in the foreign language taught in their school (Fernández Fontecha, 2009).
- Other national programmes: Programmes such as *BEDA*, (*Bilingual English Development and Assessment*) which is predominant in private schools or program for linguistic immersion, is also present in the Spanish education system. They are mainly aimed at improving the foreign language competences of individual students or teachers (Buckingham, 2016). Another well-known program is *PALE* (*Programas de Apoyo a la Enseñanza y el Aprendizaje de Lenguas Extranjeras*).
- Regional programmes: As aforementioned, most bilingual communities have their own bilingual projects which are implemented in many different forms and ways depending on the schools' structures. Hence, these programmes might change depending on the languages spoken in the community or region.

2.1 Language assistants in CLIL

Language assistants are a key player within CLIL programmes. LAs are usually defined as those foreign language native speakers who are part of an exchange program and are used in linguistic projects to support CLIL teachers. In other words, LAs are native speakers who support the teaching of English and content taught in English in schools for at least one academic year. They have been also regarded as “language and cultural informants” (Llinares and Dafouz, 2010: 98) and are recruited in their countries of origin and travel to Spain on a student visa. They may renew their participation for a second year, but then are not allowed to continue further (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2014).

LAs work up to 16 hours in the classroom per week, and at the discretion of the school principal, they may spend up to two of those hours teaching English conversation classes to the teaching staff (Comunidad de Madrid, 2014). To endow the CLIL programmes with satisfactory language standards, LAs are assigned to bilingual schools and, together with language teachers and especially content teachers, they put into practice a team teaching model or become mixed teaching teams (Méndez García and Pavón, 2012). Thereby, content

and language integrated learning (CLIL) programmes have undeniably given an unparalleled boost to staff interdisciplinarity or ‘globalized teaching’ in Spain (Segovia et al. 2010, 155).

One of their main roles is to bring the culture of the native speaking country into the classroom and be a representative of the country they come from. In other words, LAs are meant to support teachers by providing a native model of the English language, fomenting intercultural awareness, and supplying an authentic need for communication in English within the classroom (Buckingham, 2018). In this regard, the figure of the LAs has become one of the main assets of the bilingual programmes regardless the approach or methodology used to teach foreign languages. It must be pointed out that assistants bring freshness to learning environments and, in many cases, students feel highly motivated when they are in the classrooms since they can share experiences and are motivated by an appealing cultural exchange.

In addition, the presence of the language assistants is also beneficial for both content and language teachers. Having LAs in the classroom means that the teachers can benefit of a constant training in BICS and CALP and they can work in their pronunciation, grammar, listening, and writing skills in real time with a “first hand” source. For this reason, teachers have mainly valued their input in the foreign language and their contributions to teaching resources (Fernández Fernández and Halbach, 2010: 248).

In the students’ eyes, LAs are the best opportunity to learn contents through the language or the language itself depending on the approach. They foster motivation and in most cases, students feel engaged and understand the importance of learning a second language thanks to the figure of the LA who supports them in every step and also shows them the Real English (BICS) as well as the academic (CALP). In this respect, a bond between the LA and student is developed which helps students to feel more relaxed and comfortable when speaking in a second language. In response to a survey, secondary students who had studied in a primary bilingual school overwhelmingly found LAs to be «irreplaceable and [...] absolutely responsible for their linguistic and cultural advancements» (Gerena and Ramírez-Verdugo, 2014: 127).

However, more often than not, these assistants have not been properly trained or inducted in CLIL and they do not know about student-centered methodologies, classroom management or

design of activities and materials. Some LAs studied pedagogy at university; others have some teaching experience; many have neither education-related degrees nor teaching experience (Gerena and Ramírez-Verdugo, 2014). Therefore, their teaching support is merely based on intuition and on previous experiences when they could really contribute to the teaching process and become even a greater asset for the project. Notwithstanding, their role has often been misinterpreted by teachers and the LAs themselves causing LAs to often not be used to their potential. They sometimes carry out inappropriate tasks or they may not completely fulfil their role, often causing undesirable results (Buckingham, 2018). Gerena and Ramírez-Verdugo (2014) suggest that LAs should be more integrated as a linguistic and cultural resource, as they had also witnessed LAs performing menial chores such as making photocopies and preparing materials.

Effectively, there is research on this matter pointing out what are the strengths and weaknesses of the LAs programmes based on students', teachers', and language assistants' feelings and opinions. The main conclusions are usually the same: Lack of training, different expectations, unclear definition of LAs' roles and tasks or education non-related qualification on the LAs' side among many others. With respect to some of these conclusions, some authors have expressed their standpoints on how LAs are being used in Spanish primary schools in many different linguistic projects. For instance, many have considered that LAs should be trained teachers rather than university students Fernández and Halbach (2010).

Ortega Cebreros (2003) and Scobling (2011) highlight that LAs are often given a less important role to play in the classroom, which is perceived by students. As students are used to working with grammar and a textbook, they see LA-led activities related to culture or oral skills as less important and even frivolous. Similarly, as regards language assistants' opinion on the issue, in other studies on LAs in Spanish schools, it has been documented that LAs tend to feel ill-prepared and unsure of their role (Hibler, 2010; Scobling, 2011; Tobin and Abello-Contesse, 2013) since LAs perceived deficiencies in their training despite feelings of enthusiasm and usefulness when taking on responsibilities (Buckingham, 2018).

All things considered, there does not seem to be homogeneity and clarity about the LAs roles in the classroom, their participation, their collaboration with teachers or their skills in relation to methodologies. On a brighter note, they are regarded as the ones who bring the motivation into the classrooms and the most natural and direct contact with the foreign language. They

are also regarded as the ambassadors of their countries bringing about diversity and multiculturalism making out of the language something alive and real for students. Therefore, it is recommended that bilingual programmes examine the role of the LA and create a comprehensive training plan that efficiently prepares the diverse body of LAs (Buckingham, 2018).

2.2. Ministry of Education selection process. Candidates, requirements, benefits, and functions

The purpose of this section is to depict the process by which LAs are eligible to work in Spanish primary schools, what are the requirements and the benefits they obtain by being part of the program as well as their functions in the schools.

The website of the Ministry of Education establishes the parameters² that the LAs have to meet in order to apply for a vacancy in the Language Assistant Exchange Program. It also provides further information on necessary procedures for LAs to begin the process and states what LAs are expected to do in the schools and what not through the *Language Assistants guide (2019-2020)*. Moreover, a more detailed guide called *Functions of a language assistant for the 2019-20 school year* delves into the duties and challenges that LAs have to assume in the program.

First of all, to be eligible to apply the so called LAs must hold a degree or to be in their last year, not be over 60 years, and must come from the following countries: Germany, Australia, Austria, Belgium (French or English), Brazil, Bulgaria (English), Canada (French or English), China (Chinese and English), United States of America, Russia, Filipinas, Finland (English), France, Hungary, Ireland, India (English), Italy, Luxemburg (English), Malta, Morocco (French), Norway (English), New Zealand, Netherlands (English), Countries of Oceania (Fiji, Salomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu), Poland, Portugal, United kingdom, Singapore, Sweden (English), Switzerland (German, French or Italian) and Tunisia (French).

² <http://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/servicios-al-ciudadano/catalogo/general/99/998188/ficha/998188-2019.html#dg5>

Furthermore, the LAs will receive a monthly stipend of €700 as an aid for subsistence and accommodation and are covered by medical insurance, either under the European public system for European LAs or by private insurance for non-Europeans. According to the Language Assistants guide (2019-2020: 23) “language assistants will start their assignment on the 1st of October and will end on the 31st of May. The language assistant will normally collaborate with the teacher twelve hours a week in the classroom and enjoy the same school holidays as the school’s teachers. The number of weekly hours may vary in some Autonomous Communities”.

As for what LAs are expected to do in the classroom and what not, the Language Assistants guide (2019-2020: 26-27) states that “a language assistant is only to help the classroom teacher, and his or her efforts are aimed to strengthen the oral skills of the students”, and also sketches the tasks that the LA may perform under the supervision and coordination of the classroom teacher which are the following:

1. Conversation practice by topic.
2. Presenting the culture of your country.
3. Create materials to facilitate students learning as directed by the teachers.
4. Make recordings in your own language which the language teachers may use as an example of a native speaker’s speech in the target language.
5. Contribute to the training of the teachers at the school, provided that you have time available in your schedule.
6. Other similar tasks.

In further detail and more extensively applied to the classroom context, the functions of the LAs are delimited in the aforementioned Functions of a language assistant guide published on the Ministry of Education web site for the 2019-2020 school year and are as follows:

1. Support classroom teacher(s).
2. Help strengthen, above all, the oral and communicative skills of the students.
3. Share aspects of your culture.
4. Participate in extracurricular activities: cultural activities, sports, field trips, school exchanges, etc. (If possible).
5. You may participate in language training activities for the school teachers.

6. Collaborate in the preparation of teaching materials for classroom use.
7. Work with one or multiple teachers in a foreign language class or in non-language subjects.
8. Work in the same classroom as the teacher, helping upon request.
9. When the class is divided into two groups: one group with the teacher and the other with you.
10. Preparing your in-class participation ahead of time, according to the teacher's instructions.
11. The teacher can provide you with teaching material or ask you to prepare your own material according to his or her instructions.
12. Find out about departmental or library resources (books, CDs, DVDs, etc.).
13. Keep track of class schedule.
14. Planning notebook: write down what you have planned, what you have done and what you haven't, so as not to repeat or skip content with different groups.
15. Class roll: to get to know the students.
16. Extra teaching material and exercises to supplement assignments from the teacher.
17. Above all else, you must speak your own language.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW. RESEARCH ON THE FIELD. LAs' ASSETS AND SHORTAGES

As it has been pinpointed at the beginning of this Master's Thesis, there is still no abundance of research in the role that the LAs play in the bilingual programmes and by extension, how their participation and contribution to CLIL settings could be improved. However, the purpose of this section is to analyse previous case studies in order to draw empirical conclusions based on teachers', students' and LAs' opinions and feelings about the role and participation of the last ones in the classrooms. Both positive and negative aspects will be assessed and contrasted in order to elucidate what are the assets of having LAs in bilingual programmes but also what might be improved in order to fully explode the great resource that LAs are in CLIL and any other bilingual context. On this basis and taking into account the lacunae observed through the analysis of other studies, pertinent conclusions and pedagogical implications will be drawn as well as a proposal for the optimization of the role of language assistants with the aim of improving their contribution and the co-teaching in CLIL settings.

One of the researchers who has delved in the LAs' matter deeply at every level in Spain is Lyndsay R. Buckingham. In her doctoral thesis (Buckingham, 2016) and subsequent articles consequence of her thesis, Buckingham accurately analyses different types of LA in the Spanish education system, how are they used and what are the potentials problems in the LAs program.

As the author explains, LAs and teachers were asked for general information first such as their age, nationality, studies, and what were their roles in the school. Afterwards, they were asked to describe their expectations, opinions and experience with regard to the bilingual programmes. The second part consisted of open-ended questions to request details of participants' expectations that otherwise could not be collected by means of closed questions. A total of 81 LAs, the large majority of participants were from the United States followed by the United Kingdom, and 127 teachers completed the initial questionnaire and 88 LAs and 110 teachers subsequently completed the follow-up questions. A detail which is relevant on this study is that about one quarter of the LAs (between 22.2% and 29.5%) held some university degree related to education. Of those holding education-related degrees, between 27.8% and 34.6% held a Master's degree.

After an exhaustive analysis of the answers given by both teachers and LAs, it can be stated that the compiled potential problems surrounding the role of LAs can be organized into four categories: a misinterpretation of the role of the LA, a lack of planning and communication between the teacher and LA, a lack of implication or effort by the LA, and a lack of training for the LA. There are many tables in this study which represent the parameters researched through the questionnaires but perhaps, the most representative and the one which sheds more light on the current deficiencies in the LA programmes is the table 44 in page 210 literally reproduced as follows:

Difficulty	%
Being "misused" in the classroom	53.4%
Lack of communication with teacher (s)	47.7%
Mismatched expectations between teacher and LA	46.6%
Excessive responsibility in the classroom or with students	40.9%

Lack of preparation for your role in classroom activities	37.5%
Lack of preparation or training for your role as LA	33.0%
Lack of participation in classroom activities	30.7%
Excessive participation in classroom activities	21.6%
I have had no difficulties.	19.3%
Other: Inadequate support from the Language Coordinator	1.1%
Other: Teachers not inviting	1.1%
Other: Discipline of students	1.1%
Other: Lack of resources	1.1%
Other: Lack of respect by teachers Other:	1.1%
Other: Lack of time to complete my duties	1.1%
Other: Lack of training by my teachers in knowing how to use me effectively	1.1%
Other: Little help with classroom management	1.1%
Other: Just initial difficulties	1.1%
Responses	88

Table 44. LA Follow-up questionnaire: Difficulties experienced (Buckingham, 2016)

Evidence from this study and others (Hibler, 2010; Ortega Cebreros, 2003; Scobling, 2011; Tobin and Abello-Contesse, 2013) shows that there is great disparity in the use of LAs in the classroom, ranging from scenarios of productive team teaching and effective project work to problematic relationships between teacher and LA and misuse or lack of use of the LA (Buckingham, 2016). Furthermore and in line with the fourth item in the table which is a very remarkable contradiction with the guidelines offered in the LAs handbook, LAs have often reported being left alone to teach groups of students, whether a small group or the entire class-group (Hibler, 2010; Ortega Cebreros, 2003; Scobling, 2011; Tobin and Abello-Contesse, 2013).

As a matter of fact, the results and conclusions of this study could be compared with others which results point in the same direction. Despite the fact that the role of the LA seems rather straight-forward in the handbooks, previous studies suggest that it is often misinterpreted by both LAs and teachers (Buckingham, 2018). For instance, almost all the LAs surveyed by Hibler (2010) were in want of more communication with teachers, and 80% of CTs felt the

need to communicate and coordinate better with LAs. Three LAs said that this lack of communication with CTs led to them leading class activities without previous preparation. In fact, 73% of LAs in the same study said they felt lost at times in the classroom and were not sure of what they should do. Half of LAs said they did not participate in most classroom activities, though 60% of CTs said that LAs did participate in most activities.

Paradoxically, 67% of teachers in the same study wished the LAs were more involved in the class. To reinforce the results showed in table 44 and others in Buckingham's thesis, it should be convenient to reproduce the answer of two LAs (among many others in the study) which are very illustrative and perfectly reflect the situation of a high percentage of LAs. For instance, one of the participants outlined:

"I have received a lot of training about specific activities over the year. But I feel I haven't been given the more basic, over-arching perspective on bilingual education. I get the feeling the teachers I work with don't get this either. It's like we're missing a crucial link to put everything else in perspective. On the job, you get a lot of practice and you begin to form your own theories. It would be interesting to see if the theories I have developed doing this are actually backed up by bilingual education research".

On the other hand, another LA expressed an insightful comment which is very representative with regard the lack of training received by LAs upon arrival to Spain:

"I have worked with kids at summer camps, school age before school care and daycare, so I am 100% fine that there isn't specific training! But, it wouldn't hurt for all of us to have the same basis of information and that all school[s] expected the same of all of us! All of my friends do different jobs; however, we are all auxiliaries [language assistants]. As auxiliars, we are given half information for everything (mostly appointments at aluche [for residency paperwork] and what is expected in the classroom), I would like to know concrete information and everyone should have the SAME information! Instead of one list here, one list there, etc. Also, maybe in the [United] states there is a different idea of "training or preparation", but I don't think that we were trained at all! Yes, I went to the auxiliar meeting, a woman did one "get to know you" activity to demonstrate. In my mind a couple hours of them throwing random information at you isn't training by any means!"

As can be deduced, this thesis and its results reveal the lacunae of LAs' program in the Community of Madrid and specifically points out what both LAs and teachers would need in order to revert the situation. Subsequently, other articles written by Lyndsay R. Buckingham which summarize the investigation carried out in the thesis were also reviewed. These articles are "Defining the role of language assistants in the bilingual classroom" (2018), and "Language assistants' views on the training provided by bilingual programmes in Madrid" (2018). Both articles synthesize and summarize the results extracted from the aforementioned thesis and also mention results from other studies.

As might be expected, there is good feedback on the performance of LAs in the classrooms from both students and teachers. In fact, there are many comments that highlight LAs' job collected from these articles. Buckingham (2018) states that students have also generally found LAs to be quite helpful, kind and sensitive and have credited LAs for helping them master English.

The conclusion that can be extracted from this thesis and subsequent articles is that even though the contribution of the LAs in CLIL settings in our bilingual programmes is invaluable, there is still important lacunae related to aspects such as definition of the role of LAs, optimal exploitation of such resource, communication and collaboration with teachers, duties in the classroom and overall appropriate training for CLIL settings. As Buckingham (2016) remarks in the discussion of the results and conclusion of the study, LAs perceived a lack of training and preparation for their role in bilingual schools and as a consequence, if LAs are not clear on their role, this can translate into feelings of insecurity when they arrive to their assigned school. In fact, More than half of LAs felt their duties during the school year did not correspond to what was explained in the training.

In the same line of investigation, the study conducted by Fernández-Costales (2019) analyses the current situation of LAs in Spanish bilingual education classrooms and specifically examines what are the main challenges of LAs to support teachers who teach non-linguistic (content) subjects through an additional language in CLIL contexts. Throughout the study, the author also provides information on the current situation of LAs in Spanish bilingual programmes, what are the requirements and training for LAs, their functions according to the current laws and also reviews some previous studies in the field.

In the section 2.3 of the study, the author depicts the LAs' functions such as support teachers they work in conjunction with to contribute to boost and reinforce the students' communicative skills, to act as ambassadors introducing and sharing aspects of their own culture, to encourage students to use LE in oral activities, to be the source of motivation for students and additionally when possible, to collaborate in afterschool activities and along with the teachers in the design of teaching materials as well as help teachers to improve their command of the language. Lastly, but not less important, the author also remarks what LAs are not required to do under any circumstance. Tasks such as designing assessment tools or correcting exams although they are allowed to cooperate if necessary, teaching programming or surveillance tasks and definitely, LAs should never be in charge of a lesson development since they are in the classrooms exclusively to support the main teachers. The study also specifies according to the Ministerio de Educación (2017: 20) when or in what contexts the LAs should intervene:

- When carrying out practical activities related to the subject matter but not in the explanation of the main concepts.
- In activities in which students put into practice communicative skills such as debates or explanations, etc.
- In the elaboration of students' oral and written presentations.
- In games, contests, etc., in which students have to prove what they have learned.
- In tasks or projects in which students are working in groups supporting them in linguistic issues.

Nonetheless, one of the main advantages of having LAs in the classroom as Fernández-Costales (2019) rightly points out is that with the LAs the ratio of students per teacher, since the class can be divided into two groups, or let the assistant rotate and work in a more personalized way with small groups of students (or individually).

The qualitative research consisted of semi-structured interviews with the aim of offering more flexibility and openness in the answers so the participants could express what they truly think about their roles and contributions. The results were analysed by setting the categories of the answers inductively (Grounded theory) and using the software MAXQDA for qualitative analysis. The sample of participants consisted of 5 LAs (2 from USA, 2 from England and 1

from Ireland) of whom 4 had university studies and interestingly enough, none related to education, and 5 teachers from primary public schools and having the teachers at least 3 years of teaching experience. There are several findings after analysing the answers provided by teachers and LAs being especially noteworthy, accordingly with the researches previously reviewed, that LAs demand much more coordination with the teachers being this issue one of the most important lacunae in the program.

Furthermore, the teachers consider that a more rigorous criteria should be established when selecting LAs in relation to their didactic and pedagogical qualification (Fernández-Costales, 2019). On a broader horizon, however, the teachers highlight the asset that LAs are to CLIL programmes since they enrich them by being real models of the language as well as the ambassadors of a foreign culture in the classroom.

The study by Méndez García and Pavón (2012) aims at finding out if the collaboration among teachers, particularly between LAs and content teachers, with the subsequent use of two languages in the same classroom, may result in the development of strategies that will ultimately contribute to the improvement of the teaching process, the learning of content matter and also the development of language skills and language awareness. As it has been observed throughout this study collaboration between teachers and LAs is essential for the purpose of clarifying the LAs roles and what should be the extent of their participation in the classroom. In this way, the expectations of both teachers and LAs are met avoiding misunderstandings and optimizing the contribution of LAs to the students' learning process.

Hence, as Méndez García and Pavón (2012) suggest in this study, to endow the CLIL programmes with satisfactory language standards, LAs are assigned to bilingual schools and, together with language teachers and especially content teachers, they put into practice a team teaching model or become mixed teaching teams. For that matter, in CLIL settings and as the name suggests, the teaching of contents and language is integrated thus the need of collaboration among teachers since it is not unusual anymore to see two teachers in the same classroom and in the same lesson. Thereby, it is understood that teaching in a CLIL context is not an isolated task and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programmes have undeniably given an unparalleled boost to staff interdisciplinarity or 'globalized teaching' in Spain (Segovia et al. 2010: 155).

Nevertheless, in this research two shortcomings are identified among others. On the one hand, in a CLIL context at least two subjects are taught in the target language, English in most cases, but also the target language is taught as a subject itself. Therefore, one of the shortcomings outlined is that as the agreement with the foreign institutions does not oblige schools to recruit language assistants who are specialist foreign language teachers, some might exhibit a lack of competences and skills in this area (Méndez García and Pavón, 2012). To ameliorate this situation, the LAs receive a very brief training (one day course) on their functions and roles. As might be expected, this training is totally insufficient to teach in a CLIL context since this approach is compound of several aspects which require of a proper induction to understand its functioning.

On the other hand, a suggestion for the improvement of the second deficiency regards collaboration between language and content teachers and could be weekly meetings that are crucial for the effectiveness of the teaching process (Pavón and Rubio 2010). Teachers and language assistants are not provided with a comprehensive set of guidelines to explore how to collaborate in class, nor does there seem to be a delivery model. Yet, when planning bilingual projects the coordinator is meant to schedule one-hour weekly meeting for content and language teachers to plan, assess and devise their teaching practice. However, sometimes these meetings do not take place for many different reasons and consequently, to make the most out of their collaboration and to consistently maintain communication and an exchange of ideas, content/language teachers and language assistants need to rely on their intuitions, knowledge and expertise to effectively design co-planning strategies for teaching and assessment purposes (Méndez García and Pavón, 2012).

With the aim of clarifying all these aspects, through the analysis of teachers' perceptions of how this co-existence is structured and implemented, this study aims at elucidating the background knowledge they possess, the collaborative methodologies that they regularly implement when teaching together, and the mechanisms applied when using the two languages to transmit academic or cultural content. The research tools used in this investigation were semi-structured interviews specially designed by the authors for this qualitative research. The sample of participants consisted of 3 LAs, 7 content teachers and 4 language teachers all of them from 3 different schools.

The main findings with regard to teachers and LAs collaboration is at the very least illustrative in line with one of the main deficiencies of the LAs programmes. According to Méndez García and Pavón (2012) teachers report not being given consistent instruction on the practices that should be observed for effective co-teaching strategies and the outcome is that their teaching practice is mainly based on their intuitions and on the previous knowledge they may have acquired. On this premise, it is obvious that the guidelines on the functions of LAs provided by the regional government of Andalusia, in this particular case, and by the Ministry of Education in the case of other communities is insufficient for the implementation of effective co-teaching.

As the authors remark in the conclusion of the study, contrary to the recommendations of the ideal pattern for collaborative teaching (Adams, Cessna and Friend, 1993; Murawski and Dieker, 2004), teachers do not share the same level of knowledge, expertise and skills about the special type of instruction and assessment required. And what is more important, there is no regulation concerning the definition of classroom roles and responsibilities, which could prove detrimental for the successful handling of the two languages (Méndez García and Pavón, 2012). In other words, coordination is one of the crucial elements for the success of the participation of the assistants in the bilingual classroom (Caparrós, 2010; Lova y Bolarín, 2015).

On the same basis, Dafouz and Hibler (2013) underline how each year more than 800 native English-speaking language assistants are brought into Madrid's bilingual programme to assist CLIL teachers and promote students' foreign language and intercultural competence. They highlight, however, that even when a great effort is being put into bringing these LAs to better CLIL programmes and the economic cost that it entails, no specific guidelines are provided by the bilingual programme administrators regarding how the assistants should collaborate with the local teachers in the classroom (Dafouz and Hibler, 2013). In this scenario, the study intends to describe how teachers and LAs interact in the classroom, how their roles are assumed and distributed, and how these roles are articulated linguistically as classroom discourse functions.

To put this issue in perspective, the study conducts a literature review based on team teaching, the different styles and features which helps to clarify the importance of collaboration and cooperation among teachers and LAs in CLIL settings. The practice of team teaching has

become a trend in many educational contexts as interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches (Davis, 1995) and they have proven beneficial for effective learning. Team teaching is understood as a situation that refers to two teachers collaborating for a shared goal being the most common format the simultaneous presence of both teachers in the classroom actively involved in instruction (Buckley, 1999).

In fact, team teaching has been addressed from sociocultural theories of learning which support the idea that team teaching talk has a pedagogical and a critical and social function. Surely, students acknowledge the dynamic nature of the interplay among teachers, learners, and tasks, and provide a view of learning as arising from interaction with others (Dafouz and Hibler, 2013). According to Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2004), collaborative teaching is effective for students with a variety of instructional needs, including English language learners. Nonetheless, team teaching can be approached from student-centered methodologies since the teachers would act as a role model for students when using different techniques and strategies to achieve a common goal. Certainly, team teachers serve as models of cooperation whereby students are able to emulate the collaborative skills that their teachers exhibit in the classroom (Hibler, 2010).

Besides, this study also reveals important results that were found in 2009 when the Community of Madrid commissioned drew on the 300 questionnaires collected after a LAs' training session in order to shed light on their needs and the reality of the programme. The data was analysed and the findings revealed that in spite of the huge effort made for the programme to be successful, the role of the LA was insufficiently defined and also both teachers and LAs demanded more ownership in the programme as a whole (Dafouz and Hibler, 2013).

Emphasizing the sheer importance of coordination and collaboration among teachers and LAs in order to obtain quality in bilingual programmes, Lova and Bolarín (2015) aim to evaluate the theoretical and regulatory framework under which bilingual programmes in Murcia are implemented and elucidate teachers' opinions on the reality of coordination among different participants, including LAs in bilingual programmes. The study highlights the importance of coordination among teachers and LAs and reviews other authors' opinions on the matter. For instance, Scobling (2011) stresses that communication between teachers and assistants is essential to work together and reach agreements on the preparation and organization of

lessons because «the better prepared classes are, the better they work and are those in which the assistants feel more comfortable in order to develop their teaching task » (Scobling, 2011: 34).

To comply with the objective of the research, the author interviewed 14 teachers from 8 different public schools using as an instrument to collect data an open and semi-structured interview to provide flexibility, openness and transparency on the answers. The interviews were structured in two different parts. The first one was focused on collecting personal data about the participants and the second was based on finding out how coordination tasks with other teachers and LAs are carried out, if these tasks differ greatly from those they carried out before joining the program and if coordination goes beyond their school, that is, if there is connection with other schools (Lova and Bolarín, 2015). The main findings which were connected with LAs concluded that the teachers outlined the need of more coordination with LAs.

In this regard, Lova and Bolarín (2015: 106) pointed out that “the LA is fundamental in the improvement in the oral skills, both for the help provided and for the motivation that they instil in the children appreciating their presence as very positive” hence, the need of a plan or guidelines to improve this matter and as a consequence the quality of the bilingual programme. The findings also remark the channels by which teachers and LAs communicate being the most frequent informal contacts (breaks, hallways, in the yard) and sometimes even through e-mail and social networks (Lova and Bolarín, 2015). As might be expected, these means of communication are appreciated since they show the willingness of all the participants and their implication and commitment with the project.

Nevertheless, they also show the need of designing other ways or plans to make communication and therefore coordination more effective and beneficial for students. For this purpose, as rightly emphasize Laorden and Peñafiel (2010: 333) “it would be necessary to free the teachers involved in the project from some teaching task so that they can have hours of coordination and teamwork”. Nonetheless, the study also remarks the invaluable asset that LAs mean for the bilingual programmes and the authenticity that they bring into the classrooms. It is worth to mention that they bring about the language, culture and society of the countries where the foreign language is spoken, especially from their country of origin (Caparrós, 2010).

Moreover, Lova and Bolarín (2015: 103) state that “the use of materials from English speaking countries, tourist brochures, maps, postcards, magazines, posters, images of cities, houses, dances, meals. . ., contributes to awakening the curiosity of the students to know the life and culture of those countries” and also, it rises the level of motivation of the students and their cultural knowledge (Pérez, 2008) as well as teachers’ motivation (Madrid, 2004). Additionally, the article concludes with a reflection that must be taken into account for further research and pedagogical implications. According to Lova and Bolarín (2015: 107) “the philosophy of the integrated curriculum and the interdependence of languages and content represent a task that must be based on the effort of coordination between the participants”.

In a more personal and descriptive way, Caparrós (2010) comments on the importance of LAs through a description of her personal experience as a LA in an English native speaking country. This research describes the measures that the Spanish government has implemented to promote foreign languages and also delves into the role of LAs in the classroom. In a sober and straight to the point introduction, Caparrós describes what is the situation in Spain with regard to foreign languages. Caparrós also mentions the study conducted in 2006 called “the Europeans and their languages”. In accordance with this research, Spain ranks sixth within the EU after Hungary, Portugal, Italy, United Kingdom and Ireland in relation to the number of people who do not speak a second language. In fact, 56% of the Spanish population only speak their mother tongue. However, in the last two decades this tendency seems to have been reverted since the vast majority of schools have opted for bilingual models of education, implementing measures and resources to promote foreign languages as essential tools in modern societies.

Following these assumptions, Caparrós focuses her study on the role of LAs in the classroom highlighting their importance and also describing her own experience. For the reasons aforementioned, the first measures to promote the learning of foreign languages were taken in 1998 through agreements of collaboration with foreign language institutions as well as increasing the number of foreign languages teaching hours in schools. In June 2006, the Andalusian government passed an order to regulate the provision and the activity of LAs in the public schools. Through this order, the Ministry of Education also established arrangements of cooperation with English speaking countries.

The article also describes the functions of the LAs in the Spanish classrooms being the most remarkable ones to conduct linguistic, intercultural, sociolinguistic, and recreational activities not only to promote the learning of foreign languages but also to enrich the process with native speakers bringing the culture of the native speaking countries into the classroom. However, according to Caparrós (2010) the LAs like the rest of the teachers must take into account the needs, interests, abilities, and capacities of students in both the language and the contents and also methodologies to properly deliver knowledge.

Therefore, the LAs are not only ambassadors of the language in the classrooms but also should be trained in some basic aspects such as techniques and methodologies with the aim of fully integrating them in the dynamics of the classroom before starting their experience. In fact, it would also be beneficial for students and they would be of much more support for the teachers when delivering lessons and helping students with their tasks. Moreover, this article also emphasises the benefits of having LAs in the classrooms. In words of the author, “thanks to them, students find the degree of motivation they lack when learning a second language as they have the possibility of having direct contact and exposition to the foreign language through them and they transmit to the community the need of learning languages” (Caparrós, 2010: 40).

Turning to the issue of collaboration among teachers and LAs as a paramount factor for a proper teaching experience, Carless and Walker (2006) analyse the collaboration between native-speaking English teachers (NETs) and local English teacher (LETs) in Hong Kong secondary schools. The research, properly grounded by data collection through classroom observation and interviews in schools as well as literature review, focuses on three main aspects: the nature of collaboration between the teachers, the impact that this collaboration has on students and not less important, the impact on the teachers themselves. Although the nature of the research is not based on the Spanish context, the findings could be extrapolated to the LAs’ contexts in Spanish schools as a way to improve the net of collaboration among content teachers, language teachers and LAs.

Nonetheless, it also highlights the importance of every figure and establishes a correlation between the essentiality of NETs and LETs not being any of them more important than the other. In this regard, Carless and Walker (2006: 464) point out that “these strengths are, in general, the relative weaknesses of LETs whose own strengths, on the other hand, reflect the

relative weaknesses of NETs". This leads to think that both teachers are complementary and also that the role of LETs is also important even when they are not native speakers. Medgyes (1994) argues that LETs can be positive role models for students; are generally better placed to anticipate language difficulties; and make profitable use of the mother tongue, with consequent richer resources for explaining some grammatical points. In addition, they are likely to have better familiarity with local syllabuses and examinations (Tang, 1997) and may often find it easier to develop close relationships with students.

On this basis, it is easy to assume that in a CLIL context in a Spanish primary school, both the LA and the local teacher either of content or language, should be equals as their skills help students in many different ways to understand the learning process and also to anticipate problems that might be the reason of frustration and eventually even of dropout. Therefore, team teaching defined as simply two teachers together in the classroom, actively involved in instruction (Carless and Walker, 2006), properly planned and delivered becomes one of the strengths of CLIL but for this purpose, not only LAs need the proper training but also the coordinator of the bilingual project has to make sure to find the time for them for effective planning and communication.

In this line, the paper remarks the advantages of team teaching for students adapted from Buckley (2000) as follows: there are more opportunities for individual or small group support because two teachers are present in the classroom; the presence of different personalities, teaching styles and voices can make the classroom more lively and students can choose to interact more with whichever co-teacher they relate to better. In fact, Storey et al. (2001) found evidence that lower ability students' English improved more when they were taught by a combination of NET and LET rather than one of these on their own. These findings also reinforced an earlier study (Johnson and Tang, 1993) which found NETs faced discipline problems with less academically oriented and/or less motivated students, an inability to use the students' mother tongue being particularly disadvantageous.

However, concerning the role of both in the classroom, it is remarkable the fact that LETs tended to observe the LAs conducting the lesson without cooperating and for their part, the LAs felt more comfortable teaching alone. In other words, neither LAs nor NETs preferred team teaching. With regard to the benefits for teachers, the research summarised how LETs benefited from their collaboration with NETs having developed proficiency and aspects of the

English language such as use of slang, more vocabulary, etc., as well as widening the teaching strategies and techniques based on collaboration, more effective use of pre-tasks, and the integration of grammar in a communicative approach.

All in all, the article outlines how important collaboration between teachers and assistants is, not only for students and the enrichment of their learning process but also for the enrichment and benefit of teachers themselves. As a matter of fact, it is a challenging task but when handled thoughtfully can showcase the strengths of each party and minimise their weaknesses (Carless and Walker, 2006).

In an in-depth analysis of bilingual education in Spain and the collaboration between teachers and LAs, Abbie Hibler presented in 2010 her Master's degree Thesis, where she guides the reader through the bilingual education system in the EU and more specifically in Spain and also, she depicts the theories on second language learning and teaching. Thereafter, the study focuses on team teaching evaluating different styles and also the challenges and benefits. This research was designed to contextualise and analyse the practice of team teaching within the Community of Madrid context.

The research was divided into a three-part research procedure to intensively evaluate the LA's scheme. In the first part, a questionnaire was used in order to survey opinions and attitudes towards collaboration between LAs and teachers. The second part was merely based on classroom observations and eventually, the third part consisted of interviews with the participants in the classroom observed with the aim of providing insights on the team teaching and the LA's scheme. The study intends to be fact-finding in order to strengthen the effectiveness and therefore the contribution of LAs (Hibler, 2010).

With regard to team teaching, it is stated that there are two existing scenarios of team teaching within bilingual programmes. The first style entails the combination of a content teacher and a language teacher working together to implement CBI-style instruction. The second style combines native speakers and non-native teachers together in L2 classrooms (Hibler, 2010). As a matter of fact, the practice of team teaching (TT) has been gaining momentum in nearly all educational contexts since interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches have proven beneficial for effective learning (Davis, 1995), and that if strategically implemented, positive results are plentiful on various surfaces and for all stakeholders (Carless, 2001). Hence, team teaching

could be plainly defined as the act of two teachers collaborating for a shared educational goal (Hibler, 2010). Moreover, Hibler resorts to Maroney's styles of team teaching (1995) synthesising the five styles in the table that follows (Hibler, 2010: 24):

Team Teaching Style	Definition
Standard TT	Takes places when both teachers actively share in instruction.
Collaborative TT	Similar to standard TT yet students learn solely in group formats, sometimes referred to as Total Collaborative Learning (Gokhale 1995).
Complimentary/Supportive TT	Refers to approaches where one teacher is in charge of content teaching, the other focuses on reinforcement activities or skill building.
Parallel TT	Students are divided at random and each teacher is responsible for the learning of their group.
Differentiated TT	Similar to parallel TT yet students are grouped according to learning needs/levels.

Table 2.1 Styles of team teaching (Maroney, 1995)

Maroney (1995) states that many effective TT situations combine styles depending on the strengths and personalities of the teachers, as well as the needs of students. Consequently, in order to successfully implement any style of team teaching, teachers and LAs must first work to create an atmosphere of agreement and support allowing time to plan and coordinate together through designated meetings (Hibler, 2010). Furthermore, teachers and LAs should promote an environment of common belief by which it can be clearly seen that by collaborating, they do a better job. In addition, they should foster equality valuing their differences as something from where they can learn from each other. Differences seen as opportunities of improvement and not as pitfalls. Also, it would be very advantageous if

leadership was redistributed with the purpose of giving more leading role in certain situations to LAs inasmuch it could better the team.

Notwithstanding the above, team teaching encompasses benefits but also challenges. On the one hand, the main benefit of team teaching is the reduction of ratios so LAs and teachers can devote more time to one-to-one teaching and make the process more individualised. Additionally, teachers can benefit from working with native speakers by improving aspects such as vocabulary, pronunciation or the use of real and up-to-date English plus they become a model of teamwork for students.

In summary, “diversification of TT styles is beneficial for students and, moreover for teachers, diversifying styles can reduce the perceived ‘monotony’ typical classroom teaching, and is a catalyst for implementing the various CLIL dimensions” (Hibler, 2010: 25). On the other hand, it is known the workload that collaboration entails and this is usually the reason why sometimes time for planning and collaboration is scarce. However, if the benefits of team teaching are thoroughly considered, not only the coordinator but also every figure in the administration of the school should make the effort to ameliorate the workload and allow time for teaching meetings and trainings in such aspect.

Finally, the analysis of the data collected throughout the investigation reveals several issues. The results showed that many teachers have problems when implementing the LAs into the classroom since their roles are not clearly defined. In general, the team teaching combination had positive effects on all the stakeholders. In some cases, the implementation of the LA scheme even had exceptionally positive results. In other cases, however, both teachers and LAs reported to be discouraged and disengaged with the practice of team teaching. In general terms, there appears to be a lack of role definition for the LA in terms of pedagogical implications, further hindered by an ‘expectation-oriented’ mishap where head teachers wished the assistant were more proactive and productive, and where the LA would like to be included more in the class and have more ownership in the program as a whole (Hibler, 2010).

Moving forward with a positive outcome, it must be mentioned that when teachers let LAs act as teachers, as a team they were able to make a great impact on students and also the teaching process was more functional. Contents were “brought to life” and the fact that there were two

teachers in the classroom facilitated group work, experiments, project-based learning and the use of ICT.

In 2016, Llaneza published his doctoral thesis on Language assistants. In a similar line of investigation with regard to Hibler's Thesis, this study exhaustively analyses not only the role of LAs in the Spanish bilingual system but also the bilingual system itself as well as the implementation of CLIL in the Community of Madrid. Besides an extensive literature review on the field, the study is defined as naturalistic with a mixed qualitative-quantitative approach. A total of 108 LAs took part in the study expressing their feelings and opinions about their role through a questionnaire to depict their importance in the bilingual system in general and particularly in the schools where they were assigned. Finally, through three case studies the author describes their impact in CLIL classrooms and particularly their relationship with students and teachers in three different primary schools in Madrid.

Before analysing the LAs roles in depth, the author also puts the reader in perspective by depicting the Spanish bilingual system and more specifically, how the CLIL approach was implemented in Madrid endowed with the figure of the LAs. In the "White Paper" (1995), the Commission (White Paper, Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society) insists that all European citizens should be able to communicate in at least three languages. For this purpose, in 1996 the Council of Europe recommended the coordination of efforts regarding the implementation of bilingual education programmes in Europe. In this context, the LAs contributed being a linguistic and sociocultural reference in the implementation of the bilingual system in Madrid.

At the beginning of the implementation of CLIL programmes in Madrid, there were some guidelines to help LAs with their adaptation in the schools. However, these guidelines were only an introduction to their roles and were not enough to explain what was expected from them. As a matter of fact, in the support materials published by the British Council for the British LAs in other countries (Lavery, 2003), it is missed a clearer definition of their functions in the schools they are going to work in (Llaneza, 2006). In the academic years (2005-2007) when the previous research to this thesis was conducted or in the next year when the data was collected, the LAs did not received any specific training in the countries of origin although there was a lot of information on the entities' websites in charge of their selection (Llaneza, 2016).

Nonetheless, the help offered to LAs was extended through the years. As well as an informative and inductive training the day before starting the academic year, the Community of Madrid set three training days in different stages of the academic year.

With respect to the duties of the LAs in the classroom, the study describes what the LAs are expected to do in line with the guidelines established by the Community of Madrid and the Ministry of Education. These duties have been already commented on this document and even though the investigation for this thesis was conducted through the years, the main duties have not changed. A significant aspect mentioned by Llaneza (2016) however, is that coordinators in accordance with the managerial team must determine in what (extra) activities LAs should participate such as teachers' meetings, afterschool activities, etc. Thus, it is understood that coordinators should facilitate time for LAs to take part in different activities which will be beneficial for them and their learning, and also time to plan and improve collaboration with teachers. Another significant point made by Llaneza (2016) is the possibility of extending the permanence of LAs with the aim of providing LAs and the bilingual project with more stability.

The results revealed that the LAs contribution was positively appreciated by the educative community including parents and also by the LAs themselves. Their presence offered a more individualised attention to students plus it had a great influence in oral communication for students. In fact, the role of teaching assistants has evolved throughout the years, and more and more schools notice the value and importance of Teaching assistants within the school system. Consequently, they have had more teaching duties assigned to them (Gao and Shum, 2010). Nevertheless, when the three case studies were analysed different models of collaboration between teachers and LAs were appreciated as well as different strategies for communication including multilingual resources and the use of the L1 when needed.

In the conclusion of this study, many are the aspects analysed to answer the questions that triggered the investigation. To begin with, it is pointed out the initial ambiguity of LAs' functions in the classroom. Both teachers and managers as well as LAs noticed that the role of LAs in the classroom and school was not properly defined in line with other investigations that show that this situation is generally extended (Tobin y Abello-Contesse, 2013; Ohtani, 2010). With respect to LAs' integration in the team and the educational community, the LAs were positively valued by students and parents. Precisely, their presence was not seen as

something new anymore since the program had been running for four years and there were well established mechanisms for support and integration.

As for the specific tasks conducted by LAs, there was some concern at the beginning of the bilingual program in Madrid since neither teachers nor the management teams were sure about the tasks or duties they could be assigned with. However, over the academic years the guidelines became clearer and the concerns on teachers' and principals' side lessen. In relation to collaboration with teachers, based on the observations and interviews with the principals and teachers, it could be observed that LAs opinions were usually taken into account and to some extent, they were integrated in the didactic planification teams. Eventually, some considerations and pedagogical implications are proposed among which one is specially remarkable for the purpose of this Master's Thesis.

As regards the most appropriate response to this situation, one suggestion would be a short but effective proposal for the optimization of the role of language assistants in CLIL contexts. A proposal that can ameliorate their situation and can better their contribution to CLIL programmes in Spanish primary schools based on essential concepts about Student-centered methodologies, collaboration with teachers and setting of their functions.

4. PROPOSAL FOR THE OPTIMIZATION OF THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS IN CLIL CONTEXTS

The results obtained from the literature review clearly pinpoint the shortages in LA programmes in CLIL contexts in Spain. These results are going to be categorized with the aim of summarizing what are the main needs of LAs. Subsequently, a proposal for the optimization of each category will be presented on this basis. The categories and proposals are the following:

1. **Coordination:** The main lacunae according to the research analysed stems from the fact that there is a lack of coordination between teachers and LAs, becoming this the main deficiency of the program. One clear example is that CAM education policy and program organization does not include planning time for collaborating teachers (Hibler, 2010) hence on-site planning time must be found. Therefore, one suggestion

would be the creation of the team teaching handbook. Teachers and LAs spend a great deal of time together either in the classroom, the staff room or even in the yards.

Thereby, if official time is not allocated for them to plan in their schedules, they might have to resort to short lapses of time when, for example, students are carrying out or getting ready for activities, teachers' or students' breaks. In these short and informal meetings, teachers and LAs could briefly discuss classroom management aspects or upcoming topics and activities and how they will coordinate their roles and actions. To keep a record of these ideas, they could create a physical handbook which could be available always in the classroom for them or other teachers in case of absence or else, take down notes that could be compiled in the cloud using free tools such as google documents. In the latter case, there would be no risk of physically losing their work and it could even be storage for next academic years and new LAs to be used as a guide.

2. **Functions:** Another shortage extracted from the literature review emphasizes that there is an unclear definition of LAs' roles in the classrooms. As observed in the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education, the guidelines provided define standardized basic functions for LAs. However, this may not be suitable for each classroom given the needs of students, teachers and the diversity of settings. In some of the studies analysed, it is argued that there is a lack of definition about the LAs' roles and as a consequence, the LAs feel ill-prepared and sometimes even disoriented. For these reasons, it should be understood that the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education are just general orientation, and LAs will only comprehend their real functions upon arrival to the schools.

In this way, as suggested by some authors -such as Pavón (2012)- in the literature review, the best way to clearly define LAs' functions is to establish a network of collaboration with teachers. Collaboration is based on communication and one of the ways that can make LAs sure of their roles and confident is to know the classroom and students' needs so they can deduct and assume responsibilities agreed with the teachers. For this purpose, it is essential involvement and time. The former can be achieved by making LAs participants of every decision in the functioning of the classroom and by disclosing to them beforehand every detail about students, routines,

objectives and challenges. The latter is understood in two different ways: time to find out and time for planning.

Once LAs are in the classrooms, they need time to understand how everything works even if they have been explained beforehand. Thereby, giving them time for adaptation in order to experience by themselves is essential. Moreover, time for planning is intrinsic to coordination which has been analysed before. It is known that schedules are very tight in a school however, every chance either formal or informal can be exploited with the purpose of discussing terms and actions.

3. **Methodological aspects:** Due to the selection criteria of LAs, the analysed research point out that LAs are often ill-prepared and disregard on CLIL foundations, student-centered methodologies, and classroom management. A high number of LAs are only required to be native speakers with a degree or in their last years of studies and in many cases, these degrees or studies are not related to education. For this very reason, it is highly recommendable to induct LAs in the basis of student-centered methodologies and also provide them with bibliography to widen the repertoire of activities and their approach. The main techniques they could be trained in are the following:

- **COLLABORATIVE AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING.** On the one hand, collaborative learning could be defined as a technique of teaching and learning in which students gather in working-groups to research about a relevant question or project. The learning process might vary depending on students' decisions and its main core resides in its social root since working and making decisions together is essential. It is a pedagogy that has at its center the assumption that people make meaning together and that the process enriches and enlarges them (Matthews, 1996: 101).

On the other hand, cooperative learning is understood as a technique in which learners work together in small groups on structured activity and as a consequence, they can share strengths and develop weaker skills. In cooperative learning, each member of the group is responsible for their work and the outcomes are also assessed as a whole group. Cooperative learning

encourages and is in fact built upon the contributions of group members (Sharan and Sharan, 1987: 21).

- **PROJECT BASED LEARNING (PBL).** Project based learning could be defined as a practice or technique which has at its core learning-by-doing. This technique encourages learners to investigate real life issues and demands practical proposals with the aim of promoting change at local and high scale levels. It is based on challenging questions or problems, that involve students in design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities; give students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time; and culminate in realistic products or presentations (Jones, Rasmussen, and Moffitt, 1997; Thomas, Mergendoller and Michaelson, 1999).

A driving question is suggested and in-depth inquiry activities proposed by the teacher might be to collect, organize, and expose data. Short explanations or readings about the topic. Researching how the subject matter affects our environment or finding news about it from different sources to share with the group. Then, the groups decide how to share the outcome of their research which will be discussed, revised and reflected on by the group as a whole along with the teacher and eventually, a final summit involving the parents could be hosted in order to propose solutions for the community.

- **TASK BASED LEARNING (TBL).** In task-based learning, the teacher does not pre-arrange the language that will be studied as the lesson's main goal is to work on a relevant task and the language studied will arise at the time the students complete the task. A good TBL lesson is structured in the steps that follow; **Pre-task**, where the teacher introduces the topic and clear instructions are presented to students and by so doing, some language could be recalled and might be useful. **Task**, the students work on the task in order to complete it peer working or in groups using different resources while the teacher monitors the progress. **Assessment or report**, the students present their results previously agreed upon and the teacher corrects mistakes and gives quick feedback in language and content.

- **FLIPPED CLASSROOM.** According to Barbara Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson (1998) the flipped classroom is a model in which students gain first-exposure learning prior to class and focus on the processing part of learning (synthesizing, analysing, problem-solving, etc.) in class. This technique, which is gaining ground, encompasses all the SCMs hallmarks since it promotes students' autonomy and reflection activating higher thinking skills and also the extra-mural feature since everything is connected to the learners' real world.

Moreover, this technique provides more quality time in the classroom since students are expected to deal with the theory bulk outside the classroom and use the time allocated for the lesson more effectively. This allows students to interact and share the knowledge they previously have had access to and more importantly, students learn at their own pace. The strategy used for this first-exposure aforementioned can vary depending on the resources and it can be readings from books or readings designed for a task to podcasts or even videos recorded by the teachers themselves and posted via YouTube. There is also the possibility of sharing the links to videos on YouTube from other authors. For this technique to be effective, it is important that students are provided with materials of all kinds and not only with readings. Materials must be engaging, and this means that listening, watching, reading, writing and finding out more have to be met in the flipped classroom.

4. **Selection criteria.** Another issue reported by teachers in the literature reviewed is that the selection criteria for LAs might be the main inconvenience. To be eligible as a Language assistant, the most important requirement is to be English native speaker and hold a degree or be in the last year of studies. Nevertheless, the degree must not be necessarily related to education which in many cases is what really provokes the disregard of all the shortages analysed in this study. Consequently, it should become a priority to review the selection criteria followed by the administration in order to provide the programmes with LAs that might not have an extensive experience but could however be integrated faster as they would know how a scholar environment works in advance.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this Master's thesis was analysing the shortages of the LAs' programmes and propose improvements. Moreover, this dissertation aimed to remark how a precious asset LAs are for CLIL settings, bilingual programmes, teachers, the community and overall, for students. LAs bring the reality of the language into the classrooms in an enjoyable and dynamic way and thanks to them students become aware of the importance of modern languages in the globalised world they live in. Furthermore, the conclusions and proposals suggested deriving from the studies analysed and their contexts as well as the experience lived in my own internships in Spanish primary schools.

This thesis addresses some issues which are the main lacunae of the LAs programmes in Spanish bilingual schools in CLIL contexts specifically, and at the same time proposes ways to tackle the shortages that directly affect LAs, teachers, students and the bilingual projects as a whole. Although the investment in LA programmes is significant, there is little research on this field hence further research is needed to promote the improvement of the existing programmes. Aspects such as coordination, functions, methodological aspects and selection criteria have been the main core of discussion in this study.

However, there are other areas that can be recommended for further research on this topic: relevance of LAs in bilingual programmes and results obtained compared to other programmes with no LAs, the effects of LAs on students' performance and the possible reduction of anxiety in students when learning a second language, the results in pronunciation and communicative aspects when learning with LAs, and the individualised learning process that teachers can offer to students when having LAs in the classroom. Certainly, further investigation on these fields would help to shed light on the invaluable asset that LAs are for the bilingual programmes but also, it would clarify the needs and actual limitations with the purpose of amending the shortages and keep CLIL at the forefront in the teaching of second languages.

Nevertheless, the limitations involved in this type of research must be taken into account as some aspects discussed might have been revised already by the administration. Yet, it must not be forgotten that education is an unfinished product and due to CLIL features, all the aspects covered in this Master's thesis should be constantly assessed and revised with the aim

of enhancing not only teachers' and LAs' teaching process but also students' learning process which is what really matters.

At a personal level, there are many positive conclusions drawn and acquisition of knowledge throughout this Master's degree. Overall, this Master's degree has been a great opportunity to learn about an approach that has changed the panorama in the teaching of second languages in the last 20 years. CLIL emerged as a ground-breaking methodology due to its innovative techniques by which students are the protagonists of their own learning process. It settled successfully in Europe and in other regions around the world for its use of student-centered methodologies, integration of contents and language and more importantly, its stimulus of higher order thinking skills with a real application to students' real lives. Moreover, besides content and language CLIL also encompasses two more fundamental aspects when learning a foreign language, which are cognition and culture, both included in the 4 C's stated by Coyle (1999) and distinguish CLIL from any other bilingual program.

All things considered, the conclusions and proposals drawn as a result of this investigation and of many others are a challenge that must be embraced as an opportunity for enrichment. In fact, the change could be achieved redesigning some basic parameters which may lead to automatically solving consequent lacunae and intrinsically enhance LAs programmes in CLIL contexts.

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