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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ASSISTANTS TO IMPROVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to evaluate the perceptions of students, teachers and language assistant to confirm the hypothesis that language assistants have a positive impact on foreign language learning, with a special reference to aspects related to the sociocultural, grammatical, lexical and phonological competences, as well as the increase of students' motivation and confidence when dealing with a foreign language. The followed methodology is based on questionnaires (Likert scale and open answer) designed for the triangulation of samples. The conclusions show that the presence of a language assistant undoubtedly benefits the learning of a foreign language, in particular some aspects more than others, such as those related with the lexical and phonological competences as well as an increase in the students' motivation.

Key words: language teaching, language learning, language assistant, communicative competence, oral skills.

RESUMEN

El estudio tiene como objetivo evaluar las percepciones de los estudiantes, profesores y auxiliar de conversación para confirmar la hipótesis de que los auxiliares de conversación tienen un impacto positivo en el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, en concreto en aspectos relacionados con las competencias sociocultural, gramática, léxica y fonológica así como el aumento en la motivación y confianza de los estudiantes cuando se trata de usar el idioma extranjero. La metodología usada consiste en la entrega de cuestionarios (escala Likert y respuesta abierta) a dicho triángulo de muestras. Las conclusiones muestran que la presencia del auxiliar beneficia sin duda el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera, en concreto algunos de los aspectos más que otros, como son los relacionados con las competencias fonéticas y léxicas, así como el aumento de la motivación entre el alumnado.

Palabras clave: enseñanza de lenguas, aprendizaje de lenguas, Auxiliar lingüístico, competencia comunicativa, destrezas orales.

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In this research project called ‘The Effectiveness Of Assistants to Improve Foreign Language Development In Education’ it is going to be checked whether the presence of language assistants can influence positively the process of teaching and learning foreign languages, in particular some specific aspects that will be specified in the ‘objectives’ section.

1.1. Justification and relevance

Bearing in mind some results of this dissertation, future improvements could be implemented in schools when dealing with language assistants and how pupils could further benefit from them. Along this project, previous studies will be considered at the same time, as I will share some highlights of my personal experience.

In the last years, there has been a sharp increase in bilingual schools, hence in the demanding need of language assistants, who seem to be considered a useful figure in this type of schools and produce benefits to teachers and pupils. For instance, in England, full-time teaching assistants have increased since 2000 from 79,000 to 243,700 (Sharples, Webster and Blatchford, 2015), being language assistants a significant number of those.

An increase in language assistants’ presence in Spanish schools is exemplified by the number of posts required by the Department of Education and Culture (MEC) in the academic year 2010-2011, conforming a total of 3,575 in Spain. In the academic year 2017-2018, there will be 921 language assistants in Andalusia, according to the Instructions of 30th June 2017, provided by the ‘Junta de Andalucía’.

The following table exhibits the increase in the number of Foreign Language Assistants within a period of ten consecutive academic years, from 2003-4 to 2012-3.

CURSO ACADÉMICO	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Número de países	10	10	11	14	12	12	13	16	16	16
Nº de auxiliares extranjeros en España	450	450	915	1.452	1.848	2.412	2.585	4.282	4.282	3.669

Source: MEC (2014)

According to the ‘Plan Estratégico para el Desarrollo de las Lenguas en Andalucía Horizonte

2020', approved by the Junta de Andalucía on 24th January 2017, there will be 1500 bilingual schools in this region, which will mean, for example, that in the province of Granada, one third of the schools will be bilingual in 2020. This clearly differs from current figures: there are 1375 bilingual schools in Andalusia, which results in 417150 students.

My personal experience as a foreign language assistant in England showed me to what extent this teaching figure is useful in the education system. As it is explained in the following sections, there are different work modalities that I experienced myself, such as working independently with high ability or low ability students, or working in class with the assigned language teacher in order to support students in the room, for example by checking their notebooks or offering extra information, either related to grammar, phonetics, culture... In my case, the superior who supervised my teaching practice was the Head of Modern Languages (just one person), although I had to work with several foreign language teachers to assure the proper development of the established curricula.

As it is going to be specified in this dissertation, the main objectives of this teaching figure involve oral communication (phonetics) as well as the cultural transmission. These are functions that I experienced myself while I was working as a Foreign Language Assistant in England. To provide some examples, I remember that the explanation of Spanish Christmas was delegated to me since I was returning to Spain for the Christmas season and therefore was able to take advantage of my time there to collect information and photographs related to the topic. On the other hand, I could also notice how my work helped specific students to become more accurate and fluent or to deepen their knowledge of the foreign language (in this case they were low or high ability pupils); in this sense, this practice was able to boost pupils' language level at the same time as it meant a personal enrichment for me. Therefore, my personal experience led me to conclude that the work of language assistants is extremely effective for the teaching of foreign languages since the benefits they offer for students and L2 teaching methodology are invaluable.

1.2. Objectives

The overall goal of this research study is to explore the perceptions of all those involved in the heading-learning environment characterised by the presence of the Foreign Language Assistant: the school language assistant, students who learn in a bilingual environment (learning in presence of a language assistant in some foreign lessons) and teachers who teach

groups in which a language assistant works too. To be more specific, this study explore their thoughts about how successful it is the presence of language assistants in relation to some aspects of the students' learning. The concrete objectives of this study are:

- To find out whether it is believed that language assistants stimulate the development of **the sociocultural competence** in students.
- To check whether it is considered that language assistants improve the linguistic and communicative competence of students, in concrete the **phonological, lexical and grammatical competences**.
- To explore whether it is thought that language assistants' presence in lessons has a positive impact on students' languages **confidence** and **motivation**.

1.3. Sections

In this dissertation we have offered, first of all, a justification of why knowing about the effect of language assistants is important. Then, in the second section, the literature review focuses on previous studies related to language assistants and their benefits in class. The third part of the dissertation deals with research methodology and how to develop appropriate research that can help us to achieve results for the established objectives. The fourth section, called Results and Discussion, presents the findings of this research study in relation to the objectives previously stated. In the last section, final conclusions and lines for future research are explained.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1. What are language assistants?

Language assistants are teaching assistants who help qualified teachers. Their presence in class seeks to add value to teachers, never to replace them. As Sharples, Webster, Blatchford (2015: 4) state, 'the expectation should be that the needs of all pupils are addressed, first and foremost, through high quality classroom teaching'.

According to the British Council (2017), language assistants will support English teaching overseas, will plan, support and run projects and activities; they will produce resources for students and introduce the foreign culture through classroom and extra-curricular activities. The British Council also emphasises the fact that language assistants should not be asked to teach subjects different from the English one, to mark on a regular basis, to discipline students or to replace teachers who are ill.

In the *Guía del Auxiliar. Programa de Auxiliares de Conversación en España, 2017-2018* (MECD 2017: 21) language assistants are ‘cultural ambassadors’ of their origin country, which implies that they carry responsibilities in the school where they are going to develop their work. As specified in the guide for language assistants 2017-2018, it is crucial that their impeccable behaviour leave a trace both in teachers and students; exchanges of language assistants have a cultural aim, this is why an employment relation does not take place, which has some consequences such as not being liable to social security contributions.

2. 2. The legislation on Foreign Language Assistants

There are several official documents that regulate the language assistants program, through the BOE and BOJA publications. For instance, we should mention the following:

- *Ley Orgánica de 7 de junio de 2017, por la que se convocan plazas para auxiliares de conversación extranjeros para el curso académico 2017-2018, BOE de 17 junio 2017, número 144, Pág. 45723.*
- *ORDEN de 28 de junio de 2011, por la que se regula la enseñanza bilingüe en los centros docentes de la Comunidad Autónoma de Andalucía. BOJA 12 julio 2011, número 135, página 6.*
- *ORDEN de 7 de mayo de 2015, por la que se modifica la Orden de 22 de septiembre de 2011, por la que se establecen las modalidades de provisión y las bases reguladoras para la concesión de subvenciones a auxiliares de conversación. BOJA 19 mayo 2015, número 94, página 6.*
- *Convenio de colaboración entre el Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte y la Comunidad Autónoma de Andalucía. BOJA de 6 de noviembre de 2017, número 212, página 105.*
- *Instrucciones de 30 de junio de 2017 sobre Auxiliares de Conversación para el curso escolar 2017/2018. BOJA 31 agosto 2017.*
- *MECD (2016), Las Funciones del Auxiliar de Conversación 2016-2017.*
<https://www.mecd.gob.es/servicios-al-ciudadano-mecd/dms/mecd/servicios-al-ciudadano-mecd/catalogo/general/educacion/998188/ficha/998188-2016/funciones-del-auxiliar.pdf>

The *ORDEN de 28 de junio 2011, BOJA number 135, 12th July 2011*, which regulates the bilingual teaching in Andalusian schools, in its article 23, states that all bilingual schools will be provided with, at least, a language assistant, either full or part-time, and that economic

grants will be established to implement this legislation in state schools. It is specified that the main aim is to improve the learning of communicative aspects, above all the speaking ones. It is also stated that the presence of language assistants boosts pupils' motivation and develops the sociocultural competence.

There are other important documents such as the 'Plan Fomento del Plurilingüismo' or the 'Programa BEDA'. The 'Plan de Fomento del Plurilingüismo' in Andalusia, approved by the Government of the 'Junta de Andalucía' on 22nd March, 2005 (BOJA number 65, 5th April 2005), included the presence of language assistants in those schools in which the project was implemented. Regarding the 'Programa BEDA' (Bilingual Education Development and Assessment), we find it in Spain, above all in Madrid; it focuses on improving English teaching and is managed by both 'Escuelas Católicas de Madrid' and Cambridge English Language Assessment. It aims to have an external agency to supervise bilingual projects in member schools. Those schools that are on the third level of this program have native language teachers in class.

2. 3. Functions of language assistants

As stated in the *Instrucciones de 30 de junio 2017*, language assistants have to:

- Reinforce oral skills in pupils' foreign language
- Provide phonetic and grammar models
- Prepare their own activities with language teachers, out of their teaching hours
- Put students and teachers in contact with the foreign culture by presenting activities and trendy topics
- Attend training courses, accompanied by their bilingual school coordinators
- Be able to participate in complementary and extra-curricular activities developed in their school, but not being responsible of students

According to the MECD's *Guide for Language Assistants* (2017: 23), they cannot be assigned the normal responsibilities of teachers since they are newly graduated or last academic year university students. This is why they are focused on helping students' oral skills instead of teaching proper lessons. According to this guide, 'it is very important that the language assistant talks and insists on talking to students in his/her own mother tongue, avoiding the mother tongue of pupils, except for when it is absolutely necessary'. Besides, assistants can develop the following tasks, always under the supervision of an assigned teacher:

- Specific interactive oral activities
- Teaching their origin culture and civilization
- Recording speeches in their own language so that the school is able to use them as an example of native speaker's speech
- Receiving training, as long as it is possible within their timetable
- Other similar tasks

In this guide, it is also specified that assistants can participate in a varied range of extra-curricular activities, such as: cultural, sport, trips, exchanges... Similarly, it is stated that they are not responsible for preparing exams or marking students, teaching students directly without a teacher's supervision, students' security, supervising the playground or dining room or students' discipline.

The document found on the *Guía del Auxiliar. Programa de Auxiliares de Conversación en España, 2017-2018*, about functions of language assistants, establishes the following ones (MEC 2017: 24):

- Helping the tutor or responsible teacher, who orientates and coordinates them
- Developing students' oral competence
- Teaching cultural aspects
- Representing their own country, culture and language
- Possibility of being asked to participate in extra-curricular activities and elaboration of didactic materials to be applied in class

2. 4. Work modalities

It is established in our legislation that language assistants in Andalusia must stay 12 hours in schools (divided into 4 or 5 days, depending on the real needs of schools). Their work can be mainly classified into two main groups: work outside the classroom and reinforcement offered in class.

Regarding the modality of work outside the classroom and also bearing in mind the Order of 20th June 2006 (BOJA number 131, 10th July 2006), language assistants can help in the organisation and practice of extracurricular activities (which would enable students to use the foreign language with them in real contexts) and also in the formation and updating of teachers' linguistic training. As stated by the MECD in *Funciones del Auxiliar de Conversación* (2016:7), assistants will participate in frequent meetings to plan lessons, in

which teachers and assistants should exchange ideas, clarify teaching aspects, evaluate lessons already taught and assess how certain areas of interest for the assistant can be implemented in the planning.

As regards the second work modality, reinforcement and collaboration in class, the MECD in *Guía del Tutor. Programa de Auxiliares de Conversación en España 2016-2017* (2016:17) proposes some ways in which assistants can develop tasks in class, using the foreign language:

- At the beginning of the lesson: to greet students, write time and date on the blackboard, as well as review previous contents
- During the development of the lesson: to give instructions, to paraphrase expressions or words with the aim of clarifying meanings, to exemplify the use of words or expressions, to offer individualised support to students.
- At the end of the lesson: to provide instructions for future lessons (such as homework), to follow the fixed routine to end up the lesson.

Apart from the previously mentioned ideas, the official webpage¹ of the MECD (2016:10) in *Funciones del Auxiliar de Conversación* states a variety of work modalities for language assistants:

- The language assistant depending on one teacher
- The language assistant depending on a group of teachers
- The assistant working in the same class as the normal teacher and helping students when it is required by the teachers
- The class group may be divided into two groups: one working with the normal teacher and another with the assistant
- The assistant must plan his interventions according to the teacher's instructions
- The teacher provides material for the assistant to work with
- The assistant is responsible for preparing his own working material in accordance with the teacher's guidelines

¹ <https://www.mecd.gob.es/mecd/servicios-al-ciudadano-mecd/catalogo/general/educacion/050520/ficha/050520-2016-2017>

2. 5. How can schools benefit from the work of Foreign Language Assistants?

In an hour lesson, a language assistant could work with two student groups, about 15 minutes, depending on how they are organised and the duration of the school term. Ideally, class groups could be constituted by four students each one, in order to encourage everyone's participation, as stated by the MECD (2016: 19) in the *Guía del Tutor. Programa de Auxiliares de Conversación en España 2016-2017*. Thanks to this reduction of students to carry out activities, attention can be adapted to student's level and abilities.

This would imply also benefits for foreign language teachers, who will teach reduced groups and will be able to offer students a more personalised teaching. Furthermore, the assistant will encourage the development of a methodology that will be active, collaborative and communicative, based on the use of more authentic materials than in a classroom situation not characterised by the presence of language assistants.

Thanks to language assistants, schools will be able to develop enrichment in a variety of ways: communicative, cultural and personal, by promoting tolerance, otherness, empathy, avoidance of racism and cooperation. In a nutshell, language assistants will not bring drawbacks at schools.

2. 6. How can students benefit from working with Foreign Language Assistants?

It is essential to highlight the fact that there is not much research completed on the field of language assistants. The study carried out by Ortega (2000) was the first one to focus from a research perspective the numerous advantages of using language assistants in L2 teaching and learning. It emphasises the positive aspects of an environment in which spoken interaction is regularly maintained between the student and the language assistant. Ortega (2000) offers a very detailed account of all the different factors implicit in the education environment created by Foreign Language Assistants that could contribute to facilitate the students' development of their oral skill in the L2, particularly their willingness to speak.

Students can benefit from the presence of language assistants in several ways. In general, they offer cultural richness and linguistic accuracy, to be employed in phonetic, grammar, lexis... In terms of how they can have a positive impact on pupils' confidence, Ortega (2000)'s research findings revealed that assistants are able to boost it due to the fact that generally they are very young and tend to have likes and dislikes that are similar to those of school students,

which implies that pupils will be treated more empathetically and feel more understood when speaking to an assistant. Besides, some proximity in age between students and assistants may facilitate a proper selection of topics that would motivate students to speak more and more frequently (Ortega 2000; Ortega 2003).

It is crucial to highlight that students can also benefit from the inclusion of a language assistant in their lessons since they can be more relaxed, in terms of knowing that assistants are not going to mark them or to provide a grade for them, which can have a positive impact on pupils' fluency and comfort during lessons. It is widely known that it is frequent that students' oral performance is low because of a high level of nervousness, which can be decreased by the less threatening figure of assistants (Ortega 2000). Besides, giving students the opportunity to work in smaller groups may diminish their speaking anxiety, simply because there are not so many students listening to them (Ortega 2000).

As previously explained, class groups can be split into smaller groups, meaning an increase in learning opportunities and the possibility of speaking more frequently and with more freedom, thanks to this individualised attention. According to the MECED *Guía del Tutor. Programa de Auxiliares de Conversación en España 2016-2017* (2016: 19), there are studies which confirm that students show further development and progress in their oral practice if an assistant is present, since he or she tends to be younger than the foreign language teacher, apart from the fact that lives or interests could be more similar, as Ortega (2000) had previously demonstrated through her education research based on open questionnaires.

Furthermore, according to Ortega (2000), students admit the motivating and helpful role of the language assistants, although they feel more relaxed when communicating with a non-native speaker rather than with a native one. In fact, students who communicate with a native speaker language assistant feel extremely proud of themselves, precisely because they can demonstrate that they are able to communicate with a real native speaker, which indicates that the presence of a language assistant really motivates students. Ortega (2003) also highlights that assistants perceived that students are more participative when the language teacher is not present, since pupils show more freedom or willingness to speak when some speaking practice takes place out of the scope of the influence of the normal teacher and his/her evaluation.

However, students should be aware of the fact that their progress in the foreign language is controlled during their work in reduced groups (that is why assistants could take notes during sessions). In any case, it is essential that he or she employs a measurement tool in order to value the merits achieved during the learning process in smaller groups. Apart from that, working with reduced groups is a fantastic opportunity for developing activities that cannot be carried out with the whole class group.

Despite the fact that different pieces of research have reflected the benefits of language assistants in students, recent studies have proven that there is a strong need of redefining the ideal role of language assistants in Spanish bilingual schools, due to their lack of training and consistency in their teaching practices. Related to that, Buckingham and Sánchez (2016) insist on the fact that clearer communication should take place among all educative members.

After Ortega (2000), Scobling (2011) conducted a further study on the work of language assistants. The research objectives of this study were the following:

1. To decide whether language assistants are indispensable in foreign language teaching
2. To establish up to what point do language assistants motivate students
3. To examine how foreign language teachers use language assistants inside and outside class
4. To identify those factors that affect the level of success of language assistants in their role as a motivating figure
5. To determine whether further training is required for foreign language teachers to maximise the benefits of language assistants
6. To elaborate suggestions focused on how to improve the running of the language assistants program in Spain

The main results of Scobling's (2011) study (linked to the corresponding bullet points of the objectives) were the following ones:

1. Language assistants are important and required in many cases, becoming indispensable depending on specific conditions.
2. There have been identified three specific factors that contribute to an increase in the level of students' motivation: activity typology developed, classroom organisation and structure, and behaviour and attitude of language assistants (ideally, it should be open-minded, motivating and being able to gain respect from students).

3. It is essential to enable communication between assistants and teachers focused on planning and organising lessons. Regrettably, it tends to happen that assistants are asked to develop roles that should not be assigned to them (such as marking assignments or explaining grammar concepts) or feel their role is wasted when teachers and they co-work together in the class (assistants feel more comfortable when working with a reduced students' group on their own). These findings were similar to those presented by Ortega (2003) after conducting a survey on the pedagogic experience of Foreign Language Assistants. These work contexts are likely to create uncomfortable situations in which pupils suffer the negative consequences.
4. Training of language assistants (and undoubtedly teachers) contributed to the good development of the teaching practice.
5. Further training is recommended for language assistants. Depending on the 'type of assistant', there could be offered specific training.
 - a. Type 1 (assistants that really want to teach and already know how to do it): training should be focused on improving communication and establishing relationships. They should not be left on their own since they could show apathy and have a negative impact.
 - b. Type 2 (assistants who want to teach but are scared or are unaware of how to teach properly): training is needed for general guidelines about their role, communication and support to develop their role. They need general guidance about how to work properly since they could also show shyness.
 - c. Type 3 (assistants who think they know everything): They want to work well and may have teaching experience, although they could benefit from further training. The issue with them is that comments could be taken on a personal level as offensive ones.
 - d. Type 4 (assistants who are more interested in having fun rather than in teaching): They present little knowledge about their teaching role and are more worried about enjoying their experience and establishing closer bonds with teachers rather than students. They should need to be informed in detail about their role.
6. Some suggestions aimed to improve the language assistants program in Spain are focused on: contacting assistants before their arrival at their target countries, contacting former assistants to enable communication between them and the new ones, getting information from assistants (preferences, training, professional

experience...), making assistants follow an observation period (about two weeks) before starting to work with students, increasing the training courses for assistants and teachers, enabling websites for assistants to communicate between them and, finally, offering communication and support during the whole academic year.

Appendix I presents the questionnaires given to students about languages and language assistants in Scobling's (2011) study and the results obtained in this study reveal that there is a higher number of students who were motivated in class with the foreign language assistant in comparison with those who say that they were not. This study also reveals that there is some difference (although not a significant one) between those who prefer lessons with language assistants (3,67 as a rating average) and those who prefer lessons with foreign language teachers (2,90 rating average).

There is in fact a severe need of further research on language assistants. Studies related to the influence of a language assistant in the improvement of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation have been searched with no success. These and other aspects covered by Ortega (2000) and Scobling (2011) in their research have been approached in our study in order to enrich the perspectives on the work of foreign language assistants.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. General framework

The current research is classified into the following parameters, bearing in mind Nunan's (1999) and Seliger and Shohamy's (1989) reviews. Regarding the general framework, the research is practical since it is centred on the classroom without being abstract.

3.2. Source of information

When dealing with the source of information, it is a primary research due to the fact that closeness to the primary source of information takes place (students, teacher and assistant). Nevertheless, it also takes into account previous sources that are secondary ones (such as books, articles, electronic publications...).

3.3. Approach and goal

The approach of this research is holistic because of the coherent whole study that will be carried out, in which we could separate parts. Its goal will be deductive, meaning that the

research comes from the starting hypothesis that language assistants are perceived to have a positive impact on students' languages improvement on a variety of competences, such as the linguistic one (grammar, vocabulary and phonology), the sociocultural one as well as an increase in confidence and motivation.

Therefore, based on this hypothesis, we aim to answer these **research questions**:

- Is it considered that a language assistant benefits the development of the sociocultural competence in students?
- Is it thought that a language assistant improves students' phonological, lexical and grammatical competences?
- Is it perceived that a language assistant boosts students' confidence and motivation?

There are three perspectives that appear integrated in the study in order to give answer to the research questions: students', teachers' and assistant's.

3.4. Sample

This project deals with different types of subjects, which are a teaching assistant, students and teachers, all from the province of Almería. Bearing in mind participants' gender, there is a higher percentage of females (both teachers and students) than males. Participants belong to a secondary school: IES Alborán-Manuel Cáliz. It is located in Almería city centre and it is bilingual in Spanish-French from 1º *ESO* to 2º *Bachillerato*. The students' families' background may be different, since there are some parents who work in the city while others come from areas where the main economic resource is agriculture based of greenhouses.

Apart from the fact that students' results are analysed according to their year group (1º *ESO* and 4º *ESO*), which implies some homogeneity in their age and foreign language level, students are quite homogeneous since they belong to the same high school and have been working with language assistants since they were in their first year of secondary education.

The numbers of hours a week that the students work with a language assistant in this high school are the following ones:

- 1º *ESO*: 1 hour per week, groups B and C (each group works with the language assistants every two weeks)

- 2° *ESO*: 1 hours per week, groups B and C (each group works with the language assistants every two weeks)
- 3° *ESO*: 2 hours per week, every two weeks and 1 hour per week (every week) groups B and C
- 4° *ESO*: 2 hours per week, group B
- 1° *Bachillerato*: 2 hours per week, group C
- 2° *Bachillerato*: 2 hours per week, group C

As it is noticeable, the number of hours increases as the students are in a higher academic course (becoming the presence of the language assistant two hours a week in 4° *ESO*, 1° *Bachillerato* and 2° *Bachillerato*). There are two groups in which the language assistant work with the students (commonly named ‘bilingual groups’): B and C; this is due to the design of the bilingual project at this high school.

The questionnaires were administered to the only language assistant working at this high school, several French teachers who work in the same groups as the language assistant does and students of 1° *ESO* and 4° *ESO*, who benefit from the presence of the language assistant. This conforms a total of 1 language assistant, 4 teachers and 62 students (32 students in 4° *ESO* and 30 in 1° *ESO*).

3.5. Type of data, data collection and data analysis

In this research, the type of data is quantitative and qualitative, as they were collected through the questionnaires that include closed and open items. Some brief reports have been written after analysing data in a systematic way, trying to find frequencies of answers and drawing similarities and differences between the results given by the language assistant, the teachers and the students. With the purpose of providing an answer to the research questions, a similar questionnaire, based on a Likert scale of 5 points (1-5), was administered to both students and teachers. This aims to collect detailed information about the teaching and learning process, as previously specified. Clear and concise instructions introduce these mixed questionnaires, which combine closed and open-ended questions (the last part is open since participants can comment or add further ideas).

In the given questionnaires, items appear grouped depending on the idea they want to transmit; for example, in order to explore perceptions about an improvement in students' sociocultural competence, there will be two consecutive items devoted to that aspect in each questionnaire. Following this line (two for the phonological competence, two for the lexical competence, two for the grammatical competence and two for an increase in confidence and motivation), the questionnaires will conform a total of 10 items per questionnaire, plus the last item (11), which is open and invites participants to write any further ideas they would like to add.

The following steps have been followed in order to answer the previously presented research questions:

- Surveyed sample's comments: opinions.
- Descriptive statistics: mean scores.

Tables with mean results will be shown in this project. Results could be used to point to further hypotheses or objectives instead of meaning an end in themselves. The data collection method is quasi-experimental as the classroom is based on natural conditions. Its collection time is cross-sectional: this research took place during a single point of time of the academic year, in particular at the end of October 2017, this means that students have been working with the language assistant almost for a month during the current academic year 2017-2018, when the questionnaires were administered.

3.6. Variables

A variable that may affect the current study significantly is the duration in which students have been exposed to the language assistant. Following this line, just in 1º *ESO* students may or may have not come from learning their foreign language lessons with a language assistant in primary school, due to the fact that this high school, IES Alborán-Manuel Cáliz, does not include primary education. Since there are students who are new at this high school for the *Bachillerato* levels, it is not reliable to affirm that students in 2º *Bachillerato* have been with the language assistant for 6 years. Indeed, there are 7 class groups of *Bachillerato* while there are just 4 of *ESO* in each academic level (1º *ESO*, 2º *ESO*, 3º *ESO* and 4º *ESO* have A, B, C and D class groups in each level). Therefore, it is more accurate to confirm that students have been working with a language assistant at this high school for four years in 4º *ESO*, due to the fact that they started to benefit from their presence in 1º *ESO* until 4º *ESO* (except from the

cases in which students are new to the high school). As previously stated, the probability of students newly arrived in *Bachillerato* is higher, therefore the questionnaires are handed in 1º ESO and 4º ESO to analyse the differences in students' thoughts about benefits of language assistants, considering that students from 1º ESO have started this academic year to benefit from the language assistant whereas students in 4º ESO are in their fourth year of being benefited from a language assistant's presence.

3.7. Instruments

3.7.1. Instrument design

Tools used for this research to obtain the information to be analysed are mixed questionnaires based on open and closed items. There were 10 closed items and 1 open item in each questionnaire. The open item was constituted by an open question (nº 11) formulated in order to encourage the participants of this study to add further comments about the work of assistants. On the other hand, the first 10 items included in the questionnaires encouraged participants to express their perceptions on the basis of a Likert scale of five points:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

Different measures were taken in order to guarantee the **reliability** and **validity** of the instruments, considering the different research objectives: on the one hand, it was important to make sure that students of different age would be able to understand them properly, without misunderstanding. In order to achieve this aim, in the questionnaires for the students, items have been clearly explained and more accessible language has been used.

In terms of the language chosen for the questionnaires, it was decided that the questionnaires were administered in Spanish, in order to reduce possibilities of misunderstanding as much as possible.

Questionnaires were anonymous and picked up by myself so students did not think that their answers are going to have an influence in their subject's mark (French in this case). This aspect of questionnaires not being influential in their mark was clearly communicated to

students since it was crucial that students were aware of the fact that this research had nothing to do with their high school.

Three types of questionnaires were designed including similar items: one for students; one for teachers; and another one for the language assistant. In this way, we could achieve data **triangulation**, obtaining information from the students, the teachers and the language assistant. It was therefore important to check if their answers coincide in the questionnaires, that is why the statements presented in the questionnaires are very similar.

The three instruments used in this research appear presented below. Further examples of answered questionnaires are found in Appendix II.

1. *Students' questionnaire*

CUESTIONARIO ALUMNOS

- Tema: Pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar de francés ayuda a mejorar este idioma
- Instrucciones: este cuestionario es anónimo. Tan solo has de indicar tu curso (por ejemplo, 1º ESO B). Registra tus ideas sobre cómo el auxiliar influye en tu aprendizaje de francés marcando con una X.

RECUERDA: Son tus pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar te ha ayudado a mejorar tu francés.

CURSO: _____

- 1. Totalmente en desacuerdo**
- 2. En desacuerdo**
- 3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo**
- 4. De acuerdo**
- 5. Totalmente de acuerdo**

	1	2	3	4	5
Cuestionario					
1. Estoy conociendo más tradiciones culturales de los países donde se habla francés					
2. Soy consciente de ciertas características propias de países de habla francesa (por ejemplo, los horarios de las comidas, de las tiendas, la forma de saludar...)					
3. Estoy mejorando cómo decir oralmente palabras en francés gracias a la ayuda del auxiliar, es decir, cómo pronunciarlas					
4. Entiendo mejor cómo funciona la pronunciación de las palabras en francés, es decir, entiendo más las reglas para decir las palabras					
5. Estoy aprendiendo más palabras en francés gracias al auxiliar					

6. Soy capaz de usar esas palabras nuevas que he aprendido					
7. Estoy comprendiendo mejor la concordancia entre sustantivo o nombre y adjetivos (es decir, cuándo van juntas las palabras que son femenino, masculino, singular o plural) y además soy capaz de escribirlo de manera correcta. Por ejemplo, puedo escribir correctamente frases como: “une étudiante blonde” o “un étudiant blond”					
8. Conozco mejor los verbos en francés y sus formas. Además, soy capaz de escribirlos de correctamente. Por ejemplo: “j’aime”, “ils aiment”.					
9. Me siento más seguro hablando en francés gracias al auxiliar					
10. Me siento más motivado aprendiendo francés con una persona cuya lengua materna es el francés					
11. Otros comentarios que me gustaría hacer sobre cómo me ayuda el auxiliar para aprender francés:					

2. Teachers' questionnaire

CUESTIONARIO A LOS PROFESORES QUE IMPARTEN EN CURSOS DONDE ESTÁ PRESENTE EL AUXILIAR DE CONVERSACIÓN

Tema: Percepciones sobre la presencia del auxiliar de conversación

Instrucciones para responder: cuestionario anónimo. Registra tus percepciones sobre cómo el auxiliar influye en el aprendizaje de francés de los alumnos. Marca con una X.

1. Totalmente en desacuerdo

2. En desacuerdo

3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo

4. De acuerdo

5. Totalmente de acuerdo

	1	2	3	4	5
Cuestionario					
1. Los alumnos amplían su conocimiento sobre tradiciones culturales en países francófonos					
2. Los alumnos conocen peculiaridades particulares del día a día de países de habla francesa (tales como horarios de comidas, de tiendas, saludos...)					
3. Los alumnos manifiestan una mejora en su pronunciación con la presencia del auxiliar					
4. Los alumnos entienden mejor las reglas de pronunciación gracias al auxiliar					

5. Los alumnos aumentan su léxico gracias al auxiliar					
6. Los alumnos son capaces de incluir el nuevo vocabulario en situaciones comunicativas					
7. Los alumnos son capaces de concordar sustantivos y adjetivos en función del género y número					
8. Los alumnos han mejorado su conocimiento sobre las terminaciones de los verbos en francés, en función del sujeto que realiza la acción					
9. La confianza de los alumnos al trabajar con el francés aumenta					
10. Los alumnos parecen más motivados al aprender con una persona nativa					
11. Comentarios adicionales sobre el aprendizaje de los alumnos con la presencia del auxiliar en las aulas:					

3. *Language assistant's questionnaire*

CUESTIONARIO AL AUXILIAR DE CONVERSACIÓN

- Tema: Percepciones sobre la presencia del auxiliar de conversación

- Instrucciones para responder: cuestionario anónimo. Registra tus percepciones sobre cómo la presencia del Auxiliar influye en el aprendizaje de francés de los alumnos marcando con una X.

1. Totalmente en desacuerdo

2. En desacuerdo

3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo

4. De acuerdo

5. Totalmente de acuerdo

	1	2	3	4	5
Cuestionario					
1. Los alumnos amplían su conocimiento sobre tradiciones culturales en países francófonos					
2. Los alumnos conocen peculiaridades particulares del día a día de países de habla francesa (tales como horarios de comidas, de tiendas, saludos...)					
3. Los alumnos manifiestan una mejora en su pronunciación con la presencia del auxiliar					
4. Los alumnos entienden mejor las reglas de pronunciación gracias al auxiliar					
5. Los alumnos aumentan su léxico gracias al auxiliar					
6. Los alumnos son capaces de incluir el nuevo vocabulario en situaciones comunicativas					
7. Los alumnos son capaces de concordar sustantivos y adjetivos en función del género y número					

8. Los alumnos han mejorado su conocimiento sobre las terminaciones de los verbos en francés, en función del sujeto que realiza la acción					
9. La confianza de los alumnos al trabajar con el francés aumenta					
10. Los alumnos parecen más motivados al aprender con una persona nativa					
11. Comentarios adicionales sobre el aprendizaje de los alumnos con la presencia del auxiliar en las aulas:					

3.7.2. Instrument administration

The questionnaires were administered at the beginning of the academic year 2017-2018. To be specific, at the end of October, which meant that students had been working with the language assistant for almost one month during that academic year (since language assistants start to work in Spain in the month of October). In the case of students from 1° ESO, they did not benefit from the presence of a language assistant during the previous academic year (at least this is what was supposed in the majority of the students, considering that they had not studied primary education in a bilingual school). Nevertheless, in the case of students from 4° ESO, they had been working with a language assistant since they were in 1° ESO, which conforms three full academic years of contact with the assistant and the beginning of the current academic year, as already explained in previous sections.

The students did not present any questions when they were given the questionnaires due to the fact that instructions were extremely clear. These instructions were not only written in the questionnaire sheets but also orally explained by myself, who administered the questionnaires. Such questionnaires were administered by myself in order to see students' reactions and to allow that instructions were given by the same person. This is why the centre chosen to conduct the research was the IES Alborán-Manuel Cáliz, since this is the place is where I work and I could personally give instructions to all the groups in which questionnaires were administered. Since this is a bilingual French-Spanish centre, the language studied with the language assistant was French. This was considered to be an appropriate context for our study since the current study is based on the perceptions of different subjects about how language assistants improve their foreign language learning.

The questionnaires were answered in class and the time that students took to answer them was approximately five-ten minutes. The questionnaires were anonymous and students knew that the results provided were not going to affect their foreign language marks. They also showed enthusiasm when completing them instead of apathy.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we are going to present and discuss the results of our study in the following order: 1, teachers' perceptions; 2, students' perceptions; 3, assistant's perceptions; 4, comparison among teachers', assistant's and students' perceptions.

Results are presented according to the objectives of the current research. Each objective is reflected into two items in the given questionnaires, although each item refers to slightly different nuances of the mentioned aspect (e.g. Items 1 and 2 refer both to the sociocultural competence; Item 1: I am learning more about cultural traditions of the foreign countries; Item 2: I am becoming more aware of specific cultural characteristics, typical from the foreign countries where the foreign language is spoken, such as eating timetables, shops timetables, ways of greetings...).

With the aim of presenting meaningful results, the mean of each item has been calculated and a brief report has been written in each pair of items, as it is presented below. Since we are going to discuss teachers' perceptions, students' perceptions and the language assistant's ones, a final conclusion is being offered in which the results from the three sources of information (students, teachers and assistant) have been contrasted. In Appendix II we can find examples of answered questionnaires.

4.1. Teachers' perceptions

The group of the teachers who completed the questionnaires (4 teachers) chose option 5 in the Likert scale (strongly agree) to note their thoughts about all the items. This is why decimals are not shown when the mean was calculated.

a) Sociocultural competence

- Item 1: *Los alumnos amplían su conocimiento sobre tradiciones culturales en países francófonos.* **MEAN: 5** (strongly agree)
- Item 2: *Los alumnos conocen peculiaridades particulares del día a día de países de habla*

francesa (tales como horarios de comidas, de tiendas, saludos...). **MEAN: 5**

b) Phonetic competence

- Item 3: *Los alumnos manifiestan una mejora en su pronunciación con la presencia del auxiliar.* **MEAN: 5**

- Item 4: *Los alumnos entienden mejor las reglas de pronunciación gracias al auxiliar.* **MEAN: 5**

c) Lexical competence

- Item 5: *Los alumnos aumentan su léxico gracias al auxiliar.* **MEAN: 5**

- Item 6: *Los alumnos son capaces de incluir el nuevo vocabulario en situaciones comunicativas.* **MEAN: 5**

d) Grammatical competence

- Item 7: *Los alumnos son capaces de concordar sustantivos y adjetivos en función del género y número.* **MEAN: 5**

- Item 8: *Los alumnos han mejorado su conocimiento sobre las terminaciones de los verbos en francés, en función del sujeto que realiza la acción.* **MEAN: 5**

e) Increase in confidence and motivation

- Item 9: *La confianza de los alumnos al trabajar con el francés aumenta.* **MEAN: 5**

- Item 10: *Los alumnos parecen motivados al aprender con una persona nativa.* **MEAN: 5**

f) Other comments

- Item 11: *Comentarios adicionales sobre el aprendizaje de los alumnos con la presencia del auxiliar en las aulas.*

The perceptions of the Head of Department are crucial and significant. He affirms that language assistants are absolutely essential and required to make possible a bilingual high school. Indeed, he exemplifies the positive or negative impact that language assistants present in all learning fields by stating that in the last three academic years, the high school has suffered a reduction from two language assistants to one, which has definitely meant a negative impact on the teaching and learning of a foreign language; apart from that cut, the language assistant timetable has also been reduced, which has caused difficulties in preparing

students to pass the DELF² exam (both for teachers, since it has been exhausting, and for the language assistant, who has 6 hours in his/her timetable exclusively devoted to that). He stated that he is worried about how long could it take for the system to recover from the damage caused from the reduction in both the language assistants' timetable and the number of assistants in each high school.

Another teacher affirms that thanks to the language assistant, students can improve, above all, the communicative strategies. This is due to the fact that students practise dialogues related to everyday life with a native speaker person.

4.2. Students' perceptions

4.2.1. Students who have **started** to work with the language assistant **this academic year** (from 1º ESO)

a) Sociocultural competence:

- Item 1: *Estoy conociendo más tradiciones culturales de los países donde se habla francés.*

MEAN: 3.32 (neither agree nor disagree)

- Item 2: *Soy consciente de ciertas características propias de países de habla francesa (por ejemplo, los horarios de las comidas, de las tiendas, la forma de saludar...).* **MEAN: 4.16** (agree)

The difference in results between items 1 and 2 may be due to the fact that students in 1º ESO could not understand properly the meaning of the term 'cultural traditions' without examples.

b) Phonetic competence

- Item 3: *Estoy mejorando cómo decir oralmente palabras en francés gracias a la ayuda del auxiliar, es decir, cómo pronunciarlas.* **MEAN: 4.82**

- Item 4: *Entiendo mejor cómo funciona la pronunciación de las palabras en francés, es decir, entiendo más las reglas para decir las palabras.* **MEAN: 2.78**

This difference in results (items 3 and 4) could be caused by the fact that students have clearly noticed an improvement in their pronunciation, although they are not consciously aware of the phonological rules.

² DELF: *Diplôme d'Études en Langue Française* (Diploma in French Language Studies)

c) Lexical competence

- Item 5: *Estoy aprendiendo más palabras en francés gracias al auxiliar.* **MEAN: 4.06**
- Item 6: *Soy capaz de usar esas palabras nuevas que he aprendido.* **MEAN: 4.76**

The difference in results between these two items could be because of the fact that students feel that they have more opportunities to include the new lexis in their language speeches, rather than learning new words. This may be caused by the high likelihood that the students present of getting involved in conversations or speeches in a foreign language with the language assistant.

d) Grammatical competence

- Item 7: *Estoy comprendiendo mejor la concordancia entre sustantivo o nombre y adjetivos (es decir, cuándo van juntas las palabras que son femenino, masculino, singular o plural) y además soy capaz de escribirlo de manera correcta.*

Por ejemplo, puedo escribir correctamente frases como: “une étudiante blonde” o “un étudiant blond”. MEAN: 3.94

- Item 8: *Conozco mejor los verbos en francés y sus formas. Además, soy capaz de escribirlos correctamente.*

Por ejemplo: “j’aime”, “ils aiment”. MEAN: 3.86

e) Increase in confidence and motivation

- Item 9: *Me siento más seguro hablando en francés gracias al auxiliar.* **MEAN: 3.62**
- Item 10: *Me siento más motivado aprendiendo francés con una persona cuya lengua materna es el francés.* **MEAN: 4.88**

The different results may be because students may not see themselves as more confident learners when speaking a foreign language with a native speaker, who they know is going to be aware of all the students' mistakes. However, the students could feel more motivated since they could possibly find exciting to check that they can be understood by a real native speaker who can also answer all their questions about the foreign language they learn and who could present to them some cultural and new information.

f) Other comments

- Item 11: *Otros comentarios que me gustaría hacer sobre cómo me ayuda el auxiliar para aprender francés:*

It is worth noting the comment provided by one of the students: he/she wrote that the language assistant corrects him/her when he/she makes mistakes in pronunciation when reading. This comment reinforces the idea that the phonology competence is increased thanks to the language assistant's presence.

4.2.2. Students who **started to work with a language assistant **four academic years ago** (from 4º ESO)**

a) Sociocultural competence:

- Item 1: *Estoy conociendo más tradiciones culturales de los países donde se habla francés.*

MEAN: 3.98

- Item 2: *Soy consciente de ciertas características propias de países de habla francesa (por ejemplo, los horarios de las comidas, de las tiendas, la forma de saludar...).* **MEAN: 4.24**

b) Phonetic competence

- Item 3: *Estoy mejorando cómo decir oralmente palabras en francés gracias a la ayuda del auxiliar, es decir, cómo pronunciarlas.* **MEAN: 4.72**

- Item 4: *Entiendo mejor cómo funciona la pronunciación de las palabras en francés, es decir, entiendo más las reglas para decir las palabras.* **MEAN: 3.12**

The difference in results (items 3 and 4) could be the same one that it was described in students from 1º ESO: students could have clearly noticed an improvement in their pronunciation, although they could not be consciously aware of the phonological rules.

c) Lexical competence

- Item 5: *Estoy aprendiendo más palabras en francés gracias al auxiliar.* **MEAN: 4.08**

- Item 6: *Soy capaz de usar esas palabras nuevas que he aprendido.* **MEAN: 4.74**

As it happened in 1º ESO, students probably feel that they are given more opportunities to practise with the language assistant the lexis they have already learnt, even though they do not consider that they are not incrementing their vocabulary with him/her.

d) Grammatical competence

- Item 7: *Estoy comprendiendo mejor la concordancia entre sustantivo o nombre y adjetivos (es decir, cuándo van juntas las palabras que son femenino, masculino, singular o plural) y además soy capaz de escribirlo de manera correcta.*

Por ejemplo, puedo escribir correctamente frases como: “une étudiante blonde” o “un étudiant blond”. **MEAN: 4.32**

- Item 8: *Conozco mejor los verbos en francés y sus formas. Además, soy capaz de escribirlos correctamente.*

Por ejemplo: “j’aime”, “ils aiment”. **MEAN: 4.18**

e) Increase in confidence and motivation

- Item 9: *Me siento más seguro hablando en francés gracias al auxiliar.* **MEAN: 3.74**

- Item 10: *Me siento más motivado aprendiendo francés con una persona cuya lengua materna es el francés.* **MEAN: 4.96**

The main reasons of a difference in the results obtained from items 9 and 10 could be explained by the speculation given for the 1º ESO students: they feel more motivated by the presence of a native speaker, which could imply for them that someone is going to teach differently, offering new information; whereas regarding confidence, students seem not to feel that they boost it at the same level as their motivation, maybe because they can feel sometimes that their mistakes are going to be clearly noticed.

f) Other comments

- Item 11: *Otros comentarios que me gustaría hacer sobre cómo me ayuda el auxiliar para aprender francés:*

The only meaningful comment made in 4º ESO is provided by a student who believes that language assistants are necessary.

4.2.3. Total figures of students’ perceptions (from 1º ESO and 4º ESO)

Results from the students in 1º ESO and in 4º ESO are very similar. Results from 1º ESO do not differ much from those of 4º ESO, despite the fact that the first have presumably had less contact with a language assistant. The items in which the most significant differences are found are in the items related to the sociocultural competence (items 1 and 2, in which 1º ESO has given lower scores). To specify these scores, we remember that 1º ESO gave 3.32 to item 1 and 4.16 to item 2; whereas 4º ESO gave 3.98 to item 1 and 4.24 to item 2. Such difference

between 1° and 4° *ESO* could be produced by a misunderstanding in the meaning of ‘cultural traditions’, found as part of the item 1.

It is worth noticing that even though students consider that language assistants are beneficial for them in the development of the sociocultural competence (items 1 and 2), the aspects in which students believe that assistants help the students the most are those linked to the inclusion of vocabulary in their productions (item 6), an increase in motivation (item 10) and an improvement in pronunciation (item 3). Confidence (item 9) is also considered to be incremented because of the assistant’s presence, but to a more moderate extent.

Regarding learning new lexis (item 5) and an improvement in the understanding of grammar (items 7 and 8), students believe that assistants do help them. However, they have not crossed ‘5’ (strongly agree) in the items related to these learning aspects, probably because these items seem to focus more on aspects of language instructions rather than of language use, which stresses the contribution of the assistant to the development of the oral competence rather than the written one.

Despite the fact that students consider that a language assistant does not make them raise awareness of pronunciation rules in the foreign language (item 4), they affirm that they are improving their pronunciation thanks to the language assistant’s help (item 3).

4.3. Language assistant’s perceptions

a) Sociocultural competence: 5 in both items (1 and 2)

b) Phonetic competence: 5 in both items (3 and 4)

c) Lexical competence: 5 in both items (5 and 6)

d) Grammatical competence: 5 in both items (7 and 8)

e) Increase in confidence and motivation: 5 in both items (9 and 10)

f) Other comments: It is essential that students can be in contact with a native speaker. Motivation and oral skills are the aspects that can benefit more.

In conclusion, the language assistant considers that language assistants’ job has very a positive impact on the learning of foreign languages, since students can improve in many aspects: sociocultural, phonetic, lexical, grammatical competences as well as in an increase in confidence and students’ motivation, being both the motivational and oral aspects the most

important ones (according to item 11).

4.4. Comparison among teachers', assistant's and students' perceptions

The following table facilitates a comparison among teachers', assistant's and students' perceptions in this study as well as their comparison with Scobling's (2011) one (in the items that both studies coincide).

		Tea chers' mean	Students' mean			Assistant's mean	Scobling (2011)		
			1° <i>ESO</i>	4° <i>ESO</i>	Total		Teachers	Students	Assistants
Sociocultural competence	Item 1	5	3.32	3.98	3.65	5	-	-	-
	Item 2	5	4.16	4.24	4.20	5	-	-	-
Phonetic competence	Item 3	5	4.82	4.72	4.77	5	-	-	-
	Item 4	5	2.78	3.12	2.95	5	-	-	-
Lexical competence	Item 5	5	4.06	4.08	4.07	5	-	-	-
	Item 6	5	4.76	4.74	4.75	5	-	-	-
Grammatical competence	Item 7	5	3.94	4.32	4.13	5	-	-	-
	Item 8	5	3.86	4.18	4.02	5	-	-	-
Confidence	Item 9	5	3.62	3.74	3.68	5	-	-	-
Motivation	Item 10	5	4.88	4.96	4.92	5	3.97	3.57	3.94

Coincidentally, the answers given by the language assistant and the foreign language teachers about their perceptions of the positive impact of language assistants are the same ones. Both sides do definitely agree that language assistant's presence can affect successfully all aspects of the students' learning, in particular the ones specified in the given questionnaires.

In terms of the students' perceptions, although an absolute agreement has not been shown in all the aspects of the questionnaires, all the items have been valued positively, which means that the students also conceive that the language assistant's job has a good influence when learning a foreign language. As previously specified, these aspects are: sociocultural, phonological, grammar and lexical competences and an increase in confidence and motivation.

5. FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND LINES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has been focused on the experience of L2 learning with foreign language assistants, from a theoretical and an empirical perspective. Because of the increasing figures of foreign language assistants in Spain, this research aimed to carry out a study to find out in more details whether this role (language assistant) meant a positive impact on some specific aspects in the learning of foreign languages, according to the perceptions of teachers', students' and a language assistant. Such perceptions were narrowed in the sociocultural, grammatical, lexical and phonological competences, as well as the increase of students' motivation and confidence when dealing with a foreign language.

In the first part, a theoretical review is developed around the discussion of central aspects related to the role of foreign language assistants such as the definition of language assistants, the legislation of Foreign Language Assistants in Spain, functions of language assistants, work modalities and how can schools and students benefit from their work followed. In connection to this last aspect, we present an overview of the main research findings related to this topic that appear in the research studies conducted by Ortega (2000) and Scobling (2011). They both found how language assistants present a positive impact on language teaching, in particular in motivation.

In the second part, we have approached an empirical study in order to answer three main research questions. As regards the first question, whether it is considered that a language assistant benefits the development of the sociocultural competence in students, the results show that students agree with that statement, as well as the teachers and the assistant who participated in our study. As regards the second research question ('is it thought that a language assistant improves students' phonological, lexical and grammatical competences?'), it is clear that generally, all subjects believe that language assistants help positively to the development of those competences. As regards the third question, which aims to know whether it is perceived that language assistants boost students' confidence and motivation, whereas confidence did not get as high score as motivation but it keeps meaning a positive one.

In our study, we have found a very high degree of agreement among the different perspectives: students', teachers' and assistant's. However, it is important to take into account that due to the small number of groups and participants involved in this study, the results

obtained cannot be generalised, even though they coincide with Ortega's (2000; 2003) and Scobling's (2011) studies to a very large extent.

Future research could be carried out under the variation of developing this study in a wide variety of high schools, to analyse whether results are the same. Moreover, further future research could also aim to develop the same or a similar study in primary schools, to check whether perceptions from pupils, language assistants and teachers remain being the same ones.

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APPENDIX I

Encuesta Alumnos	1	2	3	4	5	N/C	Rating Average	Response Count
Me gusta estudiar lengua extranjera	14	7	27	20	42	4	3,63	114
Me gusta hablar en la lengua extranjera	9	16	24	25	36	3	3,57	113
Me gusta tener clase con el profesor de lengua extranjera	9	13	24	21	46	0	3,73	113
Me gusta tener clase con el Auxiliar de conversación	8	9	18	22	52	3	3,93	112
Participo mucho en clase	6	25	29	31	18	0	3,28	109
Hablo mucho en la lengua extranjera en clase	12	34	30	20	17	0	2,96	113
Me gustan las actividades que realizo con el Auxiliar de conversación	4	10	20	34	40	5	3,89	113
Me gustan las actividades que realizo con el profesor de lengua extranjera	8	6	30	35	34	0	3,72	113
Me relaciono bien con el Auxiliar de conversación	4	19	27	24	38	0	3,65	112
Me relaciono bien con el profesor de lengua extranjera	5	6	27	38	32	5	3,80	113
Me comporto mejor en clase del Auxiliar de conversación que en clase del profesor de lengua extranjera	33	12	25	14	21	6	2,79	111
Prefiero clase con el Auxiliar de conversación	11	14	20	16	46	4	3,67	111
Prefiero clase con el profesor de lengua extranjera	24	14	36	15	18	5	2,90	112

Table 1. Source: Scobling (2011: 15)

Encuesta Alumnos El Auxiliar de Conversación:	1	2	3	4	5	N/C	Rating Average	Response Count
habla solo en su propia idioma (la lengua extranjera) en clase	12	12	20	23	46	0	3,70	113
me motiva a participar en clase	12	14	23	33	28	0	3,46	110
me motiva a hablar en la lengua extranjera	16	15	26	29	26	1	3,30	113
me hace interesarme por su país y su cultura	11	14	25	26	37	0	3,57	113
me motiva a seguir estudiando la lengua extranjera en el futuro	13	11	25	25	32	5	3,49	111

Encuesta Alumnos El profesor de lengua extranjera:	1	2	3	4	5	N/C	Rating Average	Response Count
habla solo en la lengua extranjera en clase	17	15	23	26	28	1	3,30	110
me motiva a participar en clase	14	17	27	26	26	0	3,30	110
me motiva a hablar en la lengua extranjera	16	11	28	27	24	3	3,30	109
me hace interesarme por los países y la cultura de la lengua extranjera	18	20	19	23	29	0	3,23	109
me motiva a seguir estudiando la lengua extranjera en el futuro	19	8	21	31	29	2	3,40	110

Table 2. Source: Scobling (2011: 15)

Encuesta Auxiliares	1	2	3	4	5	N/C	Rating Average	Response Count
Hablo solo en mi propia idioma	6	13	15	37	37	0	3,80	108
Consigo motivar a los alumnos a hablar en mi idioma	1	2	26	49	29	0	3,96	107
Es difícil motivar a los alumnos a hablar en mi idioma	9	32	20	30	16	1	3,11	108
Consigo motivar a los alumnos a participar	1	0	28	52	26	0	3,95	107
Es difícil motivar a los alumnos a participar	10	31	28	23	15	1	3,02	108
Los alumnos se comportan bien	11	16	33	32	16	0	3,24	108
Los alumnos muestran interés en mi cultura y en mi país	1	8	21	45	33	0	3,94	108
Los alumnos muestran interés en estudiar mi idioma en el futuro	3	19	33	42	10	0	3,35	107

Table 3. Source: Scobling (2011: 16)

APPENDIX II

Examples of answered questionnaires

CUESTIONARIO A LOS PROFESORES QUE IMPARTEN EN CURSOS DONDE ESTÁ PRESENTE EL AUXILIAR DE CONVERSACIÓN

Tema: Percepciones sobre la presencia del auxiliar de conversación

Instrucciones para responder: cuestionario anónimo. Registra tus percepciones sobre cómo el auxiliar influye en el aprendizaje de francés de los alumnos. Marca con una X.

1. Totalmente en desacuerdo
2. En desacuerdo
3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
4. De acuerdo
5. Totalmente de acuerdo

	1	2	3	4	5
Cuestionario					
1. Los alumnos amplían su conocimiento sobre tradiciones culturales en países francófonos					X
2. Los alumnos conocen peculiaridades particulares del día a día de países de habla francesa (tales como horarios de comidas, de tiendas, saludos...)					X
3. Los alumnos manifiestan una mejora en su pronunciación con la presencia del auxiliar					X
4. Los alumnos entienden mejor las reglas de pronunciación gracias al auxiliar					X
5. Los alumnos aumentan su léxico gracias al auxiliar					X
6. Los alumnos son capaces de incluir el nuevo vocabulario en situaciones comunicativas					X
7. Los alumnos son capaces de concordar sustantivos y adjetivos en función del género y número					X
8. Los alumnos han mejorado su conocimiento sobre las terminaciones de los verbos en francés, en función del sujeto que realiza la acción					X
9. La confianza de los alumnos al trabajar con el francés aumenta					X
10. Los alumnos parecen motivados al aprender con una persona nativa					X
11. Comentarios adicionales sobre el aprendizaje de los alumnos con la presencia del auxiliar en las aulas: Considero que el tema de los auxiliares de conversación es fundamental para el proyecto bilingüe. Pienso que sin auxiliares, no hay proyecto posible. Nuestro departamento, que ha tenido varios años dos auxiliares de conversación, ha sufrido con creces el pasar a un solo auxiliar y peor, la restricción de medio-horario del auxiliar estos tres últimos años, debido a la crisis. Preparar el DELF ha sido agotador para todos nosotros y para el/la auxiliar que tenía solo 6 horas. No sé cuánto tiempo se tardará en recuperar el daño causado por ello.					

CUESTIONARIO ALUMNOS

- Tema: Pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar de francés ayuda a mejorar este idioma

- Instrucciones: este cuestionario es anónimo. Tan solo has de indicar tu curso (por ejemplo, 1º ESO). Registra tus ideas sobre cómo el auxiliar influye en tu aprendizaje de francés marcando con una X.

RECUERDA: Son tus pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar te ha ayudado a mejorar tu francés.

CURSO: 1º ESO

1. Totalmente en desacuerdo
2. En desacuerdo
3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
4. De acuerdo
5. Totalmente de acuerdo

	1	2	3	4	5
Cuestionario					
1. Estoy conociendo más tradiciones culturales de los países donde se habla francés					X
2. Soy consciente de ciertas características propias de países de habla francesa (por ejemplo, los horarios de las comidas, de las tiendas, la forma de saludar...)					X
3. Estoy mejorando cómo decir oralmente palabras en francés gracias a la ayuda del auxiliar, es decir, cómo pronunciarlas					X
4. Entiendo mejor cómo funciona la pronunciación de las palabras en francés, es decir, entiendo más las reglas para decir las palabras			X		
5. Estoy aprendiendo más palabras en francés gracias al auxiliar					X
6. Soy capaz de usar esas palabras nuevas que he aprendido				X	
7. Estoy comprendiendo mejor la concordancia entre sustantivo o nombre y adjetivos (es decir, cuándo van juntas las palabras que son femenino, masculino, singular o plural) y además soy capaz de escribirlo de manera correcta. Por ejemplo, puedo escribir correctamente frases como: "une étudiante blonde" o "un étudiant blond"			X		
8. Conozco mejor los verbos en francés y sus formas. Además, soy capaz de escribirlos de correctamente. Por ejemplo: "j'aime", "ils aiment"			X		
9. Me siento más seguro hablando en francés gracias al auxiliar				X	
10. Me siento más motivado aprendiendo francés con una persona cuya lengua materna es el francés				X	
11. Otros comentarios que me gustaría hacer sobre cómo me ayuda el auxiliar para aprender francés: <u>en las palabras cuando me equivoco en leer ella me las corrige.</u>					

CUESTIONARIO ALUMNOS

- Tema: Pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar de francés ayuda a mejorar este idioma

- Instrucciones: este cuestionario es anónimo. Tan solo has de indicar tu curso (por ejemplo, 1º ESO). Registra tus ideas sobre cómo el auxiliar influye en tu aprendizaje de francés marcando con una X.

RECUERDA: Son tus pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar te ha ayudado a mejorar tu francés.

CURSO: 1º ESO

1. Totalmente en desacuerdo
2. En desacuerdo
3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
4. De acuerdo
5. Totalmente de acuerdo

	1	2	3	4	5
Cuestionario					
1. Estoy conociendo más tradiciones culturales de los países donde se habla francés					X
2. Soy consciente de ciertas características propias de países de habla francesa (por ejemplo, los horarios de las comidas, de las tiendas, la forma de saludar...)					X
3. Estoy mejorando cómo decir oralmente palabras en francés gracias a la ayuda del auxiliar, es decir, cómo pronunciarlas					X
4. Entiendo mejor cómo funciona la pronunciación de las palabras en francés, es decir, entiendo más las reglas para decir las palabras					X
5. Estoy aprendiendo más palabras en francés gracias al auxiliar				X	
6. Soy capaz de usar esas palabras nuevas que he aprendido				X	
7. Estoy comprendiendo mejor la concordancia entre sustantivo o nombre y adjetivos (es decir, cuándo van juntas las palabras que son femenino, masculino, singular o plural) y además soy capaz de escribirlo de manera correcta. Por ejemplo, puedo escribir correctamente frases como: "une étudiante blonde" o "un étudiant blond"					X
8. Conozco mejor los verbos en francés y sus formas. Además, soy capaz de escribirlos de correctamente. Por ejemplo: "j'aime", "ils aiment"					X
9. Me siento más seguro hablando en francés gracias al auxiliar				X	
10. Me siento más motivado aprendiendo francés con una persona cuya lengua materna es el francés				X	
11. Otros comentarios que me gustaría hacer sobre cómo me ayuda el auxiliar para aprender francés: <u>Cuando no entendemos el significado de alguna palabra nos la explica.</u>					

CUESTIONARIO ALUMNOS

- Tema: Pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar de francés ayuda a mejorar este idioma
- Instrucciones: este cuestionario es anónimo. Tan solo has de indicar tu curso (por ejemplo, 1º ESO). Registra tus ideas sobre cómo el auxiliar influye en tu aprendizaje de francés marcando con una X.

RECUERDA: Son tus pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar te ha ayudado a mejorar tu francés.

CURSO: 1º ESO

1. Totalmente en desacuerdo
2. En desacuerdo
3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
4. De acuerdo
5. Totalmente de acuerdo

	1	2	3	4	5
Cuestionario					
1. Estoy conociendo más tradiciones culturales de los países donde se habla francés					X
2. Soy consciente de ciertas características propias de países de habla francesa (por ejemplo, los horarios de las comidas, de las tiendas, la forma de saludar...)					X
3. Estoy mejorando cómo decir oralmente palabras en francés gracias a la ayuda del auxiliar, es decir, cómo pronunciarlas				X	
4. Entiendo mejor cómo funciona la pronunciación de las palabras en francés, es decir, entiendo más las reglas para decir las palabras					X
5. Estoy aprendiendo más palabras en francés gracias al auxiliar			X		
6. Soy capaz de usar esas palabras nuevas que he aprendido					X
7. Estoy comprendiendo mejor la concordancia entre sustantivo o nombre y adjetivos (es decir, cuándo van juntas las palabras que son femenino, masculino, singular o plural) y además soy capaz de escribirlo de manera correcta. Por ejemplo, puedo escribir correctamente frases como: "une étudiante blonde" o "un étudiant blond"				X	
8. Conozco mejor los verbos en francés y sus formas. Además, soy capaz de escribirlos de correctamente. Por ejemplo: "j'aime", "ils aiment"				X	
9. Me siento más seguro hablando en francés gracias al auxiliar			X		
10. Me siento más motivado aprendiendo francés con una persona cuya lengua materna es el francés					X
11. Otros comentarios que me gustaría hacer sobre cómo me ayuda el auxiliar para aprender francés:					

CUESTIONARIO ALUMNOS

- Tema: Pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar de francés ayuda a mejorar este idioma
 - Instrucciones: este cuestionario es anónimo. Tan solo has de indicar tu curso (por ejemplo, 1º ESO). Registra tus ideas sobre cómo el auxiliar influye en tu aprendizaje de francés marcando con una X.

RECUERDA: Son tus pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar te ha ayudado a mejorar tu francés.

CURSO: 4º ESO B

1. Totalmente en desacuerdo
2. En desacuerdo
3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
4. De acuerdo
5. Totalmente de acuerdo

	1	2	3	4	5
Cuestionario					
1. Estoy conociendo más tradiciones culturales de los países donde se habla francés			X		
2. Soy consciente de ciertas características propias de países de habla francesa (por ejemplo, los horarios de las comidas, de las tiendas, la forma de saludar...)					X
3. Estoy mejorando cómo decir oralmente palabras en francés gracias a la ayuda del auxiliar, es decir, cómo pronunciarlas				X	
4. Entiendo mejor cómo funciona la pronunciación de las palabras en francés, es decir, entiendo más las reglas para decir las palabras				X	
5. Estoy aprendiendo más palabras en francés gracias al auxiliar					X
6. Soy capaz de usar esas palabras nuevas que he aprendido					X
7. Estoy comprendiendo mejor la concordancia entre sustantivo o nombre y adjetivos (es decir, cuándo van juntas las palabras que son femenino, masculino, singular o plural) y además soy capaz de escribirlo de manera correcta. Por ejemplo, puedo escribir correctamente frases como: "une étudiante blonde" o "un étudiant blond"					X
8. Conozco mejor los verbos en francés y sus formas. Además, soy capaz de escribirlos de correctamente. Por ejemplo: "j'aime", "ils aiment"					X
9. Me siento más seguro hablando en francés gracias al auxiliar					X
10. Me siento más motivado aprendiendo francés con una persona cuya lengua materna es el francés					X
11. Otros comentarios que me gustaría hacer sobre cómo me ayuda el auxiliar para aprender francés:					

CUESTIONARIO ALUMNOS

- Tema: Pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar de francés ayuda a mejorar este idioma
- Instrucciones: este cuestionario es anónimo. Tan solo has de indicar tu curso (por ejemplo, 1º ESO). Registra tus ideas sobre cómo el auxiliar influye en tu aprendizaje de francés marcando con una X.

RECUERDA: Son tus pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar te ha ayudado a mejorar tu francés.

CURSO: 4º

1. Totalmente en desacuerdo
2. En desacuerdo
3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
4. De acuerdo
5. Totalmente de acuerdo

	1	2	3	4	5
Cuestionario					
1. Estoy conociendo más tradiciones culturales de los países donde se habla francés			X		
2. Soy consciente de ciertas características propias de países de habla francesa (por ejemplo, los horarios de las comidas, de las tiendas, la forma de saludar...)			X		
3. Estoy mejorando cómo decir oralmente palabras en francés gracias a la ayuda del auxiliar, es decir, cómo pronunciarlas				X	
4. Entiendo mejor cómo funciona la pronunciación de las palabras en francés, es decir, entiendo más las reglas para decir las palabras				X	
5. Estoy aprendiendo más palabras en francés gracias al auxiliar				X	
6. Soy capaz de usar esas palabras nuevas que he aprendido			X		
7. Estoy comprendiendo mejor la concordancia entre sustantivo o nombre y adjetivos (es decir, cuándo van juntas las palabras que son femenino, masculino, singular o plural) y además soy capaz de escribirlo de manera correcta. Por ejemplo, puedo escribir correctamente frases como: "une étudiante blonde" o "un étudiant blond"			X		
8. Conozco mejor los verbos en francés y sus formas. Además, soy capaz de escribirlos de correctamente. Por ejemplo: "j'aime", "ils aiment"		X			
9. Me siento más seguro hablando en francés gracias al auxiliar				X	
10. Me siento más motivado aprendiendo francés con una persona cuya lengua materna es el francés				X	
11. Otros comentarios que me gustaría hacer sobre cómo me ayuda el auxiliar para aprender francés: <u>creo que son necesarios</u>					

CUESTIONARIO ALUMNOS

- Tema: Pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar de francés ayuda a mejorar este idioma

- Instrucciones: este cuestionario es anónimo. Tan solo has de indicar tu curso (por ejemplo, 1º ESO). Registra tus ideas sobre cómo el auxiliar influye en tu aprendizaje de francés marcando con una X.

RECUERDA: Son tus pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar te ha ayudado a mejorar tu francés.

CURSO: 4º ESO

1. Totalmente en desacuerdo
2. En desacuerdo
3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
4. De acuerdo
5. Totalmente de acuerdo

	1	2	3	4	5
Cuestionario					
1. Estoy conociendo más tradiciones culturales de los países donde se habla francés			X		
2. Soy consciente de ciertas características propias de países de habla francesa (por ejemplo, los horarios de las comidas, de las tiendas, la forma de saludar...)					X
3. Estoy mejorando cómo decir oralmente palabras en francés gracias a la ayuda del auxiliar, es decir, cómo pronunciarlas					X
4. Entiendo mejor cómo funciona la pronunciación de las palabras en francés, es decir, entiendo más las reglas para decir las palabras					X
5. Estoy aprendiendo más palabras en francés gracias al auxiliar					X
6. Soy capaz de usar esas palabras nuevas que he aprendido					X
7. Estoy comprendiendo mejor la concordancia entre sustantivo o nombre y adjetivos (es decir, cuándo van juntas las palabras que son femenino, masculino, singular o plural) y además soy capaz de escribirlo de manera correcta. Por ejemplo, puedo escribir correctamente frases como: "une étudiante blonde" o "un étudiant blond"				X	
8. Conozco mejor los verbos en francés y sus formas. Además, soy capaz de escribirlos de correctamente. Por ejemplo: "j'aime", "ils aiment"					X
9. Me siento más seguro hablando en francés gracias al auxiliar					X
10. Me siento más motivado aprendiendo francés con una persona cuya lengua materna es el francés					X
11. Otros comentarios que me gustaría hacer sobre cómo me ayuda el auxiliar para aprender francés:					

CUESTIONARIO ALUMNOS

- Tema: Pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar de francés ayuda a mejorar este idioma
 - Instrucciones: este cuestionario es anónimo. Tan solo has de indicar tu curso (por ejemplo, 1º ESO). Registra tus ideas sobre cómo el auxiliar influye en tu aprendizaje de francés marcando con una X.

RECUERDA: Son tus pensamientos sobre si el auxiliar te ha ayudado a mejorar tu francés.

CURSO: 4º ESO B

1. Totalmente en desacuerdo
2. En desacuerdo
3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
4. De acuerdo
5. Totalmente de acuerdo

	1	2	3	4	5
Cuestionario					
1. Estoy conociendo más tradiciones culturales de los países donde se habla francés			X		
2. Soy consciente de ciertas características propias de países de habla francesa (por ejemplo, los horarios de las comidas, de las tiendas, la forma de saludar...)					X
3. Estoy mejorando cómo decir oralmente palabras en francés gracias a la ayuda del auxiliar, es decir, cómo pronunciarlas				X	
4. Entiendo mejor cómo funciona la pronunciación de las palabras en francés, es decir, entiendo más las reglas para decir las palabras				X	
5. Estoy aprendiendo más palabras en francés gracias al auxiliar					X
6. Soy capaz de usar esas palabras nuevas que he aprendido					X
7. Estoy comprendiendo mejor la concordancia entre sustantivo o nombre y adjetivos (es decir, cuándo van juntas las palabras que son femenino, masculino, singular o plural) y además soy capaz de escribirlo de manera correcta. Por ejemplo, puedo escribir correctamente frases como: "une étudiante blonde" o "un étudiant blond"					X
8. Conozco mejor los verbos en francés y sus formas. Además, soy capaz de escribirlos de correctamente. Por ejemplo: "j'aime", "ils aiment"					X
9. Me siento más seguro hablando en francés gracias al auxiliar					X
10. Me siento más motivado aprendiendo francés con una persona cuya lengua materna es el francés					X
11. Otros comentarios que me gustaría hacer sobre cómo me ayuda el auxiliar para aprender francés:					

CUESTIONARIO AL AUXILIAR DE CONVERSACIÓN

- Tema: Percepciones sobre la presencia del auxiliar de conversación
- Instrucciones para responder: cuestionario anónimo. Registra tus percepciones sobre cómo la presencia del Auxiliar influye en el aprendizaje de francés de los alumnos marcando con una X.

1. Totalmente en desacuerdo
2. En desacuerdo
3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
4. De acuerdo
5. Totalmente de acuerdo

	1	2	3	4	5
Cuestionario					
1. Los alumnos amplían su conocimiento sobre tradiciones culturales en países francófonos					X
2. Los alumnos conocen peculiaridades particulares del día a día de países de habla francesa (tales como horarios de comidas, de tiendas, saludos...)					X
3. Los alumnos manifiestan una mejora en su pronunciación con la presencia del auxiliar					X
4. Los alumnos entienden mejor las reglas de pronunciación gracias al auxiliar					X
5. Los alumnos aumentan su léxico gracias al auxiliar					X
6. Los alumnos son capaces de incluir el nuevo vocabulario en situaciones comunicativas					X
7. Los alumnos son capaces de concordar sustantivos y adjetivos en función del género y número					X
8. Los alumnos han mejorado su conocimiento sobre las terminaciones de los verbos en francés, en función del sujeto que realiza la acción					X
9. La confianza de los alumnos al trabajar con el francés aumenta					X
10. Los alumnos parecen motivados al aprender con una persona nativa					X
11. Comentarios adicionales sobre el aprendizaje de los alumnos con la presencia del auxiliar en las aulas: Es fundamental que los estudiantes estén con una persona nativa. Considero que la motivación y las destrezas orales son las partes más beneficiadas de este contacto.					