



Original Research

Ready to Mediate? Self-Perceived EFL Teaching Competence in Andalusia (Spain)

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Abstract: Taking into account recent developments in European guidelines for language teaching and learning, particularly with regard to the inclusion of mediation and online activities, this study investigates the integration of skills and competences outlined in regional curricula for language education in primary and secondary schools. Specifically, the research examines how teachers implement, assess, and adapt activities to develop receptive, productive, interactive, and mediation skills, alongside promoting language use and intercultural understanding. This investigation combines quantitative and qualitative data collected through a survey of fifty-three primary and secondary school teachers. Positive findings include the use of diverse materials and innovative strategies, particularly in the treatment of receptive skills and interculturality. The study also identified important challenges, especially in the areas of mediation, online interaction, and assessment practices. The study concludes that specific teacher training in mediation techniques and digital tools may help overcome these challenges and enhance competence-based language education.

Keywords: *English as a Foreign Language, Teaching Competence, Mediation, Primary Education, Secondary Education, Interculturality*

Introduction

The publication of the Common European Framework Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020, henceforth Companion Volume) has had important effects upon Spanish national and regional curricular guidelines in terms of language teaching, learning, and assessment. This European reference document highlights the essential components of communicative competence in terms of activities, strategies, and assessment. Here, unlike the traditional focus on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, the Companion Volume prioritizes activities and strategies related to reception, production, interaction, and mediation, along with the contextualized treatment of linguistic areas (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation), and pluricultural competence (Council of Europe 2020). In the specific context of Spain, these areas have been translated into six specific competences outlined in current legislation in Andalusia for primary (Orden de 30 de mayo de 2023a) and secondary education (Orden de 30 de mayo de 2023b).

While many of the aspects treated in these European, national, and regional guidelines were already familiar to teachers and learners, others, such as mediation, have not formed part of the language curriculum. To compound this lack of familiarity, the descriptors for

mediation in language learning contexts have not been sufficiently explored (Korai and Papadima-Sophocleous 2021). Similarly, the inclusion of pluricultural competence as a directly assessable component of language courses in primary and secondary education is a novelty for teachers formally trained in and accustomed to the teaching and evaluation of the now defunct four skills model.

This exploratory study examines the degree to which foreign language teachers are assimilating and implementing the new teaching and learning contents introduced in European and regional guidelines, particularly in terms of the treatment of mediation and culture. To achieve this, our investigation integrates evidence drawn from a literature review and survey data on teachers' perspectives regarding the aforementioned areas. The following section will define these specific competences and examine how language teachers can apply them in the English classroom.

Literature Review

As discussed, in recent years, educational guidelines have placed increasing emphasis on developing specific competences that extend beyond traditional language skills. Consequently, this section provides an examination of these competences—reception, production, interaction, mediation, plurilingualism, and interculturality—and their implementation by language teachers in the English classroom.

Receptive Skills

Receptive skills in foreign language learning include reading, listening, and audio-visual comprehension, and these skills are widely acknowledged by both L2 researchers and practitioners as key components (Renandya and Jacobs 2016). These skills are fundamental not only as independent abilities, but also as tools, which facilitate acquisition of the language and enable development in L2 production and interaction.

When considering these skills, there is often a tendency to focus on short, intensive, class-based comprehension tasks. In the classroom, for example, such activities can support the development of top-down and bottom-up comprehension strategies (Marlina 2018). Nevertheless, it is often in more natural and extended tasks where benefits are to be more fully appreciated. With extensive reading and listening, for example, students can improve their vocabulary and grammar development; they can also become more confident in using the L2 and gain knowledge of certain linguistic features (Renandya and Jacobs 2016; Nation and Waring 2019). Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that although EFL learning involves exposure to input through listening, reading, and audio-visual activities, this alone is insufficient to guarantee or achieve full proficiency (Wah 2019).

Productive Skills

Oral and written production skills are fundamental for the communication of thoughts, ideas, and emotions in the L2. Speaking is a sophisticated and often spontaneous process, which requires the exchange of information by integrating several linguistic components, including lexical, grammatical, and phonological control, in addition to other discourse considerations. Writing, however, is more deliberate and structured and requires greater attention to grammatical structures and discourse patterns to convey ideas coherently (Harmer 2015). Mastering these skills enhances overall linguistic proficiency and allows learners to engage more effectively and in more profound ways with other users of the language.

The use of strategies and techniques to develop these two abilities is essential for foreign language learning. In terms of learner strategies, planning, compensating, and repair can be employed to enhance communication (Council of Europe 2020). Classroom techniques could include dramatization, storytelling, and other real-life tasks, which promote communicative skills, engagement, and an anxiety-reducing atmosphere (Schenker 2020). The use of feedback is also particularly prevalent with productive skills and can take diverse forms, from teacher and peer feedback as well as self-repair in face-to-face interactions, and even instant feedback through digital tools (Wong and Yang 2017). Ultimately, integrating effective strategies and timely feedback in developing oral and written production skills is essential for achieving proficiency in a foreign language.

Interaction

Interaction in the language class involves both receptive and productive skills and the collaborative construction of communicative exchanges in real-life situations. As mentioned in the report by Council of Europe (2020), interactions can occur orally, in writing, and online. For this interaction to occur, student engagement and participation is essential. Here, the implementation of specific strategies aimed at encouraging attention throughout classroom interactions appears to be particularly useful (Gardner 2019). Collaborative projects, for instance, can offer learners the opportunity to interact verbally by planning or decision-making while practicing real-world situations through teamwork to solve problems or overcome possible challenges (Ozverir et al. 2017). In this sense, the Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020) underlines the skills of turn-taking and seeking clarification, ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak encouraging active participation and communicative skills. To further encourage active engagement and social language learning, cooperative strategies, including collaborative are recommended (Erlam et al. 2021). These approaches may help create an environment where pupils enhance their communication and problem-solving skills while learning the language (Ramos and Vázquez 2015).

Mediation

Mediation contributes to the development and transmission of meaning and generally involves receptive, productive, and interactive skills (North 2022). According to Council of Europe (2020), learners can mediate texts, concepts, and communication. The first case involves relaying oral and written texts in the foreign language often through another medium (e.g., through translating, explaining data, or other forms of text processing). Mediating concepts, on the other hand, involves collaborative learning to construct meaning managing interaction and helping others to construct new concepts. Finally, mediating communication refers to acting as a peer or intercultural intermediary, negotiating, and resolving conflicts.

This dimension of communication, then, involves not only transmitting information but also accurately interpreting it and acting in ways that facilitate others' understanding and interaction. Consequently, non-linguistic communication (appropriate body language, gestures, or visual contact), along with skills like attentive listening or focused observation, are crucial (Whatling 2012).

In this process, students make use of diverse strategies with the intention of sharing and interpreting information successfully. One suggested strategy involves explaining new concepts by connecting them to prior knowledge or simplifying texts through streamlining techniques (Council of Europe 2020). Additionally, throughout the meditation process, cognitive skills are essential for analyzing and processing information. This may include providing scaffolding support to help learners understand the original text and encouraging them to have an open mind and a sense of curiosity (Lang and Taylor 2012). Furthermore, Levy (2009) advocates the use of digital tools and resources to enable the exchange of knowledge and ideas among students.

Mediation, then, plays a vital role in facilitating understanding, collaboration, and effective communication across diverse contexts. However, its integration into language teaching can be a significant challenge for educators, particularly in designing assessments that align with this expanded construct of language learning (Scarino 2020).

Plurilingualism and Reflection on the Language

The Companion Volume discusses the concept of mediation alongside plurilingualism in language instruction, which enables a cross-linguistic interpretation of mediation and highlights the dynamic nature of plurilingualism (Piccardo et al. 2019). Plurilingualism, in essence, involves individuals with abilities to communicate in one or more languages, who can mix their overall abilities into a single interconnected repertoire shaped by several sociocultural and linguistic experiences in diverse contexts (Piccardo 2021). As stated by

Coste et al. (2009), plurilingualism involves the capacity to use languages for communication while actively engaging in cross-cultural interactions.

Plurilingual competence may be developed through the use of diverse strategies and techniques. Translanguaging, for example, involves switching between languages to improve communication (Garcia and Wei 2015); this approach can help students more fully understand communicative situations and even help develop metalinguistic awareness (Cenoz and Gorter 2021).

Interculturality

Plurilingualism, as stated by Byram (2021), is closely linked to intercultural communication competence, which involves understanding and appreciating other cultural viewpoints and norms. Here, the Companion Volume describes the learners as social agents who broaden their knowledge of language and culture to actively engage in academic and social contexts (Council of Europe 2020). This process influences learners' thoughts, identities, and emotions (Gutiérrez-Santiuste and Ritacco-Real 2023), helps develop connections with other cultures, and challenges the assumptions of their own cultural group.

Such education is essential, given the prevalence of deep-seated prejudices and intolerance toward other cultures and ethnic groups in many societies (Chlopek 2008). Intercultural education, then, promotes the cultural awareness and develops the skills needed to live in a multicultural world (Abdalla 2017). Ultimately, intercultural competence enables students to acquire a greater understanding of their own and others' cultures and, as part of plurilingual and pluricultural competence, allows them to engage more effectively in social and academic settings (Council of Europe 2020).

To help learners acquire this competence in classroom settings, it is essential to consider individual student characteristics (Chen et al. 2021). This approach allows educators to better understand students' learning progress better and offers insightful information on their development and advancement in this field (Lenz and Berthele 2010). Additionally, the use of ICT and virtual exchange programs such as e-Twinning or Erasmus+ offers students authentic opportunities to exchange cultural experiences, interact with peers from diverse countries, and learn interculturally. These initiatives help develop specific skills, including conflict resolution, critical thinking, decision-making, and action-taking (Victoria and Sangiamchit 2021).

Methodology

This section explores the perceived use of classroom and assessment activities and strategies in relation to the previously discussed areas of communicative competence. As indicated later, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how teachers incorporate these competences into their instruction, this research employs both quantitative (Likert-scale responses) as well

as qualitative (open-ended questions) research methods. In this sense, the quantitative data may provide information on possible trends and tendencies in relation to the use of communication activities, strategies, and assessment, while open questions can offer more specific insights into these areas (Dawadi et al. 2021).

The research questions guiding this study are:

- Q1: What tasks do teachers employ to help students develop each competence?
- Q2: What techniques or strategies do teachers use to enhance the acquisition of each competence?
- Q3: How do teachers assess each competence?
- Q4: What strong points and areas of improvement can be identified among teachers when implementing each competence?

Participants

The research sample consists of fifty-three participants, of whom 83.1% are women and 16.9% are men with an average age of 37, all of whom were employed as primary or high school teachers from diverse regions across Spain. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the sample size may be viewed as adequate in order to obtain diverse perspectives without aiming for generalizability (Creswell and Creswell 2017). Participants worked in diverse kinds of public ($n = 32$), semi-private ($n = 13$), and private schools ($n = 8$) and were selected based on convenience sampling through various WhatsApp groups.

Instruments and Procedures

To obtain the perspective of in-service teachers in relation to their instructional practices in the language class, a survey with both closed Likert-type questions and open-ended questions was employed. This questionnaire was designed by identifying the main areas of instructional practice described in both the Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020) and relevant legislation from the autonomous region of Andalusia (Orden de 30 de mayo de 2023a; Orden de 30 de mayo de 2023b).

The major sections included aspects related to teaching activities, strategy use, and assessment in relation to: (a) reception, (b) production, (c) interaction, (d) mediation, (e) use of language, (f) and culture. Likert-scale responses were processed using SPSS 29 to calculate the mean score and standard deviation in relation to the three dimensions of activity use, strategy use, and assessment of each major area. Additionally, given the recent inclusion of new elements in language teaching in European, national, and regional guidelines, we made a statistical comparison between the scores from each of the six areas of competence. To calculate the differences, we created a single composite score for each competence based on the totality of all frequencies in relation to activity use (Jupp 2006).

At the end of each section, we included open-ended questions to allow teachers to share additional perspectives and ideas, where they could provide insights into potential strengths and challenges in applying the six competences. Responses from these questions were organized into thematic areas following Braun and Clarke's (2006) work on the identification of themes, whereby we included only responses that were repeated by two or more respondents.

Following the initial design, the questionnaire was reviewed by three university experts with specialized knowledge of the CEFR and regional legislation in both primary and secondary instructional contexts for the purposes of validation and feedback. These experts checked for general questionnaire organization, understandability and content validity. This process led to additional adjustments of the instrument, which included the following components:

- The informed consent for participation in the study.
- Personal information, including age, gender, educational background, teaching experience.
- Closed and open-ended questions pertaining to:
 - Receptive skills (listening, reading, and audio-visual comprehension)
 - Productive skills (speaking and writing)
 - Interaction (oral, written, and online)
 - Mediation (of texts, concepts, and communication)
 - Use of language (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation)
 - Intercultural aspects.

The survey was designed using Google Forms and sent to a selection of online groups of professional English teachers. This format facilitated questionnaire distribution and data collection among participants and has precedents in a variety of teaching and learning contexts (Lim et al. 2023).

Internal Consistency in Quantitative Data

Before initiating other statistical procedures in relation to Likert-scale responses, we calculated the Cronbach alpha of each section to assess their internal consistency. The results obtained for the reliability of each individual section are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics: Cronbach Alpha of All Sections

<i>Section</i>	<i>Cronbach Alpha</i>	<i>No. of Items</i>
Reception	.707	5
Production	.818	4
Interaction	.753	5

Mediation	.902	5
Plurilingualism	.889	7
Interculturality	.858	4

These scores indicate reasonably high level of internal consistency among the questions in each of the sections related to communication skills.

Results

This section contains the results of the study, beginning with the overall analysis of the findings from the online survey regarding the previously mentioned six specific competences. This analysis is followed by a comparison of means for each section to examine major differences between the treatments of these competences.

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis

The first section of the questionnaire pertains to receptive skills (listening, audio-visual, and reading comprehension). Table 2 presents the mean scores in relation to the dimensions of activities, strategies, and assessment tools for receptive skills.

Table 2: Descriptive Results for Receptive Skills

<i>Skills and Activities</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Frequency of listening activities	53	1	5	3.79	1.026
Frequency of reading activities	53	1	5	3.79	.927
Frequency of audio-visual activities	53	2	5	3.89	.934
Frequency of comprehension strategies	52	1	5	3.71	.936
Teacher use of assessment instruments receptive skills	53	2	5	4.26	.711
Valid N (listwise)	52				

As can be observed, language teachers report that they are actively integrating receptive skills into their English classes. Notably, audio-visual activities appear to be more frequently utilized than the relatively more isolated skills of listening or reading, which may suggest an increasing recognition of the role of multimedia in enhancing comprehension. Additionally, the use of assessment instruments for receptive skills stands out, with a mean score of 4.26 and a standard deviation is .71, which would indicate that teachers regularly employ tools to evaluate.

In addition to this quantitative data, we also examined teachers' self-perceived strengths and weaknesses in relation to receptive skills, highlighting those areas mentioned by at least

two participants. As we can see in Table 3, these extracted observations reaffirm the positive self-reporting in relation to assessment instruments.

Table 3: Strong and Weak Points

<i>Section</i>	<i>Major Area</i>	<i>Minor Categories</i>
Strengths	Diverse activities and resources	Using a diverse array of activities and resources to capture student interest, such as gamification, visual aids, cultural tasks, dramatization, ICT, or games
	Assessment	Employing various assessment tools, including checklists, rubrics, or direct observation
	Student engagement	Demonstrating motivation and perseverance
Areas of Improvement	Materials	Incorporating more authentic materials
		Utilizing more diverse assessment tools, such as self-assessment
	Student support	Providing more support for students with specific educational attention
	Planning	Allocating time to create more engaging and innovative activities
		Improving lesson plans
	Activities	Focusing on phonological control and the use of different linguistic registers

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for productive skills, focusing on teachers' approaches to assessing oral and written production, as well as the strategies they use to enhance students' language output.

Table 4: Descriptive Results for Productive Skills

<i>Skills and Activities</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Oral production	53	2	5	3.75	.939
Written production	53	1	5	3.77	.954
Production strategies	52	1	5	3.62	.932
Teacher use of production assessment	53	3	5	4.04	.706
Valid N (listwise)	52				

Responses here highlight a strong focus on productive assessment practices, with a minimum score of 3 and a mean score of 4.04 for “Teacher use of production assessment,” which would suggest there is a recognition of the importance of assessing students’ output in the English classroom. Complementing these quantitative findings about productive skills, Table 5 synthesizes the strengths and weaknesses.

Table 5: Strong and Weak Points for Productive Skills

<i>Section</i>	<i>Major Area</i>	<i>Minor Categories</i>
Strengths	Diverse activities and resources	Incorporating a range of activities and resources to catch the attention and interest of students, such as gamification, presentations, visual aids, cultural tasks, dramatization, ICT, games, or projects
	Strategies	Applying diverse strategies, such as cooperative work or the use of drafts
	Assessment	Using various assessment tools, including checklists, rubrics, self-assessment, or observation techniques
	Student engagement	Demonstrating motivation, creativity, and perseverance in their teaching practices
	Topics	Including relevant topics for speaking and writing
Areas of Improvement	Speaking	Providing more opportunities for oral presentations
		Improving the structuring of teams or groups for speaking tasks
		Employing reliable assessment tools to evaluate speaking skills
		Providing focused attention for pronunciation when speaking
	Planning	Enhancing the planning and organization of activities
		Managing time to correct all writing assignments, considering class size
	Time	Addressing time management in writing tasks

Table 6 provides descriptive statistics for various types of interaction, highlighting how frequently language teachers implement oral, written, and online interaction, as well as the strategies and assessment tools used in these practices.

Table 6: Descriptive Results for Interaction

<i>Skills and Activities</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Oral interaction	53	2	5	4.08	.895
Written interaction	53	1	5	3.58	.989
Online interaction	53	1	5	2.79	1.261
Interaction strategies	53	1	5	3.74	1.041
Use of interaction assessment instruments	53	2	5	3.92	.895
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Here, results show that oral interaction is given the highest priority among interaction types, with a mean score of 4.08 and a standard deviation of .895, indicating that teachers frequently employ face-to-face interaction in the classroom. In contrast, online interaction appears to receive less attention compared to other forms of interaction. The high standard deviation of 1.26 and the low mean score of 2.79 indicate a broader range of opinions or practices among teachers.

Participants also provided their perceptions on strengths and areas for improvement in interaction activities through open-ended questions (Table 7).

Table 7: Strong and Weak Points for Interaction

<i>Section</i>	<i>Major Area</i>	<i>Minor Categories</i>
Strengths	Diverse activities and resources	Making use of a wide array of innovative tasks and resources to engage students in interaction, including ICT tools, games, cultural tasks, dramatizations, oral presentations, and debates
		Demonstrating motivation, creativity, and originality in interactive activities
		Incorporating current and relevant topics in speaking
	Assessment	Employing various assessment tools, including checklists, rubrics, or direct observation
	Student engagement	Encouraging an atmosphere of respect
	Cooperative techniques	Employing various strategies to encourage cooperative work during the interaction

Areas of Improvement	Activities	Increasing opportunities for online interaction activities
		Allocating time to create more activities
	Assessment	Expanding the range of assessment tools like feedback or rubrics
	Planning	Improving the planning of the teams or groups when speaking
	Participation	Encouraging greater learner participation in discussions or debates

Table 8 presents the descriptive statistics for mediation skills, showing the variability in teachers’ approaches to the three main types of mediation and the strategies they employ.

Table 8: Descriptive Results for Mediation

<i>Skills and Activities</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Mediation of texts	53	1	5	3.26	1.112
Mediation of concepts	52	1	5	3.54	1.093
Mediation of communication	53	1	5	3.23	1.120
Mediation strategies	52	1	5	3.35	1.118
Use of mediation assessment instruments	53	1	5	3.49	.973
Valid N (listwise)	51				

Here, the standard deviation values for these categories are relatively high, indicating perhaps a wide range of perspectives and methods among teachers. Additionally, the mean scores in general are lower than those for other competences, which might suggest that teachers find them more challenging to implement. Data obtained from teacher statements to complement these findings are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Strong and Weak Points for Mediation

<i>Section</i>	<i>Major Area</i>	<i>Minor Categories</i>
Strengths	Topics	Incorporating diverse current and engaging topics when doing mediation tasks
	Techniques	Utilizing strategies to encourage cooperative work, communication, or discussion
Areas of Improvement	Activities	Expanding activities to support the three kinds of mediation

	Engagement	Motivating students to partake in mediation tasks
	Planning	Improving the planning and organization of groups and teams
	Techniques	Employing teaching strategies to solve possible daily challenges
	Assessment	Enhancing the use of rubrics or other assessment tools for mediation tasks

Table 10 presents descriptive statistics for plurilingual competences, highlighting teachers' focus on different aspects of language proficiency, including vocabulary, grammar, phonological control, and cross-linguistic analysis.

Table 10: Descriptive Results for Plurilingualism

<i>Skills and Activities</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Vocabulary repertoire	53	1	5	4.36	.922
Vocabulary control	53	1	5	4.15	.907
Grammatical accuracy	53	1	5	4.09	.925
Phonological control	52	1	5	3.56	1.037
Orthographic control	52	1	5	3.90	.934
Analysis/comparison between languages	52	1	5	3.42	1.126
Use of instruments for linguistic competence	53	1	5	4.00	.899
Valid <i>N</i> (listwise)	51				

The results here indicate a strong emphasis on building students' vocabulary and grammar skills, as reflected in the higher mean scores for these areas. In contrast, phonological and orthographic activities, as well cross-linguistic analysis appear less frequently. Similar results are reflected in the qualitative data (Table 11).

Table 11: Strong and Weak Points for Language Use

<i>Section</i>	<i>Major Area</i>	<i>Minor Categories</i>
Strengths	Diverse activities and resources	Employing diverse engaging tasks and resources, especially through games and ICT
	Assessment	Providing positive feedback
	Language use	Focused teaching of vocabulary and grammar
		Encouraging language output

Areas of Improvement	Activities	Developing more activities that focus on comparing languages
	Assessment	Improving the assessment, such as implementing rubrics
	Language use	Enhancing instruction in specific linguistic aspects, including pronunciation, phonology, spelling, and grammar
	Engagement	Increasing student motivation in this area

Table 12 presents descriptive statistics for interculturality-related competences, highlighting teachers’ efforts to promote respect for linguistic, cultural, and artistic diversity in the classroom.

Table 12: Descriptive Results for Interculturality

<i>Skills and Activities</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Exploring/understanding other cultures	52	1	5	3.71	1.016
Activities promoting respect for linguistic, cultural, artistic diversity	53	1	5	3.91	.904
Activities to express or share own experiences	52	1	5	3.79	.957
Use of pluricultural assessment instruments	52	1	5	3.73	1.012
Valid N (listwise)	50				

The results here suggest that teachers see themselves as being proactive in instructional practices involving intercultural competence, particularly through activities that promote respect for linguistic, cultural, and artistic diversity ($M = 3.91$). Teachers also engage students in activities that encourage them to explore and understand other cultures ($M = 3.71$) and share their own linguistic, cultural, and artistic experiences ($M = 3.79$). As can be seen in Table 13, teachers’ statements echo previous sections whereby the use of diverse resources and activities are seen as strengths while time constraints are seen as areas of improvement.

Table 13: Strong and Weak Points for Culture

<i>Section</i>	<i>Major Area</i>	<i>Minor Categories</i>
Strengths	Diverse activities and resources	Using activities, games, projects, authentic materials (realia, texts, videos, etc.) or interactions to encourage cultural appreciation
	Planning	Incorporating cultural lessons that promote understanding and appreciation of diversity

	Values	Promoting values such as respect, empathy, and tolerance toward their own and other cultures
Areas of Improvement	Activities	Limited time to plan different sorts of cultural activities
	Assessment	Need to enhance the assessment of cultural activities
	Cultural aspect	Desire to incorporate more cultural aspects of different countries such as literature, art, or music
	Participation	Need to create more opportunities to interact with foreign students

To conclude this section, the results provide a detailed overview of how teachers perceive and implement different linguistic and intercultural competences in their classrooms. Despite what is reported to be a positive use of diverse strategies and resources, there are areas of improvement, especially in relation to assessment methods and the need to focus on the specific skills of mediation and online interaction.

Comparing Areas of Competence

Having obtained data sets for each competence, we proceeded to compare mean scores for each area. As previously mentioned, this process entailed obtaining composite scores from each of the quantitative data sets by combining all frequency responses pertaining to activities conducted in each of the six competence areas (Table 14).

Table 14: Mean Composite Frequency Scores

<i>Composite Areas</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Reception	1	5	3.87	.958
Production	1	5	3.80	.942
Interaction	1	5	3.53	1.17
Mediation	1	5	3.34	1.11
Language	1	5	4.00	1.02
Interculturality	1	5	3.86	.957

For the comparison of mean scores, we employed Games-Howell (Table 15), since this test assumes unequal variances between variables.

Table 15: Games-Howell Comparison of Means

<i>Skills</i>		<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Lower Bound</i>	<i>Upper Bound</i>
Interactive	Language	-.43318	.10991	.001	-.7486	-.1178
Mediation	Receptive	-.48213	.11652	<.001	-.8163	-.1480
Mediation	Productive	-.42238	.12715	.013	-.7876	-.0572
Mediation	Language	-.57569	.10553	<.001	-.8784	-.2729
Mediation	Culture	-.46078	.11677	.001	-.7957	-.1259

As can be observed, this post hoc comparison shows significant differences between the composite score of interactive skills and language skills, and between mediation when compared to reception, production, language skills, and intercultural competence. Here, the biggest discrepancy can be seen between mediation and language skills.

Discussion

From the study, we have observed significant differences in the ways in which teachers approach specific areas of learner’s communicative competence. From the results obtained, the most important finding lies in the area of mediation. This competence appears to receive less attention in the language class, or at least teachers are less conscious that they are employing mediation activities. It would seem, then, that mediation is a challenging area for teachers to implement (Lavrysh and Saienko 2020; Scarino 2020), and reasons may stem from the fact that its introduction in the language classroom is recent. Additionally, mediation is a multi-faceted area (texts, concepts, and communication), and this complexity brings with it additional challenges.

Another relatively low-scoring area was that of interaction. Here we can see that within this area, the lowest score appeared with online interaction as opposed to oral or written interaction or even the use of interaction strategies and assessment of this skill. Here, participating English teachers acknowledged the limited use of online communication in the classroom (Toscu 2023). Several factors may explain this, including the language proficiency of students, a need for teacher training in digital tools, limited access to digital resources, and insufficient classroom infrastructure (Vrasidas and Glass 2007).

In contrast to these areas, other results would appear to be more positive. Notwithstanding, it is also possible to draw some conclusions. In relation to the specific area of receptive skills, for example, teachers seem to favor audio-visual materials over more isolated listening or reading resources (Hardiah 2019). Audio-visual reception has gained a high level of prominence in the Companion Volume in contrast to other previous publications, and here, at least, it would appear that teachers are more readily prepared to incorporate this type of activity than online tasks, for example.

Findings on plurilingualism and linguistic abilities show lower scores for phonological and orthographical control. In this area, Huo and Wang (2017) suggest addressing issues with synthetic phonics for beginners while Ghorbani et al. (2016) favor the use of more explicit teaching methods.

In relation to results obtained for interculturality, the dimensions examined here indicate that there is a general willingness to engage in cross-cultural communication. However, as is the case in Infantes (2019), the depth and breadth of intercultural awareness activities may be limited by textbook content and potential over-reliance on this type of resource. In this sense, Tsavera et al. (2020) argue that task-based learning, project-based learning, cooperative activities, and role-play can help develop intercultural competence.

Additional areas of improvement identified in this study include the need to enhance certain types of assessment tools and strategies, including the use of self-assessment, rubrics, and feedback on specific competences. Here, it is possible that teachers face a similar situation as those from Firoozi et al. (2019), who found that teachers lacked assessment literacy, particularly in productive skills and oral communication. This perhaps highlights an additional need for specific teacher training in this area. Time management in lesson planning and activity design was also a recurrent issue. Many teachers do not have sufficient time to fully plan their classes and are often overwhelmed by all the expectations placed on them.

Despite these challenges, the data also point to a number of strengths in teachers' practices. Here we can highlight innovative approaches and resourceful strategies that enhance language instruction. For example, a notable strength identified was teachers' use of a range of resources, including audio-visual and authentic materials, which have been shown to enhance productive skills. Another strong point is the use of digital activities, although participants especially from primary schools face challenges such as limited time, lack of digital tools, or inadequate technical support, which, in other contexts, have resulted in limited digital competence among teachers (Castaño-Muñoz et al. 2021). In conclusion, while the data highlight areas of strength, such as resource use and varied activities to practice different language skills, there is room for improvement, particularly in online interaction, mediation techniques, and phonological instruction.

Conclusion

Before discussing other elements, it is important to acknowledge the limitations in this study. The first concern here is the length of the data collection instrument, which included nine distinct sections, and which may have been considered long by some participants. Additionally, the survey relied on subjective opinions from a limited number of respondents rather than objective and observed measures of behavior. Given the small sample size and the non-probabilistic design, results are not generalizable.

Despite these limitations, the study does offer useful insights into language teaching practices, especially regarding the implementation of the six specific competences outlined in the Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020) and Spanish national and regional curricular guidelines. One notable finding in this study, for example, is the perceived proactive employment of diverse activities and tasks, which is highlighted in open-ended responses across all skill sets. Indeed, language teachers report that they use a wide variety of tools when planning, delivering, and assessing classroom activities, and include a range of authentic, audio-visual, and digital resources. However, teachers have also identified several common areas that need improvement. First, there is a need for more varied assessment tools, particularly rubrics or self-assessment. Second, time management in lesson planning and activity design remains a major challenge, especially in relation to oral presentations, writing assignments, or online interaction given that time is extremely limited in the class.

Building on the results of this study, then, several recommendations emerge for enhancing teacher training; while this investigation is concerned primarily with practicing teachers, it is possible that concerns of both pre-service and in-service educators could be addressed. First, given the relatively recent incorporation of mediation in the language curriculum, and taking into consideration its multi-faceted and complex nature, special attention could be provided for training in this area. Workshops and course modules could include practical scenarios that incorporate activities involving the mediation of texts, concepts, and communication. Additionally, in-service training could help language teachers gain familiarity with relevant and useful digital tools as well as techniques to encourage oral, written, and online interaction. Specific training strategies, then, could prove effective in bridging current gaps and in helping teachers to implement mediation and interaction activities more effectively.

Considering these findings, this study may offer potential insights into the perspectives and practices of language teachers in similar contexts in relation to developing the six specific competences within the English classroom. While we have detected several strengths, such as the use of diverse activities and resources in receptive and productive activities, the identified challenges (particularly in areas such as mediation, culture and online interaction) highlight the need for future research and targeted teacher support. Addressing these issues could enhance the effectiveness of language teaching and learning in areas which are central to the enhancement of communicative competence.

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that they, Stephen Pearse Hughes and Irene Leal Herranz, are the sole authors of this article and take full responsibility for the content therein, as outlined in COPE.

Informed Consent

This study was conducted with the informed consent of all participants. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and procedures and their right to withdraw at any time.

Conflict of Interest

Stephen Pearse Hughes and Irene Leal Herranz declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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