Frequently Reported Practices in Communicative Language Teaching: an exploratory study at Secondary Schools and Official Schools of Languages in the Madrid region

Prácticas docentes más frecuentes para el desarrollo del enfoque comunicativo: un estudio preliminar en Educación Secundaria y Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas en la región de Madrid

MARTA GARROTE
ISABEL ALONSO
EDGARDO GALETTI
UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID

This paper is about the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in foreign language instruction in Secondary Education and Official Schools of LanguagesLanguage Schools in the region of Madrid (Spain). More specifically, its main goal is to map the variety of communicative practices carried out in the FL classroom as reported by 91 experienced teachers. Data was collected as part of a larger international research project, the KIELO study, where FL educators from different countries were asked about a variety of aspects aspects of their daily teaching activity with the help of an *ad hoc* designed questionnaire. Findings highlight that the most frequently reported practices in secondary education are clearly communicatively oriented and that their implementation in the FL classroom is mainly determined by teachers' self-conceptions as researchers and learners. Results also show that the Spanish findings are not always in line with previous KIELO studies.

Keywords: *CLT; secondary education; official schools of languages (OSLs); foreign language teachers; KIELO project*

Este artículo versa sobre la ejecución práctica del enfoque comunicativo en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en educación secundaria y escuelas oficiales de idiomas en Madrid. Concretamente, el principal objetivo de este trabajo es identificar las prácticas comunicativas más habituales en el aula de idiomas a partir de los datos obtenidos entre 91 profesores experimentados. Este estudio se ha realizado en el marco del proyecto de investigación internacional KIELO, cuyo propósito es recabar opiniones de profesores de lenguas extranjeras sobre diversos aspectos de su actividad docente a partir de un cuestionario diseñado *ad hoc*. Los resultados señalan que las prácticas más frecuentes en educación secundaria están claramente orientadas a la comunicación y que los docentes que las llevan a cabo de forma regular son aquellos que se consideran investigadores y aprendices en el aula. Los resultados también muestran diferencias significativas con otros estudios KIELO llevados a cabo en otros países.

Palabras clave: *enfoque comunicativo; educación secundaria; escuelas oficiales de idiomas (EOIs); profesores de lengua extranjera; proyecto KIELO*

1. INTRODUCTION

Communicative Language Teaching (henceforth, CLT) is a well-known language teaching approach which came to prominence in the 1980s to advocate the teaching and learning of foreign languages (henceforth, FLs) with a communicative purpose. Literature on CLT is abundant and draws on a range of ideas which move away from grammar focused pedagogy to focus on language use rather than usage, learner autonomy, fluency over accuracy, among other principles (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Candlin, 1981; Littlewood, 1981; Moirand, 1982; Brumfit, 1984; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Sánchez, 1997, 2009; Savignon, 2005; Richards, 2006; Spada, 2007; Farrel & Jacobs, 2010; *inter alia*). Nowadays, it is frequent to find references to the notion of "communicativeness" as the predominant approach in FL teaching and in many official curriculas all around the world.

According to Richards (2006: 22-23), the following core assumptions underlie current practices in communicative language teaching:

1) Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
2) Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used and take part in meaningful interpersonal exchange.
3) Meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting and engaging.
4) Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities.
5) Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization, as well as by those involving language analysis and reflection.
6) Language learning is a gradual process that involves the creative use of language, and trial and error. Although errors are a normal product of learning, the ultimate goal of learning is to be able to use the new language both accurately and fluently.
7) Learners develop their own routes to language learning, progress at different rates and have different needs and motivations for language learning.
8) Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies.
9) The role of the teacher in the language classroom is that of a facilitator who creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning.
10) The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing.

Unfortunately, the implementation of the Communicative Approach has been unequal across countries. CLT has been interpreted and translated into secondary school FL syllabi, textbooks and everyday classroom practices in different ways around the world. Some scholarly work shows that the ideas behind CLT principles are surprisingly far from the reality of many FL classrooms (e.g. Ellis, 2003; Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Albeit with some exceptions (Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood & Son, 2005), literature on CLT claims that FL teachers are unsure what CLT means and how it should be implemented (Duquette, 1995). Some other authors report problems and resistance when trying to apply CLT particularly in non-western FL contexts (Li, 1998; Yu, 2001; Yoon, 2004; *inter alia*). In Spain, although official regulations fully advocate CLT, many primary and secondary school teachers have described "serious obstacles" and "tremendous

difficulties" (Checa Marín, 2002: 27, as cited in Byram & Méndez-García, 2009: 508) to match CLT principles with their teaching reality.

The reasons for this situation are diverse (see Burns, 2007 for a revision). Some researchers believe CLT is an "umbrella" term (Harmer, 2007:70), used to refer to a myriad of different approaches: the Communicative Approach itself (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Dörnyei & Pugliese, 2015), learner-centredness (Cullen & Harris, 2009; Horn, 2009; Newmaster, Lacroix & Roosenboom, 2006), learning to learn (Thrun & Pratt, 2012), *inter alia*. At the same time, although the focus on meaning and communication is central to CLT, many scholars highlight that the current practice of CLT is not completely divorced from traditional approaches (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Widdowson, 1978, 1998; Savignon, 2005).

In this context, we aim at coming to a better understanding of the complex relationship between the theory of CLT and its reality in practice by digging into what Spanish FL teachers say they do in their present classes in terms of communicativeness. More specifically, our objective is to map the variety of communicative practices proposed in the FL classroom from the words of 91 experienced teachers working in the Madrid region. Here we set off from the assumption that FL teachers are the real professional decision-makers in the classroom, who identify better teaching practices and strategies designed to reflect their local needs and experiences beyond specific methods or approaches (Savignon, 2005; Burns, 2007). As for the decision to focus on the Madrid region, its results in official assessments and high-stake examinations are taken as referents for the national discourse on education to ground or justify actions (Monarca, 2015).

This study is part of an international language project called KIELO which embraces researchers from Chile, Finland, Japan, Sweden and Spain[1]. KIELO was launched by the University of Helsinki Research Centre for Foreign Language Education and its main aim is to look deeply into teaching and study realities in FL classrooms from an international perspective. For the time being, two countries have published the results obtained: Japan (Sasajima, Nishino, Ehara & Nagamine, 2012) and Finland (Harjanne, Reunamo & Tella, 2015). The description of the FL teachers from both countries shows that in all cases teachers fail to apply CLT principles in one way or another, ultimately proving that "there is a gap between the respondents' CLT beliefs and practices" (Sasajima et al. 2012: 378). For example, Japanese FL teachers admitted that their students' talking time is lower than theirs. They also tend to teach grammar separated from communication tasks, following a traditional method more related to the grammar-translation approach than to CLT. For their part, Finish teachers surveyed within the KIELO research project declared that their students do not use the FL as much as they are encouraged to and that their classroom participation is not prominent. In this context, our intention in this paper is to put forth data regarding CLT practices in the region of Madrid which complement this international panorama.

2. CLT IN SPANISH FL TEACHING: THE CASE OF THE REGION OF MADRID

CLT, sponsored by the Council of Europe, entered into the official syllabi of most European countries in the last quarter of the 20th century (Criado & Sanchez, 2009). This is the case of Spain, where in fact communication in FLs is nowadays one of the key competences across compulsory education, as stated in the Spanish Organic Law of Education (2013). The development and implementation of this key competence is the responsibility of the different

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[1] More information can be found at: https://tuhat.helsinki.fi/portal/en/projects/kielo-national-and-(3f38e512-f2b7-48ce-9e77-d9e210939f8c).html

Spanish regional governments, which regulate the non-basic aspects of education policies with a significant degree of autonomy.

Currently in Spain, two FLs (English and, optionally, either French or German) are taught in compulsory secondary education (from 13 to 16 years old) and in *Bachillerato* (Sixth Form Education, 16 to 18 year-old students). In addition to the compulsory secondary education and *Bachillerato*, the teaching of FLs is also regulated by the *Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas* (Official Schools of Languages. Henceforth, OSLs), a large network of state schools in Spain which accept students over 16 or even over 14 if they wish to study a FL different from the one learned at secondary school. Only in the academic year 2016-17, OSLs were attended by approximately 60.000 FL learners in the region of Madrid. Both secondary schools and OSLs in their curricula follow the descriptions given by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and teach from A1 (basic user) to B2 (upper intermediate), and up to C1 (advanced) at OSLs.

Unfortunately, although a clear majority of pupils learn FLs in secondary education, this seems not to be sufficient in the light of the research that shows that there are fewer speakers of English in Spain than in most other European countries (Reichelt, 2006). Indeed, according to the Special Eurobarometer of Languages 386 (2012), 54% of the Spanish population says they are unable to speak any FL. Some of the reasons underlying this fact may be related to the difficulties reported by Spanish FL teachers when implementing CLT in the FL classroom (Checa Marín, 2002, as cited in Byram & Méndez-García, 2009). Unfortunately, not many studies focus on the classroom to observe CLT development at secondary school, albeit with some exceptions. Cerezo (2008), for example, carried out a series of classroom observations and analysed textbooks used in upper secondary schools in the Spanish region of Murcia. She concluded that the activities performed in the classes were not of a communicative nature and that neither the students, teachers nor teaching material played the part they should according to CLT. This coincides with what Thornbury claimed back in the nineties, that it results in a hybrid of CLT and non-CLT approaches, a "not only weak, but very weak" implementation of communicative language teaching (Thornbury, 1998: 110).

To our knowledge, there is no evidence of classroom observations nor FL communicative practices investigated in secondary education in the region of Madrid. Since 2015, the curriculum that regulates the FL teaching in secondary education in Madrid (Decreto 48/2015), in concordance with the National Basic Curriculum for Secondary and Bachillerato (Real Decreto 1105/2014) is firmly rooted in a Communicative Approach to language learning which aims at helping students acquire the communicative competence through the four language skills. This emphasis on communication has been enhanced by the adoption of bilingual education in the region of Madrid.

As a matter of fact, nowadays most research attention is given to the provisions of Content and Language Integrated Learning (henceforth CLIL) implemented in the region by the Madrid government twelve years ago, with the aim of giving more emphasis on FLs (see Llinares & Dafouz, 2010 for an overview of this programme in Madrid). Both CLT and CLIL are grounded in the effective use of a foreign language for communicative purposes and the promotion of active learning (Ikeda, 2012: 6). At the present time, 112 bilingual secondary schools in the Madrid region offer from 30% to 50% of their studies in English (academic year 2016/2017). That is, students receive 5 hours per week of English, plus some core subjects and tutorials (in case of the bilingual sections) taught in this FL. In other words, CLIL significantly increases the time of exposure to the FL in the classroom. That is why CLIL has gathered momentum, being perceived as the long-awaited answer to the need to train European citizens who are competent in several languages for a nowadays plurilingual

Europe, more specifically language users of at least three languages (Pavesi, Bertocchi, Hofmannová & Kazianka, 2001: 77).

3. THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 Objectives

This paper's main goal is to map the variety of communicative practices proposed in the FL classroom as reported by 91 experienced teachers working both in secondary schools and in OSLs in the Madrid region. More specifically, these are the research questions that guide our analysis:

1) What are the most frequently reported communicative practices in the Secondary FL classroom (working with students from 12 to 18 years old) and in the OSLs (with students over 14 or 16)? Is there any difference between the teaching practices reported to be carried out in these two secondary education contexts?
2) Is there any difference between the practices carried out in the region of Madrid and the ones described in the KIELO project?

3.2 Methodology and procedure of analysis

Data was collected as part of a larger international research project, the KIELO Project, where FL educators from Finland and Japan were asked about different aspects of their daily teaching activity with the help of an *ad hoc* designed questionnaire. As explained in Harjanne et al. (2015), this tool was constructed in English on the basis of prior research and theory of CLT and included 115 closed statements and 8 open questions. More specifically, the survey applied a 1 to 4 Likert scale (1 = not true [does not happen in my classes]; 2 = slightly true; 3 = considerably true; 4 = fully true) to inquire about 15 key themes related to communicative language teaching:

1) teacher/student roles in the FL classroom;
2) teacher-centeredness vs. student-centeredness, including the planning of teaching, choice and performance of tasks and assessment;
3) native language vs. target language used by the teachers and the students;
4) emphasis on reading, writing, speaking and listening;
5) task features (mechanical and context-isolated exercises of words and structures vs. communicative tasks);
6) focus on meaning vs. form;
7) grammar exercises vs. communicative tasks;
8) exercise book vs. teachers' own tasks;
9) individual vs. group work;
10) text book vs. authentic materials;
11) traditional teaching and studying in the classroom vs. studying on the internet and informal learning outside the classroom;
12) practicing of study skills;
13) scaffolding (teacher–student, student–student);
14) differentiation, and
15) language and intercultural communication.

For the purpose of adapting the questionnaire to the requirements of the Spanish teachers, we had to make some decisions regarding the length and the issues investigated. The first of them was to include 7 initial questions which represented the independent variables and sub-variables of the study in Madrid: sex, age, foreign language, type of institution (secondary school or OLSs), if the secondary school is bilingual or not and if the secondary school teacher is a group tutor or not. The second decision was to disregard the final 8 open questions present the original questionnaire in order to shorten the survey and to mitigate respondent fatigue when taking it. In addition, for our research purposes we ignored the block of items referring to the use of the *exercise book vs. teachers' own tasks* because in Spain, the use of textbooks at secondary school is extensive. Although no laws regulate their use, there exists a kind of consuetudinary law that accepts and even suggests their use in praise of knowledge, the possibility of having reference material at hand, and the idea of an order in the development of contents. Finally, for the scope of this paper, we decided not to take into account the items regarding language and intercultural communication and devote our full attention to them in a different piece of research. All these decisions lead us to use a questionnaire containing 86 closed items, which was translated into Spanish to facilitate the teachers' participation.

As for the procedure followed, the test was first piloted by a group of 20 FL teachers in April 2016. The Cronbach coefficient ($\alpha = 0.72$) confirmed the reliability of the instrument. Later, the Spanish survey was made available online and sent to 387 different secondary schools and OSLs in November 2016. Eventually 91 FL teachers working in different areas of the Madrid region filled in the survey.

Collected data were organized in an SPSS database and missing values were replaced using the method median of nearby (surrounding) values. Descriptive statistics were used to give an account of the sample. As the dependent variables are scale variables, the number of participants is n=91 and the distribution of the sample is normal, according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test ($p < 0.05$). The tests used for the analysis were parametric.

Since the number of dependent variables was high (n=86), a factor analysis was conducted to reduce data, obtaining 16 summary variables. Once we had the new variables, a K-means cluster analysis with a two-cluster solution was performed in order to group teachers in relation to the similarity of their FL pedagogical practices. Finally, regarding the statistical tests, we applied T-student and ANOVA tests to find out if there were significant differences regarding punctuation in the questionnaire and features such as sex, age and the rest of the independent variables.

4. RESULTS

A first glance at the results obtained using descriptive statistics shows that the majority of teachers who participated in the survey were women (n=73) in their forties (n=35) and fifties (n=32). Most of them teach FLs – mainly English (n=79) – in secondary non-bilingual high schools (n=58); and the remaining ones work in OSLs (n=34). Table 1 shows more information regarding the independent variables of this study:

*Table 1: **Sample statistics***

FL surveyed teachers (n=91)			
Gender		Male	18 (19.7%)
		Female	73 (80.2%)
Age		20-30	6 (6.5%)
		31-40	17 (18.6%)
		41-50	35 (38.4%)
		50+	32 (35.1%)
FL		English	79 (86.8%)
		French	5 (13.9%)
		Others	4 (4.40%)
Teaching context	Secondary school 57 (62.6%)	Bilingual programme — Yes	33 (36.2%)
		Bilingual programme — No	58 (63.7%)
		Group tutor — Yes	37 (40.6%)
		Group tutor — No	54 (59.3%)
	OSL		34 (37.3%)

4.1 Final set of variables analysed

Table 2 shows the final set of dependent variables obtained (n=16) from the factor analysis. For clarification purposes, the means highlighted in bold are the highest ones, whereas those presented in italics are the lowest ones.

*Table 2: **Summary variables***

Summary variable	n of items	Cronbach's a	M	SD	Min./Max.
Use_of_L1	5	.62	2.50	0.43	1.6/3.6
Teacher's_updating	3	.84	3.05	0.69	1.0/4.0
STT	4	*.56*	2.49	0.40	1.5/3.5
Students'_participation	5	.83	3.05	0.49	1.8/4.0
Students'_passiveness	3	**.87**	*2.26*	0.66	1.0/3.6
Teacher's_practise_in_CLT	11	.80	2.72	0.38	1.7/3.7
Use_of_textbook	2	.82	3.02	0.59	1.5/4.0
Real_materials	8	.81	**3.24**	0.41	2.0/4.0
Real_life_tasks	3	.85	3.05	0.54	1.3/4.0
Student_centeredness	6	.80	3.09	0.45	1.5/4.0
Encouragement_in_using_L2	13	**.91**	**3.43**	0.44	2.0/4.0
Communicative_tasks	8	.77	3.03	0.39	2.3/3.8
Non_communicative_tasks	3	.84	2.81	0.53	1.6/4.0
Traditional_teaching	3	**.88**	*1.88*	0.66	1.0/3.3
Students'_autonomy	4	.81	**3.20**	0.47	2.0/4.0
Mixed_ability	4	*.50*	2.43	0.46	1.7/3.7

Before commenting on the results shown in Table 2, it is of paramount importance to explain the meaning of the different labels used. Thus, *Use of L1* entails teachers' as well as students' use of their mother tongue to communicate in the classroom, either as a means of

explaining complex concepts or during pairwork and groupwork. *Professional development* encompasses the answers related to the respondents' view of themselves as researchers and learners (Breen and Candlin, 1980). *STT*, or *Student Talking Time*, deals with the amount of oral output produced by learners. It is also essential to distinguish between *Students' participation* and *Students' involvement*: the former is related to students' autonomy, activeness and agency whereas the latter refers to the extent to which students become involved in the FL learning process. *Teacher's practice in CLT* clearly includes respondents' teaching strategies which follow CLT principles. The label of the variable *Use of textbook* speaks for itself. *Authentic materials* refers to the use of images, comics, films, texts, the internet or any other genuine resource teachers resort to when designing learning tasks. However, tasks and procedures which look for recreating real-like or daily-life contexts, using authentic materials or not, are included in the variable *Real life tasks*. Those practices considered from the students' perspective, taking into account their knowledge, learning styles, needs, interests, etc. are encompassed in the label *Student-centeredness*. The variable *Encouragement to use FL* does not only involve fostering students' use of the foreign language, but also how the teacher uses it and for what kind of teaching activities. *Communicative tasks* denotes the importance given by the teacher to productive skills (speaking and writing) and the teaching of grammar through texts, following an inductive method. On the contrary, *Non-communicative tasks* entails an emphasis on receptive skills (reading and listening). *Traditional teaching* includes those practices related to teaching vocabulary or grammar in a decontextualized manner or the use of grammar drills. Unlike *Students' participation, Students' autonomy* is related to pairwork and groupwork and their ability to help each other and ask a classmate for help. Finally, *Mixed ability* measures the extent to which teachers deal with heterogeneous groups.

Results in Table 2 show that the FL teachers surveyed report promoting effective communication in the target language by *encouraging the use of the FL* among all participants in the classroom (3.43), by the pedagogical manipulation of *authentic materials* (3.24), and by promoting their *learners' autonomy* (3.20). Other relevant communicative practices highlighted by the surveyed FL teachers are: *student centeredness* (3.09), *real life tasks* (3.05), *professional development* (3.05), *students' participation* (3.05), *communicative tasks* (3.03) and *the use of textbook* (3.02). At the other end of the scale, the lowest means refer to the variables *Students' involvement* (2.26) and *Traditional teaching* (1.88), which is coherent with the previously reported communicative practices. Curiously, the mean *Teachers' practice in CLT* yields a lower mean (2.72) which seems to be contradictory to the wide range of communicative practices above described.

As also shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha test shows that the variable *Encouragement to use FL* is the one with the highest reliability, followed by *Traditional teaching* and *Students' involvement*. On the contrary, the variables *Student talking time (STT)* and *Mixed ability* did not reach the required level of expected reliability.

Findings also show that there are not many differences between the teaching practices reported by FL teachers working in secondary schools and their colleagues in OSLs (see Tables 3 and 4 below). Both groups of teachers coincide in attributing the highest means to the variables *encouragement to use in using FL, student autonomy, student centeredness* and *the use of authentic materials*. If anything, table 4 shows higher means (above 3), which point at a wider range of reported communicative practices at OSLs: *students' participation* (3.31), professional development (3.28), *real life tasks* (3.22), authentic materials (3.21), *communicative tasks* (3.14), *student centeredness* (3.12) and *the use of textbook* (3.10).

*Table 3: **Secondary school (N=57)***

Summary variable	n of items	Cronbach's a	M	SD	Min./Max.
Use_of_L1	5	.62	2.61	0.43	1.6/3.6
Teacher's_updating	3	.84	2.92	0.72	1.0/4.0
STT	4	.56	2.39	0.40	1.5/3.5
Students'_participation	5	.83	2.91	0.46	1.8/3.8
Students'_passiveness	3	**.87**	2.19	0.68	1.0/3.7
Teacher's_practise_in_CLT	11	.80	2.73	0.35	2.0/3.5
Use_of_textbook	2	.82	2.98	0.60	1.5/4.0
Real materials	8	.81	**3.27**	0.44	2.0/4.0
Real_life_tasks	3	.85	2.96	0.51	1.7/4.0
Student_centeredness	6	.80	**3.08**	0.42	1.8/4.0
Encouragement_in_using_L2	13	**.91**	**3.29**	0.44	2.1/4.0
Communicative_tasks	8	.77	2.97	0.39	2.3/3.8
Non_communicative_tasks	3	.84	2.87	0.49	1.7/4.0
Traditional_teaching	3	**.88**	1.94	0.66	1.0/3.3
Students'_autonomy	4	.81	**3.10**	0.49	2.0/4.0
Mixed_ability	4	.50	2.43	0.43	1.8/3.5

*Table 4: **Official Schools of Languages (N=34)***

Summary variable	n of items	Cronbach's a	M	SD	Min./Max.
Use_of_L1	5	.62	2.35	0.40	1.8/3.4
Teacher's_updating	3	.84	**3.28**	0.60	1.7/4.0
STT	4	.56	2.67	0.36	2.0/3.5
Students'_participation	5	.83	**3.31**	0.45	2.6/4.0
Students'_passiveness	3	**.87**	2.38	0.63	1.0/3.7
Teacher's_practise_in_CLT	11	.80	2.71	0.45	1.7/3.7
Use_of_textbook	2	.82	**3.10**	0.59	1.5/4.0
Real_materials	8	.81	**3.21**	0.39	2.4/3.9
Real_life_tasks	3	.85	**3.22**	0.57	1.3/4.0
Student_centeredness	6	.80	**3.12**	0.51	1.5/3.8
Encouragement_in_using_L2	13	**.91**	**3.68**	0.35	2.8/4.0
Communicative_tasks	8	.77	**3.14**	0.37	2.3/3.9
Non_communicative_tasks	3	.84	2.72	0.60	1.7/4.0
Traditional_teaching	3	**.88**	1.78	0.67	1.0/3.3
Students'_autonomy	4	.81	**3.39**	0.37	2.8/4.0
Mixed_ability	4	.50	2.40	0.53	1.8/3.8

4.2 Cluster analysis

As mentioned in the methodology section, a K-means cluster analysis with a two-cluster solution was performed in order to group teachers in relation to the similarity of their FL pedagogical practices. Two different groups of teachers were identified. The first group was integrated by 55 teachers whose means regarding some of the summary variables above are

higher than the means obtained by the remaining 36 teachers.[2] There are not many differences between these two groups of professionals. The first one is formed by 48 female teachers of English as a FL in their forties; the second cluster is also mainly integrated by female teachers of English and French as FL over 50. Table 5 shows more data regarding their profile:

*Table 5: **Distribution of independent variables in the clusters***

			More communicatively oriented (n=55)	Less communicatively oriented (n=36)
Gender		Male	9 (16.4%)	9 (25.0%)
		Female	46 (83.6%)	27 (75.0%)
Age		20-30	5 (9.1%)	1 (2.8%)
		31-40	13 (23.6%)	4 (11.1%)
		41-50	22 (40.0%)	13 (36.1%)
		50+	15 (27.3%)	17 (47.2%)
FL		English	49 (89.1%)	30 (83.3%)
		French	0	5 (13.9%)
		Others	3 (4.4%)	1 (2.8%)
Teaching context	Secondary school	Bilingual programme Yes	18 (32.7%)	15 (41.7%)
		Bilingual programme No	37 (67.3%)	21 (58.3%)
		Group tutor Yes	22 (40.0%)	15 (41.7%)
		Group tutor No	33 (60.0%)	21 (58.3%)
	OSL		24 (43.6%)	10 (27.8%)

As seen in Table 5, the analysis of the distribution of the independent variables in the two clusters shows that working in a bilingual secondary school is not a determining factor to be more communicatively oriented.

*Table 6: **Two-cluster solution***

	More communicatively oriented practices (N=55)	Less communicatively oriented practices (N=36)	Mean difference
Professional development	3.46	2.44	1.02
Real-life tasks	3.26	2.74	0.52
Students' participation	3.24	2.78	0.45
Student-centeredness	3.26	2.84	0.42
Teacher's practice in CLT	2.88	2.48	0.40
Authentic materials	3.38	3.04	0.34
Encouragement to use FL	3.56	3.26	0.30
Mixed-ability	2.54	2.24	0.29
Students' autonomy	3.32	3.04	0.28
STT	2.59	2.35	0.24
Communicative tasks	3.13	2.89	0.24
Use of textbook	3.10	2.92	0.18
Non-communicative tasks	2.84	2.78	0.06
Traditional teaching	1.89	1.87	0.02
Use of L1	*2.46*	*2.58*	*-0.12*
Students' involvement	*2.11*	*2.50*	*-0.39*

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[2] The terms "more or less communicatively oriented" are used here to refer to the concepts of "context dependent" and "context independent" proposed by Harjanne et al. (2015a).

As for the communicative practices of these two groups of teachers, Table 6 shows the results obtained. For most summary variables the means are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) except for four: *Use of L1*, *Use of textbook*, *Non-communicative tasks* and *Traditional teaching*.

As it can be observed in Table 6, the main difference between these two groups of teachers lies in the conceptualisation of their professional role in the CLT classroom (Breen and Candlin, 1980). The more communicatively oriented professionals understand that their role in the CLT classroom is that of researchers and learners "(…) with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities, actual and observed experience of the nature of learning and organizational capacities" (Breen and Candlin, 1980:99). Another difference is the focus on real life tasks which sometimes implies the use of authentic material (images, use of comics, films, the internet) for pedagogical purposes. These findings have clear implications for FL teaching that will be discussed in the following section.

5. DISCUSSION

So far, the results reported by the Spanish teachers participating in the survey describe a cline of teaching practices under the "umbrella" term of CLT which are situated between two extremes: from a more communicative-oriented praxis to a more traditionally-oriented one. Going back over the research questions previously posed, the aim of this section is, on the one hand, to comment on some of these communicative practices and, on the other, to compare them –when possible– with the ones reported by other FL teachers from Finland and Japan participating in the KIELO project. For the sake of clarity, the main findings are discussed under two main subsections: the highest means and the lowest ones.

5.1 The highest means.

The results show that the FL teachers who participated in the Spanish survey report promoting communicative practices in the secondary classroom mainly by *encouraging the use of the FL* among all participants in the classroom (M=3.43). This is not surprising since the reinforcement of oral skills (oral comprehension and expression) in Spanish classrooms is fostered and given priority by the *Ley Orgánica 8/2013, de 9 de diciembre, para la mejora de la calidad educativa* (*Organic Law for the Improvement of Education Quality*). In any case, the mean shows that the students' talking time is considered by Spanish teachers to be fundamental for the development of the communicative competence. The result of this variable is even higher than in Finland, with a mean of 3.39, which is also the highest contribution in the Finnish study. Contrarily to the Spanish and Finnish results, Japanese teachers "do not let students use English so much" (Sasajima et al. 2012:377), as the answers they gathered for the statement "When my students speak L1 (Japanese) in my lessons, I interfere and motivate them to use the target language" were mainly negative, considering the students are not competent enough to engage in a discussion using the FL. The Japanese results are confirmed by other studies (Abe, 2013) and illustrate the previously reported problems found in non-western FL contexts when trying to apply CLT.

Other results worth mentioning are the variables related to the use of authentic materials (images, use of comics, films, the internet) in the FL classroom. Findings show that the mean regarding the use of authentic materials in the Spanish survey is quite high (M=3.24), particularly if compared with the results obtained in Finland (M=2.05). Apparently, Madrilenian FL teachers, especially those working in OSLs, feel the need to complement or expand the textbooks by using realia for pedagogical purposes, to meet the

needs of their particular learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) and also for motivational reasons (Gilmore, 2007). Spanish teachers also stand out for promoting their *learners' autonomy* (M=3.20), particularly when compared with the results for teachers in Finland and Japan. In other words, Spanish students are encouraged to work in groups and to help each other in a FL.

As it becomes clear, the Spanish findings are not always in line with previous KIELO studies (Sasajima et al. 2012; Harjanne et al. 2015). Madrilenian FL teachers seem to have dissolved their authority figure in the classroom, compared to Finish and Japanese colleagues. Apparently, now their role is the one of facilitating the communicative process in the FL classroom. Spanish teachers also differ from their international colleagues in the use of authentic material (images, use of comics, films, the internet). These are two typical features of CLT – that of a "learner-centred and experience-based view of second language teaching" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 69) – that seem to be assumed by the more communicatively oriented teachers participating in our study. But who are these teachers? According to our data, they are the professionals who believe their teaching role is that of researchers and learners and act accordingly in the FL classroom (*Professional development* M=3.05). These teachers look for and provide opportunities for students to use and practice the FL and to reflect on language use. This interpretation is coherent with some of the teaching practices already described for more communicative oriented teachers, such as the regular use of authentic materials and the focus on real life tasks in the FL classroom. Our findings show that no other independent variables such as sex, gender, teaching context or grade play a decisive role in encouraging more or less communicative practices in the FL classroom. Surprisingly, even the bilingual program implemented in the public secondary schools in Madrid seems to have a low impact on these FL teaching practices.

Results also show that there are not many differences between the teaching practices reported by FL teachers working in secondary schools and their colleagues in OSLs. If anything, data point at a wider range of reported communicative practices at OSLs, which reinforces the idea of keeping students at the centre of the learning process. Apparently, these findings denote a clear improvement of the situation reported by previous studies in Spain (Cerezo, 2008; Checa Marín, 2002, as cited in Byram & Méndez-García, 2009).

5.2 The lowest means

In line with what has been said so far, the lowest mean in the Spanish results is the one obtained by the variable *traditional teaching* (M=1.88). This result highlights the aforementioned "communicative" turn of the Spanish FL teachers working in secondary and OSLs in the area of Madrid and it contrasts with an apparently more traditional approach to FL teaching in Finland and Japan. As a matter of fact, Finnish FL teachers displayed a lower mean in communicative tasks (communicative oral tasks M=2.96; communicative written tasks M=2.56) than their Spanish colleagues (communicative oral and written tasks M=3.14). For their part, Sasajima et al. (2012) found that in Japan the teaching of grammar is to be separated from communicative activities, causing Japanese students plunge into traditional teaching.

Regarding student involvement, which is one of the lowest means in the Spanish survey (M=2.26), it seems to coincide with the teaching reality described in the Finnish and the Japanese studies. In other words, FL teachers in the three countries do not seem to involve their students in the FL learning process. Maybe this gradual release of responsibility by the teacher to the student is one of the most difficult principles of CLT to implement in the classroom.

Finally, the last low mean we consider worth mentioning is mixed-ability. This is related to the importance of responding to the diverse students' needs in a FL classroom where anxiety levels can be higher for those students who do not feel comfortable using a different language from their mother tongue. Both, Spanish and Finnish FL teachers admitted to using a differentiated instruction in heterogeneous groups (M=2.42 and M=2.47 respectively). Concerning the Japanese survey, the authors do not comment on this issue and, therefore, it must not be a common practice either. Taking into account the high number of students per classroom at Spanish secondary schools, as well as the great variety of levels sometimes found in the OSLs, personalised education is some kind of utopia that seems hard to implement in foreign language classes. At OSLs, the existence of mixed-ability classes has been a constant for years and very little can be done to homogenize levels. The only possibility to tackle this problem is by implementing techniques related to process, product, and learning environment as well as the introduction of more pair, group and project work in class in order to foster all learners' capacities without concentrating only on language knowledge (Tomlinson, 2000; Winebrenner, 1996).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The main contribution of the present study is having dug into the CLT metacognitive knowledge of Spanish FL teachers, identifying those communicative principles which are more commonly applied in the classroom and those which pose difficulties or still remain a challenge for educators, such as the students' involvement in class and the complex issue of implementing CLT in mixed-ability classes, which may be one of the most challenging aspects due to the high number of students per classroom. We hope these findings provide valuable information to improve FL teacher training programs.

At this point of the study, we must acknowledge some of the limitations of our analysis. We believe one of its main caveats is that what teachers express as their practice cannot guarantee whether they practice what they report. That is why further research in the Spanish context should involve contrasting the results of the questionnaire with performance-based data collected through classroom observations. Additionally, the number of questionnaires gathered in this study are limited and were only distributed in the region of Madrid. Therefore, results should be confirmed by more representative studies on the FL teachers' communicative practices at a national and transnational scale.

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