

LISTENING TO THE TEACHERS: CEFR IMPLEMENTATION IN UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE CENTRES IN SPAIN¹

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Abstract: Despite the widespread reference to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the Companion Volume (CV) in the language teaching curriculum in Spain, there is no information regarding teachers' familiarity with the documents and their degree of implementation in University Language Centres, crucial for the internationalization of universities. To bridge this gap in the literature, a questionnaire was designed, validated and administered to sixty-four teachers from 14 different Centres throughout Spain. Findings reveal gaps in the teachers' knowledge regarding differences between the documents, specific issues related to the CV, and varying degrees of familiarity and use of competences and their descriptors. A further analysis of open questions also revealed those aspects which are missing in teacher training. The results obtained may be used to inform continuous teacher training to improve CEFR/CV implementation in University Language Centres in Spain, aligning their teaching practice to the documents.

Key words: University Language Centres, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Companion Volume, teachers, survey, descriptors, competences, mediation, action-oriented approach.

1. INTRODUCTION

The final version of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment (CEFR) was published in 2001 to provide 'a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe' (Council of Europe, 2001:1). The main characteristics of the CEFR are that it (a) is action-oriented, (b) promotes language use, (c) encourages reflection, (d) emphasises progression through levels, (e) encourages learner initiatives (learner-centred), (f) focuses on the positive (what learners can do rather than what they cannot do using the language), and (g) is goal oriented (Faez et al., 2011).

Nearly two decades later, the Companion Volume (CV) with New Descriptors (Council of Europe, 2020) was published to answer the attested need to refine the CEFR framework (Figueras, 2012; Little, 2011). As a result, the CV includes new descriptor scales, provides a more elaborate description in existing scales, develops the notion of mediation, the plurilingual and pluricultural competence, addresses sign language, adapts descriptors for young learners, and provides a more comprehensive development of the action-oriented approach.

The impact of these two documents, particularly the CEFR, (due to its publication date in 2001), has been greater on evaluation than on the teaching and learning of languages (Díez-Bedmar & Luque-Agulló, 2023; Figueras, 2012). In the Spanish teaching context, a limited number of studies (Díez-Bedmar & Byram, 2019; Figueras, 2013; Levi & Figueras, 2022) have analysed the teachers' stance towards the CEFR and the CV and the degree of implementation of some crucial aspects (mediation, the action-oriented approach, etc.) in the foreign language classroom in primary and secondary education, as there is widespread reference to the CEFR/CV in the language teaching curriculum (see section below on the CEFR/CV in Spain).

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However, there is no information, to the best of our knowledge, regarding the opinions and knowledge of the CEFR/CV of the individuals involved in language teaching in University Language Centres as well as the degree of implementation of the documents in those Centres. These institutions have a crucial role in the internationalization of universities as they: a) offer the university community language courses to improve their communicative competence; and b) design, administer and evaluate candidates who take high-stakes language exams if accredited by an external quality agency. As a consequence, the staff in these institutions would be expected to have mastered the use of the CEFR/CV for the teaching of languages, which would in turn have an effect on the students' language learning process.

Analysing the teachers' viewpoints and their perception regarding the actual use of the CEFR/CV in University Language Centres is of uttermost importance in two respects. First, it will reveal teachers' prevailing needs to understand the CEFR/CV better and implement these documents in the language classroom in an effective way. Second, the findings may inform the teachers' continuous training that these professionals demand so that the CEFR/CV have a full impact on language teaching in University Language Centres. The main aim of this study is, therefore, to conduct a national-scale study to reveal the teachers' perceptions of the CEFR/CV, their current knowledge about the documents and their actual implementation in University Language Centres in Spain.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CEFR/CV IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES: PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEFS

Back in 2011, Little (2011: 383) warned against the repercussions of the CEFR if a partial use of the document was made, as it would have "the least impact where it should make the greatest difference: in the L2 classroom". The following years have witnessed an increasing use of this descriptive document, particularly in the case of teachers, curriculum and materials designers as well as evaluators. However, information regarding the actual use of the framework in the language classroom is limited. Ascertaining the opinions, beliefs and knowledge of teachers and learners regarding the documents may shed light on the changes needed in teacher training and the classroom for the CEFR/CV to have a full impact on teaching and learning. In answer to this need, some studies have been conducted both in Europe and beyond (Díez-Bedmar & Byram, 2019; Faez et al., 2011; Franz & Teo, 2018; Moonen et al., 2013; Normand-Maconnet & Lo Bianco, 2013; Valax, 2011; Yin & Ahmad, 2021), regarding two main aspects: a) the users' familiarity and knowledge of the CEFR and the CV; and b) the perception and implementation of important aspects of the CEFR/CV, such as mediation (Kossakowska-Pisarek et al., 2022 for university teachers; also see contributions in North et al., 2022), the action-oriented approach (de Jong, 2022; Levi & Figueras, 2022; North et al., 2022), or the plurilingual and pluricultural competence (North et al., 2022). Due to the main objective of this paper, this section focuses on the former type of studies.

Concerning stakeholders' beliefs and opinions on the documents, some studies have explored their perceived impact on teaching, learning and evaluation in diverse contexts and educational levels (Faez et al., 2011; Franz & Teo, 2018; Moonen et al., 2013; Normand-Maconnet & Lo Bianco, 2013; Valax, 2011; Yin & Ahmad, 2021). Ten years after the CEFR was published, Valax (2011) explored the opinions from language teachers regarding the impact of the CEFR inside and outside Europe in tertiary, secondary and primary education levels, concluding that there was little interest for this framework. Likewise, Faez et al. (2011) studied primary and secondary teachers' perceptions on using CEFR-informed instruction (action-oriented approach) for French as a second language in Canada, once they had received some specific training on CEFR-aligned methodology. The study suggests that teachers were positively inclined towards CEFR-informed instruction and believed it promoted student confidence, autonomy, motivation and use of authentic language. However, participants in the study were "confused about the CEFR's descriptive scales and levels" (p. 15), which points to the need for further teacher professional training related to CEFR-aligned pedagogy.

Teachers' perceptions were also considered by Moonen et al. (2013), who studied the impact, perceptions, needs, plans and implementation of the CEFR on their teaching and assessment practice in secondary education in the Netherlands. The results show that relatively few teachers applied its guidelines, which was externally accomplished by means of textbooks, rather than at their own initiative, although there were wide differences considering the different schools. These findings suggest that the CEFR impact on L2 pedagogy is lower than that on curriculum development and assessment.

Likewise, in this case regarding tertiary levels, Normand-Maconnet & Lo Bianco (2013) enquired about the familiarity of Australian students and staff with the CEFR, showing that most respondents were aware of the Common Reference Levels and anticipated their possible inclusion within future national educational policies. However, the study also gave some evidence on the stakeholders' lack of enthusiasm and closed-mindedness towards the CEFR.

This early disinterest and possible dearth of knowledge about the CEFR, which may have been a consequence of externally prescribed top-down educational policies, or, additionally, lack of training opportunities, has also been reflected in the conclusions of other studies. For instance, Sülü & KÖr (2014) used a questionnaire to analyse teachers' knowledge about the CEFR and their implementation in Turkish Universities. Their findings show that approximately half of the participants had read the document, but they had not implemented it. Their conclusions suggest a need for more in-service training on CEFR related aspects. A more adverse situation was reflected in Thailand, where Franz & Teo (2018) analysed English language teachers' understanding and perceptions of the CEFR in secondary state schools. Their conclusions show that teachers considered the document as a test, more suitable for European learners, with no impact on their teaching context. The disinterest of CEFR users shown in previous studies is, however, not consistent with Hismanoglu, (2013:944) who enquired about prospective EFL teachers in Turkey, stating that the majority of them "know about the CEFR, read the CEFR, took a course / got education concerning the CEFR or the CEFR related subjects, had sufficient amount of knowledge with respect to the CEFR, view the CEFR as having impact on the coursebooks used for teaching English to students in their department, on the tests used in their department and on language teaching techniques used in their department."

In line with the results by Hismanoglu (2013), yağatay & Guroca (2016) compared state and private university teachers' perceptions about the CEFR in Turkish state and private universities. In this study both groups of teachers stated their interest for more effective pre-service and in-service training about the CEFR regarding three specific areas: the setting of objectives, materials development and evaluation, concluding that instructors' practice in private universities was more aligned than that of teachers in state universities with CEFR principles.

More recent studies (Yin & Ahmad, 2021) have also explored teachers' knowledge and implementation of the documents in secondary education depending on the amount of training received. Conclusions show that frequent training and workshops correlate with higher CEFR/CV knowledge and use. Also within the Malaysian context, Alih et al. (2021) explored teachers' perceived challenges and readiness for CEFR/CV implementation. Although in general teachers had positive beliefs towards adopting the framework, more time, collective effort and adequate materials were required.

There has also been a progressive acknowledgment and incorporation of CEFR guidelines both within and beyond European countries, and for pre-service and in-service teacher training. Research (Alih et al., 2021; Fernandez-Alvarez & García-Hernández, 2021; Levi & Figueras, 2022; North et al., 2022; Salekhova et al., 2022; Yin & Ahmad, 2021) indicates that teachers are increasingly showing a positive stance towards the CEFR framework not only for assessment purposes but also as a pedagogically relevant document in their teaching practice.

However, studies conclude that more attention is to be paid to the implementation of mediation (Kossakowska-Pisarek et al., 2022 for university teachers; also see contributions in North et al., 2022), the action-oriented approach (de Jong, 2022; Levi & Figueras, 2022; North et al., 2022), or the plurilingual and pluricultural competence (North et al., 2022), among other crucial aspects in the CEFR/CV. Studies also conclude that its implementation may be challenging and that more guidance and training are needed for understanding CEFR-aligned evaluation and teaching procedures, which would in turn improve the use of the documents in diverse contexts (Alih et al., 2021; Díez-Bedmar & Luque-Agulló, 2023; Yin & Ahmad, 2021).

Thus, the literature review shows that there is a need to expand the users' knowledge on the CEFR/CV by means of continuous training and workshops, so that important CEFR/CV related issues are incorporated in their teaching practice in diverse contexts and educational levels.

3. THE CEFR/CV IN SPAIN

3.1. CEFR and CV in the Spanish legislation

In Spain, the acknowledgment and implementation of the CEFR has evolved differently in the private and state school contexts. Within the former, many private language centres and schools started using the CEFR framework for teaching and specially for assessment procedures a few years after the initial publication of the documents, as they guaranteed learners a CEFR-aligned curriculum and evaluation. This incorporation has been more gradual in the case of state educational policies.

For secondary education, three different educational laws have made reference to some of the issues described in the CEFR, namely LOE, LOMCE and LOMLOE. First, it was included in 2006 in official educational documents in the Organic Law 2/2006 (LOE) of May 3rd, in this case with implicit references to the document. Second, still for secondary education, it was subsequently included in the core curriculum of foreign languages established in the Royal Decree 1105/2014 of December, 26th, (LOMCE, in BOE 03/01/2015), which explicitly incorporated aspects such as plurilingualism, pluriculturality, and levels aligned to descriptors in assessable learning standards (p. 516).

This Royal Decree also divided the language to be learnt in the CEFR four blocks -oral and written reception, production and interaction- rather than the traditional skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing); it also included the notion of *competences* and mentioned action-oriented methodologies (p. 517). Thus, this second law reorganized the core aspects of the curriculum following CEFR guidelines. More recently, the current Organic Law 2/2020 (LOMLOE) of 23 December has also ascribed to the CEFR and, particularly, to the CV guidelines, in a more detailed way. In fact, the notion of (CEFR) content blocks -*core knowledges*- is included in the LOMLOE (BOE 03/30/2022, p.41579), the plurilingual and pluricultural competence is also mentioned (p.41579), as well as notions such as mediation or action-oriented methodologies (p. 41714), turning lesson plans into learning scenarios and evaluating by means of real-life projects (p.41715).

Regarding primary education, it was not until 2022 when the CEFR was specifically considered for this stage, with the Royal Decree 157 of March, 1st. This law acknowledged the CEFR, but remarked that it must be “adapted to the particular needs of primary learners” (p. 82). This relatively late incorporation of the CEFR may be due to the lack of specific descriptors for A1 and pre-A1 learners in the original CEFR framework, many of which were later included in the CV.

The teaching scenario is different in tertiary education. Trying to comply with the objectives established by the Bologna process, the Spanish government advanced in 2017 that it would be mandatory to achieve a B1 or B2 level in a foreign language to obtain a university degree (except those related to languages). This exit requirement was implemented the next academic year in most universities. To help students achieve this goal, higher education institutions had previously created their University Language Centres “instead of including the study of the foreign language as a compulsory course along the degree” (Ramos-García & Fernandez-Viciana, 2019:51). Since then, University Language Centres have played a fundamental role as they cater for the students’ need of foreign language courses and official communicative language competence accreditations. In doing so, and also meeting the needs of teachers and administrative staff, these Centres have proved to be an important pillar for the university internationalization policies. Regarding foreign language teaching, courses in these centres are aligned to the CEFR/CV. However, contrary to the situation in primary and secondary education “There has been no explicit legislation for University Language -Centres, which write their own syllabi to suit their needs following the guidelines of the CRUE (*Conferencia de Rectores de las Universidades Españolas* [Spanish Conference of University Rectors], 2011)” (Levi and Figueras, 2022:4).

As for the accreditations in foreign language communicative competence, the Spanish University Language Centres which have been awarded the CertAcles accreditation, awarded by the *Asociación de Centros de Lenguas en la Enseñanza Superior* [Association of Language Centres in Higher Education]), (ACLES) design, administer, evaluate and, if the candidate is successful, accredit CEFR levels by means of the CertAcles exam suite. This high-stakes exam is nationally accepted and has been gaining international recognition since 2014 (Shackleton, 2018). Some Centres are also accredited by other external quality agencies, which, similarly to ACLES, evaluate that the two documents are being observed, that raters pursue continuous training and that all the crucial aspects regarding test design, validation and administration are carefully considered. As a result of these external evaluations, teachers in University Language Centres, which may be also involved in the candidates’ evaluation in accreditation exams, are expected to show a comprehensive understanding of CEFR/CV guidelines, which should in turn translate into their curriculum design and teaching.

As shown, since the CEFR, and later, the CV, were published, the diverse educational reforms in Spain have not followed a smooth path when applying this framework. Particularly in the case of national (and regional) educational policies, the imposed politically determined top-down approach to ascribe to certain guidelines, the continuous change of laws, and the lack of funding for implementing these laws, may have produced: (1) a resulting dearth of knowledge on how the CEFR/CV has been reflected in the law; and (2) a deficient implementation of CEFR-aligned pedagogical practices (also see Figueras, 2013; Díez-Bedmar & Byram, 2019; Levi and Figueras, 2022).

3.2. Spanish teachers’ perceptions of the CEFR/CV

CEFR-related research in Spain has been limited, reporting on a relatively small sample of practitioners in a reduced number of regions. Figueras (2013) conducted a small-scale study surveying the perceptions and knowledge of primary, secondary and tertiary teachers. Her findings show that educators expressed views about the CEFR without necessarily knowing the document itself, as only 17% of participants reported having read the document. In fact, this study found that the participants’ knowledge came from other sources, such as training sessions and reading about the CEFR. Díez-Bedmar and Byram (2019) focused on in-service secondary teachers to enquire about their general knowledge of the CEFR/CV. Results revealed that their knowledge was superficial, although respondents manifested being familiar with the levels and believed that the documents have a substantial impact on teaching and evaluation practices. Fernandez-Alvarez and García-Hernández (2021) also studied in-service secondary school teachers’ perceptions about the notion of linguistic mediation and the extent to which they include linguistic mediation activities and strategies in their lessons. The conclusions cast light on the insufficient degree of familiarity of in-service teachers with the CEFR and the use of secondary sources to learn

about it, which calls for the need for teacher training at all levels. More recently, Levi and Figueras (2022) show parallel results with their survey about practitioners' knowledge and perceptions about the CEFR levels and scales and the action-oriented approach, concluding that even though educators may be familiar with levels, "there appears to be little or no recognition of the action-oriented approach, especially at school level" (p. 4).

The literature review conducted, therefore, reveals a dearth of studies providing a comprehensive account of Spanish teachers' knowledge, beliefs and use of the CEFR and the CV, paying special attention to crucial aspects of the documents, such as descriptors, linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, plurilingual and pluricultural competences, the notion of mediation and the action-oriented approach, and how they may subsequently be implemented in the classroom.

Due to the importance of learning about how the documents are put into practice, particularly in University Language Centres, i.e., Centres in which the teaching is expected to be fully-aligned with these documents, a national-scale study was conducted to determine teachers' knowledge, beliefs and perceived impact of the CEFR/CV in University Language Centres in Spain.

The research questions of this paper are therefore as follows:

- RQ1: Have teachers in University Language Centres received enough training to implement the CEFR and the CV in their teaching context?
- RQ2: To what extent are the teachers in University Language Centres knowledgeable of the CEFR and the CV?
- RQ3: Do teachers in University Language Centres implement the CEFR and the CV by paying attention to the different competences and using descriptors? Do they include mediation in their classes? Do they follow the action-oriented approach?
- RQ4: What are the teachers' opinions on the usefulness, effectiveness and impact of the CEFR and the CV in University Language Centres?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Data collection instrument

An online questionnaire was designed considering previous literature (Díez-Bedmar & Byram, 2019; Figueras, 2012; Hismanoglu, 2013; Moonen et al., 2013; Normand-Maconnet & Lo Bianco, 2013; Sülü & KÖr, 2014; Zheng et al., 2016) to collect quantitative data on teachers' perceptions on the CEFR/CV. The first version of the questionnaire was then revised by five experts on CEFR/CV use in the teaching, learning and evaluation of languages as well as three prospective respondents. The questionnaire was then modified on the basis of the feedback received, adjusting minor misunderstandings in the phrasings and incorporating some other changes regarding question format and mandatory/optional answers. The final version of the questionnaire (Appendix 1) was distributed to the University Language Centres by email so that they could distribute it to all teachers. It was also posted on Twitter and Facebook to reach as many participants as possible. The questionnaire was administered in Spanish to facilitate the participation of teachers of any language. Responses were collected from December 2021 to May 2022.

As seen in Table 1, the questionnaire consists of five sections. Section I is introductory, as it states the objectives of the questionnaire. Section II (questions 1-8) enquires about teachers' demographic data, teaching and learning experience in language centres (and elsewhere), and their accredited level of the language(s) they impart. Section III (questions 9-12) examines teachers' training on CEFR-related aspects, and Section IV (questions 13-28) enquires about their knowledge on the different aspects included in the CEFR and the CV, making a distinction between the two documents and specifically requesting information related to their inclusion of mediation and the action-oriented approach within their classroom practice. The last question on this section considers whether they believe their classroom teaching to be oriented at real-life communication. Finally, Section V (questions 29-33) focuses on the teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the two documents, their clarity, the impact and usefulness. Teachers were also asked if they missed any information which would have been interesting for their teaching practice. The 33 questions are either: a) open and closed multiple choice questions (MQ); b) likert-scale questions from 1 to 10, (LS); c) yes-no questions (Y/N); or d) short open questions (OQ).

Table 1. An overview of the questionnaire distributed to teachers in University Language Centres.

	Teachers	Items	Information/data requested
Section I	Objectives of the questionnaire		
Section II	Teachers' profiles	1-8	· Age (MQ) · Gender (MQ) · Qualifications/educational background (OQ) · Native speaker (Y/N) · Learning experience (MQ) · Teaching experience (MQ) · Type of accreditation certificate and level (MC)
Section III	Training on CEFR and CV	9-12	· Specialized training (Y/N/Partially) · Training institution (MQ) · Useful training aspects (OQ) · Missing aspects in training (OQ)
Section IV	Knowledge and use of the CEFR/CV	13-28	· Knowledge of CEFR (LS) · Knowledge of CV (LS) · Source of knowledge (textbooks, classroom materials, syllabus, rubrics, training courses, specialised readings, language centres, accreditation exam, official documents) (MQ) · Differences between CEFR and CV (Y/N+OQ) · Descriptors (LS) · Source of knowledge for descriptors (MQ) · Use of descriptors for teaching (LS) · Use of linguistic competence for teaching (LS) · Use of sociolinguistic competence for teaching (LS) · Use of pragmatic competence for teaching (LS) · Use of plurilingual and pluricultural competence (LS) · Use of mediation for teaching (LS) · Knowledge action-oriented approach (Y/N/Partially) · Use of action-oriented approach (LS) · Aim to prepare students for effective communication (1-10) (LS)
Section V	Opinion and impact	29-33	· General usefulness and effectiveness of CEFR/CV (LS) · Rate usefulness for teaching communicative competence (LS) · State impact of CERF/CV in language centre (OQ) · State usefulness of CEFR/CV (OQ) · State missing information (OQ)

Source: authors.

4.2. Participants and setting

A total of 64 teachers from 14 different University language Centres or University Language Services answered the questionnaire.² Participation was voluntary and not rewarded in any way. Demographic data regarding age, gender, studies, number of years spent learning the language they teach, and languages accredited are summarised in the Appendix 2.

² The authors would like to thank University Language Centres participating in this study. The University Language Centres or University Language Services from which participants answered were Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Lenguas Modernas – Universidad de Jaén; Centro de Idiomas, Universidad Miguel Hernández de Elche; Centro de Idiomas – Universidad de Valladolid; Centro de Lenguas, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid; Centro de Lenguas, Fundación Universidade de Vigo; Centro Universitario de Idiomas a Distancia – Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia; Centro Universitario de Lenguas Modernas - Universidad de Zaragoza; Escola d'Idiomes Moderns – Universitat Barcelona; Idiomas Complutense; Instituto de Lenguas – Universitat de Lleida; Servei de Llenguës Modernes – Universitat de Girona; Servicio de Idiomas – Universidad Pablo Olavide; Servicio de Idiomas – Universidad de Murcia; and UCO Idiomas.

5. RESULTS

This section provides the findings obtained thanks to the respondents' answers to the questionnaire regarding their training on the CEFR/CV (first section below), their knowledge and use of the CEFR/CV (second section), and their opinion of the documents and perceived impact in the teaching context (third section).

5.1. Teachers' training

Figure 1 summarizes the results obtained when analysing whether teachers in University Language Centres have received enough training to implement the CEFR/CV in their teaching context (RQ1). Most of the teachers in this study (72%) consider they have received training or enough training on the use of the CEFR/CV. Contrarily, 12% of the teachers claim that the training was not enough for their teaching practice, and another 16% of them admit not having received any training. Although the percentage of teachers who claim not to be prepared to implement the CEFR/CV in their classes due to the limited or lack of training is low in Spanish University Language Centres, this finding is in line with previous studies which highlight the need to support teachers with continuous training, as this would guarantee a better knowledge and, consequently, implementation of the documents (Faez et al., 2011; Yağatay & Guroca, 2016; Hismanoglu, 2013; Moonen et al., 2013; Sülü & KÖr, 2014; Yin & Ahmad, 2021).

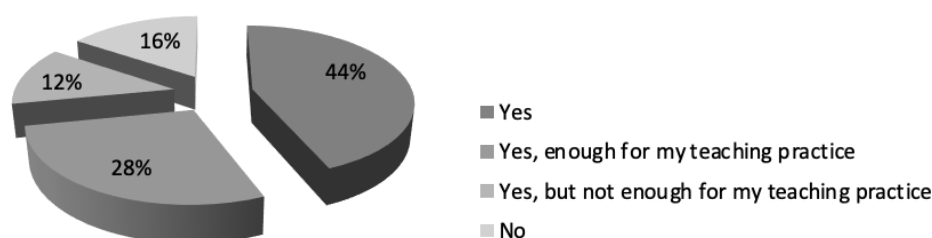


Figure 1. Teachers' training on the use of the CEFR/CV.

The role played by University Language Centres in the teachers' training is evident as 50% of the teachers indicate that the training received has been mainly received in such Centres. Teachers also report having received instruction on the CEFR and the CV in other institutions (21.9%), in an MA programme at university (12.5%), in a specialised course at university (9.4%) and in online seminars (6.3% of the teachers).

The most beneficial aspects of the instruction received is, according to their responses, the explanations about the differences between levels and their evaluation (44.9% of the teachers indicate so), information on the Framework (14.3%), the explanation of communicative language activities (8.2%), mediation (10.2%), the competences (8.1%), the use of descriptors (6.1%), explanations of the terminology in the CEFR/CV (6.1%), and the role of evaluation (6.1%). Mentions are also made (2% of the teachers for each) to the possibility to discuss ideas with other colleagues, exam design, the focus on the sociolinguistic and the pragmatic competences, rubrics, the action-oriented approach and the innovations in the CV.

The content that teachers miss in their training is hands-on practice sessions on the use of the CEFR/CV in the teaching of foreign languages (26.7% of the teachers mention it). Other missing aspects are explanations on the clear delimitation of the different levels (16.7%), training on language evaluation (13.3%), specific instruction on the use of the CEFR/CV to languages other than English (13.3%), and further training on mediation (10% of the teachers).

As can be seen, and even though most teachers affirm having received training on the CEFR/CV, further training is needed to ensure all teachers' correct implementation of the documents in the classroom. Those aspects which teachers highlight as missing in their training may be prioritized in specific courses in their continuous teacher training programmes in University Language Centres.

5.2. Teachers' knowledge of the CEFR and the CV and their implementation in class

This section considers teachers' overall familiarity with the CEFR and CV, their knowledge and implementation of descriptors, competences, mediation and the action-oriented approach in their teaching practice (RQ2 & RQ3).

As can be seen in Figure 2, and as expected due to their publication dates, teachers are far more familiar with the CEFR than with the CV. In fact, 48.4% of the teachers admit that they are not familiar with the CV (selecting 1-4 on the 10-point Likert scale), whereas only 4.8% of the teachers indicated that they are not familiar with the CEFR. Closely related to these findings, almost half of the teachers (45.1%) perceive they are quite familiar with the CEFR (having selected 9 or 10 on the 10-point Likert scale), whereas only 11% indicate so for the CV.

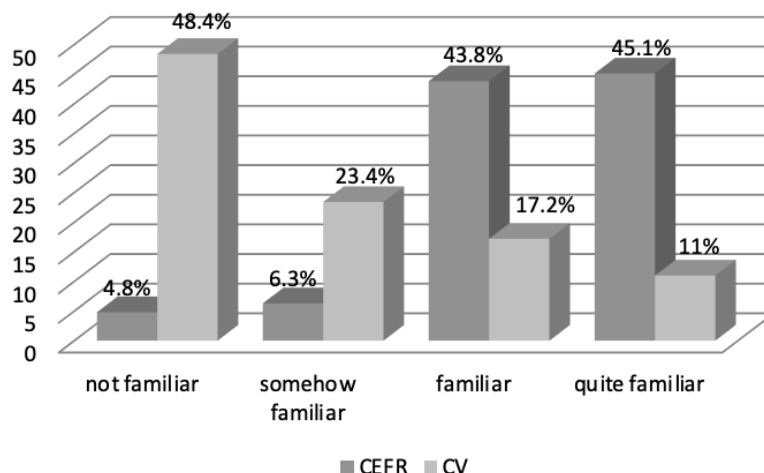


Figure 2. Teachers' self-reported familiarity with the CEFR and the CV.

Teachers were asked where they had heard or read about the CEFR/CV and the descriptors so as to determine the sources they had used for gathering this information. 23.4% of the teachers' had noticed the references to the CEFR/CV in the Spanish education law. Training and life-long learning has also played a special role in the teachers' familiarization with the documents, as teachers indicate that they have seen references to those documents in the courses taken (17.2%) or the literature read (17.2%). The CEFR/CV are also noticed in the University Language Centres, as specified by the teachers who point to the use of the documents in the Centres (9.4%), as well as in the rubrics (9.4%), course planning (6.3%), materials (6.3%) and textbooks (6.3%) employed there.

The teachers' knowledge of the differences between the CEFR and the CV were then explored. In line with the results in Figure 2, showing that only 11 % of the teachers claimed to be quite familiar with the CV, the results obtained when explicitly asking about the differences between both documents indicate that half of the teachers (59.5% of them) consider that their knowledge of such differences is insufficient, with 42.2% of the teachers rating their knowledge with the minimum possible score (1 on the 1-10 Likert scale). Only 9.4% of the teachers rate their knowledge of such differences as excellent (9 or 10 on the Likert scale). A follow up question was made to ask teachers about such differences. The three which were more frequently mentioned were the presence of more descriptors in the CV, the concept of mediation and the different updates in the CV.

The teachers' knowledge of the descriptors in the CEFR/CV and their use was then explored. The answers, in Figure 3, reveal that most of the teachers are familiar with the CEFR/CV descriptors and that they are frequently used in their teaching practice. However, 12.6% of the teachers admit that they have an insufficient knowledge of the descriptors and that they do not use them in class. This finding, which reveals the gaps in the real implementation of the CEFR/CV in the classroom, is in line with previous studies (Faez et al., 2011; Levi & Figueras, 2022). The data in Figure 3 also shows that the teachers' knowledge of the descriptors may be improved, as only 31.1% of them consider such knowledge as excellent. This is especially important because the descriptors are being used quite frequently (42.1% of the teachers indicate so) by teachers who may still need further instruction on their use.

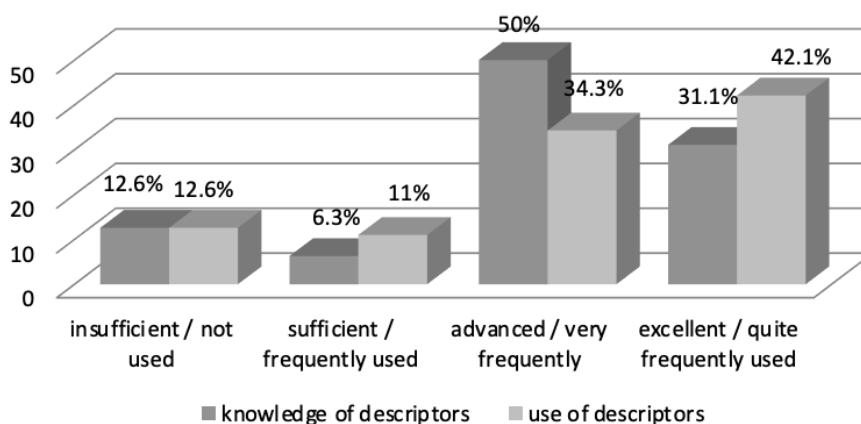


Figure 3. Teachers' self-reported knowledge and use of descriptors.

When specifically asked about descriptors, teachers report having seen references to them in official documents (45.3% of the teachers' responses), the publications they read (17.2%), materials used in class (10.9%), other materials (10.9%), meetings at the University Language Centres (9.4%), in the textbooks employed in class (3.1%) and in exams (3.1%). The comparison of these results with those regarding the places where teachers had heard or read about the CEFR/CV reveal that teachers perceive more references to the descriptors than to the CEFR/CV in official documents (45.3% vs. 23.4% of teachers' responses, respectively) and in the teaching materials used in class (24.9% vs. 9.4%, respectively). However, the teachers' answers also show that they do not find references to descriptors in course planning (whereas references to the CEFR/CV there are reported by 6.3% of the teachers) and are less frequently present in rubrics than the references to the CEFR/CV (3.1% vs. 9.4%). Efforts should be put, therefore, to make explicit use of the descriptors in the documents employed in the University Language Centres. If done, teachers may become aware of the importance of descriptors and their use in the teaching of languages, instead of perceiving vague references to the documents, which may lead teachers to feel the CEFR/CV as unnecessary for their teaching practice.

The attention teachers pay to the different competences in their classes was also analysed. The findings, summarised in Figure 4, show that the competence which most teachers (76.5%) report to be quite frequently used in class is the linguistic one. Approximately half of the teachers indicate that they pay attention to the other competences quite frequently (53% for the sociolinguistic competence, 54.7% for the pragmatic one and 43.7% for the plurilingual and pluricultural competence). These results evidence that attention is paid to the four competences, but to varying degrees. Therefore, there is still room to increase the presence of the competences in class, specially so in the case of the plurilingual and pluricultural one.

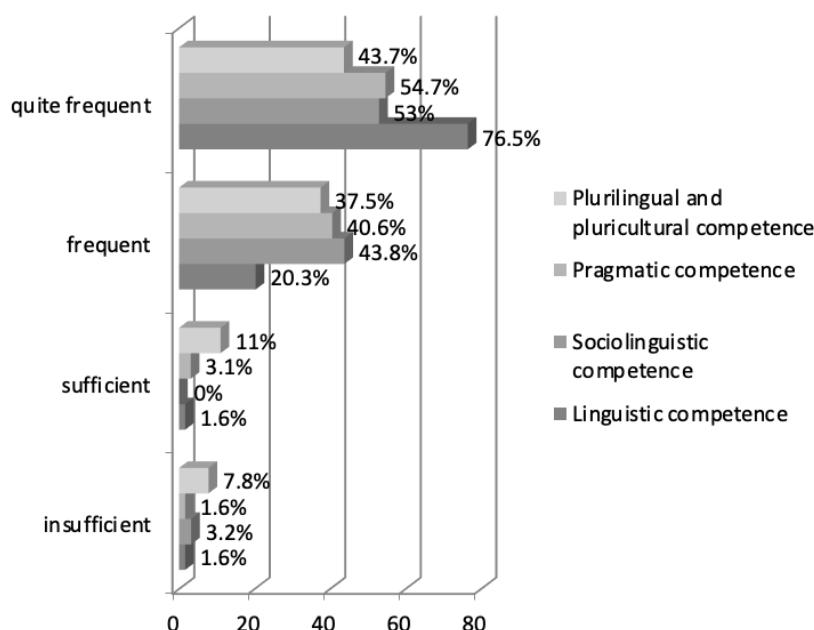


Figure 4. Teachers' self-reported use of competences.

Since they are two crucial aspects in the CEFR and the CV, teachers were also asked if they included mediation and the action-oriented approach in their teaching. Figure 5 evidences that 21.9% of the teachers admit their insufficient focus on the action-oriented approach, and 18.8% of them indicate that they do not pay enough attention to mediation in class (teachers selected 1-4 on the 1-10 Likert scale). The data in Figure 5 cast light, therefore, on the need to further train teachers to include mediation and the action-oriented approach in their classes, a conclusion which has been also suggested in other studies (de Jong, 2022; Fernandez-Alvarez & García-Hernández, 2021; Kossakowska-Pisarek et al., 2022; Levi & Figueras, 2022; North et al., 2022).

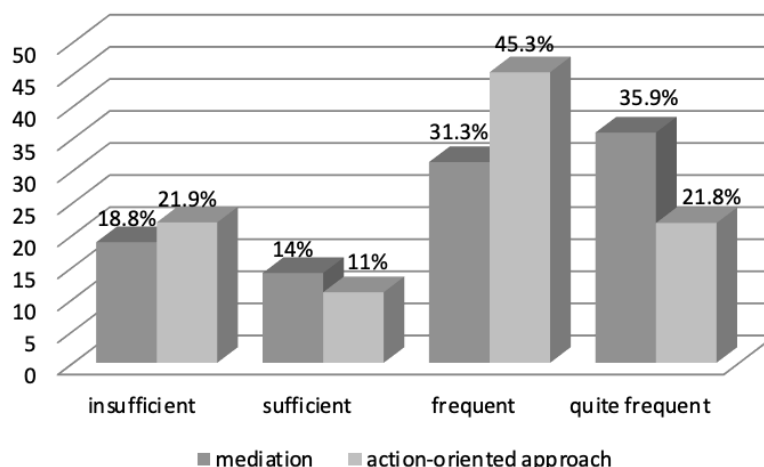


Figure 5. Teachers' self-reported implementation of mediation and the action-oriented approach.

Finally, all teachers believe they train their students to be able to communicate effectively in the real world - 60.9% of them evaluates this with the highest score possible (9 or 10 on the 1-10 Likert scale). Further training on the action-oriented approach and the way to integrate it for those teachers who do not implement it yet or are insecure when trying to implement it in the classroom will have a positive impact on the students' effective communication in the foreign language in the real world.

5.3. Teachers' perceived usefulness, effectiveness and impact of the CEFR/CV

Section V in the questionnaire aimed to retrieve information regarding the teachers' opinions of the usefulness, effectiveness and impact of the CEFR/CV (RQ4)

The results concerning the teachers' perceived usefulness and effectiveness of the documents, summarised in Figure 6, reveal the low percentage of teachers who consider that the CEFR/CV are not useful documents (1.6%) or effective tools (3.2%), or who only partially agree that they are useful (9.4%) or effective (11%), contravening results in Franz and Teo (2018) and supporting more recent studies (Alih et al., 2021). Although these results are positive in the sense that they highlight the teachers' awareness of the usefulness and effectiveness of the documents, they also point to the need to include in teacher training specific examples of how the documents may be useful and effective in the teaching of foreign languages in University Language Centres (Figueras, 2013; Levi & Figueras, 2022; Yin & Ahmad, 2021).

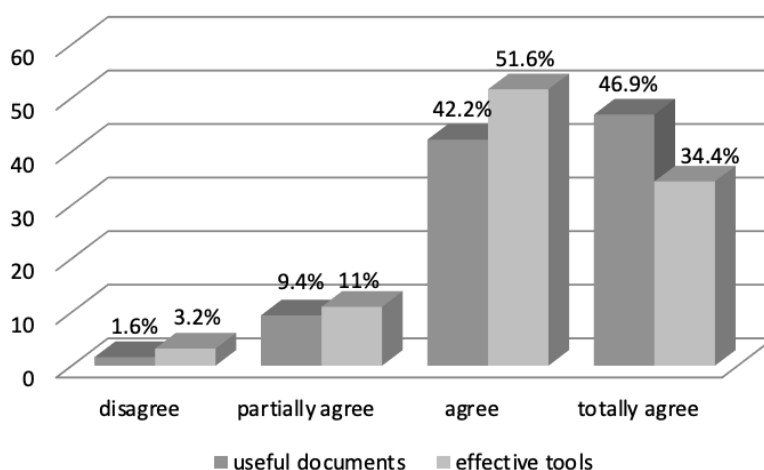


Figure 6. Teachers' self-perceived usefulness and effectiveness of the CEFR/CV.

The impact that the documents have on their teaching is mainly perceived in exam design (22.3%), course planning (10.7%), the consideration of all the competences in their teaching practice (9.7 % of the teachers), classroom evaluation (8.7%), the use of descriptors (7.8%), the setting of objectives (7.8%), the consideration of contents aligned to the levels (6.8%), the different communicative language activities (6.8%), the consideration of students' real level (5.8 %), students' active participation (3.9%), textbooks (2.9%), preparation for official

language exams (2.9%), material preparation/design (1.9%), and rubric design (1%). Only one teacher claimed that the CEFR/CV had had no impact on his/her teaching, as the only change s/he perceived is in the titles of the courses, now indicating a CEFR/CV level (1%).

The results obtained, therefore, point to the need to include specific hands-on sessions in teacher training so that teachers can (better) implement the CEFR/CV in their classrooms regarding those aspects they confirmed the CEFR/CV had a limited impact on.

Finally, teachers were given the opportunity to describe the most useful aspect of the CEFR/CV for their practice and detect aspects which were missing from the documents. Their answers regarding useful aspects reveal that teachers appreciate having the CEFR/CV as a guide, as documents which help them have clear objectives per level and a common terminology (34.9%), and find it useful to have the descriptors, because they help them specify what the student should be able to do per level (33.5%). They also remark the standardization that the CEFR/CV have brought regarding assessment and test design in their teaching (6.3%), which is reflected in a better assessment conducted in class (7.9%). They state that the CEFR/CV have also been useful in the design and selection of the textbooks, teaching resources, etc. (6.3%), and the possibility to consider the different communicative language activities (6.3%).

Regarding missing aspects, teachers demand the availability of better descriptors, which specify the different levels in more detail (38.4% of the teachers), as well as real examples of how to use the CEFR/CV in their teaching (17%). In line with previous results (Alih et al., 2021; Levi & Figueras, 2022; North et al., 2022) teachers also request easier terminology which may make the documents more reader friendly (14.9%). Finally, 4.2% of the teachers request time to implement everything involved in the CEFR/CV in their classes.

6. CONCLUSIONS

A national-scale study was conducted to analyse the teachers' training on the CEFR/CV, their knowledge and opinions of the documents, the teachers' perceived degree of implementation of the CEFR and CV in their classes and the real impact that they have in University Language Centres in Spain, institutions where the teaching of languages is expected to closely observe the CEFR/CV guidelines. A total of 64 participants from 14 University Language Centres voluntarily answered the questionnaires provided. Although it would have been ideal to receive and analyse a higher number of teachers' responses, the employment conditions of most teachers in University Language Centres (on temporary contracts on many occasions), their working load, and the unrewarded participation in the survey distributed for this study may have affected teachers' participation. The results obtained are valuable as they have allowed an overview of the current implementation of the CEFR and the CV in University Language Centres in Spain, as reported by one of the most important groups of end-users, the teachers, who affirm having received extensive training. The findings indicate that further training is needed if a comprehensive implementation of the CEFR/CV is to be achieved. Gaps in the teachers' knowledge of the documents have been found regarding some major issues: a) the differences between the two documents; b) crucial aspects, such as mediation and the action-oriented approach; and c) the overall knowledge of levels, descriptors and competences and their descriptors (but for the linguistic and sociolinguistic competences).

The conclusions reached thanks to the qualitative analysis of the open questions, where teachers reflected on the aspects which were missing in their previous training or felt unfamiliar with, have revealed the contents to be included in seminars and workshops to foster the CEFR/CV implementation in the language teaching practice in University Language Centres. If taken into consideration in teacher training, the alignment of the teaching practice to the CEFR/CV would be improved, subsequently facilitating a better implementation in the classroom, as has been previously reported (Alih et al., 2021; Yin & Ahmad, 2021).

This is specially so because, in line with previous research (Figueras, 2013; Hismanoglu, 2013; YaLatay & Gürocak, 2016), most teachers in this study confirm that the CEFR/CV have a very high impact on their teaching and exam design despite the limitations highlighted in this study concerning teachers' knowledge of the documents and their implementation in the language classroom.

Further studies are needed so that the teachers' knowledge and degree of implementation of the CEFR/CV can be analysed in different teaching contexts. Additionally, it would be relevant to analyse and contrast teachers' knowledge and beliefs to those of other end-users, such as learners. This may shed light on what happens in real classrooms, informing teaching and learning processes (competences, descriptors, strategies, etc.) in University Language Centres.

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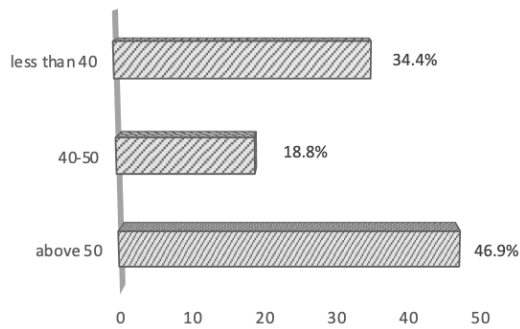
APPENDIX 1

Proyecto FineDesc. Formulario docentes Centros de Lenguas/Servicios de Lenguas		
Sección 1 de 5	Objetivos del cuestionario	
Sección 2 de 5	Datos personales	1. Edad (Opción múltiple -OM-) 2. Género (OM) 3. ¿Cuál es tu formación académica? (Licenciatura, Grado, Máster, etc.) (OM) 4. ¿Eres profesor/a nativo de la lengua que enseñas? (Si/NO) 5. Por favor, indica los años que has pasado aprendiendo la(s) lengua(s) extranjera(s) que ahora enseñas, si no eres profesor/a nativo/a (OM) 6. Por favor indica cuántos años de experiencia tienes en la enseñanza de lenguas (OM) 7. ¿En qué Centro de Lenguas o Servicio de Idiomas trabajas? (Respuesta abierta -RA-) 8. ¿Cuál es tu nivel de acreditación en la(s) lengua(s) extranjera(s) que impartes más alto? Indica la(s) lengua(s), el nivel y el examen (DELFI; Cambridge, PLIDA, ACLES, etc.) (OM)
Sección 3 de 5	Formación específica sobre el MCER y/o VC	9. ¿Has recibido formación específica sobre el uso del MCER y/o el VC para tu labor docente? (OM) 10. Si has recibido formación específica sobre el MCER y/o el VC para tu labor docente, ¿podrías indicar dónde? (OM) 11. Si has recibido formación específica sobre el MCER y/o el VC, ¿qué aspectos fueron más útiles? (respuesta abierta -RA-) 12. Si has recibido formación específica sobre el MCER y/o el VC, ¿qué aspectos echaste en falta? (RA)
Sección 4 de 5	Conocimiento actual	13. ¿Conoces el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas? (escala lineal -EL- 1-10) 14. ¿Conoces el Volumen Complementario? (EL) 15. Si has oído/leído sobre el MCER o el VC, indica donde (OM) 16. ¿Conoces las diferencias entre el MCER y el VC? (EL) 17. Si conoces las diferencias entre el MCER y el VC, indícalas (RA) 18. ¿Conoces los descriptores del MCER/VC? (EL) 19. ¿Dónde has visto los descriptores? (OM) 20. ¿Utilizas los descriptores del MCER/VC para la enseñanza de lenguas en el Centro de Lenguas/Servicio de Lenguas en el que estás trabajando? (EL) 21. ¿Prestas atención a la competencia lingüística en las clases que impartes en el Centro de Lenguas/Servicio de Lenguas en el que estás enseñando? (EL) 22. ¿Prestas atención a la competencia sociolingüística en las clases que impartes en el Centro de Lenguas/Servicio de Lenguas en el que estás trabajando? (EL) 23. ¿Prestas atención a la competencia pragmática en las clases que impartes en el Centro de Lenguas/Servicio de Lenguas en el que estás trabajando? (EL) 24. ¿Prestas atención a la competencia plurilingüe y pluricultural en las clases que impartes en el Centro de Lenguas/Servicio de Lenguas en el que estás trabajando? (EL) 25. ¿Prestas atención a la mediación en las clases que impartes en el Centro de Lenguas/Servicio de Lenguas en el que estás trabajando? (EL) 26. ¿Conoces el enfoque orientado a la acción? (OM) 27. ¿Usas el acercamiento orientado a la acción para programar y desarrollar tus clases? (EL) 28. Valora hasta qué punto preparas a tu alumnado de forma efectiva en la lengua extranjera en el mundo real (EL)
Sección 5 de 5	Opinión (efectividad, claridad e impacto)	29. Valora esta frase: el MCER y el VC son, en general, documentos útiles (EL) 30. Evalúa esta frase: el MCER y el VC son herramientas efectivas para la enseñanza de la competencia comunicativa en lengua extranjera del alumnado (EL) 31. El impacto del MCER y el VC se refleja en mi labor docente en el Centro de Lenguas o Servicio de idiomas en el que trabajo en... (RA) 32. Para mí, lo más útil del MCER y del VC para mi labor docente es (RA) 33. Lo que les falta al MCER y al VC para ser más útiles en mi labor docente es...

APPENDIX 2

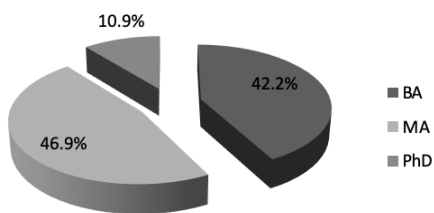
Teachers' profiles (N= 64)

Age

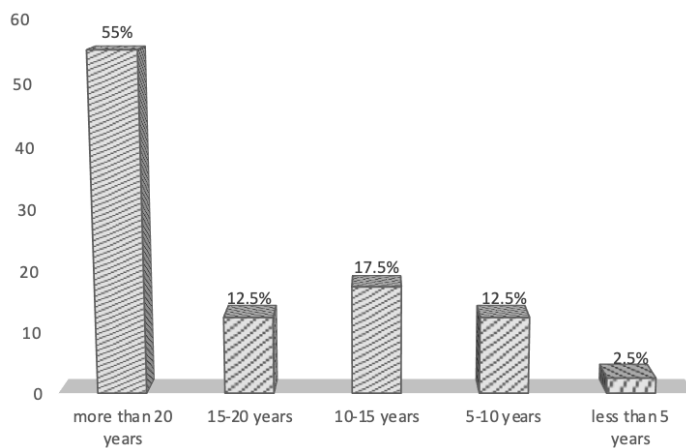


Gender: 75% females, 23.4% males, 1.6% preferred not to answer

Studies



Number of years studying the foreign language they teach



Teachers: languages and levels accredited

