

# Communicating in the multilingual school: training in a foreign language for future teachers

Comunicarse en la escuela plurilingüe: la formación en lengua extranjera del futuro profesorado

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The need for communication in a foreign language today is manifested in educational policies that promote multilingual teaching. This study was carried out to research the foreign language training of future teachers. **Methodology:** A questionnaire was designed with sociodemographic questions and questions related to learning a language, and Cambridge-level tests were applied. The study sample is made up of 427 students of the Degree in Primary Education at the University of Malaga during the 2018/2019 academic year. Data analysis was performed with the SPSS statistical package (v. 22). **Results:** It has been found that 48.01% of the informants, study languages outside the university, 86.48% have not taken any course or stay abroad, 99.06% have accredited some level of English and the second foreign language for most is French. Regarding the relationship of these variables with the score obtained in the oral and written comprehension tests, in all cases they are significant. **Discussion:** There is a divergence between the level achieved in the tests and the level accredited and required as a minimum requirement by public administrations. **Conclusions:** These findings are of great relevance to know the linguistic formation of a group that plays an essential role in bilingual education and to establish future lines of action to promote the improvement of foreign language competence.

**KEYWORDS:** teacher training; teaching a language; English as a foreign language; reading comprehension; oral comprehension; bilingualism.

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** La necesidad de comunicación en lengua extranjera de la sociedad actual se manifiesta en las políticas educativas que promueven una enseñanza plurilingüe. Este estudio se realizó con el propósito de indagar en la formación en lengua extranjera de los futuros docentes. **Metodología:** Se diseñó un cuestionario con preguntas sociodemográficas y relacionadas con el aprendizaje de una lengua y se aplicaron unas pruebas de nivel de Cambridge. La muestra de estudio está formada por 427 estudiantes del Grado en Educación Primaria de la Universidad de Málaga durante el curso 2018/2019. El análisis de los datos se realizó con el paquete estadístico SPSS (v. 22). **Resultados:** Se ha constatado que un 48,01 % de los informantes cursan estudios de idiomas al margen de la universidad, un 86,48 % no ha realizado ningún curso o estancia en el extranjero, un 99,06 % tiene acreditado algún nivel de inglés y la segunda lengua extranjera para la mayoría es el francés. En cuanto a la relación de estas variables con la puntuación obtenida en las pruebas de comprensión oral y escrita, en todos los casos son significativas. **Discusión:** Existe una divergencia entre el nivel alcanzado en las pruebas y el nivel acreditado y exigido como requisito mínimo por las administraciones públicas. **Conclusiones:** Estos hallazgos son de gran relevancia para conocer la formación lingüística de un colectivo que juega un papel esencial en la enseñanza bilingüe y para establecer líneas de actuación futuras con objeto de promover la mejora de la competencia en lengua extranjera.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** formación del profesorado; enseñanza de una lengua; inglés como lengua extranjera; comprensión lectora; comprensión oral; bilingüismo.

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Translation by **Paula González** (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Venezuela)

### 1. Introduction

In today's society, it is essential to know how to communicate in more than one language as this ability opens doors to other cultures, encourages the acquisition of knowledge, contributes to expanding borders in search of friendships, forms of leisure, employment opportunities, or lifestyles. This belief seems to be very widespread in the hyperconnected and globalized world in which we live (Santos-Díaz et al., 2020; Shafirova et al., 2020; Wulz, 2015; Zhang & Cassany, 2019).

However, a quick look at the educational results manifested in external tests reveals a wide list of pending tasks regarding the development of the communication skills of our students, in general (Lorenzo, 2016; Pérez Invernón, 2019; Trigo et al., 2019), and their use of foreign languages, in particular (Lorenzo & Rodríguez, 2014; Pérez Invernón et al., 2016; Pavón & Pérez Invernón, 2017).

Given this problem, the competent educational institutions have been developing strategies aimed at the gradual establishment of a multilingual school model, capable of responding to the challenges that the knowledge society demands (Abdelillah-Bauer, 2011; Coyle, 2015; Lauridesen & Lilemose, 2015; Meyer et al., 2015; Mottareale, 2017). However, as Guardamillas & Alcaraz (2017, p. 97) point out, in the different Spanish territories there is “a significant degree of heterogeneity both in the linguistic and methodological requirements of the teaching staff and in the subjects included in the bilingual

study plans". Regarding the linguistic requirement, except for Navarra and Madrid that demand a C1 level, all the Autonomous Communities require a level of linguistic accreditation of B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, hereinafter, CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). However, in the methodological field, there is a greater disparity, divided into three groups:

- Those communities that do not require methodological training to teach non-linguistic areas in a foreign language. In this group are Madrid, Castilla y León, Catalonia, and Valencia.
- Those that mention methodological training, but do not explicitly require training focused on the CLIL approach. Andalusia and Extremadura are located in this group.
- Those that require a number of hours of permanent training in the CLIL approach. The Canary Islands and the Basque Country are included in this group.

In this sense, focusing on Andalusia, the context in which this research is framed, to adapt Andalusian society to the new challenges posed by the phenomenon of globalization and promote language learning and linguistic diversity, the Junta de Andalucía approved in 2005 the Plan for the Promotion of Multilingualism (Agreement of March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2005 of the Governing Council) and in 2017 the Strategic Plan for the Development of Languages in Andalusia (Agreement of January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017, of the Governing Council). In this way, it is made clear that, as the bilingual programs are strengthened and the level of competence between students and teachers increases, in the future, it will be an essential requirement for teaching in the bilingual program, to have a level of C1. For this, there will be the collaboration of the Official Language Schools (EEOOII by its acronym in Spanish) and the Permanent Teacher Training Centers (CEP) to guarantee the gradual linguistic accreditation and methodological training of the teaching staff.

In line with the above, it is necessary to pay attention to the teacher training processes:

- On the one hand, within the framework of permanent training, it will be necessary to analyze the policies implemented by the different Autonomous Communities (Guarro et al., 2017) and reflect on the effect that this training has on the professional development of teachers (Álvarez & Alejaldre, 2019; Forteza et al., 2020; González-Peiteado, 2013; Sanz Trigueros, & Guillén, 2016) and in student performance (Cordero, & Gil-Izquierdo, 2018; Gómez López, 2014).
- On the other hand, in the field of initial teacher training, it would be convenient to reflect on the conception that future teachers have about their professional projection (Martínez-Agudo, 2011) as well as promote meta-reflection processes (Castillo et al., 2020; Estrada & Zayas, 2019; Fernández-Viciano & Fernández-Costales, 2019; Sologuren & Castillo-Fadić, 2020; Torrado-Crespón, 2018), which will make them more aware of how to learn and, therefore, will put them in a better position to teach.

Following these approaches, although the profile of the ideal foreign language teacher has been widely studied (Martínez-Agudo, 2001; Yance et al., 2011; Martín del Pozo, 2013; Páez, 2013), we consider that there are aspects that have not been taken into account and that are essential for effective teaching. All researches focus on linguistic and methodological competence and include a dimension focused on the personality of the teaching staff, but do not address, for example, the education of readers for a multilingual school (Gómez López, 2014; Fernández-Ruiz et al., 2018; Pérez-Parejo et al., 2018; Rivera & Romero, 2020) or the strategies that, from initial education, can be developed to improve teacher training and guarantee successful graduation under the conditions demanded by the current school (Delicado & Pavón, 2015). Within these strategies, the impact of the stays made by future teachers during their training should be taken into account (Choudaha, 2014; Sanz-de-la-Cal, 2014; Santos-Díaz, 2015; Sanz-Trigueros & Guillén, 2020).

Regarding lexical competence in a foreign language, Santos-Díaz (2015) analyzes the impact of stays abroad for future Secondary Education teachers. To do this, it analyzes the number of words written in a test of lexical availability in English and French and distinguishes between three types of stays: with the Erasmus scholarship, studies with another type of scholarship (usually with a duration of one month in the summer period), and other stays without scholarships. The study concludes that, although all the informants who have made some type of stay write a greater number of words in a foreign language than those who have not, the greatest lexical production occurs when the informants have made an Erasmus stay, followed by other scholarship studies. These findings are corroborated by Herranz & Marcos (2019) and Šifrar (2020).

Regarding methodological training, Sanz-de-la-Cal (2014) and Sanz-Trigueros & Guillén (2020) point out that the possibility of doing internships in other countries means that future teachers can live in immersion and learn from the *modus docendi* not only from other experienced teachers but also from the way of approaching teaching according to the educational policies of the different countries (Wulz, 2015).

Given the need to more fully outline the qualities inherent in all good teachers and to solve deficiencies, in this work we focus on initial teacher education. Thus, we will analyze the mastery that students have in English as a foreign language and the factors that influence the improvement of their professional skills to teach within the current multilingual school.

## 2. Objectives

This study has two complementary objectives. On the one hand, know the foreign language training of students of the Degree in Primary Education through variables such as officially accredited level in English, knowledge of other languages, stays abroad, and studies outside the university. On the other hand, it aims to analyze the relationship of these variables with the results obtained in a Cambridge level test and, more specifically, in the skills of *Listening*, *Use of English*, and *Reading*.

## 3. Methodology

This work is framed in the quantitative paradigm and has an experimental design as it tries to corroborate the relationship of the established variables with the command of the English language demonstrated when performing a test (Sáez, 2017). In the first instance, descriptive research is carried out since, through a questionnaire, the training in foreign language possessed by the researched subjects is analyzed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In the second instance, a triangulation is carried out by contrasting the findings with the results obtained by the informants in the Cambridge level test and verifying the information (Aguilar & Barroso, 2015).

### 3.1. Participants

The sample is made up of a total of 427 students who were studying in the Degree in Primary Education at the University of Malaga during the 2018/2019 academic year. Their age ranges between 18 and 49 years old ( $\bar{x}$ = 20.51;  $\sigma$ = 3.356). There is a predominantly female profile where 73.07% are women (n=312) compared to 26.93% (n=115) who are men. Students belong to the four courses following the following distribution: in the first 108 students (25.29%), in the second 110 students (25.76%), in the third 182 students (42.62%), and in the fourth 27 (6.32%). Thus, the sampling error is 6.2% of the total population of enrolled students (N=1100).

### 3.2. Instrument

The present research has been carried out using two data collection instruments. The first instrument consists of an unpublished questionnaire that consists of 31 questions, 23 closed and 8 open (Martín-Izard, 2010). Besides requesting sociodemographic information such as gender and age, others are included that inquire about the level of knowledge of the foreign language, the frequency of use, and importance given to the foreign language in the different subjects, training, and educational level acquired in each of the language skills for their teaching, among other variables. The validation of the questionnaire has been carried out in two phases:

- a) In the first place, following the guidelines set by Cabero & Llorente (2013); Escobar & Cuervo (2008), and Robles & Rojas (2015), the questionnaire was subjected to an external evaluation phase in which expert judges from different universities (University of Malaga, Granada, Cádiz, and the International University of La Rioja) were involved. The means of contact used was email, which included a cover letter explaining the nature of the study, the request for collaboration for validation, the questionnaire itself, and the tables for evaluating the relevance and understanding of each question using a 5-value Likert-type scale (Matas, 2018). The general assessment of the experts was very positive, they considered the instrument very relevant and adequate for the object of study of the research and made some suggestions for improvement that were incorporated into the questionnaire. The statistical reliability tests of the instrument confirmed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.982, which will make it possible to use the questionnaire in subsequent research.
- b) Next, a piloting phase was carried out, maintaining the principles of Dörnyei & Taguchi (2010) in which we marked the questions that were considered unnecessary and any changes that could improve the questionnaire. For this, a sample of 105 male and female students was chosen out of the 120 enrolled in groups C and E –70 in group C and 50 in E– in the fourth year of the Degree in Primary Education in the academic year 2017/18. The sample size for the piloting conforms to the description of Dörnyei & Taguchi (2010), it should be approximately 100 participants (for statistical reasons not less than 50) since this number of informants allows the researcher a meaningful analysis that guides the questionnaire towards its final version.

The second instrument is a standardized test to assess the level in English in the different skills provided by the Cambridge corporation (Cambridge English Language Assessment, 2016) and which are not published, to prevent students from knowing them previously. Specifically, the following aspects of the language have been evaluated:

- a) *Reading and Use of English*: It is structured in seven parts with a total of 52 questions divided into two main segments that are distributed according to the knowledge they evaluate. *Reading* contains tasks 1, 5, 6, and 7; the *Use of English* segment includes exercises 2 to 4 that describe the level of grammar and vocabulary knowledge. The score range for each activity for each correct answer ranges from one point for exercises 1, 2, 3, and 7; while tasks 4, 5, and 6 give two points. The maximum score for *Reading* is 42 and for *Use of English* 28. The tasks corresponding to *Reading* expose a varied range of texts of different lengths in which the participants will have to demonstrate their skills to understand general and specific information, opinions, attitudes, purposes, etc. As for the *Use of English* activities, they aim to assess whether students have a varied vocabulary related to various topics and different grammatical structures.
- b) *Listening*: this oral comprehension test consists of four parts with a total of 30 questions and contains the recording of a text or several texts of different types such as monologues, dialogues, interviews, radio shows, news, etc. Participants, after hearing the recording twice, must answer multiple-choice, sentence-completion, and multiple-join questions. Each one of the correct answers will be valued with a point, being able to obtain a maximum score of 30 points.

Regarding the equivalence of the results obtained with the CEFR levels, *Cambridge English Language Assessment* (2016) includes a converter that we summarize in Table 1. The score in which no level appears has been coded as lower than B1 since the converter does not distinguish from that level:

**Table 1.** *Cambridge test scores converter at CEFR levels.*

Test	Score	CEFR level
<i>Reading</i>	37	C1
	24	B2
	16	B1
	10	-
<i>Use of English</i>	24	C1
	18	B2
	11	B1
	7	-
<i>Listening</i>	27	C1
	18	B2
	12	B1
	8	-

**Source:** Self-made.

### 3.3. Procedure

The process of applying the instruments, access to informants, and data collection were divided into four phases. In a first phase, collaboration was requested from both the Vice-Dean of Students and Mobility of the Faculty of Education Sciences of the University of Malaga, as well as the teachers of the Degree in Primary Education to explain the nature of the research, the confidentiality of the collected data, and request their collaboration.

In a second phase, after signing informed consent, the questionnaire and the level test were passed to the students. Both tests were carried out on paper in person during the 2018/2019 academic year during school hours. Due to the length of the Cambridge tests, they had to be taken at two different times: a first day dedicated to the questionnaire and the *Reading* and *Use of English* tests, a second day for *Listening* and *Writing*, and, a third day, for a smaller group of volunteers for *Speaking*.

In a third phase, the level tests were corrected and the scores obtained were sent to each teacher for dissemination among the participants. Next, the answers were dumped into a matrix in Excel and, later, they were transferred to the SPSS statistical program (v. 22) for statistical processing.

In a fourth phase, descriptive (such as the calculation of averages and frequency distribution) and inferential analyzes were carried out through hypothesis testing with Student's t-test. The variables under analysis were of two types. On the one hand, four corresponding to the questionnaire referring to knowledge and training in a foreign language: 1) Study of a foreign language, 2) Stays abroad, 3) Accredited level in English, and 4) Knowledge of other languages. On the other hand, the variables that measure the skills evaluated with the Cambridge test: 1) *Reading*, 2) *Use of English*, and 3) *Listening*. These variables have been analyzed taking the exact score obtained, as well as using the conversion of their results according to the levels of the CEFR (see Table 1).

## 4. Results

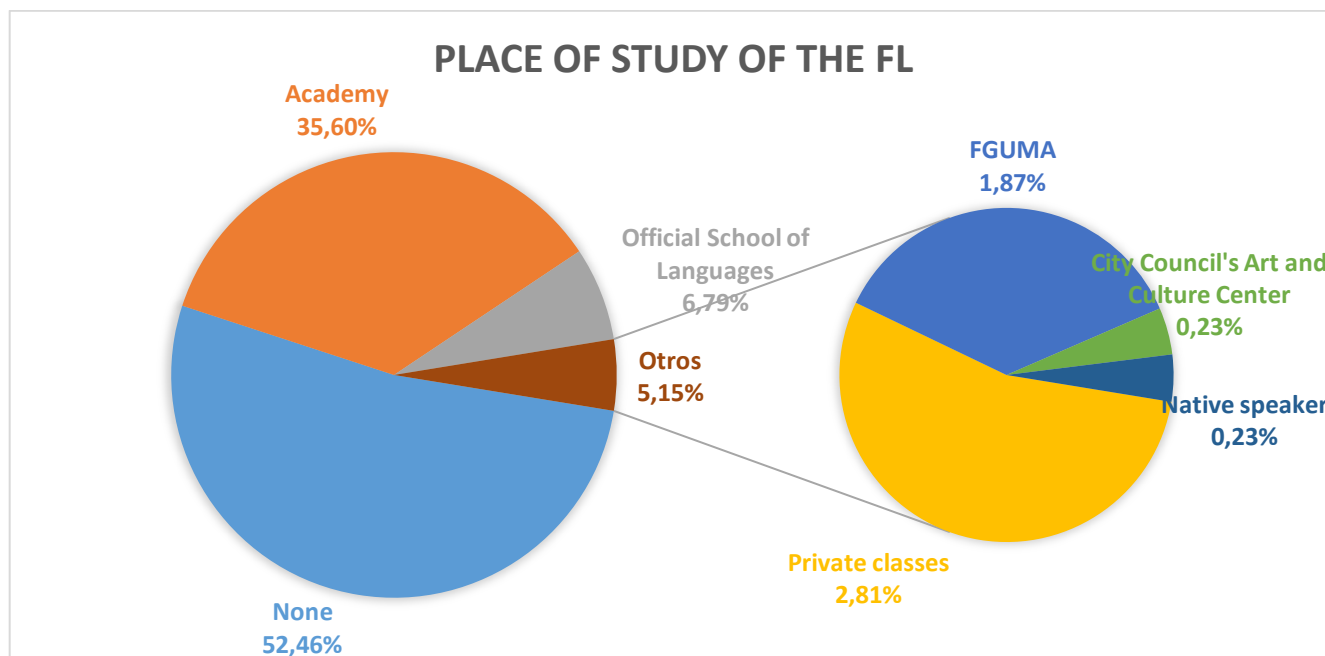
### 4.1. Foreign language training

To know the type of training received on the English language, information was requested of its study in Spain, indicating the place where they did it, as well as the stays abroad. Both training modalities are not mutually exclusive, since most of the students who carry out stays abroad do so to perfect the language they usually study in Spain. It is worth mentioning that in the Primary Education Degree, the specific subjects taught in the mention of English or the bilingual group, although they use this language as the language of instruction, aim to teach methodological and non-linguistic aspects.

#### 4.1.1. Study of a foreign language

In the first place, the students had to answer the following question "Are you studying English outside of your undergraduate studies?" Almost half of the students study a foreign language, specifically 47.54%. 43.33% study only English (n=185), 0.94% English and other languages (n=4). and 3.28% other languages excluding English (n=14).

Then, those who had answered affirmatively to the previous question had to indicate the name of the center or institution. Once the information was collected, the responses were grouped according to the type of institution or center –see Figure 1–. In decreasing order of choice, are the academies (35.60%), the Official School of Languages (6.79%), private classes (2.81%), classes at the General Foundation of the University of Malaga (1.87%), and only one informant chose the City Council's Art and Culture Center (0.23%), and another the classes with a native speaker (0.23%). Although classes with a native speaker could also be considered private classes, it has been recorded in a differentiated way to value the response of the student who wanted to make a difference in terms of the characteristics of his English teacher.



**Figure 1.** *Place of study of the foreign language.*

**Source:** Self-made.

#### 4.1.2. Completing stays abroad

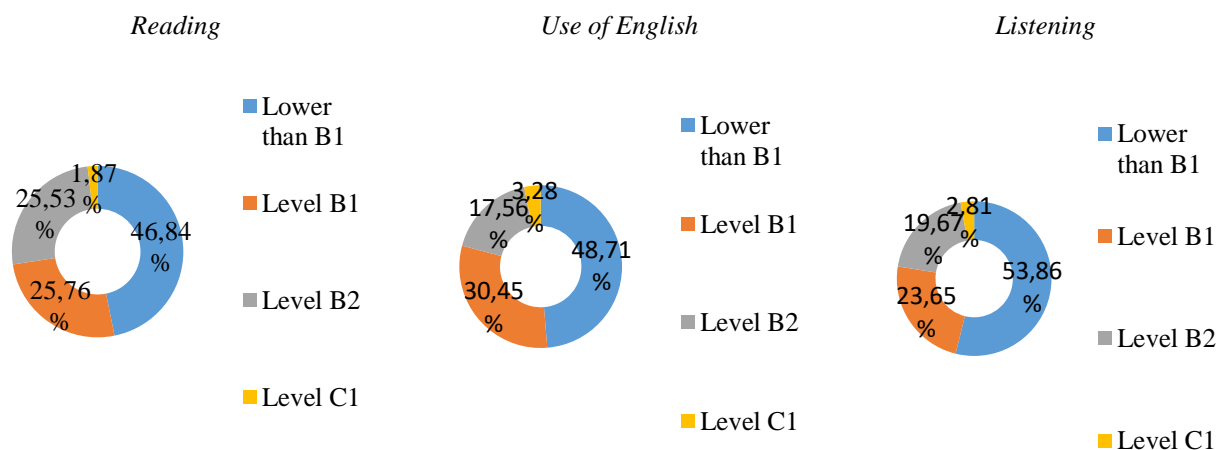
This question involves an approach to the international mobility of students, regardless of the type of stay they have made abroad. Only 15.69% (n=67) of the students have taken a course or stay abroad compared to 84.31% (n=360) who have not taken any.

#### 4.2. Skills level

##### 4.2.1. Results obtained in the tests

Once the English tests were corrected, we obtained a numerical score that allowed us to group the informants by the level reached according to the CEFR. The average score obtained in each test was 16.80 in *Reading*, 10.47 in *Use of English*, and 11.34 in *Listening*. Only the score in *Reading* is equivalent to a B1 level, while in the other two tests it corresponds to a level lower than B1.

Figure 2 shows the results of the three tests. The same nomenclature has been used to refer to the type of skill that appears on the Cambridge test. The distribution of the results shows that around half of the students have achieved a B1 level, which will be the one required to obtain the title of Graduate in Primary Education since in the vast majority it is usually the language chosen for the accreditation of this requirement. Specifically, 53.16% in *Reading*, 51.29% in *Use of English*, and 46.14% in *Listening* reached a B1 or higher level. As for the tests that have obtained lower results than a B1 level, in order from highest to lowest are *Listening* (53.86%), *Use of English* (48.71%), and *Reading* (46.84%). In all cases, the percentage of students who have reached a C1 level is very low, being higher in the *Use of English* (3.28%), followed by *Listening* (2.81%) and *Reading* (1.87%).



**Figure 2.** Sector diagram of the level achieved according to the CEFR in the written comprehension test.

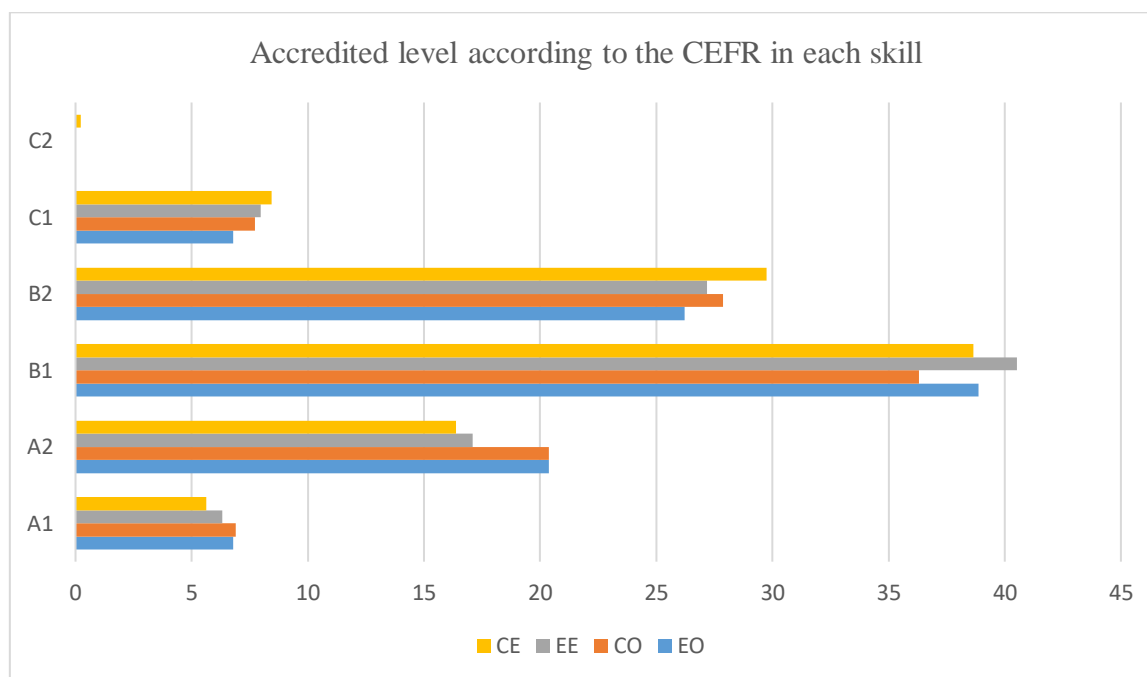
**Source:** Self-made.

##### 4.2.2. Accredited level

Taking into account that some level certificates include a separate breakdown according to skills, informants can affirm that they have acquired more or less level according to the type of skill. Almost all the informants claim to have some level of English accredited, specifically 99.06% (n=423)



compared to 0.94% (n=4) who do not. As Figure 3 shows, the only skill that an informant claims to have a C2 in is *Reading*. Most of the responses are concentrated on a B1 level, followed by a B2 level, an A2 level, a C1 level, and an A1 level.



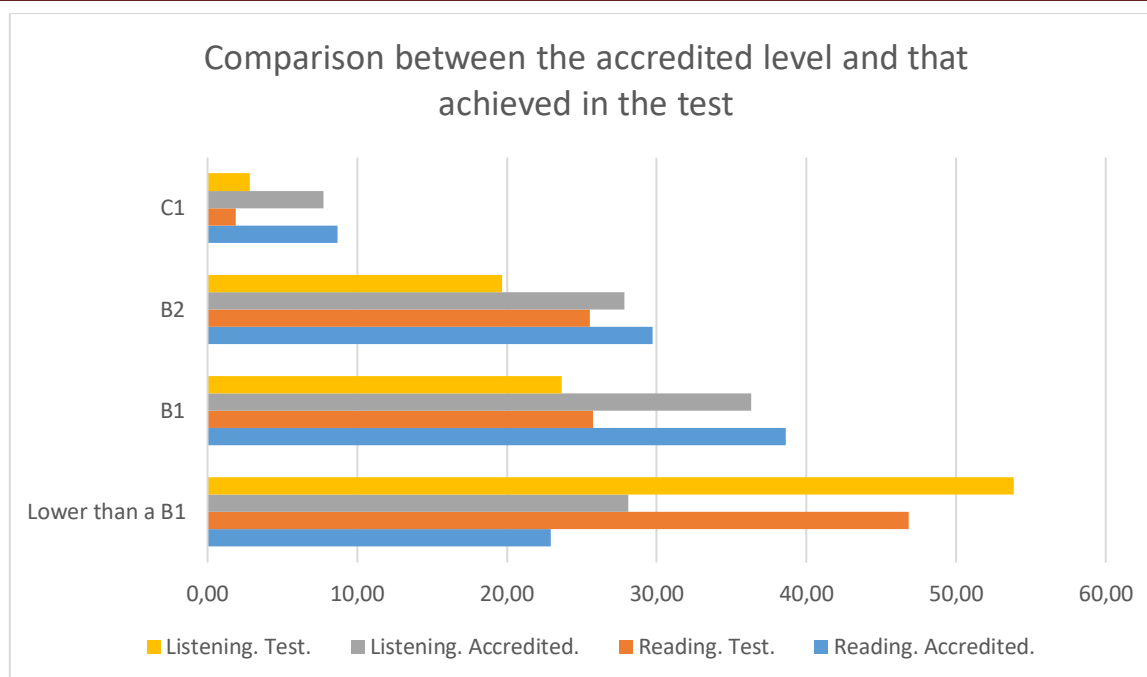
**Figure 3.** Accredited levels in English according to skills.

**Source:** Self-made.

Regarding mastering other languages, French is the second language that students claim to have accredited at some level, specifically 64.40% (n=275), compared to 35.60% (n=152) who do not have accredited any level. The rest of the languages that the informants have answered affirmatively to the question are in descending order: Italian (n=13), German (n=8), and there is only one informant who claims to know another of the following languages, in most cases because it is their mother tongue: Arabic, Basque, Japanese, Portuguese, and Romanian.

#### 4.2.3. Accredited level versus obtained results

The difference between the accredited level and the obtained results indicates that the students have a higher certified level than they are capable of achieving with this test (see Figure 4). Specifically, at the level below a B1 is where the greatest differences occur. In *Listening*, 53.86% obtained a level lower than a B1, while only 28.10% claim to have it accredited, with a difference of 25.76%. This percentage difference is similar in the case of *Reading*, where 46.84% of students have acquired a level lower than B1 but only 22.95% claim to have an A2 or A1 accredited, establishing the percentage difference in 23.89%. In the rest of the levels, this margin of difference is somewhat lower, but it follows the marked trend in which the level obtained in the test is lower than the accredited one.



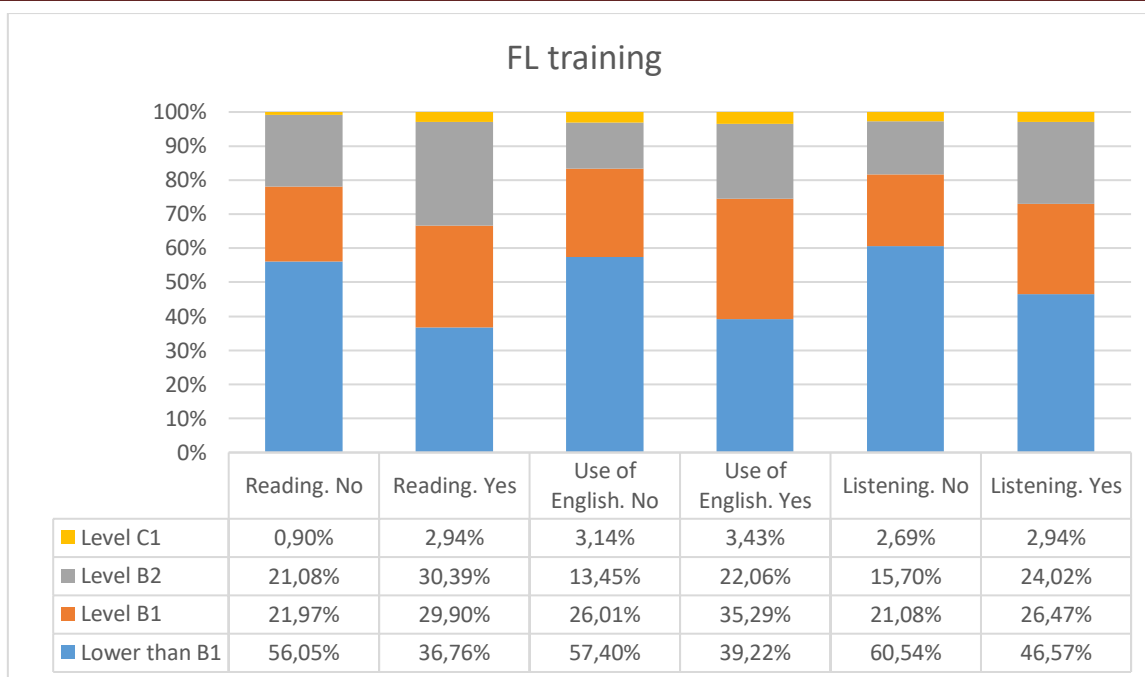
**Figure 4.** Accredited levels versus levels achieved.  
 Source: Self-made.

### 4.3. Relationship between English training and linguistic competence

#### 4.3.1. Study of English

To know the relationship between the results of the linguistic competence tests based on the variable *study of English*, descriptive analyzes have been carried out considering both the level reached in each test and the score. Figure 5 shows the distribution of frequencies by levels reached according to the test divided by the two options of the variable *study of English*: yes or no. In the three analyzed skills, most of the informants who do not study English have not reached the B1 necessary for the completion of their undergraduate studies, while more than half of those who do study English have achieved it: in *Reading*, specifically, 56.05% of those who do not study English obtain a level lower than B1 while the percentage is much lower among those who study English (36.76%), in *Use of English* the distribution is similar 57.40% compared to 39.22%, and in the *Listening* test that distance seems to be slightly shortened from 60.54% to 46.57%.

If we consider the results obtained for the future incorporation as English or bilingual teachers, approximately a quarter of the informants who study English achieve a B2 or higher, while the percentage in those who do not study English is lower. Specifically, those who study English have achieved a B2 or C1 in 33.33% in *Reading*, 25.49% in *Use of English*, and 26.96% in *Listening*. For their part, those who do not study English have achieved it by 21.97% in the case of *Reading*, 16.59% in the *Use of English*, and 18.39% in *Listening*.



**Figure 5.** Distribution of the results of the level test according to the variable 'training'.  
 Source: Self-made.

Regarding the numerical score achieved, Table 2 corroborates the previous data, since the average score of the informants who study English is higher, in all cases, than the rest by at least 2 points, and entails that the former obtain a level equivalent to B1 while those who do not study English only reach an A2 level. In *Reading*, the average reached by the informants who study English is 18.26 points and for those who do not study English it is 15.26; In the *Use of English*, the average of those who study English is 11.73 and of those who do not, 9.32. In *Listening* 12.41 and 10.37 points, respectively.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of the score obtained in the tests according to the variable study of English.

	Group statistics				
	Study of English outside of the university	N	Average	Standard deviation	Average standard error
Points in <i>Reading</i>	No	223	15.26	8.661	.580
	Yes	204	18.48	8.669	.607
Points in the <i>Use of English</i>	No	223	9.32	7.219	.483
	Yes	204	11.73	6.871	.481
Points in <i>Listening</i>	No	223	10.37	6.674	.447
	Yes	204	12.41	7.051	.494

Source: Self-made.

To verify if there are differences between the averages from a statistical approach, the Student's t-test was performed. Table 3 shows the significance of the F in *Levene's* test is  $>0.05$ , so the null hypothesis of the equality of the variances is not rejected and it is assumed that the variances are equal. Therefore, we proceed with the analysis of the equality of averages in which it is observed that the significance value of the t is  $<0.05$  in all cases, so we reject the null hypothesis of the equality of averages. In

summary, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between the study of English outside of university and the results obtained in the level tests.

**Table 3.** Student's T-test of the scores in the tests and study of English.

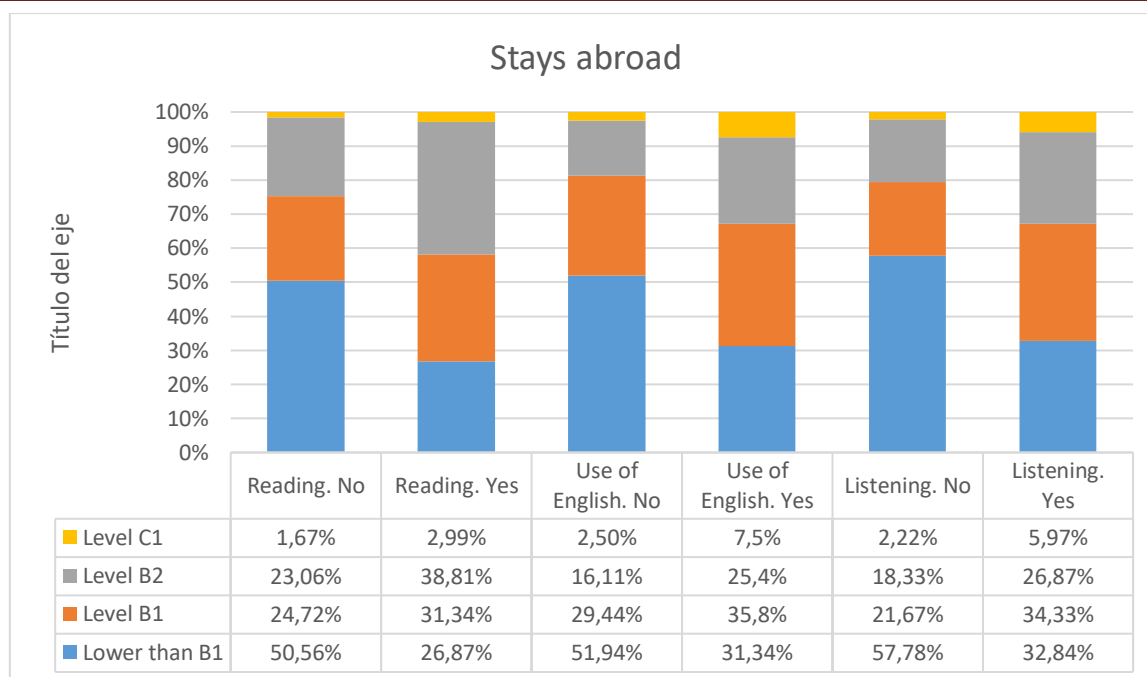
		Independent samples test						
		Levene's test of the quality of variances		T-test for equality of averages				
		F	Sig.	Sig. (bilateral)	Difference of averages	Standard error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
							Lower	Higher
Points in <i>Reading</i>	Equal variances are assumed	.049	.825	.000	-3.216	.839	-4.866	-1.566
	Equal variances are not assumed			.000	-3.216	.840	-4.866	-1.566
Points in the <i>Use of English</i>	Equal variances are assumed	2.809	.094	.000	-2.407	.683	-3.751	-1.064
	Equal variances are not assumed			.000	-2.407	.682	-3.748	-1.067
Points in <i>Listening</i>	Equal variances are assumed	1.519	.218	.002	-2.039	.664	-3.345	-.734
	Equal variances are not assumed			.002	-2.039	.666	-3.348	-.730

Source: Self-made.

### 4.3.2. Stays abroad

Following the same procedure as above, Figure 4 shows the frequencies obtained at each of the CEFR levels according to the type of test and whether or not the informants have made stays abroad. In this case, it is observed that the data tend to become more polarized, so that the informants who have made stays abroad, have obtained a minimum of a B1 in a higher percentage than the rest. More than half of those who have not completed stays have a level lower than B1, specifically 50.56% in *Reading*, 51.94% in *Use of English*, and 57.78% in *Listening*. On the other hand, this percentage is much lower in those who have made stays: 26.87% in *Reading*, 31.34% in *Use of English*, and 32.84% in *Listening*.

If we count the percentage of students who would have achieved at least a B2, in the case of those who have made stays, it exceeds a quarter: 41.78% in *Reading* and 32.84% in both the *Use of English* and *Reading*. On the other hand, the percentage is much lower in those who have not made stays: 24.72% in *Reading*, 18.61% in *Use of English*, and 20.56% in *Listening*.



**Figure 4.** Distribution of the results of the level test according to the completion of stays abroad.  
**Source:** Self-made.

Table 4 presents the descriptive data of the tests according to the variable stays abroad. It is observed that those who did not do stays abroad achieved a score of 16.13 points, equivalent to B1 and somewhat higher than those who did not study English (15.26 points). This could be because this group includes informants who do study English but have not made any stay. In the case of those who do carry-out stays, the difference compared to the rest is almost 4 points higher. In *Reading* they have obtained 20.42, in *Use of English* 13.45, and in *Listening* 14.36, corresponding to B1 level.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics of the score obtained in the tests according to the variable “stay abroad”.

	Group statistics				
	Stays or courses abroad	N	Average	Standard deviation	Average standard error
Points in <i>Reading</i>	No	360	16.13	8.779	.463
	Yes	67	20.42	8.072	.986
Points in the <i>Use of English</i>	No	360	9.91	7.162	.377
	Yes	67	13.45	6.340	.775
Points in <i>Listening</i>	No	360	10.78	6.856	.361
	Yes	67	14.36	6.543	.799

**Source:** Self-made.

Table 5 shows that there is a significant relationship between both variables. Levene's test rejects the null hypothesis of equality of variances and Student's t-test rejects the null hypothesis of equality of averages. In all cases, the bilateral significance is less than 0.05.

**Table 5.** Student's T-test of test scores and stays abroad.

		Independent samples test						
		Levene's test of the quality of variances		T-test for equality of averages				
		F	Sig.	Sig. (bilateral)	Difference of averages	Standard error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
							Lower	Higher
Points in <i>Reading</i>	Equal variances are assumed	.267	.606	.000	-4.290	1.154	-6.558	-2.022
	Equal variances are not assumed			.000	-4.290	1.089	-6.452	-2.128
Points in the <i>Use of English</i>	Equal variances are assumed	3.318	.069	.000	-3.534	.937	-5.375	-1.693
	Equal variances are not assumed			.000	-3.534	.862	-5.243	-1.825
Points in <i>Listening</i>	Equal variances are assumed	.382	.537	.000	-3.578	.906	-5.358	-1.797
	Equal variances are not assumed			.000	-3.578	.877	-5.319	-1.836

Source: Self-made.

## 5. Discussion

As they are students of the Degree in Education, the number of informants who have carried out some type of stay abroad is lower than that of other studies carried out at the University of Malaga such as that of Santos-Díaz (2020), within the framework of postgraduate studies, where 63.25% of the students have carried them out compared to 15.69% in this study. However, it would be interesting to analyze the mobility of future teachers in comparison with other undergraduate studies where there are no external practices, because, despite the advantages detected in the work of Sanz Trigueros & Guillén (2020), it still seems that future teachers are slowed down in their desire to carry out international stays if they do not have experiences that promote an international *practicum* (Sanz-de-la-Cal, 2014).

It should be mentioned that the level diagnosed in the English test is quite low if we consider that to be teachers in any bilingual program or teach English as a foreign language classes, they will need a B2. Only 27.40% of students have a B2 or higher in *Reading*, 20.84% in *Use of English*, and 22.48% in *Listening*. However, if we take into account that the objective of the Strategic Plan for Languages (Agreement of January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017 of the Junta de Andalucía) is that teachers who teach bilingual education have acquired at least a C1, the percentage of future teachers that would meet this requirement is minimal. Specifically, 1.87% have reached a C1 in *Reading*, 3.28% in *Use of English*, and 2.81% in *Listening*. Therefore, it is clear the need to adapt initial teacher training to the current

context where the profile of the bilingual teacher adapted to the framework of European higher education is increasingly required (Guardamillas & Alcaraz, 2017; Sanz-Trigueros & Guillén, 2016).

Likewise, the results obtained differ from the minimum level that is assumed after having finished High School. The Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE, 2013), recognizes that after having completed high school, each student has a B1 level of English in the first foreign language studied. Thus, since the promulgation of the Organic Law of Education (LOE, 2006), in article 62.2, educational administrations were urged to facilitate the performance of approved tests to obtain the official certification of the knowledge of the languages studied by the students of Compulsory Secondary Education, High School, and Vocational Training<sup>1</sup>. However, although the level depends on many factors, such as the type of educational center and the studies completed outside the institute, at least a B1 level is assumed. However, as we have analyzed, almost half of the students have obtained a score below B1 in *Reading* and *Use of English* and, in the case of *Listening*, it exceeds half of them.

Regarding the disparity of the results obtained in the tests and those that students claim to have accredited, it would be necessary to analyze what type of exams they have taken to accredit each of the levels. That is to say: if it is those tests promoted by public institutions –Official Language Schools, Association of Language Centers of Higher Education, or Language Services of each university– or they are private –*APTIS*, *Trinity*, *TOEFL*, or *Cambridge*– (Raigón-Rodríguez & Larrea-Espinar, 2019). Furthermore, it would be convenient to inquire about the level of demand raised in each of the exams, since the belief that there are more or less affordable means to achieve language accreditation seems widespread (Ruiz, 2019).

## 6. Conclusions

Along these lines, it has become clear that the university still has to face an important challenge: to adequately prepare future generations of teachers to successfully socialize in a key profession for the advancement of society since, as various reports have pointed out, like the one carried out by Barber & Mourshed (2008) for the McKinsey consultancy, the educational level of a country depends on the training, motivation, and lifelong learning of its teachers. However, this study has found that future teachers do not have an adequate linguistic level to face the challenges posed by the multilingual school (Abdelillah-Bauer, 2011). This issue is highly relevant for teacher professional development because, without adequate linguistic competence, it is difficult to achieve methodological solvency from the CLIL approach (Coyle, 2015) or to exercise effective reading mediation (Rivera & Romero, 2020).

While public administrations, from the permanent training of teachers (Guardamillas & Alcaraz, 2017; Guarro et al., 2017) are developing strategies so that our students can adequately move through the knowledge society, it seems that the university, despite its efforts to implement multilingual degrees (Delicado & Pavón, 2015), is not managing to graduate a competitive teaching staff in this area. Thus, a review of the training model is imminent to develop strategies that help create a third space that allows effective collaboration between the university and the school (Zeichner, 2010), since they are interdependent agents and, as such, must act with co-responsibility.

As it is research focused solely on the University of Malaga, the results are not intended to be generalized. However, the findings could coincide with those of other contexts. In this sense, we consider it necessary to undertake similar works that allow for joint reflection through the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/contenidos/estudiantes/ensenanza-idiomas/certificacion.html>

establishment of networks that favor the implementation of research projects. In this way, joint strategies can be designed to help solve the deficiencies found.

As future lines of research, it is proposed to carry out a more detailed analysis of the duration and type of stays that students have made abroad. In this way, the findings of previous studies (Santos Díaz, 2015; Herranz & Marcos, 2019) could be corroborated where students who have made a stay within the framework of the Erasmus scholarship have greater lexical competence due to the characteristics of these types of scholarships: they last for at least three months and students usually acquire the foreign language both in a natural and academic context. Furthermore, including the cultural component, could continue to deepen the line of work outlined by Šifrar (2020).

Likewise, apart from receiving language and culture classes, especially in the first month of reception, the contents are given in a foreign language and, therefore, it could be said that they acquire the language through the methodology of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), an approach that they will have to use in the classroom when exercising their profession as active teachers within the framework of multilingual education (Fernández-Viciano & Fernández-Costales, 2019; Martín-Macho & Faya, 2020; Otto & Estrada, 2019).

Together with this, it would be interesting to know what is the exposure to the foreign language of the informants since it has been shown in previous studies that it can be of great relevance whether it is the use of the language in the academic field (Santos Díaz, 2018), through their readings in a foreign language (Fernández Ruiz et al., 2018; Gómez López, 2014) as well as informal exposure through friends and family (Santos Díaz et al., 2020) or forms of leisure related with the use of the internet or digital platforms (Shafirova et al., 2020; Zhang & Cassany, 2019).

Finally, after a few years, it should be evaluated how the pandemic declared by COVID-19 has influenced university education, in general (Tejedor, et al., 2020) and language education, in particular (Ruiz-Zamora, 2020), since, undoubtedly, technology will play a leading role in the modes of communication between teachers and students (Álvarez & Alejaldre, 2019; Barrientos et al., 2020).

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