

# **Foreign language learning difficulties: English in Spain**

## **Dificultades en el aprendizaje de lengua extranjera: el inglés en España**



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### **TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO**

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## 1. Abstract

Analysing difficulties in learning English as a foreign language (FL) that contribute to a low level of communicative competence may help to find solutions for these problems. The purpose of this paper is, in first place, to place the actual level of English language competence in Spain contrasted with the levels shown in other countries of the European Union to know if a problem area exists. The results show that there is a lower level in Spain with respect to other European countries and therefore, a series of possible difficulties are presented. Secondly, the paper aims to have information about the difficulties with which researchers have been trying to deal and the methodologies taken into consideration to this aim. To carry out the research, several documents have been selected to analyse data collected by means of questionnaires and in different educational contexts: primary school, secondary school, university and unofficial or voluntary education. The results show that the difficulties related to motivation and vocabulary are the most-considered ones. They also show that in order to deal with these difficulties, the methodologies based on language immersion and/or technology are used with a higher rate of frequency in Spain as well as considered by a great number of researchers.

Key words: Language learning difficulties, English in Spain, language immersion, language and technology.

## Resumen

Analizar las dificultades en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera que contribuyen a un nivel bajo de competencia comunicativa puede ayudar a encontrar soluciones para estos problemas. El propósito de este trabajo es, en primer lugar, situar el nivel real de competencia lingüística del inglés en España en comparación con los niveles mostrados en otros países de la Unión Europea para saber si existe una problemática. Los resultados muestran que existe un nivel más bajo en España con relación a otros países europeos y por consiguiente se proporcionan una serie de posibles dificultades. En segundo lugar, este trabajo tiene como objetivo obtener información acerca de las dificultades con las que los investigadores intentan lidiar y las

metodologías consideradas para tal fin. Para llevar a cabo el estudio, se ha recurrido a varios documentos para después analizar los datos que habían sido recogidos mediante cuestionarios y en distintos contextos educacionales: educación primaria, secundaria, universitaria y no oficial o voluntaria. Los resultados muestran que las dificultades que más se tratan son aquellas relacionadas con la motivación y el vocabulario. También muestran que para lidiar con esas dificultades, las metodologías basadas en inmersión lingüística y/o tecnología son las más empleadas y a su vez, consideradas por un gran número de investigadores.

Palabras clave: Dificultades en el aprendizaje de lenguas, inglés en España, inmersión lingüística, lenguaje y tecnología

## 2. Introduction

Foreign language learning (FLL) plays a crucial role in the internationalised world we are living in. Languages are required in the economic, political and sociocultural fields as well as in the daily life of a 21<sup>st</sup> century person. However, research has consistently shown that a series of possible difficulties can occur during the FLL process.

In the context of language acquisition, there is no consensus on what foreign language learning difficulties (FLLDs) are. Some researchers suggested that a factor called “auditory ability” (the ability to deal with sounds and sound-symbol learning) (Pimsleur, 1968; Pimsleur, Sundland, & McIntyre, 1964) or problems in phonological processing (Fonseca-Mora & Fernández-Corbacho, 2017) were often the responsible ones for difficulties in FLL that could not be explained by low motivation or intelligence. Others proposed that FLLDs are transferred from the difficulties encountered in L1 (Ganschow, Sparks & Javorsky, 1998). Other findings revealed that different elements besides language learning deficits were significant in the success in foreign language learning. Indeed, affective issues, and variables such as gender, motivation, personality and difference in learning styles, among others, (Castro & Peck, 2005) are considered as components that may be at the core of foreign language learning difficulties like relevant factors implied in the process of language learning. Therefore, considering the previous statements, FLLDs could be defined as any factor

or hindrance which hampers, obstructs or prevents a language learner from acquiring and producing the language.

Studies confirm that the level of competence in English is higher in some countries than in others in the European Union, as reviewed later. Such reality implies that in the countries where the level of competence is lower, a problem area in relation to FLL exists. As a consequence of the existence of a problem area concerning FLL, researchers have proposed many different methodologies as an attempt to solve the difficulties implicit in that problem area. In some recent articles published in two of the Spain's largest circulation newspapers, 'El País' and 'El Mundo', the results of some barometers related to language competence and language use are collected and briefly explained. In the surveys, a 44% of Spanish respondents declared that, in their opinion, their level of English was low or very low (Soler, 2017) and that a 59,8% of Spanish respondents does not write, speak or read in English (Montero, 2017). In the article written by Soler (2017), he stated that, according to the results, Spaniards think of themselves as the users with the lowest level of English.

The main purpose of this paper is to answer the following questions:

- Is the level of language competence in English in Spain lower than in other countries within the European Union?
- What are the difficulties that researchers are trying to solve in Spain?
- What are the methodologies for language education proposed to solve them?

In order to answer the previous questions, first, some reports on language competences have been reviewed so the actual level of English in Spain can be shown. Later, there is a literature review to provide the potential difficulties that, according to previous research, affect the language learning process (LLP). After that, seventeen articles dealing with language learning difficulties have been selected as the corpus of the analysis. The results of all seventeen studies have been analyzed in detail, and organised in two tables. Finally, the conclusions of the different studies have been commented and some recommendations have been provided.

### **3. Reports on linguistic competences**

A report on linguistic competences is one of the instruments used to relay information concerning foreign language proficiency. They also provide the language level of a group of people in relation to the communicative competences and, to the same extent, they are used to collect data and establish the language level of a group compared to other groups. In this paper, two reports have been presented with the intention to provide the linguistic competences of Spain in English in comparison with other member states of the European Union. The first report, ‘European Study of Competences in Languages (ESCL)’ is presented as a summary of the most relevant points of an analysis carried out by a group of researchers – explained below. The second study, ‘Europeans and their Languages’ is presented as an analysis of the most pertinent details considering the purpose of this paper.

#### **3. 1. ‘European Study of Competences in Languages (ESCL)’**

The National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEE) (2013) conducted the last up-to-date Spanish version of the European Study of Competence in Languages (ESCL). For it, they collected data from the European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC) with a survey “designed by the European Commission (2011) for the assessment of proficiency of students in the final year of secondary education in several European countries, and therefore aged between 13 and 16 years” (INEE, 2013, p. 10). In this study, the most prominent data from the international report were presented and those of Spain compared in detail with the rest of the participating countries and regions. In addition, four Spanish research groups specialised and interested in education<sup>1</sup> analysed the data in different chapters. In one of them, they explored the determining factors of the level of English as a foreign language (FL). These factors are “(I) individual characteristics of the students such as gender, age, motivation, etc., (II) their family background – the education of the parents or their employment status, among others, and (III) the characteristics of the schools where they study” (INEE, 2013, p.16) and also the corresponding educational system (INEE, 2013). Sweden was considered as a comparative framework in the aforementioned chapter first because it was the participating country with the best performance in the survey, and

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<sup>1</sup> Brindusa Anghel, Eva Expósito, José Luis Gaviria, Ainara González, Maia Güell, Esther López, Alfonso Lorenzo, Esther Martínez, Enrique Navarro, Sara de la Rica and José Manuel Vez are the authors of the studies. See INEE (2013), page 8 for more detailed information.

second because both Spain and Sweden share two fundamental characteristics. The first characteristic is that Spanish and Swedish are the mother tongues and the only official languages in Spain and Sweden respectively, and the second one is that English is a compulsory subject during secondary education (INEE, 2013). The task was carried out by doing the following:

First, education centres within each country or participating institution are selected at random. Secondly, within each centre, the students who will have to perform the tests are randomly chosen. Finally, each student is examined randomly in two of the three language skills evaluated: (I) oral comprehension (*listening*), (II) reading comprehension and/or (III) writing. To be more precise, for Spain the sample consists of 1,734 students from 78 centres. Likewise, the sample for Sweden includes 1,579 students from 60 different centres. We selected native students representing 89.19% and 92.68% of the samples from Spain and Sweden, respectively, to avoid a potential selection problem for any differences in mother tongue between foreign students as well as the differences associated with cultures and customs of the different countries of origin (INEE, 2013, p. 12).

Additionally, each institution tested the two most widely taught foreign languages to the students who had completed “at least one academic year in the language being assessed – in the case of Spain, the 4th year of ESO (compulsory secondary education)” (INEE, 2013, p. 10).

In *Figure 1*, they accounted for the results in relation to the scores of the two comparing members, Spain and Sweden, and the average of all the participating members. And after observing and analysing, they accounted that “Spain is long way off Sweden in the three language skills, with relatively minor differences in reading comprehension” (INEE, 2013, p. 15).

In a deeper analysis, they observed some significant differences. First, the amount of mothers working full-time is much higher in Sweden – 70% in Sweden against 45% in Spain. Second, the percentage of parents with the highest level of education is higher in Sweden as well – 50% in Sweden and 35% in Spain. Third, parents have a higher knowledge of English in Sweden. Another difference is that Swedish students spend more time preparing for English examinations but startlingly, in

Spain English language learning starts earlier, three years before, and the students receive more hours of English per week.

	LISTENING		WRITING		READING	
	AVERAGE	DEVIATION	AVERAGE	DEVIATION	AVERAGE	DEVIATION
SPAIN	0.234	1.096	-1.432	2.927	0.356	1.241
SWEDEN	2.376	1.114	1.668	1.893	2.019	1.298
AVERAGE	0.467	1.282	-1.427	3.095	0.320	1.319
SPAIN-SWEDEN	-2.142	-0.018	-3.1	1.034	-1.663	-0.057
SPAIN-AVERAGE	-0.233	-0.186	-0.005	-0.168	0.036	-0.078

Source: Prepared by ESLC 2011.

Figure 1: Average Score and Deviation of the three linguistic skills (INEE, 2013)

They concluded that in comparison with Sweden, a low performance of Spanish students in English exist despite the amount of time that Spanish students dedicate to do homework and the amount of extracurricular English classes they take, which in both cases is higher than that in Sweden. They also highlighted the importance of parents and their level of English because if there were the same proportion of parents with a good level of English as in Sweden, the differences between Spain and Sweden could be reduced approximately an 8% (INEE, 2013).

### 3.2. 'Europeans and their languages'

For the purpose of having information about the spoken ability, the level of understanding and use of other languages, learning behaviour, attitudes towards learning or improving language skills, perceptions of the most useful languages, views on EU policy in relation to language use and the role that translation has; the European Commission requested a survey based on multilingualism within the EU on 2012 (the latest report released). "Some 26.751 respondents from different social and demographic groups were interviewed face-to-face at home in their mother tongue"

(Eurobarometer, 2012, p.3). The findings of this survey will help to set the current situation in Europe regarding languages.

Figure 2 shows specifically the average results from the 27 members of the European Union (value EU27), where a 54% of the interviewees speak at least one foreign language, but a 46% cannot communicate in any other language. The presence of some remarkable differences can also be noticed. On the top, it is Luxembourg, where a 98% of the respondents can communicate in at least one foreign language; an 84% is able to communicate in two different foreign languages; a 61% can communicate in three languages and only a 2% cannot communicate in a different language rather than their mother tongue. On the contrary, at the bottom it is Hungary, where a 35% of the respondents can communicate in another language, a 13% are able to interact with others in two distinct languages, only a 4% can communicate in 3 languages and a 65% of the respondents cannot communicate in any other language.

On the bottom six, together with Hungary, Italy, Portugal, United Kingdom and Ireland Spain is found, where a 46% of the interviewees can communicate in a second language, an 18% can communicate in a third foreign language and only a 5% can create a conversational speech. Nevertheless, the relevant point is that more than a half of the Spanish people involved in the survey (54%) are not capable to create a satisfactory communicative situation in any different language from their mother tongue.

In some of the countries where the amount of speakers of a L2 (and even L3 and L4) is large, two or more official languages coexist. The coexistence of more than one language is conducive to the learning of L2 for the reason that learners can be continuously in contact with the L2.

An observational study on the mastery of English has been accomplished in order to know the level of English among the European members. First, within the survey, respondents were asked what languages, apart from their mother tongue, they believed to be more useful for their personal development and also, they were asked to name two languages they believed to be the most useful for children to learn in the future. The results were highly clarifying since a huge percentage of the respondents agreed that English is the most useful language in both cases (Eurobarometer, 2012).

D48T Languages that you speak well enough in order to be able to have a conversation - TOTAL





























		At least 1	Diff. EB77.1 - EB64.3	At least 2	Diff. EB77.1 - EB64.3	At least 3	Diff. EB77.1 - EB64.3	None	Diff. EB77.1 - EB64.3
	EU27	54%	<b>-2</b>	25%	<b>-3</b>	10%	<b>-1</b>	46%	<b>+2</b>
	LU	98%	<b>-1</b>	84%	<b>-8</b>	61%	<b>-8</b>	2%	<b>+1</b>
	LV	95%	=	54%	<b>+3</b>	13%	<b>-1</b>	5%	=
	NL	94%	<b>+3</b>	77%	<b>+2</b>	37%	<b>+3</b>	6%	<b>-3</b>
	MT	93%	<b>+1</b>	59%	<b>-9</b>	13%	<b>-10</b>	7%	<b>-1</b>
	SI	92%	<b>+1</b>	67%	<b>-4</b>	34%	<b>-6</b>	8%	<b>-1</b>
	LT	92%	=	52%	<b>+1</b>	18%	<b>+2</b>	8%	=
	SE	91%	<b>+1</b>	44%	<b>-4</b>	15%	<b>-1</b>	9%	<b>-1</b>
	DK	89%	<b>+1</b>	58%	<b>-8</b>	23%	<b>-7</b>	11%	<b>-1</b>
	EE	87%	<b>-2</b>	52%	<b>-6</b>	22%	<b>-2</b>	13%	<b>+2</b>
	SK	80%	<b>-17</b>	43%	<b>-5</b>	18%	<b>-4</b>	20%	<b>+17</b>
	AT	78%	<b>+16</b>	27%	<b>-5</b>	9%	<b>-12</b>	22%	<b>-16</b>
	CY	76%	<b>-2</b>	20%	<b>-2</b>	7%	<b>+1</b>	24%	<b>+2</b>
	FI	75%	<b>+6</b>	48%	<b>+1</b>	26%	<b>+3</b>	25%	<b>-6</b>
	BE	72%	<b>-2</b>	50%	<b>-16</b>	27%	<b>-26</b>	28%	<b>+2</b>
	DE	66%	<b>-1</b>	28%	<b>+1</b>	8%	=	34%	<b>+1</b>
	EL	57%	=	15%	<b>-4</b>	4%	=	43%	=
	FR	51%	=	19%	<b>-2</b>	5%	<b>+1</b>	49%	=
	PL	50%	<b>-7</b>	22%	<b>-10</b>	7%	<b>-9</b>	50%	<b>+7</b>
	CZ	49%	<b>-12</b>	22%	<b>-7</b>	6%	<b>-4</b>	51%	<b>+12</b>
	RO	48%	<b>+1</b>	22%	<b>-5</b>	8%	<b>+2</b>	52%	<b>-1</b>
	BG	48%	<b>-11</b>	19%	<b>-12</b>	4%	<b>-4</b>	52%	<b>+11</b>
	ES	46%	<b>+2</b>	18%	<b>-1</b>	5%	<b>-1</b>	54%	<b>-2</b>
	IE	40%	<b>+6</b>	18%	<b>+5</b>	4%	<b>+2</b>	60%	<b>-6</b>
	UK	39%	<b>+1</b>	14%	<b>-4</b>	5%	<b>-1</b>	61%	<b>-1</b>
	PT	39%	<b>-3</b>	13%	<b>-10</b>	4%	<b>-2</b>	61%	<b>+3</b>
	IT	38%	<b>-3</b>	22%	<b>+6</b>	15%	<b>+9</b>	62%	<b>+3</b>
	HU	35%	<b>-7</b>	13%	<b>-14</b>	4%	<b>-16</b>	65%	<b>+7</b>

Figure 2: A percentage of speakers of foreign languages per country (Eurobarometer, 2012).

Thus, some information from the survey about the real use of English in different real contexts regarding the macro-skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) has been gathered. *Figure 3* shows the frequency of use of language so as to maintain a conversation (speaking skill). Regarding the European level – EU27 – it is

observed that a 38% can maintain a conversation in English. The highest scores<sup>2</sup> are found in the Netherlands (90%), Malta (89%), Sweden (86%), Denmark (86%), Austria (73%) and Finland (70%), whereas the lowest scores are found in Hungary (20%), Spain (22%), Bulgaria (26%), Slovakia (26%), Portugal (27%) and Czech Republic (27%).

































	<b>EU27</b>			<b>IE</b>			<b>LT</b>			<b>PT</b>	
	English	38%		Irish/Gaellic	22%		Russian	80%		English	27%
	French	12%		French	17%		English	38%		French	15%
	German	11%		English	6%		German	14%		Spanish	10%
	<b>BE</b>			<b>EL</b>			<b>LU</b>			<b>RO</b>	
	English	38%		English	51%		French	80%		English	31%
	French	45%		French	9%		German	69%		French	17%
	German	22%		German	5%		English	56%		Italian	7%
	<b>BG</b>			<b>ES</b>			<b>HU</b>			<b>SI</b>	
	English	25%		English	22%		English	20%		Croatian	61%
	Russian	23%		Spanish	16%		German	18%		English	59%
	German	8%		Catalan	11%		French	3%		German	42%
	<b>CZ</b>			<b>FR</b>			<b>MT</b>			<b>SK</b>	
	English	27%		English	39%		English	89%		Czech	47%
	Slovakian	16%		Spanish	13%		Italian	56%		English	26%
	German	15%		German	6%		French	11%		German	22%
	<b>DK</b>			<b>IT</b>			<b>NL</b>			<b>FI</b>	
	English	86%		English	34%		English	90%		English	70%
	German	47%		French	16%		German	71%		Swedish	44%
	Swedish	13%		Spanish	11%		French	29%		German	18%
	<b>DE</b>			<b>CY</b>			<b>AT</b>			<b>SE</b>	
	English	56%		English	73%		English	73%		English	86%
	French	14%		French	7%		French	11%		German	26%
	German	10%		Greek	5%		Italian	9%		French	9%
	<b>EE</b>			<b>LV</b>			<b>PL</b>			<b>UK</b>	
	Russian	56%		Russian	67%		English	33%		French	19%
	English	50%		English	46%		German	19%		English	10%
	Finnish	21%		Latvian	24%		Russian	18%		German	6%

Figure 3: Languages different from their mother tongue that people are able to use well enough as means to maintain a conversation. (Eurobarometer, 2012)

<sup>2</sup> By 'score', it is meant the percentage of speakers per country with the abilities required to communicate (speaking, listening, writing and listening).

Likewise, *figure 4* displays the use of English as the language to read magazines and newspapers (reading skill). In it, Malta (74%), Denmark (58%), the Netherlands (56%), Finland (49%), Cyprus (46%) and Austria (43%) are observed as the countries with the highest scores and Hungary (18%), Spain (15%), Czech Republic (17%), Bulgaria (16%), Poland and Portugal (20%) together with Romania (20%) as the countries with the lowest. The European average is represented by a 25%.





























	English	French	German	Spanish	Russian	None
 EU27	25%	7%	6%	4%	2%	56%
 BE	37%	28%	13%	3%	0%	42%
 BG	16%	1%	3%	1%	17%	64%
 CZ	17%	1%	8%	0%	6%	46%
 DK	58%	5%	31%	2%	0%	27%
 DE	33%	5%	7%	2%	2%	56%
 EE	36%	1%	7%	0%	35%	26%
 IE	4%	7%	4%	2%	1%	70%
 EL	40%	4%	3%	0%	1%	55%
 ES	15%	7%	1%	13%	0%	58%
 FR	32%	4%	5%	9%	0%	57%
 IT	26%	9%	1%	4%	0%	63%
 CY	46%	4%	1%	0%	1%	46%
 LV	27%	0%	6%	1%	46%	21%
 LT	23%	1%	5%	1%	61%	20%
 LU	35%	54%	52%	10%	1%	15%
 HU	12%	1%	9%	0%	1%	77%
 MT	74%	4%	2%	0%	0%	21%
 NL	56%	15%	46%	6%	0%	28%
 AT	43%	5%	6%	2%	1%	48%
 PL	18%	1%	6%	0%	6%	69%
 PT	20%	10%	1%	9%	0%	68%
 RO	20%	7%	1%	2%	1%	58%
 SI	39%	1%	24%	2%	1%	20%
 SK	18%	1%	12%	1%	8%	32%
 FI	49%	5%	11%	4%	1%	40%
 SE	28%	5%	13%	3%	0%	45%
 UK	10%	13%	3%	3%	1%	59%

**Highest percentage per country**  
 Highest percentage per item

**Lowest percentage per country**  
 Lowest percentage per item

Figure 4: Use of the FL to read newspaper or magazines (Eurobarometer, 2012).





























In *figure 5*, the capability to listen to the news or the radio can be spotted (listening skill). The results in the European average present that a 25% can follow the speeches in the news. As previously compared, the highest results are in Malta (85%), Cyprus (63%), Denmark (57%), the Netherlands (57%) and Finland (50%), while Spain (12%), Hungary (12%), Slovakia (14%), Bulgaria (17%) and Poland (17%) represent the countries with the lowest scores in this context.

	English	French	German	Spanish	Russian	None
 EU27	25%	7%	7%	5%	3%	56%
 BE	<b>41%</b>	30%	18%	4%	0%	35%
 BG	17%	1%	4%	1%	19%	60%
 CZ	18%	1%	9%	0%	8%	40%
 DK	57%	5%	34%	3%	0%	24%
 DE	33%	5%	7%	2%	2%	55%
 EE	39%	1%	9%	1%	44%	19%
 IE	5%	8%	5%	2%	1%	61%
 EL	42%	5%	3%	0%	1%	53%
 ES	12%	6%	1%	13%	0%	60%
 FR	26%	3%	4%	11%	0%	59%
 IT	24%	9%	2%	3%	0%	65%
 CY	63%	5%	2%	1%	2%	31%
 LV	29%	1%	7%	1%	47%	17%
 LT	28%	1%	6%	1%	70%	12%
 LU	39%	55%	53%	11%	1%	12%
 HU	12%	1%	10%	0%	1%	75%
 MT	<b>85%</b>	5%	2%	1%	0%	7%
 NL	57%	17%	49%	7%	0%	25%
 AT	44%	6%	6%	2%	1%	47%
 PL	17%	1%	6%	1%	8%	64%
 PT	20%	10%	1%	13%	0%	64%
 RO	26%	8%	2%	5%	2%	52%
 SI	42%	2%	27%	4%	3%	16%
 SK	14%	1%	11%	1%	8%	33%
 FI	50%	4%	11%	4%	2%	39%
 SE	24%	5%	16%	4%	0%	44%
 UK	9%	11%	4%	3%	1%	60%

<b>Highest percentage per country</b>	<i>Lowest percentage per country</i>
Highest percentage per item	Lowest percentage per item

Figure 5: Languages different from their mother tongue that people are able to understand well enough as means to follow the news on radio or television. (Eurobarometer, 2012)

Finally, regarding the context of online communication (writing skill), in *figure 6* it can be observed that the average score of Europe corresponds to 26%. The highest scores are found in Malta (64%), Denmark (58%), the Netherlands (56%), Finland (51%), Greece (46%) and Austria (45%). On the other hand, Hungary (16%), Spain and Slovakia (17%), Czech Republic (19%) and Bulgaria, Poland and Portugal (20%) have the lowest scores.

	English	French	German	Spanish	Russian	None
 EU27	26%	5%	5%	3%	1%	61%
 BE	40%	19%	7%	2%	0%	47%
 BG	20%	0%	3%	1%	10%	69%
 CZ	19%	1%	7%	0%	2%	58%
 DK	58%	2%	19%	1%	0%	32%
 DE	32%	4%	7%	1%	1%	59%
 EE	42%	1%	5%	0%	19%	30%
 IE	4%	6%	3%	2%	1%	74%
 EL	46%	4%	2%	0%	1%	50%
 ES	17%	5%	1%	9%	0%	65%
 FR	29%	3%	2%	6%	0%	64%
 IT	29%	6%	2%	2%	0%	64%
 CY	44%	3%	1%	0%	1%	51%
 LV	28%	0%	3%	1%	41%	25%
 LT	31%	1%	4%	1%	40%	31%
 LU	33%	41%	37%	5%	1%	30%
 HU	16%	1%	8%	0%	1%	74%
 MT	64%	3%	1%	0%	0%	32%
 NL	56%	7%	31%	3%	0%	37%
 AT	45%	5%	5%	2%	0%	47%
 PL	20%	1%	5%	1%	4%	69%
 PT	20%	6%	0%	5%	0%	72%
 RO	24%	5%	1%	2%	1%	59%
 SI	43%	1%	16%	1%	1%	34%
 SK	17%	1%	9%	1%	3%	47%
 FI	51%	3%	8%	4%	1%	42%
 SE	30%	2%	4%	1%	1%	59%
 UK	10%	8%	2%	2%	2%	66%

<b>Highest percentage per country</b>	<i>Lowest percentage per country</i>
Highest percentage per item	Lowest percentage per item

Figure 6: Use of the FL to communicate online (Eurobarometer, 2012)

The previous considerations do not include countries where English is the L1. Besides, the situations surveyed in *figures 3, 4, 5 and 6* and briefly analysed above are very specific and they may not be an utter representation of the reality with reference to the ability of L2. The situation considered for the listening skill represents the context of listening to the radio or the news, and maybe a part of the respondents does not listen to the radio or the news but still has the required listening ability. The selfsame case occurs in the writing and reading situations where the English contexts of use are restricted to online communication and reading a newspaper or a magazine respectively. In spite of that, this report can give us a hint of the reality with regards to language competence. Furthermore, concerning the topic, in all of the contexts Spain belongs to the group of those countries with low abilities.

#### **4. Possible difficulties in the language learning process**

Schumann (1975, p. 209) declares that in second language learning several factors have been considered important. Method of instruction, age, aptitude and particular affective variables such as motivation, attitude and empathy are among those important factors. Similarly, “numerous explanations have been proposed and debated concerning why some students who do well in other courses (e.g., mathematics, science, social studies) do not perform well in or fail FL courses” (Ganschow et al. 1998, p. 248).

Research on language learning difficulties shows their existence in a wide range of contexts . Schirmer, Fontoura and Nunes (2004) examined a set of language learning disabilities or disorders associated to language developmental process and neurobiology. Dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, brain injuries, dysgraphia and dysorthographia are part of these disorders and to the same extent they are considered difficulties. In this paper, this kind of difficulties is dismissed because the attention is on the difficulties occurring in learners not suffering from any of them.

Likewise, specific difficulties like problems with an oral communication approach to foreign language learning and memory problems for sounds and words (which often overlapped with listening difficulties) (Ganschow, Sparks, Javorsky, Pohlman & Bishop-Marbury, 1991) are discarded. In this paper, the factors affecting the LLP that affect negatively such process are considered difficulties. In the same way, the difficulties presented below represent a compilation of some of the potential difficulties that may be responsible for the underachievement of the mainstream language learner.

In the first place, some researchers identified individual differences (IDs) between learners, like Skehan (1991), who affirms that “the foundation of ID research is that it examines attributes on which learners vary and how such variations relate to language-learning success” (p. 290) “since different learner attributes may have different consequences for the nature of language development” (p. 278). In this way, he considered four areas in relation to IDs: “these are language aptitude, motivation, learner styles and learner strategies” (1991, p. 276). He also clarified the concept of *language aptitude* considering that there is a talent for learning languages that is independent of intelligence; such talent is not simply the result of previous learning experiences; it is relatively stable; and it varies between people (Skehan, 1991). ‘*Learner styles*’ is another concept regarding IDs. In Skehan words (1991, “the concept of learning style does not suggest a concern for individual or restricted variables, but rather a general predisposition, voluntary or not, toward processing information in a particular way” (p. 288).

Learning styles can be related to the Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) (Gardner, 1983; 1993). Gardner (1983; 1993) labeled seven different areas of the brain, which correlated to distinct intelligences: *linguistic*, *logical-mathematical*, *spatial*, *musical*, *body-kinesthetic*, *interpersonal*, *intrapersonal*, and *naturalistic*. His ideas were groundbreaking because he said that people processed information in different ways. A problematic area in the classroom lies in that “traditional tests (e.g., multiple choice, short answer, essay...) require students to show their knowledge in a predetermined manner” (Brualdi, 1996, p. 4). According to Arnold and Fonseca-Mora (2004), “MIT in the EFL classroom [...] can help language teachers to give recognition to the holistic nature of learners and to address student diversity” (p. 120).

One of the most common problems concerning IDs and that students experience and teachers have to face is the lack of motivation towards learning a language. Dörnyei (2009) presented *The L2 Motivational Self System* regarding L2 learning. It has three components: The first component, Ideal L2 Self, is the ideal image that learners have of themselves. If the image of person we would like to become speaks an L2, it is a powerful motivator to learn the L2. The second component, Ought-to L2 Self, concerns the attributes that one believes they should have in order to meet expectations or avoid negative outcomes. The last component, L2 Learning Experience, concerns the immediate learning environment and previous experience with language learning

Additionally, Karunakaran (2011) proposed that the personality of learners can be detected. In fact, “the extroversion, uninhibited nature, empathy, self-esteem, dominance, talkativeness, and responsiveness facilitate the second language learners to acquire L2 very effectively” (Karunakaran, 2011, pp. 18-19).

As an additional point, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) analysed *anxiety* in the foreign language classroom concerning performance evaluation. They affirmed that a type of anxiety, communication apprehension, shows up in situations when communication is required, including producing and receiving a spoken message. Another type of performance anxiety, test-anxiety, is experienced in testing situations by students who have perfect test performance expectations. The last of the three sorts of anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, although similar to test-anxiety, may occur in any social, evaluative situation where students fear others would evaluate one negatively. However, they proposed that apart from the combination of these fears transferred to foreign language learning, they “conceive foreign language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p. 128).

Some researchers argued on the age in which a learner should start learning the L2. Some of them discussed about the Critical Period Hypothesis. The results in some studies, like the studies carried out by Johnson and Newport (1989) showed that there is a gradual decline of performance. The *maturational state hypothesis* (early in life, humans have a superior capacity for acquiring languages, and it disappears or declines with maturation) is supported in their studies although the results show that during

adulthood, language does not become totally unlearnable. On the other side, Bialystok, and Hakuta (1999) analysed the interaction of age with linguistic and cognitive factors and their results showed that even though there are performance differences between children and adult learners, late learners are sometimes able to achieve native-like perfection in a L2 and sometimes performing just as well as early learners, although the older group on average performs worse while, on the contrary, others like Kennedy (2006) gave importance to the variable of time declaring that it is not about the age but the amount of time spent studying the FL. “Studies have shown that it takes thousands of contact hours to achieve the ability to function beyond the tourist level in Spanish and French; four to five times longer for other languages such as Arabic, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, or Russian”(Kennedy, 2006, p. 478).

Some authors commented on difficulties related to the language. The first author, Cummins (1979) proposed the *linguistic interdependence theory*. This theory proposes that the knowledge of the L1 can be transferred to the L2 acquisition. After studying bilingual education classes, he concluded that the competence of a student in a second language depended on his or her level of L1 ability. In relation to this assumption, psychologists Ganschow et al. (1998) also stated that students’ FL learning difficulties were not a result of learning disabilities, they were instead directly related to problems with learning in their native language and thus, they formulated the “Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis”. This hypothesis theorized that FL difficulties stem from deficiencies in one or more linguistic codes (phonological, semantic, and syntactic) in the student’s native language system. Karunakaran (2011) also examined the importance of learners’ knowledge of their L1 because it provides the mechanisms of how a language can be grouped – grammatical rules – and in consequence learners can understand how the L2 works. Additionally, Karunakaran (2011) widened such concept with the notions of transfer and inter-language. *Negative transfer*, which can be referred to as ‘interference’, comes about when previous performance distracts the performance on a second language task. He also considered another phenomenon as part of negative transfer: *overgeneralisation*. It takes place when learners extend the linguistic features beyond limits of grammar, like, for example, in the case of using the particle ‘-s’ as a plural mark for every noun.

Rubio and Martinez-Lirola (2010) discussed about the origin relationships between languages as whether a hindrance or a benefit considering the characteristics

which L1 and L2 share. They state that, as a general rule, the level of English is mostly higher in countries whose L1 is of Germanic origin or which share, at least, linguistic characteristics with English. The influence of linguistic similarity facilitating language learning can also be seen in many other languages, not only in the English language sphere (Rubio & Martínez-Lirola, 2010).

Apart from what has been previously mentioned, some authors maintain the existence of specific problems in the language per se in the spotlight. Regarding the language learning difficulties (LLDs) of English, Coe (2001) examined the linguistic problems of Spanish speakers learning English. They have been classified within the fields of phonology, orthography and punctuation, grammar, and vocabulary. *Phonology* includes, as a generalisation, aspects such as difficulty in vowels and devoicing or final voicing consonants, consonant clusters, spelling and pronunciation, rhythm and stress and intonation. The field of *orthography and punctuation* includes spelling issues, the use of contractions, some punctuation conventions, and the use of capital letters. In the field of *grammar*, a wider variety of issues can be reported. These include word order, the use of elements in questions and their appropriate order, question tags, negatives, verbs, their categories and structures; ellipsis, time, tense and aspect, use of passives, articles, gender and number, adjectives, pronouns, possessives and possession, clause structure and complementation, indirect speech and prepositions. In the *vocabulary* field, aspects like the origin of lexicon, two and three part verbs, the male plural form in Spanish for male-female pair or group, one item in the mother tongue expressed by many items in the L2, and the case of ‘false friends’ are recorded (pp. 90-110).

Likewise, some authors provided difficulties related to the educational field. In some contexts, the political decisions play a decisive role in the learning of a specific language. We can find the case of Spain, where a dictatorship regime took place (1936-1975) and it was decided that only a contact with the French language would exist. Such situation caused that language learners could not learn any other language rather than French whilst in such political regime. This could explain to a great degree why a very high percentage of Spanish senior citizens are not able to speak English nowadays (Rubio & Martínez-Lirola, 2010). In addition, researchers also mention the *lack of guidance from students’ parents* as these students are first generation learners of

English and therefore, parents cannot help their children. This factor could be the source of the *lack of exposure* to the FL at home (Kannan, 2009; INEE, 2013).

Authors like Williams (1994) commented on the difficulties related to sociolinguistic aspects:

Language, after all, belongs to a person's whole social being: it is part of one's identity, and is used to convey this identity to other people. The learning of a foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills, or a system of rules, or a grammar; it involves an alteration in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner (p. 77)

Besides, a L2 can also constitute a part of such identity. Schumman (1975) argued that a student needs to enter into the culture if he or she wants to become bilingual (acculturation). “However, upon entering the new community the learner is faced with several problems that can produce negative reactions to the new language and its speakers. These reactions often interfere with second language learning” (p. 210). One of the primary problems stated by Schumman (1975) is that the learner is viewed as an “alien” that needs to undergo “dealienation” and join the target language community, and in the process, he or she usually experiences three types of disorientation: language shock, culture shock and culture stress. *Language shock* corresponds with a series of problems. First, there is the problem of the correct naming of objects and ideas. The dissatisfaction encountered in our native language when the correct word does not come to our mind is intensified in the L2 learning. Second, the visual image that a word has can be quite different in the L2. Third, there can be a sense of shame and fourth, language shock may be related to fear. These problems are more prominent in adult learners. *Culture shock* “can be defined as anxiety resulting from the disorientation encountered upon entering a new culture” (Schumman, 1975, p. 212) while *culture stress* “often centers around questions of identity” (Schumman, 1975, p. 212). The learner may be, for instance, an architect but be unable to function as one because the definitions of what an architect should do are different.

Likewise, Rubio and Martinez-Lirola (2010) discussed on the importance of “attitudes towards learning a FL, its native speakers, its culture and the social value of learning a different language, which goes together with learning a different culture”

(p.31) On this idea, Schumman (1975) explained how “students who had positive attitudes towards learning French, the French course, the French teacher and who felt that they had a good deal of parental encouragement to learn French were likely to be successful learners” (p. 218).

At the same time, researchers like Aimin (2013) defended the importance of *social interaction* during the LLP since language can be acquired easily by allowing the students to socialize and interact either with other learners or with the speakers of the language they are learning (p. 166). If social interaction is not accomplished the learning process may not be fully and effectively completed.

As an additional point, there happens to be a state of affairs in some territories where a widespread language is used and it “leaves population a sense of unneeded task to learn a foreign language” (Rubio & Martinez-Lirola, 2012, p.64). A great number of Spaniards, in spite of acknowledging the importance of speaking English, assume that English is not so much a *social need* but a means to find better job opportunities (Rubio & Martinez-Lirola, 2012). Dörnyei (1990) affirmed that the involvement and striving of a person is part of the *instrumental motivational subsystem*.

An interesting point is that media serves an important function in language learning. Nobody can now think of a home without a TV, a radio, a computer, a smartphone or even the internet. Media is being used with a higher rate of frequency within the classrooms as a tool for empowering the FL skills. On this topic, some researchers discussed about the necessity of the media because it can enhance the language skills, especially television broadcasting of films and cinema. In the past, in some countries broadcasting was available in the original foreign language with subtitles in the L1 while in other countries only dubbing programmes existed. Rubio and Martinez-Lirola (2010) stated that those countries where dubbing programmes existed have a low percentage of speakers of English as a FL. Therefore, in order to improve in the FL, films and cinema ought to be viewed in the original version more prominently in countries like Spain, where dubbing is the norm, with the possible use of subtitles in L2 or L1 (Talaván-Zanón, 2006; Rubio & Martinez-Lirola, 2010). However, some authors, like Mitterer and McQueen (2009), indicated that the appropriate use should be on same-language subtitles as they indicate which words are being spoken, and so, via the lexically-guided retuning mechanism, they can boost speech learning and

hence facilitate language understanding. Nowadays, although the dubbing programmes still exist, televisions are permitted to select the language and the subtitles facilitating such task. The ideal use of media in the original foreign language has albeit some detractors, “many people consider audiovisual input to be exclusive ludic, so they do not understand why should they [*sic*] make efforts to read something when they could just hear it in their own language” (Talaván-Zanón, 2006, p. 42).

Researchers also commented on difficulties related to education policies and methodologies. In fact, Kannan (2009) ascribed the difficulties to the methods in which students are taught the language. He states that they – students – study English from the examination point of view, in other words, they learn by memorization rather than testing and analysing the language; but they also fail in the attempt to acquire the L2 because there is no practice of the language and because of the absence of exposure to the L2.

Miles (2004) presented the fight amongst theoreticians about those advocating the idea of monolingual teaching – using the L2 in the language classroom – and those advocating bilingual teaching – both L1 and L2 are used within the language classroom. Hence, the ideals of monolingual versus bilingual teaching classroom need to be considered as part of a possible impediment because the use of the target language in the language learning classroom can help some students while some learners acquire the FL better in the native language. Connected with the previous ideals, Rubio and Martínez-Lirola (2010) claimed, as claimed by many practitioners, that an appropriate classroom methodology is crucial for developing communicative skills. An appropriate methodology is made up of teaching practices that balance the development of all skills. One of the problems related to this issue is that there seems to be a gap between what official curricula demand and actual teaching practices. While, the main objectives of the curriculum advocate the development of language ability for communication, written skills are favoured over oral skills within the language classroom. Furthermore, many teachers have a tendency to neglect the development and training of speaking skills in the classroom despite language textbooks, used by many teachers, work on both declarative knowledge (vocabulary and grammar) and non-declarative knowledge (listening, speaking, reading and writing) (Rubio & Martínez-Lirola, 2010).

Finally, DiFino and Lombardino (2004) discussed about a series of difficulties that are external to the language learner:

Sometimes there are other sources of problems exogenous in nature such as instructor or curriculum-related problems: inexperienced instructors who have not undergone proper pedagogical training for the L2 classroom; native speakers with no prior pedagogical training or experience; large classes with more than 20 students, curriculum that is overloaded with material and unrealistic goals; and classes that are too fast paced for some individuals. (p. 393)

## 5. Objectives and Methodology

The following paper aims to review studies published within the beginning of 2016 and July 2017 and related to the approaches towards solving the possible difficulties which Spanish (inhabitants of Spain) learners may face when they learn English as a second language. For the purpose of analysis, 17 articles focused on the Spanish context have been analysed.

### 5.1. Inclusion/Exclusion criteria

The articles that compose this corpus have been selected taking into account the following criteria:

- Theme: research about how to solve the difficulties in the language learning process.
- Impact: articles published in impact factor journals, that is to say, those reviewed and filtered by experts.

The articles which compose the corpus are indexed in the ERIC database in the search of 'solve foreign language learning difficulties'. The articles selection has been filtered taking into consideration the upcoming parameters:

- Considering the 'descriptor' filter, the articles related to 'English as second language' and whose body includes 'questionnaires' have been selected because they can gather information from real cases.

- Considering the 'location' filter, the articles which have 'Spain' as the scope of the study have been selected.
- The 'publication date' filter has been restricted to 'since 2016' because the purpose is to know what the research community thinks or is considering on this subject. This means that the selection includes articles since 2016 up to now. Some articles have an earlier date, but they have been included since they were collected in journals published in 2016.

The fact that all these impact factor journals have been admitted in ERIC database means that they have been positively evaluated for their quality in publishing processes, their good working on visibility and spreading, and use, and also, the contents quality.

Applying the filtering process yielded 19 articles. Two of them have been excluded because one of them does not have Spain as the setting for the study and the other article is not focused on English as the problematic language and the respondents are not Spanish speakers (from Spain).

## **5.2. Analysis criteria system**

The analysis has been carried out considering the following variables:

- Participants' characteristics: educational level
- Methodology: approaches to teach English or solve difficulties in the process of learning English, and difficulties attempted or considered to be treated.

Data collected from all studies following variables described above are explained below. Meanwhile, in Table 1 the approaches, methodologies, techniques or tools used or proposed to solve the difficulties are located whereas in Table 2, the difficulties that researchers attempt to solve are gathered.

## **6. Analysis**

All seventeen articles have two factors in common: along all the articles the usefulness of specific methodologies is studied, and in all of them, at least one difficulty is considered. In some instances the discussion will be on the difficulties aimed to be solved whereas in other instances the discussion will be about some beneficial aspects concerning difficulties as consequence of the methodologies implemented. The analysis

will be executed in two parts, first, the methodologies employed in the articles will be reviewed as well as the context of learning (educational level), and afterwards, the difficulties which they aim to solve by means of these methodologies will be analysed. In order to make this paper easier to the reader, we are going to synthesise the concept ‘methodology’, so from now on, any methodology, tool, technique, method or approach will be referred to as ‘methodology’ when speaking in general.

Table 1 shows the different methodologies studied in the articles and the level of education in which they are implemented, which is called in this paper ‘educational context’.

With respect to the educational context, language immersion is preferred in primary and secondary school, even though in post-secondary education this sort of methodology is of great value as well. Two types of language immersion have been discussed in some of the articles: content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and English-medium instruction (EMI). On the one hand, CLIL is discussed in Tragant, Marsol, Serrano & Llanes (2015), Alejo & Piquer-Píriz (2016), Arribas (2016) and Lasagabaster (2016), all of them in the context of primary or secondary school. This specific bilingual methodology has seen a great expansion in Europe, and the authors of the articles account for its attractiveness since it does not focus only on content or language. On the other hand, EMI is discussed in Lasagabaster (2015) and van der Worp (2017) only in the context of post-secondary school, especially in universities. EMI is seen as an instrument to internationalise universities because with its implementation, content and language learning can be accomplished at the same time (Lasagabaster, 2015).

Other studies have been focused on the field of digital learning resources. The educational contexts in these instances are various and so are the methodologies studied. In the context of secondary school, Renau & Pesudo (2016) analyse the use of a WebQuest whilst JClic software is used in Stelea & Girón-García (2017) as a computer-assisted language learning (CALL) tool, although in this paper JClic is reviewed as a separate element. In both techniques students are allowed to acquire the knowledge and the information according to their abilities and a high degree of autonomy, diversity and interactivity are promoted.

In the post-secondary scene, a variety of methodologies is examined. Hernández-Nanclares & Pérez-Rodríguez (2015) examine the design of a ‘flipped classroom’; Giralt & Jeanneau (2016), Puranen & Vurdien (2016) and Guadamillas-Gómez (2017) examine three telecollaboration projects. In the project examined by Giralt & Jeanneau (2016), the students were being prepared for a mobility programme, Puranen & Vurdien (2016) examined a project used as a support for students who were preparing for their C1 and C2 Cambridge levels, and in the project examined by Guadamillas-Gómez (2017) the students were taking an EFL course at university. Mompean & Fouz-González (2016) study the use of a social network like Twitter in the context of an official language school while in the context of post-secondary education, Gonzalez-Vera (2016) studies the impact of Moodle platform – a virtual learning environment (VLE) – and also other electronic resources as instruments to improve students’ level of English. These instruments are composed by language learning websites, ebooks, YouTube videos and social networks. But she is not the only author who analyses VLEs, because in fact, in the study developed by Arús-Hita (2016) the use of VLEs comes into play. With no specific educational context, Arús-Hita (2016) analyses how a digital project based on Moodle, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) can be of benefit to FLL.

Apart from the methodologies previously mentioned, in two of the articles different methodologies, which we could consider as not very common, are analysed.

On the one hand, we notice that only in Roothoof and Breeze (2016), the technique of oral corrective feedback (OFC) is studied and it has been studied in a mixed context, in other words, the participants belonged to different high schools and language schools. They account for the effectiveness of this technique based on previous research but claimed that a small amount of studies has been carried out on the students and teachers’ attitudes on this method, so they have decided to fill that research gap.

On the other hand, we find in Beltrán-Palanques (2016) the only study which considers interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), especially with interactive written discourse completion tests/tasks (DCTs) and verbal reports (VRs) as instruments that can provide “information as regards the participants’ cognitive process, perceptions of speech act performance, validation of research instruments, sociocultural and sociolinguistic

knowledge, as well as politeness issues” (Beltrán-Palanques, 2016, p. 305). This methodology has been observed in the context of a language school.

Table 1. Methodologies considered, analysed or employed as an attempt to solve the possible difficulties.

	Language Immersion		OCF	Digital Learning Resources								Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP)	
				Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs)			WebQuest	JClic	Flipped Classroom	ITL/ Teleco.	Others		
	CLIL	EMI		Moodle	MALL	CALL						DCTs	VRs
<b>Authors and Educational context</b>	<b>Primary school</b>												
Tragant, Marsol, Serrano & Llanes (2015)	✓												
<b>Authors and Educational context</b>	<b>Secondary School</b>												
Alejo & Piquer-Píriz (2016)	✓												
Arribas (2016)	✓												
Lasagabaster (2016)	✓												
Renau & Pesudo (2016)							✓						
Stelea & Girón-García (2017)								✓					
<b>Authors and Educational context</b>	<b>Post-secondary Education (University)</b>												

Hernández-Nanclares & Pérez-Rodríguez (2015)										✓			
Lasagabaster (2015)		✓											
Giralt & Jeanneau (2016)										✓			
Gonzalez-Vera (2016)				✓								✓	
Guadamillas-Gómez (2017)										✓			
van der Worp (2017)		✓											
<b>Authors and Educational context</b>	<b>Unofficial / Voluntary Education (Languages Schools, Online language courses )</b>												
Beltrán-Palanques (2016)												✓	✓
Puranen & Vurdien (2016)										✓			
Mompean & Fouz-González (2016)												✓	
<b>Authors and Educational context</b>	<b>Mixed (Secondary School and Language School)</b>												
Roothoof & Breeze (2016)			✓										

Authors and Educational context	Unspecified												
Arús-Hita (2016)				✓	✓	✓							

- CLIC: Content and language integrated learning
- MALL: Mobile-assisted language learning
- CALL: Computer-assisted language learning
- VRs: Verbal reports
- DCTs: Discourse completion tests/tasks
- OCF: Oral corrective feedback
- EMI: English-medium instruction
- ITL: Intercultural telecollaborative learning
- Teleco.: Telecollaboration
- Others: Websites, Social Networks (Twitter, Facebook...), YouTube videos, E-book reading...

Table 2 shows the difficulties that the previous methodologies attempt to solve or those difficulties which they may treat. Likewise, as we have mentioned above, in some articles they are not difficulties but beneficial aspects related to possible difficulties found out throughout the study.

Language immersion is obtaining a profound dominance in FLL over the last few years. Like previously stated, CLIL is a methodology considered by many researchers. The methodologies based on CLIL (Tragant, Marsol, Serrano & Llanes , 2015; Alejo & Piquer-Píriz, 2016; Arribas, 2016; Lasagabaster, 2016) seem to prove that learners improve in all cases in vocabulary and in some cases in grammar, writing, reading, speaking and pronunciation (Lasagabaster, 2016). At the same time, Alejo & Piquer-Píriz (2016) and Arribas (2016) observe that motivation is increased in this type of methodology as well as students have a better attitude towards learning the second language (L2) (Arribas, 2016). Additionally, Alejo & Piquer-Píriz (2016) aimed to study how important the method was for the L2 exposure and the context of learning. Although the study was focused in the differences between two types of CLIL (Urban and Rural CLIL), it demonstrates that this type of methodology is appropriate for learning English in context. On the other hand, and additionally to some studies based on CLIL, EMI serves as an instrument to deal with motivation (Lasagabaster, 2015). However, van der Worp (2017) claims that the difficulties which EMI methodology can solve are related to anxiety and to the language, especially the difficulties which have to do with the four macro-skills: listening, speaking, writing and reading. But “EMI students were also generally more frequently exposed to English. This exposure logically supports better language proficiency and with a higher level of proficiency it is easier to understand the English exposure.” (van der Worp, 2017, p. 65).

Technology is gaining ground in the field of LL and it is considered to be integrated as part of many methodologies. One of these methodologies is telecollaboration and one of the remarkable aspects about the methodologies based on telecollaboration or intercultural telecollaborative learning (ITL) is that in all of them, the main aim is for students to work especially on cultural or intercultural competences. Despite this, motivation and own learning involvement together with difficulties concerning language issues (vocabulary, writing, reading and grammar) are also considered. Giralt & Jeanneau (2016) and Guadamillas-Gómez (2017) observe that anxiety is in both cases reduced and the amount of lexicon or vocabulary is increased when they communicate with international partners and they also observe that the

difficulties related to the macro-skills, writing, reading (Giralt & Jeanneau, 2016) and speaking (Guadamillas-Gómez, 2017) are also improved along with some grammatical issues. Guadamillas-Gómez (2017) reviews how this project can be advantageous to English as L2 learners and asserts that it can increase L2 time of exposure.

In Renau & Pesudo (2016), the main conclusion of the study is to encourage English teachers to make use of the WebQuest in the EFL classroom since it demonstrated to be a useful teaching strategy that lets addressing the gaps between the traditional teaching and learning processes. The WebQuest provides, according to them, a technological resource that brings together the students' needs and also enhances motivation together with cultural competence. Nonetheless, they allude to a relatively-new term not included in table 2, *digital competence*. They say that with the use of a WebQuest this competence can be improved. Arús-Hita (2016) reviews another of the technology-based methodologies, VLE, and finds out that it can improve part of the difficulties related the language, chiefly the problems connected with vocabulary, listening comprehension and some points of the English grammar. Gonzalez-Vera (2016) investigates the impact of Moodle, a VLE, together with other digital resources, on LL. She brings to light that these resources are helpful especially for difficulties occurring in the domain of factors like motivation and own learning involvement. She declares that “the use of Moodle [...] provided them with confidence.” (Gonzalez-Vera, 2016, p. 59) and the use of these tools contributes to fostering independent learning while Mompean & Fouz-Gonzalez (2016) adds that they can also contribute to the improvement of the pronunciation skills.

JClic is part of this amalgam of technology and language learning combination. By means of Stelea & Girón-García's study (2017), it is observable the difficulties which this specific instrument can treat. They reveal that, as in part of the various articles, motivation is treated and increased, and they also observe that learners improve their attitudes towards L2 and two of the points connected to some linguistic factors: writing competence and grammar aspects.

In Roothoof and Breeze (2016) ‘corrective feedback’(CF) is considered as an option to deal with errors in L2 oral production, that is to say, when L2 learners make mistakes in the process of producing a speech. Although their article presents a discussion between teachers and students' attitudes towards CF rather than an approach to solve any difficulty, it still leads to the conclusion that this method is “the first step towards the development of a programme to induce teachers to pay attention to the issues involved in dealing with learners' spoken errors and to raise their awareness of their students' expectations regarding this aspect of language

learning” (p. 333). However, an immediate feedback is at the same instance a beneficial aspect of CALL (Stelea & Girón-García, 2017).

Finally, the last relevant point in this analysis is that there are some difficulties which are only treated in one of the methodologies, perhaps because they are not either so considered or so relevant in the language learning panorama. However, be that as it may, they are still considered by some authors and therefore gathered in this analysis. One of such difficulties is the students’ satisfaction in relation to the methodology implemented, and it can be found in the methodology based on a flipped classroom (Hernández-Nanclares & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2015). Together with students’ satisfaction, they intend to improve students’ own learning involvement so as they can be aware of what they improve and what they should keep on working on. Another of these difficulties is the one regarding pragmatics. Beltrán-Palanques (2016) first explains that pragmatics “should be appropriately introduced in the instructed setting in order to teach and assess this competence successfully” (Beltrán-Palanques, 2016, p. 304) and although pragmatics is the main objective, it can contribute to solve some grammar points and increase the vocabulary as well. Furthermore, Lasagabaster (2015) is the only author who considers gender, claiming that EMI helps to dilute the differences found in previous studies related to gender and that EMI dispels the belief that FLL belongs to the feminine domain, declaring that “EMI seems to help both male and female students to form vivid images of themselves as authentic users and speakers of the language” (Lasagabaster, 2015, p. 14).

Table 2. Difficulties treated, considered or attempted to be solved

	SS	OLI	Anxiety	Motiv.	Attitudes towards L2	Gender	Voc.	L C	Writ.	Read.	Speak.	Gram.	Pron.	Prag.	L2 expos.	C O L	CC / ICC
Hernández-Nanclares & Pérez-Rodríguez (2015)	✓	✓															
Lasagabaster (2015)				✓		✓											
Tragant, Marsol, Serrano & Llanes (2015)							✓										
Alejo & Piquer-Píriz (2016)				✓			✓					✓			✓	✓	
Arribas (2016)				✓	✓		✓										
Arús-Hita (2016)							✓	✓				✓					
Beltrán-Palanques (2016)							✓					✓		✓			
Giralt & Jeanneau (2016)		✓	✓				✓		✓	✓		✓					✓
Gonzalez-Vera		✓		✓													

(2016)																	
Lasagabaster (2016)						✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Mompean & Fouz-González (2016)												✓					
Puranen & Vurdien (2016)																	✓
Renau & Pesudo (2016)				✓													✓
Roothoof & Breeze (2016)										✓							
Guadamillas-Gómez (2017)			✓				✓			✓				✓			✓
Stelea & Girón-García (2017)				✓	✓				✓			✓					
van der Worp (2017)			✓					✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		

- SS: Students' satisfaction
- OLI: Own learning involvement
- COL: Context of learning
- Voc.: Vocabulary
- LC: Listening comprehension
- Writ.: Writing
- Gram.: Grammar

- Prag.: Pragmatics
- CC: Cultural competence
- ICC: Intercultural competence
- Read.: Reading
- Speak.: Speaking
- Pron.: Pronunciation
- Expos.: Exposure

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

This meta-analysis demonstrates that there is not a single method capable of solving all the difficulties all in one. It also demonstrates that, although it lacks more empirical research, there is a preference of use regarding the types of methodologies when the educational context is considered and therefore not all the types of methodologies are being used in every single context. In fact, some methodologies are restricted to some specific contexts, like for example, CLIL is not considered in different contexts rather than primary and secondary school while EMI is only used in post-secondary education. And in turn, digital learning resources are preferred in post-secondary education and unofficial or voluntary education.

After reviewing the articles, CLIL seems to be demonstrated as one of the most complete methodologies because it treats a large amount of difficulties while others simply focus interest on one or two and, generally speaking, it can also be concluded that most research aims to solve the difficulties which deal with the linguistic domain and individual factors, mainly motivation, vocabulary and grammar although they give importance to the four macro-skills.

Conclusively, the most remarkable point extracted from the analysis of this paper is that nowadays the preferred methodologies in Spain – when it is about learning English as a FL – are language immersion and the methodologies that include digital learning resources. It is worth mentioning that twelve out of seventeen articles study the implication of technology within the classroom. It is essential to assume that people use their electronic devices more regularly and for every task they need to carry out like communicating, buying, paying, listening to the radio or watching TV. . Hence, a full or higher integration of technology and electronic devices within the language learning environment or as the instruments to learn English should be considered although the language teaching methodology would need some modifications. To this aim, a great quantity of in-depth analyses and research needs to be done so as to have knowledge of the most appropriate digital tools for language learning. Although teachers need also to be trained to have a more positive attitude towards technology because it can solve language learning difficulties and therefore, it affects the way students react to the foreign language.

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