

ARTICLE

Teacher Training in Rural Settings: Enhancing Spanish Language Competence through Text-based Pedagogy

Beatriz Sedano Cuevas ^{1*} , Mahdieh Fakhar Shahreza ² , Gloria Portolés Lázaro ³

¹ Departamento de Filologías y su Didáctica, Universidad Autónoma de MADRID, 28049 Madrid, Spain

² The Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), 28006 Madrid, Spain

³ CEIP 'Compromiso de Caspe', 50700 Caspe, Spain

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study that is part of the HABLARLES project, within the broader ÁGORA research initiative, conducted in collaboration with school teachers in Alcañiz (Spain). The aim was to systematize and enhance an established training program that supports teachers in developing their students' communicative language competence through a text-based pedagogy. The methodology began with a comprehensive needs analysis, administering a pre-questionnaire to identify the region's teachers' challenges and training requirements. Based on the results, the structured training program was tailored to address the identified needs, engaging 70 teachers through seminars and working groups. The training focused on the selection and use of high-quality texts, equipping educators with practical intervention strategies to effectively support students' language development. A post-questionnaire administered to teachers who implemented the proposed pedagogy revealed significant improvements in teaching practices, such as the ability to select and use texts effectively for language instruction, alongside the establishment of a collaborative network for sharing and aligning teaching strategies. Regarding student outcomes, teachers observed notable progress in communicative language competence, particularly in oral and written skills, lexical acquisition, and increased motivation for reading and writing. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to assess the sustained impact of text-based pedagogy on rural education, expand studies to diverse settings, and enhance teacher collaboration and professional development.

Keywords: Continuous Teacher Training; Rural Education; Text-Based Pedagogy; Literary Texts; Spanish Language Pedagogy; Communicative Language Competence

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Beatriz Sedano Cuevas, Departamento de Filologías y su Didáctica, Universidad Autónoma de MADRID, 28049 Madrid, Spain;
Email: beatriz.sedano@uam.es

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 6 April 2025 | Revised: 19 May 2025 | Accepted: 21 May 2025 | Published Online: 6 November 2025
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i12.9393>

CITATION

Cuevas, B.S., Shahreza, M.F., Lazaro, G.P., 2025. Teacher Training in Rural Settings: Enhancing Spanish Language Competence through Text-based Pedagogy. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(12): 454–470. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i12.9393>

COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2025 by the author(s). Published by Bilingual Publishing Group. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The importance of contact with literary texts from an early age has been noted as one of the key factors for progress in language development, both for comprehension and expression or production activities ^[1-4].

In contrast to the language to which children are exposed in everyday communicative situations (simple linguistic structures, such as the excessive use of the imperative mood), more complex vocabulary and linguistic structures appear in quality children's literary texts ^[5]. Therefore, these texts, usually narrative, such as literary tales, become another model of language. In this sense, Teberosky and Sepúlveda ^[4] highlight the importance of exposing children to language input beyond everyday language and consider other sources available to children and young audiences, such as quality literary books or texts which they often reach through read-aloud practices. Such practices, combined with the rewriting of fragments, can improve writing skills since children incorporate the linguistic forms of the source texts in their own texts ^[6]. For instance, students learn about text segmentation, discursive organizers, genre structure, and reported speech ^[7] and can focus on the language itself since the content and structure of the story is already provided ^[8].

A literature review study by Colomo ^[9] about teaching Spanish as a foreign language to children and young people underscores the significant role of adequate literary texts. They can not only provide rich linguistic input that enhances language proficiency but also stimulate creativity and cultural awareness. Furthermore, they support the development of complex skills such as interpreting inferential content, reflecting on universal themes present in literary texts, and acquiring cultural knowledge to foster socio-cultural and intercultural competence.

Other studies in the national context with classroom intervention and consideration of pupils of migrant origin highlight that such linguistic knowledge through texts is produced when there are continuous reflection and discussion about the language that the teacher must promote ^[10].

However, in order to implement work with children's literature texts in the classroom, specific teacher training is necessary: knowledge of this specific literature, understanding of the criteria for selecting and assessing this type of text, practical strategies for

classroom application, etc. These issues have been pointed out as necessary and deficient in teacher training in recent years in both the Spanish-speaking context ^[11-14] and the Anglo-Saxon context ^[15].

Therefore, continuous teacher training is essential when it comes to training teachers as text mediators for their students, building on the knowledge and experience they already have and generating reflection on their teaching practice ^[14,16]. Furthermore, it is important that training is not only focused on individual needs but also on the collective needs of the community and institutions to which they belong ^[16].

In-service 'inter-school' training (*intercentro* in Spanish) in Spain, which integrates multiple educational centers, takes on special importance in the context in which this research is situated, rural environments, since, in addition to the above, it is fundamental for the creation of synergies between teachers due to the isolation that they can sometimes feel in these environments due to geographical dispersion. In this sense, training spaces are also configured as meeting places for teachers ^[17]. In this regard, different studies highlight the importance of teacher collaboration, co-learning and reflexive practices as crucial aspects in teacher professional development ^[18-20], especially in rural contexts and low resources communities ^[21].

Specific challenges of implementing new pedagogical strategies in rural education contexts have been pointed out by previous studies in international contexts such as geographic isolation, lack of resources and amenities, low reading level of students or lack of motivation ^[21-23]. Nevertheless, some benefits that should be considered have been also pointed out such as the union of community, smaller class sizes, and proximity to nature ^[23].

In the Spanish context, very recently, specific initiatives have been carried out to assess the specific training needs of rural schools, as well as those of the teachers themselves (eg. the seminar "*Retos Educación-Territorio/Challenges in Education and Territory*", or the European project "FOPROMAR"). The challenges involved and the dynamic nature that these trainings must have due to the specific characteristics of the learning context have been also highlighted ^[24]. For instance, these teachers often have to teach children of different ages, learning paces, abilities or needs in the same classroom in so-called 'multi-grade classrooms' (*aulas multigrado* in Spanish) in rural grouped schools, which allow students in these settings to complete their compulsory education with-

out having to travel ^[25] (See section 2.1. for a description of these schools). Likewise, this author points out the special importance for these contexts of having the collaboration of the environment and social agents (e.g., families, town councils) when creating learning communities.

Given the above, continuous training in rural environments is an area that is currently undergoing revaluation and advocacy, and there is a pressing need for more initiatives that systematize concrete training initiatives. This study is situated precisely within this context, as explained below.

This paper reports on a study conducted as a part of ÁGORA research project (refer the Funding section), which addresses the challenges faced by language teachers in disadvantaged rural areas of Spain through targeted professional development programs. In particular, the paper focuses on one of the projects into which ÁGORA is subdivided: HABLARLES (*Hablar, leer y escribir*: Talk, read and write in English), designed in collaboration with school teachers in the region of Bajo Aragón (Alcañiz, Teruel, Spain) and based on a consolidated training program that these teachers have developed and now coordinate to support other teachers in rural schools with resources and strategies for enhancing students' communicative language competence through the use of texts. In this respect, HABLARLES aimed to systematize the training process to improve it and collect the results.

One of the main problems identified in the previous training experiences was teachers' concern over the lack of communicative language competence ^[26] in Spanish of their students, who come from families of diverse, often foreign, origins. The cultures and languages coexisting in schools are diverse, as are the communities to which these schools belong. For instance, in one of the participating schools (preschool and primary education), 64% of the students are migrant pupils. In addition, as these are rural localities, a significant portion of the population is engaged in agriculture, which attracts seasonal workers to the area to work during the fruit-picking season. As a result, during the school year, pupils often enroll after the official start date. Therefore, teachers' concerns focus not only on developing the communicative competence in the mother tongue but also on learning a foreign language in the case of pupils from other countries. In addition, teachers at these schools often lack knowledge of resources and books on children's and young people's literature appropriate to their students' levels, as well as criteria for selecting such materials.

As mentioned above, the initiative involved

systematic monitoring and evaluation of the training program to ensure its effectiveness and congruence with educational objectives. To this end, first, a training needs analysis was conducted. Subsequently, the teacher training program was monitored and evaluated. Detailed descriptions of these processes are provided in the methodology and results sections.

The research questions for this study are as follows:

Q1: How does participation in the HABLARLES project influence rural teachers' approaches to teaching and promoting Spanish language competence?

Q2: What impacts does the HABLARLES project have on students' development of Spanish language competence, according to teachers' perspectives?

2. Materials and Methods

To carry out the current study, a descriptive and exploratory survey research design was used. As Creswell stated ^[27], this type of design is commonly appropriate when the main purpose of the study is to gather, describe, and interpret the trends, attitudes, and opinions of a representative sample of the target population. Regarding this study, it is worth noting that the principal goal was not to test specific hypotheses but rather to identify rural teachers' perceived needs and their self-reported experiences during a pedagogical training initiative in rural settings.

The methodological approach of the study was also affected by Mertens ^[28] who highlights the value of contextualized, practitioner-based research in education, particularly in diverse, marginalized, and under-resourced or underserved contexts. As mentioned earlier, the focus of the study was on collecting descriptive and perception-driven data to understand teachers' reflections and their perceived changes, without the application of inferential statistical techniques, which is, in turn, in line with Mertens' perspective.

Accordingly, two questionnaires were deployed as the main instruments, including a pre-questionnaire to identify the real needs of the participating teachers and inform the design of the training program and a post-questionnaire to gather teachers' perceptions after using and implementing the strategies learned. In what follows, the procedure followed during the training sessions, the pedagogical framework used, and the text-based process that guided instructional implementation are elaborated on in detail.

2.1. Context, Population, and Sampling

As mentioned in the introduction, HABLARLES is focused on a training experience that has been developed for 20 years in public schools under the name *Leer, escribir y hablar para cambiar* ('Reading, writing and speaking to change') aimed at providing teachers with tools and resources designed to improve students' communicative language competence utilizing appropriate and high-quality texts. In the 2023–2024 academic year, collaboration was established with ÁGORA and HABLARLES, whose supervision managed to establish a training network attended voluntarily by 70 teachers from the region of Bajo Aragón, representing all educational levels, as described below.

With regard to the school centers, a total of 16 schools, all located in rural areas in two different provinces of the same region (Zaragoza and Teruel) took part in the training. Specifically, 8 schools of preschool and primary education levels, 5 rural grouped schools (Colegio Rural Agrupado [CRA] in Spanish), and one high school (secondary education). The distances between localities are short, which facilitates the mobility of teachers to attend the seminar and the working group, establishing the city of Alcañiz as the meeting place.

Rural group schools are centers in Spain where preschool and primary Education levels are taught, but which, unlike the other educational centers, they consist of classrooms spread over different nearby municipalities, with the administrative headquarters located in the town with the largest population. Their classrooms are characterized by being heterogeneous, accommodating pupils of various ages and learning levels, all of whom are attended to by the same teacher according to their educational needs.

The profile of the 70 participating teachers was also very heterogeneous: 35 teachers from preschool (3–6 years), 30 from primary (6–12 years) and 5 teachers from secondary school. Also, some of the preschool and primary teachers teach at both levels of education. These data were decisive for the organization of the working subgroups in the teacher training itself because each level of education requires specific actions (e.g., a different selection of texts).

2.2. Research Instruments

The methodology began with a comprehensive needs analysis, involving the administration of a pre-

questionnaire to the participating teachers with two objectives: 1) to identify the challenges and training requirements, and 2) to foster collaboration among teachers in the different municipalities and centers. The 18-question survey encompassed areas such as teacher profiles, rural teaching challenges, training gaps, student interests, family/community support, and project participation. It gathered insights into teachers' beliefs about communicative language competence training and their willingness and expectations to participate in the project.

The post-questionnaire assessed teachers' training experience and strategy implementation through 16 questions. These evaluated teaching improvements and their perceptions of the impact on students' progress in communicative language competence. Also, their initial needs and expectations for the project were revisited. Both questionnaires are available on the project website.

2.3. Procedure

This section explains the procedure followed during the teacher training program. After the first needs analysis through the information collected in a pre-questionnaire, the training program, held in the town of Alcañiz (Teruel, Spain) was adjusted to these teachers' needs. The first part consisted of a 10-hour seminar, and the second part involved the creation of a 20-hour working group for monitoring and assessment. The training emphasized practical approaches to selecting and utilizing texts, equipping educators with concrete intervention strategies to support students' language development effectively.

The seminar sessions were for all registered participants together, and the working groups were divided into subgroups following the educational levels described above.

2.3.1. Seminar Sessions

The seminar comprised two 5-hour face-to-face sessions. In the first session, a presentation of the project and theoretical framework on which it is based was given, followed by thorough explanation of the practical pedagogy process. Additionally, participants worked on selecting appropriate texts for various levels, analyzing literary texts to identify language aspects relevant to written production. The second session focused on the use of non-fiction books and

expository texts for project-based learning related to specific curricular areas. The process is explained in the description of the work process below (2.2.3.). It should be noted that during the working groups of this initiative, it was decided to work only with literary texts to ensure that this strategy would be acquired in a meaningful way.

2.3.2. Working Group

In the 20-hour working group (12 face-to-face and 8 hours of personal work and asynchronous online collaboration throughout the process), registered teachers were organized according to the educational levels and specialties they taught in 6 subgroups (**Table 1**). During the face-to-face sessions, teachers who already had a track record and experience in the project supervised each sub-group.

Table 1. Sub-groups by educational level

Subgroup	Educational Level
1	Preschool (0-5 years)
2	1st cycle of Primary (6-7 years)
3	Second cycle of Primary (8-9 years)
4	Third cycle of Primary and Secondary (10-12 years)
5	Foreign language teachers
6	Specific needs and attention to diversity (Specialized)

The trainers had previously selected books based on criteria of quality and suitability (which is explained in 2.3.3). Textual diversity was also considered, encompassing oral traditions, classic stories, illustrated books, alphabet books, poetry collections, and more, in order to create a rich and varied reading itinerary. Teachers were tasked with analyzing the potential of texts following these criteria and selecting a specific one to develop a proposal and put it into practice in their classrooms following the process.

Subsequently, they reconvened to the group to share the process followed and receive feedback from the other teachers. This collaborative effort resulted in the creation of a resource bank featuring a curated selection of books and their corresponding proposals, which served to further shape and systematize the work that had been developed over the years.

A significant portion of the group's work was conducted through online collaboration via Google Drive. This platform facilitated the sharing of theoretical resources for teachers' didactic and literary training, collaboratively created lists of age and educational-level-appropriate books, and the practical classroom proposals implemented.

In addition, as a second phase of the project, a

documentary repository has been created with the proposals developed and implemented by teachers in order to contrast intervention strategies in other centers and areas, and as examples for other teachers to find inspiration for implementing their own proposals. These resources can be accessed on the project website (<https://www.agora-atlas.es/microproyecto-hablar-leer-escribir-y-escribir/>).

2.3.3. Explanation of the Text-Based Pedagogy Process

This sub-section briefly explains the process that teachers take to the classroom to work with texts to give a better understanding of this pedagogy. In addition, the two criteria for text selection are explained in more detail.

The pedagogy of *Leer, escribir y hablar para cambiar* ('Reading, writing and speaking to change') is grounded in a socio-constructivist approach to literacy learning^[29] beyond mere decoding and encoding of language and focusing on developing communicative competence through meaningful engagement with texts and the active role of the teacher as a mediator in the learning process. A text-based pedagogy process was developed based on two strategies: working with literary texts (fiction) to teach the language in use and developing projects that use informative texts (non-fiction) to address curricular content, focusing on the referential function of language and leaving aside the particularities of each subject.

In short, it is a continuous process which involves the different communicative language activities: reading, talking and writing about what is read and written. **Figure 1** shows a brief explanation of the process with the students.

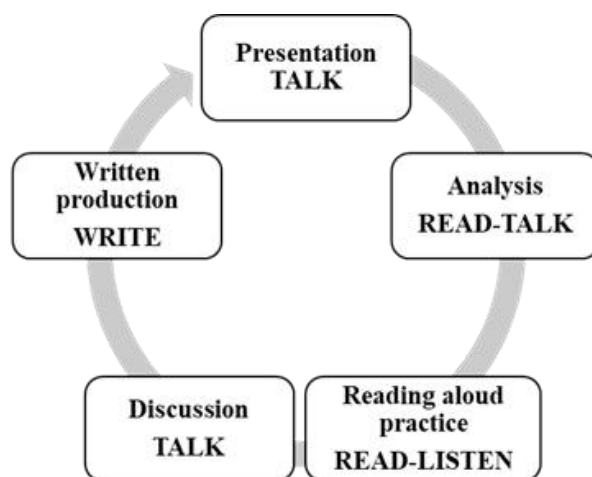


Figure 1. Text-based pedagogy process from *Leer, escribir y hablar para cambiar* - 'Reading, writing and speaking to change'.

- **Presentation.** The text is presented to the large group accompanied by a motivational-binding activity that creates expectation and curiosity (e.g., carrying the book in a suitcase or having a family member or a child from another class present it as a model reader). The first discussions are generated.
- **Analysis and anticipation.** First, the medium is analyzed (cover, back cover and flyleaf: author, illustrator, title, front and back cover illustrations). Then, the first hypotheses are established before the first reading: what it will be about, which characters will appear... Attention, anticipation and comprehension are worked on.
- **Reading aloud practice.** Afterwards, the text is read aloud for the first time. If it is a picture book, it is shown at the same time because the illustration also has a narrative charge.
- **Discussion.** A discussion with kids is established around the book on questions that involve real understanding: what happened, which character they identify with, what they would have done in their place, what other stories does it reminds them of, why the illustrator has used a specific shot, etc.
- **Written production.** Finally, they move on to written

production tasks, both in groups (on murals) and individually (in their notebooks or worksheets). Some types of texts may include lists of characters, places, and linguistic formulas at the beginning or end of the story, as lists can be used from preschool and higher ages as a tool for organizing information. Descriptions of characters and places are also worked on using photographs of some significant passages in the story, and a joint text is agreed upon among the class, revised and then written. Another proposal is rewriting or “delayed copying”, the aim of which is to appropriate the language ^[6]. It consists of choosing a short fragment of text, reading it aloud several times to the students, who must write it as they remember it and reproduce a sequence of the story as faithfully as possible. In this case, copying is not associated with something negative, but as a first step towards creation: a good model that will help them to do their own writing. Also, a common practice is a collective mural with the history timeline to serve as a guide for the rest of the class, especially for pupils at less advanced stages of writing or who are unfamiliar with the language. **Figures 2** and **3** show examples of third-year preschool children’s individual and collective written productions).

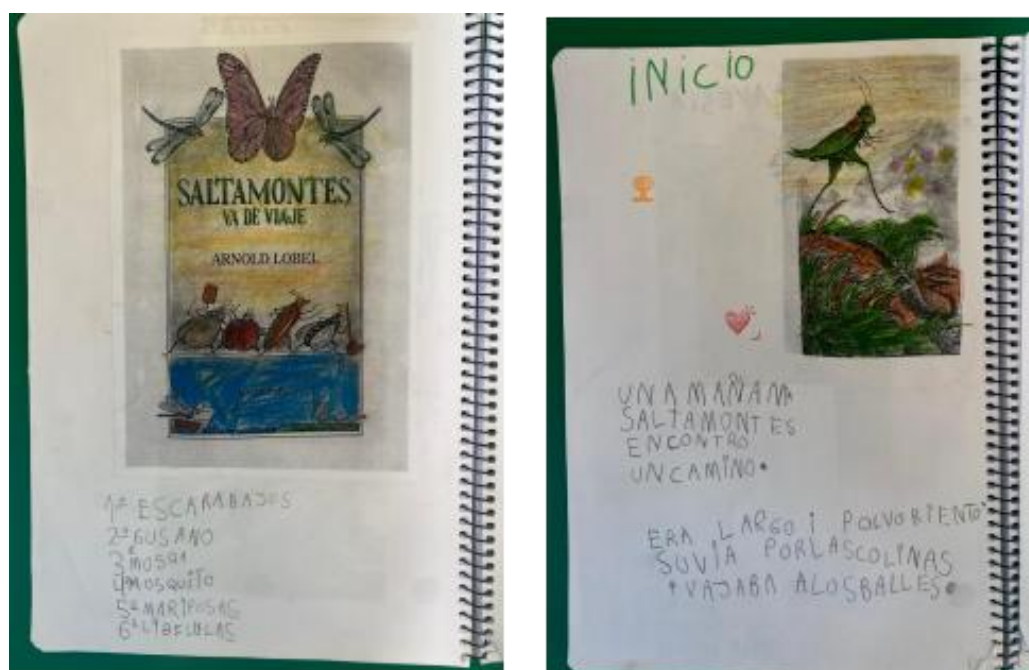


Figure 2. Individual written productions: list of characters and rewriting of the story beginning.

Note: Book: Lobel, A. Grasshopper on the Road.

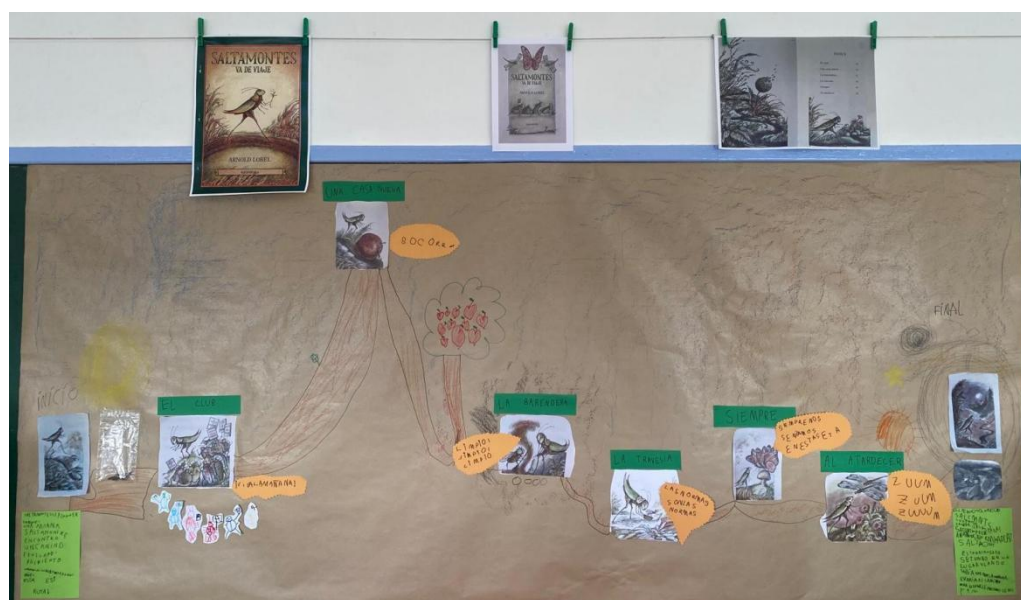


Figure 3. Collective written production: mural of the story timeline.

Note: Book: Lobel, A. Grasshopper on the Road.

2.3.4. Text Selection Criteria

Within this pedagogy, as mentioned above, books are selected according to two criteria: quality and suitability [1]. Quality refers to literary value, since children's literature, no matter what age it is aimed at, is literature first and foremost^[30]. In this sense, books are analyzed, assessing differ-

ent aspects such as the publisher, the physical attributes of the book, the illustrations and the text itself. Suitability refers to characteristics that the book must possess according to align with the reader's age, concerning the psycho-evolutionary stage and educational level. All of these are summarized in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Criteria for the selection of literary texts.

Quality	Suitability
Publisher: independent publishers that consider an active and questioning child reader.	Kids' interests and emotional capacity, and thought characteristics: egocentrism, centration... ^[31]
Authorship: a variety of national, international, classic and contemporary authors.	Cognitive capacity. E.g., ability to understand the double meaning language: e.g., humor, irony.
Book as an object: dimensions, format, support, and contribution to the meaning of history.	History level of complexity: voices, dialogues
Illustrations: use of color, plans, techniques.	Reading competence of the educational level to which kids belong.
Dialogue text-image: expanding, contradicting.	Attention to the kids' diverse profiles as more or less experienced or demanding readers.
Text's linguistic characteristics: vocabulary, linguistic structures.	

2.4. Data Collection and Data Analysis

With regards to data collection, both questionnaires were designed in Microsoft Forms to collect responses in a more organized way for further analysis. The pre-questionnaire was presented during the first seminar by the training coordinators to the 70 teachers from surrounding schools who had agreed to participate in the project and training. It was sent to their email so that each teacher could do it without time pressure, and for those teachers who had not been able to attend. The post-questionnaire was administered 2 months after, once the training was finished. Responses for both questionnaires were collected over 4 weeks to give teachers enough time. The data were analyzed comprehensively based on the research questions and elaborated on in the results section below.

3. Results

This study used a descriptive survey research design^[27], as outlined in the methodology section. Out of 70 teachers who participated in the training program, 27 voluntarily responded to the items of the pre-questionnaire, which served as an initial needs analysis to get information about the specific challenges teachers encountered in rural settings of Spain. The main purpose of the pre-questionnaire was to collect insights pertinent to their difficulties in improving students' language competence through text-based instruction to inform the training phase. Following their participation in the professional training program, 12 teachers filled out the post-questionnaire. The respondents worked in different educational institutions, consisting of public primary schools and rural community schools. The study scrutinized their initial perspectives, instructional practices and strategies used, and any pedagogical shifts that resulted from their participa-

tion in the intervention program and the application of the strategies learned. Accordingly, in what follows, the results of the two research questions are explained in detail.

3.1. Results of the First Research Question

As stated in the introduction section, the first research question was posed to see how participation in the project through the training program influenced rural teachers' approaches to teaching and fostering their students' Spanish language competence. To answer this question, responses to seven items of the post-questionnaire (i.e., items 11, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, and 21) were analyzed. These items specifically examined teachers' perceived improvements in their teaching practices. More precisely, these items investigated whether the teachers considered their participation in the given project promoted their ability to teach and to develop their students' communicative competence in Spanish. Moreover, these items examined the extent and nature of these improvements, along with any reasons provided by teachers who did not perceive a positive influence.

3.1.1. Impact of the HABLARLES Project on Teaching Practices

As illustrated in **Figure 4**, the majority of participants (91.66%) perceived that taking part in the project assisted them in improving their teaching methods as well as their ability to enhance students' language skills. This means that most of the teachers verified the positive influence of the project and the training course on their instructional approaches. Only 1 teacher (8.33%) reported no significant impact hours should discuss the results and how they can be interpreted from the perspective of previous studies and of the working hypotheses. The findings and their implications should be discussed in the broadest context possible. Future research directions may also be highlighted.

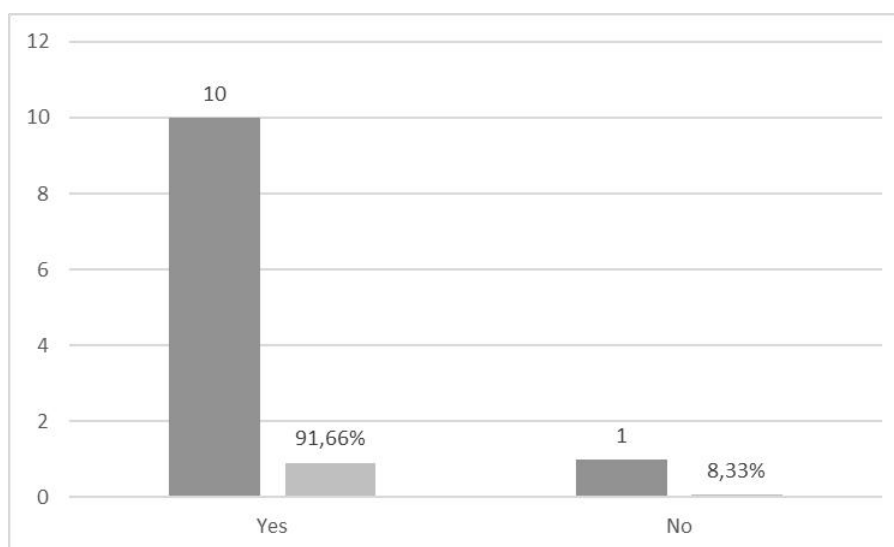


Figure 4. Distribution of teachers' perceptions on the impact of the HABLARLES project.

Furthermore, when they were asked to quantify the extent of the project influence (question 7), nearly two-third (n = 10, 91.66%) of respondents reported that the project significantly helped to improve their teaching practices. This

analysis highlights the effectiveness and the success of the initiative in enhancing their teaching methodologies and promoting teachers' abilities to improve their students' Spanish language competence (**Figure 5**).

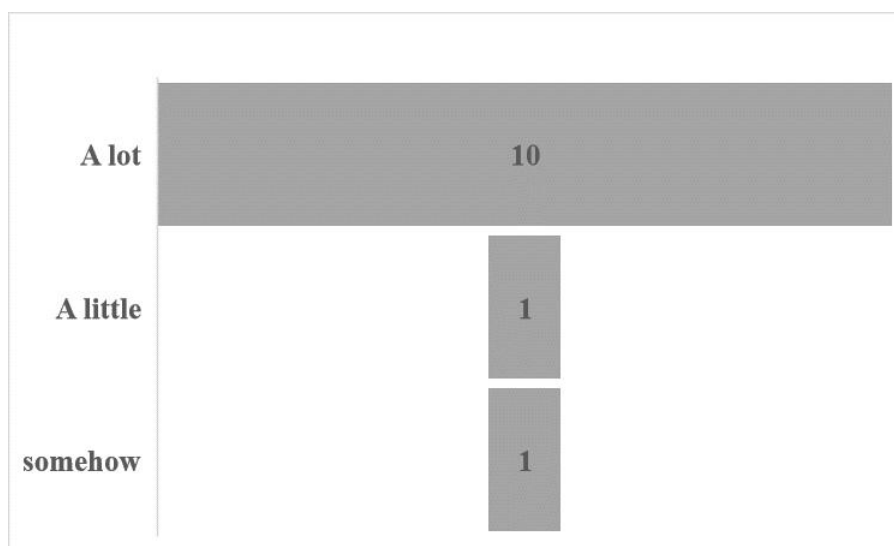


Figure 5. Distribution of teachers' ratings on the impact of the HABLARLES project.

3.1.2. How the Project Supported Teachers

Responses to question 13 further provided insights into how the project benefited the participating teachers. Among the 11 teachers who responded, about one-third of the respondents (36.36%) highlighted their enhanced application of texts and teaching strategies. This was the most commonly reported benefit by the teachers. More precisely, they

emphasized that this project helped them gain better skills in selecting, integrating and applying the text more effectively in their classroom contexts. This, in turn, indicated that the initiative could significantly strengthen teachers' pedagogical approaches to teaching language through the use of literary texts. Additionally, 27.27% of the respondents stated that the initiative persuaded them to reflect on their teaching methods, suggesting an increased self-awareness

of their instructional approaches and an enhanced tendency to reassess their teaching strategies.

Moreover, about 18.18% of the teachers noted their expanded knowledge and understanding of literary materials and new methodologies to engage students with texts. This means that the initiative could serve as a valuable repository and pedagogical insights. Furthermore, about 9.09% of the participants appreciated the opportunity provided by

this project to get to know their fellow colleagues and to create a network with them and subsequently to exchange the best practices. This highlights the significance of creating a professional network and taking advantage of peer learning in the processes of teacher professional development. In addition, about 9.09% reported no perceived impact, which emphasizes the importance of further investigation to identify why some participants found it ineffective (**Figure 6**).

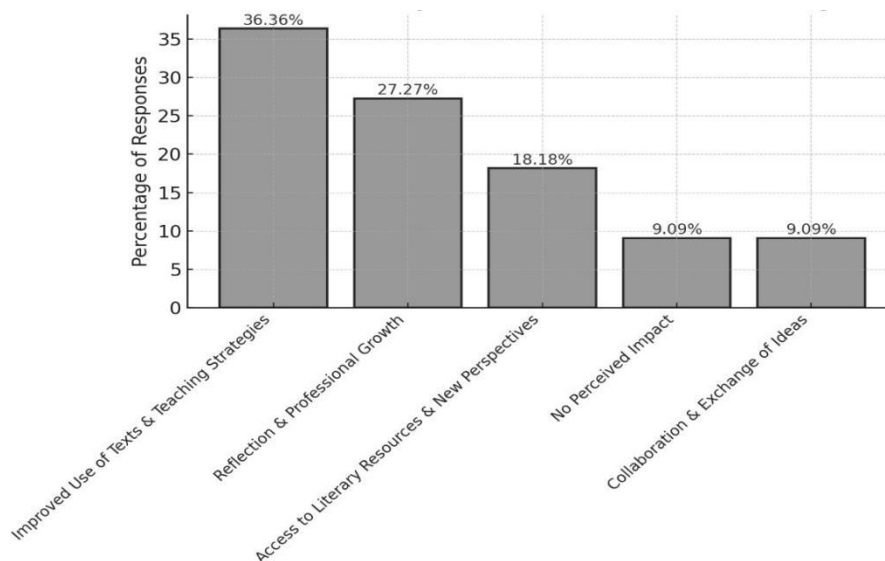


Figure 6. Distribution of the perceived impact of the initiative on teaching practices.

3.1.3. Reasons for Lack of Impact

Question 14 was designed to examine the reasons why some teachers mentioned no perceived impact. Not all participants answered this question. While most respondents expressed positive perceptions, a few teachers did not report any important benefits from the project. In fact, only 1 respondent (8.33%) explicitly mentioned that the project did not assist him. Some of them cited logistical challenges, such as the distance between their schools and the university, as potential obstacles to effective implementation.

3.1.4. Fulfillment of the Teachers' Expectations, Suggestions, and Their Final Observations

The last three questions of the post-questionnaire were posed to see whether the project had met the teachers' expectations according to what was asked in the pre-questionnaire. Additionally, to find out whether the teachers' suggestions for the project have been addressed. Finally, to identify fur-

ther comments and suggestions from the teachers about the continuation of the project.

In order to provide better recognition of the project's success in meeting the teachers' expectations, in what follows, we primarily report the teachers' responses regarding their expectations and perceived benefits of the initiative mentioned in the pre-questionnaire. As illustrated in **Figure 7**, most of the teachers (28%) stated that they seek primarily concrete teaching strategies and practical tools to promote their instruction practically rather than just theoretically. In addition, a significant proportion (20%) of the respondents pointed out the significance of exchanging experiences and working collaboratively with other teachers. This reveals the strong need to create network opportunities, to share resources, and to create professional learning communities. Many teachers (16%) emphasized their need for effective teaching strategies to improve students' communicative competence and for literacy instruction. Additionally, their need for structured feedback and professional support

was reported by 12%. Moreover, some respondents (8%) highlighted that continuous professional development, such as access to new pedagogical theories and research, is of high importance to them. Another 8% expressed their need

for emotional encouragement, highlighting the fact that they probably feel isolated and unsupported in their professional context, i.e., the schools. Finally, the other 8% reported no specific suggestions or expectations.

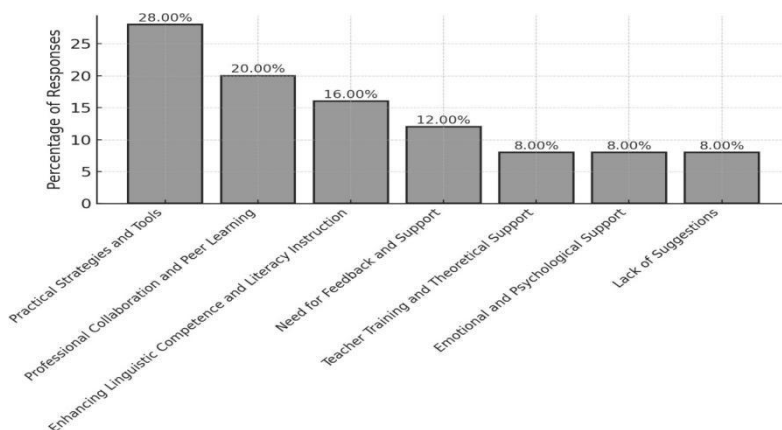


Figure 7. Distribution of teachers' expectations, suggestions, and perceived benefits from the project.

Having the responses of the participants to this question of the pre-questionnaire, comparatively, the teachers' responses to the same question of the post-questionnaire are elaborated on in what follows. Half of the participants (50%) mentioned that the project fulfilled their expectations to a great extent, while 41.66% reported that it met their expectations to some degree. Only 8.33% felt that the project contributed a little bit to their expected outcomes. It is worth noting that no participants stated that the project failed to meet their expectations entirely.

Regarding suggestions, 31% mentioned that their suggestions were addressed, while 15% said they were not. The remaining 54% responded with "Other," suggesting that

some suggestions may not have been fully employed, or some new ideas that were not previously expressed may have emerged. As for final observations, 33.33% reported a desire for the project to continue and expand, emphasizing its practical applicability and benefits. 8.33% showed interest in the final results of the study, while 8.33% accentuated the importance of a positive work environment as a pivotal factor in effective teaching. However, 25% of responses stated that they had nothing further to add. These findings highlight the importance of creating and keeping open communication channels and guarantee that teachers' insights are incorporated into future iterations of the project (**Figure 8**).

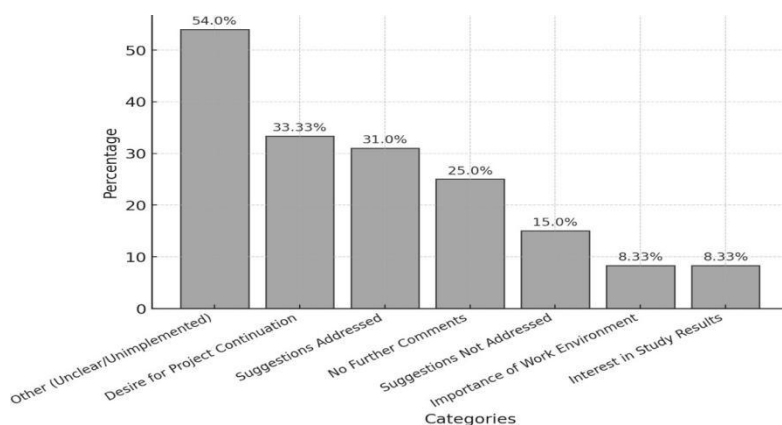


Figure 8. Frequency distribution of teachers' suggestions and final observations.

3.2. Results of the Second Research Question

Having outlined in the introduction section, the second research question was designed to explore the impacts of the project on students' development of Spanish language competence from the vantage point of the teachers. To address this question, responses to items 15 and 16, 17 and 18 of the post-questionnaires were analyzed.

The analysis of responses to the above-mentioned items

revealed that almost all teachers (91.66%) believed the given project positively influenced students' language communicative competence, showcasing its general effectiveness in promoting students' skills. In addition, 83.33% reported that this project had a substantial positive influence on students' learning to a great extent, 8.33% referred to a short extent of impact, and 8.33% mentioned that it had positive effects to some extent (**Figure 9**).

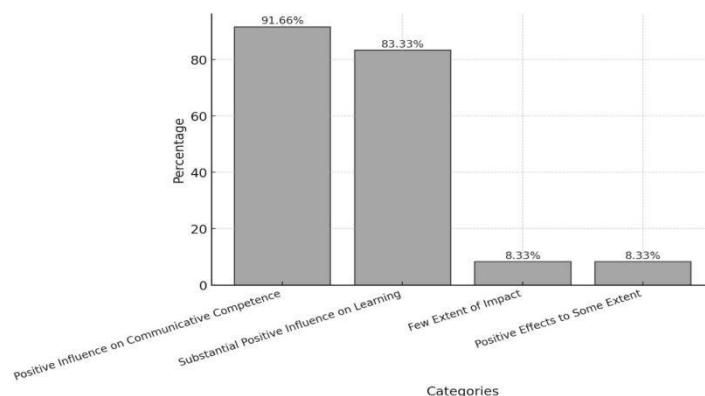


Figure 9. Frequency distribution of teachers' perceptions of the project's impact on students.

Specific improvements noted by the teachers (41.67%) were better vocabulary, oral and written expression, and pragmatics as primary benefits, which were all related to improved language skills. More precisely, teachers mentioned that students have improved their ability to express themselves and engage with language in a richer and more meaningful way. It has also increased students' motivation and engagement (16.67%). They stated that students now believe that language is something more dynamic, participatory, and reflective rather than just a subject to study. In addition,

having provided teachers (16.67%) with better tools and criteria for selecting texts and structuring lessons, this, in turn, has led to more significant and meaningful learning experiences for students, as well as improved teaching proposals on the part of the teachers. Moreover, 16.67% highlighted a greater appreciation for literature and writing, noting that students are gaining exposure to literary materials, notable authors, and a passion for reading and writing. It is important to note that one respondent (8.33%) reported that the project had no effect (**Figure 10**).

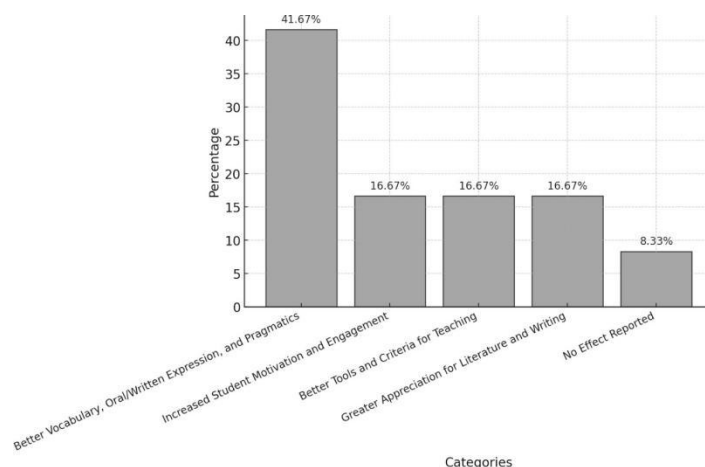


Figure 10. Specific improvements noted by the teachers.

4. Discussion

The findings of the current study are compatible with previous research on the role of literary texts in the development of language skills and communicative language competence. The obtained results also align with the findings of previous investigations on the vital importance of teacher training in fostering students' language communicative competence. In what follows, attempts are made to make several key comparisons.

4.1. Recognition of Literary Texts as Significant for Language Communicative Competence Development

The findings of the current study revealed that the project helped teachers to better recognize the importance of children's literary texts in promoting students' Spanish communicative language competence, both as a mother tongue and as a foreign language. The teachers reported that their students' communicative language competence was improved by taking advantage of the pedagogy based on the use of literary texts, in particular with better oral and writing expression and increase of vocabulary. This aligns with several research that highlights the pedagogical value of literary text in the context of language development of young learners with reading-aloud and rewriting practices of these types of texts [1-7].

Also, the literature review study focused on Spanish as a foreign language to children and young people mentioned before [9] emphasizes the importance of selecting appropriate texts based on age and incorporating them into interactive and communicative practices. This may allow teachers to work on different communicative activities such as reading, writing, listening, and talking about the text, which is compatible with the pedagogy followed during the training program of the current study and links to the following section.

4.2. Integration of Literary Strategies in the Classroom

Teachers participating in the project reported improvements in their instructional approaches and practices, particularly in the selection of the texts and in the use of literature as a teaching resource. Therefore, understanding literature as

a pedagogical tool can enrich the significance of systematic professional development in improving effective classroom strategies.

Also, the teachers highlighted that this pedagogy increased students' motivation and their engagement in language learning, by transforming their perspectives through a more dynamic and participatory approach. This is aligned with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory [32], suggesting that language development is enhanced through engagement with cultural artifacts, such as literature, in a collaborative and supportive learning environment.

Specifically, thanks to the use of quality children's literature, teachers reported an increase in interest in literature, reading and writing as pleasurable activities, along with greater knowledge of important authors. This aligns with previous theoretical works on teaching Spanish as a foreign language for children and young people that stress the importance of literature resources to develop cultural awareness, sensibility to literature, sociocultural and intercultural competence [9], understanding of universal problems and critical thinking [33]. In this sense, text-based pedagogy should explore texts from different cultures and countries in order to reflect on diverse cultural perspectives and stimulate students' critical thinking.

4.3. Challenges in Implementation

Despite the generally positive perceptions of the project, some teachers commented about the logistical barriers, like distance from their training centers (i.e., schools) and limitations of the resources that they had. These challenges are similar to those pointed out by previous studies on rural education, which emphasized the problems of implementing new pedagogical strategies in regions that are geographically in far and resource-limited settings [21-25].

In a large-scale study examining the implementation of targeted teacher training for literacy purposes and the use of literary texts in communities in developing countries and remote locations, Peller et al. [21], emphasized that teacher training is effective when it provides with ongoing support including evidence-based methodologies, resources, tools tailored to students' needs for personalized learning.

Also, in a meta-analysis of teacher professional development in different educational contexts over a decade, Avalos [18] highlighted that co-learning and reflective practices

among teachers are vital for long-term success. In line with this, research by Darling-Hammond et al. ^[19] proposes that professional development is most influential when it is continuous, collaborative, and incorporated into teachers' daily practice, highlighting the significance of systemic support in rural education settings in which an initiative has seized.

4.4. Implications for Future Research and Practice

The results of the current project propose several key considerations for further research and educational practice, which are explained in what follows.

1. Ongoing and context-specific teacher training programs: To ensure and maintain the ongoing benefits and positive impacts of the HABLARLES project, professional development opportunities should be continuous to meet the specific needs of the teachers in rural areas, individual and collective ^[16,21]. As suggested by different authors and national and international contexts mentioned before ^[11–15], these training programs should focus on specific aspects using children's literary texts, and they should also equip them with practical strategies to effectively incorporate what they have learned in diverse classroom contexts ^[18,21,23]. Some studies, such as Azano and Stewart's ^[23], propose adopting a dialogic pedagogy with an emphasis on the local and cultural context to understand students' specific characteristics and needs.
2. Logistical challenges: The problems mentioned by some teachers emphasize the need for the kind of training programs to be more accessible and available in both online and face-to-face modes like in some other contexts ^[22].
3. Longitudinal studies on student outcomes in other rural contexts: While the findings of this study revealed teachers' perceptions of students' progress in the give rural setting (i.e., Alcañiz, Spain), further research is needed to evaluate effects of literary interventions on students' reading, writing and communicative competence during a long-time period, utilizing mixed-methods or statistical approaches taking into account

large scale studies ^[21].

4. Increased teacher collaboration and resource sharing: Persuading and facilitating inter and intra-school collaboration among educators in rural areas could promote the exchange of best practices, teaching methods, and approaches and could build a supportive professional community among the fellow teachers. This would help the teachers to mitigate the difficulties created by geographical isolation ^[17] and limited instructional resources. This aligns with studies in which professional collaborations foster both teacher development and student learning outcomes ^[18–20].

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

The results of the study underscore the significance of structured literary exposure and targeted teacher training as effective strategies for promoting communicative language competence in Spanish in rural educational settings. The findings revealed that the HABLARLES project contributed positively to promoting the instructional approaches and practices employed by participating teachers, especially in how they selected and utilized literary texts as pedagogical classroom resources. Teachers reported that not only did their classroom practices improve, but students' motivation and engagement also increased. They have also pointed out the role of literature as a dynamic element in the language learning process.

5.2. Limitations

Despite its valuable insights, this study is not without limitations. First, the sample size for the post-questionnaire ($n = 12$) was relatively small, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Second, the research design was descriptive and exploratory in nature, and subsequently no inferential statistical techniques were employed. As a result, the findings are based on the teachers' self-reported perceptions rather than objectively measured outcomes. Moreover, the teachers' participation was voluntary, which might result in response bias.

5.3. Future Research Directions

According to the findings of the study, future research could benefit from adopting and implementing a longitudinal design to track the sustained or long-term effects of the project on student outcomes and teacher development in rural contexts over time. Utilizing mixed-methods or inferential statistical approaches would also provide a more rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention. Moreover, expanding the study to a broader range of rural zones and educational settings could help to obtain a more inclusive understanding of diverse challenges and opportunities associated with implementing text-based pedagogical strategies. Furthermore, further and continuous attempts should also be made to address and remove logistical barriers, strengthen collaboration among teachers, and provide accessible and ongoing professional development courses to meet the needs of rural teachers.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, B.S.C., M.F.S. and G.P.L.; methodology, B.S.C. and G.P.L.; validation, B.S.C., M.F.S., and G.P.L.; formal analysis, B.S.C. and M.F.S.; investigation, B.S.C. and M.F.S.; resources, B.S.C., M.F.S., and G.P.L.; data curation, M.F.S.; writing—original draft preparation, B.S.C.; writing—review and editing, B.S.C., M.F.S., and G.P.L.; visualization, B.S.C., M.F.S., and G.P.L.; supervision, B.S.C.; project administration, B.S.C., M.F.S., and G.P.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This research was funded by the project ÁGORA (*Innovación tecnológica y metodológica para la enseñanza de lenguas y generación de sinergias en el ámbito rural* / Technological and methodological innovation for language teaching and Generation of synergies in Rural Areas; ref. PID2021-128182OB-100; <https://www.agora-atlas.es/>).

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Written consent was obtained from all participants prior to submission of the article by agreeing to this question included in the pre- and post-questionnaires of the research: *Do you consent to the anonymous use of the data obtained from your participation in this research project?*

Data Availability Statement

The dataset for this study (pre- and post-questionnaire responses from Microsoft Forms) is available in this link: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1CcQwnc665B107p0atj4pc6jubkTSPHNC/edit?usp=sharing&oid=107115459214922664373&rtpof=true&sd=true>.

Acknowledgments

The pioneer centre (preschool and primary) in implementing the teachers' training programme was 'Juan Sobrarias' in Alcañiz (Teruel) led by Pilar Ledesma as a teacher and training advisor. Therefore, the authors would like to thank them for their contribution and to all participants in this study: schools and teachers who participated in the training and research, and students from School 'Compromiso de Caspe', who provide samples of their work with texts samples of their work with texts.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Colomer, T.M., Ramada, L., Reyes, L., 2018. Literary Narratives in Early Childhood and Primary Education (in Spanish). *Síntesis*: Madrid, Spain. pp. 1–212. Available from: <https://www.sintesis.com/libro/narrativa-s-literarias-en-educacion-infantil-y-primaria> (cited 3 April 2025).
- [2] Bonnafé, M., 2008. Books and Reading: Why Start with the Little Ones. *Revista Cero en Conducta*. 56, 11–22. (in Spanish)
- [3] Sepúlveda, A., Teberosky, A., 2011. Language in the Forefront of Children's Literature for Teaching and Early Learning of Written Language. *Culture and Education: Cultura y Educación*. 23(1), 23–42. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1174/113564011794728560> (in

- Spanish)
- [4] Teberosky, A., Sepúlveda, A., 2018. Learning from Adults Reading Aloud. *Revista Entreideias: Educação, Cultura E Sociedade*. 7(2), 73–90. (in Spanish)
 - [5] Cameron-Faulkner, T., Noble, C., 2013. A Comparison of Book Text and Child Directed Speech. *First Language*. 33(3), 268–279. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142723713487613>
 - [6] Sepúlveda, A., 2011. Early Learning of Text Writing as (Re)writing [Doctoral Dissertation]. Barcelona University: Catalonia, Spain. pp. 1–309. Available from: <http://hdl.handle.net/10803/80535> (in Spanish)
 - [7] Teberosky, A., Sepúlveda, A., 2009. Text in Early Literacy. *Journal for the Study of Education and Development*. 32(2), 199–218. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1174/021037009788001770> (in Spanish)
 - [8] Ottin Pecchio, G., 2020. Pair Rewriting: An Initial Learning Task for Writing. *CLIL Journal of Innovation and Research in Plurilingual and Pluricultural Education*. 3(1), 57–63. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/clil.42> (in Spanish)
 - [9] Colomo Nieto, P., 2022. Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language to Children and Adolescents Through Literary Texts. *Recursos Para El Aula de Español: Investigación Y Enseñanza*. 1(2), 74–119. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37536/rr.1.2.2022.2039> (in Spanish)
 - [10] Ledesma, P., 2014. Language Competence in Boys and Girls in 2nd and 3rd Grade of Primary Education. Comparative Study Between Two Populations, Autóctona y de Origen Inmigrado [PhD Dissertation]. Universidad de Zaragoza: Aragón, Spain. (in Spanish)
 - [11] Díaz-Plaja, A., Prats, M., 2013. Remember, Learn, Practice: What the Future Teacher Knows and Should Know. *Lenguaje y Textos*. 38, 19–28. Available from: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=5335574> (in Spanish)
 - [12] Silva Díaz, M.C., 2001. The Training of Teachers in Children’s Literature: A Diagnostic Study. *Cuatrogatos: Revista de Literatura Infantil*. 5/6, 1–13. Available from: <https://www.cuatrogatos.org/es/site/articulo/542> (in Spanish)
 - [13] Munita, F., 2018. “To Me, They Were All Just Stories”: The Impact of Teacher Training on Beliefs and Knowledge About Children’s and Young Adult Literature. *Catalejos. Revista Sobre Lectura, Formación de Lectores y Literatura para Niños*. 3(6), 102–125. Available from: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/251825> (in Spanish)
 - [14] Munita, F., 2019. “Back to Reading,” or the Importance of Personal Reading in Continuing Education for Teachers in Language and Literature Didactics. *Profesorado. Revista de Currículum y Formación de Profesorado*. 23(3), 413–430. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30827/profesorado.v23i3.11236> (in Spanish)
 - [15] Cremin, T., Mottram, M., Bearne, E., et al., 2008. Exploring Teachers’ Knowledge of Children’s Literature. *Cambridge Journal of Education*. 38(4), 449–464. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640802482363>
 - [16] Escudero, J.M., González, M.T., Rodríguez, M.J., 2018. The Contents of Continuing Education for Teachers: Which Teachers Are Being Trained (in Spanish). *Educación XX1*. 21(1), 157–180.
 - [17] Portolés, G., 2020. Training Spaces: A New Perspective for Teachers [Master’s dissertation]. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona: Catalonia, Spain. (in Spanish)
 - [18] Avalos, B., 2011. Teacher Professional Development in Teaching and Teacher Education Over Ten Years. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 27(1), 10–20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.08.007>
 - [19] Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M.E., Gardner, M., 2017. Effective Teacher Professional Development. Learning Policy Institute: Palo Alto, CA, USA. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54300/122.311>
 - [20] Hargreaves, A., Fullan, M., 2012. Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School. Teachers College Press: Columbia, NY, USA. pp. 1–220.
 - [21] Peller, S.L., Marcotte, A.M., Wells, C.S., et al., 2025. Teacher Training, Coaching and School Libraries in Rural Indigenous Guatemala: A Multi-Pronged Approach to Improving Reading Proficiency. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*. 8, 100437. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2025.100437>
 - [22] Barley, Z.A., Brigham, N., 2008. Preparing Teachers to Teach in Rural Schools. *Issues & Answers. REL 2008-No. 045*. Regional Educational Laboratory Central: Washington, DC, USA. pp. 1–27.
 - [23] Azano, A.P., Stewart, T.T., 2016. Confronting Challenges at the Intersection of Rurality, Place, and Teacher Preparation: Improving Efforts in Teacher Education to Staff Rural Schools. *Global Education Review*. 3(1), 108–128. Available from: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1090174> (in Spanish)
 - [24] Aznar, P., 2025. The DPT’s Education and Territory Chair Reflects on Training Needs in Alcorisa. *Teruel Daily*. Available from: <https://www.diariodeteruel.es/bajoaragon/la-catedra-educacion-y-territorio-de-la-dpt-reflexiona-en-alcorisa-sobre-las-necesidades-formativas> (cited 1 April 2025). (in Spanish)
 - [25] Ibáñez, M.L., 2019. Educating in the Environment: The Village as a School. *Cuadernos de Pedagogía*. (496), 90–95. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357929793_Educar_en_el_entorno_el_pueblo_como_escuela_Revista_Cuadernos_de_Pedagogia_num_496_pp_92-95_2019 (in Spanish)
 - [26] Council of Europe, 2001. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. pp. 1–273.
 - [27] Creswell, J.W., 2012. Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualita-

- tive Research, 4th ed. Pearson: Boston, MA, USA. pp. 1–673.
- [28] Mertens, D.M., 2019. *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods*, 5th ed. SAGE Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA. pp. 1–544.
- [29] Ferreiro, E., Teberosky, A., 1979. Writing Systems in Child Development. *Siglo XXI*: Buenos Aires, Argentina. pp. 1–367. (in Spanish)
- [30] Cerrillo, P.C., 2007. *Children's and Young Adult Literature and Literary Education: Toward a New Approach to Teaching Literature*. Octaedro: Barcelona, Spain. pp. 1–192. Available from: <https://octaedro.com/libro/literatura-infantil-y-juvenil-y-educacion-literaria/> (in Spanish)
- [31] Piaget, J., Tenzer, A., 1964. *Six Psychological Studies*. Vintage Books: New York, NY, USA. pp. 1–169.
- [32] Vygotsky, L.S., 1978. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA. pp. 1–159.
- [33] Krashen, S.D., 2004. *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research*. Bloomsbury Publishing: New York, NY, USA. pp. 1–216.