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ACOPLE: Enhancing EFL Teacher Competencies through Innovative, Social, and Task-Based Learning in Rural Spain

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ABSTRACT

This study presents the ACOPLE (Competency Update for Foreign Language Teachers) micro-project, part of the broader AGORA initiative (Technological and methodological innovation for language teaching and generation of synergies in rural areas). Its main goal is to enhance the second-language communicative competence of rural foreign language teachers in Spain. The project responds to evidence of fossilization or attrition of teachers' target-language skills caused by scarce opportunities for practice and limited lifelong learning. Designed to provide accessible, engaging professional development in low-resource settings, ACOPLE followed a mixed-methods approach combining synchronous videoconferencing and asynchronous microtasks delivered through mobile and social learning platforms such as WhatsApp and Microsoft Teams. A pilot edition tested the project's feasibility, yielding high participant motivation and engagement once tasks were understood, alongside a preference for familiar tools like YouTube. However, challenges included weak self-management skills, low confidence in asynchronous interaction, and difficulties with advanced digital tools like ChatGPT. Grounded in the Mobile Open Social Learning for Languages (MOSL4L) framework, ACOPLE demonstrated that microlearning through familiar,

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flexible, and contextualized tools can enhance professional growth in isolated contexts. Yet, success depends on improved digital literacy support, extended time for task completion, and stronger synchronous guidance. These preliminary results offer actionable insights for refining and scaling teacher training in rural areas through micro-credentials, blended support, and inclusive digital methodologies tailored to underserved educational contexts.

Keywords: Teacher Training; Rural Education; Language Learning; Technological Resources; Teaching Methodology

1. Introduction

The ACOPLE (Competency Update for Foreign Language Teachers) micro-project is part of the AGORA (Technological and methodological innovation for language teaching and generation of synergies in rural areas) research project, whose main objective is to address the many challenges faced by foreign language teachers in rural areas of Spain. ACOPLE was created with the aim of providing foreign language teachers in these rural contexts with strategies to maintain and improve their communicative competence at second language (henceforth, L2) level. Building on the authors' prior work in earlier applied projects, this was carried out through the application of a conceptual framework grounded in mobile, open, and social learning for languages, and through the integration of hybrid technological and pedagogical resources. Thus, ACOPLE relies on the MOSL4L paradigm, which is based on mobile, open and social dimensions. The three key factors to enhance the effectiveness of MOSL4L in educational contexts are: m-learning; open access to information; and the need for social interactions as part of educational context[1].

Foreign language teachers working in rural areas of Spain often face significant barriers to maintaining their communicative competence in the target language. Due to limited access to professional development opportunities and a lack of regular, authentic language practice, many of these educators experience what the literature identifies as fossilization (the stagnation or entrenchment of certain linguistic errors) and even attrition (the gradual decline of previously acquired language skills). This situation is particularly pressing given that rural teachers typically operate under tight teaching schedules and have fewer institutional resources, making it difficult to participate in ongoing training aligned with their needs. Research highlights that the lack of structured opportunities for lifelong learning, combined with minimal exposure to immersive language environments, contributes directly to the erosion of language competence over time[2]. Moreover, findings by De Prada Creo[3] suggest that fossilization is not only persistent but also often goes unrecognized by the educators themselves, as they perceive their language skills to be sufficient for classroom purposes, even when they fall short of expected standards. Furthermore, Tołoczko[4] explains that cognitive and contextual factors (e.g., limited mental capacity for tiring learning activities due to work overload) can intensify the problem by reducing teachers' ability to maintain a high level of linguistic command over time. A decline in fluency, vocabulary repertoire, grammatical accuracy, etc., in turn, impacts on the quality of instruction to students, particularly in rural areas where the limitation of real-life practice opportunities affects students as well.

In response to these persistent barriers, ACOPLE proposes an innovative professional development model tailored to the specific needs of rural language teachers. Thus, its methodology revolves around the integration of a series of asynchronous microtasks, each accompanied by a synchronous session, followed by the assessment of learning outcomes. Through this hybrid approach, ACOPLE not only aims to enhance language proficiency but also strengthen digital pedagogical strategies, empowering teachers to be in a position to better support their students in dynamic 21st century learning environments, creating a flexible and engaging personal learning experience.

According to the data collected through questionnaires, interviews and class observations within the AGORA project, oral skills are particularly affected. For example, in one of the interviews, one of the participants stated that what teachers need is "to give us what we need to teach English, which is language. Just as firefighters are required to be in good physical shape, they have a gym in the fire station, so here it is the same, no more, no less." Then he adds, 'I, for example, have a conversation assistant who comes to my house, paid for out of my pocket, for one hour a week to at

least speak some English.' This testimony, while anecdotal, reflects the urgent need for sustained and meaningful opportunities to practise oral communication in English. As a direct response to this need, the training design includes a synchronous session at the end of each microtask, aimed at fostering peer interaction and giving teachers a chance to improve their speaking and listening skills through real-time communicative exchange.

Also, among the language levels primarily affected by lack of regular use or practice, the teachers consulted agreed with the academic literature that attrition tends to impact first on those aspects that are less common, more complex or require more contextual exposure, such as advanced vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, accurate pronunciation and pragmatic competence. Each of the four microtasks is designed to improve the different needs identified in our analysis. For example, task 1 is dedicated to improve some of these aspects, which may be due partly to the need to work on reading in L2. For each microtask, the corresponding skill and the justification for addressing it will be outlined.

2. Theoretical Framework

Technological development in recent decades has meant that the act of teaching and learning is not limited to the face-to-face modality, i.e. to the same physical space in which the teacher and the learner coincide synchronously. Jonassen and Driscol [5] in agreement with Garcia Aretio [6], argue that the consolidation of educational modalities characterised by spatial—and in most cases also temporal—separation between teachers and students, is currently the trend of greatest expansion among the different forms of education, both geographically and institutionally. Furthermore, distance learning is often cost-effective and timesaving. It has a particular potential for second languages since it integrates digital tools (e.g., social networking) with pedagogical approaches [7].

Nowadays, technology is the key element that allows access to information and favours self-training, especially when the learners' circumstances are adverse and prevent regular institutional training, as may occur in rural environments and in the field that concerns us: language teaching. Web 2.0 allows not only the acquisition and/or maintenance of competencies and skills at the individual level but also the practice of interaction in virtual environments that favours social and community learning. The integration of online technology has facilitated distance learning, which is practical and exploratory, often characterised by interactive and collaborative elements and personalisation to the learner's interests, pace, and level [7].

On the other hand, it is true that technology in assisted language learning has great potential; however, there are also essential skills students need to develop for distance learning. The relevance of autonomous and independent learning that entails the capacity for self-management has been identified as one of the seven characteristic features of the distance modality highlighting the relevance of autonomous and independent learning [8,9]. Nowadays, distance education is digital, requiring updated digital competencies for educators and students. In addition, subsequent studies revealed that the closures of educational institutions because of lockdowns due to COVID-19 had disparate effects on students and teaching staff, contingent on their educational modality prior to the closure of these institutions. This was due to their infrastructure and knowledge of methodologies appropriate to that modality. Both educators and students demonstrated strong competencies such as self-regulation and self-management [10,11]. Furthermore, self-management of learning has been identified as a key skill for promoting continuous lifelong learning. However, at the same time, it has been identified as one of the most significant challenges encountered by participants of MOOCs and LMOOCs [12–15]. Consequently, it would be of value for educators and students to develop this skill, which will then accompany them and facilitate lifelong learning.

The advantages of distance learning thanks to permanent connectivity translate into ease of access by the learner to training (both formal and non-formal) anywhere and anytime without the need to go to an educational centre, which gives learning a high degree of flexibility, an essential feature today to respond to the needs of the Knowledge Society. In this sense, mobile devices play a fundamental role thanks to their technical characteristics linked to portability, ubiquity and connectivity, becoming facilitating tools for distance learning. Mobile devices have been demonstrated to facilitate student engagement in activities everywhere and anytime. Consequently, this approach can possibly change their learning experience [7].

Given that our proposal is framed in a rural distance learning environment, it is essential to apply a didactic paradigm that takes into account the circumstances and needs of learners in their personal and work context. It must be a flexible, adaptable, easily contextualised and interactive paradigm, characteristics that coincide with some of those highlighted by Traxler when describing m-learning. Traxler[16] defines it as "any educational provision where the sole or dominant technologies are handheld or palmtop devices". The use of mobile devices with seamless and accessible access to information allows learning to go hand in hand with other activities in learners' daily lives, without forcing them to "stop", so that they can continue learning in "down time", whether they are eating, travelling on the underground, or waiting in the dentist's waiting room.

Kukulska-Hulme et al.[17], among others, have expanded their definition of m-learning to include other dimensions, of which we highlight social learning in community, thanks to which individuals interact with varied groups of people united by academic and/or professional links, favouring the exchange of knowledge and experiences. For these reasons, the creation of Virtual Learning Environments (henceforth, VLE) favours social and collective learning, in which all participants have the opportunity to learn from each other, despite being geographically dispersed. Thus, through interaction with other members of the community, learners acquire not only knowledge and skills, but also core values and competences, such as teamwork, effective communication and negotiation skills, replicating in the VLE the life, academic and professional processes that take place in real life. Technological advances have enabled the creation of social media which, used for educational purposes, drive innovative practices transforming learning into a collective experience and away from the exclusive and individual approach to become a social and multidirectional activity. In this regard, the value of a horizontal type of learning, which takes place eminently by contrast and negotiation with peers, should be emphasised. This type of learning questions previous paradigms by imitation of one model and replaces or extends them with another that involves the sharing, negotiation, reorientation, healing and reinterpretation of knowledge that emerges in a distributed, dynamic and multidirectional way in the collective[7].

The theoretical framework on which ACOPLE is based converges in Mobile Open Social Learning for Languages (MOSL4L), an emerging language learning paradigm that combines these three elements (mobile, open and social learning) to create a conceptually different language learning space from traditional models.

The triangular shape at the top of **Figure 1** highlights the relationship between the subjects, open educational resources (henceforth, OERs) and the mobile tools used for interaction. As Read et al.[1] explain, the symbolism is as follows: the subjects represent those who participate and carry out activities with the OER. Mediators are the tools employed for the activities; the rules define guidelines and conventions that guide the work; the social learning community oversees the coordination and distribution of OERs.

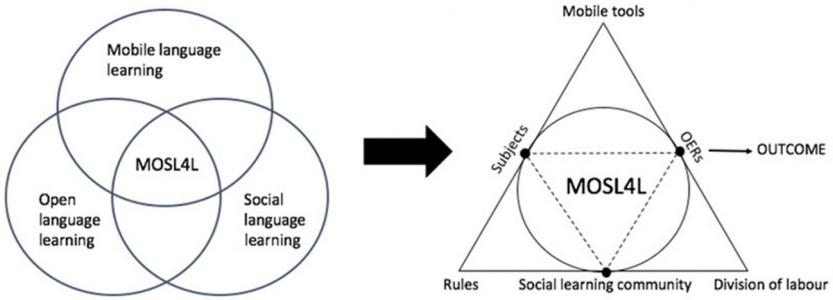

Figure 1. MOSL4L.

Image source: Read et al., 2021, p. 431[1].

According to Kukulska-Hulme et al.[18] the key elements in the design and architecture of learning spaces in MOSL4L are:

- specific opportunities and challenges;
- relevance to participants' needs;
- potential of micro-experiences and learning moments

as structures coherent with the MOSL4L paradigm;
- need to adapt curricula to current communicational challenges.

These elements have been thoroughly considered during the elaboration of each of the four microtasks. Firstly, the specific learning opportunities for primary and secondary language teachers working in rural areas were analysed. Simultaneously, the barriers and needs were assessed and addressed during the elaboration of the activities that make up each microtask so they can take advantage of the potential micro-experiences and learning opportunities. Particular attention was given to factors like connectivity in those geographical areas (such as choosing apps they were already familiar with), teachers' time constraints, and heavy workloads, and at the same time, we considered their need to practice the foreign language they teach.

Microlearning, an educational approach focused on the delivery and production of content in small doses, is a paradigm that has acquired a significant role in the field of contemporary education. One of the concepts that define it and by which it is identified is the fragmentation of information offered in dosed content pills, facilitating learning in contexts where the user's attention is limited and time availability is scarce, in line with today's rhythms of life. Theo Hug, one of the leading specialists in this field, highlights the relationship of microlearning with implicit, informal and incidental forms of learning[19]; for this reason, its application is especially appropriate in the context of social media platforms, given that these are designed for the rapid dissemination of information and constant interaction between users.

Another significant advantage of microlearning is its potential to foster the learner's engagement in the learning process, as the fragmented content and the completion of microtasks or micro-activities does not require excessive dedication and therefore facilitates compliance. According to Salinas and Marín[20], the division of content into small units, accessible from anywhere and requiring little time for reading or viewing, adapts to the needs of the learner better than any other paradigm. Indeed, one of the main advantages of microlearning is its flexibility. Users can access snippets of educational content anytime, anywhere, which is perfectly suited to today's dynamic and mobile lifestyles. This accessibility not only promotes self-directed learning but also allows educators to tailor content to the specific needs of their learners, facilitating a more personalised and learner-centred approach. In fact, thanks to its flexibility, the teachers responsible for the project were able to modify the content and objectives of the last microtask when they detected that the needs of the participants in the pilot test required it.

3. Methods: Description of the Microtasks and Implementation

This preliminary exploratory experience is understood as an initial, flexible, and open-ended approach to the object of study. Although limited in scale or scope, these experiences are essential for guiding subsequent methodological decisions, identifying relevant variables, and appropriately contextualizing the phenomena under investigation. Far from being minor or incidental steps, they are conceived as necessary empirical trials, where the researcher's intuition, engagement with the field, and interaction with participants help refine research questions and inform the choice of instruments and techniques. In this sense, they are embedded within a broader research framework in which uncertainty is not avoided but embraced as part of the knowledge-building process. This methodological stance values what is emergent, unexpected, and specific, granting legitimacy to the early exploratory phases as meaningful and foundational instances for the rigorous development of the study.

The project was presented to teachers during an in-person session at a seminar held within the AGORA project in Alcorisa (Teruel) in November 2024. The target audience consisted of active English teachers working in rural primary and secondary education. This article presents the results of a pilot test, acknowledging that the limited number of students who participated prevents the results from being considered representative. However, the findings provide valuable insights for adjusting the design of practical activities based on observed strengths and difficulties. The implementation followed a methodology that combined synchronous sessions (via Microsoft Teams) with asynchronous activities, assigning one week per microtask. During the process, students faced challenges in time management and asynchronous communication. Despite having a WhatsApp group for resolving doubts, participants only expressed their

concerns during synchronous sessions and tended to postpone tasks until the deadline. This behaviour suggests a lack of autonomy in distance learning and difficulties in digital interaction.

A description of the different microtasks follows:

3.1. 'Book Club'

This microtask is a reflective and dynamic activity of exploring literature in English. The study of literature in a foreign language not only enriches vocabulary and language skills but also allows an immersion in the culture and narrative structures of that language. The following activity is designed to improve English language skills through reading, analysis and oral and written expression.

A short literary story in English will be provided (in this case, "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins). The selection of the text will allow participants to be confronted with structures and vocabulary appropriate to their level of proficiency in the language. Participants are invited to read the story carefully, reflecting on its content, style and narrative structure. It is advisable to note down any doubts about vocabulary, expressions or grammatical aspects that may cause confusion. Throughout the week, a communication channel will be opened on WhatsApp where participants will be able to share their impressions, ask questions and discuss the story. This interaction will foster collaborative learning and allow for a better understanding of the text.

As part of the activity, each participant will select an excerpt from the story that is meaningful to them. Subsequently, they will record an audio or video in which they will read the fragment and explain the reasons for their choice. This material will be shared in the WhatsApp group, thus promoting oral expression and argumentation in English. To culminate the activity, a synchronous session will be held in which the comments and reflections shared throughout the week will be analysed. The aim of this activity is to offer an enriching educational experience, where the learning of English is integrated with literature in an interactive and stimulating way. In addition, there will be a debate on the form and content of the story, encouraging oral expression in English. This is one of the key elements that teachers stated that they wanted to improve, so it is a good opportunity to work both on the written skills as well as the oral skills in a collaborative way, while fostering other educational values such as critical thinking and reading comprehension.

3.2. 'The Right(s) Evolution'

The microtask 'Charla Express con la HistorIA' and The Right(s) Evolution in English. The microtask is named after the ability of participants to interview historical figures using generative AI technology. Specifically, they used the voice feature of the free version of ChatGPT to explore the figures' contributions and perspectives on Human Rights over time while practicing English communication skills as they discuss on its evolution [21].

The primary objective of this microtask is to improve oral fluency and prosody (intonation, accentuation and rhythm) in English as a foreign language through interactive role-playing and collaborative discussions. The specific objectives are to increase participants' confidence and motivation to practice English as they interview historical characters through cutting edge technology; and to develop the ability to critically evaluate AI-generated responses and identify possible limitations or biases. This microtask is in line with the proposal of the Educational Innovation Hub at UNED. The resources needed for this microtask are mobile devices with internet access, headphones, the OneNote application, a notebook and pen for notes, ChatGPT (free version), and applications for recording voice messages.

This microtask was designed based on the microlearning and MOSL4L paradigms to accommodate rural teachers' busy schedules. On the one hand, the work plan (contained carefully sequenced mini activities, for instance, visualizing a short YouTube video (between 1 and 3 minutes) as a reminder of how English intonation works; and then practicing as they converse with the ChatGPT. This chatbot is available 24/7 and by activating the voice feature rural teachers were able to practice different accents, registers, and styles. Therefore, they could seize the many learning opportunities while addressing their need to practice their communicative competence in English.

3.3. 'Camera! Action!'

This microtask aims at improving the participants' vocabulary comprehension across different real-world contexts to enhance their listening comprehension abilities and adaptability to diverse speaking styles. Through the visualization

of three short videos from Youtube the participants had to identify and take note of any new or interesting expressions or words in these videos. After this, the participants were asked to introduce the newly discovered expressions into online platforms, such as yarn.co (https://yarn.com/) and/or Youglish (https://youglish.com/) to look for other contexts in which these expressions can also be used. By engaging with these tools, the participants were able to observe how the expressions fit into a broader range of scenarios, fostering a more comprehensive grasp of language usage. In the next phase of the task, the participants were asked to create original sentences or mini-conversations in which they had to introduce the newly learned expressions.

To facilitate this process, they were encouraged to use Microsoft OneNote for the classification and record of the expressions and WhatsApp to share with their colleagues their sentences and explanations of the expressions they found and chose. Finally, the synchronous session focused on reviewing the expressions that the participants had identified and practiced their meanings and pronunciation. Moreover, further Youtube videos were reproduced during this session to explore other different accents and pronunciations of some selected words. Overall, this microtask provided a dynamic learning experience in which the participants could expand and reinforce their English vocabulary and pronunciation through real-world communicative settings, encouraging learners to integrate new words into their daily linguistic repertoire.

1st video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmM0dvfPM0Y.

2nd video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wv5362FRLGI&ab_channel=PoloRoy57.

3rd video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUkLhtQNj0c.

Accordingly, this microtask is grounded in the microlearning paradigm, particularly in the use of short, meaningful content sequences that promote language acquisition through active engagement with authentic materials. This is of great interest to rural teachers with limited exposure to spoken English. This way, by working with real-life audiovisual material, participants had the opportunity to encounter varied pronunciation, intonation patterns, and authentic vocabulary in use, fostering pragmatic awareness. Moreover, the collaborative learning approach of the activity permitted participants to negotiate meaning, exchange interpretations and provide peer feedback which promoted co-construction of knowledge, reinforcing the idea that learning is not a solitary process, but a community-driven experience. Therefore, this microtask aligns with the ACOPLE objectives not only by enhancing foreign language communicative competence through flexible, accessible, and collaborative methods but also by providing rural teachers with useful digital resources, thereby promoting continuous lifelong learning.

3.4. 'Little Theatre'

For this microtask, the dialogue excerpt from 'The Yellow Wallpaper' by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is used again as it was previously introduced in the first microtask and was familiar to the participants. The task consists of exploring some lexical and semantic aspects of the dialogue in relation to the historical and social context. In the first phase of the task, the participants had to work collaboratively to (i) choose an excerpt from the dialogue and, (ii) transform it into a modern version by showing contemporary sociocultural and sociolinguistic perspectives and sharing it on their WhatsApp group. During the synchronous session, the participants had to perform their new updated version of the dialogue, practising intonation and pronunciation. Also, the participants had to analyse and reflect on their own learning process by discussing key learnings, any challenge faced, or strategies employed. This way, the participants may develop their abilities to improvise, interpret and communicate ideas clearly and effectively.

This microtask ensures alignment with the microlearning paradigm as it enables participants to engage meaningfully with the task, in a collaborative way, despite their limited time availability and heavy workloads. This way, by offering short, focused learning extracts, it encourages active participation, encouraging participants to reflect on the ways in which social contexts influence language use. Not only does this microtask raise awareness of historical and cultural changes but also fosters a deeper understanding of how societal changes shape discourse, pragmatics, and lexical choices over time. It particularly supports the ACOPLE project's objective of enhancing oral communicative competence, especially spontaneous oral production by requiring learners to reinterpret language contextually and express themselves in a recreated, real-world communicative scenario.

4. Analysis of the Results and Discussion

The analysis of the ACOPLE pilot implementation reveals several key insights into both the strengths and limitations of the proposed training model for foreign language teachers in rural settings. One of the key outcomes was the high level of engagement demonstrated by the participants in the experience once they felt at ease with the learning context and their tasks ahead. The incorporation of widespread tools clearly proved instrumental in enhancing motivation and active participation. According to European Commission's Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027), 68% of educators across Europe report improved engagement do in teacher training programs. These findings align with previous research on the importance of digital accessibility and relevance in teacher engagement[2]. A study by Barbour et al.[22], focusing on remote teacher professional development in isolated areas found that asynchronous tools such as forums and shared docs improved sustained participation by 50%, compared to synchronous-only methods.

However, several barriers to effective participation were also identified. Chief among them was difficulty with time management: many participants postponed task completion until the final deadline, which led to increased stress and diminished learning outcomes. This pattern points to limited self-regulation skills in asynchronous learning contexts, echoing broader concerns about learner autonomy in distance education[4]. In fact, self-regulation constitutes one of the greatest challenges in distance learning environments. Precisely because of this, online courses are often structured in a chronologically segmented way, breaking down the learning journey into manageable stages. Course schedules and deadlines are typically presented either at the beginning of the program or organized into smaller, sequential tasks rather than a single large assignment. This modular structure helps learners navigate the content more effectively and maintain motivation over time. Moreover, the use of microtasks, which are short, focused activities, can be particularly advantageous. These promote a sense of progress, reduce cognitive overload, and facilitate better time management, all of which are critical for sustaining engagement and fostering autonomy in asynchronous learning settings.

Additionally, participants exhibited low confidence in using advanced digital tools, including ChatGPT, voice-to-text converters, and voice recorders, all technologies that are increasingly essential in language education. This underscores the need for targeted digital literacy support, especially in settings where digital pedagogies are still emerging. A study published in the Journal of Medical Internet Research highlights that younger individuals, particularly those from Generation Z, excel at gathering information from various sources and using multiple digital tools concurrently. This proficiency is attributed to their extensive experience with the internet and an inherent open-mindedness towards new technologies. In contrast, middle-aged individuals often prefer authoritative information sources and rely on a mix of traditional methods and new digital tools, reflecting a pragmatic and balanced approach to information seeking.

Another recurring issue was reluctance to participate in asynchronous communication via social networks, particularly WhatsApp. While this platform was selected for its accessibility and ubiquity, participants expressed hesitation in posting doubts or interacting with peers asynchronously. Many chose to remain silent until synchronous sessions, where they acknowledged the usefulness of activities only after clarification. This suggests a lack of confidence in self-expression and highlights the critical importance of psychological safety and scaffolding in online learning environments.

Task-specific feedback further deepens our understanding of participant needs. In Task 1, "Book Club," participants requested the inclusion of a vocabulary bank prior to engaging with the text, indicating the need for linguistic scaffolding to navigate complex literary materials. In Task 2, "The Right(s) Evolution," delayed submissions and minimal peer interaction were again symptomatic of limited self-management skills and reluctance to seek clarification, which impaired full participation. In contrast, Task 3 'Camera! Action!' showed smoother implementation, although real-time comprehension of idiomatic expressions and the use of unfamiliar web tools presented moderate challenges. Task 4, 'Little theatre', which involved the creative adaptation of a literary dialogue, proved intellectually demanding. It required both critical thinking and sociolinguistic awareness, as participants had to reinterpret the original narrative through a contemporary lens while preserving its emotional depth.

The ACOPLE pilot also led to measurable advances in participants' linguistic-related competencies, particularly in areas of vocabulary acquisition, oral fluency or pragmatic awareness. For example, participants could enhance their reading comprehension and vocabulary-building strategies as well as improve their communicative skills in realistic, socially relevant contexts.

5. Conclusions

The ACOPLE pilot study highlights the need for targeted strategies to support rural language teachers in developing digital autonomy and improving asynchronous communication. In spite of the size and the merely illustrative nature of the sample, the findings of this initial experience include valuable initial insights of the parts of the design that appear to be stable and adequate, and those envisaged to require improvement for full scale versions of the didactic module. Challenges include users' limited transversal skills in time management, and also digital competence gaps, such as voice-based technologies, generative AI, and asynchronous interaction through social networks. It is to be emphasized that these issues do not stem from insufficient L2 competence, but rather from contextual constraints, such as unfamiliarity with newer platforms and limited infrastructure for effective distance learning.

Based on these findings, several practical recommendations emerge that will directly inform the design of the full-scale edition of this training module for rural language teachers. First, the extension of time allocation from one week to two weeks per microtask will be implemented as a structural change, allowing participants to engage more meaningfully with the content, reduce cognitive overload, and accommodate their demanding teaching schedules. This adjustment responds directly to participants' expressed need not only to complete tasks but to enjoy and reflect on them.

Second, the revised module will incorporate a greater number of synchronous sessions distributed strategically across the training period. These sessions will serve as scaffolding points for clarification, peer interaction, and motivation, especially for those who experience difficulties with asynchronous communication or unfamiliar digital tools. In addition to real-time guidance, these sessions aim to strengthen the sense of community and support often lacking in rural professional development.

Third, in response to participant motivation and recognition needs, the program will include the issuance of official certificates that document hours, competencies addressed, and successful completion of the training pathway. Furthermore, a micro-credential system will be introduced, aligned with the European framework for digital credentials, to acknowledge mastery of specific tasks and peer-assessed performance. These credentials aim to reinforce professional identity and encourage sustained engagement beyond the training period.

Fourthly and finally, the pedagogical materials and microtasks themselves will be refined based on the pilot test results. For instance, a pre-task vocabulary bank will be included in literary-based tasks, and onboarding tutorials will be offered for unfamiliar digital platforms (e.g., ChatGPT, voice tools). Special emphasis will also be placed on encouraging digital interaction through guided protocols for WhatsApp discussions and lightweight participation prompts to reduce hesitation and promote autonomy.

In sum, the ACOPLE pilot revealed substantial promise in leveraging hybrid methodologies for rural teacher training, with strategic adjustments, namely increased time allocation, structured digital training, and hybrid delivery, the authors claim that the program can evolve into a scalable, inclusive, and context-sensitive solution for underserved educational environments. These insights offer valuable implications for the design and scaling of future professional development initiatives in rural and deprived educational contexts.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, methodology, bibliography, writing, supervision and editing, J.J.M.-R., M.V., M.G.M.C., T.G.-V. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

This is an eminently exploratory study.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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