

THE CHALLENGE OF THE SKILL OF SPEAKING IN MONOLINGUAL SECONDARY EDUCATION CENTRES OF ANDALUSIA

EL RETO DE LA DESTREZA DEL *SPEAKING* EN CENTROS DE EDUCACIÓN SECUNDARIA MONOLINGÜES DE ANDALUCÍA

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Abstract

Spain, following the recommendations of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2011), is undergoing a quick English-learning process in order to qualify the population as citizens of the world. The mastering of speaking skills in English is crucial to ease personal, social, political, professional and economic relationships. For this reason, the objectives of this paper are: analysing the current regional and national legislation regarding foreign language communication; understanding how relevant it is for the Andalusian population to speak fluently in English, given the magnitude of the international tourism industry in Andalusia and the current European socio-educational context; as well as knowing if Andalusian Secondary Education students are aware of this situation, and how comfortable they feel with their current oral-skills in English nowadays.

Key Words: English Learning Process, foreign language communication, tourism, socio-educational context, speaking.

Resumen

España, siguiendo las recomendaciones del Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas (MCER, 2011), se encuentra inmersa en un rápido proceso de aprendizaje del inglés que permita a sus gentes convertirse en ciudadanos del mundo. El dominio del componente oral de esta lengua es fundamental para facilitar las relaciones sociales, laborales, políticas o económicas. Por ello, esta investigación establece los siguientes objetivos: analizar la legislación estatal y autonómica vigente con respecto a la comunicación en lenguas extranjeras; entender hasta qué punto es relevante para la población andaluza el hecho de poder hablar con fluidez en lengua inglesa dada la envergadura del turismo internacional en Andalucía y el contexto socioeducativo europeo actual; tratar de averiguar si los estudiantes de Educación Secundaria andaluces son conscientes de esta situación, y conocer cómo de cómodos se sienten hoy día con la práctica de la destreza oral o *speaking* en lengua inglesa.

Palabras clave: Proceso de aprendizaje del inglés, comunicación en lenguas extranjeras, turismo, contexto socioeducativo, *speaking*.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are two terms that clearly define the current European socio-educational context: multiculturalism and interculturality. This is due, in part, to the constant and numerous migratory movements between different countries where school age children become protagonists of the new reality. For these students, mastery of the English language has become a priority.

Spain, as a member state of the European Union, has gone from being an emigrant country to becoming an immigration recipient (Anguita, 2016). In Andalusia the number of resident foreigners has increased considerably in recent years, either because they have settled there, or because they have established a second home. Many of them, despite not speaking the Spanish language fluently, have created companies needing to employ local staff.

On the other hand, the number of international tourists visiting the Andalusian community continues to increase year after year (INE, 2017). International tourism is, undoubtedly, a mainstay in the economy of this region and, in turn, stands out as one of the sectors with the highest index of employability (FRONTUR, 2017).

For all these reasons, one would expect the Andalusian students to have a good level of English. However, although they get to communicate in this language, they do not do it fluently (Europapress, 2017).

The present contribution is a first approach to the study of English as the first foreign language in monolingual educational centres of Secondary Education in Andalusia. The predominance of this language within a globalized society and its possible permanence as such over the next decades will be observed.

Likewise, it will be analysed why in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia the practical use of English and the development of a fluid communicative ability in this language must be fundamental elements to include within the curricula of the educational centres, considering not only the bilingual condition of an important part of the population, but also the relevance of the international tourist market within this community.

Likewise, the linguistic competence in English currently possessed by the Andalusians as a whole will be analysed in comparison with people from other autonomous communities. And, finally, a review will be made about what the current legislation proposes both at the autonomous and state levels, paying special attention to the indications made about the comprehension and production of oral texts.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The domain of a second language has become in recent years a priority within the Spanish educational system (MECD, 2016). The globalization that we are experiencing at an economic, technological, political, social, business and cultural level, as well as the consolidation and durability of English (Crystal, 1997; Dewey, 2007; Fernández, 2009; Ostler, 2010), have made acquiring the ability to communicate effectively not only in our mother tongue, but in a or several foreign languages, a main element of the curriculum of Spanish schools (Barbero, 2012; LOMCE, 2013). The need to develop this

skill should lead to revising the traditional teaching-learning process of foreign languages in educational centres.

2.1 English as an enhancer element of the Spanish Tourism industry

In 2016, 75.6 million international tourists visited our country, 10.3% more than the previous year, according to the Survey of Tourist Movements in Frontera (FRONTUR, 2017; INE, 2017). Data from the Tourist Expenditure Survey (INE, 2017) estimate expenses in 2016 at 77,625 million Euros, 9.0% more than in 2015. Almost a third of the expenditure was concentrated in the Canary Islands (32.8%), followed by Catalonia (20.9%) and Andalusia (14.3%).

As for the nationalities that spend most money on tourism in Spain, the British (20.9%) and the German (14.3%) stand out notably (FRONTUR, 2017).

Andalusia is one of the autonomous communities that receives the most economic benefits from international tourism. Revenues from tourism in Andalusia were estimated at 19.2 billion Euros in 2016, which represents 12.5% of GDP according to the Report on tourism as a strategic activity of the Andalusian economy (2016). If we add the income obtained by hiking, the share rises to 13.9%.

According to the information provided by the Junta de Andalucía (2016), more than 30% of the total number of tourists who visited Andalucía in 2016 are foreigners. Among them, the British market predominates, accounting for 10% of the total.

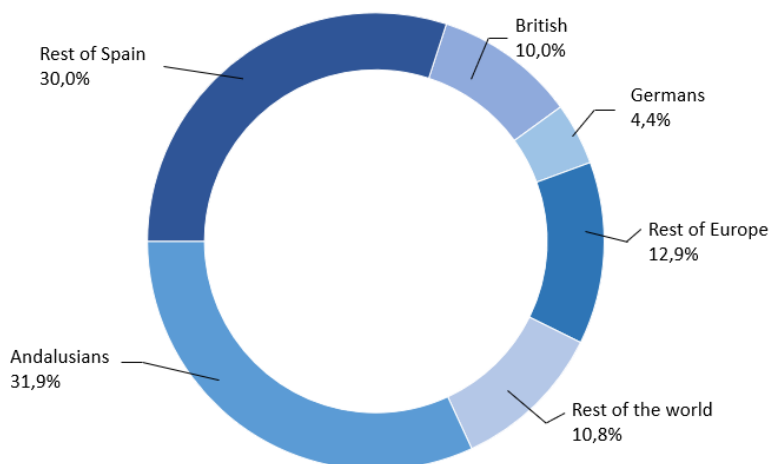


Figure 1. Tourists in Andalusia according to their origin¹

Considering the great importance that international tourism has in Spain and, specifically, in Andalusia, it would be expected that the level of English of its inhabitants would be in consonance. However, the data provided by the studies carried out by the companies Cambridge University Press

¹ SAETA, Public Company of Tourism and Sports of Andalusia, taken from EPA, INE (2016)

(2016) and Education First (2017) indicate that Spaniards and Andalusians are among the European inhabitants who speak the worst English.

According to the data provided by the fourth edition of the Cambridge Monitor study (2016), almost 50% of the Spanish population has a low or very low level of English. The level of speakers with a very high level (7%), however, is comparable to that of countries like Germany and it exceeds France (4%) and Italy (5%).

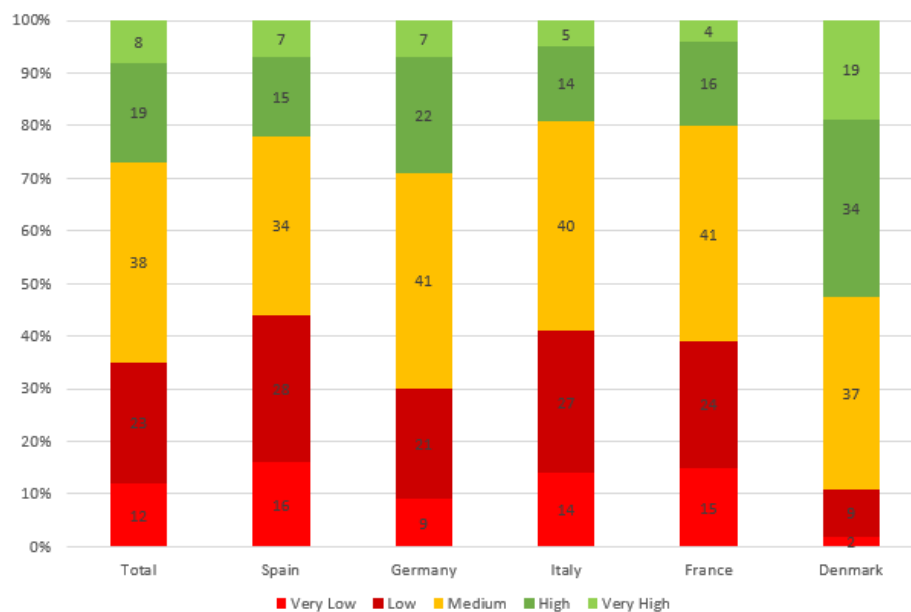


Figure 2. Level of English per country²

Following, in Figure 3, the level of English of these countries is reflected on a scale from 1 to 5.

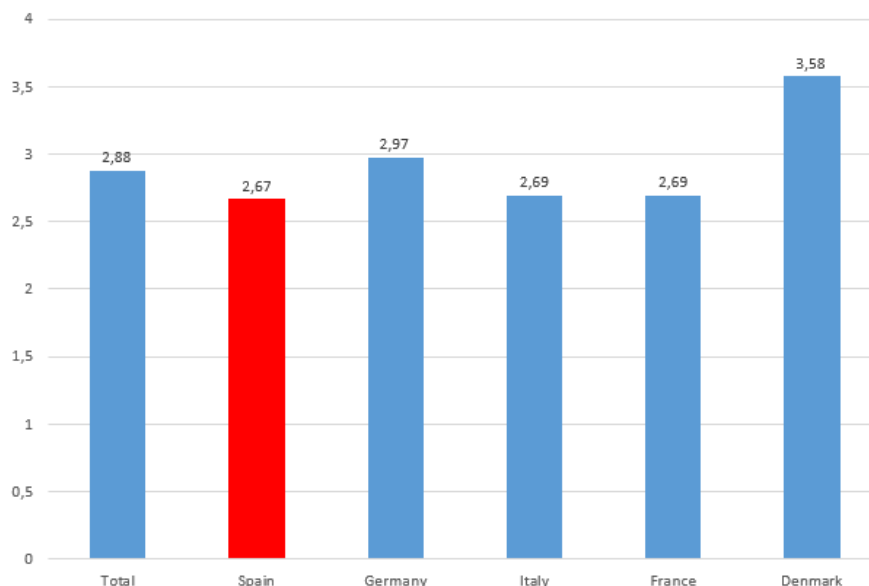


Figure 3. Level of English per country (scale from 1 to 5)³

² Cambridge University Press (2016).

³ Cambridge University Press (2016).

Spain would be placed in the most unfavourable position with an average rating of 2.67, although it presents a positioning very similar to that of the other two countries of Romance languages that were part of this study -Italy and France- both with an evaluation of 2.69 (Cambridge University Press, 2017). It is remarkable to see how countries whose mother tongues come from the Germanic branch of Indo-European, have the highest levels of English, notably Denmark with 3.58 points.

Regarding the distribution by autonomous communities, Basque Country and Navarre are the two regions with the best level of English (EF, 2017). Andalusia, however, is among the communities that have the lowest levels, along with Extremadura, Murcia and Valencian Community.



Figure 4. Level of English per Autonomous Community⁴

The dissociation that exists in Spain between the need to speak English well to be able to give an adequate coverage to one of the main sectors of its economy and the reality regarding the mastery of this language, leads us to consider if this need goes unnoticed between the educational and economic agents or if, on the contrary, it is not only a recognized requirement, but the measures desired to cover it have already been put in place.

2.2 Current legislation

Considering the data presented, it is necessary to know what the current state and autonomic regulations are regarding the acquisition of foreign languages. Although Spanish legislation covers all educational stages from children to higher education, this study will focus on the stage of Compulsory Secondary Education. Within it, a very specific aspect of the area of Foreign Language (English) will be analysed: the practice of speaking.

The teaching-learning of the oral contents of the English language stands as the essential objective for communication among people to be effective. What is desirable by the education system is to make English, as the lingua franca of the 21st century, inspire desire and need to be spoken.

⁴ EF (2017)

The current legislation contemplates the mastery of foreign languages as a priority within the Spanish educational system –given the relevance that this fact has in a global world– while identifying it as one of the main shortcomings. Therefore, the Organic Law for the improvement of educational quality, LOMCE (2013) states that efforts to cover this need must be increased.

It should be noted that the Spanish law not only highlights the importance of students developing fluency in a foreign language, but also establishes what approach their teaching and learning should have in the stages of Secondary Education and Baccalaureate. The Royal Decree establishing the basic curriculum of Compulsory Secondary Education and the Baccalaureate (2014: 422), talks about giving this subject an action-oriented approach, basing it on real communicative situations of various kinds, just as proposed by the Council of Europe through the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

The latest European proposal (CEFR, Companion Volume, 2018) that updates the new challenges of Plurilingualism and Pluriculturalism in all levels of language teaching, aims to provide a common basis for the development of language programs, curricular guidance, examinations, manuals and teaching materials in Europe. In it, the premise is established that, in order to learn a language, is to be able to communicate effectively through it.

Additionally, the educational proposal on the acquisition of foreign languages, which constitutes this document, not only describes what it would be desirable for students to learn, but also guides educational agents on which approach to use to teach it.

Considering the indications established by state laws in the field of education, it is necessary to know the legislative adaptation in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia.

In the order through which the curriculum corresponding to Compulsory Secondary Education in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia (2016) is developed, it is specifically established that the main objective of teaching a foreign language is to develop the communicative and social competence of the students.

Finally, the regional law refers to the close relationship between foreign language learning and tourism, while highlighting the importance of this sector within the Andalusian community.

[...] En la Comunidad Autónoma de Andalucía el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras resulta aún más relevante debido a la importancia y solidez de nuestro sector turístico y a la cantidad de personas de otros lugares que escogen esta tierra como lugar de residencia (Orden de 14 de julio de 2016: 211).

As it can be seen, the current legislation echoes the economic and social need to be able to cope with fluency in one or several foreign languages. Additionally, it highlights the fundamental objective of guiding action to the learning of these languages, carried out in personal and professional situations that are within a real context.

3. RESEARCH

3.1 Design of the research

The present study consists of a theoretical part centered essentially on three points that will support the empirical part. The second part of this research is based on the analysis of the results obtained from a survey.

This survey has been designed following a pattern of closed options, with two possible answers: 8 of them with options of yes or no, and another 2 with two options: Spanish-English and much-little. The 10 questions that are formulated are totally anonymous, without segmentation by sex, age or any other characteristic, except the province / school in which it is carried out. All of them are aimed at fourth year students of ESO (Educación Secundaria Obligatoria / Compulsory Secondary Education), two classes per monolingual centre of three Andalusian provinces: Huelva, Seville and Malaga, which are the cities where the research was carried out. Having tried to work in all the Andalusian provinces, we got the collaboration of these three provinces (maybe some other centres did not want to be assessed, due to several reasons).

The following table shows the 10 questions asked and the values assigned to each of them for subsequent measure.

QUESTIONS	VALUES
1 Do you like learning English?	Yes – 1 No – 0
2 Do you feel comfortable when you speak English with your partners?	Yes – 1 No – 0
3 Is it easy for you to understand your partners when they speak in English?	Yes – 1 No – 0
4 Do you like working in groups while using the English language?	Yes – 1 No – 0
5 In which language would you like your English lessons to be taught?	Yes – 1 No – 0
6 Would you like to have more time to speak English in class?	Yes – 1 No – 0
7 Do you think that being able to speak English can help you make friends?	Yes – 1 No – 0
8 How important is to learn English for you?	A lot – 1 A little – 0
9 Do you think being able to speak English can be useful for you in the future?	Yes – 1 No – 0
10 Have you ever tried to speak English with native English speakers?	Yes – 1 No – 0

Table 1. Questionnaire on conversational English and measurement values

3.2 General objective and specific objectives

The general objective of this research is to carry out a survey on the interest that students of the Community of Andalusia have for conversational English and its usefulness, as well as to know the importance that they give to the fact of being able to communicate in this language.

As specific objectives, this study aims to:

- Analyse the degree of comfort that students currently feel when they speak in English, making a differentiation by centres and provinces.
- Find out in which language the English classes are taught in these centres (even if they are monolingual centres, the English language course can be taught in both English and Spanish).

3.3 Hypothesis

The present study is based on the hypothesis that the students of Secondary Education of the Andalusian educational centres tend to use English to communicate despite having low level in this language.

In this globalized society, young people increasingly use foreign languages in their day-to-day lives and Andalusian students are not an exception. Andalusia is a community where the majority of speakers are able to communicate in English, but not fluently.

The English that is spoken is, in general, deficient, and this fact is possibly not related to the students' ability but to the way in which they learn this language. The students of the Andalusian community are aware of the importance of English today and of the value that can be brought to their lives by knowing how to communicate effectively in this language.

At the present, the English language is taught in Secondary Education centres in Andalusia for a much greater number of hours than it was taught for in the 80s and 90s. However, the fluency and effectiveness with which they communicate has not improved proportionally to the increase in teaching load.

3.4 Population and sample

The survey was conducted in three monolingual secondary education centres in Andalusia, among peer groups, located in the provinces of Huelva, Seville and Malaga. It has been addressed to students of the 4th year of ESO.

The distribution of students by province is:

- Huelva: 31 students. 31 valid surveys.
- Sevilla: 50 students. 49 valid surveys.
- Málaga: 33 students. 27 valid surveys.

The total number of students surveyed is 114. However, the total number of valid surveys to carry out this study is 107.

As can be seen, the number of students and the valid surveys do not match. This is because some of the surveys contain incomplete or invalid answers. Those surveys with erroneous answers to one or more of the questions asked have been discarded from the study.

3.5 Instruments

As already mentioned in previous sections, a 10-question survey was distributed to students. A FreeOffice spreadsheet (Calc) was used for the transfer and processing of data.

The study includes closed-response questions that are analysed quantitatively. This type of questions provides better defined answers, allows their quantification and facilitates the extraction of percentages. The possibility of formulating open questions has been ruled out, since it would involve having to interpret each answer individually and then seek equivalences among all of them.

3.6 Process

Initially, a questionnaire was designed to know the results about the interest, motivation and mastery that students have regarding conversational English.

Contact was made by telephone with the teachers who hold the English language course at two centres in Seville and Huelva, and in person with the teacher at a centre located in Málaga. They informed the centre's management and requested the pertinent authorization to carry out the survey.

3.7 Data analysis and results

Figure 5 shows the total results obtained in Huelva, Seville and Malaga. It contains the answers that the students of the three centres have given to each of the questions in the survey. The questions with answer options "yes or no", are represented in dark blue and orange, while the questions with answers "Spanish-English" and "a lot-a little", are shown in dark blue-green and grey-yellow, respectively.

At first glance, the predominance of affirmative responses (represented in dark blue) is noticeable. The results obtained in these questions also draw attention: In what language would you like your English classes to be taught? (each option has obtained around 50% of the votes); and how important is it for you to speak English? (largely majority response of the option "a lot").

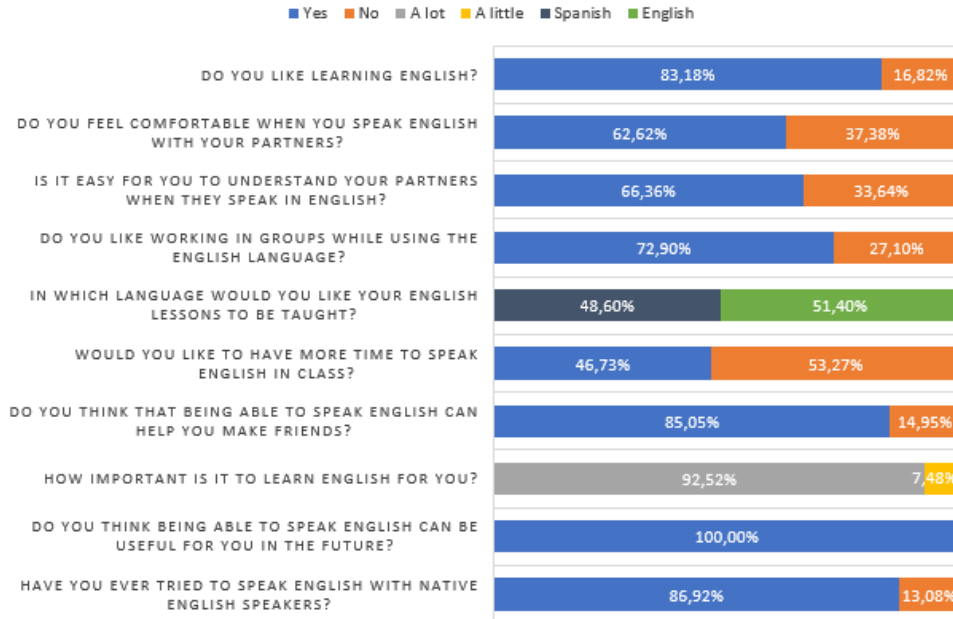


Figure 5. Total results

Figures 6, 7 and 8 show the results obtained at city level. According to the results obtained in Huelva, it can be said that students are fully aware of the relevance and utility of being able to communicate in English, and that a great number of them have tried to speak English with a native person at least once in their life. They like learning English and they would rather have their lessons to be taught in this language. However, Huelva students claim to feel uncomfortable speaking English with their peers and having trouble to understand what they say. This may be the reason why they got such a low percentage of affirmative responses to the question *would you like to have more time to speak English in class?* (35.48%).

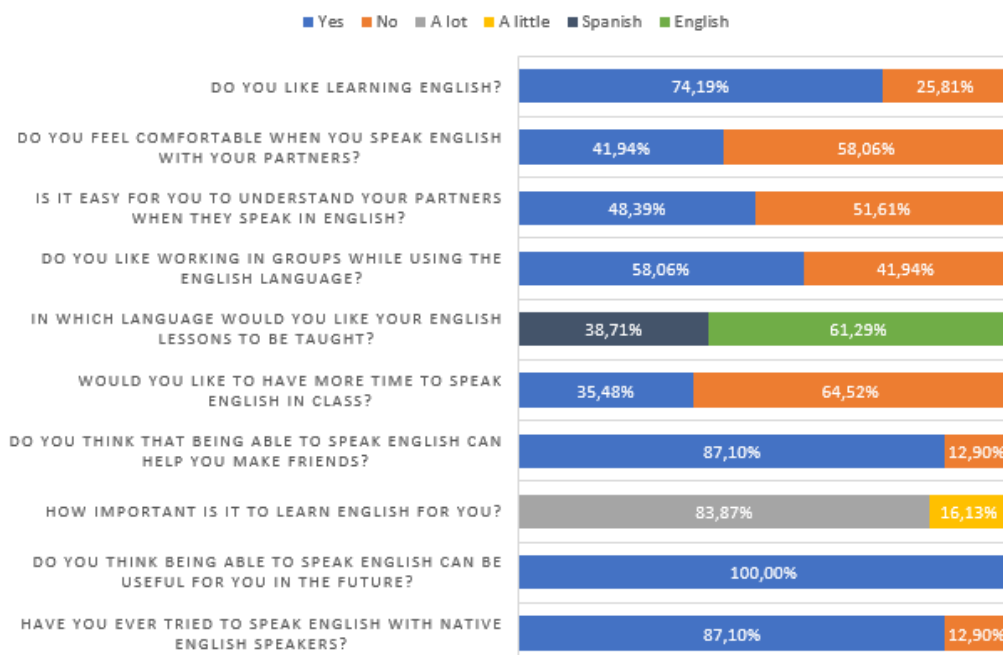


Figure 6. Huelva results

Seville, on the other hand, is the city with the highest volume of affirmative responses. 9 out of 10 students like learning English and find this ability useful to make friends. The vast majority consider very important to speak the language, and all of them see it very important for their future. Despite of the positive results, most of them would rather have their lessons to be taught in Spanish, and only 50% of them would like to have more time to speak English in class.

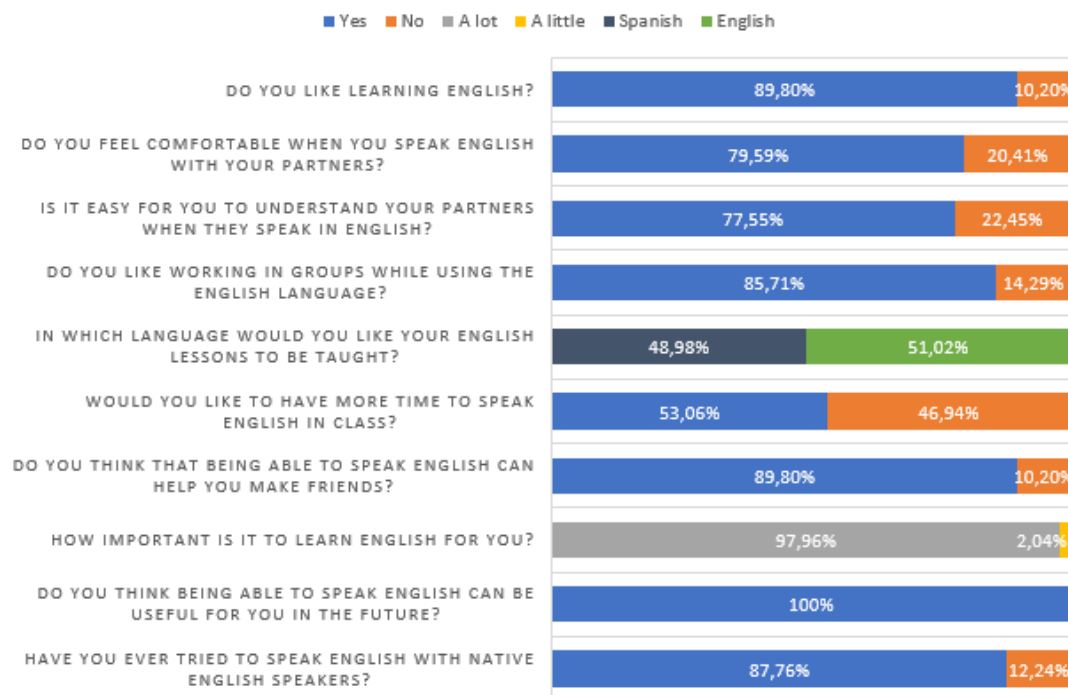


Figure 7. Seville results

Finally, it can be said that Malaga delivers quite neutral results. For the most part, the number of affirmative responses range between 48% and 66% of the total. Except for the results obtained in questions 7 to 10, where the uttermost part of the students declares to be aware of the importance of being able to communicate in English. Although as in the case of Huelva and Seville, they would rather not to have more time to speak English in class.

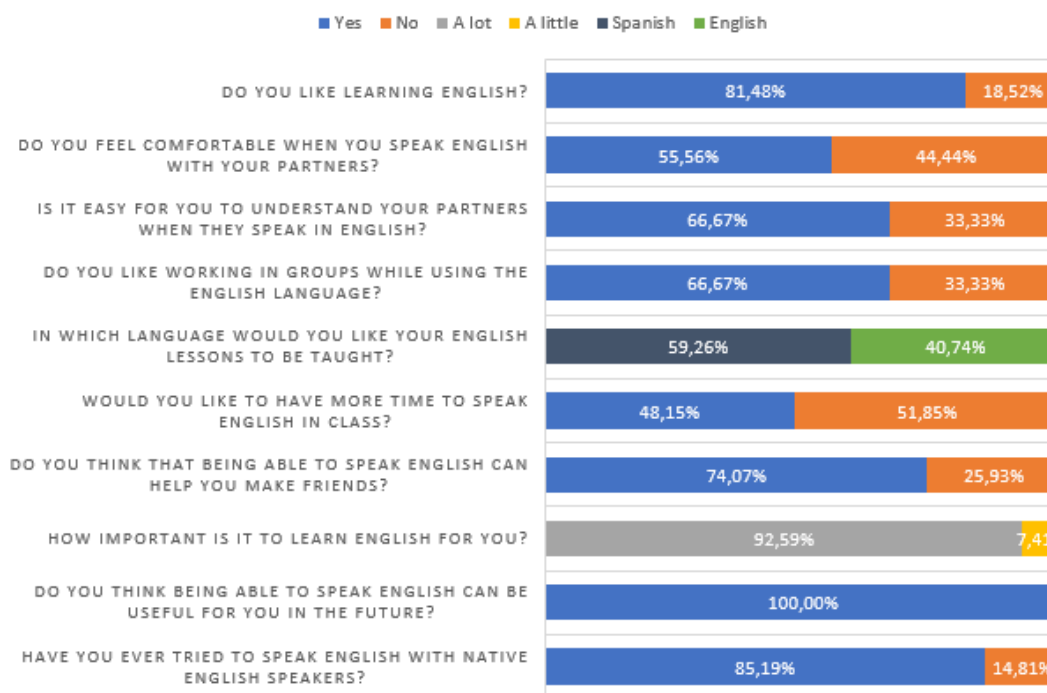


Figure 8. Malaga results

After the presentation and analysis of the results obtained in this study, the degree of agreement or discrepancy they have with respect to those that were polled in similar investigations will be contrasted in the 3.8 Discussion section.

3.8 Discussion

In 2004, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, through the National Institute for Evaluation and Quality of the Educational System (INECSE), published a study whose data correspond to the year 2001. In this study, conducted at the national level, they value the basic skills obtained by students in 2nd and 4th of Compulsory Secondary Education in the English language area. It included both the degree of communication obtained at the end of the course, and the specific knowledge that students had of the language.

It is considered of vital importance to mention this study as it is very noteworthy that, the data obtained at that time have varied in a non-meaningful way in some aspects with respect to those obtained in this research, despite the fact that almost two decades have passed since it was carried out.

Although this study was carried out at the national level and a different measurement instrument was used (surveys containing multiple-choice questions were used), we consider that it is possible to establish an equivalent relationship with the results obtained at present.

Regarding the interest shown by students in learning the English language, the results are much more positive today than in the past. 50% of the students of 4th Secondary Education surveyed in 2001 stated that they liked "enough" or "a lot" to learn English, while in the research carried out in the present

study, 83% of students said they liked to learn English. In that study, it was observed that the students' performance was higher the higher the evaluation they made about the affirmation "I like to learn".

Concerning the usefulness that the students of 4th ESO saw in learning English as a foreign language, the improvement is also remarkable. The majority of the students surveyed in 2001 responded by choosing the options "quite" and "a lot", expressing their agreement that English would serve them to: know other ways of life, customs, cultures, etc. (72%), contact people from other countries (83%), travel or carry out stays in other countries (83%) and carry out further studies (72%). In the present study, students consider that knowing how to speak English can help them make friends (85%) is very important (92%) and can be useful for their future (100%).

However, regarding the communicative aspect, the little difference between the results obtained in both studies is worrying. In the research carried out in 2001, the ability of the student to follow the conversation with the interlocutor was valued, among other skills. 44% of the students evaluated showed difficulty in being able to follow the conversation with the speaker, having to use the mother tongue to ask for clarifications or to solve communication problems in comprehension and expression. In the research carried out for the present study, 38% of the students affirm that they do not feel comfortable speaking in English with their classmates, and 33% state that they do not find it easy to understand their interlocutors when they speak.

It is striking that, although the motivation and interest on the part of the students is much higher than 20 years ago, the proficiency in the English language that the Spanish and Andalusian population currently has continues to be deficient. Over the last few years there have been major migratory processes, where Spain has received a massive influx of immigrants of Romanian, Russian, German and British origin, among others. Many of them have settled permanently or semi-permanently in Andalusia, in places such as the coasts of Malaga, Huelva, Cádiz or Almeria. It is a growing population that does not master the Spanish language and, therefore, uses English to communicate. This multicultural context, added to the relevance that bilingualism has acquired in Spanish secondary schools, requires that the measures included in the current legislation be put in place as a matter of urgency to equalize the level of English of the Andalusians when compared to students in other regions of Europe

4. CONCLUSIONS

Initially, the hypothesis was that the Secondary Education students in the Andalusian educational centres are aware of the value and the importance of knowing how to speak English today. The English that is still spoken in this community is, in general, deficient, although this fact does not stop them in their attempt to communicate in this language. It is believed that the low level that students have is not related to the lack of interest or low ability, but to the way they learn this language.

Through the administered investigation, it has been possible to verify that this hypothesis is fulfilled. In general, one observed that conversational English is faced with difficulty by a large percentage of the students surveyed. It is estimated that factors such as the teacher and the teaching methodology, or the guidelines set by each centre in relation to the learning of foreign languages, could

be directly or indirectly related to the results obtained. Although the current legislation specifically contemplates the acquisition of a second language as a priority integrated in the basic curriculum, and includes the development of communicative competence and oral comprehension as essential parts, many Andalusian educational centres have not been able to stay current with these requirements.

In this sense, it is believed that a change in the teaching methodologies used in the Andalusian centres that participated in this research could transform the learning experienced by the students, making them increase their confidence and desire to speak English inside and outside the classroom. At the same time, it is suggested that, if some educational interventions were carried out in this area, the process of learning the English language would be more enjoyable and meaningful for the students, decisively influencing the use of the hours of study.

4. LIMITATIONS AND PROSPECTIVE

At first, an attempt was made to conduct research on a larger sample among students in the 4th year of Secondary Education. Five more monolingual centers were contacted (three in Malaga and two in Seville) although none of them agreed to participate. The results obtained could show some weaknesses on the teaching methodologies being used and on teacher training.

Both the relevance of the English language and the current situation of globalization, the strong economic impact of tourism in Andalusia, and the difficulties that Secondary Education students have when communicating in English invite the extension of this research and the development of similar studies that supply new data on those already obtained.

Therefore, it would be desirable to carry out a study that included all the Andalusian provinces and in which a survey could be conducted on a greater number of students and teaching centres. Similarly, it would be interesting to carry out a similar study in other autonomous communities in Spain, in order to be able to compare the results obtained. In this case, it could be observed if there are major differences between the levels of English of certain communities and others, depending on factors such as the regulatory requirements to be able to teach, the training and specialization of the teaching staff or the teaching methodologies.

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