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Research Paper

The Reality of Language Teacher Needs in Rural Education

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Abstract

Rural depopulation and the state of education in rural areas are characterized to provide a contextualization for the role of second language teachers there. Subsequently, results are presented from a needs analysis of the Spanish provinces that have suffered the greatest demographic decline and associated problems over the last half-century. Based on these results, a series of training macrostrategies are proposed as part of the AGORA (Technological and methodological innovation for Language teaching and GeneratiON of synergies in Rural Areas) research project. Such an approach will provide tailored training that meets the needs of rural teachers and, at the same time, enable them to support the students they have. Results of these strategies will facilitate the transfer of knowledge to society and are envisaged to inspire other researchers and educational authorities, given the transversality and scalability that can be expected from the outputs of the project.

Keywords: Second Languages; Rural Depopulation; Rural Education; Teacher Training; AGORA.

1. Introduction

According to researchers like Viñas (2019) and Dolton-Thornton (2021), there has been a significant movement away from rural areas across Europe since the mid-20th century and in other parts of the world. Studies have been published for a range of countries, not only those in Europe like France (Coutin, 2022) and Spain (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2023), but also other disparate parts of the world like Bangladesh (Islam & Mia, 2007), India (Luvalo, 2014; Murthy & Mathur, 2008), South Africa (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019), and China (Li et al., 2020). Specifically regarding Spain, the object of the study in this article, Collantes et al. (2014, p. 85) note that “Spain has been one of the European countries most affected by rural depopulation, especially in the second half of the 20th century.” Díez-Gutiérrez (2023), drawing upon Rico (2020) and Pinilla and Sáez (2017), note that two-thirds of the towns/villages in Spain have less than a thousand inhabitants, and half of them have less than five hundred. This reflects a population density of below eight people per square kilometre. As these authors note, the development has historically been centred around the cities, so little by little, a significant part of the population has migrated to these destinations in search of better resources.

In Eurostat (2017), it was noted that communities in rural areas were more likely to suffer from poverty and social exclusion, something more likely to occur in eastern and southern Europe. Labianca and Valverde (2019) note that conditions such as limited access to health care, lack of infrastructure, education, and training, and so on, especially for young people, lead to material and immaterial isolation in rural areas. As well as the availability of basic services, this depopulation has also had a negative effect on the sociocultural status of these rural areas because it affects social interaction, culture, education, and collective memory (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2023). It is not surprising, therefore, that young people in these areas often see their future in terms of an idealist good life in a large city or conurbation. Such a view underestimates both the advantages of rural areas and the disadvantages of city life. As Domínguez (2020) notes, the message that younger people receive from the media, TV, social networks, and so on is that success lies in the urban context. Pueyo (2021) argues that rural education has a key role in shaping the expectations of the younger generations, helping them value what the local context provides for them in terms of quality of life.



Following an analysis of the literature on rural depopulation and the state of education in rural areas in the next section, the AGORA (Technological and methodological innovation for Language teaching and GeneratiON of synergies in Rural Areas) research project¹ will be introduced as a pathway to support teachers in these areas.

The starting hypothesis of AGORA is that, while respecting the valuable diversity of the socioeconomic and cultural profiles that make up Spain, effective training of second language teachers in rural areas must be carried out to optimize their professional development and standardize the quality of their teaching. The predicted improvement of academic results and the enhancement of educational and cultural centers there will, in the medium term, act as a catalyst for the reconstruction of the social fabric in the corresponding areas of influence. To this end, second language teachers must be actively and permanently involved in their own training process by implementing theory-grounded actions, organized in a common and transverse plan, between peers from different rural geographical areas. The first stage of the research from the project, namely an analysis of the many challenges that language teachers still have in disadvantaged areas of rural Spain, will be presented. Following on from this study, an action matrix will be presented that will be used to negotiate a series of supporting initiatives with rural teachers.

2. Literature Review

As has been noted in the Introduction section, rural depopulation is a serious problem in modern society, especially in Spain. Such abandonment has led to the concept of emptied Spain, coined by Velázquez-Gaztelu (2017). A range of studies has identified a common set of problems in rural areas, which has contributed to social instability and depopulation (e.g., Collants et al., 2014; CIS, 2020; Díez-Gutiérrez, 2023; Díez-Gutiérrez & Rodríguez-Rejas, 2022; Jurado Almonte & Pazos-García, 2023; Requena & Reher, 2011; Statista, 2021). These problems can be summarized as follows:

1. There is often a lack of social resources or amenities necessary to support people and limit their isolation.
2. Given the essentially agricultural nature of rural areas, the scope of quality employment for young, qualified people is limited, and they cannot find relevant jobs for their level of qualifications.
3. Large hospitals and a wide range of medical services are typically associated with cities. While the need to use such services is not that frequent, not having access to quality health care close by can be a cause of worry and problems.
4. As the number of people in a given area lowers, the need for housing drops which in turn reflects upon its supply. Subsequently, as the amount of accommodation drops, it becomes harder for new people to move into the area.
5. Because depopulation is more prevalent in rural areas, low birth rates are more noticeable, and some small villages are almost empty. Once this starts to happen, a snowball effect can occur with other people not wanting to stay alone with ever fewer services, and the society left behind there gets older.
6. The immigration (legal and illegal) of people from other cultures who have little or no interest in integrating or in having their children educated in local schools can be a problem. Whereas the influx of new people into rural settings, with ever fewer indigenous people, is an important step to repopulation, this is only the case if the migrants adopt and accept the local values and add to local results.
7. The typical situation of rural schools is of small numbers of students with a wide range of ages. Here, it is quite common for classes to have more than one age range, so the teachers must divide their efforts to provide attention to different subgroups. Hence, the possibilities for young people in such circumstances to obtain a broad and deep education, until they are ready to enter university, are limited.
8. The economic crisis that has been provoked to a large degree by the war in Ukraine has put a strain on regional expenditure and possibilities for local employment.
9. Whereas there is a crisis of values in most modern societies, it is arguably worse in rural areas, since there is less social contact, so social support networks are fewer, and therefore, the inherent messages young people in these areas receive are often lacking. In their place, is the view from online sources, that a modern vibrant future awaits

them in urban settings. Furthermore, the teaching materials used in rural classrooms are typically not based in the local context, so possibilities for students to appreciate and value what they have nearby are missing.

10. Whereas crime and its related difficulties are a problem in all areas, not just rural ones, often in low-population regions the number of police and security services available are smaller than in urban settings, so the people living there feel more isolated and less protected.
11. Political problems, in general, reflect corruption, instability, and a lack of clear governance. This lack of representation by authorities that can be trusted, and are approachable, can lead to alienation and a loss of belief that anything can be done to improve things in the future.
12. In modern society, violence against women and minorities is still very much a problem. It is not a question that such violence is more prevalent in rural areas, more that the amount of support available for victims is lower.

It should be noted that whereas the studies undertaken by the above authors shed valuable light on the types of problems arising from rural abandonment, there is always a fundamental limitation, namely that they only consider the people still in rural areas. Arguably, those less satisfied with such a life have already left for the large cities and therefore, have not participated in the studies, and do not have their opinions included there.

Díez-Gutiérrez and Rodríguez-Rejas (2022) note that the repopulation of these emptied areas has become a national priority. Following an extensive analysis, they go on to present a series of initiatives argued to be key for this process, namely: establish a set of areas of land, managed by the town halls, for public use to freely cultivate crops; provide access to social housing; facilitate tax reductions in rural areas, provide a guaranteed minimum wage in these areas; ease access and relocation for migrants; introduce or extend broadband Internet access; set up rural public banks that directly support local initiatives, provide dissemination and commercialization networks; start local anti-globalization initiatives; establish rural teaching and training programmes, and finally, promote policies for gender equality. As well as any improvements made to infrastructure and resources in rural areas, thanks to increases in specific state funding, a key factor in improving the longer-term prospects for these areas, is the support required to improve the situation of younger people and their expectations. If the youth are not motivated to stay, then future depopulation will inevitably continue to rise. The education they receive, and the values transmitted during this process, lays the foundation for any future decisions they make.

The role of education in limiting rural depopulation has been noted by different authors, together with an associated set of problems, at an international level. For example, Islam and Mia (2007) present a case for the role of education in transforming rural populations in Bangladesh, which is oriented to the developing world, and thereby focuses on people in states of poverty. However, their arguments are relevant in a European context to the extent that education can not only address problems of basic literacy but also promote the acquisition of indigenous skills and knowledge that is transferable to a range of activities in rural areas. Furthermore, promoting the value of rural areas can foment new technology-based initiatives above and beyond those currently undertaken in agriculture. While focusing on rural India, Murthy and Mathur (2008) also present arguments relevant in Europe, namely that online technology such as e-learning platforms can have a socializing function for rural teachers, who otherwise would not come into contact with similar individuals. The support and learning there can lead to an improvement in people's well-being and earning capacity. Similarly, Luvalo (2014) presents a study on the role that higher education can have in establishing projects that are contributing to rural development in South Africa. The author notes that such projects can focus on capacity building and community cooperation, the provision of work-integrated learning opportunities, and the role of stakeholders in promoting the sustainability of rural initiatives.

Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) present the results of an analysis that, although undertaken in rural South Africa, is directly relevant to the European context. They highlight a series of barriers to effective education in these areas including limited parental interest in a child's education, a lack of state funding, limited pedagogical resources, and the grouping of different age ranges in the same classroom. In a similar way to the situation of rural education in China, Li et al. (2020) present an analysis of the difficulties present there. They start by noting that despite the Rural Teachers Support Plan (2015-2020), intended by the government to address previously identified problems, the number of rural teachers has decreased substantially over this period. They summarize a range of studies from the literature, highlighting problems that still exist, including the limited social status of rural teachers, limitations in professional development and

training, welfare and economic difficulties, isolation and difficulties with interpersonal relationships, low professional happiness, and the need to improve professional knowledge and teaching resources. Finally, for example, they note that surveys undertaken by 10,356 rural teachers showed that nearly 80% expressed a preference to move back to work in urban settings.

Domínguez (2020) presents the results of a study of rural teachers in Spain which highlights a range of difficulties including curriculum delivery, transport, teacher training, and employment insecurity. Labianca and Valverde (2019) present an analysis of a series of projects undertaken to empower local groups in rural areas and highlight the key role that leading actors, historical members of the community, and local institutions can have in these initiatives. Pueyo (2021), for example, argues that rural schools, which are often not seen as significant in larger political plans, are an important service to keep villages alive. Coady (2020) notes the importance of rural schools and highlights a range of difficulties, including finding and retaining specialized teachers, providing relevant training to support them, and interacting with non-English-speaking families to facilitate their children's learning. Furthermore, the author notes that in the field of second language teaching in rural areas, a subsequent problem exists in obtaining resources for languages. Díez-Gutiérrez (2023) studied 92 teachers and 141 students from secondary schools in the Bierzo region of Spain, combining questionnaires with interviews and group discussions, to highlight the perception that the resources and materials provided for teachers there, do not reflect the realities of rural life—something that is largely invisible or forgotten.

An important support for rural teachers with the difficulties identified above is the application of technology. Chinapah and Odero (2017) present an analysis of the results that support the use of technology for inclusive learning in rural areas, particularly in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Of direct relevance here is how its use acts as a leveller for people from a wide range of cultures and economic realities. Huertas-Abril (2022) presents a study of the use of eTwinning tools that facilitate multimodal communication between students, promoting the development of new social practices and social learning skills. Similarly, Kristiawan, Carter, and Picard (2022) present a study of professional development workshops undertaken with Islamic school teachers in rural areas, undertaken to enhance their technological and pedagogical knowledge. It showed that the teachers improved their ability both as material developers and in understanding how to incorporate technology and pedagogy in EFL language teaching.

In this section, a range of problems present in rural areas leading to depopulation has been identified, together with the importance of using education to support young people, increasing their identification with the local context where they find themselves, and their motivation to stay. Subsequently, difficulties present in rural education have been highlighted, across a wide range of countries and social contexts, although they are directly relevant in Europe, specifically in Spain. Finally, the way in which technology can help with these difficulties has been noted. The literature identifies the problem but offers little in the way of solutions. The AGORA project, presented in the introduction, aims to do just this, by supporting second language teachers by engaging in a series of microprojects aimed to potentiate the use of innovative methodological and technological approaches to teaching and learning languages in rural areas. The project will be undertaken with a sample of the Spanish provinces that have suffered the greatest demographic decline and associated problems over the last half-century, namely Alcañiz, Ponferrada, and Úbeda. The approach will be learner-centred, experimental, mixed in purpose, level of depth and type of data used, and aligned with participatory action research (henceforth PAR, Walker, 1993). The project will be carried out in several phases: The first phase will consist of a needs analysis of the target population with data triangulation. This process is important to complement what has been reported in the literature with direct feedback from the target group, namely second language teachers in deprived rural areas. The second phase of AGORA will involve the design of a training macrostrategy in light of the results of the first phase and after adaptation of the adopted conceptual framework. The third phase will involve the implementation of a series of microprojects for language teacher training, which will be tutored and coordinated by the research team during the project in such a way that they can be run autonomously after the end of the project. The fourth will be devoted to the overall evaluation of the results, which will be compared with the initial hypothesis and the objectives initially set. Finally, the fifth will deal with the dissemination of the research work and the results obtained. The transfer of knowledge to society is envisaged with actions that can inspire other researchers and educational authorities, given the transversality and scalability that can be expected from the fruits of the project. In the following section, the results of the needs analysis are presented.

3. An Analysis of Language Teachers' Experiences in Three Regions of Rural Spain

The research methodology followed here has been mixed (Robson, 2002), combining three different tools that provided both qualitative and quantitative data gathered as per Creswell (2009, pp. 125-128) from educational institutes in the three regions participating in the project:

1. Semistructured interviews for nonteaching second language professionals. There were 14 questions in total, focusing on different aspects of rural education.
2. A series of classroom observations was undertaken in educational institutes in the regions being studied, the purpose of which was to gain an understanding of how the teachers deal with the difficulties present in their everyday reality.
3. A questionnaire with 80 questions for the language teachers themselves to answer. The structure of the questionnaire was as follows:
 - Section 1. Profile of the teachers and their school (16 questions)
 - Section 2. Professional training and updating (11 questions)
 - Section 3. Relationship with their school and social environment (28 questions)
 - Section 4. Methodological, linguistic, and technological dimensions (25 questions)

There were 58 answers in total to the questionnaire, most of which were obtained by the teachers filling out an online version, although some were done on paper and had to be coded into electronic format by members of the research group subsequently. Whereas quantitative data were obtained in this study, the emphasis is given here to qualitative data in the results. This reflects the PAR approach (Walker, 1993), underlying the generation of the action matrix detailed below, and the collaborative development of microeducational projects later in AGORA, where there is a negotiation of meaning between the research team and participating teachers. That is, the objective of the exercise is to identify the main categories of resources, approaches, and technologies to include in the matrix more than the actual numeric values of each, which is not so relevant at this stage in the research.

In this paper, the focus is given to data from section 4 of the questionnaire. Regarding the methodology used in the classroom, most of the teachers followed a communicative approach, where real-world scenarios were used to engage the students with the second language. Some project-based learning was used, to take the understanding one step further and get the students to undertake meaningful tasks in the target language. Finally, some use of flipped classroom activities was undertaken, where students were encouraged to obtain information on a given topic and reflect upon it before it was covered in the class. Whereas most of them were satisfied with what they were doing, there was an openness to try new ways to teach and learn languages, if sufficient support was provided. When specifically asked about how they would like to update, innovate, or diversify their teaching methodologically, the most frequent reply was the desire to encourage more collaboration and facilitate learning outside the classroom with specific relation to the local context and environment. Regarding the materials and resources at the teachers' disposition for teaching purposes, more than half of the subjects considered that they had sufficient; however, some noted a feeling of inadequacy related to a need to constantly create new materials, as reflected in comments like: "There is always room for improving materials" and "there are never enough new resources that refer to current events."

Regarding the technology available for use in the classroom, there was no evidence of any shortages, and a wide range of different devices were highlighted, including desktop computers, portables, tablets, mobile phones, smartphones, digital whiteboards, and the like. Thanks to different initiatives from the large telecommunications providers, all the teachers noted a fast and reliable Internet connection at the study centre, although not all the students had such access from their homes. It was noted that regarding geographical, and other local conditions, sometimes when the weather was bad, the quality of the Internet connection degraded. Of all the possible applications of such technology to the teaching of second languages, the most commonly used were educational games, online educational platforms, and specific learning activities that pulled together different resources, both on the devices in the classroom and available online. It was surprising that activities using e-mail were not mentioned nor was the participation in social networks, where if suitable care is taken to protect students' identity, rich and varied access to native speakers can be obtained. When

specifically asked about the problems, the teachers had with the use of technology in the study centers, they said that it was not always possible to access the computers they needed in the centers. Furthermore, a lack of digital skills was highlighted, regarding the best way to use the technology to access and work with the resources. Finally, some reference was made to the quality of some online courses and the lack of professional recognition for any efforts made by the teachers in learning and applying new online tools.

When asked about their experience in teaching/learning through technological means (Internet, mobile apps, etc.), most teachers said that they did not have much experience, but were always keen to have more and learn new skills. Regarding, how they thought that technology could be used to support their professional activities, a wide range of replies were provided, ranging from teaching to logistical activities, including improving language learning, facilitating communication with families and between teachers, improving didactic planning and students' digital competence, facilitating task management outside the classroom and continuous teacher training. When asked about training initiatives that they would like to receive, and ways in which they could improve their digital competences, a wide range of requests were made by the teachers, including gaining more knowledge of device management, undertaking collaborative work with colleagues from the same or other centres, learning how to integrate new tools in teaching practice, understanding the didactic exploitation of technology in the classroom, and to find out about ways to receive recognition of this use as teaching or curricular merit.

When asked about the students' use of technology, the majority noted that the students did not have any restrictions to its use during the school day once permission had been obtained from parents. However, many households did not have computers or access to the Internet, thereby limiting the possibility for flipped teaching or extending activities into the students' time away from the classroom. Before being asked to undertake the questionnaire, the teachers were given a presentation, and provided with documentation, about the AGORA project, and what its objectives were. The final question they were given was about any suggestions they might have as to how they could be helped by it. Apart from repeating some of the observations made above, different requests were presented including receiving training for multilevel classroom management, information on web resources available to teachers, and the need to potentiate equal opportunities for teachers in rural contexts as there are in urban ones. Whereas not directly related to methodology or technology, almost all the teachers requested support in improving their second language competences, most in its oral aspects, such as by interacting with native speakers, something that could be potentiated by ICT. Regarding support for helping students, they noted the need for training for ways to use technology to help the students acquire a second language (mainly English) and help improve their motivation and discipline.

As well as the questionnaires, semistructured interviews were used with nonteaching staff at the educational institutes to gain a complementary perspective of how the teachers undertook their professional activities in the rural context. A total of 14 questions provided information on the relation of the teachers with their local context, how different types of collaboration were established, what kind of training options were available, how the teachers were evaluated, and the quality of the teaching provided. Eight such interviews were undertaken, highlighting the perception that supporting such centres and the teaching that goes on there was not a priority in the respective regions, while in general, the teachers supported the students as fully as possible, making use of the available resources and collaborations. Whereas many possibilities existed online for teachers to improve their skills and knowledge, often a lack of structure, time, and recognition meant that the options for training were not adopted as much as would be desired. A desire for more support for the teachers was identified together with the need for the political institutions to provide more structure and leadership. Finally, observations of two language classrooms in each region revealed the presence of teachers with considerable experience, trying to make the best of the difficult circumstances present in such rural institutes. The student groups were small, often of mixed ages, with a mixture of racial backgrounds where the value of the education provided was often undervalued. What all the teachers had in common was a desire to be supported and provided with a coordinated set of options for training and collaboration.

Following on from an analysis undertaken of the previous three sets of data, an action matrix was developed with two dimensions that will set the structure and content of the interaction of the research group in AGORA with the rural language teachers in the three different regions, namely the tracks or channels used for the interactions, and the focus of each interaction. The former is presented in Table 1 and the latter in Table 2 below. Given the geographically dispersed nature of the three regions collaborating in this project, both with respect to each other and the members of the researchers

in AGORA, the use of online technology is of fundamental importance. In Table 1, a series of six different tracks/channels are presented that will be used as a vehicle for reaching the rural language teachers and providing them with the resources and activities presented in Table 2. For each vehicle presented in Table 1, its functional relevance is highlighted, that is, what the track/channel provides concerning the others identified there:

Table 1. *Interaction Channels and Functions*

Nº	Channel	Function
1	Sharing of linguistic and didactic resources and materials	Access to resources and materials that can complement what rural teachers already have. These can be used as is or to inspire the generation of similar ones that are based in a given rural area.
2	Creation of projects with technological systems and tools	Opportunities to form collaborations to work on activities that are relevant in different regions.
3	Actions with the community	The establishment of initiatives where teachers from different rural areas can pull together to solve common problems and meet shared goals.
4	Expert training (ATLAS)	Short presentations and activities that detail and discuss specific techniques and approaches.
5	Support from other specialists (second languages, pedagogy, technology)	Guidance and help from similar minded teachers, providing the opportunity to learn from experience.
6	Conversation with advanced speakers	Access to and interaction with native speakers, or at the least, ones at higher competence levels.

The different types of focus presented in Table 2, each of which being open for use in the six tracks/channels presented in Table 2, are grouped into one of four categories:

Table 2. *Interactional Focus*

Category	Objectives
1. Methodological optimization	1.1. Improvement of psychopedagogical and attitudinal aspects (motivation, self-regulation) 1.2. Attention to linguistic competence diversity (low level, low performance) 1.3. Cultural mediation: subject-territory (identities, imaginaries, contextualization, and adaptation of learning, return to the community) 1.4. Group management (inclusion, multi- and interculturality, conflict resolution, cooperation, and collaboration) 1.5. Promotion of the communicative approach (standardization of the use of the second language, EMI, CLIL) 1.6. Strategic management of methodologies and their integration (flipped learning, personalized learning, reading-based learning, feedback, evaluation)
2. Updating skills	2.1. Second languages 2.2. Digital competence 2.3. Methodological innovation
3. Networking	3.1. With the community (service learning) 3.2. With families of students (basic scaffolding) 3.3. With students (social mediators) 3.4. With teachers and specialists of the same subject (collaborative creation of resources) 3.5. With teachers and specialists of other subjects (curricular integration)
4. Professional diversification	4.1. Design and coordination of research projects (various calls) 4.2. Design and coordination of teaching innovation projects 4.3. Presentation of communications and papers 4.4. Preparation of scientific articles

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper started by considering the difficulties underlying rural depopulation and went on to highlight the importance given to education in these areas as a way to address them. The AGORA project was presented as an initiative intended to support rural teachers, and the problems they have with such education, specifically focusing on second

language teachers. As a start to this project, a study was conducted providing data from semistructured interviews with nonteaching second language professionals, classroom observations in the studied regions' educational institutions, and a questionnaire administered to language teachers. The findings reveal the following:

1. Classroom methodology: The majority of the teachers employed a communicative approach, integrating real-world scenarios to engage students in learning the second language. Some teachers utilized project-based learning methods.
2. Teaching materials and resources: Over half of the surveyed teachers believed they had sufficient materials, but some expressed concerns about the need to create new resources continually.
3. Classroom technology: There were no reported shortages of technology, with a variety of devices available, including desktop computers, laptops, tablets, mobile phones, smartphones, and digital whiteboards.
4. Experience with technology: Most teachers acknowledged having some experience with teaching and learning through technology (e.g., the Internet and mobile apps), expressing an eagerness to enhance their technological skills.
5. Student technology use: The majority of teachers indicated that the students had no restrictions on technology usage during the school day, provided parental permission was obtained. However, a significant number of the households lacked access to computers or the Internet, limiting opportunities for flipped teaching or extending learning beyond the classroom.

The AGORA project is designed to support language teachers' requirements, as highlighted in the study, by creating a holistic impact that encompasses pedagogical innovation, engagement with decision-makers, and a broader societal transformation in rural areas through improved language education. Its impact is planned to have a triple pedagogical, organizational, and social nature. Firstly, this project will adopt an incremental, bottom-up developmental procedure with a view not just to undertaking an experimental pilot with potential scalability, but also a fully operational set of didactic actions with a long tail effect. Therefore, the microprojects run during the life of the project are intended to be shared, reused, and repurposed by a potentially massive number of users in a flexible, adaptive, and open manner. One of the premises of this project is the transferability of results to other specialized linguistic domains (e.g., sustainable business, agritourism, and agricultural engineering) and more distant areas of knowledge, as appropriate. This will cover not only the architectural model, but also the resources, tools, and contents because they will be modular, and hence, easily combinable, and transportable.

Secondly, an effort will be made to involve policymakers, so that they are informed of the project results and the underlying methodology, as they become available. Therefore, part of the impact of this project will take place through the policy community, for example, by using the area of influence of the three academic chairs participating in this project in organizations like UNESCO, USAID, HEFCE, ALT, and JIS. Opportunities for interaction will be created for decision-makers to become aware of the existence of the didactic methodology developed in AGORA and its medium-term potential. Thus, stakeholders will be invited to participate in academic and media events organized by the research team (e.g., keynotes, TV interviews, round tables, etc.) and in the debate on the interpretation of the findings, given the multidisciplinary nature of this project, to promote further organizational action and intervention beyond the scope of the research team. To that end, guides, policy recommendations and white papers will also be written and hopefully published in collaboration with the Spanish Ministry of Education and other relevant national and international bodies.

Thirdly and finally, the AGORA team is committed to contributing to the Spanish social demand for qualified second language teachers in rural areas, with quality methodological and technological training and social and cultural awareness. This work, therefore, must not be limited to the experimental population since it is a real-life issue. This project will ensure that as many social agents as possible are reached by the team and its partner groups. Furthermore, the impact that AGORAs work will have on the quality of rural second language education is foreseen to have a cascading effect on other areas of society. Apart from the well-known opportunities and returns associated with having communicative capabilities in other languages, not only does education, in general, increase people's self-acceptance but also their critical ability to diagnose their needs, assert their rights, and take informed control of decisions affecting their lives. This, in turn, has the potential to respond decisively to the transformation of their territories and communities, increase the labour force, and enhance general security, livelihood, and welfare.

While respecting the valuable diversity of the socioeconomic and cultural profiles that make up Spain, effective training of second language teachers in rural areas must be carried out to optimize their professional development and standardize the quality of their teaching. The consequent improvement of academic results, and the enhancement of their educational and cultural centres, will in the medium term, act as a catalyst for the reconstruction of the social fabric in the corresponding areas of influence. To this end, second language teachers must be actively and permanently involved in their own training process by implementing theory-grounded actions, organised in a common and transverse plan, between peers from different rural geographical areas.

Notes

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

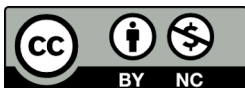
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