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TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH
FOR YOUNG LEARNERS: A STUDY ON THE
EFFECTIVENESS OF REAL AND MEANINGFUL
COMMUNICATION WITHIN A TRINITY COLLEGE
LONDON FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an effective approach for teaching young learners who are acquiring English as a second language. This effectiveness is based on the fact that 100% of the students analysed for this study passed the Trinity College London Graded Examinations in Spoken English (TCL GESE) after attending ACTIVA English extra classes for the academic year 2012-2013. These classes followed the CLT approach, a fact which can be shown by analyzing the questionnaires given to 15 teachers employed in ACTIVA during that period of time. The teachers analysed answered a series of questions regarding the approach being discussed. First, their answers gave us a view of what the approach implies. And then, these answers will also respond to the TCL GESE examinations requirements which are different according to each grade. That is why it can be claimed that the CLT is an effective approach for teaching English within a TCL framework.

KEYWORDS: Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT), English language, *Trinity College London* (TCL), young learners, Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE), questionnaires.

RESUMEN

El Método Comunicativo es un enfoque efectivo a la hora de enseñar inglés como segunda lengua a alumnos de educación primaria. Esta eficacia se basa en el hecho de que el 100% de los estudiantes analizados aprobaron sus respectivos exámenes orales de Trinity College London (TCL GESE) tras acudir a clases extraescolares durante el curso 2012-2013. Estas clases siguieron el Método Comunicativo, hecho que ha sido confirmado después de analizar los cuestionarios repartidos a 15 profesores que trabajaron en ACTIVA durante ese periodo. Dichos profesores contestaron a una serie de preguntas relacionadas con el enfoque en cuestión. En primer lugar, a partir de sus respuestas se puede crear una visión de lo que el enfoque significa. Y, además, estas respuestas coincidirán en su mayoría con los requerimientos de TCL los cuales varían en función de los grados a los que se pueden optar. Por todo ello, se puede afirmar que

el Método Comunicativo es un enfoque efectivo cuando se trata de enseñar inglés dentro del marco teórico de TCL.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Método Comunicativo, Inglés, *Trinity College London* (TCL), estudiantes de primaria, exámenes orales (GESE), cuestionarios.

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FOREWORD: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

This undergraduate dissertation responds to the final formal requirement to complete the degree in English Studies at the University of Valladolid. It is framed within the subject *Communicative Strategies of the English Language* as reflected in the teaching guide 2014.

The fact that I am working with students who are learning English as L2 has motivated me in the process of this study in which I will analyse the satisfactory performance of more than 300 children who, after attending English *extra lessons* during the academic year 2013-2014, they succeeded at the Trinity College London (TCL) Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE).

1. INTRODUCTION

The initial boom for English language learning as a complementary and distinguishable aspect of people's careers has become a personal necessity which leaves behind all those who cannot speak the language. That is why teaching English beginning at an early age is acquiring such relevance. In this process, a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is one of the most practiced methods due to its use of real material and meaningful communicative situations in which both learners and teachers find themselves personally involved.

As it is stated in the title, our aim is to study the effectiveness of real and meaningful communication within a TCL framework. This effectiveness will be shown in the fact that Spanish L1 young learners of English succeed in their TCL GESE examinations after being taught through a CLT approach.

Several authors (Dell Hymes, 1996; Michael Canale and Merrill Swain, 1980; Janice Yalden, 1983; Keith Johnson, 1983; or Miguel Llobera, 2000) have analysed the CLT approach for teaching languages. However, there are no studies that refer to the great importance that the approach has when it is used to teach English within a TCL context. This is why this study represents an attempt to investigate the main principles and ideas of the CLT approach as a means of gathering clear evidence of the effectiveness of this approach when used as the only method for teaching young learners (students aged 6-15

years old). The study is framed within a TCL framework and supported by ACTIVA *Actividades Formativas S.L.* - the company I work for -, a recognised company who guided students in their learning process from which we have obtained the data being analysed.

The research focuses on the CLT approach and the results let us generate the hypothesis that claims that the CLT is an effective method to teach English language extra lessons to young learners whose final aim is to pass a TCL GESE examination at the end of an academic year. The success of the CLT approach will be judged by the percentage of candidates that passed this exam.

Throughout this study, 15 questionnaires will be analysed to demonstrate the effectiveness of the CLT. These were given to a group of teachers who, before becoming teaching staff in Activa, attended a training course in the CLT approach. Teachers learnt the different features which make up the CLT, and were instructed in how to lead a class following this approach. The valuable information that will be obtained through the questionnaires will allow us to show how useful the CLT approach is due to the fact that all students analysed passed their TCL GESE examinations after attending extra English lessons.

The starting point for this study is the series of GESE examination results of 313 young Spanish learners of English as L2 (referred to as *exam candidates* from now onwards). All exam candidates completed an English course based on the CLT approach during the academic year 2013-2014; and, at the end of this course, they took the corresponding level of the TCL GESE examination. They were assessed by three professional TCL examiners, being all of them successful at passing the exam. This makes us believe on the efficiency of the CLT approach among young learners who aim to acquire and improve their oral skills in English in order to pass the named exam. Many issues open up in particular contexts when CLT theory is put into practice; some teachers reported in their questionnaires that they sometimes have to use other approaches different than the CLT to make sure that their students understand them; for example, they sometimes have to use the Spanish language to clarify one particular concept. However, these issues do not negate its usefulness.

The final aim and main reason for analysing these questionnaires is to demonstrate the fact that by being taught from a CLT approach, young learners will acquire the skills and abilities needed to pass their corresponding TCL GESE examinations.

Through this study we will give a detailed account of the different CLT features analysed, we will look at any issues that might come up, and we will show the conclusions that we will reach within this TCL framework.

2. THE CLT APPROACH

There has been much research done on the CLT approach, however, in this project my emphasis will be in trying to prove its effectiveness among young learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) when attempting to take a TCL GESE examination.

The present study suggests that ACTIVA extra lessons are a successful tool for acquiring a linguistic competence which allows students to reach a realistic competence in listening and speaking skills when interacting with English speakers (Appendix 3: 5). This desired communicative competence has been discussed over the years.

2.1. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CLT AND MAIN FEATURES OF THE APPROACH

English Language Teaching has a long history. Language teaching methods have changed a lot from the Renaissance, when the Huguenot refugees in Elizabethan London were taught English as a Second Language (Howatt, 1985), to the present day when there are many different language learning approaches. In fact, in the last few years we have witnessed that globalization has increased the importance of language learning.

The concept of *communicative competence* coined by Dell Hymes in 1972 grew out of dissatisfaction with the concept of *linguistic competence* and the ideas of the inborn predisposition to language which were introduced by Noam Chomsky in 1965. It was

also a response to the *Audio-Lingual Method*¹, and to the Grammar Translation Method² which were used at that time. Nowadays, most scholars consider *linguistic competence* to be a part of *communicative competence* (Paulston, 1992).

For this study, it is very important to look into Canale and Swain's four components of the communicative competence: *grammatical competence* which includes the knowledge of the lexicon, syntax and semantics, or words and rules in general; *sociolinguistic competence* which refers to the appropriateness of communication depending on the context including the participants and the rules of interaction; *discourse competence* which is concerned with the cohesion and coherence of utterances in a discourse or cohesion and coherence in general; and *strategic competence* which means appropriate use of communication strategies especially when communication fails. If teachers manage to make their students succeed in the development of these competences, they will reach their aim in the English language teaching process (Canale and Swain, 1980: 37).

Ruth Gairns and Stuart Redman stated that acquiring a communicative competence is the desired goal of the CLT. They defined it as the ability to use the linguistic system effectively and appropriately in order to be able to produce the kind of language that learners are expected to use in their daily conversations (Gairns Redman, 2006: 7).

In line with the previous authors, the Teaching English British Council Database states: '[t]he communicative approach is based on the idea that learning language successfully comes through having to communicate real meaning. When learners are involved in real communication, their natural strategies for language acquisition will be used, and communication will allow them to learn to use the language naturally. [...] Since this

¹ The British Council states that *Audio-lingualism is a method of foreign language teaching where the emphasis is on learning grammatical and phonological structure, especially for speaking and listening. It is based on behaviourism and so relies on formation as a basis for learning, through a great deal of mechanical repetition* (British council BBC, *Teaching English*).

² The British council has defined and described as follows the Grammar-Translation method: "A way of teaching in which students study grammar and translate words into their own language. They do not practise communication and there is little focus on speaking. A teacher presents a grammar rule and vocabulary lists and then students translate a written text from their own language into the second language" (British Council, *Grammar Translation*).

method focuses more on developing language that is used in everyday life and focuses more on the practical end of language learning' (Strohman, 2014: 9).

The CLT approach considers interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. Ala Pankiewicz claims that the CLT is 'important for developing and improving speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills, and that it prevents students from listening passively to the teacher without interaction' (Pankiewicz, 2015: 46).

In 2006, Jack C. Richards claimed that the CLT was a qualified approach to learn English because it uses the target language as the only language in the class, and it aims to make the teaching of communicative competence its main goal. He also pointed the importance of the meaningful situations proposed in the class which make students learn within a real context.

Moreover, in agreement with the CLT approach, Stephen Krashen's *Natural Method* (Krashen and Terrell, 1983) rejects grammar to be the central part of language. It presents communication as its main function, and vocabulary - the lexicon which is used to send messages – as its main focus. Its emphasis is on the exposure and input by making students emotionally prepared to learn allowing them to listen before producing, and on the need to use written texts and other printed sources for input.

In addition, a more recent refinement of CLT approach called *task-based language-learning (TBLL)* has gained considerable popularity because it is a more enjoyable method as it focuses on the use of authentic language and on asking students to do meaningful tasks using the target language (Malmir et al., 2010).

To sum up, the CLT approach claims that *language* is a system for the expression of meaning and it considers that interaction and communication are the main functions of language. The CLT states that the structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses, and that the primary units of language are not only grammar and structure, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as shown in discourse. In spite of the fact that learning a language in its natural context is the best way to do it, there is a wide range of communicative strategies which are used aiming at

teaching successfully. It is ACTIVA teachers' duty to create an English language atmosphere in which students find themselves engaged and happy to learn and acquire the language through their communicative extra lessons.

2.2. THE CLT AND THE TCL GESE EXAMINATIONS FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Spanish L1 young learners of English attend to communicative extra lessons which direct them to succeed in their TCL GESE examinations. The main goal of these extra lessons is passing their examinations.

In order to understand the whole process carried out to elaborate this dissertation, we will analyze in this section the "Syllabus for Trinity College London Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE)" (Appendix 3) and the official web page of the Institution (www.trinitycollege.com) to get a general idea of what TCL is, as well as what TCL GESE examinations are, what they consist on, how they are structured, and what their goal is.

Trinity College London is a fully recognised examination board within the United Kingdom which evaluates students at all levels. Accredited qualifications in English language, music, and the performing and creative arts are provided by this body throughout the world.

Since 1877, Trinity has been conducting examinations designed to help students progress. Moreover, a progressive evaluation marks the students' achievement at each stage of their development and at all levels of competence. This method has been proved to keep students inspired and motivated during their English language learning.

Trinity offers six suites of examinations in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) according to the different individual needs. These are divided into two groups:

First, International ESOL examinations – available worldwide:

- Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE)
- Integrated Skills in English (ISE)
- Spoken English for Work

And secondly, UK ESOL examinations – available in the UK only:

- ESOL Step 1 and Step 2 examinations
- ESOL Skills for Life examinations
- ESOL for Work examinations

The examination board guarantees their competence and the acceptance of their examinations by universities and employers worldwide. Despite the existence of a range of examinations, for this project, I will focus on the GESE examinations which measure learners' progress and development by providing a valid and reliable scheme of assessment.

Learners find themselves encouraged and motivated in their English language acquisition development by the TCL graded examination system. It consists of a series of 12 progressively graded examinations which have been created for speakers of languages other than English, and which measures their linguistic competence from complete beginner (Grade 1) to absolute mastery (Grade 12). Through a one-to-one format, a face-to-face oral interview between the candidate and an English native speaker examiner, the examinations mimic real-life exchanges by passing on information, sharing ideas and opinions, and debating on specific topics according to the demands of the grade.

The learning progression of the exam candidates is framed in four development stages which include different tasks to let them demonstrate their discourse competence.

- At the Initial stage (Grades 1-3) the examiner is in charge of conducting the examination which corresponds with the level of Basic User in the Common European Framework of Reference.
- At the Elementary stage (Grades 4-6) the candidates introduce a topic of their preference providing the examiner with an outline of some points which they have prepared beforehand and which will help the examiner to direct the discussion of the topic chosen. Then, a discussion on two subject areas selected from the list provided by the TCL follows at the Conversation phase. These examinations create a bridge

from the Basic User to the Independent User level in the Common European Framework of Reference.

- At the Intermediate stage (Grades 7-9) the candidate achieves the Independent User level in the Common European Framework of Reference.
- At the Advanced stage (Grades 10-12) the candidate obtains the Proficient User level in the Common European Framework of Reference.

As I stated in the title of this study, I will only consider the Initial and Elementary stages (young learners, which corresponds with Grades 1-6 within the Trinity College London framework).

INITIAL	ELEMENTARY	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
Grades 1-3 (5-7 minutes)	Grades 4-6 (10 minutes)	Grades 7-9 (15 minutes)	Grades 10-12 (25 minutes)
Conversation	Topic discussion Conversation	Candidate-led discussion of topic Interactive task Conversation	Topic presentation Topic discussion Interactive task Listening task Conversation

Table 1: Assessment Summary of the TCL GESE Examinations.

Table 1 summarizes the parts that make up the different TCL GESE examinations according to the assessment of the 12 grades. The timings above cover the time from the candidates' entrance, until they leave the examination room, plus the time for the examiner to fill out the individual Examination report form (Appendix 3: 6).

GESE Syllabus states that regardless of where examinations are conducted, they are graded by 'a qualified Trinity examiner who is trained, standardized and monitored regularly to ensure impartiality and consistency of assessment' (Appendix 3: 8). The examiner assesses the use of language of the particular grade and that of all the preceding grades whose mastery is assumed. That is why TCL Examination Board establishes a series of factors whose fulfillment is assessed in each part of the examination:

- *communicative skills*
- *language functions*
- *grammatical, lexical and phonological items*
- *accuracy in the use of the grammatical, lexical and phonological items*
- *appropriacy of the grammatical, lexical and phonological items used*
- *fluency and promptness of response appropriate for the grade (Appendix 3: 8).*

Finally, an A-D grading scale is awarded to the candidate's performance in each phase of the exam. After these results are entered online onto Trinity Computer System, a certificate is generated:

1. A — Distinction (reflects an excellent performance): Pass with Distinction
2. B — Merit (reflects a good performance): Pass with Merit
3. C — Pass (reflects a satisfactory performance): Pass
4. D — Fail (reflects an unsatisfactory performance)

Once the candidate has passed the examination, an International Certificate is awarded for all levels. These certificates are sent to examination centres - like ACTIVA - for distribution (usually after 6 to 8 weeks). Moreover, this certificate, which is calibrated to the CEFR, is accredited by schools, employers, trainers and universities around the world.

As stated in the Introduction, in this study I will analyse the TCL GESE examination results of more than 300 candidates (see Appendix 2) whose assessment was reported after following the whole procedure shown above. 313 exam candidates will be assessed, and their success will verify the effectiveness of using a CLT approach to teach a class of young learners.

We will now briefly summarize the TCL GESE stages that have been considered for this study. I do not intend to give a very thorough description since this study only analyses the initial and elementary stages (further information and some extended features can be read in detail in the TCL Syllabus - see Appendix 3).

2.2.1. THE INITIAL STAGE. GRADES 1-3 (A1-12.1 CEFR)

By the end of this stage, Trinity College London assures in its GESE syllabus (Appendix 3: 11) that candidates will be able to:

- *understand what is said clearly, slowly and directly in simple everyday conversation with support*
- *communicate in basic and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters*
- *use basic sentence patterns and communicate through simple phrases, groups of a few words and formulae about themselves and other people, what they do, places and possessions*
- *ask and answer simple questions about personal information and everyday life*

2.2.2. THE ELEMENTARY STAGE. GRADES 4-6 (A2.2-B1.2 CEFR)

By the end of this stage, TCL guarantees in its GESE syllabus (Appendix 3: 20) that candidates will be able to:

- *understand the main points of clear speech on familiar matters*
- *enter into conversation, express personal opinions and exchange information on familiar subjects of personal interest or related to everyday life*
- *demonstrate a sufficient range of language to describe experiences and events and give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans (Appendix 3: 20).*

3. OUR STUDY

The main aim of this study is to show the effectiveness of real and meaningful communication within a Trinity College London framework. That is, the candidates' success in Trinity examinations (considering only the Initial and Elementary stages among *Zona Castilla*).

This effectiveness will be shown by the fact that 100% of the exam candidates passed the Trinity exams at the end of the academic year after attending ACTIVA extra classes which follow the CLT approach.

For this purpose, I will analyse two main sets of data in this section: the teacher questionnaires and the candidates' exam results.

In this section I will describe with great detail the whole process carried out to elaborate this dissertation, that is, the methodology used (the participants, who are the teachers asked with the purpose of obtaining valuable data through the questionnaires, the questionnaires, and the TCL GESE examination results of the young learners) and the steps followed to collect and classify all the data obtained from the different sources.

3.1. METHODOLOGY

We will now describe the participants, the questionnaires used to collect the data, the TCL GESE examination results, and how the data were first collected and then classified.

3.1.1. THE PARTICIPANTS

This study in which I want to prove the effectiveness of the CLT approach analyses three different factors: the company ACTIVA, the teachers in charge of instructing the young learners of English L2, and the TCL GESE examination candidates.

The first participant in our study is ACTIVA. It must be stated that the company is the main body involved (www.activa.org). Their status as a Registered TCL Exam Centre lets them conduct tests every year. The company provides an appropriate CLT methodology to all the students who join their English classes every year. This is achieved through a team of qualified professionals: manager, teachers, consultants, sales representatives, and coordinators. The company promotes their PIPE Program (Integral Program of Plurilingual Education – *Programa Integral de Plurilinguismo Educativo*) to different Primary and Secondary schools within the Castilla y León area which includes centres in the provinces of Valladolid, Palencia, and Zamora. The schools enrolled in this program agree to incorporate an independent *English Language Unit* in their centres. These 'units' work towards the expansion of the centres' bilingual concept by offering *extracurricular lessons* within the centres premises. The lessons usually take place in the afternoon after the school day is over. It is ACTIVA's duty to guarantee that these extra classes follow the guidelines set by the TCL. Thus, the

company provides its clients (schools) with communicative and dynamic classes which motivate and encourage English language acquisition.

The second group of participants is the set of teachers that we have analysed. ACTIVA gives a complete and rigorous teacher training course which enables instructors to lead their classes within the CLT approach they promote. These teachers that have taken part in our study have worked or still work in different schools in *Zona Castilla* (terminology used by ACTIVA which includes centres located in the provinces of Valladolid, Palencia, and Zamora). All the teachers consulted are considered to be a valid source of information for the study due to the fact that they had to pass a selection process. In the application process they first went through a phone interview and then, the resulting short list attended an in-person interview with ACTIVA's human resources manager who decided whether they were valid or not to fulfill the tasks they were expected to accomplish for the post. Once they were employed, they all received a specific training course at the beginning of the academic year (if a teacher was recruited at any other time but the beginning of the school year, they would receive a specific training according to the post's requirements). The training is based on a set of guidelines traced by the TCL. The training aims at upgrading teachers' communicative language and teaching skills. It gives an overview of some useful methods for teaching their own pupils on the basis of a communicative approach and, what is more important: it explains how to prepare their students for the TCL Certificate.

The third and central subject of study in this dissertation is the set of TCL GESE examinations conducted among a group of students who satisfactorily and steadily attended and made the most of ACTIVA extra lessons during an academic year. That is why these examinations can be seen as the goal of a year of work within a communicative environment. In addition, this assessment will mark whether CLT is or is not effective at learning English L2 within a TCL framework.

Considering these three sets of participants, our study has followed two main investigation paths. On the one hand, we have analysed the total of 313 examination results of those students who took a TCL GESE examination after attending ACTIVA extra lessons during the academic year 2013-2014 in the schools within *Zona Castilla*. And, on the other hand, we will analyse the questionnaires filled out by the group of 15

teachers L1 Spanish aged 22-47 who worked during the academic year 2013-2014 as English bilingual teachers (English L2) for ACTIVA.

Besides, three official TCL Examiners are also present in this study as far as they assessed all the children studied. The fact that there were three different examiners assures us that their assessment was not corrupted.

Furthermore, ACTIVA's participation was important due to their agreement and involvement: they allowed me to have access to the participants' information needed for the execution of this study. All data has been treated anonymously. Every personal detail regarding the participants – both the teachers and the exam candidates - in the same way as any information about the schools studied have been omitted throughout the study. Since all the information must remain anonymous, a specific nomenclature has been employed throughout the study. That is why the teachers' questionnaires do not show any relevant information which could relate them to the actual people who filled them in (Appendix 1). Schools names have been replaced by Roman numbers: from *School I* to *School XXI* (Appendix 2). Names and Last names of exam candidates have been removed and so given a number: from *Candidate 1* to *Candidate 313* (Appendix 2). They have been classified in Excel tables according to the examiner who conducted their examination. Examiners' personal details have been also omitted and they are referred to by numbers: *Examiner 1*, *Examiner 2*, and *Examiner 3* (Appendix 2).

3.1.2. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In order to get real and high-quality information for the study on the effectiveness of the CLT approach among young learners, a questionnaire was designed (see Appendix 4). It was created according to a series of features of the CLT approach which I wanted to analyze with the purpose of demonstrating the effectiveness of the approach being discussed. The written questionnaire, based on the work by Ozsevik (2010: 90-91), consists of four parts which aim at obtaining real and useful data dealing with the CLT approach, and necessary to accomplish this study:

- I. The *Personal Information* section which has to do with the individual details about the teachers consulted for the study. This section aims at obtaining a general background of the participating teachers. The questions asked in this section were the following:
 1. *Age (21-29 / 30-39 /40-49 /50 or more)*. Teachers were asked which age group they belonged to. Even though this point will not be relevant for the initial purpose of the study, it was included so I could obtain more information about them just in case it might seem relevant for our future objectives.
 2. *Gender (Male/ Female)*. Traditionally, there has been a higher number of female teachers worldwide. In this study, we will find out if ACTIVA follows this pattern.
 3. *How many years have you been studying English?* Since the native language of all our participants is Spanish, a proper instruction in the English language obviously becomes essential. So, this question is crucial for showing how well they know the language in order to be skilled enough to teach a class. However, the fact that a teacher has studied English for an extended period of time does not always imply their mastery of the language. That is why the length, together with the education received at school (question 4), the degrees held (question 5), the language courses taken (question 7), and the experiences abroad (question 6), they all assure a fruitful English acquisition.
 4. *What method/approach/strategy were you taught at school?* This fact is a very important issue due to the fact that everyone is influenced by their education. However, as I will explain in section 4.3.1., all teachers in ACTIVA receive a specific training which makes them acquire the necessary abilities to teach within the Trinity College London framework already described.
 5. *What bachelor/degree/master/other did you study?* The main purpose of this question was to check teachers' competence when answering the questionnaire. Even though not all of them hold a "Teaching Degree" – some have completed different degrees in "Business" (Participant 12), "Art History" (Participant 13), or "Architecture" (Participant 15) -, they are able to teach as they have overcome the selection process by the human resources manager as I explained in section 4.1.1.
 6. *Have you ever studied/worked in any English speaking country? Where? How long?* Having a certain experience abroad is, most of the times, a very positive experience which enhances teachers' skills.
 7. *Have you ever taken a test in English? If yes, what was it? (Trinity exams/Cambridge exams/ TOEFL/other certificates)* Being qualified from an English examination does not always guarantee teachers' language mastery. However, teachers are supposed to be able to master the use of the language as

these tests in English are usually a quality indicator of their performance. Moreover, it sometimes does not happen as some teachers oral skills are not what they are expected (this can be seen when they go through the phone interview and they are automatically excluded if their English is not good).

8. *How many years have you been teaching English?* The matter of experience in teaching is a very important issue due to the fact that experienced teachers usually have better class management, so their students have some kind of advantage over those taught by inexperienced teachers.
- II. The section dedicated to the *School Information* contains data about the teaching environment. It provides a general description of the type of work the teachers are developing, and it includes the following questions:
9. *What type of students are you working with? (Preescolar/Infantil/ Primaria/ ESO/Bachillerato)* Only “Young Learners” - pre-primary and primary students - have been considered for the study.
 10. *According to Trinity College London, what grade are you teaching? (1-12)* Young Learners’ performance ranges from Grade 1 to Grade 6 of the Trinity College London GESE examination scale.
 11. *How many hours of classes do you teach a week to the group(s)?* ACTIVA offers students two hours of English teaching per week; so it depends on the number of groups the teacher instructs that they have a higher or lower number of working hours.
 12. *How many children are there in your group(s)? (0-10 / 11-15 / 16-20 / 21-25)* 12 is the maximum number of students per group to guarantee a quality teaching; however, there are some exceptions depending on the schools’ terms. Sometimes, the schools agree to include more students to the groups already full (those made up of 12 young English learners).
- III. The *CLT approach for teaching English as a foreign language* part compiles data regarding the teaching process itself. This section provides quality data obtained from the questionnaires in which the teachers show their concerns about the CLT. They provide interesting feedback about their experiences as English teachers to young learners within the CLT approach.
13. *What strategy/approach/method do you follow in your classes?* A general question is asked to teachers on how they conduct their classes. Even though they are expected to use the CLT approach taught in the training course they are required to attend to before starting to work for the company. The question is

aimed at acquiring further information about the implementation of the so called CLT approach.

14. *How do you like using it in your classroom? How do you benefit from CLT?* A short description about the class management can be obtained from this question in the way the teacher shows their impressions of the usage of the approach being discussed throughout this paper.
15. *Is CLT more effective than any other traditional teaching method?* Teachers are meant to give their opinions about the advantages of a communicative teaching over any other method.
16. *In what way does CLT profit children who are acquiring English as a second language?* Rich and meaningful information about the effectiveness of the Trinity College London method is gained through this question.
17. *What is involved in CLT methodology in your view? (True/ Not True/ Don't know)*
 - a. *CLT is student/learner-centered approach.*
 - b. *CLT emphasizes fluency over accuracy.*
 - c. *CLT emphasizes communication in a second language (L2).*
 - d. *CLT relies heavily on speaking and listening skills.*
 - e. *CLT requires teachers to have a high proficiency in English.*
 - f. *CLT involves only group work or pair work.*
 - g. *CLT requires higher knowledge of the target language culture.*
 - h. *CLT involves no grammar teaching.*
 - i. *CLT involves teaching speaking only.*

Teachers create a general account of the CLT features by agreeing or disagreeing with the statements above.

- IV. The section dedicated to “*Questions pertaining to perceived difficulties/challenges in adopting CLT*” enables teachers to show their concerns about the CLT approach. In this section, teachers have to give an answer according to a scale which shows the challenge rate that the statement inspires (4 = Major challenge, 3 = Challenge, 2 = Mild challenge, 1 = Not a challenge at all).

18. *Teacher-related difficulties & challenges*
 - i. *Teachers' proficiency in spoken English is not sufficient.*
 - ii. *Teachers lack the knowledge about the target language (English) culture.*
 - iii. *There are few opportunities for teachers to get CLT training.*
19. *Student-related difficulties & challenges*
 - i. *Students have low-level English proficiency.*
 - ii. *Students have a passive style of learning.*
 - iii. *Students resist participating in communicative class activities.*
 - iv. *Students lack motivation for developing communicative competence.*
 - v. *Traditional view on teachers' and learners' role is not compatible*

In line with question 17, questions 18 and 19 provide a detailed view that the teachers have of the CLT approach. In their answers, teachers show their perception of the approach. This time, by marking the statements above according to a scale (4-1), teachers show the higher or lower challenge rate that some situations cause on them when they use the CLT approach in their classes.

20. *Please list any other potential problems and difficulties you might encounter in adopting CLT in Spain.* This is the place where teachers give a more detailed account of the problems, difficult situations or specific aspects they may wish to refer to.

3.1.3. DATA COLLECTION AND CLASSIFICATION

Questionnaires were the main instrument used in order to conduct data. These were sent via email to teachers employed by ACTIVA. In the collection process, I contacted a total of 15 teachers who worked for *ACTIVA Castilla* during the academic year 2013-2014 and they volunteered to complete the questionnaires and forwarding them back to me so I could carry out this study. Despite the company offers English classes for all levels, only pre-primary and elementary teachers (Grades 1-6) have been consulted in order to get the information I wanted to elicit for this study.

The collection of the examination results of the candidates studied was thanks to the collaboration of the company. They agreed to give me access to some of their materials of internal use. The fact that I had free access to all the computer material, such as personal and academic data of each exam candidate, helped me during the research; thus, the access to the TCL GESE examination results was possible. Moreover, as I stated in 4.1.1., the anonymity of each person involved in the investigation was respected at any time.

The classification procedure was an organization task through which all information collected was sorted into different excel documents. After I had collected all the questionnaires, and I had all the information regarding the TCL GESE examination results of the exam candidates, the next step was classifying all the data. Firstly, all the input obtained from these questionnaires answered by the teachers involved in the study was presented in Excel sheets so that the great amount of data obtained could be better analysed (Appendix 1). Secondly, another Excel document was created to show the

results of the TCL GESE Examinations taken by the total of 313 young learners (Appendix 2).

3.2. STUDY DATA ANALYSIS

This section discusses the different results obtained in each part of the questionnaires in relation to the research questions presented in the introduction. It also focuses on the analysis of the TCL GESE results of the exam candidates.

3.2.1. QUESTIONNAIRE DATA ANALYSIS

In this part, we will analyze the information obtained from the teachers' opinions which have been included in Appendix 1. A total of 15 teachers have taken part in this study. Now, we will analyze each question of the questionnaires:

- I. *Personal Information.* Even though this section is not very relevant, every individuals' backgrounds is important in order to better interpret their answers to the questionnaire.
 1. *Age (21-29 / 30-39 /40-49 /50 or more).* The data show a majority of young teachers over those who are over 30 (12 participants aged 21-29, 2 participants aged 30-39, and 1 participant aged 40-49).
 2. *Gender (Male/ Female).* Traditionally, as I said in 4.2.2., there has been a higher number of female (12 participants) than male (3 participants) teachers, a fact which is shown through this study.
 3. *How many years have you been studying English?* An average of 17 is the number of years that the teachers analysed have been studying the language. This means that, due to their general young age, they have been studying English since they started their elementary education, and what is more, many of them are still taking English classes.
 4. *What method/approach/strategy were you taught at school?* Teachers have experienced a range of English teaching approaches during their schooling which let them to acquire the abilities they have nowadays. Even though some of them report to have been taught a communicative approach, most of them agree on the prevalence of more grammar-centered methods in their education.
 5. *What bachelor/degree/master/other did you study?* Most of the teachers consulted have completed a Degree in Teaching (8 participants) and some have expanded their studies by pursuing a Masters degree.

6. *Have you ever studied/worked in any English speaking country? Where? How long?* This experience abroad is not general among the teachers analysed. However, some of them have either studied or worked in a country different from Spain. The participants 4, 6, 7, 11 and 12 studied in different English speaking countries (mainly England and Ireland), and the participants 1, 5 and 6 worked abroad within an English language environment (England, Ireland and Poland).
 7. *Have you ever taken a test in English? If yes, what was it? (Trinity exams/Cambridge exams/TOEFL/other certificates)* The majority of the teachers (10 participants) hold a certificate which acknowledges their performance of the English language. Cambridge official certificates are the most common among these teachers (participants 2, 5, 10, 13 and 15).
 8. *How many years have you been teaching English?* Many of the teachers interviewed have not enough previous work experience (participants 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13 and 15 have worked as English teachers for one or less than one year). Participant 8 has no previous teaching experience: he has only taught private lessons. That is why they are trained under a TCL environment in order to fulfill the objectives aimed at by the company. Others, however, have previous teaching experience which is an advantage to some extent (participants 2, 3, 9, 10, 12 and 14).
- II. *School Information.* Normally, the longer a teacher has been developing their job, the better they teach, as they learn how to connect better with their students, and they are able to realize better their strong and weak qualities. That is why, in this section, by looking deeply into the teachers' statements, several issues come up regarding their skills in order to teach their classes.
9. *What type of students are you working with? (Preescolar/Infantil/Primaria/ESO/Bachillerato)* Eight out of fifteen (8/15) of the teachers work with preschool groups and 14/15 with elementary students. The groups these teachers work with are always formed by no more than 15 children, that way, a direct communication teacher-learner is assured.
 10. *According to Trinity College London, what grade are you teaching? (1-12)* All of the teachers answered that they were able to teach grade 1 after attending the training course at the beginning of the academic year, 11/15 could teach grade 2, 5/15 grade 3, 5/15 grade 4, 2/15 grade 5, and only 1/15 was capable of teaching grade 6.
 11. *How many hours of class do you teach a week to the group(s)?* Each teacher works two hours per week with each group. They acquire more experience as they teach more than one group; this fact is important for the next section of the questionnaire where the teachers' answers to the questions pertaining the CLT approach would be more accurate.

12. *How many children are there in your group(s)? (0-10 / 11-15 / 16-20 / 21-25)* 13/15 have 1-10 students in their group, 6/15 have 11-15, and 1/15 has 15-20 students. The exception of candidate 6 must be pointed out due to the fact that he acts as *coordinator*; it means that they are open to any group, any size, or any provisional group or substitution that may be required.

III. *CLT approach for teaching English as a foreign language.* This section contains all the considerations stated by the teachers interviewed about the CLT. They talk from their personal experiences when using the approach in their English classes to young learners within Activa. By answering the questions below, this group of teachers give a small account of the CLT features.

13. *What strategy/approach/method do you follow in your classes?* Even though teachers sometimes ignore the terminology used in this field, they all refer to a ‘communicative approach’ in which the oral part plays a main role. Moreover, some candidates mention different approaches such as the *Task-based approach* (Participant 7), or the *audio-lingual method* (Participant 10).

14. *How do you like using it in your classroom? How do you benefit from CLT?* All teachers agree on the fact that the CLT is more advantageous than any other method or approach since it is fun and entertaining. Children find themselves motivated within a real English language environment (Participant 6 states: the approach ‘has great benefits for children. They learn and enjoy at the same time’ (Appendix 1, sheet III)).

15. *Is CLT more effective than any other traditional teaching method?* All participants assert the effectiveness of this approach. For example, in the questionnaire, Participant 15 presented the approach as ‘especially effective to learn ‘useful’ language to manage real situations’ (Appendix 1, sheet III).

16. *In what way does CLT profit children who are acquiring English as a second language?* Different skills are developed through this approach; teachers mention *verbal fluency and confidence* (Participant 13), *communication* (Participants 5, 12 and 14), and *motivation* (Participant 15) among others.

17. *What is involved in CLT methodology in your view? (True/ Not True/ Don’t know)* A general picture regarding CLT can be traced through teachers’ evaluation. The following table shows all the information contained in Appendix 1, sheet III question 17

17.	Number of participants								
Answer	a	b	c	D	e	F	g	h	I
True	14	10	15	14	11	3	6	2	2
Don’t Know	1	0	0	0	2	0	2	1	0
Not True	0	3	0	1	2	12	7	12	13

True and Not True³	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15

Table 2: What is involved in CLT methodology in your view?

Table 2 contains the number of participants who answered to question 17. They could choose among several options, and those are the choices that are reflected in the table.

- a. *CLT is an student/learner-centered approach.* All but participant 12 agree with this statement.
- b. *CLT emphasizes fluency over accuracy.* The majority (10 participants) supports this utterance but there are some who do not agree with it (3 participants) and others who are doubtful (2 participants).
- c. *CLT emphasizes communication in a second language (L2).* All participants agree on this point.
- d. *CLT relies heavily on speaking and listening skills.* Only Participant 7 does not accept this affirmation.
- e. *CLT requires teachers to have a high proficiency in English.* This is an important aspect for most of the teachers (11 participants), but there are also some who show their skepticism.
- f. *CLT involves only group work or pair work.* Participants are not happy with this claim as most of them consider it a false statement.
- g. *CLT requires higher knowledge of the target language culture.* There is not a unified judgment. Participants place themselves into two opposite stances and two of them show doubts towards the statement.
- h. *CLT involves no grammar teaching.* There is a general disagreement with this sentence (12 participants), but there are 3 participants who do not completely reject the present claim.
- i. *CLT involves teaching speaking only.* In line with the previous claim, teachers also show their disagreement with this idea.

IV. *Questions pertaining to perceived difficulties/ challenges in adopting CLT.* This section shows very valuable data about the existing difficulties or challenges. Through a scale of 4 (from *major* to *not challenge at all*), the teachers asked expressed their concerns encountered when the approach had been used. Firstly, I have created the following table in order to have a complete view of the answers given by the participants in questions 18 and 19 (Appendix 1, sheet IV):

DIFFICULTIES/CHALLENGES IN ADOPTING CLT	N° of participants	
	Question 18	Question 19

³ It must be pointed out that two participants (4 and 11) included a new option “True and not True” in order to give what they considered a more accurate answer to question 17,b.

	I	II	III	I	II	III	IV	V
1= not a challenge at all	0	4	3	0	1	7	7	2
2= mild challenge	5	6	6	5	2	2	2	4
3=challenge	6	3	4	4	5	4	2	5
4=major challenge	4	2	2	6	7	2	3	4

Table 3: Difficulties/Challenges in adopting CLT

Table 3 shows the teachers' points of view about what they consider to be challenging when they use the CLT approach.

Now, each statement is analysed in terms of the participants' choices. According to their answers to the questionnaires, the following was concluded:

18. *Teacher-related difficulties & challenges.*

i. Teachers' proficiency in spoken English is not sufficient. Not being enough skilled to communicate perfectly with their students entails a challenge for the majority of the teachers.

ii Teachers lack the knowledge about the target language (English) culture. The participants asked did not show their concerns for this statement; from their point of view, the fact of knowing the target language culture is not essential when teaching an English class.

iii. There are few opportunities for teachers to get CLT training. Not receiving a CLT training is not a major problem for teachers. It can be inferred from here that they can make any necessary research about the approach on their own in order to learn how to lead a CLT class.

19. *Student-related difficulties & challenges*

i. Students have low-level English proficiency. Participants consider the students' lack of English language command a big challenge when teaching a class. Teachers find some trouble when their students' English level is low.

ii. Students have a passive style of learning. According to the previous statement, any students' passive attitude complicates teachers in their class management.

iii. Students resist participating in communicative class activities. Even though students in general do not take a participative attitude in the class, teachers do not report it as being a challenge at all.

iv. Students lack motivation for developing communicative competence. The students' motivation does not seem to represent any difficulty to the teachers.

v. Traditional view on teachers' and learners' role is not compatible with CLT. Teachers consider it a challenge as they think that there is no place for the traditional methods of instruction within the CLT approach.

20. *Please list any other potential problems and difficulties you might encounter in adopting CLT in Spain.*⁴

Participant 1: ‘According to my beliefs, families might be one “difficulty” in adopting CLT in Spain. With CLT approach, worksheets are mostly unnecessary, but in parents’ eyes, this is not because of the methodological approach but because of a lack of interest and professionalism from the teacher’. As it can be seen, he shows his concerns about the fact that a CLT approach implementation raises some parents’ dissatisfaction. They consider this to be an ‘easy and unprofessional’ teaching approach.

Participant 2: ‘The educational system tends to be traditional but is changing in many ways, still a long way to go’. Participant 2 shows a slight optimism in the implementation of the CLT. She is waiting for a future in which CLT is the only approach used.

Participant 7: ‘Perhaps the number of hours is not enough. It is also a problem the passivity we find in some students, you really have to force them in order to speak English’. This participant raises two different questions: the insufficient number of teaching hours and the fact that students are not autonomous at speaking, which is a great hindrance in language teaching.

Participant 8: ‘Children are used to learn English by means of other methods and it is difficult for them to change it’. The existence of a traditional way of teaching is still a fact, so it often makes students who are familiarized with those methods, reject the CLT approach.

Participant 9: ‘A big problem that I perceive in CLT method in Spain, apart from the traditional view, is the approach of the society. By this I mean that in Spain there is very little help with English from the culture. Other countries include the English culture much more strongly in the society by movies, tv shows, etc., and the vision of language as an opportunity to create relations with the rest of the world is much more broad, whereas here you can even get laughed at if you pronounce a word incorrectly’. Participant 9 openly blames Spanish culture for the problems in adopting the CLT approach.

Participant 15: ‘in my opinion, there are two main difficulties. On the one hand this method requires a higher workload from the teacher than others, and there is no remuneration of any way for using it. And on the other hand it is a method that does not fit the format of the most famous certificates in English as FCE or CAE, which give more value to grammar’. Two problems are noted by Participant 15 when implementing CLT in Spain: on the one hand, the extra

⁴ Before analysing the teachers’ answers in this section, it must be said that their statements have been copy-pasted from the questionnaires to the excel tables.

effort required on the part of the teacher, and, on the other hand, the uselessness of this method when these students decide to apply for Cambridge official certificates which are the most widely recognized in his view.

3.2.2. TCL TRINITY EXAMINATION RESULTS TABLES DATA ANALYSIS

All the TCL GESE examination results of the 313 exam candidates were organized in an excel document (Appendix 2). In order to get a clear view of their performance in the examinations it was necessary to arrange the candidates' into tables. First, they were classified by examiners in three different excel sheets (examiner 1, examiner 2, and examiner 3), and within these, they were sub classified by examination centres (school I – school XXI). In sum, this excel document (see Appendix 2) which was created to show the TCL GESE examination results display, in three independent excel sheets, the assessment given by the three TCL official examiners presented in section 3.1. As I said before, this assessment consisted on rating each of the candidates' performance based on a scale A-D (this procedure has been already explained in section 2.2.). Each examiner evaluated a number of exam candidates belonging to various schools

I. Examiner 1. This sheet includes the assessment given to the students who attend to schools I-XIV.

II. Examiner 2. This sheet includes the assessment given to students the students who attend to schools XV- XX

III. Examiner 3. This sheet includes the assessment given to students the students who attend to school XXI.

A fourth sheet was created in order to summarize the information shown in the three previous sheets. The percentages corresponding to the number of passing grade candidates were also calculated.

IV. Results. The results presented in Sheet IV display that 99,3610224% candidates passed the their TCL GESE examination. Moreover, this number is not reliable when assuring the effectiveness of the CLT approach within a TCL environment due to the fact that those two exam candidates who make up the 0,63897764 failure rate

percentage were not enrolled in ACTIVA extra classes. So our initial hypothesis is accepted and we can assure that the CLT approach is an effective method as far as all exam candidates passed their examinations after completing an Activa English course.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The ultimate goal of the study was to show the real effectiveness of learning English from a CLT approach. The study was conducted within a TCL framework: a total of 311 exam candidates succeeded in their official examinations at the end of the course 2014-2015. These students attended to Activa extra lessons which helped them acquire the skills and knowledge needed for their purpose.

The results shown in the questionnaires (based on Ozsevic, 2010) respond to the teachers' concerns on the approach being discussed. Teachers were supposed to agree on the same thoughts when reporting what the CLT implies and how they use it in their English classes due to the fact that they all receive an initial training course at the beginning of the academic year as I explained in section 3.1.1. However, that supposition was not absolutely confirmed because some teachers' answers are not what they were expected at the beginning of the study. This lead us to believe that they did not receive a good training on the CLT so they have not a unified idea of what it is about. Even though this situation could have been revised to avoid such problems, all the teachers analysed agreed on the fact that the best method for teaching English language at an early age is the communicative approach.

Looking at the questionnaires it can be concluded that most of the teachers are young women who have been studying English for about 17 years and they hold, at least, a university degree. During their school years, they received a grammar-centered education, and only seven of them had a studying or working experience abroad. By the time they were asked, they used to teach primary students twice a week generally in groups of no more than 10 students each. The majority of teachers taught their classes according to the Trinity Grade 2 guidelines in order to make their students pass the TCL GESE at the end of the course.

Furthermore, the following ideas can be concluded after analysing 'Part III' of the questionnaires in which teachers agreed on the fact that the CLT approach focuses on learners (Question 17a), it emphasizes fluency (17b) and communication in a second language (17c), and it relies heavily on speaking and listening skills (17d). They also showed the importance for teachers to have a high proficiency in English (17e) and a higher knowledge of the target language culture (17g). Teachers also shown their concerns when using the approach: they encounter some problems when their proficiency in spoken English is not sufficient (18i), when there are few opportunities for them to get CLT training (18iii), when they lack the knowledge about the English culture (18ii), when students have low-level English proficiency (19i), and when students have a passive style of learning (19ii). However, the fact that students resist participating in communicative class activities (19iii), or that students lack motivation for developing communicative competence (19iv) did not mean a challenge at all for them. All these statements create a general image of what CLT is and what it involves.

After studying the 15 questionnaires and looking at the candidates' TCL GESE examination results, the efficacy of the CLT approach has been demonstrated. The success of this approach can be seen in this practical study: all the students who attended to Activa communicative extra lessons passed their TCL examinations (more than 99% of the exam candidates analysed).

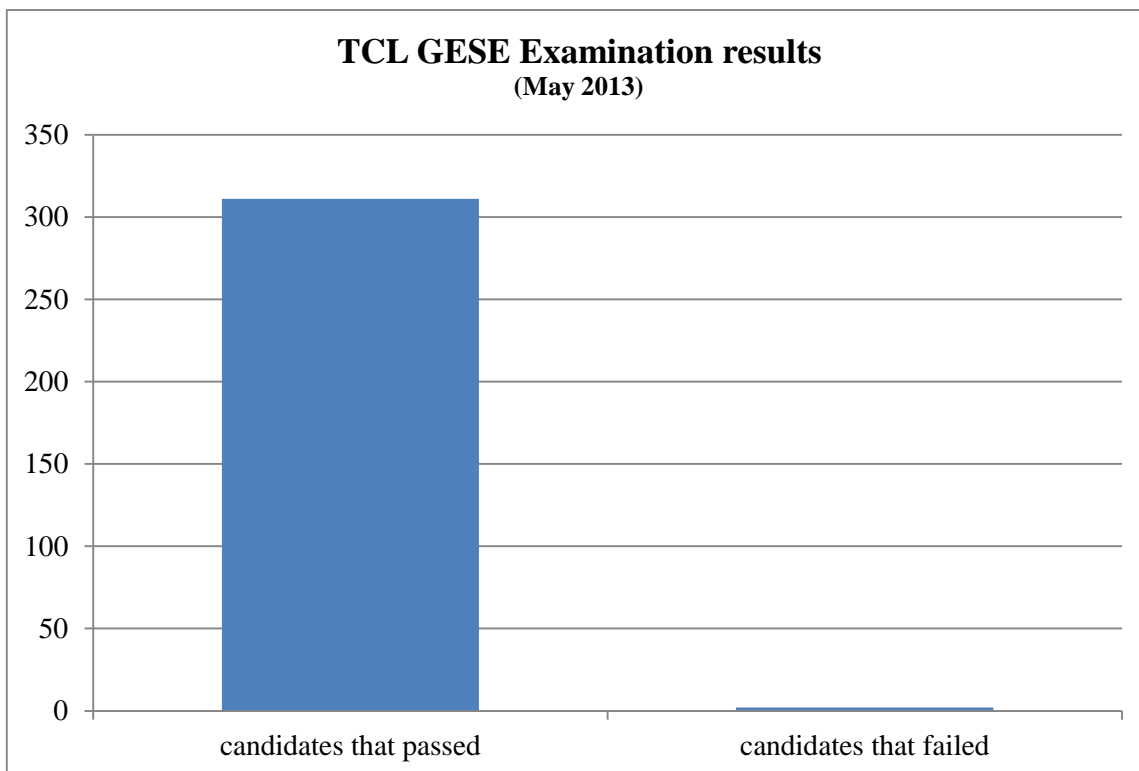


Chart 1: 'TCL GESE examination results'

This Chart 1 shows the number of exam candidates who took a TCL GESE examination (313). The first column shows the number of young learners who passed their corresponding exam (311); and, the second column shows the two exam candidates who did not pass the exam (the reasons for these failures have been already explained in section 3.2.2.).

Despite the fact that there are some aspects⁵ that did not allow the 100% success of the approach (number which we want to demonstrate in this study) the CLT is still the best approach for teaching a language due to the real situations that are proposed in the class. The CLT makes children become involved in the communicative learning process due to the use of meaningful and real material; it is a process of immersion in the target language by which learners become self aware of the broad environment which surrounds the English language. The CLT approach is '*learner-centered*' and it promotes a 'highly personalised teaching programme which gives both the learner and

⁵ We are referring to the two individual cases: candidates 246 and 247 who, as I explained in 4.3.2., did not attend to ACTIVA's extra classes and they failed their TCL GESE examinations.

the teacher an optimal environment in which to work' (Yalden, 1983: 155).

Through the study carried out, it is possible to agree on the effectiveness of the CLT approach. The hypothesis which was set up in the introduction has been checked, so it can be stated that TCL methods for the teaching of languages are truly efficient. The effectiveness of real and meaningful communication within a TCL framework has been proved. So, there is reason to believe that, nowadays, the CLT approach is the best language teaching method for young Spanish speakers aiming at acquiring English as L2 (ESL).

Finally, I would like to show my personal opinion, by agreeing with the effectiveness of the CLT approach over any traditional teaching method which has been explained at the beginning of the study (section 2). From my personal experience, I have seen its effectiveness in the fact that the students nowadays have a much higher English language performance than they used to have in the past. Children who are studying English with ACTIVA extra classes, are, by far, more skilled than those people who used to be taught English through a traditional approach.

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