


Oral Communicative Competence and Active Methodologies in Higher Education: University Teachers' Perspectives


Marta Gràcia

Universidad de Barcelona ✉ 


Daniel Ondé Pérez

Universidad Complutense de Madrid ✉ 

Beatriz Cabellos

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid ✉ 

Jesús M^a Alvarado Izquierdo

Universidad Complutense de Madrid ✉ 

<https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/rced.100634>

Received: January 2025 • Evaluated: March 2025 • Accepted: April 2025

Abstract: Oral communicative competence (OCC) is a key skill for students' academic and professional development; however, its effective integration into higher education teaching practices remains uneven. This study examines university teachers' perspectives on student participation, their readiness to adopt active learning methodologies, and the strategies used to promote OCC in the classroom.

A survey was administered to 867 teachers across different disciplines Spanish universities. The results reveal a growing awareness of the need to move towards more participatory teaching approaches, although important gaps persist between teachers' intentions and actual classroom practices. Differences across disciplines and teaching contexts highlight structural and pedagogical barriers to student engagement.

Findings suggest that fostering OCC requires not only methodological change but also targeted professional development and institutional support. The study contributes to current debates on students' participation and oral communicative competences in higher education by identifying key challenges and opportunities for enhancing them.

Keywords: oral communicative competence; active participation; university students; higher education; university teachers

EN Competencia comunicativa oral y metodologías activas en la universidad: percepciones del profesorado

Resumen: La competencia comunicativa oral (CCO) es una habilidad clave para el desarrollo académico y profesional del estudiantado universitario; sin embargo, su integración efectiva en la práctica docente sigue siendo desigual. Este estudio analiza las percepciones del profesorado universitario sobre la participación del alumnado, su disposición hacia metodologías de aprendizaje activo y las estrategias utilizadas para promover la CCO en el aula.

Se administró un cuestionario a 867 docentes de distintas disciplinas de universidades españolas. Los resultados evidencian una creciente conciencia sobre la necesidad de avanzar hacia enfoques más participativos, aunque persisten brechas relevantes entre las intenciones docentes y las prácticas reales. Asimismo, se identifican diferencias según áreas de conocimiento y contextos educativos, que ponen de manifiesto barreras estructurales y pedagógicas para la participación del alumnado.

Los hallazgos sugieren que el desarrollo de la CCO requiere no solo cambios metodológicos, sino también formación docente específica y apoyo institucional. El estudio contribuye a los debates actuales sobre la participación del estudiantado y sus competencias comunicativas en educación superior, al identificar retos y oportunidades para mejorarlas.

Palabras clave: competencia comunicativa oral; participación activa; estudiantado universitario; educación superior; profesorado universitario

Sumario: 1. Introduction 2. Methods 2.1. Participants 2.2. Instrument 2.3. Procedure 2.4. Data Analysis 3. Results 3.1. Methodology and student participation 3.2. Teaching Actions and Strategies to Foster OCC 4. Discussion and conclusions 5. References

Cómo citar: Gràcia M., Ondé Pérez D. ., Cabellos B. y Alvarado Izquierdo J. M. (2026). Oral Communicative Competence and Active Methodologies in Higher Education: University Teachers' Perspectives. *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 37(3), 515-525. <https://doi.org/10.5209/rced.100634>

1. Introduction

University studies provide students with the opportunity to develop a set of skills which are essential for their personal, social and professional growth. Among these skills is oral communicative competence (OCC), defined as the ability to orally express and interpret ideas, thoughts, emotions, facts and opinions, as well as to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in various social and cultural contexts (Council of the European Union, 2006).

Competency in oral language allows the student to produce complex, coherent, cohesive utterances that are appropriate to the context, while at the same time affording the student the ability to request information, argue, ask for clarification, refute, synthesise, summarise, reflect on their own language, etc., with various interlocutors and with different objectives (Camus et al., 2019; Ondé et al., 2024). This confirms that OCC is an increasingly demanded skill in society, especially in university students who will join the labour market. Oral language teaching and learning must be a priority in university contexts, since mastery thereof has implications at a personal, professional and social level. This is in line with the provisions of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001), which gives foundational importance to OCC.

For university students to develop OCC, it is essential that they actively participate in classes, asking questions, engaging in debate, providing a critical view of the content, making counter-arguments, managing conversations, etc. It is also key that teachers learn and implement strategies to promote student participation in their classes, and that they progressively abandon traditional lecture-based classes (Balloo et al., 2025). To achieve this, the role of the university instructor (also called “teacher” or “professor” in this article) in promoting the participation of students in class is fundamental.

Therefore, in this study the authors propose identifying university instructors' perceptions of student participation in their classes, if they intend to move from lecture-based classes towards more participatory classes and what strategies are used to foster OCC among their students.

Development of OCC is essential at all levels and educational contexts, not only because of how it fosters the effective sharing of information in various settings, but also because it has clear utility for grasping content and, therefore, in the development of other skills. The importance of OCC lies not only in its function as a means of demonstrating knowledge acquired in the classroom, but also in its role as a psychological tool that facilitates the construction and transformation of knowledge, enhances meaningful learning, and encourages reflective thinking, among other benefits (Baker et al., 2020; Littleton and Mercer, 2013). In other words, OCC is critical to the cognitive development, academic performance, and future employability of university students (Vass and Littleton, 2010). In this vein, several studies highlight OCC as a strong predictor of academic performance (Mercer et al., 2017) and employability (Bolívar-Cruz and Verano-Tacoronte, 2018).

This potential of OCC at higher levels explains why recent research supports and promotes the integration of OCC development into university curricula. Studies have shown that explicit work to develop OCC skills can lead to improved academic performance and better preparation for professional career paths (Atkins and Heron, 2024; Doherty et al., 2011; Cebrián-Robles et al., 2018). Therefore, it is imperative to implement specific actions to foster OCC, given that these skills can be honed and improved (Mercer et al., 2017).

Gràcia et al. (2022, 2023) have designed a professional development resource that is based on instructor reflections at different educational levels, as well as an evaluation of the strategies teachers use with their students to promote OCC and the associated student progress. The main instrument of this training resource is the digital resource Assessment Scale for Oral Language Teaching at School – decision support system (EVALOE-SSD-UNI), which allows teachers to engage in this reflection through the analysis of their own classes (Gràcia et al., 2022, 2023). The conceptual approach that underlies the EVALOE-SSD-UNI digital resource focuses on reflection and introducing actions into classes which are linked to the five communicative dimensions shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Dimensions in which the 30 items of the digital resource EVALOE-SSD-UNI are grouped

Dimension	Definition
D1. Instructional design	This dimension covers the pedagogical actions relating to the planning and explanation process which teachers consider necessary to help students acquire OCC.
D2. Instructor's management of conversation	This dimension refers to the set of actions relating to what the teacher does to encourage students to communicate in class through oral language, to converse with teachers, or with each other in an increasingly autonomous way. This process begins by giving concrete instructions on how to do so, and progressively helping to autonomously manage the conversation.
D3. Student conversation management	This dimension includes the actions carried out by students to help ensure that communication and conversation are always present in the classroom.
D4. Teacher strategies to promote the use of oral language for different purposes by students	Covers actions by teachers aimed at helping students use oral language with different intentions or purposes. In the same way, this dimension includes the strategies used by the teacher to help students improve their follow-up interventions, such as expansions, reformulations or clarifications.
D5. Student communicative functions	This dimension includes the student interventions that have specific communicative intentions or purposes such as: giving information, expressing one's own ideas, obtaining information or asking questions, expressing doubts, expressing interest, protesting or policing the actions of others.

Source: EVALOE-SSD-UNI (Gràcia et al., 2022)

Despite the importance of OCC and efforts to give university teachers resources for fostering it in their classes, research indicates that it is often approached irregularly and with unclear objectives in higher education settings (Martín and Chireac, 2022; Ondé et al., 2024; Wallden and Larsson, 2022).

Several studies (Ondé et al., 2024) have identified that, although OCC is recognised as a key aspect in university education, it is not given the attention or efforts necessary to foster it appropriately. Rather, there is evidence that there are few activities aimed at OCC development in university settings (Domingo et al., 2010; Gargallo et al., 2020). In addition, the existing research does not seem to focus on how teachers incorporate the elements of OCC dimensions into their classes, as defined in the digital training resource EVALOE-SSD-UNI (see Ondé et al., 2024).

One of the causes for this lack of attention to OCC in university classes may be the scant preparation given to teachers to foster these skills. Several studies highlight that university teachers admit that language competence is given insufficient weight in teaching plans and they feel unprepared to teach these skills (Sarceda and Rodicio-García, 2018; Villarroel and Bruna, 2014).

The students themselves also perceive and report this limited presence of activities aimed at promoting OCC (Maldonado et al., 2022). Several studies show that university students have few opportunities to express themselves orally, and that these activities carry little weight in the final evaluations (Fallarino et al., 2020; Ion and Cano, 2012). Likewise, students often do not recognise the importance of oral language in their learning (Martín and Chireac, 2022). This fact explains that in a study carried out by Ondé et al. (2024) it was found that 60.6% of instructors report low student participation in their classes, highlighting the need for more interactive teaching approaches.

The decision to promote OCC at the university level may be determined by several factors. Among the most relevant are awareness of OCC's importance for anyone in a professional environment. That awareness can be fostered through more participatory and reflective classes where teachers and students give adequate weight to this competence. In addition, aspects such as a consideration of gender, teaching experience, teachers' academic background and the area of knowledge also play a key role in the degree and manner of fostering OCC.

As just noted, one of the fundamental variables in implementing certain teaching practices is the degree to which teachers are aware of their own practices and their beliefs about how to incorporate certain strategies, as well as resources or activities to refine their teaching practices. In this sense, studies on beliefs find that beliefs affect teacher attitudes, which explains the implementation of some practices or others. Studies in this vein have identified how beliefs regarding computer technologies (Cabellos et al., 2023), educational inclusion (Gonzalez-Gil et al., 2019) or the characteristics of teaching and learning processes (Ertmer et al., 2015; Pozo et al., 2006) affect the activities carried out in the classroom. This fact does not exclude beliefs about participation in promoting OCC. For example, several studies focused on promoting OCC in foreign language classes identified that there was a positive correlation between the importance given to OCC and the number of activities designed to promote it (Yuksel et al., 2021).

However, it should also be borne in mind that, generally, teacher beliefs, independent of the subject about which the instructors are asked, tend to be more complex than what is actually done in class (Arancibia et al., 2020; Kaymakamoglu, 2018). In the specific case of OCC, Ondé et al. (2024), found that 72.8% of teachers are considering a redesign of classes to favour a more participatory exchange, indicating a growing awareness of the need for a shift. However, as we pointed out earlier, practices in this vein are executed at a low rate (Domingo et al., 2010; Gargallo et al., 2020).

Another aspect that is especially noteworthy is the effect of instructor gender on promoting OCC-focused participatory activities. Despite the small amount of research conducted on this topic, it is noteworthy that in a recent study carried out by Ondé et al. (2024), it was found that female teachers show a greater interest in using participatory teaching methods than male teachers.

The influence of the student's gender is also relevant when analysing OCC. The meta-analysis carried out by Petersen (2018) suggests that the differences between men and women, even at different ages, are negligible, and have become smaller over the years. Likewise, in OCC tests in the English Language subject, no significant gender impact was identified either (Huang, 2010; O'Loughlin, 2002). On the other hand, when the attitudes of students towards OCC are analysed, no differences are observed as a function of this variable (Harb et al., 2013). However, recent studies in university settings highlight that when class dynamics are analysed, inequalities in student participation do appear based on gender, with men usually exhibiting greater leadership in interventions (Martínez Martín et al., 2020; Ramos-Pardo et al., 2021).

In previous studies (Gràcia et al., 2020, 2024a, 2024b, 2025; Ondé et al., 2024) we have analysed university classes and interviewed teachers at the early childhood and primary education levels in order to develop assessment and intervention tools to improve the quality of initial training for future teachers. In this project, we are interested in learning what aspects and characteristics of university professors and teaching staff in various subjects are related to OCC development, for which we put forward the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of university professors regarding the teaching methodologies used, their interest in making them more participatory, and the strategies used to promote OCC among their students?
2. How do university instructors perceive the characteristics of their classes with respect to instructional design, conversation management and strategies for this, and students' communicative functions?

- How do these perceptions differ according to the educational level of the subject (bachelor's or master's level), the teacher's educational background (with or without a university master's degree), their gender, the type of subject and student gender?

2. Methods

A cross-sectional survey study was conducted using non-probability sampling.

2.1. Participants

Eight hundred and sixty-seven professors from Spanish universities participated, of which 60.1% were women and 38.5% were men. This sample was obtained from a total population of 137,090 professors affiliated with the Spanish university system in the 2022-23 academic year (Spanish University System, 2023). Although the sampling was non-probabilistic, the sample obtained has a similar distribution in variables of interest with respect to the total population, which allows for a suitable approximation (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison between population and sample data

Features of the study	Population ^a	Sample
<i>No. of universities</i>	91	57
Public	50 (54.9%)	35 (61.4%)
Private	41 (45.1%)	22 (38.6%)
<i>Teacher gender</i>		
Women	56.5%	60.1%
Men	43.5%	38.5%
Other	---	1.4%
<i>Teacher age</i>		
< 35 years	9.0%	12.4%
35-40 years	9.7%	9.2%
40-50 years	29.6%	31.1%
50-60 years	33.6%	32.8%
> 60 years	11.9%	14.6%
<i>Ownership model</i>		
Public	81.5%	87.1%
Private	18.5%	12.9%

Source: Spanish University System (2023, 2024a, 2024b).

2.2. Instrument

A questionnaire with response options presented in a Likert scale was used. Questionnaire items were grouped into three blocks: 1) demographic and academic data of teachers, 2) perceptions about teachers' strategies and methodologies in relation to OCC, and 3) differences that teachers perceive in relation to OCC as concerns the gender of students.

2.3. Procedure

The email addresses of university professors from the 91 Spanish universities were collected using institutional websites and a Python-based scraping procedure. From this list, an invitation for voluntary participation in the research was sent to these emails. The associated message stated that this study was part of a research project within the Spanish national R+D plan. The information collection was carried out during the months of April and May 2024. Informed consent of the participants was requested as a preliminary step for access to the survey.

2.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential analyses were performed using the SPSS statistical software to examine teachers' perceptions and differences according to variables such as teaching only at the bachelor's degree level, having a master's degree, area of knowledge, teacher gender, and student gender. To compare between the different groups and evaluate the differences in statistical significance, a χ^2 test was used.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model was applied using the R program (polychoric correlation matrix, Diagonally Weighted Least Squares (DWLS) estimator) to validate the conceptual model based on the five dimensions proposed in this work. To assess the fit of the model, the following indices and recommendations were taken into account (Brown, 2015): comparative fit index (CFI > .95), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI > .95), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA < .08), and standardised root mean square residual (SRMR < .08). Once the factorial structure was validated, the reliability value (i.e., internal consistency) for each dimension was estimated using Cronbach's alpha. Once the structure composed of five dimensions was validated at the sample level, the scores obtained in each dimension were used as inputs for a mixed factorial ANOVA model.

3. Results

3.1. Methodology and student participation

The results in relation to the first research question - on identifying how teachers perceive their teaching methodologies and their efforts to promote oral communicative participation and competence of students and identifying the differences between these perceptions based on the variables analysed (see question 3) - indicate that the majority of participating teachers (73%) consider changing their lecture classes to be more participatory, with some statistically significant differences observed in some of the variables. Figure 1 shows that female instructors report a greater predisposition than male instructors (75.7% vs. 68.8%; $\chi^2_1 = 4.9$, $p = .028$). In addition, if we compare teachers who have a master's degree to those who do not, we see that the former have a greater predisposition to change (75.8% compared to 68.3%; $\chi^2_1 = 5.8$, $p = .016$). It is also observed that teachers who teach master's subjects have a greater predisposition than those who only teach undergraduate subjects (75.3% compared to 69.2%; $\chi^2_1 = 4.4$, $p = .036$), which, among other aspects, may be related to a lower average size of class groups. Finally, teachers who perceive low student participation in their classes, compared to those who observe high participation, are more prone to change (76.9% compared to 66.6%; $\chi^2_1 = 10.9$, $p = .011$).

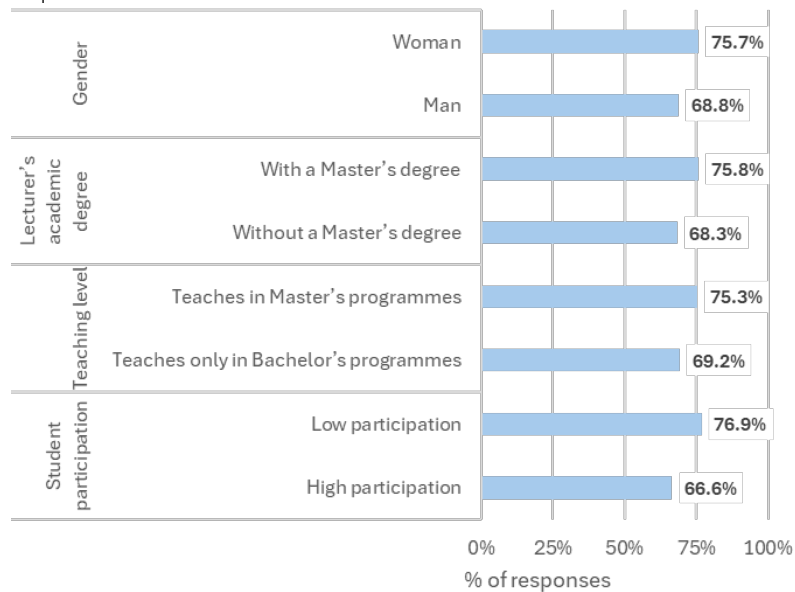


Figure 1. Willingness to transform lecture classes into more participatory classes

Regarding the student participation variable, in Figure 2 we can see that teachers consider that, in general, student participation is low; percentages are below even 30% in Engineering/Architecture and Sciences, although in the Humanities the percentage is slightly higher than 50% ($\chi^2_4 = 20.7$, $p < .001$).

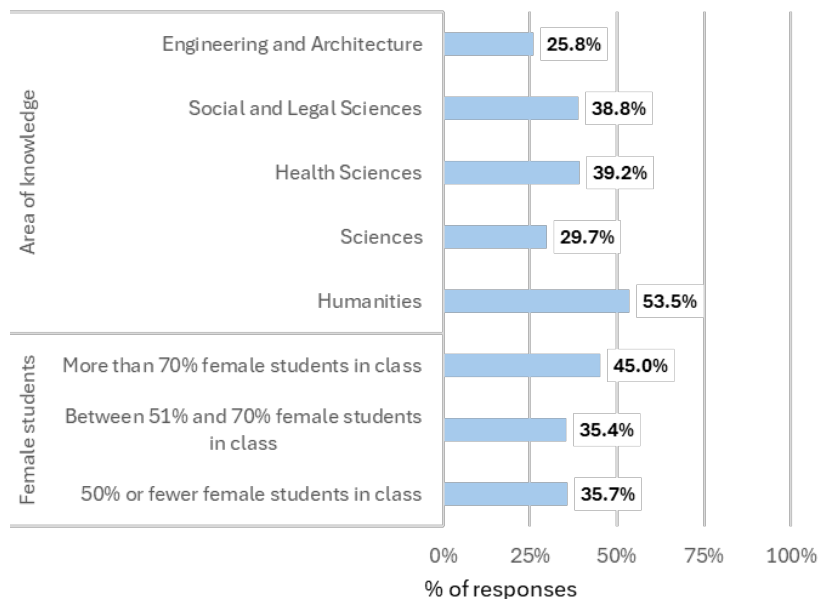


Figure 2. Percentage of participation based on area of knowledge and proportion of female students

In addition, information was collected on the approximate proportion of male and female students who were grouped into three blocks: 50% or less female students (21.7% of the sample), between 51 and 70% (38.8%), more than 70% (39.5%). Figure 2 shows that there is a slightly higher percentage of participation (45%) among teachers whose classes have more than 70% female students ($\chi^2_2 = 7.6$, $p = .022$).

3.2. Teaching Actions and Strategies to Foster OCC

A CFA model of correlated factors was conducted on the data, with the five dimensions being specified as the content factors or facets. An initial analysis revealed an acceptable goodness of fit ($\chi^2_{395} = 4441.5$, $p < .001$, CFI = .965, TLI = .961, RMSEA = .110, SRMR = .086) except in RMSEA and chi-square that is not interpretable in large samples. The modification indices (MI) allowed us to detect overlap between two items in dimension 5 (D5) ("My students improve their participation after I, or one of their classmates, have done some reworking [item 23] or make a clarification [item 24]"). The CFA model was respecified by freeing the corresponding parameter, and an appropriate goodness of fit was obtained ($\chi^2_{394} = 3637.4$, $p < .001$, CFI = .972, TLI = .969, RMSEA = .098, SRMR = .078). All factor loadings estimated by this model were statistically significant ($p < .05$) and a level of correlation between factors ranging from .466 (correlation between D1 and D3) to .813 (correlation between D3 and D5) was obtained. The reliability estimate for each of the dimensions (Cronbach's alpha) was as follows: .881 (D1), .879 (D2), .656 (D3), .881 (D4), and .851 (D5, with item 24 removed due to overlap with item 23).

To answer the second research question (exploring how teachers assess the design of their classes, conversation management and the communicative role of students) a 5x5x2x3 mixed factorial ANOVA model was first created with the dimension as an intra-subject factor (5), and the area of knowledge (5), the gender of the teacher (2) and the percentage of female students (3) as inter-subject factors.

The dimension that obtained the highest response averages was D2 (teachers' management of the conversation, mean = 4.2). D4 follows as dimension with the second highest average (teacher strategies, mean = 3.8). Next are D3 (students' conversation management, mean = 3.3) and D5 (student communicative functions, mean = 3.3). Last is D1 (instructional design, mean = 2.8).

The differences between the averages obtained by each dimension were shown to be statistically significant ($F_{4,778} = 188.0$; $p < .001$), with a high effect size ($\eta^2 = .489$).

Regarding question 3 (on the differences between these perceptions based on the variables analysed) statistically significant differences were found for the variables area of knowledge ($F_{4,789} = 5.0$; $p < .001$) and teacher gender ($F_{1,789} = 17.0$; $p < .001$), although the effect size is small in both cases ($\eta^2 = .025$ and $\eta^2 = .021$, respectively). In general, the highest response rates were found among teachers in the Humanities and social sciences and Legal areas (compared to the lowest rates reflected in the Engineering/Architecture and Science areas), and also among female teachers. There were no significant results related to interaction effects between the inter-subject factors analysed, although we did find significant interactions between some intra-subject effects. Specifically, there is a significant interaction between dimension and areas of knowledge ($F_{16,3156} = 3.9$; $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .019$), and dimension and gender ($F_{4,786} = 3.4$; $p = .010$; $\eta^2 = .017$). However, these statistically significant interactions seem to be the result of marginal differential effects. Figure 3 shows the differences in the assessment of the dimensions in connection with areas of knowledge. No significant results were obtained in respect of the proportion of male and female students ($F_{2,789} = 0.8$; $p = .470$).

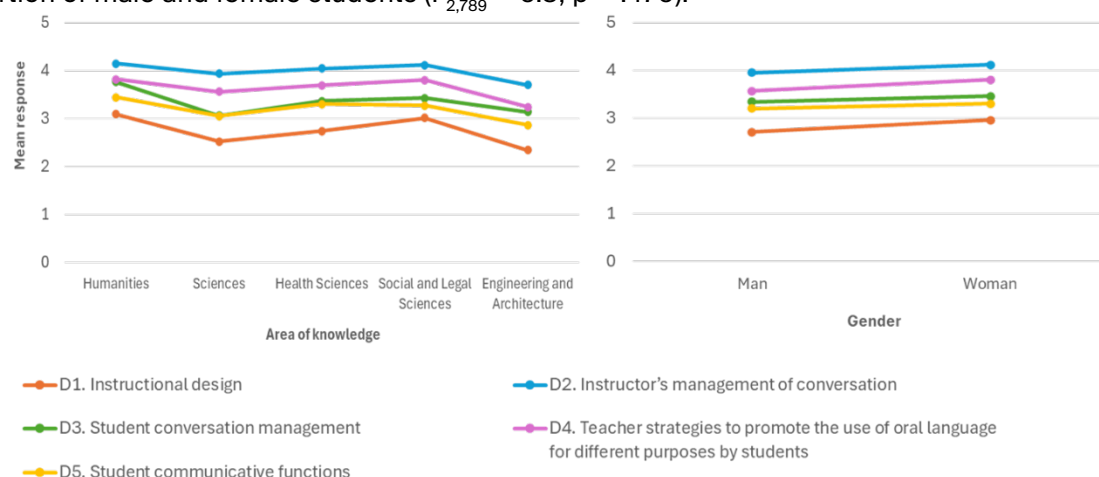


Figure 3. Differences between gender of teachers and area of knowledge depending on the dimension evaluated.

Regarding the actions and strategies that teachers claim to use in their classrooms to promote OCC, Figure 4 shows that the least frequent are those corresponding to D1 (instructional design), while the most frequent are those corresponding to D2 (communication management by teachers) and D4 (teacher strategies to promote OCC).

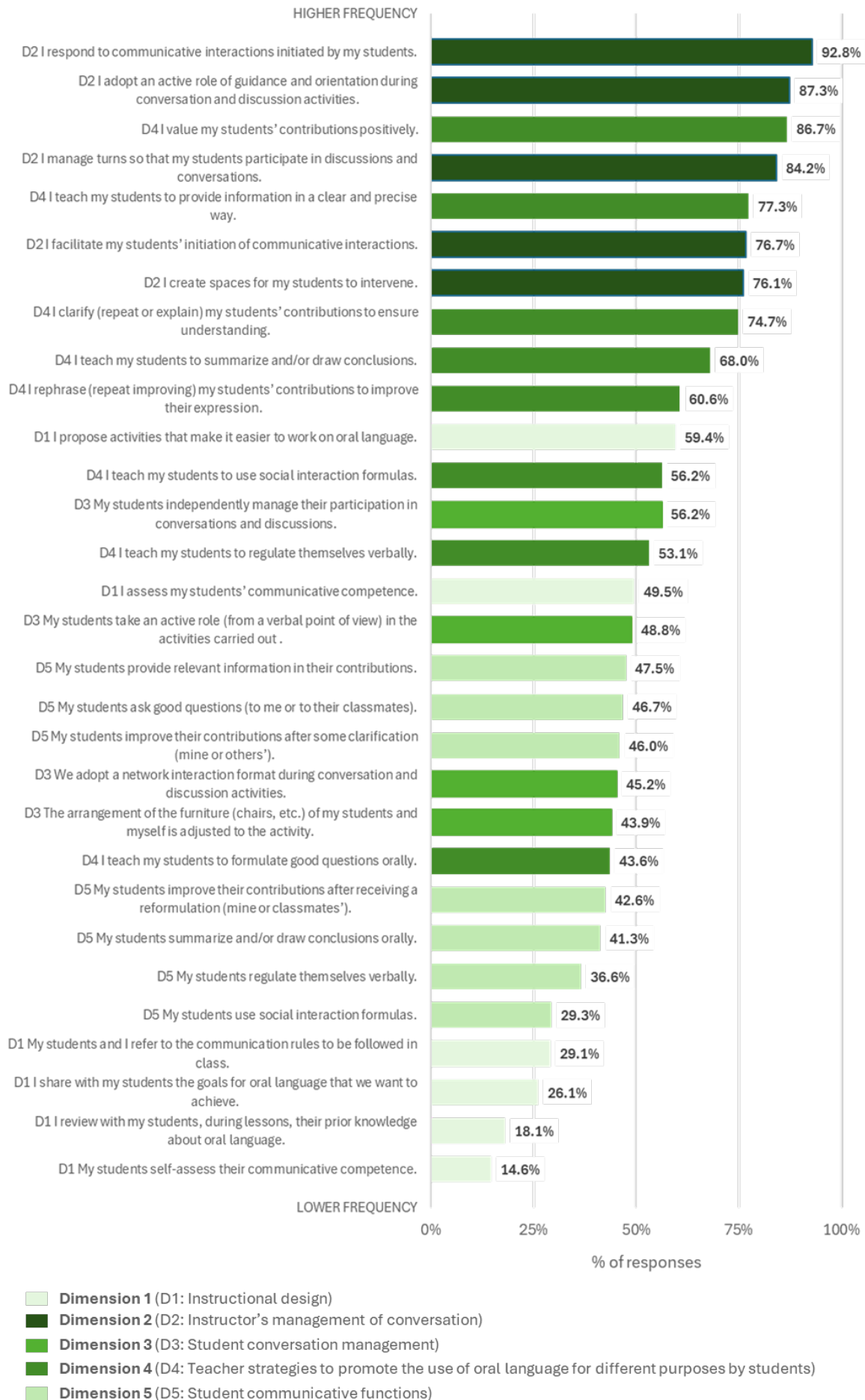


Figure 4. Actions and strategies of students and teachers in relation to OCC development

The results linked to D1, instructional design, highlight that teachers do not make it a priority to promote their students' OCC, with low frequencies of evaluation of student productions, requests that students evaluate each other's productions, and sharing with students the objectives linked to OCC. "Activities to facilitate OCC" is the only action which can be counted as a high-frequency action (59.4%).

The actions linked to D3, communication management by students, and D5, Student communicative functions are present more often than the D1 activities, but only in one case does a D3 or D5 action achieve high frequency: the D3 item "My students autonomously manage their participation in conversations and discussions" (56.2%). This should be analysed in further depth, since it is a highly complex action on the part of students, which in our experience does not usually occur in the absence of specific preparation and instruction.

In contrast to the dimensions regarding the students, instructors have a highly positive perception of their management of the conversation (D2) and the strategies they use to promote OCC (D4). This very positive view is somewhat contradictory with respect to their perception of the low participation of students in class. Specifically, the D3 results (student-led management of conversations) contradict the D2 results, according to which teachers manage turns for student participation.

4. Discussion and conclusions

This research has provided useful findings on the three research questions: the perception that university professors have regarding the need for more participatory classes or the participation of their students; the strategies they employ to promote students' OCC along different dimensions; and the relationship of these perceptions and strategies to academic level (bachelor's or master's degree), teacher gender, the area of knowledge and the gender of the students.

The results in connection with the first question indicate that, despite the recognised importance of OCC in the academic development and professional future of students, it receives scant attention in university classrooms and presents several areas for improvement.

OCC is an essential component in the preparation of university students, as it allows them to effectively express and interpret concepts, thoughts and opinions. OCC is not only a predictor of academic achievement (Mercer et al., 2017) but is also crucial for employability in increasingly competitive sectors (Wright and Horst, 2013). However, previous research reveals that 60.6% of teachers report low student participation in their classes, suggesting that there are insufficient opportunities to develop these skills (Ondé et al., 2024).

The lack of clarity in the objectives related to OCC, as indicated by Martín and Chireac (2022), may be a contributing factor to the perceived lack of participation in university classes. In this way, the model for OCC development on which the EVALOE-SSD-UNI digital resource for professional development is based (Gràcia et al., 2022, 2023) highlights the need for instructional design that encourages awareness of students' own strategies for promoting OCC, as well as reflection on the intended objectives and the activities and actions necessary to achieve them. In this sense, the findings of this study on the low participation of students as perceived by teachers reflect the lack of specific actions in classes necessary to promote OCC. Actions in connection with conversation management by teachers and students and actions related to instructional design should be considered as a path to improving OCC in the classroom. These results show the need for teachers to adopt a more proactive approach in the management of sessions. The aim should be to design classes in a way that makes explicit the objectives, actions and strategies used while simultaneously encouraging interaction and verbal exchange between students, along with reflection and evaluation of their own abilities and how to improve them. This is not limited to oral discussions and presentations, but rather involves a general change in teaching methodologies. The idea is that the students themselves manage the classes and actively participate, following individual preparation outside of the classroom (prior readings, exercises, problem solving, artistic productions, laboratory activities, etc.) or in small groups during the face-to-face sessions (joint problem solving, text discussions, self-evaluation and peer evaluation of outputs, etc.) (Gràcia et al., 2025; Ondé et al., 2024).

The results show that 72.8% of teachers are reconsidering their methodologies with the aim of making them more participatory. This desire for improvement aligns with recommendations on the need to diversify training activities and prioritise dialogue-focused settings (Doherty et al., 2011; Cebrián-Robles et al., 2018). However, it is essential that these intentions take shape in specific methodologies and dynamics within the classroom. There should be a gradual introduction of methodologies in which students and not the teacher are at the centre, with discussions based on the contents, contributions and questions of students, or reformulations by the instructors drawn from previous individual or small-group student work. All of this can help to develop OCC as well as other key skills such as critical and argumentative thinking. Research has shown that these skills are essential for academic and professional success (García-Milà et al., 2016; Mercer et al., 2017).

Regarding the first and third research questions, a notable aspect of the results is the difference observed according to the gender of the teacher. Female teachers report increased awareness and a higher frequency of actions to promote student OCC, which is consistent with previous research suggesting that women tend to adopt more collaborative approaches (Akhmetova, 2017; Cordero-Aliaga and Romero-López, 2025). This difference may be related to more inclusive teaching styles that foster a more actively communicative environment. In addition, it was observed that teachers with more experience (11-20 years) reported higher levels of student participation.

The main obstacles identified by teachers to justify the greater frequency of lecture-based and non-participatory classes by students include groups with large numbers of students, restrictive time limits for covering curricular content, and a widespread lack of specific training in participatory methodologies. These

barriers must be addressed to facilitate a real shift towards more participatory practices. The pressure to adhere to an extensive curriculum can lead teachers to prioritise traditional methods over innovative approaches that foster OCC. This research highlights that the fact of “explaining” all the content in class does not imply that students master it in a meaningful way or are able to use the material correctly and competently when required. It is necessary to undertake an in-depth review of what teaching staff understand by learning and their role as university instructors. The question is whether being a university professor means “presenting all the material”, “explaining the entire syllabus”, or whether it means trying to make students more aware of their learning process, learning in a more self-regulated way, taking advantage of class time to ask and discuss what they have read and studied during the course (texts, problems, etc.), and making significant gains in content acquisition from their participation in class (Moreno Díaz et al., 2025; Rochera et al., 2023).

Through CFA, this research has obtained sample evidence on the conceptual structure around five dimensions. The results linked to the second research question (on teachers’ use of strategies to foster student-led class management and communicative functions as key elements of their OCC) highlight the need to encourage the transformation of university classes into settings where teachers encourage students to make contributions, ask questions, argue, generate inferences, and solve problems. Classes should also be spaces that invite student reflection on their abilities to ask questions, both regarding more theoretical content and regarding OCC skills that they will need as future professionals in, for instance, medical practice (giving good and bad news to patients, clearly explaining what a disease or treatment means, etc.), psychology (in clinical, educational or other settings), or as advisors, educators, social workers, international aid workers, or practitioners in one of many other fields (Engin, 2017; Gràcia et al., 2024a, 2025; Ondé et al., 2024).

The urgent need to design and implement teacher professional development programmes for university teaching staff is underscored by this research. It is essential to provide specific training to create classes that make it possible to introduce and use effective strategies to promote OCC. This includes not only psychopedagogical strategies, but also training on how to manage group dynamics and foster a positive, trusting and participatory climate. Taking a pragmatic approach to integrating OCC is fundamental for comprehensive student development (Balloo et al., 2025). Universities should consider training programmes that address these specific needs to improve both teaching competencies and students’ communication skills (Atkins and Heron, 2024).

There are several limitations to this research that should be borne in mind when interpreting the results. The cross-sectional design and non-probabilistic sampling limit the possibilities for generalising the findings. Similarly, reliance on self-reported data may have introduced biases in teaching staff responses. The heterogeneity of Spanish universities, along with the absence of a complementary qualitative analysis, complicates data interpretation. Finally, the exclusive focus on teacher perceptions, without a direct assessment of the impact on OCC, limits the overall understanding of the most effective teaching practices.

In conclusion, this research highlights a series of challenges around fostering OCC in Spanish university classrooms. Regarding the first research question, although there is a growing awareness among teachers about the importance of adopting more participatory methodologies and abandoning largely unconstructive transmissive practices, it is still necessary to translate this awareness into effective, generally applicable actions. Regarding the second research question, the need to move towards an educational model that values and actively promotes OCC as an integral part of the skills development process is underscored. Therefore, it is necessary to design training processes for university teachers that equip them with teaching strategies that foster OCC development among their students. Only in this way will it be possible to ensure that they are adequately prepared to face the challenges of the current academic and professional world. These training and reflection processes must be designed while taking into account the differences detected in this study in relation to the third research question. That is, the designs must consider differences in teachers’ perception depending on whether they are leading undergraduate or master’s degree groups, the gender of the teacher, the type of subject and student gender.

5. References

- Akhmetova, G., Seitova, D. and Mynbayeva, A. (2017). Gender Differences in Teachers Pedagogical Communication Styles. In Z. Bekirogullari, M. Y. Minas, & R. X. Thambusamy (Eds.), *Cognitive - Social, and Behavioural Sciences - icCSBs 2017*, January, vol 20. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences* (pp. 54-63). Future Academy. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2017.01.02.7>
- Arancibia, M. L. A., Cabero-Amenara, J. and Marín-Díaz, V. (2020). Beliefs about the teaching and use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in higher education teachers. *University Education*, 13(3), 89-100. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-50062020000300089>
- Atkins, J. and Heron, M. (2024). Oracy skills in a digital environment: What do foreign language undergraduate students need? *The Language Learning Journal*, 52(5), 585-596. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2024.2342339>.
- Baker, M. J., Andrieessen, J. and Schwarz, B. B. (2020). Collaborative argumentation-based learning. In N. Mercer, R. Wegerif and L. Major (eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Research on Dialogic Education* (pp. 76-88). Routledge.
- Baloo, K., Heron, M. and Baker, S. (2025). Awareness, understandings, and teaching practices surrounding academic oracy in university preparation pathways. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2025.2462019>
- Bolívar-Cruz, A. and Verano-Tacoronte, D. (2018). Self-assessment of the oral presentation competence: Effects of gender and student’s performance. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.STUEDUC.2018.04.001>

- Brown, T. (2015). *Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Applied Research*, Second Ed. Guilford Publications.
- Cabellos, B., Pérez Echeverría, M. P. and Pozo, J. I. (2023). The use of digital resources in teaching during the pandemic: What type of learning have they promoted?. *Education Sciences*, 13(1), 58. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13010058>
- Camus, M., Iglesias, M. and Lozano, I. (2019). A qualitative study on the communicative didactic competence of teachers in training. *Teaching and Teaching: Revista Interuniversitaria De Didáctica*, 37(1), 83-101. <https://doi.org/10.14201/et201937183101>
- Cebrián-Robles, D., Franco-Mariscal, A. J. and Blanco-Lopez, Á. (2018). Preservice elementary science teachers' argumentation competence: Impact of a training programme. *Instructional Science*, 46(5), 789-817. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11251-018-9446-4>
- Cordero-Aliaga, S. and Romero-López, M.A. (2025). Gender Perspective in Teacher Training. A Systematic Review. *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 36(1), 69-82. <https://doi.org/10.5209/rced.93115>
- Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment—Companion Volume*; Council of Europe Publishing: Strasbourg, France, 2001. <https://www.coe.int/lang-cefr>
- Council of the European Union. (2006). *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning*. Official Journal of the European Union. http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c1
- Doherty, C., Kettle, M., May, L. and Caukill, E. (2011). Talking the talk: Oracy demands in first year university assessment tasks. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 18(1), 27-39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2010.498775>
- Domingo, J., Gallego, J. L., García, I. and Rodríguez, A. (2010). Communication skills of teachers in training. *Faculty Journal of Curriculum and Teacher Education*, 14(2), 303-332. <http://hdl.handle.net/10481/7077>
- Engin, M. (2017). Contributions and Silence in Academic Talk: Exploring learner experiences of dialogic interaction. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 12, 78-86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2016.11.001>
- Ertmer, P. A., Ottenbreit-Leftwich, A. T. and Tondeur, J. (2015). Teachers' beliefs and uses of technology to support 21st-century teaching and learning. In H. Fives and M. G. Gill (Eds.), *International handbook of research on teachers' beliefs* (pp. 403-418). Routledge.
- Fallarino, N., Leite, A. and Cremades, R. (2020). Case study on the development of oral competence in early childhood and primary education in a public school. *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 31(3), 319-328. <https://doi.org/10.5209/rced.63349>
- García-Milà, M., Pérez-Echeverría, M. P., Postigo, Y., Martí, E., Villarroel, C. and Gabucio, F. (2016). Nuclear power plants? Yes or no? Thank you! The argumentative use of tables and graphs/¿Centrales nucleares? ¿Sí o no? ¡Gracias! El uso argumentativo de tablas y gráficas. *Journal for the Study of Education and Development*, 39(1), 187-218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02103702.2015.1111605>
- Gargallo López, B., Pérez-Pérez, C., García-García, F. J., Giménez Beut, J. A. and Portillo Poblador, N. (2020). The learn-to-learn competency in college: Proposal for a theoretical model. *Education XX1*, 23(1), 19-44. <https://doi.org/10.5944/educXX1.23367>
- Gonzalez-Gil, F., Martín-Pastor, E. and Poy Castro, R. (2019). Inclusive education: Barriers and facilitators for their development. A study from the perception of the teaching staff. *Faculty Journal of Curriculum and Teacher Training*, 23(1), 243-263. <https://doi.org/10.30827/profesorado.v23i1.9153>
- Gràcia, M., Alvarado, J. M., Vega, F., Jarque, M. J., Castillo, P. and Adam-Alcocer, A. L. (2023). A digital tool designed to support secondary education teachers' professional development and to develop students' oral language competence. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2023.2197963>
- Gràcia, M., Casanovas, J., Riba, C., Sancho, M.R., Jarque, M. J. and Vega, F. (2022) Developing a digital application (EVALOE-DSS) for the professional development of teachers aiming to improve their students' linguistic competence, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 35(3), 492-517. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2019.1707690>
- Gràcia, M., Espino Datsira, S., Alcalde Sicilia, J. and Merino Rubio, I. (2024a). Actividades, evaluación y propuestas de mejora en la formación inicial de profesorado de educación infantil, primaria y secundaria en relación con su competencia en lengua oral. *Perfiles educativos*, 46(183), 94-108. <https://doi.org/10.22201/iissue.24486167e.2024.183.61170>
- Gràcia, M., Jarque, M. J., Astals, M. y Rouaz, K. (2020). Desarrollo y evaluación de la competencia comunicativa en la formación inicial de maestros. *Revista iberoamericana de educación superior*, 11(30), 115-136. <https://doi.org/10.22201/iissue.20072872e.2020.30.591>
- Gràcia, M., Quezada Hernández, V. and Segué Morral, M. T. (2024b). La formación continua del profesorado universitario para contribuir al desarrollo de la competencia en lengua oral de los futuros docentes: propuesta de guía. En D. Calderón-Garrido, M. Sabariego Puig, M. P. Sandín Esteban, *Educación 2022-2024. Retos, tendencias y compromisos Monográfico: La investigación educativa como base de la Agenda 2030 y los ODS*. pp. 3-35. *Octaedro*.
- Gràcia, M., Vega, F. and Miralda-Banda, A. (2025). Estrategias docentes de profesorado universitario para promover el desarrollo de la competencia en lengua oral de los futuros docentes. *Revista Interuniversitaria De Formación Del Profesorado. Continuación De La Antigua Revista De Escuelas Normales*, 100 (39.1), 331-352. <https://doi.org/10.47553/rifop.v100i39.1.99369>

- Harb, J., Bakar, N. and Krish, P. (2013). Gender differences in attitudes towards learning oral skills using technology. *Education and Information Technologies*, 19, 805-816. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-013-9253-0>
- Huang, C. P. (2010). Exploring factors affecting the use of oral communication strategies. *LongHua Technology University Journal*, 30(1), 85-104. <https://www.academia.edu/22788882>
- Ion, G. and Cano, E. (2012). The training of university teachers for the implementation of competency-based evaluation. *Education XX1*, 15(2), 249-270. <https://doi.org/10.5944/educxx1.15.2.141>
- Kaymakamoglu, S. E. (2018). Teachers' beliefs, perceived practice and current classroom practice in relation to traditional (teacher-centered) and constructivist (learner-centered) teaching (Note 1). *Journal of Education and Learning*, 7(1), 29-37. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v7n1p29>
- Littleton, K. and Mercer, N. (2013). *Interthinking: Putting talk to work*. Routledge.
- Maldonado, M. A., García, A. G., Crespo, J. M. A., Alós, F. J. and Osella, E. M. M. (2022). Oral competence and anxiety: training and effectiveness in university students. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 80, 401-434. <https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2022-1800>
- Martin, R. A. and Chireac, S. M. (2022). Training in oral competence, an inexcusable challenge. *Digital Tones: Journal of Philological Studies*, 42, 1-22. <http://hdl.handle.net/10201/115811>
- Martínez Martín, I., Rabazas Romero, T., Sanz Simón, C. and Resa Ocio, A. (2020). Participatory action research in university teaching methodology. An experience of innovation from a gender perspective. *Social Trends. Journal of Sociology*, 6, 111-132. <https://docta.ucm.es/rest/api/core/bitstreams/8753b517-17af-468f-b8f0-d66eec84c7ef/content>
- Mercer, N., Warwick, P. and Ahmed, A. (2017). An oracy assessment toolkit: Linking research and development in the assessment of students' spoken language skills at age 11-12. *Learning and Instruction*, 48, 51-60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2016.10.005>
- Moreno Díaz, K., Mauri Majós, T. and Colomina Álvarez, R. (2025). Types of support that Chilean new head teachers receive for their professional learning during induction. *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 36(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.5209/rced.90395>
- O'Loughlin, K. (2002). The impact of gender in oral proficiency testing. *Language Testing*, 19, 169-192. <https://doi.org/10.1191/0265532202lt226oa>
- Ondé, D., Cabellos, B., Gràcia, M. and Alvarado, J. I. (2024). ¿Cambiarías tus clases magistrales por clases más participativas? Estudio por encuesta dirigido a profesores/as universitarios/as. En M. M. Molero, A. Martos, P. Molina, M. C. Pérez y S. Fernández, *Exploración de variables psicológicas y educativas: Avances en la investigación escolar*. pp. 391-413. *Dykinson*. <https://doi.org/10.14679/3769>
- Petersen, J. (2018). Gender Difference in Verbal Performance: a Meta-analysis of United States State Performance Assessments. *Educational Psychology Review*, 30, 1269-1281. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10648-018-9450-X>
- Pozo, J. I., Scheuer, N., Pérez Echeverría, M. P., Mateos, M., Martín, E. and de la Cruz, M. (2006). *New ways of thinking about teaching and learning. The conceptions of teachers and students*. Graó.
- Ramos-Pardo, F. J., Martínez-Martín, I. and Blanco-García, M. (2021). Sense of education for citizenship from feminist, critical and decolonial pedagogies. A proposal for teacher training. *Left*, 50. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-50492021000100204>
- Rochera, M. Oller, J., Engel, A., Gràcia, M. and Colomina, R. (2023). Reflection, Implication and Sense of Learning: Perspective of Teacher Training Students. *Faculty, Journal of Curriculum and Teacher Education*, 27(1), 87-105. <https://doi.org/10.30827/profesorado.v27i3.23489>
- Sarceda-Gorgoso, M. C. and Luisa Rodicio-García, M. L. (2018). Training scenarios and professional competencies in initial teacher training. *Revista complutense de educación*, 29(1), 147-163. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5209/RCED.52160>
- Spanish University System - SUE (2023). *Integrated University Information System - SIU: University personnel statistics*. Spanish Ministry of Universities.
- Spanish University System - SUE (2024a). *Integrated University Information System-SIU: University Student Statistics (EEU)*. Spanish Ministry of Universities.
- Spanish University System - SUE (2024b). *Integrated University Information System - SIU: Statistics of Universities, Centres and Degrees (EUCT)*. Spanish Ministry of Universities.
- Vass, E. and Littleton, K. (2010). Peer collaboration and learning in the classroom. In K. Littleton, C. Wood, and J. K. Staarman (Eds.), *International handbook of psychology in education* (pp. 105-136). Emerald.
- Villarroel, V. and Bruna, D. (2014). Reflections on generic competencies in higher education: A pending challenge. *Psychoperspectives: Individual and Society*, 13(1), 22-34. <https://doi.org/10.5027/psicoperspectivas-Vol13-Issue1-fulltext-335>
- Wallden, R. and Larsson, P. (2022). "It can be a bit tricky": negotiating disciplinary language in and out of context in civics classrooms. *Classroom Discourse*, 14, 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19463014.2022.2084426>
- Wright, T. and Horst, N. (2013). Exploring the ambiguity: what faculty leaders really think about sustainability in higher education. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 14(2), 209-227. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14676371311312905>
- Yuksel, D., Soruç, A. and McKinley, J. (2021). The relationship between university EFL teachers' oral feedback beliefs and practices and the impact of individual differences. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 61, 387-414. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral-2021-0051>