Experiences of a foreign language assistantship in Mexico: A case study

Thesis

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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher’s website:
http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.00015a81

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EXPERIENCES OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE ASSISTANTSHIP IN MEXICO: A CASE STUDY

Emily Adele Marzin

Doctorate in Education

30 April 2022
Abstract

This thesis explores the experience of a foreign language assistantship programme in Mexico to gain in-depth insights into how the status, roles, and tasks (SRTs) of foreign language assistants (FLAs), as defined by language assistantship programmes agencies (Azimut Exchanges, 2018; the General Bureau for International Relationships, 2019; the International Centre for Pedagogical Studies, 2018), are understood by the stakeholders – namely the assistants’ tutor, educators, students, and FLAs – at a higher education institution, and which of those SRTs are achieved in practice and how.

This case study focuses on the French language Department of a public university in Mexico. Based on a social constructivism framework, the research examines the experiences of two FLAs, one French and a French-Canadian FLAs, three educators of French – one Mexican and two French, including the assistants’ tutor – and 220 French language students working or studying at this institution. Using a thematic data analysis of semi-structured and focus group interviews, questionnaires, and logbook entries, it explores the experiences and perceptions of the two FLAs’ SRTs both inside and outside the classroom.

The findings show that three aspects of the stakeholders’ understanding of assistants’ SRTs influenced the assistants’ practice: 1- the communication and partnerships between the stakeholders involved, 2- the pedagogical expectations of students and educators, and 3- the perception of the role of culture in the foreign language teaching and learning process. Results also suggest that while the assistants’ presence and work fulfilled the general objectives of the assistantship programme and that they performed their prescribed roles and tasks, FLAs also carried out additional ones. It concludes that to successfully engage the stakeholders with the presence and work of FLAs, improving communication, partnership, and training might be considered to mitigate misinterpretations and frustration. The findings support the need to reshape future assistantship programmes to further develop assistants’ intercultural communication skills and prepare them to take linguistic and cultural variations into account.
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank Dr Inma Alvarez, Dr Mara Fuertes Gutierrez, Dr Tita Beaven, and Dr Uwe Baumann for their hours reading my work and providing constructive feedback and critical insights, which were particularly valuable to me at vital stages of this project. Also, the comments made by Dr Tim Lewis and Dr Ana Comas-Quinn after the mock viva; thank you for your expertise. After the examination, I would like to thank Dr Mirjam Hauck and Dr Assia Rolls for their time, for their questions, and for being part of my viva.

Besides my supervisors, I am most grateful for the encouragement and administrative and practical guidance I received from June Ayres.

My heartfelt thanks also go to my husband, Ray, for his patience and emotional support during the doctoral process. He was always fully available and understanding from the beginning to the end.

I am also profoundly grateful to my academic godmothers, Jane, Krisztina, Luzma, Patricia, and Zsuzsanna, for believing in me, encouraging me, and giving me their advice while drafting my thesis.

My research would have been impossible without the aid and support of my research participants. It was a pleasure to work and investigate alongside the former and current assistants; I appreciate their availability and trust. Without my colleagues, this research would not have been possible. I thank them for their time and feedback. The students also represent a crucial group of participants, and I am grateful for their contributions.

In closing, I wish to thank my institution, which allowed me to conduct my study and all the institutions that shared key documents and experiences related to foreign language assistants and assistantship programmes.
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## Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BERA</td>
<td>British Education Research Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEFR</td>
<td>Common European Framework of Reference for Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIEP</td>
<td>Centre International d’Études Pédagogiques (International centre for pedagogical studies in French)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DGRI</td>
<td>Dirección General de Relaciones Internacionales (General Bureau for International Relationships in Spanish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EA</td>
<td>Échanges Azimut (Azimut Exchanges in French)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGI(A)/(E)</td>
<td>Focus group interview (with assistants)/ (with educators)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLA(s)</td>
<td>Foreign language assistant(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC</td>
<td>Self-Access Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEP</td>
<td>Secretaría de Educación Pública (Mexican Departement of Public Education in Spanish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRTs</td>
<td>Status, roles, and tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation</td>
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Chapter 1 Introduction

Foreign Language Assistantship programmes agencies have worked with European educational institutions for several decades and, more recently, with non-European institutions (García Fernández, 2000; Haramboure, 2000) to promote a particular language and its cultures to language learners, mainly via face-to-face interactions inside and outside the classroom, through the work of foreign language assistants (Codó and McDaid, 2019; López Palacios, 2012; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012). The idea behind the necessity of these programmes comes from the belief that practising communication skills and experiencing face-to-face linguistic and cultural encounters with individuals from other countries can be challenging for foreign language learners, especially in non-immersion and geographically remote learning contexts. In the past two decades, it has been argued increasingly that some aspects of these challenges are quickly disappearing due to the advances in technologies that facilitate students and teachers to get a wide access to cultural and linguistic information of their choice, decreasing their dependence on printed and static resources, as well as exchanges with others anywhere in the world (Hauck, 2019; Kern, 2006; Kukulska-Hulme, 2019; Lee, 2009). In addition, the rapid introduction of Artificial Intelligence systems, such as voice assistants, for the purposes of foreign language practice has been recognised as motivating for learners (Dodigovic, 2005; Underwood, 2017). At the same time, the importance of face-to-face encounters in educational settings has been advocated by others (Buckingham, 2018a, Jiménez-Garrido and Pérez-Navío, 2014) and continues to be part of assistantship programmes’ ethos worldwide. Indeed, current educational frameworks for language students (e.g., the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2012 and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2020) emphasise the importance of cultural and linguistic sensitisation via the development of communicative and intercultural competence, including face-to-face contacts.

Academic publications show the benefits of using external resources in the form of foreign language assistants (FLAs) in the language teaching and learning process.
Among the advantages that scholars acknowledge that working with FLAs has over other types of resources is that assistants contribute to generating linguistic and cultural curiosity in both students and the teaching community, enliven the language classroom, and engage with learners in conversation on current elements of the target country’s culture (Forder, Phillips, and Watts, 2012; Gower, 2005; Jiménez-Garrido and Pérez-Navío, 2014). However, up to now, scholars have paid little attention to the actual work of FLAs in foreign language education (Buckingham, 2018a; López-Medina and Otto, 2020).

This study explores the experiences of stakeholders involved in the assistantship in the French Department of a Mexican higher education institution. More specifically, the present research aims, firstly, to report how the assistants’ status is defined throughout their stay and the actual roles and tasks performed inside and outside the classroom. Secondly, it is intended to provide insights into the extent to which the status, roles, and tasks (SRTs) prescribed by the agencies working with Francophone FLAs are achieved in practice. Therefore, it presents the previously unheard voices of these stakeholders regarding the practice of Francophone FLAs working in Mexico. The findings will facilitate awareness and stimulate interest in a largely unrepresented topic in the literature – the understanding and the achievement of SRTs by foreign language assistants – and provide recommendations for all stakeholders involved in the assistantship experience. These include the need for further communication and dissemination of assistants’ SRTs to encourage a common understanding of these and better integration of FLAs and culture in language classes in general.

This first chapter introduces my professional background and my interests as a researcher. It provides a rationale for the study, the research questions, and the methodological choices. This chapter also offers an overview of foreign language assistantship programmes. Finally, it presents the outline of the thesis.

1.1 Researcher’s background and interests

Studying the experiences of a tutor, educators, students, and FLAs taking part in the programme will help understand a reality of FLAs’ practice. My interest in this
research emerged from questions I have asked myself and the issues I have observed during my academic and professional experiences as a language student and a language educator.

Firstly, the decision to choose this topic was driven by my experiences of learning languages with various educators. These experiences brought me to notice pedagogical differences related to the teaching of cultural content. They would vary from prioritising grammatical and lexical topics and including very little (inter) cultural knowledge, separating language and culture through weekly interventions by FLAs, also called lecturers, to connecting target languages and cultures and encouraging intercultural dialogue.

Secondly, it was also motivated by my interest in exploring an enhanced involvement of FLAs in the language teaching and learning process when working with francophone assistants, from France and Quebec, once I became a language educator myself. The Language Department situated in a Mexican public university, where I work as a French educator, claims to encourage a communicative approach in the language classrooms. However, I directly observed and experienced that emphasis is placed on completing the syllabus topics. These mainly focus on grammar and vocabulary content, leaving little time to practice communicative skills and disseminate cultural knowledge of the language studied.

In terms of working with FLAs from France and Quebec in my French classes, although their SRTs were never explained to me, it made sense to me to include the assistants in my teaching practice. However, during spontaneous conversations with the assistants’ tutor, educators, assistants, and students of the French Department (description of these stakeholders in 2.1.1 and 3.2.2), I realised that they perceived the purpose of the assistantship differently. Those differences included learners’ and educators’ dissociation of the content shared by the assistants from their grammar and lexical learning process and educators’ assigning the assistants the role of disseminating the target culture. At the same time, assistants expressed their frustration over their lack of experience in making pedagogical decisions, and a stereotypical vision of their culture was perceptible in the FLAs’ comments. These observations triggered a real curiosity to further
understand francophone assistants’ presence and practice in my French Department in Central Mexico and how the assistantship is experienced by educators, students, tutors and (Francophone) FLAs in (Mexican) educational institutions.

1.2 Research questions

As we will see in the review of the relevant research literature, several gaps can be identified when exploring the realities of (Francophone) assistantship experiences (in Mexico). The present research, through an in-depth exploratory approach, aims to address the lack of previous research concerning Francophone FLAs outside of Europe, the lack of studies reporting the realities of assistantship experiences from the synchronous perspectives of students, assistants, and educators, and the way observed problematic issues in defining, describing, and disseminating stakeholders’ relationships and partnerships as well as FLAs’ SRTs impact the assistants’ practice.

The present research project seeks answers to two research questions:

1- How are the status, roles, and tasks of Francophone FLAs working in a Mexican public higher education institution understood by the stakeholders?

2- Which roles and tasks are actually performed by the FLAs during the assistantship, and how?

Firstly, examining students’, educators’, the assistants’ tutor’s and FLAs’ expectations and experiences concerning the SRTs assigned to Francophone assistants in Mexico will provide insights into their understanding of the assistantship programmes objectives and guidelines. This analysis will also reveal how that understanding affects the type of partnerships established between the stakeholders and the impact on FLAs and the assistantship overall. Additionally, the data collected and discussed will seek to identify possible similarities and differences between their perceptions concerning the status of the target cultures and their influence on FLAs’ status and practice.
Secondly, looking at experiences of assistants’ practice is intended to establish to what extent the prescribed roles and tasks are achieved and understand how FLAs perform them. The impact of the stakeholders’ expectations and understanding on FLAs’ practice will also be examined, and how their practice may also affect their status in the language teaching and learning process.

1.3 FLA programmes: An overview

This section provides an overview of assistantship programmes to better understand this investigation's research area and show the relevance of researching this topic.

Foreign language assistantship programmes have two direct beneficiaries: the FLAs, as it offers them the possibility to have a professional experience abroad for a few months by supporting language students in non-immersion contexts with their language learning (Buckingham, 2018a; Bosch, Laprea León, and Torrealba, 2000) and the language students since it provides them with face-to-face contacts with the target language and cultures in their classrooms (CIEP, 2018; EA, 2018). Since their emergence, different contextual factors and language learning and teaching methods have influenced the programmes’ objectives, selection criteria, and assistants’ SRTs. For example, the first assistantship programme exchange established in 1905 focused on promoting an alternative to the grammar-translation approach used during this period for language learning purposes (López Palacios, 2012), whereas today, these programmes emphasise practising oral skills and exploring different societies and cultures (Centre International d’Études Pédagogiques - CIEP, 2018; Dirección General de Relaciones Internacionales, 2019 - DGRI; Échanges Azimut - EA, 2018).

However, several issues that have been reported since the beginning of these exchanges (Molitor, 1909) are still observed in stakeholders’ narratives (e.g. López Palacios, 2012), such as the lack of indications in institutional guidelines concerning the performance of FLAs’ prescribed roles and tasks, the approach to be taken to cultural knowledge and the teaching of cultural practices, and the status of FLAs as intercultural mediators in languages education (Buckingham,
2019; Ehrenreich, 2006; Hibler, 2010; Scobling, 2011). According to some scholars, these reported issues have led to disappointment and frustration among stakeholders (e.g., Buckingham, 2018b).

The small number of recent studies and records of lived experiences on the views on the FLAs’ (prescribed and achieved) SRTs, the partnership between educators, students, and FLAs, the training received, and the teaching of cultural practices (Buckingham, 2018a/b; Codó and McDaid, 2019; Gerena and Ramírez-Verdugo, 2014; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012; Scobling, 2011, among others) reveals a gap in reporting tutors’, educators’, FLAs’, and students’ voices that the present study attempts to fill. Additionally, no publication has been found to refer to the reality of assistantship experiences in Latin American countries.

1.4 Thesis outline

This thesis is organised in six chapters, in addition to references and appendices, as follows:

Chapter 1 provides information concerning the researcher’s interests and background. It presents the research questions and the context chosen for the study.

Chapter 2 critically reviews relevant literature. It aims at identifying gaps that this thesis seeks to address.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology used for this study, particularly the research context, the participants, and the data collection instruments. It also describes the data analysis approach and provides a rationale for addressing ethical issues.

Chapter 4 focuses on findings regarding the expectations and understanding of the tutor, educators, FLAs, and students of the foreign language assistants’ SRTs achieved and the decisions undertaken throughout the FLAs’ practice. The intention here is to provide an answer to the first research question.

Chapter 5 focuses on findings concerning the roles and tasks performed and decisions made during the FLAs’ practice and answering the second research question.
Chapter 6 summarises the research, draws together its key findings, and describes the study limitations, recommendations, and implications for theory and practice, providing suggestions for future research. The final section of the chapter explains the dissemination of the findings, including plans for future publications.
Chapter 2 Literature review

This chapter reviews the literature about language assistants in language education. It first explores the terminology used to refer to the stakeholders involved in the assistantship programmes, then sections 2.2 to 2.4 examine three specific areas listed below. The final section of the chapter describes the conceptual framework that presents the connections between the concepts explored in the literature review.

For this literature review, publications from 1905 to 2020 were consulted in three languages (English, French, and Spanish), and searches were conducted using relevant keywords in different databases (see Appendix 1). This process revealed that research on FLAs is scarce and amounts to fewer than 50 sources.

The available literature focuses on three specific areas:

- Description and evolution of assistantship programmes (Codó and McDaid, 2019; Forder et al., 2012; García Fernández, 2000; Gower, 2005; Haramboure, 2000; López-Medina and Otto, 2020; López Palacios, 2012; McLelland, 2018; Molitor, 1909; Rowles and Rowles, 2005; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation or UNESCO, 1953; and six circulars published in the Official Journal of the French Ministry of Education, along with reports or government decrees, 1894-2016)

- Review of FLAs’ status, roles, and tasks according to stakeholders’ expectations (Buckingham, 2018b; Cibin, 2012; Dafouz-Milne and Hibler, 2013; Ehrenreich, 2006; García Laborda, Vecan, and Sauciuc, 2020; Grinager, 2018; Groom and Richard, 2005; Haramboure, 2000; Hibler, 2010; Jiménez-Garrido and Pérez-Navío, 2014; Lacronique, 2000; Lópe-Medina and Otto, 2020; Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, and Webster, 2010; Sánchez Murillo and Sibaja Hernández, 2013; Scobling, 2011)

- Report of FLAs’ practice, ranging from the initial training sessions and the partnership to professional awareness (Bosch et al., 2000; Buckingham, 2018a; Centre International d’Études Pédagogiques or CIEP, 2018;
Considering the scarcity of the contribution published on foreign language assistants and assistantship, the following sections offer a comprehensive review of both grey and scholarly literature that contributes to current knowledge.

2.1 Stakeholders in FLA programmes

This section identifies and defines the stakeholders involved in the FLA programmes. The definitions are based on information found in the grey literature issued by governmental organisations and public bodies, directly and indirectly, involved in the assistantship and academic publications, including a visual representation of those stakeholders and their lines of communication, together with an examination of the FLA terminology.

2.1.1 List of stakeholders

*Ministries of Education* are those institutions responsible for all country education policies. These bodies build and promote bilateral educational agreements and exchanges between countries within their remit, such as assistantship programmes. Ministries finance such programmes and define their general objectives and FLAs’ status according to evolving educational needs (Bosch et al., 2000; Circulars reviewed in 2.2.1; Échanges Azimut or EA, 2018 - https://echanges-azimut.com/assistant-de-langue/; French Ministry of Education, 2020 - https://eduscol.education.fr/; López Palacios, 2012). The present study involves the French, French-Canadian, and Mexican Ministries of Education.

*Agencies* are local governmental institutions that administer FLAs’ application and selection process on behalf of those Ministries and help pursue the assistantship programme’s overall objectives by designing general guidelines and establishing assistants’ status, roles, and tasks or SRTs (EA, 2018 - https://echanges-azimut.com; French Ministry of Education, 2020 - https://eduscol.education.fr/).
The FLAs’ country of origin’s agency appoints the assistants and communicates the selection to the host country’s agency (see García Fernández, 2000, for example). The latter connects the candidates with their host educational institution and is expected to supervise FLAs’ practice and overall stay. This research involves three agencies: the CIEP, mandated by the French government, the EA by Quebec, and the DGRI in Mexico.

*Host educational institutions* of countries involved in bilateral FLA programmes are primary and secondary schools and universities that apply to take in language assistants. In the case of higher education institutions, FLAs work in the Language Department and, more specifically, for the target language department; that is, in the French Department for this study. If selected, these institutions will sign an agreement with the local agency. Guidelines issued by the agencies describe the responsibilities of the institutions regarding FLAs (EA, 2018 - https://echanges-azimut.com/recevoir-assistant-de-la-langue/; DGRI, 2019 - https://www.gob.mx/).

According to the guidelines, host educational institutions are required to name a tutor who will attend to FLAs’ needs and requests. In the present study, the participating host institution is a university.

During their stay with the host education institution, FLAs are in contact with different stakeholders, from which governments and agencies expect fluid communication (CIEP, 2018; DGRI, 2019; EA, 2018).

*Language coordinators* have administrative, organisational, and management roles. Their tasks include coordinating the teaching team and the students of the target language department in the host educational institutions, establishing the schedule of classes, and organising events. According to the agencies’ guidelines, language coordinators working with Francophone FLAs in Mexico may also have other positions, including assistants’ tutors, heads of language departments, and/or educators (CIEP, 2018; DGRI, 2019; EA, 2018).

*FLA tutors* (also called *Mentors* in Culpeper et al., 2008 and Gower, 2005) are usually language coordinators, heads of language departments, and/or language educators (DGRI, 2019) of the target language in the host institutions. They are in
charge of one or more FLAs and act as the main contact between FLAs and the local agency running the assistantship programme and between the assistants and the educators’ team. The latter provides tutors with a list of general responsibilities to FLAs (for example, CIEP, 2018; EA, 2018; DGRI, 2019), including providing educators with the description of FLAs’ SRTs, inquiring about the partnership between assistants and educators, and providing assistants with administrative and educational guidance (see García Fernández, 2000; Lacronique, 2000; Rook, 2016).

*Educators* are language teachers and work with FLAs in the classrooms of the host educational institution, French teachers, in the case of this research. They are expected to guide the assistants in developing and performing the prescribed roles and tasks by helping them select appropriate resources and design culture-focused activities to present in class (Lacronique, 2000; López Palacios, 2012). In this study, the terms *Educator* and *Teacher* refer to a professional teaching a language.

*Students* are learning the target language in the host educational institution, French, in the present study. Depending on the agreement signed between the agencies and the host educational institutions, learners study in primary or secondary schools or universities. Studies have reported multiple settings (e.g., bilingual primary schools in Codó and McDaid, 2019 and Jiménez-Garrido and Pérez-Navío, 2014; or secondary schools in Haramboure, 2000, Martinez, 2000, and Lacronique, 2000). They are in regular contact with FLAs, mainly in the classroom. Students are expected to take advantage of the assistants’ presence to improve their speaking skills and cultural knowledge of the target language in face-to-face interactions (Bosch et al., 2000; CIEP, 2018; EA, 2018).

### 2.1.2 Lines of communication between stakeholders

As the present study focuses on stakeholders’ assistantship experiences in Mexico's francophone assistantship programme, it is important to explain how they interact. Figure 1 represents who the stakeholders are in this context and their lines of communication according to the grey literature. The arrows illustrate
whether the communication is mutual (double-headed arrows) or unidirectional (single-headed arrows) between stakeholders.

Figure 1: Lines of communication between stakeholders in French assistantship programmes in Mexico

According to the grey literature (CIEP, 2018; EA, 2018; DGRI, 2019; French Ministry of Education, 2020 and other governmental circulars), information is expected to be mutually communicated through 16 lines and disseminated by one stakeholder and received by another in five lines. This indicates that communication should generally be fluid between the majority of the stakeholders. The single-headed arrows suggest a hierarchy between some institutions involved in the assistantship (e.g., the ministries and the agencies) and the type of dialogue or communication exchanges between these particular stakeholders. Although governments and agencies recommend fluid communication between stakeholders
involved in the host institutions, scholars, as we will see in the following sections (2.4.2 and 2.4.3), reported that, in practice, the lines of communication could be improved by mutual exchange of information that would resolve possible problematic issues (discussed in Bosch et al., 2000; López Palacios, 2012; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012).

The present research will allow us to identify how stakeholders communicate in the context of the study and the impact of this communication on the overall assistantship.

### 2.1.3 FLA Terminology

The literature is consistent in naming and defining stakeholders involved in the FLA programmes, except for the terms used for assistants supporting language education, for which a variety of terms such as teaching assistant, (foreign) language assistant, and foreign language teaching assistant have been employed.

According to the literature reviewed, teaching assistant is the term most commonly used to describe a graduate student or a pre-service educator who participates in the teaching process using strategies he or she has acquired during prior training (Groom and Richard, 2005; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). This term is applied in different contexts, including that of language education. Language assistant or foreign language assistant generally refers to a university student having a (first) professional working experience abroad in an educational institution assisting in the language teaching and learning process (Buckingham, 2018a; Bosch et al., 2000). The term foreign language assistant refers to an assistant who supports language students and educators and lacks previous teacher training or teaching ambitions (Groom and Richard, 2005; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). In addition, it also relates to Fulbright programme participants. These new English language teachers are placed in educational institutions worldwide to improve their teaching skills and help educators (https://us.fulbrightonline.org/). In the Fulbright programme, the term foreign language teaching assistant is used. Following the definition provided above and the profile of FLAs participating in this study, the term foreign language assistant will be used.
The literature and assistantship guidelines differentiate between FLAs’ and educators’ teaching responsibilities but use the terms *teach* or *teaching* to refer to both. Accordingly, this research uses these terms to describe the work FLAs conduct in their practice.

After defining the stakeholders involved in the FLAs programmes, the following three sections provide a historical description and evolution of assistantship programmes’ objectives, a review of FLAs’ status, roles, and tasks according to stakeholders’ expectations, and a report of FLAs’ practice, ranging from the initial training sessions and the partnership to professional awareness.

### 2.2 Foreign language assistantship programmes

This second section reviews the literature about the history of assistantship programmes in language education – including Francophone assistantship programmes between France, Quebec, and Mexico being the focus of the present research – examining founding documents, recent academic publications, and assistantship programme agencies’ guidelines. It also scrutinises the candidates’ profiles and the agencies’ FLA recruitment process.

#### 2.2.1 Historical background of FLA programmes: Objectives and challenges

The existing white and grey literature on the historical background of more than 125 years of FLAs programmes is scarce. It focuses on European cases, offers an overview of key dates, and provides a general understanding of these programmes’ evolving objectives and challenges. Due to a lack of access to founding documents written more than six decades ago and mainly available in national archives and governmental resources, the review of this topic partly relies on the work of authors who have surveyed the literature and a review of more recent official documents available online.

From the beginning of the last century to the present day, the number of bilateral language assistantship programmes administered by governmental agencies has increased (López-Medina and Otto, 2020). Such programmes originated at the end
of the 19th century and targeted the practice of French and English. In 1894, a

circular from the French government encouraged female English au pairs to work

as helpers in teacher-training schools in France to assist students in practising

English oral skills with native speakers (López Palacios, 2012). In France, in 1902,

a decree established the direct method for teaching modern languages (López

Palacios, 2012). This method focuses on developing oral communication and

pronunciation, using inductive grammar teaching techniques, realia, and

experiencing language learning naturally by giving instructions in the target

language (Puren, 1988). A couple of years later, French and English Ministers of

Education shared discontent about how this language-teaching method was used

in the classroom. As a result, between 1905 and 1907, England and France,

followed by Prussia, Austria, and Germany, signed bilateral agreements to regulate

assistants’ exchanges and encourage more direct contact with the target language

in the classroom. These exchange programmes were aimed at pre-service

language educators who “conduct reading and conversation while continuing their

studies” (Rowles and Rowles, 2005, p.4) and “improve their linguistic and cultural

competence by being immersed in a target culture environment” (Codó and

McDaid, 2019, p.219). At that time, the programme was also designed “to help

language teachers and pupils gain the first-hand experience of the target culture”

(McLelland, 2018, p.14). In 1909, in an evaluative report on FLAs working in

France, Molitor highlighted the contrast between the programme objectives and the

practice, especially concerning the assistants’ status and the nature of partnerships

with educators. This difference of perspectives referred to in the literature since the

beginning of the assistantship programmes shows, according to Molitor, that

programme’s objectives were subjected to educators’ and FLAs’ interpretations

and the needs of the language practice, which gave rise to possible

disappointment.

Between the late 1910s and the early 1950s, the publications consulted do not

register any significant changes in terms of the FLA programmes’ objectives, partly

due to the two world wars and periods of world economic instability. According to a

conference delivered at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural
Organisation (UNESCO) in 1953, after the two world wars, assistantship programmes reappeared with a greater focus on fostering understanding and peace among nations. The presence of FLAs was then considered beneficial for educational institutions from a humanistic viewpoint, including more interaction with students than previously. This objective adjustment echoes the French Ministry of Education’s suggestion in 1961, which sought to further mutual understanding between FLAs and educators to achieve an ideal efficiency level concerning their partnership (Circular September 1961, cited in López Palacios, 2012). Echoing Molitor’s words of concern in 1909, the 1961 document emphasised the need to negotiate the tasks undertaken to prevent disappointment among stakeholders.

Similarly, 20 years later, the same institution encouraged schools and educators to improve FLAs’ integration by “making sure they are not unattended or underemployed” (Circular September 1982, cited in López Palacios, 2012, p.28). Since 1953, several official documents have repeatedly mentioned the significance of further fostering partnerships between educators. Questions can be asked if the objectives and explanations provided by governments and agencies were sufficiently clear for the other parties involved and if the teamwork was successfully achieved in practice.

From the last two decades of the 20th century to the present day, academic publications report a variety of approaches concerning the general objectives of these bilateral FLA programmes. However, it is possible to identify two common goals in recent literature. Firstly, the presence of native speakers aims to overcome students’ possible resistance and lack of opportunity to improve their communication skills (García Fernández, 2000; Lacronique, 2000; López Palacios, 2012). Secondly, the goal is to awaken interest in the assistants’ national and local culture through entertaining activities (Codó and McDaid, 2019; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012; UNESCO, 1953). Despite the assistantship programmes’ objectives, which identified assistants’ role in cultural diplomacy and in fostering dialogue and understanding between FLAs, educators, and students through mutual linguistic and cultural knowledge, several authors draw attention to such programmes’ culturalistic scope (Codó and McDaid, 2019; Ehrenreich, 2006;
McLelland, 2018). FLAs are usually described as *diplomacy or state representatives* in the agencies' guidelines, embodying a whole nation and who may eventually end up disseminating cultural stereotypes. These programmes intend to undo or encourage FLAs to simplify and standardise the content they present to the students, preventing them from sharing linguistic and cultural variety. Codó and McDaid report that, at times, agencies provide the assistants with a list of cultural items to present, which according to the authors, “justifies exerting power and excluding those deemed unfit (e.g., diversity in terms of religion, sexuality)” (2019, p.234). The concept of nativeness and teaching culture is reviewed in 2.3.3 below. Additionally, the kinds of responsibilities assigned to this *state agent* seem incompatible with the general message describing FLAs’ situation as a well-paid part-time job with minimal responsibilities (Ehrenreich, 2006; García Fernández, 2000).

The expected benefits of assistantship programmes described in the literature focus on what the FLAs’ presence and classroom practice can provide for language students, educators, and host schools. These general advantages include gaining educational support, discovering new resources and approaches, and providing learners with a different and authentic cultural and linguistic experience with the assistants (Bosch et al., 2000; Rook, 2016; UNESCO, 1953). However, publications or most recently published programme guidelines rarely mention the benefits that FLAs can bring (e.g., Ehrenreich, 2006; López Palacios, 2012; CIEP, 2018). Those proposed include gaining a (first) professional experience abroad and allowing assistants time to practice one of their additional languages and travel. This may influence FLAs’ expectations concerning their SRTs and suggest that the intercultural scope of the assistantship is overlooked.

After nearly 125 years and despite the advances in technologies that provide educators access to digital cultural and linguistic content and the possibility to connect with speakers worldwide, bilateral agreements between governments worldwide to send and receive FLAs assistantships have increased the number of participating host educational institutions, indicating the success of such programmes, the significance of face-to-face encounters in language classrooms,
and of devoting research to this area. The literature review also shows that, throughout the years, some challenges remain despite some changes in objectives.

### 2.2.2 Francophone FLA programmes in Mexico

The relative recency of bilateral assistantship programme agreements in Latin America might explain the scarcity of academic publications covering this topic. The context of the present study is a Mexican public university welcoming FLAs from France and Canada (Quebec specifically). To gain further understanding of the historical background, objectives, and challenges of the FLAs programmes between the two Francophone countries and Mexico, this sub-section reviews a total of twelve documents issued by the French, French-Canadian, and Mexican Ministries of Education, plus another fifteen sources published by the agencies describing the Francophone assistantship programmes in Mexico.

According to a survey conducted in 2013 by the French Embassy in Mexico City, French was the second most studied language in Mexico ([https://mx.ambafrance.org/Cours-de-francais,6567](https://mx.ambafrance.org/Cours-de-francais,6567)). It is studied primarily in Alliances Françaises and universities by nearly 200,000 Mexican students (Silva, 2011). In recent years, an increasing number of Mexicans have considered studying or working in a French-speaking country. The literature reports two Francophone countries involved in bilateral agreements with Mexico: France and Canada (specifically, Quebec) concerning the FLA programmes.

For almost 80 years, FLAs working in France were pre-service educators and European, for the most part (Haramboure, 2000). However, since the late 1990s, the increasing number of Spanish as a Foreign Language learners in French secondary schools and the dominance of the communicative teaching approach has led to an appreciation of the need to employ native Spanish speakers to assist in the practice of communication skills ([Circular from June 1999, French Ministry of Education; García Fernández, 2000](https://mx.ambafrance.org/Cours-de-francais,6567)). Ministries of Education looked, therefore, for ways to further promote the inclusion of communicative skills in the language classroom, partly through the presence of FLAs. As a result, in 1998, the French
government, represented by the CIEP, opened the assistantship exchange to Latin American countries. Additionally, this year, the programme was available to any undergraduate student from Europe and Latin American countries with an intermediate knowledge of the host country’s language. This change in the FLAs’ profile explains in large part the following statistics on French FLAs’ motivations to undertake the role: In 1998, 89% were interested in becoming language educators and 88% in practising the language of the host country as opposed to 55% and 66%, respectively, the following year (García Fernández, 2000). In 2009, a similar bilateral programme, administered by Échanges Azimut (EA), was signed between Mexico and Quebec to encourage Spanish and French practice in both countries. Government documents and agencies’ guidelines published from the last decade of the 20th century to the present day establish similar objectives to those reported in other language assistantship contexts in academic publications (Codó and McDaid, 2019; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012). These assert that assistants contribute to linguistic and cultural practice through an apparent authentic connection between the target language and cultures, fostering peace and understanding of different cultures (see the Circular from the French Ministry of Education, May 2016). However, the texts issued by those institutions fail to provide further indications regarding the type of cultural knowledge to be shared or how to establish face-to-face contacts and mutual understanding between the parties involved, which may lead to varying interpretations from the stakeholders, including the dissemination of stereotypes.

While bilateral francophone FLAs programmes started in Mexico more than 20 years ago, assistantship experiences in Mexican host institutions have not yet been reported or investigated.

The available literature does not allow us to understand the scale of the FLA programmes. It also provides little data concerning the number of assistants, languages, and countries involved. As a reference, the French programme that in 1905 involved a few dozen candidates, two languages and two nations now sends around 1,400 assistants to 27 countries, promoting more than 15 languages yearly.
(CIEP, 2018). Nevertheless, this historical review contributes to identifying challenges from the early stages to the present day.

On the one hand, we have the importance of good partnerships between stakeholders integrating the assistants into the teaching and learning process and using their linguistic and cultural knowledge. On the other, there is the need to clearly define the objectives of FLA programmes and provide further indications of how those will be achieved in practice. Based on this observation, the present study aims to determine whether the reported concerns are observable in the context of the participating stakeholders. The purpose is also to provide insights into how these possible issues impact FLAs' practice and the overall assistantship.

### 2.2.3 General profile and selection of FLAs

The foreign language assistant profile is mainly described on the agencies’ websites and guidelines (e.g., British Council, 2019; CIEP, 2018). The sole difference between all these descriptions is the age requirement for the candidates. Several authors (Bosch et al., 2000; Forder et al., 2012; García Hernández, 2000; Rook, 2016) describe a general FLA profile, which also corresponds to the profile used by the agencies involved in the present research (gathered from CIEP, 2018; DGRI, 2019; EA, 2018). This is to be between 18 and 30 years of age, a national of a country whose official language is being taught, a university student or graduate, and a speaker with an intermediate level of competence in the language(s) spoken in the host country. However, Bosch et al. (2000) reported a counterexample regarding this last point. In 1999, 100 Mexican FLAs worked in France without speaking the language, which can be explained by the recency of the bilateral agreement between those countries (see 2.2.1). On the one hand, the fact that FLAs do not speak or fully manage the host language could present advantages, including sharing similar concerns with the learners regarding acquiring new linguistic and cultural content, and empathy can be developed from both sides. On the other, the disadvantages are also numerous, such as struggling to deal with daily life and administrative issues, establishing a deep rapport with other colleagues at work, including the tutor, or not fully understanding the concept
culture and its implication in the language classrooms and FLAs’ practice (also mentioned in Bosch et al. 2000) and further discussed in 2.3.

The literature identifies a similar operational mode in the selection process, regardless of the programme and the country (Forder et al., 2012; García Fernández, 2000; Lacronique, 2000; Rook, 2016). In bilateral assistantship programmes, two or more agencies are involved. Agencies that recruit future FLAs define the selection process, which varies slightly between the different agencies, in terms of dates, for example. According to García Fernández (2000), agencies — in FLAs’ country of origin (O) and the host country (H) — follow similar steps, which correspond to those used by CIEP, DGRI, and EA:

1. Between November and January: publication and submission of the candidates’ application (O);
2. before March: selection of candidates (O), and
3. between April and May: sending results to the host agency, which sends them to educational institutions and future assistants (O and H).

The French-Canadian agency narrowed down the number of candidates to 50% compared to 85% for CIEP. This discrepancy might be explained by the number of host universities available and the newness of the French-Canadian agreement: eight Mexican universities welcome French-Canadian FLAs, while more than fifty educational institutions work with French assistants. According to the information shared in DGRI meetings, the number of FLAs per educational institution responds to the amount of language learners. While the CIEP sends between one and five assistants per host university, EA sends one. The institution where the present research took place usually receives three assistants, two French and one French-Canadian. Various authors (Bosch et al., 2000; López Palacios, 2012; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012) report that the high number of procedural steps and stakeholders involved in assistantship programmes have created obstacles to the flow — and comprehensibility — of information, thereby fostering different interpretations and misunderstandings among the stakeholders concerning prescribed roles and tasks (see Figure 1a, in 2.1.1). This observed confusion
highlights the need for more effective communication and partnership between the parties to achieve the programmes’ objectives (see 2.4.2).

Reviewing the candidate’s profile and selection process indicates the importance of constant communication between the stakeholders to identify and mitigate the challenges discussed in the literature, including the general understanding of the SRTs. The present study collects insights to understand how the objectives and SRTs were understood and communicated to stakeholders.

2.3 Status, roles, and tasks of FLAs

This section explores the information on SRTs issued by several governments involved in bilateral language assistantship agreements and that from several agencies. It also presents the expectations and understanding of educators, students, and FLAs of SRTs in the literature.

2.3.1 Government guidelines

Governments’ bilateral agreements regarding assistants’ SRTs are translated by agencies into programme descriptions and made available on their websites for FLA applicants and host educational institutions. As mentioned earlier, the majority of government documents were not accessible. Thus, I partly relied on the work of authors who had reviewed those from academic publications (Codó and McDaid, 2019; López Palacios, 2012; Rowles and Rowles, 2005) to summarise the changes in governments’ positions through time and in France, Canada (Québec in particular) and Mexico, and to examine the official status of FLAs, and the roles and tasks they are expected to carry out during the assistantship.

The various labels applied to FLAs in the institutional documents (French government circulars issued in 1905, 1961, 1971, 1977, 1982, and 1999, cited in López Palacios, 2012; Molitor’s report in 1909, and UNESCO’s report 1953) indicate adjustments made to their status, the diversity of responsibilities in the assistants’ work, and the difficulty of finding a sole definition.

Initially, an FLA was referred to as a pre-service teacher (1905) and a teacher assistant (1909) who carried out teaching responsibilities under the authority of an
educator. Although this low status continued to be emphasised throughout the 20th century, with the FLA being presented as an in-between agent who is neither a student nor an educator (1999), the texts progressively moved away from the initial teaching status stating that an assistant cannot substitute educators (1961) nor have pedagogical knowledge and training (1982).

During the second half of the century, some governmental documents also described the FLA as a teaching tool (1953, 1977) with the specific task of fostering an authentic and relaxed environment favourable to the practice of oral skills. At the same time, their status also appears to request further commitment as official documents refer to the FLA as a diplomacy and state representative (1953, 1971) expected to illustrate the linguistic and cultural variety of his or her country of origin and behave in a certain way.

In more recent publications, several scholars (Bosch et al., 2000; Grinager, 2018; Harambourg, 2000; López Palacios, 2012; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012) concur in defining a common status: FLAs are temporarily employed by their country of origin and paid by the host country to assist educators and students in the teaching and learning process. This status is also confirmed in the most recently available government documents published by the three countries involved in the francophone assistantship programmes in Mexico: the French Ministry of National Education, Youth, and Sports (2016), the French-Canadian Ministry of International and Francophone Relations (2017), and the Mexican Secretariat of Public Education (2019).

As the foregoing explains, roles and tasks are defined by the mandated FLAs agencies. As a result, governmental documents provide very few indications of prescribed roles and tasks. The available literature on the topic is presented below.

In the early 1900s, FLAs were asked to implement pedagogical knowledge acquired during their studies in the language classroom (bilateral agreement between France and England, in Codó and McDaid, 2019). In the 1950s, FLAs were required to create materials and activities to enhance students’ speaking
practice (UNESCO, 1953), implicitly requiring pedagogical knowledge (see 2.3.3 and 2.4.3 for more explanations on assistants’ professional awareness).

More recently, in 2016, assistants were requested to foster authentic communication between the cultures in contact through the target language (Circular May 2016). Among the reviews of several governmental documents, several authors (Buckingham, 2018a; Rook, 2016; Rowles and Rowles, 2005) identified two common roles assigned to FLAs: 1- to support the improvement of learners’ linguistic and communication skills, and 2- to promote their knowledge of the target cultures. All these authors considered that governmental descriptions tended to be brief and generic where FLAs’ roles and tasks were concerned, leaving the agencies responsible for giving further insights into the possible tasks that assistants need to fulfil for their roles. In the case of FLA programmes in Mexico, recent government documents include the two previously mentioned roles and add some recommendations on how to enact those, such as bringing further authenticity to the linguistic content taught in class (French government, Ministry of National Education, Youth, and Sports, 2016) and establishing an effective partnership between tutors, educators and students, and FLAs for the French-Canadian and Mexican governments (Ministry of International and Francophone Relations of Québec, 2018, and Secretary of Public Education, 2019).

Definitions of the SRTs presented in this sub-section establish the evolving status of FLAs, which, from the second half of the 20th century, was focused on supporting teaching language and culture. Governmental guidelines, however, fail to provide detailed information concerning how to translate the assigned status into practice or the type of partnership expected between the stakeholders involved in the host institutions. The description applied to the different status indicates, on the one hand, that FLAs will carry out teaching responsibilities while, on the other, that their profile distances them from assuming those functions. Although the latter is generally determined by them and adapted to the teaching settings, it may lead to countless interpretations and explains the differences between what the governments indicate and the descriptions of SRTs of FLAs in programme
guidelines (Bosch et al. 2000, among other authors). These are explored in the following sub-section.

2.3.2 Assistantship programme guidelines

Several FLA programmes’ longevity and recent growth have stimulated scholars’ interest in reporting on assistants’ assigned SRTs, analysing, and discussing the guidelines connected to them (most recently, especially in European countries, Buckingham, 2018a/b; García Laborda et al., 2020; López-Medina and Otto, 2020). However, any such literature on the SRTs of francophone assistants working in Mexico is non-existent, and publications are limited to the guidelines published by the programme agencies (CIEP, 2018; DGRI, 2019; EA, 2018).

The literature review shows that, although the descriptions of the roles are phrased in various ways, they pursue the general and historically established FLA programmes’ objectives: provide support to reinforce students’ oral skills and promote knowledge of different cultures. To illustrate this claim, it is helpful to explore scholars’ work reviewing how the roles and tasks of FLAs are defined in agencies’ guidelines in different contexts. The available literature reports on three countries’ realities: Spain, Italy, and The United Kingdom. In Spain, assistants are expected to practice conversation, present aspects of their culture, create teaching and learning materials, make recordings as an example of a native speaker’s speech, and foster students’ interest in the target language and culture (Buckingham, 2018b; Grinager, 2018; Rook, 2016). In Italy, FLAs promote their culture, coordinate cultural initiatives, and enhance the practice of the comprehension and production of the foreign language, among other roles and tasks (Cibin, 2012). For the British agency, assistants “expose learners to a real (authentic) language and aid their understanding of different countries and cultures” (Rowles and Rowles, 2005, p.3). This last description implies, on the one hand, that language students are not usually exposed to real use of the target language in their learning process and that FLAs’ presence and their classroom activities would fill this gap. This is arguably questionable, specifically in terms of assistants’ interpretation of what constitutes cultural authenticity. Conversely, the quote indicates that FLAs have the appropriate knowledge and skill to understand
a variety of cultures and encourage it among language learners, which is absent in the guidelines consulted (CIEP, 2018, for instance).

All of these agencies’ guidelines refer to the importance of culture within the language learning experience, indicating that the cultural dimension is key in defining FLAs’ roles as temporal stakeholders in the language learning and teaching process. The concept of culture has been generally defined as a socially constructed and non-static system of values, beliefs, and attitudes that influence members of society’s behaviours and interpretations of their environment and language (Hofstede, 2001; Kramsch, 2011; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998, among other scholars). The relevant issue in language education is how to best learn about or understand an unfamiliar culture. We know originally from linguistics but more famously from anthropology (Mostowlansky and Rota, 2020) that, apart from studying it from the outside – known as etic or external perspective – using generic descriptions of symbols, language, norms, values, and artefacts, we can also focus on the members of such culture as a primary source of cultural – what is known as an emic understanding (Miller, 2014). The etic approach encourages generalised cultural assumptions; therefore, what is perceived as real, authentic and updated for one individual might be perceived differently by another. The emic approach has provided further opportunities to make informed observations about the target culture, including in the language education field (see, for instance, Davies, 2004). With this in mind and considering the FLAs’ agencies’ objectives, assistants appear to provide a suitable answer to encourage learners to gain the ability to go beyond apparent and descriptive cultural knowledge based on their day-to-day experience with the students’ target culture and language. However, regarding the responsibility of the assistants to disseminate cultural content, as mentioned in programmes’ guidelines, it might be worth asking: What is the culture or cultures FLAs (are expected) to represent and share? Whose socio-cultural reality would it correspond to? What would count as an authentic representation of the target culture, and whose idea of authenticity is it? Those questions remain, unfortunately, unanswered by the available guidelines. The present study offers to identify to what extent and how the French and French-
Canadian cultures are presented in practice by two FLAs and how these are understood by them as well as by educators and students.

Additionally, these guidelines mention that the roles may vary depending on the host educational institution in the three countries. These authors also note that FLAs carry out unofficial tasks, such as substitute educators and even discipline students. According to the literature, the descriptions of roles and tasks published by assistantship programmes agencies that administer several bilateral FLA exchanges tend to be very general (see Table 1), and these one-size-fits-all explanations have disadvantages (Buckingham, 2018b; Cibin, 2012; Codó and McDaid, 2019). According to the latter, these include the difficulty for stakeholders in identifying which roles and tasks FLAs will perform, how they should carry them out, and the eventuality of stakeholders' expectations and needs being overlooked, which may lead to disillusionment.

Concerning the experiences of francophone FLAs in Mexico, according to the literature consulted – documentation, mainly published online, available for prospective candidates and universities – and complementary documents used internally by the French, Quebecker, and Mexican agencies (gathered by email and during briefing meetings - see Appendix 2, for more information), assistants provide 12 to 14 hours support weekly over the course of several months for the teaching and learning process by performing activities focused on oral skills practice to complement the syllabus, and thus facilitating foreign language learning. The three agencies involved – CIEP, DGRI, and EA – manage bilateral assistantship agreements with other countries, and agencies usually provide FLAs and host schools with similar information to cover different practice contexts. Although this procedure might save administrative time and ensure homogeneity in the SRTs, it reduces host institutions, FLAs, and tutors to establish what is expected, thus increasing different interpretations and possible problematic issues in practice. However, authors who have analysed FLAs’ in situ experiences, such as Ehrenreich, also agree that “the only pattern in the assistants' work [...] is that there is a wide variety of experiences” (2006, p.191). This observation suggests a challenge for the agencies in establishing a general description of SRTs when
these will most probably be influenced by the teaching context and the expectations of the stakeholders working or studying in the host educational institutions.

According to the documents, no explicit mention of the connection between language, culture, and communication in FLAs’ practice is made. The roles and tasks presented to them during those meetings indicate a separation of those three elements. Table 1 gathers the two roles – 1 and 2 – and corresponding tasks – A, B, and C – defined by the three agencies working with francophone assistants in Mexico.
Table 1: FLA roles and tasks according to Francophone assistantship programmes in Mexico

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<tr>
<td><strong>1- Improve students’ communication skills</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>CIEP 1 A- Enhance conversation practice with the students in class</td>
<td>EA 1 A- Lead activities that focus mainly on oral communication and that complement the linguistic content</td>
<td>DGRI 1 A- Lead language clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIEP 1 B- Lead a language club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIEP 1 C- Contribute to authentic voice recordings</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2- Develop students’ knowledge of different societies and cultures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIEP 2 A- Participate in various educational activities held in the school</td>
<td>EA 2 A- Share national culture and lifestyle with students</td>
<td>DGRI 2 A- Share national and regional culture through pedagogical and entertaining activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIEP 2 B- Implement educational exchange programmes</td>
<td></td>
<td>DGRI 2 B- Organise academic, cultural, and artistic activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DGRI 2 C- Participate in various educational activities held in the school</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Prescribed tasks play two separate roles: One focusing on communication and the other on culture. CIEP lists more tasks for improving students’ communication skills, and DGRI emphasises developing students’ knowledge of different societies and cultures. The way tasks are labelled in the EA programme seems to imply several sub-tasks. Table 1 also indicates similarities in the tasks mentioned by the programmes (e.g., CIEP 1B and DGRI 1A). For example, linguistic competence may be implicitly included in the tasks listed. Except for CIEP 1A, no explicit mention of linguistic competence suggests any responsibility of FLAs to enhance conversation practice in class.

Nevertheless, they include leading language clubs, contributing to authentic voice recordings as features of the first role, and sharing information about their national and regional cultures and lifestyles with students as components of the second. The roles and tasks listed in the agencies’ guidelines imply a disconnection between cultural knowledge and communicative competence, encouraging students to practise them separately. This division echoes both the French government’s description (in a circular from 1999) and the expectations of some stakeholders (Ehrenreich, 2006) respecting assistants’ in-between status. Even the guidelines suggest a lack of clarity in defining how SRTs are prescribed.

Additionally, the information consulted indicates roles that FLAs are not expected to perform, mostly due to their non-professional status. These unofficial roles, described in internal documentation and during briefing meetings, include substitute teaching, performing administrative tasks pertaining to educators, disciplining students, correcting homework, and evaluating students. The Mexican FLA agency points out that the performance of these unofficial roles has been reported in several universities. Thus, some educational institutions disregard those restrictions and assign assistants teaching responsibilities.

The agencies’ guidelines reviewed in this sub-section provide evidence of the status of FLAs in assisting students and educators in practising the target language and discovering the target cultures. Despite the apparent straightforward listing of FLA roles in the guidelines, studies indicate these are often unknown and
misinterpreted by the stakeholders or turn out to be impractical for the practice context (Bosch et al., 2000; Lacronique, 2000). The present research does not investigate how this information was communicated and understood at a Mexican university, whether the prescribed FLAs' roles and tasks were performed, and how.

### 2.3.3 Expectations and understanding of assistants’ practice

After reviewing the description of government and agency guidelines on assistants' SRTs, this sub-section explores the literature on the expectations of educators, students, and FLAs regarding this topic. The relatively small number of academic publications on the topic gathers assistantship experiences in different teaching environments: English language assistants working in primary and secondary schools in several European countries (Ehrenreich, 2006; Rowles and Rowles, 2005) or working in Spanish bilingual primary schools (Buckingham, 2018b; Codó and McDaid, 2019; Hibler, 2010; Jiménez-Garrido and Pérez-Navío, 2014; López-Medina and Otto, 2020; Scobling, 2011), and European assistants, including German, Spanish, and Italian FLAs, working in French primary, secondary and high schools (Cibin, 2012; Haramboure, 2000; Martinez, 2000; Lacronique, 2000; López Palacios, 2012). Despite the absence of studies focused on Francophone assistantship experiences in Mexico, the authors mentioned above provide an overview of stakeholders’ expectations and understanding of assistants' profiles and SRTs and the impact on language practice.

Evidence gathered by several authors (in López Palacios, 2012, among others) about foreign language assistants' status generally aligns with stakeholders’ expectations, understanding of the place given to the FLA in the classrooms, and the assigned level of responsibility concerning teaching decision-making. According to stakeholders’ narratives, the literature consulted reports on six statuses accorded to FLAs.

1. Educators’ helper. This involves hierarchy and excludes reference to the students (Buckingham, 2018b).
2. Conversation assistant. FLAs focus on the practice of learners’ oral skills (Buckingham, 2018b).

3. Conversation motivator.

4. Pronunciation assessor. Items 3 and 4 necessarily show that educators do not always motivate the practice of conversation or evaluate students’ pronunciation and that educators and students depend on the assistants to perform these tasks (Grinager, 2018);

5. Cultural ambassador. FLAs represent a nation’s cultural diversity through classroom activities (Bosch et al., 2000; Hibler, 2010).

6. Assistants’ in-between status means that FLAs are not considered either students or educators (Ehrenreich, 2006).

While the list shows similarities with some government definitions of status presented in 2.3.1, including the intermediary (mentioned in 1999), the helper (1905) and the diplomatic position (1953 and 1971), it also indicates that FLAs achieved more status in practice. Those expected statuses, discussed in recent publications, correspond to different visions of the FLAs’ practice and a very distinct period of time, suggesting that their status has evolved unevenly. Some authors, however, specify that due to stakeholders’ countless interpretations, the specificities of the teaching context – partly explaining some precisely identified statuses (e.g., pronunciation assessor) – and the reported lack of communication of FLAs’ SRTs, those given statuses are not mutually exclusive (Bosch et al., 2000, among others). This can lead to communication drawbacks and the performance of unofficial roles and tasks (mentioned in Hibler, 2010).

Number 6, above, is further developed in Haramboure (2000), who identifies in the comments of several stakeholders three statuses attached to the FLAs, which may aid in understanding the problems caused by this intermediary position. Firstly, the temporary status is associated with the length of stay and the frequency of FLA classroom performances. Secondly, the distinction in status between the educators and assistants and the type of tasks that both of them perform. And lastly, a unique
status “placing the assistant in a position which no other occupies: neither teacher nor pupil. […] it is not precisely to teach but to encourage pupils to learn by being a representative of the language and culture students are acquiring” (p. 44). Haramboure also reveals the difficulty for several stakeholders in agreeing on a single status, which may impact the roles and tasks they expect FLAs to perform and, therefore, the overall language practice. Other authors, however, identify similarities in the roles and tasks expected of and performed by the FLAs. These consist of assisting educators and students in the teaching and learning process both in and out of the classroom, explicitly fostering oral communication skills, and promoting cultural knowledge (Buckingham, 2018a; Hibler, 2010; Lacronique, 2000; López-Medina and Otto, 2020; Scobling, 2011).

Scholars also draw attention to aspects that must be considered when defining FLAs’ roles and tasks. They claim that an improved understanding of such aspects would reduce the gap scholars observed between the prescribed and expected roles and tasks and mitigate possible stakeholders’ disappointments in practice (Bosch et al., 2000; Ehrenreich, 2006; Hibler, 2010; López Palacios, 2012). These authors observe that educators’ and assistants’ (lack of) knowledge and understanding of their mutual and the agencies’ expectations complicated the integration of FLAs into the teaching and learning process through a partnership (a concept further explored in 2.4.2). According to these studies, some educators struggle to integrate FLAs in the teaching and learning process, more precisely in their classrooms, and consider setting up a partnership with them to be time-consuming. Others assign them menial tasks such as photocopying or ask them to perform unofficial tasks such as teaching a whole class. For their part, and according to Hibler’s study, “40% of the language assistants stated that they did not know their role” (2010, p.40). As a result, some FLAs develop feelings of uselessness and disappointment and state that they feel like “a one-trick pony” (Buckingham, 2018b, p.41) or “a bird in a cage that the teacher brought out to play with for a while before putting him back in his cage to continue with the curriculum” (Scobling, 2011, p.3) and that “they don’t show all of their abilities or they don’t
have the opportunity to develop a project connecting students’ and assistants’ interest” (López Palacios, 2012, p.21).

The reviewed expectations of students, educators, and FLAs concerning the assistants’ SRTs indicate a need for governments and agencies to listen to and consider those voices as their opinions and understanding of the assistantship experience influence the roles and tasks assigned and undertaken by the assistants and the achievement of the assistantship’s general objectives. One of the present study’s goals is to collect and disseminate stakeholders’ insider expectations and understanding of SRTs and examine their possible impact on the FLAs’ practice.

Concerning the impact of stakeholders’ expectations and understanding of FLAs’ prescribed profile and SRTs on the overall FLAs’ classroom practice, authors observed the influence of four features: the age proximity between assistant and learners, the lack of teaching experience or ambition of the native speaker status; and the FLA’s cultural knowledge of the language studied. The following paragraphs present those features and report assistantship experiences to further understand these practices.

As defined in the agencies’ guidelines consulted, FLAs should be under 30 years of age. This usually corresponds to a university student's age, sometimes an additional selection criterion. Assistants are usually closer in age to students than most language educators (Scobling, 2011). In addition, the assistantship is often FLAs’ first working and living abroad experience due to their young age. It has been claimed that these elements and the second feature described below often encourage closeness between themselves and students (Bosch et al., 2000; Haramboure, 2000).

The second feature is the status of a non-expert in language teaching. Most assistantship programmes are open to candidates with no prior teaching training or experience. Some agencies specify that FLAs assist educators and students, complement the teaching and learning process, and do not include the
performance of traditional educators’ functions, such as student evaluations (CIEP, 2018; EA, 2018). However, several studies indicate that the descriptions in institutional documents, added to the lack of communication between stakeholders, encourage different interpretations of their non-professional status, which places the assistant in a hybrid position between a language learner and a pre-service educator (Cibin, 2012; Haramboure, 2000).

The third feature established in the guidelines is the native speaker status of the FLAs. Although the literature reports (Árva and Medgyes, 2000; Cook, 1999) that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the dichotomy non/native speaker was challenged for ideological, (socio)linguistic, and pragmatic reasons, the concept is still widely used among the academic and education field and is also used in the present study, native speakers, according to several sources (Davies, 1998; Johnson and Johnson, 1998; Stern 1983), share the following characteristics: intuitive knowledge of rules and grasp of meanings, ability to communicate within social settings, produce fluent discourse, and interpret and translate into the L1 of which she or he is a native speaker, possess a range of language skills and knowledge of differences between their own speech and that of the 'standard' form of the language, and identification with a language community. Regarding the native speaker status of FLAs, it seems important to indicate that especially outside of Europe, and despite the amount and diversity of content and interaction that became available due to the accessibility of the internet, assistants may be the few native speakers of the target language students have met and will meet face-to-face (Jiménez-Garrido and Pérez-Navio, 2014; López Palacios, 2012). Added to this, some researchers have noted that most language educators are non-natives of the language they teach (Canagarajah, 1999; Rajagopalan, 2006). Face-to-face interactions with FLAs, driven by their updated cultural and linguistic knowledge and the dialogue they can initiate in their classroom interventions between the cultures in contact, could still be of great value and relevance and may encourage learners to take an active part in the discovery and practice of the target language and culture.
The final profile feature relates to the assistants’ knowledge of the target culture, and publications use different names to describe this key function and what is expected from FLAs as representatives of their own culture of origin: cultural informant (Dafouz-Milne and Hibler, 2013), cultural ambassador, cultural assessor, and linguistic and cultural model (Grinager, 2018), and cultural resource (Lavery, 2001). To understand the relevance of this element in the context of FLAs practice, it seems important to discuss the place of culture in language education, the influence of the teachers’ familiarity with the target culture, the pedagogy of foreign culture, including strategies and resources used, and the dialogue between cultures.

Concerning the place of cultural knowledge in language classrooms, scholars cited in this paragraph have reported changes in educational policies and educators’ teaching methods in the last decades. For instance, in 1981, Strasheim reported that educators spent 10% of their instructional time teaching culture, which increased to 50% according to Moore’s research in 2006, suggesting that the cultural component gains significance, at least in Europe, partly due to the increasing emphasis on the cultural sensitisation in the frameworks such as the CEFR since 2001. In the last decade, while an increasing number of studies provide examples of class activities fostering a stronger connection between the target language and culture (Dema and Moeller, 2012; Kramsch, 2011; Diez-Bedmar and Byram, 2019), the reality in practice has also suggested that some teachers prioritise the study of linguistic content over the cultural knowledge, often due to lack of time stating that language syllabuses are already overloaded (Byrd et al., 2011).

Added to this tendency is the assumption, often observed among students and educators, that a native speaker (teacher) should be naturally able to teach sociocultural knowledge by comparing the two languages (Yang and Chen, 2016). Such a mindset has created insecurity in non-native educators and deterred them from integrating their own cultural knowledge into their classrooms due to a lack of confidence and preparation and/or limited contact with the target culture (Castro
Prieto, Sercu, and Méndez García, 2004). Regarding the native teacher’s familiarity with the target culture and its intuitiveness to teach it, several authors (Ávra and Medgyes, 2000; Hibler, 2010; Medgyes, 1992) challenge this assumption. It has been noted that there are potential drawbacks for native speaker educators since they do not always possess multilingual and multicultural experiences despite their linguistic skills and insider cultural knowledge:

They are often unable to analyse and conceptualise what is too familiar. [...] much of what they know is unconscious and incomplete, not to mention the fact that a person normally belongs to only one out of many subcultures that each national culture encompasses. (Byram et al., 2002, p.18)

Davies (2004) suggests nativeness includes acquiring the language in childhood, comprehending and producing idiomatic linguistic forms and fluent and spontaneous discourse, and understanding regional and social variations. According to Byram et al. (2002), this might prevent them from remaining detached from different cultural representations or interpretations of other cultural realities. Some scholars have reported the benefit of counting with both types of educators, arguing that both native and non-native speakers as teaching figures in the classroom complement each other, which supports the advantage of integrating FLAs into the teaching and learning process (Hibler, 2010; López-Medina and Otto, 2020; Scobling, 2011). This last point suggests that, in language classes taught by non-native teachers, assistants’ presence might help reduce drawbacks from both sides. It indicates the need for stakeholders to establish effective communication and partnership and questions teamwork outcomes if the teacher is a native speaker. Notwithstanding this, these considerations are not reported in the consulted literature.

Disseminating cultural knowledge involves adopting appropriate strategies and resources to present it to learners. The lack of cultural knowledge, training, and/or knowledge of strategies to teach culture has influenced some language educators to restrict their teaching objectives to transmit representative cultural facts or fear cultural stereotypes (Byram and Kramsch, 2008). It has also been highlighted that,
on the one hand, while native teachers tend to focus on the authentic use of the language (e.g., idioms), they are more innovative and empathic and encourage fluency in oral skills practices using various materials (Hibler, 2010; López-Medina and Otto, 2020; Scobling, 2011). On the other hand, authors have reported that non-native teachers are more inclined to concentrate on the textbook language and the syllabus, have good classroom management and discipline experience, enhance accuracy and grammar, and use students’ first language more (e.g., Avrá and Medgyes, 2000). Sánchez Murillo and Sibaja Hernández (2013), among other authors, discussed the decision of many educators to focus on a superficial study of the culture – defined as “elements that can easily be observable and are often inalterable and representative of a country, naming celebrations, tourist places, geographical sites, national symbols, food, and famous people” (Gómez Rodríguez, 2015, p.45) – which do not explicitly include a dialogue between the cultures in contact.

Teaching cultural content also involves selecting material to motivate students to learn more about the target cultures and further engage them in their language learning process. The material mostly used in language classes is the textbook. Ali, Kazemian, and Mahar (2015) and Risager (2018) reflect on this material’s cultural representations. Their evaluation suggests that textbooks often use cultural comparisons, which contribute to raising awareness of the diverse interpretations of cultural aspects. However, they also fail to provide educators with intercultural strategies to teach this cultural knowledge. To mitigate these drawbacks, Byram et al. highlight the importance that “the use of authentic material […] from different origins with different perspectives should be used together to enable learners to critically compare and analyse the cultures” (2002, p.24). These profiles also echo the resources used to teach cultural content and the challenges of providing students with updated resources and relevant cultural activities. Dema and Kramer Moeller argue that “while textbooks […] often depict culture as statical […] rarely contain any information on values, attitudes, and beliefs in L2 culture, making the teacher’s task even more challenging. […] with the incorporation of technology,
both the teacher and the students become part of the interactive environment” (2012, p.78). Considerations of the type of cultural content, the face-to-face interactions, and a certain degree of pedagogical awareness to disseminate culture seem to be indirectly required from FLAs by educators and students in their classroom performances (see Table 2 below). More than authentic material or realia, which nowadays may be found online, assistants then appear as young native speakers who offer students face-to-face conversations in the target language and cultural aspects. Their presence aims to fill implied gaps in geographically distanced teaching contexts, in which student populations do not always have the means to travel and lack face-to-face contact with the target language and culture. Some educators lack updated and non-stereotyped cultural knowledge. However, as mentioned previously and reported in the literature (Ehrenreich, 2006; García Laborda et al., 2020; Haramboure, 2000; Scobling, 2011), agencies' guidelines and SRTs' descriptions tend to exclude the mention of the possible intercultural scope of FLAs' practice and the use of the teaching of culture strategies that their performance seems to require.

Although native or non-native educators have begun to include more cultural content in the classroom, the challenge, for the past few decades, remains, despite the interactive environment that the internet provides, to integrate an effective approach to bring both language and culture in students’ social reality (Lange, 1999). In terms of educational policies, and mainly through the support of Byram’s contributions, including the Five savoirs model (1997), educational frameworks, such as CEFR (2001, 2018, 2021), have promoted the dissemination of culture in the language classroom the development of intercultural communicative strategies among educators and students. The model mentioned considers a gradual and interdependent acquisition of skills, knowledge, and attitudes to become an intercultural speaker, including Savoir être or intercultural attitudes, Savoir or knowledge, Savoir comprendre or skills of interpreting or relating, Savoir apprendre et faire or skills of discovery and interaction, and Savoir s’engager or critical cultural awareness. In the case of FLAs, while authors and guidelines have
qualified them as updated cultural experts and bearers of cultural and linguistic authenticity (Buckingham, 2019; CIEP, 2018; EA, 2018; Ehrenreich, 2006; Haramboure, 2000; López Palacios, 2012), programme agencies do not ensure that FLAs have multilingual and multicultural experiences or intercultural awareness, nor provide them with instructions on how to disseminate cultural content or the types of topics to present.

Assistantship experiences analysed in academic publications provide insights into how the above-described features impact language practice’s decisions, as Table 2 shows.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed impacts of the factors on FLAs’ practice in the literature (authors, date)</th>
<th>Features associated with the observed impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little authority and closeness to learners due to a lack of professional experience and student status (Haramboure, 2000; Scobling, 2011).</td>
<td>Age proximity: ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster comparisons among learners and FLAs of similar concerns ease learners’ and FLAs’ ability to relate to the realities of the target cultures (Martinez, 2000; Rowies and Rowles, 2005).</td>
<td>Age proximity: ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLAs and learners share similar cultural interests associated with the youth culture facilitating the communication between FLAs and students (Bosch et al., 2000; Byram, 1997; Rook, 2016).</td>
<td>Age proximity: ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistants fail to understand FL learners’ difficulties as they never learnt the target language, which makes them more forgiving of errors made (Graham, 2000; Hibler, 2010).</td>
<td>Age proximity: ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of authentic materials and entertaining activities focused on cultural knowledge (Bosch et al. 2000; Rowies and Rowles, 2005), which can be unsuitable or unrelated to the learners’ level and the topics studied due to a lack of professional experience (Lavery, 2001).</td>
<td>Age proximity: ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of the ‘real language’ (e.g., active vocabulary, idioms), personal examples (Hibler, 2010; Rook, 2016) bring the linguistic topics studied alive through pragmatic and different accents (Haramboure, 2000; Martinez, 2000) and foster the intercultural awareness by comparing cultures (Grinager, 2018).</td>
<td>Age proximity: ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistants are models of the target language and culture for the learners (CIEP, 2018; Grinager, 2018). They move away from the culture displayed in textbooks and cultural stereotypes (Lavery, 2001) or might reinforce them (Ehrenreich, 2006).</td>
<td>Age proximity: ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly due to a lack of professional experience, FLAs step out of the learning routine and focus on cultural topics they are familiar with (Haramboure, 2000).</td>
<td>Age proximity: ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The trusting relationship developed between FLAs and students, partly due to the age closeness and assistants’ lack of teaching authority, motivate the students to be understood by native speakers and use the target language as a communication vehicle which enhances confidence (Hibler, 2010; Scobling, 2011).</td>
<td>Age proximity: ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to their student/non-professional status and the empathic atmosphere they create, FLAs are considered intermediaries between learners and educators (Bosch et al., 2000).</td>
<td>Age proximity: ✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the literature in the table, though in different combinations, these features appeared to have influenced attitudes towards FLAs’ classroom practice. The closeness in age is perceived positively and encourages communication skills around students’ interests in a trustful and relaxed atmosphere and fosters a dialogue between the cultures in contact. Nativeness seems to be considered a factor that positively impacts the practice, as assistants represent opportunities for face-to-face encounters using the target language and offer an empathic complement to educators’ grammar- and vocabulary-focused teaching. FLAs’ lack of prior teaching experience brings them closer to the student's status, which may manifest in the assistants’ decision to use personal material instead of the textbook. However, reported experiences indicate shortcomings, such as several assistants’ limited skill in explaining classroom activities or selecting material adapted to learners’ language levels. While assistants’ cultural knowledge provides advantages, such as discovering shared cultural meanings between students and FLAs and fostering intercultural dialogue, various limitations encourage a stereotyped view of the target culture.

Overall, the authors report that assistants’ presence and participation in the teaching and learning process increased students' interest in the target language and culture, which seems to be facilitated by the four features mentioned above. According to Bosch et al., “for 89% of the learners, the young assistants awaken curiosity for the language and the culture of their country of origin” (2000, p.25) and, according to comments reported in López Palacios, “the assistants’ dissemination of cultural knowledge arouse a friendship for France and […] a desire to improve their language proficiency” (2012, p.21). Additionally, FLAs fostered motivation among students: “making the language come alive for pupils” (Rowles and Rowles, 2005, p.27), “using their [students’] language abilities to find out things they want to know about the language assistants” (Rook, 2016, p.25), and “deschooling the learning […] so learners are more responsive and interested” (Bosch et al., 2000, p.24). Finally, stakeholders’ experiences indicate mutual learning between students and FLAs as they share the common objective of improving their foreign language and discovering new cultures (Haramboure,
Several FLAs’ experiences report positive attitudes towards teaching, resulting from an effective partnership with educators and various experiences within the classroom structure. However, the literature reviewed did not address how these attitudes are related to the stakeholders’ knowledge and understanding of the prescribed FLAs’ SRTs. This study represents an attempt to identify their expectations and interpretations of these.

While the four features of FLAs’ profile are clearly stated in the agencies’ guidelines, those identity characteristics paint a rather static portrait of the assistants’ identity. The concept of identity has been defined by Norton (2000) and Mynard, Burke, Hooper, Kushida, and Lyon (2020) as ways in which an individual or a group understands his or her relation – constructed and constantly reevaluated across time and space – to the world and how it affected his or her future actions. Identity is fluid, individual and collectively constructed. Although it is necessary, as reported by several authors (Buckingham, 2018b; Cibin, 2012; Codó and McDaid, 2019, among others) and discussed earlier in this chapter (see 2.4.2, for this last point), to provide a clear definition of the FLAs’ SRTs and nature of their partnerships, it reduces the assistants to a static set of roles and disregards the fact that their identity, influenced by different factors (e.g., encounters, experiences, tasks) will constantly be reshaped through the assistantship. Authors reported dichotomies in the FLAs SRTs based on stakeholders’ insights (see, for instance, Bosch et al. 2000), including cultural and linguistic learner and expert, foreigner and native, and in-between status as a student and non-teacher or a temporary helper and a teaching substitute, leading to possible misinterpretations and the performance of extraofficial roles and tasks (Ehrenreich, 2006; Haramboure, 2000). Based on Norton’s (2000) and Mynard et al.’s (2020) definitions, although their perspective is connected to language learning and community building, I contend that the ways that FLAs and other stakeholders make sense of these assistants’ identities may impact different aspects of their overall experience, such as their motivation and involvement, their ability to project themselves as part of a community, and how they connect with others.

Recommendations to mitigate observed drawbacks in practice include redesigning
the training experience offered to FLAs and enhancing further communication, partnerships, and reflection among the stakeholders. These topics will be examined in the next section. By collecting a tutor, educators, FLAs, and students’ perceptions and experience, the present research aims to make sense of how FLAs are profiled and how they identify themselves in the different contexts they evolve in and the SRTs they are asked to or/and endorsed.

2.4 Assistantship practice

From the assistantship programme agencies’ first briefing meeting to the assistantship’s last day, FLAs’ stay is punctuated by events that shape the assistants’ practice, including the partnership established with other stakeholders and assistants’ professional commitment to the teaching and learning process. This section focuses on three aspects related to the practice of FLAs. First, training, followed by partnership and communication, and third, FLAs’ integration and professional awareness in FLAs’ practice.

2.4.1 Training

Documents published by the agencies give information about the training sessions available for FLAs (CIEP, 2018; DGRI, 2019; EA, 2018). Academic publications describe the training received and analyse its impact on assistantship, specifically on practice (Buckingham, 2018a; García Fernández, 2000; Lavery, 2001), by pointing out its limitations (Gerena and Ramírez-Verdugo, 2014; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012) and the adjustments that could be made to the assistants’ profile and roles (Scobling, 2011) to improve the quality of the practice experience (Bosch et al., 2000; Haramboure, 2000; Lacronique, 2000).

It has been reported that assistantship programme agencies establish the quantity, schedule, and type of training offered. In general, they offer FLAs several training sessions. These last for a few hours and consist of general administrative, security, and practical information concerning the host country (Haramboure, 2000; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012). Such sessions are not mandatory and are held before assistants arrive at the schools. Sometimes, workshops and talks that deal
with methodological aspects of the FLAs’ future practice are offered, but these tend to be discretionary (Buckingham, 2018a). Recently, in 2018, CIEP released an online training module. The resources, written in French, aimed to facilitate FLAs’ understanding of their roles and tasks and familiarise themselves with the design of classroom activities, including a list of websites to find material. Apart from this optional training opportunity, there is no evidence of any training regarding using digital skills to support FLA practice. This oversight suggests different interpretations. First, due to the presence of technologies among the youth, programmes may assume that FLAs have those skills and will be inclined to use technology in their interventions. Secondly, disregarding digital skills indicates the programmes’ emphasis on face-to-face contact in FLAs’ practices. And thirdly, educational institutions may still have a poor – or even no – internet connection or the necessary technological devices.

The available scholarly publications do not provide a detailed description of the training received, but some do offer assistants’ testimonies on this. According to these studies, the training that FLAs received was perceived as insufficient preparation for the prescribed roles and tasks: “They did not receive training on their functions […]. Assistants were left on their own and depended on the tutor availability” (García Fernández, 2000, p.34) and “the assistant training is still a problem. They have, generally, no professional experience […] and ignore the issues the host educational system is facing” (Bosch et al., 2000, p.21). At the same time, FLAs were expecting to receive a different type of training. For example, 39.5% of the assistants interviewed by Buckingham (2018a) felt that the roles performed during their stay did not fully correspond to the explanations given during the training. Buckingham also draws attention to the fact that almost 50% of the FLAs claim that they did not have briefing meetings or training sessions during their assistantship and that their comments show a connection between their feeling of being insufficiently prepared for the practice and having received insufficient and impractical training (Buckingham, 2018a, p. 238). This situation was also reported in FLAs’ comments discussed in Bosch et al. (2000). It led some assistants to withdraw or feel lonely and isolated in their “neither-fish-nor-flesh”
position (Graham, 2000) and to seek out support, resources, and advice from other FLAs (Buckingham, 2018a).

The literature makes several suggestions for improving training sessions, and offering preparation adapted to the realities of practice, based on assistants’ experiences, as follows.

1. Provision of training sessions focused on specific aspects of the FLAs’ work, such as teaching strategies, classroom management, and analysis of the intercultural objectives of the assistantship (Bosch et al., 2000; Buckingham, 2018a; Gerena and Ramírez-Verdugo, 2014)

2. Identification of the different FLA profiles and implementation of training adapted to their needs and teamwork with educators (Scobling, 2011), and

3. Organisation of encounters (training or briefing meetings) locally, in different periods (monthly or quarterly), and with various participants (tutor, educators or other FLAs) to ensure follow-up and an effective partnership and help to prevent shortcomings (García Fernández, 2000; Haramboure, 2000; Lacronique, 2000).

Although these recommendations seem to respond to the concerns raised above and place value on FLAs’ contributions by facilitating their integration and sharing responsibilities, the authors report that these goals may be challenging because of financial and time-related constraints.

According to internal documents sent by the CIEP and EA assistantship coordinators (details of these can be found in Appendix 2), both agencies organise a one-day training session with the selected candidates before their departure to Mexico, during which they receive a booklet containing a general description of the assistantship and practical contents (e.g., the weather, emergency phone numbers). The training lasts three hours for French-Canadian candidates and ten hours for French FLAs. The difference concerning the length of the training might be partly due to the number of assistants (86 French and eight Canadian) and that the French agency is involved in bilateral agreements with 26 other countries,
which also have a similar training session in the same period, while EA works with three. According to the documents, their content comprises:

1. A talk on diplomatic and security issues.
2. A talk on assistants’ prescribed roles.
3. A round table with former FLAs sharing their experience.
4. Role-plays on classroom issues and strategies.

In Quebec, assistants also listen to a talk on culture shock, feelings they might experience, and how to cope with cultural issues and differences between language teaching in Mexico and Canada (e.g., formality in the relationship between students and educators). The coordinators implied that the communication with the DGRI is inefficient (e.g., delays or lack of information). Therefore, it seems that the FLAs’ country of origin agencies are sometimes unable to offer assistants specific details on certain Mexican institutions’ educational settings during those training meetings.

FLAs are afterwards sent to Mexico, where DGRI supervises them during their stay. French assistants participate in a three-day training course based on pedagogical advice and administrative and security issues, which is reduced to a one-day training session for the French Canadians. Additionally, the Mexican agency organises one briefing meeting for FLAs’ tutors working with French FLAs (which I attended in September 2016 and 2019 - details in Appendix 2) and another for those working with French-Canadian assistants. These meetings provide administrative information and answer practical questions about situations related to FLAs’ roles and tutors’ responsibilities. The training described and organised by the DGRI is the only scheduled meeting opportunity for FLAs and tutors once they arrive in Mexico. Except for the feedback form sent at the end of the stay, the Mexican agency maintains minimal contact with the assistants. This raises several questions. Among the potential improvements to training mentioned above, the literature fails to mention training tutors in-depth to help them better understand assistants’ SRTs. Additionally, there is no access to support from the agencies for host schools, tutors, educators, and FLAs. This also echoes the need
for further connection between FLAs and stakeholders highlighted by scholars investigating the topic in European countries to benefit stakeholders (Bosch et al., 2000; Haramboure, 2000; Lacronique, 2000).

According to the authors cited in this sub-section, the support given to FLAs during the training sessions lacked accuracy and efficiency, causing different interpretations of the SRTs and possibly leading to disappointment in practice. Some scholars deplore the low frequency or absence of opportunities for involvement and partnership between the stakeholders involved in the assistantship at a local level. Closer teamwork from the earliest stages right up to the end of the assistantship seems essential to establish effective communication and help prevent possible problematic issues.

2.4.2 Partnerships and communication

The literature reviewed draws on the responsibilities of host institutions and tutors and assistantship experiences to describe partnerships and communication mechanisms (Bosch et al., 2000; López Palacios, 2012). These include comments from the stakeholders on expectations about teamwork (Buckingham, 2018b; Hibler, 2010), the significance of such cooperation in the practice and the overall assistantship (Martinez, 2000; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012), and examples of effective teamwork as well as suggestions to mitigate reported mismatched goals, miscommunication, and discontent (Bosch et al., 2000; Culpeper et al., 2008; Hibler, 2010).

According to some authors, the young age of the FLAs and lack of teaching experience and reference points in this new environment, which has not been designed with young assistants in mind, all make them vulnerable. FLAs seek guidance from tutors, educators, and fellow assistants in an attempt to integrate into the school community (Bosch et al., 2000; Cibin, 2012; Culpeper et al., 2008). Government circulars cited in López Palacios (2012, p.28) advise educational institutions “to welcome the assistant and ensure his or her integration in this new environment” (Circular November 1971) and that “tutor and educators need to ensure their integration into the teaching team to prevent from isolation or feeling of
usefulness” (Circular of September 1982). Although studies do not mention whether tutors, educators, and FLAs have access to those official texts, it seems highly probable that they will not read them, indicating agencies’ responsibilities to include such recommendations in their guidelines. Some agencies’ guidelines emphasise the need for partnership and communication, highlighting tutors’ and educators’ key role in making the assistantship experience successful and reducing possible shortcomings, including mismatched objectives and goals, through effective teamwork. For example, Échanges Azimut (2018) and The British Council (2019) handbooks for host schools include sections on *How to work with the language assistant* and *How to make the best use of your Language Assistant*, and CIEP (2018) recommends that assistants foster teamwork and good communication with educators from the start. Regarding those examples, Culpeper et al. observe that they “are not necessarily scrutinised and knowledge of professional responsibilities tends to be hazy. In particular, responsibilities of the ‘mentor’ role […].” (2008, p8)

Agencies working with francophone FLAs in Mexico also recommend partnerships based on educators’ guidance of the assistants’ performance related to the topics taught. In some situations, FLAs are empowered to lead activities by themselves, and in others, educators teach theoretical content that assistants put into practice according to the guidelines. The information consulted also indicates educators’ leading teaching position in the classroom concerning the teaching decision-making process (internal documents sent by the French and Quebecker agency and shared orally during briefing meetings by DGRI). Some agencies, including CIEP, DGRI, and EA, request tutors to send quarterly feedback reports and comment on possible observed infringements or discontent. However, assistantship programme agencies have not always considered these reports (Bosch et al., 2000; Haramboure, 2000), questioning their use.

Furthermore, most agencies strongly suggest hosting schools where assistants participate early in the programme (Lavery, 2001). This is so that FLAs can observe students, educators, the teaching approach, and the material used and identify possible issues that could help them establish future partnership bases.
However, there is evidence that some institutions do not fulfil the responsibilities established by the agencies (Bosch et al., 2000; Haramboure, 2000). According to these authors, who reported the realities of FLAs in France, this situation impacted FLAs’ practice and caused disillusionment.

Added to this, documents and articles consulted indicate the clear and significant need for further partnership and communication in assistantships to better respond to the reality of the practice (Buckingham, 2018b; Hibler, 2010; López Palacios, 2012), including matching institutions’ needs with FLAs’ agenda (Culpeper et al., 2008).

In contrast, experiences reported in the literature suggest hesitation, struggle, and discomfort, mainly from educators, while integrating FLAs into the teaching and learning process. For López Palacios (2012), this situation is possibly caused by the lack of availability of comprehensive guidelines on how to establish a partnership between FLAs and tutors, and educators’ lack of knowledge, time, and understanding, together with educators’ fear of sharing or losing their authority, or even a disregard for assistants’ roles and tasks. This echoes the hesitation of educators discussed in Bosch et al. (2000), who observed that “welcoming a stranger into their classrooms is delicate, hard, and time-consuming.” (p.22), and it is also identified in the EA guidelines (2018) as the main reason for explaining difficulties in teamwork and communication issues. Authors report that the educators’ attitudes described above have interfered, in some instances, with the effective partnership and communication that the guidelines recommend. Hibler (2010) points out that not knowing how to use the FLAs may explain why “some assistants felt disconnected from the classroom […] they became quite distanced from the teachers and only did what they asked of them […] many assistants perceive that teachers were not wanting or trying to incorporate them into their class” (p.58). This echoes the September 1961 French government circular warning that “The effectiveness of assistants’ practice is related to the partnership with teachers […] if a constant and trustful contact is absent […] and tasks are not planned jointly […] confusion and disappointment in practice are to be expected” (cited in López Palacios, 2012, p.28). For their part, first, Culpeper et al. (2008) and
a decade later, Buckingham (2018b) suggested that the lack of clarity related to the presence and intervention of FLAs leads to a hierarchical relationship within the practice where educators are in control. Culpeper et al. (2008) explained that “[the] lack of clarity about professional responsibilities can […] profoundly influence contributions to an activity, as roles encapsulate rights and responsibilities and are more generally a source of social power” (p.8). Buckingham (2018b) observed that “the danger is that students see the assistant as a less powerful player […] and may lose respect for him and her, making it much more difficult for the assistant to control the classroom when leading the activity” (p.41). These reported missed opportunities confirm the importance of identifying stakeholders’ expectations, clarifying how they will communicate and work together, grasping the inherent challenges involved, and defining common objectives, which the present research attempts to carry out on a case study scale.

Academic publications also mention the benefits derived from experiences of effective teamwork and communication between these stakeholders. This partnership ideally evolves during the FLAs’ stay, frequently guided by the tutor and educators in the first weeks and based on understanding the language teaching process and its requirements. Both should gradually develop a trustful and professional relationship leading to autonomous decision-making in terms of selecting and designing material and activities from the assistants (Bosch et al., 2000; Haramboure, 2000) based on practical and explicit instructions (Culpeper et al., 2008) and regular meetings (Gower, 2005). According to these authors, this process should allow FLAs to understand better the pedagogical objectives and learning skills that correspond to each level of proficiency and students’ and educators’ expectations when designing and presenting their classroom activities. The gradual growth of partnership should permit educators to identify assistants’ strengths and weaknesses, monitor their presentations, provide constant feedback, and help mitigate possible issues. In addition, an effective duo consisting of an educator and assistant also impacts the learning process. If FLAs and their culture-focused activities are appropriately integrated into the class and the linguistic content studied, students will better understand and value the significance of their
presence and what they present (López Palacios, 2012; Martinez, 2000). This echoes the complementarity between non-native educators and FLAs mentioned in 2.3. In this study, the collected impressions on the FLAs’ practice and their analysis are aimed at a deeper understanding of how partnership and communication happen between the tutor, educators, students, and assistants to address suggestions for improvements in practice.

Scholars have provided suggestions based on experiences of FLAs’ practices and the awareness of the advantages of having effective partnerships and communication between stakeholders. Bosch et al. (2000) offer recommendations for educators at different stages of the assistantship.

- Before assistants’ arrival: Tutors and educators are suggested to read and agree on FLAs’ roles and tasks (both prescribed and unofficial), the guidance to be given, and assistants’ integration into the teaching team, among other topics.

- During the first week: Educators are recommended to hand FLAs a copy of the language syllabus and calendar, including the linguistic content studied at each level. The sharing of expectations, concerns, and suggestions related to the teaching approach used and material and activities that are generally effective with students is consistently recommended.

- During practice: Assistants are suggested to record their activities and material, reflect on their experience, and submit it to the teaching team and future assistants. Educators and assistants should participate in repeated meetings to identify and solve issues and foster a trustful relationship between the stakeholders.

This last suggestion was also discussed by Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez (2012). In addition, EA’s guidelines (2018), Hibler (2010), and Martinez (2000) recommend that assistants ask for educators’ guidance and use a variety of strategies and activities in the classroom that involve partnership (e.g., organisation of off-site activities and events).
These proposals are meant to foster an effective partnership between educators and assistants, often overlooked in the guidelines, which require detailed indications and more involvement as prescribed by governments and agencies. The literature consulted does not describe or report the tutor’s role, experiences, and recommendations about teamwork and communication. This doctoral study also includes a tutor as one of the research participants to fill this observed gap. Although few guidelines are provided to support partnership and communication between the stakeholders, this sub-section captured good practice suggestions and examples in the literature that are expected to benefit the assistantship overall. However, this requires willingness, availability, well-defined roles, good decision-making, open communication, and a capacity for co- and self-reflection (Bosch et al., 2000; López Palacios, 2012). Developing appropriate professional teamwork methods is a worthwhile pursuit that may impact the stakeholders’ attitudes, understanding, and expectations about their roles and tasks (Buckingham, 2018b; Harambouré, 2000). This study collects insights into how partnerships were performed and impacted FLAs’ practice and assistantship. This aims to report an example of a francophone language assistantship experience that does not feature in the literature and identify good practices and possible areas for improvement in terms of partnership and communication. Figure 1 (see 2.1.1) represents the lines of communication between the stakeholders involved in francophone assistantship programmes in Mexico, according to the literature. This study contributes to identifying and providing insights on how those communicate in practice.

2.4.3 FLAs’ professional awareness

The literature reviewed has shown that little guidance has been available for tutors, educators, and FLAs to perform their prescribed roles and tasks. Despite the non-professional status of FLAs prescribed in the programmes’ guidelines, this observed gap has motivated several stakeholders to question how FLAs’ integration into the teaching and learning process is enacted (Ehrenreich, 2006; Hibler, 2010; Lacronique, 2000) and its impact regarding the assistants’ status and their level of pedagogical commitment (Bosch et al., 2000; López Palacios, 2012).
The historical background of FLA programmes, reviewed in 2.2.1, indicated that institutional modifications had generated contradictions, especially regarding educators’ and assistants’ status and roles in practice. This has contributed to the difficulty of clarifying which functions FLAs should perform and how (Buckingham, 2018b; Codó and McDaid, 2019). The first contradiction concerns the pedagogical scope of the tasks assigned. Agencies guidelines, including CIEP and EA (2018) and DGRI (2019), emphasise that most FLAs do not have a teaching background or interest in becoming teachers. Nevertheless, it seems that carrying out the lists of prescribed roles and tasks (Table 1 in 2.3.2) in the context of language education naturally involves the development of pedagogical skills from the assistants, an aspect scarcely covered during training sessions (see 2.4.1) (Buckingham, 2018a; García Fernández, 2000). The second contradiction is related to the type of tasks performed. Although FLAs’ roles and tasks seem rather evident within the guidelines consulted, some educators’ lack of knowledge and understanding or disregard for said guidelines has led to FLAs being overused. As a result, some have been required to perform extraofficial tasks or even meaningless activities (Gerena and Ramírez-Verdugo, 2014; Scobling, 2011).

These two situations explain some of their testimonials, especially those struggling to differentiate between roles enacted by educators and those performed by FLAs (Bosch et al., 2000; Lavery, 2001). Scholars’ analyses of educators’ and assistants’ experiences provide further insights into these perceptions.

As presented in 2.4.2, the literature recommends integrating FLAs into the teaching and learning process. Ideally, they will progressively improve their understanding of selecting, designing and presenting culture-focused activities to complement educators’ linguistic topics (Bosch et al., 2000; Martinez, 2000). However, this also implies that FLAs will increasingly be expected to take teaching initiatives and develop pedagogical awareness, including adapting the material to the students’ level or incorporating different communicative skills into their classroom performances (Bosch et al., 2000; Haramboure, 2000; López Palacios, 2012). Some narratives indicate that some educators become progressively more demanding regarding FLAs’ work, requesting more material, activities, and
commitment (Buckingham, 2018b; Ehrenreich, 2006; Martinez, 2000). FLAs sometimes receive this additional workload well. However, although this circumstance may reflect educators’ growing trust in the assistants’ competence, this could also create resentment or further confusion over their SRTs. Recommendations to mitigate disappointment and successfully integrate FLAs into the teaching and learning process are presented in 2.4.2 and include constant communication and teamwork from the beginning of the assistantship. Another recommendation discussed in the literature to help mitigate misunderstandings of this sort and related to the increasing professional awareness expected from the assistants is the practice of collective reflection (Klapper, 2000; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012).

According to recent studies, reflective practice is based on a series of general principles, such as focusing on the practitioners, learning from experiences, connecting theory and practice, and promoting self-awareness, and it is conducted in different ways ranging from partnership to classroom observation (Banegas, Pavese, Velázquez, and Vélez, 2013; Etscheidt, Curran, and Sawyer, 2012; Sellars, 2012). Reflecting on practice can be performed individually and collaboratively using several options to report experiences, such as using logbooks and participating in focus group interviews. It has been argued that the collaborative reflection process enhances individual introspection and fosters a more in-depth analysis and understanding of issues arising inside and outside the class by sharing knowledge and suggestions with a group dedicated to a similar cause (Mann and Walsh, 2017; Rodgers, 2002). Several authors suggest that these stakeholders hold regular meetings to improve partnerships and integration, identify shortcomings, and guide assistants and educators in practice, as presented in 2.4.2. These would offer an opportunity for reflection on the assistantship experience, including the place of assistants in relation to educators in the classroom, FLAs’ level of pedagogical commitment, and how to adequately incorporate the work of both stakeholders in the teaching and learning process (Bosch et al., 2000; Haramboure, 2000; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012). As an example, Klapper (2000) reports successful results in the impact of
reflective practice on teaching assistants' self-professional development after participating in follow-up workshops, emphasizing reflection on classroom practice during their stay. To my knowledge, apart from this example, which focused on teaching assistants, the present study is the only one that allowed FLAs and educators to discuss and reflect collectively on the assistantship experience and assistants' practice.

Narratives from different stakeholders reported in the literature review indicate that professional awareness and teaching decision-making are required from FLAs, which contradicts the status prescribed in the agencies' guidelines. This topic is, however, scarcely discussed in publications. Placed in an in-between position with no teaching experience or support, assistants are often asked to assume teaching responsibilities and develop professional teaching awareness without formal instruction. This situation raises questions and causes confusion about assistants' SRTs. It bolsters the necessity of organising meetings to reflect on teaching practice and negotiate changes, improving the assistantship experience and encouraging FLAs to adapt their practice. The present research included opportunities for stakeholders and FLAs to reflect collectively on the practice and the overall assistantship experience.

2.5 Conceptual framework

In this chapter, the review of scholarly publications has identified the objectives defined by the French, Quebecker and Mexican Ministries of Education and how these are translated into assistants' SRTs by the agencies. Furthermore, it presented the stakeholders in the assistantship and their lines of communication, including how SRTs are disseminated and understood by educators, students, and assistants, and how training, partnerships, and communication were and can be achieved between them. Additionally, it explored how FLAs' profile features influence and impact the language practice and the stakeholders’ expectations, including the FLAs' integration into the teaching and learning process and the professional awareness they are expected to develop.
Figure 2 conceptualises the assistantship experience for the first time by identifying the stakeholders involved, their relationships, and their responsibilities in the target language country and the host educational institution.

Figure 2: Conceptual framework based on the literature review

According to the literature reviewed in this chapter, Ministries of Education from the target language country and the host countries promote and finance the FLA programmes. These, together with programme agencies from the target language and the host countries, establish the general objectives of the programmes, the assistants’ profile features, and FLAs’ status, roles, and tasks.
In the target language country, the agency selects FLAs and provides them with training where SRTs are addressed. FLA receives similar training from the host agency on arrival in the host country. This institution also selects the host educational institution, and an agreement contract is signed, where the responsibilities the assistants hold are established. A tutor is appointed to provide the FLA(s) with administrative, educational, and developmental guidance throughout their stay in each school. Guidelines mention tutors might also have different statuses, including language coordinator positions and educators. Language coordinators and tutors expect fluid communication with the host agency, FLAs and educators. The host agency organises a meeting with the tutors on the assistants’ arrival, where SRTs and guidelines are communicated. During the FLAs’ stay, tutors and educators are expected to collaborate to successfully organise FLAs’ classroom interventions with the learners, integrate them into the teaching and learning process, and encourage the achievement of the programmes’ grounding objectives.

While the narratives of stakeholders involved in FLAs’ daily practice and explored in this chapter highlight examples of successful assistantship experiences, several scholars have also pointed out some problematic issues. These concern the training received, the teamwork between educators and FLAs, and the dissemination and communication between FLAs’ SRTs and profile. According to several of the studies reviewed for this chapter, stakeholders’ expectations and understanding of different aspects of assistantship, including the FLAs’ profiles and SRTs, have impacted the assistants’ practice to the point that there were reports of cases of disappointment and frustration among stakeholders, as well as assistants’ performance of unofficial tasks.

This chapter identified several gaps in the literature. As we will see in the review of the relevant research literature, several gaps can be identified when exploring the realities of (Francophone) assistantship experiences (in Mexico). The present research, through an in-depth exploratory approach, aims to address the lack of previous research concerning Francophone FLAs outside of Europe, the lack of studies reporting the realities of assistantship experiences from the synchronous
perspectives of students, assistants, and educators, and the way observed problematic issues in defining, describing, and disseminating stakeholders’ relationships and partnerships as well as FLAs’ SRTs impact the assistants’ practice. In terms of academic publications, the review indicates a scarcity of studies on FLAs and assistantship experiences, particularly from the viewpoint of different stakeholders working or studying with assistants outside Europe. This study addresses that gap by providing a detailed description of an assistantship experience reporting the realities of students, assistants, a tutor assistants, and educators involved in the Francophone FLAs’ daily practice in a Mexican educational institution.

Additionally, the literature review shows a lack of information and reported practices on how FLAs’ SRTs and partnerships are defined, disseminated, and understood – including the expected level of pedagogical involvement of FLAs and collective reflection on FLA practice, the intercultural scope of assistants' practice, and the integration of assistants into the learning and teaching process - by agency and stakeholders, specifically those who work and study at the host institution. The present research aims to report how students, assistants, a tutor of the assistants, and educators experienced those aspects of the assistantship to gain further understanding of the reality of FLAs' practice in the context previously mentioned. These identified gaps in the literature helped refine the focus of two research questions: 1- How are the status, roles, and tasks of Francophone FLAs working in a Mexican public higher education institution understood by the stakeholders? and 2- Which roles and tasks are actually performed by the FLAs during the assistantship, and how? These questions, in turn, guided the design of the methodological approach presented in the next chapter.
Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter accounts for the research approach and details the research sites, participants, and timeline followed. It describes the data collection instruments employed and the methodological considerations taken into account to analyse the data, including an account of the researcher’s roles. The final section explores the ethical issues involved.

3.1 Research approach

Based on the research objectives of this study – to report on how the assistants’ status is defined throughout their stay in a Mexican educational institution and the actual roles and tasks performed and to provide insights into the extent to which the prescribed status, roles, and tasks (SRTs) by the agencies working with francophone FLAs are achieved in practice – and my research questions (see 1.2), this section explains my research approach.

This study uses qualitative research to make sense of a social phenomenon within its natural setting (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), make the participants’ worldview visible, and gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon by analysing their perspectives. Several scholars have identified several characteristics in qualitative studies (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990) which apply to this thesis, such as the interpretation of meaningful events for the participants concerning how assistants’ SRTs are understood and performed, and the fostering of a trustworthy relationship with and between the participants involved in their daily practice through collective interviews. These interconnected aspects are not exhaustive, yet this research’s objectives and questions allowed me to define my research design, select, and design data collection instruments, and apply an analytical approach. The experiences and perspectives of a tutor, educators, students, and those involved in the FLAs’ classroom practice were gathered using four different data collection instruments. In addition, this research also brings my own perspective as a language learner and a French teacher working with FLAs, as explained in section 1.1.
The interpretative framework that guided the practice of the present research is that of social constructivism, as referred equally by Creswell (2014), Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Hatch (2002), as a paradigm that allows developing an overall picture of a context or phenomenon inductively by revealing insights on how the participants make sense of multiple realities, experiences, and factors through interactions with others. Scholars, including Boyland (2019) and Hatch (2002), also inform social-constructivist researchers of several considerations and possible limitations of such a framework. Identifying one's own assumptions and recognising that those and the respondents’ may influence the interpretations of the data need to be considered. Framing this research under this paradigm allows participants to abundantly explore their views and nuances that have influenced their experiences and construction of knowledge concerning FLAs’ status, roles, and tasks within embedded expectations, situations, and relationships between stakeholders. Also, I believe that I started this study acknowledging preconceptions about the research topic and the context (see Chapter 1), which in addition to my analytic approach, including the triangulation of the data, helped me to mitigate the drawbacks previously mentioned while seeking to provide the most comprehensive description of the participants through their narratives.

Within qualitative research, the case study is the approach that best serves the objectives of the present study (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In particular, this case study of the exploratory type, which, according to Yin (2014), focuses on understanding what is happening regarding the FLAs’ practice in the French Department of a Mexican educational institution, seeking new perceptions than those already described in the extant literature on FLAs. It proceeds by asking questions using several instruments administered collectively and/or individually and evaluating a phenomenon from different angles, including those of students, FLAs, educators, and the tutor. It is also an intrinsic case study, defined by Stake (1995) as a study that serves to better understand a specific case in all its particularity and ordinariness. This method identifies points of convergence and divergence, partly fostered by the cross-verification of pieces of evidence (Yin, 2014) between a specific phenomenon such as a programme, a person, or a social
group and the participants, the time, and the space (Willis, 2007), and facilitates in-depth understanding through several lenses (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Creswell and Poth, 2018) and sources of information (Swanborn, 2010). The methodological choices of the present research involve cross-verification of the information gathered from various datasets and simultaneous data collection on FLAs’ practice from the perspective of different groups of participants. In the data analysis, the cross-verification helped me to triangulate the results gathered and develop a deeper and comprehensive understanding of the case. I decided to analyse participants’ data as a ‘proxy for experience’ (Guest, MacQueen, and Namey, 2012) as a means to understand their perceptions, feelings, and knowledge. Based on Ajzen (1988), Baker (1992), and Hernández-Campoy (2004), I felt it important to acknowledge the impact of my participants’ perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes about the assistantship experience that they self-reported during data collection.

Authors propose using multiple data collection instruments to gather multiple sources of evidence, which correspond to one aspect of a case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Those used in the present study – in-depth semi-structured individual interviews, focus group interviews, questionnaires, and logbooks – and the corresponding rationale are explained in 3.3.

As section 3.4 explains the data collected were analysed using thematic analysis (as described in Braun and Clarke, 2013; Guest et al., 2012; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014), which allows for condensing extensive and varied participants’ views and experiences to establish links between the research objectives of this study and the summary of findings derived from the raw data.

3.2 Research sites, participants, and timeline

This section gives an account of the physical locations where this research occurs. It also defines who the participants are and summarises the timeline and key moments (see Appendix 3 for a summary of the data collection process).
3.2.1 Research sites

This study's main site is the Language Department at a state university in Mexico. This site includes language classrooms and a Self-Access Centre (SAC).

An average of 250 learners study French each semester. The language can be studied across six semesters, corresponding to A1, A2, and B1 levels of the Common European Framework for Languages (2020). Thus, students need a whole year to complete a single level of proficiency, as described in this document. During their stay, the university appoints each FLA to work in three A1-level classes, two A2-level classes, and one B1-level class per semester. When conducting the present study, I worked with the assistants as a B1-level French educator.

The Self Access Center (SAC) provides users with both pedagogical (e.g., textbooks, games) and non-pedagogical material (e.g., movies, magazines) related to language learning. Each language assistant facilitates language clubs for French students for five hours weekly in this facility. During the study, I was a co-coordinator of the SAC.

A second research site is the headquarters of two assistantship programme agencies. The first is the Centre International d'Études Pédagogiques (CIEP) in Sèvres, France, which I visited in 2016. The second headquarters is the Dirección General de Relaciones Internacionales (DGRI) in Mexico, which I visited in 2016 and 2019. I could not go to the Quebecker agency for financial reasons, but I contacted them via email and video calls. A team of ten to twenty employees work at these sites to administer various documents available for the host educational institutions, tutors, and FLAs, select future assistants, connect them with the schools and organise an annual briefing meeting with the selected FLAs.

3.2.2 Participants

Three different groups of participants took part in the study. Their comments contributed to gaining a deeper understanding and analysis of assistants' SRTs and the overall assistantship experience.
French A1-level language students were the first group of participants. 220 of them, belonging to six different classes, took part in the study. Unlike other French learners in the Language Department, A1-level students had never previously experienced studying with FLAs (see the rationale for selecting this group in 3.3.6). In the data collection and analysis, each student group is referred to, respectively, as S101, S102, S103, S104, S105, and S106. S stands for student, and the number stands for their A1-level class.

The second group of participants corresponded to the three educators who teach the A1-level of French in the French Department with the assistants. They are part of the teaching team and other (non) participant educators and work with the FLAs. Among the three educators, one also worked as the assistants’ tutor and was the head of the French Department. In the data collection and analysis, educators have the pseudonyms E1, E2, and E3, where E stands for educator. E1 is French and has been teaching French at the research site for 17 years. Since 2007, she has been the assistant tutor and the French Department head. As their tutor, her role consists of guiding the assistants during their stay regarding administrative requirements (e.g., health insurance), establishing their weekly schedule, and assigning them various tasks. As the head of the French Department, she is in charge of the teaching team and some administration tasks. E2 is Mexican and has five years of experience teaching French. E3 is French-Bolivian and has ten years of experience teaching French. All three started as FLAs, two in Mexico and one in France.

Another group of participants consists of the FLAs. The French Department annually receives three assistants, two French and one French-Canadian. However, the 2017-2018 cohort consisted of two only, one French and one French-Canadian, who participated in the study. They were under 25 years of age. Both worked with A1-level learners and the educators previously described. The French-Canadian assistant is FLA1, and FLA2 refers to the French assistant. They were both studying for a Bachelor's degree in Quebec, FLA1 in performing arts and music and FLA2 in sport management.
Additionally, I received written information from the French and Quebecker FLAs’ coordinators and oral information during briefing meetings held at the Mexican agency headquarters. I emailed the first two and was invited to DGRI’s encounters by the French Department coordinator (see Appendix 2 for more detail). Although the documents and information sent and gathered helped me better understand which status, roles, and tasks were required from FLAs in Mexican institutions, no interviews were conducted; thus, I do not consider the stakeholders mentioned in this paragraph to be research participants.

3.2.3 Timeline and moments in the data collection

The research started with a pilot study (described in 3.3.6) from September 2016 to June 2017. It then continued to the actual study (see Appendix 3 for a summary of the data collection process) between September 2017 and June 2018 and the data analysis in January 2019. Finally, I started to commit this thesis to paper in April 2022. However, there were various periods of disruption due to work and the pandemic. This research took place over two periods. The initial findings were disseminated (from November 2017 to September 2019 and from January 2021 to the present day (further details of the dissemination are provided in Chapter 6).

Three specific events involving the participants were also part of the data collection process.

The first event was the Semaine de la langue française et de la Francophonie, organised worldwide in March by francophone governments and educational institutions. Since 1970, this celebration has allowed French speakers to explore aspects of the richness and diversity of the language. At the research site, the French Department planned two Francophonie weeks during this study, in November 2017 and April 2018. The week consists of events such as conferences, games, and workshops about francophone countries and speakers. From selecting and scheduling to participating in the activities, assistants worked weeks in advance on organising this four-day event, which offers more than 30 hours of activities. Data collected during these two weeks provided further insights into stakeholders’ expectations and understanding of FLAs’ SRTs.
The second event was another task FLA1 and FLA2 were required to do. In particular, in January 2018, E1 asked assistants to design recordings for the French Department, intending to record audio files. The tutor delivered a list of topics to record, covering the linguistic topics studied in A1-level classrooms. Assistants recorded conversations in French using these themes, transcribed them, and sent them to the tutor and educators. The task aligns with one of the tasks listed in the CIEP guideline (2018 – see Table 1 in 2.3.2). Assistants’ and educators’ impressions of this task’s performance and the use of this material were collected during focus group interviews and logbook entries.

The third event relates to the FLAs’ involvement in assessing students’ performance. French students take five exams each semester: two mid-terms to evaluate their reading, listening, and writing skills, an oral presentation in the classroom, a final writing exam, and a final oral exam. FLAs took part in evaluating the latter, particularly marking students’ performance. Comments collected in a focus group interview on their participation provided further insights into SRTs expected, prescribed, and achieved.

### 3.3 Data collection instruments

This section presents the four data collection instruments. It includes their characteristics and advantages and clarifies how to prevent possible issues from arising. It also provides a rationale for choosing these instruments in the present research. A summary of the instruments used and the data collection procedure is available in Appendix 3. The final sub-section explains the pilot study outcomes and how they helped with the design of this study.

#### 3.3.1 Questionnaires

This study used three questionnaires containing both open-ended and closed questions. Combining these items is a distinctive element of the semi-structured questionnaire selected in this study. This instrument was administered to educators at the beginning of the study, and students, at the beginning and the end of each semester.
Denscombe (2010) suggests that a questionnaire “consists of a written list of questions and [...] gathers information by asking people directly about the points concerned with the research” (pp.155-156). Many types of questionnaires exist. These vary in the number of items and structure. Selecting between a structured, semi-structured, and unstructured questionnaire mainly depends on the kind of data (e.g., facts, opinions, frequency) being sought. Questionnaires require a lengthy design process as the opportunities for asking, probing, and response-keying are usually limited. Cohen et al. (2011, p.377) suggest various stages in designing a questionnaire: 1- decide purposes, population, and kinds of questions; 2- generate the topics to be addressed; 3- write; 4- pilot, 5- validate, and 6- administer the questionnaire. Following these steps in my pilot study allowed me to make adjustments (see 3.3.6) and guaranteed that accurate data was collected to support the interpretation of the findings. The third stage is considered particularly essential (de Vaus, 2014; McGuirk and O’Neill, 2016). The format, sequence, wording, classification, length, and output must be analysed to help guarantee reliability, validity, and respondents’ participation and understanding. As well as these authors’ recommendations, I benefited from my supervisors’ guidance and the recommendations of the Open University’s Ethics Committee to produce items that respondents would understand and be based on the research objectives.

The following three kinds were selected from the existing types of questions described in the literature (Brown, 2009; de Vaus, 2014; Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2009; McGuick and O’Neill, 2016) questionnaires conducted in this study.

The first is the open-ended question. This consists of more than one-word answers. Answers are generally in the form of sentences. Cohen et al. (2011, p.382) assert that open questions enable participants to write “a free account in their terms, explain and qualify their responses and avoid the limitations of pre-set categories of responses.” I used this type of question to obtain qualitative answers (e.g., What do you expect from the FLAs and what do you think they will expect from you?), to give voice to the participants, and to collect in-depth insights into the assistantship experiences. Although the authors consulted connected open-ended questions with detailed answers, I observed that some participants did not respond
with extended or complex explanations. Nevertheless, these were compensated for by their responses to other items in the questionnaires. Besides the fact that some respondents’ answers lack details, McGuick and O’Neill (2016) mention other disadvantages of using this type of question. These include the fact that the answers are time-consuming to code and challenging to analyse due to “their lack of consistency and comparability” (p.249). While it took me a long time and several attempts to code those qualitative answers, this process helped me familiarise myself further with the data, making the cross-verification phase easier.

The second type of item is the multiple-choice question. This corresponds to a closed-ended question with two or more optional answers. The advantage of this item choice is the facility for rapid data analysis. The design was the most challenging part of this task. After piloting these questions (e.g., From the list, select the socio-cultural notions shared by the FLAs), I had to reformulate them so that students unfamiliar with pedagogical concepts could understand and respond. Denscombe (2010, p.165) also recommends that the researcher takes special care in ordering the items: “the most straightforward questions come at the start, the least contentious questions and least sensitive issues are dealt with at the beginning.” I placed the closed-ended items initially, which I considered the easiest and quickest to answer at the beginning.

The last type of item is the rank order, also known as a Likert scale. This is a comparative and ordinal scaling technique. For Cohen et al. (2011, p.385), this item “requires respondents to compare values across variables; they are unlike rating scales in which values are entered independently of each other.” Additionally, Wilson and McLean (1994) suggest limiting the number of ranks to five. Exceeding this number, this item’s understanding and purpose could lose significance and be overwhelming. I kept this recommendation in mind and limited the statements to this number. In the students’ questionnaire, a rank-ordered item was used (e.g., According to you, a foreign language assistant is - order the 5 options: 5 = totally agree, 4 = partially agree, 3 = agree, 2 = agree a little or 1= disagree).
In this research, three questionnaires were administered, and the data gathered contributed to cross-verifying convergences and divergences evidenced in other instruments.

In September 2017, educators received an online questionnaire (Qedu). This consisted of eight open-ended questions designed to collect opinions on educators’ expectations concerning the assistantship and previous experiences with FLAs (Appendix 4).

In addition, all A1-level learners answered two other questionnaires. Q1 was distributed during the first semester (Q1a in September 2017 and Q1b in February 2018), and Q2 during the second semester (Q2a in December 2017 and Q2b in June 2018). Q1 consisted of one rank-ordering item and five open-ended questions (Appendix 5) to collect the students’ expectations of assistants’ SRTs. Q2 consisted of one multiple-choice question and two open-ended questions (Appendix 6) to collect information about FLAs’ enacted roles and tasks.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

In this part of the research, in-depth semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with FLAs at the beginning and the end of the data collection process. According to the literature (Boyce and Neale, 2006; Guion, Diehl, and McDonald, 2011; Kvale, 1996; Longfield, 2004), an in-depth interview consists of an intensive individual interview, allowing the researcher to explore participants’ thoughts and perspectives on the topics discussed in detail. Therefore, the in-depth interview is a suitable data collection instrument for qualitative research, especially case studies. In the context of this study, the interview was understood as an encounter in which the assistants would provide insights and opinions concerning their perspectives and experiences based on the information exchanged individually.

When conducting interviews, the characteristics of the interviewer are an essential element. Scholars recommend key attributes that this actor must possess: trust, curiosity, and naturalness (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011), as well as knowledge, clarity, sensitivity, openness, steering, criticality, memory, and interpretation (Kvale, 1996). Bryman (2016) recommends using a semi-structured
interview format – in which the interviewer “is able to vary the sequence of the questions […] Also, the interviewer usually has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what is seen as significant replies” (p.201) – with open-ended questions to encourage personal, reflective and extensive insights. The literature also describes practical details to attend to before conducting an interview, such as clearly establishing the setting or checking the quality of the recording device to help to mitigate unanticipated contingencies that can arise during the interview (Bryman, 2016; Kvale, 1996; Roulston, De Marrais, and Lewis, 2003). Learning about these criteria and all the details commented on in the literature, my previous experiences with research interviews and working with FLAs, as well as the opportunity to pilot the questions, contributed to my preparation as an interviewer for the data collection process. Ethical measures taken as part of the interview preparation are explained in 3.5.

However, Boyce and Neale (2006) identified several limitations in using in-depth interviews. It is time-consuming and requires the interviewer to develop strategies to relax the respondents (e.g., clearly explaining the interview purpose by reading the outlines with them and bearing friendly and open body language). Also, I acted as an interviewer, a colleague, a co-coordinator of the SAC, and a language educator. These different roles have most likely impacted my relationship with FLAs and their interview participation (see 3.5.3 for more insights on how I intended to mitigate this).

After evaluating the strengths above and limitations, I decided that two in-depth semi-structured individual interviews would help me achieve my research objectives and approach and answer the two research questions. Two interviews were held with each FLA. Before the beginning of their classroom performances, one interview took place to collect insights into expectations and understanding of assistants’ SRTs, corresponding to the first research question, and a second one at the end of the assistantship to discuss professional, personal, and cultural experiences and the achievement of SRTs, which corresponds to the second research question. At the beginning of each in-depth interview, the respondent and, the interviewer, myself, read the topics and questions (Appendices 7 and 8).
During the interviews, which lasted approximately one hour, I also used follow-up questions based on their responses.

According to Longfield (2004), this type of interview is often combined with focus group interviews to gather further information on participants' expectations and experiences, which was also the case in this study. This is presented in the following sub-section.

### 3.3.3 Focus group interviews

This research conducted focus group interviews with FLAs throughout their stay and then with educators at the end of each semester.

A focus group interview (FGI) is a data collection instrument in the form of a collective group interview. It is frequently used in qualitative studies to understand social issues more deeply. During FGIs, “there is an emphasis in the questioning on a particular fairly tightly defined topic, and the accent is upon the interaction within the group and the joint construction of meaning” (Bryman, 2016, p.501). Bryman’s observation underlines that language is a critical element in the social construction of knowledge among the participants (Charmaz, 2014; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Besides the opportunity that the group set-up offers to collect subjective insights from key actors, other advantages cited in the literature (Bryman, 2016; Burgess, Sieminski, and Arthur, 2006; Krueger and Casey, 2000) include the group homogeneity that is meant to foster open communication between the participants and the immediacy of feedback to a respondent’s opinion by the participation of other group members. In this study, the two groups of participants shared the same workplace and profession. These common characteristics contributed to creating an optimal environment for collectively sharing and reflecting on the assistantship experience. Another aspect related to the success of a FGI that is broadly discussed in the literature is the role of the moderators, who “facilitate the group interaction rather than lead the discussion” (Denscombe, 2010, p.117). Well-trained moderators ensure that “there will be a good quality of focus group results that address the research objectives” (Gerger Swartling, 2007, p.3) by following the
interview topic outlines without interfering with members' narratives and opinions, only if introversion is helpful and if it is receptive and encouraging towards different perspectives without ending the discussion (Krueger and Casey, 2000). To create this type of environment, I designed the FGI outlines to stimulate discussions by using open-ended questions suitable for collecting information about participants’ views on assistantship experiences. Each outline is separated into topics and sub-topics (Appendices 9 to 15). During the FGI, I was a moderator, where the question I asked included warm-up and closing items.

However, some limitations can be identified, such as the simple difficulty of gathering a group of individuals simultaneously or that some participants may dominate the interactions (Cohen et al., 2011). Fortunately, I did not encounter such limitations in my study, as participants had similar availability, worked at the same educational institution, and had a warm relationship. Regarding the responsibility that one participant might dominate the group, I was previously aware of this issue partly due to my own research experiences and reading on managing this type of interview. Still, I never had to interrupt an interviewee; they did not interrupt each other. However, authors such as Krueger and Casey (2000) maintain that participants might be uncomfortable with others’ presence to discuss sensitive topics. To further understand the educators’ perceptions in my research, I consider that the collaborative reflection encouraged in FGIs, the individual reflection collected in logbook entries (more detail in 3.3.4), and the one-to-one interviews are three complementary instruments. Furthermore, the participants showed a lively interest in sharing experiences and collaborative feedback, and no other discussion group exists in the educational institution. Although many scholars recommend that the participants’ number should vary from between six to twelve (Barbour, 2018; Denscombe, 2010; Krueger and Casey, 2000; Nyumba, Kerrie, Derrick, and Mukherjee, 2018) to avoid moderation issues or ensure an adequate range of perspectives to reflect upon that might not arise in a smaller group, mini-focus groups, according to Anderson (1990) allow for greater exploration of topics in-depth. In my study, two small cohorts participated in FGIs, which was far from a drawback. It created an atmosphere where respondents had more time to discuss
views and additional topics. Overall, the comments made during these FGIs formed part of discussions on various issues that might not have emerged from the individuals themselves. Another disadvantage, listed in Burgess et al. (2006), is related to the time it takes to transcribe interviews. Automated transcription is sometimes used to overcome this limitation. After several attempts with different software, I was disappointed with the results, partly due to the accents and the homophones, in French and Spanish. I decided to use manual transcription. Although this stage could be seen as inconvenient, I valued the transcription process because it allowed me to review the participants’ comments and change or adapt topics and questions to be discussed in further FGIs.

Focus group interviews were conducted with two groups, the FLAs on the one hand and the educators on the other. I selected this instrument for the educators’ group due to this group’s shared knowledge and experiences. Even though all the educators were former FLAs and now work as language educators at the same university together with the FLAs, their past and current experiences both as and with assistants may have impacted their beliefs and answers. During the focus group interviews (FGIEs) (see Appendices 9 and 10 for more detail), participants discussed FLAs’ performance and SRTs, and their relationship with them and the students. They shared feedback and recommendations on assistants’ practice, the teaching materials used, and the cultural content disseminated. Each of the two FGIEs lasted two hours. The first was conducted after three months with the assistants, and the second at the end of the assistantship. Educators wrote an individual logbook entry at the end of the FGIEs (presented in 3.3.4). Here, they reflect on the topics discussed during the interview and comment on a future partnership with FLAs. Table 3 shows the interview settings and the issues discussed with the three educators.
Table 3: Details of focus group interviews with educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FGIE Elements</th>
<th>Focus group interview 1 (FGIE1)</th>
<th>Focus group interview 2 (FGIE2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date - Time</td>
<td>December 6th 2017 10am – 12pm</td>
<td>June 10th 2018 1pm – 3pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>- Compare experiences</td>
<td>- Discuss overview, feedback, and results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Discuss the roles of educators</td>
<td>- Discuss the roles of the educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Discuss the cultural activities and material used with FLAs</td>
<td>- Discuss the cultural activities and material used with FLAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Discuss the use of the logbook and feedback</td>
<td>- Comment on the impact of FGIEs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material used</td>
<td>- Logbook</td>
<td>- Logbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Interview outline</td>
<td>- Logbook extracts from educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Interview outline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two assistants' focus group interviews (FGIA) provided a space to collectively discuss, every month and a half from November 2017 to April 2018, expectations and understanding of their SRTs and the overall assistantship experience in their practice. Each FGIA lasted between 90 minutes to two hours (see appendices 11 to 15 for the outlines). At the end of each FGIA, assistants wrote an individual logbook entry about the objectives of their practice and the overall assistantship. Table 4 presents the topics discussed and the material used during these interviews, including scholars’ contributions to intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997; CEFR, 2001, 2018, 2020; Skopinska, 2003; Virasolvit, 2013).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Focus group interview 1 (FGIA1)</th>
<th>Focus group interview 2 (FGIA2)</th>
<th>Focus group interview 3 (FGIA3)</th>
<th>Focus group interview 4 (FGIA4)</th>
<th>Focus group interview 5 (FGIA5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date - Time</td>
<td>November 22\textsuperscript{nd} 2017 1pm – 3pm</td>
<td>December 7\textsuperscript{th} 2017 2pm – 4pm</td>
<td>February 1\textsuperscript{st} 2018 10am-12pm</td>
<td>March 13\textsuperscript{th} 2018 3pm – 5pm</td>
<td>April 19\textsuperscript{th} 2018 1pm – 3pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>Discuss overview of the first month - Comment on intercultural communication competence (ICC)</td>
<td>Discuss overview of the past months - Comments on sociocultural topics to include in the teaching material.</td>
<td>Discuss goals and tasks accomplished since the beginning of the assistantship - Comment on cultural material designed by FLAs</td>
<td>Discuss overview of the past months - Comment on documents issued by the agencies intercultural approach in the classroom</td>
<td>Comment on the events of the Francophonie week and on the impact of FGIA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material used</td>
<td>ICC model (Byram, 1997) - ICC in the CEFR (2001; 2018) - Logbook</td>
<td>Sociocultural topics in the FL classroom (CEF, 2001; Kandeel, 2013) - Logbook</td>
<td>Evaluation of the material (Vopinska rea, 2003) - Textbook (Alter ego + A1) - Material designed by the assistants - Logbook</td>
<td>Documents issued by the agencies - Démarche interculturelle progressive d’auto-formation (Virasolvit, 2013) - Logbook</td>
<td>Table to comment on the Francophonie week - Logbook</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of interviews (focus group and in-depth individual), the subjects for reflection, the material used, the date, and the place of these encounters, were decisions I made according to key moments of the assistantship (detailed in 3.2.3). However, I am aware of the possible bias these decisions and my position as an insider researcher may raise. These issues are addressed in 3.5.3.

3.3.4 Logbooks

In this research, logbooks were used by the three educators and the two FLAs to report assistants' classroom performances. This fourth data source contributed to collecting assistantship experiences from a different angle and increased the possibility of identifying similar and/or unique patterns in the findings.

Several authors mention writing tools managed by participants and researchers, such as diaries and logbooks, to aid reflection on classroom practice (Bolger, Davis, and Rafaeli, 2003; Maloney and Campbell-Evans, 2002; Ohly, Sonnentag, Niessen, and Zapf, 2010). According to Farrell, “writing is a process of discovery… we come to know ourselves better, allowing us to shape and reshape ourselves” (2003, p.73). Whether freestyle hand-written in a notebook, compiled using digital software or an audio recording device, logbooks allow for a more immediate reflection on thoughts and behaviour within the professional environment by reducing the time between the experience and the practitioner’s explanations (van Meerkerk, 2017). Entries in a logbook may consist of a simple description of what happened during class or be more complex by analysing why it happened (Korthagen, 1999; van Meerkerk, 2017). This tool allows the researcher to collect “snapshots of particular social spaces, embodied and emotional practices in making” (Morrison, 2012, p.74) and record participants’ observations when not present. When solicited by the researcher, logbooks usually focus on specific aspects to be observed by the participants. Meth (2003) underlines that logbooks have to be complemented by other qualitative research methods, such as interviews, to balance the subjectivity of their insights.

The aforementioned authors also point out the limitations of using logbooks: the fact that participants might progressively forget (or neglect) to write and this tool's...
selective and subjective aspect. The first drawback was indeed observed during the data collection process. While FLAs and educators did not log all the assistants’ performances, they recorded weekly at least three-quarters of the classroom interventions performed. As for the second limitation, each FLA’s performance was reviewed from both the perspective of an educator and an assistant and, at times, was commented on during FGIs and in students’ questionnaires. It was then possible to cross-verify the data and construct a picture of FLAs’ classroom performances.

In my study, I value the advantages and disadvantages listed by the abovementioned authors about logbooks for two main reasons: Firstly, this tool encourages reflection on FLAs’ practice from the perspectives of educators and assistants, which provides further insights into their understanding of enacted roles and tasks, and secondly for the practical reasons mentioned at the beginning of this sub-section. During the pilot study, I became aware of the need to collect more data concerning FLAs’ practice by complementing what the assistants and educators commented on during the FGIs with the reality of what happened in the classes. For this reason, I considered video recording and classroom observations. This was impossible due to scheduling issues and the university’s policies. I also thought about requesting assistants’ lesson plans. This proved to be difficult. On the one hand, FLAs were unfamiliar with and did not use them during their stay; on the other hand, educators did not agree to share theirs. The request that assistants and educators keep a logbook to register FLAs’ practice during or immediately after each intervention appeared to be a way around this.

During the first week of their assistantship, I gave FLAs and educators a notebook to report on the assistants’ classroom performances. As recommended in the literature (and as none of them had had any experience using this instrument), I decided that aspects of practice should be integrated into the logbook entries. Therefore, I listed elements that I suggested the participants include describing and commenting on FLAs’ practice. Those aspects included when the FLAs presented the activity, the class schedule, the length of the activity, the number of students, the group, the material used, the cultural goals, (self) feedback, and students’ and
educators’ perceptions. The 120 entries collected were divided according to the elements suggested. In addition, at the end of FGIs, participants wrote a short personal reflection on their encounter and the established professional objectives. For these entries, I suggested some possible questions (see the FGIs outlines in the appendix). The participants wrote from 15 to 25 words for each question.

3.3.5 Languages used in data collection

This study involved three languages (French, Spanish, and English). My native language is French. Additionally, I have a C2 language level in Spanish (Diploma de Español como Lengua Extranjera, obtained in 2018) and a C1 language level in English (Test of English as a Foreign Language in 2019).

The translation of definitions, quotations, and data raises issues, including the languages to prioritise in the data collection process, the non-translatability of some concepts, and ethical issues concerning power relationships when using a range of languages (Holmes, Fay, Andrews, and Attia, 2013). However, Squires (2009) explains that the intention of the researcher who uses translation is “to bridge language barriers between themselves and their participants” (p.278). This study has examined the theoretical background in French, Spanish, and English (see Appendix 1 for the keywords used). I have also translated some original quotes (e.g., guidelines from the Mexican and French FLA agencies) into English. In terms of data collection, respondents, except for one participant, were consulted in their first languages. One educator is a native Spanish speaker, has a C1-level degree certification in French, and preferred to use French in interviews, logbook entries, and the questionnaire. The other educators are native French speakers who used this language in data collection. Students’ questionnaires were written in Spanish and proofread by an academic native speaker not involved in this study. The FLAs are both francophones, so the interviews were written and conducted in French, and their logbook entries were also written in French. In French, respondents mentioned only a few cultural references in Spanish (e.g., Día de los Muertos, La Catrina). Occasional cases of code-switching echo the non-translatability of some of the abovementioned concepts and Simon’s (1996) words of caution on the intercultural and identity questions related to data translation in
cross-language studies: “Translators must continuously make decisions about the cultural meanings in which language carries and evaluate the degree to which the two different worlds they inhabit are the same” (pp.137-138). I faced this type of decision in the analytical process, and the participants’ choice to use those terms in Spanish is discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. I believe that writing and conducting data collection from the language participants felt more confident insofar as it helped reduce the ethical challenges highlighted by Holmes et al. (2013) to a minimum. In FLAs’ focus group interviews, I chose to translate some theoretical concepts into French, considering assistants’ preference to use their native language and bearing in mind the issues with power relationships mentioned in Holmes et al. (2013).

In keeping with the need for relevance and the dilemmas that translating original statements could present, Temple and Young argue that “there is no single correct translation of a text. Meaning is constructed through discourse between texts” (2004, p.165). In the present study, I analysed the information in the language they were expressed, that is, French and Spanish. Translation occurred after the analysis for the thesis writing process, corresponded to the EdD Programme requirement (in EdD Programme guide, section 7.3.9), and was confirmed by a native speaker. The quotes presented in the analysis chapters are available in French and Spanish (Appendix 17). Their translation into English will facilitate the dissemination of my work at international conferences and publications. Also available to a translated version of the transcript sample of educators’ and FLAs’ interviews in Appendices 10 and 15.

3.3.6 Pilot study

Before starting the main period of collecting data, I conducted a small-scale implementation of the intended study from September 2016 to June 2017, involving 258 participants divided into three groups.

Van Teijlingen, Rennie, Hundley, and Graham (2001) identify different reasons why this rehearsal step is crucial: establishing whether the sampling frame and technique are effective, helping shape the sample size, and determining which
resources are needed for the main study. In addition, as Burgess et al. (2006) reported, the pilot study offers the opportunity to test the effectiveness, weaknesses, and necessary changes in terms of research focus and methodology to be improved to create the best conditions for data collection. In this research, the initial study mainly served to pilot my research instruments, gain experience using them, and adjust the size sample.

The pilot study showed positive outcomes regarding the efficiency of the application phases of data collection, the estimated response time for questionnaires and interviews, the participation rate, and respondents' interest and involvement in the research. Nevertheless, some adjustments concerning aspects of the instruments and the selection of participants seemed necessary, as the following paragraphs show.

Two focus group interviews were added with FLAs to respond to their interest and willingness to participate in more than three focus group interviews during their stay and collectively discuss their practice. After noticing educators' interest and reading their answers on an individual questionnaire conducted in the pilot study, it was decided to use the same topics and questions to design two focus group interviews. This allowed for further collective discussion between these participants. Additionally, I noticed that FLAs and educators based most of their comments on concrete examples of practice, which they sometimes had trouble remembering. I considered including logbooks in the main study to collect more practical evidence and insights into FLAs' day-to-day practice. Four questions were left unanswered or lacked explanations in the questionnaire conducted with the students, so I reformulated them using more straightforward wording or asked respondents to explain their answers. According to what Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest, I use peer debriefing to review the instruments. This person was familiar with the research but not involved and helped me challenge my assumptions by asking questions about methodological choices.

Three out of the seven French educators working at the research site showed interest in participating in the main study during the pilot study. Each taught two of
the six A1-level groups, which were the groups selected for the main study. Initially, French students of all levels answered the questionnaires. Still, as the research objectives are to gain insights into FLAs’ practice through the perspectives and experiences of several stakeholders, I decided to focus on A1-level learners and their educators. These students had never studied with FLAs, so previous experiences would not influence their perspectives on FLAs.

3.4 Data analysis

Data analysis makes meaning out of the information collected, which involves examining, constructing categories, naming the categories and sub-categories, and developing systems for placing data into categories to unravel connections and contrasts between participants’ experiences. This section explains the choices made concerning the data analysis, including the phases of the coding process.

In this study, the information gathered from the participants consists of free-flowing texts: transcriptions of four semi-structured and seven focus group interviews, 443 written answers to five questionnaires, and 120 logbook entries. As my research objective focuses on understanding and making sense of the experiences concerning assistants’ SRTs and practice, qualitative analysis is the most suitable approach, in contrast to quantitative analysis, which corresponds to a statistic-driven approach.

According to several sources I consulted (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Guest et al., 2012; Suter, 2012), qualitative data analysis can be carried out using exploratory and explanatory procedures. The former, which is the one used in the present study, is content-driven, and coding generally emerges through the data analysis. In contrast, the latter is hypothesis-driven, and codes are usually created from such hypotheses.

After exploring the existing methods of analysing qualitative data, I decided to use a thematic analysis approach (as described in Braun and Clarke, 2013; Guest et al., 2012; Miles et al., 2014). This is a data-driven approach in which the researcher closely explores the textual information gathered to identify similar
themes. As Braun and Clarke (2013) commented, it is common for the research questions to change through inductive data analysis, and this was indeed the case during my pilot and main study.

Authors identify different phases or steps for the coding process when undertaking a thematic analysis. I used Braun and Clarke’s (2013) six-step process, as I illustrate in the following example (see 4.2.1 for the analysis of the extract and its translation in English):

1. Familiarising yourself with your data

This step is crucial to get a thorough overview of all the information collected before coding items and searching for patterns.

This phase first included transcribing and printing the interviews and focus groups and reading the answers provided from the questionnaires and the entries from the logbooks. This first step helped me make sense of the data, read and re-read the entire data corpus, including the 1,980 answers collected in the students’ questionnaires, underline parts of the data, and write preliminary ideas on the content. For example:

La tutrice nous a dit de rester au centre d’auto-apprentissage, à la demande des professeurs [hierarchy ? - FLA2 reports hat he feels conioned by the educators’ decisions], plutôt que de les aider pendant la 1ère semaine de cours où ils apprenaient à connaître les étudiants et présentaient le programme [place of FLAs ? – FLA2 seems to question the priority of presenting this document over introducing himself to the students. He feels less important and maybe not part of the team]. Je voulais aider [frustration/ misunderstanding ? – FLA2 shows confusion. Although he understood why he wasn’t present in the first class, he pictured his classroom intervention and believed it would benefit the students/future partnership], comme n’importe quelle autre semaine. (FLA2 – FGIA2)

Although transcribing and reading required considerable time, it helped me get familiar with the data, and I could already identify some patterns.

2. Generating initial sub-categories and categories
The second step involves highlighting text sections and assigning a code to a data chunk, sentence, or word. In this study, the term *sub-category* is used for a concept or topic and *category* for a group of several quotes on those topics.

I used descriptive statistics for the students’ questionnaires to quantitatively analyse the data collected. I grouped the answers to each question into a handful of sub-categories. I counted the number in each sub-category and computed the score using the cross-multiplication method to get the fraction. In the analysis chapters, those results are presented in percentages as well as some illustrative quotes (e.g., students answered that FLAs would present material related to arts (100%), everyday life habits and situations (80%), holidays and traditions (60%), and history (15%)). The choice to quantify the large data set – 1980 answers – into bite-sized descriptions allowed me to uncover patterns, draw conclusive insights, and cross-verify these with the sub-categories generated by the other instruments, which would have otherwise been unattainable.

For the interviews, I printed the transcriptions of the interviews and focus groups and used photocopies made of each logbook entry and questionnaires.

Lastly, I analysed the data manually using colours and adhesives notes to generate the sub-categories (green, blue, and purple, in the following example). This second step was the most challenging and time-consuming due to the amount of data, the fact that results were written in two different languages, and that I needed physical space, as I did not use a software, to get a visual representation of those preliminary codes in different instruments. I repeated the process many times and finally created a set of initial sub-categories (see the example below). For this, I highlighted everything that stood out as relevant to my research questions and assigned a sub-category for each fragment and a brief description.

La tutrice nous a dit de rester au centre d’auto-apprentissage, à la demande des professeurs, plutôt que de les aider pendant la 1ʳᵉ semaine de cours où ils apprenaient à connaître les étudiants et présentaient le programme. Je voulais aider, comme n’importe quelle autre semaine. (FLA2 – FGIA2)

Initial sub-category – Understanding of tutor and educators FLAs’ SRTs vs understanding of FLAs SRTs
After this step, I cut out and grouped the answers and extracts associated with a particular initial sub-category. The use of colours was very helpful at this stage. Grouping the data and finding a common thread between the participants’ quotes helped me establish a final version of sub-categories and categories (see Appendix 18 for the final version of the coding). This last part was challenging and required going back and forth between the answers and the different (sub-)categories. I used the excerpt from FLA2 in the second focus group interview to illustrate the process of naming sub-categories and categories:

plutôt que de les aider pendant la 1ère semaine de cours

ils apprenaient à connaître les étudiants et présentaient le programme.

La tuteur nous a dit de rester au centre d auto-apprentissage, à la demande des professeurs.

3. Searching for themes

After enlisting a set of final categories and sub-categories, this step involved identifying active interpretation of the themes grouping categories. I identified several patterns that were the most relevant for answering the two research questions and started to sort them into potential themes and identify preliminary connections between the (sub-)categories, the categories and the potential themes.
La tutrice nous a dit de rester au centre d’auto-apprentissage, à la demande des professeurs, plutôt que de les aider pendant la 1ère semaine de cours où ils apprenaient à connaître les étudiants et présentaient le programme. Je voulais aider, comme n’importe quelle autre semaine. (FLA2 – FGIA2)

Sub-category – Assistants’ schedule
Sub-category – Place of FLAs vs Class content
Sub-category – FLAs’ ideas of their SRTs and teamwork
Category - Partnerships in FLAs’ practice
Potential common theme - Partnerships with educators and impact on FLAs’ practice

4. Reviewing the themes

This step checks whether the themes work with the coded fragments and data corpus. I asked myself some questions to complete this phase: ‘Am I missing anything? Are these themes present in the data? What can I change to make the identified themes work better?’ I then refined the themes identified in Step 3. To do so, I went back and forth between themes, categories, sub-categories, and fragments until I believed that I had categorised and thematised all the relevant information and that these represented my data accurately. At this stage, and as suggested by Creswell and Miller (2000), I decided to cross-verify my interpretation of some respondents’ comments to mitigate speculation and assumptions on my part. Therefore, I sent FLAs and educators several quotes and asked them to provide me with further explanation and check the credibility of the information and narrative account. Researchers systematically check the data and the narrative account with the lens focused on participants. Several procedures facilitate this process. First, a common strategy is to convene a focus group of participants to review the findings. Alternatively, researchers may have participants view the raw data (e.g., transcriptions or observational field notes) and comment on their accuracy. Throughout this process, the researcher asks participants if the themes or categories make sense, whether they are developed with sufficient evidence, and whether the overall account is realistic and accurate (questions asked in brackets in the following example. I translated the questions into English here). In turn, researchers incorporate participants’ comments into the final narrative. In this
way, the participants add credibility to the qualitative study by having a chance to react to both the data and the final narrative.

E.g., La tutrice nous a dit de rester au centre d’auto-apprentissage, à la demande des professeurs [why do you think this happened ?], plutôt que de les aider pendant la 1ère semaine de cours où ils apprenaient à connaître les étudiants et présentaient le programme [what would you have done ?]. Je voulais aider, comme n’importe quelle autre semaine [how did it make you feel ?]. (FLA2 – FGIA2)

Theme B - Partnerships and pedagogical expectations and decisions in FLAs’ practice.

5. Defining and naming themes
The fifth step is an ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and name and describe them. I performed this phase using my themes lists and establishing why these were relevant. I used audio recordings to describe the themes and explain to myself their significance and how they related to other themes. I renamed some of them for the final version (see themes, categories, and sub-categories in Appendix 18).

E.g., La tutrice nous a dit de rester au centre d’auto-apprentissage, à la demande des professeurs, plutôt que de les aider pendant la 1ère semaine de cours où ils apprenaient à connaître les étudiants et présentaient le programme. Je voulais aider, comme n’importe quelle autre semaine. (FLA2 – FGIA2)

Theme B - Partnerships and pedagogical expectations and decisions in FLAs’ practice.

[This theme related to how stakeholders work together in and out of a classroom setting, their expectations of FLAs’ SRTs and how this influenced the assistants’ practice - RQ1 and RQ2].

6. Producing the report
This last step involves selecting appropriate extracts, discussing the findings, relating to the literature, and answering the research questions. This step corresponds to the following two chapters of this thesis.

3.5 Ethical issues
Ethical considerations are essential in all research, particularly human subjects studies.

This section presents the ethical principles guiding this educational study, privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality, and describes the researcher’s roles.

3.5.1 Ethical principles

Denscombe highlights the importance of ethical measures that “researchers are expected to put in place to minimise the risk of harm: participants will remain anonymous, data will be treated as confidential, and participants understand the nature of the research and their involvement” (2010, p.7). These elements are secured by respecting rules and principles, as Cohen et al. (2011) and Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest. Both original lists included ethical issues not applicable to my research (e.g., “Be sensitive to needs of vulnerable populations, respect norms and charters of indigenous societies or avoid collecting harmful information” in Creswell and Poth, 2018, p.55), which I did not consider. Besides considering the three references’ ethical measures, I adhered to all British Educational Research Association guidelines. When I started the pilot study, I paid particular attention to the consent, openness, and withdrawal sections (numbers 11, 12, 14, and 15 from the 2011 edition). For the main study, I carefully followed numbers 27, 28, 31, 40, 44, and 52 (corresponding to transparency, privacy and data storage, and disclosure in the 2018 edition). I took action to help mitigate any possible ethical bias.

I integrated ten ethical considerations suggested in the literature to anticipate issues I considered during the four research moments listed below.

Before the study:

1- Importance for the researcher to reveal her identity and background,

2- Purposes and procedures should be explained to the respondents, and

3- The right for them to terminate their involvement at any time.

After identifying participants and instruments, I submitted the research instruments, the information sheet, the consent form for participants, the Proforma, and project
registration to the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Open University for
approval in July 2016. The approval arrived two months after.

During the data collection process, I worked as a French educator and as a SAC
co-coordinator. Before starting the data collection, I presented myself as a
researcher to the participants and explained the research objectives and why their
participation was necessary. In the information form they received, I mentioned
how and to whom data collected would be reported and the possibility of
withdrawing and accessing the information. The head of the French Department,
E1, agreed with the practical aspects of conducting my data collection instruments
at the research site, including providing me with the schedule of A1 level classes
and FLAs’ and using the French educators’ room for FGIs. Educators agreed that I
could conduct questionnaires for their students.

At the beginning of the study:

1- ensure the benefits for the respondents,

2- inform them about who has access to data, and

3- ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

My insider knowledge and pilot study' results evidenced a disconnection and
frustration related to FLAs’ practice and confirmed participants’ interest in
addressing this situation. It was discussed with participants and the educational
institution that the results would provide information about existing perspectives
and experiences on assistants’ SRTs, which could help mitigate possible issues.

The information sheet and consent form explain the security, privacy, anonymity,
and confidentiality of data and respondents (Appendices 19 and 20).

During data collection:

1- participants receive the same treatment and

2- respect potential power imbalances.

The same instrument was conducted with each respondent of the same group
under similar conditions (e.g., time, amount of questions). Questionnaires were
written in the participants’ language (see 3.3.5) and relied on voluntary participation. To increase awareness of possible difficulties arising from unequal power relations, I involved FLAs and educators as partners. I provided them with the focus group interview outlines and kept them informed by sharing reports of the FGIs attended. During the FGIs, I acted as a facilitator, raised professional and cultural issues, and occasionally intervened to reframe the debate or share theoretical concepts from the literature to facilitate the discussion.

After the study:

1- data security and destruction and
2- share the study’s results.

Data generated are stored in two places, in Mexico, in my house: in my desk, top locked drawer, and on my personal computer, encrypted in a password-protected file. Data will be destroyed no later than two years after completing the doctorate. From the beginning of the research, participants were informed about data protection, storage, and destruction. I presented my findings at several conferences, to which I invited my participants. I will keep disseminating this project's outcomes through articles and proposals in which the anonymity and confidentiality of the data and respondents will be respected.

3.5.2 Privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality

As explained in the previous sub-section, the existing ethical guidance for undertaking a qualitative study provides procedures to consider what issues might surface during the study and how to address them.

Privacy refers to respondents’ right not to participate in the research, answer questions or share personal information (Burgess, 1989). In my study, I ensured my participants’ privacy through the consent form (Appendix 19) and their agreement with the information included in my narrative. Several authors and guidelines describe elements a consent document should contain (British Educational Research Association, 2018; Burgess, 1989; Creswell, 2014; Marshall and Rossman, 2011). As a representative example, Cohen et al. (2011, p.78) suggest six essential guidelines:
1- a fair explanation of the procedures;
2- their purposes;
3- a description of expected discomforts and risks;
4- of the expected benefits;
5- an offer to answer any enquiries concerning the procedures, and
6- an instruction that the respondent is free to withdraw consent.

These were included in the consent form signed by the participants.

Anonymity consists of preserving respondents’ identity by removing their names and the research sites and not including information that might lead to their identification to provide them privacy during data collection, analysis, discussion, and dissemination of the findings. Nevertheless, authors sustain that full anonymisation is almost impossible to complete, especially in case studies, due to methodological choices implied and the type of relationship among the participants (Burgess, 1989; Walford, 2005; Wiles, Crow, Heath, and Charles, 2008). My study included discussing participants’ practices, and the information collected represents a significant amount of personal and cultural data directly related to their identities. However, I attempted to keep their anonymity at all times by using letters and numbers to designate them (see 3.2.2), and these codes were only accessible to the researcher. Research sites and names never appear in the transcriptions or the analysis chapters.

Confidentiality is often linked to anonymity and provides participants with “protection over the use of data offered by them in research” (Burgess, 1989, p.121) by “not disclosing information from a participant in any way that might identify that individual or that might enable the individual to be traced” (Cohen et al., 2011, p.92). In the Proforma approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Open University), I informed the committee that data collected would be stored on my laptop under a My Documents folder, password-protected, and destroyed no later than two years after the end of the doctorate. According to the mentioned authors, an issue is that respondents could be identified in data through
specific aspects (e.g., nationality, year). During FGIs, comments on the assistantship experiences included educators' and FLAs' names, which were removed from the transcriptions to ensure the respondents' confidentiality.

3.5.3 Being an insider researcher

Qualitative research is inclined to subjectivity. Thus, the researcher needs to question and evaluate his or her role in the research process to clarify reflexivity and help address the study's objectivity (Finlay, 1998).

The position of an insider researcher presents several advantages, three of which are particularly commented on by scholars (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002; Mercer, 2007; Smyth and Holian, 2008; Unluer, 2012): an updated knowledge and understanding of the research site's politics and cultures; natural access to the participants as the researcher is already part of the group, and support to encourage them to share personal insight. Besides, Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs highlight that insider investigators “are in a prime position to investigate and make changes to a practice situation. […] make challenges to the status quo from an informed perspective” (2013, p.34). This type of researcher has the advantage of in-depth knowledge of the issues and understanding local values and beliefs.

From the first steps of this project, I was committed to exploring and further understanding the language assistantship in my institution based on how stakeholders see and interpret the reality of the FLAs' practice. This led me to explore the case study's principles (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014) and consider myself in a role of an insider researcher. This means that I would take on several roles simultaneously during the data collection for this research undertaken within a university where I work as a language educator and a co-coordinator of the SAC. I explicitly confronted an awareness of the impacts and bias of a direct partnership between investigator and participants by consulting ideas on the advantages and limitations in the literature (e.g., power issues in Smyth and Holian, 2008).

Generally, it is easier for the insider researcher to obtain consent to conduct the research and conduct data collection instruments (Coghlan, 2003; Herrmann, 1989). With an evolving awareness of this study's professional and cultural context,
a good relationship was established with FLAs. Relationships with my long-term colleagues’ relationship remained excellent, and their voluntary input during FGIs suggests expertise and fairness. I consider that these participants had the opportunity to share their views freely and collaboratively.

The insider status also presents disadvantages, as described by several authors (DeLyser, 2001; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002; Sikes and Potts, 2008; Unluer, 2012). I tried to overcome the following difficulties by taking a preventive approach.

Firstly, role duality. Before starting this study, I was known to the participants as a language educator. After explaining my project and using the information sheet (Appendix 20) with them, they began to perceive me as an educator, a colleague, and a researcher. This situation could have generated difficulties while trying to balance these roles, especially while explaining and negotiating my needs. Throughout the study, I took notes about my tasks with each group. Reports and transcriptions also helped guide the respondents in sharing their perspectives and trying to keep my role as a researcher clear. No role duality conflict, on my part, was reported during the data collection. Such a situation positively impacted my ability to successfully distinguish between my different roles and function as a researcher as rigorously as possible.

Another difficulty was making assumptions. My familiarity with the participants, the main research site, the language assistantship, and the topics discussed in the interviews could have led me to make wrong assumptions concerning the respondents’ perspectives. Nonetheless, I was aware, as explained in Unluer (2012), that “educational research is concerned with human beings and their behaviour, involving a great number of players, each of whom brings to the research process a wide range of perspectives, including the researcher’s own perspective” (pp.1-2). To mitigate this situation, I used different strategies. During the FGIs, I would ask further questions about their experiences or rephrase a gesture or an answer with a nod. If I had some insider knowledge about a specific classroom situation, I would ask the whole group for its view to get a broader vision of the issue observed.
Subjectivity in data collection and data analysis was an issue. Authors who discussed the researcher’s subjectivity (Greene, 2014; Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, and Muhamad, 2001) argue that the researcher's familiarity with the topic may detract from an objective perception and analysis. The researcher may project her own perspectives rather than interpreting information from the participants’ points of view. I had access to sensitive and personal information during the data collection process. I attempted to respect the respondents’ privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, and data at every research stage (see 3.5.2). Also, during FGIs, to prevent deferring answers about a topic discussed beforehand with the participants, I asked them to clarify their ideas as if they were the first time they mentioned them. The data cross-verification and participants' opportunity to share their perspectives individually in logbooks, interviews, and questionnaires helped me mitigate the impact of a subjective attitude.

Reflecting on my insider status, including identifying my (previous) beliefs, knowledge, perceptions, and expectations on the assistantship and the FLAs, made me further consider my prolonged exposure and familiarity with the context. This made me assess the multiple influences in place and their impact on some methodological choices (e.g., the selection of the participants, the languages used in data collection, and the choice to use logbooks), which add rigour to the research design.

This chapter provided a description and a rationale for the selected research approach, which led to an explanation of the research method and a presentation of the research context, the participants, and data collection instruments. After explaining the analysis approach used to present and interpret the data collected, ethical measures were described. I consider that through the process of my research, I have been aware of how my socio-cultural, professional, and personal background and my position as an insider researcher could influence my methodological choices.
Chapter 4 Understanding of FLAs’ status, roles, and tasks: Findings and discussion

This chapter analyses and discusses data collected from the tutor, educators, students, and foreign language assistants (FLAs) concerning their understanding of assistants’ status, roles, and tasks (SRTs) (see Appendix 21 for more details on instruments used to collect the data presented in each section). This data analysis will help answer the first research question: How are the SRTs of francophone FLAs working in a Mexican public higher education institution understood by the stakeholders?

Chapter 4 is divided into the three main themes emerging from the data analysis that impacted the understanding of assistants’ SRTs: 1- experiences, communication, and initial expectations: 2- partnerships and pedagogical expectations and decisions in FLAs’ practice; and 3- perception of culture in language teaching and learning process and FLAs’ practice.

4.1 Assistantship experiences, communication, and initial expectations around SRTs

This section analyses information communicated to the tutor, educators, students, and FLAs concerning assistants' SRTs and how this was disseminated. It also identifies if they previously worked as or with assistants or studied with FLAs and how those experiences were. This aims to unravel their initial expectations and understanding regarding assistants’ SRTs. Data collected in the early stage of the study and analysed in this sub-section indicate some level of connection between participants’ lack of or previous assistantship experiences, their initial expectations of FLAs’ SRTs and how these were communicated to them.

FLAs’ agencies share with assistants and tutors, during briefing meetings, general guidelines intended for francophone FLAs working in Mexico. Both groups are briefly informed of the expected status, two prescribed roles, and corresponding tasks (see Table 1 in 2.3.2 - CIEP, 2018; DGRI, 2019; EA, 2018). Additionally, the
Mexican agency asks the tutors to share the information received with their teaching team, i.e. other educators and language coordinators.

The three groups of participants reported different experiences regarding previous contacts with foreign language assistantships. While for FLA2, this assistantship was his first experience, FLA1 had several experiences studying foreign languages with FLAs during her university years in Canada. As described in Chapter 3, beginner-level students had never experienced classes with assistants, as stated in their profiles. The educators, for their part, had collaborated with different FLAs for years and worked as FLAs.

FLAs’ perspectives concerning their assistantship experiences and how information on SRTs was communicated during the agencies' briefing meetings (from CIEP, DGRI, and EA, see 2.3.2) indicate that they felt some confidence but, at the same time, uncertainty and dissatisfaction concerning the information received.

During the initial interview, some FLAs’ statements indicate that their early expectations of SRTs tend to coincide with the information received in the agencies briefing meetings and suggest that their role is different from that of educators, as highlighted in those encounters (CIEP, DGRI, and EA):

I am here to support the educator and to teach things about my culture to Mexicans. That’s what FLAs did in my university […] because I’m a language assistant and not a language educator. (FLA1)

Making students want to learn French, giving them a nice impression of France. […] because when you like something, you want to learn. […] The challenge for educators is that they must teach grammar. (FLA2)

Regardless of the fact that FLA2 did not have previous assistantship experiences, both FLAs identified themselves as a cultural complement to the teaching and learning process, mentioning their responsibility of engaging learners in the language learning process and cultural discovery, and also seemed comfortable understanding the prescribed SRTs, which differ from educators’ duties. Assistants’ initial expectations regarding their status and roles remind us of the educators’
helper, as mentioned in Buckingham (2018b) and the cultural ambassador, as reported by Bosch et al. (2000) and Hibler (2010).

However, in the same interview, further comments indicate that the FLAs were unsatisfied with the information on SRTs agencies disseminated before their arrival and how this was done. During his initial individual interview, FLA2 commented, “We had a visit from some security attachés who look after French people. They piled on the pressure [...] we didn’t even know how our practice would be.” As this FLA had no concrete idea of his working environment yet, he suggested that the information was incomplete and provided too early. FLA1, for her part, questioned how the Mexican agency (DGRI) provided the information: “Each assistant had different expectations and understanding [...] it was hard to know what we were supposed to do in practice as the agency doesn’t even know what could happen.” This comment suggests that the information provided concerning SRTs generated uncertainty among FLAs, which echoes another of her statements: “They [the DGRI speakers] showed us [Quebecker FLAs] the job description of an assistant, the same that we had in Quebec, which was useless to repeat, long paragraphs with very complicated words which people who didn’t speak good Spanish couldn’t understand.” She felt that the information provided was not communicated appropriately. Both FLAs thought the information was too general and limited from the assistantship’s early stages. There was no concern from those providing the information as to whether this was understood or useful to them. FLA1 also indicated that although the target and host country agencies repeated the information and assistants are required to have an intermediate level in the target language, which was reported in various studies, including Forder et al. (2012), and Rook (2016), she suggested that some attendees’ (common) understanding was limited due to their low level of Spanish. Assistants’ statements analysed here show a certain degree of uncertainty and disappointment about those meetings and their impact on FLAs’ initial expectations and how they identified their future selves, echoing FLAs’ criticisms reported in Buckingham (2018a) and Hibler (2010) about insufficient and impractical information, and the training received, leading to
some cases in unsuccessful assistantship experiences, resulting in disappointment as we will see in 5.3.

Furthermore, during the same interview, both FLAs felt that the way that the information was disseminated, separated assistants and tutors and restricted a possible initial contact with their tutor. They considered that the host agency missed an opportunity to encourage communication and early partnership between assistants and tutors. A meeting involving both agents would have helped them agree on a similar understanding of SRTs and complemented the official information received with practical examples instead of repeating a general description of SRTs to both groups separately, reducing the issues mentioned above. Communication issues and their impact on FLAs’ practice and partnership with local stakeholders have been reported since 1909 by Molitor and again later by Bosch et al. (2000) and Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez (2012). Findings from the present study suggest that the need for those stakeholders to improve lines of communication is still a concern and that the conclusions of studies conducted on the topic did not reach the stakeholders.

In the educators’ group, although they had collaborated with different FLAs for years and worked as FLAs themselves, according to their answers to a questionnaire, comments indicate an absence of communication concerning FLAs’ SRTs and how it had impacted their initial expectations. It seems important to highlight that their assistantship occurred before 1999 when the assistantship agencies recruited pre-service language teachers and candidates with teaching ambitions – as explained in García Fernández (2000) – partly explaining their expectations of FLAs, as their answers indicate. According to E1’s and E3’s comments, they substituted educators during their time as FLAs. As an assistant in a higher education institution in France, E2 did not work in class with educators and had temporary teaching responsibilities, including practising conversation alone with a group of students. As an educator, she acknowledged replicating the roles she performed in the past in her approach to teamwork with FLAs.
Regarding FLAs’ SRTs, although E1 had attended the tutor meeting by the host agency many times during which she received prescribed information on this topic, it was not until, according to educators’ comments, four months after the assistants’ arrival in December 2017, that E2 and E3 received this information. E1, who was the FLAs’ tutor and the French Department coordinator, brought this topic up during a focus group interview, indicating that FLAs’ roles have changed since the educators were assistants themselves and mentioned the current restrictions placed on FLAs: “We have to be careful here. The DGRI specifically asked the assistants to share culture and practice speaking skills, not teach grammar.” The other two educators were unaware of such changes and acknowledged that being aware of this earlier in the semester would have better prepared their work with FLAs. I contend that, as a result, the expectations those two educators had throughout this first semester may have differed from those specified in the guidelines, which may have impacted FLAs’ classroom practice and influenced the information educators provided to their group of students. Furthermore, the fact that E2 and E3 were unfamiliar with this information and were notified at the end of the first semester suggests a lack of communication from E1, which coincides with communication issues and the significance of organising meetings with stakeholders involved in assistants’ daily practice highlighted earlier by FLAs and also in several studies, including Gower’s (2005) and López Palacios’s (2012). Stakeholders’ miscommunication and misunderstanding of SRTs also echo scholars’ explanations – among others, those of Ehrenreich (2006), Hibler (2010), and López Palacios (2012) – of reported disappointments. However, as we will see, findings evidenced that the three educators, including E1, disregarded these restrictions in practice (listed by agencies involved with francophone FLAs in Mexico, CIEP, DGRI, and EA) and did request FLAs to substitute for them occasionally (a task analysed in 5.3). On the one hand, data show that educators’ initial expectations of FLAs’ SRTs were influenced by their own assistantship and that they were unaware of changes made in the FLAs’ profile more than ten years ago. On the other hand, findings indicate communication issues at the tutor level and that this group chooses to overlook the
official restrictions to better respond to teaching practice needs, as reported in Culpeper et al. (2008), as we will see in detail in 5.3.

For their part, students' initial expectations reflect their lack of experience studying with FLAs, their lack of information about their presence in class and the overall assistantship objectives. As described in Chapter 3, beginner-level students had never experienced classes with assistants, as stated in their profile. Days before the FLAs' arrival, students commented on different expectations concerning assistants' SRTs, in the initial questionnaire. A small minority (9%) of the respondents answered that they did not receive information from the educators and had no idea how to define the assistants and what to expect from them. This reported lack of information may have also influenced some respondents' expectations concerning assistants' SRTs. For more than 60%, FLAs can teach, which contrasts with the testimonials from FLAs above and the assistantship programmes' candidate profile (2.2.3) but does coincide to some extent with educators' understanding. Although for more than 50% of the students, FLAs are not expected to make teaching decisions, 80% of the respondents answered that assistants would be involved in the teaching and learning process. Concerning the cultural aspect of the FLAs' practice, 67% expect assistants to disseminate their native culture exclusively. Results (53%) also suggest that FLAs are expected to guarantee a natural interaction with the target language and culture by acting as language and cultural models, echoing FLAs' statements, indicating that students are inclined to learn from them and imitate them, perhaps in contrast with the textbook and their educators. The expectations of FLAs' SRTs collected in this questionnaire also revealed various interpretations, which could be related to how educators communicate those before assistants' arrival, including no or vague explanations or descriptions matching the understanding of educators analysed above. In any case, students' answers suggest a need for the host institution, and most specifically educators, to improve communication of assistants' work and presence to reduce possible problematic issues and disappointment in FLAs’ future practice, as mentioned before.
The results collected indicate that the (lack) of assistantship experiences and stakeholders’ knowledge of assistants’ SRTs have impacted participants’ expectations and understanding of these. Concerning the briefing meetings, findings show that FLAs needed different or more specific information and practical examples of practice than what agencies for the target and host countries provided in the briefing meetings (see Appendix 2). Additionally, the data suggest a need for ensuring that the assistants, tutor, and educators receive similar information and have a common understanding of FLAs’ SRTs, through meetings and guidelines written in both Spanish and French before the assistants’ arrival. While the three groups acknowledge the supportive role of FLAs in the teaching and learning process and assign them a key role in disseminating the target cultures, some differences in perception are observable concerning FLAs’ level of teaching responsibilities, which is analysed in the following sub-section.

Although the data collected did not include information about the type of communication between the ministries of education involved, the tutor and the dean of the host university, and the latter with the DGRI, the lack of knowledge from some stakeholders reported in the data also indicates that the dissemination and communication of assistants’ FLAs need improvement. The findings presented in this section about the research site present a different picture from the information found in the literature (see Figure 1, 2.1.1) about the actual lines of communication. Figure 3 illustrates communication in the researched setting. Double-headed arrows show that both stakeholders exchange information. Simple-headed arrows represent that communication only goes in one direction. If the arrow is dashed (double or simple), findings evidenced a partial need for improvement in communication. The added question mark next to some arrows indicates that this line of communication between both agents was not mentioned in the data collected and analysed.
Figure 3: Stakeholders in an assistantship in Mexico and their lines of communication

The present study contributes to evidence that the lines of communication between some stakeholders need to be improved to define and disseminate which status, roles and tasks FLAs are expected to achieve and how. This mitigates different interpretations and understanding at all levels and prevents reported disappointment in the assistantship experience.

4.2 Partnerships and pedagogy in FLAs’ practice

This second section is divided into two main topics concerning stakeholders’ expectations and decisions regarding partnerships and pedagogy during FLAs’ classroom performances. Data analysis supported the connection between those themes and participants’ understanding of the assistants’ status, roles, and tasks.

4.2.1 Partnership in FLAs’ practice

This sub-section analyses how the three groups of participants envision partnerships in the assistantship experience and how those were achieved in practice. Data analysis indicates that several decisions made during the
assistantship and FLAs’ profiles impacted the expectations and achievements of partnerships, influencing participants’ understanding of assistants’ SRTs.

While educators’ and FLAs’ comments collected in the early stages of the assistantship indicated their general intention to work as a team, the way that the assistants’ schedule was established caused disappointment and impacted, to a certain level, how FLAs defined their status and the partnership with the tutor and educators.

Whereas educators indicated their willingness to bring support to FLAs and integrate them into the teaching team, E1 and E2 drew further attention to the centrality of the linguistic topics in FLAs’ classroom performances:

- I know that we will work in a team with them. I provide them with the topic corresponding to the level and the content already studied with the students. (E1)
- The educator should ask them to plan activities according to the grammar and vocabulary content enlisted in the syllabus. (E2)
- We tell them what they should do […] and advise them so everything goes well. (E3)

As stated in the questionnaire, educators’ views on the partnership with FLAs were mainly influenced by their need to complete the syllabus and suggested this process will involve assistants’ participation in putting prescribed linguistic topics into practice. Initial intentions reported here from the educators correspond to the recommendations of guidelines, including those from CIEP (2018), DGRI (2019), and EA (2018), and others reported in the literature, namely in Bosch et al. (2000), Culpeper et al. (2008), and López Palacios (2012) for successful partnerships and by extension the overall assistantship experience. These suggest integrating FLAs into the teaching team through fluid communication, which is partially the case in the present study.

Despite the successful examples of partnership stated and analysed in the second part of this sub-section and educators' reported readiness to integrate the assistants from the first classes, FLAs’ statements suggest that it was not always the case in practice.
At the beginning of the assistantship, the tutor, E1, established FLAs’ schedules. It changed approximately every two weeks; therefore, assistants and educators regularly received updated timetables indicating when and with which groups each assistant would be working for the following days. In the early stages of a FGI, FLAs expressed their discontent about changes and choices in proposed schedules:

You have completely unpredictable hours [...] it’s a tough schedule. No educator would agree to work from 8 to 9 am and from 5 to 6 pm or 6 hours in a row and have a new schedule every couple of weeks. It’s ridiculous. (FLA1)

Upon the educators’ request, the tutor told us to stay in the self-access centre rather than helping them during their first week when they got to know students and introduced the syllabus. I wanted to attend as any other week. (FLA2)

FLAs’ negative perceptions show that teaching and learning needs conditioned the schedule and the partnership with the tutor and educators. On the one hand, these comments indicate that FLAs considered themselves part of the teaching team, echoing educators’ initial intentions and the literature’s words of caution on the significance and advice already mentioned on successfully integrating FLAs into classroom practice and fostering partnerships between educators and FLAs. The example of how the schedule and assistants’ presence were managed also highlights the tutor’s key role, which is rarely commented on in the literature, apart from DGRI (2019), EA (2018), and Culpeper et al. (2008). On the other hand, FLAs considered this partnership limited as they were not consulted as part of this team due to their not belonging to the same professional group as educators and, according to FLA1, as not being “as essential as teachers and an additional workload”. This second aspect mirrors the concept of hierarchical relationship derived from the lack of clarity and indications for the educators on how to integrate FLAs into the day-to-day practice effectively explored in Buckingham (2018b), Culpeper et al. (2008), and López Palacios (2012).

After reviewing participants’ views of the partnerships in the early stages of the assistantship, the following paragraphs explore how the participants reported the partnerships achieved in class during the eight-month assistantship and how it
positively impacted the classroom practice and their understanding of their place in the teaching and learning process.

After two months, FLAs views on their partnerships with educators oscillated between a sense of freedom, support, and imposition:

- We have good communication and partnerships. There is a relationship of trust and dialogue among some educators. They let me choose my activities according to the syllabus [...] other educators impose on us how to present a topic. (FLA1)

- I work with educators who help and advise me. We talk about my activities, they offer me feedback to improve my practice. (FLA2)

Although both FLAs appreciated educators’ guidance and trust, FLA1 preferred making some decisions, and FLA2, who identified himself as a helper, sought educators’ approval. The FLAs’ comments indicate two opposite approaches from educators. On the one hand, there is an apparent negotiation and educators trust assistants’ abilities to make pedagogical decisions, mirroring educators’ previous comments and narratives analysed by several scholars on educators’ growing requests and commitment, including Buckingham (2018b) and Ehrenreich (2006).

On the other hand, FLA1 also reported limited collaboration and hierarchical relationships, which could suggest a lack of trust and time availability from the educators – also commented on in Bosch et al. (2000) and López Palacios (2012) – and/or their consideration of FLAs’ lack of teaching experiences, as discussed in Lavery (2001). These reported heterogeneous ideas of partnerships might indicate that educators did not commonly agree on how to integrate and work with FLAs, echoing miscommunication issues evidenced in 4.1 and discussed in the literature, in Hibler (2010), for example. This may have influenced assistants’ integration into the teaching and learning process to a certain extent.

Educators’ comments coincide with FLAs’ narratives, indicating in their comments how they understood their partnership during assistants’ classroom performances providing them with supervision and support:

- When assistants ‘have their own time,’ we can help them if there’s a problem […], but we don’t impose ourselves. We’re just there if there’s a problem. (E1)
Students are on their phones. You must help. [...] sometimes, I feel that there’s way too much noise. I also intervene, even if it’s just to police it. (E2)

They come to help us present activities but not during the entire class. (E3)

The data collected after four months of practice indicate that while educators described their role as helping FLAs with possible managerial difficulties, their comments also suggest that they are the ones that know and understand how to deal with students. This suggests that they were aware of FLAs’ non-professional status and the possible need for guidance, as reported in Haramboure (2000) and Scobling (2011). On the one hand, this echoes their intentions as analysed above, as well as attitudes expected and observed by FLAs, and led educators to adopt a supportive perspective, as suggested in official guidelines, in EA (2018), for example. On the other hand, this could foster a hierarchal environment, where partnerships and assistants’ status is subjected to certain needs for the teaching and learning process, as highlighted in Culpeper et al. (2008), mirroring assistants’ previous comments on schedule issues, and possibly influencing students’ understanding of FLAs’ and educators’ status when both are in class.

During focus group sessions, assistants provided further examples of how they see their partnerships with the educators and how this may have impacted learners’ expectations and understanding of FLAs’ SRTs:

Sometimes, educators let us take the lead and do corrections. In the meantime, they get ahead with their work. It doesn’t bother me, but I can imagine students saying that educators use us so that they can do something else. (FLA1)

I think that the idea of giving up their [educators] place for the assistant is a process that is difficult for some educators; it’s not like you’re replacing the teacher in the students’ hearts, I mean, but it’s like sharing power. (FLA1)

In the same focus group interview, FLA2 used certain expressions to describe his interventions (e.g., on stage, that’s my turn, or remain in the background). These echoed FLA1’s interpretations of educators’ reactions to her presence and status and the hierarchal environment reported earlier in this sub-section and how it could affect students’ views, something also discussed by Buckingham (2018b), which
could lead to diminishing the status of FLAs among the students who see them as *less powerful players* or according to them an in-between status sometimes helping sometimes teaching, as reported in Ehrenreich (2006) and Haramboure (2000). Data analysis suggests that, on the one hand, FLA1 associated this situation with a loss of control by the educators, which is also described in López Palacios (2012). On the other hand, she considered that these did not pay enough attention to her presentations – which she confirmed on various FGIs – and used this teaching-free moment to perform alternative tasks. However, this could also indicate that educators trusted her classroom interventions and believed their help was unnecessary. The comments analysed in this paragraph seem to confirm quotes previously analysed, showing that FLAs’ classroom performances and partnerships are subject to educators’ decisions and interpretation of assistants’ status and how their interventions should be achieved, leading perhaps to renegotiate the nature of their relationship and re-evaluate FLAs’ identity.

As those analysed thereafter on the impact of their partnership with educators on classroom practice, further assistants’ statements indicate the significance of their relationship with the students. After four months of practice and contact with them, FLAs expressed interest in following the students’ academic progress:

I want to feel involved in the project and students’ progress; it would feel like our work as assistants is more useful. (FLA2)

Students mentioned they would like to see more of the assistants in class. […] it’s impossible to follow the progress of my groups […] I’d like to have a class from beginning to end to see how they progress. (FLA1)

Assistants suggest that their practice would be more meaningful if they could be part of the students’ learning processes, indicating their willingness for a deeper partnership with students and, by extension, the educators. Although they acknowledged the need to clarify the situation and express their wishes to their tutor and the educators during this interview, FLAs assumed the partnership worked. They had no control over this decision. In line with learners’ and educators’ initial expectations, and despite the FLAs’ reported frustrations, these comments indicate growing considerations for students’ learning process and the
classrooms and education in general. This mirrors the need highlighted in the literature to clarify FLAs’ status and prescribed and expected commitment to all the stakeholders involved in the classroom practice to mitigate possible disappointment at different levels, also reported in Haramboure (2000) and Scobling (2011), as well as improving the lines of communication (see 4.1). While assistants claim that the type of partnership established between them and the learners is connected to their willingness to take practice a step further and seek to take on something more similar to the role of a teaching practitioner, it also shows they felt unable to negotiate their SRTs. This echoes the integration and communication issues already reported in this section.

The data collected from students coincide to a certain point with FLAs’ and educators’ expectations and observations concerning the partnerships and assistants’ status. After a semester of FLAs’ weekly classroom work, students provided their understanding of a foreign language assistant in a questionnaire (Appendix 14). Answers showed that they give FLAs two different statuses, helpers and teachers. Firstly, they used the verbs help and assist (ayudar and asistir in Spanish) in 60% of the answers. For instance, “He assists the educator and us in our learning, in a less formal way” (S106 student) and “She helped us to practice with funny activities” (S104 student). The first status identified that FLAs’ presence helps place the learning in a less structured setting. Secondly, 40% of the students used the verb teach and the noun teacher (enseñar and docente in Spanish), for example:

- She wants to be a future teacher and learns from E2. She practices with us. (S101)
- He teaches instead of our teacher when she is busy and with too many students. (S103)

Answers suggest that assistants’ participation involved teaching acts. This (pre-) teacher status mentioned – (pre-) teacher – implies that FLAs learn and practice teaching skills and have a logistical role when substituting the educators (the latter topic is analysed in 5.3), which contradicts educators’ quotes concerning their non-teaching status. After a semester of FLAs’ classroom performances, students’
comments evidenced that decisions made in practice regarding partnership influenced how they understood assistants’ status, oscillating between teachers and helpers, which accords with Haramboure (2000), Lavery (2001), and Scobling (2011). My findings provide insights into a context never studied before, including the voices of students studying with FLAs. At the same time, they confirm the different expectations and understanding reported by FLAs and educators in this sub-section and several scholars (see the six statuses in 2.3.3) and reinforce the significance of establishing a common understanding of FLAs SRTs.

Despite the reported contentions concerning FLAs’ status, several statements indicate that assistants’ non-professional position and their age closeness positively influenced the partnership between assistants and learners. These features contributed to building a privileged relationship and fluid dialogue, as we will now see.

Assistantship programmes for francophone native speakers in Mexico are open to candidates with no prior teaching training or experience who are under 30 years old (CIEP, 2018; DGRI, 2019; EA, 2018), which is the case in this case study. It is worth mentioning that in the French Department, educators’ average age is 40 years old, while that of the FLAs’ is 24, and the students’ is 21.

In the initial questionnaire, 74% of students commented that assistants’ main difference from educators was their age. According to FLAs’ statements collected in FGIA2, the age proximity facilitated casualness in the dialogue and diminished the possible hierarchy between students and these native speakers. Understandably, the personal connection between learners and assistants was less than with educators:

It was easier for them to ask slightly more personal questions because we were the same age. (FLA1)

Students seem more trusting of us because we are not educators but assistants; we are the same age as them. They get less stressed out. (FLA2)

Further comments suggest a trustful and friendly relationship between students and FLAs outside the classroom – in the SAC (see participants’ statements in
5.1.2) and during casual encounters – where both groups, close in age, acted alternatively as cultural learners and experts. FLA1, for example, invited students to francophone artists’ shows to provide them with a “different version of French culture than what they see in classes.” FLA2 went to students’ parties where he felt “immersed in Mexican culture and able to learn more about their culture.” Both quotes evidence a spontaneous dialogue between cultures that their non-professional and young status is likely to have made possible. In line with the assistants’ statements, educators shared during the initial focus group interview that age proximity is an essential factor when discussing culture, encouraging a natural bond; students feel motivated to discover connections with other young adults – an aspect discussed in Bosch et al. (2000) and Haramboure (2000) – and to be understood by them when speaking the target language, as reported in Scobling (2011). Although participants’ comments indicate that FLAs maintained an in-between status, especially outside the classroom, this did not seem to hold back the practice of the target language in a friendly and supportive atmosphere and intercultural dialogue, as mentioned in Bosch et al. (2000).

This sub-section shows that several aspects influence FLAs’ partnerships among stakeholders. Firstly, how various decisions are communicated and made and the extent of FLAs’ involvement in such choices. Secondly, the diversity of participants’ expectations and understanding concerning partnership and FLAs’ integration into the teaching and learning process; and lastly, FLAs’ non-professional and young status.

While FLAs accept this guidance, some of their statements indicate their desire for deeper involvement in the teaching process and to receive recognition in a different type of partnership with educators. Although statements suggest that they assumed responsibilities beyond agencies’ expectations in practice, it remains to be seen if this matches the reality of practice and if FLAs are pedagogically ready to assume such functions, as we will see in the following sub-section.
4.2.2 Pedagogical expectations and decisions in FLAs’ practice

This sub-section analyses respondents’ comments concerning teaching decisions made during FLAs’ practice and presents ideas on the feedback and its impact on the assistants and the language teaching and learning process. This analysis aims to better understand how participants’ expectations and understanding of FLAs’ SRTs influenced some decisions made in practice.

Educators showed that they expected FLAs to integrate and connect the institution’s A1 level French syllabus (see Table 5 in 4.3) to their weekly cultural classroom interventions throughout the assistantship. This started with the selection process of cultural topics presented in class, which educators initiated:

- It was always something that we’d already covered in class. […] It’s more about learning cultural things and reusing the grammatical notions learned with me in class. (E1)
- It was always vocabulary or grammar. I would ask her to do a game with the vocabulary students learned. (E2)
- I made the most of his being there to do cultural things related to the topics that we were covering. For example, in the near future, I asked him to talk about his next holidays. (E3)

These comments, collected during the initial focus group interview, indicate that educators control the topic selection, the material, and activities FLAs will be designed to integrate better the content they will present into their teaching sequence. While the way that educators handled this process suggests hierarchical partnership and a need to improve communication (echoing the data analysed in 4.1 and 4.2.1) and could have included FLAs’ opinions, it was probably guided by the needs of the teaching context, mirroring the conclusions of Buckingham (2018b), Hibler (2010) and López Palacios (2012), which educators are familiar with.

Educators further commented on the choice of topics during the last FGI:

- I told the assistant days before what we were going to do […] to prepare some cultural activities more than anything, and he prepared them. (E1)
- With the students, we made a list of cultural topics. Assistants decided then how to do their presentations. They would ask me a
week before what I wanted. I would give them little bits of advice by email. (E2)

Assistants expected that we would help them include their cultural activities prepared for our sequence. (E3)

While educators’ quotes confirm their initial leadership and support in the selection of cultural themes and, for E2 and E3 in the preparation of FLAs’ activities, their expectations seem to imply pedagogical decision-making (e.g., reusing the grammatical notions, designing a game suitable for beginner learners) from FLAs. Although FLAs, in previous comments (4.2.1), claimed their willingness to be further involved in the teaching and learning process, this implication, partly due to assistants’ non-professional status and lack of teaching practice, would require educators’ time and guidance, which according to some statements (see 4.1) they did not always provide. The following comments from educators collected in the last FGI seem to confirm this conclusion and provide an explanation:

We have to follow a syllabus, so when they come, it’s in terms of culture because we don’t have time to concentrate on anything other than vocabulary and written and oral comprehension. (E1)

We have to respect a syllabus, and we feel that the cultural classes take up too much time, and we lack time for grammar and revision. […] so that we don’t get behind with the syllabus. (E2)

Educators’ comments partly contradict their initial intentions to connect the prescribed topics of the syllabus to FLAs’ cultural presentations, suggesting that this connection was unsuccessful in completing the grammar and lexical themes. This shows issues in the partnerships between the two groups and educators’ understanding of the place of culture in the language classroom (see 4.3), which might have impacted the support brought to FLAs and their status. This last point can be connected to a lack of educators’ awareness of what FLAs’ presence implies, concurring with Culpeper et al. (2008) and from FLAs on what to expect from educators’ partnership and guidance, as described in Hibler (2010).

Despite the drawbacks expressed in the above comments from educators, FLAs’ considered that they successfully complied with educators’ expectations to integrate prescribed linguistic topics into their cultural presentations. After a few weeks of practice, FLAs stated:
I felt uncomfortable when I gave presentations on cultural topics and that the students’ minds were elsewhere. (FLA1)

I find that it’s easier to say, ‘we’re going to work with the near future, and I prepare a cultural thing for it. I feel like the students listen more because it’s what they just learned. (FLA2)

FLAs remarked that connecting linguistic and cultural content, as claimed in educators’ statements, facilitated their practice and encouraged students’ understanding of the cultural topics presented. When this connection was absent, so was the students’ interest. Quotes indicate that assistants understood the educators’ choice to connect cultural and linguistic topics, which shows pedagogical awareness from the FLAs and may have required them to make pedagogical decisions (e.g., adapt the level of the material, use a prescribed linguistic structure to disseminate cultural knowledge), as suggested in previous educators’ comments and as per the data collected throughout their practice and analyses thereafter. While the FLAs (evolving) professional awareness is scarcely or not even covered during training sessions, echoing Buckingham (2018a) and García Fernández (2000), their prescribed roles and tasks imply a certain level of pedagogical consciousness. As a result, and concurring with some studies, including Bosch et al. (2000) and Martinez (2000), assistants progressively improve their understanding of the teaching process and adapt their interventions, as we will now see.

In this study, FLAs and educators kept a logbook that registered aspects of assistants’ classroom performances (see 3.3.4 and Appendix 16 for more details), providing further insights into how assistants’ SRTs were understood.

Their individual reflections on practice, pedagogical decisions and awareness emerged from analysing the assistants' entries. 70% of their comments concerned how students perceived their activities and how assistants’ interpretations of those perceptions impacted their practice. FLA1 wrote:

Students liked it; they participated a lot. I will use the activity again. (February 14th)

I must revise this information or this part of the activity because that didn’t work with this group […]. I could adapt it to different levels. (March 3rd)
We must listen to the students’ advice. (March 12th)
They understood the game, and they wouldn’t stop playing. Nice session! (March 16th)

For his part, FLA2 logged:

I made progress in my participation. [...] I am adapting to my audience. The activity must impact the students (more interest, motivation to learn, and interaction). (November 8th)

Good interaction. Learning and laughing, I like teaching. I taught this class three times, improved the activity, and dropped what didn’t work. [...] better try and make mistakes than regret it. (December 3rd)

I act like someone who wants to help and lead a group. [...] I try to set a goal for each class to transmit something to the students. I like to promote a trusting environment. (March 18th)

FLAs’ comments indicate their ability to self-evaluate and rely upon learners’ positive reception to consider their presentations successful or make adjustments. To a certain point, they identify themselves as educators or trainees in charge and continually make better decisions to integrate the learners. While this interpretation echoes the assistants’ quotes analysed in 4.2.1 and the previous paragraph, it also mirrors educators’ expectations and the literature on FLAs’ growing understanding of teaching and learning needs, which they progressively integrate into their classroom performances, as reported in Bosch et al. (2000) and López Palacios (2012). Additionally, the analysis of the fragments shows that using this instrument allowed them to connect their practice with their thoughts and guide their pedagogical decisions, suggesting self-reflection. This aspect, which emerged from the data, was not reported in the literature consulted, but further insights analysed thereafter evidence that in the present study, FLAs, and to certain extent educators, engaged in self-reflection.

FLAs’ logbook entries also indicated individual reflection on the understanding of their SRTs, including considerations for teaching decisions in their practice:

The organisation is an important point. I now have a better idea of the length of the activity. [...] The constant practice gave me the experience to evaluate and pilot my activities to administrate my time. (March 20th - FLA1)
We still have things to improve. We can always progress [...] I realise that being a French educator is not easy. (December 2nd - FLA2).

A lesson isn’t just about the hour and fifteen minutes that you spend in a classroom; it’s also about what happens before and after, doing feedback, and looking back on my performance in the class. (February 10th - FLA2)

In contrast to the previous entries that focused on students’ impressions, those fragments suggest a growing pedagogical awareness and readiness in both assistants, manifested in their perceived understanding of the teaching and learning context and willingness to adjust their practice. Again, although those responsibilities seem to go beyond the agencies’ prescribed SRTs, this echoes a higher involvement in the teaching and learning process analysed in 4.2.1. It might result from educators’ growing trust in their pedagogical skills. In the third FGI, FLAs discussed their ability to self-evaluate their practice and confirmed this analysis.

During the second FGI, both FLAs mentioned that this daily writing habit encouraged self-reflection on their classroom practice, helping them professionally:

- I like having a logbook; it allows me to get self-feedback on my activity. I put my opinion, how I felt the thing went. (FLA1)
- The logbook allowed me to stop for a moment after the lessons and write an evaluation of my presentations. The logbook was important in personal and professional terms to do little weekly evaluations. (FLA2)

In their comments, assistants show that the logbook intended to register the description of their practice fostered a regular and individual reflection, evidencing their growing professional awareness and the pedagogical decisions made in their practice. Although several scholars, as mentioned above, have discussed these last two topics separately, to my knowledge, no published studies have integrated the use of logbooks and shown the connection between the themes. Additionally, the data collected allow us to look at those topics from the educators’ angle, which is the focus of the following paragraphs.

During the assistantship, educators shared their impressions of FLAs’ classroom performances in their logbooks during FGIs, thereby providing further insights into
their pedagogical expectations and decisions. Most educators’ comments consist of positive feedback (90%). These mostly referred to FLAs’ choice of resources and activities, which educators supervised, as previously commented, and the impact of those on the teaching and learning process. Less positive comments related to the difficulty of specific activities for beginners, technical and time management issues, and decisions that mostly correspond to teaching skills. Although these are predictable due to assistants’ lack of experience, it might also suggest the need for educators to provide further guidance to FLAs, as well as for the assistants to request more precise explanations.

The following educators’ comments, collected in the FGIE1, illustrate how they expected assistants to use pedagogical strategies to improve the passing on of cultural knowledge and an example of how FLA1 did it in practice:

- He felt more comfortable teaching and learned to decode non-verbal language, the ‘Mexican yes,’ which means ‘no’. (E1)
- She is theatrical, so even with a simple gesture, she can explain things that they wouldn’t have understood otherwise. (E2)
- The more Spanish he learned, the easier it would be for him to explain, to use cognates. (E3)

These extracts echoed FLAs’ concerns about using suitable teaching strategies and reaffirmed stakeholders’ expectations of assistants to act as temporary teaching and learning helpers capable of pedagogical decision-making. Such expectations seem to correspond to the different statuses identified in the literature, including those not mutually exclusive, as mentioned in Bosch et al. (2000). Still, they require fluid communication between stakeholders and guidance on achieving those successfully, as Hibler (2010) described. Unfortunately, the following comments, collected during the final FGI, indicate that educators did not always provide FLAs with feedback:

- I would take notes in the logbook […] only if there had been problems, I would tell them, but I wouldn’t give them real feedback. (E1)
- I write their activities in the logbook and my feedback simultaneously, sending them a photo via Messenger. (E2)
I give feedback straight after the lesson. I’d say, ‘Come to my office at midday, and I’ll give you some feedback.’ (E3)

Although educators seem to expect changes in FLAs’ practice, the evidence suggests that sometimes they separate themselves from the feedback (e.g., *come to my office, via Messenger, or I wouldn’t give them real feedback*). Reasons for their positions were discussed in the same FGI. Educators mentioned that they did not always give (detailed) feedback due to time issues; they did not want FLAs to have more workload in case they had to modify their resources and activities. They did not expect FLAs to fully understand the usefulness of these comments as they do not have teaching training skills or professional teaching status. It seems contradictory that educators have growing pedagogical expectations of FLAs and did not communicate them for the reasons mentioned. This evidences the need for an improvement in communication and, as recommended in the literature, to take the time for the French Department to provide assistants with more practical and explicit instructions on their classroom performances, echoing Culpeper et al. (2008), which could be done in regular meetings with the stakeholders involved, as suggested in Gower (2005).

Contrary to what may be inferred from educators’ choices concerning the feedback, FLAs affirmed that they requested educators’ evaluation, which they appreciated and used:

At the end of the class, I would always ask the educators if it was OK. I always got feedback on my presentations. It helped me a lot with my classroom interventions. (FLA1)

I am asking for feedback from the educators on my teaching. It is indeed good; for example, I got better at changing my voice when speaking in public, writing on the board, explaining words with synonyms, etc. (FLA2)

The data collected during the fourth FGI show the feedback provided contributed to self-reflection and adjustments in assistants’ practice. Teaching strategies mentioned in the assistants’ statements, including adapting the resources and activities to the students’ level, effective board use, and slowing down their natural speech pace, suggest that educators increasingly expected them to make decisions generally not ascribed to non-professionals. FLAs’ comments show they
valued the suggestions made – questioning their understanding of SRTs and possibly adjusting their practice and suitable pedagogical decisions – and aimed for further professional recognition. The analysis mirrors previous discussions in this chapter and the literature on educators’ and FLAs’ apparent willingness to temporarily share the teaching position. However, this impression was never mutually expressed – but rather required, as we will see in 5.3 – in this study or the ones I consulted on the topic.

Data analysis showed that during focus group interviews, educators and FLAs reflect on practice, especially pedagogical decisions. In the initial FGI, assistants commented on the possible impact the discussions held during these regular encounters would have on their assistantship:

With FLA2, we have very different perceptions. [...] I put into question the ideas and values of my region, my country [...] to trigger discussions. FLA2 has more of a personal perspective and talks about his everyday life. (FLA1)

Exchanging ideas around topics like attitudes, knowledge, and activities is productive. [...] I liked this encounter; to get an overview, be open, talking about your feelings and perceptions, it is important to help each other. (FLA2)

At the end of their stay, during the final FGI, assistants jointly commented on the same topic:

It’s good to get feedback. [...] It is a shame that the educators don’t participate in the sessions. It would be important to have one meeting annually with all the educators and assistants. (FLA1)

It was interesting to talk about our work; we don’t talk about it outside school. I liked it. [...] we’re a good team. That’s also what made it easier for me to settle in. (FLA2)

This reflection activity allows me to discuss different topics, take the time to stop, and think about improving our practice and progress. (FLA2)

Assistants’ comments indicate that these sessions encouraged an in-depth level of self-reflection and co-reflection on the understanding of their SRTs, the general practice and development of a possible partnership with the fellow assistant, and the decisions made concerning their classroom practice. FLA2 appeared enthusiastic and satisfied with collaboratively discussing his practice, including
teaching decisions and personal thoughts. The use of the words team and help indicates his willingness to create a community of practice, seemingly free of judgments on the other assistant, whom he considered a peer. FLA2 added on the positive impact these meetings could have had on the understanding and partnership of both groups concerning SRTs and the assistantship in general. For her part, FLA1 did not benefit from this reflective cooperation, evidencing a perception of FLA2’s different attitudes towards collaboratively commenting and reflecting on practice.

Additionally, she considered that further involvement from the educators (including the tutor) might have encouraged them and FLAs to become more engaged in the assistantship and the reflective practice. The successful practice of reflection between the teaching team and assistants was reported by Klapper (2000). Furthermore, this was suggested by Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez (2012), among other authors, to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to regularly reflect on assistantship issues, including the assistants’ SRTs, level of pedagogical commitment, and integration into the teaching and learning process.

Educators commented on some pedagogical decisions made and their impact on the learning and teaching process at the end of the assistantship. At the end of FLAs’ stay, educators stated that during assistants’ classroom interventions, they had the opportunity to observe their students and their learning process, as well as the teaching strategies they used:

We analyse how we are teaching, what we missed, and what could interest our students. Also, the assistant brings […] dynamism, different ideas, or activities. (E1)

You reflect when the students are doing an activity. […] you say, ‘Ah, I could use this for a different level.’ It’s for us to reflect on our teaching. (E1)

[…] you also observe the students’ behaviour and body language […] you have a different angle, which allows you to analyse your way of teaching. Also, reusing activities that worked well to do them with my students at other levels. (E2)

It was about observing the activities, how students reacted, getting new ideas, and how to give structured instructions. That’s something that I learned from them. (E3)
Statements suggest that assistants help educators to reach professional objectives and be self-reflective. Observing FLAs’ classroom performance also allowed educators to evaluate and value assistants’ work. Although the educators’ comments analysed in previous sub-sections indicate that FLAs are not considered professional teachers, the above statements suggest that educators acknowledged, to a certain extent, a budding professional status in the assistants.

The data analysed in this sub-section suggest that pedagogical decisions were made and expected from SRTs. These were influenced by educators’ requirement to cover linguistic topics, the expectation that assistants would incorporate those topics into the transmission of cultural knowledge, students’ impressions of their practice, educators’ feedback and partnership, and assistants’ individual and collective reflection on practice. Additionally, the reported pedagogical decisions and reflections seem to have impacted how assistants see themselves, understood their SRTs, and to a lesser extent, influenced educators’ recognition.

4.3 Perception of culture in teaching and learning and FLAs’ practice

This section analyses and discusses the place of cultural knowledge in A1-level classes and the status of FLAs as temporary cultural helpers through stakeholders’ perspectives. Governments and agencies expect FLAs to embody and disseminate the French language and various cultures (2.2). Institutions’ and participants’ expectations, understanding, and performances of assistants’ SRTs are connected to their vision of culture and how they situate cultural knowledge in the teaching and learning process, as we will now see.

The first part of this section focuses on participants’ initial expectations regarding the assistant’s responsibility to disseminate cultural knowledge and the type of content expected.

Assistants’ expectations were collected in the initial interview in order to understand their perceptions of the connections between languages and cultures and the possible impact of this perception on their future practice. At this initial
point, both showed a willingness to share their vision of culture and encourage an (inter)dialogue between students’ cultures and the assistants’, showing their early perception of culture and understanding of their role and their future decisions in practice to disseminate culture. While guidelines and some scholars acknowledge that assistants are expected to act as a cultural and linguistic model of the target language (CIEP, 2018; Grina
ger, 2018), who will share similar cultural interests with learners, facilitating the communication between both groups (Bosch et al., 2000; Rook, 2016), as expressed in FLAs’ views, agencies fail to raise awareness of the intercultural scope of FLAs’ practice.

In the case of students and educators, although the content they expected from FLAs often seemed to correspond to representative and preconceived ideas about the target cultures, some answers indicated that they anticipated assistants’ presence and interventions helping to overcome this limited cultural understanding. Half of the learners expected FLAs to have up-to-date linguistic and cultural knowledge and therefore become models of the French language and culture in the classroom. This echoes the comments made by 30% of students that their educators were not constantly updated concerning cultural knowledge, which the three groups of participants confirmed at different stages of the data collection, and corresponds to a gap that FLAs (were) expected and prescribed, according to the participants of some scholars (e.g., Hibler, 2010 and López-Medina and Otto, 2020) to fill. The percentage concurs with the literature mentioned above, and FLAs’ initial intentions and learners’ initial expectations also indicate the significance of assistants’ nativeness in complementing the reported lack of cultural knowledge in their future classes. Related to the type of content, students answered that FLAs would present material related to arts (100%), everyday life habits and situations (80%), holidays and traditions (60%), and history (15%). Despite the accessibility of information about cultural content online, students’ statements suggested they benefit from assistants updating cultural and social knowledge of the language they are learning. Although the practices of FLAs outside of the European context have only been reported by a few scholars (Rowles and Rowles, 2005, for example), the majority of the literature consulted,
including the agencies’ guidelines, acknowledge the benefits that linguistic and cultural models and ambassador native speakers, such as FLAs (CIEP, 2018; EA, 2018), bring to the language teaching and learning process in countries where face-to-face contacts with the target language and culture are limited (Jiménez-Garrido and Pérez-Navío, 2014; López Palacios, 2012).

Educators’ views collected in an initial questionnaire mirror students’ answers on the expected cultural topics to be included in FLAs’ material:

I expect they will talk about history, celebrations and everyday life conditions. (E2)

[…] the diversity of the French and French-Canadian population, traditions, and how to act in their countries. (E3)

In the same questionnaire, E1 believed FLAs’ presence and intercultural mediator role in overcoming the stereotypical vision of francophone cultures she observed in class (e.g., in textbooks), acknowledging their potential lack of updated awareness of the target cultures, thus echoing students’ responses above. Furthermore, she expected FLAs to have extended knowledge of francophone cultural diversity, corresponding to millions of speakers worldwide and many different realities. Educators’ answers suggest that they expect FLAs to be responsible for disseminating cultural content, indicating that they distance themselves from this aspect of language teaching and that they, and the material they use in class, participate, to a certain extent, in building a representative vision of francophone cultures. The analysis of the educators’ and students’ perceptions suggest several contractions, which were partly illustrated, as we will later see, by the inconsistency in which FLAs approached the dissemination of cultural knowledge, raising some problematic partnership issues, among other impacts. On the one hand, the analysis of students’ and educators’ answers raises questions about assistants’ usefulness concerning a simplified conception of the target culture similar to that which may be found online or in the most commonly used classroom material – the textbook (see discussion on cultural representation in this resource in Ali et al., (2015) and Risager (2018), they seem to be expected to cover. On the other hand, it also shows FLAs’ key role in transmitting updated and less stereotyped cultural
content and vision and complementing (non-) native educators’ knowledge and – mirroring the conclusion of several authors, such as Hibler (2010) and López-Medina and Otto (2020) on assistants’ supporting cultural role. This knowledge appears missing in class and mirrors part of the assistantship’s prescribed objectives. More generally, the first part of this sub-section evidenced a need at the host institution level, and even perhaps at the assistantship agencies level, to discuss and find ways for FLAs to step away from the dissemination of French and French-Canadian culture(s) based on an essentialist view of those societies and reducing stereotyping (Holliday, 2013; Tador, Chao, Hong, and Polzer, 2013).

The second part of this section will help further understand the place of culture at the research site and its connection with participants’ understanding of FLAs’ SRTs and the assistants’ practice, analysing the French syllabus for A1-level classrooms. Designed by the head of the French Department (E1) in 2016, it consisted of two pages. The first page enlists the communicative, sociolinguistic, and cultural general objectives (e.g., learning to greet and present oneself, behaving with friends and colleagues) and pragmatic competence (e.g., fluency, coherence, and cohesion). This page presents each competence separately and does not provide enough information to practice the objectives. This may suggest that educators are expected to teach them disconnectedly or that they already know how to interpret the information provided. Furthermore, the cultural objectives listed suggest little representation of a variety of francophone cultures and mainly focus on France (e.g., types of families in France, shops opening hours in France). This lack of representation is further discussed in 5.4. The second page of this document consists of prescribed linguistic topics and suggested teaching periods.

FLAs’ commented in a focus group interview that the tutor gave them this second page upon their arrival, which was later confirmed. E1 argued that the first page only concerned the teaching team, suggesting that FLAs would not use or understand the information on the first page and do not belong to the teaching team. This insight echoes the communication and integration issues previously reported and discussed in this chapter, but the data does not provide evidence of
how this impacted the assistants’ practice. However, the classroom presentations they recorded in their logbooks show the prescribed topics’ influence and corresponding teaching periods on their practice. Table 5 illustrates this connection. It includes a description of the content shared – in column one, dates on which FLAs are presented – in column two, A1-level linguistic topics on the French Department’s syllabus – in column three, and the suggested teaching periods for completing each exam – in column four.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics (Content presented by FLAs)</th>
<th>FLA1 (Dates)</th>
<th>FLA2 (Dates)</th>
<th>A1 Level syllabus</th>
<th>Teaching periods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal presentations (name, nationality, country, family)</td>
<td>Beg-Sept Mid-Feb</td>
<td>Beg-Sept Mid-Feb</td>
<td>Unit I: Discovering - Greetings/Introduce oneself - Countries - Jobs - Animals</td>
<td>mid to end-Aug 2017 and end-Jan to mid-Feb 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals (pets, farm animals)</td>
<td>Mid-Sept End-Feb</td>
<td>Mid-Sept End-Feb</td>
<td>Unit II: Describing - Physical description - Moral description - Clothing vocabulary - Likes and dislikes - Pastimes</td>
<td>end-Aug to mid-Sept 2017 and mid- to end-Feb 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs (definition, typical jobs)</td>
<td>Mid-Feb Mid-Feb</td>
<td>--- End-Feb</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing (typical clothes, colors, fashion)</td>
<td>End-Oct End-Oct</td>
<td>End-Oct End-Oct</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastimes (description, popular activities)</td>
<td>Mid-Feb Mid-Feb</td>
<td>End-Feb End-Feb</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of ideal person (Moral/physical description)</td>
<td>Mid-Sept Mid-Feb</td>
<td>--- End-Feb</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| — 1st exam mid-Sept 2017 and end-Feb 2018 — |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Presentation of family (types of families and marriage, presentation of own family) | End-Sept Mid-Mar | End-Sept Mid-Mar | Unit III: Family - Family members - Family events - 2nd group verbs - Presenting a third person | mid to end-Sept 2017 and end-Feb to mid-Mar 2018 |
| Presenting a friend (physical/moral description, likes/dislikes) | Beg-Nov Beg-Nov | --- | --- | --- |
| Routine and schedule (time, punctuality, opening hours) | Mid-Mar Mid-Mar | Unit IV: Numbers - Time - Phone number - 3rd group verbs - Daily routine | end-Sept to mid-Oct 2017 and mid- to end-Mar 2018 |

| Francophonie week (Beg-Apr 2018) |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Celebrations throughout the year (dates, traditions, actions) | End-Oct Mid-Feb | End-Oct Mid-Feb | Unit V: Time - Days, months, and seasons - Celebrations - Using future tense - Holidays | end-Oct to mid-Nov 2017 and end-Apr to mid-May 2018 (2 weeks Easter break) |
| Next vacations (activities, future tense) | Mid-Nov Beg-Apr | Mid-Nov Beg-Apr | --- | --- |
| Food (Traditional dishes, lexical) | Mid-Nov Beg-Apr | Mid-Nov Beg-Apr | Unit VI: Food - Food vocabulary - Invitations - Mealtimes - Stores/city | mid- to end-Nov 2017 and mid- to mid-May 2018 |
| Invitations (Accept/refuse invitations) | End-Oct End-Oct | --- | --- | --- |

| Francophonie week (Mid-Nov 2017) |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Hometown (Stores, size, lifestyle, weather, activities) | End-Nov End-Apr | End-Nov End-Apr | --- | --- |

| — 2nd exam mid-Oct 2017 and beg-Apr 2018 — |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|

| Final written exam end-Nov 2017 and end-May 2018 |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Final oral exam beg-Dec 2017 and beg-June 2018 |
Some inconsistencies between the presentation dates and the teaching periods are highlighted in red. Two reasons explain these: the date of FLAs’ arrival (beginning of September) and educators’ requests to present certain topics on specific dates (e.g., Saint Valentine’s Day or Day of the Dead celebrations).

Additionally, Table 6 shows that educators and FLAs adjusted their calendars to the syllabus. This mirrors the significance of completing the prescribed linguistic topics within the time constraints and their priority over the cultural content (see analysis and discussion of educators’ comments in 4.2.2). In relation to this, during the first FGIE, two educators explained:

> We risk getting behind with the syllabus. Sometimes it’s too tight to cover everything because, as it’s once a week, we have three days a week to work on grammar, etc. […] that’s a slight downside for me. (E1)

> In one part of the class, we’d try to look at a cultural point; it depended if that point was covered in the syllabus. Once a week is sometimes too much. (E2)

First, educators’ statements suggest that including cultural content would risk not completing the syllabus, indicating that culture is a secondary objective. In a follow-up question, educators were asked if the way the syllabus was designed and the pressure to complete it has impacted their vision of the place of culture and their appreciation of the cultural content shared or if they already had this perspective. While their complementary answers indicated that they generally prioritise grammar and lexical knowledge over cultural content, they did not explicitly refer to the syllabus’s influence on their decisions. Secondly, educators’ extracts indicate that they distance themselves from cultural content, which is a task they attribute to the FLAs who act as temporary cultural helpers. Although this reported separation of linguistic and cultural objectives echoes how the first page of the syllabus presents those, it works against some expectations analysed earlier in this chapter on the need to further intersect the cultural component of the language classes and the separation observed between linguistic and cultural elements. This may indicate, as mentioned before, a tendency among some educators to leave the culture as the weakest component of the syllabus – a point already reported by Byrd et al. (2011) – suggesting educators’ perceptions of assistants’ cultural role as
less important and disconnected from the topics studied with educators in class. While the literature confirms integration issues concerning FLAs and their work, reporting educators’ fear about sharing their authority (e.g., López Palacios, 2012), no studies have evidenced a connection between the status of culture and the FLAs’ status.

In this third part of the section, after considering initial expectations from the stakeholders, we will now look at the evidence of FLAs’ practice regarding their helper status.

According to statements collected in logbook entries, interviews, and questionnaires, FLAs included the practice of communicative skills (writing, reading, speaking, and listening – Council of Europe, CEFR, 2020) in class (e.g., writing informal letters on February 14th with FLA1 or debating on celebrations on October 31st with FLA2). In their practice, assistants used personal pictures or everyday-life objects (e.g., the wedding of FLA2’s sister – “Based on his pictures, students asked him questions to know what his life in France is like” in E1’s logbook), topics closed to students’ interest (e.g., mime game to review sports lexicon with FLA1 - reported in E2’s and E3’s logbooks), colloquial expressions (e.g., the insult workshop in Francophonie week – “They help us to understand colloquial expressions from their countries.” says a S104 student in the final questionnaire), making voice-recording (analysed in 5.1.3), and updating and completing the cultural references available and the cultural knowledge of the educators (e.g., during final interview, FLA1 “it’s good to have people who are cultural ambassadors, because educators aren’t always up to date, especially concerning the French-Canadian culture which is under-represented.”). Unlike most studies on this topic, activities presented in this paragraph provide insights into how assistants disseminated cultural content in class. FLAs’ approaches observed here included the use of a variety of resources and tasks, implying pedagogical decisions making from their part and that they were temporarily helping educators and students practice the language and learn more about the target cultures – expressed in students’ and educators’ expectations previously analysed – and apparently not met by the educators in class. While very few
scholars reported practical examples of how assistants disseminated their culture (e.g., Haramboure, 2000; Martinez, 2000), studies evidenced that FLAs’ classroom performances required the use of new strategies in teaching culture that assistants, due to their lack of language teaching experiences, are not always familiar with and that the agencies fail to provide them with (Ehrenreich, 2006; Scobling, 2011).

Authors such as Byram and Kramsch (2008) raise awareness of the significance of developing appropriate techniques for disseminating cultural knowledge to language learners and on the issues that this lack of training could raise, such as the transmission of representative cultural facts and the loss of students’ interest, which is partially the case in this study.

Further data collected at the end of both semesters in the final students’ questionnaire indicate that FLAs presented a variety of cultural content in class. Based on the sociocultural knowledge categories of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001, p.102), learners completed a table (see Appendix 8 for the table used in this questionnaire) where they indicated if FLAs shared each type of sociocultural knowledge, in column one, and provided examples of activities performed, in column two. Table 6 summarises the results collected.
Table 6: Sociocultural knowledge categories covered by the assistants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociocultural knowledge categories</th>
<th>Topics mentioned by the students per category</th>
<th>Percentage of the categories observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Everyday Living</strong> (e.g., Food and drink, mealtimes, working hours, leisure activities)</td>
<td>Francophone dishes (during <em>Francophonie</em> weeks)</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Routines of FLA2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes and dislikes of FLAs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hobbies of FLAs and explanation of indoor and outdoor activities in Québec</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jobs lexicon and descriptions (FLAs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living conditions</strong> (e.g., living standards, housing conditions, welfare arrangements)</td>
<td>Hometown of FLA1</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>House description of FLA2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student life of FLA1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Next vacations of FLA1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal relations</strong> (e.g., social classes, relationships, family structures, work relationship)</td>
<td>Best friends’ presentations of FLAs</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family presentations of FLA1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values and beliefs</strong> (e.g., institutions, History, traditions, arts, national identity)</td>
<td>Wedding of FLA2’s sister</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Music (during <em>Francophonie</em> weeks)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Movies (during <em>Francophonie</em> weeks)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>History (during <em>Francophonie</em> weeks)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religion in France</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-verbal communication</strong> (e.g., gestures)</td>
<td>Gestures and faces of (dis-)agreement when teaching</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social conventions</strong> (e.g., punctuality, clothing, behavioural and conversational convention)</td>
<td>Valentine’s day in Canada and France</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Punctuality in Canada and France</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making plans to go out in France</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rituals</strong> (e.g., birth, marriage, celebrations, festivals)</td>
<td>Celebrations (Halloween and Christmas)</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Festivals in France and Québec</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National holidays in France</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weddings of FLA2’s sister</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students confirmed the seven types of sociocultural knowledge listed in the CEFR through FLAs’ presentations. For example, 96% of the learners remembered that assistants presented tasks related to everyday living, which they associated with *dishes, routines, likes, dislikes, hobbies, and jobs*. These cultural activities correspond to the linguistic topics listed in the French syllabus (see Table 6). While the title of some FLAs’ classroom presentations suggests that those contain general representations of the French and French-Canadian cultures (e.g., religion in France), others focused on the assistants’ personal cultural experiences and perspectives (e.g., the wedding of FLA2’s sister). The non-verbal communication category was perceived during FLAs’ practice but was not translated into activities. The results collected confirm the information from the logbook previously analysed and indicate that assistants fulfilled students’ and educators’ expectations of sharing cultural knowledge, including representative content, cultural diversity, and everyday life situations through personal examples and educators’ request to connect the cultural content with the prescribed linguistic topics. Findings mirror what is expected from cultural ambassadors, according to the literature, namely sharing personal and general content on the target culture, in Ehrenreich (2006) and López Palacios (2012) and providing learners with privileged opportunities to practice language communicative skills, reported in García Fernández (2000) and Lacronique (2000). However, to my knowledge, no study has collected such detailed data concerning the type of cultural content FLAs introduced.

At the end of their stay, FLAs reflected on how they put their responsibility to disseminate language and culture into practice, providing more insights into their understanding of SRT, especially concerning the importance of bringing cultural authenticity in the classroom during their presentations: “due to our daily life experiences with the target culture and language, we are bearers of a certain authenticity” (FLA1), which echoed students’ and FLA1’s and FLA2’s comments on the native speaker’s role and legitimacy in contributing to the authentic practice of the target linguistic and cultural knowledge (see comments analysed in 5.1). To counterbalance these possible issues, the literature reminds us that selecting material, especially authentic resources, is key to encouraging learners’ motivation...
and curiosity about the target cultures, echoing Ali et al. (2015), Byram et al. (2002), and Risager (2018). Those statements concerning the authenticity of the cultural content presented in FLAs’ practice indicate that, to a certain extent, they question (the genuineness of) other sources and can only evaluate if those are updated and authentic. It also suggests that for these participants, educators might be less legitimate to share such culture and offer learners fewer opportunities to be in face-to-face contact with cultural and linguistic content. This mirrors students' answers analysed earlier and E1’s comments in her logbook: “For some students, being in the classroom with the assistant is the only moment they can interact face-to-face with a foreigner, authentically learning about another culture.” The educator, born in France, suggested that her classroom interaction includes less authenticity and culture than during FLAs’ interventions. On the one hand, this conclusion supports the presence of assistants in language education, especially in teaching and learning contexts geographically remotest from any francophone country, as observed before in this section. On the other hand, examples of cultural generalisations used in assistants’ presentations (see 5.2) challenge their interpretation of authenticity and what their presence, as native speakers, could bring compared to other sources of knowledge (e.g., textbooks) that were reported less authentic by FLAs (see 5.4). Concerning this last point, although some official documents (e.g., Circular - French Ministry of Education, May 2016) and several studies comment on FLAs’ nativeness and the authenticity of the content presented in their practice, including Lavery (2001) and Rook (2016), authors, such as Codó and McDaid (2019) and Ehrenreich (2006), also observed that on occasion assistants also disseminated stereotypical ideas of the target culture at their initiative or educators’ and others. This analysis evidences and concurs with scholars, such as Buckingham (2019) and Ehrenreich (2006), on the need for agencies and language Departments to provide detailed indications and examples of the type of cultural knowledge share authenticity expected to diminish the dissemination of stereotypes.

This study indicates a level of connection between the place of the culture in the language teaching and learning process, the status of FLAs, and how SRTs are
understood and performed. This connection emerged from the data and suggested that assistants' status, roles, and tasks and the cultural knowledge they disseminate seem to be considered secondary and, to a certain extent, non-essential elements of language education. While initial expectations and comments collected in practice indicate that FLAs complemented the linguistic topics taught in class and helped to contextualise the language learning and establish direct interaction with francophone speakers by acting as temporary cultural helpers, the French Department prioritised and separated, to a certain level, the study of prescribed linguistic topics from discovering cultural content disseminated by FLAs in a weekly classroom intervention for a few minutes. Additionally, statements suggest that the cultural content requested and presented corresponds in some part to a simplified vision of the culture, which to some extent echoes the importance given to the target cultures. Furthermore, findings evidenced a need for the agencies to consider the perspectives of stakeholders involved in FLAs' daily practice to reflect and further value the (inter)cultural scope of the FLAs and provide guidelines on how to better integrate them and their language and cultures and their temporary cultural ambassadors status into the teaching and learning process.
Chapter 5 Roles and tasks performed by FLAs: Findings and discussion

This chapter analyses and discusses the roles and tasks of foreign language assistants (FLAs) during the assistantship. This will help answer the second research question: Which roles and tasks are actually performed by the FLAs during the assistantship, and how? Firstly, it explores the extent to which the two roles prescribed by the agencies were performed and how in 5.1 and 5.2. Secondly, this chapter analyses two unofficial tasks FLAs carried out, namely substitute teaching and students’ evaluation, in 5.3. Finally, in 5.4, it reveals a significant additional role played by FLAs: the encouragement of intercultural dialogue. The data collected provide insights into how these three specific tasks were performed are presented below (see Appendix 21 for the instruments used in each sub-section).

5.1 Improving students’ communication skills

As presented in Table 1 (in 2.3.2), the assistantship agencies’ guidelines specify that FLAs should perform the role of improving students' communication skills. Each agency includes corresponding tasks to achieve this role. Échanges Azimut (EA, 2018) provides a general task: leading activities on oral communication and complementing linguistic content. Centre International d'Études Pédagogiques (CIEP, 2018) explicitly prescribes three tasks: enhancing conversation practice in class, leading a language club, and contributing to authentic voice recordings. This last one is the only specific task listed in the guideline published by the Dirección General de Relaciones Internacionales (DGRI, 2019).

5.1.1 Enhancing oral communication in the classroom

Each FLA worked 70 hours of classroom time per semester with three A1-level groups and three educators. Each group consisted of approximately 25 students, and each session lasted one hour and 15 minutes. As a result of these conditions, opportunities to practice oral communication skills, including speaking interaction,
were usually limited and performed through whole-group activities and instructor-student question-and-answer sessions. Despite this constraint, all the participants’ comments evidenced that FLAs encouraged oral communication skills in class.

Comments collected in educators’ and assistants’ logbooks and focus group interviews provided information on assistants’ classroom practice on different dates and helped identify how FLAs encouraged students’ communication skills. Tables 7 and 8 show the material used, describe the activities performed and indicate assistants’ and educators’ comments on eight FLAs’ classroom interventions. FLA1’s sessions are reported in Table 7, and FLA2’s in Table 8.
### Table 7: FLA1’s presentations in class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching material</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic: Pastimes</strong></td>
<td>1. Talk with the students’ pastimes and sports practice in Mexico using likes and dislikes expressions. <strong>(Speaking)</strong> 2. PowerPoint presentation: most popular sports in Canada while the students filled in the blanks of the transcription of her speech. Vocabulary exercise (picture). <strong>(Listening)</strong> 3. Mime game using the vocabulary reviewed during the session.</td>
<td>“She shared some expressions using sports vocabulary and students shared some in Spanish. Students and the assistant learned, I learned.” (E3 on February 27th) “I pick up on culture through the kind of games we play, and through the conversations which the students have after playing the games.” (FLA1 in Focus group 3) “The mime part was funny. Even if we were talking about the same activities, the students mimed them in a different way than I would. It’s cultural, I guess.” (FLA1 on February 26th)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic: Jobs</strong></td>
<td>1. PowerPoint presentation: Vocabulary related to jobs, description of actions for some jobs. <strong>(Speaking/Listening)</strong> 2. Podcast about dream jobs. <strong>(Listening)</strong> 3. Writing exercise: Description of Mexican jobs in French.</td>
<td>“It’s a slide which I included jobs which are typical in Mexico. I said, ‘Well, look in Mexico, you have this. So how could you describe that job to a Canadian?’” (FLA1 on the final interview) “Students were surprised that FLA1 presented typical Mexican jobs. They realised that these jobs were not known elsewhere and that they could use their linguistic knowledge to present their culture to French speakers.” (E2 on the final focus group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic: Celebration</strong></td>
<td>1. PowerPoint presentation: Valentine’s day in Quebec using expressions, romantic vocabulary and typical gifts. <strong>(Listening)</strong> 2. Talk with the students on anecdotes related to this date. <strong>(Speaking)</strong> 3. Podcast about love and answered comprehension questions. <strong>(Listening)</strong> 4. Writing exercise: A love letter in French using expressions previously explained (picture).</td>
<td>“If I say I’ll look at my diary, it’s because I’m going to look at my diary: [...] I did this activity in a Mexican context because, if I did it in Germany, students would take it literally.” (FLA1 on the third focus group) “Mexican students are creative. I know that the last activity would be a success. They used the little vocabulary they have to complete the activity.” (FLA1 on February 13th). “Mexicans have a sentimental soul, they were happy with this session, especially the letter.” (E2 on February 14th)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topics: Celebrations</strong></td>
<td>1. PowerPoint presentation: national and local celebrations, description and significance (picture). <strong>(Listening)</strong> 2. Video illustrating the information presented and comprehension questions. <strong>(Listening)</strong> 3. Talk with the students about the celebrations presented by the assistant and the Mexicans (mainly in Spanish). FLA1 shared anecdotes. <strong>(Speaking)</strong></td>
<td>“I liked her presentation, there were lots of nice little images. It would have been cool to have included a photo of you eating some typical food from Quebec.” (FLA2 on the third focus group) “She used a lot of photos and the video helped the students to picture her reality, in Quebec.” (E1 on November 28th). “As students don’t know my region, at the end of the day the only image which they’ll ever have of that region will be me. Until they go there.” (FLA1 on the first focus group).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching material</td>
<td>Topics: Clothing and celebrations</td>
<td>Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>« Ma » fête des morts au Mexique</td>
<td>1- PowerPoint presentation: Photos of FLA2 experience of Day of the dead. (Listening) 2- Talk with the students about the Day of the dead traditions and how the French celebrate this event. (Speaking) 3- Writing exercise: description of an outfit students would wear for this event</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic: Invitations</td>
<td>1- PowerPoint presentation: description of an invitation, pictures of FLA2 sister wedding, the vocabulary of accepting/declining invitations. (Listening) 2- Reading comprehension of a dialogue and role play. (Speaking) 3- Creation of an invitation for a Mexican celebration.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic: Celebrations</td>
<td>1- PowerPoint presentation on Valentine’s day in France: expressions and romantic vocabulary (picture). (Listening) 2- Podcast on Valentine’s day gifts. (Listening) 3- Talk about how students celebrate this festival. (Speaking)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic: Celebrations</td>
<td>1- PowerPoint presentation national and local celebrations. (Listening) 2- Vocabulary exercise on dates and actions for each celebration. 3- Talk with the students about the celebrations presented by the assistant and the Mexicans (mainly in Spanish). (Speaking) 4- Writing exercise on a Mexican celebration.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As indicated in both tables, specifically in the classroom activities described in the tables and the comments, FLAs presented activities and material that encouraged students to listen (e.g., slides presentations, videos, or podcasts) and speak (such as debates or role-plays) French. The material incorporated linguistic content corresponding to the topics listed in the A1-level syllabus (Table 6 in 4.3), such as pastimes, likes, dislikes, and sports, echoing students’ comments below on FLAs’ complementing the content taught in class by the educators. FLAs created most of the resources they used (90%). These were mainly slide presentations and included personal material (e.g., FLA2 sister’s wedding invitation). Activities designed included debates with classmates and assistants and podcasts and videos of native speakers. While this material could be consulted online, questioning the usefulness of FLAs, participants’ statements indicated that those audio-video resources provided a basis to add personal views of young native speakers in a face-to-face dialogue. It echoes educators’ and students’ comments analyses below and some of the advantages of integrating FLAs in language classrooms, highlighted in Bosch et al. (2000) and López Palacios (2012), among other authors. The analysis of eight classroom activities shows that FLAs fostered the practice of students’ oral skills. As discussed in the previous chapter, FLAs’ understanding and performance of this task were influenced by educators’ supervision of topic selection and material and activities design, their feedback, and assistants’ reflection on practice observed during focus group interviews and in their logbooks.

Regarding the material used and assistants’ performance of the tasks, educators reported, in the final focus group interview, that they appreciated the importance of FLAs’ communicative role in class and that assistants’ decisions facilitated students to listen and speak French. E1 acknowledged that assistants’ positive attitude towards the performance of this prescribed task encouraged students’ oral communication practice and helped build a privileged relationship between FLAs and learners. At the same time, E2 observed students’ shyness while practicing oral skills with FLAs in class, and she assumed this was partly due to their limited linguistic competence. This educator commented that she had to remind the students to “take advantage of this opportunity to talk to native speakers”, which is, according to her, the primary purpose of the assistants’ presence. This last
comment raises the possibility that, at least in some classes, assistants’ classroom activities are the only opportunities available for the students to practice communication skills in a face-to-face setting with a native of the target language, an objective emphasized in agencies guidelines (CIEP, 2018; DGRI, 2019; EA, 2018) and the complementarity of integrating FLAs, their resources and activities into classes taught by non-native educators, reported in the literature (Hibler, 2010; López-Medina and Otto, 2020; Scobling, 2011). Both educators valued the assistants’ work concerning the performance of the first task, which contrasts with some of their comments on the time dedicated to cultural knowledge during FLAs’ presentation, putting the syllabus completion at risk (see 4.3). At the same time, it emphasises their perception of the teaching of culture as a secondary objective in the language teaching and learning process (also observed and commented on in 4.3).

In line with comments (Tables 7 and 8) and E1’s experiences, but differing from E2’s perspective analysed above, 90% of learners’ answers in the final questionnaire confirm that FLAs’ interventions fostered the practice of oral abilities, and they benefited from it:

- He helps you to practice the language using entertaining dynamics. It is different from my teacher. (S101)
- The assistant practices the language seen in class, with the educator, in a playful way. (S103)
- Assistants help us to gain confidence. (S105)
- They speak with us to make us practice, much more than with our teacher. (S106)

Learners emphasised the vitality and natural quality observed in the conversation practice with the assistants. It inspired them the confidence to speak French, suggesting that students and assistants built a positive relationship. Students’ comments suggest that the type of relationship with FLAs, observed and analysed in 4.2.1, facilitated the practice of their communication skills, also discussed in García Fernández (2000) and López Palacios (2012) and highlighted in agencies guidelines). Their comments also indicate that the more theoretical lessons given by educators, mainly focusing on grammar and vocabulary, offered less opportunity to speak French entertainingly, with the help of ‘the real language’ and personal example. While the last two elements were also reported in FLAs’ narratives in Hibler (2010) and Rook (2016), the present study contributes to
confirming, first-hand, the positive impact of the presence of FLAs, their material and activities in the practice of students’ oral skills.

The findings indicate that FLAs performed the prescribed task of enhancing students’ oral communication in the classroom. The analysis suggests that the material, activities, and pedagogical decisions incorporated in FLAs’ classroom performances corresponded to educators’ and students’ expectations, especially in terms of practicing the linguistic topics taught, while fostering an enjoyable and favourable atmosphere and providing learners with further opportunities to improve their French speaking and listening skills.

5.1.2 Leading language clubs

The Language Department asks assistants to spend one-third of their assistantship – corresponding to ten hours weekly – in the Self-Access Centre (SAC), providing language club sessions to groups of three to five student users. In the SAC, FLAs worked without a programme and tutor’s or other educators’ supervision. During language clubs, users and facilitators choose a socio-cultural topic to discuss at the beginning of the language club session.

All the participants’ remarks confirmed that FLAs lead language clubs, and users practise their communicative skills. For his part, although FLA2 felt he contributed to the practice of students’ oral communication skills. He also considered that in the SAC, he was not acting as a FLA or performing an extra task or thought he was more in charge: “Did we practice oral communication skills in SAC? Yes. It was good because I had different responsibilities. I have one job as an assistant and another one as leading games and language clubs in the SAC.” In his final interview, he later confirmed that he felt a sense of enjoyment while working in SAC, where he considered having freedom of choice and flexibility compared to the more structured classroom context, where his performances mostly depended on educators’ requirements. At the same time, it offers learners the opportunity to free themselves from the classroom’s structured context; many do not take advantage of the opportunity to develop autonomous skills. Still, they used the facility as an extension of the classroom:

Students can go whenever they like; it’s their learning […]. But they don’t do that. […] for the few students that come, they rarely come wanting to think for themselves. They approach SAC as a class to do homework with us. (FLA1)
Collected in her final interview, FLA1’s perception refers to some students’ attitudes who intend to complement their in-class practice with FLAs in the language clubs offered in the SAC, which also relates to their understanding of the FLAs’ role as conversation facilitators. FLA1 seemed to have a different understanding of the self-access centre. While she stated that learners could make their own decisions, her comment indicates that assistants could not help with homework in language clubs. FLAs’ interpretation of the attitude of some learners echoes E2’s statement on how she understood the SAC and assistants’ work there. E2 mentioned that she sometimes used this facility during class to encourage students’ oral skills and linguistic topics with FLAs. In a space where assistants and students supposedly work or study without educators’ supervision, this educator’s comment indicates that she occasionally disregarded this aspect and that assistants still had to deal with classroom demands to practice linguistic content. E2’s decisions could have influenced students’ and assistants’ understanding of the SAC and FLAs’ role as language club leaders. Statements analysed suggest different expectations and understanding of FLAs’ role in this facility, indicating that the task was probably not explained to them or not in the same way. This analysis evidenced a need to encourage better communication and partnership between the stakeholders involved in FLAs’ performance of this task outside of the classroom – mirroring dialogue issues reported and discussed in 4.1 – through regular meetings between tutor, educators, and assistants and more precise agencies guidelines, to establish what is expected from the FLAs and their level of guidance in this facility. Although several scholars highlight possible shortcomings due to misinterpretation of FLAs’ SRTs (discussed in Bosch et al., 2000; López Palacios, 2012; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012), no studies have, to my knowledge, investigated if and how FLAs lead language clubs during their stay.

Some comments collected in the students’ final questionnaire reported that during language club sessions, FLAs supported and encouraged them to practice their communication skills, echoing FLA1’s and E2’s comments:

He teaches French through his experiences. He is like a friend. (S103)

She is a classmate, a helper to whom you can ask questions, talk to her, improve your pronunciation, and practice without the fear of assessment. (S105)

I was pleased to practice French in small groups; I liked it better. (S106)
Although speaking and listening ability was also practiced in class, students also perceived FLAs brought their communicative skills out of the classroom into a relaxed atmosphere, where there is no evaluation. Additionally, it seems very rewarding and motivational for the students to practice the language in a small group setting with young native speakers who may better relate to their own experiences, opinions, and interests than a classroom teacher. It seems that assistants’ non-professional status also accounted for their empathy towards students in the language learning process and their mistakes, also reported in Graham (2000) and Hibler (2010), and facilitated closeness between assistants and learners, which was observed in Bosch et al. (2000) and Haramboure (2000), and creates a trustful environment where the latter are more inclined to language practice, as discussed in Scobling (2011).

At the end of their stay, FLAs further discussed how they lead language clubs in the SAC. FLA1 acknowledged that while she adapted the level of the sessions to students’ skills, she deviated from the linguistic topics of the syllabus (see Table 5). She decided to focus on cultural topics related to her life in Québec during some language club sessions, especially when students did not request her to practice linguistic topics: “I did a Thanksgiving activity with the students in SAC. […] we talked about UNICEF food banks for Halloween […]. It’s part of those things they don’t need to learn for an exam, but they want to learn” (FLA1).

Although students are seemingly interested in learning more about culture while practising French conversation, FLA1 implied that the cultural content mentioned is not evaluated; therefore, although students may enjoy the cultural content, they may not be considered very important in the learning process by the syllabus or the educators. On the one hand, her perspective echoes the reported priority of teaching linguistic content over cultural knowledge and separating both elements (see the analysis and discussion in 4.3). On the other hand, it seems to contradict her previous comment on the use of SAC by the students as an extension of the classroom. Echoing FLA1’s remark on users’ interest in cultural knowledge and students’ answers on privileged relationships developed in the SAC with the assistants, FLA2 suggests that this facility is a place where both assistants and students look for communicative opportunities to get to know native speakers and learn more about their cultures and of each other’s languages, being in turns, experts and learners:
I know that sometimes in SAC, I should speak even more French [...] Even if my job is to teach Mexican people about French culture, I also want to learn about theirs. [...] There’s so much to learn about the Mexican culture that I should stay even longer. (FLA2)

At the end of his stay, he considered that he did not always prioritise the performance of the practice of students’ communicative skills. For him and users, engaging in intercultural dialogue was sometimes more attractive than target language practice in the SAC. He shared bi-lingual cultural exchanges with Mexican students, inspiring his interest in discovering more about his host country. Assistants’ and students’ quotes on language clubs indicate that the relaxed atmosphere and reported lack of teaching structure encouraged oral practice and shared cultural content. The literature consulted does not report or discuss assistants’ work as language club facilitators. At the same time, findings suggest that in this facility, FLAs’ status oscillates between linguistic and cultural experts of the target language and learners of the host language and culture, assisting the teaching and learning process. This aspect, observed in Ehrenreich (2006) and Haramboure (2000), has apparently facilitated the practice of the target language to a certain extent and discovering cultural knowledge.

In conclusion, the analysis suggests that both assistants planned and led language club sessions as one of the prescribed tasks mentioned in one agency guidelines and requested by the host Language Department and their tutor. Communicative skills were practised despite differences in expectations and understanding of FLAs’ role and how to perform the task. Additionally, those sessions were perceived as opportunities to practice linguistic topics studied in class in smaller groups and a relaxed environment and exchange through dialogue content of students’ and FLAs’ cultures.

5.1.3 Contributing to authentic voice recordings

A few weeks after participating in the final oral exam (see 5.3 for more explanation), upon the tutor’s request, assistants complied with the French and the Mexican assistantship agency task of contributing to authentic voice recordings. FLAs performed this task during the first week of the second semester (February 2018) while educators were teaching. In the final focus interview, E1 stated that these materials intend to offer an alternative to the pedagogical and didactically oriented content included in *AlterEgo+1*, the textbook used by beginner-level educators in the French Department. They are expected to be used by educators
and assistants in the classroom as more natural listening aids and give more variety to the available oral expression models.

FLAs' and educators’ quotes provide insights into how this third task was performed and the material used. To achieve this task, and according to assistants’ comments collected FGIA3, their tutor provided a list of six themes (described in Table 9 below) corresponding to the content evaluated in the final oral exam applied to A1-level learners.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics recorded</th>
<th>Content of the recordings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Personal presentation</td>
<td>Name, age, nationality, civil status, likes and dislikes, qualities and defects, and present tense 1st group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Personal presentation of two best friends</td>
<td>For each friend: Name, age, nationality, likes and dislikes, job, civil status, qualities and defects, and present tense 1st group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Personal presentation of an important person</td>
<td>Name, age, nationality, likes/dislikes, job, civil status, qualities and defects, present tense 1st group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- Personal presentation of your family members</td>
<td>For each member: Name, age, nationality, likes and dislikes, job, civil status, qualities and defects, and present tense 1st group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5- Description of your week</td>
<td>Days of the week, hours, schedule, routine, and present tense 1st group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6- Next holidays</td>
<td>Activities (leisure, actions), places in a city, and future tense.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to their remarks, no explanation concerning the linguistic content or how to ensure the prescribed authenticity of the recordings was requested. FLAs explained that they received instruction from E1 to record voice contributions to the selected topics, write the corresponding transcriptions, and send the material to educators. While FLA2 remembered that the French and Mexican agencies mentioned this task during briefing meetings, FLA1 only became aware that making audio recordings was a prescribed task after she completed it. Assistants recorded themselves speaking French slower than normal pace in a dialogue format. According to FLA2, they carried out the voice recordings as follows:

After the experience we had last semester during the oral exam, we had a better idea of what to do. We looked at the oral exams from the first week; we talked as students. FLA1 asked me a question, and I responded. Then we did the transcripts to have some tools to train the students in a class.

This statement, collected in FGIA3, indicates that participating in student evaluation (analysed in 5.3) helped them perform the recording task. Assistants also showed their understanding of the educational objective of the material. FLA1 added, during the same interview, that they had in mind to record an example of “a perfect candidate”. Furthermore, they felt growing empathy for the students as they worked on this task:

> It’s also a good exercise for us to see how the students feel during the exams […] it’s good to see things from the other side. (FLA1)
> It’s not easy to speak to an exam panel for three minutes about different topics. Imagine doing that in another language. (FLA2)

The analysis suggests that the creation of these recordings helped FLAs develop an awareness of the linguistic requirements corresponding to the students’ level. It allowed them to create appropriate material to help learners with listening comprehension and speaking. It echoes comments analysed and discussed in 4.2 concerning FLAs’ pedagogical decisions and reflection on practice. While this approach was not prescribed or required from the assistantship guidelines, this study and previous ones show that the teaching team often expected FLAs to take pedagogical initiatives, including learning how to design resources, as observed in Bosch et al. (2000), López Palacios (2012) and Martinez (2000) and that FLAs’
feeling to be part of the teaching and learning process. Their task performance challenges the assumption that assistants are not experienced enough to participate in pedagogical development.

Some comments by educators collected in the logbooks mention how this material was used in A1-level classes. For E1 and E2, assistants included some of those recordings in their classroom activities (on February 21st and March 13th), and E3 (on February 10th) used those as a complementary resource to practice listening comprehension and linguistic topics, achieving its initial purpose. E3 mentioned that students understood the content of the recordings, appreciated that assistants included local cultural references (e.g., names of local places) and felt that FLAs produced this authentic resource especially for them. The educator added that learners could identify FLAs’ voices, which they contrast with textbook audio. Although nowadays, resources recorded by native speakers could also be found online and used in and out of class, the difference in how FLAs designed them suited learners’ level, brought them closer to native conversations and gave students the satisfaction of understanding familiar voices. This echoes assistants’ growing ability reported in different studies, including Martinez (2000) and Rowles and Rowles (2005), to relate to learners’ realities and specific needs of the teaching and learning context. Additionally, insights were collected on this task’s performance and how educators and students responded to the material echo assistants’ intermediary role between the type of knowledge and material educators use, observed in Lavery (2001). Students’ desire for content further focused on their interest, illustrated in Bosch et al. (2000) and pragmatic content, as in Haramboure (2000).

Participants’ comments confirmed that FLAs recorded audios to help students improve their listening and speaking competence, as requested by the guidelines and the assistants’ tutor. Although no specific instructions were given to the assistants concerning how to enact this task, the transcription of recordings, intended for beginner learners, showed that FLAs adapted their speech pace and incorporated grammatical and lexical topics studied in A1-level classrooms (see Table 5). Findings show that the recordings helped students practice
communication skills. However, the style of conversation seems far from the kind of conversation one hears in a non-teaching situation. On the one hand, it questions what the guidelines meant by authentic recordings, suggesting a need for further explanations. On the other hand, it asks if FLAs’ experiences of students’ oral evaluation influenced their interpretation of authenticity.

5.2 Developing students’ knowledge of different societies and cultures

This section analyses and discusses whether students were helped to develop socio-cultural knowledge of the francophone world. This is related to the second role prescribed by the three agencies involved in this study (Table 1) and is divided into three specific tasks mentioned in the agencies’ guidelines. The first task expected within this role is described as sharing their national culture and lifestyle with students (EA, 2018), or more specifically, sharing their national and regional culture through pedagogical and entertaining activities (DGRI, 2019). Besides this, CIEP (2018) and DGRI (2019) identify a second task: organising and participating in academic, cultural, and artistic activities. A third task is only listed in the CIEP guidelines: participating in educational exchange programmes. The extent to which each of these three prescribed tasks is performed and how is detailed in the following three sub-sections.

5.2.1 Sharing national and regional culture and lifestyle through pedagogical and entertaining activities

FLAs shared information about national and regional cultures and lifestyles by selecting and designing activities and resources during classroom practice. The respondents’ comments, shared in logbooks, during FGIs and in questionnaires, including statements reported in Tables 7 and 8 (see 5.1.1), suggest that the cultural content shared and how this was achieved encouraged a positive reaction among the participants.

Participants observed that students and assistants developed a special learners-experts relationship. For instance, in a focus group interview, E1 explained that
“They [students] realised that these jobs [e.g., Mariachi musician, traditional healer], which are common in Mexico, were not known elsewhere and that they could use their linguistic knowledge to present their culture to native speakers”, echoing comments made about the SAC experience (see 5.1.2), and FLAs’ ability to relate some cultural knowledge progressively to the Mexican cultural context (see 5.4 for more insights on FLAs’ decisions that encouraged intercultural dialogue). Additionally, participants thought FLAs’ cultural activities related to students’ interests or young culture, such as sharing an apartment or going to nightclubs:

- It allowed them to see the reality of another young adult in a francophone country first-hand. (E3 – in FGIE2)
- FLA1 teaches us about everyday life habits from Canada, not our teacher. (S103 – in the final questionnaire)

Also, statements indicated that FLAs’ cultural activities aroused students’ curiosity and motivation:

- Based on FLA2’s pictures, students asked him about his life in his country. (E1 – in FGIE2)
- He encourages us to develop our communicative competence based on real-life French cultural habits. (S102 – in the final questionnaire)

Those statements indicate that students learned about cultural aspects of the target language during assistants’ interventions (including real-life, everyday-life habits), partly due to their young and native status. At the same time, comments seem to suggest that educators do not count on this updated cultural information close to students’ interest, mirroring comments analysed in 5.1.3 on the audio recordings and highlighting the significance of face-to-face exchanges in class with FLAs. Although these observations support assistantship programmes objectives and guidelines (see 2.2) in that FLAs are expected to provide cultural content to the language classroom, it also reinforces the assumption that due to his or her native speaker status, a FLA is often viewed as the sole and temporary cultural transmitter in the host school (mirroring the connection reported in 4.3 between the place of culture in language classes and the status of the assistants, both considered secondary). My findings concord with some scholars, including Ávra and Medgyes (2000), Hibler
(2010), and Scobling (2011), who reported that, on the one hand, non-native educators’ lack of confidence, updated knowledge and/or limited experience and/or time to disseminate cultural knowledge, and on the other hand, encouraged educators to leave the sole responsibility for teaching cultural content to FLAs, concording with my findings.

However, in terms of the content shared, although participants evoked a certain perception of French and French-Canadian socio-cultural reality in FLAs’ resources and activities (see additional comments in Tables 7 and 8), some materials used in their classroom performances contained cultural generalisation (e.g., pictures of traditions in Quebec). This analysis suggests that while participants considered that FLAs performed this task successfully, assistants might need further preparation to disseminate culture in teaching contexts and select the content to share. This point echoes Byram et al.’s (2002) observation that, in some cases, nativeness prevents from critically observing our own cultural representations and remaining detached from other cultural realities, and also concords with authors such as Byram and Kramsch (2008) and Sánchez Murillo and Sibaja Hernández (2013), who report that teaching culture requires the acquisition of specific pedagogical skills, including intercultural communicative competence (see 5.4 for more insights). The present study is the first to evidence, to a certain extent, a need for agencies to further discuss and train assistants in pedagogies for effective teaching of socio-cultural knowledge in language classes, including focusing on their personal experiences as native speakers, instead of providing simplified cultural representations.

The data in this sub-section suggests that assistants shared national and regional cultures and lifestyles through pedagogical and entertaining activities during their weekly classroom practice. The cultural content presented corresponded to participants’ expectations and the FLAs’ realities presented in some classes of a, to a certain extent, general vision of the target cultures, which would require to be addressed. The cultural knowledge presented in the analysed sessions also allowed the practice of linguistic content studied with the educators. Decisions made in terms of activities and resources contributed to students’ knowledge of different cultural aspects of francophone societies.
5.2.2 Organising and participating in academic, cultural, and artistic activities

The university where the research took place organises regular cultural events in which students are encouraged to participate; the *Francophonie* week, held twice a year in the Language Department, is one. These weeks consist of conferences, communicative games, workshops, and activities about countries and societies that share French as the common language. The aim is to spread information about francophone cultures and the French language to benefit students, educators, and the public in general. In this context, FLAs are expected to organise and participate in these academic, cultural, and artistic activities once per semester.

*Francophonie* weeks consist of a 30-hour programme. Planning and participating in these cultural weeks’ expectations requires extra input and a higher workload from the assistants – their usual working week is between 12 and 14 hours. Although this is a prescribed task for assistants, no mention was made of the number of dedicated hours. In fact, during the briefing meeting in Mexico, the DGRI highlights to assistants and tutors that they should not work more than 14 hours weekly. As mentioned by FLA1, after the second *Francophonie* week, assistants doubled their number of working hours, breaching the number of working hours mentioned in the FLA contract (see 2.3.2). Participants’ comments seem to indicate that FLAs’ working hours were disregarded, suggesting an imposed partnership in the case of *Francophonie* weeks. This echoes comments on how partnership and communication between FLAs and tutors could be improved, as observed and analysed in 4.1 and 4.2.

Additionally to the *Francophonie* week's organisation and participation in this event, FLAs state that their tutor requested them to design the programme to promote it in the university among the student community. Once the schedule has been established, the Communication Department creates a poster (Figure 4) is a detail of the 2018 edition.
The poster and schedule are written in French. This suggests that even though it is open to the general public, it is targeted toward francophone speakers, including students learning French and their teachers. The upper part of the document contains the event’s title, dates, place, and a picture. This image is stereotypical of French culture. The woman wears the standard red scarf, beret, and sailor shirt. She is smoking a cigarette and drinking coffee. Although the French Department did not design the poster, I can confirm that educators, FLAs, and the tutor validated it with my knowledge as an insider researcher. The decision to approve the poster seems to contradict the overall assistantship programme objectives, including promoting Francophone cultural diversity and echoing the lack of francophone variety reported by FLAs (see 5.4). However, this vision also corresponds to some stereotypical representations of France presented in FLAs’ practice and, to a certain extent, expected from FLAs (see 4.3).

Before and during *Francophonie* weeks, the French Department strongly encouraged educators and students to attend the events via posters (see Figure 4) and advertisements on the university website. Although attendance was not obligatory for educators or learners, a decision from the French Department and repetitively reminded in classes by educators may have influenced students’ attendance and participation during those events. Learners who exceed 11 absences in a semester face a 20% drop in their final grade. Each attendance event made up for two absences to encourage them to participate in the *Francophonie* week. The French Department and educators control students’
attendance in class. Still, according to the assistants' comments, this heavy-handed way of pushing students to attend events may have had the opposite effect.

From their side, FLAs’ comments collected in FGIA2 and FGIA5 show that they felt discouraged because students may have attended events only out of fear that they may fail the class otherwise, partly blaming the French Department for the low turnout in Francophonie weeks. The following two comments illustrate this point:

Educators should talk about it; I was disappointed. They shouldn’t just say that they have to go to make up their absences, but that Francophonie week is important. A country’s culture is key. (FLA1)

It would be better to find another way for them to be actors in Francophonie weeks, not just spectators. (FLA1)

They always have their sheets for us to sign to prove they came and reduce their classroom absences. It’s a shame that it comes down to that. (FLA2)

It lacked participants. […] there weren’t many volunteers; they stayed silent! (FLA2)

FLAs thought those weeks were mainly scheduled to allow students to make up for their absences rather than opportunities to practice the language and entertain them while educators had some free time. The data analysed in this paragraph indicates several issues: FLAs’ perception of feeling non-essential, illustrated in some statements analysed and discussed in 4.3, and educators’ lack of support, partly explaining the disappointing lack of attendance that FLAs commented on. However, to my knowledge, FLAs never reported those perceptions to educators or the tutor, as they felt the situation would not change or they would not be heard. It strongly suggests a need to improve the lines of communication, perhaps allowing to mitigate such feelings among FLAs.

During the fourth FGI, they also noted educators’ perceived lack of involvement or interest in the assistants’ work outside of the classrooms, and they detected apathy concerning the cultural week from both educators and students:

I felt that I was sometimes alone, and if the educators weren’t there, students didn’t feel they had to come. (FLA1)
Educators weren’t always present; it would be good to be as many of the teaching team members as possible. (FLA2)

Those statements indicate that FLAs felt that participation could have been higher if educators had shown more interest and involvement in the event. On the one hand, comments echoed what was observed at the beginning of this sub-section and in 4.3 on partnerships, FLAs’ integration and its impact on participants’ understanding of FLAs’ SRTs. On the other hand, given that cultural understanding and learning were at stake, educators’ apparent low level of participation suggests that it was not their responsibility, but FLAs’ being the “cultural ambassadors”, impacting the sense of meaningfulness of the event in learners’ perception. This interpretation could also explain why some students did not consider cultural activities presented during this event significant, knowing there would be no evaluation connected to the event. This aspect echoes some comments regarding cultural content shared in the SAC (in 5.1.2), the separation of cultural and linguistic content and the place of culture in class (both analysed in 4.3). The literature, including the agencies' guidelines, often refer to the FLAs as cultural ambassadors and the advantages of native face-to-face contacts assistantship provide – see Buckingham (2018b) and Grinager (2018) – and warn us about a possible misunderstanding of FLAs' SRTs leading to disappointment, as mentioned in Bosch et al. (2000) and Culpeper et al. (2008). However, very few reports missed opportunities for students' and educators' involvement and their negative impact on FLAs' experiences, such as those analysed above and in Hibler (2010) and López Palacios (2012).

Despite the low participation of educators and students observed by FLAs, comments from these two groups of participants on aspects of assistants' organisation and participation in the Francophonie week were favourable. They contributed to the view that the cultural week was a success in offering an experience of complementary linguistic and communicative practice through the dissemination of cultural knowledge. More specifically, educators reported in FGIE2 that Francophonie weeks allowed students to put their pragmatic competence to the test with slang expressions (E2) and learn about different
francophone customs using French (E1). Although educators did not attend all the workshops held during Francophonie weeks, they assumed that French was practised in some learners’ events. Although E1 and E2 acknowledge that a connection between students and FLAs was established through Francophonie weeks’ events, their comments indicate that they seem to dissociate themselves from responsibility for the event. Educators also acknowledged that culture is not sufficiently present in their classrooms and that Francophonie weeks are a good opportunity to fill this gap (e.g., “Students dare to ask questions about cultural life, about things we hadn’t spoken about in class” - E1). Although E3 felt little responsibility for presenting culturally-focused topics in her classroom, she acknowledged that she and the students witnessed “examples of what is culturally important for Francophone countries” and “learned things about Québec.” Her first comment seems to imply that students learned about all the francophone cultures during the activities, which was not exactly what the schedule indicated. Some socio-cultural realities of France, and Canada, especially Québec and Togo, were presented. This is certainly not “each country” as alleged and clearly not representative of the millions of French speakers’ realities in many different contexts. E1’s and E3’s views reflect their vision of the culture as a secondary objective and the distance they seemed to keep with this type of content (analysed in 4.3). While their statements evidence that students enjoyed and benefited from these events, it also indicates that they separated the language practice from the target cultural knowledge, focusing on the former. Although no academic publication reported a similar conclusion concerning students’ perception of FLAs’ shared cultural knowledge, some studies, including Sercu et al. (2004) and Lázár (2003), draw attention to the grammar and vocabulary level students should master before being exposed to cultural content. For instance, according to Sercu et al., “their [language educators] first responsibility is to make sure students have a good command of the foreign language, and consequently, that time devoted to the teaching of culture is time lost for language teaching and learning” (2004, p.100). Educators’ comments previously analysed in this study suggest they shared a
similar vision, which becomes tangible in how they integrated the assistants in class (4.3) or participated in the *Francophonie weeks*.

On the other hand, in terms of students’ perspectives, information collected in an internal questionnaire conducted by the French Department to students in April 2018 and reported during educators’ final FGI by E1 confirms that although those events were successfully organised and presented, the practice of French was not as significant. Results from 110 beginner-level students indicate that 88% of beginner-level learners attended six events or more. 80% of these students appreciated the wide range of activities, and 85% applauded the organisation’s efforts. Additionally, 34% considered practising French during the event, and 42% learned about francophone cultures. It also shows that students had less opportunity to speak French than to listen to FLAs speaking in French. During some activities, Spanish was prioritised, probably to ensure that all students could understand and participate, even though instructions were also given in French. As an observer, I took part in most *Francophonie* week activities in April 2018 edition.

After consulting with FLAs who attended the workshops I did not participate in personally, I can say that French was used in eight of them, and six were presented in Spanish out of the fourteen activities. Students presented one activity and FLAs thirteen. Ten of the fourteen activities, such as movies in French with Spanish subtitles, required little student participation. Six workshops needed the students to speak French. Six activities aimed to share French and French-Canadian cultural knowledge, three to the French-Canadian culture, two to the Mexican and French cultures, and one dedicated to the Togolese culture. Although the analysis suggests that learners appreciated the events, they did not seem to provide sufficient opportunity to practice French or discover and foster a dialogue between several francophone cultures. Assistants’ comments below partly differ from this conclusion.

Even though assistants expected further involvement from students and educators, they considered the event successful. Comments compiled in Table 10 illustrate that linguistic and communicative competence and (inter)cultural knowledge were fostered in the activities performed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities (speaker or organiser)</th>
<th>FLAs’ comments on the activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South of Mexico by bike (FLA2)</td>
<td>“It’s my journey through their country. It was a foreigner showing them photos of these places. I tried to show the difference between traveler and tourist.” (FLA2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation game (FLA1)</td>
<td>“Maybe they didn’t have any cultural information. To learn a language, you must learn to let yourself go, be more natural and you can’t care about looking stupid.” (FLA1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You tubers (FLA1/FLA2)</td>
<td>“It’s very cultural because I think that there are videos for all styles, for all tastes, the funny side of cultures, the political side, the sociocultural side.” (FLA1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French-Canadian music (FLA1)</td>
<td>“I asked them questions about what kind of music they liked. [...] they realised that they could listen to the music they like in another language. It’s really cultural.” (FLA1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Express (FLA2)</td>
<td>“It was a treasure hunt in French. Some people didn’t really know the city that well, but it was a chance for them to quickly visit the town whilst using their French.” (FLA2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My experience in Togo (FLA2)</td>
<td>“The official language is French. They had many questions and saw that many countries in the world where they speak French, but a very different kind of French.” (FLA2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board games (FLA1/FLA2)</td>
<td>“They learned some French words, but they explained themselves in Spanish. [...] it was more classic games we play in France and Quebec.” (FLA1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The Legend of Sarila’ movie (FLA1)</td>
<td>“It was very intercultural because there are loads of expressions, traditions. We saw landscapes, typical animals.” (FLA1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French music (FLA2)</td>
<td>“I think that when the teachers were present, I only spoke in French. I chose music from different periods, different genres, and the top singers.” (FLA2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insults workshop (FLA1/FLA2)</td>
<td>“It was slightly street language. Everyone was motivated and knew that we were doing that activity. We explained where the insults came from, it made them laugh.” (FLA1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arti show (FLA1/FLA2)</td>
<td>“They discovered new poems, new songs. It was up to them to look for a song which they liked and which they wanted to perform.” (FLA1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master chef (FLA1/FLA2)</td>
<td>“The recipes were more or less traditional. We cook inexpensive dishes, not difficult to make, food that students could prepare with their budget.” (FLA1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francophone tasting (FLA1/FLA2)</td>
<td>“There are no conversations about the dishes, they all speak in Spanish. Nobody explains about their dish, where it comes from.” (FLA1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie ‘Between the walls’ (FLA1/FLA2)</td>
<td>“It’s very cultural, with the outskirts of Paris, it’s a very negative image, and it shows them a different image of France.” (FLA2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statements show that FLAs attempted to establish a dialogue between cultures using French on topics corresponding to their own and their students’ interests (e.g., YouTubers) and involved learners’ participation in entertaining activities (e.g., Master chef). FLAs used sentences such as “it’s very cultural” and “it’s very intercultural” to describe their interest in sharing cultural content about everyday life, which differs from textbooks or stereotypical representations of francophone cultures. However, the titles of some events suggest that assistants prioritised representative or even stereotypical information rather than promoting discussions and critical interpretations of cultural topics. FLA2 mentioned that French was not the only language used, coinciding with what the students reported. Perhaps this indicates that the cultural exchange content was more significant than focusing on practising the target language, which mirrors his comment about SAC sessions (in 5.1.2). Despite examples of cultural generalisation and a limited variety of francophone diversity, FLAs’ comments show their intention to encourage a dialogue between cultures. However, comments indicate that French was not always used, suggesting a separation of the target language and culture.

The present study is the first that reports from the perspectives of educators, the tutor, students, and FLAs on the prescribed task and how. The analysis indicates that FLAs organised and participated in academic, cultural, and entertaining activities, thus complying successfully with the prescribed task. Although the French Department requests them to achieve this task and acknowledge its scope on students’ learning process, the participation and involvement of teachers and students could be higher and more representative of francophone diversity, contributing to showing FLAs’ further recognition of their work.

5.2.3 Participating in the implementation of exchange programmes

At the research site, different offices and departments communicate information about student exchange programmes. They are expected to do this by holding meetings and sharing digital material on university websites. Although only the
French agency mentions this prescribed task in the guidelines, neither FLA1 nor FLA2 knew assistants were required to implement those programmes.

FLA2 referred to his dissemination of information on exchange programmes attempting to establish a dialogue between the students and his native culture during his stay: “I tried to pass on a message about learning about a new culture to become more interested in one’s own culture. Also, to make them want to become assistants.” His comment supports awareness of the second role listed in agencies’ guidelines, *Develop students’ knowledge of different societies and cultures*. He tried to pass on this vision to students and hoped this might trigger learners’ motivation to participate in an assistantship experience. During the second FGIs, assistants commented that they were required by the tutor to organise and host a talk about the assistantship programmes available for Mexican students of French in France and Québec. However, and it was confirmed by both FLAs, that due to their lack of information on the subject, several former Spanish assistants in France and Québec presented the event by talking about their experiences and explaining in detail the procedure to follow to apply for the Spanish exchange programme.

The sole available data indicated that FLAs did not strictly implement exchange programmes but helped inform language students about these during both *Francophonie* weeks. Besides, such programmes, including the assistantship, usually require a B1 level of proficiency (see 2.2.3). As the students involved in this research had an A1 level, these programmes would probably appear like a distant possibility. According to my knowledge, this study is the only one that reports the assistants’ performance in this prescribed task. Findings suggest that FLAs lacked knowledge on the topic, indicating a need to improve communication and information disseminated from the agencies to FLAs and tutors or the necessity to remove this task from assistants’ mandated functions.

Findings indicate the Language Department and the tutor (E1) requested the performances of the roles and tasks analysed in sections 5.1 and 5.2. Those who agreed with educators’ and students’ expectations included the oral practice of
linguistic topics taught in class and the dissemination of the culture. Similarly, scholars have observed the performance of these same roles in FLA experiences in Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom (Buckingham, 2018b; Cibin, 2012; Grinager, 2018; Rook, 2016; Rowles and Rowles, 2005) and briefly mention related tasks (e.g., practice conversation, make recordings as an example of a native speaker’s speech, and coordinate cultural initiatives), which correspond with some of those listed by the three agencies working with francophone FLAs in Mexico (CIEP, DGRI, and EA). Information from those agencies online and during briefing meetings (see Appendix 10) includes the prescribed roles and tasks mentioned above. While authors perceived assistants’ and educators’ lack of knowledge and understanding of the roles and tasks and how to include the FLAs in their classrooms in general (Bosch et al., 2000; Ehrenreich, 2006; Hibler, 2010; López Palacios, 2012), most of their results suggested that the two main roles were enacted with success (also in Lacronique, 2000; Scobling, 2011).

However, the data analysed in 5.1 and 5.2 show that communication on the prescribed tasks, specifically how those are expected to be performed, needs improvement at all levels (e.g., implementing exchange programmes). This leaves space for stakeholders’ expectations and understanding of those roles and tasks, and eventually for disappointment in practice (e.g., educators’ lack of participation in Francophonie weeks) and, at times, shifting away from the assistantship founding objective of cultural diversity (e.g., representative vision of the cultures in FLAs’ activities). The data analysed in this thesis also indicated that although the tutor and educators provided little instruction on performing the different tasks, they seemed satisfied with how these were enacted. These findings of my study contributed to identifying that FLAs seemed to have encouraged the development of students’ communication skills and their knowledge of the target culture through:

- practical and professional experiences gained during their weekly classroom performances,
- an empathetic attitude towards students (especially when recording audio),
- the enhancement of a relaxed atmosphere (especially in the SAC),
- the enhancement of mutual learning opportunities, in terms of cultural knowledge, for both students and assistants,
- materials and activities close to students’ interests and FLAs’ everyday lives.

These findings contributed to evidence that while educators and assistants mainly commented on aspects of students’ response to FLAs’ classroom practice (see Tables 7 and 8), the design and use of the activities in the class show that FLAs understood the purpose and mechanics of combining entertaining and culturally-focused activities, practising communication skills (CEFR, 2020), and complementing the linguistic topics previously studied. FLAs showed abilities and determination to encourage students to express their opinion orally on cultural content, even at a beginner level, through playful and culture-focused activities.

In addition to the prescribed roles, this case study found that FLAs performed additional tasks, as we will now see. I refer to them as unofficial tasks, i.e. tasks they were not supposed to perform in the assistantship programme (see 2.3.2). The following section will discuss those.

5.3 Substituting educators and evaluating students

This section analyses and discusses two unofficial tasks identified based on the comments collected from educators and FLAs: substitute teaching and students’ evaluation. Although agencies’ guidelines available online concerning the work of francophone FLAs in Mexican higher education clearly state that assistants are not expected to perform tasks generally required of teaching professionals, namely “take sole responsibility for the whole class […] design exams, do correction work and students’ supervision, evaluation” (EA, 2018), I witnessed local agency coordinators and some tutors awareness of the occasional performance of such tasks, when attending agency briefing in Mexico. It implies the local agency’s approval and lack of penalty in case of achieving it. Despite this acknowledgement, the training offered by the agencies (described in 2.4.2) never prepared francophone FLAs working in Mexico for this possibility.
The most commonly mentioned unofficial task in the data was that of substitute teaching. During the second FGI, FLAs confirmed that the Mexican agency warned that this task was performed and confirmed they substitute teachers occasionally:

They [speakers in the agency meeting] told us that some former assistants substituted teachers […] it’s weird since I don’t know what students have done, how they did it, and you take over the class, and it is a weird transition. Also, because students are not used to my way of leading the class. (FLA1)

In our meetings in Mexico City, they told us that we might be alone in class sometimes. It happened once in the first semester. It was pretty cool because I didn’t feel out of my depth; on the contrary, I liked it because […] afterwards, I could tell myself that I had given lessons to Mexican university students. (FLA2)

While FLAs did not inform us if this experience was imposed on them, both agreed to stand in for educators. FLA2 considered it a rewarding professional experience, and FLA1 thought that this temporary teaching role could not be effective due to her perceived lack of experience from the students’ viewpoint. She implied there was no opportunity to prepare or understand the teaching context and studied topics, which partly contradicted what she commented at the end of her stay and E2’s statement analysed below. Nonetheless, while both declared to be willing to take risks and be open to challenges in practice, and more specifically, if they would agree to teach alone in future practice, each FLA reacted differently. FLA1 was very enthusiastic, and FLA2 did not feel capable due to his lack of experience and confidence in teaching grammatical elements of language. Their reactions illustrate that they disregarded their proscribed identity as non-professional based on their evaluation of their teaching abilities. They both performed twenty substitutions throughout their stay, suggesting they might not have had the choice or enjoyed the task.

At the end of their stay, when discussing instances when FLAs cover for educators, assistants testified they could count on teaching support to perform this task. The following comment made by an educator seems to confirm their view.

One week, I was absent, which was helpful, as I can’t cancel classes. I left a detailed list of the activities and resources, but they adapted them. […] Afterward, I had a chat with the assistants to
see how it had gone. And they also sent me a daily summary of what they did. Upon my return, I did a little quiz to see what the students had learned. (E2)

Although FLAs acknowledged their lack of preparation to teach when substituting E2, the educator indicated that they made pedagogical decisions more than following the activities and resources provided during the substitutions. This might have fostered her concern for her group’s progress while FLAs covered for her. It echoes statements analysed in 4.2, suggesting FLAs expected and wished to be more involved in the teaching and learning process, although, in terms of substitution, FLAs reacted differently. The teaching substitutions reported here, and FLAs’ reactions to this task partly fulfil this intention. Findings show that, on the one hand, the choice to disregard the task proscribed by the agencies may lead FLAs to enact teaching acts that they were not trained or ready for – also reported in Gerena and Ramírez-Verdugo (2014) and Scobling (2011). On the other hand, the fact that assistants are asked and trusted to perform these tasks indicates that they can do so, suggesting a sort of professional recognition from educators and students, as observed in Bosch et al. (2000) and Haramboure (2000).

For their part, students were not asked about the teaching substitutions upon the French Area’s request, suggesting that the tutor knew this task was unofficial. However, some learners’ incidental comments from three groups confirm that they noticed that FLAs substituted educators occasionally:

- Bring us to support when the educator is doing something else and is not here. (S101)
- He helps the educators when our teacher is away. (S103)
- Substitute the educator when she is busy and can not be in class. (S104)

For these students, assistants acted as aids to the educators in the classroom, echoing their initial understanding of FLAs’ SRTs (see 4.2). Students seemed to become accustomed to this system and accept it as assisting both educators’ and students’ needs. These comments suggest that after a semester of practice, the reported occasional substitutions were perceived as a part of the assistants’ tasks. This situation might have challenged and influenced their understanding of FLAs’
SRTs, as analysed in 4.2.2 and echoing some authors’ words of caution – including Bosch et al. (2000), Culpeper et al. (2008) and Lavery (2001) – on the imprecision in agencies’ guidelines and their dissemination. According to those scholars, this situation impacted the assistants’ practice, leaving the possibility of prioritising the needs of the educational institutions and overlooking the official guidelines. It suggests the need to update the descriptions of SRTs, including the performance of such tasks and, perhaps, the assistant’s profile and the training provided, which would consider candidates with teaching ambitions and introduce pedagogical guidance.

The second unofficial task, evaluating students, was observed during the final oral exam (conducted in December 2017) and commented on in the assistants’ second FGI. The tutor’s decision to include FLAs in evaluating students’ final oral exams was explained by the high number of candidates and the necessity to grade them in a limited time (described in 3.2.3). An educator accompanied each assistant to evaluate the students, and each evaluator used a rubric.

Assistants discussed their mandatory participation in this evaluation process, at the end of the first semester, days after the final oral exam. Both assistants knew performing this task was against the agencies’ recommendations. While FLA2 perceived it as an opportunity to take on new responsibilities and to perform a task generally assigned to educators, who have more experience evaluating students, FLA1 expressed her discomfort with the role she was asked to perform in this task:

We slightly broke that trust regarding the relationship between assistants and students during oral exams. They think they can tell us anything because we won't evaluate them. (FLA1)

When students come to me to prepare, they think that an educator will afterwards assess them, and if they then must do it with me, it’s uncomfortable and reassuring at the same time. […] It’s not very ethical. (FLA1)

Even if it’s not part of the job description […], We give grades; the educator is there to change them if necessary. […] I couldn’t do it alone. (FLA2)
While FLA2 felt the need for educators’ input and approval of his assessment, during the same interview, he stated that he perceived himself as an educator when performing this task and felt he could better evaluate learners he had worked with. This suggests inconsistency in the way he thought about this experience. Although there was no evidence that FLA1 expressed her discontent with the tutor, her comments indicated that she was aware this task was unofficial and wished she refused to evaluate students’ exams on the grounds of the different relationship between educators and her closeness to the candidates, based on her interpretations of students’ feelings with an experience of tutoring she had with them. Even though both FLAs expressed their willingness to take on more responsibilities throughout their practice (also analysed in 4.2), which is observable in FLA2 above statement, they also seemed to have established boundaries in the achievement of teaching acts, whether due to their lack of certain pedagogical skills or to ethical issues.

To my knowledge, the present study is the first to present and analyse how FLAs achieved two unofficial tasks in their practice and the perspectives of three groups of stakeholders. According to the findings, even though the agencies’ guidelines advised assistants and the tutor against FLAs teaching alone, this principle was not always followed and seemed to have temporarily addressed a need for teaching substitution and assisting educators to assess students on behalf of the French Department and further pedagogical responsibilities for the FLAs part. Assistants’ responses to the performance of those tasks oscillated between frustration, insecurity, compliance, and enjoyment. Apart from the fact that these are part of the French Department's activities and that educators suffer a shortage of help to teach some classes and assess learners’ speaking skills during their final exam (explained in 3.2.3), additional reasons may explain the performance of those unofficial tasks. Firstly, educators experienced a wish to reproduce their own experiences as FLAs (point analysed in 4.1.1). Secondly, there is convenient to have a temporary helper familiar with the context and who can take over in times (e.g., sickness or teacher’s leave for other reasons). Thirdly, FLAs have not questioned or complained about extra official work they are expected to do. And
finally, there exists a growing trust and recognition of the tutor and educators in assistants’ teaching awareness and skills.

Based on this analysis, and concurring with suggestions for improving training sessions debated in the literature, my findings evidence a need for the agencies and tutors to provide sessions on specific aspects of FLAs’ practice – indicated in Buckingham (2018a) and Gerena and Ramírez-Verdugo (2014) – including how to perform, if the reality of the practice request it, teaching acts, as recommended in Scobling (2011), and set up regular meetings to prevent drawback from the different parties involved, see Lacronique (2000), and reflect collectively on the impact of such experiences, as well as the overall assistantship experience, on how each the tutor, educators, and FLAs identify themselves and each other.

A final task outside the limits of the official assistantship guidelines was found in this study – Encouraging dialogue between cultures – and will be analysed in the following section.

5.4 Encouraging dialogue between cultures

An additional role emerged from the data analysis of this study. FLAs were found to encourage dialogue between cultures, according to the participants’ experiences. This role seems to have been activated by the choice of topics and content of activities, strategies assistants used in classroom practice, and the development of assistants’ intercultural awareness. This section analyses how this role was performed and its impact on participants’ understanding of FLAs’ SRTs, the teaching and learning process, and the overall assistantship.

5.4.1 Selecting topics and material

Comments analysed in 4.2.2 indicated that the selection of cultural topics and material mainly corresponded to educators’ and students’ expectations and was generally subjected to certain needs for the teaching and learning process. In this sub-section, participants’ comments indicate that this choice was also guided by assistants’ willingness to share a critical vision of their native culture to encourage intercultural communication with students through reflection.
FLAs’ perspectives, collected two months after their arrival, in a FGI, suggest their willingness to encourage dialogues between cultures in their practice is based on less idealised and stereotyped cultural representations:

I believe that the assistant role is to be a cultural ambassador who presents his or her culture objectively with positive and negative points [...] to establish a cultural dialogue. (FLA1)

I thought they asked us to give a soft version, as we are cultural ambassadors and not mention topics like politics or homophobia. I can’t say, ‘In France, homophobia doesn’t exist or racism’ because if Mexicans go there, they could witness discrimination. (FLA2)

Assistants confirmed agencies’ expectations for them to be cultural spokespersons in a Mexican educational institution. At the same time, those and E1 strongly suggested FLAs not discuss potentially controversial topics during briefing meetings (e.g., drug trafficking, abortion), indicating that they are asked to represent part of the cultural realities of their country of origin. In their quotes, FLAs consider that these topics are parts of the Mexican, French, and French-Canadian cultures and stated that learners often asked them questions about those topics, mostly in the SAC. It led them to suggest scheduling two movies dealing with such issues during Francophonie weeks. However, their tutor did not accept this proposal. While the comments indicate the assistants’ intentions to provide students with more input on ways of thinking and living from France and Quebec, including topics that could foster a negative feeling towards those countries, the tutor’s decision may suggest her intention to avoid cultural clashes, as mentioned in Byrd et al. (2011), that FLAs are perhaps not ready to handle. The analysis shows some contrast between the cultural authenticity initially expected from FLAs, reported in 4.1 and 4.3, what they wanted to present in class, their recommendations at the beginning of their practice, and their perceptions. While the first point was discussed in some studies, including in Lavery (2001), Martinez (2000) and Rook (2016), this research is, to my knowledge, the first to provide insights on the other three issues. Furthermore, the above statements raise questions on the definition of authenticity among the respondents if FLAs are requested to provide a soft version of French and French-Canadian cultures and how to present this type of content in class. Furthermore, this situation challenges
the usefulness of FLAs compared to material found online or in textbooks. While few official documents recommend cultural authenticity in the assistantship experience (e.g., Circular of French Government, 2016), guidelines available fail to put it into practice, which according to some scholars, such as López-Medina and Otto (2020) and Scobling (2011), could compromise FLAs’ prescribed supporting role to complement the linguistic topics taught with updated and real cultural content (echoing findings in 5.3)

In practice, while the resources designed (analysed in 5.2.1) and the selection of specific topics (e.g., during Francophonie weeks – analysed in 5.2.2) indicated several instances of stereotypical representations of the societies – perhaps influenced by the French Department reported refusal, and educators’ and students’ expectations regarding the type of content may partly explain this decision – the assistants managed, occasionally, to include topics that moved away from cultural generalisations and would bring culture and language together. Examples are colloquial conversations, idioms, and informal language in class and during Francophonie week. Aspects of culture and language presented in this way, even to A1-level learners, according to the participants, proved to be very motivating:

The assistant shares colloquial and everyday life expressions. It is my favourite type of content. (S103)

He used authentic and colloquial expressions from his country. I have learned a lot. (S104)

He helps us better understand the culture, language and typical expressions in his language. (S106)

The assistantship is an experience for us to know the language better, the colloquial expressions, the way they live and interact with each other. Thank you for that! (S106)

Students reported authenticity in the speech, vocabulary, and colloquial expressions used in the FLAs’ practice. Although this type of lexis and the pragmatic situations are not typically taught to beginners, they are genuine representations of culture and help students understand and produce the target language in different social situations. These answers indicate that FLAs are live samples of the target language and culture, as prescribed in official guidelines, and
examples of their interventions show that they encourage building a bridge between the linguistic topics studied and socio-cultural content that move away from a more static and fit-all culture found in textbooks. However, it is reasonable to highlight the possibility for learners to participate in online forums and social media and use these language items with native speakers. On the other hand, it is realistic to point out that FLAs are limited to their own francophone linguistic and cultural knowledge worlds and to educators’ requests to connect their cultural topics to the linguistic content and the frequency of their classroom interventions. The extent to which they were aware of this and whether they could transmit this intercultural message will be further discussed in 5.4.3.

Assistants confirmed using this type of lexis in their logbooks; for example, FLA2 presented expressions related to love, and FLA1 shared colloquial expressions related to hockey and discussed their perceptions, including colloquial expressions in their practice:

Se me cayó, I dropped it [Spanish expression used to imply that something happened by accident or unintentionally]. An expression like that, seeing how language affects our way of interpreting the world and the things around us. I like to use those in class in both languages. (FLA1)

We used a video with donner sa langue au chat [French idiom meaning to give up]. It was a bit hard to explain and translate. […] that’s where our job gets interesting, to connect language and culture. (FLA2)

Statements, collected in the third FGI, echo the assistants’ discussion during the last FGI about the insult workshop. In this Francophonie event, in which students participated the most, FLAs explained and translated informal expressions according to them. This, as well as the above comments, shows that assistants could manage a certain level of Spanish, are learning about Mexican culture, and suggest their awareness to relate linguistic and cultural content and ability to establish a dialogue between the cultures in contact. Additionally, according to their statements collected in their final individual interviews, they appreciated this opportunity to have a genuine two-way dialogue with the students in which both groups have new and interesting information to share and learn from, being, in
turn, learners and experts (echoing experiences reported in the SAC – 5.1.2, and class – 5.2.1). FLAs’ decisions to share and explain language and culture’s tangible expressions not usually taught in the A1-level textbook to learners suggest their willingness to connect the target cultures and language, which seem to have helped students (and FLAs on occasions) increase their interests compared with their cultural practices and enhancing intercultural awareness. Although studies do not discuss how FLAs’ decisions during practice encouraged intercultural dialogue, scholars identified the impact on the assistantship experience. The first decision to integrate cultural knowledge in class is the selection of topics. Haramboure (2000), Hibler (2010) and Rook (2016) have observed that assistants’ choice to talk about their interests and include the use of the ‘real language’ (e.g., idioms) in their classroom performances contributed to bringing the linguistic topics alive through pragmatic and a variety of accents. These decisions helped participants better understand the connection between culture and language in my study.

Concerning the choice of material, assistants and educators remarked that several resources seemed to contribute to initiating dialogue between cultures. In their logbook, educators agreed that using real-life material provides meaningful learning opportunities:

- It helped students to picture her reality in Quebec. (E1 on April 26th when referring to FLA1’s daily routine)

- I feel that students memorise the vocabulary better; it becomes meaningful. (E3 on November 28th when reporting students designing an invitation with FLA2)

The exchanges above-mentioned likely helped raise awareness and reflection among the FLAs about creating stereotypes.

FLAs observed how personal items promoted interest, communication, and understanding, during FGIA3. This resource type, such as defining some traditional Mexican jobs in French (according to the logbook entries of E1, E2, and FLA1), apparently contributed to conversations contrasting Mexican and French-Canadian cultural practices and allowed them to understand new cultural practices better.
FLA1 expressed her perspective on objects brought from home using a French cultural item:

We could add more authentic material in class. For instance, you talked about la Galette des rois [a traditional tart served in France households at the beginning of January]. You could have brought la fève [the small character that is hidden inside the pie]. It would help them, and we compare cultures [...] with la Rosca de reyes. (FLA1)

For this meeting, FLAs brought materials they created for classroom performances and discussed how those encourage a dialogue between assistants’ and learners’ cultures. In her quote, FLA1 suggested that using a typical object would help connect the French tradition mentioned with the Mexican’s, showing her ability to bring the target and the native cultures into echoing Byram’s savoir comprendre (1997).

At the end of this FGI, assistants reviewed another material used in the classroom, the textbook (AlterEgo+1). Although they did not use it during their presentations, their discussion indicates an awareness of how material choice may or may not encourage intercultural dialogue in class. FLAs’ comments, based on a series of statements issued by Skopinskaja (2003 – see Appendix 8), is gathered in Table 11.
Table 11: FLAs’ comments on the textbook (FGIA3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are the objectives of the material correspond with students’ age, social class, and context?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s well adapted to university students, but here it’s not just university students. They are taking up their studies again after a few years. For them, the main objective is not to go and study abroad. As it’s an international piece of material, it’s not adapted to Mexicans.” (FLA1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I agree. Also, the book talks about working on Sundays, which is not a Mexican topic but a very French one. It’s not adapted to the context. There’s also a chapter about travelling, and I think they have less opportunity to travel than us. This subject might not be relatable for certain people.” (FLA2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent is the content integrated into the lessons? Do they cover culture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Even if a teacher looks at an activity in the book, he can leave it out and not do it. The educator only does cultural activities if they have time in their class.” (FLA1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the subjects socially acceptable or is there any taboo?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In the descriptions, it remains very vague, there’s no mention of homosexuality, disabilities, widowed people […] they said they have dark hair, black skin as it’s not mentioned in the book. It’s saying that in France, people don’t talk about skin colour.” (FLA2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the material encourage tolerance towards culture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There is an awareness of being part of an international community. If a white person goes to different country be called an immigrant? […] Examples are mainly Eurocentric and don’t represent the Francophone diversity […] if the students go to a Francophone country, they should know about this diversity.” (FLA1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assistants’ comments on *AlterEgo 1+* imply that the book presents various culture-focused activities but overall was judged to lack dialogue between target and learners’ cultures. For FLAs, the cultural knowledge disseminated in the book is seemingly not relatable to all the students’ cultural contexts, suggesting the assistants’ knowledge of students’ cultural background and ability to integrate this variable in their weekly tailored interventions, making their presence and work, to some extend, more relevant and accessible. Statements also show FLAs’ reflections on learners’ ability to interpret and relate to cultural practices. Assistants consider that the book disseminates imprecise content or may avoid some topics concerning francophone cultures, echoing FLAs’ comments on selecting controversial topics and leading to stereotyping. Although they deplore the lack of connection with the Mexican language learning context and the apparent dissemination of vague or superficial cultural representation, they acknowledge that this material is aimed to be used in various teaching and learning contexts. It supports the need for competent speakers to enhance their cultures’ vision using real-life experiences and materials.

In terms of material FLAs used in practice and commented on in the data collection instruments, results indicate that assistants develop an awareness of how it can encourage intercultural dialogue in the classroom. The theory shared during FGIAs with the assistants has probably impacted this observed consciousness (Appendices 6 to 10), FLAs’ resources’ selection and use to show their cultures to the students in their practice and facilitated an intercultural dialogue (point analysed in 5.4.3). The selection of adequate material is also key. According to the findings, FLAs were expected to share and present authentic resources. While Lavery (2001) identified that FLAs’ lack of teaching training led them to present material and activities unsuitable and unrelated to the learners’ level and/or previous topics studied, Byram et al. (2002), among others, affirm that the use of authentic material contributes to students’ motivation to know more about the target culture. The material selected and designed by FLAs allows one to step away from the culture displayed in textbooks and possible cultural stereotypes (Lavery, 2001). This echoes Risager’s analysis of the cultural representations in
textbooks (in 2018), who also noticed that this material fails to provide strategies on how to teach culture. This lack of training for FLAs also led FLAs studied by Ehrenreich (2006) to reinforce existing stereotypes of the target cultures. However, stereotypes seemed to have been part of the present study's dialogue between students’ and FLAs’ cultures.

Findings show FLAs’ willingness and some decisions in practice in terms of topics and material. These include their critical analysis of the cultural themes recommended by the agencies and those used in the textbook and present informal language and real-life material. This, attempting to share cultural content that moves away from a simplified vision of the target cultures and encourages a dialogue between the cultures in contact.

### 5.4.2 Disseminating culture: FLAs’ strategies

Assistants’ comments on their classroom performance, collected in FG12, indicated that they used different strategies, including discussing stereotypes, comparing cultural aspects, and making students reflect on various cultural elements. FLA2’s strategy to deal with stereotypes shows his intention to promote discussion on preconceived cultural ideas:

> They’re clichés; it makes everyone laugh, and then I tell them that these ideas do not represent the reality I know. It’s like saying that when I think of a Mexican, I imagine the moustache and the hat, tacos. Those are stereotypes, but we know they’re exaggerated. That’s why we laughed about it, and then we discussed them. It was my strategy to make an intercultural connection. (FLA2)

FLA2’s decision to laugh, use stereotypical visions of the French and Mexican, and compare both cultures apparently successfully encouraged an intercultural dialogue in class. His comment collected after two months of practice complements his opinion on the Mexican cultural identity given only a few days after his arrival: “I thought it was a dangerous but wonderful country, with many different landscapes, a country with social inequality, lots of street food, drugs, weapons, tourism, tacos, cactus, and tequila. [...] I wanted to come here to see it.” At that time, he showed a willingness to rethink his ideas on some Mexican cultural stereotypes, encourage dialogue between the two cultures, and turn over-simplified ideas about both
countries into more realistic cultural representations, which according to his statement about clichés in class, he implemented. At the end of his stay, he indeed confirmed that his initial wish for an intercultural dialogue was fulfilled through his practice (see 5.4.3 for the analysis of FLA2’s intercultural awareness). Those statements illustrate how the context and his work contributed to reshaping his opinions and perhaps his identity as a FLA, mirroring Mynard et al. (2019) on the impact of a community on (re)positioning yourself. On the one hand, FLAs' views on how to disseminate cultural content in class evidence their willingness and intention to make pedagogical decisions, which goes against their prescribed profile and some comments on the assistants' SRTs (see 4.2.2 and 5.3). On the other hand, it indicates assistants' capacity for a certain detachment from simplified cultural representations. This contradicts what Byram et al. (2002) appear to claim on the intercultural awareness of some native speakers, their ability to interpret and relate those, echoing Byram’s savoir comprendre (1997), and use it as a pedagogical strategy.

After six months of practice in FGI3, FLAs mentioned that as their understanding of the Mexican culture grew, their selection of resources and class activities changed, and the strategies used to present cultural knowledge. They considered that cultural comparisons helped students' interpretation of socio-cultural representations and related them to their own through meaningful activities. After becoming familiar with food buying habits in Mexico, for example, FLAs used this cultural knowledge to construct shared meanings with the students. FLA2's comment illustrates this analysis: “It’s like Oxxo in Mexico [...] ‘Ah, yes, OK, a little supermarket.’ Or expressions which create a more social link.” These connections were likely to help learners relate to the point being shared, bringing meaningfulness to the learning, a strategy especially useful in a non-immersion context. Assistants suggest that their activities encouraged learners' participation and contributed to enhancing intercultural dialogue and students' reflection concerning Mexican and francophone cultural practices. Again, the comments suggest assistants’ ability to interpret and relate socio-cultural knowledge from different cultures, explicitly using students' backgrounds, echoing Byram’s five
Savoirs model, to disseminate content and encourage intercultural dialogue and indicating not only an impact of the context and practice on their practice but most probably on their own identity as FLAs. While Ali et al. (2015) and Risager (2018) reported that some language textbooks use this strategy to raise cultural awareness, the present study is the first to provide insights into using such an approach in FLAs’ practice.

Another strategy observed in FLAs’ practice is the reflection on cultural aspects. Assistants confirmed, at the end of their stay, in a focus group interview, that they pursued this intention for intercultural communication in their practice:

I make them debate and reflect on their culture and the French-Canadian culture. (FLA1)

Students better understood the cultural content when they were involved in activities and when they reflected on both cultures. (FLA1)

They ask themselves questions about their culture and realise that France is different from what people imagine. It makes them want to go to France to immerse themselves in French culture. (FLA2)

Although this level of reflection was seemingly not mentioned in students’ comments, those suggest that the cultural knowledge taught and how this was presented have contributed to an intercultural exchange:

Assistants encouraged the students to know more about culture and to reflect. To speak a foreign language, you should also know the culture. (S101)

It’s a native speaker who offers an actual and practical focus on our learning. The cultural exchange makes this experience much more fortunate because everything makes more sense. (S102)

It’s a person who allows us to get closer to other cultures and allows us to share our cultural worlds. (S102)

He is someone who shares his life with people from a foreign country and who shows an interest in a new culture; ours. (S105)

These answers collected in the final questionnaire suggest a connection between linguistic competence and cultural knowledge. FLAs’ participation and some pedagogical decisions brought meaningfulness and created an opportunity for
reflection. Additionally, both groups of participants indicated a mutual willingness to discover their cultures. Statements mirrored CEFR (2001 and 2020) components to foster intercultural communication in language classrooms, and Byram's *savoir apprendre* and *savoir-faire* (1997) that refer to the ability to bring the target and the native cultures into contact, intend to overcome stereotyped views of those cultures and act as a cultural intermediary to foster communication. FLAs' intercultural awareness will be further developed in the following sub-section.

**5.4.3 Gaining intercultural awareness**

Throughout the discussion during focus group sessions, assistants compared and reflected on intercultural teaching practice strategies provided by the literature (see FGIAs’ outlines in Appendices 6 to 10) and their classroom experiences. Those discussions seem to have contributed to the assistants’ awareness of integrating intercultural dialogue in class.

After one month of practice, FLAs’ reflections focused on the significance of including cultural content in the linguistic content taught in class, which allowed them a certain level of introspection into their own culture:

- I now dislike classes that don’t include culture or when unrealistic listening exercises are used. (FLA1)
- I have discovered a lot about my own culture. I have researched historical events to prepare for my activities. (FLA1)
- You should not make a list of dishes but explain why they are typical and their meaning. You have to ask yourself if the material you use will generate an intercultural dialogue instead of stereotypes. (FLA2)
- With the students, I’m able to decenter from my culture and accept that it’s different and not be limited by my vision of life. I have learned a lot about my country and Mexico while preparing for my lessons. (FLA2)

Assistants’ comments confirmed FLAs’ growing pedagogical awareness and involvement evidenced in various sub-sections (e.g., 4.1.2 and 5.1.3) and reported by several authors, including Buckingham (2018a) and García Fernández (2000). Statements also suggest that after a few weeks of practice, FLAs, especially FLA2, experienced openness toward different cultures and relativism toward theirs.
Additionally, those also indicate their intention to integrate a dialogue between culture in their classroom performances and pedagogical approach when teaching cultural content, showing an impact of the past weeks of practice and, to a certain extent, of the literature shared and discussed in the first and second FGIAAs (Byram, 1997; Council of Europe, 2014, and Kandeel, 2013). The analysis evidences a level of openness about other cultures and one’s own and that the communicative activity is affected by knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes towards the cultures in contact, which echo the general intercultural competence of Declarative knowledge and Existential competence described in the CEFR (2001 and 2020) and Savoir être and Savoir explained in Byram’ Five Savoirs model (1997).

During the third FGIA, the quotes collected confirmed FLAs’ interest in acquiring new socio-cultural knowledge during their stay and contact with Mexican students:

I like going out with the students. We speak a little bit of French, and I learn more about Mexican culture. (FLA1)

In SAC, we speak in French about Mexican and French-Canadian culture; it’s a dialogue based on cultural facts. (FLA1)

Through my lessons, I want to transmit a message. This experience [travelling by bike in Mexico for one month] opened me culturally and allowed me to understand my students’ reality. (FLA2)

You have to live the culture to understand it. It is in the country, week by week, month by month, the people you meet, this is when you start to understand the culture. It is not easy to talk about your culture to Mexicans because we are not in France, and they don’t differentiate between the reality seen in textbooks and ours. (FLA2)

The extracts indicate that part of the relationship between assistants and students was based on sharing aspects of their cultures inside and outside the classroom, mirroring comments analysed in 4.2.1 and 5.1.2 on the learners-experts status. Furthermore, the above statements suggest FLAs’ interest in understanding students’ cultural backgrounds, which they have evolved for several months, and their readiness to expand cultural knowledge and intercultural dialogue through an attitude of openness and curiosity, echoing the significance of building a
pluricultural repertoire described in the CEFR companion with new descriptors (2018).

In the fourth focus group interview, FLAs’ discussed the Advice for a gradual self-training approach to intercultural competence by Virasolvit (2013). Their comments indicate an individual and collective growing intercultural consciousness and that their practice included such approach through empathy, identifying differences and similarities, understanding of the plurality of cultural practices, and critical cultural awareness:

Empathy is when you put yourself in someone else’s shoes. I can understand your culture, and we can compare cultures. It is trying not to judge, not to feel superior. (FLA1)

Grasp the differences and connect two different ways of expressing ideas, but we have the same intention. We have to try to identify similarities to understand better the differences. (FLA1)

I am more open to new cultures, allowing me to understand without judging and reflecting on the differences. (FLA2)

Interculturality is to exchange culture, and multiculturality is saying, that I have a culture, you have yours, and we cohabitate. It is a dialogue enhanced by specific skills. (FLA2)

The fragments suggest that FLAs acquired a set of skills and considered they used those in their communication with the students. The analysis indicates that the assistants have gained more than openness to other cultures, the ability to handle otherness, identify and interpret similarities and differences, and evaluate the cultural perspectives in contact to enable communication and act as intercultural mediators. Such skills echo the five Savoirs described by Byram (1997), namely savoir être, savoir, savoir comprendre, savoir apprendre and faire, and savoir s’engager and the components of the intercultural communication competence defined in the CEFR (2001, 2018, and 2020).

At the end of their stay, FLAs highlighted the significance of their work in terms of encouraging a dialogue between cultures:

For the students, it’s good to have us as intercultural ambassadors. Educators don’t always have time for culture. Maybe they are not interested [...] students must have us talk about culture so they can relate to their own. (FLA1)
Understanding why we do what we do. Avoid saying that’s strange but try to reflect on the cultural habits. [...] It is an unconscious process that FLAs could help make conscious. (FLA1)

Out of the 250 students, very few will study and work in France; our job is to keep them motivated through the intercultural dialogue to give them the willingness to go there. (FLA2)

FLA1 suggests that, based on what she experienced, including the place of culture and the assistants’, if it were not for the assistants’ culture would be far less or not taught in class, echoing the analysis of some extracts in 4.3. Both assistants considered that their intercultural approach helped learners to discover and reflect on aspects of their and the target cultures’. While this corresponds to the main objective of the assistantship programme, no agencies or studies have provided FLAs with the opportunity to further understand and discuss how to disseminate cultural knowledge and adopt an intercultural attitude.

Findings indicate that through experiences inside and outside of class, including their participation in focus group sessions, FLAs developed intercultural awareness. Although comments show differences between both assistants’ reflections on aspects of their work and mission, FLA1 and FLA2 seem to have applied this consciousness to students’ practice of communicative skills and discovery of different societies and cultures, encouraging their interest and motivation. While the statements analysed in this sub-section evidenced FLAs’ sensitiveness and ability to understand, reflect and, according to them, integrate an intercultural approach in the language learning and teaching process, and despite the reported significance of such topic in the assistantship experience (Ehrenreich, 2006; García Laborda et al., 2020; Haramboure, 2000; Scobling, 2011), agencies guidelines fail to mention of the possible intercultural scope of FLAs’ practice and the use of corresponding strategies that their performance seems to involve.

However, FLAs’ comments reflect on, and in practice, analysis, and reflexivity of socio-cultural, their performances analysed in Chapters 4 and 5 did not always integrate this approach. Reported expectations and experiences regarding the partnership between educators and FLAs (4.1.2) and the priority to study linguistic topics and the place of culture in language education (see 4.3) may partly explain
why sometimes FLAs did not put into practice this intercultural willingness and awareness. Based on the benefit of the collective reflective practice to encourage in-depth analysis and understanding of issues carried out in the class with colleagues (Mann and Walsh, 2017; Rodgers, 2002) and on observed communication and partnership problems between FLAs and educators, authors recommend the use of the reflective practice to encourage further development (Bosch et al., 2000; Haramboure, 2000; López Palacios, 2012; Méndez García and Pavón Vázquez, 2012). However, none of those studies implemented it. In the present research, the theoretical content shared on intercultural dialogue in language education during FLAs’ group interviews contributed to fostering their awareness of this topic inside and outside of class. Despite being absent from the agencies’ guidelines (CIEP, 2018; DGRI, 2019; EA, 2018), this additional role and the decisions it takes to perform seemed to have been the cornerstones of the successful performance of FLAs’ expected and prescribed SRTs.

While the agencies’ guidelines do not mention the enhancement of intercultural dialogue as a prescribed role for FLAs and/or host schools, the description of the objectives includes that the assistantship experience will encourage, on the one hand, FLAs to (re)discover their own culture and the host culture they will be immersed in (CIEP, 2018; Circular of the French Ministry of Education, 2016; UNESCO, 1953), and, on the other hand, students and educators to know more about the society and culture of the target language (Bosch et al., 2000; CIEP, 2018; Rook, 2016). These considerations suggest cultural knowledge sharing, which corresponds to the second prescribed role, using foreign language oral skills related to the first prescribed role, but fails to consider the significance of a dialogue between the cultures in contact. This aspect is not mentioned during informative briefing meetings or training sessions.

During the data collection, the topic of how intercultural dialogue was enhanced emerged. According to the findings, decisions made in FLAs’ practice, including the selection of resources (e.g., FLAs’ personal objects and pictures) and topics (e.g., close to the real use of the language with colloquial expressions), strategies used (e.g., cultural comparisons and including their knowledge of Mexican cultural
aspects into their activities), and co-and self-reflection on practice fostered during group interviews and in logbooks on materials and intercultural awareness strategies and attitudes influenced the way assistants enacted this role. This also shows that the context challenged the assistants’ SRTs delimited by the guidelines and that they could endorse new responsibilities and explore a different version of their prescribed functions. My study made a unique contribution to identifying which roles and tasks are performed in the context of francophone FLAs working in a higher Mexican educational institution for two semesters and providing insights into how these are enacted. These are presented in Tables 12 to 15. The first two include the prescribed roles and corresponding tasks (based on Table 1 - see 2.3.2), and the last two additional roles and present if those were performed in FLA1 and FLA2’s practice.
Table 12: Summary of FLAs prescribed role 1 and tasks as specified in the official documentation by CIEP, EA, and DGRI and compared to the findings of this study

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>1- Improving students’ communication skills</td>
<td>Role performed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Tasks   | CIEP 1A- Enhancing conversation practice with students in class  
CIEP 1B- Leading a language club  
CIEP 1C- Contributing to authentic voice recordings | EA 1A- Leading activities that focus mainly on oral communication and that complement the foreign language programme | DGRI 1A- Leading language clubs | All tasks performed |
| How is it performed? | Agencies do not provide guidance on how to perform the role and corresponding tasks. | | | CIEP 1A/ EA 1A - With the help of material, activities, and strategies incorporated in their classroom performances.  
CIEP 1B/ DGRI 1A - In and out of class, the language club about FL cultures and the linguistic content studied.  
CIEP 1C - Record audios incorporating linguistic content studied in class and showing empathy. |
Table 13: Summary of FLAs prescribed role 2 and tasks as specified in the official documentation by CIEP, EA, and DGRI and compared to the findings of this study

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>2. Developing students’ knowledge of different societies and cultures</td>
<td>Role performed</td>
<td>All tasks performed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks</td>
<td>CIEP 2A- Participating in various educational activities held in the school CIEP 2B- Implementing educational exchange programmes</td>
<td>EA 2A- Sharing their national culture and lifestyle with students</td>
<td>DGRI 2A- Sharing their national/regional culture through pedagogical and entertaining activities DGRI 2B- Organising academic, cultural and artistic activities DGRI 2C- Participating in various educational activities held in the school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is it performed?</td>
<td>Agencies do not guide how to perform the role and corresponding tasks.</td>
<td></td>
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EA 2A/ DGRI 2A/2B - Include cultural content in their classroom practice. This corresponds to participants’ expectations, FLAs’ realities, and a representative vision of FL cultures.

DGRI 2C/ CIEP 2A - Perform outside of the classroom. Enhance students’ interest in the culture but observed lack of participation and FLAs’ frustration.

CIEP 2B - Require FLAs to know the specifics of exchange programmes they lack.
Table 14: Summary of FLAs' unofficial tasks as specified in the official documentation by CIEP, EA, and DGRI and compared to the findings of this study

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tasks</td>
<td>The agencies identified unofficial tasks, namely substituting educators and evaluating students in internal documents and during briefing meetings, and acknowledged FLAs had performed them in the past.</td>
<td>Substituting educators</td>
<td>Evaluating students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is it performed?</td>
<td>Agencies do not guide how to perform the tasks.</td>
<td>The performance of these tasks answered the French Area's needs. FLAs' agreed to perform those on occasions, including pedagogical decisions and responsibilities. While this show further professional recognition from the teaching team, it also suggests a controlling attitude from this group and some disappointment from FLAs.</td>
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Table 15: Summary of FLAs' additional role that emerged from the data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Governmental Circulars (see 2.3), Unesco (1953), and Rowles and Rowles (2005)</th>
<th>Emerged from the data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Although governments’ objectives mention the dialogue between FLAs’ cultures and the students’, assistants’ profiles do not include the intercultural awareness and agencies do not evoke or train FLAs in that matter.</td>
<td>Encouraging dialogue between cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is it performed?</td>
<td>Agencies and literature do not guide how to perform this role.</td>
<td>Through decisions in practice, including the topics, resources and strategies, willingness and gradual awareness to encourage a dialogue between cultures.</td>
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</table>
This case study allowed us to investigate in depth the assistantship experiences of stakeholders involved in the daily practice of two francophone FLAs. The analysis discussed the extent to which the roles and tasks prescribed by the three agencies working with FLAs in Mexico were performed and exposed the details of how they were achieved. Furthermore, it provided insights into how those were performed, which lacked the guidelines. Findings identified two other tasks and an extra role, which were not listed or described in the agencies’ guidelines, and how they were achieved.
Chapter 6 Conclusions

This chapter summarises my research and indicates its contributions to theory and practice as well as its limitations. It also presents recommendations for practitioners and opportunities for future research and ends by mentioning some prospects for disseminating the findings.

6.1 Summary of the research

This case study was designed to provide insights into stakeholders’ understanding of the SRTs assumed by French and French-Canadian foreign language assistants working in the French Area of a Mexican public university and the impact on the teaching and learning process.

The work of foreign language assistants (FLA) consisted of assisting French as foreign language educators and students to improve learners’ linguistic and communication skills and develop francophone cultural knowledge. This study was based on a qualitative approach and used individual semi-structured in-depth and focus group interviews, logbook entries, and questionnaires to collect assistantship experiences of a tutor, educators, students, and FLAs to answer the two research questions:

1- How are the status, roles, and tasks of francophone FLAs working in a Mexican public higher education institution understood by the stakeholders?

2- Which roles and tasks are actually performed by the FLAs during the assistantship, and how?

Findings exposed in Chapter 4 indicate that comments from the respondents agreed with the agencies’ guidelines and saw FLAs as linguistic and cultural models and broadcasters and temporary helpers in the teaching and learning process with no pedagogical training. However, findings also indicated that communication and dissemination on which SRTs and how to perform them need improvement at all levels to mitigate reported misunderstanding and disappointment in practice. According to the data, the teaching and learning requirements and stakeholders’ experiences, expectations, and understanding of
assistants’ SRTs and the place of culture in education influenced FLAs’ status and partnerships established throughout the assistantship, placing, on several occasions, the assistants and the target culture in a secondary position.

Furthermore, the data analysed in Chapter 5 showed that FLAs performed the two prescribed roles and corresponding tasks issued by the agencies involved with francophone FLAs in Mexico: Improve students’ communication skills and develop students’ knowledge of different societies and cultures. Assistants also testified to achieving two of the unofficial tasks mentioned explicitly in the Mexican agency briefing meetings and policies upon the French Department’s request, namely teaching substitutions and student evaluations. While performing those was professionally rewarding, an assistant also expressed frustration. An extra non-mentioned role was identified: Encourage dialogue between cultures. Apart from teaching, planning lessons and events, designing materials, and discovering new values and beliefs in this cultural immersion, FLAs often acted as an intermediate between cultures. This aspect is not contemplated in the agencies’ guidelines.

These roles and tasks were enacted by the need to accomplish the assistantship guidelines and aspects involved in the assistants’ practice. These were:

- The type of communication and partnerships between the stakeholders involved;
- the impact of their expectations and understanding of SRTs on FLAs’ (pedagogical) expectations and decisions made in practice, and
- the separation of language and culture in the teaching and learning process, influencing the place of the FLAs.

Additionally, findings showed that agencies and higher education institutions provided limited opportunities to the stakeholders involved in FLAs’ daily practice to give and receive feedback or reflect on their expectations and performance or the (inter)cultural aspect of their experience. However, data analysis indicated that FLAs’ pedagogical and intercultural awareness was partly fostered during focus group interviews and to some extent in their practice. This need for reflection and feedback became significant during the assistantship. More opportunities in this
regard for the stakeholders at all levels may have helped avoid observed misunderstandings, frustrations, and disappointments.

### 6.2 Contributions to knowledge and practice

Firstly, this investigation makes a unique contribution to the study of Francophone assistantships in non-European contexts.

As mentioned in the literature review, since the first bilateral assistants’ exchange nearly 125 years ago, a limited number of academic studies have been published on FLAs and assistantships, especially related to non-European contexts (Ehrenreich, 2006; Rowles and Rowles, 2005). This situation is partly due to the relative newness of such programmes in these contexts and experiences of and with francophone assistants (López Palacios, 2012 and several authors published in *Langues Modernes*, vol.4, 2000). Furthermore, to this day, and apart from official documents issued by the agencies (CIEP 2018; DGRI, 2019; EA, 2018, among others), the realities of FLAs working in Mexico, including the French and French-Canadian assistants, have not yet been studied. More than being the first academic study in this context, my research offers a unique and comprehensive literature review and theoretical framework on the topic of foreign language assistantships.

Additionally, this case study contributes to identifying if problematic issues reported in different contexts in the literature are observable in a setting never studied before, how they occur to recognise elements of good practice (e.g., reflection on practice and regular meetings), and areas of improvement (e.g., the performance of unofficial tasks and dissemination of SRTs). In this way, the data collected in this research could contribute to offering agencies working with francophone assistants in Mexico a close and insider view of the realities of a particular assistantship experience from the synchronous perspectives of a tutor, students, educators, and FLAs. To my knowledge, two other studies provided this variety of angles in Europe (Bosch et al., 2000 in France; Buckingham, 2018a in Spain). These insights into assistants’ practice and SRTs could complement the general information and possibly hard-to-relate to concrete situations, available online and
be disseminated to tutors and FLAs in briefing meetings (see recommendations in 6.4) and to the agencies via encounters or academic publications, for instance.

Secondly, this case study made visible the perspectives of FLAs, a tutor, educators, and students concerning expectations and understanding of the assistants’ SRTs and how they experienced the assistantship. My research offered a unique opportunity for educators and FLAs to discuss and reflect on practice individually and collectively. No research on FLAs has used logbooks or focus group interviews to collect insights into the practice and foster reflection among the respondents. Their comments helped identify connections that partly explained reported frustrations and mismatches:

- between whom and how the official information is disseminated and understood and previous assistantship experiences, stakeholders’ expectations and FLAs’ practice,
- between the type of partnerships established and the performance of teaching acts, and
- between the integration of target culture and FLAs, both seen, at times, as a secondary objective, by the tutor, educators, FLAs, and students.

To my knowledge, no other study has shown those links. Connections observed in the present case study could raise awareness among agencies and host institutions on taking concrete actions to mitigate such issues.

Finally, this research identified the performance of two unofficial tasks – namely teaching substitutions and co-evaluating students – in FLAs’ practice and an additional role. Despite the non-professional status described in the assistants’ profile in the literature, this study shows that FLAs endorsed responsibilities usually required by educators. Few scholars explain how these are performed and their impact on the practice and stakeholders (e.g., the lack of clarity of SRTs in Codó and McDaid, 2019 and FLAs’ lack of pedagogical training during agencies’ meetings in Buckingham, 2018a). The present research provides further and concrete elements of response, including educators’ experiences as previous FLAs and the priority to cover the French Department’s needs. More than agencies’
acknowledgement of such tasks’ performance, findings show a need to perhaps modify FLAs’ profile and selection. According to the SRTs expected and performed in the present study, I consider it important to establish if candidates are willing and capable of taking pedagogical responsibilities, and if so, inform the stakeholders involved in the practice and train the assistants according to the educational institutions’ needs.

Stakeholders’ comments indicated an additional role performed by FLAs: Encouraging dialogue between cultures. Although some authors and guidelines present assistants as experts of their culture of origin (CIEP, 2018; EA, 2018; Ehrenreich, 2006; Haramboure, 2000, and López Palacios, 2012), documents issued by agencies, the publications reviewed, and the data collected fail to provide assistants with instructions on cultural content dissemination nor ensure candidates’ interest or ability to interact with the host culture. Additionally, guidelines lack clarity regarding the connection between language and culture, which echoes participants’ comments on separating these two concepts. Findings showed that scholars’ recommendations (Byram, 1997; Council of Europe, 2014; Kandeel, 2013; Skopinskaja, 2003; Virasolvit, 2013 – see focus groups’ outlines in appendices 11 to 15) on how to integrate cultural knowledge in language classes helped FLAs to raise intercultural awareness and foster an intercultural approach in their practice. This supports the need for the stakeholders to understand how language and culture may be so interconnected (and described as such in the CEFR, 2018 and 2020) better to integrate FLAs into the language teaching and learning process and go beyond cultural stereotypes. While agencies’ guidelines and the literature disregard mentioning the potential intercultural scope of the assistantship, the present study shows that not only do the two FLAs encouraged the dialogue between Mexican cultures and their own but also that this extra role seems to have facilitated the performance of the other two prescribed roles and influenced the FLAs’ practice overall and development of their own intercultural awareness.
6.3 Study limitations

In this study, several limitations can be identified. This section describes five limitations, explains why these exist and how they impacted the findings and provides ways to mitigate the identified limitations in the data collection and analysis.

6.3.1 Insider-research status

Although the case study is designed to give voice to the participants and explore their perspectives of the reality of the case, the researcher, especially when conducting qualitative studies, may impact the research in different ways (highlighted in Unluer, 2012, among others). In that sense, data analysis and the presentation of findings are subjected to my judgments. I have tried to present data that support participants’ perspectives, and I believe that the quantity of data collected on similar topics (e.g., selection of the material and cultural topics), the participants’ opportunity to reflect, and cross-verification in the data analysis, helped me reduce the possibility of subjective influence.

6.3.2 Sample size

This study included the participation of two current FLAs, representing the totality of the assistants’ cohort working at the research site in 2017 and 2018. It also involved three educators, the totality of the participants interested, including the assistants’ tutor, all self-selected and teaching at A1-level, and 220 students, the totality of learners studying the A1-level. The reason for this selection was further explained in 3.2.2 and 3.3.6.

While scholars (Denscombe, 2010; Krueger and Casey, 2000) recommend at least six participants for focus group interviews to prevent moderation issues, among other questions, I consider (in agreement with Anderson, 1990) that, especially for FLAs’ and educators’ cohorts, the small size sample allowed me to create a trustful atmosphere where participants had more time to share their perspectives and reflect on the practice and the overall assistantship experience.
This study could also have involved German- or English-speaking FLAs and educators working at the research site. At the time, the university hired new coordinators, and although they showed interest in my research, they chose not to add further activities to their new position. Comments collected from these participants on their practice could have allowed me to compare how assistants’ SRTs are disseminated, understood, and performed within the French, English, and German Departments. This, to observe if similar situations, such as the performance of unofficial tasks or the place of assistants and target cultures were present, may inform other settings within Mexico.

6.3.3 Selection of places

Regarding selecting places where the data was collected, the data collection could have included other higher education institutions working with francophone assistants in Mexico. The purpose of this would be to compare the dissemination, understanding, and performance of FLAs’ SRTs in different contexts and provide more general recommendations for agencies and educational institutions and stakeholders working or studying in the schools. I decided to do a case study to include students, the tutor, educators, and assistants involved in the assistantship at the university where I work; such focus was more attuned to the nature of a Professional Doctorate. It was also helpful for logistical reasons, including conducting regular interviews and creating a trustful and closer relationship with the participants. French coordinators from other universities confirmed their interest in future research by sharing their assistantship experience during national and international conferences (Table 16).

6.3.4 Tutor’s role

Another limitation concerns the data collection and the participants: more data could have been gathered about the FLAs tutor’s role. This stakeholder is rarely mentioned in the literature (briefly in the assistantship guidelines – CIEP, 2018; DGRI, 2019). While the present research seems to have partly overlooked how the tutor role could have influenced other participants’ understanding of assistants’ SRTs, her views were collected in focus group interviews with educators and a
questionnaire. She could have been interviewed individually about her understanding of assistants’ SRTs, her role in disseminating them, her relationship with FLAs, and her influence on SRTs’ performance. Although interviewing tutors could be added to future research, I consider that her participation in two different data collection instruments, the amount of data collected and its cross-verification in the analysis helped me mitigate this limitation.

6.3.5 Data collection methods

As suggested in the literature on case studies (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014), the data collection process could have involved direct observation of FLAs’ classroom performances and the lesson plans used. These instruments could have been useful to document further activities and material they designed, their place in the classroom and teaching and learning process, students’ and educators’ behaviour to cross-verify participants’ comments provided in interviews, questionnaires, and logbook entries. As explained in Chapter 3, the video or audio recording of FLAs’ classroom performances was unmanageable due to schedule issues and institutional policies. As for the lesson plans, educators disagreed about sharing theirs, and FLAs did not use any. Although this was an important omission, other instruments helped get relevant data to answer the research questions from different angles.

Additionally, conducting meetings with assistants and educators simultaneously could have offered them further opportunities to collectively communicate and reflect on assistants’ SRTs’ overall practice and assistantship experience. Despite the interest of both groups, it was impossible to conduct these interviews due to time constraints. Educators' and assistants' reflections on those topics were collected separately in focus group interviews. However, meetings with both groups could be held in future research (6.4.4). Separating FLAs and educators allowed participants to freely discuss problematic issues and negative comments concerning the other party. For time and availability, it was impossible to interview E2 and E3 separately, providing perhaps further opportunities to speak without the pressure of the head of the French Department.
Finally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I, unfortunately, had limited access to the analysis and writing periods to my participants and the research site to double-check my interpretation of the data. Although I contacted them by email and met online via Skype with some of them, face-to-face encounters would have probably provided me with further opportunities to discuss my interpretations.

6.4 Recommendations for stakeholders

This section describes four recommendations based on my findings, explains how these would be implemented, and provides possible outcomes to the agencies, educational institutions, and participants involved in the assistantship experience.

6.4.1 Status, roles, and tasks expectations

Findings indicate that stakeholders’ expectations involved in the assistantship are scarcely shared and discussed, encouraging differences in understanding SRTs and possible misinterpretation in practice.

Prior to FLAs’ arrival, and especially for institutions that welcome assistants for the first time, I recommend using an online structured questionnaire to identify different stakeholders’ expectations concerning assistants’ SRTs. Sent by the agencies to heads of Language Departments, FLAs’ tutors, educators, students, and future FLAs, answers will help such agencies get a closer and updated look at the educational institutions’ realities and recognise possible disparities between the SRTs’ descriptions, dissemination, and expectations. Another option is for those agencies to design a briefing document and carry out an induction event with tutors, educators, and FLAs to set preliminary expectations. Providing the stakeholders with the opportunity to reflect and give their opinions may also strengthen their partnerships and encourage further involvement in the assistantship.

During FLAs’ stay, I suggest that Language Departments hold regular check-ins to encourage discussions between the actors involved in daily practice (see 6.4.4 for more details on these meetings).
After the assistantship, it would be convenient to provide heads of Language Departments, FLAs’ tutors, educators, students, and FLAs with follow-up forms to confirm if the initial expectations were fulfilled and collect more information on the experience in general. This could be done through an online survey or meeting held by the agencies or/and the Language Departments.

6.4.2 Status, roles, and tasks dissemination and understanding
This study points out that information concerning SRTs is mainly disseminated during briefing meetings, organised before the assistantship by the agencies, through a list of functions written in slide presentations to FLAs and tutors. Tutors are asked to pass on this information to the teaching team working with assistants. Comments indicate that this information was too general and unclear, subjected to each participant’s interpretation, and neither educators nor students had access to it. My intention is first to design a handbook, pilot it in the French Department where I work, address potential changes and offer this instrument to other Language Departments working with FLAs, in Mexico or other countries (in several languages).

Assistantship programme agencies could design a digital handbook (see 6.6.2) for tutors, educators, and FLAs, including a detailed description of SRTs and guidelines for reflection on these and the overall assistantship. This material could be available online and used during meetings throughout the FLAs’ stay, for example, to discuss issues.

6.4.3 Training and reflection
The literature and the findings of this study show that the agencies and the host education institutions offer little or no training opportunities to tutors, educators, and FLAs. These mainly focus on providing general information on administrative and classroom management issues. However, respondents’ comments suggest the need and interest in getting more professional development opportunities on how to work with assistants and educators, the role of culture in language teaching, and the intercultural communication prospective of the assistantship.
Each agency could create an online platform for assistants, tutors, and educators, including forums, virtual meetings, and material (e.g., examples of FLAs’ activities, suggestions on how educators should work with assistants), videos, resource bank, suggestions (e.g., on the type of content, stereotypes), and workshops. Sharing resources and exchanges between the participants in the assistantship via the suggested online platform could better meet the assistantship programme objectives and support FLAs’ in their prescribed roles and tasks. This will also foster regular communication, partnership, and reflection, improve linguistic and cultural content integration, and provide strategies to include the latter in classroom activities.

6.4.4 Partnerships and practice

According to the briefing meeting, agencies’ coordinators know that FLAs perform functions and make pedagogical decisions generally expected of professionals. Although these are not approved in the guidelines, findings showed that FLAs were increasingly requested to perform this type of task (e.g., substitutions, evaluating students) and make pedagogical decisions as the assistantship progresses.

Therefore, I would suggest the agencies issue updated and detailed descriptions of each stakeholder’s prescribed functions, heads of Language Departments, FLAs’ tutors, educators, and FLAs. This is expected to clarify their relationships and partnerships and the teaching responsibilities required from FLAs and help reduce possible lack of communication, disappointment, and infringements of the guidelines. I recommend clearly explaining the unofficial tasks to ensure that all parties receive the same information and are made aware of possible sanctions, including suspending the agreement with the educational institution.

In addition to the reports annually required from tutors and FLAs, which are not always sent to nor read by the programme coordinators (according to my knowledge), I recommend the agencies send representatives to the educational institutions to report the SRTs performed and provide guidance if needed.

During this study, educators and assistants participated separately in several focus group interviews to share insights and reflect on FLAs’ practice. The data collected
showed that both groups benefited from these meetings. I suggest that Language Departments working with FLAs create a space for dialogue between the tutor, assistants, and educators. These meetings would contribute to conciliating the nature of evolving relationships and tasks assistants will most likely be expected to perform, fostering trust and constant communication and partnership, mitigating infringements and possible problematic power issues, and best serving the teaching and learning process's needs. These encounters could be held once a month, representing around five sessions throughout FLAs’ stay, where issues and suggestions are discussed and decisions are made collegially.

6.5 Future research

As an area with little attention from the literature, many aspects of language education assistantship still need to be explored. This research has enabled me to develop several propositions for future studies, which this section presents.

This case study focuses on the assistantship experiences of participants working and studying in a Mexican university. Although this country has been involved in two francophone bilateral FLAs exchanges for many years, including more than 100 educational institutions in Mexico and more than 150 assistants, no study has been published on this topic. It would be worth conducting studies in other Mexican educational institutions to further understand the assistantship experiences in the years to come. Research could include the pandemic's impact in the last couple of years, such as educators’ experiences working without the weekly assistants’ classroom performance in the teaching and learning process.

Additionally, it would be advisable to conduct a cross-sectional study to explore the experiences of FLAs in different educational institutions across Mexico and other countries, including those where this topic has not yet been explored (e.g., Argentina, Brazil, and India). This global research could explain how the SRTs are disseminated, understood, and performed in different contexts. It will also help raise awareness of the significance of FLAs in the teaching and learning process, especially in countries where they represent rare or only face-to-face contact with the target language and culture.
Furthermore, comparing cohorts from consecutive years working in the same institutional context could also provide valuable findings. In both research areas, the results collected could be sent to the stakeholders (see 6.4) to help them better understand the working context of FLAs, their issues, and their needs. At the same time, it would also encourage reflection on their positions and relationship with future cohorts, which would likely fast-track improvement on all fronts.

As this study focuses on collecting the experiences of participants involved with A1-level of French classrooms, further research could include A2 and B1 levels to observe possible differences and similarities in FLAs’ practice and performance of SRTs and stakeholders’ experiences.

Findings also show that the partnership between FLAs and educators could be improved. Future research could involve conducting focus group interviews with FLAs and educators and focus group interviews with both cohorts separated, in which they collectively shared perspectives and reflected on practice. By comparing the data collected on each type of focus group, it would be possible to identify if the observed frustration and infringements are reduced or absent through constant communication and closer partnerships. This research in different educational institutions could also help collect data on how the partnerships are fostered and/or developed in other contexts, observe similarities and differences, and provide examples of successful practice.

Future studies could also explore the impact of FLAs’ presence and performance on culture and language teaching. Collecting data on two cohorts would be helpful: one group with regular and numerous contacts with target cultures and language inside and outside the classroom via FLAs’ interventions and another with a single weekly classroom contact with assistants. This research could help identify the impact of these encounters on various factors: the motivation to discover more about each culture in a non-evaluating environment, the willingness to practice the language outside of class, and the sense of belonging to the community of cultural practice composed of assistants and students.

6.6 Dissemination of findings
This section presents the steps taken and the ones planned to disseminate this study’s findings in the future.

### 6.6.1 Conference papers

During this research journey, I presented my work at several conferences (Table 16).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Place/ Date</th>
<th>Presented in</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Outcomes of the conferences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th EECELE (encuentro de estudiantes y catedráticos de lenguas extranjeras) - National conference</td>
<td>Universidad del Valle de Puebla - Puebla, Mexico/ November 2017</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Pilot study results</td>
<td>Relative unawareness of FLAs' roles and interest in finding out more about this topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25th International conference on learning - International conference</td>
<td>University of Athens, Greece/ June 2018</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Research methods and early results</td>
<td>Attend presentations of papers related to the topic of culture in FL class and access more bibliographical references.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting Edges - International conference</td>
<td>Canterbury Christ Church, England/ June 2018</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Research methods and early results</td>
<td>I listened to authors that I consulted for my study and discovered new ways to see my results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Congress on education and learning - International conference</td>
<td>Université Diderot-Paris, France/ July 2018</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Research methods and early results</td>
<td>I gained closer contact with researchers from whom I learned a lot (Scholarship received).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LECTure series (Research cluster LECT-Learning, Education, Culture and Transformation - that I belong to) - National conference</td>
<td>Universidad de Guanajuato - Guanajuato, Mexico/ September 2018</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Research methods and early results</td>
<td>Audience's interest when listening to the insights, data collected and possible practical outcomes (especially the handbook).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14th FEL (Foro de Estudios en Lenguas) - International conference</td>
<td>Universidad de Quintana Roo- Playa del Carmen, Mexico/ October 2018</td>
<td>Spanish alongside two LECT colleagues</td>
<td>Significance of intercultural communication in FL classes</td>
<td>I gained closer contact with researchers from whom I learned a lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMIFRAM (asociación de maestros e investigadores de francés de México) - National conference</td>
<td>UANL - Monterrey, Mexico/ November 2018</td>
<td>French alongside a BA student</td>
<td>Assistants' functions in a Mexican institution</td>
<td>This event allowed me to compare my research context to the reality of other universities in which FLAs are working in Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interculturality in teacher education and training - International conference</td>
<td>Karlstad Universitet-Karlstad, Sweden/ June 2019</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Intercultural scope of assistantship</td>
<td>This conference focused on interculturality allowed me to receive attention from a community of ICC academics and envision collaborations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30th ASELE (Asociación para la Enseñanza del Español como Lengua Extranjera) - International conference</td>
<td>Politécnico de Porto- Porto, Portugal/ September 2010</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Reflective practice in language teaching</td>
<td>The focus of this conference was 'Internationalising the learning' and several speakers presented ways of including culture in FL classes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experiences of presenting the present study made me realise the potential national and international scope of the findings. Sharing my findings further with the research community could contribute to stakeholders, scholars, and possibly policymakers’ interest and awareness to consider FLAs as key stakeholders, for instance, enhancing intercultural communication in language education, especially in a non-immersion context.

6.6.2 Publications

In the light of the results of this study, it is reasonable to consider writing academic papers for refereed journals on the literature review and theoretical framework as well as the three main topics that emerged from the data analysis.

Firstly, a state-of-the-art article on the conceptual framework designed in Chapter 2 and the gap in the literature this research evidenced could be submitted to journals such as *Pedagogy, Culture, and Society*. This article would be, to my knowledge, the first academic publication to offer such an overview of the different stakeholders involved in the assistantship, especially outside of Europe, and how those are connected and communicate. It will also point out several areas of improvement such programmes should be exploring in the years to come.

Secondly, a French case study article would report specific FLA experiences in a Mexican higher education institution for the francophone journal *Synergies Mexique*. This journal focuses on studies conducted in Mexico on teaching realities in French language classrooms. This article will present and discuss which SRTs assistants perform and how.

Thirdly, a publication in the journal *Teaching and Teacher Education* would review existing publications on the assistants’ pedagogical responsibilities expected and performed. It will describe how these functions are endorsed in the present study and show the parties’ observed mismatches. This article would also provide recommendations to help mitigate possible issues and include guiding principles to foster practical collective reflection between stakeholders.

Lastly, French is taught and learned in a non-immersion and monolingual and cultural environment in my study. It would seem interesting and useful to disseminate the significance and impact of using cultural products and francophone culture-focused material designed by FLAs in class. This article
would include a literature review concerning the authenticity of the educational material and describe its impact on the teaching and learning process of cultural knowledge and possible intercultural skills. An original research article could be submitted to *Language, Culture, and Curriculum*, among other options.

Additionally, it would be helpful to publish an online handbook for the assistantship stakeholders. Participants in my study commented that the agencies did not provide sufficient insights into SRTs and general practice. Earlier, I recommended that assistantship programme agencies could be in charge of the design and dissemination of such a handbook, which I could contribute to based on my findings and knowledge of some assistantship experiences. This material will include the following resources:

- a detailed description of SRTs to align, designed according to agencies, the tutors’, educators’, and FLAs’ expectations
- guidelines and questions to encourage reflection through the assistantship (this resource could be used in monthly meeting sessions)
- a suggested calendar to schedule meetings
- a list of practice issues (using concrete examples of practice) with possible solutions collectively and examples of good practice and partnership (based on testimonies of former assistants, tutors, educators, and students).

In November 2022, this project generated interest and was awarded a grant from the University Council of Modern Languages. Before publishing the resource in The Open University’s OpenLearn Create platform, freely accessible worldwide, I intend to pilot it with the tutor and educators involved in the present study and future Francophone assistants and with a different cohort. The aim is to compare the accessibility of the resource between users with a living knowledge of collective reflection on FLAs’ practice and a cohort without such experience.

Furthermore, such a handbook could be shared and adapted to any other Language Departments working with assistants of any language. During conferences, I mentioned producing this handbook as a practical result of disseminating my research, which generated great interest. I am in contact with French Departments of Mexican higher education institutions that receive FLAs and are interested in using this material.
6.6.3 Degree programmes

The research and dissertation process impacted me professionally. Based on the theoretical knowledge I acquired throughout the past few years and my findings, I was able to disseminate my understanding of some topics among students.

In 2017, 2019, and 2021, I had the opportunity to teach the subject *Intercultural communication* in two BA programmes: Spanish as a second language teaching and English teaching. According to the focus of the present study and the insights obtained, I decided to include in this course topics such as (pre-) educators’ expectations, perceptions, and reflection when teaching culture in the language classroom. In addition, I conducted an action research based on my research experience and my willingness to share my BA students’ reflections on intercultural awareness in an individual portfolio. It explored the possibility of using this instrument to enhance reflection among pre-service English and Spanish educators to endorse cultural practices beneficial for their future students. This study was presented at several international conferences, including a national conference (AMIFRAM, see Table 16). One of my BA students participated with me, sharing her learning and reflection process she experienced in the course. It was gratifying for me to share a research experience with her.

Additionally, my research interest in intercultural communication and culture teaching in the language classroom provided some learners with suggestions and views on their BA dissertations. I also gave several workshops focused on interculturality to candidates for student exchanges.

6.7 Concluding statement

On the eve of submitting my thesis and after five years, I felt that this journey was difficult and sometimes lonely. Still, it has been the most rewarding experience I have been through in my academic years. Fortunately, I received constant guidance and advice along the way that helped me continue believing in the significance of my study and my abilities as a researcher.

The pandemic impacted the final stages of my project and the assistantship programmes. At the beginning of 2020, I started writing up my dissertation based on my preliminary analysis. As it coincided with the two years of COVID-19 confinement, this situation affected my access to the research site and my well-being, including feelings of loneliness and separation from the research and
teaching communities. Still, I feel grateful for the time I had to reflect and write about my doctoral research.

During the pandemic, higher institutions started to teach language virtually, and the agencies of assistantship suspended the programmes. According to the websites of the French, French-Canadian, and Mexican agencies, exchanges of FLAs are scheduled to restart in September 2022. Despite international mobility restrictions, the assistantship, as language classes continued, could have been carried out online. This situation generated many discussions. The way that educational institutions had to adapt the language learning process leaves room for new types of assistantship experiences in the future, including virtual encounters (e.g., webinars and forums), potentially providing opportunities to disseminate assistants’ target cultures to a wider audience and variety of resources through a (first) professional experience abroad. However, the fact that agencies did not explore this option evidences the significance still attributed to face-to-face contact for the stakeholders involved in the assistantship programmes.

The analysis of the participants’ perspectives brought a further understanding of how they experienced FLAs’ practice and the place of culture in the language teaching and learning process. This allowed me to critically interpret the official information provided by the agencies and suggest adjustments. According to my findings, I contend that the shape of assistantship programmes in the future should further emphasise developing FLAs’ intercultural communication skills and train them to make references to linguistic and cultural variations. Additionally, this focus echoes the specific skills needed for an effective communicator in intercultural environments included in CEFR (2018, 2020), therefore giving even more significance to the presence of such mediators in language classrooms.

Today, I consider myself more aware and better prepared as an educator and a colleague to adapt my institution’s action plans and guidance to future FLAs. Based on the encouraging results collective discussion had on educators and assistants, I am decided to further promote awareness of the practice of reflection among stakeholders working alongside FLAs in my Language Department and other Mexican higher education institutions. The purpose of this is to encourage communication and a shared understanding of integrating FLAs and cultural knowledge into the language classroom.
My research and its dissemination support the need to further explore how the assistantship is understood and experienced by the participants. It is hoped that it will encourage the development of awareness and closer partnership on the part of stakeholders and policymakers in the outreach of the presence and performance of FLAs among the language teaching community, especially in a non-European context.
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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Literature search record

Table 17 shows the details of the literature search.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Database searched</th>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Limiters</th>
<th>Number of results</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 2018</td>
<td>ResearchGate</td>
<td>Assistants de langue étrangère and Status Assistants de langue étrangère and Rôles Assistants de langue étrangère and Expériences</td>
<td>2000 onwards</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Exclude teaching assistants and assistants working in bi-multilingual primary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign language education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January and August 2021</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>French, English, Spanish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2018</td>
<td>Dialnet</td>
<td>Assistants de langue étrangère and Collaboration Assistants de langue étrangère and Formation</td>
<td>I relied on the relevancy ranking and customised search engines for Google and Google Scholar search, and only consulted institutional websites.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January and August 2021</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2018 October 2018 September 2020</td>
<td>OULibrary</td>
<td>Foreign language assistants and FLA and Language assistants Foreign language assistants and status</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Date Range</td>
<td>Platform</td>
<td>Keywords</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2017</td>
<td>Google (English, Spanish, and French)</td>
<td>Foreign language assistants and Roles Assistantship experiences</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2017</td>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign language assistants and Partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td>Training in assistantship</td>
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<td>January and August</td>
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<td>Google Scholar</td>
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<td>Foreign language assistants and Roles Assistantship experiences</td>
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<td>Foreign language assistants and Partnership</td>
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<td>Training in assistantship</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2017</td>
<td>ERIC</td>
<td>Asistentes de lenguas extranjeras</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td>Auxiliar de conversación</td>
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<td>January and August</td>
<td></td>
<td>Asistentes de lenguas extranjeras and Estatuto</td>
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<td>2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2018</td>
<td>ScienceDirect</td>
<td>Auxiliar de conversación y Estatuto</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td>Asistentes de lenguas extranjeras y Estatuto</td>
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<td>January and August</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2019</td>
<td>Wiley Online Library</td>
<td>Auxiliar de conversación y Experiencias</td>
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<tr>
<td>January and August</td>
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<td>Asistentes de lenguas extranjeras y Experiencias</td>
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<td>2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2018</td>
<td>Taylor and Francis Online</td>
<td>Auxiliar de conversación y Colaboración</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td>Asistentes de lenguas extranjeras y Colaboración</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2019</td>
<td>Semantic Scholar</td>
<td>Asistentes de lenguas extranjeras y Capacitación</td>
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<tr>
<td>January and August</td>
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<td>2021</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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6 Websites
Appendix 2 – Meetings with CIEP, DGRI, and EA

1- CIEP
In June 2016, I met the recruitment coordinator for Latin America of foreign language assistants at CIEP in Sèvres, France. This meeting allowed me to collect further documents on the selection process, the training received, and the connection between CIEP, DGRI, and Mexican host universities. The list below presents the material collected during this encounter:

- Guide for the foreign language assistants in France (2016);
- country profile and general information (Mexico edition - 2016), and
- training schedule with future FLAs in Mexico held in Sèvres (2016).

2- Échanges Azimut
In July 2016, I contacted the exchange programme coordinator for FLAs in Québec, Canada. The coordinator sent me some documents used for FLAs’ training, provided in Québec and shared information on the selection and the connection between EA, DGRI, and Mexican host universities. These documents were:

- workshops’ outlines (culture shock, classroom management and pedagogical advice) (EA, 2015);
- booklet of classroom activities designed and performed by former French-Canadian FLAs (EA, 2015), and
- country profile and general information (Mexico edition - 2016).

3- DGRI
In September 2016 and 2019, the French coordinator at my university asked me to attend the FLAs tutors’ meeting, in Mexico City, at the French Institute for Latin America. During this encounter, several topics were addressed: administrative information to the tutors, answering practical questions or situations related to FLAs’ missions and tutors’ responsibilities. Nearly 100 participants, including tutors from different parts of the country and three supervisors from three agencies involved in the FLAs’ enrolment and management: DGRI in charge of the FLAs
exchange programme, and a representative of the French embassy in Mexico. The information shared consisted of the following:

- FLA programme guidelines;
- host educational institutions' obligations;
- tutors' responsibilities and the language assistant roles, and
- pedagogical websites and material available online to download.
Appendix 3 – Summary of the data collection instruments and data analysis procedure

Table 18 illustrates the instruments used in this study to collect data, including the participants with whom these were conducted and the dates when these were conducted.

Table 18: Instruments, participants, and dates in the data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FLAs</td>
<td>Initial in-depth semi-structured interview (Int1)</td>
<td>September 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group interview 1 (FGIA1)</td>
<td>November 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group interview 2 (FGIA2)</td>
<td>December 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group interview 3 (FGIA3)</td>
<td>February 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group interview 4 (FGIA4)</td>
<td>March 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group interview 5 (FGIA5)</td>
<td>April 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final in-depth semi-structured interview (Int2)</td>
<td>April 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Logbook entries</td>
<td>September 2017 to April 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>Initial questionnaire (Qedu)</td>
<td>September 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group interview 1 (FGIE1)</td>
<td>December 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group interview 2 (FGIE2)</td>
<td>June 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Logbook entries</td>
<td>September 2017 to April 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Initial questionnaire 1 (Q1a)</td>
<td>September 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final questionnaire 2 (Q2a)</td>
<td>December 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial questionnaire 1 (Q1b)</td>
<td>February 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final questionnaire 2 (Q2b)</td>
<td>June 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 19 explains the procedure used to conduct the data collection instruments in the main study.

Table 19: Data collection procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1: General information and consent</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>Logbook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants read and signed the information sheet (Appendix 1), in which I shared the objectives of my project and Consent form (Appendix 2), in which I ensured their privacy and participants accepted the terms of the data collection process.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The French coordinator and I established the date and place for the student questionnaires. According to the respondents’ availability, I established the dates to send by email questionnaires to educators and former FLAs.</td>
<td>According to the focus of this instrument, I established to give it to FLAs and educators at the beginning of the assistants’ practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 2: Schedule</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>Logbook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants and I establised the date and place for the interview.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 3: Design of the instrument</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>Logbook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I designed the interview outlines, including the main topics to discuss and several questions (Appendices 3 to 6 and 12 to 16).</td>
<td>I designed both questionnaires conducted to the students (Appendices 8 and 9).</td>
<td>I designed the questionnaires for educators and former FLAs (Appendices 10 and 7).</td>
<td>I designed instructions and guidelines (Appendix 17).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 4: Conduct the instruments</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>Logbook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I interviewed the participants. Each encounter is recorded using an audio recorder.</td>
<td>I conducted the questionnaire in the classrooms.</td>
<td>I sent emails to educators and former FLAs.</td>
<td>I delivered the logbook to each FLAs and educators, which they used throughout the practice and at the end of each focus group interview.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 5: Prepare results for analysis</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>Logbook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I transcribed the recorded information.</td>
<td>I read all the questionnaires and wrote in MS Word all the answers for each question.</td>
<td>I read all the entries and wrote in MS Word all the sessions reported.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 6: Dissemination of the results/findings</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>Logbook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upon the respondents’ request, I offered to send them the transcription of the interviews or the detailed answered of the questionnaires by email, or to return the logbooks. However, none requested it. A few months after the Viva, I will present my findings to the participants at a virtual conference.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4 – Initial questionnaire (Educators) – September 2017

Name: __________________ Years of professional experience: ___________

Educator, this questionnaire aims to collect input concerning your expectations and experiences working with the assistants. It will take you 30-40 minutes to complete. Your answers are confidential and used only for the purpose of this study.

Thank you for taking the time to answer and helping me out by sharing your experiences.

1- According to your experience, are there any benefits to having a Foreign Language Assistant (FLA) in your classroom? If so, what are they?

2- Are there any disadvantages to having a FLA in your classroom? If so, what are they?

3- What do you expect from FLAs, and what do you think they will expect from you?

4- What kind of interaction and contact do you await to have with FLAs?

5- What kind of interaction and contact do you await for your students’ interaction with FLAs?

6- What cultural content do you wish FLAs to present and develop in the classroom?

7- From your point of view, which qualities should a FLA possess?

8- Do you include FLA (e.g., contribution, presence, activities) in your lesson plan? If so, please explain how.
Appendix 5 – Initial questionnaire (Students) – September 2017

Assistant name: ___________________ Group: ___________________

Student, this questionnaire aims to collect your expectations about the language assistants and their roles. This will take you 15-20 minutes to complete. Your answers are confidential and used only for the purpose of this study.

Thank you for taking the time to answer and helping me out by sharing your opinion.

1- According to you, a foreign language assistant is: (order the 5 options: 5 = totally agree, 4 = partially agree, 3 = agree, 2 = agree a little or 1 = disagree)
- an educator of his or her native language
- a trainee or future educator
- an international student on a gap year
- an educational facilitator for sociocultural activities
- a language and cultural model

2- Foreign language assistants (French and French-Canadian) will attend and participate in your class from September to April. What do you expect their tasks to be?

3- Do you think there is a difference between an educator and a FLA? Why or Why not? Please explain.

4- Do you think the presence of assistants will represent an element of change in the classroom? Please elaborate.

5- What kind of interaction and contact with FLAs do you await to have?

6- What cultural content would you hope FLAs present and develop in the classroom?
Appendix 6 – Final questionnaire (Students) – June 2018

Assistant name: _____________ Group: ________________

Student, this questionnaire aims to collect your impressions about the language assistants and their roles. It will take you 15-20 minutes to complete. Your answers are confidential and used only for the purpose of this study.

Thank you for taking the time to answer and helping me out by sharing your experience.

1- After a semester of practice, define a language assistant:

2- Select the sociocultural content shared by the assistants (in class or/and outside) and describe the tasks performed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociocultural content</th>
<th>Social-cultural content shared</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyday living (e.g., food, schedule, pastime...)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living conditions (e.g., living standard...)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal relations (e.g., family; work...)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values and beliefs (e.g., history; art, religion...)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-verbal communication (e.g., gestures)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social conventions (e.g., invitations ...)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rituals (e.g., celebrations)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3- Do you have any suggestions for the assistant to improve their practice?
   Please explain.
Sample of a student’s answers to the final questionnaire:

Nombre del /de la asistente: X X X 
Grupo de francés: 5-106

A través de este cuestionario podrás plasmar tus impresiones sobre los asistentes de idiomas y lo que hizo durante este semestre. Te tomará 15-20 minutos. Tus respuestas son confidenciales y se usarán con el único motivo de un proyecto de investigación. Gracias por tomarte el tiempo de contestar y de ayudarme compartiendo tus experiencias.

1- Después de un semestre conviviendo con los asistentes, define que es para ti un asistente de idioma:

El asistente asiste al profe y a nuestro aprendizaje, de forma más informal.

2- Señala en la tabla las nociones socio-culturales que el/la asistente compartió (en clase o afuera de clase) y describe a grandes rasgos cómo te fueron presentadas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nociones socioculturales compartidas</th>
<th>Nociones compartidas por el/la asistente Selecciona</th>
<th>Actividad realizada</th>
<th>Lugar de enseñanza Selecciona</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vida cotidiana (eje: comida, horarios, pasatiempos...) (Sí) / No</td>
<td>Habló de sus actividades fuera de la uni, como hockey y karaoke</td>
<td>En clase</td>
<td>Fuera de clase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estilo de vida (eje: prestaciones sociales, nivel de vida...) (Sí) / No</td>
<td>Cuando descubrieron su ciudad, mencionaron el tipo de barrio y cómo viven algunas personas</td>
<td>En clase</td>
<td>Fuera de clase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaciones interpersonales (eje: en familia, en el trabajo...) (Sí) / No</td>
<td>En la primera clase, ella presentó su familia.</td>
<td>En clase</td>
<td>Fuera de clase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valores y creencias (eje: historia, arte, religión...) (Sí) / No</td>
<td>Habló de la historia de Quebec</td>
<td>En clase</td>
<td>Fuera de clase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comunicación no verbal (eje: gestos) (Sí) / No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>En clase</td>
<td>Fuera de clase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reglas de convivencia (eje: invitación, respeto...) (Sí) / No</td>
<td>Realizamos una actividad sobre el día de San Valentín y supimos cómo se celebra en Canadá</td>
<td>En clase</td>
<td>Fuera de clase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutinas (eje: celebraciones familiares o nacionales...) (Sí) / No</td>
<td>Nos disfrutamos para el día de las muertas y Halloween</td>
<td>En clase</td>
<td>Fuera de clase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3- ¿Tienes algunas recomendaciones para a los asistentes para mejorar su práctica? Explica, por favor

Me gusta cuando viene en la clase porque es más divertido y que practicamos mucho lo que se ve en la maestra. Quiero ver la más seguido.
Interview Objective:
Assistant, this interview aims to collect input concerning your cultural background and your expectations as a future language assistant in the French Department. This recorded interview lasts 1h00-1h30. The researcher only uses transcription and translation of your participation for this study’s purpose.

Thank you for taking the time to answer and helping me out by sharing your experiences.

Foreign Language Assistants’ (FLA) Context:
1- What were your reasons for applying to the language assistant programme in Mexico? What sociocultural concepts do you associate with Mexico and its population?
2- Since your arrival, have you felt any kind of ‘culture shock’? If so, please elaborate.
3- How do you envisage your role as a language assistant through class observations and/or the university’s modus operandi?
4- Are there any cultural notions that you find sensitive to deal with within the foreign language classroom? Please elaborate.

Cultural background:
1- Please define your cultural, religious and social identity.
2- What kind of interaction do you have with individuals of different racial, religious and cultural backgrounds?
3- What cultural concepts and ideas are usually related to your background?

Assistant’s identity in a foreign culture:
1- In your opinion, is there a French or French Canadian identity? What are the defining elements? Please elaborate.
2- Inferring from what you observed, is there a Mexican identity? What are the defining elements? Please elaborate.
3- On the characteristics you observed from the Mexican identity, which ones are drawn the furthest away from your attitude, values and beliefs, and if these are difficult to understand?
4- From your perspective, what challenges have native educators teaching their language in a foreign country in a non-immersion context?
Appendix 8 – Final individual semi-structured interview (FLAs) – April 2018

Assistant, this interview aims to collect input concerning your cultural and professional experiences as a language assistant in the French Department. This recorded interview lasts 1h00-1h30. The researcher uses transcription and translation of your participation only for the purpose of this study.

Thank you for taking the time to answer and helping me out by sharing your experiences.

1- For each stage, describe personal and professional learning:
   - The first weeks (Observation, calendar,…)
   - The first classes (Planning, presentations,…)
   - The content shared during classes
   - The knowledge of Mexican culture and students’ interests (Celebrations, language, traditions,…)
   - The Francophonie weeks
   - The last days of classes

2- Describe the logbook's role, the educators' feedback, the students, the assistant and the focus group interviews.

3- The roles of the assistants, according to the CIEP, are

   [...] d’améliorer les compétences en communication des élèves (notamment à l’oral) et d’approfondir leur connaissance d’une civilisation et d’une culture différentes. Il intervient généralement en appui au travail mené par les enseignants de langue vivante de l’établissement scolaire où il est affecté et sous leur tutelle (pratique de la langue orale avec les élèves aux côtés du professeur, participation à diverses activités éducatives de l’établissement, contribution à des enregistrements authentiques destinés à enrichir les collections audiovisuelles des établissements, aide personnalisée à l’élève, animation d’un club de langue…). (CIEP, 2018)

   Which one did you accomplish? Did you perform others?

4- For each theme, explain your perceptions and possible evolutions that you observed.
   - Language teaching
- Teaching culture in the language classroom
- Material and content
- Teaching decisions
- Agencies (CIEP, DGRI, and EA)
- French Department
- The SAC

5- An overview of the assistantship
- What would you have changed in your assistantship experience (tasks performed, attitudes, relationship types between students and educators,…)?
- Did you like or dislike your teaching practice experience? Explain.
- Which advice would you give to future FLAs?
- Did this cultural, professional, and personal experience impact your future projects? Explain.
Appendix 9 – Initial focus group interview (Educators) – December 2017

Educators, this interview aims to collect input in relation to your cultural and professional experiences working alongside the language assistants. This recorded interview lasts 1h30-2h00. The researcher uses transcription and translation of your participation only for the purpose of this study.

Thank you for taking the time to answer and helping me out by sharing your experiences.

1- Comparing experiences
   - Types of activities performed by the assistants in class
   - Selection of the topics and the didactic sequence
   - Presence of the assistant in class (for students and educators and within the learning process)
   - Attitudes of the assistants during the semester in the classroom and university (relationship with students, educators, teaching practice, content shared,…)
   - Overview of the semester for each assistant (professional, cultural, and personal evolution, feedback and suggestions)

2- Roles of the educators
   - Testimonies of their experiences as FLA (differences or similarities, did this experience influence your relationship with the current assistants?)
   - Define your roles as educators in the assistantship
   - Assistants in class (How, why, and when to intervene or interfere? Did you or they face a problem? How did you solve it?)
   - Suggestions to improve their presentations

3- Logbook and feedback
   - Use of the logbook (content, frequency, entries, positive and negative aspects, is it useful? Do you show it to assistants?)
   - Feedback (the role of feedback, how, when, what kind, and where to give it, and assistants’ reaction to the feedback)
4- Individual logbook entry: Summarise the session and list the objectives for next semester (relationship with assistants, feedback, your roles, what to do to help them…).
Appendix 10 – Final focus group interview (Educators) – June 2018

Educators, this interview aims to collect input in relation to your cultural and professional experiences working alongside the language assistants. This recorded interview lasts 1h30-2h00. The researcher only uses transcription and translation of your participation for this study’s purpose.

Thank you for taking the time to answer and helping me out by sharing your experiences.

1- Comparing experiences
   - Types of activities performed by the assistants in class
   - Selection of topics and the didactic sequence
   - Attitudes of the assistants during the semester in the classroom and university (relationship with students, educators, teaching practice, content shared,…)
   - Overview of the semester for each assistant (professional, cultural, and personal evolution, feedback and suggestions)

2- Roles of the educators
   - Assistants in class (How, why and when to intervene or interfere? Did you or they face a problem? How did you solve it?)
   - Have you noticed any change in your roles, position in the classroom during their presentations, or your professional relationship with FLAs?

3- Logbook and feedback
   - Have you noticed any change in your use of the logbook? In your comments?
   - Have you noticed any change in how you provided them with feedback? (types of feedback, changes in your expectations, etc.)

4- Individual logbook entry: Summarise the session and list the objectives for the next FLAs’ cohort (e.g., relationship with assistants, feedback, your roles, what to do to help them).
The translated version of the transcript sample of educators’ final focus group interview:

“Researcher: Thank you for coming today. I will record the interview. It’s pretty similar to what we did last time. Let’s look at the first topic, comparing experiences. What kinds of classroom activities did the assistants do during the semester? How did they choose their topics and teaching techniques? Could you describe the attitudes of the assistants?

E3: With FLA1, we started to do cultural activities, but there was also grammar and vocabulary at the same time. For example, the first activity was to introduce herself, she wrote on the board, and we prepared a PowerPoint presentation for her to show. She said it could be a model for their reports or oral exams. It was different from the last time that she did her presentation. The first time she talked about Québec was pictures of the food and the geographical situation; this time, she did the letter and the personal introduction simultaneously. It was more complete.

E2: Games are another kind of activity. In order to introduce vocabulary, for example, matching an image to a word with cards or on the board. I asked them to do presentations linked to the final oral exam to give the students a model. We chose the topics at the start of the semester; FLA1 was the one that decided how she would do her presentation. She would ask me a week before what I wanted. After class, I write their activities in the logbook and my feedback simultaneously, sending them a photo via Messenger. And the techniques… in general, she was the one to give the presentations. I was in the class with her, I only left two or three times. With FLA2, I had more control because he didn’t really know what to do at the beginning. For example, for his presentation about his town, I told him, ‘You must talk about the layout, etc.’ before the class. Sometimes he would talk with just one photo, and I recommended that he write things in the passé compose, for example, when he talked about his trip to Togo. So he didn’t explain any grammar points. I did that.

E1: FLA1 would send me the documents. At the start, she did a presentation about traditional dishes from Québec, with photos. She compared Mexican and Quebecois dishes. Then she used a song. Afterwards, we looked at the topic of housing, using a little advert from Québec. We looked at its vocabulary; then the students had to write their own advert.”
Appendix 11 – Initial focus group interview (FLAs) – November 2017

Assistants, this session aims to collect input in relation to your cultural and professional experiences as a language assistant in the French Department. This recorded session lasts 1h30-2h00. The researcher only uses transcription and translation of your participation for this study’s purpose.

Thank you for taking the time to answer and helping me out by sharing your experiences.

1- Overview of the first weeks:
   - Roles of FLAs in Mexico, French Department, and classes.
   - Relationship with the Mexican culture, students, and educators.
   - French teaching practice
   - Pedagogical and cultural content (resources, communication with educators, choice of content, planning, strategies)
   - Logbook (how they use it and when)

2- Assistant = intercultural mediator - Discuss and give examples:
   - Intercultural Communicative Competence - Table designed by the researcher
   Components of intercultural communicative competence in the language classroom - Byram (1997) and CEFR (2001, 2018, and 2020)
   - Attitudes, knowledge, comprehension, and actions (Council of Europe, 2014, pp.19–21)

3- Individual logbook entry: Personal, professional, and cultural goals for the following weeks.
Appendix 12 – Second focus group interview (FLAs) – December 2017

Assistants, this session aims to collect input in relation to your cultural and professional experiences as a language assistant in the French Department. This recorded session lasts 1h30-2h00. The researcher only uses transcription and translation of your participation for this study’s purpose.

Thank you for taking the time to answer and helping me out by sharing your experiences.

1- Overview of the past months: organisation, schedule, cooperation between educators, students, and assistants, planning classes, material, SAC, cultural topics …

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<th>Negative aspects</th>
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2- Discussion on sociocultural topics in the classroom (Kandeel, 2013, pp.80–81).

3- Individual logbook entry: Personal, professional, and cultural goals for the next semester.
Appendix 13 – Third focus group interview (FLAs) – February 2018

Assistants, this session aims to collect input in relation to your cultural and professional experiences as a language assistant in the French Department. This recorded session lasts 1h30-2h00. The researcher only uses transcription and translation of your participation for this study’s purpose.

Thank you for taking the time to answer and helping me out by sharing your experiences.

1- Personal, professional and cultural goals for the semester January-June 2018 (established at the end of the semester September-December 2017):
   - Read and comment on your goals (What has changed? What are these goals? - compare and discuss with FLAs)

2- First weeks of the semester: Tasks accomplished in January (positive and negative aspects)

3- Analysis of the material (Skopinskaja, 2003)
   - Textbook *Alter Ego + A1* (material used in the classroom)
   - Material designed by the assistants

4- Individual logbook entry: Personal, professional, and cultural goals for the coming weeks.
Appendix 14 – Fourth focus group interview (FLAs) – March 2018

Assistants, this session aims to collect input in relation to your cultural and professional experiences as a language assistant in the French Department. This recorded session lasts 1h30-2h00. The researcher only uses transcription and translation of your participation for this study’s purpose.

Thank you for taking the time to answer and helping me out by sharing your experiences.

1- Overview of the past months in three categories (negative and positive aspects, and aspects to improve): organisation, schedule, cooperation between educators, students, and assistants, planning classes, material, SAC, and cultural topics …

2- Comment on ‘El reporte de actividad’ (a document FLAs completed for the assistantship coordination in Mexico-DGRI- to report their experience).

3- Comment on ‘Courrier des assistants’ a newsletter sent by CIEP to FLAs

4- Discuss and comment on ‘Démarche interculturelle progressive d’auto-formation’ (Virasolvit, 2013)

5- Individual logbook entry: Personal, professional, and cultural goals for the coming weeks.
Appendix 15 – Final focus group interview (FLAs) – April 2018

Assistants, this session aims to collect input in relation to your cultural and professional experiences as a language assistant in the French Department. This recorded session lasts 1h30-2h00. Transcription and translation of your participation are used, by the researcher, only for the purpose of this study.

Thank you for taking the time to answer and helping me out by sharing your experiences.

1- Preparation of the Francophonie week (time, programme, material,…).
   Discussion.

2- Overview of the week (evaluate each event individually)
   Opinion and intercultural approach to the activities. Discuss in group.

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3- Overview of the cooperation between the assistants (positive and negative aspects, what did you learn from this experience, the sessions,…)

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The translated version of the transcript sample of FLAs’ final focus group interview:

“Researcher: Hello, both of you. It’s our last session together, and we’re going to talk about Francophonie week, which took place from the 16th to the 19th of April 2018. Let’s start with the preparation process.

FLA2: FLA1 and I prepared for Francophonie week when we returned in January, but E1 confirmed the programme quite late. It was enough time because I spent the week preparing for my activities. The programme was varied and really good, and I’m happy with the work FLA1 and I did.

FLA1: The programme was confirmed a week before Francophonie week. We didn’t prepare together; we divided the activities, and everyone prepared at home.

FLA2: We only had some activities together, like the Youtubers.

FLA1: Yes, but each person prepared their speech and presentation for the activity, and we improvised. The week was confirmed very late, and certain students weren’t aware. We sent the programme two months ahead to give ourselves lots of time so that that word would spread quickly, and then it was confirmed very late.

Research: With regard to the first edition, what was different?

FLA1: For my part, I had less preparation to do. And you?

FLA2: Yes, I had to work quite a lot because I wanted to prepare interesting activities, and I wanted to give it my all, to leave a good impression because it’s the end of my job as an assistant. I really did it all from scratch because it was a talk, and I was under a bit more pressure because it was in front of a bigger audience.

FLA1: That wasn’t even in the original plan. E1 was the one who added them, and it was at the last minute. She emailed us the plan for Francophonie week, explaining the changes and asking us to confirm the following day.

FLA2: I’d like to add that the programme was very varied, and some activities called out more to the students, like the Youtubers and the insult workshop.”
Appendix 16 – Logbook guidelines

Dear educator,

This logbook will accompany you during the school year, and in which you could gather information related to the presentations of the assistants in your classrooms. The objective is to highlight elements that occur in the class during the assistants’ practice. This will allow you to support them in their practice and reflect on assistants’ and your roles.

These elements listed below could guide you to comment on the assistants’ presentations:

- Date:
- Number of students:
- Group:
- Time:
- Name of the activity:
- Length:
- Cultural goals:
- Material used:
- Recommendations:
- Students’ perception:
- Educator’s perception:

Thank you again for your cooperation.

Dear assistant,

This logbook will accompany you during the school year, and in which you can gather the information related to your presentations in class. The objective is to highlight the elements that occur during your practice. This will allow you to reflect on your professional practice and roles as an assistant.

These elements listed below could guide you to comment on your presentations:

- Date:
- Number of students:
- Group:
- Time:
- Name of the activity:
- Length:
- Cultural goals:
- Material used:
- Recommendations:
- Students’ perception:
- Educator’s perception:

Thank you again for your cooperation.
Appendix 17 – Original quotes of data collection

Chapter 4

Section 4.1

Je suis là pour prêter main forte au prof, pour enseigner des choses de ma culture au Mexicains. C’est ce qu’on fait les assistants dans mon université […] parce je suis qu’un assistant de langue pas un prof de langue. (FLA1)

Faire en sorte que les étudiants veulent apprendre le français, leur donner une bonne impression de la France. […] parce que quand tu aimes quelque chose, tu veux apprendre […] le défi pour les profs c’est qu’ils doivent enseigner la grammaire. (FLA2)

Nous avons eu la visite de responsables de sécurité qui s’occupe des français à l’étranger, et ils ont vraiment mis la pression […] On savait même pas comment on allait travailler. (FLA2)

Chaque assistant avait des idées et des interprétations différentes du poste […] c’est difficile de savoir ce qu’on est censé faire en pratique puisque l’agence savait même pas ce qui pouvait se passer. (FLA1)

Ils nous ont montré la description du poste d’assistant, c’était la même chose qu’au Québec, qui était inutile de répéter, des longs paragraphes avec des termes compliqués que certains qui parlaient pas très bien espagnol pouvaient pas comprendre. (FLA1)

On doit faire attention là. L’agence mexicaine demande spécifiquement que les assistants partagent leur culture et participent à la pratique de communication orale ; pas d’enseigner la grammaire. (E1)

Section 4.2.1

Je sais qu’on va travailler en équipe avec eux [les assistants]. Je leur donne le sujet qui est en lien avec le niveau et le contenu étudié en classe avec les étudiants. (E1)

Le prof doit leur demander de planifier des activités selon la grammaire et le vocabulaire listés dans le programme. (E2)

On leur dit ce qu’ils doivent faire […] donne des conseils, et tout va bien. (E3)

Le fait qu’on ait des horaires complétement imprévisibles […] c’est un horaire difficile. Y’a pas un prof qui serait d’accord de travailler de 8 à 9am et de 5 à 6pm ou 6 heures d’affilé et d’avoir un nouvel horaire toutes les deux semaines. C’est ridicule. (FLA1)

La tutrice nous a dit de rester au centre d’auto-apprentissage, à la demande des professeurs, plutôt que de les aider pendant la 1ère semaine de cours où ils apprenaient à connaître les étudiants et présentaient le programme. Je voulais aider, comme n’importe quelle autre semaine. (FLA2)
Etre aussi importante que les profs et perçue comme une charge extra de travail pour eux. (FLA1)

On a une bonne communication et partenariat. Il y a une relation de confiance et un dialogue avec quelques profs. Ils nous laissent choisir les thèmes en lien avec le programmes [...] d’autres profs nous impose comment présenter le thème. (FLA1)

Je travaille avec des profs qui m’aident et me conseillent. On parle de mes activités; ils me donnent de la rétroaction pour améliorer ma pratique. (FLA2)

Quand les assistants ‘ont leur moment’, on peut les aider si il y a un problème [...], mais on ne s’impose pas. On est juste là si il y a un problème. (E1)

Les étudiants sont sur leur téléphones. Tu dois aider. [...] parfois, je sens qu’il y a trop de bruit. J’interviens aussi, mais c’est pour faire la police. (E2)

Ils viennent nous aider à présenter des activités mais pas pendant toute la durée de la classe. (E3)

Parfois, les profs nous laissaient prendre les rênes et ils faisaient des corrections. Pendant ce temps-là, ils avançaient dans leur travail. Ça me dérange pas, mais je peux imaginer que les étudiants disent que les profs nous utilisaient pour qu’ils puissent faire autre chose. (FLA1)

Je pense que l’idée de laisser sa place à l’assistant est un processus difficile pour eux, c’est pas comme si on les remplacaient dans le cœur des étudiants, mais c’est comme partager le pouvoir. (FLA1)

Je veux être plus impliqué dans le projet et dans le progrès des étudiants; je sentirais que notre travail d’assistants est plus utile. (FLA2)

Les étudiants ont dit qu’ils aimeraient nous voir plus dans leur classe. [...] C’est impossible de suivre les progrès de mes groupes [...]. Je voudrais avoir un groupe du début du semestre à la fin, pour voir leur progrès. (FLA1)

El asistente asista al profe y a nuestro aprendizaje, de una forma más informal. (S106)

[ella] nos ayudó a practicar con actividades divertidas. (S104)

[el] quiere ser maestra en el futuro y aprender de nuestra maestra [E2] Hace sus prácticas con nosotros. (S101)

[el] enseña en el lugar de nuestra profesora cuando está ocupada y cuando hay muchos estudiantes. (S103)

Les étudiants semblent être plus en confiance avec nous parce que nous ne sommes pas profs mais assistants; nous avons plus ou moins le même âge. Ils étaient moins stressés. (FLA2)

C’était facile pour eux de poser des questions plus personnels parce qu’on a le même âge. (FLA1)
Différente version de la culture française que celle vue en classe. (FLA1)

[…] immergé dans la culture mexicaine et être capable d’apprendre plus sur la culture. (FLA2)

Section 4.2.2

C’était toujours quelque chose qu’on a vu en classe. […] C’est plutôt apprendre des choses culturelles et réutiliser des notions de grammaire apprise avec moi en classe. (E1)

C’était toujours du vocabulaire et de grammaire. Je lui demandais [FLA1] de faire un jeu avec le vocabulaire que les étudiants avaient appris. (E2)

J’ai bien profité de sa présence [FLA2] pour faire des choses culturelles en lien avec les sujets qu’on avait étudiés. Par exemple, avec le futur proche, je lui ai demandé de parler de ses prochaines vacances. (E3)

J’ai dit aux assistants ce qu’on allait faire […] préparer quelques activités plus qu’autre chose, et il les a préparées. (E1)

Avec les étudiants, nous avons fait une liste des thèmes culturels. Les assistants ont décidé ensuite comment faire leurs présentations. Ils me demandaient une semaine à l’avance ce que je voulais. Je leur donne des petits conseils par mail. (E2)

Les assistants s’attendent à ce qu’on les aident à inclure leurs activités culturelles à nos séquences. (E3)

On doit suivre le programme, alors quand ils interviennent, c’est pour le côté culturel parce qu’on a pas le temps avec eux [assistants] de se concentrer sur autre chose que le vocabulaire, la compréhension écrite et orale." (E1)

On doit respecter un programme et on sent que les classes de culture prennent trop de temps et qu’on a pas assez de temps pour la grammaire et les révisions. […] alors on prend du retard sur le programme. (E2)

Je me sens pas à l’aise quand je fais juste des présentations sur des thèmes culturels et que la tête des étudiants est ailleurs. (FLA1)

ça me paraît plus simple de dire, ‘on va travailler avec le futur proche’ et de préparer une chose culturelle là-dessus. Je sens que les étudiants écoutent plus parce qu’ils viennent de l’apprendre. (FLA2)

Les étudiants ont aimé; ils ont beaucoup participé. Je vais réutiliser cette activité. (FLA1)

Je dois réviser cette info, ou cette partie de l’activité parce qu’elle avait pas marché du tout ou je peux l’adapter à différents niveaux. (FLA1)

On doit écouter les conseils des étudiants. (FLA1)

Ils ont compris le jeu, et ils ne voulaient pas s’arrêter de jouer. (FLA1)
J’ai progressé dans mes interventions. [...] Je m’adapte à mon public. L’activité doit avoir un impact sur les étudiants (plus c’est intéressant, plus ils sont motivés pour apprendre, et plus il y a de l’interaction). (FLA2)

Bonne interaction. On apprend et on rit, j’aime enseigner. J’ai enseigné cette classe 3 fois et j’ai amélioré cette activité, abandonné ce qui ne marchait pas. [...] Il faut mieux essayer et faire des erreurs que de regretter. (FLA2)

J’agis comme quelqu’un qui veut aider et diriger la groupe [...] j’essaie de fixer un objectif pour chaque classe, de transmettre quelque chose aux étudiants. J’aime promouvoir un climat de confiance. (FLA2)

L’organisation c’est un point important. J’ai une meilleure idée de la durée de l’activité maintenant. [...] La pratique constante m’a donné l’habilité d’évaluer et de tester mes activités, de gérer mon temps. (FLA1)

On a encore des choses à améliorer. On peut toujours progresser [...] je me rends compte que d’être un prof de français, c’est pas un boulot facile.” (FLA2)

Un cours, c’est pas juste 1h15 minutes que tu passes en classe, mais aussi ce qui se passe avant et après, la rétroaction, se replonger sur ma pratique en classe. (FLA2)

J’ai bien aimé avoir ce registre d’activités; ça m’a permis de noter mes propres impressions sur mes activités. J’ai écrit mon opinion, comment je sentais qu’allaient les choses. (FLA1)

Le cahier m’a permis de faire un pause après les leçons et d’écrire une évaluation de mes présentations. C’était important d’un point de vue personnel et professionnel, de faire des petites évaluations chaque semaine. (FLA2)

Il se sent plus confortable dans son enseignement et a appris à décoder le langage non-verbal, le ‘oui mexicain’ qui veut dire ‘non’. (E1)

Elle est théâtrale, donc même avec un simple geste elle peut expliquer des choses qu’ils [étudiants] n’auraient pas compris autrement. (E2)

Plus il apprend l’espagnol, plus facile ça sera pour lui d’expliquer, d’utiliser des expressions apparentées. (E3)

Je prends des notes […] seulement si il y a eu des problèmes, je leur dis juste mais je ne donne pas vraiment de rétroaction. (E1)

Je leur donne de la rétroaction directement après la leçon. Je dis ‘Viens dans mon bureau à midi, et je te donnerai de la rétroaction’. (E2)

J’écris leurs activités dans le journal et ma rétroaction simultanément, et je leur envoie une photo par Messenger. (E3)

À la fin de la classe, je demande toujours aux profs si ça allait. J’ai toujours de la rétroaction de mes présentations. Ça m’a beaucoup aidé pour mes interventions. (FLA1)
Je demande de la rétroaction de la part des professeurs sur mon enseignement. C’est vraiment bien, par exemple, je me suis améliorée dans mon changements de voix dans je parle en public, j’écris au tableau, explique des mots avec des synonymes, etc. (FLA2)

Avec FLA2, on a des perceptions très différentes. […] je remets en questions les idées et les valeurs de ma région, de mon pays […] de susciter des discussions. FLA2 a plus une perspective personnelle et parle de sa vie quotidienne. (FLA1)

Échanger des idées sur des sujets comme des attitudes, des connaissances, et des activités sera productif. […] J’ai aimé cette rencontre, d’avoir un aperçu, d’être ouvert, parler de tes sentiments et perceptions, c’est important de s’entraider. (FLA2)

C’est bon d’avoir de la rétroaction […] je pense que c’est dommage que les profs ne participent pas aux sessions. Ça aurait été important d’avoir une réunion par an, avec tous les profs et les assistants. (FLA1)

C’était intéressant de parler sur notre travail; on en parlerait pas à l’extérieur de l’école. C’était bien, j’ai bien aimé. […] nous sommes une bonne équipe. C’est aussi ce qui m’a facilité mon adaptation. (FLA2)

Cette activité de réflexion me permet de discuter sur différents thèmes, de prendre le temps de faire une pause, de penser sur la façon d’améliorer notre pratique et progresser.” (FLA2)

Nous analysons comment on enseigner, ce qui nous manque, et ce qui pourrait intéresser nos étudiants. Aussi, l’assistant donne […] dynamisme, des idées différentes, ou des activités. (E1)

Tu réfléchis quand les étudiants font une activité. […] tu dis, ‘ah, regardes, je pourrais l’utiliser avec un niveau différent’. C’est pour nous faire réfléchir sur notre enseignement. (E1)

[…] tu observes aussi le comportement des étudiants, leur langage corporel […] tu as différents angles, qui te permettent d’analyser ta façon d’enseigner. Aussi, de réutiliser les activités des assistants qui ont bien fonctionnées pour les faire avec mes étudiants d’autres niveaux. (E2)

C’était le fait d’observer les activités, comment les étudiants ont réagi, avoir des nouvelles idées, et comment donner des instructions structurées. C’est quelque chose que j’ai appris d’eux. (E3)

Section 4.3

Je m’attends à ce qu’ils parlent de l’histoire, des célébrations et des aspects de la vie quotidienne. (E2)

[…] la diversité des populations françaises et québécoises, les traditions, et comment agir dans leurs pays. (E3)
On risque de prendre du retard dans le programme. Parfois c’est trop juste de tout traiter parce que c’est une fois par semaine, ça veut dire qu’on a trois jours par semaine pour travailler la grammaire, etc. […] c’est un léger inconvénient pour moi. (E1)

Dans une partie de la classe nous avons essayé de regarder un point culturel, ça dépendait si ce point était présent dans le programme. Une fois par semaine est parfois trop. (E2)

En fonction de ses images, les étudiants lui ont posé des questions pour savoir comment est la vie en France. (E1)

Ellos no ayudan a entender expresiones coloquiales de sus países. (S104)

C’est bon d’avoir des ambassadeurs interculturels, parce que les profs ne sont pas toujours actualisés, spécialement sur la culture québécoise, qui est sous-représentée. (FLA1)

De part nos expériences de vie quotidienne avec la langue et culture cible, nous sommes garant d’une certaine authenticité. (FLA1)

Pour certains étudiants, être en classe avec l’assistant, c’est le seul moment où ils peuvent interagir face à face avec un étranger, qu’ils apprennent sur la culture de façon authentique. (E1)

Chapter 5

Section 5.1.1

Table 7: FLA1’s presentations in class

| Elle a partagé quelques expressions sur le sport et les étudiants en ont partagés en espagnol. Les étudiants et l’assistant ont appris, j’ai appris. (E3) |
| J’ai repris la culture de par les jeux auxquels on joue, et des conversations entre étudiants, après avoir joué. (FLA1) |
| La partie de mime était drôle. Même si on parlait des mêmes activités, les étudiants les ont mimées différemment de comment je l’aurais fait. C’est culturel, j’imagine. (FLA1) |

| C’est une diapositive qui inclut les professions qui sont typiques au Mexique. J’ai dit ‘Bon, regardez, au Mexique, vous avez ça. Donc, comment pouvez-vous décrire ce travail à un canadien ?’. (FLA1) |
| Les étudiants étaient surpris que FLA1 présente des professions typiquement mexicaines. Ils ont réalisé que ces métiers n’étaient pas connus ailleurs et qu’ils pouvaient utiliser leurs connaissances linguistiques pour présenter leur culture à des locuteurs natifs. (E1) |

| Si je dis ‘je vais regarder dans mon agenda’ c’est parce que je vais regarder dans mon agenda. […] J’ai fait cette activité dans |
un contexte mexicain parce que si je l’avais fait en Allemagne, les étudiants pourraient le comprendre du point de vue linguistique et pas culturel. (FLA1)

Les étudiants mexicains sont créative. Je savais que la dernière activité serait un succès. Ils ont utilisé le vocabulaire qu’ils avaient pour faire l’activité. (FLA1)

Les mexicains sont sentimentaux, ils étaient contents avec cette session, spécialement avec la lettre. (E2)

J’ai aimé la présentation, il y avaient beaucoup de jolies images. Ça aurait été pas mal d’inclure une photo de toi qui mange des plats typiques québécois. (FLA2)

Elle a utilisé beaucoup de photos et la vidéo a permis aux étudiants d’imaginer sa réalité, au Québec. (E1)

Comme les étudiants ne connaissent pas ma région, finalement la seule image qu’ils auront de ma région ça sera moi. Jusqu’à ce qu’ils y aillent. (FLA1)

Table 8: FLA2’s presentations in class

Il s’est déguisé en Catrin, pour le jour des morts pour enseigner. Les étudiants ont apprécié. (E3)

J’ai aimé la dernière partie. Les étudiants ont décrit des tenues mexicaines typiques en utilisant du vocabulaire en français. Aussi, certains sont venus en classe avec leurs visages maquillés. (FLA2)

Les étudiants ont participé en répondant aux questions sur leur culture et ont aimé créer leur tenue en utilisant leur vocabulaire français. (E2)

Je lui ai demandé de faire des activités où les étudiants pourraient produire quelque chose, comme élaborer des tenues ou des choses comme ça. (E2)

En fonction de ses images, les étudiants lui ont posé des questions pour savoir comment est la vie en France. (E1)

Je crois que les apprenants étaient intéressés. Ils m’ont posé des questions sur la façon dont ma sœur a célébré son mariage. (FLA2)

Il a utilisé différents types d’activités pour présenter et illustrer le thème et le vocabulaire. (E3)

Les étudiants étaient surpris d’observer les différences dans la façon dont les deux pays célèbrent la Saint Valentin.” (E3)

Au Mexique, cette célébration est très importante. Je n’étais pas surpris de voir que les étudiants étaient si participatifs. (FLA2)

Ils ont préféré quand FLA2 a partagé des expressions d’amour qu’ils pourraient utiliser avec leurs êtres chers. (E3)
Les étudiants étaient contents de découvrir les célébrations françaises et de comparer avec les événements mexicains, et de savoir qu’il a participé à certains d’entre eux. (E1)

Les étudiants m’ont posé beaucoup de questions, parfois en espagnol. Ils semblaient intéressés. (FLA2)

J’étais fière de mes étudiants. Ils ont utilisé les verbes et le vocabulaire des fêtes pour écrire un petit texte. (E2)

Il faut profiter de cette opportunité de parler avec des locuteurs natifs. (E2)

El asistente pone en práctica el idioma que vemos en clase, con la profesora, de forma divertida. (S101)

[el] te ayuda a practicar el idioma con dinámicas divertidas Es diferente con la maestra. (S103)

Los asistentes nos ayudan a ganar confianza. (S105)

Nos hablan para hacernos practicar, mucho más que con la maestra. (S106)

Section 5.1.2

Avons-nous pratiqué les compétences de communication ? Oui. C’était bien parce que j’ai eu différente responsabilités. J’ai un job comme assistant et un autre comme menant des jeux et des sessions de conversation au centre d’auto-apprentissage. (FLA2)

Les étudiants peuvent se déplacer comme ils veulent; c’est leur apprentissage […] Mais ils font pas ça […] pour le peu d’étudiants qui viennent, ils prennent rarement d’initiatives. Ils utilisent le centre d’auto-apprentissage comme si c’était une classe, pour faire les devoirs. (FLA1)

[el] enseña francés con sus experiencias. Es como un amigo.” (S103)

Ella es una compañera de clase, una ayudante a quien puedes hacer preguntas, hablarle, mejorar la pronunciación y practicar sin el miedo de la evaluación. (S105)

Estaba feliz de practicar francés en grupos pequeños; me gustó más. (S106)

J’ai fait une activité pour Thanksgiving avec les étudiants dans le centre d’auto-apprentissage. […] nous avons parlé des banques alimentaires de l’UNICEF pour Halloween […] Ça fait partie de ces choses qu’ils ne doivent pas apprendre pour un examen mais qu’ils veulent apprendre.” (FLA1)

Je sais que parfois au centre d’auto-apprentissage, je devrais parler plus français […] Même si mon travail est d’enseigner la culture française aux mexicains, je veux aussi apprendre sur la leur. […] Il y a tellement à apprendre sur la culture mexicaine que je devrais rester même plus. (FLA2)
Section 5.1.3

Après l’expérience que nous avons eu le semestre dernier pendant les examens oraux, on a eu une meilleure idée de ce que l’on devait faire. On s’est penché sur les thèmes des examens oraux dès la première semaine ; on a parlé comme des étudiants. FLA1 me posait une question, et je répondais, ensuite on a fait les transcriptions pour avoir des instruments pour entrainer les étudiants en classe. (FLA2)

C’est aussi un bon exercice pour nous de voir comment les étudiants se sentent pendant les examens. […] C’est bon de voir les choses de l’autre côté. (FLA1)

C’est pas facile de répondre à différents thèmes. […] de parler face à un panel pendant trois minutes. Imagine le faire dans une autre langue. (FLA2)

Section 5.2.1

Ils ont réalisé que ces métiers n’étaient pas connus ailleurs et qu’ils pouvaient utiliser leurs connaissances linguistiques pour présenter leur culture à des locuteurs natifs. (E1)

Ça leur permet de voir la réalité d’un autre jeune adulte, dans un pays francophone, de première main. (E3)

[ella] nos enseña sobre los costumbres cotidianas de Canada, no lo hace nuestra maestra. (S103)

En fonction de ses images, les étudiants lui ont posé des questions pour savoir comment est la vie dans son pays. (E1)

Nos estimula a desarrollar nuestra competencia comunicativa, en contextos de la vida real, sobre costumbre culturales francesas. (S102)

Section 5.2.2

Les profs doivent en parler dans leurs classes; j’étais un peu déçue. Ils n’auraient pas dû dire qu’ils devraient y aller pour réduire leurs absences mais parce que la semaine de la Francophonie est important, la culture d’un pays est important. (FLA1)

Ça aurait été mieux pour eux de trouver une autre forme d’être acteurs de la semaine de la Francophonie, pas juste spectateurs. (FLA1)

Ils ont toujours leur feuille pour que nous la signons pour prouver qu’ils sont venus et réduire leurs absences en classe. C’est dommage qu’on en arrive à ça. (FLA2)

Ça manquait de participants […] il n’y avait pas beaucoup de volontaires; ils sont restés muets ! (FLA2)
J’ai senti que j’étais parfois seule, et si les profs se sont pas là, les étudiants ne se sentent pas obligés de venir. (FLA1)

Les profs n’étaient pas toujours présents; ça aurait été bon de rassembler le plus possible de personnes. (FLA2)

Les étudiants osent poser des questions sur la vie culturelle, sur des choses que nous n’avons pas abordées en classe. (E1)

Des exemples de ce qui est culturellement important pour chaque pays qui parle français. (E3)

Ils ont appris de nouvelles choses sur le Québec. (E3)

Table 10 : FLAs’ comments on Francophonie week activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C’est mon voyage dans leur pays. C’était un étranger qui leur montrait des photos de ces endroits. J’ai essayé de montrer la différence entre voyageur et touriste.</td>
<td>FLA2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peut-être ils n’avaient pas d’information culturelles. Pour apprendre une langue, tu dois apprendre à te laisser aller, être plus naturel et tu peux pas avoir peur d’avoir l’air stupide.</td>
<td>FLA1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C’est très culturel. Je pense que il y a des vidéos pour tous les goûts, la partie amusante des cultures, le côté politique, le côté socio-politique.</td>
<td>FLA1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je leur ai posé des questions sur ce qu’ils aiment comme type de musique […] ils se sont rendu compte qu’ils pouvaient écouter de la musique qu’ils aiment dans une autre langue. C’est très culturel.</td>
<td>FLA1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C’était une chasse aux trésors en français. Quelques personnes ne connaissaient bien pas la ville, mais c’était une opportunité pour qu’ils visitent rapidement la ville en utilisant la ville.</td>
<td>FLA2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La langue officielle était le français. Ils avaient beaucoup de questions et voyaient que quelques pays du monde parlent français, mais un français vraiment différent.</td>
<td>FLA2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ils ont appris quelques mots en français, mais ils les ont expliqués eux-mêmes en espagnol […] C’étaient plus des jeux classiques qu’on joue en France et au Québec.</td>
<td>FLA1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C’était très interculturel, parce que une tonne d’expressions, de traditions. On a vu des paysages, des animaux typiques.</td>
<td>FLA1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je pense que quand les profs sont présents, je parlais que français. J’ai choisi des musique de différentes périodes, différents genres, et des chanteurs à la mode.</td>
<td>FLA2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C'était légèrement langage de rue. Tous étaient motivés et savaient qu'on allait présenter mes activités. On a expliqué d'où les insultes viennent, ça les a fait rire. (FLA1)

Ils ont découvert des nouveaux poèmes, des nouvelles chansons. C'était à eux de choisir une chanson qu'ils aimaient et qu'ils voulaient chantée. (FLA1)

Les recettes étaient plus ou moins traditionnelles. On a cuisiné des plats pas chers, pas difficiles à faire, de la nourriture que les étudiants pourraient préparer avec leur budget. (FLA1)

Il a pas de conversation sur les plats sur les plats, ils parlaient tous en espagnol. Personnes n’a expliqué de leur plat, d’où il venait. (FLA1)

C’est très culturel, avec les banlieues de Paris, c’est une image très négative, et ça leur montre une image différente de la France. (FLA2)

Section 5.2.3

J’ai essayé de passer un message, le message d’apprendre une nouvelle culture pour s’intéresser davantage à une autre culture. Aussi, leur donner envie d’être assistants. (FLA2)

Section 5.3

Ils nous ont dit que les anciens assistants avaient remplacé des profs […] C’est bizarre parce que comme je sais pas ce qu’ils ont fait et comment, et tu reprends la classe et c’est une transition bizarre. Aussi, parce qu’ils sont pas habitués à ma façon de diriger la classe. (FLA1)

Dans nos réunions à Mexico, ils nous ont que nous pourrions parfois être seuls en classe. Ça m’est arrivé une fois, au premier semestre. C’était pas mal parce que je me suis pas senti bizarre; au contraire, j’ai aimé parce que […] après, je pourrais me dire que j’ai donné cours tout seul à des étudiants universitaires mexicains. (FLA2)

Une semaine, j’étais absente, et c’était utile, comme je ne pouvais pas anuler la classe. Je leur ai laissé des activités et du matériel mais ils ont adapté […] Ensuite, j’ai eu une discussion avec les assistants pour voir comment ça s’était passé. Et ils m’ont aussi envoyé un résumé quotidien de ce qu’ils ont fait. À mon retour, j’ai fait un petit quiz pour voir ce que mes étudiants avaient appris. (E2)

Nos brinda apoyo cuando la maestra se entretiene con otra cosa y no está. (S101)

[el] ayuda a los profes cuando nuestra maestra no está. (S103)
sustituye a la maestra cuando está ocupada y no puede estar en clase. (S101)

Pendant les examens oraux on a légèrement brisé cette confiance de par la relation entre assistants et étudiants. Ils pensent qu’ils peuvent tout nous dire parce qu’on va pas les évaluer. (FLA1)

Quand les étudiants viennent me demander de l’aide pour préparer, ils pensent qu’après un prof va les évaluer et si c’est moi qui évalue à la fin, c’est gênant et rassurant à la fois […] c’est pas très étique. (FLA1)

Même si ça fait pas partie de la description de notre travail […] On a donné des notes; le prof est là pour les changer si besoin. Je peux pas faire ca tout seul. (FLA2)

Section 5.4.1

Je crois que le rôle d’assistant c’est d’être un ambassadeur culturel qui présente objectivement sa culture avec ses aspects positifs et négatifs […] pour établir un dialogue culturel. (FLA1)

J’ai eu l’impression qu’ils nous demandent de donner une version édulcorée, comme nous sommes des ambassadeurs culturels et de ne pas mentionner des thèmes comme la politique ou l’homophobie. Je peux pas dire ‘En France, l’homophobie n’existe pas ou le racisme’ parce que si les mexicains vont là-bas, ils pourraient être témoins de discrimination. (FLA2)

[ellos] nos ayudan compartiendo expresiones coloquiales y de la vida cotidiana. (S103)

[ellos] nos ayudan a entender las expresiones coloquiales de sus países. (S104)

[ellos] nos ayudan a entender mejor la cultura, la lengua et las expresiones típicas de su lengua. (S106)

La estancia de los asistentes es una experiencia para nosotros para conocer mejor la lengua, las expresiones coloquiales, la forma en que viven et interactuar entre nosotros. Gracias por eso! (S106)

Se me cayó, je l’ai fait tomber. Une expression comme ça montre comment la langue impacte notre façon d’interpréter le monde et les choses autour de nous. J’aime les utiliser en classe, dans les deux langues. (FLA1)

On a utilisé une vidéo avec donner sa langue au chat. C’était un peu difficile à expliquer et traduire […] c’est quand notre job devient intéressant, connecter la langue et la culture. (FLA2)

Ça a aidé les étudiants à imaginer sa réalité, au Québec. (E1)

Je sens que les étudiants on mieux mémoriser le vocabulaire, c’est devenu plus significatif. (E3)

Nous pourrions ajouter plus d’objets authentiques en classe. Par exemple, tu parles de la Galette des Rois. Tu pourrais avoir
apporté la fève. Je pense que ça les aurait aidé, et à nous, à comparer les cultures avec la Rosca de Reyes. (FLA1)

Table 11: FLAs’ comments on the textbook (FGIA3)

C’est bien adapté aux étudiants universitaires, mais ici il n’y a pas que des étudiants universitaires. Ils reprennent leurs études après des années. Pour eux, l’objectif principal n’est pas d’aller étudier à l’étranger. Comme c’est un matériel international, c’est pas adapté aux mexicains. (FLA1)

Je suis d’accord. Aussi, le livre parle de travaille le dimanche, ce qui n’est pas un thème mexicain mais très français. C’est pas adapté au contexte. Il y a aussi un chapitre sur les voyages, et je pense qu’ils ont moins d’opportunité de voyager que nous. Ce sujet n’est peut-être pas en lien avec certains d’entre eux. (FLA2)

Même si le prof regarde une activité dans le livre, il peut la prendre en compte ou pas. L’enseignant fait seulement des activités culturelles si il a le temps en classe. (FLA1)

Dans les descriptions, ça reste très vague, il n’y a pas de mention de l’homosexualité, de l’handicap, de gens veufs […] la peau noire, comme c’est pas mentionné dans le livre, donc ça dit que en France, les personnes ne parlent de la couleur de peau. (FLA2)

Il y a une conscience de faire partie d’une communauté international. Si une personne de peau blanche va dans un autre pays elle est considérée comme une migrante ? […] Les exemples sont généralement euro-centristes et ne représentent pas la diversité francophone […] si les étudiants vont dans un pays francophone, ils doivent connaître cette diversité. (FLA1)

Section 5.4.2

Ce sont des clichés; ça fait rire tout le monde, ensuite je leur dis que ces idées ne représentent pas la réalité que je connais. Quand je pense à un mexicain, je leur dis que j’imagine la moustache et le chapeau. Ce sont des stéréotypes mais on sait que c’est exagérer. C’est pour ça qu’on en rigole, et on en parle. C’était ma stratégie pour établir une connexion interculturelle. (FLA2)

Je pensais que c’était un pays dangereux mais merveilleux, avec différents paysages, un pays avec des inégalités sociales, beaucoup de cuisine de rue, drogues, tourisme, tacos, cactus et téquila […] Je voulais arriver au Mexique et le voir. (FLA2)

C’est comme l’Oxxo au Mexique […] ‘Ah, oui, ok, un petit supermarché.’ Ou des expressions qui créées un lien plus social. (FLA2)
Je leur ai fait débattre et réfléchir sur leur culture et la culture québécoise. (FLA1)

Les étudiants ont mieux compris le contenu culturel quand ils étaient activement inclus dans les activités et quand ils réfléchissaient sur les deux cultures. (FLA1)

Ça leur fait se poser des questions, réaliser que la France est différente que ce que les personnes imaginent. Ça leur donne envie d’aller en France, de s’immerger dans la culture française. (FLA1)

Los asistentes fomentan que los estudiantes sepan más sobre la cultura. Para hablar un idioma extranjero, debes también saber de la cultura. (S105)

Es un nativo del idioma que ofrece un enfoque actual y práctico del aprendizaje. El intercambio cultural hace que esa experiencia sea mucho más provechosa porque da más sentido. (S101)

Es una persona que nos permite acercarnos a otras culturas y que nos permite compartir nuestros mundos de cultura. (S102)

[el] es alguien que comparte su vida con personas de otro país y que muestra interés en otra cultura; la nuestra. (S102)

Section 5.4.3

Maintenant, je déteste quand les classes n’incluent pas de culture, ou quand on utilise des audios peu réalistes. (FLA1)

J’ai découvert beaucoup sur ma propre culture, j’ai fait beaucoup de recherche sur les événements historiques pour préparer mes activités. (FLA1)

Tu ne dois pas faire une liste des plats mais expliquer pourquoi ils sont typiques et leurs significations. Tu dois te demander si le matériel que tu utilisés produit des stéréotypes. (FLA2)

Avec les étudiants, en classe ou pendant les cercles de conversation, je suis capable de me décentrer de ma culture et d’accepter que c’est différent, et ne pas me limiter à ma vision de la vie. (FLA2)

J’aime sortir avec les étudiants. On parle un peu français et j’apprends plus sur la culture mexicaine. (FLA1)

Au centre d’auto-apprentissage, on parle en français sur la culture mexicaine et française, c’est un dialogue basé sur des faits culturels. (FLA1)

De par mes leçons, je veux transmettre un message. Cette expérience m’a ouvert culturellement et m’a permis de comprendre la réalité de mes étudiants. (FLA2)

Tu dois vivre la culture pour la comprendre. C’est dans le pays, semaine après semaine, mois après mois, les gens que tu rencontres, c’est quand tu commences à comprendre la culture. C’est pas facile de parler de la culture aux mexicains parce que ils
sont pas en France et ils ne différencient pas entre ce qu’ils voient dans les livres et la nôtre. (FLA2)

L’empathie c’est quand tu te mets à la place de quelqu’un d’autre. Je peux comprendre ta culture et on peut comparer les cultures. C’est pas essayer de juger, ne pas se sentir supérieur. (FLA1)

Saisir des différences, faire des connections entre deux façons d’exprimer des idées mais on a la même intention. On doit essayer d’identifier des similitudes pour mieux comprendre les différences. (FLA1)

Je me suis ouvert sur d’autres cultures, ça m’a permis de comprendre sans juger et réfléchir sur les différences. (FLA2)

L’interculturalité c’est échanger la culture et la multiculturalité c’est dire que j’ai une culture et que tu as la tienne et de cohabiter. C’est un dialogue possible grâce à certaines habiletés. (FLA1)

Pour les étudiants c’est bon d’avoir des ambassadeurs interculturels. Les profs n’ont pas toujours le temps pour la culture. Peut-être qu’ils ne sont pas intéressés […] les étudiants ont besoin de nous pour parler de la culture pour pouvoir le connecter avec la leur. (FLA1)

Comprendre pourquoi on fait les choses qu’on fait. Éviter de dire, c’est bizarre mais essayer de réfléchir sur les habitudes culturelles […] c’est un processus inconscient. (FLA1)

Sur 250 étudiants, très peu étudieront et travailleront en France, notre boulot c’est de continuer à les motiver avec le dialogue interculturel, de leur donner la volonté d’y aller. (FLA2)
Appendix 18 – Data analysis: Themes, Categories and sub-categories

Theme A – Assistantship experiences, communication and initial expectations
  Category A1 – Past experiences with FLAs and expectations on SRTs
    Sub-category A1.1 – Previous assistantship experiences and SRTs’ expectations
    Sub-category A1.2 – Lack of previous assistantship experiences and SRTs’ expectations
  Category A2 – Communication of SRTs
    Sub-category A2.1 – Moment information received
    Sub-category A2.2 – Type of information received
    Sub-category A2.3 – Interpretation of information
  Category A3 – Initial expectations
    Sub-category A3.1 – Pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural responsibilities
    Sub-category A3.2 – Uncertainty and differing expectations

Theme B – Partnerships and pedagogical expectations and decisions in FLAs’ practice
  Category B1 – Partnerships in FLAs’ practice
    Sub-category B1.1 – Assistants’ schedule
    Sub-category B1.2 – Place of FLAs in class
    Sub-category B1.3 – Closeness with students due to non-professional status and age proximity
    Sub-category B1.4 – Issues and areas of improvement in teamwork
  Category B2 – Pedagogical decisions in FLAs’ practice
    Sub-category B2.1 – Selection of topics according to the syllabus
    Sub-category B2.2 – Approval and feedback of FLAs’ practice
    Sub-category B2.3 – Reflection and co-reflection on (FLAs’) practice
    Sub-category B2.4 – Teaching strategies used by the assistants

Theme C – Perception of culture in language teaching and learning process and FLAs’ practice
  Category C1 – Place of culture and status of FLAs in language teaching and learning process
Sub-category C1.1 – Target cultures in the syllabus
Sub-category C1.2 – Participants’ simplified vision of target cultures
Sub-category C1.3 – Connection between language and culture
Sub-category C1.4 – FLAs as temporary cultural helpers and nativeness
Sub-category C1.5 – Type of cultural content shared

Theme D – Improving students’ communication skills
Category D1 – Enhancing oral communication in the classroom
  Sub-category D1.1 – Strategies and attitudes to encourage oral communication
  Sub-category D1.2 – FLAs’ activities to foster oral communication
Category D2 – Leading language clubs
  Sub-category D2.1 – Oral practice in a relaxed atmosphere
  Sub-category D2.2 – FLAs’ understanding of this task
  Sub-category D2.3 – Sharing languages and cultures as experts and learners
Category D2 – Contributing to authentic voice recordings
  Sub-category D3.1 – Task performed without instructions and with pedagogical awareness
  Sub-category D3.2 – Offer a variety of resources for oral practice

Theme E – Developing students’ knowledge of different societies and cultures
Category E1 – Sharing of national and regional culture and lifestyle through pedagogical and entertaining activities
  Sub-category E1.1 – Assistants as language and cultural model
  Sub-category E1.2 – FLAs’ activities to share culture in class
Category E2 – Organising and participating in academic, cultural, and artistic activities
  Sub-category E2.1 – High involvement from FLAs
  Sub-category E2.2 – Low involvement from educators and students
  Sub-category E2.3 – Stereotypical vision of target cultures shared
  Sub-category E2.4 – Participants’ reactions to cultural events
Category E3 – Participating in the implementation of exchange programmes
  Sub-category E3.1 – Trigger students’ motivation
  Sub-category E3.2 – Lack of preparation for this task

Theme F – Teaching substitutions and student evaluations
Sub-category F1.1 – Reasons to perform unofficial tasks
Sub-category F1.2 – Experiences in performing the tasks
Sub-category F1.3 – FLAs’ reactions to performing the tasks

Theme G – Encourage dialogue between cultures
Category G1 – Intercultural dialogue in pedagogical decisions
Sub-category G1.1 – Selection of topics and material
Sub-category G1.2 – Strategies in disseminating cultural content
Sub-category G1.3 – FLAs’ gradual intercultural awareness in their practice
Appendix 19 – Consent form

Consent form for participating in a research project
Experiences of a foreign language assistantship in Mexico

Name of participant: ___________________
Name of principal investigator: Emily Marzin

1- I consent to participate in this project. The details have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written statement in plain language.

2- I understand that my participation will involve action research (inquiry conducted by and for those taking action to assist the ‘actor’ in improving and/or refining his or her activities), and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.

3- I acknowledge that:

a. The possible effects of participating in this research have been explained to my satisfaction;

b. I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project without explanation or prejudice and request the destruction of any data gathered until it is anonymised at the point of transcription on May 2021. After this point, data will have been processed, and it will not be possible to withdraw any unprocessed data I provided;

c. The project is for the purpose of research;

d. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

e. I have been informed that with my consent, the data generated will be stored on the researcher’s computer and in her house and will be destroyed after two years;

f. Any data will be referred to by code in any publications arising from the research;

g. I have been informed that a summary copy of the research findings will be forwarded to me should I request this.

I consent to this study being audio-taped □ yes □ no (please tick)

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on the research findings. □ yes □ no (please tick)

Participant signature: ___________________ Date: ___________________

Emily Marzin – EdD Open University – eam529@open.ac.uk
Appendix 20 – Information sheet

Information sheet for participants
Experiences of a foreign language assistantship in Mexico

1- Aim of this project:
With your participation, I aim to gather information on how FLAs’ status, roles, and tasks are defined and enacted in culture in the foreign language classroom. The study will include the following participants: 3 Educators, 220 Students and 2 Assistants.

The expected benefits for each participant will be:
- For FLAs: developing a critical view of your practice as it encourages self-reflection and co-construction.
- For educators: considering FLAs as key participants in students’ learning process by giving them more teaching responsibilities.
- For students: being more aware and involved during FLAs’ participation. It will also facilitate the contact between you and FLAs.
- For former FLAs: providing the opportunity to share and reflect on your experiences.

2- Types of data to be collected:
Data collection will include questionnaires, logbook entries, interviews, and group sessions. Interviews and group sessions will be audio recorded with your consent (as mentioned in the consent form you signed).

3- The method of collecting data:
I will use a case study approach (research used to understand underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations) from the data collection to the analysis.

4- Confidentiality terms associated with data:
Data generated will be stored on my personal computer in My Documents folder, password-protected, no later than two years after the end of the Doctorate project.

5- Compliance with Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts:
I will ensure you all understand the purpose of participating in this research. I guarantee your confidentiality and anonymity. I make sure rights are respected. If necessary, any data will be referred to by a pseudonym. I proposed that a summary copy of the research finding will be forwarded.

6- The time commitment expected from participants:
For each group of participants, my study will require a different level and time commitment:
- Educators: two focus group interviews (1h30-2h00 each) and one questionnaire (20-30 minutes)
- Students: two questionnaires (15-20 minutes each)
- FLAs: two individual interviews (1h-1h30 each) and five focus group interviews (1h30-2h00 each)
7- Opportunity to withdraw from the study with no adverse consequences:
If you need to withdraw from the study, this will have no adverse consequences.

8- Opportunity to have any supplied data destroyed on request:
Data generated will be destroyed no later than two years after the end of the EdD project. As a participant, feel free to ask me about Data Protection, storage and destruction.

9- Details of any risks associated with participation:
I will conduct interviews and organise group sessions in a public university (in classrooms, in the SAC or educators’ meeting room) for FLAs and educators.
I will be applying to students (in the classrooms)

10- Debriefing
After the data collection of the pilot study, I will write a final report (March 2017). I will answer any questions about confidentiality and ethical guidelines (before, during and after data collection). As I still work at the research place, I will be in touch daily with FLAs, educators, and students, so it will allow me to keep you all informed about the findings.

11- Disseminating and publishing research outcomes:
I wish to publish and disseminate this project outcome (articles and conferences) in the future. I consider including a list of the persons who made a substantive and identifiable contribution to the generation of data.

Contacts: Emily Marzin – EdD Open University – eam529@open.ac.uk
Appendix 21 – Instruments used in each section of the data analysis chapters

Table 19 illustrates the instruments and participants used in each section of the data analysis chapters.

Table 20: Data analysed in chapters 4 and 5: Instruments and participants

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