

Language Accreditation in Spanish University Circles

Relevant features in ACLES's model

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RESUMEN

Entre las instituciones educativas universitarias ha surgido una importante preocupación con respecto a los sistemas de acreditación de competencias lingüísticas para las lenguas extranjeras. Debido a las nuevas demandas sociales y los requisitos de Bolonia, los estudiantes universitarios necesitan demostrar su nivel de competencia en diferentes estadios de su educación, y con fines muy diversos como son el acceso a la movilidad Erasmus, la obtención de título de graduado, el ingreso a determinados programas de Máster, entre otros.

Desde sus comienzos, ACLES (Asociación de centros de lenguas de Enseñanza Superior), compuesta ahora por 46 centros, se ha preocupado fundamentalmente por velar por la enseñanza de lenguas a nivel universitario, promoviendo estándares de calidad para los centros de lenguas y el plurilingüismo, tal y como aconsejaba el Consejo de Europa y de MCER. Sin embargo, con las necesidades emergentes del sistema universitario y de la sociedad globalizada, ACLES recientemente ha concentrado la mayor parte de su esfuerzo en crear un nuevo modelo de acreditación que vele por la transparencia en los procesos de evaluación y acreditación en los centros de las universidades españolas, y que vele por la homogeneidad de los niveles de competencia a nivel nacional. El presente trabajo describe los rasgos más característicos de este modelo de acreditación propuesto por ACLES y creado desde las universidades para las universidades.

Palabras clave: ACLES, enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, estándares de calidad, niveles del MCER, homogeneidad, evaluación y sistemas de acreditación

ABSTRACT

A major concern among Spanish educational tertiary institutions is the need for accrediting levels of competence in a second or third language. Due to the new social demands and Bologna requisites, university students need to prove their language competence at different stages and for many purposes such as Erasmus mobility, graduating, entrance to master programmes, etc.

From its beginnings, ACLES (The Spanish High Education Language Centres Association), composed of 46 universities, has mainly been concerned with language education at a tertiary level, promoting standards in language learning and teaching at different centres and promoting plurilingualism following the Council of Europe's and the CEFR guidelines. However, due to the new requirements arising in tertiary education and the need of transparency in examination processes, ACLES has recently been concentrating most of its effort on evaluation and testing, as well as on standardising CEFR language competence levels in the national territory for accreditation purposes. The present paper aims at describing the main features in an accreditation model for languages proposed by the ACLES association that is gradually gaining more recognition at a national and that will certainly enable to homogenise language levels and the corresponding evaluationsystems in university circles.

Keywords: ACLES, language learning and teaching, high quality standards, CEFR levels, standardization and homogeneity, language policy, evaluation, accreditation system

1. THE RECOGNITION OF ACLES ASSOCIATION AT A NATIONAL LEVEL.

The Spanish High Education Language Centres Association (ACLES- Asociación de Centros de Lenguas en la Enseñanza Superior) was born in 2001 after a meeting held in Salamanca in which experts working at different universities gathered and shared their concerns about their professional activity in Spain. Since then, this Spanish Association has represented its members at a national level and, through CercleS (Confederación Européenne des Centres de Langues de l'enseignement Européenne) at an international level. Currently, ACLES counts with 46 members.

ACLES is primarily concerned with language education at a tertiary level and, particularly, with promoting language teaching methodologies and encouraging the creation of new centres, or developing others within the national borders at this university level. Furthermore, the association aims at promoting plurilingualism among Spanish citizens following the guidelines established by the Council of Europe and the CEFR.

Due to the new social demands of our globalized society, the European citizen's mobility, the new Erasmus exchange programmes, Bologna regulations, etc., there is now a concern regarding high quality standards on language teaching and learning have aroused. In particular, there is a clear need to standardize the different language competence levels according to what the CEFR stated and to homogenize the corresponding evaluation systems. And the association is now devoting most of its time to this issue.

1.1 ACLES MEMBERSHIP

Today, 35 Spanish Universities belong to ACLES, being some of state-run universities and others private institutions (1). ACLES is present in 11 regions or "comunidades autónomas" in Spain and the Association is currently working on its expansion to include others such as Extremadura, the Canary Islands, Baleares, Vasque Country, Castilla La Mancha and Asturias.

The association's strong presence in some of the most important Spanish economic regions has enabled language centres to exercise relative influence through ACLES on the recent decisions made by educational organisms regarding languages teaching at a national level, as we shall explain later on this paper.

More and more centres have been requesting their admission in the ACLES association, but recently the association's admission committee has been facing several problems since not all centres applying seem to have similar objectives or to be working at the same educational level. For this reason, the list of prerequisites centres had to comply and the set of descriptive documents required (2) were specified on the association's website.

Any centre interested in becoming an ACLES member is required to send a formal proposal, including the three different documents: a) a formal letter stating the university's willingness to become members, signed by the university's representative (usually in Spain the Rector or corresponding vice-chancellor) and delegating on the language centre director to be the university's visible representative at this association; b) a formal report describing the language centre's main features; and c) a form with the "centre specifications and data", i.e., a summary of the most important data to be easily processed by the association.

From these three documents, the one that offers more information to the admission committee is the formal report as it describes the Languages Centre's main features, the historical background and the academic activity developed. In particular, this report -of an extension of about 6 to 12 pages- has to devote special attention to several items.

1. The centre's aims and objectives.
2. A description of courses. Details regarding the number of languages, the CEFR levels taught, credits given, skills included, methodology employed, evaluation system and type of certificates expired, are to be included.
3. Number of students and profile. The document has to specify the number of students enrolled in each course and include a description of the student's profile (age, educational background, staff, etc.).
4. Resources. First, the human resources (teaching and research staff) the centre counts on, as well as the staff working on administrative issues. Any other resources such as facilities, labs, rooms, equipment, library, computer rooms, study rooms, etc. should also be detailed.

Some centres are not only devoted to language teaching but also to other activities such as holding official exams, translation services for their university or even text editing for academic publications, linguistic advice for departments, etc. If this is the case, these activities need also be specified in the report.

Once the centre has sent all this information to the association, the application is turned onto the admission committee, the entity which evaluates the proposal. Next, it is included onto the agenda of the General Assembly to be finally approved if it counts with two thirds of the votes in favour.

1.2 ACLES AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.

Apart from the obvious goal of promoting language learning and teaching, these days most language centres are asking the association for help on issues related to accreditation since new demands regarding certification have emerged in Spanish university circles. It is for this reason that the association has been working hard on the creation of an accreditation system for language competence that would offer a common solution for the ascribed language centres.

University language centres are being asked by their home institution to certify language levels for different purposes, some of the most frequent ones are:

- Bologna plan, and its regulations, which is demanding graduate students to have specific levels of language (or even languages) competence by the time they finish their degrees.
- Erasmus mobility. Students and teachers are asked for second language prerequisites in order to be able to participate in this kind of exchange programmes.
- “Master de Profesorado de Secundaria”. Students willing to enter certain master programmes in Spain, and particularly this Master for which local education authorities have established that only students with a B1 language competence in English can enter.

Due to all this, language centres in Spanish universities have been experiencing an overload of work on certification and accreditation of language levels. But the only guidelines given for establishing the different language levels and its evaluation process are those present in the CEFR and in Bologna regulations, which have turned out to be quite insufficient. So, how are do we know that all language centres are certifying exactly the same in Spain? Is actually a B.1+ level, for instance, in Valencia the same as to any B1 of any another university? Also, there seems to a lack of homogeneity in certificates as some are certifying per skills, others are not, some are including the number of hours while other don't. Thus, not all universities recognise other language certificates.

This lack of homogeneity and transparency in language certification is actually hindering the desired mobility among European Citizens that Bologna plans try to promote. So, ACLES as well as other European associations, has decided to work on an accreditation system that could fulfil the arising demands in Spain and that could be recognised at a national level.

1.3 ACLES'S FUNCTIONING.

ACLES holds regular meetings organised at 3 different levels: executive team, language centre directors and focus groups. The Executive Committee meetings are held three times per year, usually one per semester, with a closed agenda that is previously discussed via mail. Ten people are summoned to these meetings: the President, the secretary and the Treasurer as well as 3 other members of board and 3 senior advisors. It is here where main decisions are made regarding the association's procedures, the planning of executive tasks and future actions to be taken. Since there are 3 main current worries, the executive committee is given support from 3 focus groups working on very specific areas which are certainly of interest to all centres. They make specific proposals regarding their topic and, then, the executive committee analysis and discusses them. Feedback is given to the focus group and, according to the further discussing in the focus group, some changes might be made on the final report that is sent back to the executive committee.

The second level meetings are the Director's ones, which are held once or twice a year, again with a closed agenda. Here, the President reports the directors on the main actions taken by the association on behalf of the language centres. Apart from the topics in the agenda, this is the time when language centres share their best practices and make proposals to the executive members in relation to future actions, training sessions, and can ask for advice or support on any specific item.

Currently, the association has 3 main areas of concern so 3 different focus group meetings were created in the year 2008 and have been meeting regularly since. The first focus group is devoted to language policy at university circles. Basically, they analyse different documents written by Spanish or European universities or authorities regarding this issue such as the Final report written by High Level group on Multilingualism Commission of the European Communities and the European

Commission's document on Education and Training, both of which have been of special interest for the association. This group's main objective is to analyse the strategies available for promoting multilingualism in the European Union and for creating language awareness among the Spanish /European population. Furthermore, special attention is given to study of practises developed in different Spanish regional areas where official languages coexist such as Cataluña, Galicia and Valencia.

The second focus group is centred on quality assurance. It aims at sharing good common practices in language centres and extending those which are turning out useful, while eradicating those which are not. It also enables centres to standardise evaluation methods in order to assure quality at language centres', a great challenge for most centres today. This process of quality insurance involves all staff (teaching and administrative) as well as the all procedures implemented at the centre. In order to facilitate language centres this quality evaluation, the association's focus group has created a questionnaire (available on the website) which includes some of the most common and relevant items regarding quality that language centres need to reflect upon.

Some centres are using already existing external evaluation systems such as ANECA and ISO9000, which are quite popular in Spain and have turned out to be very useful as they allow to describe systematically the language centre's features and obtain quantitative data. This data allows the centre to carry out a detailed analysis of different items and, from it, make clear proposals to vice-chancellors, especially related to any duplicity of tasks, the centre's lacks, strong and weak points, any excesses it might have and, eventually, reduce costs, etc.

The third focus group is devoted to one of the main preoccupations language centres currently have: Accreditation. In the following sections this issue will be discussed in detail.

2. ACLES' PROPOSAL FOR AN ACCREDITATION MODEL AT UNIVERSITY CIRCLES

As it has been previously stated, the responsibility for language certification and accreditation in university circles is relying mostly on language centres, which are experiencing a great overload of work. It is for this reason that most directors have been regularly bringing the issue of accreditation to ACLES' meetings in order to find a common solution that would suit for centres.

2.1 PREVIOUS REFERENTS ON ACCREDITATION.

Accreditation is an issue other European institutions have already been working on for some years. In fact, there are several referents regarding accreditation systems that are worth mentioning here.

UNlcert® is an educational and certification system of foreign language proficiency introduced by the German Association of Language Centres, which operates as the professional organization of all bodies and employees teaching languages at the tertiary level of education throughout Germany. Since 1992, this system is being used at German universities. One of the advantages of UNlcert® offers is the fact that it conforms higher educational conditions as it was specifically thought for university students. This system is not limited to German speaking countries as any individual institutions may submit for accreditation their own language programs along the UNlcert lines. However, this certification presents two clear disadvantages, the first, their target group is non-philologists and, the second, this certificate that can only be issued by universities which belong to the UNlcert® Network.

CLES is the language certification accredited by the French Ministry for Higher Education since 2000 and developed jointly with French Universities. According to its web, this certification is available in 9 different languages (English, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Arabic, Polish, Modern Greek and Russian) and assesses five language skills: listening, reading, writing, speaking and interacting. From ACLES' point of view, one of the most interesting features is the fact that CLES enables students to sit the exam at any time of their studies, and at any level. Spanish universities were demanding a high degree of flexibility in a possible Spanish model, since the periods of the year when different universities needed to accredit levels of language competence seem to be varied. CLES, similarly to UNICERT, allows any student enrolled in any Higher Education course in France to take the exam. However, it has some restrictions that the Spanish association would try to avoid. For instance, a student majoring in a specific language cannot sit the exam to certify that language.

Other referents available on accreditation are: the KPG in Greece (Kratiko Pistopiitiko Glossomathias), NCLP in Finland (National certificate for Language Proficiency) or the Mexican Model accreditation system for languages.

2.2 PRINCIPLES GOVERNING ACLES' ACCREDITATION MODEL.

When the problems directors faced at their centres in relation to certification and accreditation, we found there was a great disparity on centre's needs and certification's system and, thus, one of the most urgent issues was trying to harmonize certification systems. After discussing thoroughly the different university needs and each university's restrictions, we came to the conclusion that the principles governing ACLES's new accreditation model were the following:

a) The use of the CEFR parameters seemed to be a common denominator for all centres and most centres were already using the labels and descriptors suggested by the council of Europe.

b) The new model had to meet the demands of Spanish universities, i.e., it had to be specifically useful to university circles and, since it was a requisite to become a graduate or to enter some master programmes at a national level, there had to be the model had reach certain extent of homogenization.

c) This model is to be plurilingual as it has to be useful for all languages, not just English, and for different language levels (from A1 to C2 levels). Not all universities in Spain are requiring the same language level for Bologna graduates as there is no national consensus in this issue, some universities require B1.1, others B.1.2 and others B2. Also, there is no national agreement on entrance for different master programmes or for incoming students in exchange programs, or for the scholarships awarded by different foundations.

d) The model had to be an inclusive, it shouldn't be exclusive or discriminating as it had to co-exist with already existing exams such as those supported by the British Council which has a very strong presence in Spain. In fact our desire is that the model becomes valid for members and non-members of the ACLES association. In fact, any centre willing can take part of this accreditation system, as long as it complies the requisites established, can adopt the proposal.

e) Flexibility had to be one of the main features of the model. Great disparity was found on the dates and periods in which centres needed to hold exams. Official exams, for instance, Cambridge has two 2 fixed periods at which exams can be taken: June and December. However, these periods not always meet universities' needs for scholarships, course inscriptions, exchange programme admission, graduation period, etc. The model also had to be flexible on the skills to be certified, as some centres require specific level on writing or oral production and others on all five skills.

f) The model has to be respectful with each university's autonomy. Again, major differences are found in the procedures established to recognise language levels at different centres. The way languages are being certified depend greatly on the language policy established by each specific university. For example, the number of students who can take the exam, the reciprocity of recognition of certificates among universities, so on so forth. The model would allow members to decide when to hold exams, how do carry them out, in what languages, the staff involved, the fees students had to pay (as there was great disparity on this issue, etc). This would offer a further advantage, since it would be low-cost as it does not involve too great a financial cost for universities due to the fact that it would be auto-financed by using the already existing resources (human and material ones) available at the centre.

g) The model of certification was not to be necessarily linked to centre's courses. On the one hand, students could just sit the exam without the need to follow any previous course, as in the case of future Erasmus participants or master candidates who are asked to certify a specific language competence. On the other hand, we had students who had followed a specific course and after its completion, took a final exam at a specific level to certify the language competence. In order to have an accreditation system, valid for both cases, the accreditation exam was not to be linked specifically to any course content but rather to the CEFR descriptors and comprise all skills.

Our proposal is not suggesting one national common exam, but rather a set of guidelines for evaluation that, on the one hand, are to be followed by all centres but, at the same time, are to respect certain level of autonomy to each university. This means that ACLES' model is to allow each university language centre to organize their own exams with their own staff and facilities but, at the same time, requires them to apply a specific framework for the skills involved, exam duration, type of exam, marks, student's inscription procedure, process to calibrate marks, etc.

By doing this, a high quality guarantee system for certification in the national territory would be set, favouring transparency in the process of accreditations and certification. This transparency would enable to be recognised language centres' certificates at a national level.

2.3 THE ACLES' ACCREDITATION MODEL.

Baring in mind the principles described, ACLES has created a transparent model of accreditation that would facilitate the co-operation among universities and the recognition of language certificates at a national level, a possible in the future at an international one.

As we have previously stated, the model allows to certify any level of language competence, from an A1 to a C2. However, the association has started working on accreditation at a B1 and B2 levels as they are the ones most language centres are being asked to certify for graduation, Erasmus and master programmes purposes.

Each language centres will be able to determine the number of languages and the levels they want to certify as not every centre needs to certify all level and all the language that are being taught, only the ones that needs official accreditation. This is based on the principle of flexibility we have previously highlighted.

So as to obtain the ACLES accreditation, all the skills have to be examined. This does not mean that the certificate, can not include the specifying results for each skill if the centre is demanded to do so. For instance, some universities to allow candidates into an Erasmus exchange programme, only requires a B1 level on written skills, so the certificate would certify the level and specify the grade obtain for that precise skill.

Regarding the exam, this has to be an independent from any particular course being taught at the centre. This does not mean that language students following a specific course could not take the exam to certify that level. For instance, any university students can sit the ACLES certification exam no matter if he has followed a course at the centre or not. On the contrary, a students who completes successfully a B1 level course by passing the continuous evaluation system established, will not be automatically getting the ACLES certificate unless the student takes a the final independent exam which has been particularly prepared for certifying that level. Consequently, the final ACLES accreditation model suggests a global exam, which comprises all skills and whose result is 100% of the final mark.

According to the principle of respecting university's autonomy, any centre can hold an indefinite number of sessions per year in order to fulfil their particular needs. Furthermore, each university could establish their own fees for taking the exam. When discussing this issue at the regular meetings, we discovered great disparity among the different taxes universities charged for taking the exam, range from 60€ to 100€. In addition, each candidate inscribes at their own centre following the centre's specific regulation regarding the exams and pays the fee the university established without any need for intermediaries in the payment process ad happens in the TOEFL exam, for instance.

When it comes to certificates, this model will enable to reach some homogenization as all the certificates within the ACLES model will have a similar structure. The University is the one expediting the certificate but this certificate will also include the ACLES logo to reflect that the certification process has been following the ACLES high quality guarantee system. All certificates will follow the CEFR guidelines regarding certification and evaluation. This means that they have to include the CEFR nomenclature for levels (or the equivalences to their levels), the qualification scales used, the global descriptors for each level and the examination date. At all times, the structure and evaluation criteria have to be clear for the candidate in advance. The candidate should be previously informed about the specific contents, structure and evaluation criteria. Moreover, revision processes are to made clear and may conform to the specific university rules, so here again we give flexibility to the university to deal with this issue according to their internal regulations. This flexibility is also perceived in the fact that each institution could chose the exam vehicles (paper based, computer based, etc).

If the association wanted its proposal to become successful and to be adopted by most universities, the executive committee had very clear that the model had to be approved by the Spanish Rectors' meetings (Conferencia de Rectores de Universidades Españolas - CRUE). For more than a year, there was a strong campaign in order to present the model to most rectors. In June a booklet (3) explaining thoroughly the ACLES Accreditation model was created and, finally, in October 2011, the model was approved by Rectors and there was common consensus on the recognition of the ACLES model at a national level.

2.4 REQUIREMENTS FOR CENTRES ADOPTING THE MODEL.

The ACLES accreditation is an inclusive model, so any centre –member or not of the association- can become an authorised centre as long as it meets certain requirements. ACLES centres are required to comply with the following requirements: firstly, they have a language centre responsible for certification. If this is not the case, a university body needs to be responsible for the certification. Secondly, they need to accredited by the association and reaccredited every 3 years to guarantee that the

processes and the high quality guarantee standards are still being followed. Thirdly, they need to submit a series of documents relating to their evaluation process established. First, a letter stating their willingness to participate in the accreditation process and specify the number of languages and levels to be certified in each session as well as the expected number of sessions to be held every year. This means that if a centres expects to hold, for instance, three, but then needs to hold five, he can do so as long as he informs the association about the changes. Also, their certification template has to be submitted to allow the association check if it follows the guidelines and suggest any changes to comply with the model. Along with this, language centres need to clarify the rules governing their evaluation process -which each university is free to set- in order to make the whole process as transparent and clear as possible. Finally, the centre is required to send a commitment letter stating their intention to follow the specifications of the ACLES model of accreditation.

Since non- ACLES centres can also ascribe to the ACLES accreditation model, these are asked to submit the same documents as ACLES centre and some additional ones to let the association learn about who they are and what are the centre's aims. The additional documents required in these cases are: a) A brief description of the centre's main characteristics regarding students, staff, languages taught, etc.; b) a letter stating who the centre's responsible person is and what university they belong to; c) a guarantee of the disposal of qualified staff that can be in charge of exams and the whole examination process.

Once a centre has been accredited, it has to commit itself to naming a representative that will work as a link between the accreditation commission and the centre itself and who is responsible for sending annually (in the month of June) information regarding the number of languages and levels the centre desires to certify. It's just a prevision on the number of sessions planned to hold. If the centre then holds a higher number of sessions, it will have to inform the association so as to rectify the corresponding annual fee. Furthermore, information about training programmes for their staff regarding evaluation and certification has to be sent. In addition to this, every two years, a copy of the examinations for each level and the evaluation criteria used has to be sent to the commission in order to validate exams and calibrate the questions used for each level.

Apart from this, centres are required to create an examination team, specialised on evaluation. This team is to attend all meetings regarding certification that are held by the association and keep a computer register of the number of exams held and the candidates for each session. Moreover, the examination team who is the one marking the exams, has to commit itself to have the exam results in 30 days after the exam date and to expire the certificate in 60 more days, i.e. 90 days after the students have taken the exam.

In terms of money, every centre is to pay a fee to ACLES for exams, languages and levels. This fee is composed of a fixed quantity for being an accrediting centre and a variable quantity for the number of certificates each university desires to emit, according to the number of sessions to be held, the number of languages and levels. Non-Acles centres will be paying a higher and different fee. Furthermore, all centres ascribing to this model commit themselves to cover the possible expenses for a possible ACLES Audit.

2.5 HIGH QUALITY STANDARDS ON EXAMS AND CERTIFICATION.

Three key issues are to be guaranteed in the ACLES model. Firstly, related to exam content and duration. The association states that exam duration can be variable but ranging from 70 to 250 minutes. Additionally, these exams have to follow the CEFR standards on level contents and comprise all macro-skills in the evaluation^[1], which could be done all at once in the same exam or in separate sections. Tasks given to students are to be unpublished, so that no students would have previously had access to it. Furthermore, the type of tasks given can be of a varied nature but they should simulate real situations and include authentic material, whenever possible. Even for the lowest levels.

Secondly, the evaluation criteria cannot be that of one only examiner. ACLES suggests having at least two examiners evaluating each part, 2 for the written section and 2 for the oral one. Having two examiners lead to obtaining a final resulting average mark, which seems to be more objective. In case there is great discrepancy among the two given marks, a third examiner will take part and the two closest marks will be the ones considered for the evaluation average. A pass mark is obtained when the global average is over a 60%. However, this average mark can only be calculated if the student has achieved at least a 50% in all the specific skills.

Marks are expressed according to the university's criteria: some universities just need an APT or NOT APT for the level, while others are demanding numerical marks. Again ACLES makes a recommendation regarding marks and suggests considering: 6,0 – 6,9 “aprobado” (a pass), 7,0- 8,9: “notable” (a B mark) and 8,9 – 10 “sobresaliente” and A mark.

Certificates expired by universities are also expected to follow some standards. First, certificates will only be available when the level has been achieved and each one will receive a code. Two logos are to appear, that of the university's logo and

that of ACLES so as to guarantee the high quality standard process of certification. Moreover, following the CEFR recommendations, the certificate is to include the language examined, the specific level in terms achieved, the date of exam and if relevant, the specification of each skills.

2.6 THE ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE.

In order to monitor the process of accreditation, assure the high quality standards and guarantee that centres comply their commitments, an accreditation committee has been created and four accreditation areas in Spain have been established. Area 01: Cataluña, Valencia and Baleares; Area 02: Andalucía, Murcia and canary islands; Area 03. Madrid, Extremadura, Castilla la Mancha, Navarra y Aragón, Area 04: Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria, País Vasco y Castilla - León

The accreditation committee is composed of 6 members.

One of its members is a representative from ACLES' executive committee, who will also have the role of president at this specific committee. Other four members are the board representative of each geographical area, that is 4 one from each area. If one specific area grows drastically, another board member could be included. The centres involved will appoint their representative, who will then have to count with the support of the ACLES executive committee. These board members will share ideas and opinions on what is being discussed in each specific area and will act as interlocutors with the all area centres. Furthermore, they are the ones to give support and asses centres so as to be able to become accredited centres. And finally, the sixth member is an expertise on evaluation to assess the accreditation committee and give advice by expertise on evaluation associations such as EALTA.

This accreditation committee has as its main functions to fix dates for centre's accreditation, accredit or not the different centres with a reasonable justification, keep register of exams held in their areas (languages, levels, results and evaluation criteria) and monitor the accreditation process in different centres, being able to carry out, if justified, an Audit.

3. CONCLUSION

The Accreditation model presented by the Spanish Association ACLES is the result of the work carried out by the association in last eight years due to the growing concern among language centres on certification and accreditation. Spanish language centres had been experiencing an overload of work in certification because evaluation processes in Spain seemed not to be homogeneous and did not follow the principle of transparency. This made difficult to recognise certificates candidates presented to meet the requirements of scholarships, of mobility programmes or masters entrances stages.

The model ACLES proposes intends to promote co-operation at a national level as it attempts at making the process of accreditation transparent and based on high quality standards which are homogeneous. This model is enjoying a wide acceptance and recognition in university circles as it is being adopted in 46 Spanish Universities and counts on the approval of the CRUE (Confederación de Rectores de la Universidades Españolas). This success is probably due to flexibility it offers in its application, being respectful with each university's autonomy. It does not impose a common national exam but rather a set of guidelines for evaluation and certification of language competence, following the CEFR parameters and the regulations established by educational institutions in Spain.

[1] The complete list of Spanish Universities belonging to ACLES is: Univ. Complutense de Madrid, Univ. Antonio de Nebrija, Univ. Rey Juan Carlos, Univ. Pontificia de Salamanca, Univ. de Burgos, Univ. de León, Univ. de Salamanca, Univ. de Valladolid; Univ. Politécnica de València, Univ. de València, Univ. de Murcia, Univ. Politécnica de Cartagena, Univ. Católica San Antonio de Murcia, Univ. de Alicante; Univ. da Coruña, Univ. de Vigo, Univ. de Cantabria, University of Navarra, Univ. Pública de Navarra, the UNED (Univ. Nacional a Distancia), Univ. de Zaragoza, Univ. de Barcelona, Univ. Autònoma de Barcelona, Univ. de Girona, Univ. Internacional de Catalunya, Univ. Oberta de Catalunya, Univ. Politécnica de Catalunya, Univ. de Vic, ESADE, Univ. Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Univ. de Córdoba, Univ. de Granada, Univ. de Huelva and Univ. de Sevilla.

2 To make the process more transparent and clear, the prerequisites and a template for all documents has been made available on the website (www.acles.es).

3 A copy of the booklet is available at http://www.acles.es/multimedia/enlaces/9/files/fichero_29.pdf

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ANEXO

[1] ACLES suggests an outline for exams which is available on the association's website at:

?http://www.acles.es/multimedia/enlaces/11/files/fichero_28.pdf