



Exploring the ideal foreign language teacher profile in Spanish preschools: teacher education challenges

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ABSTRACT

The democratisation of early childhood education and care and the promotion of plurilingualism across Europe have facilitated the implementation of educational projects and research on early language learning at the pre-primary stage. However, in Spain and similar foreign language (FL) education contexts, it is not clear who should be implementing this early introduction of the FL, what their qualifications should be, or what preparation they require. The objective of this study was to identify the most adequate teacher profile for this language education. A Delphi research design was applied focusing on three main concerns: the most suitable teacher profile, the required qualifications, and the necessary preparation. Ninety-nine experts participated in two rounds of questioning: one qualitative with an open-ended online questionnaire and another quantitative, wherein experts' degree of agreement was recorded on a Likert scale online questionnaire. Results suggest that an early childhood educator with at least an upper-intermediate level in the FL seems to be the most suitable profile. However, experts considered adequate preparation is necessary at both the pre-service and in-service stages, covering language improvement, specific pedagogy, and child's development.

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1. Introduction

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)¹ has occupied a secondary position in educational research and policy making throughout history (Zabalza, 2008). In the 20th century, with the widespread provision of compulsory education, ECEC has become an independent entity; therefore, the idea that we have today of childhood is quite recent (Murray, 2015, 2017; Palacios, 2013). Nevertheless, ECEC has undergone different changes, from the conception of school as a closed place where the child remained separated from the family to a change of mentality encouraged by authors such as Montessori, Dewey, Decroly, Clarapade, Piaget, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, who defended the idiosyncratic character of these early years and the necessity of a holistic and inclusive approach to their education (Murray, 2015, 2017, 2018; Rabadán et al., 2010). Progressively, the idea of ECEC as the founding pillar for children's later development has gained strength, as learning is considered a process of growth not only in

terms of knowledge, but also in terms of competencies for life and lifelong learning (Council of Europe, 2019; UNESCO, 2016); the provision of qualified early childhood educators (ECEs) is an essential measure to achieve this target (Council of Europe, 2019; Lazzari, 2017).

Linked to this generalisation of ECEC, since the beginning of the 20th century, the European Commission has encouraged the early introduction of languages (European Commission, 2003, 2005), not only for the acknowledged benefits of being plurilingual (Cenoz, 2003; Madrid, 2001; Seker et al., 2012; Yeganeh, 2013), but also because it is at this stage that learning foundations are laid (European Commission, 2003). The attention to multilingualism and early years prompted the flourishing of the field known as ‘early language learning’ (ELL) within language education, referring to the processes of language development at an age which is earlier than the usual onset age in each country (Mihaljević-Djigunović, 2012; Murphy & Evangelou, 2016). Within this context, the lowering of the starting age in language learning was a frequent reality among member states (Rixon, 2013). According to the Eurydice (2017), the compulsory learning of the first foreign language² (FL) in most European countries begins between 6–7 years old, although in countries such as Poland or Cyprus, it is compulsory from preschool, and in others, like Spain or Germany, it depends on the region. Unofficially, the lowering of the FL onset age is a reality in many countries, although to different degrees, as reported by Mourão and Ferreirinha (2016) and Mourão (2021) about Portugal, by Langé and Lopriore (2014) about Italy, or by Rokita-Jaśkow and Pamuła-Behrens (2019) about Poland. Similarly, Spain has encouraged this early start in the different educational laws, with an introduction of the FL at least in the last year of pre-primary education (Organic Law 8/2013), although the reality shows that most schools start EFL at the age of three (Andúgar et al., 2019). Actually, in the new education reform to be implemented in the coming years, bilingual programmes in a FL are encouraged as soon as the pre-primary stage (Draft ECEC Royal Decree, Spanish Ministry of Education)s. d.

The action plan ‘Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity 2004–2006’ (European Commission, 2003) described the conditions on which the success of ELL programmes depends; there is particular emphasis on the importance of guaranteeing quality teacher education both at the pre and in-service levels, making highly qualified teachers a key element of education success (Ackerman, 2004; Capperucci, 2017; Celaya, 2012; Enever, 2014a; UNESCO, 2018). In this respect, Cerná (2015) concludes, “there remains a consensus that the key factor of potentially successful early years L2 learning is teacher education” (p. 169). However, research indicates that language teachers at the PPE level are not specifically trained to meet the demands of children aged below 6 years (Enever, 2015; Fleta, 2016; Flores & Corcoll, 2008; Rodríguez, 2004). Michel and Kuiken (2014), based on various case-studies in European pre-primary multilingual contexts, insisted on the need for providing more comprehensive teacher education programmes and to further examine these issues; as it was also intended with the Czech ‘National Plan’ where one of the main aims was to implement the English language as part of ECEC teachers education (Cerná, 2015). Moreover, given the multilingual reality in which we live, it is necessary to train the new L2 teacher profile (Kubanyiova, 2020) to offer a quality provision for children. Rodríguez (2004), Flores and Corcoll (2008), Ioannou-Georgiou (2015), Portikova (2015), Andúgar (2017), and Andúgar et al. (2020) have stressed that the preparation of the educator responsible for the introduction of the FL at

the PPE level requires an interdisciplinary approach that covers not only knowledge about the language but also FL pedagogy and understanding of the child and their developmental processes. To this respect, the recurrent FL teacher profile seems not to be qualified enough to fulfil this new demand and a reconceptualisation of their education needs to be addressed.

1.1. The case of Spain

In the particular context of Spain, where this study is contextualised, ECEC is non-compulsory and it is organised in two cycles: the first covers up to three years and the second covers the PPE level, from three to six years old. The latter is offered in most elementary schools, whereas the former is provided in specialised centres, both state and private, called ‘infant education centres’ or nurseries. Qualified practitioners are required during the entire stage; however, university degrees are necessary to work with pre-primary children, and therefore, in the Spanish context, practitioners are frequently referred to as ‘teachers’; while in 0–3 years period practitioners require a vocational degree (non-university) issued by the Spanish Ministry of Education. The enrolment rate for 0–5 years old is close to 100% (Ministry of Education, 2020), although, due to the pandemic, these figures have decreased slightly (Ministry of Education, 2021). Compulsory education, as in most European countries, begins at the age of 6 (Eurydice, 2019). FL education, generally English, is compulsory from the age of 6 years, according to Spanish education law (Organic Law 8/2013 LOMCE).

At the ECEC stage the FL is recommended from pre-primary education, particularly in the last year (5 years old). The national curriculum explicitly indicates that it is the responsibility of regional education departments to guarantee this early introduction to the FL (Royal Decree 1630/2006), recommending two 30-min sessions per week at year 1 (3 years old) and two 45-minute sessions per week at years 2 and 3 (4 and 5 years old). However, as a consequence of the diversity among regions, there are various education systems, and communities such as Catalonia, Valencian Community, Galicia, the Basque Country or Navarre, with two official languages, have their own plurilingual practices. There are noticeable differences in this early FL introduction due to political, economic or linguistic reasons (Andúgar, 2017; Andúgar et al., 2019, 2020), although most regions have adopted, at least, the recommendations at national level. For example, in bilingual communities such as Catalonia, where schools have complete freedom to introduce the FL as early as the socio-linguistic scenario allows it, or the Basque Country where it is officially initiated at least at the age of 4 in almost 100% of schools (Andúgar et al., 2019, 2020). In a middle position, despite the existing legislative gap in the matter (Bobadilla-Perez & Couto-Cantero, 2015), the Galician region promotes the introduction of the FL at 5 years old, although they have started interesting initiatives to advance the onset age of the FL, such ‘Edulingüe plan’ or ‘Plurininfantil Start’ (Couto-Cantero, *forthcoming*). Despite these differences, the model of low-exposure language learning (European Commission, 2011) can be identified across Spain.

Similarly, the teacher profile is not clearly defined. In most cases, the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher, with no ECEC background, is responsible for introducing English at the pre-primary stage. In a few Spanish regions, the ECE is allowed to assume these FL sessions, provided that they certify an upper-intermediate/advanced

level in the FL. As stated by Mourão (2015), ‘greater interest in ELL at pre-primary level has naturally created a new demand for qualified English teachers but the recommended qualifications and competence are difficult to ascertain’ (p. 53), adding more difficulties to the ECE workforce and professionalisation debate (Nutbrown, 2021; UNESCO, 2018).

2. Rationale and aims

Given the variability of teaching profiles, the diversity of educational models of introducing FL, and the pressing need to specify some guidelines to offer an interdisciplinary preparation to the teacher responsible for teaching FL at the pre-primary education stage, a wider project was launched to reach consensus on key issues in relation to the early introduction of FL in Spain. Four main dimensions were analysed: the situation of early FL learning in Spanish pre-primary settings, teaching guidelines and resources, good teaching practices, and the teacher profile. The present study, which is part of a larger project on early FL learning, focuses on the teacher profile, which has been disregarded in teacher education research (Alstad, 2020). Despite being contextualised in Spain, this study represents other similar FL teaching contexts in Europe and worldwide such as Portugal, Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, Greece, Argentina, and China.

This study addresses the problem of the lack of agreement on the most adequate teaching profile for the FL teacher at the PPE level.

The main objective of our research is to agree on a teaching profile and education needs of the practitioner responsible for the early introduction of FL, mainly English, in PPE. From this general objective, the following specific objectives are itemised:

- (1) To explore the most appropriate teacher profile to introduce the FL in PPE.
- (2) To determine the necessary linguistic qualifications.
- (3) To outline the necessary teacher education programmes for this group of practitioners.

3. Methodology

The most suitable research methodology for our purposes was the Delphi method, a prospective technique that allowed us to scientifically analyse the level of consensus among experts’ opinions (Landeta, 2002; Linstone & Turoff, 2002), revolving around three variables: teacher qualification, language requirements, and teacher education.

This mixed method design is characterised by consecutive rounds of surveys in which experts are reiteratively asked until consensus is reached, based on the stability of their responses. This study was conducted in two rounds: the first was qualitative in nature, the second quantitative. Since the results for the median convergence coefficient (MCC)³ in the second round were between 70% and 90% (Pozo et al., 2012; Putnam et al., 1995; Seagle & Iverson, 2002) for all items except Q6 (see Appendix 1), we completed the Delphi consultation.

3.1. Participants

The participants in a Delphi study are experts in its broadest sense, defined as the person whose personal experience and knowledge about the subject of study contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the research (Landeta, 2002). In the present study, the group of experts comprised specialists from both EFL and ECEC fields, providing us with a variety of perspectives on the subject. We used snowball sampling to contact participants according to the different groups of experts necessary for this research. A total of 99 experts participated in the first round, whereas in the second round the number decreased to 86, which is lower than the usual inter-round mortality rate. Experts were distributed as follows: EFL teachers (33.3%), ECEs (30.3%), language education consultants (14.1%), academics and material designers (9.2%), and parents and adult students who began FL learning in preschool (13.1%). This diversity of experts ensured the multiplicity of perspectives required in a Delphi research (Pozo et al., 2012).

3.2. Instruments

The main instrument in the first round was an online open-ended questionnaire focusing on the study variables and intended to obtain qualitative data (Appendix 1); it was administered online through Google. After the results of the first round were analysed using the Nudist Nvivo 10 software, we obtained a set of statements about our research variables that expressed experts' opinions. To calculate the degree of participants' consensus about different statements, a second online questionnaire using Likert-type questions (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*) was designed (see Appendix 2); we analysed the responses using the SPSS 21.0 software. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated from the quantitative questionnaire (2nd round), resulting in a 0.933 reliability rate.

4. Results and discussion

The analysis and discussion of the results are grouped according to the three research variables, based on the quantitative data obtained in the second questionnaire, and enriched with experts' excerpts from the first round.

4.1. Teacher qualification

Regarding which teacher profile is the most adequate to introduce the FL at early years, the results in Table 1 confirm that this issue is in full debate and both positions, namely, the EFL teacher (Q1) and the ECE with an FL certification (Q2), obtained very similar results, with means of 3.08 and 3.56 out of 5, respectively.

However, as illustrated in Figure 1, Q1 shows more heterogeneous results than Q2. A closer look at the variation of responses with the MCC calculation detailed in Appendix 2 indicates that Q2, i.e., the ECE profile, obtained a higher degree of convergence of responses than Q1 (MCC-Q1 = 74.1% vs. MCC-Q2 = 84.9%), thus implying a stronger agreement on this option.

Table 1. Results of the dimension ‘teacher qualification’ (measure of central tendency).

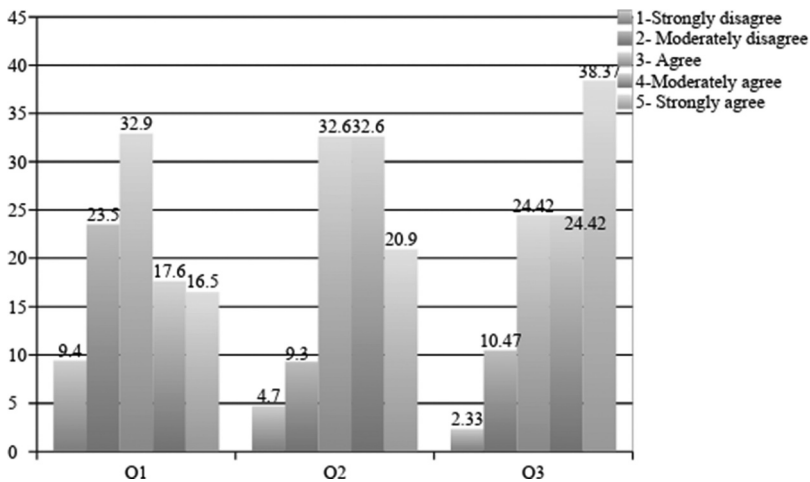
Question	Mean	Median	SD
Q1 The EFL teacher is the most appropriate practitioner to introduce the EFL in PPE.	3.08	3	1.207
Q2 The ECE with a certified level of FL competence is the most appropriate practitioner to introduce the EFL in PPE.	3.56	4	1.069
Q3 Language assistants should not teach English at the pre-primary stage, as they do not possess the necessary pedagogic education, although they can be a key assistance in the classroom.	3.86	4	1.118

According to the results, the experts considered the ECE as the most appropriate practitioner to introduce the FL at the PPE level, as proposed by Fleta (2016), Mourão and Ferreirinha (2016), Portikova (2015), and Rodríguez (2004), as long as they have the necessary communicative competence in the foreign language. This was clearly stated in Expert 3’s response from the first round:

In my opinion, although the EFL teacher is qualified to develop the FL in children, not being trained to work with such young learners, they do not always know the teaching techniques and resources used with children aged 0–6 years. [Expert 3]

To this respect, Expert 19 specified:

I think the most appropriate teacher is the ECE, as they know the characteristics of the stage, but they must study an FL degree to be competent in English, as well as to know how to teach it (phonetics, methodology, etc.). If possible, it would be desirable to complete an internship in England or USA in a school [Expert 19]

**Figure 1.** Teacher qualification results expressed in %.

Moreover, as Expert 32 suggested, although this practitioner should ideally be an ECE, he/she should be different from the educator responsible for the majority of the curriculum, so the well-known one-teacher-one-language principle emerges from the expert's viewpoint, which is more related to a tandem model (European Commission, 2011):

[...] it would be ideal to have an ECE with English skills. But this teacher should only speak English (one teacher, one language). If learners are aware that language teachers speak another language, they will not try to communicate with them in English [Expert 32].

In cases where the EFL teacher is introducing the FL in PPE, the participants explained that coordination between the class ECE and the EFL teacher would be necessary, as supported by Mourão (2019, 2021), Schwartz and Gorgatt (2018) or Mourão and Robinson (2016) detailing how the ECE practitioner and the itinerant EFL teacher could work together in the interest of designing and implementing good practices in the introduction of English at these early ages as 'the integration of an early English initiative will depend upon successful collaboration between the educator and the TE (FL specialist)' (Mourão, 2021, p. 13). The following expert explained:

Ideally, the classes would be conducted by an FL specialist teacher, with its corresponding FL sessions, and the ECE should have notions of English and daily support the specialist's work with instructions, routines ... In this way, the children would have a more real and close contact with the language and would use it, little by little, more automatically in their daily school routines. [Expert 75]

Finally, in this category, the profile of the language assistant teacher, as the native speaker who assists the FL teacher in the English lessons, emerged. Notably, 38.7% and 24.42% of the experts strongly and moderately agreed, respectively, that the language assistant is a necessary support (Q3) but should not be responsible for the main teaching, given that their psycho-pedagogical knowledge of the stage cannot be guaranteed, as it is pointed out in the following quotation:

The most appropriate profile would be that of the ECE, with the help of language assistants, but not the assistants alone, because although they know sufficient English, but they are not teachers, nor have methodological education [Expert 5]

This statement contradicts the results of Waddington's study (Waddington, 2021). After researching which teacher Catalonian Pre-service ECE students consider most suitable, results suggest that it should be an 'ideal native speaker', supported by the assumption of the importance of achieving native-like pronunciation. As she argues, this can be to the detriment of ECE practitioners by classifying them as 'second-class' teachers and represents an outdated view of how a language should be learnt nowadays.

To summarise, the participants seem to agree on the need to create a new profile: the early EFL educator, i.e., an ECE with an EFL specialisation, thus, trained on ECEC, as well as on the teaching strategies for the early introduction of the FL. In line with Ioannou-Georgiou (2015), '[...] being an effective pre-primary L2 teacher requires a complex set of competences including, but not limited to, L2 competence and age-appropriate pedagogical competence' (p. 107). The European Commission (2011) also deems this profile appropriate:

Table 2. Results of the dimension 'linguistic requirements' (measure of central tendency).

Question	Mean	Median	SD
Q4 Intermediate level is not enough to teach the FL in PPE.	3.86	4	1.308
Q5 At least an upper-intermediate level in the FL level should be the requirement to teach EFL in PPE.	3.53	4	1.336
Q6 Advanced level is the ideal level to teach EFL at preschools because an advanced oral competence is necessary to offer students a high-quality input.	3.29	3	1.413

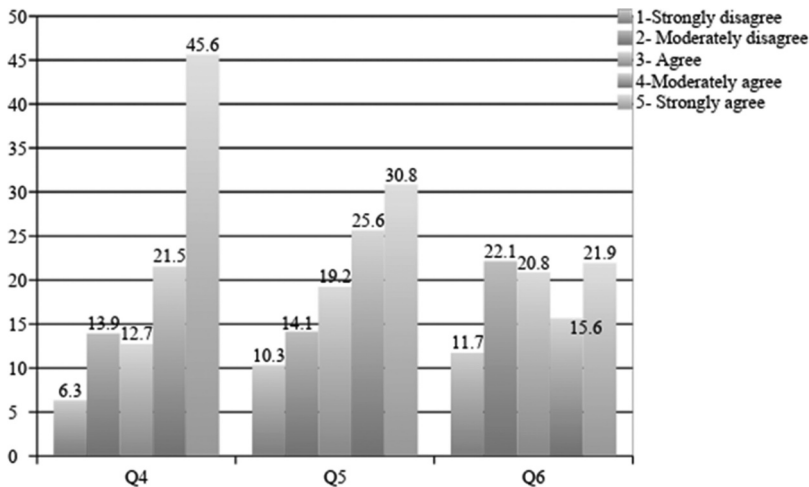
In some cases, staff with good pedagogical skills but low language proficiency practices ELL; in others, language teachers lacking an appropriate pedagogical background practice it. In both cases, only a few may be aware of how young children's cognitive processes develop, particularly in the case of second/foreign language acquisition. Both pedagogical and language skills are essential if ELL is to be effective. (p. 18)

4.2. Language requirements

As shown in Table 2, when the experts were asked about the different language levels of the CEFR,⁴ the statement 'an intermediate level is not enough to teach the FL in PPE' (Q4) earned a mean of 3.86 out of 5, implying that the experts agreed that an intermediate level is insufficient. Similarly, the other two statements (Q5 and Q6) show results higher than 3.5.

Among the different variables studied, the dimension of language requirements showed lower rates of consensus coefficient (Appendix 2), implying less degree of agreement among participants. A closer look at the frequency results confirms this heterogeneity, mainly in Q5 and Q6.

As recommended in the European context, and despite the fact that ECEs are not expected to be linguistic experts, results suggest that they must at least achieve an upper-intermediate level, being proficient enough to speak spontaneously and naturally with their learners in the FL (Council of Europe, 2020). Accordingly, Expert 33 claimed:

**Figure 2.** Language requirements results expressed in %.

I think that the minimum level should be a upper-intermediate level in the FL, although they should be trained in an advanced level [Expert 33]

(Figure 2)

Finally, establishing an advanced level as the ideal linguistic requirement (Q6) received a mean score of 3.29, although this item was subject to more dispersed opinions. Notwithstanding, there were more experts who, in line with Ortega (2015) and based on the need to master orality at this stage, advocated this requirement. Furthermore, the conclusions reached by the study ‘Early Language Learning in Europe, ELLiE’ (Enever, 2011), which could be extrapolated to the pre-primary context, considered that the optimal linguistic level should be C2, given the necessary predominance of orality at early years. We understand that this will be the tendency and that gradual progress will be made in terms of preparation in order to promote linguistic requirements above upper-intermediate level in the FL.

4.3. Teacher education

Results detailed in Table 3 show that the participants favoured promoting specific preparation for the teacher introducing the FL in PPE. In this dimension we found the highest mean results, indicating that the participants strongly agreed with the statements described in this section.

With a mean of 4.52 (Q7), nearly all experts strongly agreed with the fact that current university degrees, by which teachers in Spain are qualified to work in a school, are insufficient to carry out this early introduction of FL, as stated by González-Davies, (2007, as cited in Celaya, 2012), as they focus on general ECEC competencies in the case of Early Childhood Education Degree, or language competencies in the case of FL Education degrees. Thus, the experts advocate a new university degree focused on pre-primary FL learning, as previously suggested by different authors (Andúgar, 2017; Flores & Corcoll, 2008; Jover et al., 2016). This degree should include language preparation (Q10), but also pedagogic (Q11) and psycholinguistic dimensions, as well as early childhood psychology contents (Q12). According to Figure 3, it is remarkable that more than 70% of the participants considered important psycho-pedagogical preparation (Q11 and Q12). As reflected by Expert 32:

Table 3. Dimension ‘teacher education’ results (measure of central tendency).

Question	Mean	Median	SD
Q7 A specific preparation for teachers responsible for teaching EFL in PPE is necessary.	4.52	5	.788
Q8 Current teacher education programmes at the universities are far from the reality of the EFL pre-primary classroom.	4.21	4	.955
Q9 It is necessary to design a university degree for ECEC with a specialisation in FLs.	4.07	4	1.022
Q10 Significant linguistic preparation is necessary for the early EFL educator to provide high-quality input to their pre-primary students.	4.30	5	.954
Q11 Pedagogical knowledge in the most appropriate strategies and techniques to develop EFL at the PPE level is necessary.	4.63	5	.649
Q12 Preparation in developmental psychology to know how the child’s mind works is necessary for developing EFL at the PPE level.	4.62	5	.703

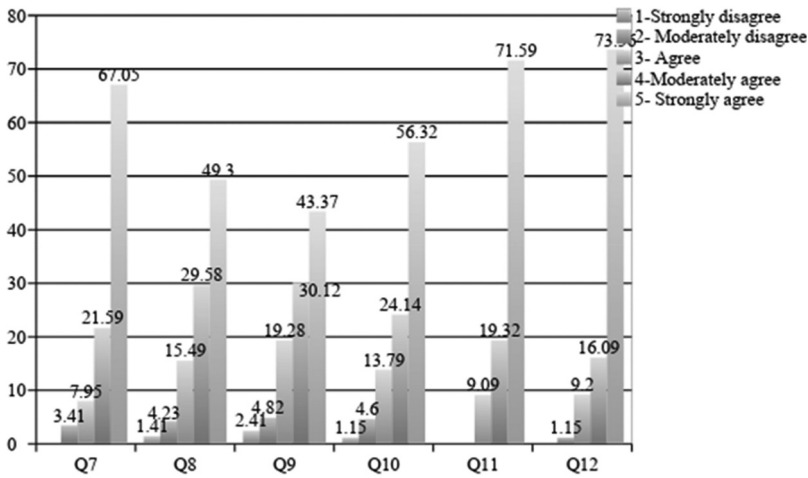


Figure 3. Teacher education results expressed in %.

Teachers who want (or must) teach foreign languages at this stage should be aware of the psychological characteristics of these early students (university education is not enough, mainly theoretical) and learn about the most appropriate methodologies through permanent developmental courses. All teachers should update themselves on the methodological aspects and resources to be used in the classroom [Expert 32]

Some experts, as well as Flores and Corcoll (2008), Enever (2015), and Jover et al. (2016) have already pointed out this weakness both in university and in in-service programmes. We agree with Rodríguez (2004) that Spanish teachers who usually assume this teaching (primary teachers specialised in EFL) have not been trained in all of the aforementioned aspects, not guaranteeing the necessary quality that this early introduction demands (Enever, 2014b). Similarly, Mourão and Ferreirinha (2016), after an investigation into the teaching of FL in Portugal at an early age, as well as Ping et al. (2013), Portikova (2015), and the participants in this research, have emphasised the need to provide preparation to both pre- and in-service EFL pre-primary teachers related to language teaching methodologies, L2 acquisition, and child development, as ‘the younger the child starting to learn an L2, the higher the importance of teacher qualifications’ (Cerná, 2015, p. 53). Thus, it is necessary to provide adequate preparation for teachers responsible for this early introduction, since the advancement of the onset age of learning FL is expanding (Enever, 2014b; Rixon, 2013).

5. Conclusions

This study examined the opinions of 99 experts on the ideal teacher profile to introduce EFL to pre-primary children in Spain. Based on a wider Delphi research project, we analysed the experts’ responses using a Likert-scale questionnaire, expressing their degree of agreement with 12 statements organised in three categories: teacher qualification, language requirements, and teacher education.

The results supported the traditional EFL teacher, with their main psycho-pedagogical background on primary learners, rather than pre-primary ones, as being no longer suited to cope with the teaching of the highly demanded area of pre-primary EFL educator, because of the particular developmental and educational features of this age group. Thus, a new teacher profile, i.e. the ECE with a specialisation in FL education, is needed in order to face the demands of these children. This emerging teacher profile should cover, on the one hand, linguistic preparation, at least at an upper-intermediate level, although it should gradually be increased to an advanced one; and, on the other hand, psycho-pedagogical preparation that qualifies educators to efficiently approach the FL teaching-learning processes with students aged 3–6 years.

Consequently, we urge higher education institutions to rethink the university degrees in education in Spain and in other similar contexts; they should promote a new specialisation in FL education within the degree in ECEC. We are aware that the profile we propose is a challenge for trainers and institutions, but we cannot forget that the commitment of teachers is a key factor in children's academic performance (McElwee, 2015). Therefore, we believe that the different stakeholders should support this process of change; first, legislating so that practitioners have some guidance in terms of content, work load, and teaching strategies; and second, providing preparation to pre- and in-service educators to update them to this new profile. As a temporary solution, while these changes occur, based on our results, we advocate the introduction of coordination sessions between ECE and the FL teachers at pre-primary education, as well as the creation of specific peer-mentoring programmes for in-service practitioners. We believe that both can be advantageous techniques while adopting far-reaching measures.

We do not want to conclude this research without addressing its limitations and proposing further lines of research. We consider that the variable of language requirements showed more heterogeneous results than expected; thus, it is a matter that needs further debate, which would benefit from discussion groups. Moreover, the study data are contextualised in the Spanish education system, although similar international contexts might be reflected. In addition, it may be interesting to analyse the curricula of the university qualifications in this field from an international perspective according to the new profile that we depicted in this research.

Notes

1. Terminology clarification: In this study ECEC refers to 'Provision for children from birth through to compulsory primary education that falls within a national regulatory framework, i.e. which must comply with a set of rules, minimum standards and/or undergo accreditation procedures' (Eurydice, 2019, p. 24).
2. Please note that this study focuses on the FL context, i.e. the target language is not naturally spoken outside the classroom and therefore learners only use the language in the formal scenario, following a low-exposure target language model (European Commission, 2011), as opposed to the second language context (L2), which refers to a language acquisition process in which the child develops the new language not only in the school setting but also in naturally occurring exchanges, such as social or family settings. Both refer to a new language apart from their mother tongue (L1).
3. This is an ad hoc coefficient calculated in order to define the stability of the responses according to the variation of the median (Landeta, 2002).

4. The Common European Framework for References of Languages (CEFR) is a document designed by the Council of Europe (2020) to establish a standardised framework for language teaching and learning, as well as equivalent language level descriptors across Europe organised around six levels of competency: Basic (A1, A2), intermediate (B1), upper-intermediate (B2), advanced (C1, C2).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Questionnaire round 1

- (1) Who do you think is the most appropriate practitioner to teach EFL in the preprimary stage? The EFL teacher? The early childhood educator with knowledge about the language? language assistants?
- (2) Do you consider a specific preparation for introducing the foreign language at this stage is necessary? What would it consist of?
- (3) What are the main difficulties faced by the practitioner in the EFL preschool classroom?
- (4) Which language level (according to the CEFR) should the early childhood EFL practitioner certify?

Appendix 2. Questionnaire round 2 items and consensus results (Median Convergence Coefficient)

Second round items	MCC
Q1 The EFL teacher is the most appropriate practitioner to introduce the EFL in PPE.	74.1%
Q2 The ECE with a certified level of FL competence is the most appropriate practitioner to introduce the EFL in PPE.	84.9%
Q3 Language assistants should not teach English at the pre-primary stage, as they do not possess the necessary pedagogic preparation, although they can be a key assistance in the classroom.	87.2%
Q4 Intermediate level is not enough to teach the FL in PPE.	79.7%
Q5 At least an upper-intermediate level in the FL should be the requirement to teach EFL in PPE.	75.6%
Q6 Advanced level is the ideal level to teach EFL at preschools because an advanced oral competence is necessary to offer students a high-quality input.	58.4%
Q7 A specific programme for teachers responsible for teaching EFL in PPE is necessary.	88.6%
Q8 Current teacher education programmes at the universities are far from the reality of the EFL pre-primary classroom.	94.4%
Q9 It is necessary to design a university degree for ECEC with a specialisation in FLs.	92.8%
Q10 Significant linguistic preparation is necessary for the early EFL educator to provide high-quality input to their pre-primary students.	80.5%
Q11 Pedagogic preparation in the most appropriate strategies and techniques to develop EFL at the PPE level is necessary.	90.9%
Q12 Preparation in developmental psychology to know how the child's mind works is necessary for developing EFL at the PPE level.	89.7%