

# EFL Teachers' Reflections on Their Teaching Practice in Spanish Preschools: A Focus on Motivation



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*“Children want to discover the world around them, want to enjoy games and pauses, want to be spoken to significantly and to experiment, want to discuss and reflect. They want to be children.”*

(Flores and Corcoll 2008, p. 1)

**Abstract** Teaching a foreign language in preschool is a matter of great interest at the present moment in most European countries. The Council of Europe has paid particular attention to early foreign language learning in order to promote plurilingualism across Europe (European Commission, Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity 2004–2006. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/SK/ALL/?uri=URISERV:c11068>, 2003; European Commission, Language learning at pre-primary school level: making it efficient and sustainable. European Strategic Framework for Education and Training (ET 2020). Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/language-policy/documents/early-language-learning-handbook\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/language-policy/documents/early-language-learning-handbook_en.pdf), 2011; Edelenbos P, Johnstone RM, Kubanek A, The main pedagogical principles underlying the teaching of languages to very young learners. Languages for the children of Europe: published research, good practice and main principles. European Commission, Education and Culture, Culture and Communication, Multilingualism Policy, Brussels. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu.education/languages/pdf/doc425\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu.education/languages/pdf/doc425_en.pdf), 2006); and the European Council of Barcelona (European Commission, Presidency conclusions. European Council of Barcelona 15–16 March 2002. Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/>

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[download\\_en/barcelona\\_european\\_council.pdf](#), 2002) was the beginning of different reports and initiatives aimed at developing this plurilingual European citizenry: Each European country has developed their own strategies to reach this objective and differences exist regarding the starting age of the teaching of a foreign language among the European countries (Eurydice, Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe 2012. Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, Brussels. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/key-data-2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/key-data-2012_en.pdf), 2012). In Spain, a lot of effort has been made in this concern with bilingual programmes in the different regions. However, there is an enormous gap between the legislative and methodological level, mainly due to the lack of uniformity with the decentralization of the education system (Calero J, La equidad en educación: Informe analítico del sistema educativo español (No. 175). Ministerio de Educación, Madrid, 2006). A lack of specific teacher training for this early introduction of the language, as well as vague legislative guidelines, has led teachers to implement their own methodological models and strategies. This chapter covers teachers' reflections on the implementation of English in preschools in Spain, paying particular attention to the description of teachers' strategies for increasing students' motivation towards the FL as a paramount objective in this learning. After reviewing the main literature on teaching strategies aimed at very young language learners, we will present a qualitative analysis of 32 structured interviews with English-as-a-foreign-language teachers across Spain reflecting on their own practice in order to describe their strategies for increasing the motivation of 3- to 5-year-olds, rethinking pedagogical models for promoting languages at preschool and language policy in Spain.

## 1 Introduction

The European Union has stressed the importance of learning a foreign language (henceforth, FL) in any of the different educational stages, with special emphasis on early-years education. The European Council of Barcelona (European Commission 2002) has already highlighted the need for new methodologies to encourage citizens to learn languages other than their mother tongue and requested member states to take action and find ways to achieve the task. This resulted in numerous studies, projects and actions at both national and EU level, like the Action Plan entitled "Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity 2004–2006" (European Commission 2003). However, and as stated in the report "A Review of the European Schools Language and Science Policies" (Nash and Eleftheriou 2008), European education systems are complex and different, and divergences can be found even within countries at the regional level. The age of onset of learning a FL, for example, differs from one country to another. Thus, Nash and Eleftheriou (2008)

conclude that in 2006–2007 more than half of European primary pupils were learning a FL. The latest study published by the Eurydice Network “Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe” (Eurydice 2012) offers an overview of the current state of teaching foreign languages in Europe (32 countries) and concludes that European students usually start learning a FL between 6 and 9 years, except in countries such as Belgium or Spain, where they start earlier. The issue of early language learning (henceforth, ELL) is often subject to arguments that may differ depending on whether we are talking about foreign or second languages (FL and SL, respectively), as the learning context is different (DeKeyser and Larson-Hall 2005; Grotjahn 2003; Hoff-Ginsberg 1998; Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson 2001; Muñoz 2008; Patwoski 1982).

In fact, in an artificial context, i.e., a context where the language is not naturally spoken outside the classroom, it is important to optimize the use of the FL (Álvarez-Cofiño 2003; Morris and Segura 2003; Muñoz-Redondo and López-Bautista 2002–2003), as language learners do not have many opportunities to practice the target language (Leonardi 2012). Yet, according to some studies (Pino and Rodríguez 2010; Morata and Coyle 2012; Palvianien et al. 2016), the teacher may find it difficult to employ the FL all the time. However, as the European Commission (2011) specifies, “working in pre-primary school settings through the target language can help children reach similar or at least comparable competencies in the first language/mother tongue and in the target language.” (p. 14). Therefore, an early start in the FL context is of paramount importance. Nevertheless, the Critical Period Hypothesis is overtly questioned (Wiley et al. 2005), and many researchers have detected advantages in a later start (Eckstrand 1978; Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle 1978; Singleton 2005; Nikolov and Mihaljevic 2006; Muñoz 2006). Still, there seems to be enough evidence to recommend ELL based on features such as brain plasticity, the ability to imitate, appropriate cognitive ability, and the willingness to learn (Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović 2011). In this way, the advantages of preschool FL learning seem to prevail, as stated by Madrid (2001): “[...] those pupils who begin the L2 in the kindergarten or in the first phase of Primary Education normally obtain better results in later stages and overcome those who start in the obligatory phase – grade 3, age 8”<sup>1</sup> (p. 148). Pinter (2015) also declares that “younger learners are less anxious and less inhibited, and overall, they can spend more time devoted to the language compared with those who start later” (p. 29), which facilitates communication in the classroom. Furthermore, according to author Singleton (2014), the crucial factor in learning a FL is not age, but motivation. As Sotés (2000) notes in his study of the trilingual model of the Basque Country (Spain), “given motivation and perseverance, good results in second language learning can be in fact be achieved at any age” (p. 33). Besides, as Dolean (2015) suggests, if the teaching and learning of a foreign language is based on “organizing meaningful age appropriate activities held in the target language, using concepts

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<sup>1</sup>Note that all quotations in Spanish have been translated.

that children are already familiar with in their native language, then teaching can occur as early as children are registered in educational programs (i.e. kindergarten)” (p. 11), so she recommends a partial immersion at this early stage, teaching the FL implicitly and eliminating the barrier of not understanding the message.

Likewise, the EU emphasizes the need to develop a positive attitude towards language learning in young students in order to promote multilingualism, and lay the foundation for life-long language learning. As suggested by the European Union “it is a priority for Member States to ensure that language learning in kindergarten and primary school is effective, for it is here that key attitudes towards other languages and cultures are formed, and the foundations for later language learning are laid” (European Commission 2003, p. 7). The EU has put its efforts into making a series of recommendations that can be found in the document “Language learning at pre-primary school level: making it efficient and sustainable” (European Commission 2011), which is based on the previous report, “The main pedagogical principles underlying the teaching of languages to very young learners” (Edelenbos et al. 2006) in order to support this learning. As Enever (2015) declares, it is necessary for governments to join forces in order to face the main weaknesses of the teaching of FLs at an early age, such as “teacher expertise, the role of motivation, establishing continuity of learning, setting realistic aims and the role of out-of school learning” (p. 22); otherwise, the advantage of early learning may be nullified.

So it appears that there is a favourable climate for early foreign language learning as long as the methodology used is suitable for the child’s age and its main goal is to develop a positive attitude towards linguistic diversity. In order to achieve this, the different teaching strategies are vital. In this chapter we will analyse FL teachers’ reflections and their main strategies for motivating and promoting a positive attitude towards FL learning with VYLL<sup>2</sup> in Spain (3–6 years). First, some theoretical issues related to motivation at Pre-primary level will be addressed.

## **2 Teachers’ Strategies for Increasing Motivation and Positive Attitudes Towards the Foreign Language**

### ***2.1 Motivation and Early Childhood Education***

Broadly speaking, motivation can be defined as “to be moved to do something” (Ryan and Deci 2000, p. 54). In order to obtain that goal, cognitive and emotional processes are activated (Hakki 2014). Dörnyei (2014) specifies that the term motivation answers the questions: “why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue it” (p. 516).

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<sup>2</sup>The term Very Young Language Learners (henceforth, VYLL) refers to language students before Primary Education, in Spain covering the range from 3 to 6 years old.

In preschool education, motivation is understood in terms of children's self-satisfaction. Children at this stage do not want to do an activity because they think of its possible future benefits, but because they have fun and enjoy discovering things (Bruner 1961; Mayer 2004). Activities are motivating the moment they give infants a sense of joy (Heckhausen 1987). From the cognitive perspective, motivation is a rewarding sense of pleasure children obtain when they perform challenging tasks. In a study conducted by Stipek et al. (1995), motivation rates among preschoolers were higher in child-centred groups, rather than didactic-focused ones, proving that better results were obtained in terms of the children's holistic development in those programmes in which children simply play and enjoy themselves. In this regard, success depends on the scaffolding given to the child and the motivation provided in their environment, the school in this case. The relationship between motivation and emotional experiences has been the focus of different studies (Carlton and Winsler 1998; Pintrich and Schunk 2002). This intrinsic motivation "includes both positive affect during a task and situational and personal interest in the task" (Berhenke 2013, p. 5). Furthermore, motivation in the early education stages is also dependent on nearby adults, as Thoumi (2003) suggests. The teacher's task, according to studies on motivation in preschool, will be to scaffold (Vygotsky 1978, 1987; Carlton and Winsler 1998; Mayer 2004) children in the task and design activities that match their interests.

## 2.2 *Motivation and VYLL*

Motivation to learn a FL is a key factor to keep in mind when designing the curriculum and activities inside and outside the classroom, in order to provide an effective learning experience of the language in formal situations. Gardner (2007) distinguishes between "language learning motivation and classroom learning motivation" (p. 10): the latter may be affected by various factors, such as the teacher, the environment, the contents and materials, etc., and also by the individual features of each student. Gardner considers it essential to study both the educational and the cultural context when explaining the motivation to learn an L2, rather than defining its typology because, as he states, it is "the intensity of the motivation in its broadest sense, incorporating the behavioural, cognitive, and affective components, that is important." (Gardner 2007, p. 19).

Motivation is therefore essential in learning a FL, where actual use of the target language is often restricted to the classroom context. Consequently, teachers should take advantage of their situation with regard to early learners, as they demonstrate a willingness and good attitude towards new learning. The way teachers can motivate students is through proper selection and use of learning strategies that will guide the students to self-realization and enjoyment. As illustrated by the study of Jurisevic and Pizorn (2013), conducted with Primary school students in Slovenia, motivation

is a key factor in the learning and future use of the FL. The same study revealed that VYLLs show predilection for classes that contain playful elements, and although this may be observed in all stages of education, it is especially relevant in the VYLL context. As Vygotsky declares (Vygotsky 1978), “the child moves forward through play. Only in this sense can play be considered a leading activity that determines the child’s development” (p. 103).

However, despite the long tradition in the study of motivation in learning FLs, most of the techniques for increasing it are addressed to older learners, and therefore need to be adapted for our context of study. As stated by Djigunovic Mihaljevic (2012a, b), the most important longitudinal studies on the subject of attitude and motivation in learning FLs at European level, such as the Pécs Project (1977–1995), the Zagreb project (1991–2001) or the Early Language learning in Europe (2006–2010), conducted on students from the Primary stage (young learners), conclude how difficult and important it is to investigate the motivation and attitude of these learners. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider that young FL learner attitudes and motivation are phenomena that have a distinct nature and require a specific approach when compared to older learners, and [...] attitudes and motivation not only interact with a host of other individual learner variables and with contextual variables, but their interactions change with learner’s age (Djigunovic Mihaljevic 2012a, b, p. 68).

Therefore teachers need to know how to adapt their lessons to children’s singularities, in order to increase their motivation, because “unless they accept their learners’ personalities and work on those small details that constitute their social and psychological make-up, they will fail to motivate them” (Gilakjani et al. 2012, p. 15). Enever (2015), based on work by Halliwell (1992), considers it essential that the activities carried out in the classroom include a balance between play and cognitive challenge to promote motivation. In short, as Vilke (1997) upholds, the teaching of English in VYLL should be based on three key points: the cognitive development of students, the L1 as a starting point, and the focus on learning rather than teaching, as we shall see in the different strategies that teachers can follow to boost their students’ motivation.

### 2.3 *Teaching Strategies for Fostering Motivation*

Based on Richards and Rodgers (2001), teaching strategies are those procedures used by teachers to face challenging situations in their teaching practice. Therefore, our focus in this chapter is on those teaching procedures, activities, practices, behaviours, etc., used by teachers to promote motivation in the EFL classroom with VYLL. In doing so, three dimensions need to be considered:

#### 1. The Teacher

The teacher’s attitude is the first main factor that can influence the levels of students’ motivation rates. Teachers are the crucial link in the development of infant attitudes towards learning, having both positive and negative effects on their aca-

**Table 1** Teachers

	The teacher...
Related to children	... helps children in their natural development providing enough of a challenge
	... empathizes with children’s personal situations
	... knows about children’s developmental processes
	... provides a respectful environment and creates a good atmosphere in class
	... supports children’s autonomy
	... establishes close relationships
	... scaffolds children’s problem-solving
	... uses rewards sparingly and cautiously
Related to attitude	... has a good sense of humour
	... is open to students’ suggestions
	... is operative
	... is entertaining and playful
	... has an adequate tone of voice
	... is creative
Related to competence	... has an advance competence in the FL
	... is able to use a variety of materials
	... knows how to introduce cultural aspects in the curriculum
	... knows how the school and the educational system works
	... is able to plan lessons according to students’ needs and interests
	... knows how very young learners learn and is able to foster it.

*Note.* Based on Lobo (2004), Carlton and Winsler (1998) and Murado-Buoso (2010)

democratic future (Birch and Ladd 1997; Dobbs and Arnold 2009; Hamre and Pianta 2005). In a study on 8- to 14-year-old FL students on causes of motivation in the classroom (Nikolov 1999), it was concluded that they fluctuate depending on age and that for younger students the following was always fulfilled, “classes must be fun and the teacher is in focus” (p. 53). Although our object of study focuses on 3- to 5-year-olds, this conclusion may also be supported in our case. Accordingly, it seems important to know how motivating teachers should be and what they should do to help create the adequate context in the classroom. As Thoumi declares (Thoumi 2003), a “good motivator is, in general, one who can communicate, deliver, model, guide or suggest something suitable for the progress of children and young people, one who facilitates, guides and directs, bringing support, not dependence on the adult” (p. 16).

As shown in Table 1, the teacher should have a positive attitude, which must be reflected in a good environment, and should pay attention to the individual pace of each student (Flores and Corcoll 2008). It is essential to know the students’ level and the cognitive-process stage they are in according to their age in order to maximize their learning opportunities (Muñoz-Redondo and López-Bautista 2002–2003).

## 2. Teaching methodology

In terms of methodology (Table 2), ELT methods, such as the Communicative Approach, Task-Based Language Learning, and above all, the Total Physical Response (henceforth TPR), are the most recurrent ones in this learning stage (Edelenbos et al. 2006; Pino and Rodríguez 2006), mainly due to the fact that these methods prioritize “the use of real materials surrounding the child, looking for motivation for learning other languages, describing the teacher as a facilitator of learning, and targeting at the simultaneous acquisition of L1 and L2 in a relaxing and motivating atmosphere” (Pino and Rodríguez 2006, p. 153). Additionally, the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology, one of today’s teaching trends, perfectly matches the holistic learning encouraged by early childhood pedagogy (Coyle 2007; Marsh and Frigols Martín 2012). This method, applied to Pre-primary education, involves the daily activities of the pre-school class, but in the foreign language. However, it is noteworthy that these methods need to be adapted to the developmental features of this educational stage. Focused on 3- to 5-year-olds, Rodríguez (2004) proposes a number of strategies for effective teaching of FLs in preschool education, among which we highlight: working eminently on the oral aspects of language, centred on dynamic and playful tasks, using any situation to learn new vocabulary, and employing worksheets only as a support for communicative activities. Fleta (2014) also believes

**Table 2** Teaching strategies

	List of strategies
About teaching methodology	Provide comprehensible input, using non-verbal language
	Scaffold students in their learning
	Teach English from a holistic approach
	Promote meaningful learning
	Prioritize oral skills
	Use procedural approaches, such as task-based/project-based learning
	Use TPR techniques to promote kinaesthetic learning
	Offer a variety of activities, mixing both quiet and noisy activities, games, storytelling, creative tasks, etc.
	Use LI when required in order to promote a stress-free environment
	Use of routines in the FL
About planning	Short and frequent session inserted within the daily curriculum
	Plan thematic units, focusing on contents and communication
	Coordinates linguist and non-linguistic contents
	Coordinate lesson plans with the class teacher (non-EFL teacher)
	Take English outside the classroom, planning activities in different scenarios
	Flexible class and task distribution
Circle time, learning areas and formats	

*Note.* Based on Lobo (2004), Mourao (2014), Mur (2002), Murado-Buoso (2010), Pino and Rodríguez (2010), Shin (2007), and Soberón (2003)



that, apart from developing oral skills, we should also work on both fine and gross motor skills that imply movement, rhythm, and activities that involve silence so as to match different learning styles. Moreover, the use of circle time and learning areas are useful resources at preschool (Mourao 2014, 2015) and teacher-led activity can stimulate child-initiated play taking place in these learning areas, provided that they occur in “an attractive, interesting, welcoming and comfortable place” (Robinson et al. 2015, p. 29). Finally, and according to Mur (2002), the teaching methodology must cover students' capabilities widely, such as the ability to creatively use their limited language. Additionally, children instinctively talk and socialize, thus imagination in using the FL communicative should be a key aspect in the teaching methodology (Mur 2002). Moreover, children's limited capacity for concentration promotes varied and short tasks, not longer than 10–15 min (Shin 2007).

### 3. Materials and resources

Another key to success in motivating children is the type of materials and resources used. On the one hand, published textbooks are a significant help for teachers that do not have much experience in teaching English to VYLL, providing them with ready-to-use lessons with attractive resources. However, as asserted by Fleta and Forster (2014), textbooks constrain teaching because they barely meet particular students' need: they limit the contents to a specific culture or exclusively reflect the opinions of their designers. It is equally important to involve students and to work on the development of their creativity through materials that challenge their imagination. On the other hand, the amount of online resources makes it very easy to find motivating materials for our students and which can be adapted to the characteristics of the different groups (Rodríguez 2004; Szulc-Kurpaska 2007).

Finally, we cannot fail to mention those resources that provide fun learning in the classroom, such as picture books (Pino and Rodríguez 2010), puppets and realia (Álvarez-Cofiño 2003; Cabanés et al. 2003; Morris and Segura 2003; Zuljevic 2005), chants and songs (Fleta 2014; López-Tellez 2003; Muñoz-Redondo and López-Bautista 2002–2003), audiovisual materials and cartoons (Prošić-Santovac 2017) etc (Table 3).

**Table 3** Materials and resources

Materials should ...	... encourage creativity and imagination
	... adapt to different needs and learning styles
	... be play-based materials: puppets, games, songs, rhymes, books, realia
	... use audiovisual support, particularly visually attractive materials
	... include students' personal objects and toys
	... make use of internet as a bank of real and authentic resources

*Note.* Based on Lobo (2004), Murado-Buoso (2010), Rodríguez (2004), Mourao (2014, 2015) and Shin (2006)

As a concluding remark, when trying to promote a motivating environment in the classroom, it is important to consider the three different components of the teaching act, i.e., the teacher, teaching methodologies, and materials. The three of them should be adapted to the learners' needs and interests in order to be successful.

### **3 Teachers' Perception of Strategies for Promoting Motivation in the EFL Classroom to VYLL in Spain**

#### **3.1 VYLL in Spain**

Although Spanish Pre-Primary Educational stage is not compulsory, most children start school at the age of three – specifically, 95%, according to the Ministry of Education (2015). Spanish education is mainly monolingual, except for those regions that are bilingual (Galicia, Basque Country, Navarra, Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands). Apart from that, foreign languages – mainly English – are promoted from a very early stage. The teaching of FLs at this very early age is an issue that has achieved paramount importance in the Spanish Education system. It began experimentally in 1996 (Order of April 29 1996, *Official Spanish Gazette* no. 112), and, gradually, successive laws have recommended the importance of this learning at an early age by focusing attention on the oral aspects, but without specifying how it should be performed. At the present time it is widespread and most of the regions have a regulated timing for this stage, although there is a lack of specifications in terms of schedule, teaching guidelines and teacher training (Andúgar et al. [forthcoming](#)). Broadly speaking, we can confirm that at least 60–90 min of the weekly schedule in Pre-primary Education is devoted to the learning of English (*ibid*). In addition, some regions within Spain have plurilingual initiatives, due to their bilingualism. In these cases, Andúgar et al. ([forthcoming](#)) have detected a confrontation between the early onset of the FL and the consolidation of bilingualism in regional policy.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

Teaching a FL to pre-schoolers in formal settings is an area in need of more studies aimed at defining guidelines to provide a more successful learning experience. In the words of Mihaljevic Djigunovic (2012b), “[it] seems to us that the qualitative research paradigm has a lot to offer and will one day, when an increasing number of case studies have accumulated enough insights, get us closer to what now seems next to impossible” (p. 174). In this chapter we present a study based on the interpretivist paradigm to analyse the motivating teaching strategies used by EFL teachers within preschool classrooms in Spain.

### 3.2.1 Research Questions and Aims

Considering this situation, we intend to answer the following questions in this study:

1. Which motivating strategies do EFL teachers consider most relevant when teaching VYLLs?
2. Do theory and praxis match? Do teachers' responses match the motivating strategies analysed from the literature review?

The main purposes of this study are

1. To detect and analyse teaching strategies, according to three main aspects, i.e., the teacher, the teaching methodology and materials that can be motivating for teaching EFL at preschool.
2. To detect the level of correspondence between theory about motivating strategies in EFL preschool classrooms and the real practice in Spanish schools.

### 3.2.2 Participants

The study was conducted on 32 EFL teachers across Spain, reflecting on their own practice to find out the teaching strategies they use in order to motivate their preschool students. Participants have, at least, a B2 level of English according to the Common European Framework and they comprised 30 women and 2 men. All participants had an average experience of 10 years teaching English in pre-primary teaching. In their self-assessment of their knowledge of the topic of this study, the group's average score was 4.1 out of 5 in a Likert scale, 1 being null knowledge and 5, deep knowledge.

### 3.2.3 Instrument and Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were administered by email to allow time for participants to answer the questions without pressure, revolving around four categories: difficulties encountered in the classroom, the FL teacher in pre-primary education, teaching strategies, and materials. We used mixed coding techniques, both deductively, i.e., using a pre-designed coding list according to the literature review, and inductively, i.e., condensing raw data into codes. Confidentiality was guaranteed replacing every personal reference to participants with consecutive enumerated codes. Through a thematic analysis of the interviews carried out with Nvivo11 software, we have interpreted a model of motivating strategies for VYLL. As a result, a list of 31 codes organized in three different categories was defined: teachers, teaching methods and materials (see [Appendix 1](#)).

### 3.3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.3.1 The Teacher

In relation to the teachers' attitude, most interviewees concluded that the teacher in charge of the teaching of EFL at preschool must love what s/he does, showing empathy to children and enthusiasm towards what s/he is doing (Lobo 2004). As participants said, *"I think that at pre-primary the teacher must be close to the students and also know how to deal with them affectionately"* (Teacher 4, henceforth T4). Equally important is that the teacher enjoys what s/he does and transmits enthusiasm to students (T20), which is intrinsically linked to playful learning. Being natural and spontaneous so that the teacher can surprise and thus engage students in their learning of the FL is crucial, T20 continues: *"You have to be very natural and spontaneous with students, and classes must be thoroughly prepared"* (T20). According to interviewee T7, *"Teachers must be highly qualified, like their job and be creative and original"*. These aspects may contribute to the creation of a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in class, where students feel comfortable with the FL, as supported by participant T3.

Teachers must also both know their students and the particular features of their process of learning very well in order to be successful in their teaching and thus in their motivation. As supported by participants (T23, T13), *"Attention should be paid to children of this age's psychological development and be aware of their necessities and interests, as well as the underpinnings of L2 acquisition"* (T23). In this sense, they need to rely on life-long-learning as a strategy to keep updated with new educational, psychological or technological trends (Rodríguez-Suárez 2003).

To sum up, in this analysis we have found that many of the strategies described in Table 1 about the teachers' role in VYLLs' motivation have been encountered in our participants' responses. The motivating teacher that our participants have described is a guide and a reference to the VY students, so s/he must be properly qualified, not only in the teaching of English, but also in the teaching of VYL (Flores and Corcoll 2008; Morris and Segura 2003; Mur 2002; Navés and Muñoz 1999; Pino and Rodríguez 2010; Rodríguez-Suárez 2003), so that they can adapt and scaffold students in their learning process, creating a stress-free and risk-taking friendly atmosphere in class. As described in the theoretical framework, her/his personality will also influence students' motivation; so being enthusiastic, positive, creative, and entertaining is of paramount importance in the encouragement of VYLLs' motivation.

### 3.3.2 Teaching Methodology

#### About Learners' Exposure to the Language

According to the results, it seems that one of the recurrent themes in our analysis in relation to teaching strategies is the quantity and quality of exposure to the language, particularly the use or not of the mother tongue. Our interviewees seem to agree on the fact that the more exposure the better, mainly given the FL context, as this will be the only input the children receive. One of the participants' comments about this:

*We are not going to learn a language unless we first listen to it and then speak. At the beginning they [the children] are not going to understand anything, everything will be as sounds with no meaning. But soon they will understand words within a context and they will start using them in that context. (T9)*

This idea is mainly supported by those interviewees who have worked in immersion programmes, as they consider that it is completely feasible to do the whole class in English, without L1 interruptions (Morris and Segura 2003), provided that enough scaffolding is provided, mainly visual support and non-verbal communication, such as gestures. Participant T12 clearly explains this issue: “*linguistic immersion is the best option. Classes must be conducted in English and supported by visual and interactive resources in order to improve understanding.*” (T12). This issue was also stated in Rodríguez (2004) because the main target at this point is that students understand the message holistically (Fleta 2014). In this sense, participants consider the necessity to communicate in the FL as one of the most useful motivating strategies: it builds upon developing children's necessity to communicate in the foreign language, which may be hard to achieve outside the classroom context, where English is rarely spoken.

However, we have also detected some opinions that are in favour of introducing L1 when necessary in order to offer a safe and comfortable context to children, as Hickey et al. (2014) suggest in their study of Welsh preschools, where teachers use the L1 (English) in order to ensure comprehension and at the same time make sure the target language (Welsh) is used exclusively at some times. Thus, using the L1 whenever needed encourages children's motivation through a pleasant experience of learning. In consonance with this vision, children could be allowed to use the L1 in order to favour understanding so as to prepare the final production in the target language. Moreover, teachers must make clear their expectations regarding the use of the L1 and FL to create a secure environment for children, and it must be borne in mind that the target language must be placed at a paramount position, as the goal is to reach the best possible level of the target language (Swain and Lapkin 2013).

Interviewee T5 argues along this line:

*It is very important that students listen to a lot of English, although at the beginning they must feel secure and understand what they are doing. The teacher must address them in English most of the class time, but if it is necessary, they will use the mother tongue for a better understanding. (T5)*

What seems clear in both positions is that oral skills should be prioritized, as Fleta (2014) suggests.

*Regarding the balance of skills, listening and speaking are the most used at this stage, as writing and reading are not consolidated skills even in their mother tongue. Storytelling, songs, poems, etc. should be present in the English classes. A lot of input is necessary as these strategies offer to students a good pronunciation model and they are highly motivating, as most children like to listen to and sing songs. (T27)*

So, as Coyle and Gómez (2014) conclude in their study with five-year-old children, songs can be a key tool in learning new vocabulary at a receptive level, although “it is possible that these preschool children, who were at an initial stage in the language learning process, were still unable to actively produce the L2. It is also likely that 90 minutes of input-based activities that required non-verbal responses from the children were insufficient for them to incorporate the words into their productive vocabulary” (p. 283). Therefore, it is necessary to respect children’s silent period (Ellis 1997, 2008) as one teacher reflects, because if we press shy students to speak, they may lose their motivation, and they will not want to participate again:

*I consider that more importance should be given to oral comprehension than to production as students do not feel ready to communicate in a spontaneous way, but they do feel comfortable showing they understand the message, although they answer in Spanish. It is more important to promote participation than to press them to express orally. (T14)*

So, at this particular stage it is essential to foster children’s participation so that they feel secure and willing to produce language once they are ready after the silent period. For this purpose, it is necessary to create meaningful experiences and familiar contexts for children in which they can use language in real situations. Other participants state that extensive input is useful, provided that an adequate methodology is implemented, as explained by T5: “An exposure to a rich language model during class time through activities that develop the pleasure for the language and that motivate students to use it; just its use is motivating and enriching”.

Finally, and due to the early FL starting within the Spanish curriculum, some teachers (T24, T20, T27, T23) reported experiences of introducing literacy in the FL, based on the Phonics method as one of the most attractive and motivating ways to do so. We find similar experiences in this regard that reinforce the use of this method to successfully introduce EFL phonemes to speakers of other languages (Álvarez-Cofiño 2003; Navarro et al. 2015), provided that L1 phonological awareness has already been started (Ruiz-Bikandi 2003). Taking into consideration Fleta’s (2014) arguments, among others, about the primacy of spoken discourse within the preschool context, we consider that literacy in the FL should wait until children’s spoken competence is consolidated, despite the successful experiences reported.

## About VYLL Methodology

According to our participating teachers, in order to motivate students the methodology should be based on the following underpinnings:

### *Natural Learning*

Most participants seem to advocate imitating the natural process of language acquisition in the FL context, as explained by the following participant: *“The other methodology that should be considered is learning by doing, i.e., learning a language and using it to do something fun, motivating and with a purpose; in this way we guarantee meaningful learning”* (T5). Actually, it implies using the language as a tool to carry out other learning tasks and activities, as proposed by CLIL pedagogies, providing the language with a meaningful context, thus fostering students' motivation. In sum, what we pursue is that *“children like foreign language classes because they have fun, play, sing, move around, but they do not understand the usefulness of the language. However, if used as the vehicular language it acquired sense”* (T10).

Furthermore, teachers should consider creating a stress-free and relaxing atmosphere in which different learning rhythms are respected and students feel comfortable (Rodríguez 2004). An appropriate teacher-student relationship is also essential (Brumen 2011). It is necessary to consider that motivation changes according to age (Nikolov 1999), so strategies different from those employed with adults must be considered (Mihaljevic Djigunovic 2012a, b), and activities must be adapted to the characteristics of the VYLL group to increase their motivation (Gilakjani et al. 2012).

*Methodology must be active, dynamic, fun and flexible. Children must feel free, confident, comfortable and loved (they are quite vulnerable at that age).* (T13)

### *Playful and Kinaesthetic Learning*

Apart from imitating the natural process of language acquisition, playful learning emerges as the second foundation in which VYLL methodology should be built upon. It is important not only because it is part of children's daily activity, but also because long-term motivation will be cultivated, as argued by this participant: *“at this age children should learn by playing, we must motivate and develop a positive attitude towards English. It is our responsibility child's future attitude towards the language.”* (T20).

Linked to this playful context, we have found many references in the interviews in which teachers affirm making use of TPR techniques (T10, T9, T2, T32, T7, T14, T11), using kinaesthetic activities to negotiate meaning within communication. Movement is also encouraged in other studies such as in Fleta (2014). Nevertheless,

some participants (T14) and researchers also call attention to balancing the use of movement and quiet moments in class: in changing the class dynamic, students are more involved in the class (Pino and Rodríguez 2010).

### *Learning by Surprise or by Discovery*

Awakening children's curiosity through activities that incorporate unexpected or magical elements that can surprise children and be visually attractive can be a very useful resource to enhance motivation, according to our participants' responses (T23, T29, T30). This is in line with recent research in which unexpected elements have been proved to be particularly motivating for babies' learning, as unforeseen elements give space for children's imagination (Stahl and Feigenson 2015). Equally interesting are those techniques in which learners learn by discovering, through experimenting with real objects in English. Through this experimentation with the world, the English teacher can find the perfect opportunity to introduce cultural elements, thus increasing students' motivation towards the FL:

*The learning of sociocultural aspects of the language should be considered and I think that it is one of the most enjoyable aspects for students. During English classes the sociocultural aspects of the language must be present, such as the typical celebrations (Halloween, Easter), foods (muffins, tea, fish and chips ...), differences regarding timetables, sports, money (pounds) ... (T7).*

In the light of our research data, teaching strategies within this field are basically dealing with making children active participants of the learning process, living and experiencing English in authentic situations in a playful and safe teaching context (Lobo 2004; Flores and Corcoll 2008) as VYLL need an organised and structured environment where repetition and routines are present (Shin 2006) and therefore "teachers need to set clear expectations about L1/L2 use in order to create a secure classroom environment in which students are able to engage in inter-action with confidence" (Swain and Lapkin 2013, p. 123).

### About the Organization of Language Instruction

In regard to planning motivating lessons, most teachers share the idea of offering frequent input, so that they propose daily sessions, though short (Mur 2002). Despite this frequency, length and intensity are important too, in order to promote a natural transition between the different activities they do (Flores and Corcoll 2008).

*I always pursue higher concentration and attention rate of students of five years old, if compared to those of four years old, working with small groups to promote more participation and interaction between students and teacher, and shorter sessions to be divided into two weekly sessions, as with just one longer session per week students feel tired and forget the vocabulary learnt the previous week. (T2)*

In this sense it is important to mention that the teacher in charge is not always the most suitable, as "[...] in some countries English in pre-primary institutions is associated with a peripatetic teacher who visits children a couple of times a week, teach-



ing English in short, isolated spurts of between thirty to forty-five minutes of activity” (Mourao 2015, p. 57).

EFL teachers in Spain are mainly the ones in charge of teaching English at preschool, without any training in early childhood education. However, we agree with Cerná (2015) in that “the younger the child starting to learn an L2, the higher the importance of teacher qualifications” (p. 53). The Spanish situation portrayed in our data is also found across different European countries; as Lugossy (Chap. 4, this volume) reflects about the Hungarian context “[...] kindergarten teachers are rarely proficient in English. On the other hand, specialist foreign language teachers employed by kindergartens rarely have the expertise to teach very young learners [...]” (p. 39), so there is a lack of comprehension on how VYLLs learn an FL due to a lack of adequate training on children’s development and early childhood pedagogy (Enever 2015). It is, thus, necessary to address efforts to teacher training programmes, both at the pedagogical and language levels.

Moreover, some participants have highlighted the necessity to coordinate their work with that done by the Pre-primary teacher so as to know students’ necessities, progress, interests and developmental stage. Participant T13 comments:

*The teacher in charge of teaching the FL must be in permanent contact with the main teacher so as to know the topic they are dealing with, the main difficulties or progress the students are making, that is, to know more about these little students.*

In this coordination, organising their lessons into thematic units and a variety of activities and groupings is essential for providing students with a fun and enjoyable learning experience (T7, T15, T14). Tales can be used as a material, but also as the leitmotif of a lesson plan:

*Every semester we work with a story or tale (not necessarily adapted to the pre-primary level as we use traditional tales or others that we have for superior levels). We start by introducing the topic with songs, games and vocabulary and always reviewing the previous content learnt. (T10)*

As discussed in the previous section, English must be introduced following the natural dynamics in the early childhood class, using mostly circle times where students can work formats in English (T4, T6, T10, T32).

Lastly, participants feel that the learning of the EFL with VYLLs cannot be enclosed within the classroom; many of them criticise the lack of English exposure through cinema or TV, for instance, thus commenting on the necessity of involving families in the learning: “*It is of paramount importance that families are involved during all the teaching-learning process, by reinforcing their learning and providing the child possibilities to use the language outside the classroom*” (T8); or even to get the home into the classroom, as T18 suggests:

*We can ask them to bring to class from home items with words in English or to write down any word they know in English and the next day we talk about it. It is very important they (family) are involved so that children can continue practising English. The more they can listen to the language, the better. (T18)*

We detail in what follows a list of activities to get English outside the classroom walls with VYLL that our teachers have proposed in their interviews:

- organise parents and children workshops, for instance, storytelling in English (T29, T32),
- give parents the songs and stories used in the classroom (T2),
- promote watching cartoons in English at home (T27, T32),
- organise the “travelling bag”, in which students will take home a bag with a book every weekend, and they will comment on their experience in a notebook, add drawings or even photos (T14), and
- invite parents with knowledge of the language to the class so that they can participate in any activity (T14).

As a concluding remark about methodological strategies related to motivation and VYLLs, our results are very much in the line with those researchers mentioned previously in the chapter. The motivating methodology described by our participants places exposure in a predominant position. As it is the only contact children may have with the FL, short and frequent sessions (Shin 2007) are recommended, whereas the L1 should be avoided or just relegated to situations that may disrupt the motivating atmosphere in class. Doing so, students’ motivation will be communication-oriented as the language will be the vehicle to fulfil communicative tasks in class. Hence it is convenient to use a holistic approach including guided and free activities by creating opportunities to practice the language in non-formal situations based on children’s previous knowledge and interests (Alstad and Tkachenko, Chap. 9, in this volume), so similar to the L1 learning process (Flores and Corcoll 2008). Focusing attention on oral aspects (Rodríguez 2004), and providing a meaningful and stress-free context, playful and kinaesthetic activities will provide the necessary rich and comprehensible input (Fleta 2014). In addition, as part of these motivational strategies it is important to incorporate activities that include unexpected elements and learning by discovery (Flores and Corcoll 2008), to boost students’ motivation and creativity (Mur 2002). So, the motivating methodology should be based on communicative tasks that promote participation such as circle time, learning areas (Mourao 2014, 2015), songs, tales, puppets, flashcards, etc., as well as manipulative activities. Finally, proper session-planning is also essential, as well as a continuous coordination between teachers in order to perform the described methodology successfully. Aside from this, not only the classroom context is relevant, but also society (Pérez-Esteve and Roig 2009), and family (Flores and Corcoll 2008; Prošić-Santovac 2017).

### 3.3.3 About Materials and Resources

Another recurrent theme running through the interviews is that the materials and resources used by the teacher need to be varied, and use as much as possible pre-school materials:

*The most useful are those that we found in any preschool classroom (as usually all pre-primary classes have a wide variety, such as ABC, numbers, shapes, calendars, colours, realia, toys, fruit toys, animals, toys, class objects, home objects, learning areas, flashcards, DVDs, big books, stickers, work sheets, paints, etc. (T6)*

Materials should also be adapted to the group's needs and interests (T6) to foster their motivation: "The choice of material is basic. Many schools base their teaching on a book, in which the contents that are going to be studied has nothing to do with the students they are addressed to and there is no motivation." (T28). Moreover, most teachers consider the Internet as an inexhaustible source of motivating resources: particularly interesting are animated simple and repetitive songs, videos, or storytelling, which promote spoken communication (T7). But ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) are a resource too; the digital whiteboard, above all, can help introducing different formats (photos, videos, texts, etc.) into the class and promotes interaction with the students.

Another recurrent resource in early childhood education according to interviewees is the puppet, which can be extremely motivating for YL and useful in terms of communication, as the following participant explains:

*According to my experience, it is very important to use a puppet as it has many functions. There is a moment when students forget that it is the teacher who is speaking and interact with the puppet. [...] It is important that the puppet only speaks English and the children are aware of that, so if they want to be the puppet's friends they must speak in English to communicate. Through this technique students feel very much motivated and confident (they do not feel embarrassed about talking). Students with good behaviour will take the puppet home to practise English with it (parents must participate). (T7)*

Finally, participants are not very keen on the use of textbooks at this age, as they cannot match all groups' needs, thus decreasing motivation (T28). However, some interviewees stress the fact that textbooks can sometimes be useful, chiefly the extra resources they provide, such as picture books, sets of flashcards or interactive software (T16, T20).

To sum up, interviewees have manifested some features of the motivating materials for VYLL. According to our analysis, materials should be varied to reach different learning styles and adapted to students' needs and interests. Moreover, they need to be interactive, manipulative and communication-oriented; and at the same time simple, reiterative and visually attractive to help children engage in real communicative situations (mainly orally).

## 4 Conclusions and Future Directions

Thanks to EU policies the importance of VYL learning to promote language and cultural sensitivity in a plurilingual area has been brought to light, provoking changes in the different member states' education systems. To this regard, several studies stress the role of motivation as the main objective to be achieved in this early teaching/learning process. However, there is still a need for further studies within the particular VYLL context, as recently argued by Murphy and Evangelou (2015). We consider that qualitative analysis has a big potential to address the complexity of this field.

This chapter has presented a study of EFL pre-primary teachers' reflections on their own practice, focusing on the development of students' motivation. Through the analysed interviews a model of motivating strategies for VYLL has emerged, based on three dimensions that need to fit together with one unique purpose, i.e., motivating students. First, we have detected that a friendly and positive personality that provokes a pleasant atmosphere in class can facilitate the learning of the FL, assisting children to take risks in communicative situations. Moreover, the teacher must be able to adapt the lesson to the young learners' peculiarities in term of personality and learning processes, and this involves adapting the teaching method to natural, kinaesthetic, playful learning, including unexpected elements to implement learning by surprise. Additionally, materials must be adjusted to the target group and, in this sense, all preschool materials can become good assets, provided that they promote communication. It is the teacher who must fit together these three aspects in a motivating English classroom; hence, more specific training is required to update teachers' skills about this young group of learners. As Enever (2014) declares "[...] there remains an insufficient supply of motivated, well-prepared teachers available and willing to meet this demand" (p. 231). Finally, we conclude that theory and praxis seem to adjust in terms of motivating strategies, as the results are in line with the analysed theoretical framework.

Future directions in this research would need to contrast other communities, such as preschool teachers or parents. Furthermore, direct observation in the classroom of the strategies detailed in this chapter would also shed light on the complexities of VYLL processes, such as the relationship between students' motivation and parents' knowledge of the target language, or implications of the use of textbooks versus audiovisual materials, or whether need-oriented motivation justifies the abandonment of the L1 in the English preschool classroom. As a final remark, we think that we must be cautious about 'romanticising' the teachers' imperative statements about what must be or should be in the language classrooms in terms of 'good practices', as future research should set up an ethical and responsible theory of preschool EFL leaning and multilingual education.

## Appendix

### *Appendix 1 List of Codes and Frequency*

	Paraphrase	Code	Frequency
About the teacher	Knowledge required	KNOW	12
	Empathy	EMPATH	12
	Creative	CREAT	8
	Confidence	CONFI	5
	Enthusiastic	ENTHU	5
About the teaching methodology	Exposure to the FL	EXPO	31
	Playful learning	PLAY	28
	Communication-oriented	COMMU	19
	Natural learning	NAT	16
	Skills distribution	SKILLS	15
	Family's role	FAM	13
	Coordination with the preschool teacher	COORD	12
	Routines and formats	ROUTI	7
	Total Physical Response method	TPR	7
	Classroom atmosphere	CLASS	5
	Content and Language Integrated Learning Methodology	CLIL	5
	Phonics Method	PHONICS	4
	Active learning	ACTIVE	3
	Corners and learning areas	CORNER	3
	Magic or unexpected learners	MAGIC	3
	Circle time or assembly	ASSEM	2
	Cultural elements	CULT	2
	Grouping	GROUP	2
About materials	Varied materials	VARIED	13
	Use of songs	SONG	9
	Use of storytelling and tales	STORY	9
	Adapt materials	ADAPT	8
	Audio-visual materials	AUDIOVIS	5
	Information and Communication Technologies	ICT	5
	Use of textbooks	TEXTBOOK	5
	Use of puppets	PUPPET	3

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