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## Teaching EFL at Spanish Preschools: A comparative analysis from two different teachers' perspectives

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Beginning to learn a foreign language at a very early age (i.e., preschool) is a burgeoning reality across Europe, following the EU recommendations. However, as different European reports state, there is a lack of concrete guidelines on how to address this age group. So, given the necessity to define adequate practices to make this learning successful, we conducted a Delphi project to reach consensus among different types of experts (n=99) on these practices (Andúgar, 2017; Andúgar & Cortina-Pérez, 2018; Andúgar, Cortina-Pérez & Tornel, 2019, 2020). The present paper emerges from the data obtained in this project and comparatively analyses the two most relevant participants' profiles: the EFL specialist teacher (n=29) and the Pre-primary practitioner (n=27) within the Spanish context. We compared their results about the category teaching methodology through the non-parametric inferential Mann-Whitney U test. Results suggest there are no substantial differences among them although there are subtle variations that must be taken into consideration.

**Key words:** Very Young Language Learners (VYLL), Early Foreign Language Learning (EFLL), teachers' profiles, Pre-primary Education, teaching guidelines, Delphi research

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### 1. Introduction

Since the Barcelona Council in 2002, the European Commission has encouraged the introduction of additional languages (AL) at a very early age with the intention of framing a multilingual Europe, supported by research on early bilingualism and very young language learners (VYLLs) (Dolean, 2015; Fleta, 2014; Mourao & Lourenço, 2015). Different EU projects and researchers have centred on the necessity of establishing adequate teaching and learning conditions so that the learning of the foreign language (FL)<sup>1</sup> is advantageous.

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<sup>1</sup> A difference is drawn between the term additional languages and foreign ones; while the former is more inclusive, foreign languages refer to a context in which languages are not naturally developed and used outside the school context. This is the case in which this study is contextualised.

The Commission report "Language learning at pre-primary school level: making it efficient and sustainable" (European Commission, 2011) is a good example of this, providing member countries with a series of recommendations, and reporting on good practices within the framework of Education and Training Programme (ET2020 Framework). However, the participating experts agreed that, although the teaching of FLs at an early age is an extended practice in most European countries, it is not a practice that is properly structured and planned. More specifically, they noted that:

With some exceptions, language activities at the pre-primary level are not formally structured. There are marked differences in staff competences. Moreover, resources and opportunities are unevenly distributed, both geographically and within different socio-demographic groups (European Commission, 2011, p.9).

There seems to be some agreement on the fact that one of the main problems faced by teachers<sup>2</sup> in the introduction of FLs at preschools is the lack of specific guidelines, both on a legislative and a methodological level (Andúgar, Cortina-Pérez & Tornel, 2019; Morris & Segura, 2003).

### **1.1. The case of Spain**

In the Spanish scenario, the learning of FLs at early years at preschools, particularly English, has been promoted since the early 90s with the appearance of the first pilot programmes in different Spanish regions. It was not until the Organic Law 2/2006 on Education (LOE<sup>3</sup>) that it was widely introduced to the entire country, although the responsibility of defining and structuring this first approach was led to the different autonomous regions. A few months later, through the Royal Decree 1630/2006<sup>4</sup>, the FL was included as part of the 'Languages: communication and representation' area in the pre-primary curriculum, although lacking specified minimum contents, such as the lexical structures or language functions that student should develop during this stage. In 2007 some general methodological guidelines supporting a communicative and natural approach were detailed in the Order ECI/3960/2007<sup>5</sup>.

Some years later the current Educational Law, the Organic Law 8/2013 for the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE),<sup>6</sup> did not introduce significant changes at the pre-primary stage, so it was the Department of Education in each autonomous region the responsible institution for organising this early multilingualism. Although the 17 Spanish regions have started this early learning, not all of them are implementing it at the same level as Andúgar, Cortina-Pérez, and Tornel (2019) concluded. The study further explains that there is great heterogeneity regarding the early introduction of FLs in the Spanish education system, detecting significant differences among territories. However, some general practices can be described in most schools across Spain:

- English is the most popular FL option at the pre-primary stage.
- Most schools begin learning a FL from the age of 5, and it is a frequent practice to start even earlier, at the age of 3.
- The amount of time devoted to the FL is usually 90 minutes per week, although there are important differences among regions in this respect.

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'teacher' is used in this paper to refer to any practitioner involved in the early introduction of the foreign language, mainly at the pre-primary stage, but not necessary implying explicit teaching of the language.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2006-7899>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2007/BOE-A-2007-185-consolidado.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2008/BOE-A-2008-222-consolidado.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2013/BOE-A-2013-12886-consolidado.pdf>

- The programme implemented is usually based on the communicative approach, through the use of routines, songs, rhymes, games, aiming at increasing children's motivation towards English.
- It is the EFL teacher the one who is most frequently responsible for this teaching, although pre-primary practitioners can also be authorised, provided that they accredit a level of the FL (at least a B2).

Given this context, we conducted a research project aiming at looking for consensus among experts within the Spanish context on the different aspects involved in Early Foreign Language Learning (EFLL), such as the situation, the methodology, and teacher training. The present paper offers a comparative analysis of methodological issues on EFLL<sup>7</sup> from two different participants' profiles, (i.e., the EFL specialist teacher and the Pre-primary practitioner).

## 2. Research Methodology

In the light of the need for an agreement on the most effective practices that would lead to successful learning of FLs with VYLLs (3-6 years old preschoolers), we conducted a Delphi research project (Andúgar, 2017; Andúgar & Cortina-Pérez, 2018; Andúgar, Cortina-Pérez & Tornel, 2019, 2020) from which this paper has emerged.

The Delphi method is defined as "a systematic and iterative process aimed at obtaining the opinions and, if possible, the consensus, of a group of experts" (Landeta, 2002, p.32). It is usually labelled as a prospective mixed-type method that approaches research from the interpretative paradigm of a group of experts while allowing the analysis of the group's statistical response (Landeta, 2002; Pozo, Suárez & García-Cano, 2012). In this project, 99 experts from different profiles (e.g., EFL teachers, preschool teachers, school advisors, material designers, parents and students) were consulted twice: the first round of qualitative nature and the second one, quantitative.

The present paper comprises the comparative analysis of the results obtained from the two most significant groups of participants (n=56) - the EFL specialist teacher, and the preschool practitioner-, using their responses to the category 'teaching methodology'. The main research question underpinning this paper is '*Does the EFL specialist teachers' view about EFL methodology for Pre-primary Education differ from that of the preschool practitioners?* Since our main goal was to identify similarities and differences among their opinions, we conducted an inferential analysis for independent groups.

### 2.1. Participants

The number of participants in this study is a total of 56 Spanish teachers distributed in two profiles:

- the EFL teacher (n=29), who has been trained at the University mainly to be an English teacher at the Primary Education level, so his/her teaching skills for the pre-primary stage is due to their experience and/or voluntary in-service training; and
- the pre-primary teacher (n=27), who has at least a bachelor's degree in Early Education and teaches at the non-obligatory stage from 3 to 6 years old. Besides, they can teach English at Preschools, provided that they certify a minimum of a B2 level in the FL.

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<sup>7</sup> As previously explained, in this research the term EFLL refers to children under 6 years old.

## **2.2. Instruments**

For each Delphi round a different questionnaire was designed. The first was made up of open-ended questions to gather all the necessary information about the different research variables. This first round was validated by experts (Cabero & García, 2011). Results from this questionnaire became the basis for the design of the second questionnaire with closed Likert-type questions, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). These questions derived from the first questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha was calculated, obtaining a result of .933.

For the present paper, section 2 of the questionnaire (i.e., 'teaching methodology') is the focus of attention, which is divided into 7 subcategories (i.e., teaching guidelines, ELT methods, onset age, family's implication, the language of instruction, classroom resources and transition to Primary Education) and contains a total of 49 items, which are listed in Appendix I.

## **2.3. Data analysis**

Results analysed in this paper stem from the second questionnaire and are quantitative. Consequently, they have been statistically analysed using the SPSS software. The mean for both groups was first calculated. Normality distribution was checked through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, obtaining a significance result of .007. Hence, non-parametric tests for inferential analysis were used, such as the Mann-Whitney U test for independent samples. While most relevant results will be commented in the following section, a table with all results can be found in Appendix II. Additionally, qualitative data from the participants' responses in questionnaire 1 have been used to support and explain the quantitative analysis.

## **3. Results and discussion**

### **3.1. Teaching guidelines**

Under this category, participants were asked about the most appropriate teaching guidelines for teaching FLs at preschool. The mean for each variable was calculated and grouped according to the two studied profiles (see Figure 1).

EFL teachers' most appreciated teaching guidelines are Q2.21 'reducing class ratio', Q2.2 'introducing FL games', Q2.4 'using songs', Q2.9 'giving positive feedback' and Q2.12 'using visual materials', which they all share a 4.9 mean. On the opposite side, Pre-primary teachers valued more positively the following guidelines: Q2.4 'using songs', Q2.18 'not overusing worksheets', Q2.12 'using visual materials', Q2.7 'using storytelling'.

We have not found large differences between results obtained from both groups except for two items: Q2.9 (positive feedback) and Q2.21 (class ratio). Statistical significance is then corroborated by the Mann-Whitney U test, which obtained a p-value of .013 and .000 for these two variables, respectively. The rest of the results from this category were non-significant (see Appendix I).

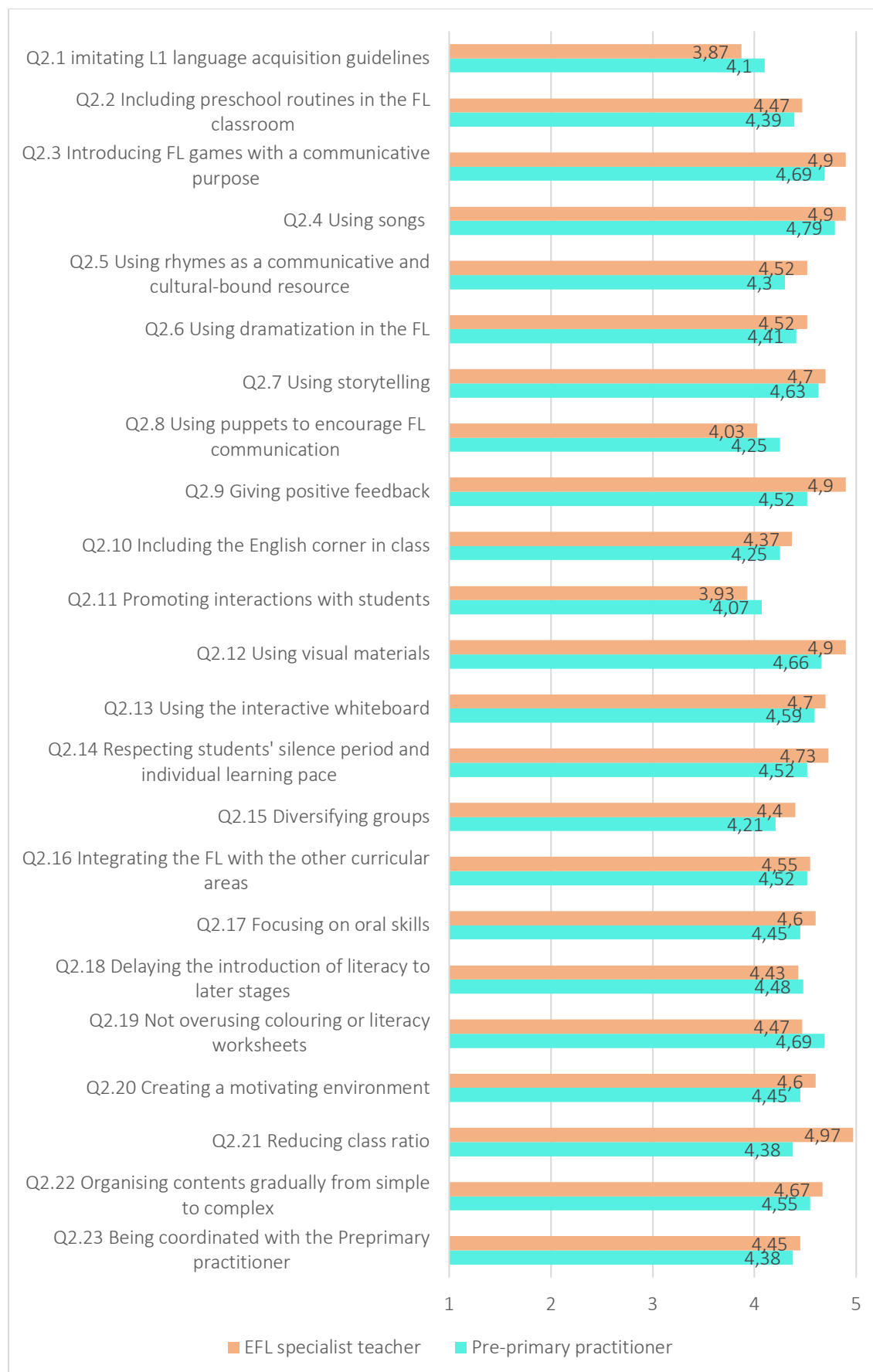


Figure 1. Mean comparison of the category Teaching guidelines

However, as a tendency, the EFL specialist teacher group values the different teaching strategies questioned in this category higher. The highest mean can be found in Q2.21 'Reducing group ratios' to increase the interaction teacher-students, providing children with more learning opportunities, as supported by González-Davies (2007, cited in Celaya 2012), who also suggested having two teachers in a class. Surprisingly, this is one of the items that has a greater mean difference between both studied groups. Although preschool practitioners consider it important with a mean of 4.38, EFL teachers situated it as the most remarkable teaching strategy to provide successful EFL learning opportunities during the early years. Some FL teachers participating in this study pointed out the importance of small groups in order to foster interaction among children:

*I believe that, above all, in preschool education, the teaching of a language should always be in small groups of a maximum of 7/8 students, which means, in many cases, having some teachers, which a public school does not usually have. [expert 56, EFLt]<sup>8</sup>*

The lowest mean found in this category is Q2.1 'Following L1 acquisition guidelines', yielding an average of 3.87 by the group of EFL teachers, and 4.1 by their counterpart. The FL teacher seems to claim for the necessary specialization of their teaching field, as explained by this participant:

*With time and experience, linguists have realized that this understandable input is not enough since it is also necessary to make the students produce in English, so traditional classes where the teacher is merely a transmitter of knowledge and the student is only a receiver are not useful. [expert 32, EFLt]*

Apart from question 2.1, there are three more items in this category in which, EFL teachers scored lower than preschool practitioners: Q2.8 'using a puppet', Q2.11 'doing circle time activities in the FL', and Q2.19 'Do not overuse worksheets (literacy activities, painting or drawing)'. All these four items can be considered pure preschool teaching strategies. Consequently, the EFL group does not tend to include those strategies within their teaching repertoire, as they prefer linguistic or communicative-based ones.

However, key methodological strategies that are used at preschool, such as meaningful or holistic learning, learning by discovery, play-based learning and creativity should become the main founding pillars of any FL approach to these early years (Björk-Willén & Cromdal, 2009; Cortina-Pérez & Andúgar, 2018; Linse, Van Vlack & Bladas, 2014; Mourão, 2014; Thió de Pol et al., 2011; Wood, 2010). Linked to this idea of a natural approach following L1 methodologies, Moya and Jiménez (2004) and Fleta (2012) found similarities between the process of acquisition of the L1 by native English children and by Spanish EFL learners. Moreover, studies such as those by Fleta (2004, 2006, 2014), Flores and Corcoll (2008), Pino and Rodríguez (2006, 2010) and Rodríguez (2004) state that there is a close relationship between the learning of the L1 and the FL. So they assume that if it is possible to recreate the learning environment of the L1, children will learn the L2 in the same way.

### **3.2. ELT methods**

There are a number of well-known ELT methods that have become the common practice in any EFL classroom. However, they were mainly created for adults or, at least for not such young learners (Andúgar, 2017; Cortina-Pérez & Andúgar, 2014). In the last decade, with the spread of VEFLL (Very Early Foreign Language Learning) in formal contexts, some of these methods have flourished at preschool settings, such as TPR (Total Physical Response), Phonics or CLIL (Content and Language

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<sup>8</sup> Participants' quotes have been translated from Spanish. EFLt refers to English Foreign Language teacher and PSt to Preschool teacher.

Integrated Learning. Concerning these methods, we find differences in favour of those EFL teachers who generally tend to value methodologies higher than preschool practitioners (Figure 2).

Results suggest that the most valued method for both groups is TPR (see also Alexiou in this volume). This method is widely used in preschools, as Pino and Rodriguez (2006) maintain, mainly because it allows the student not to feel the pressure of answering to the teacher orally, but through physical actions, which reduces this anxiety. Furthermore, it facilitates meaningful and global opportunities for learning, providing the learning process with a playful and creative character. Participant 25 suggests:

*I believe that the methodology to be used in children's education must be based on oral work, teacher-student or student-student interaction, the association of words with gestures and images (Total Physical Response - TPR) and the explanation of stories and the viewing of cartoon videos (previously worked vocabulary) [expert 25, PSt]*

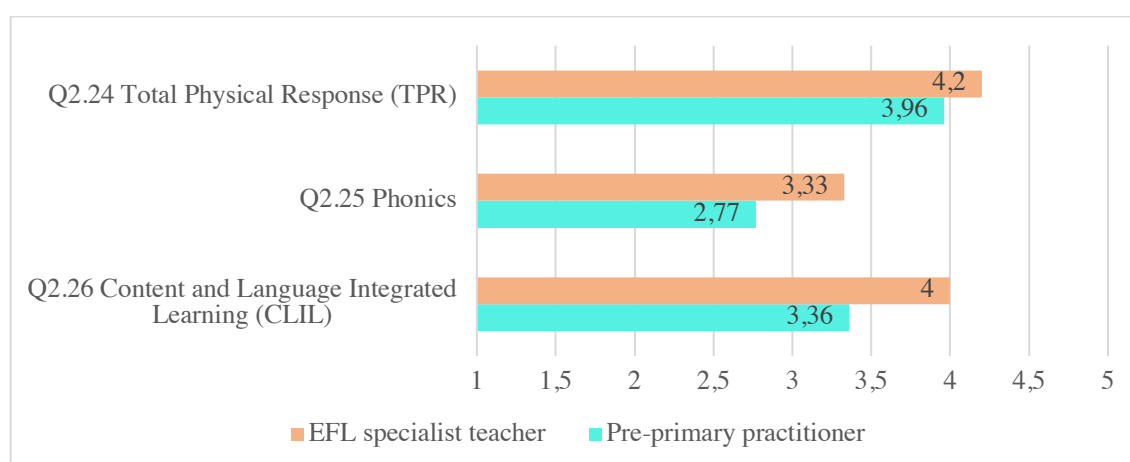


Figure 2. Mean comparison of the category ELT methods

On the contrary, Phonics was the method that scored lower, with an EFL specialist teachers' mean of 3.33 out of 5 and a preschool practitioners' mean of 2.77. The issue of introducing FL literacy at early years is highly controversial, as confirmed by the high standard deviation of 1.167 and 1.307 for each group. This approach originally intended for native speakers and that seems to be the reason for this heterogeneous response, as participant 23 expresses:

*The Phonics method is aimed at native English speakers. I do not consider it useful for teaching foreign languages [expert 23, EFLt]*

Mourão and Ellis (2020) advocate for a combination of approaches to teach early literacy in EFL contexts as a way of introducing pre-schoolers into literacy skills instead of teaching reading and writing. As they explain:

*Without enough opportunity to hear and use English, the children will not be able to read or write it successfully. This is a fact in the L1, and in settings where the children have had little exposure to another language (Mourao & Ellis, 2020, p.129).*

To implement a successful early literacy programme in a FL teaching context, phonics methodology needs to be incorporated "as part of a rich, meaning-focused pedagogy towards reading and writing development where comprehension and communication of meaning is the ultimate aim" (Papp, 2020, p.2). Some participants similarly suggested that:

*The approach to reading and writing through phonics, from my experience, is very positive and favours not only reading and writing in English but also in Spanish. I am considering an approach (introduction), with the main objective of developing children's phonological awareness and initiating knowledge of the reading-writing code. [expert 7, EFLt]*

Additionally, studies such as that of Navarro, Coyle and Roca de Larios (2016), where they investigate the effectiveness of Phonics in teaching sibilant phonemes to four and five-year-olds within the Spanish educational system, support the benefits of phonics with an integrated approach in EFL contexts.

Finally, the CLIL -Content and Language Integrated Learning- item (Q2.26) presents the highest difference in this category between the groups studied. The Mann-Whitney U test corroborated that the difference between groups is significant ( $p$  value= .034), thus we claim that EFL specialists consider CLIL methodology more appropriate than preschool teachers. CLIL is a dual-focus bilingual approach which fosters the development of the language and the non-linguistic contents integratedly. We suppose that preschool teachers not being well-acquainted with ELT methods may be a possible justification for these results.

As an ELT method it has been proved to be highly effective (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010; Madrid & Pérez-Cañado, 2012; Marsh & Frigols-Martín, 2013) and we find numerous examples of experiences that confirm these benefits (European Commission, 2011; García, 2013; Ioannou-Georgiou, 2011, 2015). Spain is a pioneer in the application of the CLIL methodology (Eurydice, 2006) and some of the autonomous communities are introducing CLIL as part of their bilingual programmes from preschool Education. The main advantage that this method presents for the teaching of FL at preschool level is that it is a methodology that integrates both the content and the FL, which helps to carry out the globalised approach distinctive of this educational stage. Furthermore, as Mallol (2012) states, since the native child is able to communicate complex ideas with simple structures and a few words, the FL learners will be able to communicate in the target language with their initiated FL repertoire through the CLIL approach.

### **3.3. Onset age**

The “when to start” question is a recurring issue in EFL research. In this paper the focus is placed on whether there was a significant difference in the teachers’ opinion about this issue concerning the factor we are studying, i.e., teacher profile. Results detected no remarkable differences between the EFL specialist and the preschool practitioner (Figure 3). Additionally, no statistically significant results were found in the Mann-Whitney U test.

The fact that Q2.29 has lower mean results in both groups indicates it is not so relevant for teachers, either specialist or preschool ones, to identify a specific school year to start the learning of a FL. On the contrary, they seem to support that adequate conditions for successful language learning need to be assured (see also Alexiou, 2020).

*If the learning conditions are right, a child can be exposed to another language at school as soon as possible. But the conditions are not usually right. [Expert 97, EFLt]*



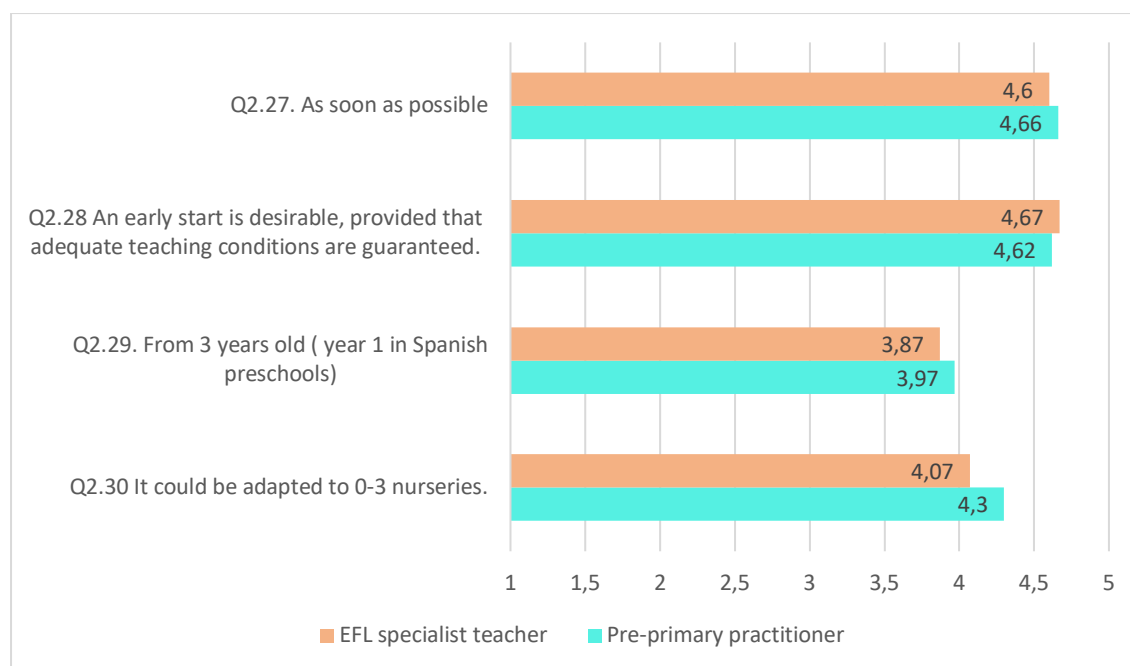


Figure 3. Mean comparison of the category Onset age

Some studies support the benefits of an early start (Bialystok, Craik & Luk, 2012; Dolean, 2015; Kuhl, Stevenson, Corrigan, Van den Bosch, Deniz & Richards, 2016; García-Sierra, Ramírez-Esparza & Kuhl, 2016; Ramírez-Esparza, García-Sierra & Kuhl, 2016) if appropriate conditions are provided. Concretely, the research by Ramírez and Kuhl (2017) in the region of Madrid (Spain) suggested that children between 8 and 36 months of age improved their communicative competence, particularly, their lexical repertoire, while in a daily intensive immersion programme with native English teachers. Among the effective teaching techniques that they propose are (1) extensive input (their brains are adjusted according to the vocabulary they hear); (2) parentese speech (higher, slower tempo, overemphasize intonation); (3) high social context with activities that foster interaction (play-based activities); (4) possibility for children to hear different native speakers; and (5) children's stimulation to participate.

### 3.4. Family's implication

This category is concerned with the involvement of families in the VEFL process (Figure 4). We observe that there are minimal differences among both groups' means. However, all groups value very positively all these variables aiming at increasing the implication of families. Consequently, no statistically significant results were found in the Mann-Whitney U test. Therefore, both teachers' profiles considered important the role of the family in the child's language learning (Cerná, 2015; Choi, Sheo & Kang, 2020; Pirchio, Taschner, Colibaba, Gheorghiu & Jursová, 2015; Sokol & Lasevich, 2015). Families have had a great influence on the expansion of FL programmes at early ages as they have pushed institutions to meet social demands (Enever, 2015; Kersten, Steinlen, Tiefenthal, Wippermann & Flyman, 2010).

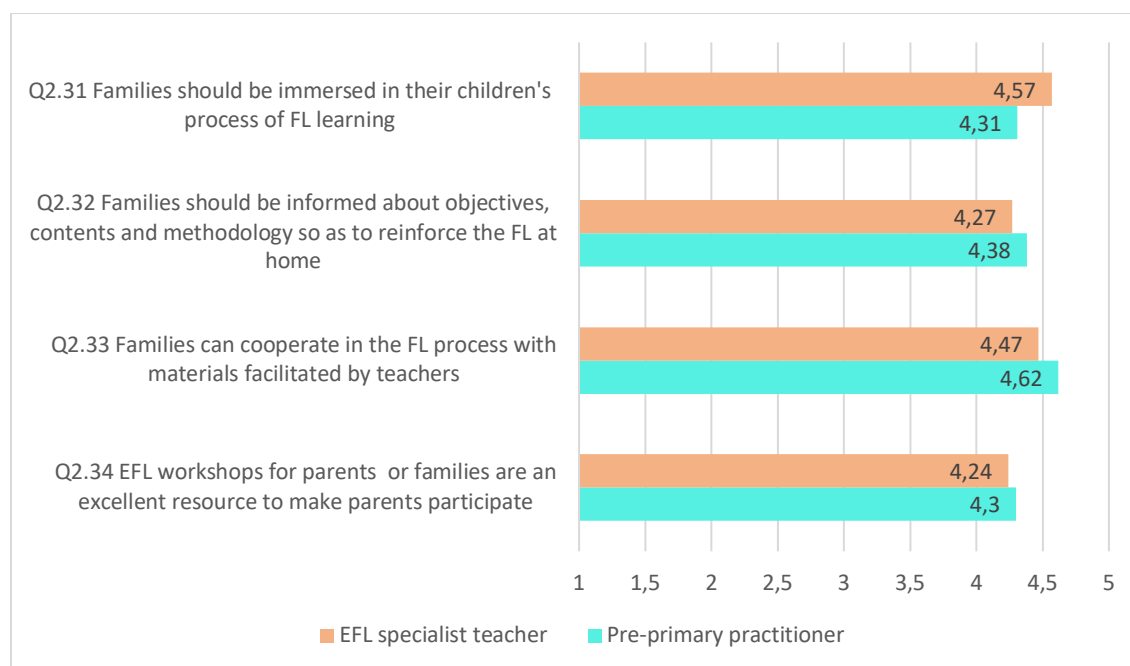


Figure 4. Mean comparison of the category Family's implication

### 3.5. Language of instruction

Whether the mother tongue should be permitted in a FL classroom is a heated debate, ranging from the target language-only principle and the flexible translanguaging, linked respectively to two different bilingual education models: the immersion and the dynamic bilingualism.

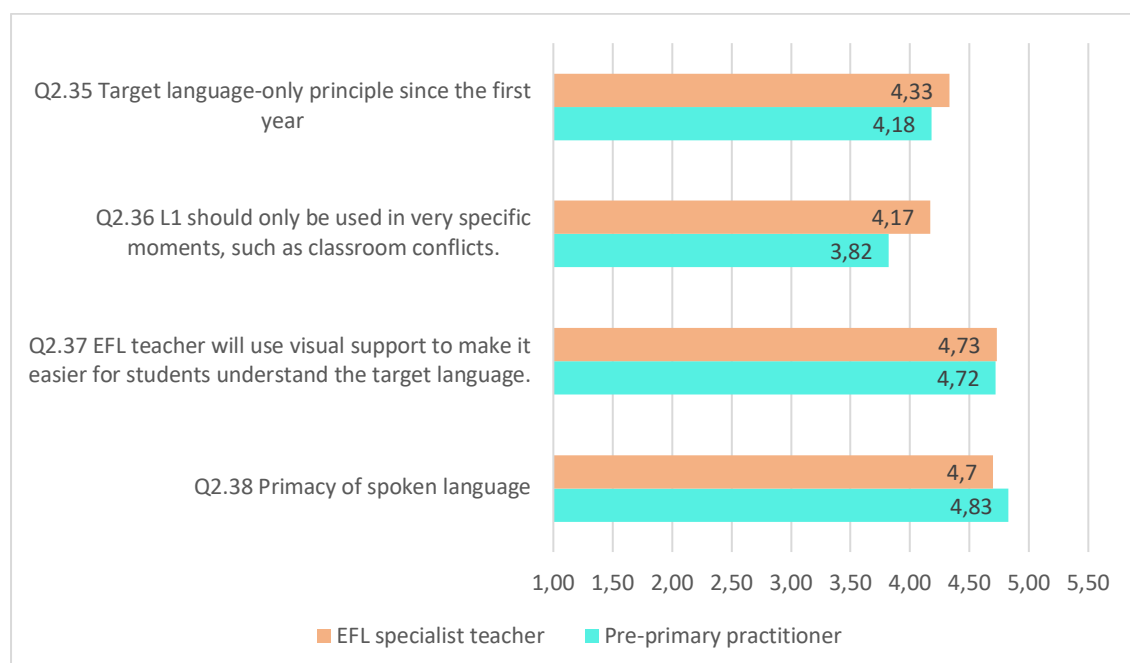


Figure 5. Mean comparison of the category Language of instruction

As observed in Figure 5, both preschool and EFL specialist teachers do agree with the first model, so that the target language is the main, and nearly unique, language of communication in the VEFL

classroom (Morris & Segura, 2003). This is justified mainly due to the fact that English is a FL in Spain, thus students will rarely listen to the target language outside the school, and teachers tend to maximize the quality and quantity of exposure (DeKeyser, 2013; Leonardi, 2012; Muñoz, 2008; Pérez-Esteve & Roig, 2009). Participant number 28 explains:

*I consider language immersion to be absolutely necessary for comprehensive training. The student, in full formation and modelling, adapts to what the teacher teaches him except for the students with needs. So yes, I think it should be the whole class in the English language [Expert 28, PSt].*

Question 2.36, related to ‘allowing the L1 at very specific moments’, scores slightly lower in the preschool teachers’ group, although no statistical significance has been found. These results agree with the extended monolingual pedagogy in which the target language is the predominant mean of communication in the classroom. However, new tendencies are advocating for a shift in the role of the L1 (García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014; Alstad & Tkachenko, 2018). For instance, Inbar-Lourie explains that “language teaching pedagogy has tended to ignore or even suppress bilingual or multilingual options endorsing a predominantly monolingual policy, one which equates ‘good teaching’ with exclusive or nearly exclusive target language use” (2010, p. 351). As justified by the following participant:

*I do not agree that the whole session should be in a FL only. I believe that the teacher should be a good role model and should speak in English "as much as possible," but that language should never be a barrier to students' "emotional access. We must not lose sight of the fact that communication is a type of relationship; therefore, communication must come first. Furthermore, I believe that if we want to form multilingual pupils, the first model must be the teacher. The pupils must see that the teacher is capable of using different languages to communicate [...] [expert 33, PSt]*

Nevertheless, there is still a lack of scientific evidence about the effect of translanguaging in the VEFLL classroom.

### **3.6. Classroom resources**

Under this category, issues about classroom resources are explored (Figure 6). In the case of textbooks both groups relegate them to a secondary position. However, a closer look at question Q2.39 indicates a mean of 4 out of 5 for the EFL specialist and a mean of 4.38 for the preschool teacher. It seems that EFL teachers are slightly more in favour of using commercial textbooks than preschool ones. This is related to Q 2.42 in which inverted results are found and preschool practitioners are more in favour of producing their resources ( $\mu=4.38$ , see Appendix II).

As we can observe, there are minimal differences between results by each teacher profile in Q2.41, thus both EFL specialists and preschool practitioners agree on the fact that realia and classroom resources are the most appropriate materials, obtaining the highest mean of this category. As this preschool teacher explains:

*The same resources and methodological strategies are used as in preschool: Games, short stories, songs, videos, flashcards, dolls, everyday objects, gestures and mime... generally using the type of grouping in a large group (what at preschool we colloquially call assembly). All these resources and this type of grouping have been to the detriment of the use of books and cards for the individual work of the student at the table, which in general, seemed to me to be very ineffective for the teaching of the language. [Expert 72, PSt]*

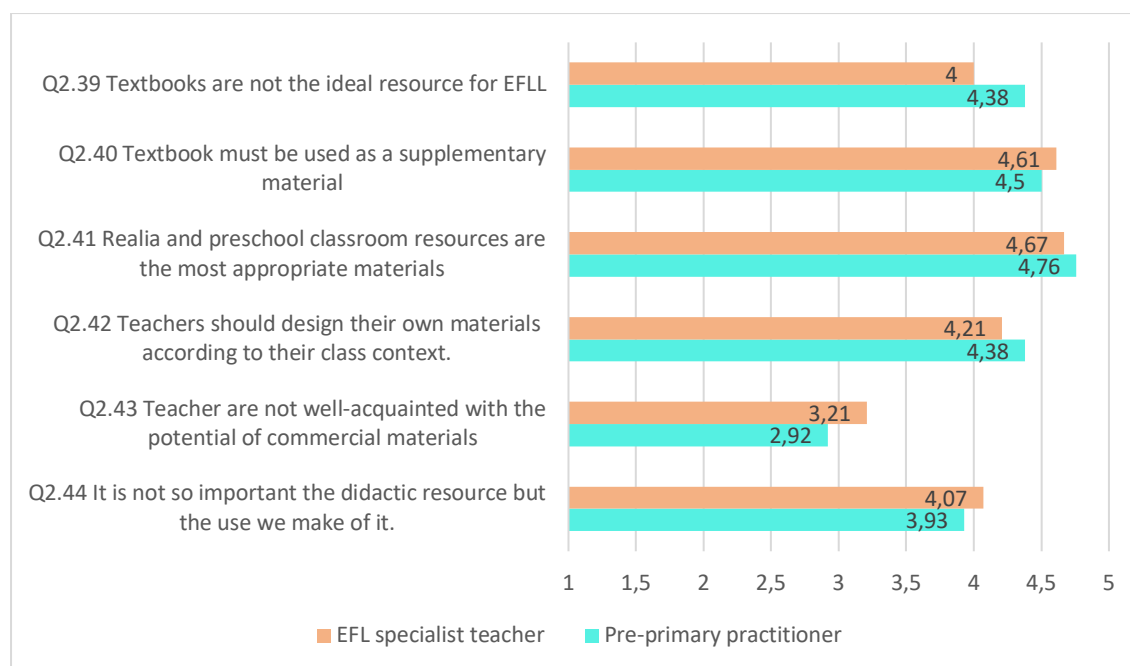


Figure 6. Mean comparison of the category Classroom resources

On the contrary, both groups of teachers do not seem to agree on the idea that they are not well-acquainted with the potential of commercial materials (Q2.43), obtaining means of 3.21 for EFL specialists and 2.92 for preschool ones. This, together with the previous results, builds on the idea that both groups of teachers advocate for relegating commercial textbooks to a secondary position, despite the fact that they feel prepared to use them. As mean differences are so narrow, no significance was found in the Mann Whitney U test.

### 3.7. The transition from preschool to primary stage

In this final category, attention is placed on the transition from the preschool Education to the Primary stage in terms of the FL. This category shows that preschool teachers valued higher all items than EFL specialists, except for the use of Phonics as a transition methodology, in which they scored lower. These results are in accordance with those from the second category, in which phonics was the least valued methodology. Again, lack of knowledge about this method could partially justify these results.

Both groups of participants agreed on the fact that there is a need for methodological continuity (Q2.48), as supported in Enever (2011); although it is clear the difficulty that this entails, as reflected by Cerná (2015), it is essential. Participant 72 clearly describes this transition:

*Respecting the students' own characteristics and trying to ensure that the methodological changes of the new stage are introduced little by little, gradually and adapting to the heterogeneous rhythm of the students. Introducing also some of the methodological elements used in the preschool stage, so that the change is as less abrupt as possible, and always starting from the initial level of knowledge of each student. [Expert 72, PSt]*

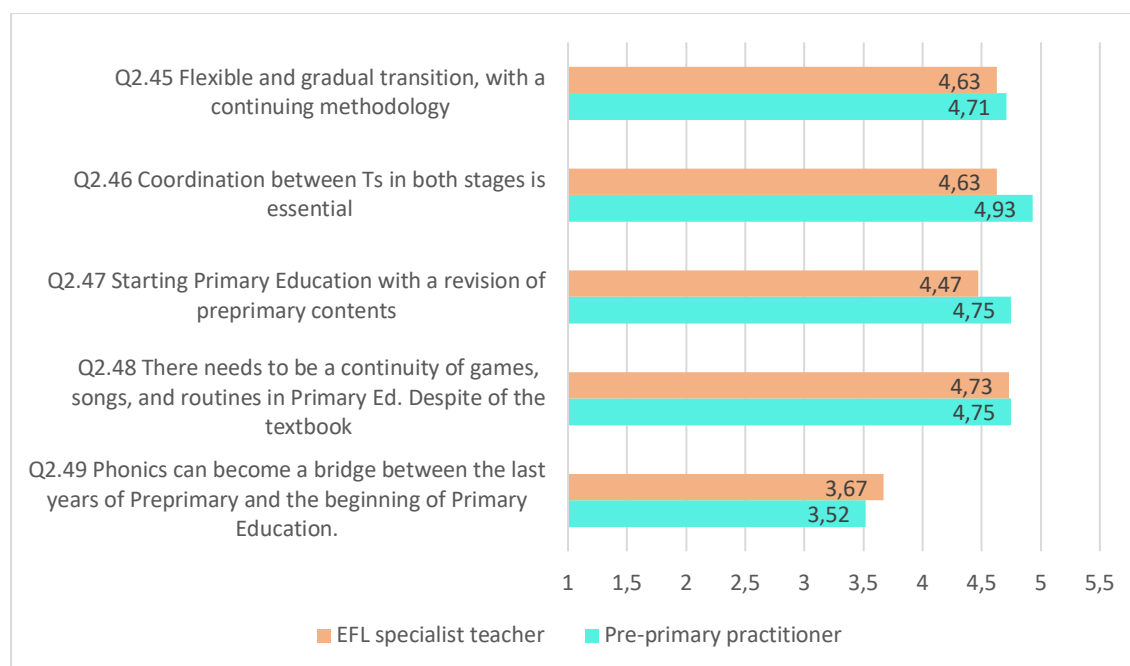


Figure 7. Mean comparison of the category *Primary transition*

In the other three items of this category, we found some discrepancy. For instance, the preschool practitioner considers essential coordination among teachers from both stages (Q2.46), which obtained a statistical significance of .044. Cooperation is an important factor of success at this very early context (Alexiou, 2020), however this continuity is not a common practice within the Spanish context where the pedagogical approach goes from the globalised one in the preschool stage to the differentiation of areas of study within the Primary schedule. In this sense, EFL becomes a new subject of study rather than a meaningful way of communication and learning. Andúgar, Cortina-Pérez, and Tornel (2019) insisted on the necessity of fostering coordination mechanisms between the PSt and the EFL teacher, and also between the English teacher at preschool and first years of Primary education. As said before, methods such as Phonics could be an interesting methodological bridge between both stages.

#### 4. Conclusions

We conducted a research project aiming at obtaining consensus on some controversial issues on teaching FLs at very early years, which comprises the age range from 0 to 6 in the Spanish context. This paper has undertaken a discussion of the results obtained in the category 'FL methodology' from a comparative perspective in terms of two different teacher profiles, i.e., the EFL specialist and the preschool practitioner.

This paper revolves around the research question: '*Does EFL specialist teachers' view about FL methodology for preschool Education differ from that of the preschool practitioners?*' Given the results analysed, we conclude that both teachers' profiles have similar opinions on how we should introduce a FL to children under 6 years old. Nevertheless, we have detected some subtle differences. In terms of teaching guidelines, EFL specialists seem to indicate some preference towards communication-oriented strategies, for example, reducing the class ratio to increase active participation, giving positive feedback to promote interactions, or using FL games, songs as communication boosters; whereas the preschool teacher is more concerned with child-oriented strategies, for example, following L1 acquisition guidelines, or replicating the preschool strategies of using the puppet, the circle time, cartoons (Alexiou, 2015) or not overusing worksheets.

In relation to ELT methods, both groups of participants considered the TPR method the most appropriate for VEFLLs, given its dynamic and game-based approach. Also, the EFL specialist highlights the CLIL method, which contrasts with the promotion of a more natural methodology by the preschool teachers' group. We believe more training is necessary so that preschool practitioners get to know the method better. Finally, preschool practitioners partially disagree with the idea of using Phonics with VEFLLs, consequently, they reject early FL literacy as they consider it should not interfere with the L1 literacy skills. However, recent research shows that early FL phonological awareness can have positive effects on the target group, provided that the method is adapted to the students and their FL level.

Besides, both groups confirm that the most appropriate onset age is 'as soon as possible', but it is necessary to guarantee the optimum teaching conditions in terms of quality of the exposition of the language, adequate methodology and holistic learning. Similar responses are also found in the category Family's implication, both groups agreeing on their valuable contribution to VEFLL. In terms of the language model, both groups of teachers advocate for an 'English-only' teaching context as a way of intensifying the input students receive. Little space is given to the L1 in the FL classroom, despite the new tendencies favouring multilingual spaces through translanguaging strategies. Concerning classroom resources, both groups share the idea that the most convenient materials are realia and preschool classroom resources, relegating the textbook to a secondary position.

Finally, no large differences are found in the transition to Primary Education guidelines category, as they both consider there is a need to continue with the methodology used in the previous stage so as to make a soft transition from preschool to Primary Education. However, results confirmed that the preschool teacher is more concerned with the necessity of establishing mechanisms to coordinate the primary and the preschool teacher.

As a final remark, both groups have a very similar view on how we should teach EFL at preschool Education. However, we discovered some tendencies that illustrate minimal differences. The participating preschool practitioners seem to have a more natural teaching approach, i.e., a child-centred pedagogy aiming at developing the child globally and integrally, while the EFL specialist teacher is more concerned with developing students' communicative competence in the FL, hence, language-centred approach. We conclude that the key to a successful VEFLL programme is in the integration of both profiles. However, to corroborate these results, more research is needed using larger samples.

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## Appendix I. Items from the questionnaire PART 2

PART 2. TEACHING TECHNIQUES
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>
<b>The methodology for the teaching a foreign language at preschool should:</b>
1. Follow the same guidelines as the learning of the mother tongue
2. Include the usual preprimary class routines but in the foreign language
3. Introduce foreign language games that have a communicative purpose
4. Use songs as a teaching resource for the foreign language class.
5. Employ rhymes that help to improve the communicative competence as well as the cultural knowledge about the target country
6. Perform dramatizations in the foreign language.
7. Use storytelling in the foreign language.
8. Use the pet in the foreign language class as a means of communication with students.
9. Use reinforcements (excellent, well done) that support and motivate the student.
10. Design and “English corner” that allow to perform different kind of activities.
11. Promote interaction among all students in the foreign language
12. Make use of visual materials (flashcards, posters, realia) that serve as teaching support.
13. Use the digital blackboard as a resource for the teaching of a foreign language through online materials.
14. Respect the students’ silence period and individual learning pace.
15. Diversify the different students’ grouping according to the goal of the activity.
16. Introduce the foreign language in a natural way, integrated with the rest of learning areas by creating contexts that be of interest for children in a trusting and playful environment.
17. Focus the attention on oral skills, by mainly working on listening and speaking skills
18. Introduce literacy in the foreign language at a later stage as children at these ages are not prepared for that task at a cognitive level.
19. Do not over use working sheets (literacy activities, painting, drawing) as they do not work relevant skills for the learning of a foreign language at this ages.
20. Create a motivating environment in the classroom and the school that reflect the foreign culture.
21. Reduce the ratio of students per group to provide a good quality student-teacher interaction with greater opportunities for student learning.

22. Organize contents in a gradual way, increasing complexity gradually and reviewing them continuously to progress progressively.

23. Coordinate contents and objectives taught by the primary specialist foreign language teacher and the preprimary teacher to work in parallel.

**The most adequate methodology for teaching foreign language at preprimary to develop an adequate communicative competence in students is:**

24. TPR (Total Physical Response): teaching method in which the student shows understanding of the instructions given by the teacher through physical response.

25. Phonics: literacy method for English native speakers that begins by learning the English phonemes and their corresponding script.

26. CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning): method that uses the foreign language to

**STARTING TIME**

27. The teaching of the foreign language should start as soon as possible because children have an enormous potential at this age (imitation, curiosity, motivation, brain plasticity and they are not afraid of making mistakes).

28. It is convenient to have an early start if the adequate conditions can be guaranteed (quality input, appropriate methodology, significant learning).

29. The start of the foreign language is recommended at the age of 3 years old, respecting the period of adaptation to school and self-paced learning of students.

30. The start of the learning of the foreign language could be even introduced earlier (0-3), although these ages do not form part of a compulsory educational stage.

**INVOLVEMENT OF FAMILIES IN THE TEACHING OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

31. Families should be involved in the teaching of foreign language at the pre-primary level in the same way they are involved in the rest of areas of their children's school life.

32. Families should be informed of the objectives, contents and methodology that is used in school in order to reinforce them at home.

33. Families, although they do not have the linguistic knowledge, they can cooperate with their children at home with the resources that teachers provide them (songs, videos, and tales).

34. English workshops for parents or parents/children organized from school are a good tool in order that parents be encouraged to engage in their children's learning of English.

### LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

35. The foreign language class should be taught entirely in the target language from the first year in order that children accept as something natural.
36. The mother tongue should be used only in concrete situations, such as when a problem or conflict arises in the classroom.
37. The EFL teacher will use visual materials that promote a better understanding of the message in the target language by the student.
38. Oral communication should be at the center of the teaching-learning process, showing it to students as a real communication tool.

### CLASSROOM RESOURCES

39. Textbooks are not a suitable resource for the teaching of a foreign language at preschool, as they are not adapted to the needs and interests of all students, do not fit the law requirements, and do not suit the numbers of sessions aimed to this teaching.
40. The textbook must be used as a supplementary material, never by itself.
41. The most suitable materials for the teaching of a foreign language at preschool level are real materials, tales, songs, flashcards, poetry, etc. existing a wide variety of these materials on the internet.
42. Teachers should design their own didactic resources according to their class context.
43. Teachers are not well-acquainted with the possibilities of the teaching materials, their selection and use (both textbooks and online materials).
44. It is not so important the didactic resource but the use we make of it.

### TRANSITION BETWEEN PRESCHOOL TO PRIMARY EDUCATION

45. The transition between preprimary and primary class in relation to the foreign language should be flexible and gradual, holding a methodological continuity to ease students the transition from one stage to another.
46. An adequate coordination between teachers (preschool and primary) is essential for this transition to occur properly.
47. The first year of primary education should start by reviewing the contents learnt in preprimary with a similar methodology as well as maintaining the global and integral character of the previous stage.
48. Although at primary level the teaching is centered on the textbook, it is necessary that exists certain continuity in terms of activities such as games, songs, tales, routines, etc.
49. A good continuity regarding the teaching of the foreign language would be the beginning with

Phonics in the final preprimary year and its continuity in Primary.

**Appendix II. Mann Whitney U test (SPSS output)**

	Q2.1	Q2.2	Q2.3	Q2.4	Q2.5	Q2.6
U de Mann-Whitney	385,500	412,500	370,500	402,000	322,500	374,500
W de Wilcoxon	850,500	818,500	805,500	837,000	700,500	752,500
Z	-,790	-,132	-1,501	-,843	-1,283	-,328
Sig. asintótica(bilateral)	,430	,895	,133	,399	,199	,743

	Q2.7	Q2.8	Q2.9	Q2.10	Q2.11	Q2.12
U de Mann-Whitney	399,500	362,500	291,000	372,500	417,000	369,000
W de Wilcoxon	777,500	827,500	669,000	778,500	882,000	804,000
Z	-,114	-,958	-2,492	-,826	-,295	-1,534
Sig. asintótica(bilateral)	,909	,338	,013	,409	,768	,125

	Q2.13	Q2.14	Q2.15	Q2.16	Q2.17	Q2.18
U de Mann-Whitney	400,000	377,500	393,000	412,000	390,000	401,500
W de Wilcoxon	835,000	812,500	828,000	847,000	825,000	866,500
Z	-,682	-1,098	-,708	-,165	-,827	-,637
Sig. asintótica(bilateral)	,495	,272	,479	,869	,408	,524

	Q2.19	Q2.20	Q2.21	Q2.22	Q2.23	Q2.24
U de Mann-Whitney	386,500	379,000	253,000	399,000	341,500	290,500
W de Wilcoxon	851,500	814,000	688,000	834,000	776,500	566,500
Z	-,924	-1,014	-3,721	-,675	-1,686	-1,043
Sig. asintótica(bilateral)	,356	,310	,000	,499	,092	,297

	Q2.25	Q2.26	Q2.27	Q2.28	Q2.29	Q2.30
U de Mann-Whitney	198,500	204,500	412,500	399,000	419,000	380,500
W de Wilcoxon	451,500	457,500	877,500	834,000	884,000	845,500
Z	-1,477	-2,125	-,438	-,716	-,254	-,424
Sig. asintótica(bilateral)	,140	,034	,662	,474	,799	,672

	Q2.31	Q2.32	Q2.33	Q2.34	Q2.35	Q2.36
U de Mann-Whitney	356,500	429,000	399,000	385,000	371,000	361,000
W de Wilcoxon	791,500	894,000	864,000	820,000	777,000	767,000
Z	-1,368	-,102	-,653	-,117	-,850	-,973
Sig. asintótica(bilateral)	,171	,919	,514	,907	,395	,330

	Q2.37	Q2.38	Q2.39	Q2.40	Q2.41	Q2.42
U de Mann-Whitney	421,000	391,500	336,000	385,000	407,000	379,500
W de Wilcoxon	856,000	856,500	801,000	850,000	872,000	814,500
Z	-,294	-,917	-1,624	-,680	-,573	-,694
Sig. asintótica(bilateral)	,769	,359	,104	,497	,567	,487

	Q2.43	Q2.44	Q2.45	Q2.46	Q2.47	Q2.48	Q2.49
U de Mann-Whitney	327,000	400,500	396,500	335,000	367,500	412,000	233,500
W de Wilcoxon	678,000	835,500	861,500	800,000	832,500	877,000	464,500
Z	-,876	-,328	-,469	-2,014	-1,065	-,182	-,437
Sig. asintótica(bilateral)	,381	,743	,639	,044	,287	,855	,662

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